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SELF LOVE AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Self love is an inescapable problem for ethics, yet much of contemporary ethics is reluctant to offer any normative moral anthropologies. Instead, secular ethics and contemporary culture promote a norm of self-realization which is subjective and uncritical. Christian ethics also fails to provide easy or direct resources to address this problem, because it tends to investigate self love with respect to conflicts between the self's interests and those of her neighbors. *Self Love and Christian Ethics* explicates and defends right self love by casting it as a problem of proper self-relation that intersects with love for God and love for neighbor. This book argues that right self love entails a true self-understanding that is embodied in the person's concrete acts and relations. In making this argument, it calls ethics to revisit ontological accounts of the self and to devote more attention to particular moral acts.

DARLENE FOZARD WEAVER is Assistant Professor of Theology at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Villanova University. She has written for *The Journal of Religious Ethics* and *Religious Studies Review*.

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Christian ethics has increasingly assumed a central place within academic theology. At the same time the growing power and ambiguity of modern science and the rising dissatisfaction within the social sciences about claims to value-neutrality have prompted renewed interest in ethics within the secular academic world. There is, therefore, a need for studies in Christian ethics which, as well as being concerned with the relevance of Christian ethics to the present-day secular debate, are well informed about parallel discussions in recent philosophy, science or social science. *New Studies in Christian Ethics* aims to provide books that do this at the highest intellectual level and demonstrate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to this debate – either in moral substance or in terms of underlying moral justifications.

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
 Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Baskerville Monotype 11/12.5 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Weaver, Darlene Fozard
 Self love and Christian ethics / Darlene Fozard Weaver.
 p. cm. (New studies in Christian ethics)
 Includes bibliographical references and index.
 ISBN 0 521 81781 1 (hbk) ISBN 0 521 52097 5 (pbk)
 1. Christian ethics. 2. Self-esteem – Religious aspects – Christianity.
 3. Love – Religious aspects – Christianity. I. Title. II. Series.

BJ1278.s44 2002
 241 – dc21 2002023791

ISBN 0 521 81781 1 hardback
 ISBN 0 521 52097 5 paperback

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John Clayton Fozard
1930–1980

how is one to put off/encounter except by puzzling the terms of
encounter/past inquiry

“Evasive Actions,” A. R. Ammons

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General editor's preface

This book is the twenty-third in the series *New Studies in Christian Ethics*. It shows extensive points of contact and critical dialogue with other books in the series. Darlene Weaver uses the influential framework provided by Susan Parsons in her *Feminism and Christian Ethics* for analyzing differing accounts of feminist ethics. She also has significant points in common with Jean Porter's *Moral Action and Christian Ethics* and with Lisa Cahill's *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics*. However it is Stanley Rudman's *Concepts of Persons and Christian Ethics* and William Schweiker's *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* that provide her with the most sustained dialogue partners.

Both Darlene Weaver and Stanley Rudman argue that many recent philosophical understandings of selfhood are too limited. Indeed, Weaver suggests that they 'truncate the self.' Both authors are convinced that a notion of self-in-relation-to-God offers a much richer account of selfhood and personhood than any secular understanding. For Weaver it is the belief that 'the person is created to love God' that is fundamental to this richer account. In the process of arguing this, both authors have kept carefully to the two key aims of the series as a whole – namely to promote monographs in Christian ethics which engage centrally with the present secular moral debate at the highest possible intellectual level and, secondly, to encourage contributors to demonstrate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to this debate.

The original feature of this particular book is that it explores and defends the notion of 'self love.' Properly understood, Darlene Weaver maintains, self love is 'reflexive, embodied, and interpretive.' This sophisticated understanding – quite different from shallow modern notions of 'self-realization' or 'autonomy' – owes much

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General editor's preface

to William Schweiker. Like him she attempts to show that a rich theological vein running through Augustine and Aquinas is still able to challenge modern assumptions. Both authors are also aware of the social dimensions of their respective understandings of 'responsibility' and 'self love.' In addition, there is an extended, albeit critical, debt to the theological writings of Karl Rahner and Paul Tillich running through the later chapters of Weaver's book.

Clearly any serious defense of self love today needs to engage in a considerable amount of intellectual clarification. The notion is vulnerable to attacks from philosophers and social scientists as well as from theologians. It can all too easily be misunderstood. Yet this book challenges the reader to make careful distinctions and to think more clearly about what love entails in a perplexing world. An extended defense of self love is welcome and overdue.

ROBIN GILL

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Acknowledgments

This book is, most directly, the fruit of instruction, guidance, and support I received at Yale Divinity School and the University of Chicago Divinity School. Less directly, it is the fruit of a range of significant experiences and relationships from my childhood to the present. It is a joy (sometimes bittersweet) and an honor (ever that) for me to see traces of these environments, lessons, events, and persons on these pages.

Gene Outka introduced me to Christian ethical debates about love. In doing so he gave me the gift of a set of questions with which and conversation partners with whom I think about things that matter most to me. Margaret Farley introduced me to the theology of Karl Rahner and taught me a great deal about contemporary Roman Catholic moral theology. Both encouraged me with their patience, confidence, and kindness. At the University of Chicago Divinity School I received instruction and support from faculty, administrators, and fellow students. I thank especially my dissertation committee, Kathryn Tanner, David Tracy, and William Schweiker. I hope these revisions do more justice to what they taught me. The then-called Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion provided financial support, and my fellow Institute members as well as my dissertation group offered comments on early versions of my argument. Don Browning, Anne Carr, Franklin Gamwell, and Rick Rosengarten extended their expertise and kindness to me. I owe special thanks to William Schweiker. I benefited enormously from his erudition, his commitment to students, and his gratuitous confidence in and support for me. He showed me that Christian ethics can be a vocation. It is one he carries out with brilliance, energy, wit, and integrity. It is a privilege to learn from and work with him.

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I began revising the dissertation while working at the Theology Department of Georgetown University. My colleagues there encouraged me during this process. Theresa Sanders read and commented on an early version of the prospectus. Vince Miller offered his wit and counsel on a variety of matters. Tod Linafelt held my hand during the submission process; I will regard this as altruistic even though a wager on the book's publication gave him a monetary incentive. Diane M. Yeager provided comments on some of the material when I shared it with her in another form. I have learned, though not well enough, from her editorial acumen and from her character. I had the privilege of learning from my Georgetown students as well. In particular, I enjoyed many conversations with my research assistant Elizabeth Sweeny about the material treated in Chapter Five. She shares with me one of the best blessings of academic life, a teacher–student relationship that blossoms into a friendship.

I continued to work on the book once I joined the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Villanova University. It is a privilege to work with my colleagues here as well as with my students. They have welcomed me and supported my work in and outside the classroom. I look forward to many years as one of their number.

In and through these institutional settings, a number of conversation partners and friends afforded me stimulating exchanges, diversions, and support. In particular, I thank Pia Altieri, Reverend Mark Begly, Louis Faassen, and Heidi Gehman. They are friends, teachers, and blessings. I owe a special debt of thanks to Charles Mathewes and to William Werpehowski. Chuck Mathewes has seen this project evolve from its earliest stages as a dissertation proposal to its present form. I thank him for his critical feedback, assistance with the publishing process, wit and, above all, friendship. Bill Werpehowski read and commented on the manuscript in its entirety. His feedback has been most helpful.

I also owe a special debt to two anonymous reviewers for their comments and to Robin Gill and Kevin Taylor for their commitment to the project as I struggled to transform the manuscript from a dissertation into a book. I may have been less successful at this than they (and I) had hoped.

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I could not have written this book without the help of my family. In particular, my sister Rachel Fozard and my brother-in-law Peter Kepperling (and soon my god-child, who is on the way!) share with me the many goods of family life and friendship. Their affection and humor, generosity and sacrifice delight and humble me. The same is true of my mother, Mary Ann Fozard, and exponentially so. When she first saw my dissertation, she said, “These are your words.” It is clearer to me now that that they are ours. My mother models the good of embodied integrity, and the words I use here to describe it reflect the words and the Word by which she lives with strength, fidelity, grit, and beauty. It is an honor to offer this book as a testament to the life she lives and as a thanks to the life she gives me. My husband, Sean Weaver, gives me countless gifts, including the material support that enabled me to pursue graduate work, an astonishing readiness to subordinate his professional life to mine, the preparation of the index, as well as his forbearance, encouragement, and friendship. I thank him for the life we make together.

I dedicate this book to my father because it is undeniably an expression (however convoluted and over-intellectualized) of a life lived in the wake of his death. His legacy to me seems, more often than not, a series of misplaced attempts to understand and to compensate for the loss of him. Granted, his absence makes for a kind of presence, but in this presence, he remains absent. I hope to learn to recognize and welcome him in this life, and I pray that I may rejoice with him in the next.