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# The Unity of *Eros* and *Agape*: On Jean-Luc Marion's Erotic Phenomenon

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## Abstract

This essay evaluates Jean-Luc Marion's claim in *The Erotic Phenomenon* that *eros* and *agape* are "two names selected among an infinity of others in order to think and to say the one love" (221). I will defend his attempt to unite *agape* and *eros* against Jacques Derrida's claim that we must love without any desire for reciprocity. Additionally, I will indicate what implications Marion's account of love has for a discussion of love and its reasons. Marion correctly identifies the paradox at the heart of love: that in order to truly love, I must give up my demand for assurance, although I may still maintain the hope that another will love me. While Marion offers an important corrective to Derrida's account of pure *agape*, I will argue that his account of love that includes both *eros* and *agape* ultimately resembles Derrida's pure *agape* too closely because Marion does not sufficiently acknowledge the role of reciprocity in love.

## Introduction

In *The Erotic Phenomenon*, the French phenomenologist and theologian Jean-Luc Marion argues that *agape* and *eros* are "two names selected among an infinity of others in order to think and to say the one love" (2007: 221). The claim stands in marked contrast to Anders Nygren's influential distinctions between *eros* and *agape* as well as Jacques Derrida's more recent claims that to truly love another demands the complete absence of reciprocity. In this essay I will evaluate Marion's claim about the unity of *agape* and *eros* and argue that Marion's account of love is a significant improvement over Jacques Derrida's call for an *agape* without reciprocity. However, despite the relative strengths of Marion's position, I will eventually critique Marion for failing to adequately account for reciprocity in love, which leads to his erotic phenomenon falling into the same pitfalls as Derrida's account of pure *agape*. Along the way I will also indicate what implications Marion's account of love has for a discussion of the reasons why we love.

## ***Eros* and *Agape*: Traditional Distinctions**

In attempting to distinguish between *agape* and *eros*, Anders Nygren argues that there is no ground for comparison because they share absolutely nothing in common, but are in fact two different approaches to life: “For what could Eros and Agape have in common? There seems to be no possibility of discovering any idea common to them both which might serve as a starting-point for the comparison; for at every point the opposition between them makes itself felt” (1953: 209). Despite Nygren’s concerns that there is no common-ground for comparison, I think it is helpful to note two major differences between *agape* and *eros* so that we can see how Marion’s phenomenology of love calls into question the traditional definitions of *agape* and *eros*.

One major distinction often drawn between *agape* and *eros* is that *agape* is self-forgetful while *eros* is self-interested: “[The] contrast between *Agape* and *Eros* is popularly seen as a special case of the contrast between altruism and self-interest” (Adams 1980: 95). Nygren himself calls *agape* “unselfish love” but *eros* is “egocentric love” (1953: 209). Even thinkers far less extreme than Nygren hold to the basic self-forgetful/self-interested distinction. For example, C.S. Lewis calls *agape* “gift-love” and *eros* “need-love” (1988). The clear implication from Lewis’s terms is that *agape* is a self-forgetful love that gives itself away to the other whereas *eros* is a love that desires something from the lover. As Vincent Brummer nicely summarizes Lewis’s distinction, “[*eros*] (or need-love) is the desire to receive that from the other which I need in order to be happy or to flourish. *Agape* (or gift-love) is the attitude of giving myself in service to the other” (1993: 110). Gift-love is a benevolent love that aims not at the self but only the good of the other, whereas *eros* is a desiring love that needs the other.

A second major distinction between *eros* and *agape* is that *eros* responds to some attractive value in the beloved, but *agape* loves what is not lovable: “Agape is a regard . . . for every person qua human existent” (Outka 1972: 9). Because *agape* is self-forgetful, it does not need to be drawn to the beloved by any unique or attractive quality that the beloved possesses. It is often seen as a dispassionate bestowal of love on the beloved. On this account it seems that the purest form of *agape* occurs when one loves something that has no value whatsoever apart from the lover’s *agape*. Referring to the purest form of *agape* as “Divine Gift-Love” Lewis describes it this way: “But Divine Gift-love . . . is wholly disinterested and desires what is simply best for the beloved. . . Divine Gift-love in the man enables him to love what is not naturally lovable” (1988: 128). Pure *agape* is a disinterested desire for the good of another who is not naturally loveable in him or her self. In contrast to *agape*, *eros* is an interested love that takes delight in another person because the other satisfies our needs or desires: “[*Eros*] appears as . . . the passionate impulse to the satisfaction of the lover’s need, the fulfillment of his desire” (Armstrong 1961: 105).<sup>1</sup> *Eros* is attracted to something in the object and so desires that for him or her self.

## **Agape, Eros, and Love's Reasons**

Another way to frame the traditional distinctions between *agape* and *eros* is to consider the reasons why we love the beloved in each form of love. According to Nygren, when I love another person with *agape* this is a purely disinterested love. I am not responding to any inherent value in the beloved because *agape* loves precisely what is unlovable. The reason why I love another rests entirely on my own decision to love without any reasons beyond my will's decision to bestow love.

On the other hand, *eros* responds directly to value in the beloved. At least on Nygren's account, the reason why I love with *eros* is that I see something that I desire and want it for my own. *Eros* responds to some perceived value in the beloved. Thus the reason why I love another with *eros* is that I want the perceived good in the beloved for myself.

## **Derrida's Pure Agape**

In his account of the gift, Jacques Derrida implicitly accepts Nygren's extreme distinction between *agape* and *eros*, arguing that *agape* is the only true form of love. But Derrida takes the traditional differences even further when he claims that to give a gift requires that I do so without any hint of reciprocity.<sup>2</sup>

Derrida insists that there are a number of paradoxes in giving a gift, because for my gift to be a true gift it must occur apart from any economic relationship: "But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange? That which opens the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, the common measure, and so as to turn aside the return in view of the no-return?" (Derrida 1992: 7). When I give a gift, I cannot view it as a way for someone to pay me back. I must give a gift without the expectation of receiving something in return simply because I have given a gift. Derrida is certainly correct that a pure or ideal gift will be one in which I give without demanding a reciprocal gift in return. No one appreciates receiving what one thought was a 'free gift' only to find extensive strings attached. We would rather not have received such a gift in the first place. However, Derrida maintains that to give a pure gift requires not just that the donor suspend her demand to receive a similar gift in return, but that there must be no acknowledgement of the gift at all.

Derrida argues that in order for there to be a pure gift, the gift must never be acknowledged because once it is acknowledged the gift enters into economic calculation. Even a 'thank you' or some other recognition of the gift returns the gift to the economy: "The moment the gift, however generous it be, is infected with the

slightest hint of calculation . . . it falls within the ambit of an economy: it exchanges, in short it gives counterfeit money, since it gives in exchange for payment” (Derrida 1995: 112) As Robyn Horner rightly explains, any acknowledgment disqualifies the gift because acknowledgement introduces reciprocity which is foreign to the gift: “On the part of the donor, any recognition of the gift as gift anticipates some kind of return. For according to Derrida, whenever I intentionally give, I invariably receive. I may receive another tangible gift, or I may simply receive gratitude. Even if the worst happened, and my giving were greeted with displeasure or rejection, there would still be some return, if nothing more than the reinforcement of my own identity as a subject” (Horner 2001: 8). So, any gift that is acknowledged by anyone in any way becomes part of an economy.

Derrida eventually concludes that even if the recipient does not recognize my gift as a gift, but I know that I have given it, the gift still enters economic calculation because I acknowledge it to myself. In order to give a gift, we must therefore give without knowing that we are giving it. Thus, we cannot give any object: “One must give without knowing, without knowledge or recognition, without *thanks* [*remerciement*]: without anything, or at least without any object” (1995: 112) Derrida concludes that one of the paradoxes in thinking about the gift is that we cannot give *anything* because in giving an object we would recognize it and it would enter into economic calculation. He argues that the gift can only be thought of as impossible: “Not impossible but *the* impossible. The very figure of the impossible. It announces itself, gives itself to be thought as the impossible” (1992: 7). For Derrida, the gift is at the outer limit of thought. We simply cannot conceive of a gift in which nothing is given, or a gift that we do not even know we are giving. However, Derrida argues that the demands of the gift require that it must be given entirely apart from any possible reciprocity.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, according to Derrida, giving a true gift is actually impossible. The gift is a never completed ideal that our actual gift-giving should attempt to emulate.

So what does Derrida’s account of the gift say about love? While Derrida sticks to the strict phenomenological requirements demanded by the gift, there are some clear implications for an account of love, the preeminent gift because it is a gift of *myself* to another. Derrida’s requirement that a gift be given apart from all possible economic calculation implies that love’s purest, and perhaps only, form is *agape*. My love must be so entirely self-forgetful that I do not even know I am giving a gift. My giving must be in secret so that another will not acknowledge my love for her. Derrida argues that Jesus’ teaching in the Gospel of Matthew implies that our good deeds must be done in secret so that they will not be acknowledged: “On three occasions [in chapter six of the Gospel of Matthew] there returns this truth, like some obsessive reminder to be learned by heart. It is the sentence ‘and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee.’ . . . In fact God asks that one give without knowing, without calculating, reckoning, or hoping, for one must give without counting, and that is what takes it outside of sense” (1995: 97). Derrida argues that to truly give a gift, i.e. to love, requires that one

suspend all economic calculation, even the desire for the love to be acknowledged and a relationship to be established. Derrida thus advocates a radical form of *agape* in which there can be no hint of reciprocity, otherwise the love is not love but economic calculation.

Because love demands that I give of myself without any hint of reciprocity, love is impossible. We cannot truly love another person because there is no way to perform a loving action without that action being acknowledged. Even if I keep it secret from any other person I cannot keep it secret from myself. Love is an ideal that we attempt to live up to, but we can never say that we have truly loved. While Derrida is correct that to truly love someone is an extremely difficult thing, has he accurately described love? I believe that Derrida is mistaken in his claim that love is without reciprocity; to love another person requires that I desire a relationship with the other. As we will see, Marion rightly acknowledges that to love another requires the hope that the other will love me in return.

### Marion's Phenomenology of Love

In stark contrast to Nygren's and Derrida's insistence that *agape* and *eros* are entirely distinct and that *agape* is the only true form of love, Marion offers his phenomenology of the erotic phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> Marion's goal in *The Erotic Phenomenon* is to think about love from itself and through itself. He wants to consider love apart from every external category imposed upon it so that he can give a unified account of love, one that does not hastily divide *agape* and *eros*:

[E]very concept of love is weakened and compromised as soon as one allows oneself to distinguish competing divergent, or indeed irreconcilable, meanings for example, by opposing from the outset, as if it were unquestionable evidence, love and charity (*eros* and *agape*), supposedly possessive desire and supposedly gratuitous benevolence, rational love (of the moral law) and irrational passion. A serious concept of love distinguishes itself by its unity, or rather by its power to keep together significations that nonerotic thought cuts apart, stretches, and tears according to the measure of its prejudices (2007: 4-5).

Marion believes that if we think about love in itself, apart from any alien categories, then we can find a unified concept of love. But how can we think about love by itself? Marion's answer is that love is a saturated phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> In other words, it is a phenomenon that gives itself to be experienced according to its own rules and terms: "[Love] does not admit reason or logic other than its own, and only becomes legible beginning from there" (2007: 217). If love must be thought according to its own reasons, then how are we to understand love?

Marion claims that love is what gives me assurance. I want to be loved because love gives me the assurance that I matter, that my existence is worthwhile to another person. Even if Descartes is right that I can be certain that I exist, this certain knowledge cannot assure me against the vanity of life. The assurance that life is worth living must come from someone who loves me: “Receiving assurance against the vanity of my certain existence does not depend upon me, but requires that I learn from elsewhere that I am and above all if I have to be. Holding out when faced with vanity, which is to say obtaining the justification to be from elsewhere, means that I am, not by being (even through myself, even as a privileged being), but insofar as I am loved (and thus chosen from elsewhere)” (2007: 23). If I have never been loved by anyone, then I consider life to be meaningless. Consequently, Marion defines love (whether *agape*, *eros*, or *philia*) as that which provides my life with meaning. When I ask the most fundamental human question, ‘Does anyone love me?’, I am looking for someone to act and feel towards me in a way that gives me the assurance that my life matters.

By defining love in terms of the question, ‘Does anyone love me?’, Marion does not define love based on an interpretation of how we commonly use the term, but defines it as that which gives me assurance: “[T]he cases of love all converge in the lover losing his primacy and, in every circumstance, exposing himself to the unique question of vanity: ‘Does anyone out there love me?’ . . . Outside of this reduction, there is no love, and no lover” (2007: 217) Because Marion defines love as that which gives me value, love begins from my desire for assurance. Only a love that could assure me counts as love.

One consequence of defining love as that which assures me that my existence matters is that much of what we refer to as love is not love at all. For example, a promise to love for a determinate amount of time does not qualify as love because it cannot assure me. If another loves me for a determinate time, I recognize that it is not a love that assures me that I am worthwhile. It is just an agreement to put up with me for a certain amount of time. A manipulative love also cannot assure me because the relationship is entirely controlled by the manipulator. If I am manipulated I may in fact grow depressed and conclude that my existence does not matter. Because Marion defines love as that which assures me that I am valuable, only love from someone outside me can assure me. But where does Marion’s account leave self-love? Is self-love not really love at all?

### The Impossibility of Self-Love

It seems quite clear that impoverished versions of love such as manipulation or seduction cannot assure me that I have value, but what about self-love? Does loving myself satisfy my desire to be loved, even if no one out there loves me? If the question is answered affirmatively, then we have no need to seek love outside of ourselves, but

we only need to love ourselves. However, Marion argues that not only does self-love not reassure us but also that direct self-love is impossible because it ends in self-hatred. The main reason why self-love cannot assure me is that love must exceed my expectations. If I can expect the love that someone gives to me, then I cannot be assured by it. I will think it is simply my due: “For the measure of this love requires loving without measure—without common measure with what I expect and imagine, failing which I will not believe in it. And, barring its excess, love remains lacking” (2007: 46). The love that assures me must outweigh the vanity that confronts me. It must be powerful enough to overcome the question, ‘Does it really matter?’ If someone for whom I have no regard loves me, my response is, “So what?” It does not matter to me that this person loves me. In a similar way, if I were to love myself the love would not be strong enough to overcome vanity. I would not be assured by it because I would not think that my love was worth anything.

However, at this point some may object and argue that self-love in the form of self-preservation is a perfectly natural and universally human impulse. Everyone has an immediate love for the self because everyone desires to stay alive. However, for Marion we do not have an automatic desire to persevere in our being. I can hate my existence as much as love it. For Marion, the central question of human existence is whether anyone loves me. If this question is not answered affirmatively, then I have no natural self-love, no natural desire to persevere in my being: “For I can just as easily not esteem my being as lovable, I can always hate being, out of disgust or impotence; I can even deny myself the right and above all the duty to encumber the world of my fellows with my pathetic claim to persist in my pitiable being. Being—should a lover necessarily love it, and love it for itself, as fitting to him in the rank of lover? Nothing is less assured” (2007: 50). Therefore, self-love rooted in the perseverance of one’s existence is an illusion according to Marion. It cannot assure me in any sense because I need a reason to persevere in my being other than the brute fact that I exist.

Marion believes that any attempt to love ourselves directly ends in self-hatred and not self-love. He argues that our desire for assurance, the demand that someone else loves me, reveals not that self-love is at the core of our existence, but that self-hatred is our primary affection:

Nothing is more evident than love of self and perseverance in one’s being, at least in the natural attitude; but as soon as we enter the erotic reduction, each appears as a logical contradiction, or more exactly, an erotic contradiction. To have done with these illusions, we will establish once and for all the exact opposite thesis—no one can love himself, and surely not with an unconditional self-love, because every man for himself finds, more original than the alleged self-love, self-hatred in himself (2007: 53).

Marion claims that the result of our search for assurance is that we do not love ourselves, but we actually hate ourselves.

The reason that I do not have self-love is because, as finite, I know I am not worthy of love. Marion thinks that I experience myself as finite by reflecting on my own inability to love perfectly. The experience of my own finitude forces me to realize that I cannot provide the assurance that I am looking for because I need an infinite love to assure me: “[T]he finitude of the self only feels itself adequately assured if an infinite love assures it; in short, the finite receives assurance from nothing less than the infinite. The finite, in order to resist vanity and its ‘What’s the use?’ requires an assurance, and thus an infinite love” (2007: 55). Because I know I am finite, I realize I cannot possibly assure myself. So, even if I could love myself in an immediate sense prior to receiving assurance from the outside, this self-love could not assure me because I require an infinite love, a love that I cannot see the beginning or end of. This must be a love that comes from outside me and appears as something unexpected.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Recovery of Self-Love**

From Marion’s claim that we cannot assure ourselves directly by self-love, it may seem that Marion wishes to completely remove self-love from all love. If Marion denies all self-love, then he would agree with Nygren and Derrida that true love is without any reference to the self. However, this is not the case. Just because direct self-love is impossible by itself does not mean that self-love is entirely absent from my love for another. Clarifying Marion’s position requires continuing with his phenomenology of love.

When I demand that another love me I am well aware of the injustice of this claim. I recognize that I am not deserving of assurance. At this stage I am demanding assurance from the other because I need to be loved. But my demand to be loved shows that I have not yet understood love. When I demand that another assure me, I am looking to get something out of her; I am considering love to be an economic exchange (2007: 69).

I have not yet understood that love suspends reciprocity. Love must be given without reason and without the expectation of exchange. For a love that can assure me to appear, it must be given freely; I must not demand it. Ultimately, this is why Marion argues that the erotic reduction leads us to ask a further question. In order to find assurance I cannot just ask the question, ‘Does anyone love me?’, but I must proceed to the question, ‘Can I love another first?’ Marion believes that the former question requires moving to the latter. I need to move to this question because it is only by seeking to love first that love occurs: “When, then, does the lover appear? Precisely when, during the encounter, I suspend reciprocity, and no longer economize, engaging

myself without any guarantee of assurance. The lover appears when one of the actors in the exchange no longer poses prior conditions, and loves without requiring to be loved, and thus, in the figure of the gift, abolishes economy” (2007: 78). I can only love when I suspend my demand for assurance and instead seek to love another.

But Marion’s claim that I can begin to love only when I no longer demand to be loved in return seems to point to *agape* as the core attitude of love. Love happens only when I give up any selfish or self-concerned desires and aim purely at the good of the other. Love seems to occur only when I love the other in herself and not for any self-concerned reason. However, I do not think Marion intends to sublimate *eros* in *agape* and identify *agape* (or at least what is commonly defined as *agape*) as the only attitude in love. He does not claim that I must only love another for herself apart from her relation to me.

One reason why we should not read Marion as rejecting *eros* in favor of *agape* is that I do not entirely give up my desire for assurance in deciding to love. Marion claims that I find a new kind of assurance when I choose to love:

[W]hen I pass on to the question ‘Can I love first?’ what assurance can I legitimately hope for, as a lover? Evidently not the assurance to be able to continue or to persevere in my being despite the suspicion of vanity, but the sole assurance appropriate to the radicalized erotic reduction— not the assurance of being [*l’assurance d’etre*], nor of being itself [*ni de l’etre*], but *the assurance of loving*. . . understood as the pure and simple assurance of the precise fact that [I love] (2007: 73).

The assurance that I have chosen to love is the only assurance that I can have at this point. The assurance of choosing to love is not even the assurance that I actually love the other, because only the other can accept my love and assure me that I am loving. While the assurance of choosing to love is a very limited assurance, it is assurance nonetheless.

But the assurance that I have chosen to love is not the only assurance I can ever hope for. Marion insists that when I decide to love I do not give up my desire for assurance. Instead I replace my *demand* for assurance with the *hope* that another will love me and thus assure me:

[The] lover, in the very moment of the most headlong advance, which frees him from reciprocity and from economy, still hopes by full rights in assurance, the assurance that someone loves him and defends him from vanity. . . But this assurance would sink instantly into its contrary if he waited for it like the possession of an object that is certain. . . Love thus only becomes thinkable according to the mode of the hoped for, of

that which can only come upon me as the radically unseen and unwarranted (2007: 88-89).

My desire for assurance does not disqualify my love for the other. I do not love if I demand reciprocal love, but I can still maintain the hope that another will love me.

While Marion denies that love must be entirely self-forgetful because I still may hope for assurance, we must remember that Marion does not simply side with the proponents of *eros* who argue that all love is a form of self-love. We cannot begin to love until we give up the demand that someone love me before I love her. I do not love so that I will receive assurance. This is to miss the very purpose of love. I can hope that another will love me, but I can in no way demand it or guarantee it.

### **The Unity of *Agape* and *Eros***

The moment when I give up my demand to be loved and decide to love first is the moment that love appears. According to Marion, both *eros* and *agape* share this fundamental movement as they are two names given for the same underlying reality. Now that we have seen the details of Marion's account we can address how his account of *agape* and *eros* differs from the common assumptions made about the two loves that we noted above, as well as how his account differs from Derrida's claim that love must be entirely without reciprocity.

Marion summarizes the first distinction between self-forgetful *agape* and self-interested *eros* as follows: "[P]assionately love, which enjoys itself and possesses the other, would contrast with virtuous love, which gives to the other and forgets itself" (2007: 220-221). *Eros* is supposedly a love that is more concerned with the self than with the other, whereas *agape* must entirely forget the self in its concern for the other. However, Marion argues that these distinctions do not reflect the shared similarities between *eros* and *agape*.

*Eros* is concerned with the other, and not only with the self, just as much as *agape* is. According to Marion's phenomenology of erotic love, the lover does not use the beloved as a means to her own enjoyment. The erotic lover only becomes a lover by giving up on self-love and attempting to love first: "But this same lover, who enjoys and possesses, nonetheless succeeds in doing so by forgetting and abandoning him- or herself first: in general and in principle by his or her advance" (2007: 221). The erotic lover must give up her own desire for assurance and seek to assure another. Ultimately we receive our assurance from another when she assures me that I love her, when she assures me that I am faithful to her. So, *eros* requires that I care for the other and not simply use the other for my own purposes. Using the other for my own lustful desires is not love, and does not deserve to be called by the name. But this seems like a very

unrealistic account of love. Don't we use the word love (as in "making love") to refer to an act where no love may be exchanged at all? Specifically, we sometimes use *eros* to mean an act of seduction, where the seducer only sees the other as an object to be conquered. But seduction does not seem to have anything in common with *agape*.

Marion argues not that seduction is a lower form of love, but that it does not reach the bar of erotic love at all. Seduction cannot be called love because the seducer only wants to seduce so that the other loves him, without ever loving the other. The seducer pretends to love to trick the other into loving him, at which point he will no longer love. From the very beginning he plans only to pretend to love so that he will receive the love of the other: "Seduction wants to make itself loved without, in the end, loving—I only go about the advance with the firm resolution of losing it as soon as possible; I only lose myself in the advance so that someone comes to me and I thus find myself again; or rather so that I find her without her ever finding me again. The advance disappears, like a lure I dangle, assuring me a free gain. In seduction I take pleasure, but the pleasure is solitary" (2007: 83). Seduction is not love because the seducer only tricks the other into loving him without actually loving the other.

The case of seduction is not an instance of love because it does not presuppose eternity; the lover has not promised to love at this moment for all time. While no one can presume to guarantee that one's love will last forever, in declaring love for someone, I must do so under the promise of eternity. To begin to love, I must desire to be faithful forever. If I say "I love you" at the same time knowing that I am only going to love for a limited amount of time, then the love is not simply deficient, but it is not love at all. My choice to be faithful does not guarantee eternity, but I do not love if I know that I will love only for a limited amount of time. Marion concludes that *eros*, and not just *agape*, requires the promise that I love for all time. An attempt to love without the promise of eternity is not love because I will not assure the beloved that she matters.

Marion responds to the second assumed distinction between an *agape* that dispassionately loves what is not lovable and an *eros* that loves only as a response to something attractive in the beloved by claiming that *agape* also passionately desires the other: "The lover, he or she who preeminently renounces possession and reciprocity by taking his or her advance, nevertheless does enjoy, does eroticize through speech, jealously demands, too, and sometimes runs away. . . . One must have a good deal of naïvité or blindness, or rather know nothing of the lover and of erotic logic, not to see that [*agape*] possesses and consumes as much as [*eros*] gives up and abandons" (2007: 221). The lover who loves with *agape* desires the good for a specific other. If she does not enjoy *this* other at all, then it is not love because the other is interchangeable with any other beloved and she will not be assured that her existence matters. In order to love I must love this specific one. I must look to give her assurance through my love.

## Marion's Response to Derrida

Marion's phenomenology of love also questions Derrida's claim that love must be entirely without the desire for reciprocity. Marion clearly contradicts Derrida's claim by arguing that our hope for assurance is not something that we should ignore or deny. On this point, I think Marion's argument is quite strong. He acknowledges that love is not a one-way street. There is a desire for reciprocity even though the lover realizes that reciprocity cannot be demanded. Even John Milbank, who argues that Marion does not sufficiently account for reciprocity in love, acknowledges that Marion maintains the hope that another will love me: "Thus against any Levinasian or Derridean eulogizing of the purely unilateral, Marion fully insists that the lover who advances goes on *hoping* for a reciprocating response even though he in no way demands it, requires it, or expects it. . . Hence the lover goes on hoping for a response, not only in order to receive acceptance, but also to receive confirmation that his act of love is truly love" (2007: 261). My hope for assurance that I love and that another loves me does not render love impossible, but it establishes love's possibility.

As we have seen, for Marion, all love includes a desire for reciprocity even if I cannot demand it. Even in a traditional understanding, *agape* is not a "pure" form of love where I give up all desire for the other to acknowledge my love or even love me in return. In order to truly love another with *agape*, I must desire the other's good as my own good. I must make another's good my own, which might lead to a relationship because I desire the same thing the other does (her good). Even in *agape*, I cannot get away from being pleased when another's good is realized. However, Derrida would have to argue that making another's good my own is disqualified by the demand that no hint of reciprocity can be allowed in pure love. To make another's good my own would mean that I would receive something if the other's good is realized. If Derrida is correct about love, then love cannot even desire another's good. It must be so entirely self-forgetful that I do not know what I am doing because to give a pure gift I must not even know I am giving the gift for fear of economic calculation.

Derrida's demand for love, that I cannot make another's good my own, leads to an extremely stilted view of love. Derrida's call for a radical *agape* ends up requiring that I not even recognize the other at all. In my goal of removing all my own desires from love I end up losing *this* particular other, the one directly in front of me. Thus, only love for a generalized other—to use Emmanuel Levinas's formulation: the widow, orphan, stranger—is possible. Once an actual widow, orphan, or stranger comes across my path, I cannot love her because there would be a possible hint of reciprocity. But, as I have shown, I think Marion provides good reasons to suggest that Derrida's demand that love be without any possible thought or hint of reciprocity obscures the nature of love, which requires that I make another's good my own.

### Marion on Love and Its Reasons

Besides providing an alternative to Derrida's account of pure *agape*, Marion's phenomenology of love also provides a very different approach to the topic of love and its reasons. As I argued above, the traditional account of *agape* and *eros* holds that the reason why I love with *agape* rests entirely on the lover's decision. Derrida follows this traditional account of *agape* by claiming that the lover cannot desire anything in the beloved because that would mean that the lover loves in order to receive something in return. The lover must not respond to any perceived value in the beloved, but *agape* only seeks to give itself away to the other. On the other hand, the reason why one loves with *eros* is in response to some perceived value in the beloved. In breaking down the traditional distinction between *agape* and *eros* Marion conceives of a very different account of why we love.

Marion assumes that there is not just one reason why I love another; we cannot reduce love to one reason. In love we do not merely ignore reciprocity; Marion insists that I can hope for it but I cannot demand it. In order to even qualify as a lover I must love this particular lover. In other words, if I do not assure the other that I love her, if I love her with such a disinterested love that the beloved is interchangeable with any other, then it is not truly love. So Marion acknowledges that I still love another person because of the other. The lover loves this particular beloved for reasons inherent in the beloved. However, Marion also acknowledges that love does not appear until the lover decides to love without the expectation of receiving anything in return. Thus the reason why I love this particular beloved is also found in my will. When it comes to giving reasons for our love Marion insists that reasons reside both in our own will and in the beloved's value. Thus, Marion's account of love truly is a unity of *agape* and *eros*.

### Critique of Marion's Account of Love

As I have argued, I think Marion is correct in identifying the paradox at the heart of love that in order to truly love I must give up my demand for assurance, although I still maintain the hope that another will love me. However, in my view, Marion minimizes the extent to which reciprocity is necessary for love even though he accounts for reciprocity in at least two ways.

One nod towards the necessary role of reciprocity in love is that even though his first-person approach limits his focus to the individual's experience of loving and being loved, he still argues that once we have worked our way through the erotic reduction we find that we have been preceded by love:

I have learned that I never could have asked myself, 'Does anyone out there love me?' if another did not love me first. It was necessary that I enter into the erotic reduction and that I advance under the form of the

lover in order that the logic of love lead me insensibly, but ineluctably, to comprehend that another loved me well before I loved her. . . . In fact, no one can claim, at least without lying to oneself or contradicting oneself, that no one loves him or has loved him (2007: 215).

We could not enter the erotic reduction without someone loving us because in order to even ask the question someone must have considered our existence at least minimally worthwhile.

A second way in which Marion minimally accounts for reciprocity is that, as we have seen, he holds that I should never give up the hope that another will love me in return. I maintain the hope in a reciprocal relationship without demanding it. Yet despite these nods toward reciprocity, he does not sufficiently account for reciprocity because he is too hesitant to allow any self-interest into love.

Marion's limiting of the role of reciprocity in love leads him to agree with Derrida that the purest form of love is one in which the other cannot possibly pay me back. This leads him to claim that loving an anonymous beloved is the sincerest and best form of love. Marion displays this tendency in a recent essay:

In fact, the more I sincerely love (or think I love, which amounts to the same for me), the less the identity or the presence of the loved one is required. I can love a woman or a man that I know only superficially, or that I do not know at all (based on his name, his reputation) or even about whom I know nothing. I can love someone who is absent most of the time, and who will probably always remain thus, and I can even love someone absent who has never yet been present, not even for a moment. I can love a woman whom I have lost, or whom I have left. I can love someone dead out of loyalty, and a child not yet born out of hope. Because I love, what I am in love with does not have to *be* at all, and can thus dispense altogether with maintaining the status of a being (2002b: 44).

While I agree with Marion that we can love, at least in a certain sense, someone who has died or an unborn child, I disagree with his claim that a love where the beloved is anonymous or not present is *more* sincere than a loving friendship. According to Marion, loving an anonymous beloved is a more sincere form of love because I know that the other will not or cannot love me in return. Marion appears more concerned with the lover's purity than with the identity of the beloved.

Marion's claim that loving an anonymous beloved is the most sincere form of love obscures the nature of love in a few ways. First, it can lead to a view of love that is so focused on the purity of the lover's motivation that it forgets the other's needs. Marion

certainly is correct that I do not love another person if my sole focus is to get her to love me in return or to get something else from her. However, if I am so focused on my own purity as a lover, then I can easily forget the beloved's needs. This is especially the case if the beloved is an anonymous beloved whose only identity is in my own mind. A "woman whom I have lost" is no longer present to me. So, while I may wish her well in a general sense, I am no longer in a relationship with her and cannot meet her needs as one who is in a proximate friendship with her might. It hardly seems like wishing her good in an abstract sense is a *more* sincere form of love than getting my hands dirty and meeting her actual needs.

Second, Marion's view that loving a beloved who is not present is the clearest form of love misidentifies the nature of love because it is often far more difficult to love someone with whom we are in close proximity. Often our love is tested most by the one we love who mistreats us, is unfaithful, or simply takes our love for granted. It is in these situations where we may realize the purity of our love for another. Do I love my daughter merely for the satisfaction of being loved in return? Or, will I love my daughter despite the fact that she may never return my love? It seems that it is in these particularly close relationships that love is most tested and purified. If an anonymous recipient of my charity takes my love for granted I can simply move on to another beloved; but if one with whom I am in a close relationship rejects my love, then I am shaken and must face the question, why do I love her? It is the risk of rejection by the beloved, the giving up of the demand for assurance that must be taken in order to love fully.

Finally, Marion's emphasis on love for a beloved who is not present as the most sincere form of love undermines his very definition of love as what gives us the assurance that our existence matters. If I sincerely love a woman "I do not know at all," then in what possible sense is she assured? If somehow this woman finds out about my love for her, she will not be assured because she can rightly object that I do not love her; I only love how she appears to me. If I can love a beloved who is not present, then the only one who might receive any assurance is me. Thus, in attempting to purify all self-interest from love, Marion's account of love ends up losing the other's need for assurance. We both need assurance, but, as Marion has rightly argued, I must give up my demand for assurance in order to assure the other that her existence matters. Marion's emphasis on the purity of love ends up leading his account of love away from his initial insight that to love another requires that I give the beloved assurance that she matters. Additionally, Marion's focus on love's purity implies that the ultimate reason why I should love another person rests in my own choice instead of in the other.

## Conclusion

I think Marion's argument that *eros* and *agape* share many characteristics, that they are two movements of the one act of love, is a compelling argument overall. Marion properly agrees with defenders of *eros* who claim that we want (and need) to be reciprocally loved by others. At the same time, Marion rightly denies that my demand for assurance leads to love. I appear as lover only when I give up my demand for assurance and seek to love without being loved in return (*agape*). But contrary to the common definition of *agape*, this does not mean I should ignore my desire for assurance. I should hope for assurance, but not demand it. However, as I have argued, Marion's claim that loving an anonymous beloved who cannot pay me back suggests that he has not adequately accounted for the full range of reciprocity in love. His erotic phenomenon looks too much like Derrida's pure *agape*.

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<sup>1</sup> This quote is Armstrong’s summary of Nygren’s position on *eros*. Armstrong questions Nygren’s interpretation *eros* although he still privileges *agape* to *eros*: “It is of course necessary to find a place for the passionate love of desire and aspiration, even if that place is far below that held by the love of divine generosity and sacrificial self-giving” (105).

<sup>2</sup> I will not provide anything close to a full account of Derrida’s account of the gift, or of Marion’s acceptance and critique of Derrida’s requirements for the gift. For a full account of Derrida and Marion on the gift see Horner (2001).

<sup>3</sup> For Marion’s arguments that the gift can be thought, but only according to the horizon of givenness see Marion (1999: 122-143); cf. Marion (2002a: 71-118).

<sup>4</sup> While *The Erotic Phenomenon* follows Descartes’ *Meditations* in not employing any references, I think it is clear that one of Marion’s main interlocutors is Derrida and his discussion of the gift.

<sup>5</sup> For an introduction to Marion’s phenomenology of the saturated phenomenon see Marion (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Marion’s claim that we need infinite love for assurance does not imply that only divine love can assure me. His claim is that the love must come from someone who promises to love for all time.