PURE LOVE

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ABSTRACT

The place of self-concern in Christian love is studied, beginning with Fénelon's extreme claim that in perfect love for God one would desire nothing for its own sake except that God's will be done. This view is criticized. A distinction is made between self-interest (desire for one's own good for its own sake) and other sorts of self-concern; and it is argued that self-concern has an important role in the Christian virtues, but that self-interest has a less important role than other sorts of self-concern. Finally, it is argued that *Eros* and *Agape* are not opposites, but *Agape* includes a certain sort of *Eros*.

In a standard handbook of teachings of the Roman Catholic Church we find the statement,

> There is a habitual state of love for God, which is pure charity without admixture of the motive of self-interest. Neither fear of punishments nor desire of rewards have any more part in it. God is no longer loved for the sake of the merit, nor for the sake of the perfection, nor for the sake of the happiness to be found in loving Him. (Denzinger, 1911: par. 1327)

This is not a surprising proposition to find in a compendium of Christian beliefs. The surprising thing is that it is not there to be endorsed, but to be condemned as "rash, scandalous, bad sounding, offensive to pious ears, pernicious in practice," or "even . . . erroneous." It is a fairly accurate quotation from Fénelon's *Explanation of the Maxims of the Saints Concerning the Interior Life*,[1] and is the first of the propositions from that book that

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were condemned by Pope Innocent XII in 1699 in the denouement of the famous dispute between Fénelon and Bossuet.

It is not my purpose here to tell the story, or sift through all the rights and wrongs, of that aftershock of the Quietist controversy. Fénelon attracts my attention because he articulated an extreme form of an ideal of disinterested love which has been attractive to Christians in many times and places. Ideals, like metals, reveal some of their properties most clearly when stretched or pressed; and I believe that reflection on Fénelon's views will shed light on the relations between love and various sorts of self-concern.

I. *Holy Indifference*

Fénelon distinguishes three basic types of love for God.

(1) Love "for the gifts of God distinguished from him, and not for himself, may be called, *merely servile love.*" Fénelon has little to say about it because, as he remarks, it is not love of God at all, strictly speaking (Fénelon, 1697:13f., lf., my italics).

(2) *Concupiscential love* is "that love wherewith God is loved only as the only means and instrument of happiness," as "the only object, the sight of which can render us happy" (Fénelon, 1697:14, 2f.). It is the lover himself, rather than God, who is the "ultimate end" of this sort of love. But in concupiscential love it is at least by the vision of God himself that one seeks to be happy, whereas in merely servile love one seeks satisfaction in gifts much more separate from God.

(3) *Charity* is love of God for himself. Its "formal object... is the goodness or beauty of God taken simply and absolutely in itself, without any idea that is relative to us" (Fénelon, 1697:42). Many passages in Fénelon's works suggest that charity consists in desiring that God's will be done, desiring it for its own sake, as an ultimate end.

Fénelon distinguished two intermediate states in which concupiscential love for God is mingled with charity. His conception of these states is complex and subtle, and changed significantly during the two-year period of intense controversy with Bossuet. We shall not be concerned with them, however, but only with the contrast between concupiscential love and the *pure* state of charity, unmingled with other motives, which Fénelon, following St. Francis de Sales, calls *holy indifference.*

In calling this state "indifference" he does not mean that it is "a stupid insensibility, an inward inactivity, a non-willing,... [or] a perpetual equilibrium of the soul." On the contrary, "as [that] indifference is love itself, it is a very real and very positive principle. It is a positive and formal will which makes us really will or desire every volition of God that is known to us" (Fénelon, 1697:51). Fénelon quotes with approval St. Francis de Sales as saying,

> Indifference... loves nothing except for the sake of the will of God.... The indifferent heart is like a ball of wax between the hands of its God,

> to receive in like manner all the impressions of the eternal good pleasure. It is a heart without choice, equally disposed to everything, without any other object of its will but the will of its God. It does not set its love on the things that God wills, but on the will of God that wills them. (Fénelon, 1697:55f.; quoted pretty accurately, from Sales, 1969:770 [Book IX, ch. 4])

The state of pure love is one of indifference because in that state the soul is indifferent to all created things, and specifically to her own good, except insofar as she believes that God's will is concerned. "The indifferent soul no longer wills anything for herself by the motive of her own self-interest" (Fénelon, 1697:49).

The most dramatic feature that characterizes the state of holy indifference is the sacrifice of eternal happiness. For one's eternal happiness is not excluded from the thesis that in this highest state of Christian perfection one wills *nothing* as an end in itself except that God's will be done. The logical consequence of the thesis had already been rigorously drawn by St. Francis de Sales (1969:770; Book IX, ch. 4; partly quoted by Fénelon, 1697:56):

> In sum, the good pleasure of God is the supreme object of the indifferent soul. Wherever she sees it she runs "to the fragrance of" its "perfumes," and always seeks the place where there is more of it, without consideration of any other thing.... [The indifferent person] would rather have hell with the will of God than Paradise without the will of God—yes indeed, he would prefer hell to Paradise if he knew that there were a little more of the divine good pleasure in the former than in the latter; so that if (to imagine something impossible) he knew that his damnation were a little more agreeable to God than his salvation, he would leave his salvation, and run to his damnation.

Fénelon (1697:87) emphasizes the conditional aspect of this sacrifice. "It is certain that all the sacrifices which the most disinterested souls make ordinarily concerning their eternal happiness are conditional. One says, my God, if by an impossibility you willed to condemn me to the eternal pains of Hell without losing your love, I would not love you less for it. But this sacrifice cannot be absolute in the ordinary state."

Fénelon (1697:90, 87) does speak of an "absolute [*i.e.*, unconditional] sacrifice of her own self-interest for eternity," which a soul in the state of holy indifference can make if persuaded "that she is justly reprobated by God." This absolute sacrifice was much more controversial than the conditional sacrifice, and Fénelon's exposition of it is tangled and tormented, and changed (I suspect) during the period of the controversy. It involves a very questionable claim about contrary beliefs being held in different "parts" of the soul. Fortunately our arguments need not depend on the doctrine of the absolute sacrifice; the conditional sacrifice of eternal happiness will provide us with plenty of food for thought.

The reason why the sacrifice of salvation cannot normally be unconditional is that Christians should believe that God does will their salvation.

They should therefore will it too, not out of self-interest, but because God wills it. Hence Fénelon (1697:73) can speak of "the disinterested love that we owe to ourselves as to our neighbor for the love of God." Precisely here another important consequence of Fénelon's conception of holy indifference comes into view. On his account the disinterested desire for one's own salvation clearly is just a special case of the desire one ought to have for the salvation of all human beings, as willed by God. More generally, indeed, if all one wills as an end in itself is that God's will be done, one will regard oneself, volitionally, as just another person. One will not be special in one's own volitional eyes, except as the only agent that one can directly control.

> Souls attracted to pure love may be as disinterested with respect to themselves as to their neighbor, because they do not see or desire in themselves, any more than in the most unknown neighbor, anything but the glory of God, his good pleasure, and the fulfillment of his promises. In this sense these souls are like strangers to themselves.... (Fénelon, 1697:106)

This neutralizing of the specialness of one's own self may be attractive to many moralists. It is a characteristic that Fénelon's theory shares with more than one ethical secular theory, including the most stringent form of utilitarianism. But my principal aim in this paper is to show that it does not belong in a theory of Christian Love.

II. Some Objections

One of the first objections to Fénelon's views that is likely to occur to us is that the state of holy indifference, as he describes it, is psychologically impossible. Could we really have no desire for anything, for its own sake, except that God's will be done? Perhaps not; but we should realize that Fénelon's exclusion of self-interested desires from the state of pure love was not as sweeping as might appear from the statements quoted thus far. For having said that "the indifferent soul . . . has no longer any interested desire," he adds, " 'Tis true, that there remain in her still some involuntary inclinations and aversions, which she submits [to the will of God]; but she has no longer any voluntary and deliberate desires for her own interest, except on those occasions wherein she does not cooperate faithfully with all her grace" (Fénelon, 1697:49f.). There is an emphasis here on the voluntary as the only morally significant functions of the soul, which is congenial to the tradition within which Fénelon is working. The "voluntary and deliberate" desires, I take it, are conditional and unconditional choices, intentions, and resolutions. These can be in the indifferent soul, according to Fénelon, only to the extent that they are derived from a decision that in every possible (or even impossible) situation, she would choose whatever would best fulfil the will of God. The "involuntary inclinations and aversions," on the other hand—the desires that we know we have, not because we decide on them but because we feel them—are seen as assailing the commandpost of the soul from outside, so to speak, and may be self-interested even in a perfectly

indifferent soul, provided they are controlled and not allowed to influence choice. The indifferent soul will normally have, for example, both a natural, self-interested, involuntary aversion to physical illness, and a deliberate intention to do, ordinarily, what is necessary to avoid or cure physical illness. But the intention will be based on the belief that God commands us to care for our health, and will not be influenced in the least by the aversion. This extreme separation between impulse and will strikes me as both unrealistic and undesirable, but I will not bear down on that point here. When I ascribe to Fénelon views about desires, they should be understood to be about *voluntary* desires, unless otherwise indicated.

I shall be more concerned here with a series of objections in which Fénelon's opponents claimed that his views would exclude from the Christian ideal some of the most important Christian virtues—particularly hope, penitence, gratitude, and even the desire to love God. Some of the fiercest controversy raged about the theological virtue of *hope*. Because he held that even salvation, or eternal happiness, is not desired with a self-interested desire in the state of pure love, Fénelon was accused of leaving no room for this virtue in the highest state of the Christian life in this world; and he was at pains to defend himself against the charge. The indifferent or fully disinterested soul, he insists, will still hope for her own salvation. In hoping, she will will to be saved. But this is not "a falling away from the perfection of her disinterestment," nor "a return to the motive of self-interest." For "the purest love never prevents us from willing, and even causes us to will positively, everything that God wills that we should will" (Fénelon, 1697:44). "Whoever loves from pure love without any mixture of self-interest . . . wills happiness for himself only because he knows that God wills it, and that he wills that each of us should will it for his glory" (1697:26f.). "Then I will that which really is, and is known by me to be, the greatest of all my interests, without any interested motive determining me to it" (1697:46). As the controversy progressed, Fénelon (1698:12) added that in holy indifference we would desire our own salvation "precisely for the reason that it is our good, since it is for this reason that God wills it, and for which he commands us also to will it. Therefore . . . precisely the reason that it is our good, really moves and excites the will of man" in hoping for the intuitive vision of God. But if, on this account, the indifferent soul desires her salvation because it is her own good, she desires her own good only because God desires it—she desires it only in order that his desires may be satisfied.

The indifferent soul can will, conditionally, that she be saved *if* God wills it. And believing that God does will it, she can detach the consequent and will that she be saved, *since* God wills it. But it is hard to see how she can will that God will her salvation. For she could hardly want God to will her salvation solely in order that his will might be done. I have not found any place where Fénelon explicitly draws this conclusion. It would probably have seemed damaging, since the desire it would exclude seems to be central

to much of Christian piety and prayer. But despite the strangeness of this consequence of Fénelon's position, I do not think this is the most promising point at which to try to show that he excludes something that is important for Christian ethics to maintain.

III. Self-Concern, Self-Interest, and the Desire to Love God

Fénelon's opponents charged that he would not have even charity itself to be sought for as a virtue (Noailles *et al.*, 1698:224). They dwelt much less on this objection than on that about hope, but they struck here a much more sensitive spot in Fénelon's position—one at which I believe that he himself was driven into inconsistency. Fénelon inherited from St. Francis de Sales a strong suspicion against desires in which one aims ultimately at one's own virtue or perfection or even one's own love for God. St. Francis de Sales (1969:785 [Book IX, ch. 9]; *cf.* p. 1549 [first draft]) had spoken of the danger of coming to love one's love for God instead of loving God. And Fénelon (1697:10f.) declared that in pure charity God is no longer loved "for the sake of the merit, nor for the sake of the perfection . . . to be found in loving him." Yet they certainly also thought that we ought to want to be virtuous, and that the chief point of virtue we ought to desire is to love God with charity.

The only way of reconciling these concerns that is consistent with the general thesis that the only thing that is desired for its own sake in pure love is that God's will be done, is to say that in pure love the soul does indeed want to love God, but only because (as she believes) he wills that we love him. Yet Fénelon was not in fact prepared to accept every consequence of this view, as can be seen in his treatment of

(A) the desire that God's will be done, and

(B) the desire that I love and obey God.

We might suppose that these desires could never be opposed to each other. But such a conflict seems at least thinkable. Fénelon accepts a distinction between God's *signified will,* revealed to us primarily in his commandments and counsels, which is often violated, and his *good pleasure,* contrary to which nothing happens. It is not just God's signified will, but his good pleasure, that the indifferent soul wants to be done. Suppose it were God's good pleasure that my heart be hardened so that I would hate him and disobey his signified will. In that case it would seem that my hatred and disobedience are what God would really want, rather than the love and obedience that he commands. So if my heart is in holy indifference, shouldn't I desire, conditionally, that I should hate and disobey God if it were his good pleasure?

Fénelon's first response will be that the supposition of God's actively willing my sin is impossible. Sins that happen, though not contrary to God's good pleasure, are not willed but only permitted by God, according to Fénelon's theology; and God's "permissive will" is not proposed as a rule for even the indifferent soul (Fénelon, 1697: article XVIII, True). Nonetheless,

Fénelon does demand of the indifferent soul a conditional desire regarding another impossible supposition—the supposition, namely, that God would torment her forever in hell though she loved him purely. I cannot see any good (or indeed any morally tolerable) reason for thinking that that supposition is any less impossible than the supposition of God's wanting me to hate and disobey him. So if we are to have conditional preferences regarding impossible suppositions, it would seem that that the indifferent soul ought to will that she should hate and disobey God if that were his good pleasure.

But Fénelon vehemently rejects any such desire. This is most explicit in his treatment of "the ultimate trials" in which an indifferent soul makes an absolute or unconditional sacrifice of her own self-interest for eternity. Even in that case, he says,

> She loves God more purely than ever. Far from consenting positively to hate him, she does not consent even indirectly to cease for a single instant from loving him, nor to diminish in the least her love, nor to put ever to the increase of that love any voluntary bounds, nor to commit any fault, not even a venial fault. (Fénelon, 1697:91)

It would be blasphemous to say that a soul in trials "may consent to hate God, because God will have her hate him; or that she may consent never more to love God, because he will no more be beloved by her; or that she may voluntarily confine her love, because God will have her to limit it; or that she may violate his law, because God will have her to transgress it" (Fénelon, 1697:93f.).

Even a conditional desire to hate God if he should will it seems to be ruled out by saying that the indifferent soul "does not consent even indirectly" to cease, diminish, or limit her love for God. And, in the course of his controversy with Bossuet, Fénelon stated explicitly that the conditional sacrifice envisaged by St. Francis de Sales is a sacrifice of one's supernatural happiness (which consists in the eternal rapture of an intuitive vision of God, accompanied by all the gifts of body and soul), but is not a sacrifice of "the love that we necessarily owe to God in every state" (Fénelon, 1838a:89 [Letter V, § 3]; *cf.* 1838b:134 [Letter III, § 5]).

There is thus an important difference between Fénelon's treatment of (B), the desire that I love and obey God, and his treatment of

(C) the desire that I be happy rather than miserable eternally, if I have charity.

It is impossible that God should will the opposite of either (B) or (C), according to Fénelon. Yet he holds that if my love were pure, I should desire conditionally to be miserable eternally, without ceasing to have charity, if God willed it; but he denies that I should desire conditionally to hate or disobey God, or even to lessen my love for him, if God willed it. This difference in the conditional desires of the soul in pure love can be accounted for only on the supposition that the soul has desire (B) independently of (A), the desire that God's will be done. For if I desired to love and obey

God only in order that his will might be done, it would seem that I should want to cease loving and obeying him if he willed it. If I ought not to have that conditional desire, then presumably my loving and obeying God is something that I would desire at least partly for its own sake if I were a perfect Christian.

One might try to avoid this conclusion by supposing that desire (B) ought to be derived from

(D) the desire that as many people as possible love and obey God.

On this account I ought not to desire my own loving God for its own sake, but only as a means to the satisfaction of (D). But this view is not suggested by Fénelon, and would require him to say that I ought to have a conditional desire to hate God if that would result in more other people coming to love and obey him. But he would surely refuse to say that, and so is still left with the conclusion that my loving and obeying God is something I ought to want at least partly for its own sake.

But if part of what I am to desire for its own sake is not only that God's will be done, but also that *I* love and obey God, then it seems that my love for him is not to be completely disinterested; there is to be an element of self-concern in it. Thus Fénelon seems forced to admit an element of self-concern even in perfect love for God.

Of course the fact that even Fénelon did not manage consistently to exclude all self-concerned attitudes from the state of holy indifference does not prove that there is a rightful place for self-concern in pure or perfect love; but I think in fact there is. Not to care, literally not to care at all, whether I will be one who loves or hates God, so long as God's will will be done, would not be an attitude of love toward God on my part, but of something much more impersonal.[2]

Perhaps Fénelon would not have been too troubled by this. What he meant to insist on most of all was the ideal of a love for God completely free of *self-interest*. To desire, for its own sake, to be related in any way to another person is self-concerned, in the sense that it is aiming ultimately at a state of affairs that essentially involves oneself. I suspect Fénelon would say that while the desire to be one who loves and obeys God is self-concerned in this broad sense, it is not self-interested in the sense that concerns him.

This response has some plausibility. In wanting to love or serve God, or someone else, one is not necessarily aiming at one's own advantage. It may be part of one's desire that one wants to give up something, or make some sacrifice of one's own advantage, for the beloved. Fénelon is particularly interested in a desire to love and obey God even if one were eternally miserable. Such desires are concerned in part with the desirer, but it would seem strange, in many cases, to call them "self-interested." This suggests that not all self-concerned desires are self-interested; self-interest is a species of self-concern.

Which species, is not easy to say, however. There is perhaps a broad sense in which it is self-interested to desire anything *for one's own sake.* But 'for one's own sake' is a very vague expression, and no account of it, or of a broad sense of 'self-interested,' that has occurred to me seems really satisfactory. I prefer therefore to use 'self-interested' in a narrower sense. Historically, to speak of a person's "interest" is to speak of his good-on-the-whole; a state of affairs is "in his interest" if and only if it is good for him, on the whole, that it should obtain. I think this agrees well enough with Fénelon's use of 'interest' (*'intérêt'*). We may say, then, that a desire is *self-interested,* in the strict or narrower sense, if and only if it is a desire in which one aims ultimately at one's own good-on-the-whole. Butler (1970:101, 104 [sermon XI]) adopts a sense very much like this for 'interested.' (When I speak of a desire in which one *aims ultimately* at an end or state of affairs *X,* I mean a desire for *X* for its own sake, or at least partly for its own sake; or a desire for something else for the sake of *X,* where one does desire *X* at least partly for its own sake.) Even this narrower conception of self-interestedness is not without its problems, for it is doubtful whether anyone has a satisfactory conception of a person's good. But let us ignore that problem for present purposes. We do speak with some confidence of states of affairs being good (or bad) for a person on the whole—whether we are entitled to that confidence or not.

Fénelon's position can be modified, in terms of this distinction between self-concern and self-interest, to make it consistent. He could say that Christian love ought to be completely free of self-interested desire, though not completely free of self-concern. This certainly would be a modification of his views, as it involves abandoning the thesis that one who has perfect charity wants nothing for its own sake except that God's will be done. But I think the weaker claim is much more plausible than the stronger, and is sufficient to account for much of what Fénelon wanted to say.

In particular, the Salesian and Fénelonian suspicion against love for one's own love of God can be interpreted as something less than a complete rejection of self-concerned desires to love God. This may be done in at least three ways. (a) Most obviously, Fénelon may still consistently object to desires in which love for God is desired not for its own sake but as a means to one's own good. Similarly, St. Francis de Sales was particularly worried that one might begin to prize one's love for God for the sake of the pleasure that one found in it. Wanting pleasure for oneself is not necessarily a self-interested motive, in the narrower sense defined above; for one can pursue one's own pleasure without pursuing one's own good-on-the-whole, as in smoking a cigarette, or eating a hot fudge sundae, that one thinks will be enjoyable but bad for one. But it seems to be consistent to maintain that in perfect charity one's love for God would be desired for its own sake, but one's own pleasure, as well as one's own good, would not.

I do not mean to suggest that St. Francis de Sales does maintain this

explicitly. When he speaks of the danger of loving one's love of God, "not for the good pleasure and satisfaction of God, but for the pleasure and satisfaction that we ourselves derive from it" (Sales, 1969:785f. [Book IX, ch. 9]), he considers only the possibilities that the love is desired for the lover's pleasure and that it is desired for God's pleasure. He is correct in pointing out that love for God could be desired primarily as a pleasant experience of one's own, and that that would be a perversion. I agree with him about this, though I do not think there is necessarily anything wrong with wanting, for its own sake, to *enjoy* loving God, so long as one's interest in the subjective pleasure is subsidiary to one's desire for the objective relationship. But it is just this desire for the objective relationship that St. Francis de Sales fails to mention. Desiring charity as pleasing to God is not the only alternative to desiring it for one's own pleasure. Love for God can also be desired for its own sake as a relation to God; and I think some aspects of the Salesian position imply that it ought to be desired in that way.

(b) Another characterization of the perversion that St. Francis de Sales fears is that "instead of loving this holy love because it tends toward God who is the beloved, we love it because it proceeds from us who are the lovers" (Sales, 1969:785 [Book IX, ch. 9]). More vividly, as he wrote in an earlier draft of his *Treatise,*

> Who does not see that [in this perversion] it is no longer God that I regard, but from God I have returned to myself, and that I love this love because it is mine, not because it is for God. (Sales, 1969:1550)

The point of these statements is not obvious, but we may conjecture that it has to do, not with what is *desired* in love, but with what is *admired.* Our interest in loving God is perverted when the focus of our admiration shifts from God's perfection, from his worthiness to be loved, to our own possible perfection. This seems to be correct, and is consistent with the view that our own righteousness and love for God are among the ends that we ought to desire at least partly for their own sake.

(c) A sense of proportion provides a final, and reasonable, ground of suspicion against one's interest in one's own love for God, and more broadly in one's own virtue. Even if self-concerned desires to love and obey God, and to be morally and religiously perfect, have a rightful or indeed a necessary place in the best Christian piety, it is clear that they all too easily assume too large a place. It is sinfully self-centered to care too much about one's own perfection in proportion to one's concern for the good of other people and the glorification of God in his whole creation. If one aims ultimately *only* at one's own perfection, one's attitude is not one of love for God. In this way it would indeed be possible to love one's (supposed) love for God instead of loving God.

IV. Penitence and Gratitude

The suggestion that Christian love ought to be completely free of self-interested desire, but not completely free of self-concern, can be tested against other Christian virtues, to see if it is consistent with a satisfactory account of them. It works out very well in the case of *penitence*. It was charged that Fénelon overthrew "the proper and intrinsical motive of repentance" by holding that redeemed souls ought to engage in penitential behavior, "not for their own purification and deliverance, but as a thing that God wills" (Noailles *et al.*, 1698:226). Insofar as the accent falls here on 'deliverance,' implying that in penitence one should have a self-interested motive, fearing some loss or diminution of one's own good, this criticism shows an ignoble misunderstanding of the nature of penitence. In this respect Fénelon's sharp retort seems fully justified: "You annihilate the acts of perfect contrition, where one makes oneself suffer for one's sin, not for the sake of the happiness that one desires, but for the sake of the righteousness that one loves in itself" (Fénelon, 1838a:87 [Letter IV, § 20]; *cf.* 1838b:143 [Letter III, § 12]). The value of penitence is not enhanced by self-interest.

But penitence is certainly self-concerned. For it involves remorse, and remorse is not just regret that something bad has happened; it is being particularly sorry that one has done something bad *oneself*. The best sort of penitence involves wanting, for its own sake, not to be a wrongdoer. In penitence one cannot regard oneself as "just another person." Insofar as the accent, in the charge against Fénelon, falls on 'purification,' implying that in penitence one's own moral or religious improvement should be sought as an end in itself, the objectors seem to have a correct view of penitence. It is a view that Fénelon himself appears to share, in proposing "the righteousness that one loves in itself" as the right motive of penitence. And it requires the admission of self-concern, though not necessarily of self-interest, to the Christian ideal.

Thus far we have not found any Christian virtue that requires self-interest. But we have yet to consider *gratitude*. Fénelon's opponents charged that he omits mention of gratitude as a motive of love toward God (Noailles *et al.*, 1698:252). He responded that gratitude is useful in the earlier stages of the spiritual life, by helping us to see and attend to the perfections of God, and by diminishing concupiscence and increasing grace; "finally, in the most perfect state, the acts of . . . thankfulness become more and more frequent, but that is because they are commanded by charity" (Fénelon, 1838b:132 [Letter III, § 2]). This answer fails to come to grips with the problem. Where acts of thankfulness have to be commanded by charity—a charity not motivated by benefits received (*ibid.*)—there cannot be much real gratitude.

The first question to ask here is whether the occasion of gratitude must be something that is good for the grateful person and that he desires *ulti-*

mately because it is good for him. Certainly one cannot appropriately be said to be *grateful* to just anyone for just any good deed that he does. Suppose a stranger risks his life to save the life of a child who is equally a stranger to you. No matter how much you admire the hero, or how much you feel for the child, it would be odd to say that you are *grateful* to the hero. You are not sufficiently involved. But you need not be *benefited* by the act for which you are grateful. You may be grateful to a second person for doing something for a third person at your request, even though it is not you but the third person who is benefited. Your request involves you enough to render both the fact and the concept of gratitude appropriate in such a case.

But would God's answers to our prayers for others provide adequate occasion for Christian gratitude to God? I think not. The Christian is supposed to be conscious of God's goodness *to him,* and grateful for that. And this is not an arbitrary demand. It is rooted in the needs of love. You might be very grateful to me for my making a contribution in your name to your favorite charity. But such a gift does not fully take the place of giving you something for your own benefit or pleasure. The good and happiness of the beloved are central ends in themselves for love. The full expression of love requires some actions that aim ultimately at those ends; and one ought to respond to such acts with gratitude.

Christians are supposed to be grateful to God for acting to promote their good. In the best sort of gratitude one must like something about what the benefactor did or meant to accomplish. And in gratitude to God it won't do to like only "the thought behind" the deed, as if he were a cousin who had knitted you a sweater of the wrong size. God makes no such mistakes. So it seems in the best sort of gratitude to God one must like one's own good; one must prefer that it have been promoted rather than not. And I think one must prefer it for one's own sake; that is, the preference must be self-interested. Suppose one were glad to have had one's own good promoted, but only as a means, saying to oneself, 'This will help me glorify God,' or 'This will enable me to do a lot of good for other people.' Such an inability to accept a gift *for oneself,* when one's own good was the chief goal of the giver, is *ungrateful.*

This argument does not show that the grateful Christian ought pursue his own good as an end in itself, but only that he ought to like its having been promoted when it has been promoted by God. It is a self-interest already satisfied, rather than a striving self-interest that is required here. But it is a sort of self-interest, favoring one's own good for its (and one's) own sake.

Our review of the motivational requirements of several Christian virtues suggests that certain sorts of self-concern hold an important place in the Christian life; and that self-interest does indeed hold a place there, but a much less important place than some other sorts of self-concern. The right

approach to Christian self-denial is not by an attempt at complete exclusion of self-interest or self-concern, but by a subtler study of their right and wrong relation to other motives.

V. *Eros in Agape*

Our discussion thus far has been about love for God, but it can also be applied to love for fellow human beings. The purest and ethically most interesting sort of love for another person is often identified with *benevolence*—that is, with desire for the other person's good. The natural extension of this view to the case of love for God is to identify perfect love for God with the desire that God's will be done.

Similarly, the contrast between *Agape* and *Eros* is popularly seen as a special case of the contrast between altruism and self-interest. *Agape,* Christian love, is identified with benevolence, and *Eros* is identified with self-interested desire for relationship with another person.[3] Benevolence is a motive that can hardly be praised too highly, and the contrast between altruistic and self-interested desires is legitimate and useful. But it has too often been treated as a dichotomy. That is, it is too often assumed, particularly where personal relations are in question, that what is desired is desired either for one's own good or for another person's good. The conception of love, and particularly of *Eros,* has suffered much from being forced into this dichotomy.

For *Eros* need not be either self-interested or altruistic. This is not a claim about what Plato (for example) meant, but about the character of the attitudes that we would normally recognize as concrete paradigms of *Eros.* The central case of *Eros* is passionate desire for a personal relationship. And such desire for a personal relationship need not be based on the belief that it would be good for anyone. This is most obvious in the case of a tragic or destructive *Eros.* There are doubtless instances in which a close personal relationship is strongly desired by both of the parties to it although neither of them believes it will be good for either of them. Perhaps if they truly love each other they will prefer on balance to break off the relationship; but that does not change the fact that they have a desire for the relationship—a desire which is neither self-interested nor altruistic in the present sense.

It is happily more usual in human relations that the lover believes that the relationship he desires would be good both for him and for the beloved. But it is *not* usual for the lover to desire the relationship only because he believes it would be good for one or both of them. Indeed if he desires the relationship in such a way that he would have no interest in it at all if he did not think it would be beneficial, we may doubt that he really loves. *Eros* is not based on calculations or judgments of utility or benefit, and must therefore at least partly escape classification as self-interested or altruistic. The mistake, in trying to force love into a dichotomy of self-interest and altruism, is a failure to recognize a desire for a relationship for its own sake

as a third type of desire that is not just a combination or consequence of desire for one's own good and desire for another persons' good. It is indeed this third type of desire—which is self-concerned but not self-interested in the sense explained above—that is most characteristic of *Eros*.

Thus the identification of *Eros* with self-interested desire for personal relationships is in error; and so is the identification of *Agape* with benevolence. The ideal of Christian love includes not only benevolence but also desire for certain kinds of personal relationship, for their own sakes. Were that not so, it would be strange to call it "love." It is an abuse of the word 'love' to say that one *loves* a person, or any other object, if one does not care, except instrumentally, about one's relation to that object. Even St. Francis de Sales (1969:843 [Book X, ch. 10]) said that "if . . . there were an infinite goodness . . . with which we could not have any union or communication, we would certainly esteem it more highly than ourselves, . . . and . . . we could have mere wishes to be able to love it; but strictly speaking we would not love it, because love has to do with union. . . ."

In saying that love involves caring about one's relationship with its object in a way that benevolence does not, I have in mind a wide variety of relationships, and not just those intimate social relationships that we think of first in connection with love. To take an example that is closely related to Fénelon's ideas: the lover will commonly want to *serve* the beloved—to satisfy his desires or promote his well-being. It may be thought that the benevolent person also wants to serve, by promoting the happiness of the object of his benevolence. But that is not quite right. The benevolent person need not care who promotes the well-being of the one whom he wishes well, so long as it is promoted. But to the lover it is not indifferent who promotes the good of his beloved. He wants to be the one who serves his beloved—or at least one of those who do.

Similarly the lover not only desires that misfortune and annoyances should not befall his beloved; he is particularly concerned that *he* not cause harm or displeasure to his beloved. And in general it is normally a part of love to want one's own actions and their consequences to express one's love. That this is true of love for God as well as love for fellow human beings seems to be one of the factors that led Fénelon into inconsistency.

The claim that Christian love – New Testament *Agape* – is not solely benevolence can be supported by at least two arguments from the Bible. (1) Whatever else *Agape* may be in the New Testament, it is first of all God's love for us. And God's love for us is surely seen as involving a desire for certain relationships between God and us, for their own sakes and not merely as good for us. The jealous husband of Israel (*Jeremiah* 2:1-3:5; *Hosea* 2), he made the whole human race so that they might seek and find him (*Acts* 17:26-27). He desires our worship and devotion. Why did Christ give himself up for the Church? Because he loved her and wanted to present her to himself in splendor as a bride (*Ephesians* 5:25-27). No

doubt it would be possible to interpret all of this on the hypothesis that God desires to be related to us only because it will be good for us. But I think that is implausible. The Bible depicts a God who seems at least as interested in divine-human relationships as in human happiness *per se*. Even Anders Nygren, who is most emphatic about the unselfishness of *Agape*, presents it as one of the distinctive characteristics of *Agape* that it creates *fellowship* between God and human beings. But if such fellowship is desired for its own sake by God, God's desire is self-concerned inasmuch as the object of the desire involves him as essentially as it involves us. And would we have it otherwise? Let him who would rather be the object of benevolence than of love cast the first stone.

(2) The New Testament sets a very high value on reconciliation and friendly relations between people. Loving enemies and strangers seems to be first of all a matter of desiring good for them, but also of greeting them (*Matthew* 5:43-47). Christians are to "greet one another with a kiss of love [*Agape*]" (I *Peter* 5:14). The incentive of love is to lead them to be in harmony with each other (*Philippians* 2:1-2). One might try to explain this on the hypothesis that reconciliation, harmony, and friendship are to be pursued solely out of benevolence, as being good for the other persons involved. But that seems a strained interpretation. There is no reason to think that reconciliation and friendly relations are always a benefit to people, except insofar as they are worth pursuing for their own sake. Perhaps a good fight would sometimes be better for people. The Christian interest in harmonious relations, as a goal of love, seems to go beyond any merely instrumental value they may have. And I believe that moral intuition, as well as Scriptural authority, favors regarding the desire for friendly relations, for their own sake, as a good motive.

Conceived as I have argued they ought to be, *Eros* and *Agape* are not opposites. *Eros* is generally present as a strand in love. It is the lover's desire for relationship with the beloved. It may be self-interested, but it need not be. It manifests itself most fully in a desire for the relationship for its own sake, and not just for the good of either party. Benevolence, the desire for the good of the beloved, is also present as a strand in love. I have argued that *Agape* is not to be identified with this strand. It includes both strands. Specifically, *Agape* includes a sort of *Eros*—not every sort of *Eros*, for there are certainly selfish, sick, and destructive forms of *Eros* that have no place in the Christian ethical ideal. One of the distinguishing characteristics of *Agape* is the kind of *Eros* that it includes—the kind of relationship that is desired in *Agape*.

It is a striking fact that while benevolence (the desire for another person's well-being) and *Eros*, as a desire for relationship with another person, seem to be quite distinct desires, we use a single name, 'love' or *'Agape,'* for an attitude that includes both of them, at least in typical cases. Why do we do this? I find it a tempting hypothesis that the central element in *Agape*,

the element that holds the concept together, is the agapic type of *Eros*. In an exemplary case of *Agape* the lover wants a certain type of relationship with the beloved. That relationship includes mutual benevolence. Thus benevolence is desired in agapic *Eros*. Desiring benevolence is not the same as having it, but there is at any rate a natural affinity between benevolence and agapic *Eros*, which springs from the nature of agapic *Eros*.

To say that the agapic type of *Eros* is the *central* element in *Agape*, in this sense, is not to deny that benevolence is *ethically* the most *important* element in *Agape*. Benevolence is not only the most important, but also the most *essential* element in *Agape*. There cannot be *Agape* at all without benevolence; but when it is demanded of me that I have *Agape* toward the starving millions of Bangladesh, or even toward a multitude of strangers in my own city, perhaps no more of *Eros* is demanded of me than that I should want *not* to have *un*friendly relations with them—which is hardly enough to count as *Eros*. Ethically important (indeed necessary) as it is, however, I think that *Agape* with so little *Eros* in it should be seen by Christians as only an incomplete and fragmentary participation in the fullness of God's *Agape*.[4]

NOTES

[1] Fénelon, 1697. I quote always from this first edition. The critical edition (Fénelon, 1911) presents a revised text made but not published by Fénelon, though the first edition can be reconstructed from Cherel's apparatus. The first edition seems to me the more important document. I have allowed by translations to be influenced in a number of cases by the language of a rather good contemporary English translation, which exists in at least two significantly different (and differently paginated) editions (*The Maxims of the Saints Explained, concerning the Interior Life*. London: H. Rhodes, 1698, and London: G. Thompson, R. Dampier, W. Manson, and J. Bland, no date).

[2] This argument is an objection to the ideal of holy indifference as caring about nothing for its own sake except that God's will be done. It is not so clearly an objection to what Fénelon called 'holy resignation,' in which one prefers the accomplishment of God's will above all other ends although one does desire some other ends for their own sakes. The conditional sacrifices follow from holy resignation as well as from holy indifference, and I am not offering an opinion here as to what Fénelon ought to have said about the conditional sacrifices.

[3] There is much in Nygren (1969) to encourage this interpretation of the distinction, though it is not fully explicit in Nygren and does not fit everything he says about *Agape*. It fits his conception of *Eros* better. Nygren's discussion, however, is less focused on the ends of diverse loves than on their causes and conditions.

[4] An earlier version of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Society of Christian Ethics in January 1979. The ideas in it have been discussed with a number of individuals and groups, and provided approximately half of the substance of the thirty-second annual Willson Lectures at Southwestern University in March 1979. I am particularly indebted to Rogers Albritton, David Blumenfeld, John Giuliano, and Warren Quinn for their comments. I also particularly prize Giles Milhaven's comments, but have not altered the paper in the light of them, since it appears with his response.

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