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Praeparatio Evangelica—or Daemonica? C. S. Lewis and Anders Nygren on Spiritual Longing*

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I wonder if he [Anders Nygren] is not trying to force on the conception of love an antithesis which it is the precise nature of love, in all its forms, to overcome.¹

Introduction: After Eros

C. S. Lewis read Anders Nygren’s *Agape and Eros* in his mid-thirties, probably during the Christmas holiday of 1934.² His first recorded thoughts, including the statement above, are from a letter dated “Jan 8th 1935” to his Oxford colleague Janet Spens. Despite his decisive criticism of what he calls Nygren’s “central contrast”—that agape is selfless and eros self-regarding—Lewis ends this letter with a declaration of uncertainty: “However, I must tackle him again. He has shaken me up extremely.” It is remarkable, then, that Nygren is not mentioned by name

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¹ C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters* (ed. Walter Hooper; 3 vols.; London: HarperCollins, 2000–2006) 2:153.

² The Swedish original of Nygren’s *Agape and Eros* was published in two parts in 1930 and 1936, and the English translation in three volumes: in 1932 (Part 1), 1938 (Part 2, vol. 1), and 1939 (Part 2, vol. 2), and finally as a revised one-volume edition in 1953. Lewis was referring to Part 1, since Part 2 had not been published, and it remains unclear whether he ever read Part 2. Hereafter all citations are from the one-volume Harper & Row edition (1969), a reprint of the 1953 edition, and are abbreviated *AE* (page references to this book appear in parentheses in the text).

in Lewis's *The Four Loves* (1960). Lewis's opening remarks on his theology of love, which do not directly refer to Nygren, "are critical of Nygren's main thesis in *Agape and Eros*."³

Walter Hooper explains that Lewis went on considering the relation of agape and eros for years. In *The Four Loves (FL)*, he "discusses them under the names 'gift-love' and 'need-love' (using 'Eros' to mean sexual love)."⁴ Lewis introduces these key concepts on the very first page, and it is their non-antithetical nature that pits him firmly against Nygren. This is another remarkable fact about *The Four Loves*: Lewis's refutation of Nygren's central contrast, the denigration of eros and its separation from agape, is executed without using the words "eros" or "agape" in the Nygrenian sense at all.

These opening remarks define his two key concepts that, in turn, encompass the "four" types of love.

"God is love," says St. John. When I first tried to write this book I thought that his maxim would provide me with a very plain highroad through the whole subject. I thought I should be able to say that human loves deserved to be called loves at all just in so far as they resembled that Love which is God. The first distinction I made was therefore between what I called Gift-love and Need-love. The typical example of Gift-love would be that love which moves a man to work and plan and save for the future well-being of his family which he will die without sharing or seeing; of the second, that which sends a lonely or frightened child to its mother's arms.⁵

Lewis posits that there was no doubt about which love most resembled God's own: "Divine Love is Gift-love." And so, Lewis tells us, he was looking forward to writing "fairly easy panegyrics" on the first sort of love and "disparagements" of the second (*FL*, 9).

However, every time he tried to deny the name love for need-love he "ended in puzzles and contradictions." The reality was more complicated than he had supposed. First, he felt he was doing violence to the rich lexicons for types of love found in other languages, which contain "stored insight and experience" (9). Secondly, needfulness belongs to given human nature. There is an "innocent Need" (149) inherent in our creaturely condition. Why should we call it selfish? Sometimes there may be a need to subdue it, but not to feel it is "the mark of the cold egoist . . . a bad spiritual symptom" (11). Thirdly, needfulness, Lewis believed, belongs to elevated human nature as well. Our spiritual health is proportional to our love for God, which must always be predominantly a need-love, and so need-love "either coincides with or at least makes a main ingredient in man's highest,

³ Caroline Simon, "On Love," in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis* (ed. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 146–59, at 154.

⁴ Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2:154 n. 3.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1960) 9. Hereafter *FL* (page references to this book appear in parentheses in the text).

healthiest, and most realistic spiritual condition” (12). In fact, it would be “a bold and silly creature that came before its Creator with the boast ‘I’m no beggar. I love you disinterestedly’” (12). We are quite far from Nygren’s suspicion of needfulness as a corruptive human impulse.

This proximity to, but rejection of, Nygren’s “central contrast” has not gone unnoticed among scholars. Perhaps the first to home in on it was the English theologian V. A. Demant, who reviewed *The Four Loves* immediately in 1960.

Professor C. S. Lewis has evidently been dissatisfied with some too simple classifications of the expressions of love, which have become current in recent discussion. There has been, for example, the theological contrast . . . made popular by a second-hand acquaintance with Nygren’s thesis that *eros* is human and *agape* the divine love. A greater falsity has become common among moralists who would put down every motive short of supernatural charity as a form of egoism. . . . He [Lewis] makes his own terminology, and very useful it is. Especially could it help those who found themselves lost in the more ponderous treatments of love by Nygren, de Rougemont and Father D’Arcy.⁶

Much later, in 1974, a German philosopher also connected the dots. Commenting on Lewis’s aborted idea of disparaging need-love, Josef Pieper writes: “That such an attitude is assumed, before reflection, reveals to what extent the reflective consciousness and the atmosphere of thought, especially of Christian thought concerning love, has already been molded by a particular conception. . . . the antithesis of *eros* and *agape*.”⁷ A few years after Pieper, the American theologian Gilbert Meilaender (1978) also connects Lewis’s gift-love and need-love with Nygren’s *agape* and *eros* respectively, but not without an essential caveat, as we shall presently see.⁸ *The Four Loves*, which opens with “some sly remarks” on how easy the author thought his task would be, has been recognized by London-born theologian Oliver O’Donovan (1991) as “one of the most popular contributions”

⁶ V. A. Demant, “Four Loves,” review of *The Four Loves*, by C. S. Lewis, *Frontier* (Spring 1960) 207–209, at 207. Another theologically astute reviewer that same year found it “interesting to compare Anders Nygren’s concept of *agape* with Lewis’ view of charity” and notes that “Nygren does not consider, as does Lewis, that God might create within himself a need for our love so that we can enter more fully into communion with him” (Donald G. Bloesch, “Love Illuminated,” review of *The Four Loves*, by C. S. Lewis, *Christian Century* [14 December 1960] 1470).

⁷ Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (trans. Richard and Clara Winston; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997) 210. Pieper calls Nygren the most influential “representative” of this prevailing atmosphere of thought instead of its “augurer,” because several theologians in the 1920’s and 1930’s were juxtaposing “*eros*” and “Christian love” (variously understood): e.g., Heinrich Scholz in *Eros und Caritas* (1929) and Emil Brunner in *Eros und Liebe* (1937). Nygren’s book has had “almost incalculable influence, although it itself may well spring from an idea that has always been present in Christendom” (Pieper, *Love*, 211).

⁸ Gilbert Meilaender, *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis* (2nd ed.; Vancouver: Regent College, 2003) 56–57.

to the Nygren debate.⁹ More recently, the Finnish theologian Risto Saarinen (2006) has also noted how Lewis's model "obviously clashes" with Nygren's and how "the showdown is probably conscious."¹⁰

None of these scholars explicitly claims that Lewis's need-love is an exhaustive translation of Nygren's eros. One occasionally gets the feeling, however, that it is implicitly assumed. This would be unwise. Insofar as need encapsulates one element in eros, the pairing of them is insightful. Lewis's letters are quite forthcoming in this respect. For instance, twenty years after first reading Nygren's book, he explains:

The great merit of Nygren, so far as I'm concerned, was that he gave one a new *tool of thought*: it is so v. [very] convenient and illuminating to be able to talk (and therefore to think) about the two elements of love as *Eros & Agape*. You notice that I say "elements". That is because I think he drives his contrast too hard and even talks as if the one cd. [could] not exist where the other was. But surely in any good friendship or good marriage . . . the two are always mixed. . . . I doubt whether even fallen man is *totally* incapable of Agape. It is prefigured even on the instinctive level. Maternal affection, even among animals, has the dawn of Agape. So, in a queer way, has even the sexual appetite, for each sex wants to give pleasure as well as to get it. So there is a soil even in nature for [Agape] to strike roots in, or a trellis up [which] it can grow.¹¹

Lewis gives another inquirer the same account: "Nygren's *Eros & Agape* gave me a good 'load of thought', a useful classification instrument, tho' I don't think his own use of that instrument v. [very] profitable."¹²

It seems relatively uncontroversial to assume that by the "new tool of thought" and the "useful classification instrument," Lewis means eros and agape in terms of what he called Nygren's "central contrast"—selfless versus self-regarding love. "Need-love" and "gift-love" are indeed the terms he later adopted to more systematically discuss what is already anticipated in these letters. The pairing of Lewis's need-love with Nygren's eros by later scholars is not wholly inaccurate, but it is part of the purpose of this article to show that it has not been precise enough.

Meilaender's caveat offers the first important qualification. He notes that to draw a parallel between Nygren's eros/agape distinction and Lewis's need-love/gift-love distinction is not entirely satisfactory because, unlike Nygren, Lewis "is not making a simple contrast between human love and divine love." For Lewis, both need-love and gift-love "are natural components of human love."¹³ This proviso is actually a double qualification: it is another way of saying that Lewis regarded

⁹ Oliver O'Donovan, "Foreword to the 1991 Edition," in John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (1938; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007) v–vii, at v.

¹⁰ Risto Saarinen, "Eros, liekki ja normi: Rakkauden fundamentaaliteologiaa," *Teologinen aikakauskirja* (Finnish Theological Journal) (2006) 167–77, at 172 n. 15.

¹¹ Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:538 [italics in original].

¹² *Ibid.*, 3:980.

¹³ Meilaender, *Taste for the Other*, 57.

both need-love and gift-love as non-sinful, natural components of human love. To describe the contrast of eros and agape as “victory for Eros” (*AE*, 231) or “betrayal of Agape” (232) (as Nygren does) is thus doubly misleading.

But even further corrections are necessary. In addition to need-love as a naturally good thing, God can bestow “two other gifts”: a “supernatural” need-love for one another and for Himself (*FL*, 147). In other words, God can grace us with an intensified need of one another and a firmer awareness of our unshakable need of Himself. Such elevated need-love forever ousts what G. K. Chesterton called “a self-sufficiency that is the very opposite of sanctity.”¹⁴ What is more, in *The Problem of Pain* (1940) Lewis argues that we are even justified in talking about God’s need-love. In some sense we are “the needed and desired of God.”¹⁵ With this, too, Lewis glaringly distances himself from Nygren.

The previous paragraphs’ caveats and qualifications may sound like “a dizzying variety of formulations,”¹⁶ but they are certainly not trivial hair-splitting and hopefully have not put off any reader. The reason for including them here has been to show that need-love is not synonymous with eros. They are indeed in many ways quite unlike each other. The need for such laborious qualifications (I mentioned but the most obvious) raises interesting questions. If need-love does not holistically capture the meaning of eros, do other concepts in Lewis’s taxonomy of love catch the leftovers? Or is there perhaps a more comprehensive translation available that apprehends more of eros than does need-love alone? Where does Nygren’s eros land in Lewis’s theology of love?

I believe it lands not far from Lewis’s understanding of spiritual longing, coupled with what he calls “appreciative love.” The German-speaking world knows this longing as *Sehnsucht*, but readers of Lewis simply call it “Joy.”

Nygren’s distrust of *Sehnsucht* runs deep. Burnaby has put his finger on it: “Where others see a *praeparatio evangelica*, he [Nygren] is more disposed to find a *praeparatio daemonica*.”¹⁷ Nygren believed that all longing and desire falls under

¹⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (1933; repr., New York: Doubleday, 2001) 109.

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998, 1st ed. 1940) 35. After strongly affirming the doctrine of God’s impassibility, Lewis suddenly “backs off” (Nicholas Wolterstorff, “C. S. Lewis on the Problem of Suffering,” *The Chronicle of the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society* [2010] 3–20, at 5). Lewis then almost qualifies this doctrine: “Hence, if God sometimes speaks as though the Impassible could suffer passion and eternal fullness could be in want, and in want of those beings on whom it bestows all from their bare existence upwards, this can only mean, if it means anything intelligible by us, that God of mere miracle has made himself able so to hunger and created in Himself that which *we can satisfy*. . . . Before and behind all the relations of God to man, as we now learn them from Christianity, yawns the abyss of a Divine act of pure giving—the election of man, from nonentity, to be the beloved of God, and therefore (in some sense) the needed and desired of God, who *but for that act* needs and desires nothing” (*Problem of Pain*, 35–36 [italics added]).

¹⁶ Meilaender, *Taste for the Other*, 59: “When we begin to ask what Lewis means by divine gift-love we encounter a dizzying variety of formulations.”

¹⁷ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 16.

egocentric and self-deifying eros, even “that ‘love for God’ which means yearning desire for God, *Gottessehnsucht*, is essentially an expression of *man’s* longing and pining” (*AE*, 141 [italics in original]). The distinctive features of his eros he sums up under three headings: “(1) Eros is the ‘love of desire’, or acquisitive love; (2) Eros is man’s way to the Divine; (3) Eros is egocentric love” (175). The eros Nygren distrusted and the Joy that fascinated Lewis all his life, preparing him for conversion, surprisingly have much in common. It is the overall task of this article to analyze their relation in more detail.

My argument will continue to unfold as follows. In the next section, I will briefly introduce Lewis’s concept of Joy, which he calls “a kind of love.” This will lay the foundation for a systematic comparative analysis of eros and Joy, executed in the three following sections according to the three main features of Nygren’s eros. I will conclude by drawing together the relevant affinities between the two concepts and acknowledging the remaining differences. Much of the argument is based on internal evidence. Lewis’s writings do, however, include at least ten explicit references to Nygren.¹⁸ Many of these, I will argue, support my conviction that Lewis himself never intended his need-love as an exhaustive interpretation of Nygren’s eros—but of which the concept of Joy, together with appreciative love, captures a significant portion.

“A Kind of Love”

The “Joy” in the title of *Surprised by Joy* is a cleverly simple term for a desire or longing for joy beyond the offerings of the natural world. It can be described both as ecstatic wonder and causeless melancholy. Lewis himself called it “a dialectic of desire”¹⁹ and a “lived dialectic,”²⁰ as both it and its mysterious object felt ever elusive. Joy is the bittersweet pursuit of the intangible appearing in the guise of the tangible.

Early aesthetic experiences, Lewis says, “taught me longing—*Sehnsucht*; made me for good or ill, and before I was six years old, a votary of the Blue Flower” (*SJ*, 14).²¹ The theme of his early poem *Dymer* (1926), written prior to his conversion,

¹⁸ Seven of these ten references are found in Lewis’s letters: see *Collected Letters*, 2:147, 153–54, 158, 165; and 3:538, 555, 980. The remaining three are found in his literary magnum opus *The Oxford History of English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954) 383; his autobiography *Surprised by Joy* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955) 198; and in his review (1938) of Leone Ebreo’s *The Philosophy of Love*, reprinted in *Image and Imagination: Essays and Reviews* (ed. Walter Hooper; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 277–80, at 279.

¹⁹ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 207, hereafter abbreviated *SJ* (page references to this book appear in parentheses in the text).

²⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (1933; repr., London: HarperCollins, 1998) xv, hereafter abbreviated *PR* (page references to this book appear in parentheses in the text)..

²¹ A reference to the German poet Novalis’s “Blue Flower of Longing.”

was “romantic longing—*Sehnsucht*.”²² *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, his allegorical spiritual autobiography, also speaks of paradoxical immortal longings that are “acute and even painful, yet the mere wanting is felt to be somehow a delight” (*PR*, xii). And in his Cosmic Trilogy, we read of “the inconsolable wound with which man is born,” the aches and yearnings which enigmatically are “the fore-runners of [a] goddess.”²³ She happens to be Venus (Aphrodite), the goddess of love herself.

A turning point in Lewis’s understanding of Joy was reading George MacDonald’s fairytale *Phantastes* as a young boy.²⁴ In his anthology of MacDonald, Lewis explains: “I had crossed a great frontier. I had already been waist-deep in Romanticism . . . but there was a difference.”²⁵ What was the difference, the new quality he found? “I should have been shocked in my teens if anyone had told me that what I learned to love in *Phantastes* was goodness”²⁶ or simply “Holiness” (*SJ*, 169). This Joy related to the living God he did not know till years later. What this book did, he remembers, was “to convert, even to baptize . . . my imagination. It did nothing to my intellect nor (at the time) to my conscience. Their turn came far later and with the help of many other books and men.”²⁷

One of these other books was *The Idea of the Holy* (1923) by Rudolf Otto, which Lewis read in his late twenties. In 1958, responding to Corbin Carnell’s queries on the matter (in the very same letter that mentions *Agape and Eros* having given him “a load of thought”), Lewis says that he has been “deeply influenced” by Otto’s *Das Heilige*. Otto’s historical and psychological analysis of “religious awe” and its relation to the holy (which he calls the “numinous”) made a profound impression on Lewis, and its impact only “seemed to increase with time.”²⁸ Lewis drew upon it, sometimes explicitly, as in the theory of religion set forth in *The Problem of Pain* (4–12), and sometimes implicitly, as in his Cosmic Trilogy.²⁹ The accounts of Joy in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and *Surprised by Joy* echo—sometimes almost verbatim—Otto’s account of numinous awe.

²² This is acknowledged in the preface Lewis wrote for the 1950 reprint of the book, cited in Corbin S. Carnell, *Bright Shadow: Spiritual Longing in C. S. Lewis* (1974; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) 56 n. 17.

²³ C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (1945; repr., London: HarperCollins, 2005) 448.

²⁴ David C. Downing has described it as “an emotional and spiritual watershed” for Lewis (*Into the Region of Awe: Mysticism in C. S. Lewis* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005] 38).

²⁵ C. S. Lewis, *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (1946; repr., New York: HarperCollins, 2001) xxxvii.

²⁶ Lewis, *George MacDonald*, xxxviii–xxxix.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxviii. See also *SJ*, 171.

²⁸ Carnell, *Bright Shadow*, 69, 57.

²⁹ A short analysis of the idea of the numinous in the Cosmic Trilogy can be found in Carnell, *Bright Shadow*, 96–97. For a recent discussion of *Das Heilige*’s influence on *Till We Have Faces* see Risto Saarinen, “Natural Moral Law in *Mere Christianity* and *Till We Have Faces*: Does Lewis Change His View?” (forthcoming).

Lewis was of course not the first or only Christian to have been acutely sensitive to beauty and troubled by an unsatisfied longing. Augustine, to whom Lewis's "own glad debts are incalculable," (*FL*, 137) was, too. As Burnaby writes, for Augustine "the beauty of nature is 'numinous', overwhelming: it is an 'almost unspeakable' beauty that must 'fill with awe everyone who contemplates it.'"³⁰ The dominant characteristic of his understanding of Christian love "is *desiderium*—the unsatisfied longing of the homesick heart."³¹ In fact, the whole life of the Christian, Augustine had said, is "a holy longing."³² In the *Confessions* he describes a piercing and transient encounter with God: "So in a flash of a trembling glance [I] attained to that which is. At that moment I saw your 'invisible nature understood through the things which are made' (Rom. 1:20)"—and then the moment was gone, leaving "only a loving memory and a desire for that of which I had the aroma but which I had not yet the capacity to eat."³³ Despite the similarity between Augustine and Lewis's experiences of this desire, their understanding of its relation to the sensible world somewhat differs, as we will see later.

Having introduced the concept of Joy, we can now begin to contrast it with Nygren's eros-love. The first obvious question is whether Joy is a love at all. Admittedly, Lewis rarely speaks of it as a love. But we can infer quite a bit from one occasion where he does. A helpful (albeit brief) passage from *Surprised by Joy* may serve as our starting point. "There was no doubt that Joy was a desire (and, in so far as it was also simultaneously a good, it was also a kind of love)" (*SJ*, 208). This remark, made almost in passing, is full of possible implications. What does Lewis mean by "good"? And what "kind" of love is at stake? Does "insofar as Joy is a good" imply that it is not always a good? What does "bad" Joy look like, then, and how is it purified?

According to Nygren, since the Greek words ἔρως and ἀγάπη have for centuries been represented in many languages by one word, "love," it has been only natural to assume that they stand for "one and the same reality, or at any rate for closely related realities" (*AE*, 32). "But the double spell," as he calls it, "cast upon us by tradition and language" must be broken (32). Nygren's historical and analytical study tries to dispel this mirage from blurring the clear-cut outlines of authentic Christian love. Eros is exposed as acquisitive, possessive, and self-deifying—in all ways antithetical to Christian love. Not surprisingly, but I think misleadingly, Nygren's model is sometimes referred to as dipartite, since it speaks of "two" loves. Based on the actual content (if not form) of his overall argument, however, I would call it monistic. If love is a good, then Nygren's eros is not love at all, but a kind of anti-love. Only his agape is love.

³⁰ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 157. The citations are from Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, cxliv. 15.

³¹ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 96.

³² *Ibid.*, 97. The citation is from Augustine's *In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 4.6.

³³ Augustine, *Confessions* (trans. Henry Chadwick; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 7.23 (127–28).

In any case, Lewis thinks that to merit the name love, the phenomenon (here, Joy-as-desire) must be a good. Hence, because Nygren's eros is derogatory, Lewis would probably not number it among loves proper. We remember that he could not deny need-love the name "love," because it was not an evil. Loves can, of course, degenerate into "complicated forms of hatred" or even "demons" (*FL*, 17).³⁴ Such dangers notwithstanding, unlike Nygren's eros, Joy is potentially a kind of love. What kind of love, then, is it?

Is it a virtue like the "four" loves?³⁵ Virtues are good traits or dispositions that, together with vices, form one's character and can be acquired or bolstered by training. But Joy, Lewis believed, "is never in our power" (*SJ*, 24). It is wholly spontaneous. For years he thought that by returning to the context (poems, music, or nature) that had originally evoked Joy, he could help reawaken it. Desires, however, are always for an object. Having been preoccupied with his inner states, he had erected obstacles for real occasions of Joy or smothered them upon arrival. After realizing the blunder, he could redirect his attention from this "self-defeating predicament"³⁶ of summoning Joy.

Consequently, it follows that in this sense Joy was in his power after all. Paradoxically, by not yearning after it Lewis could hinder less, if not exactly excite, the arrival of Joy, as "it arrived unexpectedly when he was preoccupied with other matters."³⁷ Walter Hooper has called this the "Law of Inattention."³⁸ There is a peculiar kind of proactive passivity in Lewis's mature understanding of Joy. Perhaps it would be correct to say that as an uncalled-for feeling or experience, Joy in itself is not a virtue proper; uncontrollable reawakening is different from

³⁴ The word "demon" or "demoniac" appears twenty times in *The Four Loves*. Rather than a literal evil spirit, in Lewis's thinking love-as-a-demon is often a form of idolatry. Especially erotic love may usurp the allegiance that belongs to God only. See Olli-Pekka Vainio, "The Aporia of Using 'Love' as an Argument: A Meditation on C. S. Lewis' *The Four Loves*," *The Chronicle of the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society* vol. 4 no. 2 (2007) 21–30. Vainio slightly miscalculates ("eighteen times").

³⁵ Caroline Simon warns that the title of *The Four Loves* is misleading. Lewis's model includes "at least four different parameters: (1) Love for the Sub-personal versus Love for Finite Persons versus Love for God; (2) Natural Love versus Supernatural Love; (3) Need-love versus Gift-love versus Appreciative Love; (4) Affection versus Friendship versus Eros versus Charity" ("On Love," 148). These taxonomies should all be taken lightly. Lewis says we "[m]urder to dissect" (*Four Loves*, 26): in real life the elements of love mix. Elsewhere Lewis salutes Thomas Usk for "his attempt at integration: he is not content with [a] water-tight division of human desires" (*The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* [1936; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986] 227).

³⁶ John Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (2nd ed.; Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007) 38.

³⁷ Mona Dunckel and Karen Rowe, "Understanding C. S. Lewis's *Surprised by Joy*: 'A Most Reluctant' Autobiography," in *C. S. Lewis: Life, Work, and Legacy* (ed. Bruce L. Edwards; 4 vols.; Westport, CT: Praegan, 2007) 3:257–78, at 267.

³⁸ Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Complete Guide to His Life and Works* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996) 577–78.

cultivation by intentional habituation. But it can reverberate into a more consistent and enduring relation to the world, a relation which can be either virtuous or vicious (more of this below).

What about Lewis's tripartite division of need-love, gift-love, and appreciative love? Where does Joy stand in this taxonomy? Whether Joy is need-love or gift-love depends on the subject. In Joy, our being is responding to some fundamental need. Joy is human longing for something, whether lost or never endowed. We will discuss agency more thoroughly in the penultimate section, but in anticipation we may say that in some sense God can also be regarded as both the efficient and final cause of Joy. After all, the human person is the object of God's "arrows of Joy" (*SJ*, 217). The emerging picture looks paradoxical. Insofar as God is its cause, Joy as our need-love is his gift-love to us. Joy is what Lewis experienced when God's love touched him and gave him an anticipatory, transient taste of bliss.

Joy as a Value-based Love of Desire

What exactly does Lewis mean by "appreciative love"? It is an element in love that can gradually grow into "full appreciation of all beauty," and which we can "hardly help calling *disinterested*, toward the object itself" (*FL*, 25 [italics in original]). Lewis explains: "It is the feeling which makes a man unwilling to deface a great picture even if he was the last man left alive and himself about to die; which makes us glad of unspoiled forests that we shall never see; which makes us anxious that the garden or bean-field should continue to exist" (25–26). In short, "we pronounce them, in a momentary God-like sense, 'very good'" (26). This affirmation or "almost homage" is "a kind of debt," and it can be offered "not only to things but to persons" (26) and also to God Himself (159).

Joy is markedly appreciative and value-based in this respect. It does not bestow or create the value of its objects (as Nygren's agape does), but acknowledges and appreciates the value that already is. Its objects or catalysts have one aspect in common: beauty. Lewis later narrowed this quality down to goodness, later still to holiness, and finally to the holiness of a Divine Person. Joy taught Lewis to love disinterestedly. He learned that "it is more important that Heaven should exist than that any of us should reach it" (*SJ*, 199) and that "a thing can be revered not for what it can do to us but for what it is in itself" (218).

Joy and Nygren's eros are both value-based, but not precisely in the same way. The difference is a nuanced but important one. Joy, as we have seen, can appreciate the object for its own sake (insofar as the object is God or the experience of Joy itself). In Nygrenian terms, to appreciate the goodness of an object is erotic, but to

appreciate the object “disinterestedly” is agapic. In this way, Joy overcomes the antithesis of Nygren’s “central contrast” between erotic and agapic love.³⁹ Nygren does not, of course, believe any such overcoming is possible.

What about Joy’s relation to the sensible world? Nygren distinguished between three kinds of erotic relations. The first two he called “Hellenistic” eros: “vulgar” eros glorifies and idolizes the sensible, whereas “heavenly” eros is ascetic and holds the sensible in contempt (*AE*, 49–52). Gnostic “love feasts” (orgies) exemplify the first (*AE*, 308) and the *Symposium* the second.⁴⁰ Lewis would agree with Nygren that these could hardly be squared with the Christian approach, which forbids idolatry and contempt alike. For instance, of desire in the sublimated “heavenly” sense Lewis writes:

The thought of the *Symposium*, like all Plato’s thoughts, is ruthless, and the more fervid, the more ruthless. The lowest rung of his ladder is perversion; the intermediate rungs are increasing degrees of asceticism and scientific clarity; the topmost rung is mystical contemplation. A man who reaches it has, by hypothesis, left behind for ever the original human object of desire and affection. . . . There is no possibility of adapting this scheme in its full rigour to a [Christian] heterosexual love.⁴¹

Joy does not find its ultimate fulfillment in the material, or even in the aesthetic, but it is disdainful of neither. We may of course be tempted to contempt. Lewis explains how disillusionment from his repeated failures to uncover the source of Joy eventually led him to “a retreat, almost a panic-stricken flight” (*SJ*, 191) from the pursuit of Joy. Yet instead of repenting his idolatry, he “vilified the unoffending images” (193).⁴² Joy itself, however, neither idolizes nor vilifies nature, even if sometimes we do.

Does Joy arrange the goods in nature in an ascending hierarchy of their value, like Nygren’s eros does? There is little evidence that it does. Nature walks, books, poetry, and sex are all equally valuable as reminders of and pointers toward the transcendental. Instead of an ascending hierarchy of value, there is simply a giant ontological leap from beings to Being itself.⁴³

³⁹ “For the essence of religion,” in Lewis’s view, “is the thirst for an end higher than natural ends; the finite self’s desire for, and acquiescence in, and self-rejection in favour of, an object wholly good and wholly good for it” (“Religion Without Dogma?” in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces* [ed. Lesley Walmsley; London: HarperCollins, 2000] 163–78, at 167).

⁴⁰ Both types are explained in the *Symposium* (180D), but only one is promulgated.

⁴¹ Lewis, *English Literature*, 10; see also *Allegory of Love*, 5 and 97.

⁴² In *Allegory of Love*, Lewis quotes Spenser’s Nature, who “grudg’d to see the counterfet should shame the thing it selfe” (328).

⁴³ When Lewis discovered “that pleasure (whether that pleasure or any other) was not what you had been looking for,” his “frustration did not consist in finding a ‘lower’ pleasure instead of a ‘higher.’ It was the irrelevance of the conclusion that marred it” (*SJ*, 161). Lewis clearly believed in a hierarchical order of value present in the universe, even if Joy’s relation to it is not hierarchical. See the chapter “Hierarchy” in his *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 2010) 72–81, esp. 72.

With this, we arrive at the third kind of erotic relation, which Nygren calls “Augustinian” or “Catholic.” Although Joy’s relation to creation is not hierarchical, it is nearer to the Augustinian relation than to any other. Nygren admits that Augustine’s (and following him, Catholicism’s) conception of longing seems from the outset very different than the Hellenistic conception. Both the starting point and goal are different: We are not “disguised divinit[ies]” (*AE*, 517), and the distinction between God and us “is never abolished; even at the highest point of spiritual life the distance is preserved” (518). For Augustine and for Lewis, the material world is not the problem. Nygren knows that Augustine actually “attacks the common idea of Eros theory that evil is to be traced to corporeality” (537). The problem, then, is egocentricity. Selfish pride is “the deepest root of sin” (538) and can only be uprooted by graced humility. But even this leaves Nygren dissatisfied, for humility, he suspects, is only pride disguised.

The reason Nygren is so adamantly hard to please in this case is simple. For him, there is no such thing as a desire that is “simultaneously a good.” Desire itself is evil. It contaminates all possible relations. The anthropological foundation for his understanding of desire is his understanding of needfulness. “The sense of need is an essential constituent of Eros; for without a sense of need acquisitive love would never be aroused. . . . Only that which is regarded as valuable can become an object of desire and love” (176). There is simply “no room” for “any spontaneous and unmotivated love” (176). It follows that “all desire, or appetite, and longing is more or less egocentric” (180).

Lewis’s understanding of the needfulness at the heart of desire stands in diametrical opposition to this, as noted above. For him, need is a natural and non-sinful constituent of all human love, including both its highest forms and spiritual longing. Lewis would probably nod in approval of Augustine’s position faithfully paraphrased by Nygren: “*Desire is the mark of the creature*; it is grounded in God’s own will and plan. . . . So, far from being evil and reprehensible, desire . . . is in the highest degree good and praiseworthy, inasmuch as it gives expression to man’s actual position as a created being” (*AE*, 479–80 [italics in original]). In fact, “God has created man such that he *must* desire, *must* love and long for something” (482 [italics in original]). Nygren might agree that desire is “the mark of the creature,” but only in the dimension of the fallen creature. Desire may be natural, but there is certainly nothing neutral about it, let alone good or praiseworthy.

Philip Watson, in his translator’s preface to the revised reprint of *Agape and Eros* (1953), defends the author against critics who argue “that Eros is ‘neutral’ to man in the sense that it is an essential characteristic of human nature” and that “God is the author of Eros” (*AE*, xxi). This is “an odd” argument, he says, because we “might as well say that God is the author of sin—which in one sense is only too ‘natural’ to man” (xxi).⁴⁴ Watson’s remark is highly revealing. In no place is it

⁴⁴ Lewis himself has traced the multifarious meanings of “nature” and “natural” in his *Studies in Words* (1960; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2008) 24–73.

more evident that certain important disagreements in “the Nygren debate,” including the character of needfulness, result from diverging anthropological and theological presuppositions. Nygren himself, I believe, saw this clearly. In passing and without further comment, he explained that the reason why John Burnaby’s (1938) and Martin D’Arcy’s (1945) responses come to different conclusions from his own is essentially that “they start from different premisses” (*AE*, xiii).⁴⁵ This is, of course, just another way of saying that Nygren himself starts from different premises.

All of this is highly relevant to the important question of *praeparatio evangelica*. Nygren says that “there are elements of truth” (*AE*, 161) in the view that, at least historically, religious longing has prepared ground for the Gospel as a “forerunner of Christianity” (162). However, since religious longing is intimately linked with eros, it could also be described as Christianity’s “most dangerous rival” (162). Which one are we to emphasize? Nygren’s answer is most telling. “From a purely historical point of view, therefore, it is scarcely possible to reach a definite decision. . . . In our present discussion, where we are concerned to show the essential difference between the Agape motif and the Eros motif, the main emphasis will naturally have to be placed on the rivalry between them” (162). That is to say, Nygren emphasizes their rivalry because he is concerned with emphasizing their rivalry! For the first time, it seems, Nygren hints at the real possibility of spiritual longing (eros) developing into faith (agape), but the line of thought is cut abruptly.⁴⁶ Instead of affirming the link between the sense of smell and fragrance (the divine) he cuts it in fear of stench (self-divination).

Shifting the metaphor from scent to sight, Lewis asks, “How if there is a man to whom [the spilled] bright drops on the floor are the beginning of a trail which, duly followed, will lead him in the end to taste the cup itself? How if no other trail, humanly speaking, were possible?” (*PR*, xvi). Desire points the way, but only grace can make the journey possible. The longings stirred by nature and other catalysts helped Lewis to understand what is meant by “the ‘love’ of God” (*FL*, 30). “Nature cannot satisfy the desires she arouses nor answer theological questions nor sanctify us,” but at least for Lewis, the love of nature was “a valuable and, for some people, an indispensable initiation” (*FL*, 31).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Burnaby’s *Amor Dei* and D’Arcy’s *The Mind and Heart of Love* were the first full-length rebuttals of Nygren’s theses.

⁴⁶ Conflating faith and love is not my doing but Nygren’s (see e.g., *AE*, 117–19, 125–27). As Watson explains, although “the love of man for God of which the New Testament speaks” can be called agape, “its character as response is more clearly marked when it is described (by St. Paul especially) as ‘faith’” (*AE*, xvi–xvii). Gene Outka also notes how “Nygren proposes that in place of ‘love for God’ one substitute ‘faith’” (*Agape: An Ethical Analysis* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972] 47).

⁴⁷ In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis says that the lower life of imagination is “not necessarily and by its own nature” the beginning of, nor a step toward, the higher life of the spirit, but “God can cause it to be such a beginning” (159 n. 1).

In *The Pilgrim's Regress*, Lewis symbolized by “North” and “South” things that he calls “equal and opposite evils” (*PR*, xvi). The Northerners are “the men of rigid systems whether sceptical or dogmatic, Aristocrats, Stoics, Pharisees, Rigorists.” The Southerners are by their nature less definable: “boneless souls whose doors stand open . . . with readiest welcome for those . . . who offer some sort of intoxication. . . . Every feeling is justified by the mere fact that it is felt; for a Northerner, every feeling on the same ground is suspect” (xvii). North and South are allegorical images of theological extremes:

The one exaggerates the distinctness between Grace and Nature to sheer opposition and by vilifying the higher levels of Nature (the real *praeparatio evangelica* inherent in certain immediately sub-Christian experiences) makes the way hard for those who are at the point of coming in. The other blurs the distinction altogether, flatters mere kindness into thinking it is charity [agape] and vague optimisms and pantheisms into thinking that they are Faith, and makes the way out fatally easy and imperceptible for the budding apostate. (xvii)

Lewis clarifies that these extremes “do not coincide with Romanism (to the North) and Protestantism (to the South)” (xvii).⁴⁸ It seems obvious that Lewis would count *Sehnsucht* among the sub-Christian experiences and Nygren among the men of rigid systems. In no ambiguous terms: Nygren’s belief (that all desire is evil) is itself evil.

The American philosopher John Beversluis, however, is not impressed by Lewis’s understanding of Joy. He thinks that it suggests that Lewis “understands neither the Socratic-Platonic theory of desire nor the Judeo-Christian doctrine of sin.”

The Socratic-Platonic view knows nothing of the radical evil in human beings insisted on by Christianity and accounts for their pursuit of false objects by saying that they are ignorant and pursue false objects inadvertently and involuntarily. The Judeo-Christian doctrine, on the other hand, knows nothing of the Socratic-Platonic notion of an innocent and good-oriented desire and claims that human beings pursue false objects deliberately and knowingly.⁴⁹

To think, as Lewis does, that we long for God as object of desire but shrink from him as just judge is to contrive “a conceptual hybrid that lacks the authentic pedigree of both parents” (58). Beversluis is, of course, right. Lewis’s understanding of Joy lacks the unfiltered pedigree both to the Socratic-Platonic theory of desire

⁴⁸ If we are surprised by the direction of this clarification, it is only because we happen to be reading in the post-Lubacian era something that was written in pre-Lubacian times. Ever since the Second Vatican Council, theological landscapes have, if not been turned topsy turvy, been greatly shuffled. While it does not surprise us, it may have surprised Lewis’s immediate audience to learn that “Barth might well have been placed among my Pale Men, and Erasmus might have found himself at home with Mr Broad” (*PR*, xvii).

⁴⁹ Beversluis, *Rational Religion*, 57. The preface to the second edition of his book (see footnote 36 above) is no exaggeration: it is still “the first [and only] full-length critical study of C. S. Lewis’s apologetic writings” (9). The following page numbers refer to this book.

and to a certain Christian doctrine of sin. As it so happens, Beversluis is consciously operating under the tutelage of Nygren's doctrine of desire and sin! *Surprised by Joy*, he declares, "documents Lewis's unsuccessful attempt at (what Anders Nygren calls) 'the Hellenisation of Christianity'" (59).

Beversluis notes correctly that on the question of spiritual longing as potential *praeparatio evangelica* Nygren and Lewis disagree. Lewis believed in the possibility of "forgivable honest ignorance." Beversluis thinks that this is a humane idea, but one that "cannot be taken seriously" (62). Why not? Because sin "is not honest error, but open rebellion" (64). There are "undeniable tensions" between the two claims, and this "irresolvable discrepancy . . . is the result of Lewis's unsuccessful attempt to synthesize two incompatible—or, at least, incongruous—philosophical traditions" (59). Whether or not Lewis's attempt is unsuccessful, Beversluis is surely right about the tensions. However, following Nygren, he translates tension into antithesis. Either sin is ignorance and desire innocent, or sin is rebellion and desire megalomania. Lewis believed it was not a question of either—or but of both—and.⁵⁰ According to Nygren, wanting it both—and was, here and elsewhere, Augustine's "fatal flaw" (*AE*, 470) as well. He had tried to unite things which "by their nature cannot be united" (561).⁵¹

Joy as the Pursuit of Happiness

The second main characteristic of Nygren's eros is that it is "egocentric love" (*AE*, 175). This overlaps with much of what has already been discussed regarding need-love, so we may instead focus on desire as the pursuit of happiness.

All desire and longing, Nygren said, is more or less egocentric. "But the clearest proof of the egocentric nature of Eros is its intimate connection with *eudæmonia*" (*AE*, 180). Christian love, on the other hand, "is *spontaneous in contrast to all activity with a eudæmonistic motive.*" In layman's terms, it "is free from all selfish calculation" (*AE*, 726). Eros is soaked in "a eudæmonistic scheme" (*AE*, 530) that, for our purposes, can be broken into four interconnected claims: 1) Eros pursues

⁵⁰ For Lewis, the non- or pre-Christian life is not determined primarily or exclusively by sin, but also by ignorance, misinformedness etc.—not so much that sin is ignorance as that sin is not all defining. I am thankful to Judith Wolfe for insight on Lewis's hamartiology. In Augustine's summary of Christian doctrine (*Encheiridion*, 22), "the two causes of sin" are ignorance (failure of intellect) and infirmity (failure of will).

⁵¹ Beversluis is one of the first to mention Nygren in connection with Lewis viz. the link between eros and Joy. For this perceptiveness he deserves credit. (Another scholar who has contrasted the two is Gilbert Meilaender in his *The Way that Leads There: Augustinian Reflections on the Christian Life* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006], especially the chapter, "Desire.") Unfortunately, he seems unaware of Lewis's familiarity with, and rejection of, Nygren and his theses. He chides Lewis for his understanding of Joy because it cannot be squared with a certain doctrine of sin—the one Lewis happened to reject. Beversluis concludes his deconstruction of Joy rather unflatteringly: Joy is "a preoccupation . . . we ought to ignore," "of no importance," "a narcissistic project," "a childish thing," and the "self-important claim that reality [physical nature] is just not up to one's lofty standards is not profundity; it is adolescent disenchantment elevated to cosmic status" (*Rational Religion*, 67–69).

individual happiness, and 2) this pursuit is morally tainted, because 3) it is possessive and selfish (incapable of agapic sacrifice), 4) and “uses” objects of love as its means to happiness. How does Joy fare against this four-fold eudaemonistic charge?⁵²

The differences are fundamental. Except for the first claim, it is difficult to square them in any respect. Lewis likens spiritual desire in the soul to the chair in King Arthur’s castle in which only one could sit: “And if nature makes nothing in vain, the One who can sit in this chair must exist” (*PR*, xv). Beversluis⁵³ notes that in endorsing that nature makes nothing “in vain,” Lewis commits himself to a teleological anthropology and positions himself in the natural law tradition among Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and Hooker. (It was the sixteenth-century English theologian Richard Hooker who said, it “is an axiom of nature that natural desire cannot utterly be frustrate.”⁵⁴) Teleology further solidifies Lewis’s distance from Nygren, who saw it as another reprehensible mark of eros (*AE*, 94). The natural law tradition to which Lewis belonged holds that the human telos, the goal towards which we by nature are oriented, is human flourishing or happiness.

Lewis explains that Joy “must be sharply distinguished” from happiness and pleasure.

Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that . . . it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is a kind we want. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever . . . exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. (*SJ*, 24)

Joy is distinct from all pleasure, “even from aesthetic pleasure. It must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing” (*SJ*, 74). Beversluis offers a synopsis of the distinction between Joy and pleasure that is helpful here, since its logic, I think, applies admirably to happiness as well: “Joy is pleasurable, but it is not the same as pleasure; and its pleasurable aspect is not the whole story. Insofar as it is bittersweet, it is also painful.”⁵⁵ Lewis not only distinguished Joy from happiness, he actually said it might be called a particular kind of “unhappiness,” but paradoxically a kind we want. What should we make of this? Joy is not pure happiness, but does it not pursue it?

It must be noticed that longing itself is described as a kind of unhappiness, not the object of longing. Since Joy itself can be one of the objects (we can long for Joy), one could argue that unhappiness is sought for insofar as the experience of Joy

⁵² I have elsewhere contrasted this four-fold exposition with Lewis’s eros (i.e., romantic love). See Jason Lepojärvi, “Does Eros Seek Happiness? A Critical Analysis of C. S. Lewis’s Reply to Anders Nygren,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 53 (2011) 208–24.

⁵³ Beversluis, *Rational Religion*, 42.

⁵⁴ Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: A Critical Edition with Modern Spelling* (ed. Arthur S. McGrade; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 83.

⁵⁵ Beversluis, *Rational Religion*, 37–38.

demands it. But surely this cannot be taken rigorously. The words “an unhappiness we want” are rhetorical. What they underscore is the bitter sweetness. Insofar as Joy is bitter, it is a kind of unhappiness, but it is still happiness insofar as it is sweet. If it lacked sweetness we would not find it “more desirable than any *other satisfaction*” (*SJ*, 24, [italics added]). In one sense happiness and pleasure are its by-product, but in another sense, I think, we cannot deny that Joy is the longing for fulfillment in a very intense and meaningful way, since it is our inborn desire for God who, Lewis believes, gives “the [only] happiness that there is,”⁵⁶ and “union with [His divine] Nature is bliss and separation from it horror” (*SJ*, 219). The pursuit of Joy and the pursuit of eudaemonia are kindred drives, if not one and the same thing.

Nygren well knows that eudaemonia is understood in many ways. “To this question different philosophical schools had given different answers: . . . pleasure of the senses . . . spiritualised enjoyment . . . independence of the self . . . and so forth” (*AE*, 501; see also 44). Augustine, Nygren says, looked to the transcendent for something more dependable, and he found it in God: “He is the source of our happiness, He is the end of all desire.”⁵⁷ What this really means, Nygren explains, is that Augustine merely substituted a heavenly “bribe” for an earthly one, because solution “implies no condemnation of [the] egocentric and eudæmonistic question” (503).⁵⁸ Authentic agape “has nothing in common with individualistic and eudæmonistic ethics”; instead of the egocentric quest for one’s “highest good,” what is sought is “the Good-in-itself” (44–45). Nygren is consequently uninterested in what kind of happiness is pursued. The problem for him is the pursuit of happiness itself, which (like all desire) is possessive and selfish.

In Augustine’s notion of *caritas*, which Nygren calls Augustine’s botched “synthesis” of eros and agape (which eventually “Luther shatters” [*AE*, 692]), God is supposedly loved

for His own sake, as the highest good, the object which gives final blessedness. But the blessedness does not consist in *loving*—that is, desiring and longing for the highest good—but in *possessing* it. . . . But that means that Caritas is made relative and ranked as a means—inevitably, since all love, as Augustine thinks, is desire.” (510–11 [italics in original])⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 38

⁵⁷ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 10.3 (cited in *AE*, 502).

⁵⁸ Compare this to Lewis’s sermon “The Weight of Glory”: “Those who have attained everlasting life in the vision of God doubtless know very well that it is no mere bribe, but the very consummation of their earthly discipleship” (*Essay Collection* [ed. Walmsley] 96–106, at 97).

⁵⁹ Nygren’s main worry here, that we “use” God, may be a misunderstanding. According to Burnaby, Nygren’s strong suspicion of Augustine’s *caritas* results from miscomprehending *uti* (“to use”) and *frui* (“to enjoy”). The legitimate *uti*-love of creation is real love, not instrumental love. God alone is to be enjoyed, but “God alone is *not* to be loved. . . . A means which can be loved is not only a means. The keyword is *referre ad Deum*, ‘relation to God’, and the distinction of *uti* and *frui* is merged in the ‘order of love’” (Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 106; italics in the original). Creation is “wrongly loved if it is preferred to God” (*Ibid.*, 107). Outka says, “Burnaby takes book-length pains to treat [Augustine] sympathetically” (Outka, *Agape*, 177).

Where does Joy stand in relation to this? Is the sweetness in the desiring or in the possessing? Lewis says Joy eclipses the distinction. Joy “makes nonsense of our common distinction between having and wanting. There, to have is to want and to want is to have” (*SJ*, 158). The desire itself is desirable, and experiencing it is “the fullest possession we can know on earth” (158). This may sound complicated, but “it is simple when we live it” (*PR*, xii).⁶⁰ Many “anti-Romantic” debunkers of this emotion seemed to Lewis to be “condemning what they did not understand” (xv). What is more, Joy is not necessarily incapable of sacrifice. Lewis had hoped that the “heart of reality” could be symbolized “as a place; instead, I found it to be a Person. For all I knew, the total rejection of what I called Joy might be one of the demands, might be the very first demand, He would make upon me” (*SJ*, 217). Having found the heart of reality and (without fully understanding it) having in a way completed its task, Joy was ready for renunciation. This demand, however, God never made.⁶¹

We noted above Nygren’s suspicion of Augustine’s idea of humility as the antidote to egocentricism. Nygren thought that humility, too, may be calculatingly “offered” to God as a price for a prize, as means to one’s fulfillment. Obviously in such a reading the distinction between humility and pride evaporates, making the words redundant. Lewis is less pessimistic. He is aware of pride’s snares (“how magnificently we have repented!” [*FL*, 148]⁶²), as is Augustine, though Nygren fails to mention it. But Lewis might say that snares imply a reality that can be manipulated; a mirage of an oasis presupposes real oases. Only by understanding and experiencing the real is the counterfeit exposed.

Nygren’s suspicion of humility may rest on a superficial notion of its implications. At least for Lewis, humility is not some nonchalant and half-forced admittance that one is not God. Rather, in its full-blown vigor, humility implies the acceptance of unmerited grace accompanied by the awareness of the reality of personal sin. Lewis’s own quest for Joy ended in such graced introspection: “For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds” (*SJ*, 213). The quest for Joy, longing for fulfillment in God, is not necessarily pridefully blind to one’s ignorance and infirmity but may contribute to exposing them.

⁶⁰ Dunckel and Rowe, “Understanding C. S. Lewis,” 267: “The satisfaction is the desire, not the possession.”

⁶¹ After his conversion Lewis largely lost interest in Joy, but for a different reason. Joy “was valuable only as a pointer to something outer and other. While that other was in doubt, the pointer naturally loomed large in my thoughts” (*SJ*, 224).

⁶² He continues: “As Bunyan says, describing his first and illusory conversion, ‘I thought there was no man in England that pleased God better than I.’ Beaten out of this, we next offer our own humility to God’s admiration. Surely He’ll like *that*? Or if not that, our clear-sighted and humble recognition that we still lack humility” (*FL*, 148 [italics in original]). See also Simon, “On Love,” 156.

Nygren's four-fold "eudaemonistic scheme" was: 1) Eros pursues individual happiness, and 2) this pursuit is morally tainted, because 3) it is possessive and selfish (incapable of agapic sacrifice), 4) and uses objects of love as means to happiness. Joy has intimate commerce with personal happiness. That is where the similarities end. As for the jump from "1)" onward, Lewis simply refuses to make it. His theological anthropology does not allow it. The accusation that "desire for one's fulfillment or happiness" is "wrong," is in his view "an accretion which has crept into Christian thinking from Kant and the Stoics."⁶³ In other words, Nygren's suspicion is an un-Christian accretion.

Joy as Human Endeavor Towards God

The third and final feature of Nygren's three-fold eros, somewhat overlapping with the first two, was that it is "man's way to the Divine" (AE, 175). For this, we return to Lewis's first recorded thoughts on Nygren in that early January letter in 1935 to his colleague Janet Spens. The letter's first two paragraphs discuss Nygren's theses.

You will have begun to wonder if your *Agape & Eros* was lost forever! It is an intensely interesting book. I am inclined to think I disagree with him. His central contrast—that Agape is selfless and Eros self-regarding—seems at first unanswerable: but I wonder if he is not trying to force on the conception of love an antithesis which it is the precise nature of love, in all its forms, to overcome.

Then again, is the contrast between Agape (God active coming to man passive) and Eros (man by desire ascending to God *quā* passive object of desire) really so sharp? He might accuse me of a mere play upon words if I pointed out that in Aristotle's "He moves as the beloved" (*κινεῖ ὡς ἐρῶμενον* [sic]) there is, after all, an active verb, *κινεῖ*. But is this merely a grammatical accident—is it not perhaps the real answer? Can the thing really be conceived in one way *or* the other? In real life it feels like both, and both, I suspect, are the same. Even on our human level does any one feel that the passive voice of the word *beloved* is really exclusive—that *to attract* is a—what do you call it—the opposite of a deponent?⁶⁴

As we remember, Lewis ended with the resolute decision to "tackle him again. He has shaken me up extremely."⁶⁵

⁶³ Lewis, "Weight of Glory," in *Essay Collection* (ed. Walmsley) 96. Defamators of eros, Josef Pieper thinks, bring what he calls "a pretheological conception of man" to the discussion: a fixed anthropology is brought to the study of Scripture instead of finding Scripture's anthropology (*Love*, 210–11). For a concatenation of Scripture passages that encourage pursuit of happiness and promise reward for godly behavior see Meilaender, *The Way*, 3–4.

⁶⁴ Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2:153–54; italics in original. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072b ("κινεῖ ὡς ἐρῶμενον").

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

The first important thing to notice is that each paragraph presents a different contrast within Nygren’s overall juxtaposition of agape and eros with which Lewis is “inclined to disagree.” Lewis begins by stating what he thinks is Nygren’s “central contrast”: that agape is selfless and eros is self-regarding. Although he believes this antithesis is forced upon the proper nature of love, he does not elaborate on this further here. Of course, he would later pick up the point in *The Four Loves* with his non-antithetical concepts of gift-love and need-love.

But the second paragraph introduces a second contrast between agape and eros. This has nothing to do with the “central contrast,” the purported selfless (gratuitous) and self-regarding (needful) nature of agape and eros. I press the point because it supports my conviction that Lewis was, from the very outset, conscious of the multidimensionality of Nygren’s eros and probably never intended need-love as an exhaustive translation. Even to the words “Then again” at the beginning of the second paragraph I would attach a more than rhetorical meaning. They should be read as “Leaving the central contrast aside.” The second contrast is between “God active coming to man passive” (agape) and “[active] man by desire ascending to God *qûa* passive object of desire” (eros). Lewis has misgivings about this as well. In fact, implicit in Lewis’s remarks is a tentative accusation of three different but interconnected mistakes.

The first mistake is hermeneutical: Nygren may have misrepresented Greek thought. His portrayal of the “Platonic ladders,” the human hero actively climbing the stairs towards a passive Deity, is a caricature. Lewis does not believe Aristotle’s choice of the active verb *κινεῖ* (“moves”) is accidental. Thirty years later, Lewis picks up this theme in *The Discarded Image* (1964) when discussing Aristotle’s teaching of God as the Prime (Unmoved) Mover.

[W]e must not imagine Him moving things by any positive action, for that would be to attribute some kind of motion to Himself and we should then not have reached an utterly unmoving Mover. How then does He move things? Aristotle answers, *κινεῖ ὡς ἐρῶμενον*, “He moves as beloved” [*Metaphysics*, 1072b]. He moves other things, that is, as an object of desire moves those who desire it.⁶⁶

The hermeneutical question of interpreting Aristotle correctly, however, is less important than the ontological question. What interests Lewis is “the real answer.” This is Nygren’s second mistake: a failure to correctly analyze desire itself. In the relation of desire and its object, is one wholly active and the other entirely passive? Nygren believes so. But Lewis is hesitant and appeals to ordinary human

⁶⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (1964; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 1st ed. 1964) 113. See also the reference to Aristotle’s *κινεῖ* in Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (2nd ed.; Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, 1st ed. 1957) 101. Lewis read this book carefully at draft stage and gave Barfield detailed comments in his long letter dated March 27, 1956, found in *Collected Letters* 3:724–30.

experience. “Even on our human level does any one feel that the passive voice of the word *beloved* is really exclusive—that *to attract* is a—what do you call it—the opposite of a deponent?” To say that something is “exclusive” is to say that it repels all explanations but one, in this case the passive voice smothering the active one. But what, exactly, is the opposite of a deponent? A deponent is passive in form but active in meaning; the opposite of a deponent, then, is active in form but passive in meaning. The object of desire (beloved) and its pull (to attract) are neither. In real life, Lewis thinks, activity and passivity mingle.

Nygren’s third and most important mistake, noted almost latently in Lewis’s hermeneutical and ontological correctives, is to transpose his grammatical and ontological errors into theology. Lewis appealed to interpersonal human relations (“even on our human level”) to underscore a truth that he thinks applies to the interpersonal God-human relation too. According to Nygren, pre- and non-Christian theologies depict God as wholly passive and us as wholly active, whereas true Christian theology admits us no role. Any attempt to adopt a positive account of human desire amounts to “a betrayal of Agape” (*AE*, 232). Nygren has shaken him up extremely, but Lewis is inclined to disagree.

Lewis is not unaware of the tension between the two kinds of theologies. “Both [theologies] can speak about the ‘love of God’. But in the one this means the thirsty and aspiring love of creatures for Him; in the other, His provident and descending love for them.”⁶⁷ Nygren’s influence is clearly detectable. Aspiring love is eros, and descending love is agape. Lewis believes that the antithesis, however, is not a contradiction. Why not? Because a “real universe could accommodate the ‘love of God’ in both senses.”

Aristotle describes the *natural order*, which is perpetually exhibited in the uncorrupted and translunary world. St John (‘herein is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us’) describes the *order of Grace* which comes into play here on earth because men have fallen. It will be noticed that when Dante ends the *Comedy* with ‘the love that moves the Sun and the other stars’, he is speaking of love in the Aristotelian sense.⁶⁸

The natural order and the order of Grace are evenly valid. “A real universe” can accommodate both, and we inhabit a real universe. We are created and fallen, not one or the other.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Lewis, *Discarded Image*, 113–14.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 114 [italics added, except *Comedy*].

⁶⁹ Lewis explains that while there is no contradiction, the antithesis explains why many spiritual writers (unlike Dante) show little interest in the natural order. “Spiritual books are wholly practical in purpose, addressed to those who ask direction. Only the order of Grace is relevant” (*Discarded Image*, 114).

It would be a mistake to think that Lewis himself discarded all the medieval images discussed in *The Discarded Image*. He held no belief in “a concept of Grace which simply abolishes nature,”⁷⁰ and he distrusted “that species of respect for the spiritual order which bases itself on the contempt for the natural.”⁷¹ Lewis’s creation-embracing outlook, including his affirmation of human loves, can be expressed by the age-old theological-metaphysical maxim *Gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*. Perfecting without abolishing is what Lewis called “transposition.”⁷² Basically, it is “the flooding of a lower medium and the raising of it to a new significance by incorporation into a higher medium.”⁷³ Human loves, too, of all kinds—including Joy—are subject to this logic.

Lewis’s own view of love is certainly closer to the medieval conception than to Nygren’s predestinarianism. For that is what is really at stake here: human agency. According to Nygren, when it comes to authentic love, “all choice on man’s part is excluded. Man loves God . . . because God’s unmotivated love has overwhelmed him and taken control of him, so that he cannot do other than love God. Therein lies the profound significance of the idea of predestination: man has not selected God, but God has elected man” (*AE*, 213–14). The point is underscored repeatedly: “He [the Christian] is merely the tube, the channel, through which God’s love flows” (735).⁷⁴

Allowing the human person any positive role, even a responsive one, smacks of mysticism, which Nygren highly distrusts. He refers to mysticism derogatorily throughout *Agape and Eros* as “wholly eros” in which “we raise ourselves” to the level of God.⁷⁵ Lewis’s approach to mysticism is much more amicable.⁷⁶ A rare exception is the passage in *The Four Loves* when he warns: “We must not begin with mysticism, with the creature’s love for God” (*FL*, 144). This echoes Nygren’s view of mysticism, insofar as it means the creature’s love for God.⁷⁷ But the point it stresses is that the initiative lies on God’s side, not that creaturely love is somehow

⁷⁰ Charles Williams, *Arthurian Torso, Containing the Posthumous Fragment of The Figure of Arthur and a Commentary on the Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams* by C. S. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) 175.

⁷¹ Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 267.

⁷² Lewis, “Transposition,” in *Essay Collection* (ed. Walmsley) 267–78.

⁷³ Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 105.

⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, Nygren’s model has been consistently criticized for dissolving the human person. Nygren later denied that he wanted to annihilate the agent (*Essence of Christianity* [trans. Philip S. Watson; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961] 57). But critics have argued that “a love expressly devoid of anything human and personal is, ipso facto, divine” (Outka, *Agape*, 149) and that in the “elimination of Eros man has been eliminated” (D’Arcy, *Mind and Heart*, 82).

⁷⁵ See e.g., *AE*, 129 n. 1, 572–74, 584, 588, and 602 n. 11.

⁷⁶ For a book-length assessment of mysticism in Lewis see Downing’s *Into the Region of Awe* (footnote 24 above).

⁷⁷ According to Caroline Simon, “Lewis does at times sound like Nygren” (“On Love,” 154)—this, I think, is one of those times. More in sync with Lewis’s general view would be Rudolf Otto’s definition of mysticism simply as “creature-consciousness” (*The Idea of the Holy* [trans. John W. Harvey; 2nd ed; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978] 20, 22).

sinful. Not even in *The Four Loves* is our love for, and ascension to, God disparaged. On the contrary: “Only those into which Love Himself has entered will ascend into Love Himself” (*FL*, 155). Nygren would absolutely shun such language.

In all of Lewis’s popular publications, it seems he uses eros and agape in the specifically Nygrenian sense only once. According to Nygren, philosophical idealism is “in continuous line” with the eros-tradition (*AE*, 221). Philosophical idealism happened to be Lewis’s own position in a transitional phase of his spiritual journey. In *Surprised by Joy*, a few pages before his final conversion, Lewis calls philosophical idealism “quasi-religion”: “all a one-way street; all *eros* (as Dr. Nygren would say) steaming up, but no *agape* darting down” (*SJ*, 198). There was “nothing to fear, but also nothing to hope” (198). And yet, is not this passage, too, covertly critical of Nygren? Philosophical idealism or “watered Hegelianism” (210), as Lewis also calls it, fits Nygren’s model splendidly, but not any particular branch of Christianity.

When this phase was revealed as incomplete quasi-religion, longing itself was not abandoned, but only a unilateral idea of longing—Nygren’s eros, in effect—and the counterfeit purporting to be its satisfaction, an impersonal Absolute.⁷⁸ Lewis found philosophical idealism wanting because it lacked a personal God who, in love, dives and offers us his saving hand. He did not find it wanting because we, in longing and responsive love, look (or steam) up to grasp at this hand. Lewis believed that human persons can aspire and respond to God’s love without supposing they can save themselves. People are not passive tubes.

In a qualified sense, then, *Joy* can be described as a human drive towards God. The endeavor is human, but not self-sufficient. Yet it is not an automaton or conduit either. Of the actual moment of his final conversion, Lewis wrote: “I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken” (*SJ*, 223). Nygren resolves the paradox of desirous free will and God’s sovereignty in one direction. For good or ill, Lewis refuses to solve it at all. In fact, he almost embraces it instead by calling it “this beautiful oxymoron.”⁷⁹ In actual experience of conversion, freedom and compulsion somehow fuse. This experience is beautiful and oxymoronic for the same reason: the paradox is saved.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ The final chapters of *Surprised by Joy* narrate how “a philosophical theorem . . . became a living presence” (214). Commenting on this, Carnell writes: “Philosophical idealism could be talked, even felt, but it seemed impossible to live it. . . . Idealism was undeniably too fuzzy and abstract to touch life at all the points where he [Lewis] had discovered meaning and significance” (*Bright Shadow*, 58).

⁷⁹ Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 236.

⁸⁰ “Freedom, or necessity? Or do they differ at their maximum?” (*SJ*, 223). In his *English History* (33, 43) Lewis says salvation may feel like “compulsion,” but he thinks that this is still far from a universal theory of predestination. He may have known that Otto made the very same point (*Idea of the Holy*, 87). For a helpful account of Lewis’s view on God’s sovereignty and human responsibility see Will Vaus, *Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 49–61. Vaus believes there is “a decided emphasis, in Lewis’s last interview, on God’s sovereignty in Lewis’s own salvation” (61).

Eros Purified

It is time to draw together the relevant affinities and point out the remaining differences between Nygren's eros and Lewis's Joy.

In his novel *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis imagines intelligent creatures (the *hrossa*) on Mars whose language distinguishes different kinds of longing. "There were two verbs which both . . . meant to *long* or *yearn*; but the *hrossa* drew a sharp distinction, even an opposition, between them. . . . [E]veryone would long for it (*wondelone*) but no one in his senses could long for it (*hlutheline*)."⁸¹ Here we meet the difference between "good" and "bad" Joy. *Wondelone* is proper and meaningful longing, while *hlutheline* is somehow "bent." Longing can be corrupted in two interconnected ways. It may seek fulfillment in the wrong way or in the wrong objects. Both are implicit here. An unfallen race (the *hrossa*) would not stubbornly seek to possess beauty (wrong way) or seek ultimate fulfillment in created goods (wrong objects) that in reality serve as catalysts or pointers.⁸² The purification of longing takes place on these two fronts. Lewis would agree with Augustine, here accurately paraphrased by Nygren: "Desire is not to be rooted out, but *purified* and directed to the right objects" (*AE*, 439 [italics in original]). Caroline Simon agrees that, for Lewis, "Charity [agape/grace] works both to *perfect* and *order* our natural loves."⁸³

Human love in all its forms, Lewis believed, is by its very nature the overcoming of Nygren's "central contrast," the antithesis between selfless and self-regarding love. Joy, insofar as it is a good, is a kind of love. By its very nature, then, Joy overcomes this contrast in relation to God via created nature. Joy also overcomes Nygren's "second contrast" between a wholly active/passive God versus a wholly active/passive human person. In other words, Joy contains elements of Nygren's eros and agape both, which in Lewis's model are broken down into need-love, gift-love, and appreciative love.

In one sense, nothing in Nygren's three-fold eros corresponds to Lewis's Joy without qualifications. Lewis thinks Nygren's eros is a caricature, an abstract idea that does not capture our lived experience (just as Nygren's agape is a caricature of excellent love). It follows that, since Joy represents for Lewis a real good in sync with a real universe, then by definition it cannot be a synonymous translation of Nygren's unreal eros. Joy is a qualified and purified version of the derogative exaggeration that is eros. Because it is an exaggeration, it is qualified, and because

⁸¹ C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1945) 77.

⁸² Meilaender comments that *hlutheline*, the possessive insistence of having a pleasure twice, "will be futile and will inevitably spoil the genuine pleasure which the object might have given" (*Taste for the Other*, 15).

⁸³ Simon, "On Love," 150 [italics in original].

it derogative, it is purified. This is another way of saying that Joy is Nygren’s eros in all three ways, but with a little twist. The differences that remain help to highlight what Lewis thought amiss in Nygren’s three-fold portrayal of human longing. Looking back, have the refinements not been more or less agapic?

Nygren – Eros	Value-based love of desire	Hierarchical nature idolized or vilified	Eudae-monic teleological	Egocentric possessive	Human drive toward God	Self-sufficient
Lewis – Joy	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO

Joy, like eros, is a value-based (or value-directed) love of desire. Instead of bestowing value on its objects, it perceives and appreciates the value that already is. However, unlike eros, it is not hierarchical in its appreciation. Directed by grace, it may reflect the true nature of created goods and thus neither idolize nor vilify them.

Joy, like eros, is the pursuit of happiness, but it is neither calculating nor instrumental. The self is necessarily present, but not mere selfishness. Our very being is pierced by a God-given desire for fulfillment, and this desire should not be short-circuited by bad theology. “The deception,” Lewis thinks, is “in that prosaic moralism which confines goodness to the region of Law and Duty, which never lets us feel in our face the sweet air blowing from ‘the land of righteousness,’ never reveals that elusive Form which if once seen must inevitably be desired with all but sensuous desire.”⁸⁴ Joy also eclipses the distinction between desiring and possessing: to desire God is in one sense to already enjoy him, and to enjoy him is to ever desire him.

Joy, like eros, is a human drive towards the Divine, but it is not delusionally self-sufficient. In relation to God, initiative lies with Him, but the human person is not a wholly passive tube. The responsive role it plays is no illusion. We can rightfully speak of the soul’s search for God, though Lewis says that ultimately this is “a mode, or appearance (*Erscheinung*) of His search for her,” since the “very possibility of our loving is His gift to us, and since our freedom is only a freedom of better or worse response.”⁸⁵ Lewis, unlike Nygren, ultimately resists attempting to “solve” the paradox of God’s sovereignty and human spiritual longing.

⁸⁴ Lewis, *George MacDonald*, xxxix.

⁸⁵ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 36.

The purification of desire is no simple matter. Although desire is not to be rooted out, the pride that perverts it is. And because we are not simply ignorant and imperfect but also rebels in arms seeking autonomy, our self-surrender will be painful, since “to surrender a self-will inflamed and swollen by years of usurpation is a kind of death.”⁸⁶ Rooting out pride is both death and evolution. It is not simply death, because the desire is purified. Nor is it simply unproblematic evolution either, because pride is broken.⁸⁷ Lewis’s theological vision may be “best described as, quite simply, Augustinian.”⁸⁸

On several issues that still divide Christendom, such as theological anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, and the relation of nature and grace, he “demonstrates sensitivity to both Catholic and Protestant emphases.”⁸⁹ For good or ill, Lewis cannot be accused of what Burnaby has called Protestantism’s “obtuse insistence [on] Either–Or.”⁹⁰ We have seen that this applies also to his theology of love, and especially to the God-human relation.⁹¹ In the end, Lewis concludes that we can keep Nygren’s idea of eros and agape “after we have let all his exaggerations fade out of our minds.”⁹² Far from jeopardizing the Gospel, spiritual longing is a God-given desire that prepares the way for it.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁸⁷ “Pride had to be broken in surrender, and in that surrender his longings could be re-directed” (Meilaender, *Taste for the Other*, 93).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 235.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 4.

⁹¹ In this relation, Lewis’s thought closely resembles what Nygren had criticized as “Augustine’s caritas-synthesis” (Meilaender, *Taste for the Other*, 122). Caroline Simon’s succinct observation has been verified by our analysis: Lewis’s view of longing is “much closer to . . . Augustine’s ‘caritas-motif’” (“On Love,” 154).

⁹² Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:555.