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# Values of love: two forms of infinity characteristic of human persons

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## Abstract

In his late reflections on values and forms of life from the 1920s and 1930s, Husserl develops the concept of personal value and argues that these values open two kinds of infinities in our lives. On the one hand personal values disclose infinite emotive depths in human individuals while on the other hand they connect human individuals in continuous and progressive chains of care. In order to get at the core of the concept, I will explicate Husserl's discussion of personal values of love by distinguishing between five related features. I demonstrate that values of love (1) are rooted in egoic depths and define who we are as persons, (2) differ from objective values in being absolute and non-comparative, (3) ground vocational lives as organizing principles, (4) are endlessly self-disclosing and self-intensifying, and (5) establish transitive relations of care between human beings. On the basis of my five-partite distinction, I argue that Husserl's concepts of love and value of love reveal the dynamic character of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

**Keywords** Love · Values · Value of love (*Liebeswert*) · Vocation · Person · Time · Development · Intersubjectivity · Infinity

Husserl's late reflections on values and forms of good life entail an important but largely neglected argument about human infinity. In his research manuscripts and essays from the 1920s and 1930s, Husserl introduces and develops the concept of personal value (*ein personaler Wert*), and argues that the values thus identified are specific in opening two kinds of infinities in our lives. On the one hand personal values disclose infinite emotive depths in human persons while on the other hand they connect human individuals in continuous and progressive chains of solicitude and care. Husserl calls personal values also "values of love" (*Liebeswerte*) but the point in this is not to

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promote any form of sentimentalism. Rather, the idea is to emphasize the productivity and fruitfulness of the types of connections that personal values are able to establish between human individuals.

Husserl's account of personal values of love depends on his understanding of human persons as essentially temporal and developing subjects constitutionally connected by relations of empathy and communication. For him, all persons are dynamically developing subjects who continually unfold themselves and reform themselves by reflective and self-critical acts. Moreover, human persons, delineated by finitude and mortality, are also generative beings who are able to connect to one another across the boundaries of birth and death. The essential temporality and dynamism of persons entails that, whatever personal love may mean, it is not a relation between stable or fixed beings but a connection between unique ways of becoming.

Husserl introduces the concept of the personal value of love or love-value<sup>1</sup> (*Liebeswert*) while rethinking the structures and conditions of the good life and critically inspecting his earlier contributions to value theory and ethics from 1900–1910s.<sup>2</sup> These late reflections can be found in his research manuscripts from the 1920s and 1930s, published in *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Hua42) and *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (HuaMat9). The descriptions, analyses and lines of reasoning that Husserl develops in these manuscripts cohere with the arguments that he presents in his late publications, most importantly the so-called Kaizo essays in ethics, published in *Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Hua27), and his seminal work in philosophy of science and cultural philosophy, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, and related lectures (Hua6).

These contexts are very different in their argumentative and thematic goals and interests, and thus Husserl's concept of love remains fragmented. In order to get at the core of the idea, one needs to first combine his separate reflections and remarks, capture their common meaning and then develop the main elements into a well-defined concept. This is the task of the paper at hand.

I will explicate and articulate Husserl's concept of values of love by distinguishing between five related features of these values and by contrasting them to what Husserl calls "objective values" (*ein gegenständlicher Wert, ein objektiver Wert*). More specifically, I will argue that values of love (1) are rooted in egoic depths and define who we are as persons, (2) differ from objective values in being absolute and non-comparative, (3) ground vocational lives as organizing principles, (4) are endlessly self-disclosing and self-intensifying, and (5) establish transitive relations of care between human beings.

This five-partite distinction is my own and cannot be found in an explicit form in Husserl's explorative investigations. However, I will demonstrate that Husserl's discussions of love in the manuscripts mentioned above and the examples that he offers of the emotion substantiate my analysis. On the basis of this reconstruction, I argue that

<sup>1</sup> In Husserlian framing, values in general are the correlates of axiological acts of valuing, i.e. feelings, emotions and valuations (cf. e.g. Melle 2007; Drummond 2006, 2009, 2015b, 2018; Jardine 2020). As such, they differ on the one hand from goals that are correlatives of the practical or conative acts of willing and desiring and on the other hand from percepts, things, events and facts that are correlates of doxic acts of cognition, belief, perception and their modifications.

<sup>2</sup> These are the lecture courses on axiology and ethics, *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre 1908–1914*, published in volume XXVIII of the Husserliana collection (Hua28).

Husserl's concept of love reveals the dynamic character of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

Before entering the explication, however, I must start by two preparatory remarks. First, my account draws from several earlier discussions that have touched upon the topic but not worked it out. Husserl's concept of personal love has been brought up in several interpretative and systematic contexts, most importantly when dealing with his late ethical reflections, his theory of values, and his reformulations of the categorical imperative.<sup>3</sup> I will not enter into these thematic discussions here but will restrict my task to the explication and elaboration of the central concept of love which is still missing and, in my view, will advance all of these discussions. Second, the materials to be interpreted suggest intriguing comparisons to Husserl's contemporary phenomenologists, Scheler, Stein and Heidegger perhaps most obviously, but also to many neo-Kantians, from Fichte to Rickert.<sup>4</sup> I will not go into any comparative discussions here either. My aim is purely explicative, and it is motivated by the conviction that any systemic, exegetic or comparative examination will benefit from a robust reconstruction of the key operative concept.

## 1 Egoic depths of feeling and decision

The most important and fundamental feature of personal values of love is that they are rooted in the deepest center of the person. In other words, they emerge or stem from the deepest egoic cores of persons. As such they differ from all values that receive their valency and force from targeted objects:

“[L]ove-inspired valuation flows from the subject toward the individual object and imparts or bestows a value to the latter that does not derive from the object itself but, ultimately, from him [the ego]. From this value follows a practical duty which is not determined by an objective value (that emerges from the object through affection)” (Hua42, 352).

As such, love-values have a dual relation to the ego-pole of experiencing: First, like all intentional experiences, experiences of love-values are egoic in the sense that the valued something – be it pleasing, repulsing, rapturing, boring – is given to and appears to an ego. But second, unlike any other valuing or affective experiencing, the feeling essential to genuine love also originates from the ego (and not from the object pole). So, in intentional acts of love, the ego operates in a more complex way than in other emotive acts, such as joy, fear or anger, or in any cognitive and practical acts in general.

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<sup>3</sup> I will not discuss in this paper the changes that the concept of personal values brings about in Husserl's axiology and value theory (cf. Melle 1991; Hart 1992; Melle 2002; Hart 2006; Melle 2007; Peucker 2008; Hart 2009; Loidolt 2012; Drummond 2015a; Crespo 2015; Drummond 2018). These are fundamental and far-reaching and need a separate, full-length paper to be analyzed. Here I only want to mention one transformation that is crucial. Most importantly, the introduction of the concept of personal value allows Husserl to question his earlier Brentanian formulation of the categorical imperative, a formulation that suffers from consequentialist shortcomings (Drummond 2018, 136, 141; cf. Williams and Smart 1973, 82, 98–100, 108ff.).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Steinbock 2015; Staiti 2017.

This is reflected in the form of the duties and obligations that emerge from such values; they overrule or nullify all other duties and obligations (Hua42, 624).

Husserl draws attention to this fact by writing that “not all [acts] are similarly ego-centered” (Hua42, 358). The directionality of the personal emotion of love is, of course, outward but the grounding affection or feeling, the one that “colors” the direction and feeds it, is not external to the lived experience but internal, not worldly but egoic (Hua42, 624–625).

Thus, genuine loving originates from the other pole of intentional experiencing than other emotions, feelings and acts of valuing and other types of experiences in general, which all have their affective grounds “out there” (e.g. Husserl [1939] 1985). So, the source of this type of loving is different from those of other acts of feeling and valuing.

On closer inspection, however, the structure of genuine love turns out to be even more complicated. This is because for Husserl, all loving involves two components: an affective component of feeling and a deciding egoic act which is responsible for the permanence of the emotion. An emotion is thus a position taking in respect to a feeling.<sup>5</sup> But not all emotive deciding and not all loving is grounded in the depths of the self. Only genuine love finds both its aspects, the feeling and the deciding, rooted in the depths of the ego. In the series of manuscripts titled “Schönwert und Gutwert: Weltkonstitution und Gefühl” we read:

“Genuine or true falling in love, to grasp a genuine love, – this is not just to establish a habitual feeling [*Gefallen*] by a ‘vivid’ emotion [*Gefühl*], but means that one decides for the person on the basis of the depths” (Hua43/2, 508).

So, in the case of genuine love, also the deciding moment, and not just the feeling, emerges or, rather, is grounded in the deepest core of the self. Thus, loving deciding has a special kind of stubbornness to it; it decides permanently and its permanence is secured by the egoic depth as its source. As such genuine love is resistant to changing conditions, both external and internal, changes in its object and changes in the subject. Thus, the blindness, often attributed to erotic, romantic and maternal love, and supposedly characteristic of womanly existence, may better be understood, not as any form of sentimentality or single-mindedness, but as a special form of engagement and commitment (cf. Stein [1928–1932] 2002, e.g. 85–87/93–96, 3–4/255–256; 2017, 119–121/101–102; Hanley and Valiquette 2002; Urban 2016).

Husserl’s argument about the deeply egoic sources of love illuminates the inner structures of the personal ego. The personal ego is not a mere pole of acts, or a center from which acts radiate. It is not just a temporal formation established in the habituation of lived experiences and position taking-acts in internal time. Nor is it merely a monad, harmoniously resonating with other egos. In addition to these structures – polar, habitual and monadic – the ego also has a depth. In *The Crisis*, we read:

<sup>5</sup> The freedom of the ego consists of the possibility to accept, reject or ignore the affection and the feeling (e.g. Hua4, 213–214/224–225, 278–280/291–293; Hua42, 359).

“[I]f we could equate this subjectivity with the flux of Heraclitus, his saying would doubtlessly be true of it: ‘You will never find the boundaries of the soul,<sup>6</sup> even if you follow every road; so deep is its ground’” (Hua6, 173/170).

This rather cryptic statement is illuminated by discussions in the late manuscripts:

“The ego is a pole, but is not an empty point. It is not an empty and dead substrate for qualities, but is an ego-center of actions, that has its own egoic depths (...) A distinctive feature, however, is that the ego is not only a polar centering inwardness, thereby accomplishing sense and value and deed out of itself, but that it is also an individual ego, who, in all its presenting, feeling, valuing, deciding, has a deepest center, the center of love in the distinguished personal sense; the ego who in this love follows a ‘call’, a ‘calling’, an innermost call, that strikes the innermost center of the ego itself, and that becomes determined for new kinds of decisions” (Hua42, 358–359).

The personal ego thus has the form of a flow, and this in two senses. First, the metaphor of flow captures the idea that the personal ego is a dynamic and open-ended becoming, analogous to the self-forming movement of a river or a stream (cf. Hua4, 250–251/262–263; Hua5, 17; Hua27, 37; Hua38, 104–105; Hua42, 145–146). Second, the ego also operates as a headspring or mother source from which specific types of valuing acts emanate, the endless roots of which are buried deep under the ground of our object-directed lives.

This implies that if we want to visually picture Husserl’s characterization of love as an innermost call, then we must operate in three-dimensional space. The call of love does not issue from the center of a circle, but emerges from the peak of a funnel-formed structure.<sup>7</sup> We are not “plane-beings,” as Husserl argues in *The Crisis*, but are beings of fathomless depths (Hua6, 120–123/118–121; cf. Hua4, 273/286).

## 2 Organizing principles

In Husserl’s understanding, all genuine vocations, that is, resolutions to dedicate one’s whole practical life to certain tasks or kinds of tasks, are grounded in values of love. Values of love are thus the emotive units with which we identify as feeling and willing persons and to which we devote our lives as wholes. In such cases, we are convinced or insightfully certain that certain values are necessary for us as who we are and that we need to strive for them, and thus we decide to dedicate our life unconditionally to the pursuit and realization of these values (Hua27, 28; cf. Hua4, 265–268/277–280). In the Kaizo essays, we read:

<sup>6</sup> Husserl’s statement here concerns consciousness in its purity, as disclosed by the transcendental-phenomenological method, and not merely the soul which for him means real and actual consciousness (Hua4, 120–122/128–130; Hua6, 208–217/204–213, 241–243/238–240; Hua46, 145). So, the Heraclitian terminology should not lead us astray here.

<sup>7</sup> For pictorial images, see, figures no. 9, 11, 13, 16 and 18 in Benjamin Betts’ *Geometrical Psychology, or, the Science of Representation* (1887).

“In overviewing and evaluating one’s possible future life, someone may become certain that values of a particular type (...) have the character of *absolutely desired* values, without whose continual realization one’s life can have no satisfaction” (Hua27, 27).

In the introductory lectures to philosophy from 1919, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, the argument that vocations are grounded in values of love is even more explicit. Husserl writes:

“The daimon that leads to true calling or vocation speaks through love. So, it arrives not only at objective goods and the objectively greatest good, but each has her sphere of love and her ‘duties of love’” (HuaMat9, 146 n.1; cf. translation in Loidolt 2012).

And in the *Grenzprobleme* volume, Husserl continues this line of thought by characterizing the love-based obligations as absolute ones:

“A value that springs or stems from [myself], which I myself decide for as who I am, on the basis of an ordinary loving dedication, is a practical unconditional, an absolute ought, and binds me as the one who I am. To decide against it is to be untrue to oneself, to lose oneself, to sin against oneself, to betray one’s true self, to act against one’s true being ([which is] an absolute practical contradiction)” (Hua42, 356; cf. translation in Loidolt 2012, 15).

A vocational commitment, grounded in love, establishes an ordering among the many practices, activities, actions and motivations that belong to our lives.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it regulates our practical life as a whole and brings unity to its different aspects. This means that the emotion of love and the values that it discloses function as organizational principles. They give direction and power to our actions, practices, skills and capacities, and structure our lives as wholes.<sup>9</sup> Thus personal values of love define who we are as agents and persons (Hua43/2, 507).<sup>10</sup>

“So art is a vocation for the genuine artist, and science is a vocation for the true scientist (the philosopher); it is a field or region of spiritual activities and accomplishments, for which she knows that she has a calling, so that only the pursuit of these goods can give her the most ‘inner’ and most ‘pure’ satisfaction,

<sup>8</sup> A vocation can thus be defined as an inner calling that regulates life as a whole (cf. Crespo 2015, 709). In *The Crisis*, Husserl defines it as an interested attitude (*Interesseneinstellung* Hua6, 139/136).

<sup>9</sup> In the Kaizo essays, Husserl argues that even though vocational loves (love-values) organize our lives as wholes they do not and cannot, by themselves, regulate each and every action or intentional act. For that purpose – which is the fully ethical purpose – the reflective capacity of self-critique must be practiced universally and habitually, i.e. in respect to each possible personal action and practical capacity (“I can”), but also in respect to each intentional act, i.e. also axiological and cognitive.

<sup>10</sup> Husserl’s theory of personhood is most systematically exposed in the second volume of his *Ideas* (Hua4). However, the idea of a person as a dynamic whole emerges in all his major works (see, e.g., Hua1, 101–102/66–67; Hua4, 266–277/278–290; Hua5, 17; Hu6, 233–235/230–231; cf. Hua3, 136–137/164–165, 163–164/194–195). For explications, see, Luft 2006; Heinämaa 2007; Hahn 2009; Jacobs 2010, 2014; Heinämaa 2019; cf. Hart 1992, 2009.

and each succeeding can give her the consciousness of ‘happiness’” (Hua27, 28, cf. 38; Hua37, 245–246).<sup>11</sup>

As organizational principles, values of love must not be understood as fixed foundations or stable corner stones of our active lives. Nor do they function as laws or rules that would regulate our actions and practices from inside or from outside, or as axiological axioms from which we could derive the directions or contents of our choices and decisions in altering circumstances. Rather, the principal status of values of love means that they operate as living sources of meanings that organize, format and animate our comportment from within.

Concrete examples of such vocational decisions, discussed in contemporary philosophy, include Franz Kafka’s dedication to literature, and Paul Gauguin’s dedication to painting, introduced by Bernard Williams in his “Moral luck” (Williams 1981b, 22ff.; Heinämaa 2014). Kafka decided on work as insurance officer on the basis of economic considerations. By means of this decision he did not, however, dedicate his life to the furthering and cultivating of the activities of this occupation but instead devoted his life to the activity of writing fiction. Gauguin resolved to become a painter and, even more demanding, to experiment with new goals and techniques of painting, and for this purpose moved to Tahiti in French Polynesia, abandoning his wife, five children and friends. These real cases of vocational decisions can be illuminated by fictional ones (cf. Williams 1981a, b). In Henry James’ ghost story, Owen Wingrave decides against family traditions that valorize military service and thus risks his life in an unexpected manner; and in Leo Tolstoi’s novel, Anna Karenina decides on Vronski against all social norms but also against her own love and care for her children, and thus endangers everything that she has. The destructive results described by these fictional cases are not meant to scandalize or moralize the agents but to highlight the fundamental character of vocational decisions: what is at stake is the person as such and her life as a concrete whole.

Husserl’s own examples of objects of vocational decisions based on genuine love include a child for the mother, or more generally for the parent, a friend for any non-recluse person, a home country for the patriot, music for musicians and music lovers, art in general, science for scientists and philosophers. He discusses all these examples in parallel, but the paradigm of love for him is love for persons, epitomized by the case of the loving mother.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Husserl distinguishes between specific vocations and the ethical vocation to become a true human being, that is, self-responsible in the balanced way, a way that covers the three forms of reason – the cognitive, the practical and the axiological – and is grounded in radical self-critique (e.g. Hua27, 29–45; Hua42, 269, 322, 492–494; HuaMat9, 133–134, 142, 167). Answering to the calling of becoming a *true human being* does not, however, mean that one abandons one’s specific vocation(s) but means that one elevates them by positioning them in the field of human vocations, actual and possible. Husserl writes: “The true artist (...) as such is not yet a true human being in the highest sense. An authentic human being can, however, be a true artist, but *can* be such only if ethical self-regulation *demands* this from him” (Hua27, 29; cf. Hua37, 238; Hua42, 35, 353–354).

<sup>12</sup> Compare to Kierkegaard’s argument that love for individual persons is a fundamental human need and our main reason for living: “To love people is the only thing worth living for, and without this love you are not really living” ([1847] 1995, 375). “[S]o deeply is this need rooted in human nature, and so essentially does it belong to being human that (...) even our Lord Jesus Christ, even he humanly felt this need to love and be loved by an individual human being” ([1847] 1995, 155).



The example of the mother may be disturbing for female professionals and female philosophers in particular. Not because Husserl himself would idealize or sentimentalize the case but rather because it is often used in such ways in professional contexts. Much is still associated with the motherly condition, in terms of female duties and tasks but also in terms of female dispositions and capacities and, by implication, female incapacities. And much of what is thus associated and implied is simply invalid and ideological.

Husserl's main aim, however, is not to praise or prioritize this form of love but to use it to illuminate the general structure of all genuine love. Erotic love does not serve this task, since its modern conceptualizations are laden with sensualistic and sexual connotations; and love between friends and siblings implies reciprocity or symmetry which should not be taken for granted in the analysis.<sup>13</sup>

So, in order to avoid prejudiced implications and one-sided models, one must pay attention to the other examples that Husserl provides of personal love and parallels to the case of the mother, and these are several: love of siblings, parents, friends, partners, colleagues, nations, art works, and ultimately beauty and truth. In *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, we read:

“[I]n contrast to the general human love there is a personal love that has its own right and gives to the loved one an individual value [in the eyes of] the loving subject. Thus is love for friends and motherly love. Also, for higher personalities: love for nation, which does not exclude the general love for each nation” (HuaMat9, 146 n.1, cf. 132n1; cf. Hua42, 356–357, 391–392, 420, 624–625).

Our life can involve several love-values, and when these values conflict, endorsing one rather than the other means that we have to make sacrifices and possibly also tragic ones.<sup>14</sup> Husserl's examples of such conflicts include the conflict between one's care for the family and one's care for the people, the conflict between the demands of one's vocational profession and those of family and friends, and the conflict involved in decisions to develop certain personal skills and capacities while neglecting others (e.g. Hua42, 390, 465–467; cf. Donohoe 2010, 129; 2016; Loidolt 2012, 26). The problem of conflicting love-values and sacrifice is already formulated in the early lectures on value theory and ethics from 1908 to 1914 where it is exemplified by a conflict of choosing between two different gifts:

<sup>13</sup> In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard argues that erotic love and friendship cannot serve as models of love because both involve a serious limitation. In both case, Kierkegaard contends, the lover finds it difficult to sacrifice his own emotion for the good of the loved one. She hesitates in giving up her love even when “the other's distinctiveness requires this very sacrifice” ([1847] 1995, 273; cf. Ferreira 2001, 167).

<sup>14</sup> Vocational work can be performed periodically since the decision involved in loving valuing establishes an internal unity that allows return. In the “Vienna lecture” from 1935, attached to *The Crisis*, Husserl illuminates this temporal character of vocations by the example of the philosopher: “[T]hrough no reorientation can [philosophers] simply lose [their natural individual world-interests]; this would mean that each would cease to be what he has become from birth onward. In any circumstances, then, the reorientation can only be a periodical one; it can have habitually enduring validity for one's whole remaining life only in the form of an unconditional resolve of the will to take up, at periodic but internally unified points of time, the same attitude and, through this continuity that intentionally bridges the gaps, to sustain its new sort of interest as valid and as ongoing projects and to realize them through corresponding cultural structures. We are familiar with something similar to this in the vocations that arise even in naturally original cultural life with their periodical vocational times that run through the rest of the life and its concrete temporality” (Hua6, 327–328/281–282).

“Someone sacrifices her musical joy, neglects the development of her musical gifts in order to develop exceptional gifts in science, in order to gain exceptional knowledge” (Hua28, 420).

Some of the cases that Husserl discusses involve a momentary sacrifice which allows the pursuit of both vocations in the future. But comprehensive and global sacrifices are also possible, sacrifices in which we do not just momentarily abandon our love-value in order to endorse another love-value – perhaps one that is more fragile or demands a more acute care – but in which we abandon the whole project of caring for one of the persons or the things that we love. Such sacrifices are *tragic* in that they involve irrecoverable loss and self-loss.

Husserl himself repeatedly refers to the experience of a parent who is torn between two options, whether to support a son’s decision to join the army in a situation of national danger or to draw the child’s attention to the likelihood of death, injury and trauma (e.g. Hua42, 310, 400–401; HuaMat9, 146 n.1). Here the love for one’s own child and the love for one’s country conflict.<sup>15</sup>

The paradigmatic example of a tragically sacrificial decision, however, is that of Abraham when he determines to obey the command of God and sets out to murder his son Isaac. In Husserl’s analysis, Abraham is faced with an irresolvable inner conflict between his love for Isaac and his love for God (Hua42, 466; cf. Drummond 2018, 144).<sup>16</sup> To choose one of the options is to neglect the other, and since both love-values oblige the agent completely and unconditionally – and from within – he cannot avoid grief and, moreover, is bound to face a grief that colors his life as a whole.

A mundane version of the same tragic decision operates as the culmination point in William Styron’s novel *Sophie’s Choice*: a mother is forced to choose between her two children, one of which will be abandoned to suffering and death.<sup>17</sup> The alternative of grabbing both children and making a hopeless gesture of escape with them, and thus risking being killed together, is not an option since the mother’s love for both children commands her to secure their lives without compromise. As Husserl writes in *Grenzprobleme*: “The well-being of my child is entrusted to me. I am responsible for him. To foster his well-being is ‘an absolute obligation’. Yet the suffering of my child is my suffering. (...) To eliminate my suffering is not my aim. The absolute aim is unique and exclusively to eliminate the suffering of my child” (Hua42, 391–392).

In all these cases, sacrifice is tragic and entails that one “sins against oneself”, as Husserl formulates. What he emphasizes by the religious term “sin” is that such a decision violates an absolute obligation of loving care and that consequently no such

<sup>15</sup> Some commentators argue that Husserl’s own experiences of losing one son in the battlefield in World War I and having his other son seriously injured were not just lifechanging events but also turning points in philosophizing (e.g. de Warren 2014/2015; cf. Natanson 1973, xv–xvi).

<sup>16</sup> See, Kierkegaard’s original formulation of the paradox at the beginning of his *Fear and Trembling* ([1843] 1983).

<sup>17</sup> In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt analyzes totalitarianism in terms of the process of organizing the regime of such choices and institutionalizing a policy that generates them: “When a man is faced with the alternative of betraying and thus murdering his friends or of sending his wife and children, for whom he is in every sense responsible, to their death; when even suicide would mean the immediate murder of his own family – how is he to decide? The alternative is no longer between good and evil, but between murder and murder. Who could solve the moral dilemma of the Greek mother, who was allowed by the Nazis to choose which of her three children should be killed?” (Arendt [1951] 1968, 452).

decision can be accompanied by joy, relief or comfort but all entail lifelong sadness or grief for loss and self-loss.

The point here is not to suggest that love would fail or always fail when encountered by insurmountable counter-forces or devastating circumstances. Rather, the point is that even in unrelentingly harsh and inescapable conditions there is time and space for acts of love that protect, care and promote the loved ones.<sup>18</sup> This is pictured in an illuminative way by Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia* in which a family faces global destruction of an apocalyptic scale beyond any protection or escape. The film portrays three alternative manners of reacting to such destruction, one rationalistic, the other aesthetic and the third one loving. The rationalist, the father of the family, when realizing that he cannot do anything to save his family, takes his own life and dies in solitude. The aesthete, the mother, comes to think that the majestic dimensions of destruction could perhaps be marveled or honored. The loving person sets out to construct a tent by erecting nine branches and crossing their tops. She takes the mother and the child inside the symbolic shelter, asks the child to hold her hand and close his eyes. In the last scene of the film, the three sit in a tiny circle under an enormous planet that covers the sky, protected by the construction that is physically more fragile than their bodies but emotionally impenetrable.

### 3 Incomparability and absoluteness

Husserl argues that love-values differ essentially from objective values; they are not objective or objectifiable. Three senses of "objective" combine here but can be distinguished:

First, as we saw above, values of love do not derive their force and intensity from the object pole of experience but from egoic depths.<sup>19</sup>

Second, unlike objective values, they cannot be grasped by each and every subject equally but are evidently discovered by lovers and originally given merely to them and not the others (Hua42, 350–351; HuaMat9, 132 n.1, 146 n.1; cf. Hua1, 117ff./84ff.). Thus, all other subjects, the ones who lack love for the particular person, practice or thing at issue, are dependent on the lover in their capacity to grasp its value.<sup>20</sup> They may endorse and promote the value of the object for diverse reasons, but they are not self-sufficient in their valuations. Less technically put, values of love are not (just) intersubjectively recognizable but are personally crucial to us (cf. Williams and Smart 1973, 100ff.; Frankfurt 2004). Our relation to them cannot be that of a non-participating observer nor that of the sympathizing partner (Hua42, 351; cf. Hahn 2009; Drummond 2018, 142), since we operate as their living sources.

Third, and this is most crucial to Husserl's analysis, values of love are not quantifiable and do not allow for comparisons (Hua42, 356–537, 390). Quantifiable values can be compared with one another as greater or smaller, higher or lower, and

<sup>18</sup> This means that hope is the constant companion of love, and hopelessness signals its absence.

<sup>19</sup> For the basic sense of non-objectifying acts, see, Melle 1990; Bernet 1994.

<sup>20</sup> Thus, the lover operates like an explorer who ventures into unknown depths and is able to reveal exceptional wealth.

thus contrasted and weighted against one another. They can also be organized into hierarchical structures on the basis of their relative weights.<sup>21</sup> Unlike quantifiable values, values of love do not allow any calculative considerations, and not even comparative reflections or deliberations (cf. Drummond 2016). We are called to care, further and promote the loved one in all situations and circumstances, without exception, not only on the condition that some other values can be suspended.<sup>22</sup> Love thus orders us unconditionally, absolutely (Hua42, 624–625).

The absolute unconditional character of personal love-values is manifested in the phenomenon of sacrifice discussed above: when such values conflict in our lives, then any final decision for one rather than another is experienced as a tragic sacrifice. In *Grenzprobleme*, Husserl explains:

“In the case of one [type of] values [i.e. objective values], I have the choice; the choice only has to be reasonable, I ought to choose the best among the practical goods. In the case of values that receive their personal sense from the depths of the personality and her personal love, there is not choice and no ‘quantitative’ differences, namely no differences of weight/iness, the overriding and the overridden. A value that springs or stems from [myself], on which I myself decide as who I am, on the basis of an originary loving dedication, is a practical unconditional, an absolute ought, and binds me as the one who I am. To decide against it is to be untrue to oneself, to lose oneself, to sin against oneself, to betray one’s true self, to act against one’s true being ([which is] an absolute practical contradiction)” (Hua42, 356).

This implies that our absolute values of love “outshine” all objective values that we may endorse, enhance or pursue (Hua42, 377, 624). In Ulrich Melle’s terms, they “have an absolute priority over the objective values” (Melle 2007, 13).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Husserl’s disciple and colleague Moritz Geiger presented the case of the loving mother as a counterexample to Husserl’s early Brentanian axiology (theory of value) and praxis (theory of action and will), formulated by the concept of the best possible and a purely formal categorical imperative. In the 1919–1920 manuscripts for the lecture course titled “Introduction to Philosophy” (*Einleitung in die Philosophie*), Husserl adds a self-critical note, writing: “It is obvious that an ethics which is carried out according to the mere categorical imperative like it was, following Brentano, taken as the basis here, is not ethics at all. I have already reverted back to my old lines of thought, although Geiger already made the justified objection to me in 1907 that it would be ridiculous to demand of a mother to deliberate first, if the fostering of her child would be the best [thing to do] within her practical domain” (Hua28, xlvi, cf. 419–422). For more detailed accounts of Geiger’s influence on Husserl, see, Melle 1988, xlvi–xlvi; Sowa and Vongehr 2013, c–cii, civ; Averchi 2015; Drummond 2018, 140–142; cf. Loidolt 2012, 4ff.; Crespo 2015, 722. For the neo-Kantian contexts of Husserl’s early prewar and late postwar ethics, see, Staiti 2017. For Husserl’s reading of Fichte, see Welton 2000, 372–392; Staiti 2017; Drummond 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Husserl also uses his early concept of isolation to characterize this feature of love-values: according to him, all values are isolative but unlike quantitative objective values, values of love are irreversibly isolative (Hua42, 357).

<sup>23</sup> In order to avoid quantitative juxtapositions between love-values and other values, Husserl invokes the metaphors of sunlight when describing the supreme function of love-values: “[W]hile streaming out from the self, pure love, as fully unfolded, outshines [*überstrahlen*] all objective values and lets their weight disappear” (Hua42, 624).

## 4 Endless self-disclosure

The *deeply* egoic structure of love-values makes them also endlessly self-disclosing: each instant of such valuing feeds new ones and thus it goes endlessly. Husserl formulates the idea by saying that values of love have infinite feeling-horizons: “when one opens oneself to them, then one pours ever more richer streams of the valuing feeling from oneself, and enters delight. And the more this happens, the greater depths of the self are activated” (Hua42, 358).

In the section already quoted above, in which Husserl discusses the doubly egoic nature of genuine love – having the source of both feeling and deciding in the self – he continues by describing how such an emotion deepens itself and discloses itself in ever new formations:

“Genuine or true falling in love, to grasp a genuine love, – this (...) means that one decides on or chooses the person on the basis of the depths, that one penetrates into one’s own inner depths, into the emotions that rise from the depths of one’s self, and tries to awaken such emotions in these depths, to find and enfold their immanence” (Hua43/2, 508).

In Husserl analysis, the depths of a person entail the intentional acts habituated in the course of experiential life and the meanings sedimented upon one another on the basis of egoic activities, and so secondary passivity, but also the primary passivity of obscure drives, instincts, desires, and feelings. In the second volume of *Ideas*, Husserl characterizes the latter explicitly by the metaphors of depths and the root soil (*Wurzelboden*) (Hua4, 279/292), and states that we touch here upon facticity which is “beyond our comprehension” (Hua4, 275–276/288; cf. Hua1 106–108/72–73, 117–118/84–85, 156/181–182, 167–168/141).

As such the person is not transparent to herself, but she is able to penetrate through the experiential levels of her life into her own depths. This cannot be accomplished by solitary self-reflections or self-variations but requires that the person exposes herself to new situations and unexpected events and, most importantly, to unfamiliar and alien others. By thus venturing into the world, the person can ultimately also learn to love herself genuinely, not as a possessor of goods, powers or excellences, but as a lover that unconditionally cares for another (Hua42, 469–470).

One further implication deserves attention. Namely, the constant deepening of personal love entails that this emotion cannot be satisfied or fulfilled in the same manner as other emotions and other experiences can. Consider the case of fear first. The approaching thunderstorm satisfies our fearful intending of it as dangerous when its powerful lighting hits the forest near the house and sets trees on fire. In contrast, an encounter with the loved one does not similarly comply to the loving intending; none of the person’s qualities, aspects or excellences meets the intention separately or in conjunction. Rather than being brought to rest, the intending gains strength and intensity. This aspect of loving is captured aptly by Emmanuel Levinas when he states the emotion moves “beyond everything that can complete it” (Levinas [1961] 1988, 22/34). However, the analysis that Husserl gives to the “insatiability” of love is very different from, and even oppositional to, the one that we find in Levinas. For Husserl, it is not that the loved one elicits ever new loving feelings from the subject and thus

enriches and enlarges her emotive commitment. Rather the subject herself is able to extract more feeling from her own core, and endlessly so.

## 5 Transitivity of care

Finally, as we already have seen, genuine love entails the obligation to care for the good of the ones whom we love. This holds equally for persons, human practices and their products, for example, works of art and scientific outcomes (Hua43/2, 508).

However, when we love another person, then our emotion is directed at someone who is a subject of her own axiological activities, independent of our valuations and feelings. In this case our obligation to care for the good of the loved one entails the obligation to care also for her axiological commitments, whatever these may be.

“The mother is under the absolute ought of her motherly love to care for her loved one. But in this intentional direction of care for child(ren) there is the promotion of growth of the child in the direction of its own personal values of development, and even to the direction that makes humans in general and this particular human valuable (i.e. all kinds of capacities and also in the direction of the child’s personal action from personal volitions) (Hua42, 356–357; cf. Hua27, 46).

The point here is not to endorse or idealize motherhood or parental relations but to study the love of the mother as an example of a specific kind of dedication that ties us not just to the wellbeing and flourishing of another person but more specifically also to the emotive valuations that stem from this other person and are foreign to us.

I call this feature of love-values “the transitivity of loving care” since it implies the idea that *in the case of other valuing subjects*, our care for their wellbeing and flourishing entails care for their valuations and emotive experiences. In so far as the valuations and emotions stem from the deepest core of the person, they are absolute for her. Thus, if we love someone in this deep and deeply personal way, then we must care for her and whatever the other happens to love genuinely from her own personal, egoic cores.

Moreover, since persons are for Husserl essentially developing temporal beings, our care for our loved one covers not just her actual emotions but also her future possibilities as a subject of feeling and valuing. Our obligation thus concerns the unfolding of her potentials as a lover and our task is to care for her becoming as an emotional subject in her own right. A child enjoys all music but then decides to devote her life to sports; another child is talented in mathematics but falls in love and establishes a family; a philosopher loses his sight and cannot read or write anymore; another one grows tired with professional battles and abandons her life in academia. In all these cases, our love obliges us to promote our loved one’s capacity to love something – anything – in the way that draws feeling and commitment from her core self.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that we ourselves, as persons, are also unfinished beings in the process of constant becoming. This means that as lovers we have to care for other axiological subjects and their loving commitments while changing and developing ourselves.

This transitivity of loving care adds significantly to the problems of sacrifice. If our loved one is devoted to a person or activity that we ourselves find insignificant or even harmful, and if her devotion is deep and personal in the manner discussed above, then we are, again, faced with the problem of value conflict. On the one hand we must care for our loved one, and this entails the task of fostering her capacities of valuing and loving in a genuine way. On the other hand, some of our other values, and deeply personal ones, may conflict with this task.

The time-worn story of Juliet Capulet and Romeo Montague illuminates this possibility: the parents of the two young lovers cherish their children and love them unconditionally but cannot accept their mutual devotion due to an old family feud and enmity. The axiological conflict experienced by the parents may be alleviated by arguing that in the course of the tragic events the parents come to realize that the values of family honor that they took to be absolute for them were actually only relative and comparative and that they thus deceived themselves all along (cf. [Hua43/2](#), 510). But one may also argue that a true conflict is experienced by the parents between two absolute values, the child's happiness and the family's honor, and one of these is sacrificed for the other. In this case, the reconciliation between the two families at the end of the story would mark a radical reevaluation and remorse (cf. [Hua42](#), 198–199), rather than an overcoming of self-deception.

Ultimately, Husserl seems to claim that our personal values of love oblige us to promote and enhance the love-valuings of *all others* who have similar deeply egoic and absolutely obliging values, be these others our near ones or foreign to our lives and lifeworlds. We read:

“Of course, the fulfilment of my personal absolute ought is an originary lived experience only for me and as such preferential. But the law of love reigns here. As soon as I have the other given as the subject of her personal ought in empathy (...) I ‘have to’ sympathize with her, love her; and to encourage or promote her is my absolute ought” (Ms. F I 24, 38a, b, cited in Loidolt 2012, 25, cf. 13–14; cf. [Hua42](#), 337).<sup>24</sup>

Husserl argues here that the empathetic apprehension of the other as a *subject of her own genuine love* is enough to oblige me to care for her as such, that is, as a loving subject with her own objects, goals and projects which are not mine and may radically differ from my own. In so far as I love something from my own egoic depths and can empathetically understand that others love in a similar manner, I am obliged to love them all, independently of possible differences in the contents of our emotions. We must ask how this follows, by what kind of reasoning. Let me end by providing a stepwise interpretation:

Husserl explicitly says that the care for the loved one's love follows from a certain kind of empathy, an empathetic apperception of the other as a subject of genuine

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the negative imperative formulated in *Grenzprobleme*: “It is an absolute obligation for each one, so a general [law], a law of the ought, that each one's absolute obligation belongs in the realm or circuit of my absolute obligation, in the circuit of my absolute ethical responsibilities and values. Therefore, I must not hamper anyone's engagement nor distract them from their duties, without sinning against myself” ([Hua42](#), 390). Husserl calls “community of love” (*Liebesgemeinschaft*) the type of intersubjective unity that is established in relations of love.

emotion and the absolute ought that emerges from her love: as if I were her and her deepest values and obligations were mine (Hua42, 337, 470; cf. Heinämaa 2019). What is thus needed is that I empathize with the other, not just as any kind of subject (sensing, moving, experiencing, believing, feeling and willing), but as a subject motivated by love-values similar in their nature and origin to the one that I experience in relation to her. Her values may be different from mine in their content, but they are equally fundamental to her life, that is, their structural position and their motivational role in the other's life is similar to the position and role that my own love-values have in my life. They are equally profound and central, they stem from sources or cores equally deep and awaken and activate feelings equally endless. If I care for the other person, and care for her in the unconditional sense dictated by genuine love, then I must also care for the thriving and flourishing of her valuations.

It seems to me that three perspectives on human intersubjectivity open up from this discussion of the structural features of love-values. First, as I argued above, our genuine love for a particular person binds us to whatever this person truly loves. We may not be able to love what our loved one loves but we are obliged, by our own deeply personal emotion, to care for the other's capacity of valuing in a similar manner. I have called this "the transitivity of care" involved in genuine love.

Second, in so far as we genuinely love some entity or being that entails infinite horizons – be it a science, an art, a god, the world or life itself – we are bound to all other valuing subjects who share our love and who on the basis of their own loving have devoted their lives to the promotion and enhancement of the commonly valued being. This type of binding depends, in Husserl's analysis, on our finitude as human persons. We are not just mortal but are also finite in our powers and limited in our achievements (e.g. Hua42, 317–318; cf. Hua17, 176). Thus, we can truly regard and serve a value that bears infinite horizons only if we operate jointly in mutual communication with other human beings who share the same value. This does not include just contemporaries but also past and future fellow subjects. Thus, in order to truly cherish a value in its infinity and to promote the goals determined by it, we need to relate to whole chains of generations in their open-ended continuity and branching (e.g. Hua42, 327; cf. Heinämaa 2013).

How far can we proceed with such considerations? Personal love, be it directed at human beings or human activities and accomplishments, does not cover the whole of human intersubjectivity, and not even the major part of it. Our personal love is able to single out only few individuals, and in any case a minimal number of human beings. On the other hand, most of the people that we encounter in our lives do not share our deepest vocations and vocational values but serve very different ones. In terms of love, most human beings seem either emotively indifferent to us or just comparatively valuable.

A third consideration, however, becomes possible if we pay attention, not to the contents of the shared values but to the similarities in our manners of valuing. Most human beings, if not all, relate to something – a person, an activity or a thing – in the same deeply emotive manner in which we relate to our own loved ones. Some people serve the sciences, while others are devoted to music. Some dedicate their lives to a religion, while others decide for war reportage or environmental causes. Someone sacrifices her professional aspirations for the care of a child, while the other sacrifices the care for her family for the promotion of a profession or some political end. The



structural sameness of the emotions may not be enough to make us love all such axiological subjects but it motivates us to esteem or respect them as our equals (cf. Drummond 2006).

Husserl, however, puts forward the more demanding idea, as we saw above: we are not just bound to respect the others as deeply emotive subjects in their own right but also bound to love them as such. In light of the above explications, it seems to me that this idea depends on Husserl's late analysis of the person as an endless and original source of value production. All genuinely loving others, whatever the content of their love may be, realize in their own particular valuations what is most significant and exquisite in our personal love for persons: the infinity of axiological formation and production (Hua43/2, 511; cf. Hua42, 307, 316, 324–325, 336–337, 424). In so far as we become conscious of the specificity of our manner of loving valuing, its modality, and intend it as such, we are bound to value similarly any other who exhibits the same manner. We are concretely bound to such others by chains of love that link our own emotions to the emotions of our loved ones, and from there further to the emotions of their loved ones, and so on, endlessly.

## 6 Concluding remark

I want to end with a remark about Husserl's relationship to the philosophical tradition. The concept of love as Husserl uses it cannot be equated with any traditional (philosophical) concepts. Rather than revising or developing further one of such concepts or a selection of them, Husserl's conceptualization of love draws from several sources, utilizing certain aspects of the traditional concepts that are crucial for his own analysis, but at the same time neglecting other aspects.

From Plato's discussion of Eros and desire in the *Symposium* and *Alcibiades I*, Husserl retains the idea of the insatiability of genuine love and the heightening or elevatory function of love in our lives.<sup>25</sup> Husserlian love is insatiable in the sense that each fulfilment of this emotion, rather than settling or levelling down the feeling, allows us to draw new instances of feeling from our egoic sources. Like all other emotions – and experiences in general – love involves an intention that can be fulfilled by the evident givenness of its object, but in addition to this general structure of intending-fulfilment, love also involves a simultaneous intensification in which the intention is reformed on the basis of newly released axiological forces.

From Aristotelian *philia* we get the great variance of the emotion<sup>26</sup> as well as the notion that the emotion motivates us to care for others for their own sake, out of the

<sup>25</sup> Both Plato's *Symposium* and his *Alcibiades I* depict the path to self-knowledge as proceeding via erotic love (Plato 1997a, b; cf. Rider 2010, 404–405; Gordon 2003).

<sup>26</sup> In *Nicomachean Ethics* (books VIII–IX), Aristotle's examples of *philia* include relations between individual and collective subjects of different practical and social kinds: “young lovers (1156b2), lifelong friends (1156b12), cities with one another (1157a26), political or business contacts (1158a28), parents and children (1158b20), fellow-voyagers and fellow-soldiers (1159b28), members of the same religious society (1160a19), or of the same tribe (1161b14), a cobbler and the person who buys from him (1163b3)” (Hughes 2001, 168; cf. Aristotle 1934).

concern for their personal good or flourishing.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Aristotelian *philia* offers the model for mutual or symmetrical relations between persons. But Husserl's concept of love does not require such reciprocal relating. It covers also one-sided and unrequited ways of loving.

From Christian *agape* we receive the idea of a universal love for all. Unlike numerous predecessors and contemporaries, Husserl does not conceptualize this universalism as being dependent on something over and above individual persons, be it God or the Form of reason or that of will. I do not love all humans as equal instances of the concept of self-reflective reason or that of autonomous will but love them as living nodes in a network of empathetic relations that bind similarly loving subjects into one another in endlessly enlarging circles.

Despite such parallels, Husserl's concept of genuine love differs from all these traditional concepts. Rather than singling out one of them or synthesizing some of them, his concept of love cuts, so to speak, across them all. The reason for this is that Husserl does not define genuine love by identifying a proper object, goal or result of the emotion. Instead, he defines his concept by describing a specific *manner of feeling and deciding* which is possible for finite beings who carry infinities at their cores. He provides us with a modal concept that distinguishes a particular way in which the lover relates to the loved one and correlatively to her own self.

Thus, any traditional type of love can be genuine in Husserl's sense. And each case of love – be it erotic, romantic, filial, parental or universally human – is genuine for him in so far, and only in so far, as it draws from the depths of the loving ego and unconditionally cares for the loved one, cherishing her axiological capacities and emotive depths and advancing her possibilities of becoming.

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<sup>27</sup> In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines *philia* as the activity of “wanting for someone what one thinks good, for his sake and not for one's own, and being inclined, so far as one can, to do such things for him” (Aristotle 1934, 1380b36–1381a2).

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