
PSYCHOLOGY'S LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH LOVE: CRITIQUES, AFFIRMATIONS, AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSES

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Christian psychologists' contributions to understanding love of God and neighbor have fallen far short of their potential. A major reason, I argue, is psychologists' love-hate relationship with love. Psychologists raise challenging questions about love (or some *understandings* of love), based on their (usually implicit) ethical intuitions (e.g., that telling battered women to love their abusers *harms* them). In addition, some understandings of love (e.g., pertaining to obligations, choices, and/or divine action) fit poorly with psychology's natural scientific methods. On the other hand, psychologists conduct research relevant to love and most psychologists seem deeply committed to love. Psychologists thus both critique love (hate it) and affirm it. Multidisciplinary approaches for developing a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of love are discussed.

The paucity of attention most Christian psychologists have given to love of God and neighbor-as-self is strikingly odd. Although human love is, by almost any definition of psychology, a psychological phenomenon and Jesus said the two greatest commandments in the Law are "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22: 37, 39, New Revised Standard Version), psychologists have devoted little sustained empirical and conceptual atten-

tion to love. Indeed, of over 1500 articles in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* and the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* listed in PsycINFO prior to 2004, only 5 titles (excluding references to sexual/romantic love and self-love) have included the word love.

It is particularly surprising that Christian psychologists have devoted so little attention to agape and other forms of Christian love because, even on a logical positivist account of science, drawing upon religious and ethical ideas to pose research hypotheses (say, about love) is—in the context of discovery—entirely legitimate, so long as not a hint of ethics, spirituality, metaphysics, or bias (save those associated with objectivity, materialism, and naturalism) enters into the context of *justification* (according to popular interpretations of Reichenbach, 1938), that is, into choice of method and how one collects, analyzes, and interprets data. And so on traditional accounts, even the strictest Christian compartmentalizer (who advocates for the necessity of very high walls between theology and psychological science) may legitimately investigate love. Such investigations have rarely been conducted by advocates of a "levels of explanation" approach (Myers, 2000b) to the relationship of psychology and theology, however. Nor have they often been conducted by the integrationists and others who argue for the empirical existence, and legitimacy, of a close interpenetration of psychological understandings with metaphysical (including theological), epistemological, and ethical convictions.

Such reluctance to investigate love is a phenomenon requiring explanation. In this paper, I will suggest that psychologists' modest contributions to the understanding of love may be attributed in substantial measure to our ambivalence toward it. Psy-

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chologists in general are drawn to love, but also tend to be deeply suspicious about love, concerned about its negative effects, and unclear about what method, if any, can be employed to understand it. Psychologists' customary methods, the language we employ, our sense of our history, and our aspirations all make it very difficult to talk about—and work through—our ambivalence toward love.

Christian psychologists have, I think, avoided the topic for the same reasons psychologists in general have avoided it, and for additional reasons. Our desire to gain respectability within the field as a whole makes it more difficult to investigate an unpopular topic. More substantively, several Biblical themes that are central to classical Christian understandings of love make psychological investigations of love—especially as science is traditionally understood—much more difficult (and, some would say, either impossible or dramatically limited in scope) than investigations of other topics. The Bible makes both metaphysical claims and ethical claims. Among the metaphysical claims are: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5); “God is love” (I John 4:16); and “Love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (I John 4:7). Among the ethical claims made is: “Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another” (I John 4:11). When understood within the Christian faith, love thus includes God’s contemporary action in human history. Such Christian understandings of love are inconsistent with the materialistic metaphysical claims (or pragmatic working assumptions) that some scientists assume are the only legitimate claims (or assumptions); such Christian understandings of love are not limited to the natural world that science was originally intended to investigate. Furthermore, love is about what is good, right, obligatory, and virtuous (i.e., love has to do with ethics or values), not just about the kind of facts that science discovers.

Explicit research attention is, however, beginning to be given to love. Post, Johnson, McCullough, and Schloss’s (2003) *Research on Altruism and Love* summarizes research on a variety of dimensions of love: for example, empirical psychological research on prosocial behavior. Furthermore, research recently funded by the Fetzer Institute (Altruistic Love and Compassionate Love Research Projects, n.d.) and the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love (Research Funding, n.d.) will undoubtedly increase our understanding of love. Neither that compilation

of research findings nor the new research will, however, entirely eliminate the multiply determined critiques of love and the controversies over optimal methods to study it. Nor will they fully address the ethical and metaphysical questions raised by Christian understandings of agape love. Unless psychologists’ critiques of love are directly and effectively addressed, the emerging research is likely to be hotly contested by some psychologists, quietly snickered over by many others, and—worst of all—ignored by most. Unless theologians’ understandings of love are addressed, we may end up with an understanding of something called love which falls short in fundamental ways of the robust, multidimensional, comprehensive complexity of Christian love, as traditionally understood by Christians and as understood in sophisticated contemporary theological accounts (Evans, 2004; Grant, 2001; Grenz, 1997; Hallett, 1998; Jackson, 2003; Post, 2003; Vacek, 1994).

We thus need to seriously consider psychologists’ critiques of love, their “hate” of it, if you will. The critics make some valid points about love, I think. And so if we pay close attention to the hate of love, we can better understand love. Furthermore, some of their criticisms need to be challenged so emerging research can receive the audience it deserves.

An additional reason to wrestle with psychologists’ ambivalence about love: Love is a research topic that gets to the heart of the debates over the best way to understand, and live out, the relationship between psychology and Christian faith (Johnson & Jones, 2000b). The question of how to best understand love is thus a test case for various approaches to the question of how psychology and theology best relate to one another. One of the tests Johnson and Jones (2000a) propose for evaluating any approach to relating psychology and faith is its comprehensiveness: “How much of human nature and the Christian life is being described with this approach? ... How much is being left out by this perspective?” (p. 250). Secondly, Johnson and Jones (2000a) suggest that certain approaches to relating psychology and Christianity are better suited for certain “regions” of study. Understanding love, as understood in the Bible and Christian theology, thus represents a particular challenge for advocates of levels of explanation (Myers, 2000b) and certain (but not all, Collins, 2000) integrationist accounts that want to minimize or eliminate theological and ethical influence in determining psychological understandings; love is a challenge for those types of approach to integration because love

of God and neighbor-as-self is surely in a region in which Christian beliefs are in a particularly close (integral?) relationship with the subject matter. The question we thus face is the adequacy of accounts of love that strip it of elements most Christians think are essential to understanding love. On the other hand, understanding love seems more amenable to empirical investigations than, say, redemption and predestination. This represents a challenge to Biblical counseling (Powlison, 2000) and certain (Roberts, 2000) (but not all) Christian psychology models of integration that sometimes appear to denigrate empirical methods as a means to understand human behavior.

THE DISPUTED DEFINITION OF LOVE

Varying understandings of love in Christian and related traditions (Hallett, 1989; Post, 2003) make clear the challenges of developing the psychology of love. Jesus, according to the Fourth Gospel, stated, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Wyschogrod (2002) defines alterity-altruism as other-regarding behavior "relating to the other not as a content of one's own consciousness—as a perception of or an emotional response to the other—but rather as an ethical datum that makes a claim on the self to engage in other-regarding acts" (p. 29). Underwood (2002b) suggests that compassionate love, which refers to a reality about which "there is something essentially ineffable" (p. 72), involves "an investment of self deeper than *altruism* suggests" (p. 72) and is a "free choice for the other" (p. 73). Post (2002b) identifies a particular form of altruistic love, *agape*, which he defines as "altruistic love universalized to all humanity as informed by theistic commitments" (p. 53). And Browning (2002) notes that, in Aristotelian-Thomistic models, Christian love

finally finds itself on the sacred status of human personhood, the belief that all good (and all specific goods) comes from God, and that the ultimate meaning and direction of all finite loves is the overarching love for and enjoyment of God. (p. 343)

Finally, C. S. Lewis (1960) contends that "Divine Gift-love" within us enables us "to love what is not naturally lovable" (p. 177). How, then, can we develop psychologies of love so defined?

The definitions of love psychologists in general employ when investigating love (or would employ if they conducted investigations) contrast sharply with those definitions. Psychologists' definitions reflect

their underlying philosophical and/or theological assumptions, implicit or explicit psychological understandings of human beings, ethical perspectives, and preferred method(s). Despite their differences, psychologists generally agree that the focus of attention in understanding love and other psychological topics should be on observable behavior, or otherwise scientifically measurable indices of love. Myers (2000a) thus proffers a traditional definition of psychology as "the science of behavior and mental processes" (p. 227). As Korchin (1976) noted, "If you can't measure it it doesn't exist" (p. 355). Traditional psychologists thus define love in ways that remove its subjective and emotional dimensions. That is, they depassionize love. Post (2002b), Sober (2002), Wyschogrod (2002), and others, however, define love in ways that include emotions and subjective experience. In this and other ways, standard scientific psychological definitions omit key dimensions of love, as most Christians understand it. Nothing but a partial understanding of a psychology of love can thus be produced, however valuable the insights may be that arise from that approach. Lacking a clear strategy and theory about developing a psychology of love that gets at the fullness of the Christian understanding of love, many Christian psychologists may simply avoid the topic altogether.

In their efforts to be purely objective, psychologists often leave out the *ethical* dimensions of love as well. Understood in ethical terms, love is good, an obligation (We "ought to love one another," John 4:11), a virtue, or all of the above. Whether it is fully possible to remove the ethical connotations from love is, I think, most doubtful (Putnam, 2002). If, for example, as Batson (2002) and Sober (2002) suggested, understanding altruistic love requires understanding the motivations of those involved and, as Koch (1969) suggested, "any phrasing of phenomena called 'motivational' which does not blight them demands recognition of an utter interpenetration between what philosophers have been wont to call the 'realms' of 'fact' and of 'value'" (p. 122), then any scientific investigation of altruism—whether conducted by biologists or psychologists—may commingle ethics and science.

Another dimension of love that some contend must be taken into account to understand love is its narrative (storied) dimension. Understanding the narrative context of love and other aspects of morality is, Vitz (1990) argues, critical. By telling stories, however, and assuming (correctly, I think) that we

thereby better understand love, we have moved far from traditional understandings of the philosophy of science which hold that knowledge comes from natural scientific methods alone. Analyzing narratives of love is, however, in harmony with recently burgeoning qualitative methods and with narrative therapies.

Still others contend that understanding love requires understanding the role of agency, defined by Rychlak (1988) as “the capacity for an organism to behave in compliance with, in addition to, in opposition to, or without regard for biological or sociocultural stimulations” (p. 84). Many philosophers (e.g., Kane, 1996, 2002), some psychologists (e.g., Jenkins, 1996; Rychlak, 1988, 2003), some evolutionists (Dennett, 2003), most ethicists, most legal systems, and most Christian ethicists (e.g., Birch & Rasmussen, 1989; Smedes, 1983) believe we, as human agents, are in some measure free; indeed, to be morally responsible requires freedom (Evans, 1977, 1989). Underwood (2002b) contends that “free choice for the other” (p. 73) is a central aspect of compassionate love. The relevance of agency to explanations of love is this: “Explanations, especially about morality, that omit this human capacity to choose are ... different in kind from those that include it” (Tjeltveit, 1991, p. 105).

To add to the complexity of the love that I think Christian psychologists should seek to understand, comprehensive psychologies need to address the spiritual and religious dimensions of love. Post (2002b) contends that “something is at work in love for all humanity that has connections with spirituality” (p. 57). In his first letter, John makes the descriptive, factual claim that “we love because he first loved us” (v. 9); the ethical claim that “since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another” (v. 11); and the metaphysical claim that “love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (v. 7). And the difficulty is not only the profound challenge of introducing into materialistic, deterministic psychology the Biblical notion of the God who acts in history (Slife, 2005). It is also that drawing on particular religious claims about the nature of God and human beings conflicts with the field’s desire to produce objective accounts of human beings that are universally applicable. But how can we integrate psychology and a Biblical understanding of Christian faith unless we take seriously its claims about divine commandments, human agency, and the active Spirit of God? Developing a psychology that takes these claims seriously is quite complex indeed.

Finally, many psychologists think that, when we try to understand love of God and love of neighbor-as-self, we need to take very seriously our cognitive limitations, our proclivity for self-deception, and our sinfulness—because they very often shackle our ability to know. Such human limitations lead directly to my discussion of psychology’s critiques of love.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITIQUES OF LOVE

Christian psychologists, sometimes striving to prove themselves the equal (as skeptics and in other ways) of psychologists in general, often match, and sometimes intensify, the critiques of love proffered by those psychologists. I will focus here on three general categories of criticisms of love, criticisms that have, I think, played a major role in the neglect of love by Christian psychologists.

Skepticism and Suspicion

Skepticism, contends clinical psychologist David Barlow (1996), is “one of the principal virtues of a good scientist” (p. 236). Scientific skepticism has been, and is, directed at both love itself and, especially, at various non-scientific explanations offered to account for loving behavior. Love and explanations of love must, many scientists contend, pass through the refining fire of operationalization, quantification, and experimentation before we can accept them. As Ollendick (1999) avers, “clinical psychologists need to conduct their practice within the confines of scientific knowledge” (p. 2). Particular targets of this refining fire are claims about agency, morality, spirituality, and God, which have to do with dimensions of love (on most Christian understandings of it) that are not fully amenable to such reductions. Furthermore, as Frank (1988) noted, “the flint-eyed researcher fears no greater humiliation than to have called some action altruistic, only to have a more sophisticated colleague later demonstrate that it was self-serving” (p. 21).

Science is not, however, the only source of psychologists’ reluctance to accept at face value claims made about love. It was Freud (along with Nietzsche and Marx) who inspired Ricoeur (1970) to coin the phrase “hermeneutics of suspicion,” which Westphal (1993) defines as

the deliberate attempt to expose the self-deceptions involved in hiding our actual operative motives from ourselves, individually or collectively, in order not to notice how and how much our behavior and our beliefs are shaped by values we profess to disown. (p. 13)

And so many who are inspired by Freud and Nietzsche (which includes many neo-Nietzscheans who dub themselves postmodernists; Taylor, 1989) want to explore the hidden unconscious conflicts or the desires to gain power over others that underlie acts of so-called compassionate, altruistic, or Christian love. Nietzsche was particularly skeptical (Schacht, 1983; Sprigge, 2000). "Strong ages, noble cultures," pronounced Nietzsche (1889/1968), "see in pity, in 'love of one's neighbour' ... something contemptible" (*Twilight of the Idols*, §37, p. 91). As Sprigge summarized his views, Nietzsche held that compassion is "a rather deplorable hindrance" (p. 106) and that "the profession of altruism, which goes with pity, is always fundamentally dishonest, or somehow in bad faith, or the result of social conditioning which involves no real concern for the welfare of others" (p. 118).

A rather different form of suspiciousness is articulated by contemporary philosophers who point to what Putnam (2002) identifies as "the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy" (p. 5). Claims to facts about love may, they suspect, actually include closeted moral claims; claims about love as a value may rest, in part, upon unstated, implicit factual assertions. Whether the collapse of the fact-value dichotomy will result in putting ethics at last on a firm foundation (as naturalistic ethicists claim), in so-called scientists unjustifiably claiming for their own ethical views the authority of science, or in some alternative outcome remains to be seen.

In any case, psychologists are, for multiple reasons, reluctant to accept at face value claims about many dimensions of love. In the main, Christian psychologists have not mounted investigations and formulated arguments challenging such skepticism regarding human love for God and neighbor-as-self, and have joined, I think, in the discipline's skepticism and suspicion.

Critiques of Love Itself (or of Some Understandings of Love)

Perhaps the central critique of "love," at least by clinical psychologists, is that love harms people. This criticism can perhaps be seen most clearly in the battered woman who stays with her abuser out of "love," or the codependent woman who stays with an irresponsible, destructive alcoholic, shielding him from the consequences of his drinking and otherwise enabling his alcoholism—because she "loves" him. In

both cases, the woman is harmed by her repeated, self-destructive sacrifices, by her caretaking and martyrdom (Cermak, 1986), by her "love"; her husband is harmed because he is protected, by her "love," from the consequences of his actions. Many psychologists, unfortunately, do not recognize that such understandings of "love" can and should be distinguished from most Christians' understanding of love of neighbor-as-self. Post (2002a), for example, asserts that although "altruistic love requires the abrogation of selfishness, ... it is a mistake to confuse the valid ideal of unselfishness with selflessness, its invalid exaggeration" (p. 376). Christians do not always interpret love in that way, however. As Browning (1987) notes, some Christians have overemphasized the sacrificial nature of love: People are told they have, and should show, unlimited love toward others. As a result, they are depleted, harmed.

Psychologists' ethical critiques of love are rarely overt, in substantial measure because the aspiration to be scientific, to be objective and value-free, precludes explicit acknowledgement of the ethical basis (e.g., "it is wrong to harm people") of such critiques. Rather than eliminating such ethical critiques, however, the aspiration to be objective has simply forced psychologists' ethical assumptions underground, where they implicitly affect both the knowledge production and the clinical practice of psychologists (Tjeltveit, 1999). Nevertheless, some have been more overt. Freud, for instance, was a prominent critic of sacrificial love (Browning, 1987). He was, Wallace (1986) notes, "positively acerbic toward the 'golden rule'" (p. 110).

Another ethical critique of love opposes, not love itself, but love as *central* to the good life, or to human flourishing. Or, more modestly, the opposition is to love as the *sole* ethical standard, as monistic ethical ideal. Ideal human functioning has to do, on some of these accounts, with autonomy, *self*-fulfillment, or personal authenticity, not with loving others (and certainly not with love for God). Although romantic and familial love are considered important by many (Fine, 1990), agape love appears on few psychologists' lists of the attributes of the actualized, fully functioning, or flourishing person, although it seems utterly clear to me that it should appear on such lists, if the understanding of ideal human functioning lays any claim to harmony with Christianity. Since mental health, self-actualization, and healthy functioning (understood in terms other than Christian) are of utmost importance for many

psychologists, they see an emphasis on agape love obstructing what is most important: personal growth. As Nicholson (2003) notes, the language of personality replaced that of character in American psychology in the 1920s and 30s. "In the language of character," he notes,

selfhood was achieved through surrender to a "higher" moral standard. In the new discourse of personality, selfhood was achieved through the realization of the self's own abilities. The true self of personality was not one of duty, honor, and self-sacrifice—terms that referred to a framework outside the self. (p. 37)

The criticisms of love by both Freud and Nietzsche can perhaps best be understood in terms of this critique of love: The problem is not so much love per se, but love that conflicts with self-fulfillment. Nietzsche (and some his postmodern descendants) are exemplars. As Taylor (1989) notes, Nietzsche "declared benevolence the ultimate obstacle to self-affirmation" (p. 343). Nietzsche's being an immoralist and his critique of compassion, then, did not entail a rejection of all ethical ideals; they served his particular moralist vision (Berkowitz, 1995).

The more modest version of this critique has to do with how love for others is balanced with other ethical ideals. Richardson (2003), drawing upon Woodruff, argues that "we simply cannot cultivate or practice virtues such as ... compassion ... apart from membership and participation in the life of a community" (p. 452). Love in the absence of other ideals is problematic because, Richardson continues, "you cannot practice altruism or compassion among cruel or narrowly self-seeking individuals because to do so would simply be to portray yourself as a sucker in their eyes, and to an extent be one!" (p. 453). Batson and colleagues (Batson, 2002; Batson, Klein, Highberger, & Shaw, 1995) likewise note that immorality can result from altruism when altruistic love is not properly balanced with justice.

Critiques of Efforts to Use Natural Scientific Methods to Understand Love

Another set of critiques pertains to the appropriateness of the methods we should use to understand love. Some critics of traditional psychology—inside and outside the discipline—hate the use of natural scientific methods to understand what they take to be the ethical, agentic, spiritual, and/or religious nature of love. The reductionism and quantification of natural science methods are not, in and of themselves, well suited, they contend, to provide an adequate

(full-fledged, deep, comprehensive) understanding of those dimensions of love. Those methods, then, can only provide a limited and, in some instances, a profoundly flawed, psychology of love.

By way of contrast, some psychologists (including Christian psychologists striving for respectability) hate the topic of love because it is a soft topic in a field valiantly struggling to be a hard science; because its complexity seems to conflict with the parsimony for which scientists strive; and because traditional scientific methods don't very effectively get at several dimensions of love, dimensions like agency, spirituality, virtue, and what is optimal in human life, dimensions that do seem *psychological* in nature *and* that seem vital for a deep and comprehensive understanding of love.

Psychologists, contends Leahey (2000), are afflicted with "physics envy" (p. 39): the deep desire to be a hard science. American psychologists, notes Nicholson (2003), "tended to construct scientific psychology in decidedly masculine terms. Science, like the idealized male psyche, was considered objective, detached, rigorous, and hard-nosed" (p. 83). Love, by way of contrast, is a soft topic, tied to internal motivations, sentimentality, subjectivity, emotionality, females, and religion. Accordingly, some psychologists avoid love as a topic for investigation (and surely think it a topic that will inhibit rather than advance psychologists' careers) because love is too bound up with emotions, is too closely linked with religion, and slips too easily into sentimentality. Love, that is, is a topic that is not well-suited for a discipline that is, and should be, striving mightily and manfully to be a "hard" science. Psychologists should, rather, devote their energies to topics that will contribute to the discipline's hardness and rigor. Love doesn't qualify. Indifference to love results.

Another reason for raising questions about the appropriateness of scientific methods to understand love is its ethical character, generally considered beyond the disciplinary competence of science. Although science can provide us with some understanding of human nature (Batson, 2002) and about the consequences of alternatives (e.g., whether Intervention A produces more positive benefits than Intervention B), it has no disciplinary competence to make ethical judgments like telling us what is beneficial or good (Kendler, 2000; Tjeltveit, 1999; Waterman, 1988). Science, that is, can tell us about facts, but not about values. Emotivism, the ethical theory of logical positivism (Koch, 1969), which many think

remains psychology's de facto philosophy of science, held that making such ethical judgments is meaningless. Others would contend that making ethical judgments is a valid human endeavor; it is simply a task beyond the competence of psychological scientists qua scientists. Love, accordingly, is either not a fit topic for scientific investigation or can only be partly explained by traditional scientific methods.

An alternative position, the most complex but, I think, most promising, is that scientific investigations of love will always intermingle the ethical and scientific. Both scientific and ethical analysis must occur, in tandem and in dialogue, rather than only scientific or only ethical. Rather than doing so implicitly, however, it would be better to do so publicly and explicitly. This means, of course, that the ethical diversity extant in the world will, in some measure, replicate itself in the results obtained.

Others think natural scientific methods ill-suited for investigations of love because those methods exclude the human agency that they think is essential to any adequate understanding of love. Many who believe in human agency think scientific methods can only make partial contributions to our understanding of love. Very valuable contributions, to be sure, but partial. How troubling this shortcoming of science is considered to be depends on how central one thinks agency is to love. Many psychologists don't believe human beings possess the genuine free will that most Christians think is integral to genuine agape love.

For many who don't believe in agency, scientific methods seem exemplary; their annoyance is with those who believe in agency. Those psychologists might investigate love, but the love they investigate would not be love as it is understood by most Christians.

Other psychologists, however, think the scientific method can be adopted to include agency in explanations of human beings, using quantitative methods (Rychlak, 1994), qualitative methods, or a combination of both.

Still others hate that scientific methods might be applied to a "religious" topic like love, thinking religion an appropriate topic for theologians alone to investigate. Others are open in principle to the contributions—partial but important—that empirical methods can make to religious understandings of love, but are wary of the actual practices of those who use scientific methods to understand religious topics like agape: They think the epis-

temic humility among scientists for which Brown-ing (2002) calls, the reluctance to take metaphysical stances, is—in fact—all too rare among scientists, whose methodological naturalism too often becomes a de facto dogmatic metaphysical naturalism which rejects the religion's central claims about God and the spiritual life.

Finally, some psychologists, who like simple problems and clearly testable hypotheses, or who consider parsimonious explanations to be of the utmost importance, don't like love because it is simply too complicated. We can, they might argue, turn to addressing that topic once we have built a sturdier foundation of basic psychological science.

For all these reasons, then, some psychologists believe it a mistake for psychologists to investigate love; they hate the waste of time and energy required by that kind of fruitless effort. And others think it a mistake to use traditional empirical methods to understand love. Still others think that those methods have significant shortcomings and that adequate understandings of love can only be developed when those methods are supplemented with ethical, theological, and/or qualitative methods. For all those reasons, then, attempts to develop a psychology of the love of God and neighbor-as-few are rare.

AFFIRMATIONS

Although a primary focus in this paper is on some of the factors responsible for psychologists avoiding love, factors that need to be addressed if we are to profitably develop a psychology of love, brief mention also needs to be made of some ways psychologists affirm ("love") love.

At a fundamental level, beneficence, something like love, is at the heart of the profession of psychology (May, 1984; Tjeltveit, 1999, in press). Pellegrino (1989) notes that "some degree of effacement of self-interest . . . is morally obligatory on health professionals" (p. 58). And Wallace (1991) contends that "By virtue of this professed vocation and the patient's suffering plea for help, a serious moral claim is made on the doctor, not merely for scientifically informed treatment, but for caring and compassion as well" (p. 112). This is reflected in the American Psychological Association's (2004) statement of purpose, which includes this phrase, "to advance psychology as a science and profession and as a means of promoting health, education and

human welfare" (Article 1) and its current (2002) ethics code: "Psychologists are committed to ... the use of [psychological] knowledge to improve the condition of individuals, organizations, and society" (p. 1062).

Love is also affirmed in the Baconian understanding of science: The purpose of science is to produce knowledge to benefit humankind (Toulmin, 1975). Psychologists have accordingly conducted scientific investigations of a variety of specific topics related to love, usually using terms other than love. For example, prosocial behavior (although love—if defined to include ethical claims, emotions, intentions, choices, and a relationship with a historically active God—is arguably a broader term), altruism (Batson, 2002), attachment (Fricchone, 2002; Hazan & Shaver, 1994), caring (Noddings, 1984, 2002), the therapeutic alliance or bond (Norcross, 2002; Orlinsky, Rønnestad, & Willutzki, 2004), virtues, and other topics have been investigated (Post et al., 2003).

In addition, humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers (Brazier, 1993) have long addressed topics very much like love. Psychologists are also now beginning to discuss the ideas of Levinas (Beyers & Reber, 1998; Gantt, 2000; Gantt & Williams, 2002; Harrington, 1994; Kunz, 1998; Sampson, 2003; Vandenberg, 1999; Williams & Gantt, 1998), who believed that ethical obligation to the other should play a foundational role in psychology.

The revival of interest in questions of virtue and character (Fowers, 2003, 2005; Fowers & Tjeltveit, 2003; Meara, Schmidt, & Day, 1996; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Puka, 1994; Tjeltveit, 2003; Tjeltveit & Fowers, 2003) has extended as well to the question of the virtue of love (or caring or compassion) (Barker, 2000; Cassell, 2002; Cross, 1998; Doherty, 1995; Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002; Jeffries, 1993, 1998; Kitwood, 1990; Martin, 1996; Puka, 1994), although love as a virtue has (Aquinas notwithstanding) been less prominent a target of investigation than other virtues.

Finally, drawing upon my experience as a clinician and working with other mental health professionals, I have been repeatedly struck by the relentless hope, the faithfulness in caring for clients, and the steadfast love that mental health professionals exhibit in their relationship with clients. Boundaried, limited love, to be sure, taking place within particular places and within certain fixed periods of time, and taking different forms when a client doesn't pay, but love nevertheless.

OPTIMAL RESPONSES TO PSYCHOLOGISTS' AMBIVALENCE ABOUT LOVE

Psychologists thus both critique and affirm love. Christian psychologists have been no different. The critiques have thus far been predominant, however. Psychologists, including Christian psychologists (despite the centrality of love in Christian, faith, theology, and ethics), have conducted little research on love. That fact provokes this question: How can psychologists, and especially Christian psychologists, make greater progress in understanding love?

To make greater progress and to increase the impact of current research on love, we need, I think, to acknowledge and, as appropriate, either incorporate or challenge psychologists' critiques and affirmations of love.

We need to begin, I think, by acknowledging the partial truths in the critiques I have discussed. There can be merit in skepticism and even suspicion. Indeed, Westphal (1993) argues that Christians need to wrestle with the three great architects of suspicion, Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx, because much (though not all) of their criticism is apt. Christians will be more Christian (if less religious) when purging their lives of the targets of those criticisms. Doing so—when done properly—may be good (and perhaps essential) preparation for the greater benefits that can accrue when we make the important move from a hermeneutic of suspicion to a hermeneutic of trust (Ricoeur, 1970). We need to be suspicious of too much suspiciousness, however, lest we never get to the "necessary and primary" (Hays, 1997, p. 218) hermeneutic of trust in interpreting the Bible (including its understanding of human beings), lest we never "get around to hearing scripture's critique of us or its message of grace" (Hays, p. 218).

We also need to recognize that some understandings of love, when pushed to an extreme, clearly harm people. To help avoid this harm we need to clarify that, by love, we do not mean a selfless love (Browning, 1987, 2002; Post, 2002a, 2002b). This is one reason I think the term altruism, with its connotation of a person motivated solely to benefit another, is a problematic way to think about love of neighbor. Jesus said "love your neighbor *as* yourself" (Matthew 22: 39), not "love your neighbor *instead* of yourself."

Another way to reduce the potential harmfulness of love (or some understandings of love) is to be

explicit about studying and affirming other ethical ideals in conjunction with love (Hays, 1996): Love of others balanced with love of self, love of others balanced with justice, and so forth. The role of discernment, or practical wisdom, in such balancing needs particular attention within our investigations.

I think at an emotional level the greatest obstacle to psychologists addressing love is the perception (and reality) that love is a soft topic in an academic disciplines that valorizes hardness. As we have seen, there are several "soft" dimensions to love, including (depending on one's standpoint) its emotional, ethical, agentic, spiritual, and religious nature. As we have seen, traditional natural science methods (especially when linked to behaviorism and logical positivist philosophies) are limited in their contributions to the ethical and other soft dimensions of knowledge about love.

Given the perception that love is a soft topic, three solutions to the problem of method of inquiry in a psychology of love can be distinguished:

1. Use hard methods.
3. Use correspondingly soft methods.
4. Use a variety of methods (both hard and soft, including natural scientific, qualitative scientific, and other disciplined methods of inquiry, including philosophical, ethical, and theological methods).

The first solution is the one to which psychologists reflexly turn, given the overwhelming prestige of science in the field. And I think there is an extremely important partial truth in this approach. Many aspects of love can be well addressed through natural scientific methods, as can be seen in the Post et al. (2003) summary of research and in the research proposals funded by the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love and the Fetzer Institute. However, the understandings produced by those approaches can only be partial (and hence potentially profoundly misleading) if the "soft" dimensions of love are omitted. We thus run the risk of forcing love into a Procrustean bed, lopping off dimensions of it that are not well captured (or not captured at all) with the scientific method, including its ethical, spiritual, and theological dimensions.

Because of the shortcomings of natural scientific methods, some propose the exclusive use of "softer" methods, in accord with the soft nature of love. Literary analyses, personological approaches, ethical analyses, theological interpretations, and so forth can be employed. Some would include qualitative

methods here as well, although most qualitative researchers see themselves as scientists who rely on empirical evidence and use carefully delineated qualitative methods to analyze data (although the nature of the empirical evidence and the methods differ from those associated with the natural sciences). Much diversity currently exists among qualitative methods (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2002; Hill & Lambert, 2004), but standards are also being raised and explicitly stated (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Stiles, 1993). Advocates of some "soft" methods argue, however, that because neither quantitative nor qualitative scientific methods can get at what is good (asserting that the survival of one's genes or one's group is the end toward which evolution moves us does not, for example, establish that that end is good, and certainly not the best end), softer analyses are necessary.

Some advocates of alternative methods are so convinced of the flaws of natural scientific methods and/or of the uniqueness of human beings (or of the uniqueness of certain *dimensions* of human beings) that they think psychologists should only employ soft methods. That produces, I think, a Procrustean problem that is the obverse of that produced by advocates of hard methods alone: By failing to use natural scientific methods, we fail to understand the very important lessons to be learned about love in general by examining evolutionary, behavioral, experiential, and situational dimensions of love obtained through natural scientific methods within psychology.

The third option, methodological pluralism, draws upon both "hard" and "soft" methods in order to take into account all the dimensions of love in developing a psychology of it. Making pains to differentiate their stance from a methodological anarchism in which any method is considered as valid as any other, Barker et al. (2002) assert that "different methods are appropriate to different problems and research questions" (p. xiv). Likewise, Post and Underwood (2002), who value empirical investigations of love, discuss potential contributions of the humanities in understanding altruistic love (p. 381). And Post, Underwood, Schloss, & Hurlbut (2002) argue for a multidisciplinary effort: "The sciences have much to benefit from the insights of the humanities into aspects of the phenomena that are possibly beyond the reach of science and yet crucial to the overall human and cultural context" (p. 9).

It is one thing to argue for methodological pluralism, of course. It is quite another to specify the exact

nature of that pluralism. Browning (2002), Post (2002b), and Underwood (2002a) point to several elements that seem to me essential. For methodological pluralism to work, dialogue, humility, and an awareness of common ground are all necessary. Open, honest, heartfelt dialogue across disciplinary, theoretical, ethical, and religious boundaries seems essential (Tjeltveit, 1999). Humility about the contributions of one's own perspective and openness to the insights of others is also critical (Browning, 2002). The psychological scientist needs to be humble, not just in the face of the empirical findings of scientific investigations, but humble about the limitations of science. The Christian ethicist or theologian working to develop a psychology of love needs to be humble, not just because of human sinfulness and limitations, but in the face of the data and the results of the hypothesis-testing methods employed by the psychological scientist.

Barker et al. (2002) make another helpful suggestion in specifying how methodological pluralism translates into the method to be employed in a given investigation: the principle of appropriate methodologies, which means that "the methods used should flow out of the research questions asked" (p. 3). Some narrowly focused research question about love thus very appropriately employ traditional quantitative methods. Some methods may be best for understanding *some* dimensions of love, but different methods best for understanding *other* dimensions. By way of contrast, a research question about love *understood comprehensively* (Johnson & Jones, 2000a) requires a more complex integrative approach. Batson (2002) likewise rejects the notion that all research needs to be experimental. "Research methods need," he asserted, "to be carefully matched to the questions being addressed" (p. 102).

The kind of methodological pluralism that I am suggesting is required to develop a comprehensive, fully adequate psychology of love, as classically understood by Christians, requires both the employment of traditional psychological methods and an expansion of methodological pluralism beyond that occurring within mainstream psychology (Johnson & Jones, 2000a). It is not enough to suggest, as Myers (2000b) seems to, that tradition is helpful to psychology only because it generates hypotheses to be tested by scientific methods. Although the knowledge quantitative methods generates is essential, scientific methods alone cannot provide the fullest understanding of the ethical dimension of love, or

the active role of God in human lives. Because the ethical and theological dimensions of human love are real, we must understand those dimensions to grasp human love fully. Ethics and theology are not reducible to science. An adequate psychology must thus incorporate the findings of quantitative methods, qualitative methods, ethical inquiries, and theological reflection. One approach well-suited for this task is a kind of integration (Collins, 2000) in which the investigator recognizes the artificiality of our sharp western distinctions between psychology, theology, and ethics, and between fact and value, draws upon both science and theology, realizes that there are empirical assumptions implicit in theological reflection and is willing to reconsider them in light of new findings, and acknowledges the ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical biases in traditional scientific methods and is willing to critique and—when appropriate—replace those assumptions with those consistent with Scripture and Christian tradition.

Another approach well-equipped to develop a comprehensive understanding of love is a pro-science (anti-scientism, Taylor, 1989) Christian psychology (Evans, 1989; Jones & Butman, 1991) that values science (along with other approaches to understanding human beings) and that will change its understanding in accord with the results of relevant scientific investigations. This is in contrast to those approaches that are deeply skeptical about science (e.g., Powlison, 2000; Roberts, 2000). The approach I am advocating values ethics and theology along with science, identifies and critiques the assumptions implicit in psychological theories and research reports, and interprets research findings and psychological theories in light of Christian ethical and theological convictions rather than in light of the ethical and philosophical assumptions that other psychologists employ when interpreting results and building theories.

This deep, rich, comprehensive psychology of love from a Christian perspective requires a frankly *particular* approach, one that draws explicitly and deeply on Christian ethical and metaphysical assumptions, in contrast to the discipline's usual aspiration to develop a *universal* understanding of human beings which all who believe in science will affirm. In fact, many psychologists will never agree that "we love because he first loves us"; that loving can be an expression of agentic action (chosen, free); that being loving is good, right, and virtuous;

and that loving God and neighbor-as-self is a fitting response to God's grace revealed in the cross of Christ. But a psychology that attempts to remove or ignore those elements and claims to produce a comprehensive psychology will inevitably produce but partial truths, not a comprehensive Christian understanding of love. Such a psychology of love must be consistent with the available data and scientific inquiries, but those data and inquiries can legitimately be interpreted in light of Christian ethical and theological assumptions. While I agree with Browning (2002) that for the purposes of a "general public philosophy" and "a public ethic" it is important for dialogue participants to "keep their focus on the common ground between them" (p. 344), I think there should also be times and places where participants think deeply and well about particular (distinctive, tradition-rooted, "coherent, canonical, content-full" Engelhardt, 2005, p. 221) perspectives—within a discipline, within an ethical perspective, and within a particular religious or spiritual faith. For the integrity of individuals, for the integrity of disciplines, and for the integrity of ethical and religious traditions, this seems vital—our deepest moral, religious, and truth-seeking passions are particular, not general. Ultimately, we will best understand love through an alternation between first rate *particular* reflection (e.g., a Christian psychology of love) and more general, high quality *public* reflection, both of which are valid (Johnson & Jones, 2000a).

I think there is also a valid place for the exploration of new approaches to understanding love that blur traditional disciplinary roles and methods. That is, not just cross-disciplinary dialogue or even collaboration, but new approaches that blend the best of more than one disciplinary approach—because love itself is an organic unity of overlapping, interpenetrating, inextricably bound dimensions. Some softness needs to be brought—explicitly and carefully—into the heart of the discipline of psychology, so it can better address the soft dimensions of human existence and better develop a complete, integrated, whole understanding of love. Let me provide two examples of this admittedly sketchy suggestion.

First, implicit in Browning's (2002) provocative suggestion—Science "should clarify and serve" "some of the ideals of human love" that emerge from its dialogue with religion (p. 335)—is a blurring of the traditional fact-value distinction, and a hint at a new and fruitful approach to love. Although advocacy of a softening of that dichotomy may be relatively new,

the reality of productive results stemming from such an approach is not.

Second, the very productive life of Gordon Allport may be taken as an example of someone whose spiritual and ethical convictions interacted fruitfully with his scientific endeavors in his invention of the field of personality psychology. In Allport's use of personality, Nicholson (2003) suggests, there was a "duality that lay at the center of his professional vision." He wanted to "correlate" psychology and social ethics" and in his approach to personality he "oscillated between the scientific and ethical meanings of the term without ever clearly stating that he was doing so" (p. 152). Perhaps even more promising is the possibility about which I hinted above: Scientific investigations of love that are explicitly ethics- and theology-laden (rather than traditional, implicitly ethics- and worldview-laden investigations that are wreathed in the rhetoric of objectivity).

We need not, I think, determine now which approach will shed the most light on love. Better to engage in theorizing about method while simultaneously engaging in a variety of research endeavors. Empirical research, innovative forms of integrative research, dialogue, and reflection on optimal method, when taken together, may lead to the most fruitful results.

Taking seriously the critics' hate of love will, I think, contribute to a better understanding of love and a more open reception to love among the critics. It may also be necessary at times, however, to explicitly *challenge* the critics of love when we think them wrong, challenging them with evidence, with arguments, with stories, with explicit and articulate advocacy of the importance of love (with psychologists' love of love), and with Christian love itself.

CONCLUSION

When love is clearly defined, when methods of inquiry are properly matched to the research questions posed (i.e., when we adopt an optimal methodological pluralism that takes seriously Christian theology and ethics as well as taking seriously relevant scientific findings), when dialogue is taking place, when we are open to new ways of understanding love comprehensively, and when psychologists' own commitments to love are well-articulated, psychologists' critical and affirming voices about love can be joined in ways that decidedly deepen our psychological

understanding of love. Christian psychologists face few more important challenges.

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