

JESUS AND AFFLUENCE

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Peter Singer famously argued that the moral demands of affluence are high.¹ His argument, in rough:²

First premise: Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad.

Second premise: If it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so.

Third premise: If you are spending money on luxury and frills, it is in your power to prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care (by donating the money you'd otherwise spend on luxury and frills to aid agencies who will use it to prevent suffering and death), without sacrificing anything nearly as important.

Conclusion: If you are spending money on luxury and frills, it is wrong to do so.

In support of his second premise, he offered his now famous case of the pond:³

On your way to work, you pass a small pond. One day, you notice that a small child has fallen in the pond and is having trouble staying afloat. You look around and see that you are the only one who can help. You can easily wade in and save the child, but after a moment's thought, you realize that, if you do, you'll ruin the rather expensive shoes and slacks you're wearing and be late for work. You pass by and the child dies.

Surely your conduct here is abominable. But why? Because, says Singer, it's a fundamental principle of morality that, if it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so. Cases like the pond case make this principle plausible.

Singer's conclusion is severe: if it's right, our prodigious spending on luxury and frill (fancy houses, boats, cars, clothes, dinners, vacations, etc.) is morally wrong. The moral demands of

¹ See, for example, Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1 (1972), pp. 229-243, and more recently, *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* (Random House, 2009).

² But for the first two premises, which are verbatim quotes from *Life You Can Save*, p. 15, I put Singer's argument here in my own way.

³ See, for example, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", p. 229.

affluence are high: stop spending on luxury and frill, on pain of immorality.

Singer proposes that his argument, though demanding in its implications, fits nicely with some of our most respected ethical traditions. For example, it fits nicely, he suggests, with Jesus' teaching on wealth and poverty. Jesus, he proposes, is an ally of his argument.⁴

Is he right about that? Do Jesus' teachings on wealth and poverty suggest a similarly demanding conclusion about the moral requirements of affluence? I think so. I'll try to argue as much in the paper to follow.

My plan: I start by examining the heart of Jesus' ethical teachings, the love commands. I will argue that those, together with some further teaching of Jesus, get us Singer's severe conclusion. I will then argue that the larger body of Jesus' teaching on wealth and poverty in the gospels corroborates this read of the love commands, as do the writings of the main teachers and writers of the early Church. I conclude by considering two objections.

1. The Love Commands

In each of the synoptic gospels, you find Jesus interacting with the question which are the greatest commandments in the Law. Matthew's version of this goes as follows:

34But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38"This is the great and foremost commandment. 39"The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' 40"On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

— Matt 22:34-40

The latter point, about the whole of the Law and the Prophets hanging on these two commandments, is interesting. For a devout first century Jew, the Law and the Prophets sum up the whole of morality: they lay out the basic lineaments of right and wrong. To say, then, that the whole of the Law and the Prophets hang on these commands is to suggest that in these commands, we have the heart of morality—that these commands, in some sense, sum up the whole of morality. If we want to understand Jesus' ethical teachings on wealth and poverty, we can do no better than to begin here.

⁴ *The Life You Can Save*, p. 19.

I shall focus on the second command, the command to love one's neighbor as oneself—for concision, "the love command". What does it mean? What exactly is Jesus enjoining on us here?

An answer to this question requires an answer to three preliminary questions. First: What sort of love is in view in the love command? Second: What work is the expression 'as yourself' doing in the command? And third: Who is my neighbor?

Start with the first. Nicholas Wolterstorff's recent work on love and justice is helpful here.⁵ He distinguishes three kinds of love.

There is the love of attraction, the love you have for something when you are drawn or attracted to it, in its grip, because of some good-making feature you discern in it. Romantic love is a species of this, but there are other varieties: you can be drawn to, in the grip of, someone's prose styling, some piece of music, a mountain, the smell of a rose, etc.

There is the love of benevolence, the love you have for something when you seek its good, its well-being, its flourishing. Love as attraction, when directed on something for which there is such thing as well-being or flourishing, typically carries in its train love as benevolence, a seeking after the thing's well-being. Likewise in reverse: love as benevolence typically carries in its train love as attraction. But not always. Sometimes we pursue the good of someone we do not find attractive.

There is the love of attachment, the love you have for something when you have bonded with it, become attached to it. Wolterstorff gives the example of a cat: you offer to replace my cat with a better one: fewer allergies, veterinary needs, and so forth. But no thanks, I'll keep mine.⁶ I'm attached to this cat; this is the one I love. Love as attachment typically comes with love as benevolence: at any rate, when the thing to which one is attached is something for which there is well-being, one's attachment to the thing usually carries with it pursuit of that well-being. It will often carry in its train love as attraction, though it needn't: a loved one degenerates into the depths of heroin addiction and becomes something deeply unattractive, maybe even repulsive; still I'm attached to him, bonded with him, would miss him terribly if he died. And of course there is frequently love of benevolence without attachment: I seek the good of the poor and suffering in Haiti, but I don't know anyone there and thus have no attachments. Likewise, there is love of attraction without love of attachment: I'm much attracted to my new iPad, in the grip of its beauty, but I'm not attached to it. If you offered me a better model, I would gladly trade you.

Which, if any, of these sorts of love is in view in the love command? At least the second. One central point of the command, clearly enough, is that we are to pursue the good of the neighbor in the way we pursue our own good. Why think that a central point of the command? One reason is that that's the clear import of the

⁵ See his *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 188-190 and his forthcoming *Justice in Love*.

⁶ *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, p. 189.

command in its original context in Hebrew Scripture. Jesus is quoting the command from Leviticus 19, where it occurs in the following context:

9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. 10 And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God. 11 "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. 12 You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. 13 "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. 14 You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. 15 "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. 16 You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life[a] of your neighbor: I am the LORD. 17 "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

In his forthcoming *Justice in Love*, Wolterstorff makes the plausible suggestion that the command to neighbor love here functions as a summing up of what has come before.⁷ The Israelites are commanded to leave extra in their fields for the poor, to be truthful with one another, to not oppress the neighbor nor rob him, to pay the poor man's wages promptly, to care for the disabled, to administer legal justice impartially, to reprove the neighbor so as not incur guilt because of his sin. *In sum*, they're to love their neighbors as themselves.

Since leaving extra in one's fields for the poor and the stranger, paying wages promptly, treating the disabled well, etc., are ways of seeking the neighbor's good, the love enjoined in the summarizing command—love your neighbor as yourself—is, obviously enough, at least partly a matter of benevolence.

Is it more than that? Does it also enjoin the love of attachment? The love of attraction? It doesn't seem so. The Israelites are commanded to leave extra in their fields for the poor and stranger, not to steal from or lie to one another, and not to swear falsely in God's name. But obedience to these commands has little to do with attachment or attraction. One would presumably never meet many of the poor fed by the surplus in one's fields. And one could refrain from stealing and lying to the neighbor without much by way of attraction or attachment to him.

⁷ Chapter 6.

Obedience to these commands has much to do with seeking the well-being of the neighbor, and not much, apparently, with attraction or attachment.

Benevolence love, then, is the sort of love at issue here: seeking the good, well-being, flourishing of the neighbor. At any rate, that's the sort of love at issue in the command as it occurs in Leviticus. Jesus gave no indication that he understood it differently.

It would be nice if we could say a bit more; the notions of human *good*, *well-being* and *flourishing* are notoriously multifaceted. What sort of well-being am I to pursue for the neighbor? Satisfaction of his desires? Maximization of his happiness? Activity in accord with the virtues?

The material in Leviticus 19 leading up to the love command suggests an answer to these questions. Once again, the Israelites are commanded to:

- leave extra on their fields for the poor and stranger
- not steal from or lie to one another
- not swear falsely in God's name
- not oppress their neighbors or rob them
- pay their laborers promptly
- not curse a deaf man or put a stumbling block before the blind
- do no injustice in juridical matters, showing no partiality to rich or poor
- not slander the neighbor nor take his life
- not hate the neighbor
- reprove the neighbor so as not to share in his sin
- take no vengeance nor bear any grudge against the neighbor

Wolterstorff notes that many of these commands have to do with the idea of *justice*.⁸ Care for the vulnerable—the poor and the stranger, the blind and the deaf—was for, Israel's writers, a matter of *justice*:

Psalm 82:3: "Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute."

Isaiah 1:17: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

But not all the commands in Leviticus 19 are neatly classed as commands to do justice. The commands not to hate the neighbor in one's heart, and to rebuke the neighbor so as not to share in his sin wouldn't, I think, have been thought of in terms of the notion of justice by Israel's writers. Justice, for them, was a matter of (a) corrective justice in juridical contexts—fairly applying the law, (b) commutative justice between individuals—right treatment in commerce and exchange, and (c) distributive

⁸ *Justice in Love*, Chapter 6.

justice—ensuring access to the goods of the community for all members of the community, particularly those with no power to insist on such access.⁹ The commands not to hate the neighbor in one's heart and to rebuke the neighbor so as not to share in his sin aren't neatly thought of in any of these categories.

There is, however, a Hebrew notion that nicely captures all of what's enjoined in Leviticus 19: the notion of *shalom*, which for Israel's writers was a holistic and communal state of well-being, a state in which there is enough food, clothing and shelter, enough rest, enough caring for and sharing with one another, enough celebrating together, enough safety from harm, enough justice for all, whether weak or strong: a state in which relations between humans and other humans, between humans and God, between humans and the creation, and between any given human and him- or herself, are whole.¹⁰

You get a sense of what *shalom* is like in passages like:¹¹

3 If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, 4 then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. 5 Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. 6 I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land.

— Leviticus 26:3-6

And:

25 "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. 26 And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. 27 And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and

⁹ I borrow this way of characterizing distributive justice in the Old Testament from Walter Brueggemann, *Peace* (Calice Press, 2001), p. 109.

¹⁰ I borrow here from Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 69ff.

¹¹ Here and in what follows, I make liberal use of direct quotation. There is a stylistic cost to this—reading long block quotations can be tedious. But there is benefit, given the aims of this paper. There is something powerful, I think, about confronting Jesus' teaching and other biblical material on wealth and poverty in large chunks. I have decided that the benefit outweighs the cost. Apologies to the reader if I got the calculation wrong.

deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. 28 They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. 29 And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations."

—Ezekiel 34:25-29

And:

16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. 17 And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

—Isaiah 32:16-17

And:

6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. 7 And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

—Isaiah 25:6-8

And:

16...behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening.... 17 And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city. And the old man said, "Where are you going? And where do you come from?" 18 And he said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to the house of the Lord, but no one has taken me into his house.... 20 And the old man said, "*Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square.*" 21 So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank. [Italics mine.]

—Judges 19:16-21

The state of communal well-being or wholeness described in these passages is, I want to suggest, what's back of Leviticus 19's commands. Behavior in accord with these commands is the sort of behavior that conduces to the shalom community, the community whose relations are whole, the community in which there are the above "enoughs". In such community, there is enough food, for everyone, including the poor and sojourner. The members of such community don't lie to, cheat, slander, hate, steal from, take

vengeance on one another. Poor laborers in such communities are paid promptly so as not to go to bed hungry; judges judge in accord with justice. Neighbors do not hate one another, but help one another into deeper shalom. Such are the marks of the shalom community.

The summarizing command—love your neighbor as yourself, then, is a command to behave in these ways toward the neighbor, a command to do the things that make for the neighbor's shalom. It's akin to Psalm 34's:

11 Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? 13 Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. 14 Turn away from evil and do good; seek shalom and pursue it.

— Psalm 34:14

Says the love command, then: Seek your neighbor's shalom; pursue it. Or, since shalom is perhaps best thought of as a property of communities in Old Testament thought, maybe a better way of putting it: seek the neighbor's inclusion in the shalom community.

This takes us to our second question, the question what work the "as yourself" part is doing in the command. Note in this connection just how demanding Leviticus 19's commands are. Leaving one's fields partially unharvested in times of scarcity; never stealing or lying; always paying one's laborer's promptly; never bending the rules of the legal system; never hating one's neighbor in one's heart; never taking vengeance or bearing grudges against the neighbor: living in this way would, no doubt, have been difficult. Serious obedience to these commands would have required putting a high value on the neighbor's well-being.

Here, I propose, lies the force of the command's "as yourself" clause. For that is how we pursue our own shalom: we put a high value on it. Moses¹² is urging us, I think, to put that same value on pursuit of the neighbor's shalom, to put pursuit of her shalom on a par with pursuit of one's own.¹³

So we have this picture forming: The command to neighbor love, as it first occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures, is concerned with the things that make for shalom. The command is to pursue the good of the neighbor, where the good in question seems to be that holistic state of well-being in which there is enough—enough food, shelter, celebration, sharing, justice, care for the low ones, etc. And we are to put pursuit of these things for the neighbor on a par with pursuit of them for ourselves.

¹² For purposes of this paper, nothing turns on the debate between conservative interpreters of Scripture and less conservative interpreters over whether these words were written by a historical Moses or a variety of redactors. I will assume Moses as their author, but nothing in my paper turns on it.

¹³ Cf. Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, p. 209.

Finally, there is the question: Who, from the point of view of the love command, is my neighbor? Jesus famously takes this question up in the parable of the Good Samaritan:

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" 27 He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." 29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" 37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

—Luke 10:25-37

There are interesting interpretive issues here. The question asked Jesus is, "Who is my neighbor?" But it's not clear that he ever answers it. Instead what we get is a story, the point of which, apparently, is to answer the question, What does it look like to be a neighbor *to* someone? But what about the original question? Do we get here an answer to it?

Yes, I think (more on that presently), but first and most straightforwardly, we get an answer to this other question—What does it look like to be a neighbor *to* someone? And what is Jesus' answer to that?

It's worth noting in this connection that Jesus' story would've been naturally heard by Jewish listeners steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures in terms of the concept of shalom. Compare Jesus' parable with the above-quoted story from Judges:

16And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites. 17And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city. And the old

man said, "Where are you going? And where do you come from?" 18And he said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to the house of the Lord, but no one has taken me into his house. 19We have straw and feed for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and your female servant and the young man with your servants. There is no lack of anything." 20And the old man said, "Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square." 21So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

—Judges 19:16-21

"Shalom to you; be in shalom," says the old man, "let me help you in your need." Such is the shalom community: reaching out to the needy neighbor, caring for him in his need.

I suggest that Jesus' teaching would have naturally been heard by first century Jews as a teaching about shalom, a teaching to the effect that we must widen the circle of the shalom community to include those not normally thought of as appropriate candidates for inclusion in that community. The teaching, then: to be a neighbor to someone is to seek his inclusion in the shalom community, and to do so irrespective of whether he is part of your in-group (irrespective of whether he's part of an enemy tribe, ritually clean, ethnically similar, etc.). To be a neighbor to someone is to seek her shalom, where the only condition on this, Jesus seems to be saying, is that she's a fellow human in need and in reach of your love.

What to say, then, about the original question, the question "Who is my neighbor?"? Has Jesus simply dropped that, refused to answer it?

I don't think so. The point of the original question, surely, is to ask whom the command to neighbor love in Leviticus 19 obliges one to love. Well and good, the Law is summed up in the commands to love God with one's whole heart, soul and mind and to love one's neighbor as oneself, but to whom exactly does one owe this debt of love? This would no doubt have been a pressing question to first century Jews suffering under the yoke of oppressive Roman occupation. Is it just one's fellow Jews to whom one owes a debt of love, or does the command to neighbor love envisage something more expansive?

If we understand the original question in this way, as asking whom the love command obliges one to love, then the concluding words of the pericope constitute a crystal clear answer. "Go and do likewise," says Jesus. That is, go and do what the Samaritan did: seek the shalom of anyone in need and in reach of your love, regardless whether she is an enemy, ritually unclean, a member of an enemy ethnic or national group, etc. Whom, then, does the love command enjoin me to love? Or as the lawyer puts it: Who is my

neighbor? Jesus' answer: Anyone in need and in reach of my love.¹⁴

Pulling it all together, then, we have this read of the love command: Seek the shalom of the neighbor (anyone in need and in reach of one's love), putting pursuit of her shalom on a par with pursuit one's own. Seek her inclusion in the shalom community—the community of enough—putting as high priority on pursuit of

¹⁴ Mark Nelson ("Comment on Crisp," presented at the Society of Christian Philosophers group meeting, 2011 Pacific Division APA) raises an interesting objection to the argument of the preceding paragraphs. Say I: the central suggestion of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is that the neighbor I am enjoined to love by the love command is anyone in need and in reach of my love. Not so, says Nelson. For note Jesus' question at the end of the parable: "Which of these three [the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan], do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" And the answer, which Jesus seems to approve: "the one who showed mercy on him", i.e., the Samaritan. Therefore, concludes Nelson, "our neighbor, the one whom we are commanded to love in the second commandment is our *benefactor*, that member of our community who shows mercy on us." The point of the parable, then, he suggests, is *not* that we are to love every needy human within reach of our care, but that we are to love those members of our community who support us, show mercy on us, and make our lives possible. It's a teaching about loving those in our community, then, and not a teaching about universal love to anyone in need.

By way of reply, I think this interpretation founders on the closing words of the parable: Jesus' "go and do likewise". Here, clearly enough, we get the punchline of the parable. Its point: we should imitate the behavior of the Samaritan in the story. Note, though, that the Samaritan in the story does *not* love his benefactor; he does not love a member of his community who shows mercy to him. Rather, he loves someone *outside* of his community: he seeks the shalom of someone normally deemed outside the pale (a member of a rival ethnic group, who is ritually unclean, etc.). Moreover, the object of his love in the story is not someone who has shown him mercy (the one who fell among the robbers is in no state to be showing anyone mercy). So: if the point of the parable is that we're to do as the Samaritan did, and what the Samaritan did is love someone who was not his benefactor nor a member of his community, we may conclude that the point of the parable is not what Nelson says it is. Better, I think, to read it as above. The lawyer has asked Jesus whom the love command requires us to love—as he puts it, "who is my neighbor?". Jesus' answer: Do what the Samaritan did; love even those normally thought of as outside the pale; love anyone in need and in reach of your care. Such are the neighbors for whom the love command enjoins love.

her inclusion in the shalom community as you put on the pursuit of your own inclusion in that community.¹⁵

2. Implications

Supposing all this right, we have this question: What are the implications of this for the question, How shall we treat the poor?, where for present purposes, let us think of "the poor" as those at serious risk of suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care.

Well, suppose I know of many children at serious risk of suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care, and can do something to alleviate their plight. But suppose I do nothing for them (or anyone else in similarly pinched straights) because I am committed instead to the project of living like the rich man in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus, "dressing in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day."

Then, I suggest, I am not loving these neighbors as myself: I am not putting pursuit of their shalom on a par with pursuit of my own. I am not putting as high a priority on their inclusion in the community of enough as I am putting on my own. Wherefore, I am not loving them as I love myself.

Suppose I learn of children at risk of serious suffering and death from lack of food, shelter and medical care, and send the extra change in my dresser drawer to help with their needs. The rest of my considerable fortune goes to the project of "dressing in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day."

Here I do seek my neighbors' well-being, but I am hardly loving them as myself: I am hardly putting pursuit of their shalom on a par with pursuit of my own.

Suppose I am deeply committed to the project of "dressing in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day," but I also give quite a bit to a particular family in vulnerable circumstances. To be sure, the bulk of my considerable income is

¹⁵ A possible hitch: What if you don't much seek your own inclusion in the shalom community? Perhaps you hate yourself, seek a life of substance addiction, prostitution, abusive relationships, or the like, all from self-hatred. Then putting pursuit of neighbor shalom on a par with pursuit of your own shalom would not be very demanding in your case. If you seek harm and degradation for yourself, you could do the same for your neighbor and still be in compliance with the love command as I have interpreted it. Wherefore, the love command as I have interpreted it is not very demanding; one could be in full compliance with the command thus interpreted whilst treating one's neighbor horribly.

What to say? There are various lines of repair. The simplest and most plausible, I think, is to understand Moses in Leviticus 19 as having in mind the sort of self-love that comes *naturally* to human beings—the sort of self-love displayed by mature human beings with well-functioning cognitive, conative and affective faculties. The teaching, then: seek the neighbor's shalom with the sort of intensity well-functioning humans display in pursuit of their own shalom.

Thus noted, I ignore this complication henceforth for concision.

given to the pursuit of luxury and frill, but I am generously helping this family in pinched straights. Perhaps thereby I even help them into a state that could fairly be called shalom: because of my sharing, they have enough food, shelter, security, joy, friendship, and so forth. Perhaps it could sensibly be said of me that I am putting pursuit of their shalom on a par with pursuit of my own.

All good, of course, but the love command demands more. For though it is true that, with respect to these particular neighbors, I am putting pursuit of their shalom on a par with pursuit of my own, I am aware of many, many others in dire circumstance, and as things stand, their shalom is taking a decidedly back seat to my own. In the case of these neighbors, I am not loving them as I love myself.

The love command is demanding. I am to put pursuit of the neighbor's shalom on a par with pursuit of my own. So long as I know of neighbors in reach of my love but without the enough of shalom—enough food, clothing, shelter, safety, etc., and I have the means to help them without thereby sacrificing my inclusion in the shalom community, the love command enjoins me to help. Else I am not putting the needy neighbor's shalom on a par with my own; I am not loving him as I love myself.

Should I give to a point at which I am sacrificing my inclusion in the shalom community—at which, for example, I or those in my household don't have enough food, clothing, shelter, safety, etc.¹⁶—I will have gone too far; at any rate, I will have gone beyond what the love command requires.

But putting pursuit of neighbor shalom on a par with pursuit of my shalom does require a level generosity and sacrifice up to and including the point at which, were I to continue sacrificing, I would be putting the shalom of me and mine at risk—we'd be threatened with not having enough food, clothing, shelter, safety, etc. The love command is demanding.

Perhaps some will object: “Well, whether the love command on your read of it is demanding depends on what it is to have “enough” food, clothing, shelter, safety, etc. Perhaps the right way to think about shalom is that, in the shalom community, we will enjoy these things *in abundance*. There will be an abundance of choice foods, beautiful clothing, luxurious shelter, and so forth. In that case, giving to the point at which I am risking not having enough of these goods might not amount to very radical giving at all.”

By way of reply, though, there is evidence in Jesus' teaching that he thought of shalom differently—that, on his view of it, the “enough” of shalom, the state of having enough food, clothing, shelter, etc., was a fairly minimal affair.

Two points here:

¹⁶ My shalom is intimately bound up with that of my household and other members of my close community. We'll see more on this below, but for the Biblical writers, my inclusion in the shalom community is compromised to the extent that the inclusion of those in my immediate community is compromised.

First, there are indications in the Jesus tradition that he thought of the life he was enjoining on his followers in terms of shalom—as the shalom life. For instance:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

—John 14:27

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

—John 16:33

41And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!"

—Luke 19:41-42

And that lovely invitation to the “yoke” of Jesus in Matthew:

28Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

— Matt 11:28-30

Learn from him how to live, Jesus suggests, take his way upon oneself, and thereby move into rest, into an easy yoke and light burden. All the language of shalom.

My first point, then: Jesus seems to have thought of the life he was enjoining on his followers in terms of shalom—as the shalom life.

Secondly, the lifestyle he enjoined on his followers was one of substantial simplicity and generosity. Let us look a bit more closely at that, starting with this passage from the Sermon on the Mount:

19"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 24"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

—Matt 6:19-24

The teaching: Firstly, don't store up earthly wealth, but store up treasure in heaven. (And how does one do that? How does one go about "storing up treasure in heaven"? The parallel passage in Luke 12 suggests an answer:

32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

—Luke 12:32-34

How to store up treasure in heaven, then? Sell your possessions and care for the poor.)

And secondly, Jesus seems to have had in mind that earthly treasure is dangerous. Don't store up earthly treasure, he advises, for "where your treasure is, there will your heart be... No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." His point: Earthly treasure has a tendency to capture our hearts and hinder our love of God. So don't hang onto it; sell it in care of the poor.

How much selling did he envision? How much divesting of earthly treasure was he advising? Enough, apparently, as to provoke this next bit of the Sermon:

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

— Matt 6:25-34

How much selling of earthly treasures in service of the poor did Jesus envision? Enough, apparently, as to provoke anxieties about things like food and clothing.

This teaching from the Sermon in hand, we can see what Jesus was up to, I think, in Luke 14 when he makes the stark suggestion that "none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions", and in Mark 12:

Sitting across from the temple treasury, He watched how the crowd dropped money into the treasury. Many rich people were putting in large sums. 42 And a poor widow came and dropped in two tiny coins worth very little. 43 Summoning His disciples, He said to them, " I assure you: This poor widow has put in more than all those giving to the temple treasury. 44 For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she possessed—all she had to live on."

—Mark 12:41-44

And in the story of the rich young ruler:

18 A ruler asked Him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 "Why do you call Me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good but One—God. 20 You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not bear false witness; honor your father and mother. " 21 "I have kept all these from my youth," he said. 22 When Jesus heard this, He told him, "You still lack one thing: sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." 23 After he heard this, he became extremely sad, because he was very rich. 24 Seeing that he became sad, Jesus said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." 26 Those who heard this asked, "Then who can be saved?" 27 He replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

—Luke 18:18-30

No doubt there is Jewish hyperbole in play in each of these teachings, but the point underlying them, surely, is that followers of Jesus are to live in sacrificial simplicity, divesting themselves of earthly treasure in generous love to the poor, trusting God for provision.

So Jesus invites his followers into the shalom life and characterizes it as one of substantial simplicity and sacrifice. Returning to the above objection that perhaps giving to the point at which one's own shalom is at risk isn't all that demanding, owing to the fact that shalom is a lavish affair, a state of plenteous food, housing, etc., we have the materials now for a reply: Not so, on Jesus' conception of shalom. Shalom, as he envisaged it, was not a state of lavish indulgence—quite the reverse.

Our reasoning has led us to this conclusion. The command to neighbor love, I argued, enjoins us to pursue the shalom community for the neighbor (anyone in reach of one's love), putting pursuit of her shalom on a par with pursuit of one's own. I suggested that that implies a level of generosity and sacrifice to the point where further giving would imperil one's own shalom, and that, given Jesus' conception of the shalom life, this would require a lifestyle of sacrificial simplicity.

All this suggests an approach to wealth and poverty similar¹⁷ to that endorsed by Singer's argument. According to his argument, affluence carries in its train substantial obligation to care for the suffering. Pursuit of extravagance, luxury, and frill while others are at serious risk of suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care is wrong. So too with the love command: according to it, pursuit of extravagance, luxury, and frill while others are at serious risk of suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care is wrong. Singer was right: Jesus is an ally of his argument.

This, anyway, if I have read the love command and its implications correctly. Full defense of my read would be a big project, but let me offer some evidence from a few further teachings of Jesus, and some evidence from the early church, for thinking I have read the command and its implications correctly.

3. Some further teachings of Jesus

Consider, for example, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus:

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so

¹⁷ Similar, but not identical. Below we will see some differences.

that they will not also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'

— Luke 16:19-31

An interesting question about this parable: What is it that the rich man wishes to warn his father and brothers of? Surely it is this: He wants to warn them against gaily living in splendor day after day whilst neighbors starve around them. Such behavior, the parable strongly suggests, ends in damnation. (Note too the similarity between this parable and Singer's pond case!)

And:

Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

—Luke 12:13-21

The one who stores up treasure for himself but isn't rich toward God, then, is a fool. But what does Jesus have in mind by talk of being "rich toward God"? What does that come to?

We get an answer to that question later in the passage:

And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span? If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God

so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith! And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

—Luke 12:22-34

The answer to our question what Jesus has in mind by talk earlier in the passage of “being rich toward God” comes near the end of the above-quoted passage: to be rich toward God is to have treasure in heaven, and the way to do that is to sell your possessions and give the proceeds to the poor.

The contrast here is between the fool who stores up treasure for himself and is consequently poor in heavenly treasure, versus those who use their possessions to care for the poor and are consequently rich in heavenly treasure. The exhortation, then: be among the latter.

(What to say about the fact that Jesus seems to be making here the unattractive suggestion that we should be caring for the poor so as to garner for ourselves some sort of future, heavenly pay off? Much depends, obviously, on what Jesus had in mind by talk of heavenly treasure. Later, in Luke 19, he talks about the future rewards of faithfulness in terms of having "authority over cities" in the future Kingdom. Putting that talk together with his suggestion in Luke 22 that the greatest in the Kingdom aren't those who lord it over others but those who serve, and his suggestion in Matthew 5 that we should love our enemies so that we can become like God, who loves both his friends and enemies, suggests a picture like this. The heavenly reward Jesus speaks of is the reward of becoming perfect in love, as God is perfect in love, and thereby becoming one who serves many in love, whether friend or enemy. There's a lot more to say about this, but reading Jesus' rewards talk in this vein goes a long way toward palliating its initial unattractiveness.)

And a final passage, suggesting that the sort of care for the disenfranchised Jesus enjoins on his followers goes well beyond just financial care:

And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay

you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

— Luke 14:12-14

The invitation here is to practice hospitality toward the outcast, drawing them into the shalom community and eschewing the usual project of practicing community only with those capable of raising one's social status.

The foregoing passages, and many like them, point in the same direction as passages considered earlier in the paper: Jesus urges sacrificial use of our material and social capital in care of the low ones, the poor, the outcasts, the outsiders. Teaching along these lines is just what you would expect to find if Jesus were reading the love command in the vein I proposed above. I take the abundance of such teaching in the Jesus tradition as evidence that he did read it in that vein.

4. The Early Christians

One sort of worry one might raise about reading the love command and related teachings as I'm reading them goes like this: If this is what the love command and further teachings of Jesus require—if it is really so demanding as this—why haven't more people noticed as much? Why don't we hear more about it in the Christian tradition? To be sure, Christian thought through the ages has enjoined charity and generosity, but not to the extent envisaged here. Give to the poor, sure, but give most or all of one's extra away? That goes well beyond the tradition. And isn't that reason for suspicion about the read of these teachings I am endorsing? If few in Church history have noticed Jesus saying these things, that is reason to doubt that he said them.

Perhaps so, except that it is not true that few in Church history have noticed Jesus saying these things. As Justo Gonzales demonstrates in his fascinating *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money*,¹⁸ many of the main teachers and writers of the early Church, from the first through fourth centuries of the Christian era, read Jesus' teaching on wealth and poverty along just the lines suggested above. Comments like the following are remarkably commonplace among early and influential Christian writers:

Be not a stretcher forth of the hands to receive and a drawer of them back to give. If you have anything, through your hands you shall give ransom for your sins. Do not hesitate to give, nor complain when you give; for you shall know who is the good repayer of the hire. Do not turn away from him who is in want; rather, share all things with your brother, and do not say that they are your own. For if you are partakers in that which is immortal, how much more in things which are mortal?

¹⁸ Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002.

– from the Didache

Do not wonder that a man can become an imitator of God. He can, if he is willing. For it is not by ruling over his neighbor, or by seeking to hold the supremacy over those that are weaker, or by being rich, and showing violence towards those that are inferior, that happiness is found; nor can any one by these things become an imitator of God. But these things do not at all constitute His majesty. On the contrary he who takes upon himself the burden of his neighbor; he who, in whatsoever respect he may be superior, is ready to benefit another who is deficient; he who, whatsoever things he has received from God, by distributing these to the needy, becomes a god to whose who receive (his benefits): he is an imitator of God.

– Epistle to Diognetus¹⁹

Ye, therefore, who are high in position, seek out the hungry as long as the tower is not finished.... Instead of lands, buy afflicted souls, according as each one is able, and visit widows and orphans, and do not overlook them; and spend your wealth and all your preparations, which ye received from the Lord, upon such lands and houses. For to this end did the Master make you rich.

– Hermas²⁰

...it is monstrous for one to live in luxury, while many are in want.

– Clement of Alexandria²¹

God created our race for sharing, beginning by giving out what belonged to God, God's own Word, making it common to all humans, and creating all things for all. Therefore all things are common; and let not the rich claim more than the rest. To say therefore 'I have more than I need, why not enjoy?' is neither human nor proper to sharing... For I know quite well that God has given us the power to use; but only to the limit of that which is necessary; and that God also willed that the use be in common.

– Clement of Alexandria²²

He who is able to succour one on the point of perishing, if he fails to do so, kills him

– Lactantius²³

¹⁹ Gonzalez, p. 96.

²⁰ Gonzalez, p. 99.

²¹ Gonzalez, p. 115.

²² Gonzalez, p.116-117.

²³ Gonzalez, p. 136.

What is a miser? One who is not content with what is needful. What is a thief? One who takes what belongs to others. Why do you not consider yourself a miser and a thief when you claim as your own what you received in trust? If one who takes the clothing off another is called a thief, why give any other name to one who can clothe the naked and refused to do so? The bread that you withhold belongs to the poor; the cape that you hide in your chest belongs to the naked; the shoes rotting in your house belong to those who must go unshod.

— Basil²⁴

You strip people naked and dress up your walls. The naked poor cries before your door, and you do not even look at him. It is a naked human being that begs you, and you are considering what marbles to use for paving. The poor begs you for money and gets none. There is a human being seeking bread, and your horses chew gold in their bits. You rejoice in your precious adornments, while others have nothing to eat. A harsh judgement awaits you, oh rich! The people are hungry and you close your granaries. The people cry and you show your jewels. Woe to one who can save so many lives from death, and does not!

— Ambrose²⁵

I beg you to remember this without fail, that not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we do not possess our own wealth but theirs.

— John Chrysostom²⁶

For neither am I leading thee to the lofty peak of entire poverty, but for the present I require thee to cut off superfluities and to desire a sufficiency alone. Now the boundary of sufficiency is the using those things which it is impossible to live without. No one debars thee from these; nor forbids thee thy daily food. I say food, not feasting, raiment, not ornament... And let him that can be satisfied with pulse and can keep in good health, seek nothing more; but let him who is weaker and requires to be dieted with garden herbs, not be hindered of this. But if any be even be weaker than this and require the support of flesh in moderation, we will not debar him from this either. For we do not advise these things to kill and injure men, but to cut off what is superfluous and that is superfluous which is more than we need. For when we are able even without a

²⁴ Gonzalez, p. 178.

²⁵ Gonzalez, p. 190.

²⁶ Wolterstorff, Justice: Rights and Wrongs, p. 61.

thing to live healthfully and respectably, certainly the addition of that thing is superfluity.

— John Chrysostom²⁷

Not to give to the needy what is superfluous is akin to fraud.

— Augustine²⁸

In many of the most influential writers of the early church, then, we find the same theme on display as was in Jesus' teaching: The moral demands of affluence are high. To withhold what is extra from the needy is to wrong them.

Agreed, it would be a cost to my interpretation of Jesus' teaching on wealth and poverty if this were an utterly new interpretation. But it isn't.

Two final objections before closing.

5. The Love Command, interpreted as above, is too demanding

A typical response to Singer's argument is that it is too demanding; surely morality doesn't require anything so radical as this.

Similar worries hold for my read of the love command. Here is one way of putting the worry: Above I rather uncritically assumed that putting pursuit of the neighbor's shalom on a par with pursuit of my own was consistent with a certain degree of preference for the shalom of "me and mine" (where here I had mind my children, wife, parents, and other close family and friends). I said:

Should I give to a point where I am sacrificing my inclusion in the shalom community—where, for example, I or those in my household don't have enough food, clothing, shelter, safety, etc.—I will have gone too far; at any rate, I will have gone beyond what the love command requires.

On my read of the command, it enjoins me to give until I and mine are threatened with not having enough, but I am allowed to stop there, even if strangers don't have enough. So on my read of the command, I allowed to preference the needs of me and mine over those of strangers.

But you might object as follows: "if you are preferencing the shalom of your children over that of strangers, then you are *not* putting neighbor shalom on a par with your own. You are privileging your shalom over that of your neighbors', and that, you say, is ruled out by the love command. If you are really to put

²⁷ Gonzalez, p. 209.

²⁸ Gonzalez, p. 216.

neighbor shalom on a par with you and yours, surely you must *not* preference the needs of your children over the needs of strangers."

The objection, then: if the love command is what I say it is, a command to put neighbor shalom on a par with one's own, then my claims to the contrary notwithstanding, the command so interpreted leaves no room for preferential love of one's children and other loved ones.²⁹ But if so, many will say, the love command, as I have construed it, is too radical to be taken seriously. Judith Jarvis Thomson nicely expresses the intuition many of us would have here:

A father who says, 'I'm no more concerned about my children's lives than about anybody else's life,' is just flatly a defective parent; he's deficient in views that parents ought to have.³⁰

Agreed. It would be a serious cost of my read of the love command if, so read, it required putting pursuit of the good of strangers on a par with pursuit of the good of one's children.³¹ But it doesn't.

The love command, so I say, enjoins us to put pursuit of neighbor shalom on a par with pursuit of one's own. And, I'm prepared to admit, that means putting pursuit of the stranger's shalom on a par with pursuit of that of one's children. But none of this is objectionable.

Shalom, recall, is the property of a well-ordered community, a community in which relations between human members of the community and humans and God are whole. It is God's design plan for a properly functioning human community. And though I can't defend the claim just now (the paper is long enough as it is), it is a plausible read of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures' portrayal of that design plan that, when things are going according to plan, parents care for their children in special ways, in ways that go beyond the ways they would care for strangers. It is a plausible read of that design plan, I suggest, to see it as consistent with parents' putting pursuit of their children's need for enough food, clothing, shelter, rest, safety, celebration, etc., before that of strangers.

That being so, to seek the stranger's shalom with as much intensity as I seek my daughter's does not commit me to treating the needs of the stranger as on a par with the needs of my daughter. The state I'm seeking for each is shalom, in which my relationship with my daughter is whole, in accord with God's design plan for the shalom community, and in which my relationship with the stranger is whole, in accord with God's

²⁹ For defense of the claim that that is indeed a consequence of the love command, see Francis Howard-Snyder, "On These Two Commands Hang All the Law and the Prophets," *Faith and Philosophy* 22: 3-20.

³⁰ Quoted in Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, p. 135.

³¹ Well, it would be a serious cost for traditional Christians anyway, those who think of Jesus' teachings on moral and other matters as wholly true.

design plan for the shalom community. But wholeness for the former relationship—conformity to the divine design plan for the shalom community—looks, plausibly, very different than wholeness for the latter relationship. Wholeness for the former relationship requires a level of care and involvement not entailed by wholeness of the latter. I can be pursuing wholeness of each relationship with equal intensity, then, whilst caring for the needs of my daughter in very different ways than I care for the needs of the stranger.

In short, reading the command to neighbor love as enjoining putting the neighbor's shalom on a par with one's own makes no trouble at all for the moral permissibility of preferential love for one's children.

6. The love command, interpreted as above, is not demanding enough³²

Above I described shalom as a state of communal well-being in which “there is enough food, clothing and shelter, enough rest, enough caring for and sharing with one another, enough celebrating together, enough safety from harm, enough justice for all, whether weak or strong.”

Focus for the moment on the part about celebration, a consistent theme in the Hebrew Scriptures. When the eschatological shalom comes, it will be a time of joyous celebration:

6On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

— Isaiah 25:6

Proper community life in the present age was likewise to be marked by regular celebration:

39On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. 40And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. 41 You shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year.

— Leviticus 23:39-41

Celebration, for Israel's writers, was a component of the shalom life.

³² Thanks to Michael Pace and Gregg Ten Elshof for helpful conversation on this objection.

There is indication in the Jesus tradition that he too was a friend of celebration. So:

3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. 4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. 6 "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

— Mark 14:3-9³³

And:

16 "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

— Matt 11:16-19

In sum: celebration, even extravagant celebration, was, for Israel's writers, a component of the shalom life, and seems to have been a feature of Jesus' life as well.

This in mind, return to Singer's pond case, though let us amend it slightly.

On your way home, you pass a small pond. One day, you notice that a small child has fallen in the pond and is having trouble staying afloat. You look around and see that you are the only one who can help. You can easily wade in and save the child, but you are on your way to a birthday party and realize that, if you save the child, by the time you have pulled her from the water, located her parents, and so forth, you will have missed the party. You pass by and the child dies.

Most of us, I suspect, would think such conduct abominable. Why? Because, Singer would likely respond, it is a fundamental principle

³³ Perhaps this isn't exactly celebration, but it's something close.

of morality that if it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so. Since attending a birthday party is not nearly as important as the life of the child, it is wrong to choose the former over the latter.

Now for a difficult question: Are there morally relevant differences between the behavior of the protagonist in our modified pond case and the behavior we engage in each time we throw a lavish party instead of donating that money to aid agencies who could use it to prevent suffering and death among the children of the poor? It is hard indeed to see what morally relevant differences there could be.³⁴ Wherefore, it is hard indeed to see how our practice of throwing lavish parties for one another could be any better, morally speaking, than the behavior depicted in the modified pond case. (This point in mind, the onlookers' complaint in the above story about the anointing of Jesus that the money might have been better spent on the poor has some bite.)

But if the practice of extravagant celebration is morally on a par with the behavior on display in the modified pond case, there is a problem with my interpretation of the love command. As I characterized it, the love command bids me to give to the point at which further giving would compromise the shalom life of me and mine, but makes no demand that I give beyond that point. Since the shalom life as Jesus and the writers of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures seem to have envisaged it includes among its constituents the practice of celebration, even extravagant celebration, that practice would seem to be perfectly compatible with the love command. But reflection on the modified pond case shows that practice incompatible with morality. Wherefore, the love command, as I have interpreted it, is not sufficiently demanding. At any rate, it is not sufficiently demanding to function as a standalone moral principle summarizing the whole of my moral obligations to my neighbor.

What to say about this? There are thorny issues here, but briefly, my preferred reply goes as follows.

There are certain practices that make possible a long-term lifestyle of joyous, self-giving love: eating properly and getting enough rest, to cite the obvious. The practice of regular celebration falls into this category. Without it, life becomes dull. Richard Foster puts it well: "Celebration brings joy into life, and joy makes us strong."³⁵ Shalom communities are marked by the practice of celebration, which makes them strong and helps their members into long-term, joyous, self-sacrificing love of God and neighbor. We could remove all celebration from our common lives and give the resources freed up thereby to the vulnerable, but it would come at cost to our ability to engage in long-term service to those very vulnerable.

³⁴ For a now classic treatment of the difficulty of spelling out a relevant moral difference between such cases, see Peter Unger, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁵ Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), p. 191.

Such is the main explanation, I conjecture, why Israel's writers and Jesus endorse a practice of celebration in the face of suffering and is one main reason why celebrating whilst children suffer and die is morally justifiable.³⁶

What to say though about our modified pond case? For isn't it clear that the protagonist in the case acts wrongly? No, I think not. Much depends on how the details of the story get filled in. Consider this fuller version:

You have been pulling children from ponds for ten hours now and are exhausted. As you look further down the road, there is pond after pond after pond, as far as the eye can see, millions of them, each one containing a child in need of help. There are years and years of work before you, and years of faithful service to these children behind you. To strengthen yourselves for this work, you and your family make a practice of getting proper nutrition and rest and of occasional, modest celebration of birthdays, anniversaries, church feasts, and so forth. Thereby you have been strengthened and enabled to continue on in years of joyful service to these children.

Exhausted from your day's work, you decide to head home to one of these occasional celebrations. Could you save more children today? Undoubtedly. But you must stop for regular rest and occasional celebration if you are to stay at this for the long haul, the fact that, each time you do, there will be more children you could save notwithstanding. You head home to a meal and celebration, passing a drowning child, who dies.

The story thus augmented, I think it is clear you have done nothing wrong.

³⁶ This gets at a question provoked by the discussion so far. I have been arguing that the shalom life described by Jesus is one of serious simplicity and generosity marked by occasional celebration. But how serious? How occasional? Where is the line between proper simplicity, generosity and celebrating, and objectionable living high while others die? Neither Jesus nor the Biblical writers lay down precise rules. Here is a conjecture suggested by the foregoing discussion. A constant refrain in the New Testament is that the life of Jesus following—the life “in Christ”, to use the Pauline term—is one of great joy. This sheds some light, I think, on our questions. The shalom life is a life of serious simplicity and generosity marked by occasional celebration. How serious? How occasional? Serious enough, I conjecture, that further simplicity and generosity would make it less than highly likely that a mature, well-functioning human engaged in “the Jesus life”—the life on display in Jesus' teachings and practices—could live in joyous, self-giving love. Likewise with celebration. One suspects there are no precise boundaries here, no precise line on one side of which is too much simplicity and on the other is too little. There is a range whose borders are vague, or, at any rate, hard to discern. We get a rough idea what the range looks like, though, by reflection on the example of Jesus and great followers of Jesus through the years.

I conclude that occasional celebration is morally justified, complaints to the effect that the money could have been better spent on the poor notwithstanding.³⁷ If I am right to think that the love command licenses a practice of celebration, that is no mark against my interpretation of the command.

7. Conclusion

I have argued that Jesus' love command is the command to put neighbor shalom on a par with one's own, and that the command thus understood is quite demanding, enjoining a lifestyle of sacrificial simplicity and generosity toward those who suffer.³⁸

If I have interpreted the command and related teachings correctly, they enjoin on us an approach to wealth and poverty not much different than that endorsed by Singer's famine and affluence argument. If I have interpreted the command and those teachings correctly, Singer was right to claim Jesus as an ally of his argument.³⁹

³⁷ It's an interesting question how to think about the morality of occasional celebration from the perspective of Singer's argument. In his original presentation of the argument ("Famine, Affluence and Morality") he gave two versions of the argument, a strong and a moderate version. The key premise of the strong version had it that one is obligated to prevent bad things from happening unless in so doing one would thereby sacrifice something of comparable moral significance. Its moderate compeer claimed only that one is obligated to prevent bad things from happening unless in so doing one would thereby sacrifice something of moral significance. I suspect it would be hard to justify most any celebration on the strong version of Singer's argument and not hard to justify it on the moderate version. The love command, on my read, then, is closer in spirit to the latter.

³⁸ Note well that I have not said anything about *how* to deploy one's resources on behalf of the suffering. This is a notoriously difficult question, on which, I think, the love command is silent.

³⁹ Thanks to Walter Augustine, Justin Barnard, Dariusz Bryćko, Nathan Ballantyne, Gordon Barnes, Brad Christerson, Matthew Davidson, Keith Giles, Paul Gooch, Ken Himma, George Hunsinger, Rick Langer, Mark Nelson, Donald Page, Alvin Plantinga, Nathan Schneider, Craig Slane, Dwight Smith, Gregg Ten Elshof, Kevin Vallier, Todd Vasquez, and Nicholas Wolterstorff for helpful comments and conversation.