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Book Review: The Love Commandments: Essays In Christian Ethics And Moral Philosophy

Frances Howard Snyder

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5. However, historical evidence is not irrelevant to Christian faith. If the church had not regarded much of the New Testament as supporting belief in the incarnation, it would not have offered the witness that has in fact occasioned faith in many people over the millenia, and if serious challenges to the reliability of the New Testament as evidence for the incarnation are presented, they are to be countered with historical arguments.
6. However, "evidence" has a double "for." It is evidence *for a proposition*, but it is also evidence *for somebody*. What counts as evidence for the incarnation for somebody who has encountered the risen Lord may differ markedly from what counts as evidence for somebody who has not.

While I think we have reason for taking somewhat less seriously than Evans does the passages in *Fragments* that seem to deny #5, I agree with Evans in holding ##1-6 to be true. Evans has done a genuine service in clarifying and enriching these and many other aspects of *Philosophical Fragments*. I think it is safe to say that Evans's reading of *Fragments* is more sober and less controversial than the readings of Nielsen and Roberts.

NOTES

1. The other two are Harry Nielsen's *Where the Passion Is: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (University Presses of Florida, 1983) and Robert Roberts's *Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Mercer University Press, 1986).

2. Kierkegaard never disdains a truly Socratic personality development; indeed he holds it up as a model to be admired and imitated. But he insists throughout his authorship that it is not the same as Christian faith.

The Love Commandments: Essays in Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy, ed. by **Edmund N. Santurri** and **William Werpehowski**. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992. Pp.307, \$25.00 (paper).

FRANCES HOWARD-SNYDER, Purdue University and Western Washington University

Contrary to what the title suggests, this collection focusses on the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, although many of the authors acknowledge that this commandment is subordinate to the first and great commandment, to love God with one's whole heart, and mind and soul. It contains a brief introduction and nine papers all apparently written by theologians or experts in religious studies. I shall discuss each of these papers in turn.

Gene Outka's "Universal Love and Impartiality" addresses this question: given that we ought to love our neighbors as ourselves, ought we to be impartial between others and ourselves? It is important to be clear about what

this question means. There is no doubt that I should *regard* my good and yours as equally worth pursuing. But Outka is interested in the claim that I should *pursue* my good and yours in the same way and to the same extent. He discusses four objections to this.

Two of these objections suggest that impartiality of this sort allows us to favor ourselves more than we should. According to the first argument, the injunctions to go the extra mile and to turn the other cheek require us to do more for others than for ourselves. According to the second argument, we have very powerful tendencies to favor ourselves over others. Hence we should compensate by aiming at favoring others. It is not clear why Outka discusses the second objection. He points out, "As it sensitizes us to our failures to attain even-handedness, it supports even-handedness as our normative aim" (83). One might argue that these two objections against impartiality undermine each other. Perhaps injunctions to sacrifice ourselves and to go the extra mile are simply offered as ameliorative strategies for dealing with the fact that we do tend to favor ourselves. This is compatible with the notion that each person — including myself — is equally deserving of my time and energies. It appears (although not at all clearly) that Outka rejects these two objections.

The next two objections suggest that impartiality allows us to favor ourselves *less* than we should. If someone could become completely impartial between herself and others, she might lose her own identity. Outka gives this argument (familiar from Bernard Williams and other critics of utilitarianism) a distinctively theological twist. God has given each of us a special responsibility with respect to his or her own life and soul to make something of it, perhaps to follow a particular vocation, and if I simply treat myself as one amongst others, and devote no more time to the pursuit of my own vocation or salvation than I devote to that of each of the others, I will squander this unique opportunity. If impartiality requires this, then Outka rejects impartiality. He asserts that the sort of self-regard he recommends here is compatible with universal love. There is never a situation in which one has to choose between improving one's own relationship with God and improving that of others. The fourth argument points out that there seem to be many morally important things that I can do for myself that I cannot do for others — and that these may constitute legitimate areas in which I concentrate on myself. For example, following Kant, it seems that I can't make someone else's perfection my end in the way I can make my own perfection my end. Similarly I can't gain or lose salvation for others in the way I can for myself. I can't repent for others, nor can I forgive for them, nor can I make a commitment on their behalf without their agreement. For these reasons it seems inappropriate to treat myself exactly in the way that I treat others.

Outka's paper is full of fascinating suggestions. It is easy to get bogged down

in the details. How do the different objections fit together? Are they, for example, compatible with one another? What general themes emerge? The answers aren't clear. Outka is much better on the details than on the big picture.

Impartiality is also the topic of "'Agape' and Special Relations," by William Werpehowski. He is interested in whether there is a tension between a universal love and special, partial, preferential loves, such as friendship and marriage. He addresses two questions relevant to this relationship: do special loves need to be derived from universal love in order to be acceptable from a Christian standpoint; and is it possible to love one's spouse or friend in a special way and also to love her as a neighbor? He argues that it is "theologically unhelpful" to try to justify special loves in terms of universal love, but that our attitudes towards those close to us should be colored by our awareness that they are "creatures of God," "brothers and sisters for whom Christ died," and "possible companions in beatitude." In this sense, it is appropriate to talk of one's husband or child as also a neighbor. As far as I can tell, this essay doesn't get to the really interesting and difficult issue that needs to be resolved before we can know whether special loves are in any way in conflict with agape. The question is not whether my love for my husband falls short of the agapeic ideal, but whether loving him in this special way makes it impossible for me to love *others* as I am commanded.

In "Christian Love and Political Violence," Timothy Jackson asks: "How, if at all, may agape combat unjustifiable forms of violence?" His answer takes a middle path between an absolute rejection of violence, and the permission of whatever means will secure the ends. Although violence against aggressors is permissible, violence against the innocent is *never* permissible, no matter how worthy the end. He accepts this "principle of discrimination" "because in violating it one would be attacking that very value (love's defense of innocent life) seen to validate the use of the sword in the first place. Just as it can never be correct to affirm a theoretical paradox, so it can never be correct to perform a practical perversity. Attempting to believe in a contradiction undermines all thought, just as attempting to act on a contradiction undermines all praxis"(202).

There are two difficulties with this position. First, love's goal is not the defense of innocent life, but the good of all, innocent and guilty, and if violence involves harm, then violence against aggressors as well as against the innocent should be prohibited. There is a more serious objection, however. Jackson thinks that there is a contradiction in harming the innocent in pursuit of the goal of protecting the innocent. This sort of claim is often made and has a sort of superficial plausibility, but to get a fresh look at its form, let's examine it in another context:

Suppose a man values money above all things. Now suppose we observe him spending some of his money: buying stock, buying insurance, buying

goldmines, hiring managers, etc. Do we say that he is undermining his own goals in giving up some of his money? Of course not. We realize that the best way to improve his longterm financial position is to invest some of the money he has right now. Similarly, if the value which motivates and justifies political violence is the defense of innocent life, it doesn't follow that any attack on innocent life is self-defeating or a pragmatic contradiction.

Another tack Jackson suggests is to justify violence against aggressors on the grounds that it benefits them, by preventing them from committing more sins. The idea would be that it is never permissible to harm anyone — innocent or guilty — but that violently preventing an aggressor from injuring someone else does not harm the aggressor. But then the primary justification for violence against aggressors is to promote their good, not someone else's. This both seems to justify more and less than Jackson wants: more, because it justifies violence against those engaged in victimless sins — such as rejection of the Holy Spirit; and less, because it may be that an aggressor will be worse off if he is killed in the process of committing a violent act than if he is allowed to finish and continue his life and perhaps repent of his deed and turn to God.

In “Who is my Neighbor? Love, Equality, and Profoundly Retarded Humans,” Edmund Santurri asks whether the severely retarded, those who are incapable of even minimal reasoning and conceptualization, are our neighbors, and hence worthy of a love and concern equal to that we owe normal human beings. His project has two parts. The first part is to determine what the Bible says about the status of the retarded. The second part is to examine philosophical, non-theological arguments to see if they lead to a different conclusion from those of the Bible.

Apparently there are no references to the severely retarded in the Bible. Santurri thinks, however, that he can extrapolate a response to the retarded from other elements. He insists that the Bible supports the belief that being human is sufficient for being worthy of equal concern. He assumes that God's covenantal commitments determine the extent of equal moral status, and points out that God's covenants are made, e.g., with Abraham and *all* of his descendants. A retarded descendant falls under the scope of this commitment as much as a normal one.

Santurri next evaluates several arguments for the claim that the retarded don't have the same moral status as other human beings. John Harris argues that rationality is what makes something worthy of equal moral concern. He claims that this accords with our intuitions about science-fiction cases involving rational but non-human beings. Michael Tooley argues: “For a being to have a right to *x*, the being must be capable of having an interest in *x*. But to have an interest in *x*, a being must be capable of desiring *x*. Now, at least some desires involve propositional attitudes. This capacity is unavailable to

the retarded, so they don't have rights." A final argument comes from the contractualist tradition, arguing that one doesn't deserve full moral consideration unless one is capable of behaving morally. Santurri deals deftly with each of these arguments.

I find problematic his attempt to provide a more positive account (that doesn't appeal to divine authority) of why we should accord the severely retarded, but not non-human animals, a moral status equal to that we accord normal human beings. To do this, he needs to find a feature which: 1. is possessed by all humans, including the severely retarded; 2. is not possessed by non-human animals; 3. is morally significant enough to justify and even require significant differences in treatment between, say, a cat and a severely retarded person. He offers this: "[They] are born of our kind. They are generated by our acts of creation. They look like us. They are nurtured by us. They participate with us in a variety of practices that constitute the shared meaning of our communal existence" (123).

These characteristics don't fit the bill. Suppose I am faced with a choice between saving my cat, Psyche, and saving a severely retarded stranger, Bob. Santurri believes that I ought to save Bob. Why? Well, Bob looks like me. But this suggests that if Bob were severely disfigured as well as severely retarded, then it might be O.K. to let him die. That's crazy. Bob participates in our shared practices. What practices? I don't even know Bob. And Psyche participates in a lot of my practices: we spend afternoons together on the front lawn, I put her picture on a Father's Day card for my husband, etc. Perhaps this is foolish, whimsical anthropomorphising. Perhaps Psyche doesn't really participate. But if she doesn't participate, why suppose that the severely retarded participate? Bob is genetically related to people who do count morally. But that sounds like moral nepotism. There is nothing Bob has that Psyche lacks that can ground differential treatment. Nothing, that is, that we can see. It may be that there are qualities that we are unaware of that are present in a retarded person that God is responsible for and aware of. We may have to treat this as a matter of faith, but it is hard to defend on other grounds.

In "The Law of Supererogation" David Little wonders whether loving our neighbors, and all that this entails, is a duty or whether it is supererogatory. On the one hand, it is expressed as an imperative and called a commandment. It is the summary and source of the law. Many Christians publicly confess that they have not loved their neighbors as themselves and repent. All this suggests that it is a duty. Little cites Calvin on how it's wrong to think of any as beyond the law or above duty as if we could somehow come to earn or *merit* grace by doing it. On the other hand, it seems in the nature of love to be freely given. Little reminds us that St. Paul and Calvin stress how the New Testament somehow frees us of the law. All this suggests that agape is not a duty.

To deal with this apparent tension, Little distinguishes between permissive oughts and mandatory oughts. Love of neighbor would be a permissive ought. Decisions to comply with permissive oughts “are not appropriately determined or sanctioned by any but the actor, nor will the actor normally incline to hold others accountable for failing to follow suit in similar circumstances”(169). This suggests that Little’s distinction is simply the distinction between kinds of duty — those for whose omission we are blameworthy and others. But things get more complicated than that. Little wants to include acts of simple human decency, like giving directions, amongst permissive oughts. At the same time, he thinks that someone who refuses to do this is liable to criticism. He develops an elaborate scheme of degrees of permissiveness (degrees of blameworthiness) which are determined by five criteria: cost to agent, benefit to recipient, certainty of outcome and so on.

The difficulty Little starts with and the complex account he develops to deal with it are the product of an overly narrow account of what it means to say that someone ought to do something or to say that someone does wrong for not doing it. He seems to be gripped by the idea that there is a tension between being morally obliged to do something and doing it out of affection or doing it freely. But these are not incompatible. It is quite clear that one can have an obligation to repay a favor to a friend or relative and do so out of affection. It is less clear perhaps that one does the action freely, but that is mainly because the notion of doing an action freely is rather muddy. It is done freely in the sense that the agent is able to do otherwise. Moreover it might well be done voluntarily, without any sense of being constrained or burdened by the obligation. Is there another kind of freedom that is in tension with obligation? Some writers in this area have charged that there is an important kind of freedom: the freedom to behave in a certain way without doing wrong. A moral obligation deprives one of that freedom. For example, a moral obligation to tithe deprives one of the freedom to keep all of one’s income without doing wrong. It strikes me that this is not the freedom that Paul and Calvin were talking about, nor is it a freedom that is particularly worth having.

In “Kant on Christian Love” Ronald Green undertakes to defend Kant’s claim that the commandment to love must be understood in the practical rather than the pathological sense, on the grounds that pathological love is outside our control. Green then discusses Kant’s attempt to derive universal beneficence from the Categorical Imperative (CI). He notes difficulties with doing so on the standard interpretations of the first formulation of that principle. For example, a tough-minded rugged individualist might well be able to will non-beneficence to be a universal law. Green suggests an alternative reading of the CI, more in accord with Rawls’s original position. He says “This involves taking the phrase ‘universal law’ in its fullest and most ex-

plicitly legislative sense. ...We might here recall Lincoln's observation that a republic is not just for the people but of them and by them as well. This suggests that a universal law may not just be applicable to and binding on all rational persons, but may also be a law that has been freely accepted by, even voted for, by all such persons. It is their law in the sense that they have helped will it into existence — or could be expected to do so. With this explicitly legislative metaphor in mind, therefore, we may think of universalized maxims as having to pass a test in which they must receive not just my approval but that of all the other rational persons convened in a hypothetical democratic assembly" (273). This is an interesting suggestion, but it is not entirely clear why the tough-minded individualist cannot continue to insist that universal beneficence would not be freely accepted by all persons.

In "Analogues to Justice" John Reeder explores the Humean idea that distributive justice would be unnecessary in a world in which *agape* is the norm. As a model, Reeder uses the world described in a novel by Ursula Le Guin of a society in which the members love each other, and everyone considers everyone else's good to be as important as his or her own, and no one talks about what is due or owed, what she deserves, or has a right to. In this world, he argues, love might succeed in replacing justice, but analogues to justice, distributive principles, would still be necessary. This is because several different distributive principles all appear to be consistent with the starting commitment to everyone's well-being: strict egalitarianism, utilitarianism and Rawls's difference principle.

This means that "Love your neighbor as yourself" is not a complete morality, in the sense that it doesn't provide complete guidelines as to how to behave in all morally significant choice situations. It tells me to pursue my neighbor's well-being but it doesn't tell me how to resolve conflicts between the interests of the neighbor on my left and the neighbor on my right.

It is not even clear that the commandment provides a complete guideline as to how to behave when I am dealing with a single neighbor. Obviously a central aspect of loving someone is to aim at his good, and the commandment doesn't specify what his good consists in. John Whittaker addresses this question in his paper, "'Agape' and Self-love." Whittaker asks what it means to love another as oneself. What is it about one's love for oneself that we are enjoined to extend to others? His answer is "We love ourselves by wanting to be happy, to be fulfilled, to be complete. And we do not abandon this wish." It is this feature of our self-love which we should extend to others. Whittaker points out that there are at least two ways we can do this. If I want you to be happy, and I believe that you will be happy if you go to college and become a lawyer, does it follow that I should force (persuade, influence) you to go to college and become a lawyer? Suppose you want to forego college and start a business? Is it more loving to do what I think will be most likely to

make you happy, or to do what you think is most likely to make you happy? Whittaker responds that we love others, not in forcing our own conception of the good life on them, but in helping them to pursue their own, as long as these are morally permissible. I find this restriction a little weak. There are choices which seem morally permissible for individuals to make, but which it seems wrong to help someone else pursue. It is morally permissible to drink heavily or to aim to weigh less than seventy pounds, but it seems wrong to help someone achieve these ends. Loving seems to require making evaluative judgments about what is in the neighbor's interests.

In "Salvific Love and Charity: a Comparison of the Thought of Karl Rahner and Thomas Aquinas," Jean Porter discusses the relationship between the moral life and the life of grace. Rahner claims that loving one's neighbor ("such as is expressed in genuine morality") counts as loving God (even if one is totally unaware of this — or even if one explicitly rejects God) and hence is sufficient for salvation. Porter compares Rahner and Aquinas on the relationship between love and salvation. She finds the comparison fruitful, for each highlights questions that the other needs to address. Her discussion of the similarities and differences between these two thinkers is interesting and admirably clear.

This volume covers a wide range of topics and raises some interesting questions. I was somewhat disappointed in the answers. They were, in large part, rather ordinary and timid, as if the authors were unable to go beyond commonsense or to challenge orthodoxy. Moreover, as I tried to indicate above, there are a number of philosophical errors and oversights. The book would have been more useful and interesting to philosophers if more philosophers had been included amongst its contributors.*

NOTES

*I am indebted to Daniel Howard-Snyder for considerable help with this review.