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Common misspellings and variants of the name Glenn F. Chesnut: Glenn Chesnut / Glen F. Chesnut / Glen Chesnut / Glenn F. Chestnut / Glenn Chestnut / Glen F. Chestnut / Glen Chestnut / Glenn C., South Bend

A Personal God: Love and Energy

A metaphysical system built around the three primal hypostases — that is, a system of the type which was assumed by most western thinkers (pagan, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim) for over two thousand years — allows philosophers who wish to view the ultimate ground of reality in totally impersonal terms to do so. The three hypostases were in fact all identified and delineated at the most basic level in non-personal terms:

The Threefold Structure within the Ground of Being

1. Arbitrarium: ground of chance and arbitrariness
2. Logos: logical ground of the universe
3. Energetikos: ground of the universe's mass-energy

But the three hypostases also allow those philosophers and theologians who wish to do so, to speak of a warmly personal God and fit the personal attributes of God into the basic metaphysical system

without doing injury to its basic underlying structure. They also allow this to be done — if it is done properly — in ways that do no injury to the spirit and practice of good scientific inquiry.

I want to begin to do that in this chapter by investigating the link between love and energy. The third hypostasis, the Energetikos, allows us not only to say something about where all the mass-energy in the universe came from; it also allows us to speak about what human beings call “love” — love seen as a special kind of energy operating at some of the higher levels of reality.

Panpsychism is not the answer

In this regard however, I should begin by saying that I do not believe that the philosophical position known as panpsychism is a useful way of trying to bring the force of love into the fabric of the universe. In ancient Greek, the word for soul was *psychê*, so “panpsychism” in the literal sense would be the belief that everything real in the universe had a soul: not just human beings, and not just birds and animals, but also things like electrons and white blood cells. Philosophers who have taken up this position have been apt to argue, for example, that the attraction which draws a negatively charged electron towards a positively charged proton, is simply a kind of “love” — not as multifaceted and rich as the love which draws one human being towards another, to be true — but a kind of love nevertheless. Philosophers who uphold this position can then argue that love is the basic power which drives the whole universe; the basic force which holds the entire cosmos together.

The problem with this position is that if we define the word “love” in such a weak and vague way that it can refer even to things like the blind attraction of positive and negative electrical charges towards one another, then we are using the word love in such a fuzzy and cloudy way that we have not in fact said much of anything at all. Even as a poetic metaphor, it is so overdrawn that it would be difficult to work into most really good poems. Electrons do not “feel love” towards protons in anything remotely like the way that human beings feel love towards one another. They do not have souls or psyches in that sense. Electrons are not conscious beings. And likewise, white blood cells do not use “free will” to “make the decision” to attack disease microorganisms which they encounter within the human bloodstream — this is nothing at all like conscious human decision making.

The layers of reality

Love does not operate at all levels of reality. Love is not a vague term for any kind of energy or attractive force in the universe. Love is a special kind of energy operating at some of the higher levels of reality.

Reality comes in layers. Just as the ground of being is divided into three *hypostaseis* (which should be translated as “layers” or “substrata” in this kind of context), so likewise the created universe is made up of various layers of reality.

At the lowest layer of which we know at present, we deal with the world of the nuclear physicists, a realm made up of electrons, protons,

neutrons, and various kinds of small nuclear particles called quarks, gluons, neutrinos, muons, and so on.

At the next major level up, we encounter the world of the chemists. In principle, when a chemist mixes a solution of sodium chloride with a solution of silver nitrate, and a white precipitate of insoluble silver chloride falls to the bottom, a physicist could describe the entire process mathematically in terms of the interactions of all the electrons and atomic nuclei involved. These two layers are therefore related by *interdependence*, where one causal system can be reduced to another, more general and elementary one. But what the chemists study is real, and in practice, chemists spend most of their time learning about the behavior of molecules (where each molecule is an often fairly large assemblage of atoms and subatomic particles) without going into great detail on the behavior of all of the subatomic particles.

It should also be said — and this is extremely important — that no one can in fact work out what happens when a large beaker containing a solution of sodium chloride is mixed with the contents of a large beaker containing a solution of silver nitrate, by using physics to calculate the changing positions of every electron in those two solutions. This is not just because of the vast amount of data that would have to be assembled — far more than the largest present-day computer could contain and process — but due to the fact that physics has never truly solved the three-body problem, let alone the problem of setting up equations which could calculate the movements of (let us say) 6.023×10^{23} electrons simultaneously, which is the rough order of magnitude where chemists perform most of their experiments. Chemistry is not only a field of science which is separate from the

study of physics, it has to be studied in and of itself. And it deals with real things, which actually happen.

The next layer is the one studied by biologists and physicians. Various kinds of cells and bodily fluids are made up of chemicals, and biological processes are made up of chemical changes and changing electrical potentials, so that biology is related to the two lower layers (chemistry and physics) by *interdependence*. In principle, all biological processes could be reduced to the more general and elementary levels described by the chemists and physicists. But again, biology and medicine form their own separate fields of study, and physicists and chemists are not able, simply on the basis of their knowledge of their own fields, to explain the hormone system of the trout or the proper medication to use for lowering blood cholesterol level in human beings. If I need my appendix removed or have a broken leg, do not send me to a nuclear physicist!

The fourth major layer is the one studied by the social scientists: psychologists, sociologists, economists, and political scientists. These also are real scientific fields, where researchers gather objective data and formulate verifiable theories. They are also talking about things that are completely real. There is nothing imaginary or subjective about people who are afflicted with schizophrenia or with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Human societies are made up of real, flesh-and-blood human beings who engage in totally real processes, involving the trading and bartering of material goods, struggles for power over other people, making group decisions, and so on. And political entities like the United States, Sweden, Brazil, the state of Indiana or California, the city of Chicago or Paris, and so on, are all perfectly real entities.

Some scholars argue that the social sciences are totally *interdependent* on the lower layers (biology, chemistry, and physics). This is however less obvious than the completely interdependent relationship between the three lower levels. Some of the factors involved in the study of the social scientists may also be linked to the lower layers by *correspondence* instead, about which we will explain in the next section. This is not the place however to engage in that particular debate, which often deeply divides scholars in those fields, particularly in the study of psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy.

The topmost major layers are formed by the realm of mathematics, logic, and *meaning*. It is here that we encounter not only the truths of mathematics and the basic principles of logical thinking, but also spirituality, the realm of goals and values, human individuality, and the purely personal dimension, along with certain important philosophical concepts. This level is related to the lower levels by *correspondence* rather than interdependence.

The layers of analysis in the mind's investigation of reality

1. Meaning and value (at the highest level)
2. Logic
3. Mathematics
4. Social sciences
5. Biology
6. Chemistry
7. Physics (at the most basic level)

Jean Piaget: correspondence vs. interdependence

When making the distinction between correspondence and interdependence, I am using the technical vocabulary of Jean Piaget (1896-1980).¹ This brilliant experimenter and observer was famous as a learning psychologist who discovered many valuable things about early childhood cognitive development, but he was also one of the most skilled philosophers of the twentieth century, who developed what is sometimes called a constructivist theory of knowledge. Insofar as one of the themes of this book is a sort of *contra Kantum* (an attempt to undo and redo Kant's philosophy in order to make theology possible again), Piaget is especially important because he investigated all of the major Kantian philosophical principles, not by sitting in an arm chair and musing upon them, but by actually observing babies and children to see how they actually gained their knowledge about the world.

Piaget pointed out that physics is related to chemistry by *interdependence*, but logic/mathematics is related to physics/chemistry by *correspondence*. One can set up a series of logical statements and mathematical equations which are *isomorphic* to a particular experimental situation in physics or chemistry, but one cannot derive the laws of physics or the research findings of the chemists from a study of pure mathematical logic alone. Physics and chemistry therefore cannot be *reduced to* the study of logic and mathematics.

The dangers of reductionistic systems

Most of the atheistic systems of the modern period are, at their base, illegitimate exercises in reductionism. Karl Marx tried to reduce all other knowledge to economic theory and Sigmund Freud tried to reduce all other knowledge to psychological theory, while others tried to reduce all other knowledge to the study of nuclear physics or genetics. Each group of partisans tried to claim that all other claims to genuine knowledge were illusory, for “if you study our field, we can give you the *real* answers to why everything in the universe happens.” There is an extraordinary kind of arrogance among reductionists of that sort! And it always turns out to be, at heart, the arrogance of the fool.

Even in the case of two fields which are related by *interdependence* (like physics and chemistry), there is no way that universities can dispense with having departments of chemistry as well as departments of physics. There is no way that even the most brilliant university students can, on the basis of ten or twelve courses in physics, “work out for themselves” the chemistry of compounds based on the benzene ring, or synthesize chemicals that will serve as diuretics for treating problems like high blood pressure and glaucoma. The knowledge that one is taught in university chemistry courses is *also* valid knowledge.

And this is even more the case, when we are discussing two fields which are related only by *correspondence*. Physics cannot be reduced to the study of logic. The laws of physics cannot be derived by a process of deduction from the basic principles of logic. The concept of “mass” can be fit into a logical system, but it is not itself one of the

principles of logic. Likewise, the concept of “kinetic energy” can be worked logically into the theoretical structures of mathematical physics, but the concept of kinetic energy plays no role in the theory and philosophy of logic, studied in and of itself.

In the same way, the word “love” refers to a valid and completely meaningful concept when we are talking within the realms of meaning, value, human relationships, and human motivation. These are the layers of reality “up at the top” of our list of layers. These realms are related by correspondence to, not interdependence on, the lower levels of reality, such as physics, chemistry, biology, economics, and (at least in part) sociology and psychology. The idea of love cannot be “explained away” by trying to reduce it to a statement in Marxist economic theory, or Freudian psychological theory, or the biochemistry of genetic change, or — in particular — a statement within nuclear physics about interactions among subnuclear particles.

So the concept of love has to be taken seriously. It refers to something real. It cannot be mechanically reduced to something simpler down at one of the lower levels of reality, although actions taken out of love may sometimes be in either tight or loose correspondence with processes going on at one of the lower levels. Love (at the higher level) may sometimes be in close correspondence with the biological processes, for example, which produce sexual activity and the propagation of children. Love at the higher level may sometimes be in positive and helpful correspondence with the sociological structures that keep a particular society running smoothly. But that is totally different from saying that love can be reduced to a set of mechanical biological urges and sociological forces.

Double determination and multiple determination

Sigmund Freud made the interesting discovery that human beings almost never make a decision to take any significant action on the basis of one reason alone. They almost always have at least two reasons for acting, one conscious and one subconscious. He referred to this as “double determination.” Actually the term multiple determination would be more accurate, because even in classical Freudian theory, what keeps a neurosis being played out over and over in a person’s mind, or makes a destructive psychological game work so effectively, is a set of payoffs at several different levels.

The psychiatrist Eric Berne wrote a fascinating book in 1964 called *Games People Play*, in which he described a number of common psychological con games that people play on one another.² They were con games, in that the game-player was saying one kind of thing (and acting one way) on the surface, while in reality setting up the victim to be taken advantage of, as soon as the victim had been thoroughly seduced into playing the game. The archetypal example, Berne said, was the old traditional kind of con game played along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers in the nineteenth century by professional river boat gamblers. The con man would get into a poker game with strangers, and would pretend to be very bad at playing cards. He would spot his victim, called the mark, and then lose relatively small hands to that person repeatedly, until the mark believed (falsely) that he had found a really stupid person whom he could take advantage of. Finally, on a hand in which the professional gambler had his winning

cards well hidden, he would push the mark into betting an extraordinarily large amount of money. Then he would turn over his cards, show his real hand, and smilingly scoop all the mark's money off the table.

Berne gave amusing colloquial names to a number of standard psychological games which human beings played on one another — Let's You and Him Fight, See What You Made Me Do, Wooden Leg, Peasant, I'm Only Trying to Help You, and so on — and his book became a great popular success. One of my friends, a good clinical psychologist, said he found these humorous names to be very useful however, for example, in teaching people to be union arbitrators, and in a number of other contexts, because they were not only easy to remember, they really did express the fundamental nature of the con game being played, in a way that was far clearer than a lot of the more traditional psychological terminology.

However, Berne was more than capable of describing each of these psychological games in classical Freudian technical language, and it is by looking at the more technical analysis that we can see the intricacy of each of these games, and some of the true complexity of the multiple factors and layers which are involved in real human decision making. Let us take one common psychological game as an example, one which Berne called Look How Hard I've Tried.³ This is a con game of course, because although the ones who are playing this game are trying to appear on the surface as compliant, cooperative, and doing their best to make things work — saying to their victims over and over again, in one form or another, “Look how hard I'm trying” — in reality they are working underneath as hard as they can to completely sabotage any possible chance of success.

A husband and wife come for marriage counseling, for example, and the wife (let us say) tries to give the surface appearance, during the counseling sessions, of being cooperative with the therapist, and she talks continually about how much she wants to make the marriage work. But once they are back at home, she continues to do all of the things which she knows are driving her husband to desperation. Or she stops doing X (which the counselor has called her hand on) and shifts instead to doing Y (which she knows puts her helpless husband in an equally nasty double bind). After a suitable number of counseling sessions, she can then file for divorce, saying triumphantly, “Look how hard I tried.”

Children will sometimes play this game on their parents, where the parents ask the child to do X, and the children put up a big show of attempting to carry out the task, while in fact making sure that it is going to be bungled, or that it will take so long that the parents will finally step in and do it for them, or something else of that sort.

Berne, in his book, analyzed this game in more detail for us so that we could see more clearly all of the complex factors involved in this psychological game:

The real aim of the game: Vindication.

The real thesis being maintained by the game-player:

They can't push me around.

Internal psychological advantage: freedom from guilt for aggression.

External psychological advantage: evades external responsibilities towards others.

Internal and external social advantage: being able to say triumphantly, “Look how hard I’ve tried,” and appear vindicated in the eyes of the world.

Biological advantage: opportunity to engage in belligerent exchanges, grow red in the face, scream, cry, and so on.

Existential advantage: being able to play either “helpless” or “blameless” (depending on how the game is played) and thereby avoid falling into one or another specific type of existential anxiety.

The role of multiple determination in other kinds of human decision making

The concept of multiple determination has a far broader application however than Freud ever dreamed of. In terms of the levels of reality of which we are speaking here, human beings evaluate their options, when they are making decisions, with the aim of discovering solutions which will maximize the positive payoffs and satisfactions at as many different levels of reality as possible. At a trivial level, for example, a man needs to eat food for the sake of his biological survival. But there are many different things that he can eat, and places to go where he can eat them, which will all satisfy that basic need. Which of these will give him the most additional payoffs and satisfactions? Perhaps he decides to go to a fancy restaurant with his wife for dinner. That satisfies the basic need — something to eat simply for his biological survival — but it will also serve other purposes. It will also do things such as contribute positively to

bonding with his wife, perhaps, and demonstrate his status in society, along with being able to experience the aesthetic enjoyments of food that tastes extremely good. It could also be a way of assuaging subconscious guilt feelings over various childhood issues, and so on and so forth.

To say that “he made the decision for such-and-such a reason” at one level, does not at all mean that he did not make the very same decision for an additional reason at one of the other levels. Both of those reasons for making that decision were equally real.

A couple buying a house will make the decision to purchase a particular property on the basis of a number of criteria: price, size, style, neighborhood, travel time to work, schools (if they have school-aged children) and so on. The house they actually select will be the best compromise candidate. Each factor which they weighed in their minds before making that decision would have been a genuine influence. Price would have to have been considered, and size would have to have been considered too. But I do not believe that anyone ever buys a house on the grounds of one single factor alone.

A place where thinkers get into trouble every time, is when they start writing books based on some theory that all important human decisions are based on one and only one determinative factor. One author tries to argue that all human decisions can be explained in terms of a particular economic theory, while another tries to argue instead that all these decisions are based on a single psychological need, and so on and so forth. That involves a kind of naive psychological reductionism which is totally false to the complexity of real human decision making. And yet the libraries are full of books written by “one theory” political thinkers, sociologists, psychologists,

economists, philosophers, and theologians! All you can do is shake your head in dismay at the silliness of it.

Plato's theory of love

With all these things in mind, then, let us explore the way in which love functions as a real force — a real energy — at some of the higher levels of reality. Anyone who wishes to explore this topic seriously needs to begin by reading Plato, particularly the part of the *Symposium* where Socrates gave his discourse on the nature of love (although valuable information about the topic of love comes up in others of Plato's dialogues also).

When human beings first start feeling love towards other things, Plato notes that it is particular material things that they love. The Greek word he used for love was *Erôs*. I love another human being because of that particular man or woman's body. I love a particular horse, and delight in riding it around the countryside.

Just as Freud was to note again many centuries later, there was also often a strong psychosexual component in this most primitive kind of love. We need to remember at all times, that just as the Romans spoke of the goddess Venus and her son Cupid (the Latin word for "desire"), so the ancient Greeks spoke of the goddess Aphrodite (the personification of the numinous quality of sexual desire, as it appeared in both humans and animals) and her son Eros. The Greek word Eros, Plato's word for love, means — 95% to 98% of the time in ancient Greek texts — simply the power of raw sexual lust.

But we could learn, Plato said, about higher levels of reality and higher kinds of love. As a beginning, we could learn to appreciate the

beauty of material things in general. Instead of loving just one particular horse, I could learn how to go to a horse race and admire the beauty and goodness of all the swift and powerful horses on the field. I could learn to admire natural beauty in general — the beauty of the purple mountains and the rolling prairies, the wildflowers and the trees, the deer browsing in the undergrowth and the birds flying overhead.

The major breakthrough however, in Plato's theory of love, came when I first began to recognize the beauty and goodness of some particular field of skill and knowledge, and "fell in love with it." Plato was one of the truly great philosophers of education, of *paideia* as the Greeks called it. No one learns any art or craft truly well, no one learns any field of knowledge with impressive expertise, until that person first falls in love with it. No one becomes a truly brilliant violinist who did not, as a child, first fall in love with the violin — and that had to take place before the child was able to do anything but squeak and scratch on the instrument. No one becomes a world class football player who does not love playing football with an overpowering zeal. You are not going to do all the hard practice that is necessary unless you love it so much that your love will overcome your normal desire to avoid the long and sometimes painful hours of effort.

The same thing applies to being a good scientist. People who become truly outstanding physicists *love* the study of physics with a deep passion. They live for it, and devote their lives to it. Why? Because they regard it as good and, yes, *beautiful* — because they admire not just its usefulness, but also the pure elegance of the

mathematical equations and brilliant explanations which it gives of the “why” of natural processes.

The next stage in our growth, Plato said, came when we learned how to love learning new things simply for the sake of learning itself. We fell in love with the creative process itself, and learned to feel a rich and deep joy at making new discoveries and devising new inventions and developing novel and better ways of understanding things and doing things.

I spent most of my adult life teaching at Indiana University, at the South Bend campus. During the early years in particular (the 1970’s and early 1980’s) a good many of the students were so-called nontraditional students. Most of these were the sons and daughters of factory workers and skilled craftsmen, where no one in their family had ever gone to university before. Instead of going to university right after they graduated from high school at age eighteen, they went out and got jobs just like their parents had done. But at some point in their twenties or thirties, they would decide to see if they could earn a college degree. These were such marvelous students, because they were coming to classes, not because their parents were forcing them to do it, or to avoid having to go out and get a job, but because they had developed a real thirst for learning. They were far brighter and more capable than most of the eighteen-year-olds, because of their fierce *love* for what they were doing.

Now the subjects I taught (such as ancient Greek and Roman history) were not normally regarded as interesting by Americans of that era. In fact, most Americans of that time would have regarded the study of ancient history as one of the most deadly boring things they could ever imagine. So I understood that my first task, when I began a

new course each semester, was *to make the students fall in love with the subject*. If I could awaken that passion — that desire to know, and know more, built upon a sheer delight in the kind of things that were being learnt — then the students would do prodigious amounts of work, and rise to enormous levels of creativity and insight. I must have been fairly successful at that: the word out among the student body was that my courses involved three times as much work as any other courses taught at that campus, and yet my classes were always full. Other professors would attend one of my lectures on occasion and come away saying, “But you’re not teaching at the level of an undergraduate course, you’re teaching the kind of material that only comes up in advanced graduate courses although I will admit that they were nodding their heads at all the right times, and seemed to be understanding everything you were saying.” And I would shrug, because what the students were writing on their exams showed that they were in fact understanding what I had been lecturing on. It was the power of love at work, which could empower people to do extraordinary things. If anything unusual was being accomplished, it was because my love for the subject was kindling a similar love for the subject in the students.

Intelligence and love

In the study of the evolution of species, it is clear that developing greater intelligence can confer certain kinds of evolutionary advantage. Let us not (as human beings) arrogantly speak as though intelligence was the only thing that could be useful. Sharper teeth or longer claws can sometimes also convey an evolutionary advantage, or

simply the extraordinary survivability of cockroaches, which have been around almost since the first living creatures crawled out onto dry land. Nevertheless, fish are more intelligent than flatworms. Mammals (even small mammals like mice) are much more intelligent than reptiles. Chimpanzees and gorillas are more intelligent than mice or dogs or cats or horses. Human beings are more intelligent than chimpanzees and gorillas. It seems to be one way of sometimes improving your chances of surviving and having offspring.

Nevertheless, the standard biology textbooks used in schools and colleges, during all my lifetime, were very poorly and misleadingly written on the topic of the evolution of species, because although they acknowledged that having greater intelligence and intellectual ability could convey an evolutionary advantage in many kinds of environment, they invariably treated intelligence as only a tool for manipulating and controlling the environment. “Your teeth are longer and sharper than mine, Mr. Tiger, but I can still beat you, because I can use my human intelligence to trick you and fool you and take advantage of you, and thereby kill you before you can kill me.” That is a rather grim view of reality, to say the least!

What the biology textbooks totally fail to note, is that greater intelligence can also (in addition) convey a greater ability to love. I have known people who kept pet reptiles (snakes or iguanas or something like that), and although reptiles will sometimes become used to you, where they come to regard you as something harmless (and warm to the touch) which is a regular source of food, and lie peacefully on your arm or coil themselves around your body, it would take a real stretch of the imagination to call this love. On the other hand, cats and horses and dogs, which are mammals, and are far more

intelligent, are in fact capable of showing real love. This is particularly so in the case of dogs. The biological reductionists who are reading this book will immediately at this point begin angrily rejecting my statement, snorting and saying, “It’s nothing more than the herd instinct, the pack instinct.” But remember what we discussed two sections back — in the section on double determination and multiple determination — sometimes things are both/and instead of either/or. When dogs live in the same houses with human beings, we can indeed see the dogs interpreting numerous things in terms of the hierarchies of the pack. But when one particular human being and one particular dog become really close — and this may even be true more for some dogs than for others — there is a real mutual love that goes far beyond any mere “pack instinct.”

Art and creativity

The kind of ability to love which comes with higher intelligence is not necessarily directed towards narrow physical survival in the immediate sense. The higher levels of love involve an ability to appreciate pure beauty and goodness in general, simply for the sake of the joy that is felt.

Chimpanzees have sometimes been observed beating on logs with sticks and jumping around. The observers who recorded those findings believed that this was, in a certain sense, a kind of primitive form of music and dance. Whether that is so or not, it is only human beings who are — because of their intellectual ability — able to devise and perform truly complex pieces of music, and dancing involving intricate choreography.

When chimpanzees are given paper and crayons, on rare occasions one of them will draw a primitive mandala: a crude circle with an X drawn inside it. This is the first complex figure which a small human child will learn how to draw, but human children rapidly advance beyond that point. The circle becomes a human head, with stick-like arms and legs attached directly to the head. And so on, developing more and more complexity and skill with time.

None of the ancestors of modern human beings left any surviving decorative arts. Even the Neanderthals, who were so close to modern human beings, have left no remains with any kind of decorative art. But the earliest true human beings of whom we know, were from the beginning drawing extraordinarily beautiful cave paintings and carving delicate little statuettes. The minute pottery was invented, human beings began decorating each piece of pottery with artistic designs.

This is one of the two major things which distinguishes true human remains from the remains of any of the other hominids who formed their ancestors and cousins: the presence of decorative art, done for the sheer love of its beauty. The other major distinguishing factor is the presence of creativity and the desire for continual novelty. Even the Neanderthals, having once worked out how to chip a particular kind of flint tool, would use exactly the same design for thousands of years. In the case of true human beings however, no one was ever happy chipping an ax head or knife in exactly the same way for more than a few decades. True human beings want continual novelty and innovation. Sometimes the new product is better (in the sense of working better for its established purpose), but most of the time it is simply different. Once human beings learned how to make

pottery, one can see the shapes and decorations changing every few decades. Change just for the sake of something new and different, which in and of itself gives human beings joy. In the modern world, we can see this same need for continual creativity and novelty affecting clothing styles, popular slang, and everything else in everyday life.

The love for art and music, creativity and novelty, is the great distinguishing feature of truly human intelligence. This is why I find it so dismaying when biological reductionists and other kinds of reductionists try to “explain away” our human love for art and music, and the joy we feel at creativity and novelty. These reductionists like to think that their approach is “more scientific,” when in fact they are undermining and trying to destroy the very heart of human intelligence. If it were in fact possible to have a human world without art or music or literature (which I doubt would in fact be possible, for most human beings would refuse to put up with that), we would ultimately produce a human world without any real scientific or technological creativity either.

Agapê love for other human beings

In the third to first centuries B.C., Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek. On many occasions in that work, which was called the Septuagint, these rabbis used an obscure classical Greek verb *agapaô* to translate the common Hebrew word for love. Early Christianity picked up on this and coined a new Greek word from this root, the noun *agapê*, to describe a kind of love — loving other human beings in the sense of showing them kindness and mercy, and doing

concrete helpful things for other people who were in need — which the ancient pagan world never truly talked about fully in their discussions on the nature of love.

The best of the ancient pagan Greek authors were aware to some degree of a kind of love for other human beings which was non-sexual, non-materialistic, and non-possessive. Plato, for example, at one point spoke of a higher Eros, a divine power of love which served as an intermediary between human beings and God. We could speak to God and God could speak to us through this higher love. And Plato also described a kind of love between two human beings which was based on an admiration of the inner spiritual qualities of the other person, and of a responsibility which human beings had toward the other members of the human community in which they lived. The ancient pagan Stoics touched on one aspect of this kind of loving care for our fellow human beings when they discussed the subject of duty. And going even beyond this, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus displayed in his *Discourses*, in the story of the man whose little daughter was dying, a deep knowledge of what the truly loving treatment of other human beings would require us to do. But the pagan Greek world never fully developed an understanding of the kind of love which Jews and Christians referred to by the words *agapaô* and *agapê*.

Agape love is close to being a unique part of human experience — something that can only be understood by creatures possessing a human level of intelligence, because it requires a level of abstraction and the ability to look on other human beings “from the outside,” where we ignore our own selfish interests and desires and attempt to see what these other human beings need in and for themselves. A chimpanzee living in the jungles is not often apt to receive any kind of

Agape love from his or her fellow chimpanzees, nor will a wolf living in the wild be very apt to receive a great deal of Agape love from the other members of the pack. Chimpanzees and wolves tend to be very ruthless in most of those kinds of situations.

In the atheistic reductionistic philosophies of the past century and a half, there has often tended to be a naive glorification of a return to the ruthlessness of the wolf pack, with the presupposition somehow that the human race would increase its own chances of evolutionary survival by cultivating ruthlessness and heartless savagery. The problem is, that is not what has actually happened over the course of evolution. Alligators are models of blind ruthlessness and savagery, but they are also not very intelligent. Wolves are more intelligent than alligators, and also kinder creatures — talk to people who have kept wolves as household pets if you do not believe me. Human beings, who are capable of functioning at an intellectual ability far surpassing any other creatures presently living on this planet, are the ones who have done the most (at least among the best and wisest human beings) to cultivate the ability to show Agape love. That is because truly showing Agape love requires the ability to perceive other human beings as complex and multidimensional beings, with complicated emotions and feelings, and goals and plans which may be quite different from our own.

The more intelligent and wiser a human being is, for the most part, the better able that person will be at showing the deepest and best kind of Agape love. I am talking about real thinking ability and understanding here, which does not necessarily mean the same as book learning and university degrees. But real intelligence and Agape love go hand in hand. They have to be both/and, not either/or.

The ground of being as the creator of love and the possibility of love

When we talked about the ground of being as the Energetikos, we began by showing how this transcendent ground was necessarily the source of all of the mass-energy in the observable universe. This was adequate for making sense out of the universe at its lower levels, where physics and chemistry and the other natural sciences dealt with the world.

At the highest level of reality however — the level of meaning and value — we meet a different kind of energy, the power of love. This highest level is in *correspondence* with the lower physical and biological levels, but is not *interdependent* with those lower levels. That is, we cannot reduce and totally explain away

(1) Agape love and love for obtaining compassion and justice for all human beings,

(2) the love of art, music, literature, theater, the dance, architecture, interior design, landscaping, the development of parklands and nature preserves, and so on,

(3) and also the love of scientific knowledge and the scientist's delight in creativity and discovery,

by trying to portray love as the blind movement of subatomic particles and biochemical processes *and nothing more*. If love were not a real

force and a real power, all those generations of scientists would never have devoted their lives to discovering these subatomic particles and biochemical processes.

We must therefore regard the ground of being as the creator of love and the possibility of love in the rest of the universe. This too is part of what we are talking about when we speak of the ground, at its third level or hypostasis, as being the Energetikos, *that which gives energy and vitality and the power to be creative and do productive work* to everything else which exists.

The third hypostasis as the divine love itself

When we are speaking of the kind of energy which appears in the formulas of the physicists (like Einstein's famous $E = mc^2$ equation), we know that this kind of physical energy cannot be part of the ground of being. Because otherwise, the ground of being would be subject to the second law of thermodynamics, the principle of entropy, and would have long ago run out of usable energy, at some time back in an infinite past. This present universe could never have been created in the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago, because the ground of being would already have been dead at an infinite time before that. Therefore, to avoid confusion, we have been careful to call the third hypostasis *not* Energeia, the divine energy itself, but the Energetikos, the source and creator of mass-energy in Einstein's sense.

But when we begin speaking of love as a kind of energy (operating at the highest level of reality, at the level of meaning and value) we have a different kind of situation. Love is not subject to the laws of thermodynamics. If I have a supply of physical energy (say a

box containing one hundred flashlight batteries, or a drum containing fifty gallons of gasoline) and I begin giving this away to other people and letting them use it, eventually all my supply of energy will run out. But love is a kind of energy where I have to give it away to keep it! If I give my love to other people, projects, and things in the right kind of way, I will find that my own inner supply of love will in fact grow larger and stronger.

And there is an additional truth, spoken with great clarity in the First Letter of John in the New Testament (4:10 and 19):

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us.

We love because he first loved us.

The only way to teach someone else to love, is to love that person oneself. Parents teach their children to love by loving their children. Teachers teach their students to love physics by loving physics themselves, and by loving and caring enough for their students to patiently teach them how to love physics too (or playing the violin or basketball or mathematics or what have you).

How could God create a universe in which some of his creatures were able to love with a truly deep and powerful love, unless God too felt love, and could show love to his creatures in innumerable kinds of ways? As it also says in the First Letter of John (4:7-8),

Love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for *God is love*.

It was St. Augustine, at the end of the Late Roman period, who first identified Plato's higher Eros (the divine power of the love which connects us to God) with the third divine hypostasis. Love is part of the godhead itself, Augustine said, the creative power which gives life and motion and continued being to everything else in the universe. That was one of his most important contributions to western theology.

A thousand years later, at the beginning of the Renaissance, the Italian poet Dante was still teaching that same great traditional truth. In his vision of God at the end of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante described in poetic imagery the three hypostases which make up the ground of being, the eternal Godhead:⁴

In the profound and clear subsistence
Of that lofty light appeared to me three circles,
Of three colors but enclosing the same area:

The second from the first appeared reflected,
Like rainbow from rainbow, while the third seemed fire
Breathed back and forth by the other two.

The holy fire which was the third hypostasis, the divine Love, was not only the power leaping back and forth within the godhead itself, but also shone forth its light and heat and energized all the rest of the universe — the sun, the stars, and likewise Dante's own mind and heart, which was suddenly given a new energy and power to go back into the world and deal with life on life's terms:

*Ma già volgeva il mio disio e'l velle,
sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.*

But already it turned my desire and
my freely given will,
like a wheel evenly put in motion:
the Love which moves the sun and other stars.

For Dante had begun writing the *Divine Comedy* at a time in his life when he was plunged into enormous bitterness and despair. Because of internal political machinations in Florence, he had been exiled from his native city-state for no fault of his own, and was forced to wander around Italy in exile for the remainder of his life (his tomb is located in Ravenna, on the other side of the Italian peninsula up in the north, far from his beloved home). The *Divine Comedy* was the symbolic three-part tale of his own descent into a hell of anger and resentment and bitterness (in the first part, the *Inferno*), his painful recovery through working stepwise on the Seven Deadly Sins as they had permeated his own soul (in the middle part, the *Purgatorio*), and his final triumphal return (in the last part, the *Paradiso*) to the light of God's love.

Likewise let us remember that St. Augustine was writing at the time when the German barbarians were invading the western half of the Roman empire and destroying civilization as he knew it. All of western Europe was already plunging into the long Dark Ages by the end of his life. As he lay on his deathbed, the little Roman city in which he lived was under siege by one of these savage tribes, and eventually fell into their hands. The foundation stones of the church where he presided as bishop can still be seen lying in the sands of the North African desert, but that is about all that remains of Augustine's world.

When Augustine and Dante wrote about the saving power which a loving and compassionate God gives to our souls, they most certainly did not mean that believing the right things and murmuring the right religious phrases would guarantee us that nothing bad would ever happen to us, nor did they think that we could necessarily keep bad things from happening in the world around us just by having faith in a loving personal God.

In my own reading, it has seemed to me that God always loved the real fighters, the people who did not give up when the going got tough: Paul Tillich confronting the Nazis, John Wesley riding horseback on dirt roads thousands of miles a year through every kind of weather and facing down angry English mobs, David the great king, the Israelite war leader Deborah, the prophets Elijah and Elisha, the Apostle Paul being beaten up over and over again but continuing to go from town to town preaching the gospel, the emperor Constantine attacking the armies of the idol-worshipers and bringing an end to the Great Persecution.

What God's love gives us is the restoration of our own ability to love, the renewal of our courage so that we can jump once more into the struggle and fight the good fight, and the restoration of our ability to be aware of all the goodness and beauty and love which still surrounds us. There is more goodness than evil in the universe. Our job as human beings is to help keep it that way (starting with our own personal behavior). To return once more to the First Letter of John,

In this we may have boldness on the day of judgment.
Perfect love casts out fear.

God as the Great Ocean of Love

For myself, one of the most memorable ways I have ever run across for talking about the divine Love was a phrase I ran across in one of the writings of John Wesley, the eighteenth-century theologian who was one of the founders of the modern evangelical movement. Wesley spoke of God as “the Great Ocean of Love” in which we lived and moved and had our being.

We may think of an enormous energy field of love spreading over the entire universe and beyond. As an individual human, the higher part of my being (the part that loves) is like a tiny subcurrent or rivulet within the sweeping larger currents of this huge ocean of love, deriving all of its power and motion from its inclusion within the ceaselessly flowing divine love. If I try to separate myself from this surrounding field of infinite and eternal love — Dante’s *amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle*, the “love which moves the sun and all the other stars” — my own power to love will begin to ebb and die away.

But when I allow myself to just sit quietly and feel the presence of this great ocean of love surrounding me on all sides, and allow myself to feel its mighty power running through my own being, I will find myself being restored and renewed.

Discovering a personal God

Is this a philosophical proof that the ground of being is a personal God? I would prefer to describe it as a set of good reasons why belief in a personal God of a certain sort would make good philosophical

sense as part of a rich and coherent view of reality. Or perhaps one could regard this chapter as a set of suggestions about ways we could conduct our own private experiments in thinking and acting. When I think and act this way over an extended period of time, and then consider my life from a pragmatic or existential level, has my life gotten better or worse? Have I coped better with my problems and had some triumphs over shortcomings that used to have a very destructive effect on my life? Or has my life instead fallen into greater and greater resentment and self-pity and anxiety and fear?

American philosophers traditionally have called this the pragmatic test. European philosophers would call it an existential test. This is the only way that I know, however, for deciding whether (and how far) one wishes to conceive of God as personal.

The friends of God and the spiritual marriage

The Protestant theologian John Wesley in the eighteenth century said that one of the principal goals of the spiritual life was to become one of the friends of God, like Moses, who used to talk with God every day “as a man talks with his friend.”⁵ Some of the early Christians during the patristic period, like Eusebius of Caesarea in the fourth century A.D.,⁶ had portrayed “the friends of God” in the Old Testament as the greatest exemplars of the true spiritual life, and I believe that this was where Wesley (an excellent patristics scholar) came upon that motif.

In her book *The Interior Castle*,⁷ St. Teresa of Avila in the sixteenth century described the last and highest stage in the development of the spiritual life as what she called “the spiritual marriage.” I believe that she and John Wesley were talking about very much the same kind of thing, for as I read St. Teresa’s description, I get the impression that she is not talking in this context about the passions and ecstasies of a young, newly-married couple going on their honeymoon. She talks about ecstasies and raptures of emotion aplenty in that book, but always in the context of the early middle stages of the spiritual life — at a point when the spiritual seeker has first begun to have some firsthand experience with the power of God’s grace, but at a stage where the seeker has not yet begun the slow assimilation of a deeper wisdom. But growth in the spiritual life was spoken of by St. Teresa as a long process, in which she described the consciousness progressively exploring the various parts of its own soul, as though the human soul were a castle composed of seven interior courts or chambers or “Mansions.”

Teresa’s spiritual marriage comes in the Seventh Mansion, after years of continuous prayer and devotion and growth, and so seems to me to be a metaphor reflecting the everyday experience of an old married couple who love one another deeply. The wife is perhaps working at something on the kitchen counter, while the husband is sitting at the kitchen table quietly doing something else. And they are filled with a deep peace and happiness, just at being quietly together in one another’s warm and reassuring presence. They do not have to chatter to one another continually, but when they do speak, they understand one another instantly and intuitively. Each one knows that he or she can depend on the other one absolutely.⁸

It is important to remember, that when we speak about discovering a personal God by learning how to immerse ourselves in the Great Ocean of Love which fills the entire cosmos, we are not necessarily talking about experiencing enormous religious ecstasies. This is a standard beginner's error. But an important and crucial part of the spiritual life means learning eventually that God simply wants to be friends with me, and then deciding on my side that I want to be friends with him. I am not sure anyone has said it more beautifully or evocatively than Richmond Walker (a recovered alcoholic from Boston who was one of the two most important spiritual authors in the twelve step program) in the reading for February 6 in the little book of meditations Rich wrote in 1948, entitled *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*:

God finds, amid the crowd,
 a few people who follow Him,
just to be near Him,
 just to dwell in His presence.
A longing in the Eternal Heart
 may be satisfied by these few people.
I will let God know that I seek
 just to dwell in His presence,
to be near Him, not so much for teaching
 or a message, as just for Him.
It may be that the longing of the human heart
 to be loved for itself
is something caught from the
 great Divine Heart.

NOTES

1. Flavell, *Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget*, 260.
2. Eric Berne, M.D., *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships: The Basic Handbook of Transactional Analysis* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964).
3. Ibid., 105-108.
4. My translation, from the Italian text in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Canto 33, lines 115-120.
5. Exodus 33:11.
6. Chesnut, *First Christian Histories*.
7. Teresa of Ávila, *Interior Castle*.
8. Now Teresa here makes an interesting contrast to Dante. Teresa's seven mansions were clearly intended to refer to the medieval concept of the seven heavens which surrounded the earth. And in the medieval picture of the world, as it was portrayed in Dante's *Paradiso*, the seventh heaven, which was the sphere of the planet Saturn, was the level closest to Heaven and therefore closest to God, the level where the souls of the great contemplative mystics dwelt. For both Teresa and Dante, the seventh sphere or region referred to the level where the highest and most important kind of human contact with God took place. For Dante, this was an ecstatic vision of overwhelming light, but for Teresa (if my interpretation is correct), it was instead a warm and reassuring awareness that I am being held in God's arms and am living in God's immediate presence at all times and places.

Or to put it another way, I do not believe that Bernini's famous seventeenth-century sculpture, *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, which stands in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, is a very good interpretation of

the spiritual marriage, certainly at its most important level. Let us remember that Bernini was not a saint, but a very romantic and sensual Italian artist. Observe, for example, the way in which Pluto's fingers sink lasciviously into the soft buttocks of Proserpina in another of Bernini's famous sculptures, *The Rape of Proserpina*. That is the way Bernini looked at the world. St. Teresa on the other hand indeed had some extraordinary ecstatic experiences during the course of her spiritual life, but this was not what the concept of the spiritual marriage was referring to (or certainly not primarily).

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