Unconditional Love and Spiritual Virtues

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Some Thoughts About Wisdom

The apostle Paul tells us that Christian teaching will appear to be foolishness to those outside the spiritual community and that what counts as wisdom out there is actually a doctrine of death (I Cor. 1.18). One of the teachings that are likely to appear foolish to those whose minds reflect "the wisdom of the world" (v.21) is Jesus' command to love our enemies. Christians regard that command itself as a piece of wisdom, and the understanding of the command as required for those who would be really wise.

In the following pages I shall ruminate philosophically about what it is to love our enemies. I will be "processing" the wisdom of Jesus and the apostles in such a way as to try to get "inside" it, to understand it better. So here, philosophy will be in the service of a wisdom that does not originate in philosophy, at least as 'philosophy' is mostly understood in the history of philosophy. As a discipline philosophy aims at understanding—in the current application, a better understanding of the command to love our enemies. Wisdom itself is a kind of understanding, so the application of philosophy to a piece of Christian wisdom is natural and holds the potential to increase the wisdom of members of the Christian community.

But with this happy thought philosophy will also issue a little warning by making a three-part distinction. In the preceding we have already seen two of the parts. First, wisdom can be a *deposit*: we speak of the wisdom of the Christian tradition, or the wisdom contained in Plato's dialogues or the essays of Seneca—or the command to love one's enemies. As a mere deposit, this wisdom exists in texts, not in anybody's

mind or heart. However great such wisdom may be, it is *wisdom* only derivatively: the text derives from somebody's actual understanding (that of Jesus, the apostles, Plato). Wisdom as such is the understanding actually possessed and used by a person. So the wisdom of the text becomes real wisdom only when somebody processes and appropriates it, and understands himself and his world in its terms. That's the second part of the distinction.

The second part divides into two aspects of the real understanding that a person has of, say, the command to love one's enemies. Wisdom as a special kind of understanding is directed toward the living of a life, but of course that understanding involves grasping certain ideas, in the present case the ideas of *love* and *enemy* and the ideas of *God* and *people* that are intimately interconnected in this wisdom. What is love, and how are we to understand 'enemy'? I can't very well love my enemy in response to the command unless I understand what the love is that applies to the enemy and how to identify an enemy. What is there about the enemy such that I should love him? I will not really be wise unless I have some answers to these questions regarding "what?", "how?", and "why?" Philosophy is well adapted to helping out with this part of the task of understanding.

For want of a better term, let's call this part of wisdom *the power of explaining*. In the following pages I am going to try to explain what it is to love one's enemy, and if I succeed, and successfully communicate this explanation to you, my reader, then you and I will have a bit of Christian wisdom. But the power of explanation is only the beginning of wisdom (actually, it's often a finishing, articulating touch, an ability to put into words and arguments what one tacitly "knew" already; see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.3). It is perfectly possible for someone to be able to explain, even in rich detail with vivid

illustrations, what it is to love one's enemy, without actually being able to love one's enemy. It takes a special cultivation of one's soul in some virtues that I will discuss briefly later in these pages, actually to be the kind of person who can love his enemy. But in the third aspect of 'wisdom' that I'm now getting at, a person is not wise and does not really understand loving his enemy, if he has only an "academic" understanding of it—only the power of explanation part. For such a person does not have first-hand knowledge of loving one's enemy; he is not intimately *acquainted* with such action, feeling, and thought in the actual course of life; and he is not *practiced* at *expressing* such wisdom in action, feeling, and practical thought. But such practical life-acquaintance is required for a full understanding of loving one's enemies. The reason is that the kind of understanding that wisdom is involves an inclination of the *heart* toward the *good* that the wisdom posits; and this is not given with a merely academic understanding of the tradition in question. Let us call the third aspect of wisdom *the power of living*.

Thus the three aspects of wisdom are 1) wisdom as a deposit; 2) wisdom as the wise individual's power to explain; and 3) wisdom as the wise individual's personal acquaintance with, and personal know-how respecting, what he or she understands — in the case of the present discussion, the loving of his or her enemy.

Philosophy is much less well suited to promote wisdom's power of living than it is to promote its power of explaining, though philosophers have tried, through various literary strategies, gently to move in the direction of life both themselves and those who follow their thought. Socrates engaged in conversations, writing nothing, and lived a powerfully exemplary life; Plato wrote dialogues, imitating to some extent the living word; Seneca, in his essays, integrates

philosophical analysis with exhortation and lively examples from life; Søren Kierkegaard writes "upbuilding discourses" and tries, by various literary devices, to make his other writings personally gripping as well as analytically rigorous. I am sorry to say that in the present pages all I can do in that direction is to try to write in a way that keeps before my mind and yours that the wisdom involved in loving one's enemies requires exemplification in action, perception, and feeling.

Before we address the particular love of enemies, however, let's think briefly about the broader category to which that love belongs.

Love and its Conditions

Let us speak of love for persons. (The love of chocolate and fast cars will not concern us here.)

What people call "love" often comes with strings attached. I'll love you, darling, as long as you are beautiful (rich, healthy, a credit to me). Some people seem to love their children only if they are not autistic, stupid, shiftless, ugly, immoral, homosexual, or Christian). More seriously and frequently, our love is conditioned on reciprocity: I love only people who love me, only the ones who treat me right. Here and elsewhere the strings may be invisible to us; we think we love our friends, our neighbors, and our children "unconditionally," but when the condition on which our love hangs begins to go unsatisfied, it becomes apparent that it hung on that condition all along. Some of the ways that love can be conditional seem to deprive the attitude of the right to be called love at all. To love one's wife for her money isn't to love one's *wife*. But even where we would not withhold the epithet 'love' from a conditional attitude, we may well think that it is a compromised, imperfect kind of love.

Immanuel Kant sought to shield the best kind of love from dependency on conditions by divorcing it from affectivity and desire. The thought seems to be that if loving someone requires that I feel affection for him, and/or desire his wellbeing, then my love depends on mere psychological conditions, and such dependency deprives love of its moral worth.

> It is in this manner, undoubtedly, that we are to understand those passages of Scripture also in which we are commanded to love our neighbor, even our enemy. For love, as an affection, cannot be commanded, but beneficence for duty's sake may; even though we are not impelled to it by any inclination—nay, are even repelled by a natural and unconquerable aversion. This is practical love and not pathological—a love which is seated in the will, and not in the propensions of sense—in principles of action and not of tender sympathy; and it is this love alone which can be commanded (Kant, *Groundwork,* First Part, 12th paragraph).

Kant's opinion comes more from his ethical theory than from exegetical insights. Christian wisdom has thought of the commanded love as involving a genuine caring for the love's object and a disposition arising thence to desire the best for the one who is loved, even if that one is a stranger who lacks the natural appeal of the spouse, the sister, the friend, or the countryman. For example, in the parable by which Jesus explains commanded love, he has the Samaritan's "heart go out" (*esplangchnisthê*) to the wounded man in the ditch (Luke 10.33).

So one aspect of the love of persons is this: to love someone is to cherish him or her, to see (feel) the person as valuable, as good, as excellent, in some way that nears the

heart of the loved person's being. (It is not enough to see him or her as pleasantly useful for some delimited and passing purpose of one's own, or to be smitten by his excellent hair.) A second aspect is closely related to the first: to love someone is to wish him well, to desire his success, his wellbeing, his health, his flourishing, his happiness, for his sake—not instrumentally, as promoting something else that I like. For the one who loves, just as the other's value resides *in* the other, so the wellbeing the loving person desires for him is *for* the other. The loving one's desire need not conceive the other's wellbeing in the same way as the loved one would conceive it. A parent who loves her child may wish for him a good that is strongly at variance from the child's idea of what is good for him. Still, if the parent's attitude is *love*, that good is wished for the child's sake.

Shall we insist on truth in love? Shall we insist that the seeing (feeling) of the person as highly valuable be veridical? We need not deny that genuine love can be mistaken about the value of its object. Love is enough like an emotion for this possibility to be unobjectionable. We don't deny that a person is angry or afraid simply because she is mistaken about the offense or danger that, in her emotion, she apprehends. Similarly, love can be genuine love if only the beloved *appears* excellent to the lover, even if he isn't. However, the best kind of love, the most virtuous kind, will be a correct perception of its object; and it would be a fault in a moral outlook such as Christianity, that commends love as the central moral ideal, if it commended love for people who are not lovable (thus mismatching the attitude to its object). So I think it's a universal condition of the best love that only lovable persons be loved. This is not an "is" condition, but a "should" condition; love that perceives as good what is not good may be real love, but it is not love as it should be. Christianity does not

advocate unconditional love if that implies no conditions at all: the one loved must be good.

So far, Plato and Aristotle agree. According to Aristotle (*NE* 8.2), friends love each other on one or more of three conditions: that they are pleasant, useful, or virtuous (good). A person who fulfills none of these conditions, from the point of view of the potential friend, will not become his friend. Friendships that have been established on the basis of pleasure or utility will end if one of the friends ceases to be pleasant or useful.

> Perhaps we may say that there is nothing strange in breaking off a friendship based on utility or pleasantness, when our friends no longer have these attributes. For it was of these attributes that we were the friends; and when these have failed it is reasonable to love no longer (9.3.1, 225 Ross).

But in saying this, Aristotle gives us reason to doubt whether love as we have characterized it is at issue in the "friendships" of pleasure and utility: "it was of these attributes that we were the friends," not of the person himself. Aristotle regards only the friendship of virtue as real friendship because only virtues are excellences that are near enough to the heart of the person's being. We might say that pleasantness and usefulness are "external" or "extrinsic" to a person's personhood, but virtues are realizations of true personal nature.

What if someone has been a true friend, a virtue-friend, and then goes bad? Should we persevere in loving him? Here Aristotle appears to be of two minds. On the one hand, he says it is impossible, because only what is good can be loved. But then he says that if there is any hope that the friend be reformed, it "is better and more characteristic of friendship" (9.3.3, 226 Ross) to do what one can to get him back on the track of virtue. Friendship is generous and a bit indulgent. He

ends the paragraph by saying that if the friend cannot be reformed, it is natural to abandon him. So let us say that for Aristotle, love is conditional on the loved one's being either good or formerly good with a prospect of reform.

The Christian will agree that the friend (or more broadly the loving person) will be generously imaginative in seeking ways to construe the patently corrupt person as having something good and lovable about him, and will be more tenacious than the Aristotelian in hoping for his reform (love hopes all things). This is well supported by Christian beliefs: even if we suppose, contrary to what is probable, that the corrupt person is completely without inherent character excellence, still he is one for whom Christ died, one to whom God offers redemption. So the universal necessary condition for virtuous love—that the loved one be lovable, that there be something good about him to evoke one's love—is universally met by way of the gospel story of God's love. Thomas Aquinas, for example, says

> The friendship that is based on the virtuous is directed to none but a virtuous man as the principal person, but for his sake we love those who belong to him, even though they be not virtuous: in this way charity, which above all is friendship based on the virtuous, extends to sinners, whom, out of charity, we love for God's sake (*ST* II-II 23.1, reply to objection 3).

The more apparent conditionality of Aristotelian friendship is due to its lacking a resource like the gospel, which makes all and sundry persons lovable.

Christian love is unconditional, not in the sense of having no conditions whatsoever, but in the sense of lacking one or another of the conditions that are characteristic of imperfect love. One condition that is most characteristic of imperfect

love is the reciprocation of love, and another, like it, is that the other not actively seek one's harm. Setting such conditions on one's love is virtually universal among humankind. That is why Jesus' command that we love our enemies is so striking and paradoxical and may sound like foolishness to the ears of the world's wise; and it is why the love of enemies provides an especially apt example of "unconditional" love.

Love of Enemies

To love one's enemy, then, is to cherish him and wish him well. Thus it is not enough, as Kant would have us believe, to act beneficently toward our enemy simply from a sense of duty without any affection for him or other inclination to benefit him. Such "love" may be the best we can do, given our current mood or state of character, but we will not in the fullest sense *love* our enemy unless we cherish him and wish him well from the heart. Of course, in wishing his benefit we need not wish for exactly what he wishes under the description, *my benefit*. We might wish, for his benefit, that he be more kindly disposed towards us, or that he come to love God. In Romans 12.14–21, Paul appears to reverse what appears to be the intention of Proverbs 25.21–22, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." The intention of the Proverbs text seems to be that kind treatment can be a form of revenge. But Paul begins the passage, "Bless those who persecute you." To bless someone is not merely to utter words of blessing (possibly with the intention of getting revenge on your persecutor, or dutifully obeying the moral law or a superior's command, or tricking the persecutor into letting up). To bless somebody is essentially to express to him your well-wishing. Expressed love can bring a certain kind of persecutor

to repentance and amended life. To intend such a result would not be to seek revenge.

In Plato's *Republic*, Book 1 (335e) Socrates formulates a view similar to the biblical idea of loving one's enemies:

> If anyone tells us, then, that it is righteous (*dikaios*) to give to each what he's owed and understands by this that a righteous man should harm his enemies and benefit his friends, he isn't wise to say it, since what he says isn't true, for it has become clear to us that it is never righteous to harm anyone (335e).[1]

Socrates gets to this conclusion, most proximately, by reflecting on the notion of harm. Essential harm, he thinks, is corruption of the very nature of the harmed thing: a change into being a less perfect specimen of its kind. So really to harm a human being would be to make him or her worse *as a human being*. But to make a human being worse in this most essential way would be to make him less virtuous, and since this is something that a good man would never do, the good man never harms anyone.

Socrates' formula differs from the love commandment in being entirely negative: Jesus says that we are to *love* our enemies, do positive *good* to those who hate us, *bless* those who curse us, and *pray for* those who abuse us (Luke 6.27–8). The negativity of Socrates' conclusion seems to make it less paradoxical, and in a way less morally impressive, than Jesus' command that we positively *love* our enemy. But if we look at Socrates' actions we see him, in his defense speech, doing good to his enemies. After the court has unjustly condemned him to death (and thereby shown itself to include a number of his enemies), Socrates goes right on practicing his calling,

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[1] Like most translators of Plato, G. M. A. Grube translates *dikaios* as 'just.' I have changed the translation to 'righteous' to bring out the moral generality of the Greek word.

serving their deepest interests, calling them to care more for their souls than for their wealth, health, and reputation. He not only does not harm them or wish them harm, but seeks to promote their deepest benefit, presumably with a bit of hope that they will hearken to the appeal, if not now, at some time after his death. So we see that Socrates *does* something even more admirable than what he *commends by argument* (thus differing from most thinkers about ethics, who are more likely to do something less admirable than what they commend by argument).

But if we suppose the principle that I have attributed to Christianity—that we should love only what is really good—and also suppose that Socrates is rational enough to be constrained by this principle, we might wonder what he sees in his enemies that would lead him to wish them well. That he sees some such thing seems indicated by the hope that his appeal will touch and affect their minds: at least a vestige of understanding, and thus of excellence, remains in them. This bit of excellence, seen in the light of their malice and folly, seems pretty pale compared to the Christian consideration that they are so beloved of God that God offers his only begotten Son for their redemption. But Socrates is an astoundingly original character, and I wouldn't be surprised if he intuited something about the goodness of humanity and human life that goes deeper than the rather minimal insight that his judicial murderers have not quite lost all their capacity to be corrected.

Who is My Enemy?

One might argue that, just as friendship is not real without love, so enmity is unreal without hatred. Hating one another comes naturally to enemies; the actions characteristic of being enemies tend to provoke hatred in both agent and patient. However, hatred is not a necessary condition for

someone's being an enemy. Enemy combatants do not always hate one another, and may regret deeply the kinds of destruction they must try to wreak on one another. Were mutual hatred necessary for being enemies, it would not be possible to love one's enemies. Nevertheless, hatred is typical of enemies, so it does make some sense to distinguish between "real enmity" (which requires attitude) and being enemies or being a real enemy (which doesn't). On this usage, the Christian who loves his enemy loves someone who does hate him, and we can say that someone is an enemy of the Christian without the Christian's being his enemy.

Thus hatred is strongly enough associated with enmity that an exploration of its nature belongs to a philosophical discourse on loving one's enemies. Hatred is both characteristic of the enemy's attitude toward the Christian and a likely temptation that the Christian must face in loving his enemy. I have said that the Christian knows of a kind of goodness in evil people that enables him to cherish them rationally; when that evil is turned particularly on oneself in a passion for one's destruction or hurt, it can be very difficult to "remember" this truth and to see the enemy in terms of it, to see and feel the beauty and excellence of one's enemy as a beloved of God.

I propose that to hate someone is to see him as evil and wish him harm or destruction. As such it is the perfect contrary of loving someone, which is to see him as good and wish him well. The impulse to destroy is not itself hatred. One can demolish an old building with regret, thus expressing love for it. But even pleasure in destruction does not necessarily betoken hatred. Children love to destroy sand castles they've built, but don't usually do it out of hatred of the sand castle. To be hatred, the impulse to destroy must be motivated by construing the hated one as evil; thus one destroys *out of*

hatred. Also, merely construing somebody as evil, without desiring his harm or destruction, is not hatred, but a cool (perhaps "academic") cognition (judgment or perception).

Hatred differs from anger, despite resembling it and being intimately connected with it. Anger is a response to an offense. If I am angry at someone for cutting me off in traffic, I see him as bad and desire some hurt or harm for him, but if I am rational, this passionate "seeing" is relative to and delimited by my understanding of the offense. I desire his hurt or harm *because of* his offense. If I then realize that he swerved in front of me to avoid killing my dog, which just ran across the street, my perception of him as bad will evaporate. It evaporates, if I'm a passably rational person, because I no longer see his swerving as an offense. Hatred is less susceptible to occasional revision. It is a *gelled* evil-seeing and -wishing that has become *generalized* over the person, associated not so occasionally with *what he does*, but instead with *who he is*. Racial and ethnic hatred are good examples. The individual is hated not because of what he did, but because he's the wrong kind of being. Of course, hatred may be backed up with stories about what "they" have done to "us," and the stories may be true and constitute a true account of the origin of the hatred; but the order usual for anger is reversed: the offenses are dug up to justify the vitriol, rather than occasioning it, as in the case of anger. Hatred of an individual can evolve out of occasions of anger: with repetition of offenses, the bad-seeing gets generalized into evil-seeing and detached from the occasions. I do not, merely by getting angry with someone, become an enemy to him; but if I hate him, I am his enemy.

When people curse us, despise and demean us, spread evil rumors about us, delight in our suffering, take away our means of livelihood, mistreat our children, try to eradicate us, and generally persecute and injure us, it is natural to perceive

them as hating us and being our enemy. And, feeling their hatred and threat, the response that comes naturally is to hate them in return. Even if, previously, we have looked upon them with benevolence, we now feel viscerally the conditional character of our love: we would love them, we may think, were it not for their being our enemies. But we do not love them. Indeed, we can see nothing good about them; we are overwhelmed with the dazzling, burning impression of their evil, and wish for them nothing but pain, grief, and destruction.

How Shall I Love My Enemy?

We have various instructions from Jesus and the apostle Paul about how to love our enemy. They all (with one possible exception) seem to be a matter of doing good to those who hate us and harm us (Luke 6.27b). We are told to *pray for* those who persecute us (Matthew 5.44) and abuse us (Luke 6.28b), to *bless* those who persecute us (Romans 12.14) or curse us (Luke 6.28a), and to *give to* one who robs us more than he insists on taking (Luke 6.29b). The apparent exception is the instruction to offer the other cheek to someone who strikes us on the cheek (Luke 6.29a). It is hard to see what *good* is done the assailant in allowing him to injure us further; we might rather have thought it not at all in his deepest interest to be encouraged to repeat his abuse. In Matthew's gospel, the command to turn the other cheek (5.38–9) is not presented as a way to love the enemy, but as a hyperbolic illustration of non-retaliation (or more broadly, non-insistence on reciprocation [see 5.40–42]). Non-retaliation and non-insistence on reciprocation are enhanced by love—that is, by cherishing the other and wishing him well—and a policy of this kind can also be seen to clear the way for love. We might say that non-retaliation and non-insistence on reciprocation are in the

"spirit" of love. Nevertheless, they are not the same as love, and can be pursued as a policy that is not motivated by love.

Let us consider the cases that are reasonably clear examples of positively loving the enemy: praying for, blessing, and giving to the enemy. Giving material goods to the enemy might be thought good for him even if done in a spirit of rancor or simply as a matter of duty (I'm handing my stuff over because I've been commanded to, but my heart is not generous about it). But it does not seem even possible to pray for or to bless someone without valuing him or taking an interest in his wellbeing. To "pray for" someone while wishing him ill, or even while being indifferent to his wellbeing, is not really praying for him. A blessing is also a kind of prayer, the specific difference being that one pronounces or expresses the petition in the presence of the one being blessed. To bless is to wish well while expressing this wish in words or actions or gestures. Merely verbalizing a well wishing form of words would not be to bless someone. Praying for and blessing someone is thus *essentially* a work of love, and this is the spirit in which giving material goods can also be a work of love. In giving one who robs you more than he insists on taking, you can be at the same time praying for and blessing him, wishing for him that your gift (for that is what you have turned the extortion into) should be essentially good for him, promoting his real wellbeing.

How does one perform such works? It seems to me that fundamental to this extraordinary kind of love is the issue of *light*. To see with our eyes, we need light. Without light our eyes see nothing, but it is also true that the distribution of the light deeply affects our vision. Inside the barn may be plenty of light for me to see what's in there, but if I am looking through the door from outside of a white barn that is bathed in sunlight, I may see only darkness in the barn. To see what is inside, I

may need to shield myself against the outer light. Once I get used to seeing what is inside the barn, my adjustment blinds me to what is outside.

Something analogous is true of the eyes of the heart: what they see depends on the *distribution* of the light. The eyes of the heart see by way of concepts, but the conceptualized things—the things "seen"—need to be lit up for the seer to see them. Hatred lights up the enemy's evil; it makes blindingly obvious his identity as the nasty alien one, the corrupt-hearted evildoer who merits pain and destruction. This is the light from which the eyes of one's heart need to be shielded if one is to love one's enemy. Christian doctrine supplies the concepts by which the good and lovable aspects of the enemy may be lit up. It tells us that the enemy is created in the image of God, that the enemy is one for whom Christ died, that God loves his enemies, among whom we were once counted: "…while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son…" (Romans 5.10a). Grasping these concepts, love lights up these aspects, and when it does so the enemy's nastiness becomes less articulated and obtrusively visible, fades into the background, and the enemy becomes dear, one to whom kind treatment is appropriate.

We see here that love and hatred are a kind of knowledge, the kind that I earlier called "acquaintance." This is a kind of perceptual knowledge, in which aspects of the object impress one's mind with a kind of immediate presence and clarity analogous to physical vision (or hearing, or taste, or touch). It is important to note that while love-acquaintance drives out or dims hatred-acquaintance, and vice-versa, it does not drive out all knowledge. Acquaintance is one kind of knowledge; another is justified true belief. It is perfectly possible for a person who loves his enemy to continue believing, with justification, that his enemy has performed such-and-such

atrocities, that the enemy continues to hate him, that the enemy would destroy him if given a chance. And conversely, it is perfectly possible for a Christian who is justified in his true belief that the enemy is beautiful because created in the image of God and that Christ died for the enemy's sins to hate his enemy and be unable (at a given moment) to "see" these truths about his enemy with the eyes of his heart.

Since it is no doubt true of many enemies that they (we) are nasty characters (while also being dear to the heart of God), love for them involves a certain degrading of knowledge; the lover of his enemies becomes "blind," in a certain sense, to their evil. Since he does not cease altogether knowing that the enemy is indeed an enemy, he is able, despite this "blindness," to guard against the enemy's destructiveness when that is necessary. The Christian who loves his enemy may well know that the enemy is a threat to his children's wellbeing. I think this is *not* the kind of case in which we are to apply Jesus' command not to resist those who are evil (Matthew 5.39). If so, then resistance to the enemy is compatible with loving him. The kind of knowledge of the enemy that is implied by loving him is different from the kind of knowledge by which we believe with justification that he is our enemy.

I ask again, how does one pray for and bless those who persecute, curse, and abuse us? The short answer is, "Try doing it!" In the foregoing, I have stressed the inward, spiritual side of such works of love, but they also have a more obviously performative side: one can say the words of the prayer or blessing. If a person desires to love his enemy, then even if he hates his enemy, he can still perform the "outward" side of the praying and blessing. This is not love, but it's a beginning. Another action that is within our voluntary control is to call to mind the factual basis of Christian love: I was an enemy of God, and he welcomed me into his people. Christ died for

people who curse, persecute, abuse, and hate me, just as he did for me when I cursed, persecuted, abused, and hated others. He loves them and has called me to love them too. Because we humans are reflective beings, creatures who think about and evaluate our thinking and evaluating, we are not mere victims of our thoughts and emotions, but are in a position to manage and direct them. That is why it makes sense for Jesus and the apostles to issue commands regarding love and hatred (love your neighbor, love your enemy, hate what is evil).

Our efforts to love the enemy will not always succeed, because the kinds of things we can voluntarily do to promote such love are not themselves the full and actual cherishing and good-seeing of the enemy: in addition to the words of the prayer or blessing that are fully within the reach of our will, in addition to the material help we may voluntarily give our enemies, we must *feel* the enemy's excellence and heartily *wish* him well if we are fully to love him. In any given case, the emotion may or may not supervene. But the words and actions characteristic of love will *tend* to promote the feeling. Our mental—and especially emotional—life is intimately connected with our bodily actions: the movements of our tongue in meaningful speech, movements of our limbs in helping out, and our expressive gestures. Both mental and bodily actions that will tend to promote love are within the compass of our will.

Love of Enemy as a Virtue Among Virtues

We have spoken about *doing* good to the enemy in its relation to *feeling* love for him and have suggested that these two aspects of love are reciprocally supporting. We do the enemy good out of love for him, and we develop and reinforce our love for him by doing him good. Love, so conceived, comes in *episodes* of action and feeling. But love is also a

virtue, a personal *disposition* to feel love for enemies and to do them good. In most cases, episodes of love will be expressions of love as a *virtue*. The virtue may be more or less deeply engrained, more or less robust and reliable. Most of us who love our enemies at all are only imperfectly disposed to do so; our "track record" is compromised by twinges of hatred, moments of indifference, and more or less frequent failure to do our enemies good because we do not yet possess in its fullness the virtue of Christian love.

We have seen that there is no such thing as absolutely unconditional love, because love is essentially a seeing-as-good and to see as good what is not good would be morally and epistemically substandard. Nevertheless, many of the conditions that love often carries within it undermine its status as love. For example, to the extent that parental love is conditional on the beauty or good behavior or outstanding performance of the child, parental love is only "love," not *love*. Similar things can be said about marital love, friendship, collegial love, and love of neighbor. Virtues, in relation to such loves, are sometimes condition-removers or -mitigaters. The virtues of a parent, such as patience, perseverance, gentleness, self-denial, gratitude, humility, and self-control, may combat tendencies to conditionality in the parent's love, and thus help it be genuine love. Thus is illustrated the kernel of truth in the ancient doctrine of the unity of the virtues—that no virtue is completely independent of all other virtue(s). Love of enemies is no exception. Let us consider how the virtues of gratitude, contrition, humility, and generosity may support the love of enemies.

It is often remarked that when we hate someone, we "demonize" him. He becomes, in our eyes, bad through and through, completely without redeeming qualities; and because he is such a bad job, he *ought* to be bad: no doubts are to be

cast on his badness; we don't want to hear any admiring or even mitigating or humanizing report of him. Any compromise of his supposed evil nature upsets our settled and comfortable view and is unacceptable. Above all, we want to see no human or moral commonality between ourselves and our enemy; he *must* be alien to us.

The apostle Paul articulates one of the major considerations at the basis of distinctively Christian gratitude when he says, "…while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son…" (Romans 5.10a). Spiritually serious recognition of this fact involves construing ourselves as having [formerly] hated God unrighteously (so we feel contrition) and as having been made recipients of God's unmerited fatherly favor and love (so we feel gratitude). If we succeed in putting together these construals of ourselves and God with our hatred of the enemy, the effect should be a dissonance in our minds that calls for resolution. And if our main trajectory is that of Christian spiritual growth, because gratitude for Christ's reconciling work and contrition for our sins have begun to grow natural to us, the resolution of this dissonance will take the form of weakening our hatred of the enemy so that we feel our common humanity with him. (It will *not* take the form of weakening our contrition and gratitude so that we may persevere in hating the enemy!). Seeing our commonality with him is a movement in the direction of loving him.

Generosity is a "freedom" towards the other with one's good things out of good will towards the other, and so is a species of love. Many of us are generous with our friends and our children, but less so with other fellow human beings. Our generosity has a selectively ungenerous character. The Christian tradition speaks of the extravagance of God: in the words of the hymn, "There's a *wideness* in God's mercy, Like

the wideness of the sea." And Jesus urges us to imitate the generosity of God (he being our Father and we his children):

> You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5.43–5, NRSV).

A generous spirit is an openness of mind to good possibilities for the other, an eagerness to see the good in the other and seek the good for the other; and the more generous one is, the less choosy one is about which human being enjoys the bounty. The hatred of enemies is a proviso on love, a reserving of love for one's friends. But the wideness in the generosity of the children of God militates against the provisos of a limited love.

Humility is a disposition not to insist on one's status (goodness, credit), and thus is contrary to the vice of self-righteousness, which is an eagerness to contemplate one's moral superiority to others. Just as the eternal son of God did not make an issue of his status as son, but moved forward in love to redeem humankind by becoming incarnate as one of us (Philippians 2.5–7), so the humble person does not pause to notice her own moral superiority to others of whom she becomes aware, but moves forward with the positive projects of her life. If this person is well formed as a Christian, then a major project of her life will be loving and doing good to her fellow human beings. Now among the fellow human beings in her life may be some enemies, and these enemies may well be morally inferior to the Christian. In such cases, a Christian who is less than optimally formed in the virtue of love may be inclined to take a certain satisfaction in her moral superiority to the enemy. This pleasurable contempt for the enemy is not

love; no, it is quite contrary to love, a form of reciprocity in enmity. It is a twinge of hatred. So it is easy to see how the virtue of humility supports the virtue of love. As a disposition not to feel self-righteous, it is a freedom from one of the characteristic insidious obstacles to the love of enemies.

Philosophy and Understanding Love

This has been a philosophical discourse on "unconditional" love as it is understood according to the wisdom of the Christian tradition. We have drawn, for our own wisdom, on the conceptual resources of the Christian deposit of wisdom. We have sought to deepen our understanding of the conceptual structure of Christian thought about love, not simply to sharpen our "technical" and articulate grasp of the concept, but to position ourselves better, as Christian persons, to exemplify love of that description in the motions of our hearts and the undertaking of our actions.

We have seen that Christian love is not unconditional in any absolute sense, since the concept of love in the Christian tradition is definite and articulable, and therefore has its own conditions. To *be* a concept is to have conditions of applicability, and to give a philosophical account of the concept is to articulate those conditions clearly. To have the conceptual mastery to which philosophical reflection seeks to facilitate access is to understand the conditions for Christian love. Because Christian love has a definite conceptual shape, it is possible to have mastery of the concept, and Christian wisdom about love requires such mastery. This paper has been an effort to clarify the Christian concept of love, especially the love of enemies.

However, philosophy, thought of as conceptual clarification, cannot by itself engender Christian wisdom, because such wisdom exceeds articulateness about Christian

concepts. It requires, but is more than, some ability to explain concepts like that of Christian love. It is also an understanding disposition of the will, the heart, and the body; and philosophy has much less power to engender that. That kind of understanding can be acquired only through experience of life, through ruthless truthfulness with oneself, and above all through action that is stamped with the mark of the Christian concepts. About all that philosophy can do to encourage the growth of wisdom in these dimensions is to note what they are and to mention some of the exercises by which they can be developed.