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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