# THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE

## AN *AGAPE*-CENTERED VISION OF ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE ETHICS



## Eric J. Silverman

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For Eleonore Stump, with great respect and appreciation.

# Contents

# Preface and Acknowledgments

While studying Aquinas's virtue of love (*caritas*) for my previous monograph *The Prudence of Love*, I was struck by the advantages of Aquinas's broader account of virtue ethics. In particular, the central ethical role he gives to *caritas/agape* is a much needed improvement over Aristotle's views. Furthermore, I realized that Aquinas's account of virtue ethics had resources to address a wide range of important issues that are unresolved in many versions of contemporary virtue ethics. Aquinas's views give resources to explain why there would be a unity to the virtues, how we can address the partiality-impartiality debate, what to make of the concept of the supererogatory, and several other important ethical issues. Therefore, I wondered whether it was possible to draw upon Aquinas's love-centered vision of virtue ethics in a way that did not require embracing his entire broader philosophical system, so that a broader range of ethicists might benefit from Aquinas's insights. The *Supremacy of Love* is my effort to bring critical ethical insights from Aquinas into conversation with contemporary secular approaches to virtue ethics that do not embrace his broader Christian views about metaphysics, the nature of the good itself, and other philosophical issues.

In attempting to write a second monograph while teaching a full course load at a liberal arts college, I encountered the same practical challenges that plague many early career academics: how does one find enough focused time to write a book on a challenging topic? The answer to my question came from two sources during the 2015–2016 academic year. I was granted a sabbatical from Christopher Newport University and I was accepted into Biola University's Center for Christian Thought (CCT) for the year. The ten months I spent in residence as part of Biola's center provided an ideal environment for writing this book.

I am deeply thankful to the administration of Christopher Newport University for their wholehearted support of this book, as well as its College of Arts and Humanities and the Department of Philosophy and Religion. Provost David Doughty, Dean Lori Underwood, and Chair Kip Redick provided institutional support that allowed this book to be written. My work on this project was supported by a sabbatical grant from Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. Anne Pascucci and Michelle Gooding in the Office of Sponsored Programs similarly provided administrative and logistical support for my application to Biola's CCT program. I am also thankful to The John Templeton Founda-

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I also received help from a wide variety of friends, colleagues, and mentors who offered input into my project at various stages. The 2015–2016 leaders and fellows of Biola's CCT commented on drafts of several chapters including: George Hunsinger, Rico Vitz, Klaus Issler, Uche Anizor, Elizabeth Hall, Gregg Ten Elshof, Steve Porter, Thomas Crisp, Evan Rosa, Ellen Ross, Allen Yeh, Aurora Matzke, Charlie Trimm, Duane Stephen Long, Moyer Hubbard, Steve Choi, and Wyndy Corbin Reuschling. I especially benefited from Gregg Ten Elshof's knowledge of Confucianism and my daily conversations with Rico Vitz during our shared commute. Laura Pelser and David Rodriguez provided considerable research and logistical assistance during my time at Biola University. Jason Poling and my research apprentice Lauren Chadwick helped proofread my manuscript. Kevin Timpe and Kevin Vallier each offered excellent comments on one of the chapters. Gregory Beabout gave me feedback on much of my initial research into Alasdair MacIntyre found in chapters 5 and 6. Eleonore Stump taught me a tremendous amount about Aquinas's ethics, some of which is found in chapter 3.

The cover art is a drawing of King Lear and Cordelia. She is used as an exemplar of love in chapter 2. Some portions of this book draw from and improve upon ideas in my earlier monograph *The Prudence of Love* especially chapter 2, and 3. Reused portions are used with permission Eric J. Silverman, *The Prudence of Love: How Possessing the Virtue of Love Benefits the Lover*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010. All rights reserved. Chapter 4 is developed from an earlier paper on partiality-impartiality, "How to Resolve the Partiality-Impartiality Puzzle Using a Love-Centered Account of Virtue Ethics," in *The Anthology of Philosophical Studies Volume 7*. Ed. Patricia Hanna. Athens, Greece: Athens Institute for Education and Research, 2013: 167–176. The author retained all intellectual rights to this paper.

Finally, I am thankful to my family for allowing me the time to focus on this work, and for moving across the country for the year so I could work on this project in residence at Biola University. Kristina, Allison, Julia, and Valerie, I greatly appreciate you.

# ONE

# Foundational Issues

For much of the modern era of philosophy two broad approaches to ethics were dominant: deontology and consequentialism. However, in the mid-twentieth century G. E. M. Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" brought renewed attention to the neglected virtue-centered approach to ethics. In the latter twentieth century, Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* helped transform virtue ethics from a fringe movement to a major challenger to the deontological and consequentialist approaches to ethics. While much has been written during the thirty-five years since *After Virtue* illustrating the attractiveness of a virtue-centered approach to ethics, there is no consensus among virtue ethicists concerning which version of virtue ethics provides the most plausible and attractive agent-centered alternative, except perhaps that it would be broadly Aristotelian. Furthermore, even this modest claim would be contested by ethicists preferring Humean, Platonic, or Nietzschean models of virtue ethics.

Against this backdrop of the philosophical revival of virtue, I set out to outline, describe, and advocate an account of virtue ethics that construes love as the central moral virtue. This model of love-centered virtue ethics imports important insights from Thomas Aquinas, without relying upon his broad system of metaphysical and ethical views. After describing an *agape*-centered account of Aristotelian virtue ethics, I proceed to focus upon several of its attractive features. The combination of these features should suffice to make it one of the stronger versions of contemporary virtue theory. As such, the theory is both: (a) attractive in comparison to traditional modern moral theories using deontological and consequentialist approaches, as well as (b) attractive in comparison to other accounts of virtue ethics. This account draws upon important conceptual features from Thomas Aquinas's virtue theory, though many of its foundational constituents are present in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as well

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as the New Testament. It also has important similarities to contemporary Aristotelian virtue theories advocated by Alasdair MacIntyre, Philippa Foot, and Rosalind Hursthouse. Despite some obvious historic religious influences upon this theory, the theory itself and the arguments that I offer for the theory are thoroughly secular and rely upon no inherently religious claims.

Few contemporary efforts have been made to present a distinctly love-centered account of virtue ethics within philosophy along with an extended argument for its advantages. In part, this lack is due to the relative youth of the contemporary virtue ethics movement. Furthermore, the accounts of love-centered ethics that have been presented are sometimes theological rather than philosophical as in the case of Anders Nygrens's *Agape and Eros*. Such projects rely on distinctly religious premises that would be unattractive apart from specific theological pre-suppositions. Ultimately, I argue that important features of a love-centered approach to ethics should be widely attractive including: its approach to the partiality-impartiality puzzle, the attention it gives to humanity's social and relational nature, its account of the practical rationality of moral behavior, its emphasis upon the agent's unified psyche, its ability to provide action guidance, its recognition of the moral significance of properly bonded relationships with others, and its emphasis on love as a virtue that is universally valuable, but which will be applied in culturally flexible ways. Accordingly, this approach addresses several common objections to virtue ethics including: the need for action guidance, the need to resolve conflicting guidance from multiple virtues, and the need to avoid cultural relativism while retaining a desirable amount of cross-cultural flexibility.

## OVERARCHING ARGUMENT

The central argument for any ethical system must include an overall presentation of how the system works, which moral concepts and concerns it prioritizes, why it prioritizes them, and how it might be carried out in real life, to enable one to judge whether or not the ethical system meets the reader's moral expectations and intuitions. On a range of issues of concern to contemporary ethicists, the love-centered system does an attractive job of addressing central normative ethical issues while simultaneously fulfilling moral intuitions that have sometimes been perceived as conflicting with one another. This view addresses how to: understand the concept of the supererogatory, balance commitments in close personal relationships with broader moral concerns, provide cultural flexibility while maintaining an objective view of morality, provide conceptual room for both moral impartiality as well as close personal relationships, understand the relationship between virtue and the agent's happiness,

and offer improved action guidance over competing contemporary virtue theories. Furthermore, it accomplishes these goals while working within broadly accepted principles in contemporary virtue ethics with modest additions from Aquinas's insights about the virtue of love and its relationship with the other virtues.

Chapter 2 explains why agapic love should serve as the central moral trait in our system. From Plato, to the New Testament, to Aquinas, to contemporary care ethics and psychological theory, we will see that love is frequently embraced as the moral ideal. Accordingly, a virtue theory centered on love rather than justice or any other trait seems most promising. Chapter 2 presents an account of the virtue of love that has its roots in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, portraying love as *a disposition towards relationally appropriate acts of the will—consisting of desires for the ongoing good of persons and desires for ongoing proper bonds with persons—held as final ends*. This virtue is sometimes called *agape*, *caritas*, charity, or simply love.

Chapter 3 begins by outlining Aquinas's moral system to illustrate both similarities to and differences from my own love-centered theory. It then proceeds to elucidate other distinctive features of love-centered virtue ethics: the role love plays in shaping other virtues, the unity of the virtues found in love and prudence, why it is impossible for virtues to be used badly, and how virtues typically benefit the virtuous person. This chapter demonstrates the improved action guidance made possible by love-centered virtue ethics, which is an important advantage this view has over many competing systems of virtue ethics. Contemporary virtue ethics has inherited a historic tradition that has frequently claimed that there is a unity to the virtues, that prudence unites intellectual and moral virtue, that virtues are foundational to the agent's happiness and so forth, but few contemporary accounts have a satisfying explanation for these claims and many accounts now reject these views rather than embrace them. Through this discussion, I hope to persuade the reader that the love-centered vision of virtue ethics makes sense of these traditional intuitions in a more satisfying way than competing accounts of virtue ethics.

Chapter 4 shows how love ought to be expressed in various types of relationships including: one's relationship with the self, closer personal relationships, impersonal relationships, and even relationships with enemies. It also shows how the virtue of love reconciles partial and impartial moral concerns by allowing relationships to serve as impartial reasons to justify certain categories of unequal action. Therefore, this chapter demonstrates how we can have equal moral regard for all, while maintaining and prioritizing the closer, personal relationships that help make life worth living. Thus, it offers a satisfying strategy for accommodating the modern demand for moral impartiality without sacrificing the importance of close personal relationships.

The fifth chapter considers love-centered virtue ethic's approach to descriptive cultural pluralism, which combines cross-cultural flexibility with cross-cultural moral guidance rooted in love and loving relationships. Thus, it attempts to maintain an objective basis for cross-cultural ethical norms, but without the inflexibility that easily leads to cultural imperialism. By fulfilling both moral intuitions well—the need for both a cross-cultural objective essence to moral theory and the need for cultural flexibility, I intend to show that love-centered virtue ethics possesses resources to answer these important and difficult moral questions in a better way than competing moral theories.

Chapter 6 discusses contemporary views of humanity as social animal and demonstrates that love-centered virtue ethics fits well with these views. It demonstrates that love-centered virtue ethics avoids a controversial metaphysical anthropology at the heart of its approach, while avoiding the opposite mistake of simply ignoring questions about human nature. Thus, it is compatible with a humble version of naturalism that is sometimes endorsed within contemporary virtue ethics projects.[1] Accordingly, it brings a traditional Aristotelian and Thomist view into conversation with contemporary accounts of human nature.

BROAD ISSUES WITHIN VIRTUE THEORY

A complete account of any approach to virtue ethics requires both a general theory concerning the structure of virtue generically as well as an account of the specific virtues constituting the ideal traits advocated by the theory. Paradigmatic theories of virtue ethics offered by influential historic thinkers such as Aristotle and Aquinas addressed both of these tasks. However, the numerous competing and conflicting accounts of the virtues provides a daunting contemporary challenge to this endeavor. As MacIntyre notes, "there are just too many different and incompatible conceptions of virtue for there to be any real unity to the concept. . . . Homer, Sophocles, Aristotle, the New Testament and medieval thinkers differ from each other in too many ways."[2] Furthermore, we might add the more recent and quite disparate conceptions of virtue held by David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ayn Rand, and many others to the list. As Robert Louden observes, "There is no general agreed upon and significant expression of desirable moral character."[3] While these problems are not unique to virtue ethics—since both deontology and consequentialism face analogous versions of this challenge[4]—problems stemming from the competing pluralistic accounts of moral character are genuine foundational challenges for virtue ethics.

When varying accounts of virtue are compared, it becomes evident that there are substantial disagreements on a wide range of issues. There are broad and general discrepancies including competing conceptions of

what constitutes various virtues, disagreements concerning which character traits count as virtues, and disagreements concerning the relative importance of various virtues. Some of the more specific questions arising when comparing competing virtue traditions include: "Should traits like humility, the 'monkish virtues,' and even altruism be categorized as virtues or vices?," "Is there any trait, such as prudence, which serves as a central unifying virtue that all genuine virtues share in common?," "What role does (or should) distinctive cultural constructs play in shaping the proper construal of the virtues?," "Can an account of virtue ethics be genuinely pluralistic?," "Must certain claims about human nature ground an account of virtue?," "What import does the truth or falsity of various religious claims have in determining whether traits are virtuous or vicious?," "What is the relationship between moral and intellectual virtues?," "Are moral and intellectual virtues mutually supporting or incompatible with one another?" Accordingly, one might ask: "Are there moral virtues based in intellectual ignorance?"

Furthermore, some accounts of virtues ethics seem deeply influenced by cultural context. Aristotle's ideal virtuous person looks suspiciously like a proud, self-sufficient, militarily trained member of the Athenian upper class. Similarly, David Hume's virtuous ideal looks as if it is overly influenced by the model of the secular eighteenth-century upper-class gentleman who embodied the values of Scottish Enlightenment.[5] If these observations are correct, do they cast doubt on these accounts of virtue ethics? Or is there some way to account for such culturally embodied pluralism in accounts of virtue ethics without fundamentally undermining such views? These and many other issues are raised within the broad family of contemporary virtue ethicists.

## THE NATURE OF VIRTUE

There are several broadly Aristotelian features incorporated within the love-centered approach that have been embraced by many other contemporary virtue theorists. These features include (1) a focus on the agent's character dispositions rather than her particular actions apart from the dispositions from which they stem, (2) a portrayal of virtues as broad excellences embodied in human character dispositions, (3) an emphasis on the need for practical wisdom (*phronesis*), and (4) an emphasis on the philosophical importance of moral psychology.[6]

Like other virtue approaches, the love-centered account is an agent-focused moral theory. In contemporary virtue ethics it is widely accepted that accounts of external actions alone give unacceptably thin accounts of the moral life. One reason for this view is that if we only examine an agent's external actions we lack adequate context for a full moral evaluation. Consider the classic 'trolley dilemma' where someone throws a rail

switch to divert a trolley car and saves five lives with the foreseeable cost of one innocent life. Without more information about the agent we lack vital contextual data for a full analysis of the morality of such an action.

There is a significant range of ethically relevant questions that still need to be answered. What motivated the person who diverted the trolley? Did he desire to save five lives for their own sake or was the action egoistic in some way—for example, did he want to improve his reputation as a 'hero'? Was he motivated to save the five due to some personal relationship with one of them? How well did he understand the situation? Did he think as carefully and clearly as time allowed to ensure there was no better course of action that might save five lives without the cost of one innocent life? Did he regret that the loss of a life was necessary, or was he callous toward the doomed person? Did he discount the value of the lost life in some vicious way, for example, was he more willing to sacrifice this individual because he disliked her personally or because she was the member of some disliked racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, or religious group? Was he acting characteristically out of well-established personal dispositions, or was this dramatic action uncharacteristic in some way? These and many other questions about the agent are needed for an accurate and thorough moral analysis. The context they offer shapes our judgments about the 'hero's' action. Even ethicists who place high value on the consequences of actions when making moral evaluations might think poorly of an individual who saves five people motivated by an egoistic desire for publicity, without desiring other alternative actions with no cost of lives, and who was callous toward the value of sacrificed person because of her racial identity.

Therefore, virtue approaches to ethics take a different starting point than either traditional deontological duty-based ethics or consequentialist results-centered ethics. Rather than ask narrower questions such as "What action ought the moral agent perform within specific morally relevant situations?"—trolley dilemmas and the like—or "What principles should the agent obey to determine the morally correct action?" roughly, virtue theories ask what sort of traits should the agent possess in order to embody moral excellence. In turn, these traits enable the virtuous person to react well within ethically significant situations. Yet, a full account of the virtues cannot be reduced to tendencies toward certain types of external actions but must also include the motivational dispositions undergirding such actions, the emotional patterns that occur before, during, and after morally significant action, as well as the epistemic habits which precede, accompany, and shape these actions. Virtues are the underlying habits that include both the total internal experience of ideal moral agent as well as her external actions.

Consider some typical contemporary accounts of virtue: "The concept of a virtue is the concept of something that makes its possessor good; a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent, or admirable person who

acts and reacts well, rightly, as she should—she gets things right."[7] "Virtue is a disposition (perhaps of a specially rational and self-conscious kind) to behave rightly,"[8] and "A virtue is a good quality of character, more specifically a disposition to respond to, or acknowledge, items within its field or fields in an excellent or good enough way."[9] While each of these definitions is distinct there is an identifiable recurring core to their accounts. Accordingly, I define virtue as: *an excellence of character constituted by a disposition to act and react well, in terms of internal motivations, emotions, and reasons, as well as external actions*.

Virtues are excellences of intellectual and moral character. Consider the broad range of inter- and intrapersonal experiences an individual faces: there are excellent and flawed ways one might face each type of experience. This approach is also roughly the way Aristotle proceeds in his account of ethics.[10] For Aristotle a paradigm virtue is courage: excellence concerning fear. Courage involves experiencing fear in proportion to the actual danger of a situation; neither experiencing too much fear constituting cowardice nor too little fear expressing recklessness and acting accordingly. Excellence concerning bondedness to money is generosity, neither being overly bonded to it as the stingy person, nor being financially careless due to inadequate bondedness to money. There is also an intellectual component to generosity which requires recognizing the actual value of money, neither overestimating nor underestimating both its practical value and relative importance. Temperance concerns physical appetites. The virtuous person desires the amounts and types of food in accordance with the needs of health. She neither desires food too much as the glutton does, nor too little as the prude.[11] Ideal friendship is based on the best grounds: virtue correctly identified, mutually appreciated, and carried out within a relationship of appropriate equality.[12] For each area of life there is a potential excellence of character. Each excellence of character consists in an appropriate internal disposition according to some rational principle and carried out wisely.

Someone might worry that if virtue is a thoroughgoing excellence of character that this view might have two undesirable implications. First, it might seem that only someone who attains absolute moral perfection would be virtuous, thereby making virtue practically unattainable. Second, if virtue requires absolute moral perfection, then this fact would seem to leave no conceptual space for supererogatory actions, which are good actions that go beyond those that are morally obligatory. However, both implications can be avoided since virtue has sometimes been portrayed as a threshold concept in recent virtue ethics.[13] Most likely, no human possesses the virtues in an absolutely perfect state. Instead, we deem someone as virtuous if there is a recurring virtuous pattern in her life that stems from deeper internal traits. Thus, we speak of someone as virtuous if they meet a certain threshold in their tendencies over time.

Virtues are traits that are characteristic qualities of a person. Yet, perfection in character is neither necessary to achieve virtue nor likely possible.

Conceptualizing virtue as a threshold concept with character graduations existing between the virtuous person and absolute perfection also allows the reconceptualization of supererogatory actions. Notably, while it is often intuited that there are morally good and praiseworthy actions that are not morally obligatory, many contemporary theories are unable to accommodate this intuition. As one commentator notes, "Although common discourse in most cultures allows for such [supererogatory] acts and often attaches special value to them, ethical theories have only rarely discussed this category of actions directly and systematically."[14]

One way for virtue theory to reconceptualize the supererogatory is to acknowledge that some people manifest virtuous traits to a degree well beyond even those we typically think of as virtuous. Although virtue theorists sometimes avoid the language of obligation[15] one might view extraordinarily virtuous people as those who supererogatorily go far beyond their duty. Virtue ethics might replace supererogatory language by distinguishing between those typical virtuous individuals and those who display virtue more deeply and consistently than the norm even for the virtuous. Ebenezer Scrooge may begin to meet the threshold of what it means to be a virtuous generous person at the end of *A Christmas Carol*, but his generosity does not compare to Mother Teresa's who was not merely generous but dedicated her entire adult life to loving generosity. She is generous in a more thoroughly virtuous way than even the reformed Scrooge.

Virtues are dispositions, praiseworthy enduring personal tendencies. Virtuous dispositions are excellent habitual patterns of thought, emotion, desire, and external behavior. However, having a disposition is compatible with an occasional 'out of character' action. Even virtuous people have bad days. Similarly, an occasional positive external action is compatible with a lack of general character, though such an action would be less than fully virtuous since it would neither proceed from a virtuous internal disposition nor would it be accompanied by the fully appropriate internal phenomena. A disposition is characteristic of a particular person, a quality that one would use to describe someone's general tendencies. These are qualitative descriptions identifying traits that are paradigmatic of a particular person over time.

Virtues are dispositions toward acting and reacting well in various situations. Virtues typically result both in actions from the agent's own initiative as well as reactions to situations that are relevant to a particular virtue. For example, a generous person will likely seek opportunities to give to the needy without being asked, but he is also likely to respond generously to needy persons when aid is requested. Thus, a virtuous person can be expected to initiate a lifestyle that is marked by virtuous tendencies. He actively seeks to live out his values. However, a virtuous

person can also be expected to react well in response to circumstances outside of his control.

A distinction of virtue-based ethics is its focus upon the deep inner life of the agent constituted by motivations, emotions, reasons, internal construals of external events, and so on. Therefore, virtues are not just tendencies toward ideal patterns of external behavior but also include dispositions toward excellence in the inner life. Virtue is partially constituted by inner tendencies consisting in proper desires, motives, emotions, reasons, construals, and so on. The fully virtuous person does not merely perform the proper external action but performs the proper action, for the right reason, while experiencing the proper emotions and other internal phenomena. Proper emotions also precede and follow external actions. Thus, virtue includes an entire network of related internal phenomena that constitute the core of the qualitative disposition even in many situations where a virtue does not result in external actions. For example, generous people do not have infinite resources and therefore cannot be involved in every effort to aid the needy. But, their failure to give to absolutely every person in need does not demonstrate that they are apathetic in such cases. A generous person may often desire internally to aid in cases where they simply lack the resources to act externally.

Character traits are largely constituted by one's desires expressed in love, hatred, hope, fear, and joy.[16] There is tremendous character difference between someone who delights in aiding others and one who aids others but constantly experiences it as an unpleasant sacrifice. Similarly, there is a difference between someone who eats healthily through sheer determination of will but finds healthy living thoroughly unpleasant, and the more deeply temperate person who enjoys healthy eating. Virtue approaches to ethics capture these moral nuances, which are often underappreciated in other views.

Virtue normatively results in an excellent ongoing pattern of external action concerning the relevant matters. Morally relevant actions are not limited to dramatic large events, but are also embodied in routine activities. A thrifty person instinctively assesses the value of her smaller purchases in everyday life and makes wise actions accordingly. The courageous man routinely recognizes the risks involved in everyday behaviors and reacts in accordance to this actual risk. The temperate agent makes many small decisions each day in line with temperance. Such internal and external behaviors become a kind of 'second nature' for the virtuous person.

## THE PLURALITY OF SYSTEMS OF VIRTUE

There are many catalogues of the virtues and disputes concerning which traits are actually virtuous. Some virtues appear frequently in such cata-

logues and seem as if they would appear in any plausible exhaustive list of virtues such as benevolence, justice, and practical reason. Other virtues are more controversial and are absent from many lists such as hope, meekness, and pride. Moreover, some traits, such as humility[17] and the ascetic 'monkish' virtues[18] literally appear as virtues on some lists and as vices on other lists. The value attributed to yet other traits is more situation-specific, dependent upon other culturally influenced assumptions about life, or irresolvable disputes concerning the nature of well-being. Virtues like courage are most attractive, or at least more relevant, in cultures where real physical danger is a common threat. Piety only makes sense in cultures that embrace some belief in the divine. Ascetic virtues are more plausible in cultures embracing belief in immaterial goods as constituents of genuine well-being.

One advantage of the forthcoming account is that it will allow and explain some pluralism in accounts of the virtues. While a few central virtues like love and practical reason will have to be on all lists of the virtues since they are partial constituents of any genuine virtue, some other virtues will cohere well within the conceptual account of some virtue catalogues but not others. Some accounts of virtue include very similar internal phenomena that are constituted by similar rational principles, but are applied in such different external circumstances so as to make the two traits look dramatically different from each other. For example, courage is an important virtue on many of the traditional ancient and medieval lists,[19] but the average contemporary westerner lives a life of such relative safety that courage cannot have the same significance in our account of the fully virtuous life as it had in the ancient Greek city states facing the real possibility of attack and annihilation from barbarians, foreign empires, and one another.

While something like the principle that we ought to fear that which is dangerous in proportion to its actual danger is plausibly a culturally universal principle, its application is radically different in ancient and contemporary contexts. The ancient Athenian citizen was trained in warfare and might recognize the actual danger in certain Spartan or Persian war tactics, which should aid them in controlling fear in proportion to the actual danger of such situations. Yet, there is no similar widespread experience relevant to the modern American culture. Therefore, courage will hardly have the same place in our culture's concepts of virtue whereas it was important enough in Aristotle's culture to warrant one of the longest discussions of any particular virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Whether or not some other traits are actually virtues will depend upon disputed facts about the world and/or the nature of well-being. It is well-known that Hume despised the ascetic 'monkish' virtues, endorsing an attitude one might expect from an eighteenth-century upper-class secular Scottish gentleman.[20] To those who are skeptical about the existence of a spiritual realm through which the monkish virtues purportedly ben-

efit humanity, such a reaction is entirely sensible. However, it is also no surprise that agents who believe in the existence of God and believe that rejecting earthly pleasures brings one closer to eternal joy would view such traits as virtuous. Thus, it is to be expected that such virtues are criticized on some hedonistic secular lists, but advocated within religious lists of virtues.

In light of such considerations the wide variety of catalogues of the virtues should come as no surprise. Ultimately, one should welcome the different insights that can be gained by examining disparate accounts of virtue even if some accounts are ultimately rejected. Accordingly, pluralism concerning systems of virtue does not entail universalism about all such accounts. The plausibility of some candidates for virtue is contingent upon the justification of other controversial claims about human nature, well-being, or metaphysics. Still others candidates will cohere well within some systems of virtue but not others. Most relevant to the love-centered account is the fact that some potential candidates for virtues will be incompatible with love and therefore rejected.

RATIONALITY, PRACTICAL RATIONALITY, AND RIGHT ACTION

Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is a necessary epistemic component of all virtues.[21] This observation goes back at least as far as Aristotle and entails that moral virtue is based in rational principles and therefore requires a certain set of epistemic traits and practical skills to carry out well. Accordingly, he went so far as to define humanity as a rational animal. The virtuous person's inner dispositions are shaped according to the principles of rationality. As Aristotle suggests, "virtue is a purposive disposition, lying in a mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle, and by that which a prudent man would use to determine it."[22] This definition highlights two connections between epistemic faculties and moral virtue.

First, the content of virtue itself is determined in light of the proper abstract principles of rationality. The fully courageous person fears only that which she rationally ought to fear, and she fears it in proportion to the actual danger it presents. The temperate man fulfills his appetites in ways that are rational in that they are conducive to long-term health. Furthermore, his appetites themselves become shaped according to rational principle so that the fully temperate person naturally desires that which is healthy in proportion to its actual healthfulness. The just person deals with others in according to equity in exchange, which is established according to rational principles.

Second, the virtuous person is also rational in that she is prudentially wise in her practical application of the abstract principles of virtue. She applies the abstract principles of virtue well to actual situations in the

real world. Developing this second trait is arguably the more difficult of
the two. For it is easier to realize that one should fear that which is
actually fearful, which is virtually an analytic truth, than it is to be skilled
at recognizing which things in the empirical world actually are fearful
and to act well and wisely in light of their actual fearfulness. In this way,
practical wisdom is a necessary component to any genuine virtue since it
is needed to consistently apply general abstract principles to real life
circumstances.

A third connection between virtue and rationality is endorses else-
where by Aristotle.[23] Virtue is practically rational in the sense that it
typically benefits the virtuous person. Such claims concerning the benefi-
cial nature of the virtues are still common within contemporary virtue
theory, though the exact nature of the benefit varies from theory to theory
and the claim itself is not as widely endorsed as it once was. The love-
centered theory's version of this claim will be elaborated upon in the next
chapter, but for now it suffices to note that the life of virtue is rational in
that it can reasonably be expected to advance the agent's genuine inter-
ests and even when it does not there was no wiser way to live. Therefore,
the epistemically virtuous agent recognizes that virtues are desirable
states of character.

An additional sense in which love is rational is that the loving person
cares well for that which it is most rational to care for: persons, their well-
being, and one's proper bonds in relationship with them. Persons have
the most objective value of anything in the empirical world. This claim is
implicit even in Kant's famous principle that we should, "Act in such a
way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the
person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same
time as an end."[24] Implicitly, it is irrational to treat persons merely as a
means to advance other values since everything else possesses less value
than persons. However, it is one thing to accept the abstract principle that
persons have the greatest value, but quite another to apply that truth in
the actual situations, relationships, and realities of real life. The practical
wisdom to live out such a truth is difficult to acquire.

Since virtues are broad dispositions that ground moral life, fully right
action consists in: *action emanating from a virtue, shaped by the ends of love,
and wisely carried out within a particular situation using practical reason.*
Therefore, in any particular situation there may be a range of actions that
are broadly virtuous in that they express excellence about equally well.
The best thing to do in a given particular situation may similarly depend
upon contingent facts.

Suppose a friend has been diagnosed with cancer and needs encour-
aging. There are many ways one might encourage her, which would each
serve as an appropriate expression of love. One might stay with her dur-
ing chemotherapy, drive her to and from medical appointments, bring
her meals during recovery from her treatment, distract her from troubles,

or simply provide a listening ear when she wishes to talk about her situation. Each of these actions would likely express love in the situation, though practical wisdom, as well as appropriate empathy allowing insight into the friend's needs and desires would show which action or actions would be most appropriate. The friend caring for the cancer sufferer would also have to consider his other commitments and available resources to love well in other relationships at the same time. While not all well-intended actions or even all loving actions are equally virtuous several very different actions could each embody virtuous action equally well.

Properly understanding a situation and knowing how to live out virtue's implications well within that situation both require practical wisdom. Consequently, there must be some degree of unity between moral virtue and intellectual virtue since practical wisdom and the ends of love are both required for fully virtuous action. Acting well requires the ends of love and the ability to identify effective means for carrying out those ends through practical reason.[25] Accordingly, the virtuous person displays at least a degree of intellectual virtue expressing love. As Rosalind Hursthouse explains,

> [The reason] why agents do not know the answer to "What should I do in these circumstances?" despite the fact that there *is* an answer . . . arises from an inadequate grasp of what is involved in doing what is *kind* or *unkind*, in being honest, or *just* or *lacking charity* or, in general, of how the virtue (and vice) terms are to be correctly applied.[26]

Just as telling a newlywed that "marriage is easy, all you need to do is treat you spouse lovingly" is egregiously simplistic advice, merely encouraging someone to live virtuously, honestly, or lovingly is inadequate advice. An agent might simply lack the practical skills and everyday know how to apply the broad abstract principles of virtue to everyday life. Developing the necessary wisdom usually requires virtuous exemplars, broad life experience, practice in relevant situations, advice, and knowledge of the many practical principles for applying a particular virtue to real life.

Therefore, the moral and intellectual faculties overlap. One cannot be morally virtuous without also being at least somewhat intellectually virtuous. Certain practical intellectual excellences are needed to apply the virtues. Wisdom is needed to apply the abstract theoretical conceptions of virtue to the complex realities of the actual world. For example, the principle that one should develop courage by controlling fear so that it occurs in proportion to the actual danger of a situation is much simpler than the application of the principle, which would also require knowledge of how much danger is present in various new and sometimes ambiguous situations. This principle can be seen in the types of dangers the ancient Greeks would have faced, such as the unpredictable melee of

the phalanx on the battlefield. Wisdom is required to apply virtue's broad and universal abstract principles to complex and changing specific practical realities that were never—and could never have been—discussed in particular in advance.

Some critics have claimed that the necessary vagueness in the application of virtue ethics is a devastating flaw. Accordingly, Julia Annas recently reported, but did not endorse such an objection. "One common objection to virtue ethics is that it is 'not applicable,' it is, allegedly, a theory which is too vague for us to apply it to the actual world."[27] Yet, this objection is incorrect. Such vagueness in the application of ethics is a necessary feature of the gap between any abstract ethical theory and the complex realities of the world. Accordingly, it does not identify a problem that is distinctive to virtue theory. Furthermore, the challenge in applying virtue to the real world is no greater than—and arguably quite less severe than—the problems that accompany moral rules like the Utilitarian Greatest Happiness principle or Kant's Categorical Imperative to the real world.

Rather than ignoring the challenge of applying abstract principles to the complexities of the real-world virtue ethics has appropriately acknowledged those complexities and identifies the wisdom needed to apply the principles of virtue to the real world as morally important. An important role for practical wisdom is present in many contemporary accounts of virtue ethics including Rosalind Hursthouse's,[28] Alasdair MacIntyre's,[29] and Christine Swanton's,[30] yet there are also versions which reject this feature. Two contemporary accounts rejecting this role for practical wisdom are Michael Slote's sentimentalist virtue theory and Julia Driver's consequentialist virtue theory.

Slote's view is that benevolent motivations are the sole requirement for virtuous action.[31] In doing so, he abandons the Aristotelian view that intellectual and moral virtues are unified in important ways. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Slote's view has the unfortunate implication that virtuous action can be completely ill informed and have unintentional negative results. For example, implicitly Slote must describe someone who benevolently but ignorantly tries to cure epileptic seizures in a child through a violent, nearly tortuous exorcism as virtuous even if they are culpably ignorant of the proper methods for the treatment of epilepsy.[32]

Similarly, Driver rejects a role for practical wisdom claiming that a virtue is any "trait that produces more good than not systematically"[33] in the actual world. For Driver, good intentions or benevolent motivations are unnecessary constituents as is any role for practical wisdom. Accordingly, she is well known for advocating a class of virtues based in ignorance. This view has its own advantages and disadvantages. In any case, the strength of any argument for Driver's account of virtue will be dependent upon the credibility of a foundational argument in favor of utilitarianism more broadly, a protracted discussion of which is beyond the

scope of the current argument. For those who already accept utilitarianism, the argument for such a view will be intuitive. If all that matters to morality is the maximizing of utility, then virtues will simply be traits that tend to maximize utility without any further requirement.

Since the love-centered account embraces the traditional Aristotelian role of practical wisdom, it also shares in Aristotle's rejection of algorithmic moral theories. Without wisely examining the complexities of a particular situation and considering a broad range of possible actions it is impossible to give adequate moral advice or make proper moral evaluations. Accordingly, many of the philosopher's moral puzzles present artificial dilemmas that do not reflect real-world problems. Therefore, the solutions they tend to propose are unreliable when imported to real world situation. For example, perhaps, the utilitarian solution to the traditional trolley puzzle is fundamentally correct. *If* a trolley is about to kill five individuals and *if* the *only* alternative is to divert the trolley onto an alternative track where it will foreseeably and unavoidably kill one, perhaps, the virtuous person should divert the trolley. But, in a real-world version of the trolley problem, the virtuous person might hope for some third option. At the least, there is a degree of real-world unpredictability in the actual consequences of either diverting the trolley or choosing not to divert it. Such real-world unpredictability between intentions and consequences causes serious difficulties for utilitarianism such as the problem of moral luck.[34]

Julia Annas similarly criticizes the desire for an all-encompassing complete moral theory to provide direction for every situation and portrays it as a type of immaturity. She argues,

> There's still something obviously wrong if I solve my difficult decisions by always doing what she [my morally wise mother] tells me to do. And things are no better if I solve my difficult decisions by always doing by what my [moral] theory tells me to do. That is still not an adult attitude.[35]

Implicitly, the appeal of algorithmic theories of morality is their simplicity along with their clear moral guidance. Yet, such simplicity can be attractive for the wrong reasons, such as an immature desire for a black and white moral world without moral ambiguities rather than the complex real world where mechanical theories of morality give inadequate tools for facing the full range of real-world situations one is likely to encounter.

CONCLUSION

So far, we have briefly reviewed philosophical commitments that are typical of contemporary virtue ethics such as the broad definition of vir-

tue as excellence in personal dispositions. We have also presented a strategy for acknowledging and accommodating the considerable variety of catalogues and accounts of the virtues. We have described a broadly Aristotelian strategy for portraying right action as *action emanating from a virtue, which is shaped by the ends of love, and wisely carried out within a particular situation using practical reason*. This foundation will be built upon in the following chapters.

## NOTES

1. For example, see Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 192, 216.

2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, second edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 169.

3. Robert Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 215.

4. The analogous problem for the deontologist is that there is no consensus on what the overriding abstract moral duties are that one must follow. The analogous problem for the consequentialist is that there is no consensus concerning what constitutes the good that we ought to maximize. Any impression that there is consensus concerning these issues overlooks the breadth of cross-cultural and historic views on these matters.

5. Of course, since the Scottish Enlightenment was influenced by the Roman Academy and its luminaries such as Cicero there may also be Ancient Roman ideals operating in the background of Hume's catalog of virtues.

6. There are numerous sources where discussions of these traits can be found, but a partial list includes: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, G. E. M. Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy," in *Philosophy* 33 (1958), Rosalind Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Christine Swanton's *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

7. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 13.

8. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 141.

9. Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19.

10. Aristotle adds the additional requirement that virtuous dispositions are ordered to the agent's happiness found in *eudaimonia*. I commit to the view that virtues tend to benefit their possessor in chapter 3, but that aspect of virtue is less relevant to this section's conversation and requires a degree of explanation and nuance reserved for that latter discussion.

11. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, W. D. Ross (tr.), 1107–1108.

12. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156.

13. See Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, 24–25.

14. David Heyd, "Supererogation," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/supererogation/ accessed on 1/23/2018.

15. See G. E. M. Anscombe 1958.

16. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104–1105.

17. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1123.

18. See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 1751,  9.3.

19. Aristotle gives courage one of the most in depth treatments of any of the virtues. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115–1117. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologicae* II-II.123–140.

20. See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 1751,  9.3.

21. Since my account of virtue ethics commits to a role for intellectual *phronesis* in all moral virtues, it is properly categorized as a kind of 'hard virtue' ethics according to Daniel C. Russell's distinction between hard and soft virtue ethics. See Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

22. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1955), 1107.

23. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097–1098.

24. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York, NY: HarperCollins Books, 2009), 4:428–9.

25. Julia Driver and others have suggested that there are moral virtues that require epistemic vices, such as modesty or humility. The requirement that all virtue has a connection to practical wisdom does not rule out all possible virtues of ignorance, for example, it is possible to be intellectually virtuous in that one may understand how to carry out virtuous ends well while simultaneously being ignorant in some other sense such as one's own greatness. Therefore, the observations in this section do not rule out all possible virtues of ignorance, but it is sufficient to demonstrate that there can be no virtues of complete intellectual ignorance since practical wisdom would be needed to live out any 'virtue of ignorance' properly. See Julia Driver, *Uneasy Virtue* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

26. Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics*, 60.

27. Julia Annas, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 78 (2004): 61.

28. See Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics*, 54–61.

29. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1999), 99–118.

30. See Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, 293–295.

31. See Michael Slote, *Morals From Motives* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 36.

32. I have critiqued Slote's views at length at: Eric J. Silverman, "Michael Slote's Rejection of Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 42 (2008): 507–518.

33. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 82.

34. See Dana K. Nelkin, "Moral Luck," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2003. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-luck/ accessed 5/16/2016.

35. Julia Annas, "Applying Virtue to Ethics," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32 (2015): 6.

# TWO

# The Nature of Love

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt reports, "When the sages pick a single word or principle to elevate above all others, the winner is almost always 'love' or 'reciprocity.'"[1] Even if this claim turns out to be an exaggeration Haidt is certainly correct that love has had a special position in the Western tradition since the time of Plato's *Symposium*. As one character in the *Symposium* proclaims,

> And the love, more especially, which is concerned with the good, and which is perfected in company with temperance and justice, whether among gods or men, has the greatest power, and is the source of all our happiness and harmony, and makes us friends with the gods who are above us, and with one another.[2]

This overwhelmingly positive view of love promises much on its part: that love is the source of happiness, harmony, friendship, and piety and leads to great virtue. If such claims are even partially correct, then an ethic centered upon love would have great potential. Since love has this place of prominence in Western thought, it is worth investigating what a love-centered account of virtue ethics would look like and what advantages such an approach would possess. Furthermore, a major love-centered viewpoint in contemporary ethics has been conspicuous in its absence. As Iris Murdoch suggests, "We need a moral philosophy in which the concept of love, so rarely mentioned now by philosophers, can once again by made central."[3] This chapter begins by giving an initial account of love, proceeds to consider the general advantages of the account, and ends by systematically elaborating upon various aspects and entailments of love.

## AN INITIAL ACCOUNT OF LOVE

Any love-centered account of virtue ethics will need to rely upon an account of the virtue of love. While there are many competing conceptions of love[4] I offer a definition of the virtue of love derived from Aquinas's account of *caritas*, which is the Latin equivalent of *agape*: *a disposition towards relationally appropriate acts of the will—consisting of desires for the ongoing good of persons and desires for ongoing proper bonds with persons—held as final ends*.[5] While I have provided a full defense and discussion of this account of love over alternative contemporary views elsewhere,[6] this account possesses several philosophical advantages.

By defining love as a disposition determined by desires rather than actions or emotions, this account makes a person's will the locus of love. While certain derivative patterns in emotions, external actions, and intellectual beliefs from these desires are to be expected, desires are love's central constituent rather than these other derivative components. Consider Harry Frankfurt's influential work describing the structure of a person's will in terms of various orders and types of desires.[7] A person's will includes a complex network of desired states of affairs, the relative strengths of desires for various states of affairs, what motivates a person's desire for these states of affairs, a person's desires about their desires, and whether a desire is endorsed or resisted by the person. The lover possesses a disposition towards broadly loving desires for the good and properly bonded relationships with persons in general.

While a person's volitional structure is more central to love than his emotional states, a person's desires generally influence his emotions under normal psychological conditions. The lover does not merely act in the right external way, possess the proper beliefs, or desire the right thing but under normal psychological circumstances experiences the proper emotions before, during, and after virtuous activities. Joy, happiness, satisfaction, and/or similar pro-emotions are experienced when love's desires are attained. When desires are thwarted, there tends to be sadness, disappointment, or a sense of loss.

The love of a person who does not experience these emotions in the appropriate circumstances falls short of the ideal. Yet, an agent who experiences ecstatic feelings of happiness when desires are fulfilled and devastating feelings of disappointment when they are thwarted is not necessarily virtuous. A generally virtuous person may also fail to feel proper emotions for physiobiological reasons that are unrelated to character, such as anemia, imbalances in brain chemistry, or even a tumor in a particular area of the brain. Finally, desires for certain states of affairs normatively entail that a person seeks to act to bring about those states in the proper circumstances so long as they have accurate awareness of her circumstances and that there are no competing overriding desires directing the agent to do otherwise.

The desire for the good of persons entails that the lover wants the beloved to possess the goods needed for a flourishing life. To avoid committing to a particular theory of the good, I stipulate that desires for any goods that the lover is reasonably warranted in viewing as genuinely good count as loving desires. These goods include those things that the lover views as beneficial to anyone in the beloved's circumstances: objectively or subjectively. A lover typically desires goods for the beloved such as health, pleasure, happiness, knowledge, achievement, virtue, friendship, and the like. The lover also views the beloved's subjective desires as potential contributors to her good, so long as they do not conflict with goods that may be objectively necessary for flourishing.

The lover desires bonds with each person appropriate for their relationship.[8] There are many kinds of relational bonds between persons. The closest bonds include shared life, familial identification, ongoing shared attention, affection, and sexual intimacy. However, the limited nature of time and human attention make it impossible for a person to have these sorts of bonds with all others generally. Less intimate bonds include shared human identification, dignity, and the recognition of value or moral status. Somewhere between very personal and thoroughly impersonal types of bonds would be connections constituted by shared goals, vocation, and worldview with the beloved.

On this issue, the contemporary account I advocate is distinct from Aquinas's. For Aquinas, the primary object of love is God. Humans are appropriate objects of love in a derivative sense since they bear God's image. Thus, one's relationship with God is central to the traditional Thomistic ethical system. While I surely agree that if God exists, one's personal disposition towards loving or rejecting God is a central moral issue, the account I will advocate is agnostic concerning the existence of God. Similarly, if the traditional account of Christian anthropology is correct, that humans are made in God's image and that image is the ground of their value, then the command to love God would entail also loving all humans. Yet, my account will rely upon no such theological anthropological claim.

Accordingly, Jonathan Sanford notes that within contemporary virtue ethics, it is common to embrace general benevolence or selfless altruism as an important virtue rather than Aquinas's Christian charity. This results in a difficulty explaining 'why' we ought to be benevolent toward others without the full supporting context in which Aquinas's *caritas* takes place.[9] Surely, Aquinas provides a compelling explanation for Christian charity for those who embrace his broader claims about God and humanity as a bearer of the divine image resulting in an account which justifies more than mere benevolence. We ought to love all others because they bear the infinitely valuable divine image. Furthermore, there is the hope that we may be united to all others in the shared contemplation of God in the afterlife.

While Aquinas offers one excellent way to ground human moral value, the background metaphysical views from which Aquinas derives his account need not be correct for one to believe that it is virtuous to love all humans in the sense that we should desire their good and a kind of relationally appropriate bondedness with them. Instead, one only needs to believe that humanity, or personhood more generally, has the kind of value which morally requires the kind of loving response I have described. One might simply believe that the high moral value held by persons is self-evident, that the personal rational nature is the appropriate basis for love, [10] or that the most reliable way to live a flourishing life is to possess virtues shaped by love—which is a plausible implication of the arguments found in chapter 3—or that one should be a loving person for some other reason.

## THE ADVANTAGES OF DEFINING LOVE AS *CARITAS*/*AGAPE*

There are a number of advantages to my account of love. [11] First, this account of love is relationally flexible and applicable to the full range of human relationships. Unlike theories of love that are mainly applicable to friendships and romantic relationships it is applicable to a fuller range of impersonal, personal, intimate, and internal relationships. Romantic and/or erotic relationships are an important but narrow category of relationships, while most loving relationships are of other types. Therefore, it is important to have a definition of love that possesses greater relational flexibility.

Second, this view provides criteria to distinguish genuine love from mere sentiment, infatuation, or delusion. Consider the extreme case of the stalker: while the stalker may be fully convinced of his love for the stalked, he is unwarranted in viewing his obsessive behavior as good for the stalked. Furthermore, the stalker attempts to live out bonds with the stalked that are not relationally appropriate and he has no warranted reason to believe that circumstances might change to make them appropriate. Therefore, this account of love provides criteria to evaluate the stalker as unloving, which many accounts do not. Accounts of love that fail to distinguish between obsessive behavior and genuine love are deeply flawed.

Third, this account has explanatory power for typical normative experiences of love including the tenacity of love, the non-fungibility of the beloved, the strong feelings associated with love, and so on. Love is tenacious because it is based on the essential value of personhood, expressed within the type of relationship that exists between lover and beloved. Since the value of persons does not change, neither does the essential nature of love. The relational context within which love occurs might change, but not easily or often. Close personal relationships do not dis-

solve easily, but provide a stable circumstantial context guiding the expression of love. Similarly, strangers do not become close friends quickly or easily.

Accounts of love that ground love in the lover's specific non-relational attributes have difficulty explaining why love should not change as these attributes change or when the lover meets someone possessing these relationship grounding attributes in superior degrees.[12] If Arthur's care for Guinevere is based only upon her sense of honor or fidelity, then it follows that Arthur's love should simply fade if these attributes fade. Similarly, if Romeo's love for Juliet is truly based in her beauty or sense of humor, then his love might later shift to anyone who possesses those traits in greater measure. Yet, the real-world experience of love and friendship is not as tenuous as this theoretical explanation would entail. Most of us agree with Shakespeare that: "Love is not love, which alters when it alteration finds . . ."[13] The attributes based theory of love simply does not have a good explanation for love's tenacity.

Even if a friendship or romance can be lost through personal offenses or long-term distance within a relationship, relationships of genuine love at least tend to be tenacious. Furthermore, when relationships change if one is truly a loving person the end of a friendship or even a marriage does not abolish all care for the other but instead changes the relational context in which that care can be expressed. Love based in personhood expressed within relational circumstances explains these phenomena better than love based upon other non-relational attributes.

Similarly, the beloved in closer personal and intimate relationships is non-fungible since the persons in these relationships are unique with a unique relational history; therefore, substitution cannot be made without loss of value in the lover's eyes. Furthermore, the intensity of feelings associated with love is explained by the fact that varying strengths of desires are appropriate for varying types of relationships. The closest and most intimate relationships ground stronger desires than impersonal relationships thereby explaining the strong feelings typically associated with the most intimate loving relationships. Therefore, this account of love possesses explanatory power concerning a wide range of the traditional experiences associated with love.

## CAN LOVE BE A DISPOSITION?

One objection to dispositional accounts of love comes from Alexander Pruss. He is concerned with two aspects of such accounts. He explains,

> Neither do we want to say that *agape* is a *disposition* or *tendency* to feel an emotion or an attitude. . . . *dispositions* and *attitudes* are even less under direct volitional control than feelings are, and their connection with action is still not such as to *guarantee* right action.[14]

Pruss has two concerns: first, dispositions are not under our direct control and therefore we cannot truly be responsible for them. Second, there is a significant gap between right character and right action. Even right dispositional character does not ensure right action and such actions are an essential feature of love.

Pruss's first concern presupposes something like the Kantian principle, 'ought implies can.' According to this principle one cannot be obligated to perform an action that is impossible to perform. This principle has been discussed considerably elsewhere and has some *prima facie* problems: for example, it simply denies the possibility of genuine moral dilemmas where one truly ought to do two incompatible things. Yet, there are tragic situations where it seems quite reasonable to say that the person cannot emerge without moral failure such as the famous story *Sophie's Choice* where Sophie can only choose to save one of her two children from the Nazis at the cost of sacrificing the other, but has no way to save them both.[15]

However, love-centered virtue ethics is compatible with the moral intuition that 'ought implies can.' Pruss's implicit claim is that if 'ought implies can' is correct, then we cannot be morally obligated to develop a loving disposition since developing such a disposition is not under our immediate direct volitional control. Surely, Pruss is correct that we cannot simply acquire a loving disposition by a simple direct choice of the will in the same way that one can choose to give ten percent of his income to charity by choosing to write a check. Yet, this fact hardly demonstrates that developing such a disposition over time is not a moral obligation.[16] The objection absurdly entails that there can be no moral obligations that are ongoing long-term projects, since no long-term project can be achieved by a direct choice of the will. Furthermore, the development of personal abilities and proper moral dispositions is considered to be morally obligatory under many theories including Kant's.[17] Just as Kant believed that moral duty includes the development of long-term agential traits such as reverence toward the moral law, a tendency toward practical helpfulness toward others, and to develop one's own talents, the love-centered account entails that developing a loving disposition over time is the central moral imperative.

Furthermore, even if someone claims that developing the virtues is not morally obligatory since their development is not fully under our control, virtues might still be portrayed as ideals of character. Even if one is not morally culpable for failing to develop a fully loving disposition if she is genuinely incapable of cultivating it, an ethical theory should still acknowledge the concept of morally ideal character even if it is impossible for some to attain. Such a moral theory could claim that developing a loving disposition as much as possible is morally obligatory, even if developing such a perfectly loving disposition is not completely under our control.

Second, Pruss expresses the concern that a loving disposition is no guarantee of any particular loving action. Again, Pruss is correct in this observation, but his conclusion simply doesn't follow from this observation. Just because there is a gap between loving dispositions and loving actions does not prove that love should not be defined in terms of a disposition. Loving dispositions and loving actions both possess moral value and a full account of morality might demand that we become loving persons who engage consistently in loving actions.

While agents with genuinely loving dispositions occasionally fail in regard to some particular action, whether or not an agent possesses virtuous dispositional traits is a better indicator of the overall moral status of the agent than whether they perform a particular loving action. Ideally, an agent will both possess the attribute of love and be consistently involved in loving actions as circumstances allow. If an agent consistently fails to produce loving actions it is likely that she does not actually possess a loving disposition, perhaps due to a lack of practical wisdom. Of course, it is also possible that someone might be systematically prevented from expressing love in external actions due to external constraints. Such a person might genuinely possess the virtue of love while engaging in few externally loving actions. For example, if someone were kidnapped and held in complete isolation from others there would be few ways to express love in practical action, but this lack of loving action would not prove that the person is unloving.

A moral theory can and should speak of both loving dispositions and loving actions. There are both agential *agapic* dispositions and particular *agapic* acts. A moral theory should have room to acknowledge the importance of both dispositions and acts. Finally, while someone without a fully loving disposition may occasionally produce an external action that approximates loving action, such action is still less than fully loving in that it is disconnected from a deeper loving character. Therefore, such action likely fails to be connected to fully loving ongoing internal emotions, desires, motives, and the like. Thus, while it is useful and important to speak of loving dispositions and loving actions, loving dispositions are more morally foundational since they appear to be a necessary condition for fully loving external actions. At the least, a loving disposition makes loving actions far more likely.

## RELATIONALLY APPROPRIATE DESIRES TOWARD PERSONS

Since persons are the proper object of love,[18] my definition of love includes a universal scope for persons that are appropriate recipients of love. Personhood is the trait to which love is the appropriate response. This virtue entails what is usually meant by "an unconditional love for all," a broad disposition toward care for, proper relational bonds with,

and/or the good of persons in general. However, the language of uncon-
ditionality is misleading. Such love is not truly unconditional since there
is an appropriate condition for love: personhood. Literally unconditional
love would not discriminate between objects in any way, but this is not
what is usually meant by the expression.

Personhood is never encountered in abstraction, but with particular
individuals with whom we have varying kinds of relationships. There-
fore, the fully loving agent has loving desires toward the self, close
friends and relatives, and more distant persons. These relational circum-
stances of love provide important context for the proper expression of
love. The proper expression of love's desires is shaped by the lover's
relationship with each individual.[19] As Pruss observes, "Love's actions
are not focused on love, but on the beloved as seen in the context of a
particular relationship."[20] The relationships one has with people, includ-
ing the self, are of central importance in shaping appropriate expressions
of love. Relationships define the bonds people have with one another,
which are the roles they are expected to play in one another's lives.
Therefore, loving well entails fulfilling these roles properly.

In the most technical sense, a relationship is merely a special kind of
predicate. In particular, a relationship is *an ongoing connection between
particular persons describing the bond between them constituted by the role they
play in one another's lives that can be represented by a two place predicate.*[21] A
relationship is a label referring to a bond between particular persons.
However, it may use the same person for both sides of the predicate in
the case of one's relationship with one's self. The relational predicate
describes the normative bond that these persons play in one another's
lives. As such, it is a specific instance of a category of relationships. The
relational role expressed by the predicate can be large or small. Spouses,
children, and parents are large relational roles. Both relational roles may
be identical to one another as in the case of friends or they may differ
considerably as in the case of parents and children. Typically, parents
and children both have significant and large roles in one another's lives,
but these roles are decidedly unequal. A distant stranger living three
thousand miles away may play a significant role in my life. Perhaps, she
helps grow the food that I eat or drills for the oil used in my car. Even if
one person is unaware of another particular person's existence as an
individual, he is still a fellow human and therefore an object of moral
concern. Accordingly, the minimal relational role would be that of 'fellow
human' entailing that all others are equal in that they are highly valuable
objects of moral concern.

Relationships fulfill a needed role in our account of love identified by
Iris Murdoch. She observes, "If we say that Good is Love we have to
explain that there are different kinds of love."[22] Murdoch saw the need
for a basis to distinguish between loves. However, she only saw the pos-
sibility of distinguishing between various types of love but did not recog-

nize the possibility of there being only one kind of love with various types of expressions shaped by varying relationships. The only kind of love that is morally relevant to our theory is the love of persons, but there is a variety of relational circumstances in which that love occurs. In each case love is a desire for the good of a person and a type of relationally appropriate unity with her.

Being an appropriate object for love is based upon personhood rather than some trait that exists more broadly in the animal world such as the capacity for experiencing pleasure. Yet, non-persons are of moral significance to the degree that they possess personal traits. Thus, the well-being of animals and in some situations proper bonds with them are morally relevant reasons for action. Therefore, at least some non-personal animals are morally significant creatures, but to a lower degree than persons. Accordingly, it is much more plausible that a dog, chimpanzee, or dolphin possesses great moral significance rather than an earthworm, plankton, or insect.[23]

Empathy with the beloved plays a significant role in shaping both desires of love. There are two relevant senses of empathy that aid love. As psychologist Martin Hoffman explains, "Empathy has been defined by psychologists in two ways: (a) empathy is the cognitive awareness of another person's internal states, that is, his thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and intentions . . . (b) empathy is the vicarious affective response to another person."[24] Drawing upon both senses of the word empathy, we may think of it as the ability to understand and affectively respond in union with the emotions, inner experiences, and viewpoints of another person.

Love requires at least some empathetic ability to understand the world from the beloved's viewpoint. For example, empathy is a necessary condition for some types of properly united relational bonds. The bond of the union of affection[25] that accompanies the closest relationships is partially constituted by empathy for the beloved. Without considerable empathy with the beloved it is impossible to truly be united with their affections, which is an important aspect of proper bondedness in closer relationships. Empathy aids in rejoicing when others rejoice and in mourning when others mourn. Accordingly, Aristotle describes the ideal friend as a type of second self, similar in virtue and united in affections.[26]

Empathy also plays an important role in engendering proper responsiveness in the lover. Empathizing with other's painful experiences is a reliable motivator in the lover for bringing about the good for the beloved and alleviating their distress. For such people not only count the positive emotional states of others as a good for themselves, but they can literally experience the positive emotional states of others as a good for themselves. As Hoffman suggests,

> There are countless studies showing that when people witness others
> in distress, they typically respond empathically or with an overt help-
> ful act, whichever is being investigated, and when data are available on
> both responses, subjects typically show them both. . . . a group of em-
> pathic sixth graders who discussed a sad incident in another person's
> life donated more time . . . college students who obtained high empa-
> thy scores . . . donated more money . . . were more likely to volunteer
> and put in more hours of work at shelters . . .[27]

Thus, the ability to empathize helps bring about both the internal desire
for the good of others, as well as external actions intending to fulfill that
desire.

Finally, empathy is also important because the good for other persons
is partially shaped by their subjective desires, viewpoints, and situa-
tions.[28] If one's child wants to become a carpenter and has aptitude as a
craftsman, while disliking mathematics, then offering to pay for a degree
in accounting is unlikely to be an effective expression of love. If remote
villagers in a developing nation value their connection with nature more
than they value technological advances that might alienate them from
nature then providing such technology may not be an effective way to
promote their good.[29] Those who are unable to empathize with the be-
loved will have difficulties uniting with them and promoting their good.
I can hardly will the fulfillment of another person's desires in an excellent
way, if I lack empathy such that I fail to even understand his desires.

Finally, empathy allows the lover to make quick adjustments to exter-
nal expressions of love as he recognizes the way his actions affect the
beloved. In contrast, unempathetic attempts to promote the beloved's
well-being risk incompetence, inappropriate paternalism, and negative
consequences. At minimum, empathy is a great aid to love in general,
and it is a necessary constituent of some aspects of love.

## DESIRE FOR THE GOOD OF THE BELOVED

This account accepts any desire that the agent is reasonably warranted in
viewing as beneficial to the beloved as genuinely loving and therefore is
not committed to a particular view of the good.[30] This flexibility applies
both to what the agent views as constitutive of the good and to what
means are likely to bring about that good. Therefore, not all well-in-
tended desires count as genuine desires for the beloved's good, but many
do. Typical contemporary candidates for the constituents of the 'good' for
persons include fulfilled desires, pleasure, virtue, knowledge of impor-
tant matters, physical and mental health, relationships, religious-spiritual
enlightenment, or some multifaceted list including several of these
goods.

One might argue that despite the multiple contemporary views of the good that only one of these views is actually warranted and therefore that only people with desires in line with that specific account of the good should count as genuinely loving. Such a conclusion might even be correct, but even if this narrow view turns out to be correct it is currently difficult to offer convincing support for such an argument for numerous reasons:

a. There is no consensus concerning the nature of well-being in contemporary academia.
b. There is even less cross-cultural consensus concerning the nature of well-being.
c. An argument that agents could only be warranted in holding one particular view of well-being would be extremely ambitious. It would be even more ambitious than an argument advocating a particular view of well-being as correct since the argument would have to establish both the truth of a particular view of well-being as well as the considerable lack of warrant held for all other views, by all agents, regardless of epistemic circumstances.
d. There is no clear and widely agreed upon criterion for even resolving this debate since the nature of personal well-being depends in part upon broader metaphysical disputes about human nature that are similarly intractable.

Accordingly, an argument for a particular view of the good is beyond the scope of this current project and would deserve its own book-length discussion.[31] It is reasonable to believe that multiple views of human well-being are plausible. The love-centered account is adequately flexible to work well with a variety of views on the matter. In contemporary western culture, presumably we are warranted in thinking that each of the current major views of well-being is at least reasonably warranted.

One challenge arising from the pluralistic, multifaceted way that contemporary culture thinks about well-being is that fulfilling some desires might advance a person's good in one way while undermining it in another. Accordingly, some potential constituents of well-being will need to be prioritized over others. These dilemmas show yet another way that practical wisdom is needed to be a loving person. The loving person uses wisdom and keeps the potentially conflicting ways that something might be beneficial in mind. Living by this principle need not look particularly philosophical; it can be as simple as a good parent realizing that helping a child develop self-control is more important than indulging a child's every desire even though both the virtue of self-control and fulfilled desires are plausible and perhaps even actual constituents of well-being.

An agent is not loving if she lacks a broad desire for the good of persons in general. There are several ways that this failure might occur. The most vicious and rarest would be explicit, self-conscious hatred of

persons. Hateful desires are antithetical to the desires of love and include both a desire for harm for the hated and a desire to reject appropriate relational bonds with the hated. Someone is hateful even if they possess hateful desires without acting upon them. After all, there are many potential negative consequences to the self from acting upon the hatred of others. Such a person could risk legal sanctions, retribution, ostracization, and similar harmful consequences. Therefore, the fact that a person rarely acts in obviously hateful ways is no proof that she is not motivated by a hateful disposition.

More commonly, unloving people are simply apathetic toward the good of others. Such agents are simply indifferent toward others and do not view their good as reasons for action. While this trait sounds less serious than outright hatred, it is still a deeply vicious and dangerous trait. Much harm can result from simple apathy concerning the effects of one's actions upon people outside of some narrower range of concern: the self, the family, or the tribe, and so on. This attitude is well depicted by one of Immanuel Kant's four famous descriptions of immorally violating the ethical categorical imperative.

> A fourth man, for whom things are going well, sees that others (whom he could help) have to struggle with great hardships, and he asks, "What concern of mine is it? Let each one be as happy as heaven wills, or as he can make himself; I will not take anything from him or even envy him; but to his welfare or to his assistance in time of need I have no desire to contribute."[32]

Kant's unethical apathetic individual is self-consciously indifferent toward others. He is fully aware that he does not take the good of others as a reason for action. In contrast, some apathetic individuals might simply be unreflective about the effects of their actions upon others. In many situations, it is easy to pursue one's personal goals without weighing the broader costs on others. One may overcharge for his services, cheat on taxes, be unfaithful to his spouse, neglect his children, indulge his own preferences, and so forth and simply fail to reflect upon the effects such actions have on others. Some unreflectively apathetic persons would change if only they recognized the effects of their actions, but others would not and would simply become self-consciously apathetic once they realized the full effects of their actions.

The three categories of unloving people discussed so far: hateful, reflectively apathetic, and unreflectively apathetic each entirely lack loving desires. We have discussed these categories in terms of the fullest paradigm cases of unloving vice, which are thankfully rare. Yet, there are also ways one could fall short of love even if she possesses some loving desires. One might have desires for the good of persons, but simply not have them strongly enough so that they win out over competing desires. One may desire one's own good, but not enough to eat reasonably health-

ily. One may desire a spouse's good, but not enough to be faithful to him. One may desire the good of distant strangers, but not enough to ever donate money to promote their good. In such cases, the agent's desires probably do not meet the threshold of love. One deep root of such vice might be that the agent cares so much for himself or those closest to him that no time or resources are left to offer others. For example, one might care a little about the struggles of distant people, but not enough to give up an indulgently luxurious lifestyle.

There are also intellectual roots that would result in a failure to love. One might act intending to promote someone's good, but understand his good in an unwarranted way. For example, if one cares for a smoker and tries to express love for him by helping him obtain and smoke rare cigars. Normally, helping other people fulfill their desires is an act of love since desire satisfaction is a plausible constituent of well-being. However, a pattern of fulfilling these particular desires will foreseeably undermine the beloved's health, which is clearly more central to their long-term well-being than fulfilling a desire for the short-term pleasures of smoking. Therefore, aiding in the fulfillment of, and encouraging such self-destructive desires is unloving.[33] Even if the sole constituent of well-being is fulfilled desire there is good reason to believe that fulfilling these desires could undermine the fulfillment of other more important desires long-term.

A final way that we might fail to love others is to seek to promote their good, but in a way that we should not expect to succeed. For example, if one's plan to pay for his children's college expenses is to play the lottery each week, this plan is deeply and obviously flawed. This failure represents a failure in practical wisdom's necessary role in love.

## DESIRE FOR A PROPERLY BONDED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE BELOVED

An account of morality that divorced a desire for relationships from the desire to benefit people would ignore the necessary real-world social contextualization of ethics and would risk focusing upon unreal abstractions rather than actual persons. Love's desire for a properly bonded relationship with the beloved acknowledges the necessary social context of virtue and gives it an appropriate—often neglected—role in morality. The idea that love includes union or bondedness with others goes at least as far back as Aristophanes's speech in Plato's *Symposium* where he offers a ridiculous story of human origins including a portrayal of love as a literal search for a person's lost 'other half.'[34] Aristophanes's story about the origins of love is absurd when taken literally: humans once existed in a contented state of spherical wholeness, but humans were split in two by the gods due to our hubris. Yet, metaphorically the story illustrates an

important truth about love. Love is partially constituted by a desire for a kind of bonded relationship with another person. Relationships are constituted by a type of union, bond, or attachment between persons. The loving person desires bonds in accordance with the relationships she actually possesses with others.

Murdoch understands this relationship between love and bondedness. She explains, "Love is the general name of the quality of attachment. . . ."[35] She perceives that love is closely related to attachment, bonds, relationships, and so forth. My definition offers a more refined view by proposing that love is not itself an attachment, except in the sense that a desire for relational bonds is a kind of mental or emotional attachment. Loving desires aim at proper attachments intended to bring an abstract idea of a relationship into reality with particular people though the loving person need not have reflective self-awareness concerning the full nature of these desires. While the lover desires attachments with others, she is not necessarily consumed with the theory of relational attachments to others.

There are various types of bonds uniting people in relationships. The most intimate bonds include shared life, residence, personal attention, affection, and sexual intimacy. These sorts of bonds are similar to what Aquinas refers to as 'real union.' Another intimate bond is the union of affections where one person not merely counts a good or harm to another as a good or harm to the self abstractly, but actually experiences such things as a good or harm to the self. In addition, in such relationships it is possible to experience a harm or good to another person as a different sort of benefit or harm to ourselves. If one's spouse enjoys becoming a prestigious doctor, the lover takes joy in that which brings joy to the spouse. Yet, the benefit of experiencing 'shared joys' in itself is distinct from the derivative benefits of the circumstances in which such shared joys may occur. The shared joy one has with a spouse or friend in their successfully becoming a prestigious doctor, is distinct from derivative benefits from being married to a prestigious doctor such as increased prestige and monetary resources. Conversely, if one's spouse develops cancer, the union of affections can cause the lover to experience the harm of negative emotions in a way similar to the way the beloved experiences the affective aspect of harm from the situation. This harm is distinct and separate from the practical harms of being married to someone facing such a disease who is thereby less able to offer aid and support in everyday life.

Some relationships are shaped by moderate levels of intimacy associated with bonds constituted by shared values, goals, worldview, vocation, and similar sorts of union.[36] In each case, it is important that the types of bonds desired and sought are appropriate in light of the relationship that exists, or supposedly exists, between two people. For example, if a teacher-student relationship exists between two people, then it is

important to unite in ways relevant and appropriate to the bonds that normatively constitute that relationship. A teacher who has no desire to communicate knowledge of relevant topics, develop discipline-specific skills in the student, or general epistemic habits that are necessary for learning is simply not a good teacher. He has failed to desire union appropriate in light of his actual relationship with his students.

There are also distant, deeply impersonal relationships, such as those constituted by bonds that unite all people. The limited nature of time and human attention make it impossible for a person to be close to everyone in the ways relevant to the most intimate types of relationships. In contrast, shared human identification, dignity, and the recognition of moral status are bonds that unite all humanity, and it is vicious to ignore these bonds. Racism and sexism are classic ways of rejecting bonds that in fact unite all of humanity. The casual contempt many in our society have for those with differing political opinions similarly constitutes a type of rejection of union with one another.

The minimal relational bond is based upon shared existence as persons. One way of viewing the relationship between love and justice would be to construe justice simply as love within these minimal impersonal relationships. One advantage our account has over others is that the demands within these relationships can be explained in part by the unitive desire for a properly bonded relationship one ought to have towards all people in light of their shared moral status as human beings. In light of this shared status, we ought to have a concern for others as rights bearers with innate and shared dignity, worthy of respect. In our unity with others as fellow humans, we should also have an awareness of the potential interchangeability of our situations. We ought to be concerned with the treatment of all people, since as those with shared moral status, to allow the mistreatment of one person is to potentially endorse such mistreatment of ourselves. Accordingly, the minimal unitive desires of love toward persons entail that treating people as members of an 'outgroup'—what is sometimes referred to as 'othering' persons—thus treating them as beings with fundamentally inferior moral worth is vicious.

There are several ways one might fail to desire proper relational bonds. It is possible to desire distance from others, to be apathetic concerning union with others, and it is possible to have some but not enough desire for union with others. There are also ways one might fail intellectually that would be relevant for this desire of love. One may be mistaken concerning the proper bonds one ought to desire with others or one may properly understand loving bonds while lacking the practical wisdom and ability to pursue them wisely in real-world circumstances.

Since the lover desires appropriate union in his relationships, it is possible for vicious agents to desire too many bonds, too few bonds, or to desire bonds that are simply inappropriate to the relationship. Some people's desires for bonds with others are insufficient for love. For example,

some agents abandon friendships too easily or give up on their marriages when faced with normal challenges. In individualistic cultures like our own inadequate bondedness is a common phenomenon.

A contrasting vicious pattern is embodied in a tendency toward unhealthy enmeshment with the lives of others through overbondedness. For example, some parents 'smother' their adult children with too much involvement. Controlling spouses, emotionally needy friendships, inappropriate paternalistic attitudes, and overly involved coworkers can all be expressions of overbondedness. A distinct type of overbondedness is the person who desires categories of bonds that are simply inappropriate for a particular type of relationship. For example, sexual intimacy is a type of bond that will be appropriate within only a limited range of relationships. Similarly, the pooling of financial resources will not be appropriate for every relationship.

Stricter Aristotelians might object that this account of love as a virtue does not portray it in terms of a golden mean found between vices of excess and deficiency embodying a principle of rationality.[37] Furthermore, this objection might seem correct in that there is no possibility that the lover possesses 'too much love' on this view of ethics. While Aquinas and others have thought that love does not follow the traditional Aristotelian pattern of the golden mean[38] the role played by this desire for appropriate relational bonds required by love embodies one of the two senses in which the virtue of love actually does follow Aristotle's doctrine of the golden mean.[39] First, it is possible to have a vicious attitude toward a person by having an unloving desire for either an inadequate or excessive scope of bonds with her. A desire for relationally appropriate bonds is a golden mean lying between these two vices. This desire embodies a rational principle: ideally, one ought to desire the bonds appropriate to the actual relationship that exists.[40]

There is a similar golden mean found in the lover's desire for the good of persons. It is possible to possess an inadequate desire the good of any particular person, but it is also possible to possess too strong a desire for the good of a particular person if the desire would lead to vicious preference for the good of that person to the detriment of other people.[41] In this sense, too much desire for a specific person's good is not love but a kind of unloving partiality. Thus, both desires of love can be construed as following the pattern of Aristotle's golden mean in important ways.

## THE IMPORTANCE AND COMPLEXITY OF RELATIONAL BONDEDNESS

It has been under-noticed among virtue ethicists that a significant range of virtues are rooted in proper bondedness within relationships rather than the promotion of well-being. Gratitude does little to promote the

well-being of the thanked, but it goes far to promote union within the relationship since it involves a proper acknowledgment of good events and states within the relationship. It acknowledges and reinforces bonds in the relationship. In many contexts, honesty is more important as a necessary condition for genuine emotional/relational unity within a relationship than as a promoter of well-being. Truly knowing one another is needed if we are to be united with one another. Trust brought about by ongoing honesty is part of what unites people to one another. Similarly, humility promote peace, harmony, and union within relationships while reducing pettiness and unnecessary conflict.

Some common practices within friendship are also better explained in terms of their role in promoting union rather than beneficence. Consider the practice of friends exchanging gifts at holidays or on one another's birthdays. Typically, either friend could have afforded the gift himself. There is no net financial advantage in receiving a gift if one buys a reciprocal gift in return. Furthermore, each person might have chosen a more highly desired item for himself at the same cost. So, the practice of exchanging gifts often does little to result in a net increase to the good of the friend, but is better explained in terms of reinforcing bonds within the relationships. It promotes bonding by allowing each person to show interest in the friend, knowledge of the friend's interests, and a symbolic willingness to contribute to his happiness.

Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals* presents a category of virtues that have a significant unitive function. He refers to these as the 'virtues of acknowledged dependence.' He explains,

> The virtues of independent rational agency need for their adequate exercise to be accompanied by what I shall call the virtues of acknowledge dependence. . . . both sets of virtues are needed in order to actualize the distinctive potentialities that are specific to the human rational animal.[42]

For MacIntyre these virtues are significant in that they emphasize the moral significance of the agent's need for others rather than his autonomy from them, which is a significant shift in the emphasis from both much of modern moral philosophy as well as Aristotle himself. This important category of virtues, which includes proper thankfulness, uncalculated generosity, pity, and others demonstrates a proper acknowledgment of human mutual dependence.

However, what MacIntyre does not elaborate upon is that each of these virtues implicitly involves acknowledging a kind of bond between persons requiring a unitive type of response. We should be grateful in light of our actual relationship to a benefactor. We should be generous to others in light their actual relationship to us as fellow human beings who are worthy of our support. We should take pity on those who suffer in light of our actual relationship with them as fellow wayfarers in a world

of suffering whose positions could easily be reversed. In at least many circumstances, we should have mercy on those who have wronged us, because at times we too have wronged others. Therefore, we share a status as morally flawed human beings.

Similarly, much of Aristotle's extended conversation about friendship in Books VIII & IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* focuses upon the nature of proper bonds within relationships. Aristotle asks, what in fact forms the bond uniting various types of 'friendships'? Aristotle's answer is that relationships may be based in usefulness, pleasantness, or virtue and each of these might plausibly be referred to as a friendship. Yet, only virtue provides the best, most stable, most appropriate basis, and the truest friendship. Uniting through a recognition, appreciation, and ongoing commitment to mutual virtue grounds the best relationships on his account. He goes on to suggest that a range of relationships that are not simplistically categorized as friendships will ideally be built upon a friendship of mutual virtue. For example, he believes that the relationship between spouses or between parents and children ideally include a friendship of mutual virtue.[43] Furthermore, Aristotle proceeds to offer practical tips for promoting unity within the equality of friendships and for remedying inequality within friendships for the sake of improved relational unity.[44]

Even the underappreciated virtue ethics of David Hume identifies several virtues that primarily have a bonding function within relationships. He mentions virtues like constancy in friendship, honor, deference to parents, hospitality, an appropriate public spirit, discretion, agreeableness, and even wittiness as well as several others virtues that are more appropriately thought of as expressions of union with others than as any sort of attempt to promote well-being. He describes these virtues in terms of their ability to please others.[45]

One important function of the unitive aspect of love is that it guards against 'benevolent' attitudes mixed with various morally dubious attitudes that sometimes accompany benevolence. For example, one can be motivated by an inappropriate sense of pride or superiority in one's self or some aspect of one's identity. A classic instance of this problem was displayed by those who were motivated to help others by the attitude embodied within the so called 'white man's burden.' This vicious motivation was well captured in Rudyard Kipling's poem, which portrayed the white man as the agent of pure beneficence towards an unthankful and unequal world.

> Take up the White Man's burden—
> And reap his old reward:
> The blame of those ye better
> The hate of those ye guard— [46]

Such motivation, even when combined with some level of genuine benevolence intended to help others still embodies an arrogant pride and sense of superiority toward others that undermines proper relational bonds and union with them. Even much milder attitudes resulting in unjust paternalism undermine unity with others.[47] Proper relational bonds with others require a relatively accurate view of them, one's self, and the appropriate sorts of bonds uniting them. Self-conceptions that display an exaggerated sense of self-importance and bonds which place others into such an unjust and inaccurate degree of inferiority are antithetical to love. In successful, high-functioning relationships based in mature mutual love both members of the relationship desire the bonds appropriate to their relationship.[48] To the degree that these bonds are compatible with love for all, the loving person desire bonds appropriate within in his various relationships.

Some aspects of what constitutes proper bonding are strictly determined by culture. For example, nothing in the concept of a lifelong sexual commitment between spouses requires an exchange and ongoing display of wedding rings. This custom is merely one of many possible ways of publicly displaying one's bond to a spouse and unavailability to other potential partners. Where this specific custom does not exist, others may exist to accomplish a similar purpose. Of course, merely displaying the cultural tokens associated with marital commitments is far less important than actually possessing a genuine commitment to a lifelong partnership. Building a partnership to last a lifetime, being faithful to one another, living together, pooling resources, and so forth are more important expressions of bonds within marriage.

However, the conceptual flexibility of relationships that explains the varying enculturated expressions of relationships also entails a degree of vagueness in relational concepts. The contemporary concept of marriage illustrates some of the puzzles raised by the vagueness of love's desire for properly bonded relationships. In current American culture there are foundational disagreements concerning the basic expectations of marriage and concept of marriage itself. Must a marital commitment be lifelong? Is procreation a normative expectation of marriage? Should spouses share a joint bank account? Is even an exclusive sexual commitment truly essential to marriage?

Furthermore, such vagueness concerning social structures in varying degrees influences contemporary attitudes toward virtually every category of relationship. Just as many aspects of the concept of spouse are vague or contested relational concepts such as those of parents, children, and friends are similarly vague. Accordingly, it might seem that relational concepts are too indeterminate to provide adequate guidance for that sort of relational bonds one should desire. Yet, this concern is unwarranted. At the very least one ought to desire bonds relevant to a relationship in light of the shared understanding of one's relationship one has

with her beloved. And this shared understanding of one's relationship is typically rooted in part in concepts more broadly existent in culture. Violating the norms that accompany such concepts can lead to negative social consequences. Furthermore, one should seek to fulfill promises and expectations one has implicitly or explicitly committed to within a relationship. Due to the wide ranging implications closer relationships have for life, implicit assumptions about relationships are extraordinarily difficult to escape even when explicit assumptions are eschewed.

Undoubtedly, some cultures are more explicit and more determinate in their relational concepts than others. In less pluralistic cultures shaped by very explicit relational norms such as the medieval offices of love, ancient Greco-Roman filial piety, or the five central Confucian relationships there is considerable explicit guidance concerning the proper bonds within varying kinds of relationships. Relational concepts in such cultures are far less vague than in our own. Yet, even in cultures without clearly stated explicit relational expectations there are virtually always implicit normative relational expectations including both affirmative expectations and negative prohibitions. Such norms can become most evident when they are violated due to the hostile reactions of others. These reactions can be extremely serious as when social workers from the government intervene to rescue children from an unacceptable family situation that violates cultural norms in childrearing. Such reactions can also be trivial, yet still provide a clear indicator of culturally normative relational expectations, as when neighbors react with hostility to one's lack of proper lawn upkeep.[49]

Finally, the mere existence of some degree of conceptual vagueness concerning relationships is inadequate to undermine the fact that we necessarily use conceptions of relationships. Relational constructs shape our interactions with others either implicitly or explicitly. Shared relational concepts are practical necessities for a coherent culture. The more explicit a culture is about such relational constructs, the easier these assumptions are to examine, fulfill, and even deviate from in a responsible way. Yet, cultures that lack clear systematic accounts of relationships still use relational constructs. Concepts of relationships, whether traditional or non-traditional, reflective or unreflective, explicit or implicit, shape a culture's relationships despite a degree of vagueness within them. Therefore, it is important to love well in light of the relational concepts we actually embrace and to reflect wisely upon relational concepts themselves to ensure that they are compatible with broad love toward all. In extreme circumstances, love may even require departing from a traditional cultural paradigm (which will be discussed further in chapter 5). Vagueness concerning some relational concepts should make us more thoughtful about how we typically conceptualize them, how we ought to conceptualize them, and should increase our attentiveness to the importance of loving well within relationships.

## OBJECTION CONSIDERED:
## DESIRES WITHOUT ACTION ARE NOT LOVE

Love has been defined as a disposition toward two categories of desires. Yet, someone might reasonably object that *desiring* the good is not enough to qualify as love. Instead, one must actually seek, pursue, and carry out the desires of love in external *action* in order to truly constitute love. One such objection comes from Nicholas Wolterstorff:

> If all a person ever does is desire that the good of someone be enhanced or desire that her worth be respected, I will not describe her as caring about that person. Care is seeking to promote what one believes to be that person's good or right. Seeking to promote what one believes to be a person's good or right comes in many forms.[50]

Two insights are appropriately captured by Wolterstorff's distinction between desiring and seeking the good of others. First, many people claim to desire things that they in fact do not. This is frequently the case when the individual knows that some goal is desirable or lives in a social context where he is pressured to view that goal as desirable, but does not actually want to pursue it. In this case, the person does not truly have loving desires even if he claims to possess them. Such people do not qualify as truly loving according to both Wolterstorff's and my own views.

Second, there are also examples where someone genuinely desires a good, but does not desire it with adequate strength. For example, virtually everyone desires their own physical health, but many do not desire it enough to change their lifestyles in order to bring about improved health. Such people do not love themselves well. In such cases, Wolterstorff's distinction between those who desire something and actually seek it is insightful. Such people do not care adequately about something they desire, despite genuinely desiring it. He is correct that an agent who has genuinely loving desires, but does not possess them with much strength should not be described as loving. However, my account of love also accommodates this insight. Someone who has some loving desires, but does not hold them strongly enough to integrate them so that they reliably result in action when appropriate and possible, does not meet the needed threshold to be described as a loving person. They do not have the virtue of love despite having some loving desires.

Despite the fact that Wolterstorff captures these worthwhile insights there are significant drawbacks to his view. The requirement that love must be expressed in actively seeking to bring about the good of the beloved makes the notion of universal care or universal love literally impossible. As beings of finite energy, resources, and talent, it is literally impossible for us to seek the good of everyone carried out in meaningful actions with particular people specifically in mind. For such an account

to allow for universal care, we would have to allow extremely weak examples of seeking the good for everyone to count as actively seeking to bring about their good, such as generic prayers for 'the human race' or activism for political policies that might benefit people in general—despite the fact that any political policy would be very unlikely to literally bring about the good of absolutely everyone. Actively seeking the good of literally everyone in meaningful ways seems to be impossible for finite beings.

However, if we accept that it is virtuous to desire the good of and union with people generally, then it is important to promote such desires as morally exemplary even when practical loving action toward all people is not really possible. It is unfortunate that sometimes no meaningful external route for seeking the good is truly possible, but it is still important for the moral agent to desire such goods. For example, an agent may desire that innocent hostages be rescued from terrorists overseas, be meaningfully concerned about them, and even be willing to help in sacrificial ways, despite the fact that there is little he can do to seek their good. Such desires do indeed constitute love even when there are few relevant external actions to be taken.

A related trouble with Wolterstorff's view is that there are people who are unable to seek the good for those they love due to external constraints. Hostages who have been kidnapped by terrorists for years may have no meaningful ability to seek the good of those for whom they care, but it is incorrect to suggest that they are unloving merely because circumstances prevent any plausible outlet for carry out loving desires. Yet, this claim appears to be an implication of the assertion that desire without external action is insufficient to constitute love. Therefore, a disposition constituted by well-integrated loving desires accommodates Wolterstorff's concerns while circumventing the problems that are entailed by his own view.

## PARADIGM OF LOVE: CORDELIA

One of the richer examples of love is found in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The play opens with the King announcing that he will divide his kingdom based on his three daughters' attestations of love. The older daughters flatter their father claiming to love him more than sight, life, health, beauty, and the like. Yet, the youngest daughter—full of the sincerest love—gives the simplest response. "I love your Majesty according to my bond; no more no less."[51] She suggests, as our own model of love depicts, that there is a normative ideal understanding of what constitutes love, and that the one who loves well, loves appropriately in light of that relational bond.

To love in ways or degrees other than the way one's actual relational bonds entail would be error. In this case, to love "more" than is appropriate would not suggest that Cordelia desires more goods for her father. Instead, loving too much is problematic because it would not leave enough room for Cordelia to love others and would risk undermining Lear's ability to love others as well. They would become enmeshed without adequate room in life for other healthy relationships. Such vicious love would entail relationally inappropriate overbonding.

Cordelia's response is an example of honesty and humility. She does not exaggerate the bonds of love, nor does she even use eloquence to draw attention to its full implications. Undoubtedly, she could have offered an impressive list of ways she cared for her father through her genuine love, but she eschews such an attempt since the true and broad boundaries of her love should already be clear to him. Offering a rhetorically polished account would have risked pride rather than loving by drawing undue attention to its implications, though it would have been understandably prudent in her situation. Love is not constituted by eloquent declarations, but by sincere desires and expressions of love.

Consider Cordelia's insightful critique of her sisters' insincere attestations of love.

> Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
> They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed,
> That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
> Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
> Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,
> To love my father all. [52]

Cordelia correctly recognizes the discrepancy between her sisters' words and actions. If they truly loved their father in the absurd overly bonded way they professed, then there would be no room in their lives for other loves. No virtuous father would want to be loved as Cordelia's sisters claim to love Lear. Such love would strangle any opportunity for the daughters to enjoy proper marital love. Furthermore, there would be no conceptual space to love their children, friends, selves, or people more generally. Cordelia realizes that any appropriate love of father must allow for an appropriate love of a husband, and other loving relationships.

Cordelia also shows an understanding of proper sibling love. To her insincere sisters, Cordelia offers an expression of care. Despite their flaws she expresses a desire for discretion in order to avoid damaging their reputations. As a sister she is hesitant to proclaim their vices publicly. [53]

> The jewels of our father, with washed eyes
> Cordelia leaves you. I know you what you are,
> And like a sister am most loath to call
> Your faults as they are named. [54]

Cordelia suggests that discretion concerning the faults of her sisters is an aspect of sibling love. In close personal relationships we tend to see others at their worst. Many people can put on a public façade to cover over vicious character, but few can hide the truth about themselves from their own family. Such discretion can promote a sibling's well-being, give opportunity to reform privately, and promote unity with them. Without discretion in close relationships it would be natural for people to isolate themselves for self-protective reasons.

Lear's punishment of Cordelia for her perceived insults also reveals something in his view of love. Falsely believing that she has failed him as a daughter, Lear withholds an expression of love that he understands to be a normal expression of a father's bond to a daughter. He withholds her dowry. While Lear's act is a choice of petty vengeance born out of a selfish love and a twisted understanding of what he ought to expect from his daughter, it yet reveals that he understands that the expression of fatherly love entails certain relationally normative actions—acts that he deliberately refuses to perform.

## CONCLUSION

These first two chapters have laid the theoretical foundations for a love-centered account of virtue ethics. They have discussed the contemporary Neo-Aristotelian framework for virtue as an excellent character disposition including external actions, internal desires and emotions, and combined with certain epistemic excellences. Furthermore, they have outlined a preliminary definition of love as a disposition consisting of a tendency towards two kinds of desires concerning persons. Finally, they have provided a detailed explication of the various parts of the definition of love to provide a starting point for the distinctive love-centered view of virtue ethics offered in the following chapters.

## NOTES

1. Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 45.

2. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Portable Plato*, ed. Scott Buchannan (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1976), 188.

3. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 45.

4. For four competing accounts of love see: Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), David Velleman, "Love as Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109 (1999), Niko Kolodny, "Love As Valuing a Relationship," *Philosophical Review* 112 (2003), and Hugh LaFollette, *Personal Relationships* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996). I have critiqued these accounts in Eric J. Silverman *The Prudence of Love: How Possessing the Virtue of Love Benefits the Lover* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 17–42.

5. This interpretation of Aquinas's account of charity is influenced by conversations with Eleonore Stump. See Eleonore Stump, "Love, By All Accounts," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 80 (2006): 25–43. In previous versions of my account of the virtue of love, I used the language of 'disinterested desires,' but the language of disinterest was more confusing than helpful to many readers. The stipulation that loving desires must be held as final ends implicitly rules out any morally troublesome 'interest' so there is no compelling reason to continue the use of the term 'disinterested,' which has Kantian rather than Thomistic overtones. Similarly, the language of 'relational bonds' rather than the vaguer traditional term 'union' is a verbal improvement intended to clarify the definition. These are verbal rather than substantial modifications in the definition. The most substantial change I have made in the definition is the addition of the term 'ongoing' in both desires. This change is intended to avoid the concern that it might be impossible or irrational to desire a state of affairs which is already accomplished. While I do not hold to those views of psychology such concerns have been raised frequently enough that I desire to accommodate them.

6. This account of the virtue of love is a moderately revised version of the view of love offered in Eric J. Silverman 2010, 59–92. The advantages I attribute to this account similarly summarize a fuller defense of this view made in Eric J. Silverman 2010, 82–88. I have also offered a similar summary of the advantages of love in Eric J. Silverman, "How to Resolve the Partiality-Impartiality Puzzle Using a Love-Centered Account of Virtue Ethics" in *The Anthology of Philosophical Studies Volume 7*, ed. Patricia Hanna (Athens, Greece: Athens Institute for Education and Research, 2013), 167–176.

7. See Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* LXVII (1971): 5–20.

8. One interesting relational situation is that of the person who desires a different relationship with another person than the one she currently possesses. In such cases, it is loving to desire new relational bonds in line with a new relational status so long as the transition is pursued in a way compatible with the good of the other and that the transition is compatible with the demands of current relational bonds. Accordingly, it is easy for one to transition from a friendship to a romantic relationship with another person, but somewhat difficult to transition from a professional relationship to a romantic relationship and completely impossible to transition from a parental or sibling relationship to a romantic relationship.

9. Jonathan Sanford, *Before Virtue: Assessing Contemporary Virtue Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 66–8.

10. I take this view to be roughly the Kantian basis for morality.

11. Here and elsewhere, I treat *caritas* and *agape* as conceptually equivalent since Aquinas intended his account of *caritas* to describe the central Christian virtue of *agapic* love advocated by the New Testament.

12. These problems with traditional 'attributes based' accounts of love are well documented by Eleonore Stump. See Eleonore Stump, "Love, By All Accounts," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 80 (2006): 25.

13. William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116, Colin Burrow (ed.) (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002).

14. Alexander Pruss, *One Body* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 9–10. Someone might mistakenly think that Pruss's objection is not really an objection to my view since the quote specifically targets accounts portraying dispositions toward emotions and attitudes as love rather than accounts portraying dispositions toward desires or dispositions in general as love. While his objection is phrased only as an objection to portraying dispositions toward emotions or attitudes as love, the objection is equally applicable toward any dispositional account of love since no disposition is either under one's direct volitional control or a guarantee of right action.

15. See William Styron, *Sophie's Choice* (New York, NY: Random House, 1979).

16. Here and elsewhere I occasionally use the language of moral obligation. I acknowledge that some virtue ethicists from the time of G. E. M. Anscombe have advo-

cated the rejection of such language. I am ambivalent toward the usefulness of the concept of moral obligation in contemporary discourse, however, the language of obligation is very hard to avoid, especially when interacting with others who embrace it as Immanuel Kant does in the passages discussed here.

17. See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:421–9.

18. I do not deny that people can love (and perhaps should love) non-persons, such as pets. But, this type of love is not the focus of this account of virtue ethics. Such love would be justified in part by the near personal capacities of such animals. Among animals capacities associated with personhood exist in degrees across a continuum. But, to avoid unnecessary complications, I focus this initial description and defense of my account on human persons.

19. Thomas Aquinas's account of charity is the historical source that has most influenced my view of love. I have discussed his view of love at length in Eric J. Silverman 2010, 43–58. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* II-II.23–46.

20. Pruss, *One Body*, 16.

21. I have also discussed relationships in Eric J. Silverman 2010, 68–73. The account here is moderately revised from my previous account.

22. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 95–96.

23. My view here entails a partial rejection of Aquinas's claim that we should not have charitable love toward non-rational animals. See ST II-II.25.3.

24. Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 29.

25. See ST I-II.28.

26. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1163–1172.

27. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, 31.

28. Of course, even if desire fulfillment is the sole component of well-being it would not follow that the lover should support all of the beloved's desires. For example, accomplishing some of the beloved's desires may undermine many of their other important long-term desires. E.g. today's reckless desire for recreational drugs may undermine a wide range of tomorrow's desires if those drugs undermine the user's general health.

29. One interesting account of such a tribe can be found in Daniel Everett, *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle* (New York, NY: Random House, 2008). When exposed to the contemporary technologically driven world, their response was that they envied nothing in it other than the medical technology.

30. This view is a significant departure from Aquinas's, since he held to an objective view of the goods. On his account, one's desires for the good must aim at genuine goods and within the proper ordering of genuine goods to count as loving. My goal in departing from his view is to acknowledge the great pluralism among theories of the good and to leave it to others to argue among them. It is also possible that Aquinas is correct in his view of the good and that only his views would be reasonably warranted, but that is not a view I intend to defend.

31. For a discussion of the difficulties in coming to a meaningful consensus concerning well-being, see Bernard Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 30–53.

32. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1959; originally published in 1785), 4:423.

33. Here I stipulate that despite the fact that fulfilled desire, pleasure, and physical health are all on the list of things that members of Western culture are warranted in viewing as constituents of well–being, the potential for radically disproportionate damage to one's health is sufficient so that any virtuous person should realize that fulfilling this desire is not 'on the whole' a good for the beloved.

34. See Plato, *Symposium*, 189–192.

35. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 100.

36. Issues that are not covered here may be covered in my longer discussion of union in Eric J. Silverman 2010, 47–48, 65–68. Aquinas' discussion of union relevant to love is found in ST I-II.28.1.

37. I do not commit to the sweeping claim that all virtues follow the pattern of Aristotle's golden mean. I only claim that love does fit the pattern in the two ways described here.

38. See ST I-II.64.4.

39. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106–1109.

40. This principle is compatible with the reality that sometimes relationships change. Love is compatible with the possibility that the lover might want to change the nature of a relationship and has some desires in light of the intended relational change.

41. A full discussion of the love-centered account's strategy for distinguishing between loving and unloving unequal treatments of others can be found later in chapter 4.

42. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 8–9.

43. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1158–1159.

44. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155–1172.

45. See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 8.

46. Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*, McClure's Magazine 12, (1899).

47. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 221–239.

48. While my own thoughts concerning the importance of desiring loving union or bonds in ways proper to particular relationships have been influenced by Aquinas and Niko Kolodny, there is also a similar idea in Confucian thought called the "Reification of Names." The main difference between these western concepts and the Confucian view seems to be that the reification of names includes a much higher degree of codification, formality, and ceremony than our similar Western concepts. Yet, the core intuition is strikingly similar: that it is important that one's actual desires within relationships match the normative descriptions given to them. See Confucius, *Analects* 13. Another similar ethical intuition is expressed in the ancient Greco-Roman ideal of piety, claiming that certain relationships bring with them distinctive ethical obligations. Accordingly, Aneas is the ancient character most frequently associated with piety because he paused to rescue his father and son as he escaped the destruction of Troy. Furthermore, he is properly bonded with his countrymen and gods throughout the *Aeneid*.

49. Of course, even lawn care disputes can escalate into violence, as an unfortunate attack against an United States Senator seems to illustrate. https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/06/politics/senator-rand-paul-suspect-attorney/index.html accessed on 6/3/2019.

50. Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 103.

51. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), I.1.95.

52. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, I.1.102–107.

53. It is often forgotten that the traditional view of gossip and slander even portrayed some truthful spreading of other's wrongdoing as vicious. See ST II-II.74.

54. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, I.1.292–295.

# THREE

# A Love-Centered Account of Virtue Ethics

In recent decades, virtue ethics has been transformed from a fringe movement in moral philosophy to a mainstream challenger to the dominant deontological and utilitarian views. Robert Hartman recently went so far as to claim, "Every tenable ethical theory must have an account of moral virtue and vice."[1] While Hartman's claim may be an overstatement, it certainly illustrates how influential virtue ethics has become in the broad academic discourse concerning moral philosophy.

Contemporary accounts of virtue ethics have also given increased attention to the importance of love. Despite its absence from the traditional Aristotelian list of virtues, benevolence, *agapic* love, charitable love, or simply love, has become a widely accepted virtue among contemporary virtue theorists. Although, it is perhaps not as universal in its inclusion as Rosalind Hursthouse's claim that "Charity or benevolence . . . is not an Aristotelian virtue, but all virtue ethicists assume it is on the list now."[2] While benevolence, love, *agape*, or charity are commonly held as virtues today, it is important to note that chapter 2's account of love is more demanding than many recent accounts of benevolence or charity in two ways.

First, love is partially constituted by a broad desire to promote the good for all people rather than only specific people in close relationships. Second, love additionally requires a broad desire for proper relational bonds with people. As discussed in chapter 2 this desire for proper bondedness entails more than a desire for mere physical proximity and includes proper responsiveness required by a broad range of relational bonds.

Before we can further investigate the full contemporary love-centered account of virtue ethics, it is important to review some central features of

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Aquinas's broader approach to virtue ethics. This review will allow us to better understand the context of Aquinas's claims about love and will enable us to distinguish between the specific features included in the love-centered account of virtue ethics I am advocating and the broader Thomistic system itself. This chapter proceeds by outlining foundational conceptions of Aquinas's approach to virtue ethics before proceeding to distinctive features advocated within contemporary love-centered virtue ethics. Some readers may find the broader Thomistic system in its entirety so attractive that they are inclined to embrace his broader metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. However, I am making a much humbler argument: that contemporary virtue ethics can advance, improve, and address several important questions in ethics more effectively if it is willing to embrace a handful of Thomistic assumptions about the nature of virtue.

## THE UNDERUSE OF AQUINAS IN CONTEMPORARY VIRTUE ETHICS

While few contemporaries have shaped the current virtue ethics movement more than Alasdair MacIntyre, the increased attention he gives to Thomas Aquinas in his later work has not been as influential as his focus upon Aristotle in his earlier writings like *After Virtue*. As MacIntyre claims in *Dependent Rational Animals*, ". . . Aquinas's account of the virtues not only supplements, but also corrects Aristotle's to a significantly greater extent than I had realized."[3] Similarly, I seek to borrow critical insights from Aquinas that might improve contemporary Aristotelian virtue ethics, especially concerning the nature of the virtues.

While writing my previous book concerning the virtue of love, I was struck by the way a more central role for agapic love—or at least a trait similar to it in important ways—would allow contemporary virtue ethics to address a range of important ethical issues in a more satisfying way, including issues many contemporary ethical systems often avoid addressing. I concluded that there are important features from Thomistic virtue ethics that would be attractive to contemporary secular ethicists if there were a way to appropriate them without committing to the broader Thomistic system, particularly his metaphysics.

There is an obvious danger accompanying this strategy: the project risks being too recognizably Thomistic to attract those who dislike Aquinas's broader thought, while simultaneously being inadequately committed to Aquinas to attract Thomists. To avoid this problem my argument seeks to bring Aquinas's insights concerning the centrality of love into a more secular set of assumptions about virtue ethics, while creating a broader system that is largely compatible with but neutral toward Aquinas's more controversial claims in metaphysics, human nature, or teleolo-

gy. Since the resultant virtue ethics system avoids committing to these more controversial views, this should allow non-Thomists to consider the attractiveness of Aquinas's ethical insights, while the potential compatibility with more traditional Thomist views should allow Thomists to consider the advantages of conceptualizing some of Aquinas's central insights in a way that can be used by thinkers who are not more broadly Thomistic. This section proceeds by examining central features of Aquinas's virtue system.

## AQUINAS'S VIRTUE SYSTEM

Aquinas's account of ethics focuses on an agent centered system of virtues. While he also has much to say about right action and has been influential in the natural law tradition, Aquinas's ethical writings focus overwhelmingly upon the virtues as principles of morality that are internal to the person. In the *Summa theologicae* alone, 210 questions are related to internal moral principles concerning virtues and vices, while a mere eighteen questions focus upon issues related to external law.[4] The central importance of virtue to Aquinas is summed up in the prologue to *Summa* II-II where Aquinas explains that "all moral matters can be reduced to examining the virtues. . ."[5] For Aquinas, ongoing human character excellences are the foundational issues of morality.

While Aquinas's concept of virtue is an internal moral principle embodied in an ongoing habitual disposition through which one is directed towards proper moral actions, his concept of law is an external moral guiding principle. All genuine law meets four necessary conditions laid forth in Aquinas's definition: "an ordinance of reason, for the good of the community, made by the one responsible for the care of the community, and promulgated."[6] All law stems from eternal law in the mind of God containing the foundational principles that provide order to the universe.[7] Moral principles become accessible to humanity either through revealed morality contained in divine law or through natural law that is accessible broadly through human reason. Genuinely authoritative human law in turn is based upon more foundational natural law,[8] while political laws that depart from the boundaries of natural law are 'no law at all,'[9] such as the self-serving laws of the tyrant. Yet, while law has great importance given the earthly need for civil society, Aquinas gives virtue—the internal principle of moral guidance—far more attention.[10]

Aquinas is sometimes mistakenly portrayed as simply a Christian Aristotelian virtue ethicist. While Aquinas's moral theory is indeed deeply influenced by Aristotle—whom Aquinas frequently references as 'The Philosopher'—he is hardly a straightforward Aristotelian. Instead, he is shaped by an impressive range of religious and secular sources such as: the Bible (including the Apocrypha, Old, and New Testaments); later

Christian thinkers like Augustine, Anselm, Gregory the Great, Peter Lombard, and Pseudo-Dionysius; non-Christian sources including Avicenna, Cicero, the Stoics, Roman Law, and many others. Each of these sources is repeatedly and approvingly cited by Aquinas. Of course, these sources are not equally influential or authoritative to Aquinas. Unsurprisingly, he treats Christian Scripture understood through long endorsed interpretations of the Church Fathers as the most reliable and authoritative source of truth.

## HAPPINESS AS THE *TELOS* OF HUMAN NATURE

Like Aristotle and many pre-modern thinkers, but unlike many contemporary ethicists, Aquinas views the foundational moral question as 'What is happiness?' For Aquinas—like Aristotle—happiness is the *telos* and goal of human nature embodied in fulfilling the best potentials of the human self. Accordingly, the *Summa Theologicae's* introduction to systematic anthropology in the first five questions of the second part focus upon defining the human *telos* and the constituents of human happiness. While this topical approach mirrors Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aquinas departs from Aristotle by developing a two-fold account of human happiness: an account of imperfect earthly happiness as well as an account of perfect heavenly happiness.

In addressing whether the human body is necessary for happiness, he explains the distinction between the two aspects of happiness, "Happiness has a twofold sense, one imperfect happiness possessed in this life, and another perfect happiness consisting in the vision of God."[11]

In both cases, developing human potential through the relevant virtues is central to attaining happiness since the virtues embody a properly ordered will aligned to the only true human *telos*.[12] He proceeds to focus upon how one can instantiate ideal human nature through the virtues to obtain a kind of human perfection that fulfills the self through happiness while living well with others both in earthly life as well as in the heavenly afterlife. This results in a view wherein true happiness can only be had by virtuous humans enjoying truly good things and living well with others.

Aquinas—like many pre-moderns including Aristotle—holds to a teleological view of human nature that is less popular today. On this view, the virtues are natural perfections of specific functions or aspects of the human psyche. These virtues are ongoing habitual dispositions reflecting various ideal qualities in these areas. Courage is the best disposition one could have concerning fear, temperance is the best disposition one could have concerning appetite, and so forth. Such virtues fulfill innate human potentials and result in happiness since they embody the best internal goods a human can enjoy, thereby shaping their experience of life in a positive way due to these habits. The courageous person does

not experience unnecessary painful fear like the coward, but also avoids the negative consequences of a foolhardy lifestyle. The temperate person enjoys food more than one with an inadequate appetite, while avoiding the inevitable health problems brought about by gluttony. Other virtues operate to bring about happiness in similar ways by shaping a person's psyche to enjoy good things within the boundaries of rationality while shaping habitual behavior in a way to minimize potential negative consequences.

Accordingly, Aquinas endorses Aristotle's view that,

> Science and virtue are habits . . . virtue names an actualization of a thing's potential power. What constitutes each thing's actualization is determined in light of its final end. But the final end of a potential power is to act. . . . rational powers, which distinctly belong to humanity, are not limited to one particular action but are inclined to many uses, and these powers are directed to actions through habits . . . Therefore, human virtues are habits.[13]

Perfected rational potentials in humanity are the intellectual virtues, while perfected non-rational aspects of the psyche are the moral virtues.[14] Both categories of virtues are ongoing deeply engrained habitual patterns, which partially fulfill humanity's distinct teleological purpose or final end. In this way, human virtues are similar to ongoing qualitative excellences seen in other things. Just as a knife cuts well not only once, but on a consistent basis thus fulfilling its teleological purpose in virtue of its excellent sharp blade humans can function well and enjoy happy lives due to their ongoing virtuous distinctly human excellences.

Like Aristotle, Aquinas distinguishes between the human psyche's rational, appetitive, and nutritive capacities, with its rational capacities being the most distinctly human.[15] Appetitive capacities of the soul are trainable moral faculties. Finally, nutritive capacities of the soul are involuntary bodily functions. What distinguishes humans from other living things on this view is our distinctly rational and intellectual capacities that go beyond mental capacities tied directly to physical organs. In contrast, the souls of non-human animals are believed to lack greater mental abilities that go beyond physical organs and are limited to appetitive and nutritive functions. The souls of plants have nutritive functions alone.

In light of these capacities, humans are unique in their ability to intentionally train their own non-rational aspects of the psyche so that non-rational aspects of the psyche respond according to intellectual principles. For example, humans can sometimes train themselves to be courageous and only fear that which is dangerous in proportion to the actual danger different situations present. We can learn to identify what is actually dangerous and seek to bring our emotions into line with reality. Similarly, our rational capacities allow the possibility that we can train

ourselves to eat and even desire food of types and portions that are actually healthy. However, Aquinas goes on to modify this traditional Aristotelian view by reserving the fullest sense of virtue for those habits infused by God Himself rather than those developed through human training alone.[16] Therefore, despite the potential within natural human rational powers to develop virtue, there are serious limitations to the degree of virtue that can be obtained through unaided human efforts alone.

Some of these views about virtue and its connection to human well-being continue to be popular in contemporary virtue ethics. After all, if the virtue of courage is to fear that which is actually dangerous in proportion to its actual danger, it is difficult to construe such a trait as something other than an excellence. It is easy to see how such a trait would tend to benefit the courageous person. Similarly, if temperance is to desire food in amounts and types conducive to one's own health, such a disposition is still a positive and obviously beneficial trait. What it means to live well still has much to do with the sort of embodied beings we are and our possession of certain intellectual, appetitive, and social capacities.

## THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

Aquinas—unlike Aristotle and other ancient secular Greco-Roman philosophers—but in line with medieval Christian theology believes that in addition to traditional moral and intellectual virtues, there are also God-oriented dispositions that can only be supernaturally obtained: faith, hope, and love. Most importantly, these capacities when infused by God enable humans to contemplate and enjoy God's divine essence, which is the central activity of perfect eternal happiness. In an important sense, these traits go beyond natural human potential, which is why Aquinas speaks of humanity as having a dual end, both earthly and heavenly.

> That which is above human nature is distinct from that which is in accord with human nature. But the theological virtues are above human nature . . . The object of the theological virtues is God Himself, who is the final end of all things, who exceeds our rational cognition. . . . But, the object of the intellectual and moral virtues is something comprehensible to human rationality. Thus, the theological virtues are distinguished from the moral and intellectual virtues.[17]

As with Aquinas's other topics, the sequential ordering of the theological virtues in the *Summa* is not coincidental. While charity is explicitly identified as the most important of all the virtues, faith and hope appear first in the *Summa* since they are necessary pre-conditions for love. These virtues are logically prior to love in that they make love of God possible,

since it is impossible to love God if one neither has faith in Him nor hopes in Him.

There is a logical ordering to the theological virtues in connection to humanity's ultimate perfect happiness found in contemplating the divine essence in the afterlife. Faith is foundational since one cannot hope in God for future happiness or love God unless he first believes in God's existence. Hope is built upon faith as one does not merely believe in God's existence, but also views God as one's source of true fulfillment. Finally, love of God, through which one desires union with God is only possible if one believes in God's existence and hopes in God for future happiness.[18] Unsurprisingly, the theological virtues will be incompatible with many contemporary secular virtue ethical systems.

Aquinas's theological virtues also depart from the Aristotelian model for virtue acquisition. The purest quality of virtue cannot be developed through Aristotelian mentoring and habituation. Both the God-centered theological virtues, which bring about potentials beyond earthly human nature, as well as the best versions of the moral virtues must be infused by God rather than developed by human effort. In the words of Aquinas—following Augustine—such virtues are developed as, "God works in us, without us."[19] Of course, such theological virtues are irrelevant to the contemporary religious skeptic since they are centered on one's relationship with a God, whose every existence is doubted.

## CARDINAL VIRTUES

Like some pre-modern thinkers such as Cicero,[20] but unlike Aristotle, Aquinas organizes the moral virtues around four foundational cardinal virtues from which the other moral virtues come forth: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. While the four cardinal virtues are all included in the Aristotelian catalogue, construing them as foundational virtues from which other moral virtues must be derived comes from later thinkers such as Cicero and Ambrose.[21] Aquinas claims that while the theological virtues make a person an ideal citizen of heaven and prepare her for perfect eternal happiness, the cardinal virtues make one an ideal earthly citizen contributing to the common good and prepare him for imperfect earthly happiness. Yet, even the cardinal virtues must be directed by charity to be virtues in their truest form.[22] Thus, even the more traditional cardinal virtues need *agape/caritas* and therefore can exist in either an imperfect natural habituated version or a more perfect infused version.

Aquinas offers this summary of the cardinal virtues:

> Cicero, in the *Rhetoric*, reduces all other virtues to four. . . . for example, every virtue based on the good in the consideration of rationality is called prudence; and every virtue that causes the activities of the right

and the due is called justice; and every virtue that controls and de-
creases passions is called temperance; and every virtue that strength-
ens the mind against passions is called fortitude.[23]

Aquinas gives numerous examples of more specific virtues that are nar-
rower expressions of these four broader foundational virtues. For exam-
ple, magnificence is grounded in the cardinal virtue of fortitude.[24] Clem-
ency, meekness,[25] studiousness,[26] and modesty[27] are grounded in tem-
perance. Familial piety,[28] observance of relational statuses,[29] gratitude,[30]
and truthfulness[31] are grounded in justice. Furthermore, prudence is a
necessary constituent of every other virtue since it is the intellectual habit
allowing one to choose the proper means to carry out generic moral
principles in specific situation.[32] Thus, all the other moral virtues are
supposedly grounded in the foundational cardinal virtues.

## LOVE-CENTERED ETHICS COMPATIBLE WITH BUT NOT RELIANT UPON BROADER THOMISM

The previous sections of this chapter have outlined numerous distinctive
aspects of Aquinas's virtue ethics. Most of these aspects, the contempo-
rary *agape* centered approach ultimately treats indifferently. It can accom-
modate many of these Thomistic views but does not require committing
to them. For example, it will not commit to a model for how virtue is
acquired, but can accommodate either the possibility that truest virtue
must be infused by God[33] or that virtue can be obtained through Aristo-
telian style habituation and mentoring.[34] Similarly, many monographs in
contemporary virtue ethicists including those by Christine Swanton, Mi-
chael Slote, and Rosalind Hursthouse, do not offer an explicit model for
virtue acquisition.[35] However, while I will not advocate a model for vir-
tue acquisition, I accept the commonly held assumption that at least some
worthwhile moral progress can be made through traditional Aristotelian
habituation and mentoring. Furthermore, even Aquinas himself allows
that some improvement of character can be achieved by habituation.[36]

Similarly, love-centered virtue ethics does not commit to whether or
not God exists. Like many theories in contemporary virtue ethics, includ-
ing those advocated by theists like Alasdair MacIntyre, the structure of
virtue ethics does not rely in any way upon claims about God's existence
or divine action. Obviously, if God exists, then one's loving relationship
with a personal God would be an important and central relationship as it
is in traditional Thomistic ethics. Furthermore, this fact would open up
the possibility that there may be additional virtues relevant to one's rela-
tionship with God such as Aquinas's theological virtues, but addressing
these issues is unnecessary to describe how contemporary virtue ethics
might benefit from Aquinas's insights by embracing a more love-cen-

tered system of virtue ethics. Thus, it can accommodate many such Thomist claims but does not rely upon them.

The remainder of this chapter outlines a view of love-centered virtue ethics intended to broadly capture the ethical intuitions of both Thomists and non-Thomists, but is compatible with Aquinas being correct or incorrect concerning a range of other issues. Some of these unresolved issues may even have implications for how the love-centered theory ought to be lived out. For example, if the best type of virtue can only be infused by God, this would have important implications for living out this virtue theory. Someone might mistakenly think that such unresolved issues are somehow a serious flaw in this virtue theory. Yet, it is not unusual for the proper application of ethical principles to be shaped by truths that are not part of the ethical theory itself. For example, assuming that the broad theory of consequentialism is correct, living out consequentialism properly depends in part upon which theory of economics is most correct. But no reasonable scholar expects the consequentialist ethicist to make a full argument concerning every background issue that would likely have import for living out consequentialism. Similarly, if I am to treat all persons as an end and never only as a means as required by Kantian ethics, then the precise definition of person and identification of personhood in disputable cases becomes very important to the application of a theory. However, the normative ethical theory advancing such a Kantian principle need not resolve all application related issues such as whether dolphins or human fetuses count as persons in order for the normative ethical theory to be correct. In a similar way, I do not intend to resolve every background issue that might be relevant to the ideal application and understanding of the love-centered virtue theory.

Now that we have established some background views Aquinas would have held—but which are not essential to the love-centered virtue theory itself—this chapter proceeds to examine the distinctive claims of the love-centered account of ethics: that love shapes the *telos* of all genuine virtue, that the virtues cannot be used badly, that genuine virtues tend to benefit their possessors in numerous ways, that there is a degree of unity to the virtues through love and practical wisdom, and that a love-centered account of ethics can offer improved action guidance. Additional implications of the love-centered account will be addressed in chapter 4 including its approach to the partiality-impartiality debate.

## APPLYING AQUINAS'S CLAIM THAT LOVE SHAPES THE *TELOS* OF ALL GENUINE VIRTUE

Ordering our cares in a virtuous way that recognizes the genuine nature of proper bonds within relationships is a central role of the virtue of love. Iris Murdoch's *Sovereignty of The Good* illustrates some important princi-

ples that are developed by our love-centered account of ethics. She explains,

> Our attachments seem selfish and strong, and the transformation of our loves from selfishness to unselfishness is sometimes hard even to conceive of. . . . Should an elderly relation who is a trouble-maker be cared for or asked to go away? Should an unhappy marriage be continued for the sake of the children? Should I leave my family in order to do political work? Should I neglect them in order to practice my art? The love which brings the right answer is an exercise of justice and realism and really *looking*.[37]

Each of these moral questions requires insight into both the proper expression of love as well as the true nature of the agent's relationship to the self, the self's projects, and other people. In each case it is a question of whether a person's desires—their 'loves' in the broader non-moral sense of the word—are really shaped by virtuous love. Often moral dilemmas can be resolved through insight into the self's muddled, disordered, overly selfish, or simply hidden desires that allows for the reshaping of one's desires. Remaking the self's disordered desires in accordance with love along with insight into the nature of the relationships and situations surrounding the self are critical for excellence in life's most important decisions.

One issue that divides virtue ethicists is the question of 'what do all virtues have in common?' Are all virtues useful traits? Are they traits that benefit their possessor? Are they traits that society deems admirable? Virtues may be each of those things, but one distinctive of the love-centered account is that it construes all genuine virtues as necessarily shaped by love. Love plays a central role in guiding the ends of all genuine virtues.[38] Virtuous people are honest, courageous, generous, temperate, and so forth in pursuit of the ends of love. Therefore, love is a more central, unifying excellence than most other virtues in that it is a constituent of all genuine virtues. Virtues are shaped by the ends of love and applied in accordance with the virtue of practical wisdom.

This account portrays love as objectively good, foundational, and in its abstract conception a prescriptive value that ought to be universal and cross cultural. As Stephen Pope claims, "The greatest human moral ideal is love."[39] In other words, 'love' refers to excellence in the deepest, most important part of human character. Since love pertains directly to the ideal shaping of an agent's will this virtue directs and partially constitutes all other ideal personal traits. Just as Kantian ethics portrays good will as the only completely unqualified moral good and takes this claim as a foundational starting point in ethics,[40] this account takes the unqualified moral goodness of love as a central ethical claim. If we deeply desire the good of persons and unity in proper relational bonds with them, these desires shape the development, expression, and value of other

traits. However, many other traits, even *prima facie* good traits in themselves can be misused apart from love.

For example, courage in the narrowest Aristotelian sense is roughly the disposition to experience fear in proportion to the actual danger in a situation and to act accordingly.[41] But, the ends one might pursue with such courage might be laudable, neutral, or deplorable. The deplorable criminal or the egoistic athlete may display 'courage' alongside laudable figures such as the altruistic fire fighter or duteous police officer.[42] The love-centered model has an advantage over more generic accounts of virtue ethics by portraying love as more central to character than courage and that therefore courage must be directed by love to be genuinely virtuous. The ends pursued by courage must be shaped by love for that trait to possess genuine moral worth. As Aquinas says, "No true virtue is possible without charity [love]."[43] In contrast, if the criminal is courageous the resulting harms may be more serious than if she were not. Such "courage" is not virtuous.

The same principle also applies to other traits we tend to praise. If a criminal is cunning, courageous, patient, discreet, frugal, self-controlled, strong, well-mannered, and intelligent, but puts these traits to malicious use then these traits lack moral worth. At times even Aristotle appears aware that an appropriately moral goal is a necessary condition for genuine virtue, such as when he discusses the usefulness of cleverness, but rejects it as a virtue since it can be used for either good or evil ends.

> There is a faculty which is called cleverness. This is capable of carrying out the actions conducive to our proposed aim, and of achieving that aim. Then if that aim is a noble one, the cleverness is praiseworthy; but if the aim is ignoble, the cleverness is unscrupulousness.[44]

While Aristotle recognizes that cleverness can have inappropriate aims he never incorporates the broader insight that all virtuous traits must have an appropriately praiseworthy end.

The principle that all truly virtuous traits are partially constituted by loving ends applies to both moral and intellectual virtues. For example, the virtue of curiosity has been defined by Linda Zagzebski as a disposition toward the "desire for cognitive contact with reality."[45] Yet, just as courage might be used for malicious, neutral, or praiseworthy ends so might curiosity. The Nazi doctors sought improved cognitive contact with reality through cruel experimentations on unconsenting prisoners. Both the means of collecting such information as well as the ultimate end of empowering the Third Reich were vicious.

All intentional human actions performed in the pursuit of ends necessarily have moral import since they will either embody the ends of love or fail to embody the ends of love. Actions done for non-loving ends that are apathetic toward love are vicious even if they are not explicitly malicious. While actions and traits that are apathetic concerning the ends of

love are less morally problematic than actions and traits directly pursuing unloving ends, great harm can still be done through the moral indifference of such traits and actions. While there may be actions that embody love 'to a degree,' 'somewhat,' or shaped in light of multiple ends, no intentional action is morally neutral concerning love. Indifference concerning love is not neutral, but vicious since the agent involved in such actions is indifferent toward the implications and effects they have upon others.[46]

Accordingly, reasons other traits provide for action need to be shaped by loving motivations. For example, an honest person should not just be honest for virtue's sake, but for the sake of love. Even honesty can be misused and misdirected. For example, 'brutal honesty' which expresses true observations with the primary goal of causing emotional and relational pain in others is a vice rather than virtue. Such honesty can be directed either maliciously to destroy others or with apathy concerning the effects of truth upon others. In contrast, the virtuously honest person expresses truth in ways shaped by love. There are ways to express truth, even uncomfortable truth, which encourage others and brings them closer to us instead of undermining their dignity or causing unnecessary pain. The lovingly honest person is also different from the brutally honesty person in that the virtuously honest person regrets when a painful truth must be spoken and expresses such truth carefully to minimize painful effects.

Since courage, honesty, and other virtues require love to avoid misuse, any trait displayed by agents without love fails to instantiate that which is most important to character. Even a trait as morally attractive as honesty can be vicious if honesty lacks love. Therefore, the virtue of love must be an integral constituent of all virtues.[47] If competing virtues seem to dictate actions and attitudes incompatible with love, such conflicts should be resolved in love's favor. If other candidates for virtues are incompatible with the ends of love, then those traits are not virtuous at all. Any action or trait that is inherently unloving is vicious regardless of whatever other positive attributes it may have.

The role played by love in this theory embodies a partial rejection of the claim by some virtue ethicists that the virtues cannot be ranked or ordered in any way. For example, Hursthouse claims, "Any codification ranking the virtues, like any codification ranking the [deontological] rules, is bound to come up against cases where we will want to change the rankings."[48] While this account agrees with Hursthouse's view that most virtues cannot be ranked, at least that the role of love and practical wisdom are supreme over the role of other virtues.

## VIRTUES CANNOT BE USED BADLY

Since love is a partial constituent of all other virtues in that it guides other virtues' ultimate goals the love-centered account endorses the traditional, but currently controversial claim that genuine virtues cannot be used badly. This claim about virtue goes back at least as far as Augustine and Aquinas. As Aquinas says of the virtues, "a virtue is a perfect habit, which works towards producing nothing but good. . . ."[49] Since, all truly virtuous activities are shaped by the goals of love any potential misuse of a virtue necessarily lacks a feature of a fully virtuous action and thus fail to qualify as truly virtuous.[50] Since the ends of love guide other virtues, no virtue can be misused—though this claim stops short of asserting that no virtue can ever have negative results due to bad luck or an epistemologically hostile environment. While virtues cannot be misused, they may occasionally result in undesirable outcomes for reasons other than the traits of the agent, such extreme bad luck.

It may be noteworthy if the thief restrains his fear in proportion to the actual danger of the situation, but whatever might be praiseworthy within such a trait it is not virtuous on the whole due to its unloving ends of theft. Temperance is constituted in part by a well-informed and properly constituted love of self, but this type of self-love is quite different from self-indulgence or egoism. And destructive, brutal honesty is better described as the vice of harshness or bluntness. In each of these cases, the vicious use of a skill related to a virtue will not count as a 'bad use' of the virtue since proper loving ends are a necessary constituent of any true virtue or virtuous actions.

## VIRTUES BENEFIT THEIR POSSESSOR

One important implication of the love-centered account is that genuine virtue typically results in an overall net benefit to the virtuous person long-term.[51] In contemporary virtue ethics there are a variety of views concerning the connection between the possession of virtue and the virtuous agent's own flourishing. However, it appears that many important contemporary accounts of virtue ethics fail to provide a rational reason for important virtues like benevolence, charity, or love. As Jonathan Sanford observes, some contemporary ethicists like Michael Slote fail to provide such a reason, "Slote's explanation does not sufficiently explain why we should exercise charity."[52] Sanford claims such a lack in contemporary ethics is due to the fact that selfless generic benevolence is not present in Aristotle. As he explains, "Aristotle's ethics does not, and cannot, endorse a selfless and generic benevolence."[53] These observations seem correct, the traditional Aristotelian reason for the life of virtue is the central role virtue plays in the agent's own flourishing, a claim some

contemporary ethicists have abandoned. In contrast to such contempo-
rary accounts, the love-centered account shows why virtues are generally
conducive to the virtuous agent's well-being.[54]

I have argued elsewhere that possessing the virtue of love benefits the
loving person in several distinct ways, typically results in a net overall
increase in the loving person's happiness over a lifetime, and is the most
advisable disposition to develop on relevant matters.[55] Since all virtue is
partially constituted by love's ends, several of love's benefits will typical-
ly result from the virtues more generally. Additionally, other specific
virtues will tend to be beneficial in other ways such as the expectation of
increased long-term health stemming from temperate eating or courage's
beneficial avoidance of pain from unnecessary fear. Undoubtedly, there
are benefits from other specific virtues, yet we will focus on benefits to
the agent derived from the role played by love expressed in various
virtues.

The first benefit of all genuine virtue is that each virtue provides the
individual with the beneficial final ends of love. Since each virtue in-
cludes the ends of love, virtuous agents desire the good of persons and
proper relational bonds with them as final ends.[56] These final ends are
beneficial since people without well-integrated final ends achieve fewer
of their desires. People without final ends possess a detrimental gap be-
tween their actions and their preferred outcomes since their choices are
not guided by preferred ends. Any connection between the agent's activi-
ties and preferred results would be purely coincidental. Accordingly, a
lack of final ends would result in a precipitous drop in the number of
preferred results achieved and accompanying pleasure which typically
attends the achievement of preferred results under normal psychological
conditions. To the degree that the agent's well-being is constituted by
pleasure or the achievement of preferred states of affairs the person's
well-being is undermined.[57]

In contrast, virtuous agents always possess integrated final ends due
to love's role as a constituent of virtue. Virtue requires not only possess-
ing the final ends of love but also a significant degree of the successful
integration of these virtuous goals into one's broader psychological struc-
ture. If these traits did not include a considerable integration of love's
final ends, then they would not be stable enough dispositions to meet the
minimum threshold to qualify as virtuous character traits. Therefore, the
virtuous person necessarily has goals and necessarily has those goals
integrated into the psyche in a stable way that makes these desires more
likely to be attained than if they were not. Accordingly, virtuous persons
benefit from an increased likeliness of having more preferred goals at-
tained.

A related benefit to the virtuous person is that the ends of love in-
crease the meaningfulness of the person's activities carried out as expres-
sions of virtue. Many pleasant or amusing activities are enjoyable in the

moment but are empty of deeper meaning. Sedentarily watching television for hours at a sitting can be entertaining in the moment, but sometimes leave individuals with an unpleasant feeling of empty meaninglessness afterward. In contrast, the end goals of love grant deeper meaning to activities embraced in the pursuit of those goals. Therefore, many activities that are dull or unpleasant can be imbued with deeper meaningfulness in light of these loving goals and thereby become more enjoyable. The ends of love give relevant activities greater meaning since mundane activities are now performed in a larger context of love, relationships, and bonds with others. A career in a menial, unskilled job can become more meaningful if pursued to provide for one's beloved family and contribute to the community. In turn, this deeper meaningfulness increases the pleasure of mundane activities and provides a direct connection between such activities and the agent's well-being on accounts of happiness that include meaningfulness as a constituent. In contrast, a person whose life is devoid of meaningful activities guided by final ends is characterized by boredom, emptiness, and purposelessness. Overall, such lives are less pleasant and achieve fewer preferences. The virtuous person has an ongoing supply of loving final ends since virtue entails possessing ends concerning the good of and bonds with each person.

A second benefit of being virtuous is that the ends of love that are included in each virtue require an increase in a person's psychic integration. The psyche includes a person's desires, motivations, priorities, and preferences. An individual is not virtuous if her desires toward people are unloving or if these loving desires are mere unintegrated preferences. An agent does not possess the ends of love to a virtuous degree if her desires toward people include a mix of unloving and loving desires, or if her desires lack an integrated structure prioritizing the virtuous ends of love.[58]

Love, as an aspect of a broadly virtuous psyche, protects a person from the harms of possessing a completely disordered and unintegrated set of desires. People with such unintegrated psyches possess desires that could potentially cohere together if they had further organization and structure. But, since their psyches lack these features, they fail to reach the threshold of virtue. Such psyches lack a coherent overarching volitional structure prioritizing some desires over others. This lack of integration results in a lowered number of fulfilled desires since such a psyche causes an agent to be less consistent and stable in their pursuits. This type of psyche is sometimes displayed in an easily distracted child who does not pursue particular goals or activities for more than a few minutes at a time, since no overarching structure of priorities reliably directs their behaviors.

Furthermore, a virtuous person will seek to avoid developing desires that are in direct conflict with love. Since if they possessed both strong loving and unloving desires, this would result in a deeply divided

psyche. In deeply divided psyches, attaining one goal automatically frustrates other important goals. Such divided psyches are in conflict with themselves and undermine the agent's well-being.

In contrast, virtue requires considerable integration of the psyche. The ends of love entail that the virtuous person must pursue her own well-being ways that are compatible with the flourishing of others. The virtuous person similarly loves others in close personal relationships in ways compatible with love for other people more generally. He must integrate his psyche so that the desires for proper relational bondedness with the beloved and the beloved's good in close relationships are compatible with other loving desires toward all. Conflicting desires are subordinated or eliminated by the virtuous person. Furthermore, a virtuous person's desires in general must be compatible with loving desires toward all.

People with integrated psyches have an advantage over those with disunified psyches. If a person's disunified psyche possesses incompatible desires, then fulfilling one desire automatically undermines a competing desire. This volitional structure makes it impossible to obtain an increase in well-being by fulfilling such desires. Self-integration and the modification, subordination, or elimination of competing desires is needed for desire fulfillment without simultaneous desire frustration. Therefore, having an integrated psyche is also more pleasurable than having a disunified psyche since it permits the fulfillment of a higher number of desires without frustrating competing desires.

A third way that the virtuous person benefits is that love motivates self-improvement. Desiring the good for and proper bonds with persons—both self and others—entails a strong motive for self-improvement. Self-love provides a direct motive for self-improvement as many aspects of improved general character either directly or indirectly benefit the self. Less obviously, a desire for the good of others similarly entails a motive for self-improvement. When a person desires the good for others, he desires the beloved's life be filled by that which is good. Since the lover also desires bonds with the beloved—which in personal relationships is marked by closeness, shared experience, and shared identity—the combination of these desires entails that the lover desires that the beloved's closeness to him be good for the beloved. Being closely bonded to a broadly virtuous person is likely to benefit the beloved—as Aristotle has observed—a virtuous friend is among the greatest external goods.[59] In contrast, being closely bonded to a selfish, vicious, undisciplined, or malicious person is far less likely to benefit the beloved.

Parental love for a newborn baby is a paradigm example of how love might motivate self-improvement. A reflective parent who desires that her child flourish will also understand that children greatly benefit from having virtuous parents. When a desire for the child's well-being is combined with a loving desire for close parental bonds with the child, these desires entail that she herself become a virtuous parent. Such a parent is

motivated to make significant lifestyle and character changes. A parent may change her eating habits to ensure long-term health, reject addictive substances, reprioritize spending habits, develop improved character, and make wide ranging changes in order to benefit her child. Such changes benefit both parent and child.

Love entails a motivation for significant character changes since the lover has motive to develop additional virtues. These character improvements can be beneficial to the self as well as others. Loving well requires some degree of supporting virtues like courage, self-control, and self-knowledge and the rejection of vices like laziness, envy, and hatred. These traits can each ultimately be self-beneficial. Possessing these virtues help the lover accomplish preferences and attain pleasure in their own life as well as serve the beloved well. The courageous person neither abandon goals too easily due to inappropriate fear nor underestimates the dangers involved in her tasks. She avoids both the unnecessary painful fear experienced by the coward as well as negative consequences stemming from imprudent underestimation of risks. This pattern is lived out in pursuit of all of her goals more generally, rather than just the actions carried out for the benefit of the beloved. Similarly, the temperate man shapes his appetites and can use self-control to pursue other important goods like his own bodily health. Temperance tends to bring about long-term pleasure by ensuring that short-term appetites do not undercut long-term pleasure. Such remote benefits stemming from a loving desire for self-improvement to benefit the beloved are just a few examples of how such love ultimately benefits the lover. The result is that a person who possesses even one genuine virtue, will then have reasons to seek more virtues. This pattern can partially explain why there is often a unity to the virtues. Having some virtues gives reason for pursuing additional virtues.

A final benefit of virtue is that virtuous character enhances the person's relationships. Without virtue, it is impossible to obtain certain high quality mutually beneficial relationships. While both virtuous and unvirtuous people have similar categories of relationships such as friends, spouses, children, parents, and co-workers, love and virtue improves these relationships. Aristotle refers to ideal relationships as friendships based on virtue.[60] Accordingly, without love one may still have friends, spouses, children, parents, and co-workers, but those relationships will be founded upon something inferior to virtue like utility, convenience, pleasure, or habit.

Aristotle emphasizes the unique good of friendships based in virtue. He views a virtuous friend as the greatest external good,[61] as a source of consolation in pain,[62] and one who helps the agent grow in virtue.[63] These relationships last longer than others, are thoroughly pleasant, useful, resist slander, involve sharing material goods, are more harmonious, and include sharing life's pains and pleasures.[64] He also describes a

unique high degree of interpersonal union that is only possible in friend-ships based upon virtue. These relationships allow for more trust and care than others. They are a unique context where both friends receive the best kinds of benefits from one another. Love's desire for close bonds with one's virtuous friend brings the agent closer to something uniquely beneficial, a virtuous person who reciprocates care for the lover.

Love and virtue also makes beneficial relationships more likely in general. While some beneficial relationships do not require love, even these relationships are more likely to be attained by the loving person. Since the lover wills relational bonds with others he is more likely to have closer and longer lasting relationships. The lover's desire for these bonds makes him more likely to initiate, pursue, deepen, maintain, and restore relationships. Since the loving person considers the good of others as part of his own good, destructive interpersonal habits such as competitive-ness, pettiness, and envy are less likely to arise within these relationships. As a result, the virtuous person typically has a greater number of rela-tionships. Furthermore, these relationships tend to be closer, more pleas-ant, and more harmonious than those possessed by unvirtuous people.

Love also makes relationships more pleasant and enjoyable. Since the lover desires these relationships, they contribute to her well-being by fulfilling a desire for them. Relationships are a practical necessity for most people whether or not they would prefer to have them. Yet, without a desire for these practically important relationships, these relationships would be less likely to occur since they are not desired for themselves. Furthermore, these relationships would be less enjoyable when they did occur, since they would not directly fulfill a desire. These relationships are also instrumentally useful for fulfilling yet other desires. While the lover desires these relationships as ends in themselves, it is likely that these relationships will sometimes help the virtuous person fulfill her desires and promote her well-being.

These four benefits of virtue should be expected to result from all genuine virtues, since we have: defined the ends of love as a necessary feature within all virtues, demonstrated that virtue necessarily provides certain benefits to the lover, shown that virtue tends toward the good of the virtuous person, typically increases the lover's well-being overall, and is a prudentially advisable disposition to develop. Therefore, since all virtue is partially constituted by love, virtues will similarly be benefi-cial to the virtuous person in these ways. As mentioned in chapter 1 the beneficial tendencies of the virtues create a natural connection between practical wisdom and the virtuous life. The ideal agent realizes—as Aris-totle claimed—that in an important sense the admirable life is the desir-able life. However, a fully detailed understanding of the connections be-tween virtue and one's own happiness is unnecessary for someone to qualify as a loving person.

Furthermore, due to the beneficial nature of love, being a virtuous person has a significant degree of practical rationality. There is good practical reason to desire to be a virtuous person. Even if virtue shaped by love causes pain within a particular failed relationship, that pain is likely to be made up through the general benefits of virtue and love through other positive relationships. Even in the rare case where virtue and love cause net harm to the agent due to systematic relational failure, there would have been no wiser way for the agent to live since to give up on love requires becoming the kind of person who is automatically cut off from some of the best goods in life such as the goods found within loving relationships.

## A WEAK UNITY OF THE VIRTUES

From the time of the ancient Greeks many virtue ethicists have held that there is a close connection among the virtues. In its strongest form the unity of the virtues thesis claims that all virtues are different expressions of a single trait, perhaps a form of knowledge.[65] Weaker forms of the unity of the virtues thesis claim that each virtue requires the possession of at least some other virtues or that the virtues are mutually reinforcing to at least some extent.

The love-centered account of virtue ethics embraces a unity of the virtues thesis in three ways. First, an essential trait of all other virtues is that they must be shaped by the ends of love in order to qualify as *bona fide* virtues. Therefore, virtues will simultaneously embody love as well as whatever other excellence they display. Conversely, any inherently unloving trait or action is vicious regardless of whatever other positive aspects it may possess. There is a unification of the virtues in love. The ends of any genuine virtue will be shaped by the ends of love. Furthermore, as already discussed, love entails a motive to develop other supporting virtues.

A second way that the virtues are unified is in the shared need for practical wisdom. There is a unity in the epistemic ability to recognize a real-life situation that is relevant to various virtues and apply relevant virtuous principles to the real world. Therefore, as discussed in chapter 1, there is not only a moral unity in love but a shared unity to the virtues through the epistemic trait of practical wisdom. While the ends of any genuine virtue must be shaped at least in part by love, the means for carrying out genuine virtuous activities in pursuit of those ends must be shaped by practical wisdom. Loving ends without such wisdom are mere good intentions and not fully virtuous.

Third, the virtues are united in that they tend to reinforce one another. Unlike the first two aspects which are present in every virtue, this third aspect is merely a general tendency. Virtues are such that there are many

situations where one good disposition requires some degree of another virtue to carry out the first virtue. If an agent is truly compassionate and is in a situation where he has compassion for someone who is in physical or financial need, he also needs to possess generosity to act upon his compassion. Similarly, generosity might need some degree of courage. If I am to give generously to others, I must avoid irrational fears that I will not have enough resources to take care of myself.

One implication of love's unifying role in shaping virtue is that whenever competing character traits dictate actions or attitudes incompatible with love, those dictates should be modified in light of the more foundational dictates of love. If the virtue of 'economic responsibility' demands cutting expenditures, but the virtue of love demands increasing or maintaining generous amounts of giving it is the dictates of love that ought to be followed.[66] This pattern applies to any instance when competing traits direct actions in ways contrary to love. Thus, all other virtues are modified by love's direction. If a trait is incompatible with the ends of love, then that trait cannot be a virtue. This principle is at least part of what Aquinas refers to as love serving as the 'form' of all virtue.[67]

Since the unifying feature of love centers upon the importance of 'loving desires,' an important role in the psyche is played by what Harry Frankfurt describes as higher-order volitions. Agents often possess conflicting desires: we desire to eat dessert for its taste while we also desire to avoid the high fatty and caloric content of dessert. Such conflicts in our desires can sometimes be resolved by what Frankfurt describes as second-order desires: desires about our own desires.

> It seems to be peculiarly characteristic of humans, however, that they are able to form what I shall call "second-order desires" or "desires of the second order." . . . men . . . want to have (or not have) certain desires and motives. They are capable of wanting to be different, in their preferences and purposes, from what they are.[68]

Essentially, second- and higher-order desires are desires about the kind of person we wish to be and the sorts of things we want ourselves to desire. For example, one may desire to strengthen his own desires for the good of other people while weakening his desire for possessions. Furthermore, just as it is possible to have conflicting first-order desires, it is also possible to have conflicting second-order desires. One might desire an increased desire to spend more time promoting the good of other people while simultaneously desiring to desire to invest more time at work, two desires which may ultimately be at odds given that time is a limited resource.

One important subtype of second-order desires are what Frankfurt calls second-order volitions, which are second-order desires that are endorsed by the will and are intended, but by no means guaranteed to shape first-order desires. In contrast, it is possible to have desires, even

second- and higher-order desires, which the agent does not endorse and does not wish to shape the psyche. There is such a thing as an 'unwilling addict' who does not wish to desire the substances to which he is addicted, but nevertheless desires them. Thus, a critical ethical moment occurs when a person considers conflicting lower-order desires and endorses a higher-order volition attempting to shape ongoing lower-order desires in accordance with love.

Whether or not such higher-order volitions are effective in shaping competing lower-order desires in the intended virtuous way has important moral implications. An effective long-term higher-order volition desiring to develop virtue does much to help one become a virtuous person. In contrast, an agent with an ineffective second-order volition endorsing virtue knows what it means to be virtuous, but struggles to actually develop a virtuous internal life. At best, such a person will tend to be inconsistently virtuous. Desiring and wanting to become a certain kind of person does not guarantee that the agent possesses the strength of will necessary to integrate the psyche. If one possesses and endorses the desire to possess loving desires but is unable to align the will accordingly, obviously this inability undermines virtue development in general since virtue is unified in love.

While there have been many traditional virtue ethicists who have held to a unity of the virtues thesis, more recent ethicists have tended to be more skeptical. One common objection to the unity of the virtues thesis is presented by Iris Murdoch, "We are admittedly specialized creatures where morality is concerned and merit in one area does not seem to guarantee merit in another. The good artist is not necessarily wise at home, and the concentration camp guard can be a kindly father."[69] Murdoch's objection to the unity of the virtues thesis claims that we all know people who are virtuous and excellent in some ways, but not in all ways. This concern causes difficulty for those advocating a strong unity of the virtues thesis, whereby the possession of any morally positive trait necessarily entails the possession of all good traits. Surely, one can be a gifted artist without being a good father or a good human being. The influential painter Gauguin, who left his family to focus upon his painting, is a famous example of a person who was laudable in one area but not in other areas of his life. However, it is easy for the virtue ethicist to reject this sort of counterexample as one can, and should, simply deny that artistic skill is a moral virtue. Artistic skill may be good in some broader sense, but there is no need to stipulate that it possesses moral rather than aesthetic worth.

Murdoch's second counterexample is more difficult to address. What should we make of the man who appears to be a good father while working as a concentration camp guard? One strategy for responding is to question whether such a person truly is a good father. While he may perform external actions similar to many good fathers, perhaps he cares

for his children for less than ideal reasons. Such a parent might not love his children as persons but because he views them as his legacy or some other selfish motive. Potential evidence for this view might stem from his role as a concentration camp guard. If the guard's activities are incompatible with the claim that the man cares for others as persons in general, then it at least raises a doubt that he truly cares for his own children as persons. Such a man might be vicious in both his private family and his public vocation. This response would preserve the unity of the virtues theses by simply denying that such fathers are virtuous at all.

Another possible response is to allow that the man may indeed love relatively well within his family, while denying that that his overall disposition attains the threshold of virtue. After all, plenty of less than virtuous people manifest occasional positive actions or have small scopes of consistent positive action. Perhaps, no virtue's scope should be strictly contextualized to a single or small number of relationships. So, while there may be such a thing as 'being a good father,' this should not be conceptualized as entailing the possession of any overall virtuous character trait. Just as 'courage' refers to a person's disposition toward fear in general rather than in one specific type of situation, character excellences may need to refer to broader traits than acting well within a single relationship.

A third way that we might view such a person as less than loving is to view him as primarily failing in practical wisdom. Perhaps, he possesses good intentions toward his family and some good intentions towards people in general, but he misapplies his good intentions when accepting a role as a concentration camp guard. Perhaps, he convinced himself that this role would allow him to provide for his family and that he would be gentler with the prisoners than a truly hateful guard would. Furthermore, maybe he did not fully understand what was actually happening at the concentration camp before accepting the job and is now fearful to resign. Such a person is naïve and lacks practical wisdom. Yet, whatever story we tell to attempt to mitigate the man's culpability, the fact that he accepted and continued in a direct role in such a destructive and hatefully unloving system as the concentration camp is surely incompatible with properly formed love.

In any case, the weak unity of the virtues thesis addresses such agents by examining whether or not they meet the threshold for the broad virtue of love. It is unlikely that such a person truly possesses love, since serving as a concentration camp guard entails the unloving treatment of prisoners. If such a person cares for his family in a way that allows him to provide for them by mistreating other people in more distant relationships, such care is not truly love but is a vicious form of partiality. Thus, he may truly care for his family, but such care does not exemplify the virtue of love.

## IMPROVED ACTION GUIDANCE PROVIDED BY THE LOVE-CENTERED ACCOUNT

One important advantage of a love-centered approach to virtue ethics is that it makes progress against an important type of objection to virtue ethics: that virtue ethics cannot give practical behavioral guidance since there are often competing directives for action derived from various virtues. One formulation of this objection asks:

> What does virtue ethics have to say about dilemmas—cases in which, apparently, the requirements of different virtues conflict because they point in opposed directions? . . . Honesty points to telling the hurtful truth, kindness and compassion to remaining silent or even lying. What shall I do? [70]

Similarly, Hursthouse reports, but does not endorse, a formulation of the objection that claims:

> The requirements of the virtues can conflict; charity may prompt me to end the frightful suffering of the person in my care by killing him, but justice bids me to stay my hand. To tell my brother that his wife is being unfaithful to him would be honest and loyal, but it would be kinder to keep quiet about it. So which should I do? In such cases, virtue ethics has nothing helpful to say. [71]

What does love-centered virtue ethics say about adjudicating between conflicting action guidance emanating from differing virtues? As discussed in this chapter, no trait that is incompatible with love is truly virtuous. Furthermore, no action that is incompatible with the goals of love can be a *bona fide* virtuous action. So, these sorts of actions have already been ruled out as potentially virtues.

In situations where various virtues propose competing genuinely virtuous actions, the action which best embodies the goals of love applied with practical wisdom is the most virtuous and praiseworthy action; actions which are guided by love applied with practical wisdom are praiseworthy; actions which are neutral regarding love—if any such actions truly exist—would be neutral; and actions which are opposed to love are vicious in proportion to the degree that they are opposed to love.

Consider a possible dilemma where two differing virtues might offer two different types of advice: should one reveal a painful truth to a friend? If 'honesty' directs one to tell the painful truth, while 'kindness' directs one to remain silent on a matter to avoid inflicting pain, then the agent should be guided by the virtue of love in choosing a course of action. Which action would best promote the good of and proper relational bonds with the friend as well as with others? Some painful truths might have to be faced for the sake of the friend's long-term well-being or to promote long-term bonds within the relationship while others might not. Furthermore, when a painful truth must be faced, there are ways

such a truth might be shared that would be less painful and more loving than others.

Therefore, reporting a painful truth to a friend might or might not be an expression of love depending upon circumstances and the individual's motives. Telling a wife that her unfaithful husband plans to abandon her would be a particularly loving action if one's intention is to benefit her by warning her of a serious relational danger and aid her in preventing or minimizing the harm of this event. This action would express love despite any immediate pain involved in the revelation. In contrast, reporting the truth would be an unloving action if it is motivated by a malevolent desire to gossip. Even if such a person truthfully reports a spouse's infidelities, the action is unloving if it is based in a desire to cause pain. Even if the action is honest and the faithful spouse benefits from the knowledge, the action is unloving due to its vicious overarching motivation. The gossiping person only intended to inflict pain.

Consider how the love-centered view's account of action guidance compares to influential views of right action in contemporary virtue ethics, Rosalind Hursthouse's theory advises: "An action is right iff [if and only if] it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically do in the circumstances."[72] Christine Swanton suggests: "[T1] An action is virtuous in respect to V (e.g., benevolent, generous) if and only if it hits the target of the virtue V (e.g., benevolence, generosity). [T2] An action is right if and only if it is overall virtuous."[73]

One can see why more specific action guidance might be desired than such views offer, since the rules of these theories seem to allow too many options. If I have promised to meet a friend, but have an opportunity to benevolently help a stranger change a tire on a broken-down car, which virtue should take precedence: promise-keeping or benevolence? There might be a wide range of actions that one could imagine a virtuous agent characteristically doing in the situation. Similarly, it is easy to imagine that a wide range of actions would hit the target of one of the virtues and be overall virtuous. So, how might one choose amongst the possible candidates for virtuous action?

Furthermore, there might even be multiple conflicting virtues offering competing guidance. In combat, courage may propose one set of actions for a soldier, mercy another set of actions, justice a third set, and kindness a fourth. Undoubtedly, Swanton and Hursthouse would appropriately point to the role of practical wisdom in choosing virtuous action. Yet, more specific action guidance from virtue theory is a reasonable desire and would be a great making feature of a theory if it can be accomplished without sacrificing other desirable theoretical features.

At the least, the love-centered account offers some improved tools for action guidance even if it cannot resolve all questions of action guidance. It suggests that we ought to perform an action that emanates from love—directly from the virtue of love or indirectly through the guidance of

some other virtue that is partially shaped by the goals of love—applied with wisdom. Which action should one attempt in unclear circumstances where multiple virtues suggest competing actions? If there is a single action that clearly embodies the priorities of love most fully, then that is the action that should be performed. If there is no single action that clearly embodies the priorities of love most fully, then the virtuous person should perform an action that excellently embodies the priorities of love. These principles are an improvement over the alternative formulations of virtuous action guidance since they identify love as the proper guide for all virtuous action. This improvement does not resolve all issues related to action guidance, but it at least clarifies and narrows the scope of practical debate.

Accordingly, when an action clearly embodies love more fully or to more people than another loving action, then that action is more virtuous. Yet, there may be many actions that would qualify as loving if grounded in the proper motivations wisely applied. If one is conflicted between helping a stranger repair a tire and keeping one's promise to meet a friend at a specific time, the practically wise, loving person might find a way to both fulfill the promise of meeting the friend and aid the motorist. A quick phone call could warn the friend of the modest delay caused by aiding the motorist, honor the spirit of the promise to meet the friend, maintain proper bonds within the relationship, help the friend avoid unnecessary anxiety, and allow time to offer practical benevolence to the motorist. However, if timeliness is vital—perhaps, the promise is to meet the friend at a wedding or court date—or if the agent has no skill in changing tires, a call to a local mechanic might be an appropriate way to offer aid to the motorist while causing only a slight delay in fulfilling the promise to meet the friend. So, there are potentially several ways to carry out loving action depending in part on the precise circumstances of the situation.

An action does not need to be maximally loving to all people involved for it to count as a loving or virtuous action. One reason to avoid such 'maximization' principles is that it may not truly be possible to quantify the love expressed by particular actions. An action's lovingness is largely a matter of it being motivated by certain desires that are applied wisely, rather than a matter of achieving certain quantifiable results. These are qualitative rather than quantitative considerations. Internal desires and wisdom cannot be directly measured. Furthermore, even practical wisdom can sometimes be thwarted by bad luck due to no culpable fault in the loving person. Therefore, a quantitative results oriented plan to measure love would not provide a reliable measure of an action's lovingness.

Whatever limitations there are to the action guidance provided by love, these limitations are no more serious and are often less serious than the limitations to the action guidance provided by other moral theories. Even the most quantitatively oriented moral theory, consequentialism,

only possesses the illusion of offering truly measurable action guidance. If one wants to live as a consequentialist and perform the action that maximizes happiness, defined as pleasure, for all those affected there are numerous practical difficulties. While this theory articulates a clear standard for moral action the difficulties in using the principle in real-life situations are daunting. Even if one can find a way to quantify pleasure, the utilitarian cannot know how much pleasure will be generated by an action prior to performing it, cannot know how much pleasure would have actually been generated by alternative actions, and can never be sure that all possible alternative actions have been considered or that everyone affected by the action has been identified. For the consequentialist, just as for the virtue theorist, great practical wisdom is needed in order to live ethically.

While the guidance offered by the love-centered account does not eliminate all possible conflict in action guidance, it offers enough guidance to ensure that the problem faced by the virtue ethicist is at least no more serious—and arguably is less serious—than the practical problems encountered by the act-utilitarian trying to accurately predict the long-term consequences of her actions or the Kantian deontologist attempting to fulfill competing imperfect duties.[74] Neither of these ethical theories offers clearer practical guidance when one is debating between revealing a painful truth or remaining silent on the matter. Neither category of action apart from more specific circumstantial details obviously generates better consequences long-term to aid the utilitarian. And neither action obviously violates a Kantian categorical imperative so long as no lying is involved in withholding the information from the friend. It is also plausible that either action would fit within the Kantian imperfect duty that one should aid others in the pursuit of their morally acceptable ends. It may require practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to determine which action carries out the desires of love most effectively, but no more so than that which is required for resolving similar dilemmas in competing ethical theories. And this theory, like most virtue theories, at least acknowledges the need for practical wisdom rather than pretending no significant challenge exists in action guidance.[75]

One reason a degree of vagueness in moral action guidance is to be expected is that there are undoubtedly situations where it is impossible to act in a way that expresses love to all who might be helped and the agent must simply choose between two different roughly equally virtuous ways of acting out of love. Similarly, it is also possible that this ambiguity can be present in tragic dilemmas where it is impossible to do everything that it would be morally desirable to do. For example, if a person has two children whose lives are threatened by a fire and she has the opportunity to save only one, then saving either out of love might be as good of an action as is possible. The dilemma is certainly tragic, but there simply was no better action that might have been performed. In such cases, the

loving person will certainly regret that more could not be done, but this fact represents an unpleasant facet of reality rather than a flaw in virtue theory.

While there may be multiple virtuous—perhaps, even equally virtuous—loving actions, the love-centered account can offer some general guidelines when choosing between loving actions: people in great distress have a priority over people undergoing less serious troubles. People with whom the lover has close relationships have some priority over those with whom the lover has more distant relationships. This priority is especially important in matters that are directly relevant to relational bonds. Similarly, people whom the lover is well situated to aid have some priority over those whom she is not well situated to aid. Yet, in some circumstances the lover should try to become differently situated in order to help needier or more closely related persons. People whom the agent is uniquely situated to aid have priority over those whom many other people might aid. Actions resulting in longer-term improvements in the life of the beloved have priority over actions resulting in only shorter-term improvements. Also, actions taken to restructure broad life patterns are often more important than particular individual actions. So while the love-centered account makes some progress on the challenge of action guidance, undoubtedly, some challenge remains.

A final model of virtue action guidance is Michael Slote's account:

> An act is right (morally acceptable) if and only if it comes from good or virtuous motivation involving benevolence or caring (about the well-being of others) or at least doesn't come from bad or inferior motivation involving malice or indifference to humanity.[76]

Interestingly, Slote's strategy embraces a view that has some similarity to the love-centered account in that there is a single guiding motivation behind morally appropriate action. Therefore, it has a similar advantage in that there cannot be conflicting action guidance emanating from competing virtues.

Slote's criterion for right action is helpful in that, like the love-centered account, it narrows the range of possible guides for right action. His view limits the proper motivation of virtuous action to benevolent or caring concerns. Like the love-centered account, his view avoids the problem of courage or honesty apart from benevolence offering competing action guidance. Yet, Slote's criterion for virtuous action is both too wide and too narrow. The criterion for right action is quite minimalist and therefore allows an excessively wide range of equally acceptable moral actions: any others-centered, benevolently motivated action is right. There is no need that the action is well informed, wisely carried out, emanating from a related ongoing virtuous disposition, and so on. In contrast, the love-centered account allows for a category of well-intended, but poorly informed or poorly executed actions.[77] These are ac-

tions that are intended to express love, but that are not performed with adequate practical wisdom.

If asked 'What should we do?' Slote's account responds with 'Anything so long as it is motivated by benevolence towards others!' At minimum, the love-centered account adds that the right thing to do is motivated by an ongoing disposition of love, well-informed, empathetic, and executed prudently. Yet, not every well-intended action will count as virtuous, such as actions grounded in culpable ignorance. Slote's account of right action is also too narrow as it disallows any moral relevance for actions done intended for our own good, including eating right, exercising, developing our skills and virtues, and so on. At minimum, it appears that such actions would have to have indirect instrumental moral value as some degree of proper care for the self is a necessary for future benevolently motivated actions for others. In contrast, the love-centered account acknowledges that since the self is a person, a wide range of self-loving actions are morally appropriate or even obligatory. Therefore, just as the love-centered account has advantages over Hursthouse's and Swanton's accounts of action guidance, it also has advantages over Slote's account albeit different advantages.

## HOW THE LOVE-CENTERED VISION OF VIRTUE ETHICS WORKS

Like many contemporary systems of virtue ethics, this system does not commit to a full catalogue of specific virtues. As we will see in chapter 5, one of the advantages of this account is that within the limitations of love, it possesses considerable cultural flexibility concerning what might be construed as virtuous. Presumably, most of the traditional virtues should be included in our catalogue, so long as they are directed by the goals of love. Accordingly, the virtuous person should have both intellectual and moral virtues directed by the ends of love. Virtues like honesty, courage, temperance, endurance, and so forth. As we have seen, not every honest or courageous act—or act normally associated with any other virtue—is necessarily an expression of virtue if not directed by the goals of love.

So, how would love relate to honesty? Truthfulness is not simply an end in itself, but is a way both of bonding with people and benefiting them. Consider the vice of self-deception. It is difficult to have a united psyche if one is simply unreflective or dishonest concerning one's own desires, values, priorities, state of character, and so forth. I can hardly integrate my desires by prioritizing some over others or by modifying some to make them more compatible with others if I am dishonest with myself concerning which desires are currently my own.

Of course, honesty with others in general is important, but honesty must be shaped by the desires to unite with and benefit others. This proviso is not to provide a motive for dishonesty, but concerns which

truths we share with one another and how they are shared. We have already mentioned the possibility of 'brutal honesty' intended to emotionally harm, humiliate, and shame others. Sharing unsubstantiated gossip about third parties is also another kind of activity that would be incompatible with loving honesty. Even accurate information that would harmful to others and their relationships might be incompatible with love, as in the medieval vice of tale bearing, which involves sharing information intended to harm other's relationships.[78] Furthermore, some truthful information must be shared sensitively. If I know that my best friend's spouse is unfaithful, the information should be shared in a way that is likely to be beneficial rather than harmful long term.

Courage, the tendency to only fear that which is actually harmful in proportion to its actual danger, is another virtue commonly found in accounts of virtue going back to the ancient world including Aristotle's. As we have already seen, vicious unloving courage is possible as in Aquinas's account of the brave thief since theft is obviously harmful to others. Yet, courage can also express love. Courage, shaped by the ends of love, is intended to accurately shape fear for the good of and union with persons. While the most obvious expression of courage is to reduce unwarranted fear, it also entails appropriately fearing that which is actually dangerous.

For example, a common irrational fear in contemporary Western culture is the fear of being harmed in a terrorist attack.[79] Courage entails decreasing the fear and concern one experiences over this unlikely possibility. In contrast, Westerners are far more likely to die of influenza, obesity-related heart conditions, or even being crushed by furniture. Courage might increase the fear one experiences concerning these dangers, hopefully expressing itself in actions designed to protect one's self from these dangers, such as getting a flu shot and eating a healthier diet. Similarly, courage shapes what we fear for others. If my teenage daughter wishes to take a school trip to the United Kingdom, I should not fear that she has great risk of being harmed by terrorists. Yet, if she has not learned to favor a healthy, active lifestyle, I should have greater fear for its long-term effects upon her well-being.

Temperance, which shapes appetite so that we desire to eat that which is actually healthy, similarly needs to be shaped by love. In some ways, temperance easily combines with appropriate self-love and practical rationality. Temperance helps us distinguish between self-love and self-indulgence. Self-love entails care for my own long term well-being, while self-indulgence leads me to embrace the goods of immediate pleasure while ignoring longer-term considerations. There can be an even deeper expression of temperate love, controlling my appetites to also benefit others. If I reduce the amount of food I eat, there will be more left over to share. If I constrain my appetites to that which is healthy, this diet can lead to a longer life and benefit my family. One might even ask whether

the farming practices that provide food are sustainable and good for the environment, and thus be expressions of love toward all. In this way, even temperance can express or fail to express love toward various people.

## IS A LOVE-CENTERED SYSTEM SUPERIOR TO A JUSTICE-CENTERED SYSTEM?

One potential objection to this account is that a virtue ethics system centered upon Aristotle's virtue of justice might be better than the love-centered account. Such an account could use justice to guide general impersonal behavior and supplement this virtue with his account of friendship to explain special obligations in specific close relationships. Might such an account do a better job of fulfilling our moral intuitions?

Aristotle himself claims that justice is not merely another virtue, but has a special status due to the fact that it requires all other virtues to the degree that they effect external actions toward others within the *polis*. He begins by defining just action as a kind of lawful action and claiming that such action contributes to the general happiness of society. This role for justice's contribution to the general happiness of others in society is vaguely analogous to his earlier claims that virtue contributes to the individual's happiness:[80]

> Since the lawless man was seen to be unjust and the law-abiding man just, evidently all lawful acts are in a sense just acts; . . . Now the laws in their enactments on all subjects aim at the common advantage either of all or of the best or of those who hold power, or something of the sort; so that in one sense we call those acts just that tend to produce and preserve happiness and its components for the political society.[81]

After establishing that justice produces and preserves happiness for society in general as an analogue of virtue's general connection to the individual's *eudaimonia*, Aristotle's second step is to show that the just man necessarily needs a degree of the other virtues more generally, thereby making justice a special unifying others-centered virtue:

> And the law bids us do both the acts of a brave man (e.g., not to desert our post nor take to flight nor throw away our arms), and those of a temperate man (e.g., not to commit adultery nor to gratify one's lust), and those of a good-tempered man (e.g., not to strike another nor to speak evil), and similarly with regard to the other virtues and forms of wickedness, commanding some acts and forbidding others; and the rightly-framed law does this rightly, and the hastily conceived one less well. This form of justice, then, is complete virtue, but not absolutely, but in relation to our neighbor. And therefore justice is often thought to be the greatest of virtues, and 'neither evening nor morning star' is so wonderful; and proverbially 'in justice is every virtue comprehended.'

> And it is complete virtue in its fullest sense, because it is the actual exercise of complete virtue. [82]

Since justice requires brave, temperate, and generally good acts in a wide variety of categories, the truly just person must have a number of other virtues. Therefore, Aristotle claims this trait requires a complete and comprehensive virtuous character in relation to actions effecting our neighbor.

However, limiting the range of virtuous actions from those required by justice to those that effect our neighbor reduces the scope of virtue in three significant ways. First, one's neighbor, in the Aristotelian sense, refers to generic members of the political community with whom one has impersonal relationships. It does not refer to those outside one's political community—the use of the term 'neighbor' to refer to all of humanity was not typical among Ancient Greek thinkers. Instead, it was Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan that included everyone in the scope of agapic love that expanded the notion of the term 'neighbor.'[83] Second, it does not include special moral commitments within more distinctive personal relationships, such as spouse, child, or parent. Similarly, it does not include aspects of virtue that primarily effect the self. Third, and more controversially, the external actions required by justice in this passage do not appear to require the deeply ingrained internal patterns of emotions and motivations that accompany full virtue. This passage's emphasis is strictly upon external actions that effect our neighbor. Such external actions are compatible with strong-willed character, which results in the proper just external action without full virtue. Such actions might even be compatible with completely non-virtuous motivations, such as fear of social consequences from unjust actions. Furthermore, while Aristotle claims that justice 'commands some acts and forbids others' all six of his specific examples in this passage are rather specific negative commands (e.g., commands against violence, slander, adultery, etc). Therefore, one wonders what degree of virtue is truly required to simply refrain from such obviously vicious external actions.

Is such a system of justice-centered virtue ethics plausible? First, we need to consider the most obvious objection to such an account. While justice may be an appropriate virtue for guiding actions within less personal relationships—'toward one's neighbor'—justice is an inadequate virtue for regulating close personal relationships. Broadly just actions enforced by explicit laws are typically, but not exclusively, negative restrictions requiring personal restraint from external actions embodying the active violation of another's legitimate interests and/or legal rights. The specific categories of just acts listed in Aristotle's arguments reveal a strong emphasis on negative restraints rather than positive commands: the just person must not abandon his post out of cowardice, commit adultery out of intemperate lust, commit violence or slander out of malice

and so forth. Yet, there is little in the passage to suggest that Aristotle thinks justice entails a broader commitment to positive benevolence: to feeding the hungry, to aiding the sick, to comforting the grieving, and so forth. While such an account of justice might be an adequate virtue to guide treatment of distant others within society—assuming we have a minimalist view of our general obligations toward others—it is hardly adequate to guide the ideal treatment of family and similar close personal relationships.

For example, literature is full of examples of children who are treated within the bounds of minimal legal 'justice,' but poorly treated by their caretakers: Cinderella, Harry Potter, Oliver Twist, King Lear's Cordelia, etc. Such children are fed, given clothing, and sheltered. While they might not be overtly abused, their treatment still falls far short of the moral ideal. In our closest relationships justice is an inadequate goal. Something more is required in such relationships. To say that one was only treated 'justly' in such relationships is to claim that one's treatment in these close relationships merely met a standard for an impersonal moral minimum rather than ideal expectations for a close relationship. 'She was treated justly, but not warmly,' 'He was provided for, but not cared for,' and 'Their attitude towards her was fair, but distant' all suggest that something significant was lacking in such relationships.

Aristotle has at least an initial answer to such objections. His account of friendship might be used to explain moral commitments in such relationships that go beyond the requirements of generic impersonal justice. Such friendship requires more than mere justice in external actions, but like Aquinas's account of love includes goodwill and relational bondedness. In Book IX of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle enumerates five distinctions of friendships that are not true of relationships more generally:

> Friendly relations with one's neighbours, and the marks by which friendships are defined, seem to have proceeded from a man's relations to himself. For (1) we define a friend as one who wishes and does what is good, or seems so, for the sake of his friend, or (2) as one who wishes his friend to exist and live, for his sake; which mothers do to their children, and friends do who have come into conflict. And (3) others define him as one who lives with and (4) has the same tastes as another, or (5) one who grieves and rejoices with his friend; and this too is found in mothers most of all. It is by some one of these characteristics that friendship too is defined.[84]

Aristotle claims that all close relationships—including familial relationships—ideally include these traits of friendship. Yet, these five traits should be applied within the distinct context of various types of relationships, so ideal friendship toward a parent differs from ideal friendship

toward a spouse, which differs from friendship toward one's child, and so forth.[85]

This account of justice supplemented by Aristotelian friendship offers an alternative direction for creating a more determinate account of virtue ethics. An account that someone might find attractive if they intuit that justice rather than love should be the central virtue. Yet, contemporary secular virtue ethics has generally not proceeded in this direction despite its high regard for Aristotle. Some have claimed that a close reading of Aristotle reveals that his account of justice and ethics more generally is surprisingly minimalist in its demands toward others in impersonal relationships. In particular, Aristotle's ethics lack a broadly demanding positive sweeping moral requirement toward all others. Accordingly, Michael Slote has criticized Aristotle for this lack. He observes,

> Although Aristotle mentions the fact that we tend to praise lovers of humankind, his theory of morality doesn't seem to require a concern for human beings generally, . . . it has become difficult to accept any overall moral philosophy, like Aristotle's, that offers no defense of generalized concern for (other) people.[86]

The broader expressions of virtue required for Aristotelian justice require many negative restraints in our actions toward others: refraining from violence, slander, adultery, desertion, and the like. Yet, Aristotle appears to lack an overarching positive moral directive concerning the well-being of all. While the virtue of justice may provide necessary negative restrictions protecting others from outright abuse, a positive moral principle entailing broad benevolence or care for others beyond legal minimums is lacking, a lack that Aquinas's account of *caritas/agape* remedies since he follows the New Testament in defining love as universal friendship toward all.

Similarly, when Alasdair MacIntyre revises his own virtue system in *Dependent Rational Animals*, he understands himself to be moving away from the more Aristotelian ethic advocated in *After Virtue*, to a more distinctly Thomistic view of ethics. By adding virtues of acknowledged dependence alongside the more traditional Aristotelian virtues of rational independence, MacIntyre is responding to this perceived failing in the more Aristotelian virtue system. These virtues of acknowledged dependence greatly expand the scope of our general positive moral obligations toward others. Among his paradigm examples of these virtues is Thomistic *misercordia*, an implication of Thomistic love toward the sufferer whether friend, member of the community, or total stranger.[87] This is an important addition as Aristotle's justice appears to be limited to the neighbor within one's *polis*. Therefore, for MacIntyre Aquinas was not merely a great Aristotelian, but also important as an improver and reviser of Aristotle's virtue ethics.[88]

Accordingly, even when we append traditional Aristotelian friendship to an account of justice, it seems that friendship has too limited a scope and justice—as traditionally defined in Aristotle—does not go far enough in its positive demands concerning the way we ought to treat people in general. Something like Aquinas's account of love is needed to fulfill this role. By making the most important virtue love toward all, defined as a kind of friendship, he provides a more sweeping, more demanding, positive moral principle, with an unambiguously universal moral scope. Conceptualizing love toward all as the central virtue of a contemporary virtue system improves upon this Aristotelian effort in three ways.

First, it raises the standard of moral expectations to a level more in line with contemporary intuitions. Perhaps, the largely negative restrictions upon external actions of Aristotelian justice were once believed to be an adequate moral disposition toward all. Yet, modern and contemporary ethics have had higher expectations concerning our obligations toward all than much of the ancient world. Whether it is consequentialism's expectation that we give the consequences of an action for everyone absolutely everyone equal weight in our decision making or Kant's broad imperative that we have imperfect moral duties of beneficence toward all, contemporary moral theories simply argue for more demanding positive moral expectations.

In one example of these high expectations, Peter Singer claims that in failing to redistribute their wealth to those in extreme poverty, affluent individuals—including average members of most Western industrialized nations—are guilty of the moral equivalent of murder.[89] Accordingly, John Stuart Mill considered the objection that his Utilitarianism was too demanding of an ethical system, and Immanuel Kant argued that the kind of self-sacrifices required by his ethics literally required faith in God and the possibility of divine reward to justify.[90] In these cases, we can see that moral expectations have increased considerably since the time of Aristotle.

A second way that love-centered ethics is preferable to a theory centered upon Aristotelian justice plus friendship in closer relationships is its theoretical simplicity. By advocating a single central trait regulating all relationships toward self, closer relationships, impersonal relationships within the community, impersonal relationships beyond the immediate community, God, and so on, love-centered ethics provides a conceptually simpler system. The love centered approach enables us to describe the central moral virtue: toward others generally, toward those with whom we have close personal relationships, and toward the self in terms of one virtue. By using one principle, justice, to explain general obligations toward the impersonal neighbor in our community, but a second conception, friendship, to explain special obligations in closer relationships, this Aristotelian theory is unnecessarily complex. Plausibly, yet a third virtue

might be required—prudence—to ground the strictly self-beneficial virtues, and even a fourth virtue would appear to be needed if we are to include the stranger beyond our political community in our scope of ethics.

A third advantage of a system centered upon Thomistic *caritas* over Aristotle's justice is the implicit recognition that valuing a kind of bondedness or unity with people in general is at the heart of the moral project. The importance of virtuous responses to various agential bonds, though not exclusively relational bonds is also an important claim in Christine Swanton's *On Virtue Ethics*.[91] Therefore, the role that relational bonds plays in our relationships with all in the love-centered account should be an attractive feature to like-minded virtue ethicists.

Love rather than mere justice pervades the Thomistic ethic concerning both God and other humans as expressed in the New Testament's love commands and the Parable of the Good Samaritan. If love did not go beyond the expectations of Aristotelian justice, Aquinas would have defined *caritas* as justice toward all rather than friendship toward all. Aquinas argues that we ought to love all humans as commanded by Christ since they bear the divine image. This entails that for Aquinas—as for Jesus's Good Samaritan—everyone counts as a neighbor with whom we have demanding positive moral obligations. In some traditional sense of justice, it may not be unjust to be hard-hearted to a stranger in need, but such apathy is unambiguously unloving. We may not owe anything to such a stranger out of the principle of equality of exchange, the principle of reciprocity, or as members of the shared local *polis* as captured by the traditional account of justice. No principle of positive benevolence is implicit in negative principles protecting the stranger from active mistreatment. Yet love demands more from us. It requires that we care for and, if possible, act on behalf of such a stranger.

## CONCLUSION

While the love-centered account of virtue ethics does not require a broad endorsement of the full Thomistic view of metaphysics and anthropology, it does adds several distinctive commitments from Aquinas to contemporary versions of virtue ethics. First, it adds the commitment that love is a necessary constituent of virtue in that it must provide the *telos* or end goal of all virtues. Accordingly, some traits that are candidates for virtues will not count as virtues if they are incompatible with love or if they are used in unloving ways. Implicitly, virtues cannot be used badly, since all genuine virtues are shaped by loving ends. They also cannot be used incompetently since genuine virtue is also partially constituted by the practical wisdom necessary to apply them well. There is also a weak sense of unity of the virtues through the traits of love and practical wis-

dom. These two traits ensure that the goal of each virtue is praiseworthy and that virtuous actions are generally carried out wisely.

Since, love tends to benefit its possessor in various ways and love is a necessary constituent of all virtues, there are benefits of love that will generally accrue to the lover as she possesses other virtues. Furthermore, these benefits emanating from the influence of love in other virtues is distinct from other potential benefits derived from specific virtues. For example, temperance in one's appetite for food will tend to result in improved physical health.

Finally, there are certain advantages this account possesses that shape its ability to provide action guidance. When various virtues appear to offer conflicting action guidance, any such conflict should be resolved in favor of the action that best embodies the goals of love. If there are several possible actions that embody the ends of love excellently, but no one that clearly embodies them the best then any of these loving actions are equally appropriate. Therefore, the love-centered account makes progress against this important traditional objection to virtue ethics.

## NOTES

1. Robert Hartman, "Utilitarian Moral Virtue, Admiration, and Luck" in *Philosophia*, 43 (2015): 77.
2. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 8. Despite Hursthouse's overly sweeping claim concerning the status of the virtue of love there are still philosophers working within the Nietzschean and Randian frameworks that may not endorse a virtue of love. Or at least, they may not endorse an account of love that is recognizably similar to traditional others centered accounts of love.
3. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, xi.
4. ST I-II.49–89 and II-II.1–170 are focused on issues connected to virtues and vices. ST I-II.90–108 are focused on issues connected to law.
5. Here and elsewhere I provide my own translations of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*. However, I consulted the translation of the Father's of the English Dominican Province and found it to be helpful. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologicae* II-II, Prologue.
6. ST I-II.90.4.
7. ST I-II.93.
8. ST I-II.95.2.
9. ST I-II.96.4.
10. See ST I-II.94.2.
11. ST I-II.4.5.
12. ST I-II.4.4.
13. ST I-II.55.1
14. See ST I-II.58.3.
15. *De Anima*, 414a-b, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102b, and ST I.78.1–2.
16. ST I-II.51.4.
17. ST I-II.62.2.
18. ST I-II.65.4.
19. ST I-II.55.4.
20. See ST I-II.61.3.
21. See ST I-II.61.1.

22. ST II-II.23.7–8.

23. ST I-II.61.3.

24. ST II-II.134.

25. ST II-II.157.

26. ST II-II.166.

27. ST II-II.168.

28. ST II-II.101.

29. ST II-II.102.

30. ST II-II.106.

31. ST II-II.109.

32. ST II-II.47.6.

33. See ST I-II.63.4 and I-II.63.4.

34. See *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a-1105b.

35. Consider some of their influential books: Swanton *Virtue Ethics*, Slote *Morals from Motives*, Hursthouse *On Virtue Ethics*. Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* was distinctive in that it committed to a view of virtue acquisition through habituation at least implicitly. See 181–203.

36. See ST I-II.51.

37. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 89.

38. ST II-II.23.6–8.

39. Stephen Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 318.

40. See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:393.

41. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115a.

42. Aquinas identifies this problem with many traditional virtues. He claims that even the thief displays something like courage by controlling his fear, but that this trait is not a genuine virtue because it is used in ways contrary to love. See ST II-II.23.7–8.

43. ST II-II.23.7.

44. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a.

45. Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of The Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 167.

46. See ST I-II.18.9.

47. See ST II-II.23.6–8.

48. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 57.

49. ST I-II.56.5

50. See also Philippa Foot, "Virtues and Vices," in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 175.

51. I acknowledge the possibility that extreme circumstances where an environment is conducive to systematic relational breakdown would result in a net loss to the lover's happiness, such as in totalitarian societies. But, even in these circumstances much of the harm to the agent would occur whether or not they care for others. And while living egoistically may be the most prudent strategy for survival in such circumstances, it would come at a steep cost to relational aspects of flourishing.

52. Sanford, *Before Virtue*, 68.

53. Sanford, *Before Virtue*, 167.

54. ST I-II.55.3–4.

55. See Eric J. Silverman, *The Prudence of Love*.

56. This benefit of love was greatly influenced by Harry Frankfurt's work. See Harry Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 84.

57. Most contemporary theories of human subjective well-being or happiness include either pleasure and/or fulfilled desires as important constituents of well-being. See Silverman, *The Prudence of Love*, 5–11.

58. Here and elsewhere I presuppose a model of the psyche similar to the one proposed by Harry Frankfurt. See Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and The Concept of a Person." *Journal of Philosophy* LXVII (1971): 5–20.

59. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1169b.

60. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b.

61. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b.

62. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1171b.

63. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1171a.

64. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b-1171b.

65. See Plato, *Meno*, in *Plato: Five Dialogues*, Second Edition, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 86–95.

66. I do not mean to imply that there is no situation when giving needs to be curtailed, but only that prudent spending ought to promote the goals of love. Therefore, thrift is instrumentally good, but not an overriding goal on its own.

67. See ST II-II.23.8.

68. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 6–7.

69. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 94.

70. See Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2012. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/#3 accessed on May 23, 2016.

71. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion," in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 222.

72. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 30.

73. Liezl Van Zyl, "Virtue Ethics and Right Action," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, ed. Daniel C. Russell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 188.

74. Notably, Kant offers little action guidance when choosing between the numerous activities that do not violate the categorical imperative. Furthermore, while Kant offers two examples of imperfect duties: the broad imperfect duty toward self-improvement and the broad imperfect duty of benevolence toward others there are undoubtedly other similarly broad duties. Certainly, there are times when one must choose between competing imperfect duties or when one must choose between many possible ways of fulfilling an imperfect duty. So, even Kantian action guidance is not obviously superior to the degree of action guidance offered by love-centered virtue ethics.

75. One flagrant example of simply rejecting the need for further action guidance appears in John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*. In chapter 2, Mill argues that history has already taught us the general consequences of various types of actions like theft and murder. Therefore, he concludes there is no need for great wisdom concerning moral action guidance. Yet, his argument simply begs the question against the need for practical wisdom. Since act utilitarianism demands that every act maximize utility in its results, knowing the general effects of general categories of actions is not sufficient for moral guidance in any particular situation. Even his example of the obvious negative effects of 'murder' does not truly suffice for universal moral guidance. While it may be true by definition that murder— defined as an unjustified killing—will never have good consequences there are other circumstances where killing will be justified by good consequences. It has long been held that killing in self-defense, killing by law enforcement in defense of the innocent against violence, killing in a just war, etc., is morally justified. To the traditional categories of justified killing, we might add the possibility that euthanasia or assassination might have good consequences in some specific circumstances. In fact, anytime killing will result in the best overall utility long-term, then it will be morally justified according to utilitarianism. Furthermore, many decisions are far more subtle than whether one should engage in stealing or killing. So, even if no further guidance were needed in these specific areas there still would be many other topics where guidance is needed. See John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, second edition, ed. George Sher (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001).

76. Slote, *Motives from Morals*, 181.

77. For a more detailed examination of Slote's views see Eric J. Silverman, "Michael Slote's Rejection of Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 42 (2008): 507–518.

78. See ST II-II.74.1.

79. An amusing *Washington Post* article mathematically demonstrated that Americans were more likely to die from being crushed by furniture than in a terrorist attack. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/11/23/youre-more-likely-to-be-fatally-crushed-by-furniture-than-killed-by-a-terrorist/?noredi-rect=on&utm_term=.f8fec2d92322. Accessed on 6/3/2019.

80. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1002a-1003a.

81. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1129b.

82. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1129b.

83. Luke 10:25–37.

84. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1166a.

85. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1164b-1165a.

86. Slote, *Motives from Morals*, vii.

87. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 123–126.

88. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, xi.

89. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Third Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 194.

90. See Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 17, and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:124–132.

91. See Swanton, *Virtue Ethics*, 35–40, 213–222.

# FOUR

# Impartiality, Relationships, and Love

The first three chapters have outlined several foundational commitments of a love-centered vision of virtue ethics including its account of love, general virtue theory, and its more specific distinguishing features. It is one of several contemporary models of virtue ethics and fits within the broad neo-Aristotelian commitments of recent thinkers such as Rosalind Hursthouse and Alasdair MacIntyre. Like many contemporary versions of virtue ethics and care ethics, the love-centered account allows for unequal treatment and prioritization of those in closer relationships to the lover. Yet, as this chapter will argue, unlike most competing accounts it proposes a different way of construing this unequal treatment as compatible with an important kind of impartiality.

## THE CHALLENGE OF RECONCILING IMPARTIAL MORALITY WITH PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Love-centered virtue ethics allows an important role to be played by relationships in shaping the proper expressions of desires. [1] Humans are relational beings, and an accurate account of morality should treat relationships as gifts that improve us. Love typically benefits both lover and beloved and brings about internal and external goods that cannot be otherwise obtained. While full and complete rules for every moral situation are impossible to codify, the existence of various kinds of relationships are morally important facts that shape virtuous action. Love should be expressed differently based upon relational circumstances. The loving person promotes the good of her children differently from the ways in which she might promote the good of her parents. Similarly, loving union with a colleague differs greatly from the union one ought to desire with one's spouse or children. Therefore, properly understanding our

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relationships and caring well in light of them are important aspects of the virtuous life.

Relationships entail very different types of bonds between persons legitimizing varying types of union. One's spouse has the reasonable expectation that material goods will be shared in various ways, while one's vocational colleague should have no similar reasonable expectation. One's colleague has the reasonable expectation that vocational knowledge and effort will be shared in various ways, but one's literal neighbor does not. Of course, it is possible to have a multifaceted relationship with another person, such as if another person is both spouse and co-worker. In such cases, we would have normative bonds with the other person in light of both their role as spouse and as co-worker, but it may be important to carefully delineate the relevant contexts of each relationship. Obviously, one should not promote her spouse over a more qualified colleague strictly on the basis of their relationship, though he may have reasonable expectations to preferential treatment outside of such vocational contexts. Properly understanding the nature of our relationships and caring well in light of them are central aspects of the virtuous life. Therefore, relationships play a more foundational role in the love-centered account than in most other accounts of ethics.

The love-centered account offers a unique and balanced approach to the partiality-impartiality puzzle. Many have argued that a weakness of traditional modern ethical theories is that they have an inadequate ethical role for intimate relationships. This problem is famously illustrated by Bernard Williams's example of a husband encountering two drowning people, one of whom is his wife. If he even seeks an ethical justification for rescuing his wife first—beyond the brute fact that she is his wife—he has had "one thought too many" and has committed a serious offense against the relationship.[2] Williams goes on to conclude that such partial relationships are essential to life itself and that, ". . . unless such things exist, there will not be enough substance or conviction in a man's life to compel his allegiance to life itself."[3] Therefore, he argues that any moral system that undermines these sorts of relationships is deeply problematic.

While Williams might be accused of overstating his point there certainly is something absurd in any suggestion that the husband should have flipped a coin or found some other way of treating both drowning victims 'equally.' The whole concept of committing to a 'spouse' includes accepting sweeping special unequal obligations toward that person. However, if one's concept of love is limited to a small relational scope an ethic grounded solely in such 'intimate love' would be problematic as it would allow the lover to treat billions of distant persons as morally insignificant. Accordingly, Elizabeth Ashford offers one of the more striking claims concerning the partiality-impartiality puzzle, "in the current state of the world, any plausible moral theory has difficulty in showing how

agents' impartial moral commitments and their personal commitments can be harmoniously integrated."[4] How can a moral theory harmonize special personal obligations and with broader general moral commitments?

The love-centered account's strategy for balancing these competing commitments is to acknowledge the moral importance of an agent possessing a general concern for all constituted by the same two broad types of loving desires, responses, and attitudes toward all people.[5] Simultaneously, it acknowledges the moral importance of close personal relationships by allowing that love's virtuous and appropriate expression is shaped by the agent's relationship with each person. The love-centered account addresses the tension between the moral importance of distant impersonal and closer personal relationships by emphasizing that the ideal loving agent has the same two types of loving desires, responses, and attitudes toward all of humanity,[6] but that they are expressed in ways that are shaped by the agent's relationship with each person. Accordingly, there are three expressions of impartiality that stem from this view: it is impartial in that the ideal agent has the same two broad types of desires toward all, it is impartial in that relational traits are used to identify virtuous ways of applying those two broad loving desires impartially, and it is impartial in that the loving person would expect others to apply those same relational traits as reasons for similar types of unequal concern and action.[7]

Some ethical views portray treating individuals differently due to the agent's relational status with them as necessarily an offense against impartiality. For example, traditional utilitarianism demands that agents act with strict impartiality, not favoring their own happiness or anyone else's over that of anyone in the general populous.[8] Conversely, ethical systems endorsing some unequal treatment of others based on the possession of certain relational attributes are usually viewed as partialist forms of ethics. Consider how Bernard Williams's presentation of Kantian impartiality emphasizes indifference to relational reasons for action:

> The moral point of view is specially characterized by its impartiality and its indifference to any particular relationships to particular persons, and that moral thought requires abstraction from particular circumstance and particular characteristics of the parties, including the agent, except in so far as these can be treated as universal features of any morally similar situation.[9]

Such accounts of impartiality typically hold an implicit presupposition that relational traits are among those features of a situation that are not universalizable moral reasons for action that could be treated as relevant in all moral situations. In fact, Williams's famous counter-example to traditional impartial ethics—that a husband should unreflectively save his drowning wife rather than a stranger if he can only save one person—

relies upon the assumption that relational traits between persons cannot be treated as universalizable features that might give impartial moral guidance for action. Yet, why should not the husband be viewed as acting upon an implicit universalizable principle: 'if one's spouse is in mortal danger, one should unreflectively prioritize saving his or her spouse'? After all, the existence of a spousal relationship has long been viewed as a morally proper universally applicable basis for other types of special treatment such as privileged sharing in communally held material goods and sexual exclusivity.

While unequal relationships have often been viewed dubiously within ethics, the value of impartiality has typically been held in high regards. Yet, it has been undernoted that an impartial disposition by itself does not ensure that an agent possesses an ideal moral disposition. Impartiality alone does not entail that the impartialist places a high value on human life. Agents who are strictly impartial toward others can be either moral saints or literal sociopaths. At least one sort of impartialist views all persons—or at least all persons other than himself—as possessing extremely low value and does not take their well-being as a reason for action. In principle everyone is replaceable and fungible in the sociopath's search for satisfaction. Thus, even the serial killer who kills strangers chosen randomly from an old phone book is impartial.

Similarly, one type of impartialist with a low view of general human value is the attachment disordered person. Consider this description,

> For the attachment-disordered child, other people are truly interchangeable with each other. He cares as much about a stranger as he does about his mother . . . Therefore, if every person is truly interchangeable with any other, the attachment-disordered person is willing to find new trading partners for every interaction. He might literally "sell his mother down the river" if the price were right. A lost friendship means nothing to him.[10]

In theory, Plato's guardians who lack partial relationships are assumed to be ideal objective judges and moral saints. Yet, in empirical reality at least some people who lack special bonds with particular others never learn to attribute high value to anyone at all. The attachment disordered person is impartial in that no one possesses a place of preference in his life: everyone is usable and replaceable. Therefore, impartiality does not guarantee a moral life. In contrast, close valued relationships are typically important contributors toward the development of the moral life. Typical moral development starts with the child valuing those closest to her and eventually learning to see that all people possess high value.

Annette Baier makes a similar point concerning the impartial justice of John Rawl's social contract, which is grounded not only in impartial justice, but implicitly also on the moral value of parent's partial relationship with the child.

> Rawl's theory, like so many other theories of obligation, in the end must take out a loan not only on the natural duty of parents to care for children . . . but on the natural virtue of parental love. . . . The virtue of being a loving parent must supplement the natural duties and obligations of justice, if the just society is to last beyond the first generation.[11]

Given the value of closer personal relationships and that the moral project itself is grounded in part on successful close relationships, traditional versions of impartiality need to be reconsidered to see how impartiality might be more compatible with unequal close personal relationships.[12] Yet, this reconsideration must be done without allowing for abusive favoritism or callousness toward more distant persons. Energy, attention, and resources must be reserved to aid those outside of one's close relationships, especially for those in great need or who simply lack close relationships of their own to aid them. Simultaneously, we should be wary of cultural patterns that undermine, make difficult, or erode valuable close relationships since they contribute greatly to well-being[13] and aid in moral development by helping people see the value of others.[14] Williams may have exaggerated in suggesting that life itself would not be worth living without close relationships, but he is certainly correct that intimate partial relationships are a great and unique good in most lives. It is unlikely that life could be made equally good by increasing other sources of happiness such as entertainment while eliminating close relationships. Undermining such relationships in the pursuit of some greater good is self-defeating since such relationships are important and unique contributors to the good of life that such morality purportedly seeks to advance.

## AN ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF IMPARTIALITY

Treating individuals differently due to their relational attributes is sometimes portrayed as a paradigmatic offense against impartiality. Conversely, ethical systems endorsing unequal treatment of others based on the possession of certain relational attributes are often described as partialist forms of ethics. However, I propose an alternative way of understanding the requirements of impartiality that rejects these traditional assumptions.

Unlike traditional accounts of impartiality, the love-centered account views certain types of unequal treatment based on relationships as based in a morally relevant objective fact about the world that is applied impartially and is universalizable. Unequal treatment of persons is therefore impartial and compatible with love when:

1. An agent treats a person unequally from others *motivated* by the existence of a specific instance of a general distinct type of relationship.[15]
2. The type of unequal behavior is potentially universalizable to similar situations for all agents *and* the agent would accept that the existence of such a relationship would be good reason for *anyone* similarly situated to act in similar ways.
3. The relationally motivated behaviors, attitudes, thoughts, and emotions justified by the existence of a specific instance of a general distinct type of relationship are compatible with appropriate loving attitudes and actions toward all persons.

I make two claims about this approach to addressing the partiality-impartiality debate: a verbal claim and a more substantial ethical claim. First, instead of construing this way of viewing ethics as "partialist," this approach is better thought of as a distinct subtype of impartialist ethics employing relational attributes as an impartially employed criterion for guiding action. The impartiality of such actions is ensured by the combination of requirements (1), (2), and (3). Second, whether or not one accepts the verbal claim that this should be described as an impartial approach to ethics, this vision of ethics is plausible and preferable to many contemporary ethical alternatives whether or not it should be categorized as an 'impartialist' approach.

Criterion (1)—the relational grounding requirement—may at first look like a paradigm instance of partiality, but it need not be interpreted this way. The expectation that we morally ought to treat some people differently than others based strictly upon the existence of a relationship is a moral intuition with an impressive and culturally broad pedigree. It is an expectation found in ancient Greco-Roman filial piety, in the Confucian Five Relationships,[16] in the Jewish Ten Commandments,[17] in the New Testament,[18] as well as Thomas Aquinas's thought, to name just a few examples.[19] Treating someone in a distinct way grounded in the existence of a type of relationship is not identical to treating a person differently simply because the agent likes or favors them. In contrast, there are times when we do not like those with whom we have close relationships, but still have obligations to them in light of those relationships. A person may judge that her aging father has made a series of irresponsible choices leading to his financial ruin, but might still believe that children should take care of their aging parents. Another person may not like his new colleague, but still believe that one ought to help colleagues become oriented to the workplace even if it is not part of his official job description.

This criterion establishes that the agent has not acted arbitrarily or upon mere subjective preference. Agents acting for relational reasons are not acting arbitrarily. The existence of a relationship is an objective fact

about reality, a fact to which these agents are responding appropriately. Furthermore, relationships are not reducible to arbitrary preferences or inclinations. The fully loving person has the same general loving desires toward all people, not just some, not just relationally close persons, and not just people whom she finds likeable. The lover may find himself with a troublesome relative, an uncooperative colleague, or an unfriendly neighbor. Yet, these circumstances do not eliminate the virtuousness of possessing loving desires toward them. Of course, these circumstances may be relevant in shaping the proper external expressions of love. For example, it is unloving toward the self to submit to an abusive friend or relative. In such cases, the lover will still *desire* the good of the abuser, and wish that closer union with him were possible. Yet, these desires should be modified by loving desires toward all including the self.

The existence of a relationship is an objective fact about the world rather than a subjective preference. Even when relationships are initially established due to subjective preferences, once relationships are established they becomes objective features of reality until they are modified in some way. And just as one may have relationships with unpleasant individuals, one might have desires for certain relationships that simply go unfulfilled. One might fail to ever have a 'best friend,' a sibling, or a spouse. Even when some relationships—such as spousal relationships— are established based upon subjective preferences, once the relationship is established we have obligations to our spouse even if we find him less likable than we once did.

While some relationships are established based upon subjective preferences or inclinations many relationships are involuntary. We do not typically choose our parents or children. Yet other relationships, such as those with neighbors, colleagues, and fellow citizens, are only indirectly chosen. Therefore, the view that relationships are reducible to subjective inclinations or preferences should be rejected. Relationships are facts about the world to which one might or might not respond well. Accordingly, a loving parent treats children equally in some important way. The truly loving father does not treat one child as a favorite while neglecting others. Similarly, the unpleasant uncle ought to be cared for much like the likeable aunt.

Criterion (2) for unequal treatment that is compatible with love—the universalization requirement—demonstrates that such an agent is not acting egoistically, with vicious partiality, or based upon arbitrary preferences, but instead is acting according to an impartial criterion that is universalizable and that she recognizes as valid for others.[20] Such beliefs may be implicit rather than explicit, since few people have a fully formed explicit theory of the sorts of actions and attitudes justified by various types of relationships. This way of conceiving the role of relationships in morality is not significantly different from using the existence of a morally acceptable promise or contract as a universalizable impartial moral

reason for prioritizing the use of one's time, resources, and talents to fulfill the terms of that promise or contract. Each type of relationship has an implicit set of normative commitments concerning behavior and attitudes. These commitments are rarely explicit promises, but can have similarly strong influence in shaping behavior since they can be understood as entailing obligatory special behaviors. Therefore, these commitments for distinctive types of behaviors, attitudes, and actions stemming from relationships ought to be evaluated the same way that commitments stemming from promises are evaluated.

The fact that someone is one's spouse is a universalizable normative reason to have an exclusive sexual relationship with them. The fact that someone is one's child is a universalizable reason to prioritize their basic material needs and to provide them with the guidance needed to become a fully flourishing adult. The fact that someone is one's student is a universalizable reason to teach them relevant intellectual content. Undoubtedly, there is vagueness in many current relational concepts. Many normative commitments stemming from relationships are unclear or disputed, but many others are not.

Criterion (3)—the loving outside relationships criterion—is necessary for distinguishing between relational conceptions that are compatible with love and conceptions that are inherently unloving toward those outside the relationship. Inherently unloving conceptions of relationships are vicious even if the agent would universalize them. One may believe (incorrectly) that 'everyone should be willing to lie for a friend' but since this principle requires potentially harmful actions toward those without the relational status of 'friend' this conception of friendship is vicious.

Just as there are inherently vicious promises, there are also inherently unloving relational concepts that should neither be initiated nor carried out. No one should enter into the promise of a 'murder for hire' contract and the existence of such a contract would not justify violence. Similarly, a 'partner in crime' view of friendship is an inherently unloving relational concept as it entails unloving, unjust, and possibly violent action toward those outside of the relationship. Even if Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid have a genuine friendship of good will toward one another, if their idea of friendship requires unjustifiable violence toward others outside of their relationship then their concept of friendship is incompatible with the broad disposition of love. Therefore, while some sorts of unequal treatment are justified by the existence of a relationship not every type of unequal behavior can be justified.

## THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF RELATIONAL CONCEPTS

It has often been thought that varying types of relationships distinguish one type of love from another. As Alexander Pruss says, "Love comes in

many varieties filial, parental, fraternal, erotic, friendly, compassionate, charitable, and so on. . . . love becomes distorted when we get the form wrong."[21] Love gets distorted when we treat someone in ways that are inappropriate for the relationship that is actually supposed to exist between two people. If an agent acts paternalistically toward friends, these actions undermine those friendships since they are inappropriate. If one fails to parent her children, treating them only as friends she robs her children of a unique and important relationship. If romance or sexuality is introduced into a work relationship, complexities inevitably ensue even if the two types of relationships are potentially compatible.

While all loving relationships are similar in that the same two desires constitute love in each relationship, the proper expression of these desires differs from relationship to relationship. Differing relational circumstances shape appropriate desires for union and appropriate ways of promoting another's good. Acting in ways that conflict with the relevant relationships is vicious. Relational concepts outline the bonds that supposedly exist between persons. When our desires do not match the supposed reality of our relationships, this is vicious, confusing, and destructive to the people involved. Of course, one cannot simply choose to have the right emotions and desires in the moment, but aspiring to the ideals of our relationships is part of the pursuit of the virtuous life.

Relationships also play an important role in determining which traits are virtues. Since relationships shape appropriate expressions of love, traits which strengthen, sustain, and give insight into our relationships are important virtues. Individual relationships are not the only relevant social context for the virtues, but these specific types of relationships can only make sense within one's larger network of relational concepts. Therefore, changing the ideals and normative expectations shaping one relational concept often has import for other relational concepts.

Accordingly, if our culture changes the concept of spouses by weakening the normative expectations of marriage so that it no longer requires a lifelong commitment, this change also necessitates a change in other relational concepts such as the concept of parent. Unsurprisingly, weakening the bond between parents requires weakening the normative relational expectations of the bonds between parents and children. For example, as divorce becomes normalized and widespread it is unsurprising that the normative expectations of parenting for non-custodial parents no longer include daily contact with the child.

If the normative relational bonds between employer and employee are broadened so that employers expect workers to engage in sixty-hour work weeks, this change requires lowering expectations for the amount of time such workers can be expected to spend in other relationships, such as family life. Since humans are creatures of finite time and energy, increasing expectations in one area of life naturally entails decreased availability in other areas. Therefore, there is a natural connection be-

tween relational concepts, although the connection is not always a simplistic zero sum relationship between two relational concepts. For example, it is possible to adjust several sets of relational concepts moderately or simply to have unrealistic normative relational expectations that exceed the available resources most people possess. Therefore, it is important to identify and acknowledge the complex connections between broad networks of relational concepts. Modifying relational expectations in one type of relationships without considering other relational effects can create serious cultural problems.

## THE ROLE OF VARYING TYPES OF LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

The relationships shaping the proper normative expression of love's desires include one's relationship with the self, closer personal relationships, and more distant impersonal relationships. The loving person desires the good of and union with persons in general, but applies those desires in light of the relational bonds he has with each person along with other morally relevant circumstances. The loving person is involved in morally appropriate self-love, loving close relationships, and love toward relationally distant persons. The differing types of relationships shape proper expression of the same broadly loving desires toward all people. Yet, each type of relationship is distinct and the nature of these relationships not only shapes the proper expression of love but literally influences the ways it is even possible to act in one another's lives.

While the nature of relationships plays a vital, direct role in everyday life, many moral theories fail to give relationships a proper role. Consider some common reasons for action: "I showed her how to catch a baseball because I am her little league coach," "I read to him for thirty minutes before bedtime because he is my son," "I pooled my money with her in a joint account because she is my wife," and "I taught her how to read Latin because I am her professor." In an enormous range of cases, common moral experience within particular situations suggests that the existence of a relationship is a morally appropriate reason for action. Agents who ignore the bonds entailed by such relationships are vicious. If a little league coach fails to teach the relevant baseball skills to his players or a Latin professor fails to teach Latin to her students, this failure is morally relevant. Moreover, treating one's spouse or children exactly like everyone else in every way is a vicious failure to fulfill the normative expectations of such relationships. These are failures to live up to the implicit, morally relevant bonds of relationships. Moral theories that do not give these relationships a prominent place in their accounts fail to capture much that is truly relevant in everyday moral life.

Julia Annas explains how relationships play a central role in applying the virtues. "We have duties insofar as we are teachers, parents, soldiers,

crossing-guards and so on. The role, and the way it is defined within the institution, defines duties which are demanded of the person who holds that role, regardless of her character."[22] Annas illustrates that there are differing expectations for action depending on the relational roles one occupies. Some roles require treating others in unequal ways. Teachers educate some students, but not all potential students. Parents raise particular children, but not all children. These relational roles are largely shaped by culture, institutions within culture, and/or philosophical traditions shaping both culture and institutions. There is nothing morally surprising in such an observation. Since humans literally cannot be equally and meaningfully involved with every other person, the morally relevant question is not whether humans will have unequal relationships with one another, but how such relationships ought to be structured.

## UNLOVING RELATIONAL CONCEPTS

While roles and duties defined by institutions, traditions, and cultures play important roles in shaping virtuous behavior not every role will be compatible with love. These roles provided by our culture are an imperfect moral guide at best. They may tell us—incorrectly—that we have a duty commanding absolute and unquestioned loyalty to our godfather, our Führer, or our family, even when these relationships are obviously, egregiously, and viciously harmful to others. Love reveals that such schemata for relational practices are vicious and unloving. Love does not allow for the absolute loyalty demanded by these corrupt institutions since such loyalty requires that we treat third parties as morally trivial. These vicious relational concepts leave inadequate room for proper moral concern for others outside such relationships. Thus, while relationships shape the proper expression of love, the requirements of love towards all provides criteria for reforming vicious conceptions of relationships.

There are numerous ways that a relational concept might be incompatible with love. Most obviously, a relational concept might be inherently unloving toward one of its two constituent members. Relational concepts are inherently unloving toward a member involved in such relationships when they allow for treatment that is radically opposed to loving desires; treatment that unambiguously and egregiously goes against the flourishing of one member of the relationship. The *pater familias* of ancient Rome literally had control over the life and death of family members, including adult family members, and was thus an unloving relational concept as it allows abuse by the *pater familias*. Similarly, relational concepts allowing for slavery, infanticide, late-term abortion, or for wives to be treated as chattel are inherently unloving.

A relational concept might also be unloving in that it requires treating people outside of the relationship in unloving ways. This problem is why

concepts requiring absolute loyalty to country, family, or godfather are unloving. Of course, a relational concept might require far less than absolute loyalty while still having unloving implications for those outside the relationship. Relational concepts requiring lying for a friend, nepotism in hiring, or criminal activity are each unloving toward those outside of the relationship. If one living outside of a mere subsistence economy is expected to spend all of her material resources on family, so that there is nothing left over to aid anyone else, then those relational expectations are unloving.

A relational concept might also be unloving in that its scope of union undermines other important relational bonds. Vocational concepts that are completely and unnecessarily intrusive into family life, familial concepts so broad that they prevent outside relationships, and self-concepts shaped by thorough going individualism resulting in practical egoism are each unloving concepts in light of the vicious bonds they entail. Since every relational concept has potential implications for other relational concepts, these implications must be investigated in order to judge whether a relational concept is compatible with love.

Since relational concepts can be unloving due to their implications for other relationships, it is important to recognize and predict how relational concepts affect one another and work together as a whole in complex networks. For example, experienced parents with large families realize it is important to predict how loving actions toward one child will affect each other child. Sincere affection without thoughtful love toward everyone in the family applied with practical wisdom can create jealousy, alienate children from one another, promote arrogance in a favorite child, unwisely waste communal resources, and cause a wide range of other problems. In light of these concerns, love requires rejecting both radically egalitarian accounts of relationships that do not allow for an adequate variety of relational types and overly preferential relational concepts that result in insular or enmeshed relationships thereby undermining the possibility of broader love toward all. This can be true of lovers, families, tribes, countries, and so on. Martha Nussbaum demonstrates the potential for close relationships to become viciously all-encompassing in her discussion of erotic love.

> What Strether senses is that what he calls the "deep deep truth" of sexual love is at odds with the morality of perception, in two ways. It asks for the privacy, for others to avert their gaze; and on the inside it asks that focus be averted from all else that is outside. Lovers see, at such times, only one another; and it is not really deep if they *can* carefully see around and about them. . . . There is reason to suppose that the exclusivity and intensity of personal love would in fact impede the just and general responsiveness that these gentler feelings assist. And if they impede that, they impede the perceiver's contribution to our mo-

ral project, to our communal effort to arrive at perceptive equilibrium.[23]

Some conceptions of romantic love demand that these relationships be all encompassing. Yet, just as absolute enmeshment to friends is vicious in that it does not allow for adequate love outside such relationships, long-term absolute romantic insularity is similarly vicious and destructive.

Of course, romantic relationships are not the only ones that can undermine a broader concern with morality. Nussbaum similarly offers an example of vicious familial partiality in Henry James's description of his mother: "James once wrote about his mother that, swallowed up in her intense love of her husband and family, she had nothing 'acutely to offer.'"[24] The implicit moral concern here is a legitimate one. Like romantic relationships, familial relationships involve a tremendous investment of our limited resources: time, money, emotional effort, and so forth. While there is some necessity to give such relationships a large scope, love requires rejecting the total insularity and long-term enmeshed preoccupation in either romantic or familial relationships. Short-term temporary insularity during critical stages of relational development may be necessary for establishing long-term relational bonds, but these times must be temporary and have ultimate aims beyond themselves.

In many Western cultures, courtship and honeymoon have been viewed as intense periods of relationally inward focus, as well as the time surrounding the birth of a new child. However, the purpose of intense temporary inward focus in such relationships is to establish strong ongoing relational bonds that will survive long-term without such intense focus. One reason for establishing such strong relationships is so that individuals within the relationship may play a more effective societal role than they could without the relationship. Even the New Testament warns that family life can be a practical obstacle to broader moral and spiritual life.[25] Romantic and familial relationships should not be a myopic and insular all-encompassing end in themselves if they are to be compatible with a broad and robust view of love.

The opposite mistake is to conceive morality as requiring radically egalitarian relationships and forbidding every unequal relationship. While most contemporary Western cultures promote egalitarianism in public relationships while allowing distinctions in close personal relationships, some philosophers have gone even further to claim that egalitarianism is also necessary for justice or morality in private relationships as well. Radical egalitarian themes are found in the ancient anti-Confucian Chinese philosopher Mozi. In book four of *Models and Standards*, Mozi identifies the impartiality of heaven as the moral ideal for humans to emulate in contrast with the heavily disparate roles advocated by the Confucianism of his day. Chris Fraser offers this elaboration of Mozi's view.

> This notion of taking Heaven as a moral role model leads the Mohists
> to develop a credible normative theory based on equal, impartial con-
> cern for the welfare of all. At the same time, however, it steers them
> into formulating some of their central normative principles in a poten-
> tially problematic way. Their conception of Tian (Heaven) provides a
> compelling basis for arguing that everyone's interests have equal moral
> worth. But since the Mohists believe that Tian acts impartially on eve-
> ryone's behalf, adopting it as a moral model tends to imply that each of
> us as individuals is obliged to treat others and ourselves equally—to
> act in others' interest exactly as we act in our own.[26]

This 'exactness' of treatment advocated by Mozi, or at least by many of
his interpreters, is problematic. Part of the problem with this view is seen
in the ethical analogy focusing upon divine relationships with humanity
as a model for relationships between humans. A being with infinite re-
sources can be truly impartial since it has the ability to be so, but humans
are most certainly not that type of being.

Similarly in Jacques Derrida's *The Gift of Death* he embraces a broad
egalitarianism by suggesting: "What binds me to singularities, to this one
or that one . . . rather than that one or this one, remains finally unjustifi-
able. . . . How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats
in the world to the cat that you feed at home every day for years, whereas
other cats die of hunger at every instant?"[27] While he uses a cat rather
than a human as his example, the challenge caused by egalitarianism
carries over across species. If everyone is supposed to have equal status,
how can a moral person justify spending a disproportionate effort to
benefit those close to her?

Similar themes are found in Plato's *Republic*. While Plato endorses a
deep classism, within the ruling class itself he holds to an egalitarian
ideal wherein members of the ruling class are denied closer personal
relationships with parents, children, and long-term romantic relation-
ships in order to maintain objectivity and impartiality.[28] Furthermore, the
*Republic* portrays this egalitarian lifestyle detached from personal rela-
tionships as a moral ideal for all,[29] but which only the purest souled
individuals are capable of embracing. Extreme egalitarian ideals may mo-
tivate underbonding in closer relationships and inadequate commitment
to the good of others in close relationships.

## VIRTUOUS SELF-LOVE

The love-centered account allows that proper self-love not only is moral-
ly acceptable, but is actually obligatory when balanced with the love of
others. Notably, even Aquinas recognized love of self as a duty second
only to love of God.[30] Since love is grounded in personhood,[31] the self is
as legitimate an object for love as any other person. Furthermore, there

are important expressions of love that only the self can undertake. Other people simply cannot eat, sleep, exercise, learn, develop relationships, or cultivate virtue in our place. Without appropriate self-love in these areas agents would be hindered in their ability to serve others.[32] An uneducated, unhealthy, undisciplined, loner will be unable to serve others as well as someone who cares for the self in appropriate ways. Therefore, proper self-love is justified both because it is a response to the self's own personhood and because appropriate self-love will improve the agent's ability to love others.

Yet, some ethicists argue against moral duties to the self. Consider Michael Slote's criticisms of moral duties toward the self:

> Our common moral thinking treats it as sometimes obligatory to do good things for others and almost always obligatory to refrain from harming them. But there is no similar moral obligation in regard to benefiting oneself or refraining from doing damage to one's prospects or even one's health. . . . it makes no sense to suppose there is an obligation to do things we are already inclined to do and can naturally be expected to do. Since we naturally and expectably do care for our own interests, there can't be—there is no moral need for—an obligation to do so.[33]

Both the premise and the inference within Slote's argument are simply false. First, humans do not reliably care for their own long-term interests. While all of one's choices are endorsed by the self in some important sense, not everything endorsed by the self appears to be motivated by self-interest. People sometimes even make extreme sacrifices for others. On December 4, 2006, Pfc. Ross McGinnis sacrificed himself by jumping on a grenade to protect four other soldiers.[34] Similarly, in a Nazi concentration camp Maximilian Kolbe volunteered to die in the place of another captive.

In addition to admirable acts of self-sacrifice many other decisions are simply not made according to a coherent long-term strategy of caring for the agent's genuine long-term interests. Some individuals commit suicide when years of pleasant life are likely. Other people overindulge in short-term pleasures like fatty foods, nicotine, or other recreational drugs to a degree that undermines their health, lowers their overall happiness, and shortens their life span thereby acting against their self-interests. Several ethical systems including utilitarianism, Kantianism, Thomism, and even egoism judge that in neglecting themselves such people fail in their moral duties.

While the premise from Slote's argument is false, even if we grant his claim that humans naturally and expectedly act in their own interests it would still not prove that at least some self-beneficial actions would not be morally obligatory. There are activities that we 'naturally and expectedly' perform that are also morally obligatory. It is natural and expected

that we care for our own children and do not harm them without reason.
Yet, nearly everyone and every moral system agree that there is an obli-
gation to refrain from intentionally harming one's own children. There-
fore, even if humans did naturally and expectedly care for their own
interests it would not necessarily follow that there is no obligation to do
so.

While the argument against moral duties to the self fails, there are two
additional reasons for viewing appropriate self-love as virtuous. First, as
we have already observed, since love is a virtuous response to the general
possession of personhood it follows that an appropriately loving re-
sponse to the self's personhood is virtuous. As Alexander Pruss has
argued, "When Francis virtuously loves himself, i.e., Francis, he does not
love Francis because Francis is *himself*, but he loves Francis because Fran-
cis is a human being."[35] Pruss's account may not be precisely correct, for
it may not be merely that personhood, the human capacity for person-
hood, or some aspect of personhood that grounds human moral value
rather than just our membership in the human species.[36] In any case, the
human self possesses whichever of these attributes that grounds moral
status as much as any other member of the human species. Therefore,
self-love is as morally obligatory as every other personal love.

The observation that we have some moral duties toward the self does
not entail that every self-beneficial action is justified. Just as love in other
close relationships must be compatible with love for others more broadly,
and must be universalizable as a reason for other to act similarly, so must
love toward the self. If someone cares for her own concerns in a way that
she would not judge appropriate for others to care for themselves then
such self-love is better conceptualized as vicious self-preference. Such
concern is an example of vicious self-preference because the agent either
allows herself too large a scope for her own self-interests, denies others
an equal appropriate scope for their self-interests, or both. In such cases,
the agent's own standards reveal that she does not truly believe that such
behavior is virtuous. Thus, these viciously egoistic agents overestimate
the appropriate scope of self-interest.

A second reason for viewing proper self-love as morally virtuous is
that allowing for appropriate self-love protects virtue ethics from a cate-
gory of objections and concerns raised by Ayn Rand as well some femi-
nist thinkers. Rand argues that morality without room for self-concern is
hideously unattractive, unmotivating, and implausible. She claims that
the ideal of an absolute commitment to altruism teaches the wrong les-
sons to the developing individual. She argues, "The first thing he learns
is that morality is his enemy; he has nothing to gain from it, he can only
lose; self-inflicted loss, self-inflicted pain and the gray, debilitating pall of
an incomprehensible duty is all that he can expect."[37] Rand claims that
when morality is defined entirely as self-sacrifice with no room for self-
interest, the individual necessarily becomes alienated from either the self

or from morality. Either the individual becomes alienated from morality as a serious practical threat to the well-being of the self or the individual becomes alienated from valuing the self in obedience to morality. Instead, Rand correctly argues that a plausible morality must distinguish between appropriate self-concern and inappropriate self-concern. However, Rand's counterproposal—an ethical system centered on the virtue of 'Selfishness'—is surely an overreaction in favor of self-preference. This view seems motivated by a false dilemma treating complete others-centered altruism and complete self-centered egoism as the only possible candidates for ethical consideration.

A similar concern is raised by feminists who observe that an ethics of self-sacrifice can have negative effects upon women who may let themselves be abused or taken advantage of. As Barbara Andolsen objects, "*Agape* defined exclusively as other regard or self-sacrifice is not an appropriate virtue for women who are prone to excessive selflessness."[38] One popular expression of this overly sacrificial model of love—especially, ideal maternal love—is found in the children's story of *The Giving Tree*, a story of a feminine tree that systematically sacrifices every aspect of its' self for the needs of a growing male at each stage of his life. The tree gives up its fruit, its branches, and even its trunk for his sake. An ethic of self-sacrifice risks portraying the virtuous ideal as a doormat who makes radically disproportionate sacrifices for the sake of an indulged other. Both objections to exclusively other's-centered ethics raise the legitimate concern that some ethical systems do not allow adequate room for the self. The feminist objection raises the additional concern that such ethics not only have been used to encourage a general unhealthy level of sacrifice, but furthermore the sacrifices such an ethic encourages can be disproportionately and unjustly damaging to women. In light of such considerations, the love-centered account offers an advantage by legitimizing an important role for self-love when properly balanced with love of others.

## VIRTUOUS CLOSE LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

Joseph Raz suggests that many traditional moral theories fail to explain some of the most important aspects in life: closer personal relationships. "The [moral] universality thesis fails to explain our deepest attachments, the attachments of love and friendship . . . or of the relations between parents and children . . . attachments without which life does not have meaning."[39] As Raz suggests, the bonds of important relationships have great moral significance, but seem at odds with a certain impersonal type of universal or impartial morality.

Relationships offer context and meaning to human life. Moreover, they are important ways to benefit both the self and others. Just as the

agent is uniquely positioned to benefit the self, similarly the existence of other types of close relationships allows other unique opportunities for beneficence. For example, the existence of an ongoing parent-child relationship including a history of developing trust, intimacy, and mutual knowledge over time allows goods to be brought about through the relationship that are impossible to replicate outside of such a long-term, intimate relationship of ongoing dependence. Proper bonds within close relational structures engendering mutual trust, mutual care, and expertise concerning close other persons are a natural way to promote the good of others and the good of all.

Consider the claim that a good parent ought to read an occasional bedtime story to her own young child.[40] Why is this unequal treatment appropriate even though there are other children who are worse off who might benefit from this attention? One obvious consideration is that the intimate setting of having a story read at bedtime to the child entails that having a stranger read it is a different experience from having it read by a trusted long-term caretaker. This kind of long-term intimate relationship is morally significant in part because it is a necessary condition for bringing about an important distinct good. Therefore, a plausible account of ethics ought to recognize the moral significance of such relationships. The close proximity and ongoing history of intimate trust, knowledge, and dependency within certain relationships allows important goods to be brought into existence that are not possible outside of such unequal long-term relationships. These facts justify some, but certainly not all, types of unequal treatment based upon close relationships.

Part of the moral justification of unequal close relationships is the fact that certain incommensurable goods are impossible without them. Without such relationships some of the richest human experiences would be lost. As creatures of finite time, resources, and abilities, we simply cannot have meaningful equal relationships with all other persons. Yet, highly valuable goods come from having ongoing close relationships with particular others. It is valuable to have long-term and life-long relationships with others who understand the narrative development of one's life. Such relationships allow for mutual trust, intimacy, and insight into one another that is not possible or not prudent without a significant long-term history.

## LOVE IN IMPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Most relationships are impersonal, which is to say that the agent does not care that a specific individual person fulfills the role required by the relationship.[41] This area of morality focusing upon those with whom we have impersonal relationships is sometimes construed as operating under the principle of justice rather than love. However, one way of

viewing the relationship between justice and love is that justice is love toward those with whom we have impersonal relationships. This view of justice has the advantage of theoretical simplicity as it allows subsuming ideal traits toward all of our relationships under the single trait of love.

What distinguishes impersonal relationships from personal relationships is that substitution of other people in such relationships is possible without loss of value to the lover. Frequently, these relationships exist between two people that have little or no awareness of one another as individuals. One typically does not care that a particular individual delivers the mail, delivers food at a restaurant, or drives the public bus, so long as someone does so competently. In contrast, people usually attend their own children's sporting events, friends' birthday parties, and engage in romantic activities with their own long-term romantic partners. They would not be interested in engaging in these activities with just anyone. One implication of this distinction between personal and impersonal relationships is that it is possible to have relationships that are personal for one person, but impersonal for the other. In the relevant sense, a student's relationship with his teacher may be personal in that he desires to learn from a specific teacher even though the teacher may have an impersonal relationship with that student in a class of one hundred other students.

Within the category of impersonal relationships a further distinction can be made between impersonal relationships with those people who are culturally close and relationships with those who are culturally distant. Agents have culturally closer impersonal relationships with members of their own tribe, culture, religious institution, or country. These are impersonal relationships with others, with whom the agent may never even directly interact, but who share a variety of cultural similarities such as shared language, shared history, shared cultural assumptions, often a degree of geographic proximity, and possibly even shared ancestry. These bonds create many important forms of indirect interactions despite the lack of personal relationship. Such people may pay taxes to the same governing entities, vote in the same elections, and learn many of the same culturally important stories and narratives. Their thoughts are shaped by many of the same concepts and cultural influences. In contrast, there are culturally distant persons with whom we have shared humanity, but little else.

The legitimacy of unequal commitments based in culturally close impersonal relationships has come under intense scrutiny during the past two centuries. For good reasons the legitimacy of the racism, nationalism, and nativism that have sometimes accompanied such bonds has been thoroughly rejected by ethicists. If we return to Bernard Williams's example of being able to save only one of two drowning people, while most ethicists would accept the moral legitimacy or at least the moral plausibility that it would be permissible to save one's spouse rather than a strang-

er, most would recoil at the thought that shared race or shared citizenship might be an acceptable reason for saving one person rather than the other in this situation.

While these reactions against sweeping preferences for culturally closer strangers are well justified, there are still some legitimate distinctive ways one ought to love the culturally closer stranger. First, the loving person ought to participate in shared cultural structures intended for the common good within one's own particular culture. One ought to participate thoughtfully in her own society's elections, civic discussions, pay taxes to her own communities, as well as being involved in appropriate private charities, religious institutions, and so forth. The closer geographic proximity, cultural bonds, and shared cultural structures make it easier to care for closer strangers in an effective, prudent, competent, and well-informed way. Furthermore, the agent can have more influence over these shared cultural structures, can more easily distinguish between genuine charitable structures and fraudulent ones, and more easily confirm the effectiveness of these structures.[42]

Consider Moses Maimonides 'hand strengthening' principle of giving:

> The greatest level [of giving], above which there is no greater, is to support a fellow Jew by endowing him with a gift or loan, or entering into a partnership with him, or finding employment for him, in order to strengthen his hand until he need no longer be dependent upon others.[43]

While many ethicists would reject the in-group racial prioritization in Maimonides's principle as a form of illegitimate preferential treatment since it is difficult to see how someone's racial identity is relevant to whether or not one should offer them charity, there are at least some practical advantages to this type of giving to the culturally closer stranger like Maimonides's 'fellow Jew.' One prudent overarching goal of giving ought to be to improve the overall condition of the recipient long-term so that he no longer needs charity. This goal may be easier to attain with the culturally closer stranger. It is easier to understand how to improve a person's long-term financial stability within a shared culture than a foreign culture with unfamiliar economic structures and cultural habits. It is easier to partner with such people or help them find suitable employment. In contrast, it is difficult to ensure we even understand the genuine needs of the culturally and geographically distant stranger. We have institutions, cultural traditions, and structures that connect us to these closer impersonal individuals rather than the rest of the world. These connections help bridge the distance to the culturally closer strangers and make it easier to aid them.

In contrast, it may be difficult even to communicate with culturally distant strangers without shared language. It can be difficult to aid the culturally distant stranger effectively since we may not understand his

circumstances, opportunities, and challenges accurately. Accordingly, it can be difficult to predict the long-term effects of our actions. Our efforts to aid their well-being may not have the desired effects: donations may be stolen by corrupt government officials, donated goods may unintentionally undermine local businesses overseas, resources may be wasted on projects that are not a high priority in the views of the local community, and so on.

Yet even if there are reasons to prioritize aid to the culturally closer stranger, this principle does not excuse the lover from caring for the distant stranger. Even if everyone loves well in personal relationships and participates in local cultural institutions to aid the culturally closer stranger, there would still be people in great need situated in circumstances where no one personally or even culturally close to them is wealthy enough or adequately disposed to aid them. It is especially important that people in wealthier cultures with abundant resources go beyond local cultural boundaries to help distant strangers based only on the bonds of shared humanity and the immediacy of their great need. Someone must help alleviate starvation in extraordinarily poor places like Liberia and Ethiopia (GDP ~ $500 per capita) where there simply are not enough local resources. There are also destitute groups whom local communities are unwilling to help such as the long-suffering untouchable Dalit in India. If even the most basic needs of these people are to be met, distant strangers from affluent countries will have to help.

How should one love culturally distant strangers? One implication of desiring the good of all persons is acknowledging certain *prima facie* restrictions concerning the actions we might engage in that would harm distant strangers. It is unloving to act in ways that directly harm them. Yet, while a 'no direct harm to strangers without overriding justification' principle is needed, it is far from fully adequate. At best, it is a moral minimum. Surely, we must similarly seek to avoid or at least limit ways we act that indirectly harm distant strangers or make their flourishing less likely. These moral claims are similar to the idea that people in general ought to be viewed as possessing 'negative rights' ensuring non-interference with their pursuit of basic life goods. As individuals and as a culture—we should aspire to avoid these sorts of actions as well. These restrictions on actions harming distant strangers are needed for any plausible account of love toward distant strangers, yet they are still morally inadequate on their own.[44]

One important affirmative commitment of love is that of generosity to strangers in great need. Accordingly, Alasdair MacIntyre cites Aquinas's account of *misercordi*a to discuss the importance of generosity that goes beyond the immediate community. *Misercordia* is generosity to strangers based only upon the great needs of the other person. He explains, "Extreme and urgent necessity on the part of another in itself provides a stronger reason for action than even claims based upon the closest of

family ties."[45] *Misercordia* extends the traditional, narrower concept of community to those outside of the community. Everyone is included in the scope of the moral community. Therefore, there is at least one central affirmative goal of love towards the distant stranger: to seek to help those in extreme need. As Aquinas says, "in some cases it is better to help a complete stranger, for example if it is a case of extreme necessity, instead of one's father when not in similar extreme need."[46]

Since love in closer personal relationships, culturally close impersonal relationships, and relationships with distant strangers often requires the use of resources to aid others there are important connections between virtue and our acquisition of and stewardship of resources. MacIntyre identifies such a connection between loving generosity and other virtues in broader moral life.

> If I do not work, so as to acquire property, I will have nothing to give. If I do not save, but only consume, then, when the time comes when my help is urgently needed by my neighbor, I may not have the resources to provide that help. If I give to those not really in urgent need, then I may not have enough to give to those who are. So industriousness in getting, thrift in saving, and discrimination in giving are required.[47]

If anything, MacIntyre understates the connections between broader life-style patterns and generosity to those in need. He might have added: if we spend more of our income on ourselves and those closest to us than needed for flourishing, then we will have less to give. If we do not charge the full value for our services from those who are able to afford them, then we will have less to give. If we do not invest into strategic local cultural structures that strengthen the community such as educational, medical, and charitable structures, then there are going to be more local people in extreme need long-term. If we do not take proper care of ourselves through temperance and prudence, we will be less able to care for others and will be more likely to be in need ourselves. In any case, there is a connection between the virtues such that we must structure our expenditures and lifestyles so that there are resources left over to share with the culturally distant.

## LOVE OF ENEMIES

The examples of loving relationships examined thus far have presupposed positive or at least neutral circumstances where the individuals within relationships are not substantially in conflict. Unfortunately, such assumptions are not always warranted. Sometimes, relational circumstances are far from positive. There are entire groups of people who might be described as enemies of one another. Sometimes the closest relationships enable the worst types of abuse. Even if our close relations are not intentionally abusive, there are situations where another person's

vicious character has negative consequences for those close to him. What does love entail in such circumstances? There are abusive spouses, over-bearing supervisors, divisive politicians, not to mention wantonly violent criminals. These circumstances can disrupt the normal workings of one's relationships and the appropriate ways to express love in those situations. An ethic ought to provide guidance in difficult relational circumstances, and especially offer guidance to such common difficulties.

The lover classifies no one primarily as an 'enemy' whom we desire evils to befall. The virtue of love prevents the fundamental relational status of another person from ever simply be 'enemy.' At minimum, even an enemy is still a 'fellow human' or a 'neighbor' with the same fundamental moral status as all persons. While an enemy is a fellow human with whom the lover currently has a strained relationship, this strained relationship does not justify hatred or ill-will. Therefore, the lover should still desire the good of and proper relational bonds with enemies in light of the more foundational moral status of 'fellow human.' There is no way to lose human dignity in a way that justifies a complete cessation of such love.[48] Yet, the fact that another person lives as an enemy is an important relational circumstance to consider when carrying out love.

The virtue of love entails that in difficult relational situations the lover is not satisfied with having others as enemies.[49] The lover desires peace within relationships marked by ongoing proper relational bonds and otherwise positive interactions. Furthermore, the lover still desires the good for the enemy. If another person starts to act as an enemy, the loving person would desire reconciliation marked by peace. A desire for proper relational bondedness entails a general willingness to forgive others, to pursue troubled relationships, to initiate with others when relational distance has set in, and so forth. There are even times when the lover should be willing to take careful risks with his own well-being for the sake of a beloved enemy.[50]

Someone might mistakenly think that this willingness to take risks within enemy love is at odds with proper self-love. However, the fact that the loving person should be willing to take some calculated risks based in enemy love does not entail that absolutely every risk would be appropriate. Appropriate risks motivated by enemy love should be careful, calculated, and carried out with practical wisdom rather than reckless and careless. Love for self is still an appropriate reason for action, but love of an enemy especially in closer relationships can justify at least some careful calculated risks to the self.

One practical reason that enemy love is important is that much of one's own well-being depends on positive close relationships with others, including those who choose to live as one's enemies. Therefore, even the crassest egoistic evaluation of relationships would justify some risks to self and some costs for maintaining close relationships. If one's parent, spouse, sibling, or supervisor is overbearing, controlling, or hostile it is

still prudent to seek to maintain as positive a relationship as circumstances allow. Furthermore, the lover values relationships with others not merely for self-beneficial reasons. The well-being of others and properly bonded relationships with them are also inherently valuable. The value of those others and relationships with them warrants additional risks and potentially sacrificial costs stemming from love.

While the lover still possess loving desires toward enemies and is willing to take some sacrificial risks for them, practical wisdom and properly formed self-love demand that the lover acknowledge that another person's vicious attitudes and actions need to be weighed when choosing appropriate actions. The bonds appropriate to various relationships may be disrupted by another's status as enemy. Despite the fact that the love still shapes the virtuous person's desires toward an 'enemy,' a properly bonded relationship is disrupted when another acts as an enemy. When a relationship is disrupted there are at least some relational bonds that the lover might not act in accordance with unless improvements or full reconciliation take place. For example, if one's sibling has stolen money or possessions from her, then it may be perfectly appropriate to withhold normal familial generosity within the relationship. If another person is verbally abusive, then it may be perfectly appropriate to reduce one's social interactions with him. If someone has physically threatened the lover, then physical distance may be appropriate to ensure his own well-being. If someone has abused a professional relationship with the lover, then it can be appropriate to avoid working with them as much as circumstances allow.

Furthermore, despite the lover's desire for reconciliation with enemies, love for both self and third parties are important considerations when carrying out enemy love. Since the virtue of love entails love for all persons, if an enemy is living in a way that harms others it is important to protect both third parties and the self from these harmful actions. The good of self and third parties might be undermined by imprudent love of an enemy; therefore, these concerns are important considerations to help shape action. If my father has acted unlovingly by stealing a neighbor's possessions, I must not help him cover up his crime and thus act unlovingly toward our neighbor.[51] Or if a household family member becomes a drunk or drug addict this fact may require protective actions. If the addict is prone to violent tendencies, love of self and other family members may entail ending the current housing arrangement in order to protect everyone involved. However, if the addict is unlikely to harm others directly, the most loving action may be to continue living together in order to help facilitate an eventual recovery from addiction. However, some relational bonds can eventually be permanently destroyed or permanently damaged by the ongoing vicious actions of the beloved. In the most extreme situations, the lover may view an 'enemy' as a beloved person whose vicious actions have caused long-term relational distance.

In such cases, the lover will experience some ongoing regret that the relationship could not be restored and wish that circumstances had been otherwise.

## THE DANGER OF PATERNALISM

One important moral concern in several types of relationships is that love might result in injustice toward the beloved through unjust paternalism. In Nicholas Wolterstorff's account of love as care, he emphasizes that his account of care "combines seeking to enhance someone's flourishing with seeking to secure their just treatment."[52] Wolterstorff rightly emphasizes that there are morally just and morally unjust ways that one might attempt to enhance others' flourishing. In particular, he is concerned that 'loving motivations' at times have been used to legitimize unjust treatments of the 'beloved' such as culturally imperialistic attitudes toward Native Americans, the institution of slavery, the mistreatment of women, and so on. Is there anything in the love-centered account to ensure that it does not result in vicious inappropriate paternalism justified by 'love'?

First, it is important to realize that not all paternalism is unjust or inappropriate. Virtually by definition parents ought to be paternalistic toward their own non-adult children. Similarly, some unequal relationships justify a limited degree of paternalism. If a teacher is asked to teach a student some skill or subject, the student (or at least their guardian) has consented to a degree of deference to the teacher's expertise. If a doctor is asked to help improve a patient's well-being, she has been invited to give potentially intrusive health advice. Wolterstorff himself identifies several additional categories of appropriate paternalism: when someone is physically incapable of making an important decision himself, when someone is not mentally mature enough to make a decision herself, when someone voluntarily entrusts himself to the care and guidance of others, and at least some instances involving the involuntary coercion of adults such as just laws.[53]

Second, in contemporary liberal society it is widely recognized that certain kinds of autonomy are closely connected to the good of the beloved or are even a partial constituent of their good. Presumably, we are at least reasonably warranted in believing that promoting autonomy of others is generally part of bringing about their good, though not necessarily the most important aspect of their good. The good of autonomy is incompatible with enduring coercive expressions of unjust paternalism. Therefore, love entails that in our desire for the good of others, we ought to desire their autonomy and freedom from inappropriate forms of paternalism. Therefore, throughout the relationships of love, the virtuous person will want to avoid unjust paternalism since it is a threat to the beloved's autonomy. Even in relationships where some expressions of pa-

ternalism are justified, the lover will seek to enhance the autonomy of the beloved when it is appropriate and possible since autonomy is a plausible constituent of well-being. Good parents raise their children with the hope that they will one day become fairly independent adults. Good teachers hope to make their students better informed and more autonomous. If we help someone overcome an addiction, the ultimate goal is health, improved well-being, and enhanced autonomy.

Thirdly, the account of love and loving relationships at the heart of the love-centered view of ethics uses a normative concept of appropriate bondedness. The concept of love itself entails that any truly unjust paternalism would be a form of overbondedness that is relationally inappropriate and undermines the autonomy of the 'beloved.' Therefore, such cases are inherently vicious. One insight offered by the love-centered ethic is that what determines whether paternalism is virtuous or vicious is the existence of an appropriate kind of relationship. Obviously, it is appropriate for a parent to act paternally toward their children in many contexts and circumstances. Similarly, if an aerobics instructor encourages students to continue exercising for five minutes beyond what they might prefer, this mild coercion is appropriate due to the voluntarily established unequal relationship. If my logic professor informs me that I have repeatedly affirmed the consequent rather than employed a valid form of reasoning and penalizes my grade, his coercive actions are justified by our relationship. What makes paternalism vicious is when such efforts are made without an appropriate relationship. Even if I am significantly overweight the cashier at the supermarket should not express an opinion on my food selections. Similarly, our fellow citizens should not try to regulate the size of sugary beverages as New York City did in a recently overturned law.

Naturally, these observations do not in themselves guarantee that every instance of unjust paternalism motivated by malformed love will be correctly identified and avoided. Yet, these considerations should go far to show why such actions are unloving. The love-centered account has considerable conceptual resources for identifying, analyzing, resisting, correcting, and preventing unjust forms of paternalism.

## CONCLUSION

A love-centered account of virtue ethics provides a balanced approach for weighing moral responsibilities in various competing relationships, including an account of impartiality that construes relationships themselves as impartial reasons legitimizing some sorts of unequal treatment. This view has conceptual resources allowing for a robust sense of love for self, and love within close personal relationships, culturally closer impersonal relationships, as well as culturally distant impersonal relationships.

It accounts for the reality that some important morally significant goods can only be produced within close relationships while ensuring that care in distant relationships retains proper moral weight. Finally, it includes numerous safeguards against unjust paternalism.

## NOTES

1. An earlier, less developed version of this strategy for reconciling partial love with impartial morality appears in Eric J. Silverman "How to Resolve the Partiality-Impartiality Puzzle Using a Love-Centered Account of Virtue Ethics." In *The Anthology of Philosophical Studies Volume 7*. Ed. Patricia Hanna. Athens, Greece: Athens Institute for Education and Research, 2013: 167–176.

2. Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 18.

3. Williams, *Moral Luck*, 18.

4. Elizabeth Ashford, "Utilitarianism, Integrity, and Partiality," *The Journal of Philosophy* 97 (2000): 434.

5. See ST II-II.31.3.

6. See ST II-II.31.3.

7. In developing this view, I am influenced by the structure Niko Kolodny attributes to love as based objectively in the beloved's relational traits. See Niko Kolodny, "Love As Valuing a Relationship," Philosophical Review 112 (2003), 135–89.

8. See Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 17.

9. Williams, *Moral Luck*, 2.

10. Jennifer Roback Morse, "No Families, No Freedom: Human Flourishing in a Free Society," in *Human Flourishing*, eds. Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 300.

11. Annette Baier, "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?" in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 267–8.

12. When close relationships are viewed as compatible with impartiality, their legitimacy is solely grounded in some higher order impartiality as with rule utilitarianism.

13. See also Silverman, *The Prudence of Love*, 121–128 and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155–1172.

14. See Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and The Idea of Justice* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1981).

15. Note that the motivation may either be explicit or implicit. The agent need not be fully aware of their motivation. Furthermore, motivation may be overdetermined.

16. See Jennifer Oldstone-Moore, *Confucianism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002).

17. See Exodus 20:1–17. The command to 'honor thy mother and father' establishes the special unequal prioritization of one's own parents. Arguably, the ban on adultery also establishes a preferential relational status between spouses.

18. The New Testament household codes found in passages such as Ephesians 5:22–6:9 establish certain sorts of special obligations based on one's relational status.

19. ST II-II.101.1

20. Niko Kolodny speaks about relational reasons as a justification for love using a pattern similar to the one used here. However, I have expanded the justification to include kinds of special obligations that might reasonably be expected to accompany 'love' in a broad sense of the word. See Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 150–1.

21. Pruss, *One Body*, 6–7.

22. Annas, "Applying Virtue to Ethics," 8.

23. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 188–189.

24. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 189.

25. See *The Holy Bible*, 1 Corinthians 7.

26. Chris Fraser, "Mohism" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mohism/#ethics. Accessed on 5/20/2016.

27. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*, second edition, trans. David Wills (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 71.

28. See Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992), 449–472.

29. I am open to the possibility that large portions of the *Republic* are satirical, yet the mainstream philosophical interpretation of the *Republic* does not accept this view. Therefore, I treat the claims of the *Republic* at face value in this discussion. See Eric Brown, "Plato's Republic," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2009. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-ethics-politics/ accessed on 5/20/2016. See also Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

30. ST II-II.25.4.

31. For Aquinas, love is not simply a response to personhood, but to the image of God reflected by personhood. But, our view of love is not committed to this more theological claim.

32. Even Ayn Rand seems to have realized this principle. See Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York, NY: The New American Library, 1964).

33. Slote, *Morals from Motives*, 11–12.

34. See Military Times: Honor the Fallen. https://thefallen.militarytimes.com/army-pfc-ross-a-mcginnis/2411963 accessed on 5/14/19.

35. Pruss, *One Body*, 47.

36. I follow Aristotle in believing that the natural capacities that are normative of a species are what makes one a member of a species, whether or not those capacities are actualized. On this basis, I claim that all members of the human species and any other species that normatively possesses the capacities that constitute personhood ought to be viewed as persons and accorded full moral status.

37. Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, viii-ix.

38. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "*Agape* in Feminist Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9 (1981): 74.

39. Joseph Raz, *Value, Respect, and Attachment* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12.

40. Somewhat comically, even this modest claim concerning familial relationships has been challenged. See Joe Gelonesi, "Is Having a Loving Family an Unfair Advantage?" interview of Adam Swift, May 3, 2015. http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/new-family-values/6437058 accessed May 25, 2016.

41. This distinction between personal and impersonal relationships is from Hugh LaFollette, *Personal Relationships* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 4. I have commented upon it further elsewhere: Silverman, *The Prudence of Love*, 78–79.

42. These insights accord with the traditional philosophical principle of subsidiarity.

43. Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: The Laws of Charity*, 10:7, trans. unknown, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/45907/jewish/Eight-Levels-of-Charity.htm accessed on 6/19/2019.

44. Note that these are general guiding principles for loving actions rather than absolute principles. For example, preventing the harm that might be done by a malicious violent individual may require some degree of harm inflicted upon his interests. There may be overriding justifying reasons to engage in actions that would be unloving without adequate justifications.

45. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 125. See also ST II-II.31.3.

46. ST II-II.31.3.

47. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 126.

48. This claim entails a rejection of Aquinas' unfortunate view that it is possible to lose 'human dignity' in ST II-II.64.2.

49. See ST.II-II.28:8–9.

50. See ST.II-II.28:9.

51. This view is a direct contradiction of Confucian advice in this situation. See Confucius, *Analects*, 13:18.

52. See Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 101. Oddly, immediately after Wolterstorff emphasizes that seeking to secure the just treatment of the beloved *in addition* to promoting their good is what distinguishes his account of love as care from many competing accounts he appears to backtrack in footnote 2, where he concedes "Strictly speaking, seeing to it that someone is treated with due respect for her worth is a special case of seeking to promote the good in her life." Yet, if seeking to ensure that someone is treated with proper respect is merely a special case of promoting their good, then how can the claim that love entails treating others with respect be the distinguishing feature of Wolterstorff's account of love since many accounts of love focus on promoting the good of the beloved? Perhaps, it is not his account of love that is distinctive, but rather his claim that 'being treated justly' is a feature of the beloved's good (which must implicitly be promoted by the loving person). However, there are well known counter-examples where people are treated unjustly without any obvious damage to their well-being (e.g. unjust invasions of privacy that are never discovered and do not result in any other consequences that are obvious 'harms').

53. Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, 223–234.

# FIVE

# Cross-Cultural Implications of Love

Our first four chapters have examined an account of *agape/caritas* as a virtue and its broad implications for personal character. However, the love-centered account has implications for broader cultural structures as well. A plausible moral theory must be careful in its cross-cultural implications. Given the considerable variety of morally attractive human cultures a plausible ethical theory needs to avoid simplistic cultural inflexibility. These cross-cultural differences have been documented in the past century by anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict in her famous work *Patterns of Culture*.[1] Of course, Benedict was hardly the first thinker to notice cultural pluralism as it was identified as least as early as the ancient Greek historian Herodotus 2,400 years earlier.[2] Due to the wide range of values held by various cultures and the difficulty in adjudicating between them, cultural inflexibility in an ethical theory is often viewed as subtle ethnocentrism or even explicit cultural imperialism.

While moral theories allowing for no differing cultural expressions are regarded skeptically by many ethicists the most obvious alternative—prescriptive cultural relativism—which claims that members of a culture simply ought to follow their own culture's moral principles, also has serious philosophical problems. For example, cultural relativism implausibly entails that widely respected moral reformers such as Mohandas Gandhi or Martin Luther King are deeply immoral people since they reject the values of their own culture. Furthermore, the most obvious argument in favor of cultural relativism commits a variation of the 'is-ought' fallacy by proceeding from factual observations about the world's various cultures to infer the prescriptive ethical 'ought' claim that members of each culture morally ought to follow their own culture. Thus, this approach commits a category error by inferring a values-oriented 'ought' from an anthropologically observed 'is' about culture. The fact that hu-

man cultures exhibit a wide degree moral diversity does not in itself demonstrate that all such diversity is praiseworthy or desirable.

## CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND VIRTUE ETHICS

Virtue ethics has been accused of having a particular vulnerability to cultural relativism. As Rosalind Hursthouse reports, "One common criticism is that we do not know which character traits are the virtues, or that this is open to much dispute, or particularly subject to the threat of moral skepticism or 'pluralism' or cultural relativism."[3] One version of this objection is roughly that since cultures in fact value such a wide variety of character traits there is no way to adjudicate between them in order to identify which traits are in fact virtues.

In particular, Alasdair MacIntyre's influential account of virtue ethics in *After Virtue* was thought to entail cultural relativism since it seemed to imply that each human community could define its own human *telos* and that virtues were those traits which were derived from literally any coherent account of human practices and traditions in light of which virtues were shaped, justified, and needed.[4] Since *After Virtue* was an early paradigmatic presentation of the contemporary virtue ethics movement it is likely that this account helped give the impression that virtue ethics in general has a special vulnerability to cultural relativism. Accordingly, in the postscript to the second edition of *After Virtue*, the cultural relativism objection is one of only three topics addressed by MacIntyre and receives the most attention.[5]

However, whatever the strengths or weaknesses of MacIntyre's particular account of virtue ethics in *After Virtue* there is no reason to believe that virtue ethics in general has a greater difficulty addressing cultural relativism than most other types of moral theory. After all, if cultures differ in their accounts of the good—and they certainly seem to—then the issue of which value ought to be maximized becomes just as serious an issue for consequentialist moral theories. If cultures similarly differ in their accounts of the abstract normative moral duties that ought to be followed, then the issue of adjudicating between these disparate views should be just as serious a problem for deontological moral theories. This problem would seem especially serious for ethical intuitionism since it holds that foundational ethical truths are known directly through intuition. Since people situated in differing cultures tend to intuit the moral principles of their own culture and intuitionism offers no higher order tools for adjudicating between disparate intuited principles, it would seem to be particularly vulnerable to objections based in the pluralism of human cultures. So, although it has been suggested that virtue ethics has a special problem with cultural relativism there is no reason to believe

that the challenge posed by descriptive cultural pluralism is more serious for virtue ethics than for most other types of moral theory.

While virtue ethics has no special problem with cultural relativism, it is still important to examine the precise strategy a particular virtue theory has for addressing the relationship between culture and morality. After all, if a virtue theory advocates a set of traits as virtues that are overly specific to a particular culture with little cross-cultural flexibility one may be rightly suspicious of the role that cultural influences have played in conceptualizing that theory. For example, if Aristotle's theory seems to lionize traits that seem overly distinctive of the ancient Athenian upper class male warrior-citizen or if David Hume's virtue theory advocates the traits idealized by eighteenth-century upper-class secular Scottish gentleman, those facts would warrant some skepticism toward the specific virtues it advocates as being overly influenced by their culture of origin.

In contrast, the love-centered account of virtue ethics offers a central value, which can be applied cross culturally in differing ways. Individual personality, virtues, and relationships are not freestanding structures that occur outside of broader culture context. The virtuous disposition centered on love will necessarily be lived out within enculturated relationships. The love-centered approach to virtue ethics provides both cross-cultural flexibility and vital resources for critiquing a culture's relational paradigms.

## THE PLURALISM OF MODELS OF ENCULTURATED RELATIONSHIPS

One central way that culture shapes the proper application of the love-centered account of ethics is in its paradigms for structuring relationships. Lawrence Blum describes the multifaceted ways that communal social structures serve as an underappreciated foundational context for the virtues. He explains,

> The ties between community and virtue are more significant than moral theory has taken account of. . . . some forms of community are crucial to the maintenance of a moral psychology of excellence, and that community has often been a missing desideratum in the discussion of the nature and development of admirable moral character. [6]

The roles for cultural community Blum identifies include: learning, sustaining, agency-constituting, content-providing, and worth-conferring. What is relevant for our purposes is that such enculturated communities are a necessary context for learning, developing, and encouraging virtue.[7] The idea that enculturated communities play a trivial role in a virtuous life is misguided. While such claims are rarely explicit, some approaches to ethics implicitly act as if the ethical life occurs in the unencul-

turated abstract. Morality in general and relationships are both necessarily enculturated. Rather than seeking a view from nowhere, embracing the enculturation of morality is a necessary task that virtue ethics in general and the love-centered account in particular is well positioned to address.

While love-centered virtue ethics espouses a central quality of individual character, it also provides a criterion for evaluating social structures. The relational structures that occur within and constitute a community should be compatible with an agent living in a loving way toward all within a society. Implicitly, this further requires that relationships be structured in a way that is compatible with the normative potential for the flourishing of all within the society.

Relational concepts should be shaped in such a way that each person in a society has opportunity to flourish as other circumstances allow. If social structures are not compatible with the full virtue of love, then the loving person must resist certain expectations of culturally espoused models of relationships. The loving person should be willing to touch the untouchable, to reach out across ethnic lines, and to resist marital models that might encourage him to treat wives as chattel. This requirement also allows for the unfortunate reality that the flourishing of all is not simplistically the result of properly formed social structures. Even an ideally structured society is still vulnerable to famine, war, epidemic, and similar catastrophes as well as personal incompetence and individual moral viciousness.

Relational paradigms are necessarily influenced by culture. Accordingly, there are considerable differences in how such relationships are structured by culture. One culture expects that sexual relationships are normatively restricted by lifelong marital commitment, while another culture institutes no fault divorce laws and holds the expectation that a considerable proportion of marriages will result in divorce. Similarly, one culture demands monogamous marriage, while another permits and expects that a certain percentage of marriages will be polygamous. One culture extends its family paradigm to include families centered around same-sex romantic relationships, while another culture outlaws such relationships outright, perhaps going so far as to consider it a capital offense warranting the death penalty.

How does the love-centered account address such cultural differences? First, the love-centered account does not require or expect that all cultures will be identical. There are multiple visions of cultural structures that are compatible with love for all. Yet, not all cultural differences are innocent or trivial. Some cultural differences are antithetical to the flourishing to certain of its members. Cultures that simply have no legal place for same sex relationships are antithetical to the flourishing of those who would prefer such relationships. Cultures that do not heavily weigh the priority of the well-being of children—the most vulnerable members of the family—in the shaping of their familial social structures are deeply

unloving. Such well-being should be understood in a deep way and not limited to physical health or their financial circumstances.

Furthermore, broader cultural circumstances can influence which relational structures qualify as loving or unloving ways to structure specific types of relationships. For example, instituting socially accepted, legalized no-fault divorce in a cultural circumstance where divorced women will be particularly vulnerable to exploitation and potential starvation is obviously unloving, while this consideration would not weigh against no-fault divorce in a cultural situation without such dangers. Of course, if broad cultural circumstances are unnecessarily difficult for divorced women then members of such societies should also consider steps to ease such difficulties.

While the love-centered account holds to the normative expectation that the relational structures within a culture should be compatible with the love of all and the flourishing of all, it does not require that a culture must be maximized or optimized for the flourishing of all its members. Such a requirement would be incompatible with broad cultural flexibility as the culture that is 'optimized' or 'maximized' for love would be the one that all cultures would be expected to imitate. Accordingly, a maximization requirement might encourage morally imperialistic tendencies to judge competing cultures with undue harshness rather than appreciating cross-cultural differences.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that such matters are truly quantifiable unless the concept of well-being is reduced to inaccurately simplistic measures such as wealth distribution.[8] Even if well-being does not involve values of the good that are outrightly incommensurable there would still be great practical challenges in obtaining accurate measurements of well-being. Love as a criterion for social structures employs naturally developing existing structures when possible to allow for considerable cross-cultural flexibility.

One important moral challenge will be orienting society's interactions with outsiders in a loving way. While other relationships naturally demand attentive structuring it is easy for such a society to become insular and lack an adequate place for love for the foreigner, the stranger, and the outsider. Yet, societal actions still have significant and potentially devastating implications for neighboring societies if their choices lead to warfare or seriously reduced vital resources available to outsiders, so moral considerations for such relational structuring is surely needed. Even ordinary interactions with outsiders need to be made in a welcoming way that affirms a bonded relationship with them.

Two of Alasdair MacIntyre's books on virtue ethics offer considerable commentary on the role of broader societal culture in shaping a community where virtue can flourish. In *Dependent Rational Animals*, he offers an argument that a disposition toward caring for strangers is an important virtue in a culture that possesses a proper moral orientation.

It is important to the functioning of communities that among the roles that play a part in their shared lives there should be that of 'the stranger,' someone from outside the community who has happened to arrive amongst us and to whom we owe hospitality...[9]

One reason it is morally important to have a specific directive toward welcoming the 'stranger' is because like other vulnerable categories of people, such as orphans, the 'stranger' to a society lacks the broader network of close social relationships that typically helps people flourish: relationships with nearby parents, siblings, and lifelong friends. There is also a common human tendency to distrust outsiders, further disadvantaging the already vulnerable stranger.

While MacIntyre appropriately identifies an important role for hospitality toward the passing stranger within a society, love-centered ethics points toward a need to go farther than merely welcoming the stranger who appears among us. Societal actions can affect those outside one's own society, and with whom most members of a society never have direct contact. There are trading partners that many in a society never see who may be benefitted or harmed in intersocietal interactions. The environment may be affected in negative ways that destroy critical resources needed by unseen outsiders; for example, if declining populations of animals that provide critical supplies of food are overhunted. Accordingly, it is important to ask whether a society's relational paradigms allow proper attention to care for distant or invisible strangers.

## EGALITARIAN AND CONFUCIAN CULTURES

To illustrate how the love-centered account might be employed cross culturally, consider its implications for society that is radically different from a contemporary western egalitarian society: a traditional Confucian society. Interestingly, Confucianism has precedent for an account of universal love with differing particular expressions of love based upon relationships. This precedent can be seen at least as far back as the influential Confucian Mencius (372 BC–289 BC). Mencius argued in favor of the Confucian position of love toward all, but with proper allowances for distinctions between varying expressions of love based upon relationships.

Yet, Mencius (like Aquinas) similarly held that relationships were a morally relevant circumstance in identifying proper expressions of love. As one summary explains,

The Mencian position is premised on the principle that it is right to treat all people alike only when the ways they are alike are the most ethically relevant features of the situation. We should do the same thing only when the similarities between two cases are the most ethically relevant features of the situation. Mencius believes that in many

instances, the presence or absence of a family relationship to a person is the most relevant feature (in deciding which children to give gifts, the fact that one child is one's elder brother's son and the other child is one's neighbor's child may be the most relevant feature). In other types of situations, such as a child about to fall into a well, it is the innocence that children share that is the most relevant feature. That is why it is proper to feel alarm or distress toward any child in that situation.[10]

Just as our love-centered account of virtue ethics weighs the relational traits of individuals as important morally relevant circumstances, so does traditional Confucianism. For cross-cultural comparative purposes, it is significant that Mencius applies this principle to an unequal relational structure that is out of favor in egalitarian societies: the Older Brother-Younger Brother relationship.

It is well-known that Confucian society has very formal, highly structured unequal relationships in stark contrast to the relative egalitarianism of contemporary Western societies. The Confucian tradition identifies five primary relationships with numerous guidelines, ceremonial implications, rules, and a considerable degree of unidirectional deference of one member of the relationship to the other: ruler and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and elder friend and younger friend. While the Confucian conception of each of these relationships will have considerable differences in comparison with western egalitarian culture, let us focus upon the elder brother-younger brother relationship. Like the other four relationships, the relationship between brothers includes a highly structured normative Confucian concept of differing unequal roles for elder and younger brother even into adulthood. The distinction in roles between older and younger brother is a relational distinction which is almost completely absent from contemporary western egalitarian culture.

As one might expect, the Confucian relationship between brothers is close and intimate. It is a lifelong relationship that can go beyond one's intimacy with unrelated friends. The elder brother is expected to take a protective and caring attitude toward the younger brother. The younger brother is expected to display deferential respect toward the elder brother, embrace his wisdom and make himself available to aid his brother. The *Analects* warn against,

> The younger brother who does not regard the manifest will of Heaven and refuses to respect his elder brother and the elder brother who does not think of the toil of their parents in bringing up their children and hates his younger brother.[11]

How might love-centered ethics be applicable to such a foreign non-egalitarian culture? Can love be properly expressed within both a culture with a completely egalitarian concept of the relationship between siblings as well as one advocating a normative concept of differing brotherly

roles, even if those roles contain a significant expectation of submissive deference on behalf of the younger brother toward the elder?

In both cultural contexts, the role of brother is an intimate relationship. For several years of younger life there will typically be shared upbringing and throughout life there is ongoing expectation of shared participation in mutual family life. Unlike contemporary western egalitarian cultures, the Confucian culture has a stronger explicit sense of familial obligation between brothers that extends throughout adulthood.

Undoubtedly, there are advantages to the egalitarian culture that allows both roles of older and younger brother to maintain greater flexibility in pursuing one another's good as well as their own, perhaps allowing for greater employment of personal giftedness, talents, and resources than the Confucian model. There are advantages to egalitarian attitudes about sibling relationships, allowing giftedness and personal preferences rather than birth order to shape the contours of such relationships. Yet, it is naïve to believe that there are absolutely no drawbacks to such social constructs. In an unstructured egalitarian radically individualistic culture the near infinite relational flexibility can also be a barrier to living in a loving way as there are fewer cultural resources for guiding normative family interactions in a mutually flourishing direction. The overemphasis on individual happiness and liberty in such cultures can discourage commitment to broader familial happiness in general. With fewer general expectations from family roles in such cultures, it is easy for people occupying either role to act in egoist rather than mutually caring ways. Therefore, there is less cultural structure directing siblings toward a mutually loving disposition concerning one another. In contrast, the ritual and structure inherent in a Confucian society can—though surely does not always—serve as an aid for guiding relationships in a loving way. The two cultures offer two differing strategies that can be used toward the same goal, with both strategies possessing notable advantages and drawbacks.

The highly structured Confucian model offers an advantage through greatly increased cultural guidance for the sibling relationship while running the risk of being overly constraining to both roles. Furthermore, the concern that is likely most troubling through the lens of an egalitarian society is that in such cultures the risks are uneven between the roles of elder and younger brother. The risks to the subservient younger brother are considerably more serious than those to the older brother. It is easier to selfishly abuse the role of older brother since the younger brother's role includes a systematic expectation of deference to the older brother. If love provides a corrective criterion to the Confucian culture, it will be to provide greater resources for the protection of the younger brother against potential unloving abuse from the elder brother. Perhaps, it would direct the society toward an increased focus on the greater responsibilities of the elder brother, or by providing increased protections and

culturally acceptable alternatives for the younger brother in cases of abuse.

If love provides a corrective criterion to the brotherly relationship in the egalitarian culture it might be to direct brotherly relationships toward mutual care for one another rather than mutual individualistic egoism. In either cultural context, a loving disposition can be lived out and the concept of love can be used to provide correctives to potential imbalances within culture.[12] In the individualistic egalitarian culture the demands of love require that the individual give careful consideration to whether he is living an adequately loving role in the lives of others, especially within the opportunities afforded by uniquely close relationships such as siblings. The unstructured freedom of egalitarian cultures can easily be abused as license toward individualistic indulgence and apathy toward siblings.

Similarly, unloving individuals can misuse the structure of a Confucian society in vicious ways. The elder brother could easily use the deference granted to his role abusively or at least egoistically. Less obviously, even the role of younger brother could be expressed egoistically in the sense that the younger brother might seek to fulfill his role in a minimal external sense while internally possessing apathy, hatred, or resentment toward his elder brother. He might seek to fulfill the technical external expectations of his role but lazily avoid deeper reflection upon and commitment to loving his brother. Expressing love within such relational structures does not look identical for each member, but is oriented similarly in that it is centered upon the good of each member and in living out a properly attached relationship within that structure. Accordingly, there is a range of cultural models of relationships that are compatible with love-centered ethics, and which might be improved by the insights into ethics offered by such a view of ethics.

## THE CULTURALLY SHAPED VIRTUES OF *AFTER VIRTUE*

One way to understand cultural pluralism as well as the connection between broader culture and the virtues is offered in Alasdair MacIntyre's original ethical theory advocated in *After Virtue*. It is well known that this monograph had a critical role in the recent ascendance of virtue ethics, and we have already noted its role in giving the impression that virtue ethics has difficulty in avoiding cultural relativism. While the love-centered account rejects much in *After Virtue*, drawing out MacIntyre's reflections on the relationship between virtue and broader culture is worthwhile for its insights into the relationship between ethics and culture, for identifying its mistakes that should be avoided, and due to its influential role in contemporary virtue ethics.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre defines the virtues primarily through the context of larger cultural practices rather than in the traditional Aristotelian context of human nature. He explains, "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."[13] Since virtues are defined in light of practices it is also necessary to understand MacIntyre's account of practices. He continues,

> By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[14]

There are numerous components to MacIntyre's account of practices. A practice must be a coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity and as such is culturally embedded. Practices are never developed in complete social isolation, though they may involve considerable solitary development. Although the practice of opera singing may require hours of solitary practice in voice exercises and learning new music; opera singing would not be a practice if it lacked a social and cooperative aspect. Thus, practices emphasize a social and necessarily enculturated aspect of virtue.

Practices also must possess coherent internal conceptual structure; otherwise, a cooperative element would be impossible. If there were no coherent structure to the practice, it would be impossible to identify it as a distinct practice as carried out by differing participants. Practices also require a sufficient level of complexity warranting ongoing reflection, discussion, development, and the establishment of communal standards. For example, Tic-Tac-Toe[15] cannot be a social practice, because it is not adequately complex. The optimal strategy for a game composed of such a simplistic set of interactions and a low finite number of possible situations does not possess adequate complexity requiring the sorts of reflection, interactions, and extension of excellences entailed by practices. Furthermore, internal goods must be developed within the practice as the relevant standards of excellence are pursued. Internal goods such as new skills or ways of thinking must be developed by those engaging in these practices well. While practices may also produce external goods such as financial gain, status, or titles, they must also develop personal attributes or skills intrinsically connected to the activity. An activity that solely produces external goods will not qualify as a practice.

Finally, practices must facilitate a systematic extension of human powers developed by the activity and an extension of our conception of

the goals and internal goods of the activity. This phenomenon can be observed in the sport of running. While running had existed for over two thousand years, the four-minute mile had not been accomplished until 1954. Yet, dozens to hundreds of runners were able to accomplish it in the years that immediately followed. The human understanding of the optimal ways of running, how to pace one's self to maximize speed over a distance, the best diet to eat in preparation for running, and similar knowledge each have been expanded by those engaging in this sport. Also, the internal benefits gained by a lifestyle of running are better understood than they were fifty years ago. Cardiovascular health, mental discipline, and muscular development are each understood more deeply as well as their relationship to running.

Along with practices, traditions are important in *After Virtue*'s account for numerous reasons, but especially because they help provide a *telos* for human life along with standards which are used to evaluate a life lived in light of such a *telos*. Practices take place within these larger cultural structures. Traditions also help an individual develop and maintain a narrative unity of life. As he explains,

> For all reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought, transcending through criticism and invention the limitation of what had hitherto been reasoned in that tradition; this is as true of modern physics as of medieval logic. Moreover when a tradition is in good order it is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose. [16]

In other words, each tradition provides an argument about what goals are worth pursuing in life and by which means those goals should be pursued. A tradition can be part of a larger culture and a culture can possess multiple competing traditions within it.

Furthermore, traditions can possess varying degrees of strength. A frail tradition may have lost awareness of its traditional core commitments in light of which its practices make sense, while a strong tradition continues the robust extension of its views as it consistently obtains the goals at its heart. The fact that a tradition can be strong or weak, flourishing or failing lies at the heart of MacIntyre's latter arguments in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, where he argues that much of what we take for granted as the objective starting point for enquiry is in fact a tradition of its own, which he calls the liberal enlightenment tradition. However, he goes on to argue that the liberal enlightenment tradition is floundering, and has consistently failed to achieve the goals central to its own self-concept. [17]

One role of traditions on MacIntyre's account serves as a remedy to the fragmented view of life that is commonly found in contemporary society. Humans are not one person in school, a second person within a

family, and some third person on the job. When each role is seen within the context of a comprehensive life goal taking place within an overarching tradition providing a *telos* for life, the narrative unity of the self can be regained. Without such a life goal competing aspects of life can fragment one's narrative and sense of self. Accordingly, a narrative unity of the human life is a final concept needed to help shape the virtues. To qualify as a genuine virtue the trait must be compatible with the narrative unity of a genuinely good life.

## THE LESSONS OF *AFTER VIRTUE*

What can we learn from *After Virtue*? MacIntyre's views demonstrate a broad awareness of virtue's interconnectedness with culture. Virtues enable people to achieve goods internal to characteristically human practices which are shaped by and sustain the culturally embedded traditions in which they occur.[18] Therefore, many virtues such as honesty, justice, promise keeping, mercy, forgivingness, and similar virtues are not merely excellent traits. These virtues also play important social functions in solidifying relational bonds which are conceptually shaped by one or more influential traditions within a culture providing a narrative unity to life. Accordingly, such traits may be relevant to both of love's desires. Such virtues may both promote the good of persons, while promoting proper bonds among them.

*After Virtue* also provides a helpful account of the relationship between virtues and culture. In turn, the successful living out of the virtues within such contexts reinforces the traditions in which these relationships occur. Its depiction of the role virtuous traits play within relationships and broader culture provides an insightful, descriptively accurate portrayal of the important and complex role that they play in society. One important tool added by the love-centered account to the views in *After Virtue* is an additional criterion for evaluating the relational structures advocated by traditions within various societies. Traditions must structure relationships to allow love to all members within a relationship while leaving room for love toward others outside of the relationship as well.

As MacIntyre correctly emphasizes successfully living out the virtuous life and attaining the relevant internal goods they make possible within the contexts of practices, traditions, and a unified narrative of human life strengthens the traditions in which these relationships occur. For example, a couple successfully living out the virtues of emotional and sexual fidelity within a loving marriage strengthens not only their individual bonds within the particular relationship, but in a small way also strengthens the tradition which informs and shapes their conceptualization of the virtue of fidelity. Conversely, if a considerable portion of

society ceases to live out such virtues then the tradition influencing that society's relational concepts may become changed, weakened, or both since the tradition is partially constituted by certain narratives and ideals embodied within the relevant practices shaping such virtues. Furthermore, if the reasons for these practices are lost as a tradition becomes weakened or disordered, individuals participating in these practices may become confused as they are no longer aware of the cultural contexts required to make sense of the actions their tradition espouses. These virtues sustain their traditions and communities by reinforcing both the conceptual structure of the relationships within the communities as well as by strengthening bonds of individuals within those communities.

Consider a second example: someone who carries out filial love through the virtue of mercy toward his aging parents by forgiving their substantial shortcomings thereby reaffirms and strengthens their relational bonds within a broader communal and cultural context. The tradition in which this account of filial love and forgiveness are lauded as virtues is strengthened and reinforced by his participation in it. In contrast, if the agent had not fulfilled these relational norms, one result is the community itself is weakened by having bonds between its constituent members weakened. For better or worse, the community would observe an alternative example of how parents might be treated. Accordingly, the culture and tradition in which these virtues make sense is weakened.

Since, virtues are conceptualized within a culture offering certain relational paradigms loving agents will have internalized certain regulative standards of excellence in accordance with the relational ideals available to them through local traditions. This principle is an extension of what is needed for the Aristotelian virtue of friendship. As one commentator notes,

> To have the virtue of friendship, one must have an appropriate normative conception of what kind of relationship friendship is, and what sorts of motives and conduct would be appropriate to such a relationship. And in order to do this, one must have developed one's motivation and perception to a certain level. [19]

However, unlike the traditional Aristotelian view, our love-centered account emphasizes that relationships shape expressions of all virtues in all relationships rather than just friendships based in mutual virtue.

Yet, in much contemporary thought the primacy of the individual and the conception of society as mere groups of individuals results in treating unitive functions, traits, and activities as morally trivial or derivative at best and morally dangerous at worst. The love-centered account seeks to rectify this imbalance. Having unitive bonds with others is not merely a strategy for arranging individuals in ways that might or might not maximize utility for a society, but instead the nature and role of unitive bonds

themselves shapes our expectations and experience of agents throughout society. The relational nature and enculturatedness of *After Virtue*'s ideals are important implications of the monograph worth embracing.

However, while MacIntyre's portrayal of the ethical project in *After Virtue* is influential and contains several worthwhile insights it also has a number of shortcomings. First, despite saying a wealth of things *about* the virtues in general, it has little to say advocating specific virtues in particular. At times, it gives the impression that an extremely wide variety of discordant and possibly contradictory traits might qualify as *bona fide* virtues.

Accordingly, the virtue structure prescribed within *After Virtue* was thought by many readers to entail an unacceptable cultural relativism. In his response to the critics of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre cites no fewer than four published criticisms within the first two years of its' initial publication that suggested that his view entails cultural relativism.[20] Similarly, my own initial impression was that while MacIntyre's argument successfully diagnosed much of the problem in contemporary moral theory embodied in a radical plurality of conflicting ethical foundational premises along with a general lack of awareness of these divergent starting points, his solution avoided the problem of individual subjectivism only by embracing an unacceptable degree of cultural relativism.

MacIntyre acknowledges that his views were understandably misinterpreted in this way. He responds,

> I ought to have made it clear that I did not intend to suggest—although I clearly did suggest—that the initial account of the virtues in terms of practices provided us with an adequate conception of a virtue which is then merely enriched and supplemented by being connected with the notions of the good of a whole human life and of an ongoing tradition. Rather it is the case that no human quality is to be accounted a virtue unless it satisfies the conditions specified at each of the three stages.[21]

While the structure for virtue prescribed by *After Virtue* may not entail radical cultural relativism by allowing *all* traits that are necessary for absolutely *any* practice to count as virtues, yet it still allows one to count traits as virtues that are quite controversial. Consider the cultural practice famously described by Mary Midgley in "Testing One's New Sword." She describes the medieval Japanese practice of testing the sharpness of a new sword on the first unlucky low-caste vagrant the samurai happens upon.

> There is, it seems, a verb in classical Japanese which means 'to try out one's new sword on a chance wayfarer.' . . . A samurai sword had to be tried out because, if it was to work properly, it had to slice through someone at a single blow, from the shoulder to the opposite flank. Otherwise, the warrior bungled his stroke. This could injure his honour, offend his ancestors, and even let down his emperor. So tests were

needed, and wayfarers had to be expended. Any wayfarer would do—provided, of course, that he was not another Samurai.[22]

It is difficult to see why the morally callous actions of the Samurai would fail to fit within the virtue structure advocated within *After Virtue*. One could describe the custom of 'trying out one's new sword' as a practice, or at least as part of a larger practice of Samurai swordsmanship. The larger Samurai code and worldview can be understood as a tradition in which the practice of Samurai swordsmanship takes place. Therefore, the callousness toward human life necessary to slaughter an innocent human being in order to accomplish the sole good of testing out one's new sword would appear to be virtuous unless it can be demonstrated that such callousness is somehow incompatible with the good of the Samurai's life taken as a whole.

It is likely that someone who is indiscriminately callous toward the lives of all others would ultimately undermine his own good by destroying his ability to maintain stable positive useful relationships. There is a good prudential reason that the average person is not jealous of sociopaths who are capable of using others without remorse. Yet, the medieval Samurai is not a sociopath. Instead, he possesses a fairly common type of unloving worldview, which distinguishes between an 'in-group' of human lives that count as valuable from an 'out-group' of other people which are not counted as valuable. This same pattern in worldviews elsewhere allows for slavery, torture, genocide, and similar unloving abuse of out-group members.

This narrower practice of random violence toward lower-class peasants within its cultural context seems quite compatible with the Samurai's own well-being. After all, he has a peer group that accepts this practice. Furthermore, the violence of the practice itself is focused upon random individuals the Samurai does not know, does not care about, and who contribute little or nothing to his well-being. It is compatible with the narrative unity of the Samurai's life. And it is unlikely that the Samurai's well-being depends upon his relationship with a particular lower class wayfarer in some subtle way. Therefore, it appears that MacIntyre's ethical theory in *After Virtue* must accept this particular form of callousness toward innocent human life as part of a virtuous life within certain practices and traditions. Yet, if innocent human life is more inherently more valuable than the ability to test the sharpness of a sword, then the possibility that this practice is compatible with a virtuous life is simply unacceptable. Troubling implications of such virtue theories are precisely why a loving criterion for relational structures within a culture—or at least a criterion which plays a similar role in moral theory—is needed for a plausible cross-cultural moral theory.

## CONCLUSION

A plausible account of ethics must be culturally flexible enough to avoid cultural imperialism and simplistic ethnocentricity. However, it must also offer prescriptive cross cultural truths that can be employed to critique cultures rather than uncritically embracing every cultural arrangement. The love-centered approach to virtue ethics offers a model with both features. Love can be expressed within a variety of cultural and relational paradigms. Yet, this account of virtue ethics offers tools to critique an individual's character within culture as well as a culture's relational paradigms and practices. A culture ought to be structured in a way that is compatible with the flourishing of all and for relational structure to allow for love of all. The example of *After Virtue* demonstrates the difficulty in providing an ethical model that is culturally flexible while avoiding cultural relativism.

## NOTES

1. Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934). Some of Benedict's initial observations seem to have exaggerated the differences between cultures, but concerns regarding cultural imperialism and ethnocentrism remain influential in the academy.

2. See Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, 3.38.

3. Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion," 221.

4. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 272–273.

5. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 264–278.

6. Lawrence Blum, "Community and Virtue," in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, ed. Roger Crisp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 231–232.

7. Blum, "Community and Virtue," 232–234.

8. For a discussion of the possibility of the reduction of measurements of flourishing to a single measure see: Nien-he Hsieh, "Incommensurable Values," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2016. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-incommensurable/. Accessed 5/20/2016.

9. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 123.

10. David Wong, "Chinese Ethics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-chinese/ accessed on May 23, 2016.

11. Confucius, *The Ethics of Confucius: The Sayings of The Master and His Disciple Upon the Conduct of "The Superior Man,"* ed. and trans. Miles Menander Dawson (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1915), 164.

12. In the section on enemy love, we have already discussed that love toward abusive 'enemies' must be balanced by giving strong consideration to the well-being of both self and third parties. See chapter 4.

13. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

14. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

15. Tic-Tac-Toe is one of MacIntyre's examples of something which is not a practice.

16. MacIntyre, *After Virtue,,* 222.

17. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 170–195.

18. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue,,* 181–225.

19. Justin Oakley, "Varieties of Virtue Ethics," *Ratio* 9 (1996), 137.

20. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 264–278.
21. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 275.
22. Mary Midgley, *Heart and Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 181.

# SIX

# Human Nature and Love-Centered Virtue Ethics

Theories of ethics based upon accounts of human nature were popular in ancient and medieval philosophy. Such views sometimes advocated developing virtues, which were depicted as perfections of various innate human potential capacities. This approach sometimes proceeded from an account of individual human flourishing that fulfilled human nature and then worked backwards to identify the ideal human traits that contributed to or constituted that flourishing.[1] Aristotle's approach roughly followed this pattern and the Platonist Varro identified 288 potential approaches to ethics based upon their view of human flourishing and strategy to bring about human flourishing.[2]

In recent years, some ethicists have argued that such an approach is best understood as a form of egoism. However, this traditional virtue centered approach to ethics was largely abandoned during the modern era for completely different reasons. The modern era's pre-occupation—from its inauguration by Rene Descartes—with the justification of truth claims against a high threshold set by methodological skepticism increasingly undermined confidence in all sorts of truth claims.[3] Moral knowledge was not excluded from this threat of skepticism. This modern skepticism undermined the naturalistic approach to virtue ethics due to the difficulty in justifying the inference to a moral 'ought' from an empirical 'is' within human capacities. The observation that developing certain human traits was possible or normative and would aid in a human flourishing requires an additional prescriptive 'ought' claim that was difficult to justify within the assumptions of modern epistemology. This challenge was particularly true for the Humean empiricist's view of knowledge, which only accepts the justification of two types of knowledge claims: sensory claims about observable empirical facts and definitional claims

concerning relationships between ideas. The 'ought' claims of naturalistic ethics were viewed with skepticism as these claims fit into neither trusted epistemological category.[4]

Therefore, to this day ethicists widely accept that a moral theory must avoid directly inferring prescriptive norms from claims about human nature, or at least must address the standard objections to this strategy. Theories which directly derive ethical claims from facts about human nature must face the challenge of the 'is-ought' problem since they try to deduce claims about values from factual observations. The vital premise in any such argument would consist in an empirical fact while the conclusion would be about non-empirical values. Since these are two very different types of claims, it appears that no valid inference can be directly made from one type of claim to the other. While it is surprising that more effort has not been made to justify an *a priori* premise to connect naturalistic 'is' claims about human nature to prescriptive claims concerning moral 'oughts' in the current ethical conversation the strategy of moral naturalism is generally believed to commit an obvious category error.[5]

In addition to the 'is-ought' problem there is also the challenge of establishing an account of human nature that would be determinate enough to generate plausible norms directly from it. As Bernard Williams observed, "It is hard to believe that an account of human nature—if it is not already an ethical theory itself—will adequately determine one kind of ethical life as against the others."[6] Even if there were a consensus concerning human nature and a way to justify an 'ought' premise to allow moral norms to be derived from it there would still be this determinacy problem. There is good reason to doubt that an account of human nature would be clear enough on the relevant details to directly infer clear moral norms.

For example, even if human nature is defined as that of a rational animal it is far from obvious that one can derive specific moral principles such as 'one should be honest and keep promises' from such a view. Even if we accept the claim that 'human nature is that of a rational animal' there would still be difficulty adjudicating between the conflicting inferences that might be justified by such a claim. Conflicting interpretations might include: 'since humanity is rational one should always be honest,' 'since humanity is rational one should always be honest unless something of greater value requires dishonest,' and 'since humanity is rational one should always be honest when it brings about the best results for the self.' Accordingly, there would be a 'nature-maxim' gap, wherein it would be very difficult to derive specific moral principles even from a widely accepted account of human nature.

Yet, surely accounts of human nature have important implications for ethics. Ethical views, explicitly or not, entail assumptions about human nature. Therefore, this topic cannot be responsibly avoided. Rosalind Hursthouse identifies such a role for naturalism in contemporary virtue

ethics. She explains that an examination of human nature aids us in determining which traits might be virtues. Such uses of naturalism do not provide reasons to live virtuously but, "it may serve to provide rational credentials for our beliefs about which character traits are the virtues."[7] Similarly, views of human nature play a significant role as "I'm looking to see whether my beliefs about which character traits are the virtues can survive my reflective scrutiny and be given some rational justification."[8] Christine Swanton similarly describes a naturalistic constraint on virtue ethics embraced by Hume and Nietzsche, "What counts as a virtue is constrained by an adequate theory of human growth and development."[9]

Accordingly, Hursthouse finds that traits that are actual human virtues will fit this broad description which requires some insight into human nature:

> A good social animal (of one of the more sophisticated species) is one that is well fitted or endowed with respect to (i) its parts, (ii) its operations, (iii) its actions, and (iv) its desires and emotions; whether it is thus well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve (1) its individual survival, (2) the continuance of its species, (3) its characteristic freedom from pain and characteristic enjoyment, and (4) the good functioning of its social group—in ways characteristic of the species.[10]

Since human nature can give insight into which traits actually are virtues in light of their implications for individual and group survival, individual human flourishing, and patterns of human excellent functioning, one should ask of any ethical theory: what are its assumptions about human nature? Are the implicit views of this ethical theory about human nature attractive, plausible, and in line with the most reliable current accounts of human nature that have been established elsewhere? Therefore, instead of directly inferring ethical norms or ideal ethical traits from human nature it is important to demonstrate that an ethical theory fits well with what is known concerning human nature and has no implausible or incompatible implications for it.

This chapter argues that the love-centered account of ethics fits well with the contemporary and traditional view of humanity as both social and rational animal. It is a view of ethics that makes sense, given the reality of human nature as social rational interdependent animals. Since, the relationship between rationality and love-centered virtue ethics has already been discussed in chapter 1[11] the remainder of this chapter focuses upon human social interdependent nature. While one cannot simply derive a moral theory from such an account of human nature, a view like love-centered virtue ethics is what we would expect to be true given current accounts of human nature as rational social animal.

THE ONGOING RELEVANCE OF HUMAN NATURE FOR ETHICS

Just as facts about the pluralistic nature of human cultures provide a necessary context within which a plausible ethical theory must fit, plausible moral theories must interact with claims about human nature in a similarly nuanced way. While there are serious challenges to grounding an ethical theory directly upon an account of human nature, ethical theories that give no direct attention to their implications for human nature are fraught with different problems. Accounts of ethics that are incompatible with human nature or have implausible implications concerning human nature are unacceptable because they can be irrelevant to or literally impossible for genuine human life. Accordingly, Immanuel Kant's famous principle 'ought implies can' illustrates that at the very least claims about human nature help delineate the boundaries of what humans 'can' and accordingly help identify the boundaries of what they plausibly 'ought' to do.[12]

The concern that morality ought to advocate a way of life that fits well with human nature is among Susan Wolf's implicit concerns in her famous essay on "Moral Saints."[13] In short, she argues that the moral saint in the vision of many modern normative ethicists would be an unlikable, irrational, inhuman, pitiable creature. The moral saint would be unsuitable for normal social interactions and a properly developed well-balanced life marked by distinctive personal projects beyond the all-encompassing moral project. The moral saint would be "too good for his own good, [or] at least too good for his own well-being."[14] The problem with such saints according to Wolf is not so much the general values that they hold, but that traditional moral theories require that such values be absolutized and applied systematically so that they completely dominate life. She is concerned that a moral theory ought to leave room for a genuine human life marked by personal projects, relationships, and similar needs required for genuine personal flourishing. Theories which do not might be suitable for an all-powerful God with infinite resources[15] or an abstraction of a person who has no need of genuine personal projects, but in real human life, we do not and would not admire those who live with such inhumanly single minded commitments to these values.

While there may be ways to defend modern moral theorists from Wolf's charges our purpose is to consider whether the love-centered moral saint would escape such criticisms. At least three features of love-centered virtue ethics ensure that our moral saint would be compatible with an attractive real human life marked by personal projects, relationships, and the opportunity to flourish. First, the love-centered approach's allowance of an important role for self-love ensures that the moral life is generally compatible with appropriate self-concern even if these concerns must sometimes be overridden. There is no reason to embrace Wolf's fear that an absolutized moral value would alienate the lover from himself,

since the trait of love is partially constituted by desires for proper bond-edness with the self and proper concern with the well-being of the self. Second, since love is partially constituted by desires for properly bonded relationships with others there is good reason to believe that love would encourage the moral saint to be well bonded with others rather than alienated from relationships. Finally, the fact that the virtues have a tendency to benefit the lover gives good reason to expect that the loving moral saint would have a flourishing life. Thus, the lover's moral ideals will strengthen the lover's relationships rather than alienate him from them, tend toward the lover's flourishing, and leave adequate space for personal projects.

Views of human nature also have implications concerning which activities are central to life. The activities that are central to human life are the most relevant fields of application for ethical guidance. Some approaches to ethics have much to say about artificial scenarios that rarely occur but little about real everyday human life. Trolley problems, homicidal maniacs looking for innocents, and so forth, may provide interesting abstract ethical discussions. Yet ethics is supposedly about the actual human life lived well, which necessarily takes place amidst real human life and relationships rather than artificial ethical-puzzles. Humans need ethical guidance for how to live out their next fifty-hour work week while caring properly for those with whom they live and how to balance such large personal concerns with the boarder moral concern for the good of all. Intuition revealing thought experiments have an important place in investigating moral theory, but not at the cost of real-life guidance. Accordingly, such everyday concerns such as living out one's relational commitments and bonds with others are at the heart of love-centered ethics.

Finally, human nature's implications concerning human needs and flourishing are relevant to any moral theory that includes any imperative for promoting the good of humans, whether self or others. If morality demands that we aid, love, or help others, such principles in themselves do not tell us in what goods the well-being of others consist. As suggested in chapter 2, in itself the love-centered ethic will not attempt to resolve such issues, but merely suggests that the lover's beliefs concerning the constituents of the good for humanity and the means for attaining them must be reasonably warranted.[16]

Therefore, even if it is fallacious to derive ethical theory directly from human nature, an account of human nature necessarily plays an important role in ethical theory in at least three ways. Human nature at least: serves in a negative role in limiting the possible demands that ethics can make on a person, plays a vital contextual role in delineating the most relevant applicable scope for ethics, and plays a positive role in identifying the sorts of goods which we should seek to bring about in human

lives. A plausible moral theory should fit well with human nature and love-centered virtue ethics is such a theory.

Similarly, John Hare recognizes the importance that a moral theory 'fits well with' human nature. If a moral theory fits well with human nature or is within the parameters of what one might expect given human nature, this fact increases the attractiveness of the moral theory. Hare argues that his own broad Kantian morality has the proper relationship with human nature, "Although the moral law is not deducible from human nature, it fits human nature exceedingly well. We flourish when we keep it, and we deteriorate when we do not."[17] While a prolonged investigation into whether Hare's Kantianism does indeed possess this trait is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is noteworthy that Kant himself denied that his morality had any necessary connection with human flourishing.[18] This gap between the imperatives of moral reasoning and self-regarding practical reasoning ultimately motivated Kant's postulating of the existence of God and the framework of postulated rational religion in order to provide the supporting belief structures to make certain sorts of self-sacrificial moral actions practically rational.[19]

In any case, Hare is correct that it is important for a moral theory to fit well with human nature. Love-centered virtue ethics fits well with human nature by advocating a disposition that normatively brings about human flourishing through our social bonds and through the proper structuring of our internal desires toward those relationships. Yet, the principles of the love-centered account are not merely 'fitting' with human nature, but also emphasize the proper shaping of the psyche toward the relationships at the heart of human existence, the family, and civilization. We would expect that the correct approach to ethics would have such traits given the traditional and contemporary view of humanity as interdependent social animal.

## HUMAN SOCIAL NATURE

While the love-centered virtue ethic does not proceed directly from claims about human nature, it coheres well with several important observations about human nature. While it does not appeal to any specific account of human nature as its *basis*, several of its important implications are what we would expect given current accounts of human nature. Consider the relationship between human social nature and love-centered virtue ethics:

First, this account of ethics portrays the disposition of the human will toward people generally as possessing central moral importance. This attribute is more important than optimizing human physical strength, the intellect, or promoting any other value. Second, it identifies two distinct but related types of person-oriented desires that are relevant to love; first,

the agent's desire for the good of persons and the agent's desire for proper relational bonds with persons. Portraying such issues as central to morality is what should be expected given traditional and contemporary claims about human relational and social nature. Third, the love-centered ethic shows how such a socially oriented virtue simultaneously engenders the agent's own flourishing since love tends to benefit the loving person. Consider Aristotle's claim about human social nature,

> He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state. A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature, and yet he who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors.[20]

Aristotle claims that sociality is a central feature of human nature, so much so that the complete hermit who is constitutionally unable to interact meaningfully with others or the sociopath who has no natural regard for others would be closer to beast than human. Conversely, anyone who is self-sufficient and genuinely free of the need for human sociality would be godlike and 'above' humanity. Of course, one need not endorse Aristotle's complete and fairly insensitive claim, that to lack sociality is to be sub-human in order to accept his broader principle that humanity is social by nature.

The innate social potentiality possessed by humanity is a central distinguishing feature of our species and perhaps of personhood more generally. The potential for complex networks of relationships that persons can simultaneously have with themselves, their closest friends and family, as well as with more distant individuals; is a trait that distinguishes humanity from the rest of the animal world. The role we play in our own internal lives through reflective self-consciousness, our role in the cultivation of our own volitional structures, the intimate role we play in the lives of close family and friends, and the global role we play in the lives of those we have never met are unique. These are central personal capacities that are distinctive of the human species and have great ethical relevance. To build upon the traditional Aristotelian definition, perhaps a better summary of humanity is that we are rational relational animals rather than merely rational animals, since our sociality is such a distinctive human characteristic.

Accordingly, consider these more recent claims from Rosalind Hursthouse supporting the traditional Aristotelian view:

> The best available science today (including evolutionary theory and psychology) supports rather than undermines the ancient Greek assumption that we are social animals, like elephants and wolves and unlike polar bears. No rationalising explanation in terms of anything like a social contract is needed to explain why we choose to live together, subjugating our egoistical desires in order to secure the advantages of co-operation. Like other social animals, our natural impulses are not

solely directed towards our own pleasures and preservation, but include altruistic and cooperative ones.[21]

Such conclusions about human nature have great significance for ethics. If sociality plays a foundational role in human life and nature, then ethics ought to value human social nature and grant human sociality a similarly central role in the moral life. Therefore, an account of ethics that values the relational bonds between persons for themselves is more fitting to actual human life and experience than one that does not. The love-centered account of virtue ethics fulfills this expectation by making a relationally appropriate desire for proper bonds with persons centrally important. Furthermore, this account identifies relationships as a morally relevant consideration for shaping appropriate desires and behavior. Unlike traditional impartialist ethics that views relational considerations as morally irrelevant or even subversive to genuine morality, this account recognizes the appropriate moral value possessed by relationships.

Similarly, Annette Baier suggests that valuing relational ties is at the root of many of women's recent contributions to ethics. She claims,

> [Carol] Gilligan's girls and women saw morality as a matter of preserving valued ties to others, of preserving the conditions for that care and mutual care without which human life becomes bleak, lonely, and after a while, as the mature men in her study found, not self-affirming, however successful in achieving the egoistic goals which had been set.[22]

Since Baier claims that women's insights concerning morality are largely about the value of relational ties and mutual care that occurs within closer relationships it is unsurprising that her own views about ethical theory proceed in a love-centered direction. Accordingly, she suggests that centering an account of ethics upon love would be an attractive approach to moral theory:

> What would be a suitable central question, principle, or concept to structure a moral theory which might accommodate those moral insights which women tend to have more readily than men, and to answer those moral questions which, it seems, worry women more than men? I hypothesized that the women's theory, expressive mainly of women's insights and concerns would be an ethics of love, and this hypothesis seems to be Gilligan's too.[23]

While Baier's account of love might not mirror my own, it is safe to infer that love-centered virtue ethics captures many of her central moral intuitions. Most importantly, it reflects the great moral significance she attributes to relationships, mutual care, and bonds that unite people with one another.

## REVISING ARISTOTLE'S OVERLY INDEPENDENT VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

Love-centered virtue ethics offers a useful corrective to certain traditional overly masculine accounts of ethics. Portraying love as the central moral virtue not only protects against the possibility of ethical egoism, but also weighs against overly independent views of human nature. For example, Homer's catalogue of virtues emphasizes the hyper-masculine virtues of the ancient warrior: courage, glory, honor, and so on.[24] And even the less extreme yet still overly independent Aristotelian virtuous ideal—focusing on radical independence, physical strength, courage, and forgetting other's contributions to one's own success is in need of revision. Alasdair MacIntyre recounts the flawed illusory independence of Aristotle's ideal:

> He "is ashamed to receive benefits, because it is a mark of a superior to confer benefits, of an inferior to receive them" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1124b 9–10). So the *megalopsychos* is forgetful of what he has received but remembers what he has given, and is not pleased to be reminded of the former, but hears the latter recalled with pleasure (12–18). We recognize here an illusion of self-sufficiency . . . that is all too characteristic of the rich and powerful in many times and places, an illusion that plays its part in excluding them from certain types of communal relationship.[25]

MacIntyre's corrective to Aristotle is to posit a new foundational category of virtues, the virtues of acknowledged dependence. However, love-centered virtue ethics offers its own analysis of the flawed Aristotelian ideal of the 'great-souled man' (*megalopsychos*).

While the great-souled man is virtuous in many ways, he still has a vicious unloving attitude toward his relationships in that he does not wish to acknowledge the role relationships and relational bonds have actually served in his life. No one is as radically independent as the Aristotelian ideal believes himself to be. To desire such radical independence entails rejecting proper bonds within many of his relationships. On any plausible account, this disposition embodies ingratitude by denying the role others play in his success, since the great souled man tries to "be forgetful of what he has received." Instead, social interdependent beings like ourselves ought to reject Aristotle's ideal of the great souled man in favor of an ideal distinguished by love rather than independence. As a species, we are interdependent rather than independent, and love includes properly valuing, desiring, and acknowledging the bonds constituting our relational dependencies.

It has also been suggested that Aristotle's account of the virtues is biased along gender and class lines in that it seems to limit genuine virtues to, "qualities of character and abilities regarded as admirable only in free men of some social standing."[26] Love acts as a corrective against

such elitist accounts. It is an egalitarian virtue in that one does not need social standing or considerable wealth to *possess loving desires* that constitute the virtue. Unlike Aristotle's magnanimous or generous man, one does not need substantial financial resources to *desire* the good of others. While generosity can still be a virtue, it will be constituted by generous desires relative to the context of whatever socioeconomic situation the generous person finds herself within. Similarly, courage and strength employed in pursuit of the desires of love can still be important virtues in appropriate situations. However, the radically independent strand of Aristotelian virtues is incompatible with love to the degree that they go against proper relational bonds with others and must be revised. An accurate view of human nature as interdependent and social being requires revision of such Aristotelian extremes.

Thus, the love-centered vision of morality accords well with contemporary views concerning the sociality of human nature. Living virtuously aids in our flourishing, benefits those around us, and creates stability in society more generally that provides an environment that is more conducive to virtuous living for all. In contrast, one way of living viciously is to live in conflict with our social nature. Vice can isolate us, cut us off from our close relationships, and unnecessarily put our interests at odds with the interests of others. Such vice is especially damaging when it harms our bonds with those whom we share long-term interdependence.

While it has often been thought that Aristotelian ethics offers a more socially relevant account of morality in comparison to modern deontological and consequentialist theories, the traditional Aristotelian ideal still falls short in at least some important ways. A plausible version of contemporary Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics should reject these flawed aspects of Aristotle and improve upon them. Placing a deeply relational virtue like love in the center of our moral vision goes a long way toward accomplishing this important goal.

### *DEPENDENT RATIONAL ANIMALS* AND LOVE

While Alasdair MacIntyre's early virtue theory gave culture a place of priority in shaping virtue his latter virtue theory in *Dependent Rational Animals* emphasizes the importance of examining human nature to identify a human *telos* to ground the virtues. Given *Dependent Rational Animals*' similar inspiration in Aquinas, its similar identification of the need for a corrective influence to Aristotle's excesses, and its attentiveness to the relationship between human nature and the virtues, one might expect that love-centered virtue ethics would be similar to MacIntyre's later account. Yet, while there are important similarities between the two views there are also significant differences.

MacIntyre modified his conception of virtue ethics in several ways from his original conception in *After Virtue*. He explains that, "this book is not only a continuation of, but also a correction of some of my earlier enquires in *After Virtue, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*."[27] In both his earlier and latter works, MacIntyre speaks at length about the need to contextualize virtue in light of a human *telos*. In his earlier works, especially *After Virtue*, this *telos* is largely provided by less culturally pluralistic societies operating within specific virtue shaping traditions and practices. In *Dependent Rational Animals* he advocates an account of the virtues shaped by a *telos* identified by using the methodology of speculative metaphysical biology rather than culture. Accordingly, this work embodies two main changes from his previous conception of ethics.

First, he abandons his previous reluctance to base an ethics on 'metaphysical biology,' which is a partial constituent of an account of human nature. He now claims, "I judge that I was in error in supposing an ethics independent of biology to be possible."[28] He proceeds by re-examining the fact—originally applied to ethics by Aristotle—that humans are a type of biologically constituted animal. Through an examination of the human condition as a specific species of animal, this approach seeks to identify principles about human nature needed to ground the virtues. In at least a partial rejection of the concerns raised by Hume's Is-Ought problem he sought to base an account of ethics upon an examination of human nature.[29]

In particular, MacIntyre claims that an examination of the human condition demonstrates that dependence and vulnerability are central aspects of human nature. These facts point toward the need for a new emphasis on an underappreciated category of traits: the virtues of acknowledged dependency. This emphasis entails a partial rejection of Aristotle's account of the virtues, which overemphasized traits MacIntyre calls virtues of rational independence. While maintaining an equal role for virtues of rational independence MacIntyre balanced these traditional Aristotelian virtues by positing a similarly foundational role for the virtues of acknowledged dependence. As part of his investigation, he spends the better part of three chapters investigating the metaphysical biology and moral psychology of other animals such as dolphins to provide a comparison class to allow a better understanding of human metaphysical biology.[30]

The second major shift in MacIntyre's thought in *Dependent Rational Animals* is his emphasis upon Aquinas over Aristotle.[31] MacIntyre views his own emphasis upon the virtues of acknowledged dependence rather than traditional Aristotelian virtues such as magnanimity as a distinctly Thomistic preference illustrating the superiority of Aquinas's understanding of human nature and ethics. Even the title of *Dependent Rational Animals* illustrates MacIntyre's revised Aristotelian view of humanity. As

in the traditional Aristotelian account he portrays humanity as an animal distinguished by rationality, but under his newer Thomistic influence he additionally portrays humanity as an animal distinguished by its vulnerability and relationships of dependence.

While MacIntyre's investigation into human nature leads him to place a greater emphasis upon transcultural objective human nature rather than historically and culturally shaped practices and traditions as the primary determiner of virtues, one might have expected that MacIntyre's increased respect for Aquinas would have led him to a more deeply Thomistic theory. However, while MacIntyre allows that Aquinas's account of *caritas* is one example of a 'virtue of acknowledged dependence,' he simply lists it alongside similar virtues such as Lakotian 'wancantognaka,' hospitality, pity, with wancantognaka rather than *caritas* being his paradigm example. Therefore, love does not have the central place in MacIntyre's theory that it enjoys in the love-centered account.

In accordance with MacIntyre's two philosophical shifts, he also sets out three new major theses to prove. "The first concerns our resemblances to and commonality with members of some other intelligent animal species. . . . Human identity is primarily, even if not only, bodily and therefore animal identity."[32] As part of his new strategy of 'metaphysical biology' MacIntyre undertakes a systematic investigation comparing human and non-human animals, with a particular emphasis on comparing humanity to dolphins.

MacIntyre's second set of claims embody the conclusions he gleans from his investigation based in metaphysical biology. The most important of these conclusions is that humans as a species are marked by interdependency and vulnerability. Therefore, ideal human character includes a proper disposition concerning these attributes. Since the traditional Aristotelian virtues do not include a proper disposition towards interdependency and vulnerability, he calls for a new equally important set of supplemental virtues. He explains,

> A second set of theses concerns the moral importance of acknowledging not only such vulnerabilities and afflictions but also our consequent dependences. . . . I shall argue that the virtues of independent rational agency need for their adequate exercise to be accompanied by what I shall call the virtues of acknowledge dependence. . . . both sets of virtues are needed in order to actualize the distinctive potentialities that are specific to the human rational animal.[33]

As an application of the results of MacIntyre's investigation into human nature, he advocates a set of dependency centered virtues that are intended to supplement and modify portions of the traditional Aristotelian catalogue.

Finally, MacIntyre applies his findings to broader contemporary culture and social structures. He asks what types of social structures, institu-

tions, and visions of the common good will encourage both of his categories of virtues. He explains, "A third set of theses provides answers to those questions and I shall argue that neither the modern nation-state nor the modern family can supply the kind of political and social association that is needed."[34] While turning his attention to modern social structures MacIntyre ends on a negative note as he finds the most important contemporary Western social structures—the family and the state—to be seriously wanting. He argues that contemporary western social structures are not structured in a way conducive to human flourishing through the proper development of the virtues. Continuing a theme from his earlier writings he argues for the reshaping of influential social structures to prioritize structures that are that are more relationally and ethically oriented than current social structures.

There are important areas of agreement between my love-centered vision of virtue ethics and MacIntyre's views. Both accounts emphasize the importance of dependency and proper-bondedness within human relationships demonstrating an agreement that humans are socially interdependent rather than independent beings. Living well within these relationships is central to both the moral life and human flourishing. Similarly, I agree with MacIntyre that contemporary social structures ought to be critiqued in light of the way they support or undermine human virtue and flourishing. Accordingly, relational structures that undermine loving care for or bonds with persons are problematic (as discussed at length in chapter 5). Third, my account shares MacIntyre's appreciation of Aquinas's modifications to Aristotle. In embracing love as the central virtue, this account sides with Aquinas and MacIntyre rather than Aristotle in rejecting the ideal of the great souled magnanimous man as overly independent and overly self-sufficient.

Despite these significant areas of agreement certain reservations concerning Macintyre's account remain. First, various central questions about the virtues are simply left unresolved and in some cases completely unacknowledged. What is the ideal relationship between his two sets of virtues? Are the virtues of independent practical reason strictly intellectual virtues while the virtues of acknowledged dependence strictly moral virtues? Is there a unity within any of the virtues? If not, what should one do when the guidance provided by these sets of virtues conflict? If these virtues are primarily structured by the teleology of objective human nature, then what role does culture play in structuring the virtues? Important aspects of the structural relationship between the virtues is left unclear.

Furthermore, it is difficult to see how facts about biology—much less a comparison of cross species traits—are going to be determinative in identifying which traits ought to be viewed as virtues. How can this give guidance in any but the broadest and vaguest ways? Consider one of MacIntyre's central claims about human nature: that humanity is a vul-

nerable and dependent species. What virtues or facts about the virtues unambiguously follow from this observation? MacIntyre laudably centers many virtues upon appropriately acknowledging and carrying out this human interdependence. But, since his strategy relies upon applying controversial interpretations of the implications of human nature he risks begging the question against Aristotle. Aristotle's defender might plausibly argue that facts about human vulnerability entail that we ought to minimize and avoid unnecessary vulnerability and dependence as much as possible. If this interpretation is correct, then while Aristotle's ideal agent should still be criticized for failing to acknowledge unavoidable dependencies as in the case of being, "forgetful of what he has received,"[35] the Aristotelian might retain the ideal of being as independent and invulnerable as nature allows. The mere fact that humans are naturally attracted to pleasure does not resolve the issue of whether such desires ought to be embraced, resisted, or ignored. Similarly, the mere biological fact that there are innate human dependencies and vulnerabilities hardly resolves the question of whether such dependencies should be embraced, resisted, or ignored.

Furthermore, MacIntyre's metaphysical biology and moral psychology of dolphins and other non-human animals are strikingly speculative. One might suspect that since he portrays the chief source of human vulnerability as human embodiment rather than distinctly personal attributes, we should be able to learn similar lessons about human dependency from an examination of any type of embodied animal at all. After all, it is not only chimpanzees and dolphins, but also mollusks, insects, and worms that may fail to flourish due to their existence as embodied creatures.

Yet, MacIntyre advocates a set of virtues for humans that he does not appear to advocate for absolutely all embodied animals. However, the fact that many species simply lack the sociality necessary for such virtues seems to preclude that possibility. Whereas Aristotle thought that all other animals have virtues distinctive to their own species, one is left wondering whether MacIntyre's views imply that each species should possess virtues similar to humans due to their similar embodied vulnerability. By avoiding reliance upon the dubious strategy of metaphysical biology, the love-centered approach allows for compatibility with a broader range of philosophical commitments. It neither relies upon a controversial general methodology requiring metaphysical biology or a specific controversial interpretation of what such an analysis demonstrates. It does not require accurate interpretations of the interactions of dolphins to learn about human virtue. For our purposes, the importance of love may be grounded in human nature, natural law, objective rationality, divine command, the nature of society, intuition, or who knows what. This flexibility is a strength of the viewpoint.

Another important difference is found in MacIntyre's treatment of love. While love—as we have defined it—would surely qualify as a virtue of acknowledged dependence, neither love nor any other virtue plays the central role that we have advocated for *caritas*. While love is a necessary director and shaper of all virtues on our account, it has no such role in MacIntyre's. Accordingly, while both accounts value Aquinas's insights, the love-centered account embraces Aquinas's corrections to Aristotelian ethics in a more central and systematic way.

While MacIntyre cites some aspects of Aquinas's account of *caritas* expressed in *misercordia*'s sympathy to the suffering as one example of a virtue of acknowledged dependence, he gives no further emphasis to any trait resembling our account of love. He lists it alongside of other virtues of acknowledged dependence such as Lakotian 'wancantognaka,' hospitality, pity, with wancantognaka—a disposition toward a sort of uncalculated giving—being his paradigm example of a virtue of acknowledge dependence. However, neither love, wancantognaka, nor any other virtue is offered as a central organizing virtue by MacIntyre. Accordingly, the entire relationship between the various virtues is left rather unclear.

While MacIntyre's virtue ethics has important similarities to the love-centered account, important differences remain. And these differences allow the love-centered account to accommodate many of MacIntyre's conclusions concerning human nature without relying upon his controversial methodologies.

CONCLUSION

While there are several reasons to avoid grounding an ethical theory directly upon an account of human nature, human nature necessarily plays an interesting and complex relationship with ethics. Plausible accounts of ethics ought to fit well with contemporary insights about human nature even if one should avoid simply deriving an account of ethics from human nature. The love-centered account fits in well with current views of human social nature by giving central concern to the sociality of love and the enculturatedness of love's relationships. Our vision of love allows for appropriate self-love and close relationships thereby fitting well with human social, vulnerable, and mutually dependent nature. Finally, our virtue of love addresses a central concern in human life: how to interact well with people, both self and others. By focusing its guidance on such relevant, central issues of human life, it demonstrates that it is an ethic grounded in real life concerns and considerations. Accordingly, love-centered virtue ethics embodies a view of ethics that values human relationships and bonds whose value has been recently identified by care ethicists, MacIntyre, and other thinkers. Like MacIntyre's views in *Dependent Rational Animals*, it properly accounts for human dependency, vul-

nerability, weakness, and need for others, but does so while maintaining a flexibility that an account of virtue ethics rooted in metaphysical biology would not have.

## NOTES

1. While the contemporary philosopher might suspect that such an approach would result in an egoistic view of ethics, Aristotle warded off this possibility by arguing both that the desirable life is the admirable life and that individual flourishing only occurs within a social context of broader societal flourishing. The medieval thinkers similarly resisted earthly egoism by offering an account of happiness that was largely constituted by immaterial religious goods such as goods of character, union with God, and the afterlife, which were easily compatible with dramatic earthly sacrifice for the sake of others. Accordingly, Thomas Aquinas argued that loving the self was second in importance only to the love of God, but that love of one's body came after love of neighbor. This distinction between love of body and broader love of self allowed for justifying the practical rationality of earthly altruism since bodily sacrifice is not identical to full self-sacrifice.

2. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.

3. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 51–61.

4. See David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, T3.1.1.27.

5. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 57, for one strategy to respond to the 'is-ought' problem. At least sometimes, there are compelling oughts that follow from one's empirically observable role such as the case of a captain of a ship. The captain of a ship ought to do those things entailed by being the captain of a ship.

6. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 52.

7. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 193.

8. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 194.

9. Christine Swanton, *The Virtue Ethics of Hume and Nietzsche* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 8

10. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 202.

11. See *The Supremacy of Love*, Chapter 1.

12. See Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:50.

13. See Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 79–98.

14. Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81.

15. Interestingly, there is considerable literature in philosophy of religion debating whether even an all good God could be meaningfully free. Much of this literature seems to presuppose the same kind of modernistic ethical absolutizing principles that Wolf criticizes. Therefore, one might even question whether such moral theories are compatible with traditional views of God. The philosophy of religion literature sometimes suggests that these moral theories raise problems for the traditional view of God. But an adherent to the traditional view of God could just as easily suggest that the traditional view of God raises doubt concerning these modern moral theories.

16. See *The Supremacy of Love*, Chapter 2.

17. John Hare, *Why Bother Being Good? The Place of God in the Moral Life* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 146.

18. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Allen Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5:110–111.

19. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5:129.

20. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 1253.

21. Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2012. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/ accessed on May 23, 2016.

22. Annette Baier, "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?" in *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 276.

23. Baier, "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?" 265–6.

24. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 121–130.

25. MacInytre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 127.

26. Susan Moller Okin, "Feminism, Moral Development, and The Virtues," in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, ed. Roger Crisp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 212.

27. MacInytre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, x.

28. MacInytre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, x.

29. MacIntyre directly comments upon the is-ought objection in MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 57.

30. MacInytre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 21–52.

31. MacInytre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, xi.

32. MacInytre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 8.

33. MacInytre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 8–9.

34. MacInytre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 9.

35. MacInytre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 127.

# Epilogue

This book has outlined the contours of a contemporary *agapic* love-centered approach to virtue ethics, and has argued that there are attractive benefits to this approach. This argument is motivated in part by the desire to develop a more specific and determinate account of virtue ethics that provides important details that are absent from some recent popular broader but vaguer Neo-Aristotelian accounts. In particular, this view upholds the value of love as both the central agential moral virtue as well as the central value for critiquing social structures.

In favor of this view, it has been argued that it has explanatory power for a wide range of moral intuitions. Chapter 1 lays the foundation for this project by identifying mainstream Neo-Aristotelian views of virtue, right action, practical rationality, and love embraced by this project that are widely accepted in contemporary virtue ethics. Accordingly, virtue was defined as*: an excellence of character constituted by a disposition to act and react well, in terms of internal motivations, emotions, and reasons, as well as external actions*. Similarly, right action was defined as: *action emanating from a virtue, which is shaped by the ends of love, and wisely carried out within a particular situation using practical reason*.

Chapter 2 addressed foundational issues by describing the contemporary Neo-Thomistic view of the virtue of love presupposed by this project and various advantages of this view. The virtue of love is: *a disposition towards relationally appropriate acts of the will—consisting of desires for the good of persons and desires for proper bonds with persons—held as final ends*. This account of love has several advantages. It is relationally flexible and applicable to the full range of human relationships, rather than just a subset of relationships. It provides normative criteria for evaluating individuals' attestations of love thereby distinguishing ideal or true love from mere sentimentalism, infatuation, or outright delusion. Third, this account has explanatory power for many typical normative experiences of love such as the tenacity of love, the non-fungibility of the beloved, and the strong feelings typically associated with love. It discussed the various aspects of this virtue and offered the character of Cordelia from *King Lear* as the paradigm example of love.

Chapter 3 highlighted some of the more distinctive and less common commitments of the love-centered account of virtue ethics. Unlike many contemporary Aristotelian accounts, the love-centered account claims that love shapes the *telos* of all genuine virtue. Accordingly, the virtues

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cannot be used badly since love is a partial constituent of all genuine virtue. There is also good reason to believe that virtues benefit the virtuous person in various ways, tend to benefit the virtuous agent overall, and therefore are prudentially advisable dispositions to develop. Thus, being a virtuous person is both a morally admirable goal as well as a practically rational goal. The love-centered account also accepts a weak unity of the virtues in that all virtues are partially constituted by the ends of love and applied with practical wisdom. Finally, this account provides for an improved degree of action guidance over competing accounts of virtue ethics since the action guidance of love takes precedence over guidance provided by any other disposition.

Chapter 4 outlined a strategy for harmonizing the general commitments of love toward all with the commitments of love within closer relationships. This strategy argued that the existence of certain types of relationships should be accepted as impartial reasons for unequal actions under certain circumstances. For a relationship to be a genuinely loving reason for unequal treatment within a closer relationship it must be both universalizable and compatible with love toward all. There is a range of relationships that are relevant to love. The broad categories of relationships are self, closer personal relationships, culturally close impersonal relationships, and culturally distant impersonal relationships, but there are many subcategories under these headings as well. This chapter concluded with a discussion of enemy love arguing that the while the lover views no one primarily as an enemy and always continues to love, the vicious actions of others can disrupt normal relational bonds and warrant actions intended to protect the self and third parties from the destructive actions of the 'enemy.'

Chapter 5 discussed the cross-cultural potential of love-centered virtue ethics. It combines considerable cross-cultural flexibility along with the universal criterion of love for critiquing both social structures and personal dispositions within a culture. Therefore, this view avoids both simplistic prescriptive cultural relativism and sweeping cultural imperialism. Love is inevitably shaped by cultural situatedness including culturally shaped relational constructs and the epistemic implications entailed by being situated in a particular culture. Love can be lived out well in a wide variety of cultural situations. However, love also has implications for social structures and many relational constructs need to be reshaped in light of love.

Chapter 6 considered the relationship between human social nature and love-centered virtue ethics. While the 'is-ought' problem gives good reason to avoid grounding a theory of ethics directly upon human nature it remains important that an account of ethics fits well with contemporary views of human nature. Love-centered virtue ethics gives human relationships an attractive predominant role in ethics that fits well with the contemporary account of humanity as social animal. Accordingly, it pro-

vides an appropriate corrective to some ancient accounts of virtue ethics that over-emphasize the ideal of human independence.

Finally, I end by acknowledging the limitations of this book's argument. There are many goals it has not sought to accomplish. It has not sought to offer a fully determinate applied love-centered ethic. It has outlined a normative theory without working out the sweeping critical details for applying love-centered virtue ethics. This argument has not given a systematic detailed investigation concerning the relational constructs that partially constitute Anglo-American culture. Similarly, it has not offered an in depth investigation concerning the nature of the good and an in-depth investigation into which views of the good are reasonably warranted. Therefore, the application of love into virtuous actions will be partially shaped by enculturated relationships and one's view concerning the nature of the good that will have to be mapped out within specific cultural situatedness.

Therefore, this virtue theory is not free standing. Assumptions concerning a range of related issues will be vital in identifying its proper applications. A future project—for myself or others—might include fleshing out these details by examining the effects of stipulating various other assumptions upon this theory such as that of a hedonistic value system, a stoic value system lauding immaterial goods, a Thomistic value system centered on religious goods such as union with God, a Hindu system of value stipulating that Atman is Brahman, and so on. It is my sincere hope that this is not the end of investigation into *agape*-centered ethics, but rather the beginning of a resurgence of *agape*-centered research in virtue ethics.

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