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The Experience of Love and the Limitations of Psychological Explanation

Brent D. Slife

BYU Studies has a long history of publishing the annual lecture given by the recipient of the Karl G. Maeser Distinguished Faculty Lecturer Award, BYU's highest faculty honor. It is with great pleasure that BYU Studies Quarterly publishes this year's lecture by Dr. Brent D. Slife, a clinical psychologist and professor of psychology. His speech was delivered as a forum address on May 16, 2017, at Brigham Young University.

It may not surprise you, but I want to declare at the outset that I have been multiply blessed. I want to *initially* mention an important blessing—this university—and then I would like to *dwell* on a forty-one-year blessing—my marriage. Those who have received this award in past years have stood here to express their gratitude to BYU, but I feel especially blessed in receiving this award as a non-Mormon. This university has insisted on valuing me regardless of my religious minority status. I am a religious “other,” yet this university has not only accepted me as a colleague and a friend but also persisted in recognizing me and celebrating my work. I think this is a sort of minor miracle. As you will see in the case of my wife, I honestly believe that when we truly value and even love those who are “other” in some way, God is there.¹

1. I have fond memories of chanting a variation of this phrase and meaning in an Episcopal rite song: “Where true charity and love dwell, God himself is there.” Joyce M. Glover, trans., “Since the Love of Christ Has Joined Us in One

I also want to acknowledge how important this university has been to my academic work. I have long desired to actively interface the sacred and the secular—the sacredness of my faith and the secularity of my discipline of psychology—but there are few places that permit this work. BYU, however, has not only welcomed this type of scholarship but also encouraged and facilitated it. For this reason, I have never had to compartmentalize my Christianity away from my discipline; I have been able to integrate the two—which has been an incredible blessing to me!

As I mentioned, however, the blessing I want to dwell on today is the love I feel for my wife. But discussing such a personal experience may seem a bit strange for a psychologist. Psychologists are supposed to deal with objective data.² Unfortunately, love isn't objective, so psychology's knowledge of love has been meager over the years. Consider renowned love researcher Harry Harlow and his lament in his presidential address to the American Psychological Association: "So far as love or affection is concerned, psychologists have failed in this mission. The little we know about love does not transcend simple observation, and the little we write about it has been written better by poets and novelists."³ This conclusion was stated many years ago, but it is not unusual for even modern investigators of love to echo Harlow's lament. Zick Rubin, for example, believes that some progress has been made, but he comments that love has "seemed safely beyond the research scientist's ever-extending grasp."⁴

I won't get into psychological methods here. Suffice it to say that a relatively new brand of psychological method—qualitative investigation—was specifically set up to study subjective experiences. And qualitative investigators are not afraid of even just one person's experiences, especially when those personal experiences teach us something about the phenomenon of interest.

As a marital therapist of thirty-five years, I have long realized the great blessing of my love for Karen. I know that everyone is supposed to

Body," *The Hymnal 1982: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1985), no. 606.

2. See Brent D. Slife and Richard N. Williams, *What's Behind the Research? Discovering Hidden Assumptions in the Behavioral Sciences* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995).

3. Harry F. Harlow, "The Nature of Love," *American Psychologist* 13 (December 1958): 673; quoted in Zick Rubin, "Preface," in *The Psychology of Love*, ed. Robert J. Sternberg and Michael L. Barnes (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), vii.

4. Rubin, "Preface," vii.

love their spouse, but I don't just love my wife; I am still *in love* with her. I love the way she stands, the way she walks, and the way she talks, even after all these years. And it turns out that I am not the only one who feels this form of love. Qualitative research indicates that there are many whom I will typify with my personal experiences today.⁵ Indeed, I don't doubt that many of you will see yourselves in my description.

My purpose today is not to romanticize this love. Instead, my desire is to understand it, at least to some degree. As I interface the sacred and the secular, I am struck by how little my experience of this love is explainable in conventional psychological terms, or, indeed, in *any* secular terms. And I am not merely intellectually curious about this issue. As a marital therapist, an understanding of love would help me to address the problem marriages I hope to heal. Why is my marriage thriving while other marriages are dying?

My presentation today will first attempt to describe why I believe several aspects of psychological explanation make little sense of what I experience in my love for Karen. The presentation will then turn to philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, who seems to think outside the explanatory box on this particular topic.⁶ As I will describe, Marion agrees with me that the ideas underlying our current ways of thinking about love don't inform us about what it is. Indeed, he is clear that these current ideas serve instead to drain away any meaning that could resemble what most of us experience as love.

Love of Karen

Allow me to begin with some background information on Karen and me. Like people in a lot of marriages, we could not be more different. Karen is one of those sweet and generally enthusiastic people. She's the kind of person whose only question in writing personal notes is how many exclamation points to put at the end of a sentence. She's also a

5. See Elaine Hatfield, Jane Traupmann Pillemer, Mary Utne O'Brien, and Yen-Chi L. Le, "The Endurance of Love: Passionate and Companionate Love in Newlywed and Long-Term Marriages," *Interpersona* 2, no. 1 (2008): 35–64.

6. See Jean-Luc Marion, "'Christian Philosophy': Hermeneutic or Heuristic?" in *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*, ed. Francis J. Ambrosio (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999); Jean-Luc Marion, *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); and Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

uniquely loving person; she's very other-centered—very aware of the needs of those around her. As for me, I believe that I can safely say that I am more I-centered—more egoistic. I am certainly not sweet and certainly not naturally loving. I could cite witnesses from my family of origin as evidence, but suffice it to say that there is no evidence that I could love someone over the long haul.

Yet my experience is precisely the opposite. My love for Karen has lasted more than forty years and has endured amazing changes in our identities, bodies, and situations. And, as I mentioned, this love is not some abstract “I care about her”; it is the beguiled and captivated kind of love that many seem to lose after the honeymoon period of marriage. I am still excited at her touch and her presence. I thrill in holding her hand, sitting beside her, or kissing her. And if you are a student in one of my classes, you have to put up with me talking about her—because I like to so much!

For example, I constantly experience how cute she is. I don't quite know what I mean when I say “cute” here, but I know that she feels entirely special and dear to me—like a one-of-a-kind person whose attractiveness never flags. This is not to say that my experience of her cuteness is always good for our relationship. When she's angry at me, I think she's cute, which gets me into trouble. When she's sad, I think she's cute, which gets me into trouble. When she's hurt, all I want to do is apologize, even if I have no clue how I have hurt her, which can *also* get me into trouble. You would think that a psychotherapist would have a little more emotional intelligence, wouldn't you? But it's out the window with Karen. When my students ask how I might diagnose her, I reply without skipping a beat: “Severely cute.”

And this is my first problem with conventional explanations: How can my love last so long, across so many changes, and with me as an egoistic lover? Psychology's theories can explain me when I am egoistic but not when I am truly loving her. Egoism assumes that we are all ultimately watching out for “number one.” Our motives and goals are fundamentally those that benefit us in some way or another. True to this egoism, all the conventional theories of psychology fall into line: psychoanalysts talk about the ego benefiting from pleasure, behaviorists tell us how we are ultimately motivated by rewards, and humanists discuss *self*-actualization rather than *other*-actualization.⁷

7. See Joseph F. Rychlak, *Introduction to Personality and Psychotherapy Theory: A Theory-Construction Approach*, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1981).

Even the social interactions that many economists discuss are egoistic.⁸ From their perspective, we would be irrational without some type of self-benefit motivating our interactions. This is part of the reason so many psychologists assume that mutual self-benefit, a kind of business transaction, is the best we can do in marriage, where I won't scratch your back until I am reasonably sure you will scratch mine. These mutual self-benefit relationships are certainly what the vast majority of social scientists expect, and I clearly see these types of "calculator" marriages in my practice, where spouses are angry because they have given six units of love today and their spouse has provided only four.

The difficulty with this egoistic understanding of relationships is that I experience none of it in my love for Karen—over four decades of time! My experience just doesn't seem like the kind of thing most psychologists would predict. I experience my behavior with her as almost completely *unselfish*. And perhaps most astounding to me, I experience my unselfishness toward her as *easy*—even easier than being selfish. I don't want you to think that I am knighting myself here; my egoistic sense of myself is still intact, except for those I love. My point here is that conventional explanations do not predict or even render as plausible my loving behaviors.

A second problem for conventional explanations concerns the "others" of our lives, those who are unlike us for whatever reason—a different race, gender, religion, or political persuasion. Psychologists have an international conference called Psychology and the Other that is devoted to this problem because otherness is viewed as disruptive to relationships. My students seem to feel this problem, because they fear otherness when they are looking for dates and eventual marital partners. They look, instead, for a match—a set of similarities—as the dating website Match.com exemplifies. Our culture and my discipline tend to view similarities—not differences—among people as the fundamental bonding agent of relationships. Even communities and organizations are typically thought to be unified through common beliefs and values, with differences in beliefs and values frequently viewed as threats to the community.⁹

8. See Edwin E. Gantt, "Books Briefly Noted," *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* (in press); see also Brent D. Slife, "Taking Practice Seriously: Toward a Relational Ontology," *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 24, no. 2 (2004): 157–78.

9. See Brent D. Slife, "Theoretical Challenges to Therapy Practice and Research: The Constraint of Naturalism," in *Bergin and Garfield's Handbook of*

But again, this emphasis on similarities is not my experience in my relationship with Karen. As many marital partners will tell you, they cannot imagine someone more different from them than their spouse. And when I hear my friends or clients describe this otherness, it almost always points to problems in their relationships. Yet nothing could be further from the truth in my experience with Karen. Indeed, her extreme otherness from me feels like the spice of our marriage, the really good stuff. She and I can experience the same hike or discussion and come away with dramatically differing perceptions, yet I experience these differences with her as delightful. How is my delight possible, given the so-called problem of otherness and our culture's emphasis on similarity?

None of this is to say that Karen and I don't fight, argue, or generally conflict. How could you really be "other" than someone and not conflict? It is to say, instead, that our love disallows the conflict from being threatening. Unlike most secular understandings of relationships, I experience my love for her not *in spite of* her otherness, but *because* of it. Conflict, in this sense, feels more like a kind of intimacy. It's hard to be angry with someone you don't care about. In conflict, I have the privilege of getting to know the person *through* the interaction. Imagine how our world would be if we stopped seeing differences as obstacles to relationships, but rather saw them as the healthy tension that can promote character, deepen intimacy, and kindle friendship.

These few snippets of my experience with Karen say nothing about other facets of psychological explanations, such as their abstractness, their amorality, and their determinism. I don't have time today, but I believe I could demonstrate how each of these facets of explanation *also* hinders efforts to understand love. And, honestly, I don't experience laypersons faring much better in attempting to explain their love. My clients will routinely challenge their spouses to tell them why they love them. Yet the most articulate and educated of spouses inevitably sense the inadequacy of their answers. This is surely the reason so many of us resort to poetry or ballads; the usual cultural explanations of our loving relationships appear to be just as empty as psychological explanations.

As I mentioned at the outset, I believe that the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion comes to our rescue.¹⁰ And, as it happens, Marion agrees with me about the unexplainability of love. He demonstrates

Psychotherapy and Behavior Change, ed. Michael J. Lambert, 5th ed. (New York: Wiley, 2004), 44–83.

10. See Marion, "Christian Philosophy"; Marion, *Cartesian Questions*; Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*; and Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*.

that this unexplainability is not just the phenomenon of love but also the *inadequacy* of our cultural and philosophical frameworks for comprehending love. Specifically, he believes that we are using the wrong ideas to understand our relationships with other people.

Descartes on Self

These wrong ideas, Marion argues, were popularized by the great philosopher René Descartes. We cannot overestimate the influence of this philosopher on our basic understandings of our relationships with others. Most everyone has probably heard Descartes's famous proposition "I think, therefore I am,"¹¹ in which he equated the thinking-I, the rational self, with our identity. Marion sees this proposition as a symptom of a framework for the self that messes up our understanding of love, that indeed makes it unexplainable.

A pivotal part of this Cartesian framework is that the thinking-I, the self, exists separately from other people. After all, I don't need other people in order to think, so my basic identity has little to do with other people or even the world around me. I am who I am *without* you and the world. And when I do perceive the world, it is a mere perception or representation of that world; it is not the world itself. When I lovingly perceive Karen, I am not experiencing the real person; I am experiencing my representation of her. And there is all sorts of evidence that our mental representations don't always correspond to the person whom our image is supposed to represent. The sweet and loving person I am describing to you right now may not be the authentic Karen at all but merely my mental image of her, which I control to some degree.¹² These representations are called many things in psychology—mental sets, scripts, stereotypes, or schemas—but they all function in the spirit of this Cartesian sense of the self.

An important implication of this Cartesian view of the self, according to Marion, is that we are all in a world of our own representations. It makes sense from this perspective that we would all be egoistic, because everything in our world is basically *us*—the things we control and the things we want. My representation of Karen is itself egoistic because it has more to do with me than with Karen.¹³ It is how I *want* to think of her rather than how she *really* is. Descartes's rationality, in this sense,

11. René Descartes, *A Discourse on Method* (1637), part IV.

12. With Descartes, love is reduced to a representation of an object for which one feels passion. See Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 131–32.

13. The cognitive ego makes an alter ego impossible. See Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 131–32.

functions solely for my benefit.¹⁴ We are, in effect, naturally selfish, because any self in Descartes's scheme would maximize the benefits of its representations, which, as I mentioned, is the assumption of many economists.

This selfishness means, of course, that I am not really capable of acting in Karen's best interest, especially if her best interest conflicts with my own. I am more likely to use Karen and treat her as a means to my own ends, which is consonant with much of positive psychology, where others exist primarily to make us happy.¹⁵ Many marriage researchers see this selfish mode as the primary cause of our high divorce rate:¹⁶ we see marriage as a means to our individual happiness, not as an end in itself. The bottom line for Marion here is that Descartes's understanding of the self makes truly gracious love impossible—not just unexplainable—because truly loving someone means treating them *as* an end, not as a means, and our Cartesian selfishness always makes the self the end. The best we can do in Descartes's framework is to use each other for mutual benefit.

But if all humans are doomed to our own represented world, according to Descartes, how do we function in the real world? Many clinical psychologists might answer this question with one word: *poorly*. Consider how many of us go through the day experiencing all kinds of misunderstandings with other people. This is because the parts of the real world that don't fit our represented world rarely change our representations. Because *I* control my representation of Karen, her actual self in the real world can't disrupt my little represented world.¹⁷ Her otherness in the real world won't necessarily alter my stereotype of her. In fact, Descartes predicts that I will make her otherness into the enemy. I will focus on how she is similar to my stereotype of her. This is the reason people want their spouses to be similar to them. Similarities best fit our represented world.

14. The ego for Descartes loves only the self. Even charity is interpreted as self-affection. See Marion, *Cartesian Questions*, 112.

15. See Blaine J. Fowers, "Instrumentalism and Psychology: Beyond Using and Being Used," *Theory and Psychology* 20 (February 2010): 102–24.

16. See Blaine J. Fowers, *Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness: How Embracing the Virtues of Loyalty, Generosity, Justice, and Courage Can Strengthen Your Relationship* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

17. "The Cartesian *intuitus* . . . controls its objects and imposes order on them." Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 227.

In Marion's view, by contrast, "I am not in control." Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 221.

Now, to give Descartes credit, his understanding of self and others makes sense of a lot of my experiences, and this is surely why this understanding is so prevalent in psychology. Still, the question I am raising today is, why doesn't Descartes's understanding make sense of my experiences of love? As I have described, I experience none of these implications of his understanding of the self. I am not the selfish dolt that Descartes would predict. I also experience a lot of otherness with Karen, but I experience it not as an enemy of my self and my control. Indeed, I willingly give up my control, allowing for the disruption of my represented world, because of my delight in her otherness. I guess I could be deceiving myself about my unselfishness and my delight, but this deception doesn't account for my other more egoistic relationships, which I apparently see quite clearly. It also doesn't account for those who experience this same type of love—perhaps many of you. What is it, then, about this gracious love that leads us to be so different in these loving interactions?

Marion on Love

Although Marion agrees with Descartes on many things, he presents a markedly different understanding of the self. Perhaps first is Marion's contention that not everything we experience is representable,¹⁸ with love being one of those things.¹⁹ Gracious love is what he considers a "saturated" experience.²⁰ Saturation occurs when an experience touches us so deeply that we can't explain or even fathom it. Have you ever witnessed such a stunning sunset that you can't find the words to describe it? Gracious love is similar. It is saturated so much that our experience of it is more than we can grasp or contain in a representation.²¹

18. By "experience" here, I do not mean my own "consciousness," because this is still what I am calling here a representation and thus a reduction to an "object," which for Marion eliminates any possibility of love. "Love as a figure of consciousness always ends up in self-idolatry." Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 231. By experience of a truly other (Karen), I mean that I must allow her own intentionality, her own agency, and her own "counter-current of consciousness." Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 82.

19. Marion's *Prolegomena to Charity* (specifically chapter 4) was written in homage to Emmanuel Lévinas (see also Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969]).

20. "I discover myself lovable by the grace of the other." Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 213.

21. "The instability of [loving] phenomena thus never comes from a poverty of intuition, but instead from the opposite: from my incapacity to assign to it a precise signification that is individualized and stable." Marion, *Erotic*

Here Marion hits the nail on the head for me. My experience of Karen's love is so luminous and so glorious that it feels unearthly. This is the reason we become tongue-tied when trying to explain or justify our love for another. It is the reason we recite poetry or croon love songs.

But why *is* love so difficult to grasp? Gracious love is gracious for Marion because it is never deserved or rational in the conventional sense;²² it is a pure gift without strings attached, logical justifications, or ulterior motives. Again, this feels right to me in my relationship with Karen. I naturally sense that I don't deserve her love.²³ Unlike the Cartesian approach, in which everyone *must* deserve the love they receive from the benefits they provide, love from Marion's perspective cannot be controlled through reciprocal benefit and is *never* truly deserved or justified. Love literally defies conventional logic. Indeed, it is so illogical that Marion believes we are incapable of giving such a pure gift without getting one ourselves—God's gift of Jesus Christ.²⁴ Only a truly grateful heart, a heart that has already experienced the Purest of Gifts, can truly love someone in this manner.²⁵

As the philosopher Paul Woodruff describes so well, the only proper response to that which is above or beyond us is reverence.²⁶ When I come face-to-face with a saturated experience—the wonder of a baby's birth, the illumination of a spiritual insight—the only realistic response is a profound honoring of and appreciation for it. This is the reason for my use of the term “blessed” when describing my marriage; our love feels sacred to me, like one of my main duties in life is to reverently protect and nurture it. Miroslav Volf puts it this way: “We enjoy things

Phenomenon, 96. “The beloved therefore emerges not as [a Cartesian] object, but as a . . . saturated phenomenon.” Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 234.

22. “Love lacks neither reason nor logic; quite simply, it does not admit reason or logic other than its own.” Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 217.

23. See Kyle Hubbard, “The Unity of Eros and Agape: On Jean-Luc Marion's *Erotic Phenomenon*,” *Essays in Philosophy* 12 (January 2011): 130–46.

24. “All human love originates in this divine source.” Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 241.

25. Marion argues, for example, that “charity discovers and introduces new phenomena into the world itself and the conceptual universe, which are saturated with meaning and glory, which ordain and eventually save the world.” Marion, “Christian Philosophy,” 261. Only in his more recent work on the erotic phenomenon (Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*) does he attempt to rid himself of the theological contamination, which Gschwandtner ultimately disputes. See Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 233.

26. See Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

the most when we experience them as sacraments—as carriers of the presence of another.”²⁷

Gracious love, then, is so “other”—so above and beyond—that it doesn’t fit our stereotype or representation of the world.²⁸ It throws us; it knocks us off our egoistic thrones as controllers of our own little universe.²⁹ This is the reason we feel so vulnerable when we love. Our egoistic world is put in jeopardy. There is someone *else* in our world, some “other” who matters to me besides me. Karen’s differences from me, then, are not *outside* of my love, as if they are foreign or threatening. They are *within* and an essential part of my love, even when they exceed my understanding. This excess could, in fact, be the secret of our love’s duration across the span of our marriage. Our love is never familiar or predictable, so it can never be staid or boring. Indeed, it fills me with a kind of everyday reverence that I strive to honor and appreciate.

We are also no longer separate selves in the Cartesian sense. My relationship with Karen, because of this saturated experience of love, is part of my very identity. This relationship helps to constitute who I am. I have a kind of shared being with her—perhaps even “one flesh,” as the scriptures teach us (for example, Gen. 2:24). You all know about the old couple who finish each other’s sentences. Marion puts it this way: “I am [only] insofar as I love and [am loved].”³⁰ How, then, can I be selfish or use her to my own ends when she is part of me?³¹ And Marion doesn’t believe that she merely enters my world; my love for her serves as a bridge to the real world, where I don’t always get what I want. I’m not the king or the ultimate controller in the real world. In this sense, Marion doesn’t just believe that love is required for good relationships; he believes that gracious love is required to be *in touch with reality*.

In fact, it is only when we are in touch with this loving reality that we can truly develop as selves. We were reminded of the need for gracious love in 1989 when severely neglected orphans were discovered in

27. Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015), 204.

28. As Gschwandtner, in *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 237, notes, “The Cartesian ego here loses control not just over other objects but even over itself.”

29. To become a self in this manner is to become a me that is “uncovered, stripped bare, decentered.” Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, 84.

30. Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, 195.

31. Similar to Lévinas (see *Totality and Infinity*), love goes beyond the universality and abstractness of deontological ethics, and it issues an ethical call for the particular other. Only love, in fact, can concretize and individualize the face of the other.

Romania.³² Infants simply cannot thrive without gracious love.³³ I say *gracious* love specifically because infants never do anything to deserve the love of their caretakers; infants just *are*, in all their otherness from us. There is no reciprocity with infants, no business transaction; we love them because of who they are. With infants, an experience with a gracious caregiver is a *saturated* experience, one that breaks through their mental representations and invites them into the real world. Marion's understanding of love, for this reason, explains why gracious love is central not only to our mental health but also to our initial and continuing growth as people.

American poet Christian Wiman seems to capture some of the spirit of Marion's account and my own experience of Karen when he writes about falling in love with his own wife:

Not only was that gray veil between me and the world ripped aside, colors aching back into things, but all the particulars of the world suddenly seemed in excess of themselves, and thus more truly themselves. We, too, were part of this enlargement: it was as if our love demanded some expression beyond the blissful intensity our two lives made. I thought for years that any love had to be limiting, that it was a zero-sum game: what you gave with one part of yourself had to be taken from another. In fact, the great paradox of love, and not just romantic love, is that a closer focus may go hand in hand with a broadened scope.³⁴

Conclusion

So what, in conclusion, are the practical implications of Marion's understanding of love for our everyday lives? What lessons can we draw? I ask you to consider ten such lessons.

1. Love is to some degree ungraspable, so don't get upset when your spouse's description of his or her love is inadequate.
2. Love isn't deserved; it's a gift. We don't deserve true gifts; otherwise it's not a gift at all—it's a business transaction. We don't ask

32. See Mary Battiata, "Despite Aid, Romanian Children Face Bleak Lives," *Washington Post*, January 7, 1991, A1, A20.

33. See Michelle DeKlyen and Mark T. Greenberg, "Attachment and Psychopathology in Childhood," in *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, ed. Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver, 2d ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 637–65.

34. Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 67.

true givers to justify their gifts. We accept them humbly, enjoy them, respond with gratefulness, and then give gifts to others who don't deserve them, like us.

3. Avoid "calculator relationships," in which we keep track of units of love given to one another. If we're keeping track of them, they aren't units of love at all.
4. You don't love someone so they can be happy. Love isn't the means to something else; it's the end. The quality of your relationship is the main thing, not the emotional satisfaction of the individuals in the relationships.
5. Love is widely recognized as crucial to mental health, but psychologists typically interpret it as an instrument of individual happiness rather than a crucial pathway out of our egoistic world.
6. Unlike egoistic theories of the social sciences, we are completely capable of unselfishness, whether it is love of a country or love of a person. And, perhaps surprisingly, true unselfishness isn't necessarily experienced as sacrificial, because the other who is loved is literally part of us.
7. Otherness is not the enemy or disrupter of relationships. Loving someone who is different can make us vulnerable, but this vulnerability is part of us giving up control and getting in touch with the real world.
8. When otherness is not the enemy, marital conflicts are less threatening and more productive.
9. The otherness of gracious love is pivotal to our initial and continuing development as persons.
10. Otherness ultimately becomes the spice of our relationships; loving similarities solely is akin to loving a mirror image of ourselves, which is just another kind of selfishness.

These, I believe, are some of the lessons of Marion. I hope they bless your lives as they have mine.

Brent D. Slife is a clinical psychologist who is Professor of Psychology at Brigham Young University. He is the Richard L. Evans Chair of Religious Understanding, and the editor in chief of the *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* as well as the editor of the Routledge book series *Advances in Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*. He has been honored with

several awards for his scholarship and teaching, including the Presidential Citation from the American Psychological Association for his contribution to psychology, the Eliza R. Snow Award for research on the interface of science and religion, the Karl G. Maeser Award for Research, the Circle of Honor Award from the Student Honor Association, and both Teacher of the Year by the FHSS College and Most Outstanding Professor by the psychology student honorary, Psi Chi.

Dr. Slife serves on the editorial board of eight journals and has authored or coauthored over 220 articles and ten books. His most recent books, both published this year, are titled, *Frailty, Suffering, and Vice: Flourishing in the Face of Human Limitations* (APA Books) and *Hidden Worldviews in the Theory, Research, and Practice of Psychology* (Routledge Publications).

Dr. Slife also continues his psychotherapy practice of over thirty-five years, where he specializes in marital and family therapies. His “hobbies” are his bluegrass banjo and his seven grandchildren, who range in age from seven months to seven years. His favorite activity with his grandchildren is building things, where he specializes in Lego construction. He worships at CenterPoint Church, the largest Protestant church in Utah Valley, where he is the president of its board of directors.