# Neighborliness

## *Poetics, Politics, and Practices of Neighbor-Love*

KUNGL. VITTERHETS HISTORIE OCH ANTIKVITETS AKADEMIEN

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## *Poetics, Politics, and Practices of Neighbor-Love*

IRINA HRON & HÅKAN MÖLLER (EDS)


Konferenser 115

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ABSTRACT
The figure of the neighbor—whether in the guise of the Good Samaritan, an adversary, an injured person in desperate need of our help or kindness, or simply an indifferent everyman—embodies the relationship between the individual, community, and sovereignty. But who qualifies as a Neighbor? How do we relate to and interact with our neighbors? And what are we to make of the different conceptions of neighborly love and community across the boundaries of culture, ethics, and faith? These questions open up the epistemological horizon of this volume. Presenting a wide range of approaches that integrate concepts from Western philosophy and literary studies, phenomenology, theology, psychoanalysis, and political theory, the contributors respond, sometimes in quite unexpected ways, to the call for a critical examination of contemporary concepts of neighbor-love and the challenging practice of being and becoming neighbors.

KEYWORDS
agape, art, comparative literature, European studies, literary studies, literature, love, neighbor, neighbor-love, neighborliness, phenomenology, philosophy, political theory, psychoanalysis, theology

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# Contents

PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL IMAGINATIONS OF THE NEIGHBOR

# FACES AND FACETS OF NEIGHBOR-LOVE

IRINA HRON & HÅKAN MÖLLER

BOTH REAL AND IMAGINED neighbors have played prominent roles in shaping our historical, philosophical, and literary annals. The figure of the neighbor—whether in the guise of the Good Samaritan, an adversary, a traitor, an injured person in desperate need of our help or kindness, or simply an indifferent everyman—embodies the relationship between the individual, community, and sovereignty. But who qualifies as a neighbor? How do we relate to and interact with our neighbors? And what are we to make of the different conceptions of neighborly love and community across the boundaries of culture, ethics, and faith? These questions open up the epistemological horizon of this volume. Presenting a wide range of approaches that integrate concepts from Western philosophy and literary studies, phenomenology, theology, psychoanalysis, and political theory, the contributors respond, sometimes in quite unexpected ways, to the call for a critical examination of contemporary concepts of neighbor-love and the challenging practice of being and becoming neighbors. How does literature approach the neighbor? How does theology? And why does psychoanalysis play a suggestive role in how we think about questions of neighborly love here and now?[1]

A common denominator, according to some of the arguments discussed in this book, is ethical considerations. More specifically, all of these fields and disciplines are fundamentally concerned with the boundary between the individual or self, on the one hand, and the intellectual and practical (e.g., spatiotemporal or gestural) means of determining moral propositions on the other. Above all, as the title of the volume suggests, aesthetic ideas play a key role. This is especially true in cases where established concepts are abandoned in favor of an approach that understands the poetic qualities of texts—even sacred texts—as

a premise for new and complex meanings that transcend conceptual thinking. From this combination of ethics and aesthetics, a number of original case studies emerge. They revolve, for example, around such diverse aspects as pre-reflective gestures of neighbor-love,[2] linguistic reflections on the complexity of the Hebrew word *hesed*,[3] the notion of (neighborly) love as *pharmakon*,[4] or the ordeal of (in)voluntary physical proximity to one's neighbor.[5] When read in context, however, the contributions reveal important similarities and unifying structures.

First, the interrelated poles of neighbor, love, and self remain closely intertwined. In particular, the concept of self in the command to love one's neighbor highlights the way in which neighbors are embedded in a structure of community and communion, however minimal it may be. In essence, love of neighbor is necessarily an interrelational, or, as some of the articles argue, an other-related relationship.[6]

A recurring question is what qualities our neighbors must possess for us to consider them as our equals, i.e., similar to ourselves. As the variety of contributions in this volume shows, a pre-reflective dimension seems to be inherent in the phenomenon of neighbor-love from its inception and persists in its many different forms. Even the famous parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37—a paradigmatic example of charity in the Judeo-Christian tradition—is built around a physical response that precedes and provokes the act of charity. The love of the Good Samaritan is a deeply visceral experience: He is moved to compassion at his very core, undergoing a literal suffering of the love of neighbor.[7] Charity thus has a physical, almost primal dimension, as Nietzsche wryly observes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "One still loves the neighbour and rubs oneself against him: because one needs warmth."[8] This leads to the achronic or ambiguous nature of language: What is said is one thing, what is done is another. The spontaneity of empathetic, supportive, or loving acts often precedes ethical reflection and can involve beings who lack language or are not acting in response to a commandment or law, dwelling in the "wordlessness of this bodily engagement."[9] These are the moments when neighborly love, phenomenologically speaking, *shows* itself—in a physical reaction, a spontaneous act, or in a gesture.

In this volume, however, neighbor-love is understood not merely as an ethical or theological category, as in the famous biblical commandment, but rather as a reflection on neighborly love also from a literary or poetological perspective. What are the poetic implications of this strange and often impenetrable "near-dweller," as Martin Heidegger famously refers to the neighbor?[10] How does an aesthetically nuanced relationship to our neighbors unfold, and why do we so often turn to the imaginary, that is, to narratives and fictions, to trace the challenges of neighborliness? How do literature and literary texts offer us insights not only into the poetics, politics, and practices of neighborliness, but also into the nature of literature itself? The answer, in short, is that there is "a kind of poetic thinking that steps into character where other forms of thinking fail."[11]

Far from being a simple analysis of a literary motif, each of the individual chapters engages critically with major philosophical and political concerns, exploring concepts of community formation and the new sense of urgency that emanates from the biblical command to love one's neighbor as oneself. By reconsidering various notions of "being neighbors"—this "particular structure composed of distance and proximity, indifference and involvement,"[12] as Georg Simmel once described it—the volume sheds new light on a number of significant questions, some of them hotly debated. In fact, many of these questions are fundamental to contemporary political debates about war, migration, and shifting scapegoating mechanisms, or the insurmountable logic of collective narcissism.[13] These debates are addressed, directly or indirectly, through reflections on the social and political function of the neighbor.

Yet, another common thread emerges from the particular moment in time during which the conference that inspired this volume was initially planned and subsequently postponed three times. It was finally held in September 2021, amidst the uncertainties of a global pandemic that no one knew when—if ever—it would subside. As a result, some articles make explicit reference to the moment in which they were written. Eric L. Santner, for example, begins his article with personal reflections on how best to love one's neighbor during COVID-19,

while Christian Benne begins his reading of Samuel Beckett's *Fin de Partie* by acknowledging that confinement has become a lived reality for many of us during the pandemic. Claudia Welz even situates her concept of second-person poetics directly in a pandemic context, where multiple lockdowns made physical copresence unattainable. This particular moment, both voluntary and involuntary, is thus woven into the volume.

Drawing on a variety of philosophical, literary, religious, psychoanalytic, and ethical vocabularies used to describe "the neighbor," this volume aims to challenge and complement previous work in the field. The ten contributions cover very different areas of interest within their respective disciplines, confronting us in various ways with often contradictory notions of the neighbor, and also with different versions of what (not) to make of the fundamental Christian injunction to love one's neighbor as oneself.

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The four sections of this volume demonstrate its broad, interdisciplinary scope by presenting distinct perspectives on the varied, often contradictory concerns of being neighbors and the nature of neighborly love outlined above.

The first section, TALES AND TROPES OF NEIGHBOR-LOVE, asks in which ways we talk *about* and even talk *to* our neighbors. What images and conceptions of neighborly love and proximity do we share across historical, national, religious, and cultural boundaries, and what kinds of stories do we read and tell about the blessings and curses of being neighbors? The three articles in this section each take a specific approach to examining how these concepts and practices of neighborliness arise from the intersection of philosophy, literature, and elements of theology and religious thought.

In her article 'Works of neighborly love: Literature, philosophy, and the Neighbor,' Irina Hron addresses the literary, philosophical, and phenomenological dimensions of neighbor-love. She argues that, phenomenologically speaking, neighborly love must be *given*, that is, it must be given voluntarily through attitudes, actions, or gestures.

Using a comparative literary approach, the author demonstrates that literature is not philosophy's adversary, but its creative interlocutor: Ilse Aichinger's poem 'Foundling,' a literary variation on the parable of the Good Samaritan, transcends anthropocentric perspectives and presents the neighbor as a being beyond denomination by translating it from human to animal. Doris Lessing's novel *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* depicts the unpredictable and accidental nature of encounters with the neighbor, leaving no room for personal choice. Finally, Amélie Nothomb's novel *The Stranger Next Door* illustrates how the neighbor can be a persistent annoyance that both irritates and resists systematic thinking. The readings of these literary works outline a nuanced poetics of neighborly love and givenness that extends beyond any anthropological, theological, or religio-ethical concept. Drawing on ancient Greek, biblical, and phenomenological references, Hron unfolds the ethical relationship that is at the very core of our living together.

There are some insightful connections to the next article in this section, Christian Benne's illuminating remarks on 'Licking your neighbour: Thinking neighbourliness with Beckett.' Through a close reading of Samuel Beckett's *Fin de Partie/Endgame*, his essay analyzes the importance of the concept of self for understanding neighbor-love. Benne argues that Beckett, inspired by Geulincxian occasionalism, overcomes existentialism as a vulgarized form of phenomenology. Against the singular "homme" and an eidetically reduced mind, Beckett brings into play relationships and the significance of gestures and mute bodily care—quite literally, even as the basis of his own theatrical poetics.

In his article 'Toward a *caninical* theory of the neighbor,' Eric L. Santer reads Kafka's short story 'Researches of Dog' as a kind of allegory that allows us to rethink the figure of the neighbor within the framework of what he calls a psychotheology of everyday life. Starting from a fracture in the constitution of "dogdom," Kafka's research dog explores a series of uncanny enigmas and paradoxes that share their perplexing quality with the commandment of neighbor-love, which necessarily remains alien and mysterious to most modern readers, most famously Sigmund Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

In a further step, Santner facetiously transfers the new science that Kafka's dog hopes to develop to the realm of "Odradek studies," thus bringing another of Kafka's creatures onto the stage. He ends with the image of a collapse of transcendence into (canine) immanence, which finally brings us back to the figure of the neighbor.

The second section, LANGUAGE, LAUGHTER, LISTENING: ETHICS OF NEIGHBORLINESS, focuses on a number of phenomena that shape and inform the ethical concerns of being a neighbor, particularly in relation to language, laughter, and the practice of listening. To this day, the biblical love commandment remains an enigma that calls us to rethink the very nature of responsibility, community, and, thus, neighborly love.[14] *Who*, we are inclined to ask, is our neighbor in the first place? And, to begin with, what *is* a neighbor? Are we talking solely about "an extension of the category of the self, the familial, and the friend," or does the term seriously imply the inclusion of *all* others, "extending to the stranger, even the enemy"?[15] How can we consider this concept outside a Christian context? The three contributions in this section explore how ethical relationships with our neighbors unfold, with a particular focus on inherent ambiguities. These include textual ambiguities in the biblical Book of Ruth and the complex nature of laughter, which can range from aggressive or violent to loving and recreative forms. This fluidity can lead to a lack of stability in meaning, identity, and compatibility, leading us to consider, for example, "whether there is a form of laughter that is compatible with neighbourly love."[16] The constant need for interpretation brings us back to the fundamental question: Who is my neighbor? In responding to our neighbor's call, a Levinasian figure of thought, we may become, in a phenomenological sense, what Bernhard Waldenfels calls *homo respondens*—one who actively and necessarily responds to the neighbor.[17]

The opening article in this section, titled 'Passionate reading: The Book of Ruth,' is written by Caroline Sauter. The author provides a close reading of the biblical Book of Ruth, with a focus on the poetological implications of love. The Book of Ruth, a literary masterpiece

of the Hebrew Bible, is read as a love story. Encompassing kinship and family, intimacy and sexuality, marriage and romance, love is manifest as attachment, affection, and devotion in a number of varieties. It is the complexity of expressing love on a textual level that is the center of Sauter's close readings. Focusing on two different aspects—family relations and kinship on the one hand, and sexuality and eroticism on the other—her contribution discusses and reflects on the poetological implications of love in the biblical text.

This is followed by Ola Sigurdson's contribution 'Can I laugh at my neighbour? On being re-created by love.' In his chapter, Sigurdson investigates whether there is a form of laughter that is compatible with (neighborly) love. He suggests that when laughter is antagonistic, it turns the neighbor into an object of ridicule, but since there are many different forms of laughter, there are many different ways of relating to the other *in laughter*. The author proceeds through an exploration of symmetry and asymmetry as well as the reciprocity between the laugher and the laughee in different forms of laughter and different forms of love. It concludes that laughter, like love, can be a source of subjective transformation, and that we can therefore learn something about what it means to be a neighbor through the relationship between laughter and love.

The section concludes with Claudia Welz, whose article 'Between you and me: Listening, neighborly love, and second-person poetics' raises a number of fundamental questions. Her argument is threefold. First, she discusses the age-old question—"Who is my neighbor?"—with reference to current problems affecting people on a global scale: Does neighborly love still include the closeness of the "nearest," as the German expression suggests, or should it be redefined to include the love of the farthest (*Fernstenliebe*)? Following Martin Buber, neighborly love is described as an I–Thou relation. In a second step, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's approach to listening as the primary act of love and Emmanuel Levinas' approach to neighborly love as "responsibility" derived from one's responsivity to the other are contrasted and compared: Can responsibility be understood literally as a response to a call? In this case, listening to that call is crucial. Finally, Kelly Oliver's

reading of "responsibility" as "response-ability" comes into focus. If we follow this path, Levinas' emphasis on the passivity of the agent when faced with a call he or she cannot meet is transformed into an active answer. The relation between activity and passivity is further reconsidered in light of Jean-Luc Marion's interpretation of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's painting *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1600) and complemented by current debates in the field of care ethics as well as recent research on the ethical demand within philosophy and Christian ethics.

The third section, PRACTICES OF NEIGHBORLY LOVE, examines the love of neighbor in a variety of contexts, from theological thought to explicit codifications and practical manifestations in space. The two contributions discuss how notions of neighbor-love are situated within historical contexts and shaped by specific value systems, as well as the necessity of rites and regulations. Additionally, neighborly love can sometimes represent the opposite of collective narcissism or contribute to the construction of various boundaries. As such, it can be seen as a praxis that may foster a "culture of love"[18] or, conversely, its troubling antithesis, echoing Freud's seminal study of *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

In her article 'Across the threshold: Monastic codification of neighbour-love,' Mette Birkedal Bruun's point of departure is that Cistercian monks are bound to a close communal life. Theirs is a life where the daily navigation of a shared space, the constant interaction, and the way in which the brothers help or hinder each other in the search for perfect humility and submission of the body is highly charged because salvation is at stake. The community is a strength, but it is also an ordeal and an instrument of discipline. All of this is expressed in terms of neighbor-love, charity, and despite its particularity, the monastic example gives rise to more overall questions as to the values, anthropologies, and teleologies that define the shapes and understandings of the notion of neighbor-love in different contexts.

Werner Jeanrond is less interested in monastic communal life than in the interconnectedness of different forms of love. In his contribu-

tion 'The fourfold praxis of love: Neighbourly love in context,' he argues that the Jewish and Christian biblical traditions have approached love of neighbor within a complex web of interdependent love relationships. Love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self are often explicitly linked. Love for God's good creation is implicitly present. This article examines this interrelational understanding of love. First, it argues for the unity of love in Christian theological thought. Second, it considers some central biblical and theological developments of charity. Finally, it discusses the relationship between love and charity and argues for the priority of the praxis of love over an ethics of love.

The fourth and final section, PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL IMAGINATIONS OF THE NEIGHBOR, acknowledges that debates in Europe about what unites and divides neighbors—both individuals, groups, and along cross-cultural lines—have undergone a striking transformation in recent decades. Formerly guarded, divisive borders have been transformed into open ones, while, at the same time, the external borders were being sealed. Today, we are entering a new era marked by rearmament and numerous conflict zones, raising new questions: What shapes our perceptions and imaginations of our neighbors in a time of globalization, increased social and geographic mobility, and—in the wake of new conflicts—the alarming re-establishment of borders and military alliances (not just in Europe)? What is the social and political role of neighbors and neighborly love, and how can we envision new ways of living together peacefully?

Michael Azar opens this section with an article entitled 'Love as *pharmakon*: Freud, the neighbor, and the political economy of narcissism.' The article begins with Sigmund Freud's conclusion, formulated in the wake of the horrors of World War I, that humans are born endowed with an autonomous and indestructible "death drive" (*Todestrieb*). From this premise, Azar seeks to unravel the ways in which Freud foregrounds this "tendency to destruction"[19] as a key to understanding human relations, be it among individuals or between communities of various sorts. How, according to Freud, can we grasp the elusive inter-

connections between aggression and narcissism, between biology and culture, or even between hatred and love? It turns out, somewhat paradoxically, that Freud is both an adamant critic of the injunction to love one's neighbor and an advocate of love as a means of preventing mutual annihilation. Love is a *pharmakon*: Both poison and remedy.

Mats Andrén's final contribution, 'Thinking responsibility for the neighbour: From Jaspers to Derrida,' offers a distinct, historically grounded perspective that brings the volume to a close. He suggests that one approach to framing images and imaginations of neighbors in a globalized era is to consider a responsibility that transcends cultural and political borders. In response to the consequences of modern technology, the post-war period has seen new efforts to redefine the concept of responsibility; a concept that explicitly seeks to reach out to neighbors across boundaries. Andrén presents the contributions of five philosophers to the concept of responsibility and its relevance to the question of the neighbor: Karl Jaspers, Jan Patočka, Hans Jonas, Karl-Otto Apel, and Jacques Derrida all wrote against the backdrop of the assaults of world wars, rapid technological advancement, environmental and nuclear threats, the post-war Cold War, and emerging globalization. Once again, the idea of a responsibility to one's neighbor appears as an unambiguous *ethical demand*.[20]

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This volume is the result of an international conference entitled 'Neighbor-Love: Poetics of Love and *Agape*,' held at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities on September 2–3, 2021.[21] Alongside the revised conference papers, the volume includes additional contributions that highlight the breadth and relevance of the topic of neighborly love. We would like to thank the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, the Wenner-Gren Foundations, and the Sven and Dagmar Salén Foundation for their generous support. We would also like to express our gratitude to all of our colleagues who have provided us with their expert support during the various stages of the editorial process.

## NOTES

**1** See the articles by Eric L. Santner and Michael Azar in this volume.
**2** See the articles by Irina Hron and Christian Benne in this volume.
**3** On this, see Caroline Sauter's article in this volume.
**4** On this, see Azar's article in this volume.
**5** On this, see Mette Birkedal Bruun's article in this volume.
**6** See the articles by Ola Sigurdson, Werner Jeanrond, and Claudia Welz in this volume.
**7** On this, see Hron's article in this volume.
**8** Nietzsche 1988, p. 19. Translation by Christian Benne (see Benne's article in this volume, p. 59).
**9** See Benne, in this volume, p. 66.
**10** The text we refer to here is Heidegger's 1951 lecture, 'Bauen, Wohnen, Denken' (Heidegger 2000); English translation: 'Building, dwelling, thinking', Heidegger 2001.
**11** See Benne, in this volume, p. 51.
**12** See Simmel 1971. German original: "jenes besondere Gebilde aus Ferne und Nähe, Gleichgiltigkeit und Engagiertheit" (Simmel 1992, pp. 766–767).
**13** See the articles by Azar and Mats Andrén in this volume.
**14** This aligns with the essay collection in Žižek, Santner & Reinhard 2005.
**15** Žižek, Santner & Reinhard 2005, pp. 6–7.
**16** See Sigurdson, in this volume, p. 116.
**17** On this, see Welz in this volume.
**18** See Jeanrond, in this volume, p. 210.
**19** See Azar, in this volume, p. 228.
**20** The ethical demand for genuine care finds its philosophical counterpart in a tradition of thought that is not committed to a normative-deontological ethics of duty or virtue, but rather emerges from our relation to others, with an emphasis on encountering and caring for the other. For a discussion of the term "ethical demand," see Løgstrup 2008 (English translation: Løgstrup 2020). The figure of neighborly love plays an important role in the work of the Danish philosopher. On this, see Hron's article in this volume.
**21** Editor Irina Hron's research was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [Grant-DOI 10.55776/M2575]. This includes her contribution to the introduction and her chapter 'Works of neighborly love: Literature, philosophy, and the Neighbor,' as well as her work as editor of this volume.

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*Tales and Tropes of Neighbor-Love*

# WORKS OF NEIGHBORLY LOVE

## Literature, philosophy, and the Neighbor

IRINA HRON

*To my neighbor and friend Florian Kafka (1983–2021)*

IT MAY WELL BE that the ability to love one's neighbor lies beyond the province of animal nature.[1] But let us just assume for a moment that the animal, too, is part of the dynamics of neighborly love. What consequences would this have for our understanding of who qualifies as a (Good) Neighbor—and who does not? Does a newborn qualify? Does an animal? Could an animal cultivate a sense of altruism if it so required? Or is the idea of a noble beast merely the expression of an anthropocentric notion of neighbor-love?[2] Literature is teeming with stories and parables in which animals show mercy to human beings, and where animals are the (only) ones who care. One could call it natural love or instinct—in contrast to romantic love or *agape*,[3] but all attempts to define the boundary between human and animal kindness conceptually disguise a more elementary fact. After all, in the moments of greatest need, it is utterly irrelevant *who* performs the "works of love" and mercy. As long as just anybody—friend or foe, stranger or confidant, man or beast—is *there* to do it.[4]

### The parable of the Good Fox

In her poem 'Findelkind' (1978; English translation: 'Foundling', 1991), the Austrian writer Ilse Aichinger (1921–2016) hauntingly depicts the precarious character of neighborly love by constantly blurring the boundaries between animal and human love.[5] The poem confronts us with the cruel fate of a frail and defenseless foundling without a name, who has been left to die in the snow-covered forest:

*Foundling*
Foisted off to the snow,
not named before angels,
no bronze, no refuge,
not presented to the fairies,
only hidden in caves,
their signs deftly
erased from the forest maps.
A crazed fox
bites and warms him,
favors him quickly with his first caresses
until, trembling and tormented,
he goes off to die.
Who helps the child?
The mothers
with their old fears,
the hunters
with their fake maps,
the angels
with their warm feathered wings
but without orders?
No sound,
no wings in the air,
no shufflings on the ground.
But come again then,
old crazy helpmate,
drag yourself back to him,
bite him, scratch him,[6]
warm him, if your predator's paws are still warm,
because except for you no one comes,
be sure of that.[7]

At the heart of Aichinger's poem is the demand to act, to help, to bring solace—an emphatic demand to care. Due to the lack of human companions available, a wild animal—a crazed fox—is called upon to take care of the abandoned child and to come to its rescue, because "except for you no one comes." But how is the beast supposed to do it? How can the wild creature, itself already on the brink of death, be expected to show tenderness to the child? It does so by biting and scratching, through physical contact, and thus, by satisfying the basic human need for another's caring presence and touch. The poem tells a story of lack, of abandonment, and, most notably, the story of the vital necessity of neighborly love and care in the moments of greatest need.

In an elaborate reading of Aichinger's poem, the Austrian novelist and playwright Marlene Streeruwitz (b. 1950) takes its essence to be an imperative call for responsibility: "The beasts of the forest. They have to provide care. The mothers. The fathers. The angels. They do not. They will not. They have not done it. They did not. But. The foundling survived."[8] Only the beast, in the guise of a crazed fox, comes to the child's aid, thus proving itself a true neighbor. Being the only one who responds to the child's appeal for help, the fox represents all the world for the foundling.[9]

What I am proposing here is to read this poem as a literary variation on the parable of the Good Samaritan as told by Jesus in Luke 10:25–37[10]—the paradigmatic case of neighbor-love in Judeo-Christian tradition. Both the Samaritan parable and the poem outline a series of existential figures of thought that go far beyond a strictly conceptual understanding of neighbor-love. Rather, as I will argue, they delineate a nuanced poetics of neighborly love and givenness that no concept—be it anthropological, theological, or religio-ethical—could ever hope to capture fully and adequately.

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The famous biblical parable begins with an act of violence which involves robbery, serious bodily injury, and attempted manslaughter: "A man [*anthrōpos*] was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went

away, leaving him half dead." (Luke 10:30) The fact that the victim does not die on the spot is only due to the arrival of the Samaritan who picks up the half-dead man[11] from the road, tends to his wounds and takes care of him. At this point, the very first words of the parable prove decisive. The ancient Greek *ạnthrōpos* refers to man as a generic name without regard to gender and is therefore rather to be translated as "human being" or "person."[12] Apparently, *ạnthrōpos* may be *anybody* and is, therefore, *everybody*. We shall come back to the intriguing nexus between anybody and everybody. Thus, the biblical text refuses to give the slightest hint as to what kind of person the badly wounded man might be. We learn nothing about the traveler's age or profession, nothing about social standing or religious affiliation. "A human being" is the most unspecific denomination imaginable, and as listeners/readers of the parable we are not able, indeed we are not even expected to form a picture of that individual.

The constellation in Aichinger's poem is quite similar. An abandoned child is "foisted off to the snow"[13] while the text reveals nothing whatsoever about its backstory: It has no name, no age, no gender, no origin. All we do know is that it is a human being—an *ạnthrōpos*—and that no one seems to have mercy on it: Not the angels, not the fairies, not the mother(s), not even the hunter. It is such stuff as Grimms' fairy tales are made of: Both Hansel and Gretel ('Hänsel und Grethel', 1810), Foundling-bird ('Fundevogel', 1810) and Snow White ('Sneewittchen', 1810) are sent to their certain death in the forest. It is an ancient story: "Take the child out into the forest. I don't want to have to lay eyes on her ever again. You must kill her and bring me her lungs and liver[14] as proof of your deed."[15] Snow White's jealous stepmother is known, above all, to have no mercy for the girl. Something collapses, breaks open, once a/the child in all its vulnerability is "foisted off to the snow," sent to the forest, and thus denied caring acceptance within the community of human beings. It is *not* "in another's hands, another's arms, another's eyes,"[16] and thus not included in the paradigm of neighbor-love and care. No fellow man has pity on it. The foundling-child becomes a borderline case of community, of *communitas*, understood as—following the lucid reflections of the Italian phi-

losopher Roberto Esposito (b. 1950)—"a debt, a pledge, a gift that is to be given."[17] In the case of Aichinger's foundling, only a shy forest animal—the fox—is willing to give this gift of love.

But let us return to the biblical parable and its commandment to love one's neighbor.[18] Crucial for the following considerations is the Samaritan's extraordinary gesture of neighbor-love triggered by the sight of the half-dead human being: "He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him." (Luke 10:34) What is remarkable here, even more than the charitable act itself, is the Samaritan's physical reaction that precedes and provokes the courageous act. Once again, the choice of words in the biblical passage—"and when he [the Samaritan] saw him [the human being], he was moved with pity"—makes it unmistakably clear that this is a thoroughly physical and, as a matter of fact, visceral reaction. The ancient Greek *splanchnizomai*, which means "to be moved with pity," "to be seized with compassion," literally refers to the innermost parts of the human body, namely its bowels (*σπλάγχνον—splanchnon*, pl. *splanchna*). According to the German *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (New Testament Theological Dictionary), the term undergoes a change of meaning from the originally rather coarse designation for the entrails of the sacrificial animal in pre-Christian literature to New Testament usage, where the term becomes an attribute of Christian conduct. In the New Testament context, the word is usually used to refer to the character of Jesus, though there are three notable exceptions. All of them occur in the context of the parables, where the verb *splanchnizomai* is used in crucial passages in the text, this time referring to strong human emotion. In the narrative of the Good Samaritan, *splanchnizomai* is singled out as "the decisive basic attitude of human and thus Christian activity."[19] And even if, according to the theological dictionary, this changed meaning hardly "betrays its original connection with the terminology of sacrifice,"[20] the dimension of violent physicality and sacrifice is still preserved throughout the text, as indicated by the Greek verb.[21] At the sight of the dying man, the Samaritan is so deeply moved that it turns his stomach. He is over-

come by an immediate gut-wrenching emotion that prompts him to act instantaneously and benevolently. It's a remarkable scene, and the startling conclusion that follows is that the "good" Samaritan[22] is not *a priori* a "good" person. He is not necessarily a better person than the priest or the Levite who would both, famously, "[pass] by on the other side" (Luke 10:31). But unlike the Samaritan, the priest and Levite are forbidden by law to touch one who is already half dead, as is the human being in the parable. They would be unclean for days and unable to perform their ministry. This sheds a different light on the failure of the two men to help. It says nothing about whether they are morally "good" or "bad" people, but merely states that the two men behave according to their religious socialization. They are aware of the purity laws imposed on them, and thus act in accordance with the law. Meanwhile, and rather unexpectedly, the Samaritan's guts turn at the sight of the half-dead body. The pitiable scene hits him in the stomach, it churns his bowels. He is violently seized and moved in his innermost being. The Samaritan literally *suffers* neighbor-love. He feels his neighbor's suffering in his own body in that very moment when a human being (*ạnthrōpos*) is revealed to him.

What the parable and Aichinger's 'Findelkind' poem (for all their differences) have in common at this point is the sudden irruption of mercy, exercised by a stranger on a stranger.[23] Moreover, in both texts, it is a stranger from whom one would have least expected it. In the New Testament, the Samaritans belong to a community "who did not enjoy any special prestige in the Judaism of that time or were even generally despised."[24] Obviously, the wounded would have chosen someone else as his savior, and his choice would have had a clearly sociohistorical and even sociopolitical background.[25] In contrast, the tension in Aichinger's poem is created by an existential encounter between animal and human, between "man-cub"[26] and fox. The poem is, among many other things, a Tale of Two Species for which the same (ethical) laws do *not* apply. Two species who—at least that's what we have to assume—do not share any concepts of right and wrong behavior. However, both parable and poem tell the story of the vital necessity of neighbor-love which is practiced by those who are not obliged to do

so, neither by blood ties nor by commandments or laws. No one would expect *them*, of all beings—neither the Samaritan, nor the fox—to take care of their neighbor. Hence the (Good) Neighbor is introduced in a guise that is not only unexpected but downright outrageous: The neighbor in Luke 10:25–37 turns out to belong to a socially marginal community of outlaws, whereas the neighbor of the poem approaches the child in the skin of a predator. This brings back the idea of the noble beast. No one knows how the wild animal will behave towards the child and whether it will behave at all. Not even the lyrical voice, urging the fox to drag its dying body back to the child ("drag yourself back to him"[27]), knows. Will the beast have pity on the foundling, or will it just follow its predatory instinct? Will it keep the child warm one last time before it perishes itself? Or will it take the child with it to its death? The fox appears as a neighbor beyond good and evil. And like the biblical parable, the poem is silent about the fate of its forsaken protagonist. We do not know if the *ạnthrōpos* of the parable will recover, we do not even know if he will survive. In the case of the poem, at least the title promises that the child—the foundling—*will* be found. We are left to hope that it is a merciful neighbor who will find it.

Yet another parallel concerns the setting of the two "neighbor love stories," both of which are situated in a barren and barely inhabitable landscape. It is no coincidence that the robbery in the Samaritan parable happens on the travel route between Jerusalem and Jericho. This road is a dangerous and deserted section of an old trade route. The desolation and danger of the road are an essential part of the parable, because in the wasteland one is more than otherwise dependent on the help of the neighbor who happens to pass by. And indeed, the sequential appearance of the three men at the scene of the crime is purely coincidental, they all pass by "by chance" (Luke 10:31). Likewise, the Snow Country in which Aichinger's foundling finds itself immersed is punctuated by a dire lack of care and responsibility. As in the fairy tale, in order to survive, the foundling will have to find its place in the world of man—in order to be granted the right to be taken care of.

At this point, the question remains *whom* we actually acknowledge as our neighbor—and why we do it. Who decides *who*—among all

beings—qualifies as a neighbor? Neither story gives a concrete answer to this. Instead, both texts are vague. The Lukian parable, to begin with, does not talk about the cries of pain the assaulted must have uttered, nor the deadly terror he must have felt. The text remains silent when it comes to the Samaritan's revulsion at the nearly lifeless body covered in blood and excrement. Instead of talking about all this, the parable *demands* something from both its protagonists and its audience. And it is an utterly radical demand: In order to love your neighbor, you must overcome those attitudes, beliefs, and fears that are the most deeply rooted in you. This may even mean that you have to break the rules, defying conventional norms and standards. To understand the radical nature of this demand, it is essential to remember that help, in the parable, comes from a stranger from whom the injured person (this is how the text is constructed) would never accept anything under other, less dramatic circumstances. The Danish philosopher and theologian Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1905–1981) puts it all in a nutshell: "[I]t is true in general that help [...] can nonetheless still be provided in such a way that the recipient may be unpleasantly affected by it, and would just as soon not have it."[28] To make clear how petrified—or simply incapable of action—the needy person must be to accept this kind of help without resistance, it is instructive to reflect on the guise in which the threatening neighbor would confront us today, here and now. Imagine the most nightmarish encounter you can think of. Would it be a terrorist? A gunman? A Taliban fighter? A humanoid AI application? This pushes to extremes what Løgstrup means when he speaks about the fact that our lives are seamlessly interwoven with the lives of others. If the half-dead man had had a choice, he would probably have preferred someone else as his neighbor and savior. But he is no longer able to make such a differentiation. Naked and helpless he lies in the wasteland, at the mercy of human and animal predators. The parallel with Aichinger's foundling is palpable.

What comes to light at this point is that we cannot choose the neighbor. We cannot cherry-pick as a neighbor whomever we consider acceptable and/or convenient. What the Samaritan is to the wounded man, the fox is to the foundling: A creature you would nor-

mally stay clear of so as not to come into close contact. By translating the neighbor from the sphere of humans into the realm of animals, Aichinger's poem leaves behind questions of gender, nationality, or religion, and thus presents the neighbor as a being beyond denomination. This statement might seem severe, but is it really? The neighbor—in the guise of a fox—is radically reduced to its impenetrable presence; the text will not and cannot provide any information about the animal's motives whatsoever. The neighbor is stripped of its religio-ethical as well as its sociopolitical garb and reduced to its core: A frightening and disturbing presence. Unpredictable and uncontrollable. And this is all true of the "Good Fox": Due to his animality, the old male fox does not act in response to an imperative or law. It is impossible to ascertain where the fox himself stands with respect to the ability to love one's neighbor. He cannot and will not reflect on the ethical basis of his actions, but rather (just like the Good Samaritan) involuntarily and immediately responds to the needs of another creature. What is unfolding at this point is a *happening*, an experience. Maybe for the first time, the foundling experiences another creature's attention and, thereby, a sense of minimal selfhood. Taking a phenomenological approach, Dan Zahavi (b. 1967) introduces the concept of a minimal self that is "integral to experience"[29] and relates to "the basic prereflective or reflexive [...] character of experience."[30] Thus, minimal selfhood is part of any experience regardless of whether this experience is "recognized as a particular intentional act,"[31] or completely unintentional. This "thinner" notion of self is something both infants and nonhuman animals, e.g., foxes, have in common with mature adults since, according to Zahavi, development does not affect or change the most basic structures of pre-reflective self-consciousness. Just like selfhood, gestures belong to the realm of pre-reflexivity: "experiences are not internal, they are not hidden in the head, but rather expressed in bodily gestures and actions."[32] A gesture is not an expression or a consequence of an (ethical) concept.[33] Accordingly, the fox has no concept of *agape* and he doesn't need one either. Rather, the concept gives way to intuition, and instead of contemplating or reflecting on neighborly love, it *shows itself*—through a

gesture. We do not know why the animal approaches the child, but it does. It *responds* to this tiny, vulnerable human being. In Aichinger's poem, the fox's brute caress, the warming scratching of a predator's paws ("Räubertatzen"[34]) turns into the ultimate charitable gesture of love. Neighborly love, phenomenologically speaking, must *be given*—in a voluntary act: Through an attitude, an action, a gesture.

## The givenness of the neighbor

If neighborly love must be *given*, who, we must be allowed to ask, gives us the neighbor who would and could perform this act of love? One answer to this question can be found in an essay entitled 'On certain modern writers and the institution of the family,' published in 1905 by the British writer and philosopher G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936).[35] A brief passage of his essay is exemplary in this regard: "We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our next-door neighbour."[36] Chesterton does not only comment on *who* it is that makes our neighbor; he also—and this rips into the heart of the question of neighbor-love—adds an explanation as to *why* we must love our neighbor. Almost on the fly, Chesterton provides us with an answer to a question Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) would, just a few years later, struggle so famously with in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930; English edition: *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930/1961):[37]

> [O]ne of the ideal demands, as we have called them, of civilized society [...] runs: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' It is known throughout the world and is undoubtedly older than Christianity, which puts it forward as its proudest claim. [...] Let us adopt a naïve attitude towards it, as though we were hearing it for the first time; we shall be unable then to suppress a feeling of surprise and bewilderment. Why should we do it? What good will it do us? But, above all, how shall we achieve it?[38]

Chesterton's answer is simple: "But we have to love our neighbour because he is *there*—a much more alarming reason for a much more serious operation."[39] We have to love our neighbor because he is *there*.

The point Chesterton makes is more complex than it may at first appear. He makes way for yet another approach towards the idea of the neighbor, namely the rather idiosyncratic etymological account Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) gives in his 1951 lecture 'Bauen, Wohnen, Denken' ('Building, dwelling, thinking') of the German *Nachbar*, referring to a somehow dubious provenance of the term: "The Nachbar is the *Nachgebur*, the *Nachgebauer*, the near-dweller, he who dwells nearby."[40] For both the Catholic (Chesterton) and the phenomenologist (Heidegger), the neighbor is, to begin with, a person who is *there*, who lives near or next to another, focusing on a certain spatial relation between individuals. Thus, being neighbors is to a certain extent a matter of spatial and frequently imposed proximity.

But there is yet another aspect that exceeds simple contiguity and is brought to bear in Heidegger's technical term for human existence, *Dasein*, which may be translated into English as "*there*-being" or "being-*there*."[41]

Thus, Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* introduces not only the formal condition for any concrete experience of and encounter with others ("Dasein is essentially Being-With"[42]), but is basically an analysis of being *there* in its "existential spatiality":[43]

> The 'here' and the 'there' and the 'yonder' are primarily not mere ways of designating the location of entities present-at-hand within-the-world at, positions in space; they are rather characteristics of Dasein's primordial spatiality. These supposedly locative adverbs are Dasein-designations; they have a signification which is primarily existential, not categorial. But they are not pronouns either; their signification is prior to the differentiation of locative adverbs and personal pronouns: these expressions have a Dasein signification which is authentically spatial, and which serves as evidence that when we interpret Dasein without any theoretical distortions we can see it immediately as 'Being-alongside' the world with which it concerns itself, and as Being-alongside it spatially-that is to say, as dissevering and giving directionality.[44]

Yet another, and for our purposes even more promising angle can be found in Chesterton's dazzling remarks which, once again, bring together the notion of neighbor and neighborly love, opening up the ethical dimension of the problem: "He [the neighbour] is the sample of humanity which is actually given us. Precisely because he may be anybody he is everybody. He is a symbol because he is an accident."[45] Not only is the neighbor a *Jedermann*, an "Everyman" (in capital letters), but he is the sample of humanity which is *given us*—and as we've already heard, he is given us by God, through God, according to Chesterton. But is it possible, isn't it even necessary, to make sense of this most fundamental injunction to "love thy neighbor as thyself" also outside a biblical context, beyond God, i.e., from a purely human standpoint?

The ethical demand for genuine care finds its philosophical counterpart in a tradition of thought which is not committed to a normative-deontological ethics of duty or virtue, but instead arises from our relation to others, focusing emphatically on the encounter *with* and concern *for* the other: "We are dependent animals in that our lives are seamlessly interwoven with the life of others."[46]

A major representative of this ethical thinking is the above-mentioned Danish philosopher Knud Ejler Løgstrup. His best-known book, *Den etiske fordring* (1956; English edition: *The Ethical Demand*, 2020), begins and ends with a reference to Jesus's proclamation of the love commandment, claiming that the love commandment relates to something fundamental in our existence and that we must make sense of it not simply as a divine commandment, but in "purely human terms."[47] Thus, Løgstrup suggests that the Great Commandment fundamentally helps us to understand an essential truth concerning our concrete existence here and now. At the center of his phenomenological approach is the idea of life and love as a *gift*. For Løgstrup, the basic structure of the world lies within human interrelatedness and, as its result, a mutual vulnerability out of which there arises a demand to care for others. His position shares several features with that of Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) and, to a certain extent, with Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), who also both believe that who we

are and how we live is to a large extent dependent upon our involvement with others.

Likewise, Løgstrup develops his notion of neighbor-love based on his conviction that it is simply impossible to meet others without being confronted with the radical demand to concern ourselves with their lives: "It is simply a fact that we are one another's world, whether we want to be or not."[48] Whether we want it or not, we mean the world to each other, which, as we've seen in Aichinger's poem, has radical consequences for living together and, even more so, for the problem of neighbor-love and care. And it should come as no surprise that, for Løgstrup, the child plays a special role within this interpretive paradigm since, more than any other living being, the child is in dire need of protection and loving care: "If they [children] do not encounter love, their future possibilities in life are destroyed."[49] The parallels to Aichinger's 'Findelkind' poem are obvious.

However, it is instructive to consider that Løgstrup does *not* develop a normative ethics in any traditional sense: "It contains no instructions, no precepts, no morals, no casuistry—nothing which takes responsibility away from human beings by solving in advance the conflicts into which the demand places us."[50] Instead, Løgstrup's demand is based on a situational ethics which "in a sense [. . . ] forces the individual to start afresh in each new situation, to the extent that it provides no precise instructions."[51] Every individual is constantly called upon anew to make responsible decisions in every moment, during every encounter with others. Loving one's neighbor is not simply a matter of acting according to a commandment or law, but a necessity arising from the principle of human interrelatedness. We are thrown back on our own responsibility—understood as non-reciprocal love of neighbor in purely human terms.

Interestingly, in Løgstrup's view, literature is key to coming to terms with philosophical problems. And he never gets tired of pointing this out:

> Only by an analysis of an episode from Joseph Conrad [. . . ], have I been able to come to the result and to make it clear that moral-

> ity does not consist in precepts, rules, maxims but is based on the challenges from life, for which reason morality hardly plays any part when things get heated.[52]

Only by an analysis of a literary text, the philosopher points out, can complex philosophical questions be addressed adequately. But how are we to understand what literature tells and teaches us about the ethical demand to concern ourselves with the lives of others? This is exactly what the idea of a poetics of love and neighborliness is all about, as the following literary example will make even clearer.

◆

In Doris Lessing's (1919–2013) 1983 novel—programmatically entitled *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* and initially published under the pen name of Jane Somers—two women meet who could not be more different: The first one is attractive middle-aged Janna, the well-off editor of a women's magazine, who has hitherto "successfully" avoided getting more deeply involved in intimate relationships—even with her late husband and her deceased mother. The other one is ragged, ill-tempered Maudie in her early nineties. By sheer chance, the two women come across each other, and their meeting becomes a life-changing encounter—a sort of, phenomenologically speaking, "unpredictable landing," as the French phenomenologist and theologian Jean-Luc Marion (b. 1946) would put it.[53] From the very first moment, their encounter is a *happening*:

> But then I was in the chemist's and *this happened*. I saw an old witch. I was staring at this old creature and thought, a witch. [. . .] A tiny bent-over woman, with a nose nearly meeting her chin, in black heavy dusty clothes, and something not far off a bonnet. She saw me looking at her and thrust me a prescription and said, "What is this? You get it for me."[54]

Little by little, self-centered Janna moves from her first act of reluctant charity ("I struggled with myself, and then gave her a hug. [. . .] I

was fighting with disgust, the stale smell of her."[55]) to caring concern, committing herself unstintingly to this "fierce angry old woman."[56] She does the shopping, the washing-up, she cleans up the cat mess, and even washes the frail body of the ninety-one-year-old woman:

> I washed and washed her, all her lower half. [. . .] When it came to her bottom she thrust it out, as a child might, and I washed all of it, creases too. Then I threw away all that water, refilled the basin, quickly put the kettles on again. I washed her private parts, and thought about that phrase for the first time: for she was suffering most terribly because this stranger was invading her privateness. [. . .] And I made her stand in the basin and washed her feet, yellow gnarled old feet.[57]

What may sound like a somewhat kitschy novel about friendship and love between two women who could not be more different, turns out to be something very different. In the context of this volume on neighbor-love, there are at least two things worth commenting on.

First, there is the ethical significance of vision and the act of seeing. Really and truly *seeing* the neighbor does not simply mean seeing the other as he or she "really" is, with all imperfections and faults. There is a fundamental difference between the empirical act of detecting and seeing. Seeing the other means seeing him or her from a close distance. There is a most noticeable passage in Kierkegaard which gets to the core of the matter:

> At a distance the neighbor is a shadow that walks past everyone's thoughts on the road of imagination, but that the person who actually walked by at the same moment was the neighbor—this he perhaps does not discover. At a distance everyone recognizes the neighbor, and yet it is impossible to see him at a distance; if you do not see him so close at hand that before God you unconditionally see him in every human being, you do not see him at all.[58]

The opening scene of Lessing's novel reads like the literary counterpart to Kierkegaard: Maudie walks into the chemist's, she walks by, stops in front of Janna, close at hand. "And this happened":[59] Janna's eyes were opened, and she realized what she had been ignoring practically all her life:

> I thought how I rushed along the pavements every day and *had never seen* Mrs Fowler, but she lived near me, and suddenly *I looked u*p and down the streets *and saw*—old women. Old men too, but mostly old women. They walked slowly along. They stood in pairs or groups, talking. Or sat on the bench at the corner under the plane tree. *I had not seen them*.[60]

By moving from not seeing to seeing, or seeing differently, Janna suddenly becomes located in and involved with the world around her: "And now it is as if a transparency has been drawn across that former picture and there, all at once, are the old, the infirm."[61] For Janna, this proves to be a hitherto unexperienced way of being-in-the-world which makes it impossible for her to continue to rely on her previous conventional world view: "But I have been thinking. *Thinking*. Not the snap, snap, intuitions-and-sudden-judgement kind, but long slow thoughts."[62]

The second thing to notice in this opening scene is the accidental character of the encounter with the neighbor. There is a striking phenomenological dimension to it, and I would like to quote a crucial passage on the phenomenon of the accident from Jean-Luc Marion's seminal work of phenomenology *Étant donné* (1997; English edition: *Being Given*, 2002)[63] which highlights its unique phenomenological significance: According to Marion, the accident "offers a privileged figure (the only one) of phenomenality, since it gives itself without preliminary, presupposition or foresight."[64] While, as we've seen in Chesterton, the neighbor is the sample of humanity which is given us, the accident *gives itself*, excluding any predictability, and thus, any choice whatsoever. Once again, it becomes clear that we cannot choose the neighbor, as was already the case in Luke and in

Aichinger's poem. Again, it is Chesterton who sets the scene by reflecting on the relationship between love for humanity, love for the neighbor, and personal choice:

> That is why the old religions and the old scriptural language showed so sharp a wisdom when they spoke, not of one's duty towards humanity, but one's duty towards one's neighbour. The duty towards humanity may often take the form of some choice which is personal or even pleasurable.[65]

There is certainly no element of personal choice in Janna's encounter with Maudie (and vice versa): "I was in a panic. I had committed myself. I was full of revulsion."[66] The reason the two women are exposed to each other is neither personal nor pleasurable: "I woke feeling ill, because of being so trapped,"[67] Janna remarks when she remembers that she had promised Maudie to visit her again the next day. It is certainly not for business, nor for pleasure. It is purely *accidental*: "But after all, she got along before I blew into her life—*crashed* into it."[68] In short, Maudie—and that's Lessing's novel in a nutshell—is the "sample of humanity" given to Janna. And, as Chesterton so precisely puts it, "because she may be anybody, she is everybody."

## Neighborly irruption

In the second chapter of his 1847 treatise *Kjerlighedens gjerninger* (English edition: *Works of Love*, 1946/1995), as I have already discussed in another article,[69] Søren Kierkegaard gives a staggering depiction of the biblical commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, focusing on the tension between equality (*lighed*) and dissimilarity (*forskjellighed*). Is it desirable or even possible, Kierkegaard asks, to love without making distinctions? Or must the demand for equality in loving inevitably be shipwrecked on man's natural inclinations? One of Kierkegaard's answers is, indeed, alarming: Only in death, he argues, do all dissimilarities disappear:

> Go, then, and do this, take away dissimilarity and its similarity so that you can love the neighbor. [ . . . ] Death, you see, abolishes all dissimilarities, but preference is always related to dissimilarities; yet the way to life and to the eternal goes through death and through the abolition of dissimilarities [ . . . ].[70]

In their interpretation of Kierkegaard's "books of love", Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner and Kenneth Reinhard tie in with the idea of the abolition of dissimilarities. They go to such lengths as to claim that "the ideal neighbor that we should love is a dead one—the only good neighbor is a dead neighbor."[71] Considering Kierkegaard's discourse on 'The works of love in recollecting one who is dead', as one of the chapters in *Works of Love* is titled, it would be somewhat short-sighted to argue that "the ideal neighbor that we should love is a dead one."[72] Unless we turn to literature.

◆

Certainly, one of the most bewildering contemporary literary variations on the disturbing claim that "the ideal neighbor that we should love is a dead one" comes from the Belgian novelist Amélie Nothomb (b. 1966) in her 1995 novel *Les Catilinaires*, strangely enough translated into English as *The Stranger Next Door* (1998). It is a slim work packed with literary, mythological, and ethical references. The story, in brief, goes as follows: Emile Hazel, a high school teacher of Greek and Latin, retires. He and his wife Juliette pursue their dream of ivory-tower solitude. They move to an idyllic and isolated cottage in the countryside, in every way the antithesis of their former city life. But their tranquility is shaken when their only neighbor, the gargantuan doctor Palamedes Bernardin, begins a succession of increasingly disturbing afternoon visits. He stays for exactly two hours, hardly ever speaks, while questions are mostly answered in monosyllables. He proceeds to drop by every day thereafter, with no change in attitude, forcing the Hazels to try a range of futile tactics—escape, frivolity, and even boredom—to put an end to their neighbor's increasingly disconcerting visits. But nothing works, and they cannot decide whether he

is an imbecile or utterly diabolical. In short, Palamedes is the "bad neighbor" *par excellence*, a "neighbor from hell," oscillating between irritating and downright threatening.

At this point, it is illuminating to attend more closely to the nature of yet another variety of neighbor-love, narrowly tied to the figure of the "monstrous neighbor" who turns out to be, as Žižek has succinctly put it, "an inert, impenetrable, enigmatic presence that hystericizes me."[73] Any "real" encounter with the neighbor is traumatizing because "the Other qua Real"[74] cannot be gentrified, not trivialized, and certainly not downplayed.[75]

It is precisely this irruption of the neighbor, in all its "impenetrable, enigmatic presence," that Chesterton portrays in his above-mentioned text from the essay collection *Heretics*. The British philosopher gives a detailed and downright ceremonial description of the on-stage appearance of this (as he describes it) "strange monster [...] of the suburban street":[76] "Hence he comes to us clad in all the careless terrors of nature; he is as strange as the stars, as reckless and indifferent as the rain. He is Man, the most terrible of the beasts."[77] Does the noble beast in the end turn out to be none other than Man himself, this "most terrible of the beasts"?[78]

Chesterton's "terrible" neighbor comes to us as the force of nature personified, a beast, a monster. Although differing in detail, it is striking how the characteristics of Chesterton's neighbor remind us of what we encounter in Nothomb's novel. Palamedes Bernardin, as well, resembles a force of nature, strange and indifferent, and his adversary Emile puts it this way: "When the cyclone hits—whether war, injustice, love, sickness, *the neighbor*—you're always alone, completely alone, you're a newborn and an orphan."[79] This immediately recalls Aichinger's 'Findelkind' and once again, in the literary text, the figures of neighbor and foundling/orphan are facing each other.

Whereas Chesterton, in his essay, seriously attacks modernist notions of family, community, and neighborliness, Nothomb's novel turns the problem of the neighbor into a bonfire of dark anecdotes. The novel provides a treasure trove of mocking remarks about (referring once more to Žižek's essay) "Neighbors and other monsters."

With relish, it spells out a variety of figures of neighbor. Among other things, the problem of an impossible taxonomy of the neighbor is discussed, while at the same time making fun of it. Once more, literature proves to be not philosophy's adversary, but its creative interlocutor. The text defies strictly epistemological taxonomies of neighbor as put forward by, for example, Kenneth Reinhard (b. 1957)[80] who distinguishes between a religio-ethical register, a sociopolitical concept, and a mathematical set of meanings of neighbor.[81] In a totally different manner, *Les Catilinaires* presents us with a witty Borgesian play with antinomies and double negations. Emile explicitly refers to Jorge Luis Borges's (1899–1986) famous fictitious Chinese taxonomy, which serves to illustrate the arbitrariness of any attempt to categorize the world, or, in our novel's case, the impracticality of categorizing the neighbor:

> "[. . . ] There's something staggering about describing a being starting with what it isn't. What would happen if we decided to first try to mention everything that a being isn't? [. . . ] Imagine, my dear friend, that I got into my head to describe you by first enumerating everything that you're not! It would be insane. 'Everything that Palamedes Bernardin isn't.' This list would be long, because there are plenty of things that you're not. Where would I begin?"
>
> "For instance, one could say that the doctor isn't an animal with feathers!"
>
> "Indeed. And he is neither a pest, nor a boor, nor an idiot!" Juliette's eyes grew wide.[82]

In a highly playful manner, Nothomb's novel illustrates in which way the neighbor appears as a persistent annoyance that both irritates and thus infinitely resists systematic thinking.

In order to understand the end of *Les Catilinaires*, however, one must return to Žižek, Santner and Reinhard's "ideal dead neighbor" and the problem of neighbor-love. One night, Emile happens to rescue his bothersome neighbor from a suicide attempt in the neigh-

bor's own garage, but he soon—and that's the fictional character's own reasoning—starts to realize the do-goodism in this gesture of saving the other's life. He should, so he considers, definitely not have saved his bothersome neighbor because "[n]one of the objections I presented to myself held up: there was not the slightest reason for him to live, there was not the slightest reason for him not to die, I had not the slightest excuse not to kill him."[83] Through the eyes of a literary character, we enter the realm of ethics and moral proposition. What is at stake here, from a philosophical point of view, are questions of (self-)righteousness and even a case of arbitrary law. According to Løgstrup, to work out what the ethical demand involves can mean that we may have to go against the expressed wishes of others, and instead use our own insight, imagination, and understanding: "The individual must use their own experience and insight, their own judgement of the other's situation and their mutual relationship, and not least, they must use their imagination, to determine with what words or with what silence, with what act or omission, the other is best served."[84]

Along these lines, the novel's protagonist callously presents us with the idea of euthanasia, of mercy killing *as* neighborly love. In the protagonist's mind the act of murder is turned into an act of grace and, eventually, into an act of purely altruistic love:

> I didn't judge the fate of another by my own criteria, I didn't perform an act that would earn me the esteem of normal people; on the contrary, I had gone against my own nature, I had put the salvation of my neighbor before my own, with no chance of being commended by my peers. I had trampled my convictions which were of little import, but also my inherent passivity, which was considerable, to fulfill the desire of a poor man—so that his wish would be granted, and not mine.[85]

In a highly disturbing manner, the idea that "the one who truthfully praises neighborly love cannot expect any gain from his work, let alone to become loved in recompense"[86] is turned inside out and

serves Emile as an explanatory model, even as plain justification for assisted suicide. He kills his neighbor by suffocating him with a pillow. As a result, his relationship with his hereafter *dead* neighbor improves considerably: "Moreover, since his death, I felt great friendship for my neighbor. It's a well-known syndrome, you love the people you help."[87] The neighbor that Emile suddenly loves is a dead one. In the end, we are left with the bizarre suggestion that suffocating one's neighbor is an act of salvation rather than an act of murder. And that's how the novel ends—with a ghastly and murderous gesture of neighbor-love.

## Postscript

We return one last time to the poem that became the starting point for these various attempts to understand the love of neighbor. Whatever the reason might be that the fox in Aichinger's 'Findelkind' approached the abandoned child in the first place, he *did* approach it; he "came near" (Luke 10:33); he did not pass by. The predator responds to the small vulnerable human being at his paws. What is it that stirs in his bowels? Hunger? Pity? A last burst of vitality? Could it be mercy? We will never know for sure. Nevertheless, or precisely for this very reason, the fox's rough caresses—the warming and scratching of its "predator's paws"[88]—turn into a pre-reflective beneficent gesture of love. It no longer matters if the fox is "good" according to a normative-deontological ethics of duty or virtue. The fox, and the fox alone, is *there*. No one else is. If it is true that we "have to love our neighbour because he is *there*,"[89] as Chesterton puts it, then it is equally true that whoever approaches us to be *there* when we are in dire need of help—whatever the motives may be—inevitably morphs into the Neighbor.

## NOTES

**1** Editor Irina Hron's research was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [Grant-DOI 10.55776/M2575]. This includes her contribution to the introduction and her chapter 'Works of neighborly love: Literature, philosophy, and the Neighbor,' as well as her work as editor of this volume.

**2** On anthropocentric philosophical preconceptions "from Descartes, to Darwin and then onto behaviourism, the cognitive revolution and the rise of cognitive ethology," see, for example, Barrett 2016, p. 26.

**3** For the different types of love (Affection, Friendship, Eros, Charity), see C.S. Lewis's *The Four Loves* (1960).

**4** This article contains condensed excerpts from my forthcoming book and is a slightly revised reprint of Hron 2024. I am grateful to the editor-in-chief of *Orbis Litterarum* for permission to reprint.

**5** On Streeruwitz's ethics of love, see Hron 2022.

**6** This verse line is curiously missing in Patricia Dobler's translation and was added by the author of this article.

**7** German original: "Findelkind/Dem Schnee untergeschoben,/den Engeln nicht genannt,/kein Erz, kein Schutz,/ den Feen nicht vorgewiesen,/in Höhlen nur verborgen/und ihre Zeichen behende/ aus den Waldkarten geschafft./Ein toller Fuchs/beißt es und wärmts,/erweist ihm rasch die ersten Zärtlichkeiten,/bis er sich zitternd und gepeinigt/zum Sterben fortbegibt./Wer hilft dem Kind?/Die Mütter/ mit ihrer alten Angst,/die Jäger/mit den verfälschten Kartenbildern,/die Engel/ mit den warmen Flügelfedern,/aber ohne Auftrag?/Kein Laut,/kein Schwingen in der Luft,/kein Tappen auf dem Boden./ Dann kommt doch du/noch einmal,/alter, toller Helfer,/schleif dich zurück zu ihm,/ beiß es, verkratz es,/wärm es, wenn deine Räubertatzen noch warm sind,/denn außer dir/kommt keiner,/sei gewiss." (Aichinger 2016, p. 94.)

**8** All translations, unless otherwise attributed, are my own. German original: "Die Tiere des Waldes. Sie müssen die Fürsorge übernehmen. Die Mütter. Die Väter. Die Engel. Sie tun es nicht. Sie werden es nicht tun. Sie haben es nicht getan. Sie taten es nicht. Aber. Das Findelkind hat überlebt." (Streeruwitz 2020, p. 60.) This is a slightly revised reprint of Streeruwitz 2011.

**9** At this point, the question arises why it is an "old crazy helpmate," Aichinger 1991, unpag.; "alter, toller Helfer," Aichinger 2016, p. 94, and not a vixen, i.e., a representative of the mother-instinct.

**10** All biblical citations follow the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

**11** Whenever I speak of "the man" or use the pronoun "he," I refer to the English translation of *ạnthrōpos* from the NRSV. This has no bearing on my own reading of *ạnthrōpos* as "person" or "human being."

**12** See *Elberfelder Studienbibel* 2021 (Lexikalischer Sprachschlüssel zum Neuen Testament, Wortnummer 447 [Lexical Language Key to the New Testament, word number 447]).

**13** Aichinger 1991, unpag.

**14** It is no coincidence that the Queen lusts after the girl's lungs and liver. Even in pre-Christian times, the lungs and liver were among the "nobler entrails" of a sacrificial animal, consumed at the very beginning of each sacrificial meal. Snow White thus is turned into a (sacrificial) animal and by means of sacrificial terminology the connection can be made to the term *splạnchna* from the Samaritan parable.

**15** Tatar 1999, p. 84.

**16** Welz 2008, p. 245.

**17** Esposito 2010, p. 6.

**18** The demand to love one's neighbor *as oneself* plays a subordinate role in this

article. On this, see Christian Benne's article in this volume.
**19** Friedrich 1964, p. 554.
**20** German original: "von seinem urspr Zshg mit der Opferterminologie [verrät]" (Friedrich 1964, p. 552).
**21** This is based on the lexical language key to the New Testament, word number 4531, *Elberfelder Studienbibel* 2021.
**22** Only the common metaphor of Good Samaritan makes the man a "good" person; the word "good" never appears in the biblical parable.
**23** On this, see Caroline Sauter's article in this volume.
**24** See the lexical language key to the New Testament, word number 1189, *Elberfelder Studienbibel* 2021.
**25** Historically speaking, the Samaritan is the neighbor from whom the severely injured (in all likelihood) Jew least expects, and desires help.
**26** This is the name/denomination by which the animals in Rudyard Kipling's (1865–1936) two famous "Jungle Books" refer to the human child and foundling Mowgli (Kipling 2008). For more on this, see my forthcoming book.
**27** Aichinger 1991, unpag.
**28** Løgstrup 2020, p. 77. Danish original: "Men det gælder i almindelighed, at en hjælp [. . . ] kan ydes på en sådan måde, at modtageren, ubehageligt berørt af den, langt vil foretrække at være den foruden." (Løgstrup 2008, p. 76.)
**29** Zahavi 2017, p. 193.
**30** Zahavi 2017, p. 194.
**31** Zahavi 2017, p. 195.
**32** Zahavi 2001, p. 153.
**33** It would lead too far afield in this context to address the scholarship on gestures in any detail. On a theory of gestures, see, for example, Agamben 2004, and, more extensively, Flusser 1991. See also the anthology on reading gestures (*Lesegebärden*) published in 2024 (Hron & Benne 2024).
**34** Aichinger 1991, unpag.
**35** Chesterton 1985.
**36** Chesterton 1985, pp. 139–140.
**37** On this, see Michael Azar's and Eric L. Santner's article in this volume.
**38** Freud 1986, p. 109. German original: "Eine der sogenannten Idealforderungen der Kulturgesellschaft [. . . ] lautet: Du sollst den Nächsten lieben wie dich selbst; sie ist weltberühmt, gewiß älter als das Christentum, das sie als seinen stolzesten Anspruch vorweist [. . . ] Wir wollen uns naiv zu ihr einstellen, als hörten wir von ihr zum ersten Male. Dann können wir ein Gefühl von Überraschung und Befremden nicht unterdrücken. Warum sollten wir das? Was soll es uns helfen? Vor allem aber, wie bringen wir das zustande?" (Freud 1972, p. 468).
**39** Chesterton 1985, p. 140.
**40** German original: "Der Nachbar ist der 'Nachgebur', der 'Nachgebauer', derjenige, der in der Nähe wohnt." (Heidegger 2000, p. 148.)
**41** See the English translation of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Heidegger, 2013. For a discussion of the term in the tradition of Leibniz, Kant, Gottsched, and Kierkegaard, see the entry in the German *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe* (Dictionary of Philosophical Terms, Regenbogen & Meyer 2013, p. 133).
**42** Heidegger 2013, p. 156. German original: "Dasein ist wesenhaft Mitsein" (Heidegger 1993, p. 120).
**43** Heidegger 2013, p. 156. German original: "existenzialen Räumlichkeit" (Heidegger 1993, p. 120).
**44** Heidegger 2013, pp. 155–156. German original: "Das 'hier', 'dort' und 'da' sind primär keine reinen Ortsbestimmungen des innerweltlichen an Raumstellen vorhandenen Seienden, sondern Charaktere der ursprünglichen Räumlichkeit des Daseins. Die vermutlichen Ortsadverbien

sind Daseinsbestimmungen, sie haben primär existenziale und nicht kategoriale Bedeutung. Sie sind aber auch keine Pronomina, ihre Bedeutung liegt vor der Differenz von Ortsadverbien und Personalpronomina; die eigentlich räumliche Daseinsbedeutung dieser Ausdrücke dokumentiert aber, daß die theoretisch unverbogene Daseinsauslegung dieses unmittelbar in seinem räumlichen, das ist entfernend-ausrichtenden 'Sein' bei der besorgten Welt sieht." (Heidegger 1993, pp. 119–120.)

**45** Chesterton 1985, p. 140.

**46** Fink 2007, p. 12.

**47** Løgstrup 2020, p. 11. Danish original: "rent humant" (Løgstrup 2008, p. 11).

**48** Løgstrup 2020, p. 31. Danish original: "Vi er nu engang hinandens verden, hvad enten vi vil eller ej." (Løgstrup 2008, p. 191.)

**49** Løgstrup 2020, p. 188. Danish original "Møder det [barnet] ikke kærlighed, tilintetgøres dets livsmuligheder." (Løgstrup 2008, p. 31.)

**50** Løgstrup 2020, p. 23. Danish original: "Det er ingen anvisning i den [fordringen], ingen forskrifter, ingen moral, ingen kasuistik, intet der tager ansvaret fra mennesket ved på forhånd at løse de konflikter, fordringen stiller det i." (Løgstrup 2008, p. 128.)

**51** Løgstrup 2020, p. 139. Danish original: "På en måde stiller den [fordringen] den enkelte på bar bund i hver ny situation, forsåvidt den ingen præcise anvisninger giver." (Løgstrup 2008, pp. 102–103.)

**52** Danish original: "Komme til de resultat og gøre det klart, at moral ikke består i forskrifter, regler, maksimer, principper, men grunder sig I de udfordringer, som tilværelsen stiller os, hvorfor en besindelse på moralen sjældent spiller nogen rolle, når det går på livet løs, har jeg kun kunnet med en analyse af en episode fra Joseph Conrad [...]." (Knud Ejler Løgstrup, 'Kunst og virkelighed', manuscript 1962, p. 1, quoted after and translated by Bugge 2017, p. 220.)

**53** Cf. Marion 2002, p. 132: "To *arrive* must here be understood in the most literal sense: not of a continuous and uniform arrival, delivering identical and foreseeable items, but of discontinuous, unforeseen, and entirely dissimilar arrivals. [...] Rather than of arrivals, we must therefore speak of the unpredictable landings of phenomena, according to discontinuous rhythms, in fits and starts, unexpectedly, by surprise, detached each from the other, in bursts, aleatory. [...] [O]ur initiative is limited to remaining ready to receive the shock of its anamorphosis, ready to take a beating from its unpredictable landing." French original: "*Arriver* doit s'entendre ici au sens le plus littéral: non d'une arrivée continue et uniforme, livrant des items identiques et prévisibles, mais d'arrivées discontinues, imprévues et toutes dissemblables. [...] Plutôt que d'arrivées, il faut donc parler d'arrivages de phénomènes, selon des rythmes discontinus, par saccades, inopinés, par surprise, détachés les uns des autres, par rafales, stochastiques [...] [N]otre initiative se borne à rester prêts à recevoir le choc de son anamorphose, à encaisser le coup de son arrivage." (Marion 2013, pp. 217–218.)

**54** Lessing 2002, p. 10.

**55** Lessing 2002, p. 24.

**56** Lessing 2002, p. 51.

**57** Lessing 2002, p. 52.

**58** Kierkegaard 1995, pp. 79–80. Danish original: "Og dog, paa Afstand, er 'Næsten' en Indbildning, han, som jo er ved at være nær ved, det første det bedste Menneske, ubetinget ethvert Menneske. Paa Afstand er 'Næsten' en Skygge, der ad Indbildningens Vei gaaer ethvert Menneskes Tanke forbi—ak, men at det Menneske, der i samme Øieblik virkeligen gik ham forbi, var Næsten: det opdager han maaskee ikke. Paa Afstand kjender Enhver

'Næsten', og dog er det en Umulighed at see ham paa Afstand; dersom Du ikke seer ham saa nær, at Du ubetinget, for Gud, seer ham i ethvert Menneske, saa seer Du ham slet ikke." (Kierkegaard 2004, p. 85.)

**59** Lessing 2002, p. 10.

**60** Lessing 2002, p. 11; my emphasis.

**61** Lessing 2002, p. 21.

**62** Lessing 2002, p. 136.

**63** Also, the gift-character of neighbor-love could be illuminated more closely on the basis of Marion's redefinition of the gift in terms not of economy but of givenness, compare, for example, Marion's essay 'The reason of the gift' (2005).

**64** Marion 2002, p. 152. French original: "[M]ais il [l'accident] offre pourtant une figure privilégiée (la seule réelle) de phénoménalité, puisqu'il se donne sans préalable, présupposé, ni prévision." (Marion 2013, p. 252.)

**65** Chesterton 1985, p. 140.

**66** Lessing 2002, p. 14. As in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Janna's response is a thoroughly physical and visceral reaction.

**67** Lessing 2002, p. 26.

**68** Lessing 2002, p. 35.

**69** See Hron 2018.

**70** Kierkegaard 1995, pp. 61–62. Danish original: "Saa gaa da hen og gjør det, tag forskjelligheden og dens Lighed bort, at Du kan elske 'Næsten'. Tag Forkjerlighedens Forskjel bort, at Du kan elske Næsten. [...] See, Døden avskaffer alle Forskjelligheder, men Forkjerlighed forholder sig altid til Forskjel, dog gaaer Veien til Livet og til det Evige gjennem Døden og gjennem Forskjellighedernes Afskaffelse [...]" (Kierkegaard 2004, pp. 68–69).

**71** Žižek, Santner & Reinhard 2005, p. 3.

**72** Žižek, Santner & Reinhard 2005, p. 3. However, I agree that for Kierkegaard the way to non-preferential neighbor-love goes through death and through the abolition of dissimilarities.

**73** Žižek 2005, p. 140.

**74** Žižek 2005, p. 143.

**75** On this, see Eric L. Santner's article in this volume.

**76** Chesterton 1985, p. 138.

**77** Chesterton 1985, p. 140.

**78** Chesterton 1985, p. 140.

**79** Nothomb 1998, p. 86; my emphasis. French original: "Quand arrive le cyclone—la guerre, l'injustice, l'amour, la maladie, le voisin—on est toujours seul, tout seul, on vient de naître et on est orphelin." (Nothomb 1995, p. 89.)

**80** At this point I would like to express my personal thanks to Kenneth Reinhard, who contributed to the conference from which this volume emerged with a personal video message from California on September 2, 2021.

**81** Reinhard 2014, p. 706.

**82** Nothomb 1998, p. 49. French original (Nothomb 1995, pp. 52–53):
"– [...] Décrire un être en commençant par dire ce qu'il n'est pas a quelque chose de vertigineux. Que se passerait-il si l'on s'avisait de dire d'abord tour ce qu'il n'est pas? [...] Imaginez, cher ami, que je me mette en tête de vous décrire en commençant par énumérer tour ce que vous n'êtes pas. Ce serait fou. 'Tout ce que n'est pas Palamède Bernardin.' La liste serait longue, car il y a tant de choses que vous n'êtes pas. Par où débuter?
– Par exemple, om pourrait dire que le docteur n'est pas un animal à plumes!
– En effet. Et il n'est pas un emmerdeuer, ni un rustre, ni un idiot.
Juliette écarquilla ses yeux."

**83** Nothomb 1998, p. 148. French original: "Aucune des objections que je m'adressais à moi-même ne tenait: il n'avait pas la moindre raison de vivre, il n'avait pas la moindre raison de ne pas mourir, je n'avais pas la moindre excuse de ne pas le tuer." (Nothomb 1995, p. 148.)

**84** Løgstrup 2020, p. 90. Danish original: "Den enkelte må bruge sin egen erfaring

og indsigt, sin bedømmelse af den andens situation og deres indbyrdes forhold, og ikke mindst må han bruge sin fantasi ti at blive klar over, med hvilket ord eller med hvilken taushed, med hvilken handling eller undladelse den anden er bedst tjent." (Løgstrup 2008, p. 124.)

**85** Nothomb 1998, p. 150. French original: "[J]e n'avais pas jugé le sort d'autrui avec mes propres critères, je n'avais pas accompli un exploit qui me vaudrait l'estime des gens normaux; au contraire, j'étais allé au rebours de ma nature, j'avais fait *passer le salut de mon prochain avant le mien*, sans aucune chance d'être approuvé par mes pairs, j'avais piétiné mes convictions, ce qui n'est pas grand-chose, mais aussi ma passivité native, ce qui est considérable, *pour exaucer le désir d'un pauvre homme—pour que soit exaucée sa volonté, et non la mienne*." (Nothomb 1995, p. 150; my emphasis.)

**86** Welz 2008, p. 243.

**87** French original: "En outre, depuis sa mort, j'éprouvais de l'amitié pour mon voisin." (Nothomb 1995, p. 150.)

**88** Aichinger 1991, unpag.

**89** Chesterton 1985, pp. 139–140.

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# LICKING YOUR NEIGHBOUR

## Thinking neighbourliness with Beckett

CHRISTIAN BENNE

IT CAN COUNT as a truism among commentators ancient and modern that understanding the precise meaning of the command to love one's neighbour as oneself is an impossible task because of the fluctuating nature of the concepts of *neighbour* and of *love*. We must not overlook, however, that the famous imperative contains a third concept that is just as inexplicable and subject to historical change as the first two: *the self*. Arguably, it is the basis of the others. Without another self, there is no neighbour and no love either. The appeal to neighbour-love thus comes to resemble the mathematical problem of an equation with three unknown variables: neighbour, love and self. Such problems can be solved, but in most cases, there is not just one, but an infinite number of possible solutions. Which do we pick? I understand the search after a poetics of neighbour-love to be rooted in the conviction that there exists a kind of poetic thinking that steps into character where other forms of thinking fail or are in need of a more nuanced approach, and which affords, to paraphrase Kant's concept of the aesthetic idea, much thought without the fossilizing telos of fixed concepts. This would best be achieved through textual complexities.[1] Jesus, when asked about the neighbour, answers not with a definition, but with a story (the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25–37)—one of an infinite number of possible stories.

Thinking with texts does not exclude conceptual reflection. By way of conceptual preparation, suffice it to say in this context that the notion of the neighbour seems to entail that I can recognize them as more or less like or at least comparable to me. A Victorian gentleman would not have considered another gentleman's servant as his neighbour even though he might have lived next door. And even in

the most democratic society imaginable not everybody I engage with territorially and socially qualifies as my neighbour. The appeal to neighbourly love thus at least potentially implies a universalism that is begging the question and that seems irreconcilable with the social conditions of most actual societies. This is as true for a community based on the competition for land, livestock and wives (the society of the Hebrew Bible) as for the modern neighbour in an anonymous apartment building. Conversely, when people no longer recognize themselves in their neighbourhood—be it, say, through migration or gentrification—they feel threatened, and they feel threatened first and foremost in their selfhood.[2]

*Nigh*, meaning "near", the etymological root of "neigh" in *neighbour*, suggests in its literal sense not just a spatial, but also a temporal proximity. The neighbour is not only the one next to me, but also the *next one* in time. This also works in other languages, most conspicuously in the term *Nächster*, as the neighbour is called in German biblical language. The Greek *πλησίον* and its Hebrew antecedents have been traced back to a semantics of "joining (others)".[3] My neighbour comes after me, and if only because she is constituted through my perception. By recognizing someone as a neighbour, I welcome them into the community and bestow on them the quality of possessing a self equal to my own.[4] We constantly need to readjust to new neighbours in such a way that a certain structural relationship between independent selves survives. This might be the reason why Leviticus 19:34 broadens the command of neighbourly love from Leviticus 19:18 to include the (resident) stranger as well.[5] The Jews of the Hebrew Bible had of course the most vivid understanding of what it meant to be strangers in a foreign land and to be those who had joined the neighbourhood, as it were, after those that had come before them.[6] This is crucial. If I do not accept my neighbours as selves equal to myself, this might be because I am a colonialist. If, in turn, I do not feel accepted, I might be a member of a suppressed minority. Before I can even begin to love my neighbours, I have to grant them a status of selfhood comparable to *my own* self, independent of accidental features such as cultural tradition, religion or language.

A problem therefore arises when we are no longer certain of what a self is and whether everyone has or is one. How can we even begin to think of loving (whatever that means) an elusive figure as the neighbour if we are unsure of our own selfhood? In that sense, neighbour-love might not primarily be threatened by secularization and the disappearance of religious commitment, but by the weakening of the idea of an autonomous subject in the wake of Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and all that happened in their wake. Where modern literature has depicted the neighbour, our volatile philosophical and theological foundations are at stake, from which dangles the concept of the self on a very thin thread (or maybe it is the other way around).

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Imagine being trapped in a small apartment with only two windows towards the outside world and a small kitchen in the back. You are a sick old man, blind, confined to a wheelchair and unable to move. You are not allowed to venture outside, and are forced to spend all day with your ancient parents, half-dead themselves, and a carer—who has heard all your stories and opinions a thousand times before. You want it all to end.

For some of us, this might not be a thought-experiment, but lived experience during or living memory of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the sake of this essay, I have borrowed this scene from a literary text that will provide me with the material, form and nuance for an attempt at poetically and textually thinking about the notion of neighbour-love. I am referring to Samuel Beckett's theatre play *Fin de partie* or, in its English version, *Endgame*, set in a post-apocalyptic world after some sort of pandemic or nuclear disaster—or perhaps just in a mental asylum or an old people's home, with Hamm the character in the wheelchair, and Clov his carer. The exact nature of their relationship is unclear; in the background, Hamm's parents briefly contribute to the conversation. Hamm likes to tell stories and needs an audience. Clov is far more than a servant and displays a fine sense of irony. The action is circular, and despite the title, there is no real ending, only a return to the same old routines. Beckett's *End-*

*game*, I will argue, is a penetrating analysis of the neighbour precisely because it understands the interdependency of neighbourliness, love and selfhood.[7]

Selfhood is a topic that fascinated Beckett from the beginning of his writing career, especially the problems and paradoxes of monadic self-containment, where the self is pictured as cut off from the world and other people. In his first novel, *Murphy*, published in 1938 and written in English, the main character, after whom the book is named, imagines his own self as a "large, hollow sphere", deliberately removed from the world and its inhabitants:

> This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain. Nothing ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it.[8]

Murphy's Cartesian fantasy has taken a big step towards the all-encompassing idea of subjectivity in the German Idealist tradition, where the world, like a victim of a collective stroke, cannot escape the cage of its own subjectivity as hard as it may try. Murphy does not take the monistic road, however, but confirms the Cartesian split between the substances:

> The mental experience was cut off from the physical experience, its criteria were not those of the physical experience, the agreement of part of its content with physical fact did not confer worth on that part. [. . . ] Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap. He was satisfied that neither followed from the other.[9]

In his favourite position, Murphy is tied up to a chair, naked, abandoned in thought. He is in some ways the archetype for Hamm from *Endgame*; like the later character he also has a nurse whose name begins with the letter C, Celia, herself resembling an archetype of the good prostitute, all body and care. Explicitly, she serves as Murphy's "body",[10] and she also feeds him. Murphy later becomes a nurse in a mental asylum himself and thus represents the two sides that are split into the two characters in *Endgame*. At the end of the novel, the impossibility of a pure, solipsistic and bodiless mental existence becomes apparent in the hapless fate of the deceased's ashes, which fall victim to a pub brawl:

> By closing time the body, mind and soul of Murphy were freely distributed over the floor of the saloon; and before another dayspring greyened the earth had been swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit.[11]

In a reversal of Murphy's self-understanding from the book's beginning, the body is not so much virtually present in the mind, but the mind actually disappears with the body.

Halfway through working on *Murphy*, Beckett discovered the Flemish 17th-century philosopher Arnold Geulincx, who subsequently became a lifelong inspiration, a fact that is still to make the impact on Beckett research it deserves.[12] Beckett's extensive notes on and excerpts of Geulincx show how he could fit him into a framework already under development before the discovery, but re-enforced and sharpened by it. Geulincx was a so-called occasionalist, who represented a heterodox hybrid of Cartesianism and Spinozism. To put it briefly, Geulincx taught an absolute distinction between mind and body: no causal relation whatsoever between them could even exist in theory. Man is an ethical being only in the interior world of thought and will. Everything relating to the body is part of the universe of nature that cannot be influenced by either. It is, as Han van Ruler has argued, a proto-existentialist philosophy-of-being for which man is a conscious entity imprisoned in or thrown into a material world. Life

is the task of coming to terms with integrating the drives of nature with the social character of human existence.[13]

Beckett took copious notes from the chapters on causality in Geulincx' magnum opus. To paraphrase one example from it: imagine an infant in a cradle crying because she wants to be rocked. When the mother finally rocks her, she does so because she wants to, *not* because of the crying. God happens to move her body right at that moment when her will to do so appears, but *not* because of it. The conclusion is that, ethically, we are not masters of our bodily actions, but only of our mental acts of willing in, as *Murphy* has it, the "universe inside". As we shall see, it is precisely this kind of proto-existentialism, which sounds slightly counter-intuitive to our modern scientific ears, which helped Beckett to overcome the fashionable existentialist philosophy of his own time.

Traditionally, God had been convenient as a source of both origin and telos, but in order for that mechanism to function, man had to observe God and make sense of His mysterious ways. What happens if God is removed from the Geulincxian universe, while the strict denial of causality between the mental and the physical is retained? I believe that this thought experiment is one key to Beckett's work.

John 4:12 famously proclaims: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us." The imperative to love one's neighbour is supposed to capture the essence of God. We can conclude that if we can no longer observe God in order to make sense of our mental and physical acts, we must make do with observing our neighbour. "He is as strange as the stars, as reckless and indifferent as the rain", says Chesterton, already no longer speaking of God, but the next-door neighbour, the "accident" that is actually "given us", i.e., whom we have not constructed from our own subjectivity.[14] Trying to make sense of the neighbour replaces trying to make sense of God. And trying to make sense of the neighbours means to make sense of other minds and bodily actions as much as of verbal utterances that might or might not relate to them.

In France, Beckett's adopted country, the human condition was understood as the predicament of "l'homme", an essentially solitary

being thrown into an empire of contingency. In a thoughtful essay on the "hero" of existentialism, the British philosopher turned novelist Iris Murdoch got to the paradoxical heart of this movement: "We are told that we are lonely individuals in a valueless and meaningless world. Yet it is also hinted that, when placing our own values and meanings, certain moves are preferable to certain others."[15] In other words, even though "l'homme" can only rely on himself (and is indeed usually thought of as a man) in order to create meaning, this creation inherently contains a comparison to other, maybe less successful attempts at artistically coping with meaninglessness.

The insistence on individual experience in existentialism was to a large degree indebted to phenomenology; in many ways, it represents a vulgar version of it (in the sense that one would speak of vulgar Marxism). In an interesting essay, published only recently from his posthumous papers, Hans Blumenberg reflected on the reason for the phenomenological privileging of the subject and, at least implicitly, this subject's relative poverty. While phenomenology in the Husserlian tradition proceeds through eidetic reduction, the object of pure intuition that is being reduced has no equivalent subject because the phenomenologist subject remains "a piece of the factual world". As a way of compensating "for the inequality between the world of the subject and of the object", this subject turns on itself and practises eidetic reduction of itself as if it was an object. The result is a kind of "self-purification from the world" by way of which the phenomenologist becomes a mere "functionary of transcendent subjectivity", deleting the most important property of his or her belonging to it: their being in the world as one among others, in both multiplicity and individuality.[16] In other words, the phenomenologist is, like Murphy, all mind and no body and forever concerned with the problem of the inscrutability of other minds and actions.

In some sense, Beckett, and in particular his theatre, reads like an anticipation of Blumenberg's insight. It also stands for a kind of literary alternative to phenomenology that at one and the same time counters the eidetic reduction of the object and dissolves the individualistic interpretation of subjectivity into a dividualistic one that acknowledg-

es both its multiperspectival nature and the fact that human subjects even in a post-human dystopia only exist by virtue of their relation to other subjects, whatever the nature of both the subject and of that relation might be. While constantly informed and parodistically in touch with existentialism, Beckett's texts refuse the limitations of the singular "homme" by focusing on pairs and unlikely companions. If one still wants to read them as heirs to eidetic reductions, as Beckett's aesthetic minimalism might suggest, then one has to read them as reductions of a very special kind, namely of types of *relationships* instead of singular beings, e.g., between master and slave, father and son, mother and child, patient and nurse, human and animal—all of which not only feature in, but represent the core of *Fin de partie/Endgame*.

Hamm is, among so many other things, an allegory of Man (capital M) who lays claim to the centre of the universe—note, for example, the repeated scenes where he orders Clov around to wheel him into the centre of the room.[17] God-like despite his physical failings, he is all intellect and stories. He is also a neighbour from hell. It transpires during the course of the play that he was responsible for the death of a neighbour who had come to ask for some lamp oil. Even though he had some left he could have shared, he, in Clov's words "told her to get out to hell", where she quite literally died of darkness.[18] Hamm is also indifferent about his parents' death and wants to get rid of everybody who might come near his house. At some point, Clov sees a boy outside, a "potential procreator", a horror vision for Hamm. In the French version he even proposes to exterminate him—using the same language which he before had reserved for rats and parasites.[19] Hamm only observes decay all around, he is longing to "be finished" and to take everything down with him on the way. With a nihilistic contempt for his own body and his own pain, dulled by painkillers, Hamm is a cynical naturalist who constantly mocks and rages against the stumps of religious heritage present in his memory. In a parody of the biblical story of Noah's ark—Ham is the name of Noah's son whose descendants are supposed to have peopled Egypt—Hamm in *Endgame* suggests building a raft in order to escape southwards, in search of "other mammals".[20]

Of particular interest for the topic of neighbour-love is one of Hamm's monologue rants where he seemingly confronts himself with his past failings in the face of time running out:

> All those I might have helped. [*Pause.*] Helped! [*Pause.*] Saved. [*Pause.*] Saved! [*Pause.*] The place was crawling with them! [*Pause. Violently.*] Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! [*Pause.*] Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbour as yourself! [*Pause. Calmer.*] When it wasn't bread they wanted it was crumpets. [*Pause. Violently.*] Out of my sight and back to your petting parties!"[21]

In the French version, the expression for "use your head" is "réflechisséz", which both stresses the reflective-intellectual imperative and the fact that Hamm addresses those whom he might have helped (he does not address Clov with the polite "vous").[22] His contempt for them seems to grow out of a resentment particularly inspired by the disgust vis-à-vis those who do not just use their intellect, but crave human touch and bodily contact ahead even of food.

Hamm tries to expose and deride the longing for human company as the animal practice of licking and petting, which, at the same time, homogenizes a species whose only redeeming factor would have been its underused ability of rational reflection and thus conceptual distinction. Where the "head" distinguishes, the body brings together. Full of resentment, Hamm is Nietzsche's last man who has replaced smugness and complacency with self-hate, its next logical step. The parallels are conspicuous. Note, for example, the flea episode, where Hamm urges Clov to exterminate the last flea that seems to have survived in the apartment. In the preface to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the last man is compared precisely to a flea, and as just as ineradicable. In the same context, the last man has the herd animal's need for the body heat of other animals: "One still loves the neighbour and rubs oneself against him: because one needs warmth."[23] This provided the basis for the modern critique of the neighbour since Nietzsche, who explicitly

and almost throughout his whole work, attacked the figure of the biblical neighbour (*Nächster*) for its homogenizing effects. To put it radically: to *lick* my neighbour makes me *like* (in the sense of *as*) my neighbour (and vice versa).

This is not as far-fetched as it may sound. Hamm's corruption of Leviticus 19:18 into "Lick your neighbour as yourself" hides a delicious and revealing word play almost reminiscent of *Finnegan's Wake*—Beckett had not been James Joyce's private secretary for nothing. The verb *lick* shares the same root as the verb *like* and also the preposition, conjunction and adjective *like*. The Germanic word **lik* originally meant "body"—it is still present in the German word *Leiche*, for "corpse"—after several sound changes of course. The word *gelic* literally meant "with the body of", i.e., "similar to". It is still present in the German word *gleich*. At the origin of these interconnected notions lies the intuition that to be like somebody was to resemble their body in the sense of "being in the body of" or "having the same shape". The verbal phrase "to like somebody" developed semantically from this, too—we *like* people, one could say, who are *like* us, who possess bodies that are *similar to* our own. The same goes, incidentally, for the French verb *lécher*, which Beckett used in the French version.[24]

Ironically, Hamm's attempt at eidetically reducing neighbour-love to its supposed visceral essence that he distances himself from is contradicted by his own behaviour and bodily needs—he truly is a model of the phenomenologist forgetful about his own self—or better: suppressive of his own failing and decaying body. He has a constant desire to be touched, caressed and even kissed:

> HAMM: Kiss me. [*Pause*.] Will you not kiss me?
> CLOV: No.
> HAMM: On the forehead.
> CLOV: I won't kiss you anywhere.[25]

Hamm compensates for the lack of licking (as it were), in this scene and in others, with a constant outpouring of stories that try to force Clov to engage with him in other ways, but communication repeat-

edly breaks down. This has often been mistaken as the central theme of Beckett's work and of *Endgame* in particular:

> HAMM: Clov!
> CLOV: [*Impatiently*.] What is it?
> HAMM: We're not beginning to … to … mean something?
> CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! [*Brief laugh*.] Ah that's a good one![26]

The joke that is no joke only confirms the impossibility to cooperate on the representational level.[27] The deep fissure between the You and the I does not allow for a We. However, there is a different level, seemingly cut off from all verbalization, where this We exists and where cooperation does take place. This is the level of action, of gesture, of doing rather than saying. Hamm can only rarely *say* "We", but Hamm and Clov *do* "We", and they do so all the time. Without cooperation and without Clov's care for Hamm and Hamm's attachment to Clov, nothing would happen or even move on stage.

Beckett is famous for working meticulously with stage directions. Most careful spectators or readers of Beckett's plays have noticed certain forms of achronicity between what is being said on stage and the movement of the actors. The opening scene of *Endgame*, for instance, is a silent slapstick set piece by Clov, mysterious to the spectator. It represents the art of the theatre proper, understood as the autonomy of movement, gesture and props.[28] Beckett's theatre is not so much "absurd", but the missing link between epic and post-dramatic theatre, i.e., a rediscovery of theatre's true potential beyond the dramatic text and long suppressed by it until its resurgence in the early 20th century.[29]

There has never been a convincing theory of the origin of Beckett's gestural theatre. I would argue that we can trace it back to his radical appropriation of Geulincx' occasionalism. If no God or pre-established harmony ensures the connection between mind and matter, speaking and acting, drama and theatre, and if we have unmasked a primitive naturalistic epiphenomenalism as a symptom of bodily

resentment, we need another strategy for making sense of the fact that we are affected by the action without being able to draw any conclusions about their causal origins in the mind—just as the words of the actors do not necessarily explain their actions. In short, we will have to let the body and the action speak for themselves rather than to deduce them from some sort of assumed external or internal essence or telos.

Here is another monologue by Hamm, spoken, according to stage directions, with "prophetic relish":

> One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me. [. . . ] Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. [*Pause*.] Yes, one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me, except that you won't have anyone with you, because you won't have had pity on anyone and because there won't be anyone left to have pity on.[30]

In this nightmarish vision, being *like* Hamm refers to an immobile, purely contemplative mode of existence whose care for others in the form of pity is only a form of diversion and exercise of power. For Hamm, who fancies himself an artist, the problem of being would consist first and foremost in the absence of an audience. We are back in the "hollow sphere" of Murphy's imagination of himself, where the body is virtualized and, at the end, despised and ridiculed—or misunderstood as the expression of destructive drives.

Clov, however, represents an opposite understanding. During the course of the play, he is unable to sit down, he can hardly even stop and is constantly on the move. He is action personified, not, like Hamm, the constructed result of fiction, storytelling and prose. In the opening scene of the play, we are, as it were, inside a skull, with the two windows resembling two eyes. Clov opens their lids, just as he takes the blindfold off Hamm's blind eyes. He breaks out of solipsism because solipsism is only a problem for the purely contemplative

stance. He replaces it with observation and with caring action. This includes us, the audience. By looking at us and speaking directly to us right from the beginning and throughout the play, Clov not only tears down the fourth wall, but erects, so to speak, a fifth wall, a space surrounding both the action on stage and the audience. We are all in it together. But are we all inside Hamm's head? Or in God's mind? Through his actions and gestures, Clov demonstrates that these questions are irrelevant. They are, in the Geulincxian sense, independent of any mind anyway. We need to observe and interpret them not by way of relating them causally to another mind or even God's mind, but by relating them to our own bodies and gestures. This includes language gestures, i.e., language understood as gestural rather than as purely semiotic representations.[31]

There is a deep lesson about neighbourliness to be learned here. How many neighbours does one speak with on a regular basis? Most likely not too many. We observe our neighbours through their actions and gestures. We perceive and react to them with and through our bodies. Maybe we hold the door for them, maybe we nod. Granted, there are not many sociably acceptable situations for licking one's neighbour, perhaps only infants as yet unable to walk or speak are excused in such instances. With our neighbours, we become performers in a play without words, *Actes sans paroles*—which, as it happens, is the title of Beckett's play published immediately after *Fin de partie*.[32] Most importantly, we need to relate to our neighbours' "acts without words" with our own acts, and not with the attempt to read their minds. There is no causality. This means observing and trusting the body or the smile, both our neighbours' and our own, on the occasionalist assumption that bodily actions are not necessarily symptoms of contemplated goalsetting, but that they just as well might be spontaneous acts of empathy, solidarity and sociability. There is no guarantee that they are, of course, but even God, when He was still alive, was unable to issue such a guarantee.

Since all the world's a stage, Beckett's new post-dramatic and post-epic conception of the theatre in the tradition of the mime also presents a new understanding of the world and its inhabitants in their

relations to each other. The fact that I as a theatregoer experience my neighbour as well as the actors as bodies that can be likened to me leads to a subtle recalibration of the original principle of neighbour-love. If my self is not an authentic essence, but part of an endless play or game—the *Endgame* never ends, Clov says he cannot finish Hamm—then this necessarily has repercussions on the other two variables. Only stories have beginnings and ends, including the biggest stories of them all, the biblical ones. Theatre only has time constraints. Tomorrow the same play will be enacted again, with different players playing similar roles. "Love your neighbour as yourself" is the opposite of constructing a neighbour in my image, but refers to the need to accept their givenness as a rule of the game.

This does not allow us to reduce them to an object of physical gratification or an instrument of our need for domination, including domination by way of pity. Rather, we could turn the Beckettian "licking" into a symbol of the common basis for a pre-reflective "minimal self" identified in recent phenomenological attempts to salvage the self from the onslaught of various centrifugal powers.[33] This kind of self is first of all an experiential self "that precedes the mastery of language and the ability to form full-blown rational judgements and propositional attitudes".[34] Although it does not yet solve the problem of forgetfulness of the phenomenologist's own body, it manages quite elegantly to overcome the potential solipsism of the first-person perspective because its whole point is that the for-me-ness at its heart is a common or even universal experience. Even though we can only experience it for ourselves, we are in principle aware of it because we can all relate to it. The social, narrated or otherwise constructed self does not exclude the experiential self's for-me-ness, but builds on it.[35] Furthermore, the minimal or pre-reflective self is even shared with beings that do not have language and linguistically rooted sociability. Licking and the experience of being licked constitutes, in many animal species, a form of bonding and attachment—not just between members of the same family or species (think of dogs licking their human owners) but also between complete strangers, to use an anthropocentric metaphor. Everybody who has ever walked a dog on a street can

testify how touch, gestures, sniffs and indeed licking creates very specific kinds of relations that are arguably no less "social" than linguistically constructed or even verbalized relations in the human sphere.

Perhaps Hamm has, to his dismay, realized that the mute or silent nature of neighbourliness and neighbour-love, its independence of voice, narration and interpretation are his own preferred domains. After all, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) also enacts neighbour-love as wordless. The Samaritan, being a stranger, does not share the same language with the man he helps. Disinfecting and bandaging the wounds and taking the injured to safety are mute forms of bodily care that are immediately understandable as rooted in a form of empathy that presupposes that the Samaritan knows what it is like to be in the place of the one he helps. Licking, touching, petting, giving a hand and so on do not need to seek legitimation in mental reflection in order to be validated as ethical acts that are constitutive of a We.

Licking or loving your neighbour, it has to be added, do not exclude all sorts of other actions, including verbal ones. Just as neighbours are not reducible to one another, the minimal self does not exclude the reflective self, although this seems to be a widespread logical fallacy. Body and mind are themselves neighbours, as it were. Love your neighbour as yourself is, with Beckett, the imperative to acknowledge that we are all of us both Hamm and Clov, forever reliant on one other, with no superior mind designed to regulate our internal conflicts. Yet which comes first? This seems to be a central question. It is reminiscent of the temporal dimension of neighbourhood sketched in the beginning. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, he who acts with mute care as neighbour to the victim of assault came last, after the priest and after the local Levite. Yet he was the first to help. Interestingly, he, who is called the neighbour, would then, according to the second greatest command, be the *object* of neighbour-love from the perspective of the victim. The reciprocity between the two seems to be achieved in spite of the fact that they come from different cultural and linguistic communities. It is not a common language or religion that makes a neighbour, as the Levite and the priest prove when

they pass the victim without helping him. Rather, neighbourliness is established by emotional empathy. Just as in *Fin de partie/Endgame*, cooperation functions by doing rather than saying, by engaging two bodies without a causal link to mental deliberations and verbalizations. If the neighbour is the one who comes after me, neighbour-love denotes the process of intuitively acknowledging him or her as being like me on the level that counts in the respective situation, as a being in need of wordless attention.

Precisely the wordlessness of this bodily engagement, based on generalizable experiential for-me-ness, protects it against potential reproaches for being ideological. It can neither be the effect, nor cause, nor object of resentment in the Nietzschean sense as it does not dress up in moralistic discourse. Hamm is a figure of resentment precisely because he cannot step out of the sphere of language and narrative. He wants it all to end because his basic metaphysic understanding of the world is a narrative one, which hence needs a proper beginning and a proper end. "Fini, c'est fini."[36] The poetics of neighbour-love is a poetics of muteness and of endlessness. It is the end of the story that never ends—and it needs to be told over and over again. And talked about. And enacted without words.

## NOTES

**1** "I am pushed to pieces of literature to discover the problem of the other", writes Stanley Cavell (Cavell 1979, p. 476). Literature seems to present a distinct mode of relating to other minds and selves, as a philosophical approach in itself. This essay is therefore based on the kind of literary philosophy developed in Benne & Abbt 2021 (pp. 80–105). It argues amongst other things that thinking in and with (literary) texts differs from mainly conceptual and propositional thought. Kant's notion of the aesthetic idea from the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* is an important point of departure. Cf. also the chapter on Beckett in Benne & Abbt 2021 (pp. 164–207) with a different focus, but including more background material than could be provided in the present article.

**2** Cf. the arguments about the weakness of the self in Adorno *et al*. 1950.

**3** See the article "*πλησίον*" in Friedrich 1959, pp. 309–316, on joining others (*sich zugesellen*), cf. p. 309. The entry is a formidable source for the ambivalence and constant reinterpretation of the concept of *the neighbour* already in the mosaic legal tradition and the later Christian context.

**4** Cf. Irina Hron's article in this volume.

**5** Cf. Friedrich 1959, p. 313: the limitation of neighbour-love to Israelites vs its uni-

versalization has been an ongoing debate since the earliest time.

**6** Cf. Bosman 2018.

**7** Quotations are from Beckett 1957; 1990, pp. 89–134.

**8** Beckett 1963, p. 76.

**9** Beckett 1963, pp. 76–77.

**10** Beckett 1963, p. 31.

**11** Beckett 1963, p. 187.

**12** Geulincx 1891–1893; 2006.

**13** Cf. Geulincx 2006, p. xxv.

**14** Chesterton 1986, p. 140.

**15** Murdoch 1997, pp. 108–115, esp. p. 110.

**16** Cf. Blumenberg 2018.

**17** Beckett 1990, pp. 104–105.

**18** Beckett 1990, p. 129.

**19** Beckett 1990, pp. 130–131; cf. 1957, pp. 103–104.

**20** Beckett 1990, p. 109.

**21** Beckett 1990, p. 125.

**22** Beckett 1957, p. 91.

**23** Nietzsche 1988, p. 19; my translation.

**24** This section is based on standard etymological knowledge and standard reference works such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch*.

**25** Beckett 1990, p. 125.

**26** Beckett 1990, pp. 107–108.

**27** Cf. the following dialogue: "CLOV: Things are livening up. [*He gets up on ladder, raises the telescope, lets it fall.*] I did it on purpose. [*He gets down, picks up the telescope, turns it on auditorium*] I see … a multitude … in transports … of joy. [*Pause.*] That's what I call a magnifier. [*He lowers the telescope, turns towards* HAMM.] Well? Don't we laugh?/ HAMM: [*After reflection.*] I don't./CLOV: [*After reflection.*] Nor I. […]" (Beckett 1990, p. 106).

**28** Craig 1957.

**29** Cf. Lehmann 2001.

**30** Beckett 1990, p. 109.

**31** Cf. e.g. Kommerell 2004; Benne 2018.

**32** Symbolically, they were bound together in one volume (as the one used here).

**33** Zahavi 2014.

**34** Zahavi 2014, p. 14.

**35** Zahavi 2014, p. 11. A pre-reflective, non-egological state can even still be self-conscious, i.e., a pre-reflective state does not exclude self-consciousness (p. 48). Interestingly, Zahavi illustrates some of his points by way of a thought experiment involving the twins Mick and Mack, who both stare at the same white wall. The argument is that only their first-personally experienced life is differently given in comparison to a third-person description of their otherwise identical experience (p. 22–23). If we swap Mick and Mack with Hamm and Clov and project the phenomenological problem back into Beckett, we can not only detect some structural similarities but also understand why and how an actual literary text adds infinite nuance and complexity to the thought experiment.

**36** Beckett 1957, p. 15.

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# TOWARD A *CANINICAL* THEORY OF THE NEIGHBOR

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*In summer 2019, Kenneth Reinhard and I were invited to give keynote lectures at a conference entitled 'Neighbor-Love: Poetics of Love and Agape' at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. The conference was scheduled to take place in April 2020 but was canceled in the wake of the pandemic. You may recall that some public intellectuals, including Giorgio Agamben, criticized such measures as part of a more general, ideologically driven "cancel culture." The governor of the state of Florida defended his prohibition of masks in schools in terms that could have been taken from Agamben's own writings; they were, he declared, part of a "biomedical security apparatus." From my own perspective, it just turned out that the best way to love one's neighbor in the time of COVID-19 was to isolate oneself, or if that wasn't possible, to maintain "social distancing" while the face of the Other was, ideally, covered by a mask.*

## I

Kenneth Reinhard[1] and I owed our invitation to the work we did together with Slavoj Žižek on a book devoted to the topic of the neighbor.[2] This co-authored volume attempted to revisit the biblical injunction to love one's neighbor, but to do so in a Freudian spirit, that is, to see what psychoanalysis might have to offer with respect to the meaning and stakes of this imperative in general and for our contemporary moment in particular. We were well aware of Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) own considerable skepticism about this commandment, a skepticism that pertained to a neighbor in one's own community as well as—and no doubt more strongly—to a stranger or foreigner who enters our midst, who appears right *next* to us (much, of course, depends on the nature of the proximity indicated by this little word;

in German, the neighbor in the biblical sense is *der Nächste*). In both instances, the neighbor remains utterly and even threateningly *alien*, utterly *other*, to Freud. One could, of course, say that Freud's attitude should not be surprising considering that what is at issue here is, after all, a divine commandment, one that perhaps only truly carries force for a person of faith, for someone who recognizes the word of God in the commandment. For a nonbeliever like Freud, it represents a moral generosity toward one's fellows who are for the most part undeserving of love or special kindness. As Freud writes,

> I must honestly confess that he [the neighbor] has more claim to my hostility and even my hatred. He seems not to have the least trace of love for me and shows me not the slightest consideration. If it will do him any good he has no hesitation in injuring me, nor does he ask himself whether the amount of advantage he gains bears any proportion to the extent of the harm he does to me. Indeed, he need not even obtain an advantage; if he can satisfy any sort of desire by it, he thinks nothing of jeering at me, insulting me, slandering me and showing his superior power; and the more secure he feels and the more helpless I am, the more certainly I can expect him to behave like this to me.[3]

The commandment remains especially alien to Freud against the backdrop of what he had at this point in his thinking concluded about the psychic makeup of human beings. As "creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness," he writes,

> their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. *Homo homini lupus*.[4]

These words are taken from the 1930 essay *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, where Freud puts forth the paradoxical thesis that man is a wolf to his fellow man not because of some failure on the part of civilization to fully tame his bestial nature; the bestial element in man is seen, rather, to be in some sense—Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) called it a dialectical sense—a by-product of the civilizing process itself. Civilization, whose fundamental aim is typically seen as the development of a degree of immunity against dangers assailing life from the outside, is, Freud argues, so constituted that it inevitably begins to attack itself in autoimmune fashion (much like the disease entity that goes by the name *lupus*). To put it in different biblical terms, what makes man a *lupus* to his fellow man is precisely what sets him apart from the animal kingdom: His sinful, fallen nature, his primordial, his "original" deviation from his divinely created nature. As the biblical traditions would have it, this is, of course, what also makes possible the emergence of the kingdom of God—I am tempted to say, the *royal neighborhood* of God—in which our various immune systems against external and internal aliens have been finally rendered inoperative.

This language has particular resonance against the backdrop of the crisis that led to the global spread of a virus itself bearing a kind of corona or crown.

Some eight years before Freud wrote *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Franz Kafka (1883–1924), a fellow German-Jewish survivor of the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, wrote a remarkable prose text published posthumously under the heading 'Forschungen eines Hundes' (1922; English edition: 'Researches of Dog', 1933). As in all of Kafka's animal stories, this one, too, serves as a kind of allegory that makes visible something distinctly human, which in Kafka's case typically overlaps with traits associated with assimilated Central European Jews. It's a dense and difficult text, and I won't venture any sort of comprehensive reading here but try instead to underline a few features that will hopefully bring us into greater conceptual proximity to the neighbor.[5]

## II

The story is presented as a kind of memoir of an aging dog reflecting on his choice as a young dog to pursue the life of the mind, one dedicated to research, to a certain kind of theoretical activity, rather than sharing in the common life of dogs. He confesses that this choice set him on a difficult path:

> "Why won't I behave like the others, live in harmony with my kind, silently accept whatever disturbs that harmony, overlook it as a little mistake in the great reckoning, and turn forever toward what binds us happily together and not toward what, time and again, irresistibly, of course, tears us out of the circle of our kind?"[6]

In hindsight, the narrator-dog seems to realize that such disturbances to the harmony of "dogdom," of *Hundeschaft*, point not to contingent and determinate errors, but to a more fundamental errancy grounded in a structural glitch in the constitution of the species: "on closer scrutiny I soon find that something was not quite right from the beginning, that a little fracture [*eine kleine Bruchstelle*] was in place."[7] He notes that a "a slight uneasiness"[8] (*ein leichtes Unbehagen*) would come over him not only in the midst of the collective but also in more intimate settings, indeed that the mere sight of another dog could throw him into a sense of helplessness and despair.[9] Call it *Unbehagen in der Hundekultur* (with a touch of canine self-hatred).

He goes on to recall the event that first set him on the course of his researches. It was an encounter with a group of seven dogs who engage in a kind of dance set to a clamorous music that seems to come from nowhere, a music *ex nihilo*. "They did not speak, they did not sing, in general they held their tongue with almost a certain doggedness [*mit einer gewissen Verbissenheit*], but they conjured forth music out of the empty space." He recalls "the way they raised and set down their feet, certain turns of their heads, their running and their resting, the attitudes they assumed toward one another, the combinations they formed with one another like a round dance."[10] At a certain point the music becomes overwhelming:

> you could attend to nothing but this music that came from all sides, from the heights, from the depths, from everywhere, pulling the listener into its midst, pouring over him, crushing him, and even after annihilating him, still blaring its fanfares at such close range that they turned remote [*in solcher Nähe, daß es schon Ferne war*] and barely audible.[11]

The young narrator-dog retreats to a pile of wooden planks and from his hiding place observes how the performance takes a new and horrifying turn; the seven dancing dogs "had truly cast off all shame" and stand upright on their hind legs.

> They were exposing themselves and openly flaunted their nakedness, they prided themselves on it, and whenever they obeyed their better instincts for a moment and lowered their front legs, they were literally horrified, as if it were a mistake, as if nature were a mistake, and once again they rapidly raised their legs, and their eyes seemed to be asking forgiveness that they had had to desist a little from their sinfulness [*daß sie in ihrer Sündhaftigkeit ein wenig hatten innehalten müssen*].[12]

The young narrator-dog's obsession with this for him deeply enigmatic, not to say, traumatic, encounter is what ultimately alienates him from dogdom and sets him on his course as a researcher with the aim of, as he puts it, solving the mystery of the dancing dogs "absolutely by dint of research, so as finally to gain a new view of ordinary, quiet, happy, everyday life." As he then adds, "I have subsequently worked the same way, even if with less childish means—but the difference is not very great—and I persist stubbornly to this day."[13] Be that as it may, the dogged pursuit of a sort of absolute canine knowledge begins with questions close to hand, questions pertaining to the most basic needs of canine life. "I began my investigations at that time with the simplest things [. . .] I began to investigate what dogdom took as nourishment."[14] The research concerns the question of the source of food, where food comes from. Does it come from the earth?

Does it come down from the sky? Can dogs influence the appearance of food? Though these are questions that have apparently concerned canine scholars for generations, our young researcher, admitting the limits to his capacity for proper scientific study, pursues such questions more or less on his own without consulting the authoritative, call them *caninical*, sources. A first conclusion would have it that dogs' main foodstuff indeed comes from the earth but that, for still unknown reasons, the earth needs dogs to help with its production: "we find this food on the ground, but the ground needs our water." He adds that the appearance of food has been known to be accelerated by means of "certain incantations, songs, and movements."[15] Later in the story, our canine researcher entertains an opposing opinion, one seemingly supported by empirical evidence, that food comes not from the ground but rather from above and is only brought down to earth by way of said canine rituals.[16]

At this point in the story, if not much sooner, the reader recognizes its fundamental conceit, namely, that the dogs live amid human beings who for some reason remain invisible to them. Put another way, the dogs live as if human beings did not exist and are thus forced to contend with a multiplicity of phenomena that must remain enigmatic to them or can be explained only by way of empirically noted regularities: Dogs pee; dogs find food on the ground. Dogs bark, howl, moan (so-called incantations); dogs find food on the ground. The story's conceit becomes completely obvious when the narrator-dog, discussing the odd variety of occupations in which dogs are employed, mentions the air dogs, the *Lufthunde*. This Yiddish expression for a dreamy, impractical person with no visible means of subsistence clearly refers here to small lapdogs who instead of being walked are carried around by their invisible masters. Known to the narrator only by hearsay, he expresses his incredulity that

> There was supposed to be a dog, of the smallest breed, not much bigger than my head, even in advanced age not much bigger; and this dog, naturally a weakling, to judge by appearances an artificial, immature, overcarefully coiffed creature, incapable of

> taking an honest jump—this dog, the story went, was supposed to move about most of the time high in the air while doing no visible work [. . . ].[17]

In hindsight, it becomes clear that the encounter that set him on his path as a researcher was with a group of trained dogs performing, perhaps in a park or public square, to the accompaniment of human musicians. We feel confident that the answer to that first enigma, "Who was forcing them to do what they were doing here?",[18] is a straightforward one: Their human masters.

Returning to the main question the narrator-dog pursues, namely, where food comes from, the story would seem to suggest that the *Bruchstelle* or fracture in the constitution of dogdom is connected to the lack of a concept of *providence*, that is, that food is *provided for them* by the good graces of human beings, that they are, as domestic animals, *dependent* on human care and nurturance. One might think of it as a thought experiment: What happens when a region of being is foreclosed from one's picture of the world? Kafka seems here to be revealing the sorts of uncanny enigmas and paradoxes that emerge once divine being—once revelation—has been foreclosed from human life, no longer figures as a central point of reference and orientation in the world, once man becomes, to coin a phrase, *ungodded*. The texture of ordinary life comes to be ruptured by a series of impossible questions that, as it were, hound human life without hope of "domestication" by either the natural or human sciences. This is, I want to suggest, at least part of what is in play in Freud's perplexity with respect to the neighbor and the commandment of neighbor-love; it's as mysterious as the spectacle of the seven dogs dancing to a music that seems to come from nowhere, as the appearance of food for a dog whose "ontology" has no place for the being of human being and who bark and howl into an empty sky.

## III

As I've noted, the narrator-dog in Kafka's story considers himself to be poorly trained and without special talent for the researches he undertakes (he later speaks of his "lack of propensity for science, scant

intellectual power, poor memory and, above all, inability to focus consistently on a scientific goal"[19]). Nonetheless he devises a series of experiments meant to grasp the causal chain that leads to the appearance of food, to catch it in action, as it were. After several efforts with uncertain outcomes, he decides to undertake a more radical experiment: To withdraw from the society of his fellow dogs and, more importantly, to fast, as if only the most radical ascetic practice—starvation—could clear the space for true knowledge about what keeps dogkind alive.[20] At the point where our canine *hunger artist*—Kafka wrote the story bearing that title the same year, 1922—has reduced himself to a minimum of bare life—we might say, to life in the neighborhood of zero—he awakens to find himself confronted by another dog who demands that he remove himself from the area. In the course of the dialogue that ensues the strange dog declares his breed—"I am a hunter"[21]—and continues to insist that our narrator-dog is interfering with his work and must leave. At a point of stalemate something remarkable occurs that, though the narrator-dog will later attribute it to his "overstimulation at the time [. . . ] nevertheless had a certain grandeur and is," he adds, "the sole reality, even if only an apparent reality, that I salvaged and brought back into this world from the time of my fast."[22] It was a moment of ecstasy, of *Außer-sich-sein*, accompanied by "infinite anxiety and shame" produced by a second encounter with music *ex nihilo*: "I noticed through intangible details [. . . ] that from the depths of his chest this dog was getting ready to sing."[23] Though the hunting dog appears to remain silent, a music emerges nonetheless:

> What I seemed to perceive was that the dog was already singing without his being aware of it—no, more than that: that the melody, detached from him, was floating through the air and then past him according to its own laws, as if he no longer had any part in it, floating at me, aimed only at me [. . . ].[24]

By this point in the story, the reader is already clued in, already prepared to attribute the music not to the narrator-dog's hypersensitivity brought on by fasting but rather to human hunters blowing their

hunting horns. And though this musical epiphany remains empty of content, the narrator-dog, as already noted, nonetheless registers its uncanny force as an interpellation addressed to him only, now as a kind of overwhelming Orphic voice (one is here reminded, perhaps, of the man from the country standing before the law, *Vor dem Gesetz*, the gates of which, as he learns in his last moments of life, were meant only for him):

> I could not resist the melody that the dog now quickly seemed to adopt as his own. It grew stronger, there may have been no limits to its power to increase, it was already on the verge of shattering my eardrums [*schon jetzt sprengte sie mir fast das Gehör*]. But the worst of it was that it seemed to be there for my sake alone, this voice, whose sublimity made the woods grow silent, for my sake alone [. . . ].[25]

At this point it is hard, at least for me, not to hear in this voice resonances with the debate between Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) concerning the status of "revelation" in Kafka's writings. The central point of contention between the two friends concerns the status of theological trace elements in Kafka's work. Scholem insists that Kafka's work is suffused with the radiance of revelation, but a revelation, as he puts it, "seen from the perspective in which it is returned to its own nothingness."[26] Scholem will later characterize this "nothingness of revelation" as "a state in which revelation appears to be without meaning, in which it still asserts itself, in which it has validity but no significance [*in dem sie gilt, aber nicht bedeutet*]," a revelation "reduced to the zero point of its own content, so to speak."[27] For Kafka, what I said earlier with respect to Freud's relation to the commandment of neighbor-love needs a slight but significant revision. A divine commandment, I said, is one that only truly carries force for a person of faith, for someone who recognizes the word of God in the commandment. Kafka seems to offer another possibility, namely, that it is possible to register the force of a commandment the content of which approaches zero.[28]

The canine version of this *Nichts der Offenbarung*, this "nothing of revelation" conveyed by a disembodied voice, a floating signifier of transcendence (that could nonetheless take residence in a particular dog, become the music of the Other *in* it), leads to a new turn in the researches of the narrator-dog. After this second musical encounter of the story—call it a *Musiktrauma*—he feels new life entering his body and, more importantly, a new sense of his proper vocation, a call to engage in a new branch of scientific research: Musicology or, as Max Weber might have put it, *Musikwissenschaft als Beruf*. More importantly, he finally realizes that the science of nutrition and the science of music overlap at a crucial juncture, one about which he already had some inklings at the time of his first musical encounter:

> Of course, there is some overlap between the two sciences [*ein Grenzgebiet der beiden Wissenschaften*] that even then aroused my suspicions. I mean the doctrine of the song that calls down food from above [. . . ].[29]

Again, the equally more and less mysterious reading would be that the various sorts of vocalizations produced by domestic animals can move their owners to feed them. The mystery here is, of course, that it is a mystery for the dogs how this works once the domestic sphere has become the site of a *humanitas absconditus*. These last thoughts about the border zone of the two sciences—where the two sciences neighbor one another—lead immediately to the narrator-dog's concluding words that repeat the theme of his lack of talent for proper science. But now, at the very end of his autobiographical reflections, he seems ready to fully embrace this lack as rooted in an instinct for a different mode of inquiry, for the development of an entirely new kind of science, a kind of new canine thinking: "It was my instinct that, perhaps precisely for the sake of science but a different science than is practiced today, an ultimate science, led me to value freedom above all else. Freedom! Of course, the freedom that is possible today—a stunted growth [*ein kümmerliches Gewächs*]. But nevertheless freedom, nevertheless a possession."[30]

## IV

At the conclusion of his inspiring reading of Kafka's "caninical" text, Mladen Dolar suggests that it was Kafka's neighbor, Freud, who had already begun to develop the warp and woof—hard not to say woof-woof—of this ultimate science of at least a kind of freedom, a freedom rooted in that border territory where nutrition and music, food and voice, seem to converge and diverge at the same time, where the locus of nutrition, the mouth, tongue, teeth, become, by a kind of intermittent fasting, the locus of the articulation of sounds (as every child is taught, one shouldn't speak with one's mouth full). Giving a psychoanalytic twist to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri's characterization of this "deterritorialization" of the mouth, Dolar puts it this way:

> By speech [the] mouth is denaturalized, diverted from its natural function, seized by the signifier (and [. . . ] by the voice which is but the alterity of the signifier). The Freudian name for this deterritorialization is the drive [. . . ] Eating can never be the same once the mouth has been deterritorialized—it is seized by the drive, it turns around a new object which emerged in this operation, it keeps circumventing, circling around this eternally elusive object.[31]

Our efforts to reterritorialize this object, to integrate the alterity of the voice into our life in the space of meaning never comes off without a remainder. As Dolar puts it, "But this secondary nature can never quite succeed, and the bit that eludes it can be pinned down as the element of the voice, this pure alterity of what is said. This is the common ground it shares with food, that in food which precisely escapes eating, the bone that gets stuck in the gullet."[32]

Here Dolar is more or less repeating with respect to the voice Freud's famous account of thumb-sucking first presented in his 1905 treatise *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*.[33] There Freud locates the birth of sexuality in the way in which a semiautonomous autoerotic activity splits off from its place and purpose in the homeostatic regulation of the organism. Before homing in on the "event" of that split,

Freud first calls into question what, with respect to sexuality, we seem naturally to see as the norm and normally see as natural.

In the first essay, which addresses what he refers to as *die sexuellen Abirrungen*, the sexual aberrations, Freud offers a rather stunning formulation of an errancy he's discovered to be constitutive of sexual "object choice," of the drive's deviation from its ostensibly destined natural object (a member of the opposite sex):

> It has been brought to our notice that we have been in the habit of regarding the connection between the sexual instinct and the sexual object as more intimate than it in fact is. Experience of the cases that are considered abnormal has shown us that in them the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together—a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct. We are thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thoughts between instinct and object. It seems probable *that the sexual instinct is in the first instance [zunächst] independent of its object*; nor is its origin likely to be due to the object's attractions.[34]

The cause of the drive's attachments would thus seem to be something other than the object, or rather an otherness in the object itself, something in the object that exceeds that object's properties, that is, all that can be accounted for by one predicate or another. The drive functions, we might say, according to a kind of "negative anthropology" (in analogy with the doctrine of negative theology, which posits God's essence beyond propositional knowledge). What arouses sexual desire is something in the object that is strangely independent of the object, a part that has no part in it, in a word, a *partial object* to which desire finds itself to be singularly partial.

In the second essay, which is dedicated to infantile sexuality, Freud uses the example of thumb-sucking—the German words Freud uses, *Lutschen*, *Ludeln*, and *Wonnesaugen*, are translated as *sensual sucking*—to illustrate the way in which a new and surprising satisfaction emerges

at the site of nursing, an activity that satisfies the demands of a homeostatic imperative of the organism. With Kafka's dog in mind, we might say that the object of the science of food thereby becomes the object of Freud's new science, the science of libido and its modes of production and circulation, the science of libidinal economy. Here it is not a question of object choice but rather of the splitting of the object into itself and something "in it" that bears its libidinal value, a something that, as Freud earlier suggests, can wander, can come to light upon seemingly aberrant objects endowing them with "it," the real thing that really satisfies. As Freud proposes, at the point of its emergence, thumb-sucking represents the infant's attempt to recapture a sensation of pleasure already experienced. "It is easy," he writes, "to guess the occasion on which the child had his first experiences of the pleasure which he is now striving to renew. It was the child's first and most vital [*lebenswichtigste*] activity, his sucking at his mother's breast, or at substitutes for it, that must have familiarized him with this pleasure. The child's lips," he continues, "behave like an erotogenic zone, and no doubt stimulation by the warm flow of milk is the cause of the pleasurable sensation." That pleasure, as noted, gains a kind of semiautonomy, becomes wayward.

> The satisfaction of the erotogenic zone is associated [*vergesellschaftet*], in the first instance [*anfangs*], with the satisfaction of the need for nourishment. To begin with, sexual activity attaches itself to [*lehnt sich zunächst an*] functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent until later [. . .]. The need for repeating the sexual satisfaction now *becomes detached from the need for taking nourishment*.[35]

Freud's account of the emergence of the libidinal object, the object invested with libidinal value, more or less maps on to the way in which Aristotle describes the emergence of chrematistics, the art of making money. There too something detaches itself from its own purpose, from its functional role in the management of the household, the *oikos*. For Aristotle, making money for the sake of making money represents

a deviation from, a perversion of, the primary function of money, that is, to enable the commerce necessary for the provision of the household.[36] For Marx, of course, chrematistics acquires a new source of energy in modern capitalism, the possibility of exploiting so-called free labor, of consuming that unique commodity, "labor power," for the production of surplus value (for Marx, this marks the shift from merchants' capital to capital proper). The capitalist qua capitalist must at some level be indifferent to the use values of the commodities he produces, for what is at issue here is the repetition of the production of surplus value, a supplementary satisfaction that attaches itself to, that "leans on," the production of commodities the use values of which fulfill some need or want. More precisely, capital discovers a new satisfaction at the point at which the laborer has, by adding use value to raw materials, earned what allows for living and working another day. The capitalist, however, discovers that he can continue sucking more labor out of the laborer and that the additional use value thereby produced becomes surplus value accruing only to the capitalist. *Sucking more*, *more sucking*, comes to be the primary activity, the raison d'être, of the capitalist's existence. In a word, capitalism *really does suck*.

## V

I want to work my way back to the question of the neighbor by way of some reflections on another text by Kafka I often return to. It's one that explores disorders of the domestic sphere—an enigmatic excess in the *oikos*—caused not by the absence of the human but by the presence of the inhuman, a strange creature called by the name—or is it just a word?—"Odradek." In his contribution to the volume on the neighbor to which Kenneth Reinhard and I also contributed, Žižek invokes this figure resistant to figural representation—Odradek would seem to be a sort of cubist entity or animate collage—as the proper name for a dimension of the neighbor that, in his view, constitutes a fundamental challenge to the Levinasian understanding of ethics as the just response "before the law" manifest in the commanding presence, the face of the Other (what Paul Celan calls *die Gegenwart des Menschlichen*). Is, Žižek asks,

> the 'neighbor' in the Judeo-Freudian sense, the neighbor as the bearer of a monstrous Otherness, this properly *inhuman* neighbor, the same as the neighbor that we encounter in the Levinasian experience of the Other's face? Is there not, in the very heart of the Judeo-Freudian inhuman neighbor, a monstrous dimension which is already minimally 'gentrified,' domesticated, once it is conceived in the Levinasian sense?

In Celan's terms, this might be thought of as the difference between art and poetry, between what is registered in *Kunst* and what is conveyed in the *Gegenwort* of *Dichtung*. "What if," Žižek finally asks, "the Levinasian face is yet another defense against this monstrous dimension of subjectivity?"[37] The concern with domestication is so crucial because the text, published under the title 'Die Sorge des Hausvaters,' is itself the story of something that can't be domesticated, can't be economized, by the "father of the house," the master of the *oikos*.[38]

In my own previous engagement with the text, I have tried to challenge what I see as another strategy of domestication, one that also presents itself as a more radical opening to the true alterity of Odradek, an opening that could be said to represent the stakes of a true life, one fully responsive to the "face" of such alterity. In her contribution to the so-called new materialism in the cultural and social sciences, an intellectual movement that promotes a more capacious understanding of the various forms of "vibrant matter" that neighbor on the human and that shares in the ethos of the "postcritical" turn, Jane Bennett writes, "Odradek exposes this continuity of watery life and rocks; he/it brings to the fore the becoming of things."[39] Odradek becomes Kafka's name for self-organizing matter, for spontaneous structural generation in the interstices between inorganic and organic vitality: "Wooden yet lively, verbal yet vegetal, alive yet inert, Odradek is ontologically multiple. He/it is a vital materiality and exhibits what Gilles Deleuze has described as the persistent 'hint of the animate in plants, and of the vegetable in animals.'"[40]

As many scholars have noted, the word "Odradek," which Kafka's narrator suggests might have Germanic and/or Slavic roots, seems to

signify, on the basis of family resemblances with words from these and other linguistic "households," a figure of radical rootlessness and non-belonging—*Od-radix*, *Od-adresa*. The meanings scholars have adduced for this word that, as the narrator indicates, may not have a meaning at all, include deserter from one's kind; apostate; degenerate; a small creature whose business is to dissuade; a creature that dwells outside of any kind, rank, series, order, class, line, or use; a creature beyond discourse or *Rede*; waste or dirt—*Unrat*—and so, to use a well-known characterization of dirt, "matter in the wrong place." All this suggests, I think, that Odradek's *ontological* statelessness—this is what Bennett emphasizes—cannot be separated from the sense of *political* statelessness evoked by the linguistic and historical overdetermination of its name (if it even is a proper name). It was precisely through the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that the state of statelessness came to be, as Hannah Arendt argued, the political symptom par excellence of modern Europe. And it was the particular "tribe" to which Kafka belonged—a tribe associated, of course, with a peculiar hybrid language between Germanic and Slavic—that came to embody a kind of foreignness that had no natural fit within any state. This was a tribe whose members could never be fully "naturalized," absorbed without remainder, and indeed thought by many of its own members to be, at its core, *passionately detached* from any historical nation-state. Think of it as a tribe whose very form of life in some sense *mattered in the wrong place*.

It is, then, not so much a "newish self"—Bennett's phrase—forged on the basis of a vital materiality and new sense of self-interest that Kafka's text helps us to envision, but rather the uncanny dimension of the "Jewish self" that he himself no doubt experienced as profoundly linked to a series of other historical and existential dilemmas. For Kafka himself, perhaps the most important of these was the dilemma of a writerly existence, an existence lived in passionate detachment from other social bonds and one apparently incompatible with being a *Hausvater*, the head of a household or *oikos*. It's worth adding one more association to Odradek. The creature's "statelessness" is underlined in the text when the narrator notes that when asked where it

lives, Odradek replies, "unbestimmter Wohnsitz," an expression with a distinctly bureaucratic tone signifying the lack of a fixed address. But "unbestimmter Wohnsitz" might also be read as a German translation of the word *utopia*; Odradek would thereby come to figure additionally as an abiding spirit or specter of utopia.[41]

Žižek for his part goes on to equate Odradek with the substance of human sexuality understood as a kind of errant remainder of our inscription in a normative order, as a spectral surplus matter that emerges when bodies come to matter:

> Odradek is thus simply what Lacan [. . . ] developed as *lamella*, libido as an organ, the inhuman-human 'undead' organ without a body, the mythical pre-subjective 'undead' life-substance, or, rather, the remainder of the Life-Substance which has escaped the symbolic colonization, the horrible palpitation of the 'acephalic' drive which persists beyond ordinary death, outside the scope of paternal authority, nomadic, with no fixed domicile.[42]

In light of these reflections, I am tempted to characterize the new science that Kafka's narrator-dog hoped to develop as "Odradek studies," the science of constitutively errant objects, of uncanny remainders, the "original" of which is the object of the drive as first elaborated by Freud apropos of sensual sucking. Against this background, such activity might be referred to as a sort of pulsive theorization.

If we read Kafka's 'Researches of Dog' at least in part—with Kafka, readings only come in parts—as an allegory of the collapse of transcendence into a space of pure immanence—in the story, of human transcendence into canine immanence—we see that a new dimension emerges, one I have elsewhere characterized as a surplus of immanence, as an *informe* remainder that now attaches itself to every form of life. There is now, on the plane of immanence, an enigmatic and uncanny sort of excess, a too-muchness inaccessible to the natural or human sciences generally on offer in the secular world (and thus demanding a new science). If we want to try to reconstruct the figure of

the neighbor, the love of whom is commanded in the biblical texts, we need to begin here, with this remainder of life that never quite fits into a form of life and that, under conditions of modernity, *cannot be re-absorbed by divine being*. My argument has been that Freud's skepticism about neighbor-love notwithstanding, his theory of human sexuality in fact provides the resources for just such a reconstruction, thereby orienting the new thinking around what I have called a psychotheology of everyday life.[43]

## NOTES

**1** Kenneth Reinhard is Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California.
**2** Žižek, Santner & Reinhard 2005.
**3** Freud 1989, pp. 66–69. In the following, I will use the German title of the book, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, which a more literal translation might render "Uneasiness in Culture."
**4** Freud 1989, pp. 66–69.
**5** For a comprehensive philosophical engagement with the text, see Schuster 2023.
**6** Kafka 2006b, p. 133; Kafka 1994b, p. 50. Subsequent references are made in the text with the page number of the translation first.
**7** Kafka 2006b, p. 135; Kafka 1994b, pp. 52–53.
**8** Kafka 2006b, p. 135; Kafka 1994b, pp. 52–53.
**9** Kafka 2006b, p. 132; Kafka 1994b, p. 48.
**10** Kafka 2006b, p. 134; Kafka 1994b, pp. 51–52.
**11** Kafka 2006b, p. 135; Kafka 1994b, pp. 52–53.
**12** Kafka 2006b, p. 136; Kafka 1994b, pp. 54–55.
**13** Kafka 2006b, p. 138; Kafka 1994b, p. 57.
**14** Kafka 2006b, p. 138; Kafka 1994b, p. 58.
**15** Kafka 2006b, p. 139; Kafka 1994b, p. 59.
**16** Kafka 2006b, p. 151; Kafka 1994b, p. 77.
**17** Kafka 2006b, p. 143; Kafka 1994b, p. 66.
**18** Kafka 2006b, p. 136; Kafka 1994b, p. 54.
**19** Kafka 2006b, pp. 160–161; Kafka 1994b, p. 92.
**20** I'm alluding here, of course, to the Brecht-Weil song 'What Keeps Mankind Alive?', which would be sung some six years later at the *Theater am Schiffbauerdamm*. The German title is ‚Ballade über die Frage: Wovon lebt der Mensch?'.
**21** Kafka 2006b, p. 158; Kafka 1994b, p. 89.
**22** Kafka 2006b, p. 159; Kafka 1994b, p. 90.
**23** Kafka 2006b, p. 159; Kafka 1994b, pp. 89–90.
**24** Kafka 2006b, p. 159; Kafka 1994b, p. 90.
**25** Kafka 2006b, p. 159; Kafka 1994b, p. 90.
**26** Scholem 1992, p. 126, letter of July 17, 1934.
**27** Scholem 1992, p. 142, letter of September 20, 1934. Samuel Beckett's *Worstward Ho* to which I've referred provides an entire series of "worst words" for what Scholem was after, for example: "Least never to be naught. Never to naught be brought. Never by naught be nulled. Unnullable least." See Beckett 1996, p. 106.

**28** In a brilliant lecture on Heidegger, Dieter Thomä argued that Heidegger's entire philosophical project could be understood as a series of attempts to distill into a pure imperative, into a pure call without content, the force of Being in history, see Thomä 2015.
**29** Kafka 2006b, p. 160; Kafka 1994b, p. 92.
**30** Kafka 2006b, p. 161; Kafka 1994b, pp. 92–93. One will recall in this context Celan's characterization of Lucile's counterword in Büchner's *Death of Danton*: "it is an act of freedom. It is a step." (Celan 2001, p. 403.)
**31** Dolar 2006, pp. 186–187.
**32** Dolar 2006, p. 187. The "anal" complement to this "oral" object might be characterized as the indigestible remainder that we always at some level retain whether we want to or not.
**33** Freud 2000.
**34** Freud 2000, pp. 13–14; my emphasis.
**35** Freud 2000, pp. 47–48; my emphasis.
**36** While revising this chapter a relevant anniversary took place. Fifty years had passed since the publication of Milton Friedman's seminal essay 'The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits' in the *New York Times Magazine*, see Friedman 1970. The essay has been credited with inaugurating a new era of corporate greed, a pure ethos of chrematistics.
**37** See Žižek 2005, p. 163.
**38** Kafka 1994a. Corngold (cf. Kafka 2006a) translates the title as 'The Worry of the Father of the Family'.
**39** Bennett 2010, p. 8. Odradek's preferred pronouns would seem to be "he/it."
**40** Bennett 2010, p. 8.
**41** Odradek's laughter that immediately follows seems to emphasize the spectral over the spiritual: "it is a kind of laughter that can only be produced without lungs. It sounds more or less like the rustling of fallen leaves." See, once more, Kafka 2006b, pp. 72–73.
**42** Žižek 2005, p. 166–167.
**43** This is a slightly revised version of chapter 4 from Santner 2022.

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*Language, Laughter, Listening: Ethics of Neighborliness*

# PASSIONATE READING

## The Book of Ruth

CAROLINE SAUTER

THE NARRATIVE CONTAINED in the biblical Book of Ruth fits the topic of this volume, "neighbor-love," perfectly: A young woman flees her home country, where hunger and destruction threaten, and comes to a land whose customs, language, and religion are unknown to her, facing a very uncertain future. Yet a twofold love rescues her and provides her with safety, security, and posterity: The love and loyalty she shows her mother-in-law, and the love she receives from a neighbor who decides to become her "redeemer." In fact, Ruth's very name makes her a neighbor and connects her with the idea of "neighbor-love" as mapped out in its many aspects in this volume: Etymologically, the name Ruth possibly means "friend," "companion," or possibly "neighbor" (in the sense of the German *Nächste*).[1]

In this story of a love that seems to be neighborly in the first place, one word runs as a leitmotif, a red thread through the entire narrative: The Hebrew word חֶסֶד (*hesed*)[2]—which is often translated as "love," but which also means "kindness," "charity," "loyalty," "grace," "mercy," "faithfulness," "goodness," or "solidarity."[3] Landy remarks that חֶסֶד is "characterized by selflessness," thus resembling the Greek and Christian concept of *agape* or "neighbor-love."[4] However, the word allows for many different translations and interpretations: "kindness,"[5] "solidarity,"[6] "kind act," "charity," or "loyalty."[7] It is the complexity of חֶסֶד, which encompasses neighborly love but also goes beyond it, that will be at the center of my close readings in the Book of Ruth, in which love is narrated and expressed in manifold ways.

*Ruth* is a story about kinship and family, intimacy and sexuality, marriage and romance. Love is manifest as attachment, affection, and

devotion in a number of varieties, encompassing "the four loves" that C.S. Lewis famously presented in his 1960 study: *storge*, *philia*, *agape*, and *eros*, or—in Lewis's translation—*affection*, *friendship*, *charity*, and *eros*.[8] On a plot level, the Book of Ruth is a seemingly mundane love story that finds itself—quite surprisingly, to some[9]—within the biblical canon. In Phyllis Trible's words, it is "a human comedy,"[10] deeply rooted in the human world with human affairs and human relations, and hence, as Francis Landy remarks sarcastically, this "romantic idyll" has mostly been "neglected by scholars enamoured of the serious matters of history and theology."[11]

It is therefore unsurprising that *Ruth* has brought about myriads of—seemingly more "serious"—interpretations that read the supposedly naïve romanticism of its love story symbolically, metaphorically, or allegorically: Throughout the centuries, both Jewish and Christian interpreters have understood the language and the symbolism of love in the Book of Ruth as pointing to God's kindness towards his people, whether this is perceived as Israel or as the Church. Among Christian readers, for instance, the figure of Boaz has often been interpreted as "prefiguring Christ,"[12] or as "a figure of YHWH,"[13] and the way he is "dealing kindly" (2:10) with Ruth is often understood as the direct fulfilment of Naomi's blessing of her daughters-in-law: "May the Lord deal kindly with you" (1:8), thus equating Boaz and God.[14] Ruth's fervent and radical statement of loyalty to Naomi (1:16–17) is sometimes understood as a symbol for Christian conversion, and Ruth herself as a figure of Christ.[15]

It has also been observed in most, if not all commentaries that all characters in the Book of Ruth have "telling names"[16]—*Ruth* means "friend" or "companion," *Naomi* "sweet one" or "dear one" but attempts to call herself *Mara*, "bitter one" (1:20);[17] *Boaz* means "powerful" or "potent"[18]—so that the characters themselves are often read as allegories.[19] And even the nighttime encounter between Ruth and Boaz on the threshing floor, bristling with eroticism, has been sublimized in allegorical interpretations that see a divine/human analogy at work.

Rather than following allegorical interpretations, my reading, in contrast, will depart from the very material of the text: The words the

text is made of, specifically the words used for expressing love. Instead of deciphering the "hidden meaning" "behind" the Ruth narrative, I am interested in the verbal, textual expression of love. My following close readings of the biblical text will focus on two different aspects of love in the Book of Ruth: Family relations and kinship (I), and sexuality and eroticism (II). In conclusion (III), I will reflect on the poetological implications of love in the Book of Ruth.

## Love and kinship: discourses of destabilization

The web of love relationships within the Naomi–Ruth–Boaz "love triangle" is complex, and the range of options for loving is wide.[20] Different layers of love interweave, yet kinship-love (*storge*) seems to be one of the strongest motifs structuring the narrative of the Book of Ruth. There are, however, perplexing moments, where the kinship relations, and thus the love relations, are not as clear-cut as they seem at first glance. In fact, none of the kinship relations, and none of the love relations is unequivocal. Love brings about ambiguities—first and foremost, on a textual level. For instance, when Ruth affirms her loyalty, attachment, and devotion to her mother-in-law in a beautiful poem in chapter 1, she uses terms that are referring to the institution of marriage in *Genesis*, and that are in fact most often quoted—even today—in marriage ceremonies,[21] and thus have become a familiar, almost commonplace expression of romantic love (*eros*), rather than kinship-love (*storge*), friendship-love (*philia*), or neighbor-love (*agape*). Ruth's poem reads (1:16–17):

> [. . .]
> "Where you go, I will go;
> where you lodge, I will lodge;
> your people shall be my people,
> and your God my God.
> [17]Where you die, I will die—
> there will I be buried.
> May the Lord do thus and so to me,

and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!"

In his rich and thought-provoking study *Love: A History*, Simon May has pointed out that we are likely to recoil today at the intensity of Ruth's passion for Naomi, because in the Western world, we tend to compartmentalize love, "especially under the influence of Lutheran theology," and to distinguish eros-love from neighbor-love and friendship-love, following the Christian (Protestant) tradition of a love triad.[22] However, in *Ruth* this distinction is not valid, and kinship-love, *agape*, friendship, and erotic passion become indistinguishable in her finely crafted words. In fact, in her "love poem" Ruth forsakes every aspect of ancient Middle Eastern identity—land, family, tribe, God, legacy—and "clings" to her mother-in-law, Naomi, as stated a few verses earlier: "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth *clung* [דָּבְקָה] to her." (1:14) "To cling" or "to cleave" (דָּבַק, *dabaq*) is the Hebrew verb used for Ruth's attachment to Naomi.[23] It is indeed "a very strong one," as Mieke Bal observed:[24] The same verb that is famously used in *Genesis* 2:24 for the first human couple and the institution of marriage: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and *clings* [וְדָבַק] to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24)

In the case of Ruth, it is not "a man," but a young *woman* who leaves her father and mother, by her own choice and decision, and "clings" to another, older woman.[25] This verb seems to be a very conscious word choice and an intertextual play with several layers of meaning. In fact, the *Ruth* text repeats *Genesis* allusions on numerous occasions, and the connection to *Genesis* is even made explicit in Boaz's later praise of Ruth, when he says: "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and *how you left your father and mother* and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before." (2:11)[26] In the *Genesis* passage quoted here by Boaz, and even throughout the Hebrew Bible more generally, the verb דָּבַק (*dabaq*) is used exclusively in relation to persons of male gender:[27] The Hebrew word in *Genesis* 2:24 is אִישׁ (*ish*, man/male), not אָדָם (*adam*, mankind).[28] If דָּבַק (*dabaq*) is "normally" used in re-

lation to men and referring to heterosexual relationships,[29] the text attributes the role of the man to Ruth by referencing the well-known *Genesis* passage and hence, the context of opposite-sex marriage: She leaves her mother and father and "clings" to Naomi, thereby acting as only men can in the context of the Hebrew Bible. On the level of the textual signifier, Ruth is assigned the role of a man and husband in this act of textual marriage, while Naomi takes the textual position of the wife (as the one "being clung to").[30]

Ruth and Naomi's relationship is far from clear. And this is true for the entire narrative, from beginning to the end. All traditional kinship relations are, in fact, unsettled by the way the text expresses love in the Book of Ruth. Another example from chapter 4, the conclusion of the narrative, can shed light on this:

> [13]So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. [14]Then the women of Bethlehem said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! [15]He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." [16]Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. [17]The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David. (4:13–17)

This strangely public scene of marriage (and its consummation), of birth celebration, of blessing, and of name-giving is indeed very complex. It is noteworthy that none of the main characters speak in this all-decisive scene. In fact, it is only the women of Bethlehem, the "women of the neighborhood," a collective voice, "representing, as does the chorus in classical tragedy, public opinion,"[31] that have narrative agency: They bless, they name, they reason on the parents' behalf. None of the characters have a say (quite literally) in what is being said.

When the women's chorus announces in 4:17 that Ruth's son "has been born" to Naomi—which has, understandably, been understood as "the most scandalous verse in this text"[32]—they use the verb formula יֻלַּד־בֵּן (*yulad-ben*) that is usually reserved for men in the Hebrew Bible, more specifically for the father of the child in question.[33] In fact, Ruth 4:17 is the only instance in the entire Hebrew Bible where this formula is used in relation to a woman, and not in relation to a man or a father.[34] It is as if the child born of a woman to a woman did not even have a (male) father. In other words, Obed (whose name means "servant [of God]," thus announcing the messianic potential of his birth[35]) seems to have been born into an all-female world—and indeed, the scene of public birthing, announcing, blessing, and naming in chapter 4 takes place among women only.[36] Boaz, the father, is strangely absent—his only action in this passage is to "take" (לָקַח) Ruth (4:13). In his place, Naomi is referenced with a verb form that is usually reserved for the child's father.[37] Hence, the figures of Naomi and Boaz blur and merge, as both are identified as the fathers of Obed on a textual level.[38]

Yet the woman referenced with the verb formula יֻלַּד־בֵּן (*yulad-ben*) is not even the actual mother or even the biological grandmother of the child, but rather the child's mother's (former) mother-in-law. In fact, there is no blood relation between Naomi and Obed—and yet, "[a] son has been born to Naomi" (4:17), as the female chorus announces, thus legitimizing the child as Naomi's own posterity.[39] Kinship relations become overwhelmingly complex. On the level of textual signifiers, even the seemingly clear kinship roles of mother and father are challenged when the text, by choosing the verb form יֻלַּד־בֵּן (*yulad-ben*), literally assigns Naomi (an elderly woman who is no blood relation of Obed's) the role of the father that the child "has been born to."

However, again on a very literal, textual level, Naomi is not only Obed's father, but also his mother: Naomi, the text says, "took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse" (4:16). The Hebrew word translated as "in her bosom," בְּחֵיקָהּ (*behaqah*, from חֵיק, *heq*), can also mean "breast," or "lap," or "vagina," or "womb."[40] The

word choice implies the possibilities of Naomi's setting the child on her breast, taking him on her lap, sitting him over her vagina, or placing him over her womb, and thus locates the child at the center of her (probably long-gone) fertility. In fact, the language of the text suggests that she is birthing the baby,[41] even if only on a textual level, the level of signifiers. In this sense, textually speaking, indeed the two women "become one flesh," as *Genesis* 2:24 has it and the very bodies of Ruth and Naomi blur and merge: The text has just affirmed that it is *Ruth* "who has borne the child" (4:15), and directly following that statement, *Naomi* is taking the child and laying him in her bosom/breast/lap/vagina/womb and nursing him (4:16). In this sense, the two women become one, until even motherhood, which seems to be one of the few kinship relations that can be established without doubt, becomes uncertain and fragile. In the text, by the text, and through the text, both women birth and nurse baby Obed. Both Ruth and Naomi are, textually speaking, his mothers.

In addition, in 4:16, the word translated as "nurse," אֹמֶנֶת (*omenet*) in Hebrew, has two aspects: It can, on the one hand, mean "guardian,"[42] but on the other hand, it can also mean "wet-nurse" in the sense that Naomi would actually breast-feed the baby.[43] Yet in chapter 1:12, at the beginning of the narrative, Naomi has stated very clearly and in great despair that she is "too old to have a husband" (1:12), hinting at her own menopause, and thus, at her inability to conceive, birth, and nurse children.[44] And in fact, her old or at least advanced age is highlighted throughout the narrative (1:12, 4:15).[45] Thus, while Naomi's ability to conceive and to nurse a baby seems long gone at the plot level, the very words used literally in this passage tell a different story: They let her regain her fertility. The text ascribes qualities to Naomi that are usually reserved for younger, fertile women (*behaqa*, *omenet*), thus identifying her as birthing and breast-feeding Ruth's child in place of his mother. Therefore, Naomi is indeed made Obed's mother as well as his father by the language of the text, on a very literal level. Reading the word material in this passage literally, the seemingly contrasting figures of the two women—the elderly, lonely, non-fertile Naomi, and the youthful, vital, fertile

Ruth—merge in their "joint motherhood."[46] And hence, Naomi becomes fertile not within the plot, but on a textual level, in so far as she engenders new text—namely, a genealogy seeking to "build up the house of Israel" (4:11): It is Obed, the son that "has been born" to Naomi (4:17), that would establish the royal, messianic line of Israel by fathering King David's father. The very conclusion of the narrative, in fact its last words, read:

> And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David. (4:17–22)

Out of the motherhood or fatherhood explicitly ascribed to Naomi within and through the text ("A son has been born to Naomi"), a genealogy is developed—a family line encompassing ancestors that have not been mentioned in the narrative so far. The only ancestors in *Ruth* are Naomi's late husband Elimelech and her two late sons, Mahlon and Chilion (1:2–3), yet Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon (4:18–21) have not appeared in the narrative, nor were they ever mentioned by name.[47] Naomi's regained fertility on the level of the text—her textual fertility—is reflected in the fact that the text proliferates, brings forth more text, creating *more* family, in fact a surplus of family members. The power of fertility that Naomi is missing within the plot is ascribed to her *within and through the text*. In this sense, she (re)gains textual, instead of sexual, fertility.

Obed is a child of love—love between two women who "share not only a husband and a son, but also textual subjectivity."[48] Yet the love relationship between Ruth and Naomi (and "their" child, Obed) cannot be grasped in the traditional terms that are commonly associated

with kinship relations, such as mother, father, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, or grandmother. On the contrary, love—and the verbal, textual expression of love within a text—complicates family relations and makes them ambiguous. In their blessing of Naomi, the women of Bethlehem exclaim in 4:15, "He [Obed] shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." As Ilana Pardes observed, "[t]he Book of Ruth is the only biblical text in which the word 'love' is used to define a relationship between two women."[49] In fact, this verse—occurring towards the conclusion of the narrative—is the only time in the Book of Ruth that the emotions involved between Naomi and Ruth are literally described as love. And unlike in all other occurrences in the Book of Ruth, the word translated as "love" here is the verb אָהַב (*ahav*), not חֶסֶד (*hesed*), which runs through *Ruth* as a leitmotif.[50] The word אָהַב (*ahav*) stresses the deeply emotional aspect of affection and attraction rather than the social aspect of love implied in חֶסֶד (*hesed*).[51]

What is more, אָהַב (*ahav*) is a verb that is consistently used for the (erotic) love between a man and a woman throughout the Hebrew Bible. This verse is the only exception. In fact, Zakovitch remarks in surprise that אָהַב (*ahav*)—used only this one time in Ruth—is not used to describe the relation between Ruth and Boaz, but rather between Ruth and Naomi.[52] In this sense, אָהַב (*ahav*)—a verb usually referring to the love between man and woman—relates back to the series of gender transgressions in *Ruth*[53] that we have already observed in looking closely at the text on a very literal level: Naomi and Ruth form a loving couple, a unit described with the word אָהַב (*ahav*). While the text explicitly mentions their kinship relation here ("your daughter-in-law"), אָהַב (*ahav*) undermines the stability of this relation's meaning by pointing to a man/woman relation, rather than that of a mother-in-law/daughter-in-law. It is impossible to determine exactly what "kind" of love unites the characters. The verbal expression of love complicates relations and makes them ambiguous, rather than clarifying, determining, or establishing them.

## Sexuality and eroticism: body and ambiguity

The ambiguity that love brings about on the level of *storge* also plays out in the area of *eros*. A deeply ambiguous scene of what could possibly be called seduction[54] is found in chapter 3 of *Ruth*, the turning point of the Ruth drama, indeed a "momentous" scene.[55] Here, textual ambiguities are performed in terms of sexuality and eroticism:

> Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. 2Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do." 5She said to her, "All that you tell me I will do." 6So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. 7When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came stealthily and uncovered his feet, and lay down. 8At midnight the man was startled [in Hebrew וַיֶּחֱרַד from חָרַד (verb) meaning tremble, shiver, quake, be afraid, be in dread], and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! 9He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin." 10He said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty [love] is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. 11And now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. [. . .] 13Remain this night. [. . .] Lie down until the morning." 14So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said,

> "It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." (Ruth 3:1–15)

What a daring scene. In the still and darkness of night, "another reality" than daylit reality,[56] a young woman quietly slips into a much older man's make-shift bed on the open field, under the starry skies. Sleepily, the man stirs, trembles—as a more accurate translation might have it—, he wakes up, they talk, the couple spends the night together in the field, but early in the morning, before anyone can recognize her, she is gone. Was she even here? And who was she? What did she do to him? What did he promise to her? The darkness of the setting in this deeply intimate scene creeps into the plot of this dream-like narrative.[57] Everything is blurry and dreamy. As readers, we rub our eyes, trying to make sense of this extraordinarily evasive, obscure, and opaque text.

Hence, it is certainly no coincidence that this scene is very controversially debated in all the commentaries on the Book of Ruth whether Jewish or Christian.[58] All of them exhibit the desire, the urgency to make sense when faced with the text's darkness, which is mirroring the darkness of night within the plot. The encounter takes place on the threshing floor at midnight, after a night of hard work and celebration. Landy remarked insightfully that "[a]s the place where the chaff is separated from the grain, the threshing floor is a symbol of interpretation [. . . ]."[59] Yet the text refuses to lend itself to an easy reading and a smooth interpretation. And therefore, as Landy has it, "[a] close reading becomes a disintegrative reading."[60] The text—and our understanding of it—remains as dreamy and blurry as the tale it tells. It leaves us in the dark of the unknown, it stubbornly remains ambiguous, dark and obscure, and it does not fulfil our desire for an easy, clear-cut reading. On the contrary, once we think we are on track with our interpretation, the text sends us right into a dead end. For instance, in 3:3–4, Naomi gives Ruth the following instructions:

> "[3][ . . . ] wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself

known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.
[4]When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then,
go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what
to do."

Puzzling as those instructions are in and of themselves—they might be "an outrageous scheme, dangerous and delicate"[61]—the words become even more mysterious when we look at the biblical text closely, particularly at a quite remarkable *ketiv/qere* difference that Cheryl Exum and Ilana Pardes have both pointed out in their respective readings. According to Exum, "if we pursue certain implications of a curious textual feature, we can find the three major characters—Ruth, Naomi, Boaz—somehow all involved in the intimacy of the threshing floor scene. A fascinating instance of the blurring of roles is created by a *ketiv/qere* problem."[62] This is a very strong, possibly daring reading, but it is text-based and pertinent, and its interpretative consequences are immense. In the New Revised Standard Version and most other renderings, the vocalized text (*qere*) reads,

"[3]Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your finest dress
and *go* down to the threshing floor [. . . ] [4]When he lies down,
[. . . ] go and uncover his feet and *lie down* [. . . ]."

However, the consonantal text (*ketiv*) reads,

"wash and anoint yourself, put on your finest dress, and *I will go*
down to the threshing floor. [. . . ] When he lies down, [. . . ] go
and uncover his feet and *I will lie down* [. . . ]."

If we consider the *ketiv*, there is a textual possibility of Naomi inserting herself into the text and thus, into the plot, participating physically in the intimacy of the nighttime encounter between Ruth and Boaz—at least on a textual level. The couple embracing sleepily in the dark of night might, textually speaking, not be alone. As Cheryl Exum says, "[b]y having Naomi put herself into the scene twice, in a sort of

pre-Freudian slip, the consonantal text conflates Naomi with Ruth as the 'seducer' of Boaz."[63] Who is crawling in with Boaz, "lying at his feet" until morning? Naomi? Ruth? Both? We are as puzzled as Boaz is when he wakes up at midnight, startled, shivering,[64] turning over, discovering a woman, and asking: "Who are you?" (3:9)

Who are you? Landy reads Boaz's question as an attempt at distancing himself from the dream-like appearance of a woman slipping under his covers in the dark of night, by using language: "Boaz rouses himself from his confusion and fear to speak; speech will define who this woman is, what the appropriate response will be, and thus is a means of distantiation."[65] However, even if a seemingly clear answer is given to Boaz in the text, we cannot say with certainty that the mysterious female figure uttering those words in the total darkness of an open field by night is indeed Ruth—it might as well be Naomi, if we consider the possibilities of the *ketiv*. What she says is: "I am [אָנֹכִי, *anoki*] Ruth" (3:9), thus "establishing her presence, her voice" by using the "emphatic first-person pronoun, *anoki*."[66] Yet this is not the end of the sentence, nor the end of her speech in response to his question. Rather than illuminating Boaz about her identity, her intention seems to hide it rather than to disclose it: She explicitly asks him to cover her: "I am Ruth, your servant; *spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin*." (3:9; my emphasis) This mysterious request, which is again very controversially debated within commentaries,[67] plays with the theological symbolism of *apo-kalypsis*, revelation or *revelatio*: Veiling and unveiling, hiding and revealing, disclosing and covering the face of truth.[68] Yet it also has erotic undertones: Irmtraut Fischer, for instance, reads it plainly "sexual," since the "spreading" of Boaz's cloak to cover Ruth implies the possible exposure of his genitals.[69] The text itself, however, remains obscure and in suspense.

It is irresolvable, on a textual basis, to determine what exactly transpires between the man and the woman out in the field by night. And it is exactly that ambiguity which makes the text, one of the "most intimate scenes within the Old Testament,"[70] so erotic. After all, "[i]s not the most erotic part of the body *where the garment gapes*?"[71] According to Roland Barthes, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, "it is the flash"—the

flash of skin that flashes between garment and nudity—"it is the flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance."[72] In that sense, the scene in *Ruth* which possibly stages seduction also seduces its readers. While Boaz's "garment gapes," and while metaphors of covering/uncovering are very dominant within this scene, the exact meanings of words, and the relation between signifier and signified, become doubtful and ambiguous. In other words, readers are lured and seduced into following a certain path of interpretation, yet the text is too evasive and ambiguous to allow for an unequivocal reading. The garment gapes, there is a possibility of nudity or clarity—and yet another textual layer of the meaning covers and veils what seemed to be unveiled.[73]

This textual feature of evasiveness is most striking when it comes to identity. Ruth does not reveal herself: She answers a "basic identity question"[74] with her request to be covered. Who is she? In fact, Boaz himself does not seem to know. Not even after she has (seemingly) declared her identity and spent the entire night with him, does he call her by her name; in verse 14 he says rather vaguely, early in the morning: "It must not be known that the woman [הָאִשָּׁה, *ha-isha*] came to the threshing floor" (3:14)[75]—not "Ruth," the name she herself has used to refer to herself (3:9). However, "the woman," after introducing herself as Ruth, asks Boaz to "spread his cloak" over her, "for you are next-of-kin." (3:9)[76] Yet in fact, according to the text, Boaz is not *Ruth's* "next-of-kin," but *Naomi's*.[77] Throughout the narrative, the text consistently stresses that Ruth is a foreigner, a stranger, not part of the family of Naomi, and not part of the Jewish community of Bethlehem. She is consistently called "Ruth the Moabite" by the narrator as well as by the characters—her foreignness and strangeness is starkly articulated throughout the narrative (e.g., 1:22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10). In fact, when Boaz first meets her in his field by day and enquires about her, his servant replies *not* by giving him her name, but by presenting her as a foreigner in a double formula ("the Moabite from the country of Moab"), a displaced person: "She is *the Moabite* who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." (2:6; my emphasis) And at the beginning of chapter 2, when Boaz is first intro-

duced as a character within the narrative, he is presented as a relative of Naomi's, not Ruth's: "Now *Naomi* had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz." (2:1; my emphasis) So whose "next-of-kin" is "the woman" claiming to be? Which raises the question: Who is speaking? Is it Ruth, who has no kinship relation with Boaz or anyone within the Jewish community of Bethlehem at all, as the text makes abundantly clear? Is it Naomi, who would have all textual rights to claim, "you are next-of-kin"?

Who are you? We cannot say for sure. Nor can we ascertain clearly what exactly is happening between the man and the woman on the threshing floor by night. What is Naomi telling Ruth to do when she instructs her to "uncover Boaz's feet and lie down" (3:4)? It is very plausible to read the term מַרְגְּלֹתָיו (*margelotaw*, his feet) here as a euphemism for Boaz's genitals.[78] Is Naomi telling Ruth to uncover Boaz' private parts, to expose his genitals? If so, what does it mean that Ruth, as 3:14 says, "lay at his feet until morning" (3:14)? In addition, the verb translated as "lay" or "lie down" here—שָׁכַב (*shakab*), which is frequently used of sexual intercourse in the Hebrew Bible[79]—is clearly a leitmotif of the narrative: It is used four times in our passage (3:4, 7, 13, 14) and nine times throughout chapter 3.[80] What is the woman doing when "she came and uncovered his feet [מַרְגְּלֹתָיו, *margelotaw*] and lay down [שָׁכַב, *shakab*]" (3:7)? What is Boaz asking her for when he implores her: "Lie down [שִׁכְבִי, *shikbi*] until the morning" (3:13)?

What is "the woman" doing?[81] Another leitmotif in chapter 3 is the verb יָדַע (*yada*), which also has a double sense: It can mean both intellectual knowledge and sexual intercourse.[82] In our passage from the Book of Ruth, it appears in 3:3, when Naomi says, "do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking" (3:3). What exactly is happening between the man and the woman in the dark of night? It remains teasingly ambiguous. The text *covers* a clear meaning of this encounter as "the woman" "*uncovers* Boaz's feet" (3:4, 3:7; my emphasis). So much so that Mieke Bal consistently speaks of Ruth "uncovering Boaz's feet *and/or* sexual parts,"[83] and Phyllis Trible

tells us that "just how much of the lower part of his body she is to uncover remains tantalizingly unclear."[84] The only thing that *is* clear is that the text carries erotic under- and overtones, and is "rife with sexual innuendo"[85]—a layer of meaning that many commentaries take great trouble to explain away, while others celebrate and extol it. Yet it is in no way certain that those innuendos are anything more than just that—a hint, a possibility of reading, interpretating, and understanding this highly ambiguous, obscure, and opaque text.

## Passionate reading

The Book of Ruth is very decidedly a work of literature with an aesthetic dimension,[86] a short yet rich literary masterpiece of the Hebrew Bible. All commentators—whether Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant[87]—agree on its extraordinary literary quality, "unmatched in the Old Testament."[88] *Ruth* is hailed as a "literary work of art," the "artistic culmination point of the Hebrew Bible,"[89] with an "extraordinary beauty of expression."[90] As Francis Landy has it in his fine and detailed reading of the Book of Ruth, "[l]overs make fictions of their lives, construct romance artfully [. . . ]."[91] It also entails, as is widely agreed, "one of literature's most poignant declarations of affection and love"[92]—Ruth's poem expressing her oath of fidelity to Naomi in 1:16–17. In her *Tales of Love*, Julia Kristeva has remarked very insightfully: "the language of love is impossible, inadequate, immediately allusive when one would like it to be most straightforward; it is a flight of metaphors—it is literature."[93] Hence, the genre of love literature—including the Book of Ruth—is literature in its most "literary" form. Taking the Book of Ruth seriously as love *literature*—rather than seeing it (only) as an allegorical love story pointing towards an edifying theological content—can give us clues in understanding what Derek Attridge called "the work of literature."[94]

How does love literature "work"? In my close readings, we have seen that it is the love expressed in the Book of Ruth that faces us with a twofold challenge: A linguistic challenge, and a hermeneutic challenge. We struggle to determine the words' meanings, yet they are elusive. Our desire is to make sense of this love story, but how?

The uncertainties and ambiguities on the plot level are reinforced by a deeply ambiguous language when it comes to expressing love verbally within the text (at least in the Hebrew original). It is the textual expression of love that uncovers the poetics generally at work in the Book of Ruth: The text is deeply elusive, equivocal, and unstable. There is no stability of meaning, no stability of plot, and no stability of identity in the love story of *Ruth*. This elusiveness and instability ignite our desire to make sense. In this way, the Book of Ruth is a "text of bliss," as Roland Barthes has it in *The Pleasure of the Text*—a "text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts [...], unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language."[95] It is, however, highly counter-intuitive, that it is loss, discomfort, and crisis that would make a text—such as *Ruth*—"blissful," according to Barthes. What is this bliss? In Barthes's reading, it is, as Dominik Zechner has pointed out, by no means "pure delight. Instead, it marks a rich, multi-faceted affective experience whose embrace is not necessarily pleasurable."[96] It is this elusive quality of the text, brimful with potentiality, that makes the Book of Ruth highly poetic.

In fact, the Book of Ruth leaves us struggling and at a loss—the text quite literally leaves us in the dark, as we have seen in the seduction scene on the threshing floor in chapter 3. Again and again, the textual material of *Ruth* evades and flees our desire to understand and make sense of it. And yet, this loss, discomfort, and possibly crisis at work in the linguistic ambiguity of the text has an almost erotic effect: *Ruth* plays with different notions of desire—on the one hand, by narrating and depicting erotic desire, and on the other hand, by creating an ambiguous, multi-layered text, so that our interpretative desire is spurred. Groping in the dark, our reading, our interpretation becomes blissful and passionate—we want to know more, and more, and more, we want to see more, uncover more, understand better.

Interpretation is a relation—a relation of desire. According to Werner Hamacher, it rests on the assumption of discomfort, loss, and crisis, just like Barthes's "text of bliss": In our attempts at understand-

ing, "[o]nly what is disconcerting can be loved; only the beloved that remains disconcerting while growing closer can be loved lastingly."[97] In other words, the closer I grow to a text, the stranger and more disconcerting it becomes for me; the more I am "into" a text, an author, a work, the more my desire for it is awakened, because I am more and more aware of its potentialities and its incongruities that are yet beyond my reach. This is the point of my close readings uncovering the evasive textual strategies in *Ruth*: Rather than pointing a finger at some sort of "exact" or "clear" meaning, my readings aim at uncovering the highly disconcerting potential of the very material body of the text—which would then have immense interpretative consequences. We might call them passionate readings, in the double sense of the word *passion*—meaning both erotic rapture and intense pain.

It is the passion of reading, the passion of interpretation that we can see at work in the Book of Ruth. In *Ruth*, the deeply intimate experience of loving cannot be expressed with words that are subject to certain aesthetic, grammatical, or language-bound conventions—not even when the words of love break, challenge, subvert, or play with these very conventions. Words of love entail a potential, a surplus, an abundance of meaning. The passion of love (in the double sense of the word) is what makes *Ruth* so deeply ambiguous.

## NOTES

**1** Zakovitch 1999, p. 80; Fischer 2001, p. 34; Köhlmoos 2010, p. 7.
**2** See Fischer 2001, p. 37; Goodman-Thau 2006, p. 11.
**3** On the many facets of the Hebrew *hesed*, see the reflections in Trible 1978, pp. 169, 197, also Glueck 1967; Landy 2001, p. 225.
**4** Landy 2001, p. 225.
**5** Phyllis Trible uses the translation "kindness" throughout her analysis, pointing out, however, that "*kindness* is hardly an adequate translation of *hesed*" (Trible 1978, p. 197).
**6** Bal 1987, p. 80.
**7** Landy 2001, p. 225.
**8** See Lewis 1960. Quite surprisingly, Lewis does not mention the Book of Ruth.
**9** Ilana Pardes—in a gesture of irony, to be sure—quotes Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* (1794–1807), as the motto to her own analysis of *Ruth*: "the book of Ruth, an idle, bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country girl, creeping slyly to be with her cousin Boaz. Pretty stuff indeed, to be called the Word of God!" (Pardes 1992, p. 98).
**10** Trible 1978, ch. 6: 'A human comedy.'

**11** Landy 2001, p. 218.
**12** For a critical reading, see Bal 1987, p. 72.
**13** See Landy 2001, p. 232.
**14** Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from the Bible follow the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
**15** Even Trible calls her "the mediator of this transformation to life" (Trible 1978, p. 194).
**16** According to Mieke Bal, "aspects of names in Ruth *tell*" (see Bal 1987, p. 74). However, the exact meanings and purposes of the "telling names" remain a matter of debate. Fischer points out that the main character's name, Ruth, is not clearly understandable (Fischer 2001, p. 35), Zakovitch even holds that only minor characters have symbolic names (Zakovitch 1999, p. 80), while Köhlmoos suggests that names remain consciously ambiguous to create more narrative tension (Köhlmoos 2010, p. 7).
**17** For Mieke Bal, this is a sign that "the character is not completely defenseless against the name," but takes narrative agency (Bal 1987, p. 74). Hence, she reads "the use of a proper name" in an "explicitly narrative" way (p. 76).
**18** See Bal 1987, p. 75; Fischer 2001, pp. 33–36.
**19** See a detailed overview in Landy 2001, pp. 218–249, 240, n. 60.
**20** Not least, options are anywhere between same-sex and opposite-sex. See Exum 1996, p. 5. Exum is interested not in the "correctness" of asserting same- vs. opposite-sex love in *Ruth*, but rather in how "advocates for both same-sex and opposite-sex relationships can and do lay claim to this text" (Exum 1996, p. 5).
**21** See e.g., Exum 1996, p. 6. According to Exum (p. 6, n. 14), these verses from *Ruth* are part of the religious wedding vow in the USA, UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and Israel.
**22** May 2011, p. 25.
**23** According to Strong's Concordance, *dabaq* can also mean "to keep close," "hold fast," or "stick to."
**24** Bal 1987, p. 72.
**25** Even if it is a man, namely Naomi's late son, who establishes the relation between the two women in the first place. Both women, in fact, are widows: "Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. [. . . ] and both Mahlon and Chilion [Naomi's sons] died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband" (1:3–5). In other words, the mutual love of the two women is established by the shared experience of loss.
**26** My emphasis. As Phyllis Trible writes, with the radical and remarkable decision to "cling" to Naomi, Ruth "has also reversed sexual allegiance. [. . . ] One female has chosen another female in a world where life depends upon men." (Trible 1978, p. 173.)
**27** See Bal 1987, p. 72 (the verb "to cleave" (1:14), "exclusively used with a male subject, in reference to the matrimonial bond"); see also Exum 1996, p. 8.
**28** Ilana Pardes has pointed out that "while in *Genesis*, such cleaving defines the institution of marriage, in the Book of Ruth it depicts female bonding" (Pardes 1992, p. 102).
**29** Bal 1987, p. 83.
**30** Cf. Exum 1996, p. 8. However, Exum only points out the "sexual ambivalence" of all characters and does not necessarily make the textual identification I am suggesting here.
**31** Bal 1987, p. 77.
**32** Pardes 1992, p. 106.
**33** See Exum 1996, p. 35, who quotes many parallel passages (n. 117); Pardes 1992, p. 106; Fischer 2001, pp. 255–256.
**34** Zakovitch 1999, p. 171.

**35** Zakovitch 1999, p. 171; Goodman-Thau 2006, pp. 100, 102; Köhlmoos rather sees a subtle irony at work, since the legitimized son of a free woman is given the name "servant" or "slave" (Köhlmoos 2010, p. 84). However, she agrees with the other commentators about the messianic significance of Obed's name.

**36** See Trible 1978, p. 193. This all-female setting is even more remarkable because the right to name a child is usually reserved to the father within the Hebrew Bible (Zakovitch 1999, p. 170); in exceptional cases, children have been named by their mothers or midwives (see Fischer 2001, p. 257), but never by a collective of female neighbors (Zakovitch 1999, pp. 170–171). Moreover, Fischer suggests that in the few instances of female naming, the name is usually given in relation to the life and context of the mother, while here, it is Naomi's life (not Ruth's) that serves as an explanation for the act of name-giving (Fischer 2001, p. 257).

**37** Köhlmoos 2010, p. 83 points out that this public announcement also, quite literally, makes Naomi Obed's "legal" father ("Rechtlich wird sie damit zum 'Vater' des Kindes").

**38** Mieke Bal remarks that while there is a strong textual basis for identifications between Naomi and Boaz, the same merging or blurring is true—as I will demonstrate in more detail below—between Naomi and Ruth, which leads Bal to conclude: "in marrying Ruth, he [Boaz] marries Naomi a little too, while also identifying with her. For unto her clave Ruth. This is why the neighbors can say: to Naomi, a son is born." (Bal 1987, p. 85.)

**39** See Fischer 2001, p. 256 for the legitimizing function of mentioning the father's name in the formula *yulad-ben*.

**40** See Gesenius 1962, p. 205 ("Busen, aber eher d. v. den Hüften umschlossenen Teil des Körpers"). According to Gesenius, the etymology of *heq* can be traced to an Assyrian verb meaning "embrace," "unite, merge" ("umfassen," "sich vereinigen, sich mischen"), which would highlight the sexual connotation (Gesenius 1962, p. 205).

**41** In that sense, Pardes speaks of Naomi's and Ruth's "shared parenthood" (Pardes 1992, p. 106).

**42** This aspect of Naomi as Obed's guardian or caregiver is highlighted in Köhlmoos's detailed philological analysis. Köhlmoos traces the etymology of *omenet* to the verb *aman*, "to stand firmly," thus highlighting Naomi's absolute faithfulness that even entails the theological dimension of truth (cf. *Amen*): Naomi, in her view, "represents YHWH's faithfulness" (Köhlmoos 2010, p. 82). Fischer also holds that the term *omenet* "cannot possibly mean wet-nurse, but rather adoptive mother or guardian-nurse" (Fischer 2001, p. 255). Exum refutes that view by pointing to parallel uses of the term *omenet* as "wet-nurse" in the Hebrew Bible (Exum 1996, pp. 35–36).

**43** In his translation ("und säugte es an ihrem Busen und wurde seine Pflegemutter"), Zakovitch makes this aspect very clear, yet his interpretation neglects the fact that this act of nursing and nourishing is biologically impossible considering Naomi's own words in 1:12 (see Zakovitch 1999, p. 170).

**44** Exum 1996, pp. 15–16 (esp. n. 41), 35–36; Pardes also discusses *Ruth* in terms of "the plot of fertility" (Pardes 1992, p. 106).

**45** Mieke Bal argues that "the solidarity (*hesed*) between Ruth and Naomi gives social security and posterity to the one by means of the sexuality and fertility of the other" (Bal 1987, p. 85).

**46** Pardes 1992, p. 106.

**47** It is highly interesting that the text begins and ends with genealogies. Yet while the beginning family line ends in

loss and singularity, the concluding family line highlights the messianic, redemptive potential.

**48** Pardes 1992, p. 108.

**49** Pardes 1992, p. 102. Yet it is noteworthy that this word—*ahav*, "(to) love"—is used not in the direct speech of the characters to define their attachment towards each other, but rather, in the collective speech of the women of Bethlehem.

**50** Zakovitch 1999, p. 169 points out that this is the only reference to *ahavah* in Ruth.

**51** Köhlmoos 2010, p. 82 ("der wesentlich emotionalere Begriff, der die engstmögliche Beziehung zwischen zwei Menschen ausdrückt").

**52** He therefore infers that it cannot therefore refer to "carnal love" (Zakovitch 1999, p. 169). According to Köhlmoos, however, *ahav* can also encompass the emotional bond between parents and children, husband and wife, and between friends, and even between Israel and YHWH, so that Ruth, in her reading, would "realize the all-encompassing dimension of love" (Köhlmoos 2010, p. 82).

**53** See Fischer 2001, p. 254. Fischer's example of how gender roles are transgressed is when ascribing Ruth the role of the husband in "clinging" to Naomi (1:14) in reference to *Genesis* 2:24, which she understands as going against patriarchal structures.

**54** Bal calls Ruth 3:6–16 "the seduction scene" (Bal 1987, p. 71).

**55** Exum 1996, p. 22.

**56** Landy 2001, p. 222.

**57** Landy emphasizes the dream-like setting of night and solitude: "It is a time for sleep, for unconsciousness, and for dream. [...] Whether or not Boaz sleeps in the open to dream, the narrative possibility arises that such a dream will befall him." (Landy 2001, p. 222.)

**58** Fischer considers allegorical readings, but refutes them (Fischer 2001, p. 211); Köhlmoos emphasizes the sexual connotations, but reads Ruth's actual request to Boaz as "symbolic-theological" (Köhlmoos 2010, p. 62). Trible stresses the "sexual overtones" (Trible 1978, p. 182); Exum calls it "the vital scene for romantic interpretation," "rife with sexual innuendo" (Exum 1996, pp. 22, 23); Landy points out its "intimacy" and "sexual possibilities" and calls this scene "the seduction and sexual invitation" (Landy 2001, pp. 226, 232); Köhlmoos reads it explicitly as a "sexual encounter," "sexual contact" or "sexual arousal" (Köhlmoos 2010, pp. 57, 61); Fischer highlights Naomi's "instructions for seduction," the "sexual connotations" and the connection between food/drink and eroticism ("lustvoller Beischlaf", Fischer 2001, pp. 201–202). Zakovitch, on the other hand, holds that "nothing transpires" between Ruth and Boaz in their "innocent affection" ("sittsame Zuneigung", Zakovitch 1999, p. 138).

**59** Landy 2001, p. 222.

**60** Landy 2001, p. 220.

**61** Trible 1978, p. 182.

**62** Exum 1996, p. 36; see also Pardes 1992, pp. 104–105. The Hebrew terms *ketiv* and *qere* are used for different possibilities of readings in printed editions of the Hebrew Bible (as opposed to the handwritten originals). The transmitted text of the Hebrew Bible consisted of consonants only, but in the 7th to 10th centuries, the Masoretes edited, copied and "vocalized" it—they added vowel points and reading signs. Whenever the consonantal text (*ketiv* = "what is written") differs from the vocalized Masorete editing (*qere* = "what is to be read"), they provided notes in the margin (*masora* in Hebrew, hence the term *Masoretes*). Those margin notes mark differences between the consonantal text (*ketiv*) and the Masoretic reading (*qere*), which is the authoritative text in Rabbinic Judaism to

this day. On *ketiv/qere* and the possibilities of "double writing," see Barr 1981. In Ruth 3:3–4, we find such a difference between *ketiv* and *qere* that is open for two-fold interpretative possibilities. However, in commentaries the *ketiv* is usually not read as a first-person singular, but rather as "archaic" second-person female forms (see Exum 1996, p. 36, quoting Campbell 1975, p. 120 and Sasson 1979 in their commentaries on Ruth).

**63** Exum 1996, p. 36.

**64** Fischer hints at Boaz's possible orgasm in 3:8: "einige Midraschim denken an einen Orgasmus aufgrund des Verbs חָרַד, 'erbeben'" (Fischer 2001, p. 209); Trible highlights Boaz's bodily reaction as "no doubt feeling the chill of the night air upon his exposed body" (Trible 1978, p. 183).

**65** Landy 2001, p. 230.

**66** Landy 2001, p. 230.

**67** For example, Zakovitch (referencing Rashi) reads it as an open and plain proposal of marriage (Zakovitch 1999, p. 141), while Köhlmoos, in contrast, understands it "symbolically-theologically," as asking Boaz to take YHWH's position towards her (Köhlmoos 2010, p. 62). Landy offers a very illuminating and interesting rhetorical reading of Ruth's answer to Boaz: "Rhetorically, Ruth literalizes metaphor, in that she makes Boaz physically take her 'under his wing [. . . ].'" (Landy 2001, p. 232.)

**68** On the notion of *apo-kalypsis*, revelation as unveiling, in the sense of taking away a covering veil (*velum*), see Forte 2003, pp. 18–19.

**69** Fischer 2001, pp. 210–211. In her reading, Ruth is not only requesting marriage, but the consummation of marriage.

**70** Köhlmoos 2010, p. 65.

**71** Barthes 1990, p. 9; emphasis in original.

**72** Barthes 1990, p. 10.

**73** The metaphor of uncovering and revealing nudity is prominent in Jewish mysticism, describing the hermeneutics of 'dis-covering,' 'un-covering,' or revealing *torah*. According to Elliot Wolfson, "the search for the deepest truth of Scripture is a gradual stripping away of the external forms of garments until one gets to the inner core, but when one gets to that inner core what one finds is nothing other than the *peschat*, i.e. the text as it is" (Wolfson 1993, pp. 155–203; 171–172).

**74** Landy 2001, p. 230.

**75** Fischer suggests that the use of *ish* (woman) here, instead of *na'arah* (young woman) used throughout chapter 2, could point to a sexual encounter between Ruth and Boaz: in this night, she has become "the woman" for him, "his woman" (Fischer 2001, p. 218).

**76** Landy also remarks very insightfully that rather than answering his question about *her* identity, Ruth answers by reminding Boaz about *his* identity: "you are next-of-kin." (Landy 2001, p. 235.)

**77** Even if, as most commentators have pointed out (Zakovitch 1999, p. 129; Fischer 2001, p. 190; Köhlmoos 2010, p. 49), Naomi herself relativizes this statement in 2:20: "Naomi also said to her, 'The man is a relative of *ours*, one of *our* nearest kin.'"; my emphasis.

**78** See Fischer 2001, p. 203; Exum 1996, p. 23. Even Zakovitch, referencing Josephus, admits a sexual possibility (Zakovitch 1999, p. 137). Köhlmoos, however, while admitting that *margelot* can refer to the feet or any other body part below the hips, especially the abdomen, strongly rejects that Naomi would instruct Ruth to expose Boaz's nakedness (Köhlmoos 2010, p. 56). There are two parallel passages in the Hebrew Bible where the semantically opposite formula "(to) cover his feet" (*lehaset-raglaw*) is used: for Saul (in 1 Samuel 24:3) and Ehud (in Judges 3:24). In both instances, "covering their feet" is a euphemism for performing the necessity

of nature: those men are "covering their feet" whilst *un*covering their private parts to relieve themselves.

**79** Exum 1996, p. 23. Zakovitch holds that there is no sexual meaning intended in 3:4 but offers no textual proof for that view (Zakovitch 1999, p. 137).

**80** Fischer 2001, pp. 202–203.

**81** Exum has suggested a reading in which Ruth uncovers herself once she slipped into Boaz's bed, and her request to have Boaz's cloak "spread over her" (3:9) indeed makes sense when she is naked (Exum 1996, p. 23). This view is, however, strongly refuted in Köhlmoos 2010, p. 56.

**82** See Fischer 2001, p. 201; Köhlmoos 2010, p. 55. For instance, Gen 4:1 famously reads, "And Adam knew (*yada*) Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore a son" (KJV), and this formula for being intimate appears throughout the Hebrew Bible.

**83** Bal 1987, p. 81; my emphasis.

**84** Trible 1978, p. 182.

**85** Exum 1996, p. 23.

**86** Landy also emphasizes the "aesthetic potential" of *hesed*-love in so far as exhibiting *hesed* may be viewed as acting beautifully (Landy 2001, p. 225).

**87** See, for instance, three recent examples: Zakovitch 1999; Fischer 2001; Köhlmoos 2010.

**88** Köhlmoos 2010, p. xi ("Das Ruthbuch ist ein Meisterwerk der Erzählkunst, unerreicht im Alten Testament").

**89** Fischer 2001, pp. 24–25 ("ein literarisches Kunstwerk"; "künstlerische[r] Höhepunkt der Hebräischen Bibel").

**90** Zakovitch 1999, p. 12 ("Schönheit seines Ausdrucks").

**91** Landy 2001, p. 230.

**92** Sasson 1979, p. 28.

**93** Kristeva 1987, p. 1. The French original reads: "Impossible, inadéquat, immédiatement allusive quand on le voudrait le plus direct, le langage amoureux est envol de metaphors: il est de la littérature." (Kristeva 1983, p. 9.)

**94** See Attridge 2015.

**95** Barthes 1990, p. 14.

**96** Zechner 2024, p. 23, in reference to Barthes 1990.

**97** Hamacher 2015, p. 68.

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# CAN I LAUGH AT MY NEIGHBOUR?

## On being re-created by love

OLA SIGURDSON

CAN I LAUGH AT MY NEIGHBOUR? Is there a laughter of love? Or are laughter at and love of my neighbour mutually exclusive? In the history of reflection on humorous laughter, an understanding of laughter as antagonistic has been prevalent, at least since classical antiquity. The laughing person has been understood as someone who, in control of her- or himself, laughs *at* someone else. Out of concern for the object of laughter, such laughter has, understandably, been criticized as unable to stem from a genuine concern or even love for the other. Laughter at the neighbour would then seem to turn the neighbour into an object of ridicule, not love. It was not until 18th-century Britain that an understanding of laughter as sympathetic developed. A genuinely humorous laughter is always a laughter *with* someone; laughter *at* someone thus came to be understood as a corrupted laughter.

The phenomenological question, however, is whether both these alternatives fail to come to terms with the more complex reality of humorous laughter. Is there not a possibility of a sincere laughter of love, i.e., a laughter that, while being a laughter of genuine concern for the other, still might not be reduced to mutual assent? Put slightly differently, is there a laughter that might tickle or wound the other's self in a way that can drive the other out of her- or himself? A laughter where this "failure" of self-possession would still not mean losing oneself—a kind of radical destitution of the self—as it occurs against a horizon of ultimate—even loving—trust that one will get oneself back? Such questions will guide this inquiry into the possibility of a laughter of love, an inquiry that is of concern not only for the possi-

bility as such but also for a fundamental issue of a philosophical or theological anthropology: What kind of being must a human be to find something funny? How should that human being relate to other human beings, to his or her neighbours, with laughter?

The question I would like to pose in this chapter is whether there is a form of laughter that is compatible with neighbourly love. I will do this through an exploration of symmetry and asymmetry as well as reciprocity in different forms of laughter and different forms of love. Laughter, like love, can be a source of subjective transformation. Therefore, we can learn something about what it means to be a neighbour through the relationship between laughter and love.

## Aggressive laughter

There are many kinds of laughter. Nervous laughter, spiteful laughter, laughter of delight or euphoria, nitrous oxide-induced laughter, aggressive laughter—just to name but a few. Of all these varieties of laughter, the kind repeatedly highlighted since the classical age is antagonistic, aggressive laughter. Looking at ancient philosophy and rhetoric, thinkers such as Aristotle, Plato and Cicero all agree that there is an aggressive dimension to laughter, which is why the cultivated gentleman prefers not to be laughed at, but only to laugh at someone else. Patristic theologians such as Clement of Alexandria and John Chrysostom agree, and all the way up to the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century, with his famous definition of laughter as "a sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others", many philosophers and theologians think that laughter is, in most cases, agonistic.[1] Of course there is a difference between, for instance, Aristotle and Hobbes, as Aristotle's reason for laughter is to be found more in the defect of the other than the superiority of one's self, as in Hobbes, but nevertheless they agree on the agonistic nature of laughter.

According to Aristotle in *Art of Rhetoric*, the kind of wit that makes us laugh is defined as "cultured insolence", *pepaideumenē hybris*.[2] It is essential, however, that the rudeness remain "cultured". Anything stronger than modest laughter puts the laugher at risk of losing his

self-restraint. Self-control, *enkrateia*, is a central manly virtue, according to Aristotle in the seventh book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, to be contrasted to *akrasia*, the vice of unrestraint. To be sure, it is forgivable if some men, like Xenophantus, "who tries to restrain their laughter explodes in one great guffaw".[3] But the constantly amused show a lack of character, like the *bōmolochos*, buffoon, who has lost mastery of himself and therefore does not rule over his own bodily passions. To *be laughed at* would be to assume the position of the buffoon, which is out of the question for Aristotle's cultivated gentleman. But *to laugh at someone* is of course perfectly possible for the cultivated gentleman, as long as this laughter stays within the bounds of the appropriate and fitting. Self-restraint or self-control is all-important; to be the butt of someone's joke means to have already lost it. Again, the gentleman who loses himself in laughter risks losing his gentlemanly status, as does the gentleman who becomes the object of laughter, as the necessary self-restraint of both is threatened. Within the asymmetric relationship between the laugher and the laughee, however, it is always best to be on the side of the laugher.

The kind of laughter that is suitable varies according to age and situation, however. Young men love laughter more than do grumpy old men, according to Aristotle, and a group of friends can playfully make use of "cultured insolence" without impinging on one another's honour. But the reason that it is more prudent to laugh at someone else than to be laughed at remains, since to laugh aggressively or insolently means being on top in an asymmetric relationship, in which one's self-control is not threatened. The object of ridicule, we could say, is not a neighbour.

It is quite clear, I think, that Aristotle's attitude towards laughter is determined by more profound concerns regarding subjectivity. To be in full possession of one's own self is a central virtue not only for Aristotle but according to most ethical reflections of classical philosophy; although it is not as bad to laugh immodestly as to be laughed at, laughing in itself carries a certain risk of losing one's composure. A quotation from Catherine de' Medici's personal physician Laurent Joubert illustrates this perennial risk:

> Everybody sees clearly that in laughter the face is moving, the mouth widens, the eyes sparkle and tear, the cheeks redden, the breast heaves, the voice becomes interrupted; and when it goes on for a long time the veins in the throat become enlarged, the arms shake, and the legs dance about, the belly pulls in and feels considerable pain; we cough, perspire, piss, and besmirch ourselves by dint of laughing, and sometimes we even faint away because of it. This need not be proven. I take it for certain and approved by all.[4]

Joubert's quite graphic rendering of what can happen if we laugh exemplifies one experience of how we can be carried away by laughter; what starts as just a giggle might end up in the entire loss of one's dignity. Thus, it is not just the prospect of being laughed at that threatens the self-control of the gentleman but laughter itself. As long as the virtue of self-control is respected, laughter and mirth are to be commended, including the dual ability to make and take a joke, even if that would amount to being the butt of the joke for a while. In the company of friends, where "each has the same end in view as his neighbour, being able to take a joke and return it in good taste" is appreciated.[5] In other words, laughter is still aggressive, but such banter among good friends is, as Stephen Halliwell puts it, "a transmuting of aggression into play".[6] Modesty is to be recommended on all accounts.

Of course, Aristotle is only an example, though a good one, of the tendency to regard all laughter as aggressive. He is a good example since the laughter that he thinks is commendable, although modest and prudent, is still an aggressive laughter. Even when exercised among friends, and consequently in some way a reciprocal laughter, it needs to be reined in so as not to turn friendship into enmity. Other thinkers, such as the Church Father John Chrysostom (349–407), were even more careful with regard to laughter's aggressive propensities, suggesting that it is perhaps better to avoid it altogether.[7] St John Chrysostom is, compared with Aristotle, more worried about the asymmetric characteristics of aggressive laughter, perhaps sensitized by the scenes of the mocking of Christ in the Gospels as well as

the persecution of Christianity in the centuries just before his own time. Nevertheless, he is at one with Aristotle about the possibilities of laughter to disturb or overthrow the self-control of the subject. Irrespective of regarding modest laughter as permissible or taking an even more restrictive view of laughter, the emphasis on self-control remains. This emphasis is slightly more problematic in St John Chrysostom than in Aristotle, as St John Chrysostom must recognize, as a Christian, that a human being cannot be in control of what ultimately matters: the reception of grace. For grace to be received as grace, i.e., the gratuitous reception of a gift and not something that is owed to the subject, the self has to give up some of its power to control the transactions between itself and the other. The self is reconfigured by Christian theology in the sense of being a genuine self, even a passive, receiving or even suffering self rather than the preferably active or controlling self, and that reconfiguration is slowly being worked out in the course of history even regarding laughter. To St John Chrysostom, however, laughter still threatens the integrity of the self.

## Sympathetic laughter

It was not until the 18th century that the notion of aggressive laughter received serious competition.[8] Often in direct response to Thomas Hobbes, a number of British philosophers suggested that far from always being aggressive, laughter can be an expression of mutual sympathy. The philosopher Adam Smith, whose *Theory of Moral Sentiments* from 1759 advocated the idea of mutual sympathy, thought that laughter could *not* foster such an ideal.[9] But philosophers such as James Beattie, Francis Hutcheson and Lord Shaftesbury, journals such as *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* as well as authors such as Henry Fielding thought otherwise.[10] Central to their claim was some kind of distinction between a "good" and a "bad" laughter: Hutcheson distinguished between "laughter" and "ridicule"; Beattie drew the line between "innocent mirth" and "unseasonable buffoonery"; and a number of thinkers suggested that "humour" and "wit" were different species.[11] Their point was, consequently, not that aggressive laughter did not exist but that there was also another laughter, a sym-

pathetic laughter born of a shared perception of something ludicrous, emphatically not a deformity in someone else but rather a form of perceived incongruity in how things are. This sympathetic laughter was the natural laughter, as the feeling of sympathy was the natural feeling, unlike unnatural antipathy or unnatural aggressive laughter. It was thus imperative to judge accurately when laughter could be considered prudent so as not to fall into perverted laughter.

The Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Hutcheson could even allow for a mild form of ridicule against the horizon of mutual sympathy, as when an already established bond of friendship between the laugher and the laughee ensured that the laughable shortcomings of the latter did not intrude on the friendship. This laughter, however, must be perceived to "flow from kindness" and not the opposite.[12] Hutcheson here comes close to what Aristotle has to say about laughter among friends, that asymmetry could be allowed against a horizon of symmetry. Nevertheless, there is a difference between Hutcheson and Aristotle with regard to laughter, as the former thought of sympathetic laughter as the natural form of laughter and aggressive laughter as a deviation, whereas it was the other way around for the latter: to Aristotle, aggressive laughter is natural but could be domesticated under certain circumstances.

It is not wrong to think that this 18th-century British notion of laughter and humour has defined what the contemporary world thinks about humour. Humour is often seen as something good, something natural, something that characterizes the tolerant mind, whereas whatever is aggressive is defined as not really humorous. According to the intellectual historian Daniel Wickberg, humour is today seen as "an essential feature of the normal, the sane, the balanced, the healthy personality".[13] Whatever its idea about humour and sympathetic laughter, however, it is decidedly incorrect to suggest that 18th-century Britain in general cultivated a particularly sympathetic culture of laughter. On the contrary, as the literary scholar Simon Dickie has shown, the comic literature of the 18th century was anything but sympathetic in tone, instead revelling in jokes about physical deformities (especially deafness), violence (with a particular fond-

ness for jokes about rape and domestic violence), poverty, disease and fraud.[14] According to Dickie, there is a huge gulf between precept and practice in the (un)sentimental 18th century, and we could of course ask whether our own time with its conviction that humour is inherently sympathetic suffers from the same blindness.

What interests me here is the possible transformation of our understanding of subjectivity implicit in the differing accounts of laughter. In the classic tradition, laughter is asymmetric in that the basic laughing relationship is between someone who is laughing at someone else and that someone else who is being laughed at. Except for laughter among friends, this relationship is neither reversible nor reciprocal: if the laugher were to become the laughee, that would be considered an unfortunate circumstance for the former. In later British tradition, however, the relationship is symmetric: true, natural laughter is to occur as part of the mutual sympathy among friends. Laughter is no longer understood (at least officially) to be directed at other human beings but instead at some perceived incongruity between things of some sort, or at a purely linguistic incongruity. Even here, as I mentioned, friendship allows for a slightly different accent, with asymmetry being allowed within a shared and more encompassing symmetry. Still, the emphasis in this idea of sympathetic laughter is that you are laughing with someone, not at someone; it is a symmetric rather than an asymmetric relationship.

Even though the idea of laughter has changed since the classical age, some things about laughter have not changed. In the classical tradition, the subjectivity of the laugher was defined by self-control. The reason why laughter should not be too violent but rather modest was that the laugher should not lose control, and this was also the reason why the laugher should not become an object of laughter. Now, even in the sympathetic understanding of laughter, self-control is implicit; care has to be taken (again, in theory) so as not to ridicule or wound the other, causing her or him to lose face. If the asymmetric laughter of the classical tradition presupposed that there was no harm in laughing at someone who is inferior, infringing upon their subjectivity in ways that might cause them to forfeit their self-control, the

symmetric laughter of the British tradition instead let all the participants in the laughing relationship keep their self-control. The object of laughter therefore moved out of the interpersonal relationship as such, instead attaching itself to an incongruous object like the Australian duck-billed platypus, i.e., an animal that looks like a beaver with a beak.

Of course, for both Aristotle and Hutcheson, laughter among friends seems to be the exception. Against the mutual background of trust, laughter among friends takes the hostility out of aggressive laughter or, in the later version, allows for a moment of ridicule within the larger scope of mutual sympathy. Under certain circumstances, the self-controlled subject could without fear allow for some loss of control. Phenomenologically, the experience contained in these exceptions might be worth exploring, as it hints at experience that transcends the purely asymmetric or purely symmetric relationship and therefore also at a subjectivity that is not primarily understood in terms of self-control. This will bring us to look at not only friendship, *philia*, but also at love, *agape* or *eros*, as possible forms of this subjectivity beyond self-control.

## Three different forms of love: *philia*, *eros* and *agape*

Love is other-related. To put it in another way, love is a form of relationship between self and other, which means that not only is the other figured in distinct ways by love but also the self. Even self-love could be understood as other-related in that the self relates to itself as other. Narcissus, famously, fell in love with his own reflection; thus, a minimal distinction between the self and the reflection of the self is introduced in the narcissistic self.[15] Further, this relationship between self and other that we call love can appear in quite different forms, which is reflected in the several terms for love we find, for example, in Greek: *philia*, *agape* and *eros*.

I will use friendship (*philia*) as the first form of love, since I have already repeatedly mentioned it. For Aristotle, as noted, friendship should be understood as a reciprocal and symmetric relationship. As the philosopher says in book eight of his *Nicomachean Ethics*: "To be

friends [. . . ] men must feel goodwill for each other, that is, wish each other's good, and be aware of each other's goodwill, and the cause of their goodwill must be one of the lovable qualities", that is, "what is good, or pleasant, or useful".[16] Friendship that is based on either pleasure or utility, however, is dissolved as soon as the motive for friendship disappears. It is only the friendship based on virtue that is a "perfect form of friendship", since here it is "between the good, and those who resemble each other in virtue".[17] In friendships based on virtue there is reciprocity in terms of both giving and receiving, unlike in friendships based on pleasure or utility, since those friendships are based not on reciprocal giving and receiving but, in the end, only on what the self can get out of the other.[18] Thus, a party to a friendship based on pleasure or utility does not find the other lovable in her- or himself but only as a means to her or his own pleasure or utility. True friendship is a friendship between equals (excepting friendships in an analogical sense that Aristotle mentions, for example, between father and son, husband and wife, or ruler and ruled), which means that the genuinely friendly relationship is not only reciprocal but symmetric. It is not only a "contractual" symmetry, however, as the friendly self bestows upon the friendly other not according to merit but according to possibility.[19] The reciprocity between friends allows for a certain excessive asymmetry, but only within the bounds of a more fundamental symmetry. This is also why genuine friendship primarily occurs between free men; although friendship between, for instance, husband and wife is possible, this is, according to Aristoteles, an unequal—and, we may assume, secondary—friendship. In true friendship according to Aristotle, friends are not dependent upon each other, nor does the giving and receiving between friends compromise their standing as men in possession of themselves.

Is Aristotle talking about neighbourly love when he talks about friendship? I am not so sure; neighbourly love, it seems to me, presupposes some kind of possible asymmetry or dependence which does not need to be unilateral but can change according to situation. Friends can indeed be neighbours in this more intensive sense, but that would mean going beyond Aristotle.

I shall soon return to the question of love as friendship and the kind of subjectivity implied by Aristotle's account of it, but let me first say something about the two other forms of love, *eros* and *agape*. This pairing is described as contrasting in the work of the Swedish theologian Anders Nygren and his book *Agape and Eros*, originally written in Swedish in the 1930s but subsequently translated into several languages and earning some repute.[20] As will be clear, I think that Nygren's distinction between *eros* and *agape* is exaggerated, but as a typological exercise it can make us aware of liminal forms of the experience of love that the two terms signify. Paradigmatic forms of *eros* and *agape* are found in Plato and St Paul. I shall disregard both the historical context of these paradigmatic forms of love as well as the question of whether Nygren's interpretation of them is correct, instead focusing on his antithetical configuration of their paradigmatic and typological forms.

According to Nygren, the main difference between *eros* and *agape* is the difference between an "egocentric attitude" (in a non-moral sense) and a "theocentric attitude", the former being the ego's own desire for God and the latter standing for a spontaneous and unmotivated kind of love that is indeed "indifferent to value".[21] *Agape* "does not look for anything in man that could be adduced as motivation for it"; it is "directly opposed to all rational computation and calculation".[22] Compared with my account of Aristotle's friendship above, agapeic love is quite distinct in that it does not find its motivation in any of the lovable qualities of the other; on the contrary, in a sense there is no motivation at all for such a love but only pure spontaneity. This is where the talk of neighbourly love has its origin, in a love where the vulnerable neighbour becomes the asymmetric addressee of agapeic love. The contrast to *agape* in Nygren is *eros*, which is characterized by "a desire, a longing, a striving"; the human being "only desires and longs for that which he has not got, and of which he feels a need; and he can only strive for that which he feels to be valuable".[23] Erotic love is not only motivated by something that it finds lovable but it is, as Nygren puts it, "acquisitive" in that it wants to take possession of what it finds lovable.

This has consequences for how subjectivity is regarded according to the different forms of love. With regard to *eros*, it is the human subject that is active and the loving part, and the object of love that is passive. With regard to *agape*, in contrast, it is the human self that is passive and God who is active. Erotic love tries to fill a need, a lack in the self, whereas agapeic love is completely undeserved or perhaps even unwanted by the self. The emphasis in erotic love is on what the self receives or hopes to receive, whereas in agapeic love it is on what the self gives. Of course, in agapeic love, it is not really the human being that is the active subject of love, "but God Himself, yet in such a way that the Divine love employs man as its instrument and organ".[24] Nygren actually goes to some lengths to express the passivity of the self in agapeic love, saying that the self has nothing of its own to give: "In relation to God and his neighbour, the Christian can be likened to a tube, which by faith is open upwards, and by love downwards."[25] The image of the tube, of course, is meant to convey utter passivity. The Christian, as well as the neighbour it seems, is turned into an object devoid of subjectivity.

### Could there be asymmetric reciprocity of love?

To put this distinction in terms I have already been using, both agapeic and erotic love are asymmetric. In the latter, there is a lack in the self that only the other can fill: there is a qualitative difference between being on the receiving and on the giving side, between being the *eromenos* and the *erastes*. As Michel Foucault puts it, there was an accepted convention, in the classical age, that "the *Eros* came from the lover; as for the beloved, he could not be an active subject of love on the same basis as the *erastes*".[26] Agapeic love, on the other hand, is also asymmetric but the other way round: only God can truly be an active subject of love, which means that human beings are in the position of being passive objects of love. On the human side of the relationship, love can only consist in receiving, not giving (except as an "instrument and organ" of God's love). But it is receiving without wanting: to want something would mean to reach out for it, even if in thought only, which would be an activity of desire. The proper mode of receiv-

ing agapeic love, in Nygren's way of reasoning, is through faith, which means believing and trusting, not wanting.

There is a historical shift, through Christianity, in how activity and passivity were valued in anthropological terms, a shift that might complicate things for this neat distinction between eros and agape.[27] For now, let us stick with this typology by pointing out that the human being, as the receiver of agapeic love, can no longer be considered a self-controlled agent but has to give up his or her self-control to become the recipient of love in grace. The erotic lover, however, should avoid being carried away by their desire for the loved one, lest they lose their self-control. In principle, the lover occupies the same hierarchical relationship towards the loved one in this classical tradition as does the laugher to the laughee. At the same time, this self-control is always precarious and needs to be cultivated through deliberate training (*askesis*) so that, in their search for pleasure, the lover does not succumb to the loved one in their yearning for love but remains in control.[28] The ideal is not to be free of desire altogether, but to desire with one's integrity intact—as is the case with laughter. "Self-mastery was a way of being a man with respect to oneself", according to Foucault, and to lose that mastery was to lose one's integrity as a man.[29]

Thus, both *agape* and *eros* entail a certain asymmetry. This asymmetry is emphasized, although in different ways, to the point that it becomes hard to understand whether there is the possibility of any kind or reciprocity, as in friendship. In pure agapeic love, neither yearning for nor returning God's love is, strictly speaking, possible, as this would mean that the pure passivity of the beloved is compromised. Erotic love, as described here, is perhaps not as strict, but there is still a distinct hierarchy between the active lover and the pursued object of love. This hierarchy can be tempered, meaning that erotic love gives way to friendship and the mode of the relationship is changed.[30] In principle, then, erotic love cannot be understood as reciprocal without compromising the asymmetry between self and other. Can one not lose oneself but nevertheless return to oneself as an other? Is there not, in love, the possible experience of a reconstitution of subjectivity, so that I cannot be the same after love as I was before? Friend-

ship, as described with the help of Aristotle, does have this possibility of asymmetric reciprocity in that it allows for asymmetry, even if it never ventures outside the bounds of symmetric reciprocity. Good friends are each other's peers, in Aristotle's understanding, so there is no question of leaving one's comfort zone by befriending one's enemy, so to speak. But is there not more radical asymmetric reciprocity in some ordinary experiences of love?

Some biblical stories are of course centred on the experience of gaining oneself through losing oneself. There is the parable of the prodigal son, for instance, who frivolously spends his inheritance but is nevertheless welcomed back by his father despite his destitution (cf. Luke 15:11–32), or the story of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which describes a similar trajectory and relationality of love that can be reduced to neither agapeic nor erotic love in the way presented here. If agapeic love is, as Nygren has it, centred on the other, whereas erotic love is centred on the self, the movement or direction of both these concepts of love is unilateral to adequately render the loss of self under the aegis of a hope to return to self as to other. To love someone—as in ordinary, everyday love, not only in these biblical stories—because of their inherent lovableness and with the hope of having that love reciprocated is neither, contra Nygren, egocentric nor "other-centric", but an example of a relationality of excess; it is an example of a creative discovery that transgresses any neat hierarchy between self and other without doing away with the asymmetry that is a presupposition of genuine otherness.

The French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion has presented a phenomenological understanding of love in *The Erotic Phenomenon* that points in this direction. He argues explicitly against the possibility of reciprocity in love: "reciprocity has nothing to do with love and befits only the economy and calculation of exchange".[31] At the same time, it is clear that Marion understands reciprocity as tit for tat within the economy of exchange in which the excess and spontaneity and risk of love would be lost. Love is "to give without return or chance of recovery, and thus to be able to lose and, eventually, to be lost in love".[32] Without the risk of losing oneself in love, the self never dares

to take leave of self-control, but then never experiences the chance of being loved in anything other than a symmetric love. In that sense, Nygren is correct in wanting to understand agapeic love as "directly opposed to all rational computation and calculation". This is central to what neighbourly love is all about. Love is genuine, according to Marion, when it is experienced as something "coming upon me from elsewhere than myself; it thus assigns me an irreversible dependency upon that which I can neither master, nor provoke, nor even envisage".[33] There is asymmetry in the experience of neighbourly love. On the other hand, there is hope for a response, hope that can be reduced to neither a demand nor a debt, since this would deny the freedom of the love that is hoped for. To hope for love is already not to know or already not to possess the hoped-for love.

It is through this free response of love—"the properly infinite excess of the lover"—from the other that I will receive myself back, but now as another.[34] "We only love one another at the price of a continued re-creation, a continuous quasi-creation, without end or rest."[35] Erotic love is part of this picture too, as there is a lack in the self that the self is hoping love could remedy, but as this is a constant lack, there is no way that love can become a possession of the yearning self; my thirst will never be slaked once and for all but only in a continuous receiving. My hope for love is reciprocated in the other's grace.[36] In the experience of a love outside of exchange, and thus more radical than Aristotle's friendship, asymmetric reciprocity seems to be possible at the same time as the distinction between *agape* and *eros* collapses. As Marion puts it, one "must have a good deal of naïveté or blindness, or rather know nothing of the lover and of erotic logic, not to see that *agape* possesses and consumes as much as *eros* gives up and abandons".[37] Of course, here both possessing and consuming as well as giving up and abandoning function in the mode of excess—what I call asymmetric reciprocity—rather than exchange. To love is to want not to be oneself without the other, but such a love is possible only through letting the other remain other as well as becoming other oneself. Unlike in Aristotle's version of friendship, which tends to be understood as a symmetric reciprocity, love is, according to Marion, an

asymmetric reciprocity, and the symmetric reciprocity of friendship is perhaps only possible against the background—the condition of possibility, even—of an asymmetric reciprocity in which love is understood as a gift, not as a given.[38]

## Laughter as recreation and re-creation

The price of love is "a continued re-creation", according to Marion.[39] This means that to find oneself in love is neither pure self-affirmation nor total disregard of self but rather a "discontinuous continuity" in which the self, in love, discovers itself as other and through the other. Such a love, it seems, implies a subjectivity beyond self-control both because the self puts itself at risk in loving the other and because the self in its hope of a response from the other is prepared to be re-created through the other. In such a loving relationship beyond symmetric reciprocity, is there space for laughter? If so, what kind of laughter is it, and how does it relate to the subjectivity of the laugher and the laughee?

Laughter among friends is said to be possible in both Aristotle and Hutcheson. Despite their differences, both think of laughter as recreative in another sense than Marion's, recreation here being understood as refreshment, pastime, play or amusement. When Thomas Aquinas in *Summa theologiae* rehabilitated the Aristotelian tradition of wit and laughter in the 13th century, this is precisely what he was thinking of: even if nothing other is sought in "playful" or "humorous" words than "the soul's delight", such wit can still be a virtue since it brings necessary rest and refreshment to the soul.[40] We need some modest amusement since the soul tires from its intellectual activities in the same way that the body tires from physical work, and the delight that laughter brings serves as refreshment. Laughter as recreation does not intrude on the self but is instrumentalized in the service of the self. Consequently, laughter among friends does not, in principle, transgress an economy of exchange. This is part of its value as recreation, but recreation only in the sense of play or amusement, emphatically not re-creation in the way that love continuously re-creates the self, as the self is never put at risk. It seems that

laughter among friends is not a laughter of neighbourly love, as its possible merits lie elsewhere.

What about an agapeic laughter of love or an erotic laughter of love? As suggested above, both agapeic and erotic love, at least in the typological understanding of them, are characterized by unilateral directionality. Agapeic love seems ultimately not to be a human capability or possibility, but if it is taken for such, the lover is someone who only gives but never receives, because agapeic love cannot remain pure if it is hoping for love returned. This means that the lover remains the unilateral giver of love, since the reception of gifted love would imply a passivity that would undo the self-control of the loving self. In the agapeic love relationship, on the other hand, the other is reduced to pure reception, without the capability or possibility of loving back. What an agapeic laughter of love would be, from the point of view of the loving self, is hard to imagine, at least if some kind of response from the laughee is essential to the experience of laughter. In a purely unilateral laughter, the laughing self would remain the kind of self characterized by self-possession, so the laughter would only be laughter *at* someone or something that bears an uncanny resemblance to the aggressive laughter of the classical tradition. The laugher does not want or expect anything from the laughee, and the laughee only passively offers the occasion for the laughter. From the point of view of the other, the one who is being laughed at, things are more interesting, as the experience of being the object of love or being laughed at challenges the self-possession of the other. The other can no longer, if the other receives the gift of love or laughter, remain in control but must be open to the experience of receiving something. Perhaps the laughter is an act of aggression that violently forces itself upon the laughee, but perhaps again the laughter is really an act of grace that forces the laughee to give up his or her self-centred and ultimately delusional pretensions of control? If there is a laughter of love, then at least the other, the laughee, in the agapeic relationship of love is being re-created in the strong sense, i.e., not only refreshed but constituted anew, as a self that has made the experience of self-alienation central to itself.

Erotic love is definitively a human capability or possibility, but its unilateral directionality delimits the efficacy of any possible erotic laughter. Here, the object of love can in principle remain unperturbed as the wants and yearnings of the lover are of little or no consequence to it. If the object of love, untroubled by the desire of the lover, laughs at this lover, we can assume that this is laughter not of love but of mocking. On the part of the loving self, however, things can be more or less interesting. If the desire of the self, in the erotic relationship, is only meant to fill a lack in the self through the other, then the self can in principle remain in control, as the other is only used as a means within a selfish economy of possession. But if the loving self truly cannot be or want to be itself without the other, then the other is not just an object in the self-constituting commerce of the lover but is being re-created by the excess of the loving self. The laughter of the beloved can be just mocking, but it can also be the occasion of insight into the foolishness of love on behalf of the loving self. A fool is a person who is not in possession of her- or himself, and is thus a self that is laughable in the eyes of others. At the same time, the fool is a self that is able, through its very foolishness, to become aware of its need to receive the gift of love from the other to become itself. It is a self that cannot be itself except through the love of the other, and laughter can be a reminder, however painful, of this foolishness that makes the self truly eccentric in the sense of a self that stands outside itself. Thus, to the loving self, laughter can be a force of re-creation in the strong sense, in which the experience of self-alienation becomes central to the self.

I am aware that this account of the possibility of an agapeic laughter of love or an erotic laughter of love is abstract and schematic, but this is to illustrate distinctly how the possibility of re-creating the self is an essential aspect of a possible laughter of neighbourly love. A genuine laughter of neighbourly love is not just laughter between friends that leaves the self as it is. Such a symmetric reciprocity only gives rise to recreation in the weak sense. If a laughter of love is possible, then this laughter must be of a kind that re-creates the self in a stronger sense than this. It cannot only be laughter that has no pretensions of exposing the vulnerability of the self or the other but must share at

least some features with an aggressive laughter. One central such feature would be that it is directed against the object of laughter and in this directedness can disturb the laughee in some existentially fundamental way. William Desmond holds out the prospect of something related when he proposes that "[s]ome forms of laughter can be both violent and loving" and illustrates how: "A joke at our own expense can make us strangers to ourselves; and yet this being strange shows us up more intimately."[41] As Desmond notes, such a laughter could well be an aggressive laughter that betrays or destroys rather than exposes the self that is the object of laughter; the possibilities of an aggressive and a loving laughter are closely parallel, however, if the possibility of a strong sense of re-creating the self is not to be frustrated at the outset. The other in the agapeic relationship of love but also the self in some versions of an erotic relationship of love are characterized by precisely this loss of self-possession that is a consequence also of the asymmetric understanding of laughter.

The reason that laughter can be both violent and loving at the same time is that it can be violent in that it exposes the illusory self-possession of a self but in a way that does not annihilate the self. A laughter that causes the self to lose itself altogether can be characterized as only violent and not loving, as this constitutes an experience of alienation without any affirmation. On the other hand, a laughter that is only affirmative and not in any way alienating is not a loving laughter but a recreative laughter in the weak sense, in that it never questions or challenges the self-possession of the laughing self. A truly loving laughter, then, must be one that includes some aspect of "violence" in that it challenges any delusional sense of being a self in possession of itself; this challenge is experienced as the occasion of the strong re-creation of the self rather than the annihilation of the self and thus strikes a balance between alienation and affirmation. In loving laughter, the challenge that causes the alienation of the self occurs against the hopeful horizon of a more fundamental affirmation of the self as an other.

The phenomenological deficiency of the typological account of agapeic and erotic love is not their asymmetry but their lack of reci-

procity. Love as asymmetric reciprocity can go beyond the economy of exchange, so the laughter of love should also be understood as an excess in relation to the symmetric reciprocity of laughter between friends. As just shown, loving laughter that strikes a balance between alienation and affirmation is premised on a horizon of hope, hope that the laughter is not only an aggressive laughter that causes utter alienation on behalf of the self but also an affirmative laughter that can re-create the self as other. This premise includes reciprocity between self and other that avoids reducing self and other to two self-sufficient and self-possessive entities. But this reciprocity must not be symmetrical, so as not to reduce the relationship between self and other to an economic exchange. In the story of Sarah in Genesis, there are several kinds of laughter: mocking laughter, nervous laughter, but most of all, and in the end, affirmative laughter that is also contagious (and therefore social) laughter, at the prospect of receiving a child as the ultimate gift (Genesis 21:6): "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." "God has made laughter for me"; the source of laughter lies outside Sarah's own self, it is gifted. The occasion of laughter is not unambiguous, as Sarah has her doubts about the divine giver's sincerity as well as her own ability to bear a child at her advanced age. But in her final laughter, these alienating features are overcome in affirming gift, giver and reciprocity. Sarah's laughter illustrates a laughter that goes beyond an economy of exchange and is a candidate for being laughter of love in its balance of alienation and affirmation, through which she is being re-created in the strong sense.

## Conclusion: laughter among friends and the laughter of love

Most of our laughter, I suppose, occurs within an economy of exchange. Of course, there are also many examples of aggressive laughter that do not occur against the horizon of broader affirmation and are therefore just humiliating. The modern age is not necessarily better in the sense of being more sensitive than the classical age, even though we want to think it is. But there is also a lot of laughter that seems to

have an important social cohesion function and that is recreative in the weak sense. Such laughter might occasion a final question about the possible laughter of love, namely, whether such laughter is really that desirable given the risk of being abused by laughter. Furthermore, is it really a very desirable prospect to be constantly re-created through laughter? Perhaps laughter among friends is a more attractive option, especially if we acknowledge that being in control or possession of oneself might sometimes be a very good thing. To write a text, as I am doing now, one needs to be, most days, in possession of oneself. The self-controlled and self-possessed scholarly self might sometimes need a little comic relief, and laughter shared among friends might strengthen the bond between colleagues. Should we not also ask whether laughter among friends could sometimes serve as a screen to protect us from the violence of a loving laughter, to keep us from constantly standing outside ourselves?

The short answer to all these legitimate questions would be, I think, that it is not a question of either/or. The re-creative laughter of love should be understood as the horizon and the condition for the possibility of the more common recreational laughter among friends. If our existence is ultimately borne by neighbourly love as an asymmetric reciprocity, then the symmetric reciprocity of friendship is the penultimate reception of that more radical gift. It is not a question of being either friends or lovers or neighbours, as it is possible to be all three of them at the same time, having a friendship nourished by the constant possibility and actuality of neighbourly love. Laughter among friends might not be the same thing as a laughter of love, but the way a laughter of love is managed to make it more bearable. Recreation in the weak sense might seem trivial, but not if it reminds us of how we are continuously being re-created in the strong sense by neighbourly love.

## NOTES

1 Hobbes 1999, pp. 54–55. On the history of laughter, see my work Sigurdson 2021.
2 Aristotle 1967, 2, 12, 16.
3 Aristotle 1962, 7, 7, 6.
4 Joubert 1980, p. 28.
5 Aristotle 1967, 2, 4, 13.
6 Halliwell 2008, p. 323.
7 St John Chrysostom 1995, p. 442.
8 Therapeutic laughter is another story.
9 Smith 2002, pp. 17–20.
10 See the excellent book about this period by Stuart M. Tave (1960).
11 Hutcheson 1994, p. 50; Beattie 1778, p. 377.
12 Hutcheson 1994, p. 60.
13 Wickberg 1998, p. 91.
14 Dickie 2011.
15 Cf. Freud 2011, pp. 51–77, but also my own book Sigurdson 2016.
16 Aristotle 1962, 8, 2, 4 and 8, 2, 1.
17 Aristotle 1962, 8, 3, 6.
18 Cf. Aristotle 1962, 8, 4, 2.
19 Cf. Aristotle 1962, 8, 14, 4.
20 Nygren 1930; 1936, in English, see Nygren 1982; cf. Lacan 1999, pp. 75–76. For a more thorough discussion of Nygren on *eros* and *agape*, see Sigurdson 2014, pp. 523–537.
21 Nygren 1982, p. 77.
22 Nygren 1982, pp. 76, 90.
23 Nygren 1982, pp. 175–176.
24 Nygren 1982, pp. 733–734.
25 Nygren 1982, p. 735.
26 Foucault 1990, p. 239.
27 Cf. Sigurdson 2016, pp. 243–292 et passim, as well as 2021, vol. 3, pp. 37–155.
28 Foucault 1990, pp. 63–77.
29 Foucault 1990, p. 82.
30 Cf. Foucault 1990, p. 239.
31 Marion 1997, p. 69.
32 Marion 1997, p. 71.
33 Marion 1997, p. 41.
34 Marion 1997, p. 87.
35 Marion 1997, p. 195.
36 Cf. Marion 1997, p. 213.
37 Marion 1997, p. 221.
38 The concepts of gift and given are essential to Marion's thought. See, for example, Marion 2002, as well as 1991.
39 Marion 1997, p. 195.
40 Thomas Aquinas 1972, II–II, q. 168, a. 2, resp.
41 Desmond 2018, p. 305.

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# BETWEEN YOU AND ME

## Listening, neighborly love, and second-person poetics

CLAUDIA WELZ

### Introduction: the love of the nearest and the love of the most distant

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when infection often had lethal consequences since no vaccines were available, Bernd Ulrich wrote the following lines in *Die Zeit*, the German weekly: "Da vorn sind Menschen auf dem Bürgersteig, jetzt bloß solidarisch sein und ihnen aus dem Weg gehen. Nächstenliebe als Fernstenliebe." Translated freely: "There are human beings on the sidewalk; let us show solidarity and get out of their way. The love of the nearest has become the love of the farthest."[1] I guess this was meant at least partly ironically, yet Ulrich's words were also deadly serious at a time when thousands of people, even young and previously healthy ones, died in agony and isolation after being infected. Love and concern for others were then expressed by distancing oneself physically from those who crossed one's path—with the double effect of being considerate to particularly vulnerable groups who might not survive an infection, and protecting oneself from the unknown effects of an infection.

If we reconsider the biblical concept and phenomenon of neighborly love in the 21st century, this raises the question of whether the love of one's neighbor (in German: *Nächstenliebe*, literally translated: "the love of the nearest") still involves the proximity to the neighbor, or whether this has turned into the love of the most distant (*Fernstenliebe*). The danger of becoming infected with fatal diseases has challenged our ideas of how much safety distance there should be between us when we meet in public, and this may also have changed our sense of intimacy in private life. Yet, another question also emerges: Is the

idea of the neighbor intrinsically defined by proximity, in the sense of a measurable *number* of meters or centimeters, or is the neighbor defined by something else, which may not even be visible, let alone measurable—namely, a specific *quality of the relationship* that connects us, even over a spatial distance? If it is indeed the quality of the relationship that is decisive, this would explain why many of us feel so concerned by wars that are taking place far away, whether in Ukraine, in Gaza, or in Africa.

In his celebrated book, *Ich und Du* (1923), in English: *I and Thou*, Germanophone philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965), who was born in Vienna, introduces a fundamental distinction between two attitudes:[2] (1) The I–Thou attitude (*Ich–Du Haltung*) is not goal-directed, but instead implies that one "holds oneself" (*sich halten*) in a dialogical relationship, and "responds to the *presence* of the other spontaneously, innocently," without any forethought or intention "other than being utterly present—attentive—to the presence of the other."[3] (2) If, in contrast, one assumes an I–It attitude (*Ich–Es Haltung*), one's counterpart exists only as an object of one's experience, and thus is instrumentalized.

In this chapter, my reflections are based on the working hypothesis that the love of one's neighbor, of one's fellow human being, as commanded by the Hebrew Bible/Tanach (Leviticus 19:18) and the New Testament (Matthew 22:39)—"Love your neighbor as yourself"[4]—implies an I–Thou relation, as described by Buber. If the I–Thou relation is characterized by one's concentrated attention to the Other, thanks to communication technology, we need not necessarily be in the same room as the Other for our attitude to qualify as that of neighborly love. But who then, among millions of people, truly counts as "my" neighbor?

We will proceed in three steps. First, Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan will provide an answer to the question of who "my" neighbor is. I draw on Søren Kierkegaard's (1813–1855) thinking to distinguish between neighborly love and preferential and/or erotic love. Two contemporary examples that question the scope of Christian love today will lead us back to the biblical texts. Second, I will juxta-

pose Dietrich Bonhoeffer's (1906–1945) perspective on listening as the primary act of love, and Emmanuel Levinas's (1906–1995) perspective on neighborly love as responsibility, derived from one's responsiveness to the Other: Can responsibility literally be understood as a response to a call? In this case, listening to this call is crucial. If we follow Kelly Oliver's reading of responsibility as response-ability, Levinas's emphasis on the agent's passivity when confronted with a call that (s)he cannot meet, and that precedes his or her freedom, is transformed into an active answer. I will reconsider the relationship between activity and passivity through Jean-Luc Marion's (b. 1946) interpretation of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's painting *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1600) with respect to current debates in the field of care ethics, and recent research on the ethical demand in philosophy and Christian ethics. Third, I will explore the dialogical dynamics of becoming oneself vis-à-vis the Other from the perspective of Franz Rosenzweig's (1886–1929) and Buber's descriptions of neighborly love in relation to God. In an inconclusive conclusion, I will defend the middle path of a "both … and" (i.e., of grammatical medio-passivity) by relating ethical *πρᾶξις* to artistic *ποίησις* in "second-person poetics."

## 1. Who is my neighbor?

In *Works of Love* (originally in Danish: *Kjerlighedens gjerninger*, 1847) the Danish Protestant theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard meditates on the meaning of the biblical commandment to love God and one's neighbor. His book is structured as two series of discourses. In the first series, discourse II.B elaborates on what it means to love "the neighbor."[5] Right at the beginning of the discourse, he puts forth his main claim in italics: "*It is in fact Christian love that discovers and knows that the neighbor exists and, what is the same thing, that everyone is the neighbor.*"[6] No matter whom I meet, I meet my neighbor(s). No-one may be excluded from being my neighbor. The reason for this state of affairs is that it is "*a duty to love*,"[7] which implies that we are to love "all people, unconditionally all."[8] If, instead, the love of one's neighbor was grounded in fleeting feelings and emotions, it could not be

commanded at all.[9] There are people for whom we feel no love in the affective sense of the word. However, if the love of one's neighbor is grounded in acts of the will rather than inclinations, we have no excuse whatsoever, when we do not comply with what we are commanded to do. Doing "the right thing" requires seeing oneself and others in a certain way. When we see others, we understand ourselves in view of "the moral appeal coming from what we see."[10]

In reply to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29), Jesus recounted the parable of the Good Samaritan, the only one who helped the man on the road who was attacked by robbers, beaten, and left half-dead. Interestingly, it was a foreigner who bandaged the wounds of the attacked and took care of him. "The one who had mercy on him" (Luke 10:37) was the one who showed *himself* to be the victim's neighbor. He, the helper, did not ask whether or not the wounded one was *his neighbor*; on the contrary, he ignored all ethnic, national, and religious differences, and discovered his fellow human being in one who needed his help.[11] Jesus's parable inverts the perspective of the expert in Jewish law who raised this question. Although the questioner was looking for a criterion to delineate, and thus delimit, the number of those who count as his neighbors, he learned that his question points back to himself and asks *him* to whom *he* wants to be a neighbor.

The decisive point is not that we recognize some special distinguishing feature of a limited group of people who would qualify as *our neighbors*, but that we know how to act in such a way that *we ourselves* may count as our neighbors' neighbors. Hence, our line of vision is directed away from others, and directed back at us, the viewers. Or, more precisely, to *me*, the first-person-singular agent, who is encouraged to perform the transformative action of loving my neighbors.

Kierkegaard builds up two lines of argumentation in *Works of Love*.[12] In one of them, he argues that Christianity has replaced preferential love with the all-inclusive love of the neighbor that is based on our "*equality*" before God.[13] In another line of argumentation, he holds that the biblical commandment to love tells us to preserve love for the neighbor *in* erotic love, *in* friendship, and *in* self-love.[14]

According to both lines of argumentation, the love of one's neighbor includes everyone: The nearest and dearest, the stranger and foreigner, friend and foe alike. Moreover, the love of one's neighbor appears to be both a gift and a potential self-sacrifice,[15] since all "*selfishness*" is "*rooted out*."[16]

Much has been written about *agape,* that is, Christian love (in Greek: *ἀγάπη*), and agapeistic ethics—and not all theologians and philosophers wish to distinguish it as sharply from erotic love as Kierkegaard does; instead, this essential distinction is problematized.[17] Jesus's and Kierkegaard's uncompromising understanding of neighborly love becomes obvious when we consider its ethical implications and consequences with regard to contemporary examples that question the concrete scope of Christian love as surfacing in and through Christians' actions and omissions.

In Germany there was a public debate in connection with the fire at the Moria refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos in 2020. The conservative "C parties"—CDU and CSU, which have "Christianity" in their names—were criticized: Had they not betrayed (*verraten*) the unconditional love of one's neighbor (*die bedingungslose Nächstenliebe*) because they failed to take appropriate action?[18] In any case, they failed to help hundreds of their neighbors whom they were supposed to support; they also failed to welcome refugees to Germany, and instead introduced quotas and criteria to determine who may be granted asylum, and who may not; worst of all, according to the accusations, thousands of people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea because of these restrictive policies.[19]

It was the secular public that reminded the C parties of the promise expressed in the Gospel of Matthew 25:31–46: When the risen Christ will return for the Last Judgment, all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the righteous people from the iniquitous. The former will inherit God's kingdom, the latter will be sent into the eternal fire. Why? The explanation is linked to their behavior: "[W]hatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me," Christ tells those who will forever live in God's presence (verse 40, cf. 45). In contrast, those who un-

knowingly met Christ in a human being who was hungry, and did not give him food, or who met Christ in a stranger, but did not invite her in, or in those who were sick or in prison, but they did not look after the sick and imprisoned, they will go to hell (in the sense of being permanently separated from the God they rejected by despising their fellow human beings). According to this Last Judgment scenario in the New Testament, each and every person counts. The question is whether Christians today still believe that each human life has an absolute value, regardless of a person's status, functions, and "usefulness." The Gospel speaks clearly against all forms of utilitarianism that entail being willing to help only some, while abandoning others to their fate of drowning or being burnt alive.

Another contemporary example that illustrates the predicament of practicing unconditional love of one's neighbor, as commanded by the biblical, Judeo-Christian tradition, is the 2020 Munich exhibition by the Polish–Jewish artist Ilana Lewitan (b. 1961), entitled 'Adam, wo bist du?/Adam, where are you?' (FIG. 1). The Hebrew word אָדָם (*adam*) means "human being," the brother or sister, the neighbor. In one of her installations, Lewitan crucifies the uniform of a concentration camp inmate.

The figure is headless because that which happened to the Jews in Auschwitz could have happened to anyone—thus, anyone's head could hang there. Jens Jessen argued convincingly that Lewitan formulated an anthropological constant, namely a constant threat: Anyone—that is, we too—could be the forsaken "neighbors" in the sense of "the next ones" to whom something similar could happen.[20] For this reason, we are all challenged to not look away, but to identify with the human being who is persecuted because of his or her identity. None of us can feel safe, none of us can be indifferent.

Lewitan wrote the words "wie dich selbst" on the cross—the final part of the commandment to love, which stipulates that you are to love the neighbor "as yourself." The implication: The crucified Jesus was not loved as a neighbor; instead, he was crucified just as you and I might be killed under certain circumstances of discrimination, if the majority of our fellow citizens and global onlookers were to tolerate


Fig. 1. Installation by Ilana Lewitan in Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst. © Marianne Franke/Smaek. Photograph in Jessen 2020.

this. The moral of this story: If we do not show solidarity with the victims of arbitrary discrimination, we may be the next victims, for what we do unto the least of our fellow human beings may also be done unto us, as it influences the climate of our society. The Shoah cannot be historicized with the message that we have learnt enough from history (if learning from history is possible at all) as long as day-to-day marginalization and ostracism are common in so many countries (including Israel). Lewitan stages historical crimes against humanity as a permanent warning: *Wehret den Anfängen*—nip it in the bud!

Since Hamas's terrorist attack of October 7, 2023, which killed more than a thousand civilians in Israel, and Israel's counterattack in Gaza, antisemitism has increased almost everywhere—even against Jews who have untiringly been working for peace with Palestine, and protested against their own government, against illegal settlements on the West Bank, and against IDF violence. Lewitan's installation must not be misunderstood as a defense of Jews or Judaism. On the contrary, as the death toll of Palestinian civilians in Gaza becomes unbear-

able, her work of art is a painful reminder that there are victims on both sides, that human dignity is not protected. Neighborly love is not practiced adequately, as long as Israelis and Palestinians, and people of other nations, do not recognize and respect each other as "neighbors" and thus as "brothers and sisters" whose histories are entangled.

## 2. Neighborly love as listening and being responsible

How are we to conceptualize the commanded love of neighbor, if we are to do justice to the appeal of the needy neighbor, brother or sister, no matter where we encounter him or her?

According to the German Lutheran pastor, lecturer in systematic theology, and dissident Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who co-founded the Confessing Church resistance movement in Nazi Germany, "the beginning of love" for others is indeed "learning to listen to them."[21] These words may be read in Bonhoeffer's book *Gemeinsames Leben*, which was published in 1939 (in English: *Life Together*, 1954). It summarizes his main insights about the life of a Christian community, such as the underground theological seminary he headed in Finkenwalde, before the Gestapo closed it in 1937 and arrested some of his former students. For Bonhoeffer, listening to each other is the primary practice of love, and spiritual care unfolds precisely as a ministry of listening, which in turn is based on God's lending us His ear and giving us His Word.[22] Bonhoeffer believed in a God whom he called "der große Zuhörer," the great Listener, and he presented the remarkable suggestion that we must "listen with God's ears," to be able to speak with God's words.[23] But how can we, human beings, listen with God's ears?

As Ulrich Lincoln has pointed out, listening is located between phenomenology and hermeneutics, and between doing and suffering.[24] Consciousness is, as it were, "attracted" by that which offers itself to be heard, and before we can explain it, it affects us through an "acroamatic touch" (*akroamatische Berührung*) that initiates the process of listening in all its dimensions: Receptivity, perception, and interpretation.[25] To avoid a one-sided "either/or" of subjectivity or objectivity, activity or passivity in listening, Lincoln proposes a pneumatological interpretation: Listening is taken to be an event medi-

ated by the Holy Spirit ("Ereignis im Medium des Geistes"), in and through which God is operative and present as both Speaker and Listener.[26] Along these lines, the task of hearing with God's ears may be interpreted in a performative sense, where the Holy Spirit is understood as working through human beings who listen to their fellow human beings, thereby giving the greatest possible attention to others.

One might ask whether the human being is nothing but an instrument of divine listening. I would not go that far, since I do not wish to deny human agency and regard all *we* do as *God's* work (*opus Dei*) in us; instead, I think that Bonhoeffer wants to elucidate how we can become God's co-workers. We may do so by letting God influence our thoughts, actions, and decisions; by placing ourselves—our ears, hearts, and hands—at God's disposal. The metaphor of "God's ears" hardly refers to physical ears, but to the thought that God can hear our cries to heaven and respond to them. The divine response is most often an indirect one, as the divine "voice" is mediated by human voices, just as God's listening is mediated by human listeners.

Rachel Muers has rephrased Bonhoeffer's claim that our love for others consists, first of all, of listening to them as the claim "that the divine love as gift shapes the [human] exercise of hearing and discernment"[27]—so that we can discern God's will even in situations in which many conflicting voices may be heard. To do God's will by listening to God means that whatever we do, we are called to act "in and through love."[28] In this responsive way, we can avoid reducing God's love to a set of principles we are to follow; rather, Bonhoeffer's emphasis "on the divine love as the ground of listening"[29] establishes a huge hermeneutical and ethical space within which we can assume our responsibility to keep listening and asking, to question our pre-understandings and prejudices, and to expand our field of attention by hearing one another. Importantly, we are also to hear what the Other is not saying, thus attending to silence,[30] communicating through channels of tacit communication, for instance, through attunement in the "dialogical silence" of waiting in patience for the Other's response.[31]

In the same vein, the German phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels (b. 1934) has described love as a creative response that "arises

from elsewhere" in a pathos (*Widerfahrnis*), an affect that touches us, with "diastasis as a spatio-temporal displacement" between the call and our response.[32] Owing to this displacement and time-lag, our response comes always late. Children *hear* the pronoun "thou" and their name before being able to *speak*: "We know ourselves by hearsay."[33] This implies that a human being is "a *homo respondens*,"[34] who is dependent on his or her counterpart's speech and response, becoming who (s)he is by responding to what happens, without having an answer beforehand.

Waldenfels was inspired by Levinas, who approaches neighborly love as a responsibility that is derived from responsiveness, from listening to and answering the Other. In 'Enigma and phenomenon' (1965), a text that was written between Levinas's two main works, during the transition from *Totality and Infinity* (1961) to *Otherwise Than Being* (1974), Levinas asks:

> Yet what can an attentive ear hear, listening at the doorway of language, which by the significations of which it is made closes on its own apertures? It is perhaps reasonable to respect the decency of this closed door. This door thus both opened and closed is the extra-ordinary duplicity of the Enigma.[35]

This passage is taken from a section that begins with the words: "All speaking is an enigma."[36] According to Levinas, the face of another person "insinuates" some secret message, which is "quickly belied when one seeks to communicate it."[37] Shall we then assume that it is impossible to transmit this message in the interhuman context of communication? Levinas suggests the opposite of such resignation. The paragraph in question ends with the words: "Summoned to appear, called to an inalienable responsibility [...] subjectivity is enigma's partner [...]."[38] Although an enigma eludes cognition, *a fortiori* the divine mystery, the subject is nonetheless supposed to respond to it.

As Levinas's text goes on to show, the expected response is ethical, and affects what we will (or will not) do. We are summoned "to moral responsibility," and, in Levinas's view, it was Kierkegaard who

"caught sight of" the "unique" subjectivity capable of responding responsibly.[39] Hence, the love of one's neighbor comes into view as the subject's *responsible* response to the Other. But how should we respond to the ambiguity of the opened *and* closed door mentioned in the passage cited above?

Hagi Kenaan comments that when we stand vis-à-vis the Other, the door to the Other's language "will never open,"[40] because we take the closed door as a matter of fact that we must not question. What is it that stops us from entering? It turns out that "when our responsiveness to the language of the other person is, at heart, a responsibility, [. . .] the door has always been open."[41] Kenaan concludes that it is open—or opens itself—when I begin to listen. Listening responds to that which cannot be anticipated by thought. Nonetheless, it resonates in the relationship with the person in front of me, and in the tension between conceptual language, which thematizes something "said," and the gesture of "saying," which expresses itself without any predetermined propositional contents.

Correspondingly, in an interview Levinas conjectured: "The face of the other is perhaps the very beginning of philosophy."[42] This implies that there is an unstated message in my neighbor's face, which may nonetheless be received and understood: Namely, the "encounter with the Other is straightaway my responsibility for him."[43] The love of one's neighbor, defined as responsibility, is "love without eros, charity" and "taking upon oneself the fate of the other,"[44] in the sense of giving of oneself to the Other, even though no mutuality can be expected.[45] The relationship with the neighbor is asymmetrical: The Other is the no. 1, I am the no. 2 who is at the Other's service. Levinas affirms that God's word and commandment is "inscribed in the face of the other, in the encounter with the other: a double expression of weakness and demand [. . .] that obliges me as the one responsible for the other; there is an election there, because that responsibility is inalienable."[46] Whether or not I want to take on my responsibility, I am responsible. I cannot shake off my responsibility, which individuates and distinguishes me vis-à-vis the Other: As the Other's neighbor.

Levinas, too, refers to Matthew 25. In dialogue with his Christian

partners of conversation, Levinas states that we cannot separate our relationship with God from our relationship with our fellow human beings, for we can only "hear the word of God" in the face of the Other, where "the word of God reverberates" in the form of an ethical demand: The commandment to love.[47] For Levinas, it is exactly in the face of the Other that "God comes to mind" with the divine imperative to not abandon the Other: "This obligation is the first word of God."[48] Levinas explains that, for him, theology begins in the face of the neighbor: "The divinity of God is played out in the human. God descends in the 'face' of the other. To recognize God is to hear his commandment 'thou shalt not kill,' which is not only a prohibition against murder, but a call to an incessant responsibility with regard to the other."[49] Here, the commandment to love and the prohibition to kill are brought together in the idea of responsibility. Responsible conduct is possible only if we really *hear* the divine word and notice our own being-called, where the "call" may be expressed silently in another's look, posture, or naked humanity.

Listening may be taken in a broad sense as "the other side" of language, the structural complement to speech, which is integral to any communication, and as an attentiveness that promotes responsibility and elicits an ethical response to otherness, as Sharon Todd has it.[50] Listening to what cannot be heard with our ears corresponds to seeing what cannot be seen with our eyes. In *Works of Love*, discourse II.C, Kierkegaard uses a beautiful metaphor to depict the love of one's neighbor as that which connects us: Despite all differences between us, despite diversity, or even disparity and dissimilarity that segregate us over time, there is one thing we all have in common, and this is that we are each other's neighbors; as such, eternity has marked us with a kind of "watermark" (*Mærke*) of the neighbor that only becomes visible *sub specie aeternitatis*, when the light of eternity shines through our differences.[51]

Recognizing another as one's neighbor presupposes that one acknowledges the other's humanity as a fellow human being who, according to the biblical tradition, was created by the same God, in God's image.[52] As an *imago Dei*, the human being has a special respon-

sibility to other creatures—a responsibility that has been assigned exclusively to human beings, who are supposed to be God's stewards on earth. In the Bible, this stewardship is linked to God's words that call on Adam and Eve to take care of their fellow creatures. In this sense, can responsibility be understood as a response to a call, rather than as an ability that leads to action, or as a task that may be accepted or rejected?

In his book *Zwiesprache* (1932), Buber derives the German word for responsibility (*Verantwortung*) from the response (*Antwort*).[53] Thus, human responsibility may indeed be viewed as a response to someone or something.[54] As a response, responsibility is not an independent, spontaneous act or action, but a reaction that has been provoked by an unforeseen call, by one's being-addressed. When someone cries for help, the moral agent who hears the cries receives acoustic signals of another's need. In this case, responsibility is not the freely chosen state of an autonomous agent who, at a specific moment, has obligated him- or herself to do something, but rather the process of *becoming* responsible, which begins at the moment that one *is called* to respond to one's already-being-obliged.

Here, the subject is not the center of attention and responsibility. Instead, we are speaking of a decentered subject whose responsibility starts elsewhere. Hence, the radius of one's responsibility is not necessarily the same as the reach of one's actions. If Levinas is correct, our maneuvering room may be very limited, whereas our responsibility is unlimited, insofar as it precedes our freedom, and begins even before we become aware of it. Moreover, our responsibility never ends, because we can never say that we have fulfilled our duty. Dutch care ethicists Inge van Nistelrooj and Merel Visse have further developed this line of thought. In their article '*Me?* The invisible call of responsibility and its promise for care ethics: A phenomenological view' (2019), they draw on the work of the French phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion, who, in turn, is inspired by Levinas.[55]

In his book *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (1997; English edition: *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 2002), Marion analyzes a famous oil painting that may be seen

in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome: *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1600) by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610) (FIG. 2). This painting depicts the moment when Jesus inspires the tax-collector Levi to follow him. The painting illustrates the experience of being called to responsibility. Let us take a closer look at the painting: We see a group of tax-collectors sitting at a table and counting money. From the upper right of the painting, a light shines from the just-opened door. Jesus, painted with a halo, enters from the right with Peter. Jesus's hand points at Levi, the man with the long beard and black hat, seated in the middle of the group. Levi looks at Jesus, and gestures toward himself with his left hand's index finger, as though asking, "Me? Do you mean me?"

On the *Caravaggio.org* website, we find the following interpretation:

> Christ's appearance is so unexpected, and His gesture so commanding as to suspend action for a shocked instant, before reaction can take place. In another second, Levi will rise up and follow Christ—in fact, Christ's feet are already turned as if to leave the room. The particular power of the picture is in this cessation of action. It utilizes the fundamentally static medium of painting to convey characteristic human indecision after a challenge or command and before reaction.[56]

Interestingly, Marion interprets the painting in a completely different way, and suggests that one cannot see a caller or the call itself, but only Matthew's response, the silent gesture of his hand, through which the painter "must show in silence a call that is invisible," since he cannot make anything heard, but must "use the phenomenality of the visible to make appear what belongs first to a phenomenality of the audible."[57] Yet, we *can* see Jesus's hand, which symbolizes the call, and he even makes eye contact with Levi, later known as Matthew. Therefore, in this specific case, I doubt that the call is 100% invisible. Marion seems to read an important Levinasian motif into Caravaggio's work: That the divine call only is heard indirectly, in the human response.

Fig. 2. *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1600) by Caravaggio. © CC BY.

At least a "signal" is "visible"; yet, according to Marion, only Matthew—none of his companions—"reads a call" in the signal, and Matthew's "taking it upon himself" constitutes "the first response."[58] The admission that there was a visual signal—Jesus's gesture—questions Marion's Kantian framework of interpretation, when he claims, "the a priori call awaits the a posteriori of the response in order to [. . .] phenomenalize itself."[59] If the call can be visualized through Jesus's outstretched arm and his gaze, it does not remain *a priori* (i.e., before and beyond perception), but has already entered the world of perceivable phenomena. Consequently, Marion's claim that "the call remains as such always unheard and invisible because no receptor

awaits it," and because "no hearing can in advance outline a horizon of manifestation for it"[60] is not convincing; after all, Caravaggio managed to visualize both the call and the response. Had Matthew been unable to hear or see Jesus calling him, then the call(ing) would have remained beyond any hermeneutical horizon, but both the biblical story and Caravaggio's rendering of it challenge Marion's interpretation that turns the call into the "paradox" of a "saturated phenomenon,"[61] where "the response performs the call."[62]

Although Caravaggio could not include sound in his painting, I want to contest Marion's claim that the call remains completely invisible, by being "destined to an invisible (nonsensible) hearing."[63] Something has been heard and seen, which is why Marion also must concede that "[h]earing has always already begun. It is necessary to have already heard something to deny that a call was heard."[64] Marion's redefinition of responsibility reflects the fact that listening comes first. Responsibility, "the property of a juridical 'subject' having to respond for his acts," is deduced from the response to a call that manifests in the face of the Other.[65] The call is later defined as a form of "counter-intentionality" and "fait accompli, incident, event," which is why Marion believes that responsibility flows from the "function of having to respond in the face of the phenomenon as it gives itself."[66] This means that Matthew's responsibility is not rooted in a decision to hear the call; instead, he "suffers" from having to respond.[67] Thus, Marion stresses the passive aspect of responsibility.

The call comes unexpectedly and is received like a gift that the recipient cannot give himself; it is given to him. The call remains uncontrollable, but nonetheless obligates its recipient. This is another of Levinas's motifs that Marion has adopted: That responsible action is grounded in our being-affected by the Other. However, it is crucial to emphasize that in responsibility, activity and passivity are intertwined. This argument may nuance Levinas's and Marion's preference for the purely passive aspects of a responsibility that constitutes the subject in its being-called in a primordial, pre-linguistic, non-verbal encounter with the Other.[68]

To quote Arne Grøn, who has compared Kierkegaard's and Lev-

inas's approaches to the ethical demand, "Taking a position cannot be reduced to that which calls us to take a position. But neither can the position of the subject in the ethical demand be reduced to the act of taking a position. We are subjects subjected to the demand."[69] If we were to split subjectivity into a structure of being-responsible and an act of assuming-responsibility, we could no longer speak of the identity of the responsible subject. In a Kierkegaardian perspective, the subject *is* responsible only in *assuming* its responsibility, whereas there always looms the negative possibility of *not assuming* it.[70] The Kierkegaardian self meets an opposition from within, whereas the Levinasian self that is always already responsible, whether it acts responsibly or not, meets opposition only from without.

Still, Kierkegaard and Levinas agree that the unselfish love of one's neighbor is a struggle against one's own selfishness. The call of conscience, which both comes from within and may internalize voices from without, may awaken the self, which *is* not yet as it *should be*, to the self it is *called to become*: A self that genuinely loves others. In *listening* to the call, the self is led beyond itself—with and despite itself, in neighborly love that *is* responsibility.[71]

Now, can phenomenological ethics à la Marion, with his definition of responsibility as "having to respond,"[72] keep its promise to care ethics, even though the call is not always invisible, and even though a patient's call for help may overwhelm the caregiver who, as an agent, is also a (more or less) passive recipient of this call? Insofar as responsibility is based on the radical givenness of the call to a gifted subject, that is, its non-sovereign recipient who merely receives the call, one can only agree with van Nistelrooij and Visse's conclusion that agency stands "in a dialectic tension with passivity,"[73] and that there is "a 'reactive' dimension to responsibility."[74] Van Nistelrooij and Visse correctly emphasize that what is given and received through caring practices "transcends anyone's responsibility," and that this thought helps "to decrease the emphasis on moral obligation [. . . ] by putting agency into perspective."[75] When caregivers "can emerge as both agents and recipients of responsibility, in an ongoing movement" and "within a relational practice," where "the caregiver first receives something (a

hint, a signal, a sound, a view, a smell, a silence), disentangled from her own morality, moral ideal, or ethical aim,"[76] the "burdensome centrality of a caregiver's position" is decreased, because he or she can understand him- or herself "through what has been given," and because "a non-judgmental look" at oneself, without "simplification and blame,"[77] is allowed for.

Yet, this balanced conclusion remains in a stark contrast to the main thesis of the authors: That established ideas of responsibility focused on an active agent must be redefined, so that the agent's receptivity and even passivity may enter the picture. Having worked as a caregiver myself, I seriously doubt that the strain on caregivers is relieved by the thought that we are recipients of a call we cannot control, for as soon as we have received the call, the problem returns: How shall we respond, what shall we do? Particularly those who have leadership responsibilities cannot take the pressure from themselves by claiming that their responsibility is a matter of pure passivity. Otherwise, they could exonerate themselves even if they abandoned their patients by not being active when determined action is needed. Although it is reasonable to understand the "phenomenon" of responsibility "as the ongoing appearance of a call for responsibility," it seems exaggerated to claim that we should "refrain from any objectification (prostitution, betrayal) of responsibility by connecting it to verbs like 'accepting, assuming, deflecting,' which in turn presuppose a subject, and a subject's horizon."[78] Without a subject, another's call could not be perceived by anyone. Then the patient would call in vain; no-one would hear. If accepting or assuming responsibility means betraying or objectifying it, how then can we do justice to the complete phenomenon as it unfolds in a process that entails a transition from passively being hit by a call, to receiving it, and finally actively responding to it? If we reduce responsibility to the appearance of patients' calls for help, we cannot ensure that anyone will act on their calls.

Without doubt, full-fledged responsibility includes one's responsiveness, that is, one's opening-up in response to another's call. However, for two reasons, I think that it is not helpful for a caregiver to imagine turning into "a 'passive' receiver," and thus "a 'vessel' of the

responsibility that can live through her" even though some "activities are involved,"[79] for instance, taking a patient's hand: First, we have to preserve the distinction between passivity (which means that one cannot do anything, but is affected by an event that comes from outside one's sphere of action) and receptivity (which implies at least a minimal activity: Opening oneself to another's call, his or her presence, and emotional resonance); second, if we imagine that we are nothing but empty vessels for activities or expressions of life that we cannot control, we in fact reject *our own* responsibility by not wanting to assume it, but ascribe it to something ungraspable for which *we* cannot be made responsible. In any case, a responsible subject is more than a vessel or an instrument of foreign influences, and without a responsible subject, there is no manifestation of responsibility at all.

A microphone may capture sounds, but the microphone cannot be made responsible for (not) responding to these sounds if they include cries for help. In contrast, *our human* response *is part of* our responsibility. We may respond in many different ways, and it is up to us *how* we respond. This is the case even in situations in which we cannot do much, for instance when someone is dying. However, even here we have some options, for example, do we want to stay with this person or walk away, do we want to be present silently or say something, perhaps a prayer or poem, hold his or her hand, light a candle, or open the window? Our response is shaped by our relationship to the person in question, and some situations invite "an affective rather than an active response."[80] Even when a person has already died, and we can no longer do anything for him or her (apart from arranging the burial, perhaps), we are still responsible for the way(s) in which we mourn the loss of this person, think of him or her, and remember the time we had together.

We need to combine the passive, receptive, and active aspects of responsibility, rather than cut away one dimension or the other, at least if we want to account for the whole phenomenon as seen from various angles, and as unfolding over time.

Whereas van Nistelrooij and Visse seem to overemphasize passivity, Kelly Oliver's reading of responsibility as response-ability seems

to overemphasize activity as something we *can do*, namely respond. Oliver's *Response Ethics* (2019), which appeared in the same year as van Nistelrooij and Visse's article, also takes its point of departure in relationality and interdependency, rather than subjectivity. The self is regarded as "formed in response to others" and "constituted through an address and response dynamic with others."[81] Levinas's work is declared to be the main source of inspiration, because he developed a "non-egological ethical philosophy where the normative foundation of obligations does not come from either actors or acts but rather the relationships between them."[82] Although Levinas defended the concept of subjectivity, he—like Oliver—underlined that one's relation to the Other precedes the self-conscious ego that can say "I."

Oliver radicalizes Levinas's phenomenology by undermining the opposition of subjectivity and alterity. In a certain sense, the Other "calls forth" myself—and my responsibility. For Oliver, "the call to respond" is "the basis for responsibility."[83] She describes how the subject emerges through a process of witnessing, through "the possibility of addressability and response-ability."[84] Yet again, although Levinas views responsibility as antecedent to freedom, hence not as an ability, but as an infinite demand that we can never fully meet, Oliver understands the concept of responsibility in the context of natural law (*lex naturalis*): As something we *must* do because we *can* do it, thus accomplishing something we are made to do.

But is Oliver right in claiming that subjectivity "is constituted intersubjectively"?[85] If constitution means creation *and* manifestation, then her statement implies that in the beginning, there are only relations without *relata*, intersubjectivity without conscious subjects. In such a scenario, there is no-one who can experience intersubjective relations, since there is no consciousness to which they are given. In contrast, if we interpret the idea of constitution as a kind of mutual testimony, Oliver's claim makes sense, since our self-understanding always depends on others who see and hear us, speak and respond to us.

Clearly, we become ourselves vis-à-vis others. Therefore, in the next section, I want to demonstrate *how* this process of becoming takes place: Through dialogical dynamics.

## 3. Dialogical dynamics of becoming oneself vis-à-vis the Other

So far, we have learned that I–Thou relations are central to the love of one's neighbor, which is most often lived through dialogical relations. The second-person perspective plays a crucial role in the dynamics of these relations, because the (existential and linguistic) grammar of love is dialogical.[86] This is evident in the biblical formulation of the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18), where we have an address or injunction to the hearer or reader, who is solicited in direct speech: "Thou shall love …" A textual and philological exegesis of this Bible verse reveals that "every person is commanded to love his or her neighbor and the stranger or foreigner in his or her midst."[87] Read contextually, the Hebrew word for "your neighbor" (רֵעֲךָ, *re'akhah*) is limited to the addressee's fellow Israelites in their residential proximity; however, Leviticus 19:34 includes the stranger (*ger*), since the Israelites themselves were strangers in the land of Egypt.[88] The Hebrew expression כָּמוֹךָ (*kamokha*) may be interpreted either in the sense that the neighbor is to be loved "as yourself," or in the sense of a reason why the neighbor is to be loved—namely, because he or she is "like you." In the New Testament's Greek version, the former interpretation has been chosen; Franz Rosenzweig, in his *Stern der Erlösung/Star of Redemption* (1921), chose the latter.[89]

Whenever the "I" turns to the Other, thereby turning him or her into a "You," processes of exclusion are turned into processes of inclusion. Rosenzweig's rhetorical question, "what is then Redemption, other than that the I learns how to say Thou to Him?"[90] focuses on the connection between I and You, between the first- and the second-person singular. The distant, unknown, anonymous Other, who is first referred as a "He," is then addressed as a "Thou" that comes closer to the "I." Rosenzweig emphasizes that the "You" is not identical with the "I": The neighbor is to be loved *like* oneself, for he is *kamokha*, "like you," as the commandment of love says.[91] Therefore, redemption includes the recognition of the neighbor as another "I."

In a letter to his beloved Gritli, dated July 1, 1919, Rosenzweig states that only when there is no fusion can there be an approach.

When an "I" and a "You" become one, when the word "and" is denied, and the "I" does not remain "I," and the "You" not "You," then it is not love that is between them, because love acknowledges and presupposes the separateness of places. Love does not occupy another's place. Love does not say "I am You," but "I am yours."[92] If two became one, there would be no room for the emotional movement and dialogical dynamics of self-transformation.

In the *Star*, Part II book 2, the very core book of the book, the *Herzbuch* of the whole, Rosenzweig claims that when God and the human being really encounter each other as an "I" and a "Thou," they are present to each other in this specific moment. The imperative of the commandment to love is stated in the present tense precisely because here, God and the human soul meet each other in a mutual revelation through which they are open to each other.[93] Rosenzweig claims that grammatically, it is the dialogue (*Wechselrede*)[94] of love that dominates the biblical texts, particularly the Song of Songs. In his view, erotic love is not just a simile (*Gleichnis*) for divine love;[95] instead, love that is sensual (*sinnlich*) includes the super-sensual (*übersinnlich*), and temporal love is essentially eternal, by being a love that is stronger than death.[96]

According to Rosenzweig, the world's redemption is still pending, still outstanding. It would require a collaboration between God and human beings. Although we were created without our own contribution, we will not be redeemed without contributing to our redemption. We can do this by learning to not just speak *about* others, sometimes behind their backs, but *to* others, by saying "Thou" to "him" or "her" and, finally, standing before God together, in communal prayer (*Gebet*)[97] and song, co-performing the gestures and rituals of liturgy. In these speech acts and in this silence, the future redemption is anticipated through community-building—before the All, finally, will be encompassed in the One.

We do not need to agree with Rosenzweig on all points. It is sufficient to do so on the basis of one decisive point: That the love of one's neighbor cannot be practiced only from a third-person point of view, where the neighbor appears as some object of concern. If the

love of one's neighbor is to be actualized in our everyday life, we need to turn directly to our neighbors, and become involved in dialogues borne by love.

If we want to understand the newness of Rosenzweig's so-called "New Thinking," we need to return to the middle part of the *Star*, that is, the aforementioned second book in Part II. Here, Rosenzweig develops and applies the method of *Sprachdenken*: "Speech thinking" does not want to establish a thousand connections with one stroke, as the monologue of thinking normally does; instead, it is bound to time and to the cues given by others. In an actual conversation, we do not know beforehand what the Other will say. Speaking means to speak *to* and to think *for* a very definite someone who has not only ears, but also a mouth: "To need time means: not to be able to presuppose anything, to have to wait for everything, to be dependent on the other for what is ours."[98] Accordingly, the temporal and dialogical relationships *between* God, man, and world are the *loci* or places in which these "elements" open up to each other.[99] Logical thinking is solitary and seemingly timeless, whereas speech thinking takes time and alterity seriously. Here, something new may happen that cannot be anticipated, and that is why actual communication is an adventure.

As Nahum N. Glatzer points out in his essay 'The concept of language in the thought of Franz Rosenzweig,' the most telling examples of "speech thinking" Rosenzweig could offer "came from the realm of man's relationship with the divine."[100] Rosenzweig wanted to translate theological questions into human terms, and, accordingly, the religious meaning of language into the role of speech in interhuman relations. This movement between the divine and the human is also reflected in the structure of the *Star*. In the second volume of the book, we find three sections entitled 'The word of God':

(1) In the context of creation, Rosenzweig offers a grammatical analysis of Genesis 1,[101] and claims that language is in us and around us (*in uns und um uns*), and that it is the same, regardless of whether it comes to us from "the outside" or comes from our "inside," and echoes toward "the outside" (*sie ist* [. . .] *keine andere, wie sie uns von 'außen' kommt, als wie sie aus unserm 'Innen' dem 'Außen' widertönt*).[102] More-

over, divine and human language resemble each other to the point of being identical with each other: "The ways of God and the ways of man are different, but the word of God and the word of man are the very same. What man feels in his heart as his own human language is the word that has come from the mouth of God."[103] This purported identity of the human and divine word is by no means self-evident, even though the latter is conceived as the origin of the former, which implies a kind of family resemblance. Rosenzweig interprets human similarity to God in linguistic terms: To be created in the image of God means to be called into a conversation with, and to be able to speak like God.[104]

(2) In the context of revelation, Rosenzweig presents the "grammar of Eros" and "of Pathos," the language of love and of the deed. First he analyzes the שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, including the commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul, and might (Deuteronomy 6:4–9), and then the Song of Songs.[105] It is worth remarking that the presupposition for the divine–human dialogue of love is that the human being *listens* when called by God: "totally receptive, still only opened, still empty, without content, without essence, pure readiness, pure obedience, all ear," and then the commandment falls "into this obedient listening (*ge-horsame Hören*)."[106] By implication, the love of God leads directly to the love of one's neighbor—and between them lies the human listening to God.

(3) In the context of redemption, the word of God is defined as the language of the *Tehilllim*. Rosenzweig offers an analysis of Psalm 115.[107] Its form is "the communal song of the community,"[108] a "great hymn of praise"[109] which "begins and ends with a powerfully underscored We."[110] Before discussing the Jewish year and the liturgy of various celebrations, Rosenzweig emphasizes the importance of listening. The word itself must guide the human being, until we may learn to grow silent together, and the beginning of this education is that we "learn to listen."[111] Yet, in this context, another kind of listening is necessary than the one in a dialogue or *Wechselrede*, namely, the devoted listening of everyone, where a crowd becomes "all ears." This is the case when everyone in a silently gathered community listens to a

Bible text that is read and understood as "the word of God." Let me quote a passage that clarifies the distinction between the just-mentioned types of listening:

> In dialogue, the one who strictly listens, and not only when he strictly speaks, is also speaking, certainly not even when he actually speaks, but equally as much when he raises the word onto his lips through his lively listening, through the attuned or questioning glance of his eye at the one who is directly now speaking. It is not this listening of the eyes that is meant here, but really the listening of the ears.[112]

Hearing the divine word establishes the community of listeners. On this point, Rosenzweig's approach to community or *Gemeinschaft* resembles Buber's. The *dia-* through which the *logos* (the speech, word, or reason) of love is expressed may be described as a dialogical spirit of love in which the human and the divine concur. In *I and Thou*, Buber uses a beautiful metaphor for this spirit that is operative in the language of love: It is like the air in which we breathe, rather than the blood that circulates in us.[113]

How are we to interpret the dialogical aspects of neighborly love in Buber's work? As Buber points out in *I and Thou*, "[l]ove is responsibility of an I for a You: In this consists what cannot consist in any feeling—the equality of all lovers, from the smallest to the greatest [. . . ]."[114] Paul Mendes-Flohr (1941–2024) emphasizes that love *qua* responsibility, "the love of an *I* for a *Thou*—dialogical love," responds to the presence of a person whom one meets by chance: "dialogical love is a spontaneous I–Thou response to the other, primed neither by deliberative intent nor emotive affinity."[115] Insofar as dialogical love à la Buber corresponds to neither preferential love nor charity, responsibility for the neighbor is not substantiated by the same reasons as those given by Levinas, who discards spontaneity based on freedom, in favor of an immemorial bond we have not chosen, and for which we cannot account.[116]

Although Buberian encounters may also take place non-verbally—sub-linguistically, for instance, when human beings listen to

and communicate with animals or plants, or are touched by works of art and architecture—Buber's prime example of dialogical love seems to include speech that is expressed through a second-person address-and-response dynamics between an I and a You who are engaged in a supposedly "immediate" face-to-face encounter. Like in Rosenzweig's work, oral language in its spokenness (*die Gesprochenheit der Sprache*) is crucial, not only for an exchange of ideas, but also for the dialogical dynamics of becoming oneself vis-à-vis the Other.[117]

As language is spoken and dialogue takes place in time, and human existence is understood *in* and *through* temporality, that is, the individual and communal experience of time, Rosenzweig (and Buber) employ "language as an organon of existential temporality."[118] This means that the dialogical dynamics of neighborly love must be regarded as an unforeseeable process, and not as linear progress based on a predictable succession of moments.[119]

Does the concept of dialogical love imply that we should be mentally *and* physically present with the Other, to accomplish works of neighborly love? Of course, we are not disembodied spirits, and during the pandemic, we were reminded of the enormous importance of being present face to face, in the same location. When this is not possible, we lose at least one dimension of the encounter. For instance, when we use video technology, we only see the Other on a screen, reduced to a small flat image. Then we are not gripped to the same extent by the atmosphere the Other induces in a certain setting; and we are deprived of the subtle signs of non-verbal communication that co-constitute our dialogue. If we are in the same room, we just feel what is going on *entre nous*, between you and me. Nonetheless, the pandemic has also taught us that there are situations in which there is no other way than to love our neighbors from a distance. Fortunately, physical distance does not necessarily involve emotional distance; on the contrary, our interhuman bonds may be intensified by the unfulfilled desire to really see each other. Even though we are not always able to visit the Other, and to be present at his or her side, we are still able to respond to the Other's call, also from afar.

## Inconclusive conclusion: second-person poetics

Let me briefly summarize the results of this study, before developing what could be called a "second-person poetics": In the first section, the age-old question "who is my neighbor?" was answered by arguing that, in principle, no-one may be excluded from the multitude of those who are "my" neighbors. Therefore, according to Kierkegaard, I cannot be mistaken about the fact that I am included in the multitude of those summoned to show *themselves* as neighbors with respect to the needy. No excuse in the world can exempt me from this task. Now, one might object that it is utopian to believe that we will ever be able to live up to this demand. And this is correct. But this does not allow us to give up before we even start.

As we saw in the second section, according to Bonhoeffer, listening may be understood as the primary act of neighborly love. According to the phenomenological tradition epitomized by Levinas, Marion, and Waldenfels, love is responsive: A response to a silent or verbalized call by another that evokes responsibility. As I want to define it as neither an activity nor pure passivity, but to preserve the dialectics inherent in responsibility, I have emphasized its double meaning: (1) response-ability (understood as potential) and (2) taking-upon-oneself one's responsibility (the factual realization of this potential). *Nota bene*: The active component comes after the passivity to which Levinas points when emphasizing that we are always already responsible, even before we know about it, and before we can do anything.

In the third section, we learned from Rosenzweig and Buber, two of the founding fathers of the philosophy of dialogue, that neighborly love is embedded in the dialogical dynamics of becoming oneself vis-à-vis the Other, where the linguistic interaction is shaped by multifaceted temporal relations and experiences. Both philosophers of dialogue agree that in another person, we simultaneously encounter the human and the divine Other. The next question is why we should move from the unselfish, dialogical practice of neighborly love to the suggested "second-person poetics." Why not be satisfied with real-time loving speech acts and silent acts of listening? The reason is that we need examples of a "both . . . and" of activity and passivity that

correspond to the dialectic tension between these two poles of the phenomenon of responsibility.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle famously proposes that *practice* (Ancient Greek: *πρᾶξις*) is an activity that is an end in itself—for instance, going for a walk without having a specific destination—whereas *poiesis* (*ποίησις*) refers to an activity that results in a product, and thus has an aim distinct from the activity.[120] The contrast between *πρᾶξις* (Romanized: *praxis*) and *ποίησις* is that between action and production, doing and making. The Greek word *poiesis* has entered into the English words *poetry* and *poetics*. *Poiesis* designates a creative process by which something that did not previously exist is made or produced, and thus brought into being. However, we cannot control the inspiration that initiates and spurs creativity.

In a theological context, the transcendent source of inspiration is associated with the divine that only gives itself gracefully; otherwise, it remains unavailable to us. According to the biblical, Judeo-Christian tradition, the divine source of everything good is personal. It is specifically the God who addresses all and each of us, who authoritatively commands, "love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18). So, the question is: How can "second-person poetics" help us practice neighborly love, and thus reconcile the polar opposition of activity and passivity by integrating *πρᾶξις* and *ποίησις*?

I would like to suggest that poetry can inspire us to practice acts of neighborly love because poetry helps us discover the beauty of the world despite its difficulties, for example, through the wings of a butterfly. In its fragility, the butterfly is a symbol of transformation and the transition from the realm of death to new life.[121] Although science may cure the body, poetry can nourish our souls. As Paul Mendes-Flohr put it, poetry reflects "the imponderables of human existence" and provides "horizons of hope and healing."[122] It does so despite despair and real suffering. If poetry only repeated the news or scientific discoveries, it would be superfluous.

Poetry surpasses any other genre of language through its surprising abundance of meaning that enhances the prose of everyday life and makes us marvel at something greater hidden in small things. Poetry

calls attention to true wonders that would otherwise be overlooked. Moreover, poetry can express the joy of living in the midst of mourning, and provide encouragement as an antidote to despair. While our souls are in upheaval, waiting impatiently for good things to happen, we can already imagine some of them, like dwelling places for the troubled mind, places where the psyche can rest: Bird's nests in the sky, as it were.[123]

Yet, why not be content with poems that approach the world from a third-person perspective, why should we move on to "second-person poetics"? In a nutshell, because the latter combines the *poiesis* of poetry and the *praxis* of works of love for the neighbor in a direct encounter, and it links the activity of someone taking responsibility for another to the uncontrollable creativity that produces something received graciously, undeservedly. Let me conclude by providing an example of a desolate situation, and a poem in the service of love.

In one of the most upsetting news clips at the beginning of the pandemic, under the extreme condition of an entire nation's lockdown, a nurse in New York quoted a little boy who spoke the following words on the phone to his father who was dying of COVID-19: "Daddy, Daddy, don't leave me alone in this world. . ." There is hardly anything that can give consolation in such a situation. There is no remedy that could bring the dead back to life in this world. How can this boy go on living, despite his unfathomable loss? He cannot reach the person missed so sorely. His father, who gasped out his life on a respirator, can no longer reply. Will this boy ever be able to see anything other than horror with his inner eye when he remembers the year 2020? The answer to those questions cannot be anticipated. That is why this conclusion must remain inconclusive.

Our works of neighborly love, whether they are *πρᾶξις* or *ποίησις*, *praxis* or *poiesis*, remain works in progress. Loving is truly the task of a lifetime. In what ways may a "second-person poetics" offer works of neighborly love? Written words involve a temporal delay (and responses to them even more so). But they may be reread, and each time they will reveal new aspects of meaning that were not seen previously.

By way of an inconclusive conclusion, I want to present a poem

that reached me by email. Its author is an Irish priest, Capuchin Franciscan Brother Richard Hendrick. Someone started to forward "uplifting" words, and everyone who received a poem was asked to send some words, some thoughts or pictures to someone else. Brother Richard Hendrick's poem, called 'Lockdown,' was written for Saint Patrick's Day in 2020, and this poem speaks for itself.[124] It contains a remarkable shift of perspective, moving from the third-person perspective to the second-person perspective, and thus, without denying negativity, it testifies to a love that is stronger than death:

Yes there is fear.
Yes there is isolation.
Yes there is panic buying.
Yes there is sickness.
Yes there is even death.
But,
They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise
You can hear the birds again.
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet
The sky is no longer thick with fumes
But blue and grey and clear.
They say that in the streets of Assisi
People are singing to each other
across the empty squares,
keeping their windows open
so that those who are alone
may hear the sounds of family around them.
They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.
Today a young woman I know
is busy spreading fliers with her number
through the neighborhood
So that the elders may have someone to call on.
Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples
are preparing to welcome

and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary
All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting
All over the world people are looking at their neighbors in a new way
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.
So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.

## NOTES

**1** Ulrich 2020; my translation.
**2** See Buber 1996; 2021, part 1.
**3** Mendes-Flohr 2023, p. xiii.
**4** All quotations from the Bible are from the New International Version (NIV).
**5** See Kierkegaard 2004, pp. 51–67; 1995, pp. 44–60; the commentary on *Works of Love* by Ferreira 2001; the essay collection edited by Dalferth 2002; Grøn 2005.
**6** Kierkegaard 1995, p. 44.
**7** Kierkegaard 1995, p. 44.
**8** Kierkegaard 1995, p. 49.
**9** For Kierkegaard research and the philosophy of emotion concerning the notion of "love," see Welz 2007.
**10** Grøn 2002, p. 122. Arne Grøn has developed Kierkegaard's ethics of love as an "Ethics of Vision." In *Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard* he made it explicit that, according to Kierkegaard, one's genuine self-relation occurs through the love of another, the neighbor: "det rette selvforhold går gennem kærlighed til næsten" (Grøn 1997, p. 246), which is why love has the power to "heal" a human being, to "make it whole" (Grøn 1997, p. 246: *"hele" et menneske*)—and this is exactly the physical and mental health that Kierkegaard is looking for in *Sygdommen til døden* (1849; English edition: *The Sickness Unto Death*, 1980), though *via negativa,* by diagnosing the illness that contradicts the love of God and the neighbor.
**11** See Irina Hron's article in this volume.
**12** See Welz 2008a, section 3.2.
**13** See Kierkegaard 1995, p. 44; 2004, p. 51.
**14** See Kierkegaard 1995, p. 141; 2004, p. 143; Krishek 2009, ch. 4: 'Neighbourly love versus romantic love' (pp. 109–137).
**15** See Welz 2008b.
**16** See Kierkegaard 1995, p. 44.
**17** See, for instance, Outka 1997; Brady 2003, who reveals *How Christians Through the Ages Have Understood Love*; Jeanrond 2010; Simmons & Sorrells 2016; Pattison 2021.
**18** See the article by Schrupp 2020.
**19** Schrupp 2020.
**20** Jessen 2020: "Dass mit den Juden geschehen konnte, was mit ihnen geschah, bedroht uns alle. Ihr Martyrium muss nicht exklusiv bleiben. Wir alle könnten die Nächsten sein. Ilana Lewitan formuliert hier tatsächlich so etwas wie eine anthropologische Konstante, jedenfalls die Konstante einer moralischen Herausforderung: Wende dich nicht ab! Erkenne dich selbst in jedem Menschen, der seiner Identität halber verfolgt wird! Auch du kannst dich nicht sicher fühlen."
**21** Bonhoeffer 1987, p. 82; 1996, p. 98.
**22** Bonhoeffer 1987, p. 82; 1996, p. 98.
**23** Bonhoeffer 1987, p. 84: "Mit den Ohren Gottes sollen wir hören, damit wir mit den Worten Gottes reden können." For a more detailed interpretation of this phrase, see Welz 2023a.
**24** See Lincoln 2014, p. 13.
**25** See Lincoln 2014, p. 14.
**26** Lincoln 2014, p. 175.
**27** Muers 2004, p. 171.
**28** Muers 2004, p. 171.
**29** Muers 2004, p. 171.
**30** See Welz 2017; 2023b.
**31** See Mendes-Flohr 2012.
**32** Waldenfels 2016, p. 15.
**33** Waldenfels 2016, p. 19.
**34** Waldenfels 2016, p. 20.
**35** Levinas 1996, p. 74. French titles: *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (1961; trans. 1969) and *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (1974; trans. 1981).
**36** Levinas 1996, p. 73.
**37** Levinas 1996, p. 74.
**38** Levinas 1996, p. 74.
**39** Levinas 1996, p. 76.
**40** Kenaan 2008, p. 94.
**41** Kenaan 2008, p. 94.
**42** Levinas 2001, p. 165.

43 Levinas 2001, p. 165.
44 Levinas 2001, p. 165.
45 Levinas 2001, p. 166.
46 Levinas 2001, p. 170.
47 Levinas 2001, p. 171.
48 Levinas 2001, p. 236.
49 Levinas 2001, p. 236. Previously, I discussed responsibility in relation to freedom in Levinas's work, see Welz 2018.
50 See Todd 2002, p. 405.
51 In Danish (Kierkegaard 2004, p. 94): "Næsten er Evighedens Mærke paa ethvert Menneske."
52 Genesis 1:26–27, etc. See Welz 2016.
53 Buber 1978, p. 35.
54 A similar thought is found in Ulrik Nissen's Danish book on love's responsibility, see Nissen 2022, p. 93: "Helt basalt er *an*svaret et *gen*svar."
55 See van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019.
56 See http://web.archive.org/web/20210316090935/https://www.caravaggio.org/the-calling-of-saint-mathew.jsp, accessed February 20, 2025 (originally March 23, 2023).
57 Marion 2002, p. 283.
58 Marion 2002, p. 285.
59 Marion 2002, p. 287.
60 Marion 2002, p. 287.
61 Marion 2002, p. 287.
62 Marion 2002, p. 288.
63 Marion 2002, p. 284.
64 Marion 2002, p. 288.
65 Marion 2002, p. 293.
66 Marion 2002, p. 294.
67 Marion 2002, p. 294.
68 Cf. Schriever 2018, pp. 11–12, 37–39, 50, 52–54.
69 Grøn 2017, p. 131.
70 Cf. Grøn 1997, p. 278.
71 See Welz 2008a.
72 van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019, p. 280, referring to Marion 2002, pp. 293–294.
73 van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019, p. 284.
74 van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019, p. 285.
75 van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019, p. 284.
76 van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019, p. 285.
77 van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019, p. 283.
78 van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019, p. 283.
79 van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019, p. 284.
80 van Nistelrooij & Visse 2019, p. 284.
81 Oliver 2019, p. xxix.
82 Oliver 2019, p. xxx.
83 Oliver 2019, p. xxxi.
84 Oliver 2019, p. xxxiii.
85 Oliver 2019, p. xxxv.
86 See Welz forthcoming.
87 Mendes-Flohr 2007, p. 3.
88 Mendes-Flohr 2007, pp. 6–7. Cf. Di Cesare 2020, where the *ger* is the central figure.
89 See Rosenzweig 1996, p. 267; 2005, p. 257.
90 Rosenzweig 1996, p. 305; 2005, p. 292.
91 Rosenzweig 1996, p. 267; 2005, p. 257.
92 Rosenzweig 2002, p. 358. The German original emphasizes that there can only be an approach (*Annäherung*) "wenn keine Verschmelzung stattfindet. Wenn ein Ich und ein Du eins werden, nicht das Ich Ich bleibt und das Du Du, wenn das Wörtlein Und geleugnet wird—das ist Tristan und Isolde 'so stürben wir nun ungetrennt, ewig einig ohne End u.s.w.' also nicht Liebe. Die Liebe erkennt die Getrenntheit der Orte an und setzt sie sogar voraus oder vielleicht gar setzt sie sie überhaupt erst fest (denn was hinderte in der Welt der lieblosen Dinge, dass eins den Platz des andern okkupierte!). Die Liebe sagt nicht Ich bin Du, sondern—und nun musst du mich doch ganz verstehn und mir recht geben—: Ich bin Dein."
93 See Rosenzweig 1996, p. 207; 2005, p. 200.
94 See Rosenzweig 1996, p. 207; 2005, p. 200.
95 Rosenzweig 1996, p. 221; 2005, p. 213.
96 Rosenzweig 1996, p. 224; 2005, p. 216.
97 Rosenzweig 1996, p. 260; 2005, pp. 250–251.
98 Rosenzweig 1999, p. 87.

**99** Rosenzweig 1999, p. 85.
**100** Glatzer 1988, p. 183.
**101** See Rosenzweig 1996, pp. 166–172; 2005, pp. 162–167.
**102** Rosenzweig 1996, p. 167; 2005, p. 163.
**103** Rosenzweig 1996, pp. 167–168; 2005, p. 163.
**104** See Welz 2016.
**105** See Rosenzweig 1996, pp. 193–228; 2005, pp. 187–220.
**106** Rosenzweig 1996, p. 198; 2005, p. 190.
**107** See Rosenzweig 1996, pp. 278–282; 2005, pp. 267–271.
**108** Rosenzweig 1996, p. 278; 2005, p. 268.
**109** Rosenzweig 1996, p. 279; 2005, p. 269.
**110** Rosenzweig 1996, p. 280; 2005, p. 269.
**111** Rosenzweig 1996, p. 343; 2005, p. 328.
**112** Rosenzweig 1996, p. 343; 2005, p. 328.
**113** Buber 1996, p. 89.
**114** Buber 1996, p. 66.
**115** Mendes-Flohr 2025, p. 385.
**116** For a more detailed comparison of the I–Thou relation as conceptualized by Buber vs. Levinas, see Meindl *et al*. 2020.
**117** See Welz 2010.
**118** This is an expression used by Schindler 2007, p. 219: *Sprache als Organon existenzieller Zeitlichkeit.*
**119** Cf. Schindler 2007, p. 220.
**120** Eth.Nic. VI.iv.2, 1140a 2–3 (quoted according to standard divisions). See Bernasconi 1986, p. 111.
**121** See, for instance, the last stanza of Nelly Sachs's poem 'Schmetterling' (Sachs 1961, p. 148): "Welch schönes Jenseits/ist in deinen Staub gemalt./Welch Königszeichen/im Geheimnis der Luft."
**122** Paul Mendes-Flohr, in his introduction to the virtual session, "Poetry in the Time of the Pandemic" (June 17, 2021) at the international online Lehrhaus: https://thelehrhaus.org/lehrhaus-institute-session-list/lehrhaus-institute-session-2, accessed June 18, 2021.
**123** The Danish poet Inger Christensen (1935–2009) deploys this metaphor in her poem 'Lys/Light,' stanza 4, see Christensen 2009, pp. 54–58, here p. 57.
**124** Published March 13, 2020. See https://samaritanps.org/news-and-insights/lockdown-a-poem-by-franciscan-richard-hendricks/, accessed March 23, 2023.

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## DIGITAL SOURCES

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*Practices of Neighborly Love*

# ACROSS THE THRESHOLD

## Monastic codification of neighbour-love

METTE BIRKEDAL BRUUN

NEIGHBOURS ARE BEINGS who are next to one another, physically or otherwise.[1] This element of proximity foregrounds a spatial dimension of neighbour-love. Research and daily human experience show that human beings are surrounded by virtual and physical zones—delineations that segregate individuals from their surroundings and fellow humans.[2] These zones are physically, culturally and emotionally coded domains where relationships are negotiated and bonds are forged or severed.[3]

Read by one kind of light, human communities and societies consist of many more or less heterogeneous entities of individuals clustered by choice, imposition or coincidence. They may be brought together temporarily and accidentally (e.g., in a bus), on a regular and regulated basis (e.g., in a workplace), for a longer period of time (e.g., in an apartment building) or in various other forms of constellations. Some of these entities are visible and physical (e.g., a school class or next-door neighbours), some are less tangible (e.g., segments of "like-minded" or "fellow human beings in need"). Such entities come with internal and external boundaries. Situations of such boundary-drawing involve negotiation and implicit or explicit regulation of the many ways in which the boundaries of each individual meet, converge, collide and rub against each other directly or remotely. In continuation of such spatial vocabulary, neighbour-love may be perceived as a particular way of relating to such meetings; a way that privileges, or even requires, traits such as compassion, kindness, respect and charity, each of which may, in turn, be analysed and broken down into grades and nuances.

In this chapter, I consider a case of imposed neighbour-love between cohabitants. This is a case in which the zones mentioned above

are articulated with particular and highly ritualized intensity. I am concerned with the monastic world and thus with intently regulated relationships between human beings who share a space. This is a reduced perspective, but one that gives rise to some more general considerations. When neighbour-love is codified as minutely as it happens in the cloister, it draws the clear, albeit idiosyncratic, contours of one version of an otherwise somewhat elusive notion. The monastic neighbour-love represents a version saturated with particular norms and defined by particular historical contexts, and it reminds us to look for underlying values and contextual specificities when dealing with this grand and apparently timeless principle.[4] An explicit codification of neighbour-love as the one we are studying here thus helps us to ask analytical questions to other instances: What are the teleological drivers of a given notion of neighbour-love; what characterizes the inherent anthropology; what are the evident—but also the surprising—practical manifestations of this neighbour-love? The focus on cohabitants, in turn, alerts us to the physical manoeuvring in the shared space, eliciting questions such as: How does our body meet with other bodies in a given space; how do we acknowledge or ignore the meeting; how do we show respect for the material and immaterial boundaries that surround the other? Forgoing general definitions of neighbour-love and sticking to the historical vocabulary of this particular case, I shall examine the argument that notions of neighbour-love are situated in particular historical contexts and framed within particular value systems. We shall now turn to one such particular historical context and value system to see how it helps us to shed light on our overall interest.

## Into monasticism

For all its particularity, and to a modern gaze indeed peculiarity, the monastic world is an instructive case in our quest for a deeper understanding of neighbour-love. The monastery is a microcosm, the structures of which lend themselves to analyses that may be applied to other communal entities. Benedictine monasticism, designated by its abiding by the 6th-century Rule of St Benedict (hereafter "the Rule"),

is organized in closed communities.[5] Benedictine monks and nuns profess the three regular vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, but they are also bound by their vow to *stabilitas loci*, steadfastness, which ties them to one particular house and its walled precinct—ideally for life. Several different monastic orders abide by the Rule; individual orders and, indeed, abbeys vary as to how strictly or literally they interpret it. The application of the Rule and of the additional constitutions developed over time, in short, depends somewhat on social, cultural and political circumstances as well as the people who inhabit and lead a given house at a given period.

The Cistercians are, historically, one of the more austere versions of Benedictine monasticism:[6] not everywhere and not throughout their history, but in the principle that, according to the foundation narratives, inspired their foundation. The Order was founded in 1098, allegedly in an air of reform, and through the centuries reform recurs as a basic paradigm, leading in the 17th century to a fraction into the common branch and the stricter branch, the so-called Abstinents; the Trappist reform represents a further intensification of the Abstinent ideal.[7] Cistercians share the cloistered space and a minutely regulated communal life. They are bound to one another for better and for worse. The community is seen as a bulwark against the devil because it strengthens the individual; but the community is also a central component of ascetic discipline—nothing serves the cultivation of humility better than the close cohabitation with other human beings. Monastic regulations and other texts shape this daily cohabitation and seek to prevent social and soteriological disaster.

Two Cistercian authors and contexts loom large in this chapter and need a brief introduction. Bernard of Clairvaux (*c.* 1090–1153) is the main figure, but not the founder, of the Cistercian Order and the force behind its 12th-century mushrooming from the Burgundian origin to 350 houses spread across Europe. He preached crusade and engaged wholeheartedly in church politics, but he also authored works of theological sophistication and spiritual depth. In this chapter we meet him primarily as an abbot concerned with monastic cohesion. Bernard towers over the first generations of Cistercians who

sought to describe and solidify the Cistercian ethos with the founding narratives and the early constitutions as the primary textual foundation and the bulky mid-12th century manual *Ecclesiastica Officia* as a key representation of the ideal daily life in a Cistercian abbey. Armand-Jean de Rancé (1626–1700) was the abbot and reformer of the Cistercian abbey of La Trappe in Normandy and, with a vast correspondence as the principal vehicle, among the drivers of a surge of upper-class penitence. Here we are mainly interested in his monastic regime which gave rise to a set of constitutions that elaborated and intensified the Rule and the medieval constitutions, as well as to volumes of Trappist biographies that fleshed out, so to speak, the Trappist ideal. What follows is a synchronic study of Cistercian mores on the basis of medieval and early modern texts, straddling the 6th-century Rule of Benedict, the 12th-century Cistercian foundation documents as well as texts pertaining to the late 17th-century Trappist reform. A stringent historical analysis would separate these texts and study them in their respective contexts. For our purpose, however, it makes sense to read them together as normative indicators of a certain ethos of charity that hinges on the ongoing historical modulation of a particular norm.

The aim of monastic life is to purge human beings of the consequences of the Fall and to prepare them for salvation.[8] It is the underlying understanding that, in their paradisiacal condition, Adam and Eve were turned towards God in perfect awareness that they owe him their lives and their human dignity. The serpent cajoled them to forget this foundation in prideful self-sufficiency, thus making the first humans turn towards themselves instead of God. This turn, their sin, caused their expulsion from Paradise and with them all humankind. The monastic movement seeks to correct this basic, fatal pride by an intense mortification of body and spirit and by constant cultivation of humility. Physical and spiritual asceticism, continuous liturgical service, unfaltering obedience to the abbot, manual labour and penitential prayer for oneself and others are the pillars of this life. Charity in the shape of alms, prayer and caring for the sick and needy are primary ob-

ligations. In some orders, notably the mendicants, charity manifests in preaching and teaching. Not so in the orders that follow the Rule; their houses are built in rural areas, and the inmates make their living from agriculture.

*Caritas*, charity, is the declared hallmark of the Cistercian Order. When they drew up their foundational texts in the first and second generations of the Order, the Cistercians chose to call their constitution, a detailed elaboration of their understanding of the Rule, the *Carta caritatis*, the Charter of Charity, thus describing love as the backbone of the Order and its groundbreaking, institutionally coherent organization.[9] This name, they say, signals that every decree of the charter speaks of charity, and that the entire text pursues but one goal, namely to help the Cistercians perform in their daily life the decree of Romans 13:8, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another".[10] According to Cistercian wisdom, the longevous love of one another across wide geographical expanses is best secured by thorough regulation such as the Charter of Charity.

> In this decree, then, the aforesaid brethren, taking precaution against future shipwreck of their mutual peace, elucidated and decreed and left for their posterity by what covenant, or in what manner, indeed, with what charity their monks throughout abbeys in various parts of the world, though separated in body, could be indissolubly knit together in mind.[11]

Unity in mores and customs is the token of this charity. It shows in the familial organization of the abbeys in motherhouses and daughterhouses that are bound to one another by yearly visits. The unity is solidified, at least in principle, at the yearly Chapter of abbots in the mother abbey at Cîteaux. The first and basic decrees of the Charter of Charity concern this organization, the relationship between houses, and the fundamental requirements regarding books and buildings.[12] As time went by, however, and Cistercian life was conducted under different abbatial regimes and in widely different regional circumstances and sometimes far removed from the Burgundian centre,

more and more specification was needed. The institutes that came out of the yearly Chapter speak their clear language of the goading and restriction required to maintain this charitable unity.

When choosing *caritas* as their stamp, the early Cistercians claimed a role as true heirs to the New Testament call for love of God and love of neighbour (Matthew 22:36–40), and positioned themselves in a long-standing tradition of deliberating the complex relationship between love of God, love of neighbour and the perverted post-lapsarian love of self. It is helpful to keep in mind basic distinctions of *eros* (*ἔρως*, *amor*) and *agape* (*ἀγάπη*, *caritas*, *amor*) and their roots. Simplifying complex matters crassly, it is worth bearing in mind that *eros* grows out of a Hellenistic tradition and the Platonic idea of the surge of the human soul; *eros* is driven by desire and directed towards fulfilment. *Agape* is a New Testament motif, expressed in, e.g., 1 Corinthians 13:4–5, "Love [*η ἀγάπη*] is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful"; and in 1 John 4:8, "God is love" (*ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν*); *agape* is related to *filía* (*φιλία*), *caritas*, *dilectio* and *amicitia*. In his *Agape and Eros* (1932–1939, originally in Swedish 1930–1936) the Swedish Protestant theologian Anders Nygren seminally identified these two as the key principles of love in the Christian tradition. Nygren's study reflects a particular theological and historical context, but for a broad view it is helpful to bear in mind his robust definition of *eros* as a quest and *agape* as a state. According to Nygren, *eros* is passionate, it strives, it seeks to ascend and to acquire; *agape* is affectionate, it sacrifices, it seeks to overflow and to give. Semantic overlaps, however, between the Latin terms and the infinite elaborations of these terms make it difficult to maintain Nygren's unequivocal division.[13] In the shape of *amor* and *caritas*, *eros* and *agape* are no longer clear and stable semantic oppositions. Bernard of Clairvaux's texts on love are an example of such blending. The ongoing effort to turn the awkward triad made up by love of God, love of neighbour and love of self into a pure dual love of God and love of neighbour is the nucleus of the normative texts of the monastic movement from its early days in the Egyptian desert. The texts of the desert speak of a longing to be

transformed by a love which is at once vertical, directed towards God, and horizontal, directed towards the neighbour.[14] The latter form of love is expressed in good works, be they hospitality, compassion for the needy, restraint of anger or the effort to comply with God's command to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).[15] The vertical love of God requires the right kind of motivation. John Cassian's (*c.* AD 360–435) 4th-century *Collationes*, with stylized representations of dialogues with desert fathers, is one of the texts that conveyed the desert spirit to centuries of monks. One of his dialogues is conducted with the 100-year-old Chaeremon who teaches his guests the three steps of love of God. The first and most primitive form of love of God does not even deserve to be called love, but is rather a slavish fear (*timor servilis*) of Hell; the second degree is also twisted, incited as it is by the hope of beatitude, and Cassian compares it to the mercenary's expectation of a wage; the third and final degree of love, however, is a filial love (*affectus filii*) of God which neither fears, nor hopes, but simply trusts in the divine father's mercy.[16] Through this movement from fear, via hope to love, the monk may eventually reach that purity of heart which, for Cassian, is the ultimate goal of desert asceticism and which motivates his solitude, his fasts, his vigils and his labour.[17] Cassian reminds us that, within a monastic horizon, ascetic mortification and love of God are closely connected. This worldview, its anthropological corollaries and its implications for the relationship with self and neighbour is the principle that underlies monastic life. In our Cistercian context, love of neighbour is thus inseparable from love of God. The ability to love is at the core. In the Cistercian texts, the exposition of love is embedded in a complex spiritual discourse that is developed partly in distinct treatises on love;[18] partly in commentaries on the Song of Songs which delve into the stages and facets of the spiritual embrace of the soul as the bride and Christ as the groom.[19]

However, monastic love is not all about spiritual profundity, but also about daily life. There is a direct link between the elaborate dynamics of the love of God and love of human and the detailed commands that the monks, for instance, pay heed to whether their monastic hood is up or down, spit only in the spittoons and arrange their

habit with propriety when on the latrine.[20] These ideals for quotidian life regulate, spiritually and physically, the daily interaction in the abbey and its restricted space.

## Community

The Cistercian notion of charity relies on manifest regulation and strict separation from the wider world. This double internal and external delineation lends itself to sociological analysis along the lines of Mary Douglas's cultural theory and its preoccupation with the different degrees and kinds of control that distinguish a particular group from its surroundings and which secures its internal bonding and cohesion.[21] While theory is not our main concern, Douglas does remind us of the acuteness of the external and internal thresholds of a given group, but so do the monastic sources. Allegedly the precondition of a well-functioning monastic community is the capacity of its inmates to abide by the commands of the Rule, the constitutions and the abbot. This capacity is tested at arrival, and the Rule is frank in its reminder: "Do not grant newcomers to the monastic life an easy entry."[22] Anybody who desires to take up a Benedictine novitiate must wait at the gate for four or five days in order to show the vigour of his resolve. In his novitiate, he is surveilled by a senior monk who scans his every action and his state of mind to determine whether he does indeed truly seek God and is able and ready to submit himself to the monastic regime of obedience and manual labour and some eight hours of liturgical service every day. The novice is constantly made aware of the corporeal and spiritual travails that lie ahead. After two months the Rule is read to him cover to cover to make sure that he understands the norm he is now subject to. He is then tested for another six months, including another reading of the entire Rule, and then yet another four months and a third reading of the Rule.

When, finally, the novice is received into the monastic community, "he must be well aware that, as the law of the rule establishes, from this day he is no longer free to leave the monastery, nor to shake from his neck the yoke of the rule".[23] He joins his fellow monks in the church where he promises stability, adherence to monastic life and

obedience.[24] Then he prostrates himself before each monk, asking for his prayers and divests himself of his former life and his possessions "without keeping back a single thing for himself, well aware that from that day he will not have even his own body at his disposal. Then and there in the oratory he is to be stripped of everything of his own that he is wearing and clothed in what belongs to the monastery."[25] The entry into the monastic community contains in nucleus everything that characterizes this community and its particular form of neighbour-love; that is, a love marked by brotherly surveillance and complete submission not only to the abbot, but also to the other brothers.

## Monks in space

Cistercian regulations pay minute attention to navigation in the shared space. They abound in guidelines concerning the activities in the cloister as well as in the church, the chapter, the dormitory, the refectory and the lay brothers' quarters. Each of these rooms has a particular function and spiritual ambience as well as its own set of looming temptations.[26] The church is a space of worship and orientation to God; the monks do not greet one another here;[27] only the abbot must be saluted.[28] Restlessness and a wandering mind is a danger, and the monks must not provoke it in each other. The chapter is the assembly room where the monks gather to listen to sermons, readings from the Rule and information about mundane matters. Upon entering the chapter, the monks bow to each other; this is a space dedicated to communal affairs.[29] The dormitory is an altogether different place. Here bodily needs take precedence, and one must be on guard. There are guidelines as to how to lie down in bed, how to undress while lying on the bed, how only to sit on one's bed when putting on and taking off one's shoes. The latrines are equally charged; the monks must take care to hide their face in their hood and keep their hands in front of them with their sleeves rolled up; the habit, however, must by no means be rolled up, but left hanging to the floor.[30] The Trappist guidelines for the refectory seem to balance monastic propriety and grand-siècle manners. Eat in a way that is neither too fast, nor too slow; only have the knife in hand when actually cutting, and never

ever put it in the mouth; keep your elbows off the table. Only the lowered gaze—yet without too much thought on the food on the plate—is monastic through and through. Singularity must be avoided, and this is according to the general Cistercian preference for unity, but the command not to begin with the fruit or the cheese does have a ring of late 17th-century etiquette to it.[31]

The walls of the different monastic buildings constitute one form of boundary, the monastic hood another. This is regulated with zeal as well. When drawn up, the hood prevents the monk from looking to the sides; communal spaces are spaces fraught with dangerous distraction, and since the eyes are particularly susceptible to being led—and leading—astray, the hood provides a much-needed shield. Bernard's treatise on humility, *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, is rich in allusions to monks who keep a jealous eye on their peers in the attempt to distract them from their work, provoke ascetic competition or outshine them. The hood helps to curb such unwanted activity. The hood must be down, in respect for the divine, when the monk enters the church,[32] but as soon as he sits next to his brothers, the hood must be up.[33] The same is required for the dormitory and the latrines for reasons obvious from the above.[34]

The command to silence creates another zone around the monk. The Rule prescribes silence, the Cistercians augment this decree, and the Trappists became known as keen champions of silence.[35] In the monastic movement silence is considered a means to curb verbal offences between monastic inmates: from gossip and quarrelling to laughter.[36] In Rancé's words, it would be useless to withdraw from the world, if the monks take with them into the cloister the worldly spirit that comes with any form of speech.[37] Allowing speech, in other words, would enable everybody in the abbey to remain who they were before becoming monks. In a suggestive paragraph, Rancé conjures up the menaces that will occur—and as we might perhaps infer, have occurred—if the command to silence is not honoured. The schemer will scheme; someone who is angry will find occasions for rage; someone lascivious will kindle impure desires; a liar will tell lies; a pleaser will play favourites with particular friends; in short, passions and

vices will rule untrammelled.[38] Monastic discipline and the imposition of silence go a long way to secure harmony. They are, however, not a cure-all, and we do find textual hints at cracks and fissures in the disciplinary solidity, such as Rancé's paragraph on silence. And one of Bernard's sermons suggestively portrays the many ways in which monks harass each other without words, grunting resentfully at a brother or muttering, murmuring, sneering, laughing or frowning at him.[39] Such indications point to the threshold between the brothers; their zone of interaction, as it were, and we may just begin to imagine what that looks like.

## At the threshold between brothers

Cistercian neighbour-love hinges on the ability of each monk to exploit the supportive and chastising opportunities offered by the community. Monks help each other in their quest for perfect humility and triumph over their lapsarian pride, for example, by paying attention to each other's transgressions and reporting them in Chapter so that they may be punished. The *Ecclesiastica Officia* provides the formula for relating a brother's sin as well as the ensuing choreography of prostration and flogging.[40] But monks also act as each other's servants or disciples, humbly subjecting themselves to each other's needs in a reversal of their former status to an almost pre-lapsarian state of humble simplicity. The Trappist biographies disseminate such transformations with the monks cast as each other's teachers, students, servants and supporters but above all as ever-malleable subjects ready to be edified by good examples. In these portraits we meet the haughty, irascible, lustful Piemontese soldier Count de Santena. He was transformed into the meek and gentle Brother Palemon who wished nothing but to be at his brothers' feet in demonstration of his absolute respect.[41] Dom Arsène's vita develops along similar all-transformative lines. He was a doctor of theology at the Sorbonne who entered La Trappe, and there subjected himself to be taught, shedding completely the glamour and arrogance of erudition. As a novice he conducted himself with child-like simplicity; he listened to the novice master, pretending that the novice master was older and wiser although he was in fact younger

and much less learned than Dom Arsène. He volunteered to carry out the most menial and humiliating tasks, least fitting for a person of his former rank, and took a supreme delight in seeing himself in submissive dependency of his fellow monks.[42] Dom Arsène's obedience was founded, the biography says, in a total destruction of himself, a veritable state of death which is in keeping with the Trappist ideal of radical mortification.[43] All in all, he behaved "with a simplicity that delighted his brothers".[44] The term is *charmer*, and in this context, the charm thus elicited is a state of pious delight inspired by Dom Arsène's beautiful example.

This inspiration evoked by Dom Arsène in his brothers is vital. One dimension of monastic neighbour-love is the obligation to kindle piety and humility in each other. The alternative has dire consequences. The monastic texts have an undercurrent concerned with the need to avoid scandal. For us, the term scandal may come with a hint of titillation, but the original meaning is at once graver, more charitable and more terrifying. The Greek *σκάνδαλον* means "snare", "trap" and "stumbling block", and it recurs in the New Testament as a wrecker of divine designs. In the Gospel of Matthew, for example, stumbling blocks are obstacles that hinder God's plan.[45] In the Pauline corpus this soteriological register is supplemented with a more pragmatic understanding of stumbling blocks as actions, words and ideas that bring a fellow human being to fall,[46] but the word is also applied to the message of the crucified Christ which in its capacity as stumbling block becomes a form of test.[47] In the monastic context, the notion of scandal is rarely addressed as directly and as elaborately as in the treatise 'Traité sur le scandale qui peut arriver même dans les Monastéres les mieux réglez' ('Treatise on the scandal that may arise even in the best-regulated abbeys') which was written by Pierre le Nain (1640–1713), who was sub-prior of La Trappe.[48] Le Nain explains that *scandale* is etymologically linked with the Greek word for limping and that "those who scandalize their brothers, wound their conscience and give them cause to fall, and with this fall, prevent them from walking straight along the way of God and cause them to deviate from the rightness of his commands".[49] Behaviour that may

cause scandal could be anything from eating meat even if one is not ill and thus exempt from the prohibition of meat[50] to yawning during the office[51] or addressing oneself to a brother without permission.[52] The Rule is the bulwark against scandal. In le Nain's words, "in so far as one observes the Ordonnances of the Rule and the brothers are united with one another in charity, it is impossible for laxness to enter the monastery".[53] The monastic community is, as it were, a disciplinary grinding stone upon which each monk's piousness is honed, but it is also a fragile milieu where it is easy to cause lapses with grave consequences. Thus a substantial part of regulations and other monastic texts are concerned with avoiding that encounters between the brothers become a cause of scandal.

## Concluding remarks

Cistercian monks are human beings living together in an enclosed community and bound to a particular place. They are, generally, in that place by choice, but not together with their particular fellow monks by choice. Their life is heavily regulated and intensely surveilled and supervised. All of this happens with the one aim of cultivating a humility that is deemed necessary for salvation. While acutely geared to the particular monastic teleology, the texts that aim to shape and regulate the Cistercian community, its daily life and overall ethos come with a sharp view of human cohabitation. In the Cistercian view, in order to be effective and indeed affective, charity requires a lot of regulation.

Cistercian monks are hardly typical of human communities. Nonetheless, the monastic case offers some basic elements that are helpful for further reflection. The Cistercian monastery exhibits some robust, material and ritualized versions of thresholds and boundaries that may exist in other communities, albeit in much vaguer and more elusive forms. It reminds us of the gates and probation that mark the entry into a given community. The image of the novice, waiting at the gate, making his initiatory steps under watchful senior eyes and with regular reminders of the ethos he will be bound by, is delightfully concrete. It also reflects the special form of neighbour-love that

prevails in this community. The formalized monastic profession encourages us to look for the explicit and, more likely, implicit rites of passage that mark the entry into a given community, be it defined by material or immaterial boundaries. What happens at the threshold to the community? What does this negotiation tell us of the inherent ideal of neighbour-love? Who is excluded? In similar vein, while the tightly-knit cloistered community is something quite particular, it may perhaps help us to ponder some of the dynamics of neighbour-love exemplified elsewhere. I suggest that this highly charged mode of action and form of communication may serve as an analytical catalyst for thinking about the actions and communications that connect or disconnect people in other contexts. The day-to-day contact might incite a closer look at the physical and spiritual or mental zones and boundaries that we create around ourselves or that are imposed upon us by external norms. The radical lapsarian anthropology that underlies the Cistercian mindset as well as the interactions imbued with this mindset may seem alien to us; but it prompts us to look for anthropological assumptions underlying other instances of neighbour-love and the way in which they resurface in views of self and of others. Finally the notion of *σκἄνδἄλον* and the obligation not to cause a brother to stumble raise the question if, and if so, how this concern appears in other instances and ideals of neighbour-love.

## NOTES

**1** This is particularly clear in the Germanic languages where *Nächste* (German), *næste* (Danish) and *nästa* (Swedish) remind us that our neighbour is the person next to us. Cf. the chapters by Michael Azar, Christian Benne and Irina Hron in this volume.

**2** A classic study of *proxemics*, the individual use of space, is Hall 1969.

**3** The slippery and opaque notion of *privacy* concerns such zones. I come to neighbour-love from an engagement with notions of privacy and the private in the early modern period and research conducted at the Danish National Research Foundation Centre for Privacy Studies (DNRF138) at the University of Copenhagen. Sincere thanks are due to my colleagues at the Centre. For our approach, see my chapter Bruun 2021. No stable definition of privacy exists, but there are various schools of definitions. Some of these underline boundary drawing and access control (see, e.g., Altman 1977 and Margulis 1977) while others underline the social interaction that takes place in the regulation of information (e.g., Nissenbaum 2010).

**4** This call for contextualization is in fact the opening message of Akiyama 2018, p. 1.
**5** For a Latin–English version of the Rule with substantial comments as to its different elements and the character of Benedictine monasticism, see Benedict of Nursia 1980.
**6** For a general introduction to the Cistercians, their ideals, historical development and life in the world, see the articles in Bruun 2013a.
**7** For the 17th-century rift, see Lekai 1968. For briefer surveys, see King 1999; Casey 2013.
**8** My paraphrase of the lapsarian condition sums up teaching established in the first centuries of Christianity based on literal and allegorical interpretations of the Bible. The details of this teaching vary from author to author; suffice it for our current purpose to work with the more general version, largely rooted in Augustine (354–430), which undergirds Benedictine life.
**9** For these documents, see McGuire 2013. The principal study of the role of *caritas* in the worldly repercussions of the Cistercian Order remains Newman 1996. For the self-understanding created in the foundational documents, including narratives of the first settlements in the marshlands of Cîteaux, see Bruun 2008.
**10** "[N]emini quicquam debeatis nisi ut invicem diligatis", *Exordium cistercii* II.13, Waddell 1999, p. 402. All translations from the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version.
**11** "In hoc ergo decreto prædicti fratres mutuæ pacis futurum præcaventes naufragium, elucidaverunt et statuerunt suisque posteris relinquerunt, quo pacto quove modo, immo qua caritate monachi eorum per abbatias in diversis mundi partibus corporibus divisi animis indissolubiliter conglutinarentur." *Carta Caritatis Prior*, Prologue, Waddell 1999, p. 442.
**12** *Carta Caritatis Prior*, Waddell 1999, pp. 443–450.
**13** Nygren 1953. For more on Nygren, see Ola Sigurdson's article in this volume.
**14** For the concept of love in the desert fathers, see Burton-Christie 1993, pp. 261–295.
**15** For the love of neighbour, see Burton-Christie 1993, pp. 263–295.
**16** John Cassian 1958, 11.6–11.7, pp. 104–107.
**17** John Cassian 1955, 1.7, p. 84.
**18** Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a *De diligendo Deo*, Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167) a *De speculo caritatis*, William of Saint-Thierry (*c.* 1080–1148), a Benedictine who ended his life as a Cistercian, authored a *De contemplando deo* and a *De natura et dignitate amoris* and, finally, Beatrice of Nazareth (1200–1268) composed a *De caritate Dei et vii eius gradibus*. While diverse in tone and tenor, these works share a concern with the love between God and human with implications for love of neighbour. For a discussion of differences between these Cistercian authorities, see McGinn 1994, pp. 158–323 and, briefer, McGinn 2013.
**19** Bernard's *Sermones super Cantica canticorum* were continued by Gilbert of Hoyland (d. 1172) and completed by John of Forde (*c.* 1145–1214); William of Saint-Thierry composed as much as four works on the Song, *Brevis commentatio in Cantici canticorum priora duo capita*; *Commentarius in Cantica canticorum e scriptis Sancti Ambrosii*; *Excerpta ex libris Sancti Gregorii Papae super Cantica canticorum* and, finally, *Expositio super Cantica canticorum*. For more in-depth studies of this intricate *oeuvre*, see also Pranger 1994; Verbaal 2004; Engh 2014.
**20** The use of the spittoons is decreed in the 12th-century manual *Ecclesiastica Officia* (1989), 72.15, p. 215. On spittoons, see also *Constitutions de l'abbaye de la Trappe* 1671, pp. 2–4.

**21** See the classical presentations of her grid/group theory in Douglas 1966; 1970.
**22** "Noviter veniens quis ad conversationem, non ei facilis tribuatur ingressus", the Rule 58.1; Benedict of Nursia 1980, p. 266; trans. p. 267.
**23** "[S]ciens et lege regulae constitutum quod ei ex illa die non liceat egredi de monasterio, nec collum excutere de sub iugo regulae", the Rule 58.15–16, Benedict of Nursia 1980, p. 268; trans. p. 269.
**24** "[C]oram Deo et sanctis eius", the Rule 58.18, Benedict of Nursia 1980, p. 268; trans. p. 269.
**25** "Res, si quas habet, aut eroget prius pauperibus aut facta sollemniter donatione conferat monasterio, nihil sibi reservatus ex omnibus, quippe qui ex illo die nec proprii corporis potestatem se habiturum scit. Mox ergo in oratorio exuatur rebus propriis quibus vestibus est et induatur rebus monasterii. Illa autem vestimenta quibus exutus est reponantur in vestiario conservanda, ut si aliquando suadenti diabolo consenserit ut egrediatur de monasterio—quod absit—tunc exutus rebus monasterii proiciatur." The Rule 58.24–28, Benedict of Nursia 1980, pp. 268–270; trans. pp. 269–271.
**26** See in particular *Ecclesiastica Officia* 1989, 70–83, pp. 202–242.
**27** *Ecclesiastica Officia* 1989, 70.6, p. 202.
**28** Rancé 1698, p. 7.
**29** *Ecclesiastica Officia* 1989, 70.3–70.13, p. 202.
**30** *Ecclesiastica Officia* 1989, 72.13–72.25, p. 214.
**31** Rancé 1698, pp. 27–32.
**32** Rancé 1698, p. 6.
**33** Rancé 1698, p. 15.
**34** *Ecclesiastica Officia* 1989, 70.13–70.17, p. 214.
**35** I have discussed the Trappist silence in Bruun 2013b.
**36** The Rule 6.8, see also 7.57; Benedict of Nursia 1980, pp. 190 & 200. Cf. Bruce 2007 and, for a Cistercian angle, Barakat 1975.
**37** Rancé 1689, vol. 1, p. 353.
**38** Rancé 1683, vol. 2, p. 162.
**39** See Bruun 2011.
**40** *Ecclesiastica Officia* 1989, 70, pp. 203–208.
**41** Rancé 1696a, p. 29.
**42** Rancé 1696b, vol. 1, pp. 307–308; see also the account of his adherence to Rancé and his counsels, pp. 310–311.
**43** Rancé 1696b, vol. 1, p. 325.
**44** Rancé 1696b, vol. 1, pp. 307–308; my translation: "avec une simplicité qui charmoit tous ses Freres".
**45** For example, Matthew 13:41: "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers" with "evildoers" as the translation of *σκάνδαλα*; Matthew 16:23: "But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things'"; Matthew 18:7: "Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"
**46** Romans 14:13: "Let us therefore no longer pass judgement on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another."
**47** 1 Corinthians 1:23: "but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles"; Galatians 5:11: "But my friends, why am I still being persecuted if I am still preaching circumcision? In that case the offence of the cross has been removed", with "offence" as the translation given for *σκάνδαλον*.
**48** It was printed in D'Arnaudin 1715, pp. 277–360.
**49** D'Arnaudin 1715, p. 278; my translation: "ceux qui scandalisent leurs fréres, blessant leur conscience, leur font un sujet de chûte, & par cette chûte, les empêchent

de marcher droit dans la voye de Dieu, & les détournent de la rectitude de ses Commandemens".

**50** Rancé 1683, vol. 2, p. 221.

**51** Rancé 1698, p. 5.

**52** *Ecclesiastica Officia* 1989, 71.21, p. 212.

**53** D'Arnaudin 1715, p. 287; my translation: "tant qu'on observe les Ordonnances de la Régle, & que les fréres seront unis les uns avec les autres par la charité, il est impossible que le relâchement s'introduise dans le Monastére".

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# THE FOURFOLD PRAXIS OF LOVE

## Neighbourly love in context

WERNER G. JEANROND

THE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL tradition knows plenty of attempts to divide love into different strands while, at the same time, acknowledging God as the sole origin and fullness of love. This is strange. Why do theologians wish to separate human and divine love from each other? Is it in order to affirm God's sovereignty and divinity over and against the fallibility and weakness of human love? Or might there be a wish to preserve a human domain of love which does not depend on God? Does the separation of human and divine love, then, serve to protect God's freedom, on the one hand, and human freedom, on the other?

Unlike other languages that only know one word for love, the English language can differentiate between *love* and *charity*, that is between a larger complex of loving relations that is not to be confused with particular acts of charity in response to various human needs. Hence, in English there is love as such and there is a praxis of generous giving to people in need.

Moreover, in Christian tradition we can observe a tendency to separate between human expressions of love that include physical relations to other human beings (erotic and sexual love) and mere spiritual expressions of love that are seen to represent divinely willed forms of love (*agape*). Underlying such trends is often a fundamental suspicion of human desire for love affected by the Fall of Adam and Eve, i.e., by human sinfulness. Ultimately, human love cannot be trusted; only divine love is pure and good.[1]

Some Christian thinkers have even affirmed that, ultimately, human beings really cannot love. God alone is capable of loving, and any genuine love emerging from human action is in truth an act of God.[2]

In this article, I wish to restore and affirm the human ability to love in its wider human and divine context. My thesis is that there is only one praxis of love, and that God has bestowed the gift of love to all human beings. What is the potential of this divine gift of love when taken up by humanity?

However, even theologians who affirm the unity of love and who acknowledge the divine nature of the gift of love at times feel a need to subordinate this gift of love to the gift of faith. Love, they argue, requires constant control and ongoing monitoring by faith. Here, love is subordinated to theological schemes and dogmatic systems. It appears that, for many women and men, love was too dynamic a gift, too risky a prospect and too adventurous a move, thus causing them to look for ways to domesticate love with the help of theological moves, catechisms, and doctrines. Is love a praxis too big for us humans to be engaged in? Is that the reason why we might prefer to reflect upon God as love rather than considering the human potential to love?

I wish to rehabilitate the divine gift of love and the human praxis of love in three moves: first, I offer arguments for the unity of love. Second, I consider neighbourly love within the network of mutually interdependent loving relationships. Third and finally, I explore the unity of love and charity.

## The unity of love

Phenomenologically speaking, all instances of being loved and of loving include an experience of otherness and difference. Love always involves an other—the human other, the divine other, the universe in all its forms as other, and my own self as other. Love involves relating to other subjects or to other objects. Hence, it is evident that love presupposes some level of freedom to relate to otherness in the first place. However, there is no need for *full* presence in love: we human beings are able even to relate to others who are not or no longer present. We can love somebody whose bodiliness is beyond our reach and grasp. We can love the dead, the departed, the distant. Moreover, we can even participate in emerging bodies of love, in loving communities.

On this side of death, human acts of love always involve bodies and have implications for the understanding of our respective body.[3]

Here is not the place to reflect in any detail upon the love of objects. We can say that we love cars, colours, movies, music, the sun, and the seasons, etc. We can also meaningfully state that we love values and achievements, such as freedom, truth, justice, power, virtues, etc. Whatever we claim to love, we always experience love as transitive: we love some thing or some body. Even grammatically, love presupposes an other. Love always extends to some manifestation of otherness.

We can distinguish four possible directions in the human praxis of love (to be clarified further as we go along in our exploration): we can love other human beings—dead or alive; we can love God; we can love the universe as a whole or any aspect of the universe; and we can love our own emerging selves. However, all of these directions of love presuppose a human subject in the making, though not any full or total subjectivity. Rather, love affects the process of our very becoming a subject. Those who addressed us when we were still babies, first opened our ears, eyes, hands and brains for language, and they welcomed us to the web of human communication and interaction.[4] Love is never a neutral action on behalf of an isolated agent. Instead, every act of love represents a step into a new or emerging relation and relational network with incalculable consequences. Love in all its forms is potentially transformative. Loving attention to the other affects both the self and the other.

Love, then, is not an action by fully self-present subjects; rather, love is co-constitutive of the emergence of subjectivity and subjects. The mysterious nature of love, therefore, can never be completely planned, strategically calculated, or phenomenologically exhausted. The dynamics of love can be entered into, love can be discovered and experienced, but it cannot be made or controlled—or, rather, it can be controlled but only at the cost of killing it.

Hence, it makes good sense to refer to love in terms of a *praxis*—an entire network of interdependent relations. Every aspect of this praxis affects all other aspects. The love of God and the love between human

beings are interrelated. They can and must be distinguished, but since they are capable of affecting each other, they must not be separated. The same can be said, of course, about evil acts which human beings perform against each other. Hatred, war, neglect, lack of attention and of care, patriarchal and colonial behaviour, all such actions affect the entire network of human relationships. The human desire for love always develops within larger networks of dynamic relationships. However, loving relationships need not necessarily be symmetrical. The relationship between parents and children, teachers and pupils, God and human beings, for example, are not symmetrical, but, at best, mutual. Love can even be one-sided: we can love even those who have treated us badly or who have ignored us. In principle, actions of love always remain possible, even when circumstances do not easily facilitate or promote initiatives of love. The story of love, thus, will never end as long as agents persist in the praxis of loving.

We human beings can grow in love. For such growth in love, we depend on networks of love—even beyond the immediate family. The experience of difference and otherness allows love to flourish and loving subjects to grow. For its growth, love does not require harmony. Rather, the challenge of otherness and even of conflicts provides the ground for the dynamic praxis of love. What is required to trigger the emergence of love is first of all attention to the other, curiosity to find out more about the other, while, at the same time, being prepared to discover ever new dimensions and possibilities even of one's own self in the process. This is not always easy. Hence, it makes good sense to speak with Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) of the "works of love" (*Kjerlighedens gjerninger*, 1847).[5] The Danish philosopher suggested not to approach and understand love as such, but through its concrete works.[6] As has become clear by now, love has nothing much to do with romanticizing feelings or harmonious celebrations of unity. Love can be hard work, precisely because the confrontation with otherness may make demands on us. In that sense, love is always much more than emotion or sentiment.

In both Jewish and Christian traditions, love is understood also in terms of a commandment. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the

LORD alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4–5), and "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).[7] In the Gospel of Matthew, for instance, Jesus combines these commandments: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37–40).

These biblical traditions strongly affirm the interdependent network of loving relationships. Attitudes and emotions, attention and commitment, commandment and law, beneficence and gifts, devotion and admiration, and respect and recognition are among the ingredients that may enter into our experience of love. However, none of them alone, nor all of them together can ever exhaust the dynamics of love. "Rather than looking on love as an attitude which might issue in a relationship, we could also look on love as a relationship which involves partners adopting a complex set of attitudes towards each other."[8] Only as a network of interdependent relationships does love disclose its complex, incalculable and surprising dynamics.

For the Apostle Paul, love was the most important of the three God-given virtues of faith, hope and love. In his famous hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul leaves no doubt that love is the greatest of these three (v. 13). It never ends (v. 8). "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (v. 4–7).

Theologian Karl Rahner (1904–1984) further explores Paul's theology of love.[9] He emphasizes that genuine love constitutes a radically new community of human beings. This new community of love allows the reign of God to begin in secret; it is the miracle of the birth of eternity in our midst—"love never ends" as Paul had put it. However, this miracle of love must not be confused with social planning; love cannot be produced, as it were, but it can be entered into. Looking

more closely at the relationship between love of neighbour and love of God, Rahner distinguishes between love as a reflected and explicit mode of action, on the one hand, and love as an as yet not conceptualized transcendental horizon of action, on the other hand. Rahner thus confirms both the agency and subjectivity of the one who loves and the subjectivity of the one who is loved. However, *that* I can love my neighbour is already the result of God's gift of love, and thus not separated from God's love.[10]

Hence, for Rahner this basic human act of loving attention to and recognition of the neighbour is always already related to the God of eternal life, even though we may not always be aware of this relationship. This love of the other person, then, is the fulfilment of the total and hence also spiritually transcendent nature of the human being, and it opens us human beings to the immediacy of the God who communicates himself under the form of grace. All genuine love is always grace, and genuine grace is love.[11] And Rahner can conclude: the act of love of neighbour is the only categorical and original act in which the human being attains the whole of the given reality, fulfils his or her own self and *thus* experiences God's transcendental and gracious self-communication.[12]

For Rahner, the relationship between love of neighbour and love of God has thus become clearer: the categorical and explicit love of neighbour is the primary act of loving God. It is not the total love of God, but it is the beginning of an opening towards God. Love is *the* New Testament word to bring to expression "what God is and what the human being is to be".[13] Love can only be described; it cannot be defined. It is the total act in which a person gains the right and full relationship to another person through recognizing and affirming the totality of the other in her or his goodness and dignity. Hence, love is genuinely dialogical in so far as the loving subject and the loved subject are related to each other in their respective selfhood, dignity and irreplaceable otherness.[14] Otherness, for Rahner, is and remains an essential aspect of any love relation. Therefore, God and the human person always remain mysteries, mysteries best to be approached through love.

Although Rahner stresses the link between love of God and love of neighbour, he also warns against any human claim to have grasped or understood the mystery of God. While interpersonal love gives us a hint of our relationship to God, it remains true "that only in the act of resigned and self-forsaking surrender of the subject to the incomprehensibility of God as such (which then ceases to be a limitation and becomes the very content of our relationship to God) does the most fundamental nature of love really dawn upon us, of which interpersonal love is merely a creaturely reflection".[15]

Rahner never tires emphasizing the intimate relationship between our love of God and our love of neighbour, while at the same time also underlining the difference between both loves. Both God and the human person have their own dignity, and the respective dignity must be recognized in our human acts of love. With regard to human dignity, Rahner also affirms the significance of the human body for any consideration of human love. He rejects any attempt to split the human person in bodily and spiritual love. Instead, he invites reflection upon the love of "the *whole* person" (*den ganzen Menschen*).[16]

## The love of neighbour within the network of loving relationships

I suggest that we extend Rahner's attention to the interconnection between love of God and love of neighbour by including both the love of the universe (in its many dimensions) and the love of the human self in this multidimensional network of love. All four forms of love occur within the larger context of love, which Rahner identified as the universe of grace. All love points to God, the origin and fullness of love. Explicitly or implicitly, all acts of love are related to this divine ground of love. Moreover, acknowledging the universe as God's good creation always links our human acts of love of the universe to its creator.

Although most Christian traditions have understood the universe as God's good creation, not all have called for loving care for and action on behalf of the universe. Care for the material universe, including environment, climate, sustainability, etc., involves works of love, too. In some branches of Christianity, an exclusive focus on lov-

ing God has eclipsed attention to the love of nature, of the world, of beauty, etc. At times, soteriology and corresponding acts of love concentrated solely on the spiritual rescue of human souls, while material aspects of human life and of the universe were excluded from the orbit of love and hope.[17]

For many an understanding of salvation from human depravity, the clue to hope lies in the past *before* the Fall of Adam and Eve, *before* the crime of Cain against his brother Abel, *before* the onset of human discovery, science, development and the resulting destruction of a supposedly originally clean and innocent environment. However, such a desire for innocence thinks pessimistically about God's invitation to all human beings to become agents of love in God's continuing project of creation that is shaped at once by evolution, human development and God's transforming presence in our physical universe. The longing for a past paradise romanticizes God's original act of creation and infantilizes human agency, subjectivity and participation in this project. God loves us and invites us to become friends and collaborators in his grand project of creation and reconciliation.[18] Hence, we need not escape into the role of mere spectators hoping for a cosmic drama staged in front of us though without our direct involvement, participation and commitment. The focal point of God's project lies in future fulfilment and glory—not in the past. And this promised future affects us already here and now by soliciting our participation in its dynamic movement.[19] If we must speak in terms of salvation, it would be more appropriate anyway to speak about salvation *for* rather than salvation *from*.[20] Narrating the past and remembering God's acts in history are of course important aspects for understanding and approaching the future of God's project and of human involvement in it. However, the chief perspective for the Christian praxis of love remains God's future and our divine vocation to participate in this unfolding orbit of love.

In his 2015 encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis connects the love for the earth with neighbourly love when, with reference to Saint Francis, he writes that Francis shows us "just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment

to society, and interior peace" (LS 10).[21] Francis of Assisi helps us "to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human" (LS 11).

Love of the universe is thus intimately related to the love of our neighbours. Attention to our social conditions will draw us immediately to our natural conditions and vice versa. "The social dimensions of global change include the effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity." (LS 46) Furthermore, "when media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously" (LS 47). The point here is not to demonize either the media or modern technological development. Rather, the point is to review the human use of all means and media in terms of how they advance a culture of love. "Today's media do enable us to communicate and to share our knowledge and affections. Yet at times they also shield us from direct contact with the pain, the fears and the joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences." (LS 47) Everybody who has suffered through the necessary yet painful COVID-19 restrictions and thus has experience of the ambivalence of mediated life, might be minded to agree.

Once more Pope Francis affirms the link between love, justice and truth, to which some theologians have drawn attention before,[22] when he realizes "that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (LS 49).[23]

The orbit of love is universal: love of the world involves social love and the love of God. Moreover, it also challenges us to review the extent to which we love our own emerging selves and how a genuine self-love intersects with the other forms of love. "Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour,

for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth." (LS 70) Everything is interconnected. Genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature cannot be separated from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others, including our own selves. Hence, a new spirituality is needed that includes a conversion for achieving reconciliation with creation (cf. LS 218). However, conversion applies not merely to individual persons, but to all humanity. "Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption." (LS 222)

This papal encyclical letter thus does not advocate a moralizing approach to love and life; rather, it wishes to support both happiness and the common good. "Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer." (LS 223) The joy of our hope will sustain us in our struggles and concern for this planet (cf. LS 244).

How, then, do love of neighbour and love of self relate? I am not analysing egoistic tendencies in human love, tendencies well known to each and every human being. Rather, I wish to explore the necessity of a genuine love of self in which the self remains the other to which I am also called to relate. Here it is important to recall the difference between *loving* oneself and *liking* oneself.[24] In my understanding of the complex biblical love commandment, all are called to love their emerging selves in the light of God's love, even when they do not like themselves or aspects of themselves. Ultimately, it is the knowledge and experience of God's prior love that makes self-love possible in the first place—notwithstanding any like or dislike of one's self.

To love one's own self can be hard work, especially at times of dramatic personal development when one's very self appears as a threatening other, such as, for instance, in puberty, illness, trauma, disappointment, dying and mourning. Maybe self-love is the trickiest of all forms of love, since illusion and delusion can be such powerful presences in this particular relation of love. Genuine love of self can only develop through the many struggles with otherness—both with-

out and within. Self-love only has a chance to emerge within the context of social love. Even linguistically, we depend on others in order to gain any awareness of our own emerging selves. However strange it may sound, self-love only grows through intersubjective forms of recognition.[25] Thus, we need social institutions of love for our own growth as loving subjects: family, friendship, marriage and partnership, schools and other educational establishments, churches and religious bodies, human association, clubs, assemblies, etc.[26] Since self-love (like all forms of love) is necessarily dynamic, on this side of death the work of loving one's own self remains unending. Hence, it would be presumptuous to argue for the perfect love of self (or other).

Returning to the love of neighbour, we can conclude that it remains intricately related to the love of God, to the love of the universe and to the love of self. The different attentions in love must, of course, be distinguished, but they ought never to be separated. Ultimately, the biblical love commandment concerns the development of right relationships between persons and communities and between all the respective others. In so far as human beings are understood as persons defined by their love relationships, any reference to human beings as loving "individuals" would remove them from the social orbit of love and thus make them loveless. From the perspective of love, it makes good sense to speak of persons and communities, but it makes no sense to speak of individuals and collectives.

Love, as discussed above, requires and desires otherness. Hence, it would be absurd to long for a love outside of any context of otherness and conflict. Conflict must not be a threat to love. On the contrary, in conflict love properly comes into its own. Here, otherness emerges often in radical forms provoking the broad imagination of love to respond. Even hatred cannot be called an enemy of love since it preserves some sort of relationship to another—however warped and confused. The real enemy of love is not hatred but indifference of the sort "I could not care less". Hatred, however bizarrely, cares about the other and reacts to otherness. Indifference does not.

## The unity of love and charity

For some Christian thinkers, charity defines the ethics of love. Here, the biblical love commandments are interpreted as the foundation of Christian ethics.[27] While this is an understandable move, nevertheless it runs the risk of instrumentalizing the divine gift of love for human moral projects. In this case, our respective charitable projects could lose their transcendental connection to God who is love. Therefore, I am not arguing *against* an ethics of love; rather, I am arguing *for* an understanding of love that transcends the horizon of any particular human moral project. If love is accepted both as a gift emerging from divine grace and as a call to participate in God's project, there is no need for a specific ethics of love.[28] Instead, all works of love are performed within the much larger horizon of conversion and transformation opened up by the fourfold praxis of love. What is needed, then, is a culture of love.

Neighbourly love, as we have seen above, is not a separate project of attention to the human other, motivated by whatever ethical reasoning, Christian or otherwise. Rather, it is one of the four dimensions of love besides attention to God, to God's universe and to our own emerging selves. Moreover, in such an economy of love it does not matter where one begins to love, since any such beginning will automatically draw one's attention also to the other dimensions of love. John of the Cross, it is reported, once was asked where one should begin with love—with loving God or with loving the neighbour in need. John answered that it was of no importance where one begins to love as long as one begins. If we begin with loving God, we will automatically be directed also to the needs of God's creatures, and if we begin with loving God's creatures, we will eventually be drawn also to love God the creator.[29]

According to the logic of *Laudato Si'*, any genuine attempt to love the neighbour or God will automatically also invite the love for God's good creation and the appropriate attention to its precarious ecological condition. And in line with the philosophical approach of Paul Ricœur (1913–2005), we can state that any honest attention to my own self will demand genuine attention to all the others around me.

For without them I can neither develop my own character nor my praxis of love.[30] We are in this together.

The human other thus must not be reduced to some helpful occasion for my own development. Rather, the human other and I are both part of love's dynamic movement. The decision in front of me is to join this dynamic and transformative praxis or not. If I understand the parables and sermons in the gospels appropriately, Jesus encouraged his followers to join this way or praxis of love rather than developing distinct ethical norms and laws.

The truth of the way, which Jesus tried to outline, also opened an alternative approach to justice. At stake was not a distributive concept of justice, but a justice borne by the superabundant gift of love.[31] Such a justice could be characterized as a restorative justice in which everybody is invited back into the praxis of love in which alone we can become human beings together, notwithstanding our many and repeated aberrations from this way. The parable of the lost son (or, rather, of the merciful father) provides a telling example for such a praxis of love and the related logic of a superabundant justice (Luke 15:11–32). Accordingly, it would be more appropriate to name Jesus a teacher of love than a teacher of ethics. Jesus proclaimed God's eschatological community of love in which every human being can discover her or his natural place and vocation. No ethics and no casuistic morality can ever reach the wonderful and mysterious dynamics of the praxis of love in response to this sacred vocation. Discipleship of Christ involves a personal and communal praxis of love. It does not come about through merely devising and applying Christian or other ethical principles.[32]

The shared praxis of love in respective communities will inspire ever new particular works of love, particular forms of charitable action. In this way, all works of charity will flow from the fourfold praxis of love and thus relate to their divine origin and vocation. This direction of love's flow preserves the divine gift from being reduced to mere ethical norms and projects, and it restores the recipients of our charitable works to their rightful human dignity in God's transformative orbit of love.

A commitment to the praxis of love opens our horizon afresh to the incalculability of love. We do not have any result sheets in our hands when following the way of love. Love remains a risky journey into the unknown. Nor can we *a priori* exclude other forms of such a praxis of love that have not originated in the Christian tradition. For the point here is to join the praxis of love in this fourfold network of interrelated dimensions, and not its control by any self-appointed guardians of faith. Love is never anybody's sole invention or possession.

Hence, it does matter if one approaches love through faith or faith through love. The Christian tradition has largely done the former, and, therefore, it may have missed much of the transformative dynamics of the praxis of love, which is the superabundant logic of Christian discipleship. God alone will crown this praxis in eternity. Maybe it is this expectation which Christians have in mind when praying in the Lord's Prayer "Your kingdom come".

## NOTES

**1** For a discussion of different Christian approaches to love, see Jeanrond 2021.
**2** Cf., for instance, Nygren 1982.
**3** For a more extensive discussion of the phenomenon of love and its bodiliness, see Jeanrond 2010.
**4** On this, see Irina Hron's article in this volume.
**5** Kierkegaard 1995. On Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, see Irina Hron's and Claudia Welz's articles in this volume.
**6** For a discussion of Kierkegaard's approach to love, see Jeanrond 2010, pp. 106–113.
**7** All biblical quotations are from the Holy Bible NRSV.
**8** Brümmer 1993, p. 156.
**9** For a more detailed discussion of Karl Rahner's approach to love, see Jeanrond 2010, pp. 142–152.
**10** Rahner 1969a, p. 241.
**11** Cf. Rahner 1969b, p. 243.
**12** Cf. Rahner 1969a, p. 246.
**13** Rahner 1969b, p. 236.
**14** Cf. Rahner 1969b, p. 237.
**15** Rahner 1984, p. 101.
**16** Cf. Rahner 1961, p. 1039.
**17** Cf. also Jeanrond 2020, pp. 185–190.
**18** Cf. also Oord 2022, p. 217: "God's motive for creating is love. [. . . ] God always creates alongside creatures who are created co-creators."
**19** Cf. Jeanrond 2020, p. 185. See in this context also Ola Sigurdson's thesis that "den kristna tron alltid måste gestaltas i en praktik – den är inte en tolkning av tillvaron, om man med tolkning endast menar ett sätt att *se* på världen, utan också och framför allt en gestaltning, ett sätt att *vara* i världen. [. . .] att den kristna tron inte existerar utanför dessa partikulära och konkreta gestaltningar." (Sigurdson 1998, p. 11.)
**20** Cf. Jeanrond 2023, pp. 116–118.
**21** Pope Francis 2015. The figures in the

text refer to the respective paragraphs of *Laudato Si'* (LS).

**22** See, for instance, Tillich 1954; Farley 2006.

**23** Original italics. Cf. also LS 91: "Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society." And LS 196: "The mindset which leaves no room for sincere concern for the environment is the same mindset which lacks concern for the inclusion of the most vulnerable members of society."

**24** For a more detailed discussion of the difference between *to love* and *to like* in the context of the love of enemies, see Jeanrond 2010, p. 80; 2020, pp. 116–117.

**25** Cf. Honneth 2012; Saarinen 2016.

**26** For a discussion of the need for institutions of love, see Jeanrond 2010, pp. 173–204.

**27** Cf. Outka 1972; Outka 1986, pp. 357–359. See also Paul Ricœur's critique of Outka's approach to an ethics of love, in Ricœur 1991, esp. p. 191: "The commandment that precedes every law is the word that the lover addresses to the beloved: Love me!"

**28** There will, of course, always be a need for critical and self-critical clarification of what the fourfold dynamic network of interdependent love relations concretely entails.

**29** I have not found the exact quote by John of the Cross. However, already in the first book of the *Dark Night of the Soul*, chs. 12 and 13, John stresses the interconnection between love of God, love of self, and love of neighbour. Cf. John of the Cross 1991, pp. 385–392.

**30** Cf. Ricœur 1992, esp. pp. 25, 121–122.

**31** Cf. Ricœur 1991, p. 198.

**32** See here also Joas 2013, p. 206.

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*Philosophical and Political Imaginations of the Neighbor*

# LOVE AS *PHARMAKON*

## Freud, the neighbor, and the political economy of narcissism

MICHAEL AZAR

*To an ordinary human being, love means nothing*
*if it does not mean loving some people more than others.*
GEORGE ORWELL, 'Reflections on Gandhi' (1949)

IN ONE OF his Vienna lectures during World War I, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) recounts an anecdote about a Hungarian village where a blacksmith is accused of having committed a crime punishable by death. The problem is that the village has only one blacksmith, therefore rendering the man indispensable to the community. After scrutinizing the case, the village court draws a staggering conclusion: The village is home to several tailors, so the court selects one of them and passes him over to the hangman in the blacksmith's stead.[1]

The tragicomic tale sheds light on an essential mechanism of the politics of libidinal economy: The logic of the scapegoat as an intrinsic part of the seemingly incessant conflicts both between and within political communities of various sorts. Having grown up in a culture steeped in anti-Semitism, Freud later in life also had to endure the emergence of the Hitlerian nightmare, which ultimately forced him into exile in London, and three of his sisters into the gas chambers of Treblinka. Freud's work is full of attempts to untangle the hatred of the Other in general, and of the Jew in particular, as an instance of what he called "displacement" (*Verschiebung*), a technical term that refers to the unconscious operation by which a certain object or phenomenon is supplanted by another. Within the dynamics of collective narcissism, the crucial function of displacement is that of diverting attention from the imperfections and antagonisms within a specific

community by blaming them on a neighboring group within or outside that same community.

The Freudian emphasis on various forms of collective narcissism can help us lay bare the libidinal economy at work not only in the distribution of wealth and resources, rights and benefits, but also in the ways that states and communities design and cultivate contrasts between people worthy of love and people worthy of hatred, between friends and enemies, between the good and the bad neighbor.

In the ancient Greek tradition, the function of the scapegoat is condensed in the notion of the *pharmakon*, a double-edged term signifying both poison and remedy. On the one hand, the scapegoat is invested with the sum of the corruption of the community (thus embodying the poison that haunts the community); on the other hand, the scapegoat is as a result brutally excluded or even annihilated from it (thus constituting the sacrificial remedy through which the community cleanses itself from its sins and evils). "What is the rite of purification?" asks Oedipus in Sophocles' Athenian tragedy. And Creon answers: "By banishing a man, or expiation of blood by blood."[2]

Though he does not explicitly refer to the Greek term *pharmakon*, Freud echoes its twofold logic by stressing that it is "always possible to bind quite large numbers of people together in love [*Menschen in Liebe an einander zu binden*], provided that others are left out as targets of aggression."[3] In Freud's view, therefore, the morphing of the neighbor into an enemy and scapegoat appears to be inherent in the workings of Eros itself, being at once a *Bindemittel*, a bond that brings people together, and a truly disruptive force, a source of hatred and violence. Love is a powerful drug, at once toxic and healing.

Strangely enough, this dimension of love is strikingly absent in many of the predominant theories of social and political antagonism. You will not find any comprehensive theory about love in the works of John Locke (1632–1704), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Karl Marx (1818–1883), or Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), to name but a few examples. As a rule, the role of Eros in politics is highly marginalized. By contrast, Freud continuously gives prominence to Eros as one of only two "progenitors of human civilization" (the other being Ananke, the

realm of needs and necessities), and he invariably situates it at the heart of both human coexistence and conflict. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (*Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, 1921), Freud even asserts that it is "love relationships" (*Liebesbeziehungen*) that constitute the essence of group formation, be it religious, ethnic, or political.[4]

It is well known that the Austrian psychoanalyst frequently states his ignorance about political matters. Nevertheless, this doesn't prevent him from doggedly attempting to grasp and lay bare some of political philosophy's core questions: What defines civilization and how does it emerge? From what sources do human morality and religion stem? Is it possible to reconcile the desires of the individual and the claims of the masses, the family and the state, human beings with nature? How are liberty, justice, law, and power interrelated? And how are we to evaluate—and possibly even reform—the institutions and ideologies that regulate human relationships?

Stressing the role of Eros in all these regards, Freud challenges some of the basic assumptions of political thought, not least as regards the dynamics of group psychology and the roots of social and political antagonism. Much like Karl Marx (the explorer of political economy and the realm of Ananke), Freud (the investigator of libidinal economy and the realm of Eros) persistently addresses the question as to why the history of mankind has been so marked by violence and gruesome conflicts between states, nations, and neighbors.

## The narcissism of minor differences

Let us begin with Freud's familiar notion of "the narcissism of minor differences" (*Narzißmus der kleinen Differenzen*). He first introduces the concept at the end of World War I and returns to it on several occasions throughout his life. The notion, inspired by the British anthropologist Ernest Crawley (1867–1924), is used by Freud to expound on the hostility between neighboring groups or nations that otherwise share many common traits. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 1930), Freud explains it as follows:

> It is precisely those communities that occupy contiguous territories and are otherwise closely related to each other—like the Spaniards and the Portuguese, the North Germans and the South Germans, the English and the Scots, etc.—that indulge in feuding and mutual mockery.[5]

To Freud's list of examples, we can surely add many other and even much worse instances, such as the grisly conflicts between the South and the North Koreans, the Indians and the Pakistanis, the Serbs and the Croats, the Hutus and the Tutsis, or the Israelis and the Palestinians. The narcissism of minor differences proves to be ripe for transformation into a narcissism of allegedly major differences, turning mockery and insults into massacres and genocides.

Taking the church, the nation, and the army as instances of collective narcissism, Freud argues that they are formed by the love that their members share for their common leaders—Christ, the head of state, the Commander-in-Chief—and by the same members' "illusion" that they are equally loved by their leaders. The *Bindemittel* which unites the individuals with their leaders—different manifestations of the father figure—also serves as a bond that unites them as "brothers" or "sons" with one another.

Now, for all the love that may circulate among members of such a community, there is nevertheless always a limit that prevents Eros from extending endlessly, thereby safeguarding it from the "inflation" that otherwise would threaten it. The members—those who are already inside the community—are not prone to give up the privileges and benefits that result from being elevated by their beloved leader. This is the reason why Freud underscores that all kinds of libidinally attached groups—be they religious, nationalistic, political, or even scientific—are disposed to "cruelty" and "intolerance" against those who don't belong to the same community.

It is noticeable how the narcissism at work in a given group rests on fearful and obscene fantasies about the invisible and elusive part that dwells behind the bodily surface of the putative Other. The lugubrious history of nationalistic, ethnic, and religious conflicts teaches us

that almost any sign can be used as a mark of partition, as a password, a *shibboleth*, designed to keep all signs of sameness in the Other at bay. Even the smallest difference, in accent, clothing, or eating habits, say, can be exalted to the point that it becomes an insurmountable obstacle to coexistence. "The smaller the real difference is between two peoples," says the historian Michael Ignatieff, "the larger it is bound to loom in their imagination. Enemies need each other to remind themselves of who they are. A Croat, thus, is someone who is not a Serb. A Serb is someone who is not a Croat."[6]

It is by way of the alleged enemy that the presumed friends summon themselves against the dreaded extimate part that dwells within their own imagined intimacy. Nothing is more important than keeping the dividing line intact and thereby preventing ambiguity from entering into the imagined pureness of the cherished community. Far from being reducible to the struggle for material resources and pure survival—the part of civilization that Freud confers to Ananke—Eros offers an altogether different logic in which the conflicts revolve around "sexual" privileges. Certainly, Freud's notion of Eros here extends far beyond the carnal act. It permeates the nitty-gritty of everyday life where humans contend for recognition as sexual beings—as men or women, etc.—and for "the narcissistic satisfaction" that resides in "being able to think that one is better than others."[7]

In the 1960s, Lyndon B. Johnson (1908–1973) made the following astute observation as regards the contradictory economies of Ananke and Eros: "If you can convince the lowest white man that he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice that you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you."[8] The logic of Eros complicates the idea of a linear and progressive History that supposedly pushes all men towards a universal community of equals. While the struggle for material resources, at least in theory, could allow for the possibility of a future where basic needs are satisfied and the reasons for political strife, therefore, dissipate (the hypothesis of classical Marxism), the struggle for erotic satisfaction has no end in sight since love is both insatiable and inextricably linked with the claim to exclusivity. Hence Freud's assertion

that "the Communists" are naïve in their belief that the abolition of private property would put an end to social and political antagonism. Although Freud concedes that a more just distribution of wealth and property would rob aggression of one of its tools, he nevertheless stresses that the prevailing polarizing features of Eros will prevail:

> Even if we do away with the personal right to own material goods, the prerogative that resides in sexual relations still remains [*das Vorrecht aus sexuellen Beziehungen*], and this is bound to become the source of the greatest animosity and the fiercest enmity among human beings who are equal in all other aspects.[9]

At times of political unrest and increasing polarization, the marks of libidinal partition tend to engulf everyday life and impose its pressing Manichaeism on everyone: Are you with or against us? Are you loyal or disloyal, a true believer or an infidel—worthy of love or worthy of hatred? The dissipation of gray areas, of in-betweens, of any middle ground, creates a state where everything you do or say will be interpreted as signs of either loyalty or betrayal. Matters get even worse when brute force comes into the picture. From this moment on, not even the most atrocious deed is out of the question, as long as it is framed as a defensive act stemming from love and loyalty.

The remarks of George Orwell in 'Notes on nationalism' chimes well with the Freudian analysis:

> There is no crime, absolutely none, that cannot be condoned when 'our' side commits it. Even if one does not deny that the crime has happened, even if one knows that it is exactly the same crime as one has condemned in some other case, even if one admits in an intellectual sense that it is unjustified—still one cannot *feel* that it is wrong. Loyalty is involved, and so pity ceases to function.[10]

And yet, there are always ambiguities involved in the inquisitorial procedures that are launched to distinguish between neighboring groups, thereby disrupting the frail alliance between power, knowl-

edge, and pleasure. No single *shibboleth* can by itself sustain the limit between self and other, friend and enemy, good and bad neighbor. No *shibboleth* can fully control Eros—"invincible in battle," as Sophocles (*c.* 497/496–406/405 BC) portrays the power of love in *Antigone*[11]—from transgressing borders and turning enemies into friends, or friends into enemies. In other words, the strategy intended to expel ambivalence tends to gradually morph into its opposite and give rise to confusion. We are dealing here with the uncanny dialectics of Self and Other inherent in the narcissism of minor differences. If the allegedly inferior neighboring group, that we define ourselves against, turns out to be different from what we believe that they are, then it must follow that we are not what we believe that we are.

Erich Koch (1896–1986), appointed by Hitler to rule Ukraine between 1941 and 1944, made this point clear when he came to suspect that the Ukrainian *Doppelgänger* might not be as inferior as the Germans claimed: "If I find a Ukrainian who is worthy to sit with me at the table, I must have him shot."[12] This fear of the Other as Self, or of the Self as Other—the fear of the flux between the inside and outside—explains why *shibboleths* consistently change and why new procedures are perpetually invented in an attempt to stabilize the Other *as* Other. In this sense, the boundaries of the collective subject both mirror and exacerbate the lack of stability that already pervades the individual ego. Human identity is shaped by a labyrinth of more or less disjointed and incompatible identifications and impulses, dreams of belonging, and yearnings for exclusivity in matters of love. As a consequence, both the ego and the group are subject to disturbances and vicissitudes, making the boundaries of our identities more elusive, ambiguous, and unsheltered than we wish them to be. At the end of the day, we always run the risk of being exposed as being nothing more than haphazard members of fortuitous communities.[13]

## The ego is not master in its own house

Once our attention has been drawn to the uncanny workings of Eros within both individual and collective narcissism, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Freud's thoughts on group formation and human

subjectivity clash with longstanding assumptions within political philosophy. Freudian psychoanalysis breaks with the enduring (Platonic) tradition that gives ontological primacy to reason over emotions, it rebuffs the idea that God (or History) will one day reconcile the contradictions that torment human civilization, and it dismisses the hope of a future where alienation is at last dispelled.

There is nothing in Freud's concept of man that endorses the utopian longings of the leftist revolutionary tradition, as expressed, for instance, in the following lines by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) which explicitly involve the neighbor:

> A man's existence must be entirely visible to his neighbor, whose own existence must in turn be entirely visible to him, in order for true social harmony to be established. This cannot be realized today, but I think that it will be once there has been a change in the economic, cultural, and affective relations among men, beginning with the eradication of material scarcity [*raréte matérielle*].[14]

Entirely visible to your neighbor? True social harmony? A society in which—as Sartre asserts—"each person will give himself completely to someone else, who will also give himself completely"?

According to Freud, man is by essence—that is, not by coincidence, by original sin, or as a result of class divisions or material scarcity—unfathomable both to his neighbors and to himself. Neither Messiah nor the Revolution can save us from the impenetrability of our desires, from the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) that pervades the most intimate parts of our existence. The unconscious (*das Unbewußte*) relentlessly undermines the subject's claim to sovereignty: "The ego" (*das Ich*), Freud declares, is "not master in its own house" (*nicht Herr im eigenen Haus*).[15]

There is yet another precept that inspires Freud's resistance, even blatant hostility. Time after time, Freud assails the biblical commandment of love towards all men: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (*Du sollst den Nächsten lieben wie dich selbst*).[16] A closer look at his argument can help us understand some of the underpinnings

of Freud's conceptions of love and communal antagonism. To begin with, Freud makes the crucial point that love is a finite resource. Attempting to love all people indiscriminately would not only erode the value of your love; it would also be unjust to the people—be it friends or family members—who prize your love as a sign of preference for them.[17] No person can claim to love everyone equally unless, perhaps, they simultaneously affirm that everybody is equally entitled to nothing more than "a modicum of love" (*ein geringer Betrag Liebe*).[18] The universalizing injunction to neighborly love thus collides with the logic of collective narcissism, which imposes particular duties on its members and exhorts them to love only objects that consolidate the cohesion of the group.[19]

Freud's second point is that there are people who are not "worthy of love" (*liebenswert*).[20] The neighbor (*der Nächste*) can be anything from a "model," a "helper," or a "sexual partner"—hence making him or her worthy of recognition and love—but he or she might also prove to be a "stranger" (*Fremde*), an "antagonist" (*Gegner*), or even an "enemy" (*Feind*).[21] Freud rejects the Christian idea that we can, and ought to, love our enemies. Such love would be detrimental to us, he suggests, since it radically undercuts our ability to protect ourselves against those who wish to destroy us. My enemies, Freud asserts, have far "more claim to my hostility and even my hatred" (*mehr Anspruch auf meine Feindseligkeit, sogar auf meinen Haß*) than to my love.[22]

A reader of Freud might perhaps find it awkward, even demoralizing, that the great psychoanalyst not only describes the impediments to Christian universalism, but also engages in ferocious diatribes against it. Freud seems to turn the command on its head by urging us to always be on our guard against each other. Do not love thy neighbor, unless it is evident that the neighbor in question already loves you.

To better understand Freud's indignation, we must frame his criticism within the larger critical armature of psychoanalysis, distrustful as it is to all kinds of moral precepts that demand more of man than he can offer. Freud rejects every moral assumption that rests on the idea that humans are by nature rational, gentle, and loving creatures. In

the wake of the horrors of World War I, Freud bitterly concludes that man already from birth is endowed with a "powerful share of aggression," originating from the autonomous and indestructible part of us that Freud identifies as the "death drive" (*Todestrieb*). *Homo homini lupus est*.[23]

This new concept, the death drive, marks a new chapter in Freud's understanding of civilization—the term in the German original is *Kultur*—as such. Civilization is nothing less than the manifestation of man's struggle to subdue and render docile the destructive parts dwelling within himself. In Freud's critical hermeneutics, the grand ideals and commandments of civilization testify, by detour, to the horrific drives dwelling in man. What no man desires (*begehrt*), Freud maintains, needs no prohibition:

> The very emphasis of the commandment: Thou shalt not kill, makes it certain that we are descended from an endlessly long chain of generations of murderers, whose love of murder was in their blood as it is perhaps also in ours.[24]

We might try to deny or even suppress the wolf within us; the clash between civilization and human aggression will nonetheless prove to be merciless since civilization's only chance lies in its capacity to turn man's aggression inwards, introjecting it, and recasting it in the shape of the *superego*. This is the dire predicament that Freud attempts to unravel after World War I. The *Unbehagen in der Kultur*—frustration, unease, self-punishment, and the formation of neuroses—is the price for civilization's progress. The self-imposed renunciation of the drives pits man against himself in an endless struggle without a happy ending in sight. "How potent an obstacle to civilization aggression must be," Freud exclaims, "if the defence against it can cause as much unhappiness as the aggression itself!"[25]

And yet, Freud adds, no civilization can ever obliterate the drive to destruction (*der Destruktionstrieb*). It lurks even in the most seemingly peaceful civilization, perpetually looking for new outlets that can help it achieve satisfaction. And this, again, is where displacement

enters the stage. Freud argues that the drive tirelessly seeks to bypass the prohibitions that confront it in order to acquire pleasure through "substitutive objects and actions."[26]

Even the Christians and the communists—their exhortation to universal brotherhood notwithstanding—have proven skillful in assaulting their rivals with utmost savagery. It is, Freud reiterates, only possible to bind people together in so far as others are made out to be possible targets of aggression. The scapegoat serves this purpose exceedingly well. The previously fettered destructive forces are now—when channeled towards somebody outside the community—endorsed and associated with satisfaction rather than guilt. There is pleasure in the very act of inflicting pain on a chosen enemy. From that point on, all kinds of cruelty and barbarity are elevated to landmarks of loyalty, heroism, and moral self-purification.

According to Freud's genealogy of morals, notions of good and bad ultimately derive from "social anxiety"—that is, the "fear of loss of love" from the people that you love, identify with, and depend on.[27]

## Love as *pharmakon*

What, then, can we make of this gloomy outlook on neighborly love? Must we dismiss the dream of universal brotherhood (or sisterhood), and give up all hopes for a New Man and a New World, where nobody will be excluded and left behind? As a matter of fact, Freud himself seems rather discontent with the predicament his criticisms leave us in. Many of his later works display a search for viable principles that could counter his otherwise so somber conclusions. Freud's obsession with the Judeo-Christian commandment seems to spring from an ongoing struggle between two opposing tendencies within his thought.

On the one hand, Freud seems to hold the view that there are two independent and rivaling forces that structure human life: Eros and the death drive. According to this view, human beings are torn between the life-bringing forces of love (the principle that brings people together) and the destructive forces that set them apart. In some of his most dualistic, and strikingly Empedoclean, formulations, Freud seems to echo, albeit in a secularized version, the Christian teachings

about God and the Devil, Good and Evil. At the end of the otherwise so dismal and cheerless *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud yields to a surprising idealism when he states that the hope of mankind resides in the "heavenly" workings of "the immortal Eros," the only force capable of foiling the devious undertakings of the death drive.[28]

The ambiguity of Freud's thought is out in the open: While explicitly dismissing the biblical injunction, he simultaneously lets it slip through the backdoor. It is, after all, on Eros that man must bet in order to counter the destructive forces of the death drive. In a letter to Albert Einstein (1879–1955) in 1932, Freud concludes that Eros might be our best chance to curb our strong inclination to destruction and war:

> If the propensity for war stems from the tendency to destruction, we are prompted to invoke Eros, its counteragent. All that produces ties of sentiment [*Gefühlsbindungen*] between man and man can serve us as a counterweight to war.[29]

Freud even states that Eros, by its very essence, seeks to "gather together individuals, then families and finally tribes, peoples and nations in one great unit—humanity."[30] In this definition, love is an inherent force of life, a life drive at work within man himself, continuously engaged in a fierce power struggle with the death drive.[31]

Immersed in the tragic tradition of Sophocles and Shakespeare (1564–1616), Freud, on the other hand, frequently points out that there is something, if not directly rotten, then at least profoundly troublesome already within the state called Eros. The view that love is the pure negation of hatred, and that it constitutes an antidote to the tendency to destruction, stands in staggering contrast with Freud's claim that love in and of itself constitutes a *pharmakon*, a remedy that is also a poison.

It is worth remembering that the antagonistic dimensions of love take center stage in the most paradigmatic of Freudian concepts: The Oedipus complex. Ambivalence, jealousy, and hatred are ever-present in Freud's early theories of human sexuality. Even the infant is con-

sumed by these powerful emotions, marked by an insatiable avidity for the mother, immoderate demands and claims to exclusive love, and a considerable measure of hostility against any authority that deprives him of his satisfactions. The child, says Freud, regards anyone—be it the father or a sibling—who interferes with the attachment to the mother as an intruder, a rival, a traumatic Thing. The infant tolerates no sharing whatsoever. When love is a relationship between two persons, the third party tends to be conceived either as superfluous or as utterly disturbing. Moreover, this demand for love also tends to stir up aggression toward the beloved object itself: "the more passionately a child loves the object, the more sensitive does it become to disappointments and frustrations from that object."[32]

Eros is here, all by itself, sufficient to elucidate the conflicts that arise regarding the beloved object. Already in 1905, Freud affirms that there is an "intimate connection between cruelty and the sexual drive [*Sexualtrieb*]."[33] In his view, love relations must always be understood against the backdrop of the extreme vulnerability and helplessness of the human infant at the (m)other's breast, especially since this introductory experience of love fates us to an endless quest to relive and reiterate this indelible model for all happiness. As the prototype of every subsequent relation of love, "the finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it."[34]

The fragile condition of the human child—dependent on the mother both by necessity (Ananke) and sensual love (Eros)—tends to perpetuate itself across the ages, rendering even adult persons acutely sensitive and envious whenever they love someone, as it exposes them to the risk of being rejected or even spurned by the chosen love-object. "We never have so little protection against suffering as when we are in love; we are never so desolate as when we have lost the object of our love or its love for us."[35]

Even the most flagrant forms of enmity are prone to emerge within the dynamics proper to love itself. In this regard, man is no different from the God in whose image he or she is supposedly created—always ready to unleash wrath upon every potential rival to his claim to exclusivity and his prerogatives in the realm of Eros ("*You shall have no*

*other gods before me*"), including the beloved creatures themselves the moment they prove to be unfaithful. "The prevention of erotic satisfaction," writes Freud, "provokes aggression towards whoever interferes with it."[36] In keeping with this framework, love neither appears as the counteragent nor as the opposite of hate. On the contrary, everything in Freud's theory before the introduction of the death drive in 1920 points to a bipolarity in the nature of Eros. Even the most aggressive and transgressive of all (mythical) acts—the slaying of the *Urvater*, as it is outlined in *Totem and Taboo* (*Totem und Tabu*, 1912–1913)—appears to spring out of the inherent bipolarity of Eros itself.[37] Far from binding us universally together, as Freud would have it in his most idealistic moments, love, then, tends to generate bitter antagonism and has the potential to provoke carnage among former brothers and allies as it conjures up mistrust and aversion against anything that comes in its way.

Shrewd politicians have always known how to capitalize on this, constructing their politics around the lack of satisfaction among the population (the *poison*), while at the same time offering a *remedy* for it by blaming it all on a carefully selected scapegoat, the bad neighbor responsible for depriving us of enjoyment. The Other who is not *liebenswert*.

Political discourses generally pretend to offer a better ordering of their community's libidinal economy, regulating its troublesome passions by steering them in one direction or another. There is inevitably something unsettling in the way we love and desire. People cherish objects they are not supposed to cherish, they make love with the wrong people in the wrong way, they find pleasure (*jouissance*) in objects and actions that disrupt the purported moral foundations of the community.[38] The core problem is, of course, that Eros is at once necessary for the reproduction of human life (the remedy), and a constant menace to civilization as such (the poison). As a consequence, civilization must impose "substantial restrictions" on Eros to prevent it from transgressing moral taboos and social hierarchies. Uninhibited sexual impulsions are, to say the least, unfavorable to the formation of long-lasting communities. Freud would probably concur with

Mexican writer Octavio Paz (1914–1998), who wrote that sexuality is "a volcano and any one of its eruptions can bury society under a violent flow of blood and semen."[39] It is both creation and destruction, both life and death.

We don't need to point to some of the more conspicuous instances—the Jim Crow Laws of post-Reconstruction United States, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, the Italian Race Laws of 1938, or the South African Immorality Act of 1948—to highlight the extent to which societies tend to detail the regulation of Eros.[40] In a more pedestrian way, it is present already in the more or less severe restrictions meant to uphold the binary and hierarchical sexual difference between men and women, and in the enforcement of the overarching matrix of heterosexual, reproductive, non-incestuous, and monogamous relationships.

"Civilization," Freud comments, "behaves towards sexuality like a tribe or a section that has subjected another and started exploiting it."[41] Always fearful, thus, of the very thing it is founded upon. The politics of libidinal economy is, for this reason, always informed by the struggle around how exactly to fixate the emotions, desires, and passions of the people—given that there are, as Freud asserts, no biologically given links between Eros and its objects. What, and who, are we enjoined to love—and hate? Who among the dead are we admonished to mourn—and who are we bidden to discard and forget? With whom are we called on to identify—and by way of which *shibboleths*?[42]

## For the love of our people

In one way or another, the politics of libidinal economy invents and exploits the narcissism of minor and major differences present in any society. It revolves around making the nation great *again*, or greater than it once was, or at least defending it from the humiliation that undesirable neighbors from within—or outside the borders—are willing to inflict on it. Love thy nation as thyself—by protecting it from the dangers lurking outside and inside its borders. "I am fighting for you," Donald Trump (b. 1946) declares in his speeches to the nation, primarily addressing a rather restricted part of the population as better

and more worthy of love than the others. Hence one of Trump's core promises: To protect and love the true Americans by *putting them first*.

Everything seems warranted in the name of defending and distinguishing the beloved from their presumed aggressors. If the enemy is at the gate, we must stop them before they are at our throats. This is the message delivered in all kinds of Just War rhetoric. Steeped in the language of Eros, the argument transforms the right to self-defense into the justification of all-out invasions and the slaughtering of innocent people. In the early days of October 1943, Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), head of the SS, gave a series of speeches to high-ranking SS-officials and district leaders in Posen (a region of Poland) regarding the ongoing "extermination of the Jewish people" (*Ausrottung des jüdischen Volkes*). Himmler repeatedly insisted on the "moral right" and "the duty" of the German soldier to eliminate "this people who wanted to kill us," including women and children. Indeed, it was a "page of glory in our history," he stressed, to have taken on this difficult task "out of love to our people" (*haben diese schwerste Aufgabe in Liebe zu unserem Volk getan*) and without suffering any damage to "our soul" and "our character."[43]

The Russian assault on Ukraine on February 24, 2022 might be another case in point. President Putin's heated discourses intertwine love (of Russia and its people) and hatred (of the West and its fifth columnists). His passionate defense of the threatened motherland—"Kiev is the mother of Russian cities," "Ancient Rus is our common source and we cannot live without each other"—goes hand in hand with his incitement to wipe out both the so-called "Neo-Nazis" in Ukraine and "the scum and traitors" inside Russia. It is a matter of "purification."[44] By any means necessary.

Love and hatred, life and death, biopolitics and necropolitics, join hands once the liquidation of the neighboring enemy is promoted into something *vitally* important. On the one hand, destruction, subjugation, and annihilation; on the other, creation, construction, and revitalization. As one massacre gives rise to another, the oath of love to one's group as well as to its fallen heroes and martyrs is sworn using the fresh blood of the enemies. Freud's remark in his letter to

Einstein—that the living "organism preserves its own life, so to say, by destroying an extraneous one" (*das Lebewesen bewahrt sozusagen sein eigenes Leben dadurch, daß es fremdes zerstört*)—takes on an ominous meaning in a world where, as he notes already in 1930, human beings are capable of eradicating one another, down to the last man.[45]

Freud may fall short when it comes to dissecting other facets of human antagonism—class warfare, nationalism, material scarcity, the will to power, etc.—but as regards the double-edged forces of Eros, the invincible, his admonitions are uncannily lucid. Being at once a poison and a remedy, a *pharmakon*, it is difficult to foretell if love will save the human race from extermination, or lead us straight to our demise.

## NOTES

**1** Freud 1963, pp. 174–175.
**2** Sophocles 1967, pp. 95–100. See further Girard 2004.
**3** Freud 2002, p. 50; 2006f, p. 402.
**4** Freud 2006d, pp. 430, 444. Cf. Freud 2002, p. 37.
**5** Freud 2002, pp. 50–51; 2006f, p. 402. Freud first used the term in a lecture, 'Das Tabu der Virginität,' addressed to the Vienna Psychoanalytical Society on December 12, 1917.
**6** Ignatieff 1994, p. 14. In his reading of Paul Celan (1920–1970), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) offers a compelling account of the ways in which different forms of *shibboleths*—comprising even the most insignificant and arbitrary marks—can become discriminative, decisive, and divisive (Derrida 1986).
**7** Freud 2002, pp. 79–80. In Freud's view, love seems to comprise all kinds of strong emotional attachments. In his 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (2006d), Freud offers a condensed definition of love, taking as his point of departure the love that has sexual union as its primary aim, and then expanding it further into the domains of self-love, love for parents, children or friends, love for leaders, love for material objects, and even love for abstract entities such as the nation, God, or the human race. The difference between the various expressions of love hinges on the amount of inhibition that is set to mitigate and control raw and immediate sexual drives. It is important to note that Freud never claims to invent an entirely new concept of love. Instead, he asserts that he uses the notion both in accordance with Plato's concept of Eros and with the ways that it is used in everyday language (see ch. 4).
**8** Quoted in Blow 2019.
**9** Freud 2002, p. 50.
**10** Orwell 1984a, p. 316.
**11** Sophocles 1994, l. 781.
**12** Quoted in Snyder 2016, p. 18.
**13** Freud 2006e, pp. 369–389. Cf. Freud 2001, pp. 34–35.
**14** Sartre & Contat 1975.
**15** Freud 1955, pp. 143–144.
**16** Freud 2002, p. 46; 2006f, p. 398.
**17** On this, see Eric L. Santner's article in this volume.
**18** Freud 2006f, p. 399.

**19** The injunction also clashes with a whole series of assumptions that Freud ties to the inborn narcissism of the child, especially the idea that, as a rule, a human being tends to elect his love objects in agreement with the traits that he or she wishes to find in himself or herself. According to this view, the love-object is therefore ordinarily a reflection of the *ideal image* a person holds of themselves—an image which grows out of the identifications that take shape already in the infant with regard to its parents (especially informed by the Oedipus complex). And although the image takes on new facets when the child becomes included in larger social settings than the family—involving new and sometimes contradictory identifications—it almost seems impossible, from this Freudian perspective, for someone to love an absolute stranger. A person, he writes, deserves my love insofar that he or she "resembles" me to that point that I can love myself in him or her. Freud's supposition marries well with the basic conception of the narcissism of minor differences, but it tends to conflict with another essential injunction in Freud's analysis: The principle of exogamy that results from the killing of the prim(ordi)al father. It pertains to the workings of Eros which tend, if not subdued, to transgress all kinds of imposed restrictions and borders. Freud discusses this topic on various occasions, commencing with his introduction of narcissism in *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (*Zur Einführung des Narzissmus*, 1914). It is also worth noticing that Freud's reading of the injunction to neighbor-love consistently emphasizes its universal aspirations. Interestingly enough, he never appears to problematize its emphasis on the latter part of the commandment, i.e., that you shall love thy neighbor as you (love) *yourself*. Such a reading would probably bring to the fore other kinds of objections, beginning with the most obvious one: What if a person doesn't love themself? Or if he or she only can, every so often, muster some kind of self-love against the backdrop of an otherwise enduring self-contempt, let alone (sexual or non-sexual) self-hatred? Cf. Zupančič 2000, ch. 8.

**20** Freud 2006f, p. 394.

**21** Freud 2006d, p. 427; cf. 2002, pp. 36, 47. In his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (*Entwurf einer Psychologie*, 1895), Freud also uses the German word "Nebenmensch" (which could be translated as the "next man," a "fellow human-being," an "adjoining-person," or a "neighbor"). Cf. Reinhard 2013, pp. 29–34. Here, Freud connects the Nebenmensch with "*das Ding*," a term that Jacques Lacan will later emphasize in his lecture on the ethics of psychoanalysis and the question of neighbor-love (*l'amour du prochain*). "The *Ding*," Lacan says, "is the element that is initially isolated by the subject in his experience of the *Nebenmensch* as being by its very nature alien." Lacan 1992, p. 52.

**22** Freud 2006f, p. 399.

**23** Freud introduces the notion of the death drive in his 1920 *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (2006c). The term *"Todestrieb"* appears for the first time in chapter 6, Freud 2006c, p. 211.

**24** Freud 1957, p. 296. Cf. Freud 2006b, p. 257.

**25** Freud 2002, p. 79. In the German original the quote reads as follows: "Wie gewaltig muß das Kulturhindernis der Aggression sein, wenn die Abwehr derselben ebenso unglücklich machen kann wie die Aggression selbst!", 2006f, p. 422. In her reading of Nietzsche, Freud and Derrida on the topic of cruelty, Judith Butler (b. 1956) offers a succinct account of the same deadlock: "The prohibition of aggressive action is an aggressive attack on aggression which paradoxically preserves, or redoubles, aggression even as it seeks

its eradication." As regards the confrontation between civilization and the death drive, Butler underscores that we can never in advance foretell "the destructive consequences of acts that seek to destroy destruction." See Butler 2014.

**26** Freud 2006b, p. 226.

**27** Freud 1957, p. 280; 2002, p. 61.

**28** Freud 2002, pp. 81–82.

**29** Freud 2006g, p. 491.

**30** Freud 2002, p. 58.

**31** Freud 2002, pp. 58, 81–82.

**32** Freud 1964, p. 124.

**33** Freud 2006a, p. 256.

**34** Freud 2006a, p. 303: "*Nicht ohne guten Grund ist das Saugen des Kindes an der Brust der Mutter vorbildlich für jede Liebesbeziehung geworden. Die Objektfindung ist eigentlich eine Wiederfindung*." It is a matter of dispute whether Freud succeeds in reconciling this assertion with his recurrent thesis that "sexual love" (*die geschlechtliche Liebe*)—and as he sometimes mysteriously adds, between a man and a woman—constitutes the pattern for love in general and for our life-long "quest for happiness" (2002, pp. 19–20). Do love and sexual desire really stem from the same source? To what *Wiederfindung* are the drives to pleasure ultimately leading us—to the reiteration of the lost unity with the mother or to the replication of the intense sensuous satisfaction stemming from (heterosexual) sexual experiences; or, even, to death itself (as regards the death drive?). See Note 7 above, and Fink 2016, chs 1 & 2.

**35** Freud 2002, p. 20.

**36** Freud 2002, p. 75. See further Haddad 2016.

**37** Freud 2006b, ch. 4. The inextricable interconnection between love and hate prompts Lacan in the 1970s to condense the two into a single term: *hainamouration*. See Lacan 1975.

**38** This is a key tenet of Lacanian social theory: Racism is intrinsically linked to the troublesome ways in which the other, the neighbor, appears to organize his or her pleasure or enjoyment (*jouissance*). What is it that the other(s) have that I—or we—don't have? What kind of pleasures are they extracting from their beliefs, traditions, and practices? Never knowing for sure what is going on within the minds of the bordering other(s), the racist becomes obsessed by his or her imaginations of their *jouissance*, bedeviled by the mirage that the other somehow has exclusive access to some mysterious, unhampered, perverse, and undeserved *jouissance.* These fantasies engender what Žižek calls "political jealousy" (2016, p. 75), a mix of envy, resentment, and hatred (or—in Lacan's wording—"*Lebensneid*"; Lacan 1992, p. 237). In the discourse of racism, the Other thus constitutes a challenge to our *way of life* in far more ways than what is expressed in the common accusations that they "steal our jobs and women" (or even territories). It is equally problematic that they devalue the way in which we organize our desires and enjoy our lives, by being disinterested in the gods, the objects, and the traditions that we love and cherish. The chief problem with the other is, ultimately, that they remind us of the traumatizing fact that our striving for satisfaction, and the value of our *jouissance*, are at the mercy of someone outside our control—the "imaginary other." "The subject's experience of satisfaction," Lacan writes, "is entirely dependent on the other [. . .], *the Nebenmensch*" (Lacan 1992, pp. 39, 234). In Lacanian psychoanalysis this phenomenon is often labeled "the theft of Enjoyment." Cf. George & Hook 2021, ch. 2.

**39** Paz 1993, p. 16.

**40** All these laws have in common the strict regulation of sexual relations between races, established in order to protect a particular race against other races. The second Nuremberg Law—'The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor'

(*Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre*)—is a case in point. It bans marriage between Jews and non-Jewish Germans and criminalizes all sorts of sexual relations between them. The Nuremberg Laws, inspired by the American Jim Crow Laws, soon came to be extended to Black people and Roma living in Germany.

**41** Freud 2002, p. 39.
**42** Cf. Butler 2003.
**43** Quoted in Hochstadt 2022, pp. 202–203. Cf. Longerich 2012, pp. 689–690.
**44** Cf. Pomerantsev 2022; Stallard 2022.
**45** Freud 2002, p. 81; 2006g, p. 499.

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# THINKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE NEIGHBOUR

## From Jaspers to Derrida

MATS ANDRÉN

AT PRESENT, we see a lot of ambition to develop cultural distinctiveness, nationality and cultural borders. This ambition is not without risk, as cultural borders can be charged with feelings of exclusion and nationalism. It is certainly no coincidence that national sovereignty is once again an issue for politicians within the member states of the European Union (EU).

It is therefore timely to highlight concepts that offer alternatives to the rampant nationalism in Europe. Where do we find concepts that give space and relevance to alternative ideas? In the present urgency, we need to define alternative concepts, narratives and images. Appropriately, the editors of this volume ask: "What shapes our perceptions and imaginations of our neighbors in a time of globalization, increased social and geographic mobility, and—in the wake of new conflicts—the alarming re-establishment of borders and military alliances (not just in Europe)? What is the social and political role of neighbors and neighborly love, and how can we envision new ways of living together peacefully?"

A possible angle to frame images and imaginings of neighbours in a globalized era is to turn to the concept of a responsibility that transcends cultural and political borders. The concept of responsibility is embedded in modern European history. Discussions of representative government advanced it as a political idea in the latter part of the 18th century, it was a philosophical idea in the 19th and 20th centuries, and now it is integral to existentialism, phenomenology and neo-Kantianism. Largely as a response to the consequences of mod-

ern technology, the post-war era gave rise to new efforts to define a relevant concept of responsibility. It is a concept that aims to reach out to neighbours across boundaries.

In the subsequent section, I will demonstrate five philosophers' contributions to the concept of responsibility and the connecting lines to the question of the neighbour. They were writing against the backdrops of the assaults of the world wars, of galloping technological development, of environmental and nuclear threats, of the post-war era, and the emerging globalization from the 1970s and 1980s onwards. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) applied responsibility to the burning issues he examined as a public intellectual. After the Prague Spring in 1968, the dissident Jan Patočka (1907–1977) used the concept of responsibility in considerations about European heritage. Hans Jonas (1903–1993) and Karl-Otto Apel (1922–2017) were two very different philosophers who in the 1970s and 1980s both argued that ethics must expand to embrace the entire planet, and they prescribed a collective sense of responsibility that included the future as well. Finally, we make a stop by the fall of communism in Europe in 1989–1991, when Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) examined responsibility. The argument that will come out of this elaboration is that responsibility can be developed into an abstraction that risks losing relevance. Thus, it should be engaged with concepts that underline the lives of individual people, such as equity, solidarity or—neighbour.

All of these examples indicate that responsibility is not obviously related to the idea of neighbour, as none of the texts engage with it. However, it is not far-fetched to relate responsibility with neighbour and the transcending of borders. The idea of neighbour has apparently much to do with boundaries and a sense of responsibility that reaches beyond one's own community. I will not explore the relation between the two concepts of neighbour and responsibility throughout the history of ideas. Instead, this contribution engages with the idea of responsibility in order to contribute to the framing of the image and concept of neighbour.

## Responsibility as European exceptionalism: Karl Jaspers (1883–1969)

In the immediate wake of the Second World War, Karl Jaspers broadcast a speech on the responsibility of the Germans for the war, the systematic extermination of Jews and the murdering of people who opposed the Nazi regime. He enlarged it into a book—*Die Schuldfrage* (1946; English edition: *The Question of German Guilt*, 1947)—which was published shortly after the end of the war. Central to his argument was the collective responsibility for what had happened. Of course, those who undertook criminal acts were guilty, but also those who did not act to prevent them. There was an ethical, moral and political guilt that the people of Germany had to face. Thus, they could not shirk their shared responsibility for the crimes.

It is a remarkable argument developed by Jaspers. When much focus was on survival and the initial rebuilding of Germany, when the people had to cope with the large-scale destruction of the cities, and when war criminals were hunted down and Nazi leaders were prosecuted at the Nuremberg Trials for crimes against humanity, Jaspers wanted the Germans to share responsibility for the twelve years of Nazi rule. For the sake of the Germany that was in the making, to establish democracy, to re-establish humanitarian ideals, he called on everyone to recognize their own guilt. One could not solely blame the regime and it was not an excuse enough to have followed the laws and orders of the leaders. Only when facing one's own responsibility for what had happened would it be possible to set Germany on a new course, and to prevent both a repetition of the crimes and the sentiments that facilitated the Nazi crimes taking seed again in future ground.[1]

To argue for a national responsibility was not unknown in Germany. At least since the early 20th century, conservatives and the radical political right had called for the country to take on a "world responsibility", a call that associated with claims to make Germany into a world power. However, Jaspers radically changed the meaning of German responsibility to include all Germans' acts, not just those of the state, and to relate it to a future of democracy, humanitarian

ideals and peaceful cooperation with its neighbours. That is, responsibility was needed in order for Germany to foster new relations with its neighbours, to take responsibility for both the previous occupations of and atrocities on its neighbours, and for the idea of Germans as a superior people that should rule over its neighbours. To emerge from the disasters as a "better people", they had to face their own guilt and responsibility. Only then would it be possible for Germany to regain trust from its neighbours. Consequently, Jaspers' concept of responsibility concerned the larger community as well as the individual.

In September 1946, Jaspers participated in a congress organized by Julien Benda (1867–1956) in Geneva, where intellectuals discussed what remained of the European spirit and what hopes that still could be extracted from it. His presentation was published as a German booklet called *Europa der Gegenwart* (1947). Soon translated to other languages (English edition: *Europe of the Present*, 1948), it also signified his new role as an important thinker about Europe's future. Jaspers identifies a specific European development taking place since the 16th century with "the universal science and technics", which directed Europe on a different path from those of the high cultures of China and India.[2] Thus, he found European thinking all the way back to the Bible and Homer. In European history, from Athens and onwards, he saw opposition to dictators from emancipatory movements, which from the 16th century associated with strivings for universal knowledge, in science as in history. Hence, he associated freedom with historical awareness and the will for knowledge.[3] Challenged by America and Russia, exhausted after the wars, Europe could no longer consider itself as exceptional in the world; it was becoming smaller and needed to come together in a federation.[4] Jaspers moved easily between philosophy and contemporary politics, and turned to his conceptual framework developed over four decades to address the extremely troubling issues of the day.

He implored Europeans to transcend themselves, to change their way of thinking and to realize Europe's own responsibility to transcend: Europe had created a spirit that Europe itself must overcome.[5] Jaspers characterized Europe with a Janus face, an entity which has

created a world community but also world wars and nuclear weapons.[6] Europe had been the driving force behind science and technics, and its spirit must bring to the world essential measures to reshape order. Economically, this includes fairness and politically it holds a peaceful order that stands against violence and terror. The measures should be directed by "the responsibility for the future of Europe".[7]

Obviously, Jaspers' notion of European responsibility associated with the idea of European exceptionalism and the claim that Europe should be taken as a role model for the world. Jaspers stressed that by enlarging the European idea to an idea of humanity it was possible to find the basis for a new world order.[8] One may reasonably ask if this is Eurocentric. The answer is definitely yes, if Eurocentrism solely implies exceptionalism. However, after the Second World War and in opposition to the ideology of the Nazi regime and previous German nationalism and imperial ambitions, Jaspers extended his interest in non-European cultures, especially Chinese and Indian philosophy, and proposed the equality of cultures and their right not to be dominated. In *Europa der Gegenwart*, Jaspers' conception of the European idea was based on an idea of equality between cultures and states, in the sense that no culture rules the others. Just as no nation in Europe should rule over its neighbours, Europe should not rule the world, nor should America or Russia:[9]

> The liberation of the world lies in this idea. As Europeans, we can only want a world in which Europe has a place, but in which neither Europe nor any other country rules over all, a world in which people set each other free and attend with one another in mutual concern.[10]

Thus, the idea of a European responsibility transcends Europe and reaches out to the world, but not with the aim of ruling the world. In his definition, European responsibility redefines the European exceptionalism in setting it apart from the idea of dominance over European neighbours as well as over Europe's neighbours.

## Origins of European responsibilities: Jan Patočka (1907–1977)

In *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin* (1980; English edition: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 1996) on the decline of Western civilization, Jan Patočka makes responsibility a defining feature of Europe and connects it to the identification of a European heritage that is counter to ethnic divisions and national frontiers, and promises a new human community.[11] This makes Patočka's idea of responsibility interesting to consider in relation to the notion of neighbour.

According to Patočka, Europeans are concerned with their own responsibility of doing the right thing. Responsibility is about winning freedom by subjection of what Plato called "the orgiastic", and thereby it concerns the individual struggle with oneself.[12] However, there is also a societal dimension of responsibility put forward by Patočka, that concerns the relation between the individual and society, and how a social responsibility can be formed by the individual's relation to "the transcendent Good".[13] Patočka relates to Christianity's idea of a responsible life, of taking responsibility for the guilt that the individual always must live with and to the making of a human soul in the form of an individual person. With Christianity comes no escape from the endless individual responsibility. However, even if responsibility is strongly associated with the individual and the choices that concern what (s)he wants to be, it also represents the hope of a salvation from the decline of the European society. Responsibility, for Patočka, is the basis for the spiritual and moral stature needed to answer the decline that characterizes modern Europe. This is because it is an individual experience that only makes sense if communicated and connected with others. Thus, responsibility is only meaningful if resting on an inner-worldly solidarity.[14]

Still, Patočka's conception of European responsibility begins with the individual and the relation to a transcendent good as manifested by Christianity. He suggests, like Jaspers, that Europe is strongly related to Christianity and the pros and cons of science, technology and modern progress. For both, Christianity is the basis for European responsibility, which is defined as the capacity of individuals to transcend themselves.

Jaspers' text on Europe connects responsibility to the larger community, and Patočka stresses that responsibility is only meaningful when related to solidarity with others, that is, a form of neighbourly relationship. He conceived of solidarity in contrast to the particularism dangerously growing from the Enlightenment and "the idea of the state as an earthly divinity which brooks no limitation of its sovereignty".[15]

Patočka's idea of responsibility is integrated with his examinations of European civilization, crisis and heritage. In discussing the modern civilization of Europe, Patočka resembles Jaspers in arguing that mechanical ways of thinking vulgarize life and that we should know better than to reduce our lives to fit a technological civilization. Both Jaspers and Patočka echo the inter-war period's discourse on European crisis that often circled around the consequences of the scientific and technological revolutions. While Jaspers discusses these issues in relation to Max Weber (1864–1920), Patočka relates to Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Like Husserl, he expands on the European crisis as a moral one, retrieving the leading theme of the discourse on Europe from the 1920s to the 1940s, also explored by other philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955). Like Jaspers, Patočka conceives the possibilities of the very same civilization when he pinpoints that it can create a life without violence, with equality of possibilities and opportunity to defeat poverty.[16]

According to Patočka, modern history and its continuing moral crisis of nihilism has impaired the most fundamental European heritage, as represented by classical philosophy's value of truth. Inspiring his disciples among the dissidents, such as Vaclav Havel (1936–2011), he stresses the importance of living in truth and the need to live in truthful communities where its members can "care for the soul". In his historical account, he states that these values gained a stronger influence in Western Christianity, and so concludes in referring to Greek philosophy "that it is the care for the soul that made Europe".[17]

What, though, makes humans just and truthful is their *care for their soul*. Care for the soul is the legacy of ancient Greek philosophy. Care for the soul means that truth is something not given once and for all, nor merely a matter of observing and acknowledging the observed,

but rather a lifelong inquiry, a self-controlling, self-unifying intellectual and vital practice.[18]

He regards the Enlightenment as the adjustment by Europeans to their growing strength and dominance of the world, when they explored a universality built on technical might.[19] However, the Enlightenment had also undermined the European's obliviousness of the soul. In other writings from the early 1970s, he stresses the importance of the soul. In Simona Forti's words, "for Patočka, the soul is that which enables one to overcome the simple dualism of the mythical world, the dualism between the everyday and the divine, the ordinary and the extraordinary".[20]

While Jaspers is forward-looking and considers European responsibility as something to strive for in accomplishing a redefinition of European heritage, Patočka's aim is to understand the history that defines Europe, which leads him to Christianity. Like Jaspers, his concept of European responsibility contributes to a definition of European exceptionalism. His hope for the "care for the soul" to overcome the dominance of technological civilization also stresses a European legacy. If applied to the rest of the world it risks being a new Eurocentrism.[21] However, in the 1970s he distances himself from the idea of European superiority and the very European traditional way of conceiving world history. According to Karel Novotný, Patočka's idea of caring for the soul includes "critical self-examination and self-renunciation".[22] In reflecting on the technical reason and how it during 300 years has alienated the Europeans from living truly human lives and formed a spirit keen to conquer the world—which has become a defining feature of Europe—he is utterly clear: "We can thus indicate the specificity of Europe but, on this ground, we cannot prove its supremacy."[23] Thus, not only Jaspers, but Patočka too distances himself from Eurocentrism when reflecting on European responsibility. Just like Jaspers, his responsibility relates to a Europe of nation states that overcomes narrow notions of sovereignty and rests in a shared European culture. Thus, Patočka demonstrates how responsibility fits well together with imaginings of neighbourly friendliness and contrasts nation states' frontiers and imperial ambitions.

## Responsibility as an origin: Hans Jonas (1903–1993)

When from the 1970s responsibility becomes a central concept for ethical considerations, with the ambition to embrace humanity across the globe and to include both present and future generations, the work of Hans Jonas was much discussed. At first look, it associates well with images of the neighbours having a shared common ground. However, Jonas' theory has also been critiqued.

Just like Jaspers, Jonas contrasts the concept of responsibility with nihilism. He proceeds from a fairly general definition: "The disruption between man and total reality is at the bottom of nihilism."[24] He regarded nihilism as an old phenomenon. In the early 1950s, Jonas completed the work on ancient Gnosticism that he had begun back in the late 1920s. He was originally struck by the similarities between Gnosticism and modern thinking. He subsequently concluded that Gnosticism was an old form of nihilism, which enabled him to more clearly understand the modern version as channelled by existentialism, primarily Heidegger (1889–1976). Like existentialism, the Gnostic doctrine of a God divorced from the world left human beings without a moral compass. But Gnosticism was not simply nihilistic; it also found a purpose in eternal life. In contrast, Jonas regarded modern nihilism as radical in that it offered no guidelines or objectives for human action: "That only man cares, in his finitude facing nothing but death, alone with his contingency and the objective meaninglessness of his projecting meanings, is a truly unprecedented situation."[25]

Jonas maintained that philosophy must find alternatives to nihilism, and he tried to make existentialism fit the bill. In *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* (1979; English edition: *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 1984), his magnum opus, he argued that earlier philosophers had treated the concept in an overly restrictive manner. He obtained some guidance and assistance from religion, which extended the concept of responsibility beyond human life to include nature as well. The new dimensions of responsibility that Jonas presented included the need to go beyond the anthropocentric framework of previous philoso-

phy.[26] However, he said that contemporary religion lacked the ability to fend off the nihilism—which is both powerful and vacuous, mixing extensive knowledge with ignorance about the direction of human existence—of technological civilization. Only a new ethics could remedy the situation.[27]

Jonas presented a doctrine of human action in the face of modern technology. The enormous forces spawned by technological civilization require a new ethics that must observe the cumulative impact in order to permit responsible, forward-looking action. A new ethics must incorporate the realization that human life is rooted in global conditions and that any action can threaten its very existence. A suggestive but somewhat opaque sentence pointed to the essence of the dilemma: "The gap between the strength of foresight and the power of action creates a new ethical problem."[28] For Jonas, human beings have great power to act but lack sufficient knowledge of the consequences. Thus, action must be based on an ethics that is equal to the challenges and threats of modern technology.

Given that scientific and technological progress was now threatening the future of the human race, he argued that a new imperative of responsibility is needed. Imperatives must be formulated that affirm the right of the whole planet, including rights of future generations to the planet. Jonas believes that the contemporary world demands an entirely new ethic. Traditional ethics looked no more than one generation ahead and focused on circumscribed societies—be it the city-state of antiquity or the modern nation-state.[29] But now humanity was faced with "a growing sphere of collective action [...] the enormity of whose challenges requires an unprecedented dimension of responsibility"[30] for the entire biosphere, "the global conditions of human life and its distant future, existence itself".[31] The question of time horizons represents the most radical ethical transformation to which Jonas calls attention. The Baconian rationality that has led to unparalleled technological progress is incapable of assuming responsibility for generations to come. On the contrary, the fruits of technology are endangering the very existence of humanity. Jonas says that technology has unintentionally been allowed to take over, is

racing ahead at a pace that is harder and harder to control, and offers a mirage of never-ending progress that can only result in universal disaster.[32]

According to Jonas, responsibility differs from ordinary rights and obligations. No reciprocity is demanded. The concept does not hold people accountable to others and is thereby neither legal nor political. His primary description refers to the spontaneous sense of responsibility that people feel towards small children.[33] Thus, its archetype is bestowed by nature.[34] The idea touches on the core of Jonas' thinking, which sees biological life as the basis for all philosophy and ethics. He wants to make a detour around the dualism between body and soul, instinct and will, that is so common in Western thought by finding a purpose in nature. Central to his philosophy is that life affirms and propagates itself.[35] However, he argues that there is a special, incontrovertible requirement to preserve the human race because of its ability to transcend nature.[36]

In Jonas' view, the sense of responsibility provides the basis for the optimum ethical position. Responsibility tries to predetermine human action with respect to specific values and objects. The ethics of responsibility for the world and the future protects the integrity of humanity and of nature.[37] Clearly, this includes neighbourly relations. The ethic of responsibility is inescapable and global, the foundation of social life. He regards it as a transhistorical reality, a reflection of humanity's biological origins and sense of entitlement. It is in our bones like a primal phenomenon.[38]

This is where a serious objection can be levelled against Jonas. He regards nature not only as a foundation, but as an inexorable, seething ferment that brews a sense of responsibility. From such a point of view, it is difficult to make out where historical, changing responsibility takes over. For instance, the very use of the word responsibility is linked to modern legal, political and economic individualism. Key aspects of the responsibility of which Jonas speaks are also associated with a globalized world and the time horizons that have emerged from the intersection of technology, its consequences and opportunities for collective action. By proceeding from transhistorical

conditions, he makes it difficult to discern changeable and culturally distinct phenomena.[39]

A more alarming objection is that the duty to preserve humanity can be facilitated by its contraction, whatever the means may be. This is the critique raised by Karl-Otto Apel (more of this below), which has consequences for neighbourly images. With fewer of the "others" there would be a better chance for humanity to survive, with less pressure on resources and less environmental damage to the planet. Certainly, that is not a viable starting point for creating positive images of neighbourly love.

## Responsibility as a goal: Karl-Otto Apel (1922–2017)

An alternative would be to look at the question the opposite way and regard the new type of responsibility as a goal rather than a starting point. What would be decisive in that case is the ability to address contemporary threats while overcoming borders by including both the global community and future generations. Karl-Otto Apel, who wrote in the post-Kantian tradition and collaborated on discursive ethics with Habermas (b. 1929), offered another way of understanding responsibility in relation to such issues.

In *Diskurs und Verantwortung: Das Problem des Übergangs zur postkonventionellen Moral* (1988; Discourse and Responsibility: The Problem of the Transformation to Postconventional Ethics), Apel, like Jonas, identified the need for an ethics of responsibility as a response to modern science and technology. The environmental crisis and nuclear armament are the clearest manifestations of the predicament. Natural resources are scarce and nuclear weapons can destroy the world.[40] Thus, he spoke of the "responsibility of our times" and the need for a "macroethics" or "global ethics" that can guide humanity.[41] Like Jonas, he argued that a new historical situation had arisen and forced the human race to assume collective moral responsibility.

Although Apel praised Jonas for bringing the need of a new universal ethics to the fore, he was deeply critical of the way that Jonas' principle of responsibility focused on preserving humanity and the

conditions for its survival without leaving room for a concept of progress and improved living standards.[42] Apel carried his objection to its logical conclusion by linking Jonas' principle to the Social Darwinist view that humanity can more readily survive if "parts of Third World populations starved to death". He made it clear that Jonas was not thinking that way, but asserted that his principle of responsibility failed to erect obstacles to such a solution.[43]

Apel's critique concerned the natural basis of Jonas' philosophy.[44] Whereas Jonas grounded his ethics on biology and nature, Apel proceeded from reason: people see the necessity of a new type of responsibility in their capacity as rational creatures. Thus, he placed himself in the Kantian tradition. As rational creatures, people can also demand equity on the same terms wherever they live, and even for future generations. For Apel, this concept of equity pointed forward and toward social progress. He extended the principle of responsibility to include preservation of human life *and* dignity.[45] With this point made, Apel's concept of responsibility is a safer haven for protecting the neighbour.

Apel saw what he called "communication communities" as a means of implementing such a principle of responsibility. Discourse and human beings as discursive creatures are the pillars of his responsibility. He repeatedly emphasized that the way in which discussions are conducted reveals a kind of ethics. People enter into a discussion under particular historical circumstances on the basis of specific human inclinations and interests. Meanwhile, people stake a claim to an ideal community by participating in a discussion. They assume the existence of a communication community based on the norm that everyone is accepted as an equal partner who shares responsibility for addressing the problem. One basic ethical norm is that consensus can be reached by means of argumentation. That is the prerequisite for entering into a discussion in the first place. Thus, there is a meta-norm that transcends situational norms and resides in human reason.[46] Apel never defended his thesis by looking at the past, but took his examples from modern society and clearly reflected the basic norms that are associated with a democratic, constitutional state. An example of this

is his assertion that the norms underlying policymaking, legislation and administration must be subject to public discussion in order to achieve legitimacy.[47]

The difference between Jonas and Apel is illustrated by their approaches to the responsibility of elected officials. Jonas proceeded from ancient Greek philosophy and the discussions by Solon, Pericles and other lawgivers,[48] whereas Apel considered the role of modern office holders. He rejected Weber's notion that elected officials were responsible to their constituents only and that ethics should be relegated to the private sphere. Apel sought to erase that distinction by basing ethics and responsibility on the elements of reason that are inherent to communication. He asserted that elected officials have an ethical responsibility. The tension between a specific political system, with all its conflicts and private interests, and an ideal communication community is particularly challenging. He wrote that responsible officials should promote the long-term ascendancy of "the basic norm of conflict resolution through argumentative consensus building".[49]

Apel based his concept of responsibility on an ethical rationality that he carefully separated from the institutional approach to creating legitimacy. While an institutional approach involves strategic action that proceeds from calculated-self interest, as manifested in economism and politics, ethical rationality stems ideally from discussions that are made possible by shared rules and norms.[50] In Apel's view, the sense of responsibility ultimately comes from an awareness of the gap between the current and ideal communication community as well as the insight that improvement is necessary and possible.[51]

Apel's concept of responsibility includes equity between the people of the present generations. Thus, he provides an important alternative to Jonas. Furthermore, humanity is not regarded as an eternally abstract category. Responsibility implies an ideal of equity and the possibility of moral progress. This means that with Apel, responsibility connects with the concrete neighbours across all kinds of borders. A moral progression in regard of considering and treating neighbours as equals is a real possibility. Thus, responsibility will include an aim to preserve the integrity and dignity of the neighbour.

## Responsibility as a promise: Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)

When discussing Patočka's texts on European responsibility, Jacques Derrida remarked that they demonstrated a "genealogy of European responsibility or of responsibility as Europe", which both are tied to Christianity.[52] However, he also defined Patočka in a nondogmatic philosophical tradition with, among others, Kant and Kierkegaard together with Levinas and Ricœur, that revealed a thinking about "the possibility of religion without religion".[53] Thus, Derrida set out to rupture the ties between responsibility and Christianity, looking for "the condition that the Good no longer be a transcendental objective [...] but the relation to the other, a response to the other; an experience of personal goodness and a movement of intention".[54] Certainly, seeing and relating to the other can only take place on the condition of a self. Derrida writes that "responsibility demands irreplaceable singularity", that "it comes from someone and is addressed to someone", and that "the experience of responsibility" unavoidably transmutes into guilt—"I am guilty as much as I am responsible" because "one is never responsible enough".[55] Clearly, for Derrida responsibility is a capacity of the individual to act beyond itself, unselfishly on behalf of others.[56]

This is neither the place for a detailed demonstration of Derrida's concept of responsibility through the four essays in *Donner la mort* (1992; English edition: *The Gift of Death*, 1995) that was developed from 1990 to 1992, nor for an examination of his exposition of a range of complexities of the concept. For example, he alleged that the responsible action can never be fully explained: even if it requires understanding of its implications, the action involves something that exceeds understanding, something mysterious.[57] Recurrently and linking to Patočka, Derrida stated that by responsibility something always remained mysterious. In an example of importance for our examination, Derrida rejected the possibility to define responsibility as an act of delegation and as an administrative concept. While a conceptual history of responsibility would partly demonstrate responsibility as a given authority that the receiver responds to, Derrida was interested

in responsibility as heresy and dissidence: "there is no responsibility without a dissident and inventive rupture with respect to tradition, authority, orthodoxy, rule, or doctrine".[58] Correspondingly, he distinguished between substitution and uniqueness. Responsibility can be an accounting for one's acts "before the generality", for having done what someone else could have done, but also for "singularity", "nonsubstitution", "nonrepetition".[59] For Derrida, responsibility regards ethics rather than administration, and in a thought-provoking twist he concedes to the notion of responsibility being an "ethics of 'irresponsibilization'". To be responsible, we might have to act irresponsibly. Responsibility can imply the following of legal and ethical rules but also to act against them: "The ethical can therefore end up making us irresponsible."[60] Thus, he asserts an understanding of responsibility that associates the concept with different meanings, complexities, and to some extent with opacity.

In addition, he also recalled an everyday experience of an intertwining of responsibility with irresponsibility. As having a preference to act as a citizen and fulfilling his duties as professor and philosopher, Derrida acted responsibly. However, at the same time he sacrified obligations towards many others, not only to his family but to those he responded to or addressed improperly, to those unknowns who are sick and starving. He contended that "I can respond only to the one [...], to the other, by sacrificing that one to the other."[61] Thus, Derrida's conception of responsibility is about individuals in the community of others: "Duty or responsibility binds me to the other, to the other as other, and ties me in my absolute singularity to the other as other."[62] In making these claims, he addressed an extensive community that in the last instance concerns humanity. At the same time, it means that the individual action can never include all others, or all neighbours in need of help. Practising responsibility would at the same time mean that imaginaries of neighbours in need are related to guilt.

However, from the same period dates another essay where Derrida reflects on the contemporary's Europe: *L'autre cap* (1991; English edition: *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, 1992). Original-

ly a talk from 1990 at a conference with distinguished intellectuals about the future of Europe after the fall of communism in Central Europe, it was published the following year. The essay commented on the hopes and fears that came with the redefining of Europe's cultural identity. Typical for the discourse on Europe in this period, he declared himself to be a European intellectual but not all through, as his cultural identity also included other parts ("I feel European *among other things*"),[63] contending that this signified conceptions of identity and culture. Therefore, it was necessary "to take the old name of Europe at once very seriously and cautiously".[64] He explicitly discussed the idea of Europe, of the modern tradition of this idea from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) to Paul Valéry (1871–1945), of Europe as different from other cultures, and importantly of Europe as redefining itself "in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not".[65] This is at the core of his pleading in *The Other Heading*, Europe must remember what it is and keep to certain values but also move beyond the very same values.

So, what does responsibility mean when associated with the redefinition of Europe? In Derrida, the answer to that question was based on the observation that cultural identities always are making double claims of both self-affirmation and of representing the universal. Cultural identification comes with singularity that can be "individual, social, national, state, federal, confederal", but also with claims of responding to the universal. Derrida argued that identity associates with "the responsibility of testifying for universality".[66] Against this backdrop, he related Europe to a set of duties, which we can understand as forming a conception of European responsibility.

These duties or responsibilities all correspond to values that are correlated to Europe, but they also contain an incitement to exceed the very same values. They include the duty to the European promises to condemn "totalitarian dogmatism that [...] destroyed democracy" and preserve the idea of a democracy that makes promises for tomorrow, to respect differences and "the universality of formal law", to persist in faithfulness to Enlightenment ideals and recognize its

boundaries. In addition, the duty prescribes to nurture the idea of criticism and the critical tradition but also to go beyond it "without yet compromising it".[67]

However, the first duty is to remember the European promises, in order to re-identify what Europe is. This implies an openness to what Europe is but also "opening it onto that which is not, never was, and never will be Europe".[68] In line with this argument and in a critique of the ideal of culturally homogeneous societies, Derrida prescribes integration of foreigners together with an acceptance of their otherness: "The same *duty* also dictates welcoming foreigners in order not only to integrate them but to recognize and accept their alterity."[69] Thus, to include neighbours across cultural divides and encourage taking responsibility for the neighbours different from us and to see what we have in common beyond differences.

## Conclusion

The present context for reflecting on the responsibility/neighbour theme cannot avoid the nationalistic revolutions in Europe that can very well lead to new borders within Europe and the radical change of the European Union. Already, with the United Kingdom now disengaged and struggling to establish the pros and cons of the divorce, we are witnessing the imposing of a new borderline. Moreover, we are witnessing how nationalistic movements in power are shifting democracies towards authoritarian rule. This does not necessarily associate with anti-Europeanness. In the Brexit case it certainly did, but the nationalistic leaders of Hungary and Poland profess European values, only that they differ from the European values of the EU. What Brexiteers and nationalists on the Continent have in common is the emphasis on national sovereignty as the right to make decisions on their own, even if violating European law. Their argument is in direct opposition to the basic idea behind the post-war integration of Europe that the states need to give up some of their sovereignty to gain the advantages of being a member of the Union. Thus, pleas for taking back control are a challenge to the idea of neighbourly responsibility across borders.

Having said this, there is no need to further argue for the present relevance of the concept of responsibility. Certainly, when relating responsibility to images of the neighbour one should consider whether the concept of responsibility is Eurocentric. It certainly is of European origin and can well be associated with European interests as by the EU, and even with conceptions of a European thinking as the first truly global spirit in history. However, we also see the efforts to overcome Eurocentrism in defining responsibility in relation to a humbler idea of Europe's place in the world order and of a more self-reflexive and self-critical idea of Europe and of European integration. Thus, we can apply tolerance and hospitality to the responsibility/neighbour theme.

Importantly, when relating responsibility to the neighbour we cannot limit ourselves to a concept of responsibility that remains an abstract category. This is in accordance with Apel's discussion of Jonas, when he embraces human dignity and equity for present generations as fundamental elements of responsibility. I believe that this is reflected when Derrida relates responsibility to individual guilt towards other people and in his proposition that the "responsibility binds me to the other, to the other as other, and ties me in my absolute singularity to the other as other". The Danish philosopher Peter Kemp (1937–2018) critiqued Jonas' imperative of responsibility for precisely being abstracted from real living individuals; the future integrity of humanity becomes an abstraction if left without consideration of the people of today. The responsibility for the future must not forget the responsibility for the now living. Alluding to Derrida's *The Other Heading*,[70] considerations of responsibility for the actually existing neighbours would do well to (1) activate notions of hospitality and tolerance, (2) nurture ideas of critique, democracy and international rights, (3) resist racism, nationalism and xenophobia, and (4) avoid pigeonholing itself in an identity that excludes other identities and avoid strict definitions of what is identity.

## NOTES

**1** Jaspers 1946, pp. 52–58.
**2** Jaspers 1947, pp. 11–12.
**3** Jaspers 1947, pp. 15–28.
**4** Jaspers 1947, pp. 30–31.
**5** Jaspers 1947, p. 34.
**6** Jaspers 1947, p. 35.
**7** Jaspers 1947, p. 36; my translation.
**8** Jaspers 1947, p. 37.
**9** Jaspers 1947, p. 39.
**10** Jaspers 1947, p. 38; my translation. The original: "Die Befreiung der Welt liegt in diesem Gedanken. Wir können als Europäer nur eine Welt wollen, in der Europa seinen Platz hat, aber in der weder Europa noch eine andere Kultur über alle herrscht, eine Welt, in der die Menschen sich gegenseitig frei lassen und in gegenseitiger Betroffenheit aneinander teilnehmen."
**11** Patočka 1996, pp. 82–83.
**12** Patočka 1996, p. 98.
**13** Patočka 1996, p. 106.
**14** Patočka 1996, pp. 106–115. See also Forti 2016, p. 62.
**15** Patočka 1996, p. 88.
**16** Patočka 1996, p. 118.
**17** Patočka 1996, p. 82.
**18** Patočka 1996, p. 82.
**19** Patočka 1996, pp. 81–86.
**20** Forti 2016, p. 60.
**21** Novotný 2016, p. 308.
**22** Novotný 2016, pp. 308, 313–314, n. 21.
**23** Patočka quotation is from Stancu 2016, p. 324.
**24** Jonas 2001, p. 234.
**25** Jonas 2001, p. 233.
**26** On this, see Werner Jeanrond's article in this volume.
**27** Jonas 1984, pp. 26–29, 57–58, 99–100.
**28** Jonas 1984, pp. 22–30, citation on p. 28: "Die Kluft zwischen Kraft des Vorherwissens und Macht des Tuns erzeugt ein neues ethisches Problem."
**29** Jonas 1984, pp. 28–31.
**30** Jonas 1984, p. 31.
**31** Jonas 1984, pp. 3–4.
**32** Jonas 1984, pp. 201–202.
**33** On this, see Irina Hron's article in this volume.
**34** Jonas 1984, pp. 85–86.
**35** Jonas 1984, ch. 3, esp. pp. 128–129.
**36** Jonas 1984, pp. 157, 245–248.
**37** Jonas 1984, pp. 171–176.
**38** Jonas 1984, pp. 178–183.
**39** Kemp 1992.
**40** Apel 1988, pp. 17, 23, 180–181, 247–250.
**41** Apel 1988, pp. 42, 176.
**42** Apel 1988, pp. 42–43, 183–186.
**43** Apel 1988, p. 196. "Verhungern von Teilen der Dritten Welt".
**44** Apel 1988, p. 45.
**45** Apel 1988, pp. 184–185.
**46** Apel 1988, pp. 46–49, 67, 202.
**47** Apel 1988, p. 206.
**48** Jonas 1984, pp. 42–43.
**49** Apel 1988, pp. 256–261, citation on p. 260: "die ideale Grundnorm der Konfliktlösung durch argumentative konsensusbildung entbunden".
**50** Apel 1988, pp. 55–63.
**51** Apel 1988, e.g. p. 141.
**52** Derrida 1995.
**53** Derrida 1995, p. 49.
**54** Derrida 1995, p. 50.
**55** Derrida 1995, p. 51.
**56** Derrida 1995, pp. 24–25.
**57** Derrida 1995, pp. 25–26.
**58** Derrida 1995, pp. 26–27.
**59** Derrida 1995, p. 61.
**60** Derrida 1992, p. 72; 1995, p. 61.
**61** Derrida 1995, p. 70.
**62** Derrida 1995, p. 68.
**63** Derrida 1995, p. 83.
**64** Derrida 1995, p. 82.
**65** Derrida 1992, p. 29.
**66** Derrida 1992, p. 73.
**67** Derrida 1992, pp. 76–80.
**68** Derrida 1992, p. 77.
**69** Derrida 1992, p. 77.
**70** Derrida 1992, pp. 76–80; Kemp 1992, pp. 106–111.

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