

Beyond Strategic Globalization - Markets, Firms, Poverty and the Future of the Species

Keynote Address at the First Annual
Love Conference

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[While] in our complex, modern society we may never be able to fully experience the impact of our moral decision and indecision, we can, nonetheless, attempt as far as possible to experience emotionally the knowledge of this fact, and imagine the lives of those affected. The greatest challenge of each day is: how to bring about a revolution, not of mere structures, but of the heart, that the just structures we hope for may finally follow. (Adapted from Marti Kheel and Dorothy Day)

The theme of this conference lends itself to many considerations, from local issues like the stubborn patterns of housing and school segregation right here on Long Island (one of the most segregated suburbs in the country), to the corporate scandals of recent years, to the genocide and human abuse in Darfur, Sudan, one of our world's present moral disgraces. It is for this reason, rather than any grand self-delusion regarding my competence, that I felt the need for such an ambitious title for my remarks. I will not attempt to tackle all the issues of our time as much as I will be suggesting that we must *reframe* how we see those issues, and how we must construct our public morality, our normative ethics and even our foreign policy. Since I will attempt to reframe, I must range far, rather than drill down into any single issue or, for example, engage in an analytic or deconstruction of love itself – what love is, what it is not – nor am I dubious about love's value, about whether it is a word and a set of ideas and feelings that are too messy, in the final analysis, to do any real work as we consider our social institutions and public policy. And while I will be referencing them, I have no idea what the proper balance of *philia* or *agape* or *eros* or *caritas* should be in the world, although I know we can always use more of all of them.

What I *can* say is that I have taken a position on love's meaning and potential already. I agree with Victor Frankl, the Nazi camp survivor and author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, when he said that "Love is the ultimate and highest goal to which we can aspire. Nothing can take love away from us. From this I grasp the meaning of the greatest secret that human thought and experience can impart – [that] the salvation of humanity is through love. Love that does not return hatred with hate, love that does not die in the face of destruction, love that transforms us and sometimes even the world around us." To the extent that this may seem, in the academy, philosophically uninteresting, I am intent on proving the opposite. To the extent it seems useless in our business and economic considerations, I will beg to differ. I trace the corruption in our social institutions, including our business firms, directly to a lack of love and to a view of reality built upon that lack. And this applies, too, to nations. When nations view themselves as self-sufficient they, too, have taken-up a perilous view of reality. The idea that we as individuals, as institutions, as nations live in hermetically sealed realms operated according to different moral rules, is perilous. Where we cannot see the connection between what we do in our homes, in our businesses, in our political institutions and in our international relations, to the larger reality of which we are a part; where we think that the public-private split is based on an ontological rather than a functional division for managing our common resources; where we see government as an entity apart from the people; or where we see our private wealth as unrelated to the social good, we are removed from the reality that obtains. A world view that encourages such unreality must be exposed with all of the resources at our disposal.

Into One River

The moral work of our time entails channeling into one river the various streams of thought and human experience, rather than ghettoizing the aspects of ourselves and our learning in the name of our disciplines. A discipline that arrogates to itself the “love of wisdom” must then reach into the fountains of wisdom, all of human experience, or call itself something more appropriate to what it has become. If it has become the love of something else, rather than philo-sophia, let it be named so. The task before us requires that we draw on all we know, on both heart and mind, and fashion a new philosophy of life in the hope of moving toward a planetary love ethic. Let us swallow our shallow professionalism wherever we find it, and reach for something higher with the blessings of our educations and resources. Let us not dwell in the workshop, making tools that we may make more tools. There is a large place for philosophers in the work of creating a love ethic, and we should take that place.

Love “Defined”

After considering many thinkers on love, from Jesus to Proust, from Plato to Mother Teresa, I understand love to mean a constant and intense concern for human flourishing *qua* human, the flourishing of individuals and communities as extensions of the proper interests of individuals, and if need be, at the expense of our own personal interests at times. Each of us counts – whether in Long Island or Sri Lanka. Each of us counts. Each life, and how it is lived, and each death, and why it occurred; each child and why she is healthy and educated, or if not, why she is not; each person of means, and why she claims her wealth, or if not, why not. Each of us counts, yes, but after considering the horrors we visit upon one another day after day, whether the abuse of women, the pummeling of the weak, the neglect of our children in war ravaged corners of our world, I believe that what we need are legions of persons – both of many faiths and of no particular faith – who are willing to believe that they count *less*; that their mission in life is to use their talents and efforts to elevate those who have fallen into the gaps that I discussed this morning. So this is my thinking here. We must reframe the task before us, it seems to me, or our species is doomed to more of the same, or worse. Each night when we lie in our beds it ought not take too much to imagine the horrors going on around us, around our tiny globe, or to imagine the screams that we cannot hear.

These legions I speak of must shed ultimate fealty for anything that has greater command of them than does love. For example, I do not see that love is to be imprisoned in liberal or conservative politics or self-referential, inter-textual ghettos of discourse. The questions regarding our loving must cut through the self-certain din in the public square and the incestuous amplification and shibboleths that attend forever taking sides against the barbarian who is in reality our brother or sister – one side liberal, one conservative, one blue, one red. We must use love to reframe our discourse regarding what is to be done, and shed ideological commitments that cause us to demonize others who hold dearly to sets of ideas with which we may disagree. The culture “wars” are called by that name because the combatants have given-up the hope that the other is worth persuading, and so the resort is to attacks and vilification. But as philosopher Mikhael Bhaktin says, “the last word has not yet been spoken.” We can yet keep the conversation going. The moment is ripe for vigorous dialogical effort. For when the question is put, not whether something is just or fair, patriotic or less than patriotic, but “Can you justify it in view of love’s demands?” both liberals and conservatives must pause to consider their rhetoric. Love makes you work harder to justify your positions and conclusions, leaves less room to hide, has the power to unmask. Its grip is not merely academic, ideological, clerical or doctrinal. It is that which leads Teviah in *Fiddler on the Roof* to overcome all of his “isms,” to hold onto his Jewishness, yes, but not at the expense of the filial love of his family, his challenging daughters and sons-in-law. It is in the clemency offered by Gandhi to a Hindu man with blood on his hands after killing an innocent Muslim boy to avenge the killing of his own son by a Muslim mob in the turmoil that preceded Partitioning. As the story

goes, Gandhi told him “Go adopt a child. But be sure it’s a Muslim child. Only, do not raise him as a Hindu, but raise him as a Muslim.” This is love’s demand. It is perhaps the degree to which we find this improbable that reveals our position on the road of justice and deep human concern, reveals that we may in fact be lost. When we find such words implausible we have accepted that, to borrow from James Russell Lowell, wrong *will* forever be on the throne, that the scaffold of truth sways *no* future, that the darkness must *abide*. If we cannot see the way to take the purported devil for a countryman, in the words of a recent song, we will doom our children and theirs to the kind of world that we have been handed by those who failed before us. I for one do not want to pass on the same world that I inherited.

Love itself might be insufficient to answer all of the powerful questions of the hour, but all of the answers, if thought through within the frame of love as sketched, can keep us from forgetting who and what we can be, can keep us from continuing to go down paths that lead to the absurdities of genocide, war, greed, and the social distance that robs people of their dignity and hope in both flagrant and cleverly concealed ways.

So to help me reframe, I will draw on a seemingly unlikely collection of thinkers whose seminal ideas range from loyalty to moral cosmopolitanism to agapic and caritic love itself. The thinkers are Richard Rorty, Josiah Royce, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Martha Nussbaum. For sure, this is a diverse and even, perhaps, controversial pallet from which to draw a new landscape of normative considerations. But one finds one’s tools in various rooms of the house, sometime rooms one has not considered before..

Richard Rorty

I begin with Richard Rorty, and specifically with his oft-discussed essay *Justice as a Larger Loyalty*. Those of you who are familiar with this essay are no doubt also familiar with the criticisms of it by a number of other philosophers. The value of this essay to me doesn’t reside in its upshot – Rorty’s equating of loyalty and justice. Rather, despite this dubious equating, the essay has exercised my *moral imagination* in that in it Rorty engages the possibility of our casting our blanket of fealty – which attends certain fraternal feelings – over those we would not usually consider kith or kin, and reframe that casting not as aid, or relief, or diplomacy, but as affective devotion itself, as loyalty. Rorty is here flirting with a love ethic in neo-pragmatist drag drag.

What continues to resonate for me is not only that which is underneath the title of his essay, but the tethering of the word loyalty to the word justice, the suggestion that the former has at least something important to do with the latter, and that the latter can be extended. For reasons which attend his larger philosophical projects, Rorty is invoking sentiment and feeling as philosophically pertinent along with many feminist philosophers. He asks us to consider possibilities that we don’t usually consider, or even think realistic, precisely because he knows that we human beings are capable of enormous transformations. Imagine a feeling of devotion (which attends loyalty), rather than a mere duty of loyalty or principle of loyalty or an entitlement to loyalty, and which is extended to persons that are not a part of our own thick communities of language, culture and place. To be loyal in the fully human, thick rather than merely positive, thin sense requires the persistence of a level of concern that not only entails a recognition of the *formal* dignity of strangers, but must also entail the *possibility* of actual friendship and kinship, the kinds of things we read about in novels and see in popular films, the unlikely relationship which draws out the capacity for deep fellow feeling across all lines of separation and social distance. We might not be able to do as Rorty suggests – completely erase the distinction between justice and loyalty since, clearly, misguided loyalty can itself be the cause of injustice; but to consider that the reason for some of the tension between justice and loyalty might be removed if we saw in the stranger a friend or even kin but for the contingent circumstances of life.

But there is one more move in this essay that is compelling to me, though it flusters other philosophers. It is

the idea that our own self-esteem might attend whether or not we have extended our loyalties as Rorty suggests we can, and one day might. For he says that “one’s moral identity is determined by the group or groups with which one identifies, the group or groups to which one cannot be disloyal and still like oneself.” As philosophically limbless as this observation may seem, there is something to it. For example, in analyzing Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, philosopher Laurence Thomas suggests that it is *precisely* in attaching our own self-esteem to our Other-regarding commitments that we achieve the highest levels of Other-regarding conduct. Both Rorty and Thomas, it seems to me, are suggesting that linking the power of self-esteem to affective and principled devotion to others can create a mighty moral engine, not merely a thin sense of moral duty that can be compromised when the thick eros of myopic and unbridled loyalties beckons like sirens to passing ships. In reflecting on this, I considered that this links-up, as well, to several ideas of Aristotle. According to Provençal on this point, “[Aristotle’s notion of] *Philautia* [or self-love], the species of *philia* [the kind of love that occurs in friendship and family relationships], is [actually] the ground of all other forms of human *philia*. The love of self is actualized . . . as the love of Other.”¹

Whether or not Rorty, Thomas and Aristotle are all saying exactly the same thing, their triangulation on the place of self-esteem or self-love in Other-regarding love seems clear – one points to the other. Aristotle wants to be clear that love of other is linked to self-love, and Rorty and Thomas want to suggest that that self-love can be used as a springboard to the highest ethical life.

In it, we see the ego turned around on its axis. It is perhaps the best use of the ego, perhaps the thing the ego was ultimately meant for, given that we are creatures of community. This is as much an evolutionary observation as it is a philosophical one. Imagine the ego, that natural self-regarding element of our psychologies, directed at the flourishing of others *as the source of its own nourishment*. It would be like the first bird, troubled by the drag of its plumage as it ran through the grass, suddenly spreading its wings, and realizing that its irritating appendages were the very things that gave it the power of flight.

The notion that we can link-up our self-esteem or self-love to our love of others is no mere philosophical abstraction. People whose families came to this country from Ireland, Germany or Britain identified with the plight of African-Americans and participated, at great risk, in the Freedom Rides during the Civil Rights movement in order to help secure not, primarily, their own civil rights, but the civil rights of strangers in Montgomery and Selma and elsewhere. They traveled hundreds of miles of road distance, but traversed millions of miles of social distance. These were examples of agapic love, I think, but those who took the freedom rides likely, to use Rorty’s language, “could not have done otherwise and still liked themselves.” Missionaries and aid workers give-up lives of relative comfort to assist people in war ravaged or disease-filled parts of the world whose names they had never heard of until they arrived there. These, too, “likely could not have done otherwise and still liked themselves.” One could say that these are but anomalies, tail-events (using the language of statistics), sporadic and high flying examples of intense fellow feeling, Kohlbergian Level Six

¹ Cf. *agape*, as a form of love, is both unconditional and volitional, i.e., it is non-discriminating with no pre-conditions and is something that one decides to do. Such a form of love does not require reciprocation, but decision and commitment.

types whom we know to be rare indeed. *Perhaps*. Or perhaps if we pay close attention to their examples, they can show us the way to live similar lives in the face of the moral challenges of our day, perhaps not only in some drastic embrace of possible Martyrdom but in critical acts of moral courage – to embrace a neighbor of a different religion, tribe or color, to reach out to those who suffer or those who are starved of recognition. These examples teach us how to pay the price of love, and that price, rooted in our own self-esteem, is no cost, but a form of payment *to* us. It all hinges on the question “Who and what do I want to be, to be remembered for, to live for, to die for?” Even for these persons, the cock crows thrice daily – even they are human, but they continue down their path even as they stumble forward at times.

There is something then to Rorty’s conception of justice as a larger loyalty. If justice may not be equated with loyalty, perhaps it may at least be made more secure by it. I might put it a little differently than Rorty, however – I might prefer to say something like “Where you find justice (at a minimum, the attempt to render to those the measure of care that they are due in virtue of their personhood or status as children of God), you will find loyalty standing behind it – a loyalty, perhaps, that is not conscious of itself as such, but a loyalty that abides nonetheless. There can be no justice without at least some loyalty, save for inside some thin, formal notion, which may soon collapse for want of passion. That loyalty is based upon, as David Hume and Adam Smith and so many others suggested, an identification with the other. The question of the hour is how far such loyalty may be feasibly cast, or is the idea of loyalty to distal peoples – a sustained loyalty that is kept alive by our treasure, our political discourse, our laws, our public media, and our energies and which becomes our very *ethos*, really possible? Or is it, rather, a velleity? I think it is possible, because too many have already trod that road. I think it is possible if we view love as arising from but an initial decision to extend our concern on grounds of principle, but that requires for its perfection not merely the principled concern for the other as other, but imagining the other as the kith and kin that, through the web of mutuality that exists, they already are. The people of Darfur or Palestine or on our Reservations must become “those we cannot betray and still like ourselves.” Those to whom we may be loyal reside both near and far.

Josiah Royce

Of course, as Rorty comes out of a tradition of philosophy in this country called Pragmatism, with its very American ring, it is almost natural to think of Josiah Royce when thinking of loyalty. So to Royce.

Josiah Royce, the Harvard philosopher who blended philosophical idealism and pragmatism, was less interested, on my reading, in actually equating justice and loyalty. Understanding, fully, the communal nature of human beings, Royce elevated loyalty to the level of a critical moral, psychological and existential virtue. He viewed loyalty to a life project, to certain worthy causes and institutions as that virtue which makes life worth living, and so in his thinking we find the flavor of Aristotelian communitarianism which claimed that attachment to communities flows from our very nature. The importance which Royce placed upon loyalty informed Martin Luther King’s view that until you have something to die for, you have not yet really begun to live. And in Royce’s notion of “*loyalty to loyalty*” we are asked to consider the *summum bonum* of a human life. Where we see others committed to causes and plans of life, we witness that which is highest in them at play – the giving of themselves to something outside of themselves, to something worthy and in accord with human flourishing. Royce’s notion links up with Charles Taylor’s view that “we grasp our lives in a narrative,” which I take to mean that we grasp the *meaning* of our lives in narratives – the story or stories we find ourselves a part of, or which we elect to be a part of. But not any narrative will do, of course. There are Nazi and Khmer Rouge and Stalinist narratives, too. Royce does not suggest that loyalty to just any project or plan is sanctionable, but any life plan that is itself loyal to the loyalties others maintain in their own life plans are. His notion, then, dovetails with the liberal tradition as constructed in Paine, Jefferson, Mill and others – the idea that liberty’s brake must be applied once it impinges on the liberty of another in the pursuit of her own highest flourishing, her own loyal commitments to things and persons outside of herself, when it

encroaches upon another's loyalties to his community, institutions, plans of life – the people to which he has given his heart, the people he cannot betray and still like himself.

While Royce argues that we should extend our loyalties to embrace new causes and pursuits, what he leaves insufficiently addressed, and what must be remembered, is that certain of our loyalties must be attenuated from time to time at our own hands. Loyalties are a strong ingredient in the creation of identities, and identities are not per se unproblematic. Identities are important moral and existential constructions, but are not absolutes; we have control over them, whether we think we do or not. So they carry serious moral implications. Like of food or alcohol, we can partake too much of them, and our loyalty to a particular nation or community, however worthy all else being equal, can become morally problematic, such as when we become jingoists or bigots. Identities can be harmful if they are not thought to rest in fallibilism, contingency, incompleteness, even as we hold fast to them. So our love of or devotion to a community, whether a party or a nation or a profession or institution or enterprise, can devolve into something vicious if it *self-seals*. There is another thinker who has given much thought to the breaks that we must put on our identities.

Kwame Anthony Appiah

Kwame Anthony Appiah, the Princeton philosopher who has written much in recent years about such topics as race and identity, has a better handle than Royce did, I think, on the possibilities of such problematic identities and on the ethical dimensions and problems that attach to the loyalties we maintain, the identities we partake of or which we are assigned. Appiah's recent works bid us not only to be loyal to our communities, which, as Royce says, we must be for a full life, but to be fully cognizant of our need to temper our identities when they become overheated, as we sometimes see in American political discourse or as we have recently seen in both the creation and the response to caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. This dual commitment, which Appiah refers to as "*rooted cosmopolitanism*" ("cosmopolitan" coming from the Greek word for "citizen of the world") takes us beyond the stark Lockean and Jeffersonian notions of mere *tolerance or toleration*. Says Appiah, we do well to not merely acknowledge the loyalties of others (their religions, their ways of life, their political traditions), but we do well to *imagine ourselves participating in and partaking of the fruits of their customs, traditions and worldviews*. We do well to view them as fonts of possibility for ourselves, rather than as dangerous and alien rivals. This is a centerpiece of Appiah's cosmopolitanism, and of my own.

Appiah, like Royce, is clear that our duty to recognize the dignity in all other persons requires that we must pay attention to others' loyalties and identities as we shape our own, as we think of ourselves as Westerners or Americans or Jews or Muslims. It is not to the stark, formal dignity and autonomy in the other to which we owe all of our moral consideration, but we pay that consideration transitively through respect for his own *actual* plans of life and cultural productions to which that dignity gives rise. Of course, from the point of view of many political conservatives, this is problematic, as is the very word "cosmopolitan." Indeed, the word "cosmopolitan" carries with it a lot of baggage. It can conjure-up notions that range from the rootless jet-setter whose gaze remains far off, the one who is "a lover of his kind and a hater of his kin," to the Travelin' Man and Boxcar Jones of James Taylor songs, Taylor's pathetic vagabond character who asks us, in one of those songs, to –

*claim my name from the lost and found
bury my feet down in the ground
and let me believe this is where I belong*

– or it can invoke memories of its use to brand people who carry into their nations ideas that affect its so-called purity, as Hitler alleged as regards the Jews of Europe, branding them "cosmopolitans" – under Nazi

political constructions, a legitimate offense against the state and the Volk. These all refer to the word in a pejorative sense. But I take “cosmopolitan” to be a love word, as does Appiah.

Appiah’s notion of rooted cosmopolitanism is a much more mature and much more tenable one. It acknowledges and even argues for the maintenance of a special connection to those places we call home, as Royce would have it; places in which we have collections of concrete responsibilities and duties; places that have provided for our needs; to which, in the poet Robert Pinsky’s words, our eros - passion - flows and abides; places which have given us a language, friends, memories, a shared history, and in which we are therefore embedded to a large degree. Fortunately, the notion of the detached wanderer who commits to nothing proximal but many things distal (Mrs. Jellybee of Dickens’ *Bleak House*) is not only problematic, but rare to the point of being a straw man. That said, Appiah wants us to recognize our moral responsibility to examine our identities – as, say, Americans or members of particular faith traditions or provinces or even micro-communities like business organizations and professional association or industries – to see whether they are so charged with unbridled eros that we are made somewhat mad and left with, at best, mere toleration of or indifference toward the interests and loyalties of others. And how can we love those toward whom we are indifferent or disinterested? It is indifference, not hate, that is love’s antithesis. Kenneth Lay’s indifference, as the head of Enron, to the people of California, to his shareholders and employees was just as vile as if he acted out of hatred.

And so Appiah, with reference to Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*, claims that cosmopolitanism “begins by urging that we should know others, with their differences, and believe that this will lead us to toleration, perhaps even to ‘mutual love.’ ”

John Paul II and Benedict XVI

From Appiah I go to the Papal writings. Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *On Social Concern* (1987) reminds us that the full human being as such is no mere statistic or node of economic data, but a fellow cosmopolitan, or citizen of the world – in the Papal language, God’s world. As such, our efforts to end the ills of poverty and other forms of want cannot be thought met once we address the mere thinly construed economic needs of people – such as people in the so-called underdeveloped world. Agreeing with economist Jeffrey Sachs in his more recent work, “development,” he told us, means far more than what is captured in the modern notion of “economics” (a word sickeningly reduced from the Greek *Oikos*, which entailed *philia*, or love for one’s household and community). The mere market notion to which “economics” is boiled down today does indeed entail the creation of material wealth, the safe transfer of money and assets, etc. This should never be minimized, as some tend to do to the detriment of their own prescriptions for systemic changes in domestic policy and international business. But development must be understood also to entail establishing the *capabilities* for thought, leisure, and aesthetic and spiritual growth. Development, Pope John Paul II told us, means more than money. It accompanies education, learning how to flourish, how to live a life that employs all the capabilities given by Nature’s God. As we will see, this ties in with Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach to social justice and social concern, which we will visit momentarily.

In Pope Benedict XVI’s recent encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), we are told:

The parable of the Good Samaritan . . . offers two particularly important clarifications. Until that time, the concept of “neighbor” was understood as referring essentially to one’s countrymen and to foreigners who had settled in the land of Israel; in other words, to a closely knit community of a single country or people. This limit is now abolished. Any one who needs me, *and whom I can help*, is my neighbor. The concept of “neighbor” is now universalized, yet it remains concrete [agape must be concrete and concern real people].

Despite being extended to all mankind, it is not reduced to generic, abstract and undemanding expressions of love, but call for my own practical commitment here and now In the gradual unfolding of the encounter [with the neighbor], it is clearly revealed that love is not *merely* a sentiment. Sentiments come and go. A sentiment can be marvelous at first spark, but it is not the fullness of love.”

Benedict here explains the nature of agapic love – concern for the other as a matter of decision and principle. Yet, I harken back to Rorty’s notion that sentiment and felt devotion has its place, as does a view of ourselves as having missed the mark when we do not extend that love outward. In any event, love does indeed require commitment, will, as did the Samaritan’s decision to help the stranger on the road. And indeed, Pope Benedict himself sees that the various forms of love all require one another to work well, that *eros* and *agape* are grounded in one another.

Martha Nussbaum

To Martha Nussbaum. In considering the question of social justice and morality, Nussbaum has devised what she calls the “capabilities approach” – in part as a response to those schools of moral philosophy that seem to lose sight of their objectives and either trail off into absurdities or simply fail to consider things which *have to* matter more than the theory allows. Thus she offers not a theory of justice based upon utilitarian, Kantian or communitarian imperatives alone, but rather an approach based upon holistic, cross-disciplinary reasoning, a study of philosophy, law, human psychology and cultural anthropology as they have taught us about the minimum social goods that, as the encyclicals suggested, are generally required for human flourishing. Justice and loyalty to others must take into consideration the life of the body, mind and spirit, as Pope Paul II told us. We are capable of and need a minimum portion of health, bodily integrity, sensory pleasures, time and resources to use our imaginations, time for thought and reflection, time and resources for the use and enjoyment of a range of emotions, training in practical reason so as to set down a plan of living, affiliation in communities (*pace* Rorty, Royce and Appiah), productive engagement with other species, play and leisure, a good measure of control over our fates, autonomy to plan the life that is good for us individually, as Mill and other political liberals argued. The upshot of Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach is that a society that does not provide for the times, places and resources to meet these needs in its members ought not be considered fully just, because it has not provided to all what is their due in view of her understanding of human flourishing.

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With these very incomplete philosophical sketches behind me, let me now turn in the brief time remaining to some of the problems of our day and how they might be cured by the adoption of a love ethic.

Each time I teach a segment in or course on business ethics, I begin by stunning my class with this statement: “Business isn’t about profits.” At first many dismiss me, but it isn’t too long before they begin to understand the difference between the vital need of an enterprise, and the goal of an enterprise. Profit is but a vital need. The goal of a legitimate business is to satisfy its customers – those who obtain a need or satisfaction from that which the business provides. Focus on that, and the profits should follow, all else being equal. Focus on profit, and when you are stressed you rally around that which you value the most, and you will lose site of the primary obligation to maintain the business’s ability to service its customers, which entails the provision of quality goods and services under conditions of trust and respect. Focus on profit, and you risk becoming Enron. Focus on profit, and it is profit that you will seek first, rather than the needs of those you purport to serve. Where your eyes are, there your heart is also. It makes all the difference in the world whether you focus on profits or your customers, because the one you are not focused on is the one you will first betray.

Love requires of business persons that that they be “unable to betray their customers and clients and the public trust and still like themselves.” Love requires of business that it recognize its dependence on those outside of it, and that it exists to serve those outside of it. It’s *raison d’etre* is not internal, but external. Until a business understands this it can fall victim to its own blindness and perhaps be caught up in the next wave of scandal, ruined lives and ruined wealth, and ruined opportunity to provide the needs and wants of the public into the future. Love has a place in business ethics that is scarcely discussed in the standard texts. But that is where it should be. Businesses are part of and the recipients of human flourishing, and seeing themselves in that light will help them to meet their obligations to the public. Their thinking cannot be purely self-interested and strategic, but other regarding and communally minded. Businesses exists for the public good. That is not a fantasy, but a fact. That is why when they egregiously violate the public trust, the public, stirred to act, reminds them of who, ultimately, is in charge.

But ultimately is not good enough. Democracy requires more than the demos shaken from its slumbers by a violent jerk, it requires a constant vigil. In a free market democratic order such as ours, it is the shareholder-citizen who is in charge. But that shareholders lose sight of the fact that they are citizens too is very unfortunate. Through their direct investments and investments they, that is we, own most of the material wealth of the country. The shareholder-citizen has the power to make sure the corporations they own are appropriately other-regarding in their sometimes global activity. There is real power here. A new ethos rooted in love could tap into that power, and make businesses more cognizant of their actions and movements in the world. But what has been dubbed the shareholders’ movement has so far done little more than replace the greed of executives with the greed of the shareholders themselves. Love is not greedy or impatient. It does not pressure managements for instant returns on investment, and force them more deeply into rapacity. The so-called shareholder movement has a long way to go before it comports with the love ethic I am sketching here.

Love sacrifices. In international affairs, love moves beyond purely strategic thinking. Not too long ago I heard an address by Professor Benjamin Barber, author of *Jihad vs. McWorld* and other interesting books. In that address Professor Barber spoke of the *strategic* need to engage the Islamic world; that it was in *our* interests to do so. He predicted more death would be coming our way if we did not. I agree that more death will be coming our way if we don’t. However, the concern that more death will be coming our way if we don’t is a cold strategic calculation. It is therefore an insufficient calculation, because a purely strategic response to the problems faced by people in the Middles East – a troubled place whose troubles we helped to create – is not a fully moral response. It is self-regarding, Hobbesian

Nobody wants more terrorism. But the key to its elimination is not simply watching our own necks, but it entails as well watching the necks of our brothers and sisters of the Islamic World who are still struggling with the reconciliation of Islam and what is called modernity. But, alas, a strategic response to the problems of the Middle East resonates with too many of our fellow citizens, and so our leaders feed us the kind of rhetoric associated with strategic, self-interested thinking. Such thinking coarsens us. They and we calculate that, provided we are getting what we want from the states in that region, we will be content to let the regimes which we support step on their subjects and brutalize their or other populations. As long as the oil is flowing and the Palestinians are contained, for example, we in the West will be happy. The plight of the actual peoples of the Middle East is just their problem. This is the evil logic of political realism, that immoral political philosophy that views inter-state relations as framed in competition and aggression, a state of nature, when states are but the projections of peoples, peoples who warrant regard for their flourishing, peoples who warrant our loyalty, our devotion, our love. So the foreign policy we need is one with a love ethics built into it, lest we find future 9-11s coming our way from the other vectors we have neglected, perhaps Latin America or the African Continent.

Conclusion

So in conclusion, I can but point out what is already clear: the future of our species, of humankind, remains uncertain, as ever. That is, none of us can be certain if we will in fact do more than we are willing to do right now, allowing billions to fall into the gaps of injustice and dehumanization. A planetary love ethic seems the one great hope for us, insofar as by means of it we bring our whole being to bear upon our condition and our plight on a little world drifting through space. Here I think again of the words of James Russell Lowell, with slight modification, so often quoted by King. I add but slight modification:

Careless seems the great Companion;
History's lessons but record
One death-grapple in the darkness
'Twixt old systems and the Word;
[Love] forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above His own.

The God in the shadow is in no far off place, but in our breast, in the shadows of our blood and bone. If God shall step out, it will be from there, or it will be from nowhere. It is we who are charged to sway the future by a power that few of us have dared to call upon.

Thank you.