

Love “is a Life which Binds Together:” Self-Love and the Other in Henry and Augustine

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1 Introduction: Love’s Intersubjective Mystery

The prospect of submitting love to a taxonomy of concepts, categories, or embodied gestures fails in the face of love’s mystery. Love’s movement remains refractory to all scientific proof or to the traditional philosophical canons of representation, synchronization, or synthesis. The logic of love obeys only itself, which implies that its movement breaks with all attempts to assemble its logic under the form of essence or substance. Yet, when we speak of the nature and meaning of love’s movement, we need not be resigned to complete silence. We all experience the advance of love, even if it is only in the form of self-love. It constitutes and explains not only my emotional makeup but more fundamentally it belongs to “who” I am as a genuine subjective lifestream, revealing the ground on which I can say phenomenologically “I am” this me who operates as this particular self within the field of experience of other subjects with whom I have interaction in the world. Love constitutes my identity as this relational self.

Two figures assist in a sensitive exegesis of a phenomenology of the interrelation of self and love: Augustine and Michel Henry. Read in critical conjunction with one another, their interpretations of love afford us the opportunity to describe genuine love as a twofold movement from self-love to love of the other, however mysterious and nonlinear such a double movement may well be. Shedding light on the phenomenon requires analysis of the presence of the self to itself through the distance of love, which is both a loss of the autarkic (or egotistical) self and a recovery of the self as found in the other. I do not, in other words, abandon myself when I love the other, but I find myself in that union.

Max Scheler, to whom Henry is a phenomenological heir, wisely observes that a phenomenology of love can approach its investigation only by exhibiting love’s performative, kinetic movement. For the ultimate essence of love “can only be exhibited; [it] cannot be defined.”¹ The exhibition or description of

1 Scheler 2008, 152.

love may involve the acts of embodied desire (a caress or look of empathic concern) and erotic intimacy (sexual pleasure) or even service (advocating for the dignity of the other). Each of these acts and more can certainly reflect the logic and stages of love's movement reflective of a certain "structure" I shall propose below. Be that as it may, the definition of love remains elusive and therefore consistent with our claim that love cannot in principle be fully defined.

Nonetheless, the suggestion advanced here is that love involves (at a minimum) relationship, with myself and with the other. Not to be reduced to only an episode of sexual consummation or an act of virtue, the aboriginal wellspring of love belongs fundamentally to the relationship the self has with itself. But this is only a logical first move. Loving myself necessarily presupposes, and assumes its place in, relationship with the other. I must first love myself, and upon this foundation, I love the other in her act of self-love. Yet, the chronology of "first and then" does not yield to a literal temporal sequence thematized as a strict order of operation. I love myself precisely by joining in with the other's self-love. The two movements often coincide. This structure, in turn, can serve to bind me to the other and the other to me. The present essay analyses how we might glimpse what this dynamic structure shall look like. We begin with the necessity of self-love, the foundation of selfhood, and the manner in which it is rooted in the *a priori* structure of self-experience, not a theoretical or hypothetical *a priori*.

2 The *A Priori* of Self-Love

The *urstruktur* of the self can be unveiled in part by an evaluation of the capacity of the self to love itself. Self-love lays a concrete foundation for personal identity, on which I subsist as this self at all. Already the *a priori* structure of self-love prioritizes the experience I have of myself when I feel myself as this individual self who is "mine."

What entitles me to redefine the *a priori* in accord with an appeal to experience, and to the phenomenological shape of love which rests on an analysis of self-experience? Strictly defined, the *a priori* of self-love cannot be configured in the terminology of the transcendental *a priori* that Kant specified. The *Critique of Pure Reason* plainly outlines that the *a priori* is situated in the ego wholly independent of empirical content, of any experience whatsoever. The *a priori* manifold (mainly here space and time among other categories) constitutes a set of categories in the mind that remain the necessary and universal condition for experience to occur and thus obtain at all.² Hence they

² Kant 1998, 137, B 2.

are necessary because they enjoy the status of the "conditions on which the possibility of experience depends and that found it even if one abstracts from everything empirical in the appearances."³ Such a Kantian conception of the *a priori*, influential thought it be, remains abstract, formal, and ultimately, void of material experience.

This Kantian concept of the *a priori* is characterized by Michel Henry as an "empty form" designed, like a placeholder, to occupy the simple possibility of the cognition of objects in general. Husserl repudiates it as a theoretical postulate, precisely because it "remained far removed from any actually and concretely explicative analysis of cognition."⁴ In fact, the Kantian *a priori* must in principle denote a pure conceptual formality because, as Kant states, it cannot be "borrowed from experience, but must always contain the pure *a priori* conditions of a possible experience and of an object of it." The *a priori* structure of cognition is "pure" because it can "contain nothing empirical," which signifies for Kant nothing experiential.⁵

The *a priori* of self-love, as I describe it, turns this Kantian style of *a priori* on its head. The development of self-love represents something more like what Mikel Dufrenne invokes as the material *a priori* expressed in the phenomenological tradition.⁶ It is not contingent in the sense that sometimes I love myself in the world as I remain open to it and sometimes I do not. Rather, the *a priori* here as I understand it rather coincides with the very concrete experience I have of myself as this self who occupies this or that space at any given moment, and who, in this given moment is made sensitive to certain aspects of the world. I concur fully with Dufrenne when he notes that a material and corporeal *a priori* can be conceived as a "structure of being, not as a condition of possibility."⁷ The *a priori* of self-love, if it counts as material, must contain empirical content because it is continuously preoccupied with the self that it is. I am the content I experience in the *a priori*. Self-love, as I propose it, is therefore decidedly not formal or empty or neutral. I cannot operate as an impartial spectator who reasons about the nature of myself and the world; instead I love myself as my own beloved.

And what is it that we love in self-love? We love our life; the fact that we are living merits more than mere passive espousal. We all want to live. We actively to cultivate a state of living. Even when life is extraordinarily difficult

3 Kant 1998, 227, A 96.

4 Henry 1973, 26. Also see Husserl 1969, 14. Husserl also claimed in the *Logical Investigations* that Kant "lacked the phenomenologically correct concept of the *a priori*." Husserl 2000, 319.

5 Kant 1998, 227, A 96.

6 Dufrenne 1966, chapters 3 "The A Priori as Material" and chapter 8, "The A Priori as Corporeal."

7 Dufrenne 1966, 136.

and intolerable, as Levinas notes, we enjoy the very stuff and elements of life instinctively, and we thus do not want to cease dwelling in the elements. Levinas claims even those who find themselves about to exit the world shall exclaim “one more minute Mr. Hangman!” Or better: in every interval of life I grasp for one more, since naturally “one flees toward life.”⁸ Albert Camus’ well-known analysis of suicide admits that while suicide remains a genuine existential possibility, our “attachment to life is something stronger than all the ills in the world.”⁹ We as a species elude death if even only through hope, or what I would claim, through love of self in living this life.

The phenomenology of experience is at the same time the phenomenology of how I am given to myself as this self who loves myself. I love myself because I am this self whose experience of the world is proper only to itself as this self. As a living ego, I cannot help but experience this self that I am as “me,” and I am who I am due to the fact I love myself.

So critical is love to my sense of self that Augustine will simply say that love constitutes “my weight.” This may evoke the reality that love (not thinking or reason) operates as a primal existential orientation, inasmuch as it governs my attentive regard of things, as if love formulates the centre of gravity of the experience of my surrounding world. For I am placed in the precise location into which love compels or transports me. My love is expressed, to continue with famed Augustinian analogy, as a matter of density or mass. For example, what happens when water is poured into oil? The water travels to the bottom of the container. When oil is poured into water the oil predictably rises to the surface. This occurs because each fluid operates according to its unique mass (or viscous density), and so “they are always on the move until they come to rest where they are meant to be.” By the same token, my love negotiates my identity. As this amorous self, amid the many lovable objects in the world, I settle where my love takes me. Hence when one observes what occupies me, one also at the same time observes what I love: “To whatever place I go, I am drawn to it by love.”¹⁰ What, then, is the natural place to which I must go in the disposition of love? I submit the following: I am drawn into myself in a continuous mood of self-love while simultaneously moving into the domain of the other’s self-love.

Michel Henry, for his part, also affirms self-love as an *a priori*; yet important differences remain given his work occupies post-Kantian terrain. The emphatic and radical register of self-presence makes possible Henry’s theory of pure

8 Levinas 1979, 149.

9 Camus 2018, 8.

10 Augustine 1991a, 13, 9, 278.

interiority (more radical than Augustine's), which illuminates a domain of self-love from which there is no escape because there is no distance between me and myself, between the structure and the content of the *a priori*. Lover and beloved weave together fully into a single affection of pure love known as pure self-affection. I am, according to Henry's model of self-love, drawn into myself by feeling myself feel myself. It is an *a priori* structure in that it occurs prior to the movement I enact whereby I act in the world, and thus prior to that domain in which I grasp noetically a particular thing or to enjoy an episode of conscious love expressed between myself and another object or person.

To contrast his model of the *a priori* with Kant's transcendental model is to show how Henry works out his theory consciously in the wake of Kant. Henry makes clear that self-love never may occupy a neutral or empty *a priori* manifold that is somehow separate from the content of experience in which it is designed to constitute. Henry reminds us of the *Critique of Pure Reason's* argument about the *a priori*, for that major philosophical text argues in no uncertain terms that, as Henry writes, the world is constituted "by the *a priori* forms of the pure intuition of space and time, as well as by the categories of the understanding... *a priori* means that these pure ways of making visible precede every actual experience that appearing precedes and makes possible everything that appears in it. According to Kant's decisive affirmation, the forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding are both representations. This way of representing is called *vor-stellen* in German, which means very precisely 'to pose in front of.'¹¹

What remains important for us about Henry's counterpoint (against Kant) is that it entails a renewed emphasis on the *a priori*, and one that serves the purpose of a phenomenological corrective to Kant. The *a priori* for Henry is material because it arises within the structure of self-affection. For the impression of love is the very love the self has of itself, what Henry simply describes as "auto-impressionality," in which self-love is myself because "it is an impressional material undergoing experiencing impressionally and doing so unceasingly, a living auto-impressionality."¹² And to "undergo experiencing oneself, to enjoy oneself, is to love oneself in such a way that this self-enjoyment is produced in absolute Life as its generation of the first Self in which it feels itself and thus loves itself [*et s'aime ainsi elle même*]."¹³ We shall say more below on the repetition of absolute Life's self-love within the very relationship I have with myself and with the other.

11 Henry 2015, 46.

12 Henry 2015, 62.

13 Henry 2000, 246.

To avoid any confusion about the *a priori*, I wish to emphasise that Henry names this absolute domain of self-love of the *a priori* the domain of auto-affection, and it consists in the very love of myself I enjoy of myself as I continue to experience my life as my own. This “me” that I am, argues Henry, suffers the feeling of being glued or riveted to itself. I am “plunged” into myself continuously without relenting; this inner formation of selfhood grows out of the very love of self-experience, in which “I am myself the affected and what affects it, myself the “subject” of this affection and its content. I experience myself, and constantly, in that, the fact of experiencing myself constitutes my “Me.”¹⁴ It is here that life itself, that circulates in and through my self-affection, gives to me my very place as this self with power and capacity to exercise its subjective life: “It is this *pathētik* self-affection, its infinite love of self, defines the original essence both of Truth and Life.”¹⁵

The phenomenological fact that I love myself to be a self at all forms the basis of the present essay: love is the material *a priori* of personal identity and the foundation on which I form relationships and perform acts in the world. Each Augustine and Michel Henry in their own way affirm this point of departure. Augustine no doubt employs an arsenal of definitions of love. For example in *The City of God* the bishop of Hippo invoked love as a structured movement: the *ordo amoris* condemns the impulse to love a thing or person outside of the good for which it was made. We must love a thing properly, in light of God.¹⁶ Yet, self-love formulated in his work *De trinitate* offers the most basic description of love’s internal relation to itself, whereby the self loves itself. Hence we investigate that theory of identity reflective of a more fundamental order of love in Augustine and Henry, namely: I enjoy self-love in order to love the other’s self-love. Augustine develops this conception of self-love in intricate detail, but it can be redrawn according the map below of auto-affection versus hetero-affection, in the next subsection.

Apart from the many forms love takes in the phenomenological tradition, the dominate category from Scheler to Levinas to Marion is that there are two forms of love in competition with one another: that (i) love of the other must displace (ii) love of self. Michel Henry’s theory of love stands apart because it argues love properly formulated finds its true portraiture in an *a priori* conception of self-love. Love originally is manifest as my love or care for myself as this particular self who exists in a world of others. Love is the condition for the possibility of being myself among other selves. In my attitude of love, I

14 Henry 2003, 107.

15 Henry 2003, 188.

16 Augustine 1998, 15, 22, 680.

enjoy intimacy with myself as an underlying, always present sense of myself for whom I care—the *a priori* of self-love.¹⁷ But does the *a priori* involve an outward movement, a joining in with the other's self-love? Here Augustine can provide a more balanced union of myself with the other, one that refines Henry's structure of auto-affection. This naturally prompts a further exploration of the question: what type of affection is love?

3 Love of the Other: as Auto-Affection?

The structure of the *a priori* can enable us to enter the other's domain of self-love. But this interchange with the other shall be remapped onto the differing structures of affection Henry and Augustine suggest love should occupy. Henry elects to describe self-love in light of the other as self-affection, whereas Augustine in contrast offers evidence to affirm that self-love in light of the other operates according to the principle of hetero-affection. This section culminates in the contention that self-love, as Aristotle observed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, can descend into one of two types: self-loving egotism or self-love that attends to the other.¹⁸ Two points ensue.

First, (i) Henry's conception, I am persuaded, runs the risk of the narcissistic "Self-lover" who suffers an unhealthy solipsistic attachment to one's own inward value and thus desires to make the other identical to oneself, whereas second (ii) Augustine in contrast makes clear we only love ourselves properly once we are bound up with the activity of loving the other in the world (i.e., our neighbour). For Augustine, loving myself and loving the other do not mutually exclude one another, but just the opposite. The dynamics of myself

17 Rick Furtak, following Martha Nussbaum and Robert Solomon, makes an excellent distinction between (i) episodes of love that occur at a particular interval of time, say when I express verbally to my son that "I love you" before he goes to school in the morning, versus (ii) the *a priori* condition of love that serves the function of a pre-given background attunement that makes possible particular episodes of loving relationship. I follow, in part, Furtak when he claims that love in the most expansive sense occupies an "affective *a priori*," which is intended to "capture the set of background affective dispositions such as love, care, and concern that grounds our whole emotional life. It performs this basic function by opening us to what is of value, enabling what is meaningful or significant to be disclosed to us." The point at which I diverge from Furtak lies in what I think is the phenomenological shape of love, which is the entwining of self-love and love of the other in light of the good. Love is necessarily relation and experiential, a claim with which Furtak concurs; however, I claim love must involve not just attachment, care, or concern, but the love of the other's self-love. See Furtak 2018, 108.

18 Aristotle 2004, 174–5, Book 9, chapter 8.

and the other's affective worlds interlace inasmuch as one act amplifies the other and vice versa. For Augustine, being present to myself and distant from myself in relation to the other do not mutually exclude one another, but just the opposite. Joining in with the other's self-love only serves to amplify my ownmost self-love.

The delicate balance maintained by the anthropology of self-love in Augustine involves contingency, distance, and alterity. It can be reframed, further, in the terminology of hetero-affection but a type of hetero-affection that entails a strong version of intimacy between two subjective worlds who each enjoy their own unique sphere of self-presence. In order to explore properly the Augustinian complex of hetero-affection, we must first confront and contest auto-affection in Henry.

How do we encounter (and ultimately love) the other according to Henry? For Henry's part, he adopts a position that resembles Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity in one important respect: that the other is found or made accessible only within myself. According to Husserl, I undergo the presence of the other only within my own subjective domain. The famous Fifth Cartesian Meditation articulates this interpersonal dynamic of empathic mirroring in accordance with the monadic structure of constitution. Husserl insists that I am affected by the other only to the degree that I can mirror the other's ego which exists outside of me. The monad "out there" arises within me but only to the degree it is mirrored within "my primordial sphere of ownness."¹⁹ The other remains always other, alien to me, even if the other must be experienced by me as an appearance of otherness constituted "in my own essence, inseparable from me myself." In the act of the constitution of the alter ego, to repeat the point, for Husserl, I do not acquire an original experience of the other's living ego (or the other's respective primordial sphere of ownness), but rather I "appresent" the other inside me by way of analogy, mirroring, pairing.²⁰

Henry is at once close and far away from Husserl on this score. Henry converts this Husserlian style of constitution into an operation of auto-affection. What might this indicate for the structure of the love of the other? Henry's position, first of all, requires that no distance between myself and the other can obtain. In auto-affection share with the other, what emerges is an original experience of the other's domain of auto-affection, since we share the self-same affection. In this structure of intimacy, the movement of life is governed by immediacy, in that what is affected and the affect are one and the same; auto-affection is "absolute subjectivity inasmuch as it experiences itself and

19 Husserl 1960, 110, 112, 114, 115.

20 Husserl, 1960, 121–22.

is nothing other than that experience. It is the pure fact of experiencing itself immediately and without any distance." And further, "life is the experience of itself. By touching each point of its being in the immediacy of its auto-affection, it fills everything."²¹ My absolute subjectivity enjoys perfect immediacy of self-affection, a type of givenness known as pure immanence.

It should be clear at this juncture how I experience the other within their domain of auto-affection. The other is not, phenomenologically speaking, genuinely other. Henry anticipates a clear objection his readers necessarily shall tender: is solipsism not the necessary consequence of the uncompromising and radical structure of auto-affection? Henry queries, "Is reducing to immanence not reducing each phenomenon to its self-givenness and thus enclosing it in itself, and erecting this 'enclosure' that marks the solipsism of an irremediable powerlessness? [...] does the Self not raise up the walls of its own prison, is it not in its own immanence condemned to an unbearable solitude—forever incapable of leaving itself, opening itself to an alterity without which no other, no experience of the other, seems possible?"²²

Henry ostensibly grounds the logic of auto-affection in the possibility of the other as always already given to me in the same operation in which I am given to myself. Hence the structure of auto-affection only permits me to experience the other within me, internal to the living immanence of myself, within the "walls of my own prison." Hence "each one loves himself in the 'other' who is never external to him, but on the contrary internal and consubstantial."²³ In the operation of auto-affection, I do not venture outward toward the other. Instead the other yields to me, to my domain of pure auto-affection, where no outside, otherness, or distance intervenes at any juncture.

How is this possible structurally? In the final chapter of Henry's book *Material Phenomenology*, much like Husserl's Fifth Cartesian Meditation, we see a protracted analysis of the experience of the other. Rather than an "inter-monadology," Henry proposes a structure of auto-affection explainable by the expression "pathos-with."

Here the *a priori* of self-love that joins me to myself is in reality made possible by a more primitive *a priori*, what Henry calls the pathos of life. Here life appears or commences within me at every turn I feel myself living. It arises as a substance of pure feeling that gives me to myself and gives you to yourself, and in his later theological trilogy, life mutates into the absolute Life of God. Quite apart from theological considerations, which are only marginally

21 Henry 2008, 120.

22 Henry 2015, 213.

23 Henry 2015, 246.

important to the present essay, Henry does indicate that there is a single life of pathos, a wellspring of auto-affection from which and in which all living human beings derive their singular lives. The universal founds the particular. Life itself assumes the structure of a large subject, or the gathering together of all living beings into a community of living subjects.

The universal pathos of life emergent in each of us invokes once more the structure of the *a priori*. For Henry, the *a priori* invokes the model of a material *a priori*, in which form and content coincide. The *a priori* of self-love roots itself in this common experience we enjoy of life's self-love, and thereby makes possible what Henry calls pathos-with: the lived experience whereby I am able to feel you in the domain of my own self-feeling. I am in my inmost essence identical with you in your inmost essence, since nothing foreign to what is lived as purely felt is permitted to take hold within this domain. What is affected and the affect are strictly identical, so the logic of auto-affection is such that for Henry I must feel myself at the same time I feel you.

An anthropological consequence follows from the structure of pathos-with. Logically, Henry is emphatic that there remains no possibility of distinguishing "myself" from "yourself," and even "God," in this model of intersubjectivity.²⁴ He writes, "The community is a subterranean affective layer. Each one drinks the same water from this source and this wellspring, which it itself is. But, each one does so without knowledge and without distinguishing between the self, the other, and the basis."²⁵ The union of lives who are living in the domain of auto-affection is one of complete identity and the merging of two *a priori* domains. Henry writes once more to this effect: "The universal *a priori* of the experience of the other in its original modalities is located in the essence of life."²⁶

24 Much is the theological thesis of the late trilogy of Henry on Christianity. But he's been arguing for this since his first book: "But when love receives this ontological meaning, its identification with the very Being of God makes more evident, rather than puts into question, the identity of the essence which exists between him and man. It is because such an identity actually exists that in loving the soul, God loves himself and this in such a way that there is in reality but one love, one single operation, and the love whereby God loves the soul is ultimately nothing other than the love whereby the soul loves God, nothing other than the love whereby God loves himself. 'Blessed be God that he does work in the soul and that he loves [389] his work,' says Eckhart. This operation which, in the same passage, Eckhart identifies with love, is not 'an activity' but the very essence of the absolute, namely, as he says again, God himself. And Eckhart adds: 'God loves himself [...] and in the love he has for himself, he loves all creatures, not as creatures, but as God.'" Henry 1973, 312.

25 Henry 2008, 133.

26 Henry 2008, 114.

Self-love, reshaped wholly in the context of auto-affection, then, opens out to love of the other within no other context than *auto-affection*. What is the result of conflating self-love and love of the other? Love is a "subterranean affective layer" of pure auto-affection or pure self-feeling in which the pure identity with the other's auto-affection necessarily obtains. Henry is aware that such a picture of *pathos-with* may well obscure from view what is really occurring in the union of pathos. Perhaps it is abstract? If not, concrete examples may be adduced? Henry suggests some, however dubious they may appear to his readers (they do to myself!).

The mother-infant bond is chief example Henry utilizes as the exemplar of this intersubjective dynamic rooted in pure feeling, and in point of fact, the pure fusion of feeling between distinct individuals: the mother and infant do nothing other than feel each other and communicate in the instinct involved in the pure union of auto-affection. There is no language, cognitive power, or even sensation involved. What they have in common remains and will always remain the concrete feeling they have of each other. The inter-affection model here so described can be applied to other relationships of co-dependent affect Henry invokes: the hypnotist with the hypnotized, the lover with the beloved, the analyst with the patient, etc.²⁷

The problem which Henry's model of the love of the other cannot overcome what is addressed by Augustine: the love of the difference of the other. In other words, the chief problem underlying Henry's analysis is not so much solipsism as it is narcissism. Solipsism does not let anyone from the outside into the realm of subjectivity. In contrast, narcissism is fundamentally relational and permits entry into the realm of subjectivity, but for a specific reason: to make all who enter the same as the ego itself.

The complete identification of the other with the subjective life indicates as Henry would claim that a community of living beings, their collective essence, is a pure union sameness occurring in a realm independent of the world, of language, and is "auto-affected without the separation of any difference, outside of representation and the world."²⁸ And furthermore: "The concept of the individual in the sense that we have highlighted here is so essential that there can only be a community with it. The attempt to oppose the community and the individual—to establish a hierarchical relation between them—is pure nonsense."²⁹ Pure nonsense? In what way? Apparently, in the context of the present topic of self-love versus love of the other, any community of beloveds

27 Henry 2008, 115.

28 Henry 2008, 123.

29 Henry 2008, 121.

is subject to this law of identity or law of sameness. Even the unity one may enjoy in the pairing of lover and beloved in the act of sex remains subject to critique by this law.

One would assume Henry would be receptive to the idea that the erotic union born of sexual intimacy epitomizes a fundamental path into the essence of the community of beloveds. But such an idea is firmly rejected by him. Henry's analysis of sex, to be clear, intends to condemn sex if, and only if, it is understood as a proper means of union and thus a true expression of love. The physical intimacy between lovers take place in the world and in the realm of physics, so it necessarily cannot do justice to the pure identity of affection that is the real union consummated by sharing in auto-affection.

Even more to the point: sexual intercourse can obscure or confuse us about what constitutes the ground of real union. Sex, for Henry, is thus a failure insofar as it cannot reveal what is genuinely felt in the union between lover and beloved. Think of two lovers when they orgasm. One cannot in principle feel, or really feel, the other's orgasm as it occurs, nor vice versa. There is a "wall" that forever separates complete union of orgasm, so that sex "fails to attain the pleasure of the other where it attains itself."³⁰ Thus, in the act of sex, the so-called act of two becoming one flesh, fades from view in Henry's writings. He labels orgasm a form of auto-eroticism or self-pleasure. When I orgasm with you only I feel it and enjoy it and when you orgasm with me only you live it just as it is given to you. In sex there is no "recovery of two impressional flows melting into one, but at best only the chronological coincidence of two spasms powerless to overcome their division [le recouvrement de deux flux impressionnels se fondant en un seul, mais seulement, au mieux, la coïncidence chronologique de deux spasmes impuissants à surmonter leur division]."³¹ We cannot "melt" [se fondant] into each other during the act of making love due to the orgasm's auto-release. In order to show this, we only give to each other in sex many verbal cues and signals such as sighs, spoken words, groans, etc. to communicate precisely what is not felt by the other; and we all know such sighs can be feigned, which is further proof of division between orgasms, namely, that the division between the "two flows of desire" in sex remains fundamentally insurmountable.³²

Thus, for Henry, the only conclusion we can draw is that participation of myself in the self-love of the other unfolds only within the confines of the invisible sublayer of life: "A real and living flesh that reveals itself in life's

30 Henry 2015, 211.

31 Henry 2015, 211; for the French see Henry, *Incarnation*, 302.

32 Henry 2015, 211–12.

auto-impressionality, never in the outside itself of a world. To entrust the erotic relation to the world, to look for life there, is not to overcome the failure desire knew in the lover's night."³³ How may we open up Henry to an alternative perspective? Before I dwell on Augustine's corrective, a brief critical assessment of Henry can advance and refine what I perceive to be the principal reservation about Henry's work on love: my apprehension that his inspection of auto-affection as love of the other imperils love itself as a form of accepting the difference of the other.

Why must a community of life, to continue to interrogate Henry, be a community of similarity or sameness? The answer is twofold.

First, I concur with Zygmunt Bauman assessment of sameness. He ostensibly claims that position like Henry's would invoke a community of auto-affection because, "The attraction of a 'community of sameness' is that of an insurance policy against the risks with which daily life in a polyvocal world is fraught."³⁴ This would consist of grounds for Henry to reject the difference and alterity that lie at the heart of sex and the act of orgasm. For the act of sex trades on the very idea of a radical difference of gender not least the lived experiences of orgasm of which Henry bespeaks. This polyvocal context means that sex contradicts the very idea of a pure community of sameness. Auto-affection, that is to say, operates as an insurance policy against the messiness and difference constitutive of sex.

A second problematic that underlies Henry's community of auto-affection is that it runs the risk distorting self-love as a form of making the other fit within my ego: this feeds a pathology of inwardness we can name narcissism. In loving the other's self-love, we may well combat or therapeutically treat narcissism. In loving the other's self-love, therefore, we do not treat the other person as if she were identical with ourselves. The quantitative extension of self-love cannot literally project onto the other the identical formation of self-love I have of myself, which constitutes an act of projection devoted merely to my own self-maintenance or self-satisfaction. Indeed, sometimes sex itself can reduce to this kind of self-satisfaction rooted in pure self-extension. Cognitive scientists have studied that the dopamine release from an orgasm can cause us to seek out the sexual act with the other to meet the need to have yet another release, and so forth: hence sex can become a need I crave due to the fact it is wholly attached to a specific chemical release based in the reward center of the brain.³⁵ Henry's critique of the fixation on love-as-sex would coincide

33 Henry 2015, 217.

34 Bauman 2003, 110.

35 Brewer 2017, chapter 6.

here with the selfishness that can drive sexual gratification (gratification about dopamine release)—thus his work constitutes an important correction to auto-eroticism whereby one individual uses the other for sexual gratification.

Yet, Henry's (over)correction comes at too high a cost. Henry's position eliminates the other's difference altogether. Rather than negotiate and navigate with them *in* the context of difference, Henry abolishes difference entirely. Yet, I do appreciate the spirit of Henry's argument. I concur with Henry that I am not fundamentally alien to the other. I can and we often do simulate what the other is thinking and feeling on the basis of my own self-experience. Of course, simulating or projecting onto the other or reading the other's "mind" (or speculating about what the other feels) often unveils more about us than the other.

My position diverges from Henry on the basis of this question: can I extend my self-love to the other's self-love in a manner that negotiates in and through their difference not as a source of conflict and alienation but as a source of celebration of the other just as she is given? Love does not seek out opportunities to change or educate the other, but it instead accepts wholly the other person as she is given. As Scheler observes wisely when he writes that love "accepts the object as it is, with the values which it has, and we deny that there is a value given in love as that which the object 'ought' to have."³⁶ In fact, the opposite is the case: I myself "ought" to involve the self-reflexive effort to occupy the perspective of the other and view the other as intrinsically valuable, and who can be given just as she is, and on no other basis. And this perspective takes love out of the domain of auto-affection and places it firmly within the domain of hetero-affection.

4 Augustine: Love as Type of Hetero-Affection

Augustine's work proves instructive for us on this point. While his body of work on self-love remains not as phenomenologically fined-grained as Henry's (or the post-Kantian tradition), Augustine nevertheless provides a picture of love that is at once rooted in self-love and love of the other, whereby the self holds together simultaneously identity and difference or self-presence and alterity, a tension ultimately framed fully by the logic of hetero-affection.

Augustine takes up the outward movement of love in the realm of hetero-affection as a foundation for the love of self and others. Love arises, in the language of Augustine, as "a kind of life coupling or trying to couple together two

36 Scheler 2008, 159

things, namely lover and what is being loved,"³⁷ which must take place firmly within the domain of hetero-affection (against Henry). The function of love as a "glue" which binds things together constitutes an analogy that approaches only in a glass darkly the hetero-affective action of love's outward course from me to the other. The domain of love in the performance of the exchange of love between beloveds occurs in a domain of hetero-affection, which necessarily cancels out auto-affection.

How? My counterargument against Henry is that love functions like glue, which does not make sense within Henry's paradigm of the pathos of auto-affection. This, then, makes clear the fundamental difference between Augustine and Henry: The Augustinian self preserves alterity in its outward movement of love because it adopts the metaphysics of hetero-affection, whereas Henry endorses auto-affection, which delimits the performance of love to the narrow confines of auto-affection or pure identity between lover and beloved. This distinction provokes the very question: what kind of affection captures the movement of love? Auto-affection? Hetero-affection?

In book VIII of *The Trinity*, Augustine asks if we can love that which we do not know. Certainly the Trinity itself is the object Augustine seeks to reframe in light of this question since God is ontologically distinct, and thus the ground of hetero-affection. However, Augustine's analysis in point of fact entails many layers that come prior to the otherness of the Trinity, layers that include other types of otherness, such as what he calls "fleshly things" like objects (chairs, houses, music, etc.), other humans, the cosmos. Do we first love so that we can learn and know about that which affects us in the heart?

To answer such a prompt, I contend that love obeys its own kind of knowledge, and it carries risk; it is vulnerable to and alert to the givenness of things from the outset, without at the same time demanding certainty or full possession of the otherness of the object. Love invites all things so it may bind them together into a dynamic whole that reconciles with (rather than rejects) contingency and development. Only this love as openness to objects will allow the possibility of integration to take hold. But who is the one performing the act of integration? Is it myself? And do I also know and love myself, as an *a priori* ground on which my love of objects can obtain?

Augustine also labours the point that I am first bound or glued to myself. Overlap here is obvious between Augustine and Henry. In books IX and X of *The Trinity* the bishop of Hippo depicts a structure of the self in which each of us enjoys an *a priori* intimacy with ourselves. I love myself and know myself in

37 Augustine 1991b, 8, 14, 255.

that self-love without having to go looking for myself or think about myself as an object within the flow of consciousness:

Thus the mind is of course in itself, since it is called mine with reference to itself, though it is called knowing or known or knowable relative to its knowledge; also as loving and loved or lovable it is referred to the love it loves itself with. And while knowledge is referred to the mind knowing or known, it is also called knowing and known with reference to itself; the knowledge the mind knows itself with cannot be unknown to itself. And while love is referred to the mind loving, whose love it is, nonetheless it is also love with reference to itself, so that it is also in itself, because love too is loved, nor can it be loved with anything but love, that is with itself.³⁸

Augustine distinguishes this kind of self-presence as a non-linguistic word, a 'knowledge with love' [*cum amore notitia*].³⁹ This kind of word belongs to the domain of intimate self-awareness, which entails the knowledge that I am this self without having to discover it as an object; for example, prereflective self-awareness underlies object consciousness, what Augustine says engage in when we see an object through sense impressions or when we make an internal judgement about that object. How, then, am I aware of myself, or my mind? The mind is so intimate to itself or present to itself that it appears to itself without further ado. It does not need to be discovered or deliberated about like an object outside of the mind would require after I behold it. That is, because my mind loves itself always in an ongoing *a priori* manner, "the mind does not have to look for itself as if it were not available to itself. What after all is so present to knowledge as what is present to mind, and what is so present to mind as the mind itself?"⁴⁰ And so, to quote Augustine again, "there never was a time when it did not love itself, when it did not know itself."⁴¹

The mind, furthermore, knows itself and loves itself according to a certain kind of speech act, a word uttered in the heart as we indicated above is named a "knowledge with love," a mode of prereflective self-awareness that discloses the self is always already intimate to itself. What kind of word or speech is this? Is it a soliloquy? Is it expressed in those lonely moments when I am occupied with talking to or and mumbling to myself? It is a word that Augustine

38 Augustine 1991b, 9, 8, 275.

39 Augustine 1991b, 9, 15, 279.

40 Augustine 1991b, 10, 10, 294.

41 Augustine 1991b, 10, 11, 295.

ultimately calls a *verbum intimum*, or an intimate word that resides below conscious reflection or language or grammar as such. He writes:

The word which is neither uttered in sound nor thought of in the likeness of sound, which necessarily belongs to some language, but which precedes all the signs that signify it and is begotten of the knowledge abiding in the consciousness, when this knowledge is uttered inwardly just exactly as it is. When it is uttered vocally or by some bodily sign, it is not uttered just exactly as it is, but as it can be seen or heard through the body.⁴²

The *verbum intimum* is a primal word spoken to myself as a word in which I love myself as I feel myself, and it unfolds within an *a priori* domain prior to "any sound, before any thought of sound [*verbum ante omnem sonum, ante omnem cogitationem soni*]."⁴³ This, then, constitutes the *a priori* self-love I enjoy that appears on the surface similar to the kind of self-presence of auto-affection advanced by Henry above.

It would be a mistake, however, to make Henry and Augustine's versions of self-presence (rooted in self-love) coincide in every respect. Augustine says we naturally love the surrounding world, precisely because love loves goodness. Open to the inner goodness of things, this inner "knowledge with love" automatically and instinctively reaches out of the mind; it is hetero-affective.

The mind's inward ongoing performance of self-love is simultaneously an outward ongoing performance of love of the surrounding world. Augustine talks of the natural love of the earth with which the mind is endued: I love the earth, because of its high mountains and the perfect elevation of its hills. The farmland is loved because it is fertile; good is the air and the animals because they are salubrious. I also naturally love culture, good food, and other humans. Good is the delicious food as well as the symmetrically designed house in which I dine with my friends and family. Love also loves the glowing and cheerful expression of the person next to me at the feast: good is the just person and the concord of fidelity—all are loved or should be loved according to Augustine.⁴⁴

Things, events, people and objects like these are good because they are loved. The mind loves itself but not in isolation. It loves itself just as it also unifies the surrounding world into an intelligible whole. Gathering together their

42 Augustine 1991b, 15, 20, 410.

43 Augustine 1991b, 15, 22, p. 410. For the Latin version of *De trinitate* I consulted the Bibliothèque Augustinienne. See Augustine 1955, 484.

44 Augustine, 1991b, 8, 6, 246.

properties into such proportionate solidarity, love promotes well-being and health, and ultimately, wholeness. Augustine writes of the power of love, “So love, like something in the middle, joins together our word and the mind it is begotten from, and binds itself in with them as a third element in a non-bodily embrace, without any confusion.”⁴⁵ The triadic structure of love (the lover, beloved, and love), while often interpersonal, makes all things stand out and resonate with unity. Love brings forth the fundamental ground of all that may make an appearance. Love is a kind of living glue which binds things together within the domain of hetero-affection.

Love cannot function as a binding agent in the domain of pure immanence, as if it occupied nonworldly territory. What does love love when it loves? It loves itself. Self-love in Augustine mutates without delay into an unfolding movement toward the love of the other in the outside site of the world. So, love loves itself, “but unless it loves itself as loving something, then it does not love itself as love.” *That is, love intends to love the other as the other when it loves.*

Or to calibrate it in another vocabulary: love inherently moves within an interpersonal nexus that Augustine calls brotherly love. “It is impossible that we should not love especially the love that we love our brother with. Thus we infer that those two commandments cannot exist without each other: because God is love the man who loves love certainly loves God; and the man who loves his brother must love love.”⁴⁶

Framed in this Augustinian way, self-love is a gift received from God’s original self-giveness. In this I practice the advance of loving the other by forgetting myself as a lonely, detached spectator. The accomplishment of self-love lies in the conversion to, and growth into, a “me,” in which I love in giving, by expanding myself in the performance of entering deeply into the other’s *a priori* mood of self-love. Self-love, as Oliver O’Donovan’s excellent study of Augustine on this topic, assumes an a stance on behalf of the other without delay. Properly formed self-love in Augustine converts into love of neighbour. The famed second greatest commandment Jesus articulates in the gospels, love your neighbour as yourself, shapes fundamentally the Augustinian structure of self-love so that, “loving his neighbour ‘as himself’ can mean only that he seeks to instil in the neighbour a self-love similar to his own.”⁴⁷ I am loving love, therefore, when I love the other’s self-love.

Augustine describes the action and operation of self-love shared between humans as a subjective bond that functions like glue or a magnetic force by

45 Augustine, 1991b, 9, 14, 278.

46 Augustine, 1991b, 12, 254, Book 8.

47 O’Donovan, 1980, 116.

which lover and beloved are bound up together and are therefore necessarily attentive to each other's ultimate good: "Now love is of someone who loves, and something is loved with love. So then there are three: the lover, the beloved, and the love. What else is love, therefore, except a kind of life which binds or seeks to bind some two together [*uita duo aliqua copulans uel copulari appetens*], namely, the lover and the beloved?" This sentiment is prefaced by Augustine with the suggestion that love desires to love the good (this is properly ordered love) in association with the other's ultimate good as always related to the lover's pursuit of the good; the lover and beloved's good is coupled together, *duo aliqua copulans*.⁴⁸ Shall self-love fail to be oriented to the good and to God, it descends into narcissism, selfishness, and utilitarianism—what amounts to pride *superbia*: "The more we are cured of the tumor of pride, the fuller we are of love."⁴⁹ Pride is simply self-love collapsed in on itself (the body attacking itself as in a tumor), and this self-referentiality contradicts the very movement of the properly ordered interplay between self-love and love of the other.⁵⁰

The "self" in much recent continental philosophy (Henry notwithstanding) rejoices in "possibility" as a category. But I am convinced it should do so only if possibility corresponds to the movement of love, and for this reason, to the love of the other. The self or ego reformulated in the vocabulary of an "adventure" or a "vocation" or a "composition" or a piece of "literature" or an "operation" or a "fusion of alloys" presupposes love if the action is to be understood as action in relationship with the other for the good of the other.⁵¹ My adventure or vocation or fusion must remain a narrative performed not simply in the context of the other, but with and alongside the other, who partners with me in the disclosure of the self-love that is properly ordered to the good and properly placed in the domain of hetero-affection.

To order love necessarily to the other in this manner is to take delight in the other, to enjoy the other, to cherish the other, to confer on the other the sign "you are good." However different the other's rhythm or frequency sounds to me, the logic of love involves the adventure of making new harmonies with the other, that is, of "coupling" or joining together distinct sound waves into a complex whole, a dynamic harmony of "you are good."

Here the image of *coupling* or *joining* or *binding* does not require that the existential glue of love laminate together discrete and incompatible parts side

48 Augustine 1991b, 8, 14, 255. For Latin, BA, 278.

49 Augustine 1991b, 8, 12, 253.

50 For an excellent formulation of pride as a counter to love in a manner I generally agree with, see Steinbock 2015, chapter 5, "Loving and Humility."

51 As indicative examples, see Serres 1997, 146; Nehamas 1987, 173–76. Romano 2009, 57–69.

by side, like water and oil, whose unity is no real unity at all. Rather it is the case that the metaphor of glue or binding together considers how my frequency and your frequency can remain “mingled throughout” like parts that interweave together to complete a new whole. Against Henry, I do not propose here the “melting together” of two lifestreams in the secure domaine pure auto-affectation. I instead imply that the difference and alterity of the other remain intact at all times since my love of the other occurs and spreads out within the open field of hetero-affectation. Thus: each part is diffused throughout the whole even while each part is preserved, and in this distinction of parts, each part is able thereby to exercise its ownmost unique agency. The single frequency or harmony we emit together resembles another metaphor, namely, a single drink composed of two parts, say of wine and honey, an example Augustine lyrically employs. This unity-in-difference constitutes a unity in which each part is found throughout the whole, and yet, there remain wine and honey as distinct parts—this is a fugue or harmonization of individual notes (or fluids) into a dynamic harmony.⁵²

5 Conclusion

As should be clear by now, both Henry and Augustine advance distinct, if related, models of self-love. It should also be clear, I hope, that the intriguing interplay between self-love and the love of the other necessarily takes place in the domain of hetero-affectation. To make excessively clear: loving the other occurs simultaneously with self-presence or prereflective self-awareness, known as self-love. The Augustinian language of self-love, to be phenomenologically plausible, would have to factor in more precisely just what the first-person structure of subjectivity is and how it establishes alterity in the face of the other’s subjectivity. While there is not sufficient space to devote an analysis to that intriguing topic here, we can appreciate nonetheless Augustine’s emphasis on (i) self-love and (ii) the movement of love toward alterity. Two happy outcomes arise here from the analysis above: first, intimacy with oneself and the other is not sacrificed in favour radical alterity; and second, intimacy shared between myself and the other need not reduce to a state of disembodied (non-sexed) identity of self-affectation as in Henry.

Love traverses a distance. It should not come as a surprise, then, that an Augustinian model of love of the other invokes the metaphor of glue or

52 The reference to wine/honey versus water/oil is in Augustine 1991b, 9, 7, 274.

coupling, an act that joins together while simultaneously preserving the otherness of the other. Love remains integrative not possessive; I do not even possess myself wholly in self-love, even if I am intimate with myself at an *a priori* level. As poet Czesław Miłosz writes, "Love means to learn to look at yourself the way one looks at distant things, for you are only one thing among many... then he wants to use himself and things so that they stand in the glow of ripeness."⁵³ To make myself and the other glow, love loves only properly in the domain of hetero-affection.

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53 Miłosz 2001, 50.

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