

Oliver D. Crisp, James M. Arcadi, and Jordan Wessling, eds. *Love, Divine and Human: Contemporary Essays in Systematic and Philosophical Theology*. London: T&T Clark, 2020. Xx+260 pp. \$130.00 (hbk); \$39.95 (paper).

Ross Parker
Charleston Southern University

Love plays a foundational role in the Christian understanding of God, and the Christian understanding of ethics. Love is, arguably, the most fundamental divine attribute (e.g., 1 John 4:8, 16), and, arguably, sums up the entirety of how humans ought to live (Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:9; James 2:8). In *Love, Divine and Human* Oliver Crisp, James Arcadi, and Jordan Wessling have arranged a collection of cutting-edge essays on this most important topic. Here I'll briefly state what I take to be the main argument of each chapter and provide commentary and response to some of the key claims made.¹ I'll then close with some general comments on the book as a whole.

The book begins (Ch. 1) with Kevin Vanhoozer's comparison of two models of divine love – "immanent-experientialist" and "transcendent-voluntarist" (using John Peckham's distinction). His representative of the former is Thomas Jay Oord, of the latter John Webster. Vanhoozer helpfully summarizes Oord's account of divine love as "essential kenosis" (11). Oord's definition of love is as follows: "To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others... to promote overall well-being" (quoted on 11). Oord is convinced that if God *could* stop evil but doesn't, then God is not perfectly good. As God *is* perfectly good and evil exists, Oord affirms that "God's loving nature requires God to create a world with creatures God cannot control" (quoted on 13).

Vanhoozer has concerns about Oord's account. He finds the idea that divine love is never causally controlling, even over the natural world, problematic. Additionally, Vanhoozer is concerned that Oord's account makes evil metaphysically necessary. He puts forward Webster's view as superior, particularly his emphasis on grounding a view of Divine love in the "ontology of the saving agents—Father, Son, and Spirit" (19). Key for Webster's account is that in loving, God has a "mixed" relation to the world; God's relation to the world is a "relation of reason" on the side of God (22).

Chapter 2 is Oord's response to Vanhoozer. Oord's primary argument for his account of divine love, and critique of the Webster/Vanhoozer account, is that it is the

¹ Wessling provides a helpful overview of the contents of the chapters in his "Introduction" (1-5).

only way to adequately provide a theodicy for the evil of our world. For Oord, “We must place the problem of evil among the primary questions of faith, using it to lead us toward plausible views of God’s love, power, and relatedness” (41). It seems to me that Oord fails to address a fundamental aspect of the debate; he never addresses Webster’s Thomistic claim that God’s relation to the world is “a relation of reason” and not “real”. Though only mentioned briefly by Vanhoozer, I contend that commitments on divine simplicity serve as fundamental presuppositions in this debate, such that by not addressing this Oord is missing a key aspect of the disagreement.

In Chapter 3 Michael Rea responds to J. L. Schellenberg’s argument from divine hiddenness. Rea does this by challenging what he takes to be a key supposition of the argument: that God’s love would be supreme love for all humans, understood as desiring each person’s highest good and doing all that is possible to fulfill that desire. Supreme love would require God to pursue humanity’s good over the promotion of other goods. But God, as a personal being, will have interests and desires not oriented toward human desires, and God may reasonably act on his own interests even if this means he would not be promoting human goods.

I’m not persuaded by this argument. It makes sense that God would have non-human interests and concerns. (Though Rea doesn’t try to articulate what these might be for God, he points out human examples such as love of art and natural beauty.) But Rea doesn’t provide any possible example of an interest/concern of God and a person’s highest good being incompatible; what he does is show how this can be the case in the best human loving relationships, and then assert that this would be the case in God’s love for humans as well. But since God is omniscient and omnipotent, God can enjoy the beauty of his creation (an example of a non-anthropocentric interest) *and* can desire and seek to fulfill my highest good. The conflict seems like it would only arise if there were limits of attention or power on the part of God.

Like Rea, Sameer Yadav responds to Schellenberg’s argument from divine hiddenness (Ch. 4). Yadav identifies another assumption of the argument – that divine love would desire a personal relationship with humans in the way that humans desire a personal relationship (only without imperfection). Yadav responds to the claim by offering an alternate account of divine love that is not understood in terms of what is required of the best of human loves. His proposal is that God intends for humans the relationship of humans imaging God, understood as resembling God’s ruling capacity over creation in a creaturely way. This divine intention constitutes a “kind of divine-human love relationship [that] is distinct from human relationships of friendship, spousal love, or parenthood and that God’s manifesting openness to the personal imaging relationship is compatible with permitting the beloved’s nonresistant nonbelief in God’s existence...” (73).

While Yadav argues that intending for us to image God counts as a loving personal relationship (75), I have concerns. Let’s say I intend to have a student who reflects my knowledge of, and love of, philosophy. I successfully impart to this student everything I know about philosophy and my love of wisdom. There’s a sense in which the student shares in my mind and will; he may be accurately described as my disciple and even as imaging me in some sense. But this could happen without me *loving* the student, because I don’t have concern for the student *himself* (I could be motivated by

the promulgation of philosophical knowledge in the abstract). The same seems to be the case for Yadav's account of the relationship of divine imaging.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide an exchange between Jeff Jordan and Thomas Talbott. Jordan argues against a "Maximality" model and an "Equality" model of divine love and for a "Variability" model: "God loves all humans; and yet the divine love is variable, as God loves some more than others" (90). His case can be summed up as follows: the depth of love is determined by the interests of the beloved that the lover identifies with, that human interests are at times incompatible, and so God can't identify with all of each person's interests.

Talbott defends God's maximal love for all. He argues that the depth of one's love doesn't depend on identifying with subjective interests that are not a person's best interest, that God can identify with a desire even if he can't satisfy it, and that "for every case where two persons have incompatible interests, God takes as his own some deeper and more important interest that both parties share, whether either of them is aware of it or not" (102). I find Talbott's case to be stronger than Jordan's.²

In Chapter 7 Marilyn McCord Adams (in what was her last essay) acknowledges that affirming maximal divine love creates an evidential challenge for theism with the horrors ("prima facie life-ruinous evils," 116) pervasive in our world. But she affirms (like Talbott) maximal divine love; the evidential challenge can be met because ultimately *all* will learn of God's love for them and experience "beatific intimacy" (124) with God, overwhelming the evil they have suffered. I affirm Adams's commitment to God's perfect love of all, but I have too many scriptural concerns to follow her to the conclusion of universalism.

In Chapter 8 R. T. Mullins addresses the debate on the nature of divine love and impassibility. Mullins notes that many opponents of impassibility argue that it is incompatible with divine love, since love requires empathetic suffering, but that this argument doesn't have much traction with proponents of impassibility, as they affirm a different account of love. So Mullins aims to grant a commonly accepted impassibilist account of love and argue that it requires passibility. Specifically, Mullins works with Eleonore Stump's Thomistic-inspired account of love as desire for the good of the beloved and desire for union with the beloved. Key to Mullins's argument is his defense of Linda Zagzebski's account of divine omnibusjectivity. Mullins then argues that an impassible God will be "severely limited in the possible extent of His union with creatures" (139) because he can't have omnibusjectivity.

While Mullins's discussion of passibility, impassibility, Stump's account of love, and Zagzebski's defense of omnibusjectivity are models of clarity, I'm unpersuaded by the argument itself. Mullins aims to find mutual ground with the impassibilist by accepting Stump's account of love. But his efforts to find mutual ground are undercut by putting the weight of his argument on the claim that love requires omnibusjectivity, a doctrine that the impassibilist is going to be even more quick to reject. (I'm inclined myself to affirm passibilism rather than impassibilism, but I don't find omnibusjectivity plausible).

² This isn't surprising, as I've argued against a previous articulation of Jordan's case that God's love is not maximal for all.

In Chapter 9 Jordan Wessling addresses the question of how God's wrath should be understood by those who affirm God's wrath is always motivated by love for the object of divine wrath. One option understands divine wrath as not involving direct divine wrathful action, but instead as God allowing sinners to undergo the consequences of their behavior (the "natural consequences" view). Wessling, building on R. A. Duff's communicative view of punishment, defends the divine communicative punishment view as superior: God does directly act to punish, but this is loving as "God's punishment aims to communicate to offenders the censure they deserve, with the purpose of trying to persuade these individuals to start down the path of spiritual transformation" (146). This chapter was the most helpful in the book for me personally. Wessling's application of Duff's communicative view of punishment to divine wrath provided the best account I've come across of how God can actively punish while maintaining love for the one punished.

In Chapter 10 Adonis Vidu addresses the topic of the ontology of the claim that God indwells the Christian. Vidu defends a Thomistic-inspired account against modern detractors; the Holy Spirit is assimilated in the believer through the loving habit infused through the "reciprocal causality" of the Spirit Himself. This allows us to "affirm a priority of uncreated grace over the infused habits, including love" but also allows us to "insist that these habits are precisely the form of the Spirit's presence" (186). This chapter was by far the most difficult for me to follow in the book. (This is probably because it seems like this chapter is the one that leans most toward the systematic theology end of the systematic theology / philosophical theology spectrum of the contemporary analytic theology project, whereas my background is on the philosophy end of that spectrum.)

Chapters 11-14 turn from divine love to focus on human love. In Chapter 11 Leigh Vicens addresses the relationship between love and resentment. Peter Strawson argued that resentment is intertwined with love in human relationships, which seems problematic for a Christian account of ethics. Vicens defends Derk Pereboom's account where human agents do not have "basic desert" moral responsibility because their actions are determined (though there is an "answerability notion of moral responsibility"), so we should not see others as targets of resentment. Vicens's contribution to the debate is to present Marilyn McCord Adams's model of forgiveness as providing a model for how we can love without resentment and to argue that this model is compatible with Pereboom's view that humans aren't ultimately responsible for their actions.

I agree with Vicens that even if we don't have free will, there are characteristics of humans (rationality, emotional capacity) that would make it such that we should not adopt the "objective attitude" described by Strawson. But it still seems that there would not be *as strong of emotional bonds* with our loved ones if we believed they don't have "basic-desert" moral responsibility. Further, if Pereboom's view defended by Vicens is right, then forgiveness would not be particularly difficult – what makes forgiveness hard is the belief that offenders are responsible for their actions. The more important question, then, is how we should think of forgiveness as overcoming resentment if humans do in fact have basic-desert moral responsibility.

Perhaps the most surprising and controversial position argued for in this volume is Kent Dunnington's claim that Christians do not have a duty to love their

neighbor (Ch. 12). The heart of Dunnington's argument can be summed up as follows: the love command would require significant levels of sacrifice for neighbors, levels of sacrifice that almost everyone consistently and persistently fails to live up to. (Here are some of what Dunnington takes the love command to require: "giving away most possessions... welcoming potential enemies into our homes... refraining from service in the military... refraining from...voting "guilty" on a jury or joining the police...," 208). So if we have a duty to love, we're all consistently guilty and "should be morally blamed and upbraided" (208). But this isn't a reasonable position to take on our daily moral situation. So what does Jesus's love command do? "The love command is an invitation to live in another, promised reality" (210). It is a hypothetical imperative – a command to follow if one wants full kingdom life.

While this essay is provocative (in a good way), I simply don't see Jesus's love command as enjoining us to the actions that Dunnington takes it to require. I'm not saying that I keep Jesus's command perfectly – far from it! But I agree with C. S. Lewis's assessment: "Christ did not come to preach any brand new morality. The Golden Rule of the New Testament (Do as you would be done by) is a summing up of what everyone, at bottom, had always known to be right."³

Erin Dufault-Hunter (Ch. 13) takes up the topic of human sexual love, synthesizing the work on Sarah Coakley. The key idea is that sexual desire is a God-given force that, if properly channeled, pushes us toward union with God and with God's creation. I found Dufault-Hunter's reflections on Coakley's theology of sexual desire to be challenging and encouraging; this was the most practically helpful chapter in the book from my perspective.

In the final chapter of the book (Ch. 14), James T. Turner, Jr. addresses the "Problem of Heavenly Freedom" – a tension between the claim that libertarian freedom is a great good for humans, and so the saints in the eternal state should have it, and the claim that in the eternal state the saints are impeccable, without the ability to sin. Turner critiques the position of Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, who argue that the saints in the eternal state cannot sin because their character has been formed in their "pre-heavenly existence" (quoted on 236) on the basis of their libertarianly free decisions such that they, in their heavenly state, cannot choose to sin. Turner argues against this position in two ways: first, it's implausible to think that humans are able to form their character through free choices to be impeccable (the Impossibility Thesis [IT]), and second, that because Jesus's return inaugurates the eternal state, those who are regenerated just before Christ's return would not have the time necessary to form their character such that they would not be able to sin in the eternal state (he refers to this consideration as "Omega Point" [OP]).

As I read Pawl and Timpe, they seem to adopt a purgatory account to reply to OP-type objections; they say "It seems to us that the traditional doctrine of purgatory allows the soul to continue forming the proper dispositions and character..."⁴ This

³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1952), Bk. 3, Ch. 3, par. 1.

⁴ In Turner's defense, I had to find this in a footnote: Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 4 (2009), 411, footnote 36.

seems to avoid the problem raised by OP. Turner recognizes this as a possible response; he gives an exegetical argument on the basis of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 in reply. He argues that at Christ's return, the saints will be changed instantly from *sōmata psychika* to *sōmata pneumatika*, and that "being a part of the new creation requires that a human have a CNN [Consummated new nature, unable to sin]" (245). From this it follows that the saints at Christ's return are immediately made impeccable. Turner seems right in his reading of 1 Corinthians 15 that the change in the type of body takes place immediately at Christ's return. But the proponent of purgatory can agree that those alive at Christ's return receive resurrected bodies but still go through a period of purgation before being able to enter the heavenly state with a free will which is unable to sin.

The chapters of this book are full of interesting and important arguments that I'm unable to overview and interact with. I have pages of notes that perhaps will turn into further interaction with some of these ideas. I'll close with an observation and a minor criticism. One characteristic of this volume is the significant variation in style in the various chapters. While this is usually the case in an edited volume made up of chapters authored by various people, it seems particularly pronounced here (e.g., the contrast between the last two chapters of the book – the pastoral tone of Dufault-Hunter's chapter and Turner's definitional precision, including 15 or so abbreviations that were in places challenging to keep straight). Finally, it would have been helpful to have a general overview presenting various accounts of divine and human love (e.g., whether love is fundamentally an act of will or an emotion, types of love, etc.) and canvassing debates on how divine love relates to other divine attributes (justice, passibility/impassibility, simplicity, etc.). These topics do get addressed in some of the articles (like Mullins's discussion of divine love and impassibility) but having a general overview of these issues would help the reader have a clearer lay of the philosophical and theological terrain. With that said, anyone who wants to think well on the topic of love will benefit from this book.