

INTEGRALISM AND BENEVOLENT LOVE AS VIRTUE:

DIRECTIONS FOR FAMILY STUDIES

Vincent Jeffries

California State University, Northridge

Pitirim A. Sorokin first proposed integralism as a theoretical and research perspective in the social sciences.¹ Its most salient and unique feature is the incorporation of religious ideas of truth and the nature of reality within the frame of reference of these sciences. Truth is derived from three sources: the senses, reason, and faith. In integralism these three sources of truth are combined into a harmonious ontological and epistemological system, with the revealed truth of faith being foundational.² Consistent with this focus, providing knowledge and understanding of how the ethical principles of the major world religions can be more fully realized in individuals lives and in society is a major goal of integral social science.³

Integralism is the system of truth of St. Thomas Aquinas and of Scholastic philosophy.⁴ In a Catholic tradition of integralism, the foundational sources of the truth of faith are the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition as they are interpreted by the Magisterium of the Church.⁵ Important sources within this foundation are the Papal Encyclicals and the writings of the Doctors of the Church, particularly St. Thomas Aquinas.⁶

In developing a tradition of integralism ideas derived from

religious faith can be incorporated within existing frames of reference in the social sciences at every level of the scientific continuum, from the empirical to the metaphysical.⁷ This integration of ideas and existing knowledge into a harmonious system includes general theories, theories of the middle range directed toward specific areas and problems, and empirical research within both these contexts.

One of the necessary projects in establishing integralism as a viable scientific tradition is to examine how this faith based perspective can be incorporated in the various social sciences and specialty areas within each of them. As an example of this project, this article focuses on the area of family studies, and presents a theoretical and research agenda which embodies and expresses the integral perspective.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY STUDIES

Catholic social teaching strongly emphasizes the importance of marriage and family.⁸ John Paul II notes that the family is the most basic and vital unit of society.⁹ It provides the first and most fundamental experience of giving and of authentic social relationships. In this sense the family is "the place of origin and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society: it makes an original contribution in depth to building up the world, by making possible a life that is properly speaking human, in particular by guarding and transmitting virtues and

'values'."¹⁰ Because of this importance, the family has certain "rights" which must be protected and supported by society.¹¹

Social science theory and research have also considered the significance of the family in social organization. The family is regarded as the most fundamental of groups. It has more general influence over conduct throughout the life cycle than any other group because family experiences influence how individuals behave in every other social context. This influence of the family upon individuals persists despite its more limited place in the general social structure with the rise of modernized industrial societies.¹² What happens in the family also affects the characteristics of the general society and culture. Zimmerman has maintained that because of the profound influence of the family in socialization, one can approach closest to a notion of first cause in the understanding of broader social and cultural patterns through the analysis of the family.¹³

Because of the great importance of the family, assessments which indicate a decline of its positive effects are of particular significance. Glenn notes that many family scholars who contributed commentaries on the state of the family expressed concern about recent changes in the family.¹⁴ In a similar fashion, Popenoe maintains that family decline is indicated by evidence in three broad areas: demographic, institutional, and cultural.¹⁵ Two dimensions of this decline "make it both unique and alarming."¹⁶ First, it is the basic unit

of the nuclear family rather than the extended family that is breaking up. Second, despite the fact that the family is the institution best suited to carry out the functions of childrearing and providing affection and companionship, it appears to have become increasingly inadequate in these areas in the last thirty years. In his historical analysis of the Greek, Roman, and Western family systems, Zimmerman maintains that when the family breaks down in this manner, it fails to provide socialization experiences which instill the basic morality necessary for social harmony and integration in the larger societal system.¹⁷

Attitudinal data supports these historical and comparatively based assessments of family problems. Glenn has noted that cohort data indicate a decline in marital quality from the 1970's to the 1990's.¹⁸ Likewise, Rogers and Amato found that a comparison of samples representing two generations shows a significant decline in several dimensions of marital quality.¹⁹ Correspondingly, Thornton has noted major shifts in values and norms pertaining to marriage, divorce, and childrearing which indicate a weakening of normative restraints and a corresponding expansion of individual freedom.²⁰

The marital relationship is of great importance to the rearing of children and the effective functioning of the nuclear and extended family system.²¹ From this perspective, Bumpas notes that the current high rate of marital disruption is of primary

importance among characteristics of the contemporary family.²² This is because its effects have a profound impact on family norms and on fundamental aspects of family life.

INTEGRALISM AND FAMILY STUDIES

Because of the fundamental importance of the family, developing a theory of family structure and process which can contribute to the revitalization of marriage and family life constitutes a basic challenge to scholars in the social sciences. Turner and Turner have noted the existence of three traditions in sociology which provide standards relative to this challenge: a scientific tradition emphasizing research and theoretical development, a practical tradition emphasizing the application of scientific knowledge in the effort to solve specific problems, and a reform tradition emphasizing the identification of social problems and dialogue with the general public regarding their nature and possible ameliorative actions.²³

The theoretical perspective of integralism provides a basis for developing a perspective which incorporates these three traditions. It can thus serve as a basis for revitalizing theoretical development and empirical research on marriage and family. Central to this task is an accurate formulation of the nature of love. From an integral perspective this concept of love should have faith based content and justification. It should also incorporate major aspects of marital and family interaction,

thus serving as a basis for theoretical development and empirical research.

BENEVOLENT LOVE AND FAMILY STUDIES

John Paul II notes that the most fundamental call from God to human beings is the call to love: "God inscribed in the humanity of man and women the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being".²⁴ This vocation of love is realized either through marriage or through virginity or celibacy.²⁵

The nature of the love which is "the truly firm foundation of the family" is described by John Paul II.²⁶ This "true love" is demanding. Its components are identified by St. Paul as qualities such as kindness, patience, and endurance. It excludes such negative factors as jealousy, arrogance, or rudeness, and disciplines emotional impulses which are opposed to love. These demands of love are present in all situations. It is because of these qualities of true love that it "creates the good of persons and of communities; it creates that good and gives it to others."²⁷

In classical philosophical and theological terms, love of this nature is traditionally called benevolent love. More recently, it has been termed altruistic love.²⁸ This love of benevolence entails the wish to do good to the other. This

attitude is expressed in behavior intended to benefit the other in some manner.²⁹ The essence of this love is thus commitment to the welfare of the other.

Benevolent love can be described with the traditional concept of virtue.³⁰ The components of this love can be derived from the formulation of the virtues by St. Thomas Aquinas.³¹ Each of five "primary" virtues includes various "secondary" virtues which manifest the essence of the primary virtue in a more particular manner.³²

The virtues represent an enumeration of different ways in which benevolent love can be expressed. The fundamental characteristic of doing good to the other is entailed in each of the virtues in a particular manner. As expressed in marriage and family life, they are as follows: (1) Temperance is discipline and moderation, especially regarding desires for pleasure. This virtue subjects the appetites and emotions to reason directed toward the good of marriage and family relationships. Secondary parts of temperance are sobriety, moderation in the use of intoxicants; chastity, control of sexual desires; meekness, the moderation and direction of anger; humility, the readiness to be aware of the limitations and failings of the self and the positive qualities of the other. (2) Fortitude is the willingness to undergo difficulties, hardships, and danger for the good of the spouse or family members. Secondary parts of fortitude are the virtues of patience and of perseverance. (3) Justice is the

fulfillment of fundamental obligations and responsibilities to the spouse and other family members. A further manifestation of this general orientation is respect for the basic rights of these others as separate individuals. Justice mandates commitment to the marital relationship and to family relationships.³³

Friendliness, gratitude, and truthfulness are secondary parts of justice. (4) Charity is doing good to the spouse and other family members. Helping, attention to the needs of the other, forgiving, tolerating faults, and correction are all expressions of charity. (5) Prudence entails the use of reason to ascertain and seek what is good. The other virtues provide the criteria of what is good.

In marriage and family life prudence is manifested through careful consideration of the best means to achieve worthwhile ends for the spouse and family members and to manifest love toward them. Solicitude, alertness regarding the welfare of family members, and docility, the willingness to listen to their views, are secondary virtues of prudence.

Each of the virtues plays a particular role in doing good to the spouse and other family members. The contribution of each is necessary for the complete expression of benevolent love.³⁴

Temperance provides the moderation and discipline which limits behavior disruptive to love, while also furthering consistency over time in the practice of love. Fortitude contributes to resolve in the face of the difficulties, hardships and dangers which are inevitably part of family life, whatever their nature

may be. Justice promotes the fulfilling of family obligations and gives sensitivity and commitment to the individuality and basic human rights of each family member. Charity moves beyond justice to a free giving of love to family members without concern for its return. Finally, prudence provides for the application of reason both to determine the good and to discern the most effective means of reaching that good in the practice of love of family members.

THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Adequate concepts are a necessary condition for progress in the scientific study of marriage and family. Blumer notes that it is concepts that provide for the development of systematic knowledge in science.³⁵ Because concepts are shared within a scientific community they provide for concerted activity in the search for knowledge and understanding. New concepts can advance science in three ways: by providing a different perspective which focuses attention on a hitherto neglected aspect of reality; by directing activity to achieve greater comprehension and control; by serving as a basis for the discovery and investigation of new problems. Benevolent love as virtue is a concept which can provide these benefits to research and theory in marriage and family studies.

Benevolent love is viewed as a multidimensional cluster of attitudes and potential behaviors composed of differing virtues. When conceptualized in this manner it provides a powerful

analytical tool for the analysis of marriage and family. It does so because it includes major aspects of marital and familial interaction: discipline, steadfastness, fairness, caring, rationality. Each virtue designates a particular manner of relating to other family members. Each can vary from low to high in its occurrence. Marriage and family life involve countless instances in which each family member may choose to exercise virtue, or may fail to do so, in varying degree. In other instances virtue may be either manifest or absent more due to habit than to deliberate choice. Some instances may be of minor importance, while others may have profound effect.

In a process of interaction over time benevolent love in its five primary components can vary from low to high. It can also vary in the configuration of the virtues. Such variation may be expected to produce important variations in both family processes and family structure. This is because the virtues are directly relevant to such major familial tasks as marriage maintenance, raising children, and relations with family members outside the nuclear family. From another perspective, this is so because the range and configuration of the virtues are directly relevant to a considerable portion of the interaction and construction of reality which takes place in marital and family life.³⁶

Turner observes that scientific approaches to the family can vary.³⁷ One variation is to study the family either as a group or as an institution. The family is studied as a group from a closed

system approach, in which the internal processes and structure of the family are the focus of investigation. In an alternative approach, the family is studied as an institution in terms of the relationship between the family and the external society and culture. Here the structural relations and dynamic interplay of the family and other institutions is the focus. How the tasks that are essential to the functioning of a society and to the benefit of its members are accomplished is investigated. A second variation in scientific approaches is that either a process or static analysis can be employed in both the group and the institutional modes of analysis. A process approach emphasizes the sequence of events, a static approach the coexistence of different conditions.

From an integral perspective the investigation of the causes and effects of benevolent love is the primary theoretical and research problem. This problem can be studied in the context of the aforementioned variations in approaches to the study of marriage and family.

Marriage And Family As A Group

Studying marriage and family as a group from a closed system perspective provides for the focus on three basic problems: (1) the problem of the major dimensions of love, and how benevolent love relates to them; (2) the relation of the dimensions of love to relationship quality and stability; (3) how

love relates to relationship conflict and effective conflict management.

Dimensions of love. Love can be conceptualized as a duality. One dimension is that of benevolent love, characterized by giving of self to the other for his or her benefit. The other dimension of love is characterized by a positive attitude toward the other based on the what one receives from them. This aspect of love can be termed attractive love.³⁸ This distinction between the dimensions of love is evident throughout the history of ideas about the nature of love. It can be found in philosophical conceptions of the nature of love, in contemporary theoretical formulations, and in empirical studies of the components of love.³⁹

Research studies show that these two dimensions of love are positively correlated. In adult male-female relationships measures of components of benevolent love such as care and commitment are strongly associated with measures of attractive love such as viability and intimacy.⁴⁰ Likewise, studies indicate a high correlation between virtue and attraction in the adolescent-parent relationship.⁴¹ Though these dimensions of love are highly correlated, they can vary independently. Some marriages are maintained solely because of the rewards each spouse gains from the marriage, while others are held together only by the commitment of each spouse to do good to the other.

In calling attention to the failure of love in contemporary

society, Fromm observes that "there is hardly any activity, any enterprise, which is started with such tremendous hopes and expectations, and yet, fails so regularly as love."⁴² In developing a theoretical and research agenda to revitalize the study of marriage and family an important question is whether attractive love can be maintained without at least some degree of virtuous love. In studying this problem a static approach would examine the relation between variations in these types of love at different points of time in marital and family relationships. A process approach would focus on how events and sequences of interaction over time influence the relative importance and rate of change in these dimensions of love and their interplay.

Quality and stability. A second important area of exploration is the relationship between love and the quality and stability of marital and family relationships. Quality is the subjective evaluation of the positive or negative character of a relationship, stability is whether a relationship is terminated outside of the natural death of one of the parties.⁴³ These concepts can be applied to all family relationships. In a recent review of research Hendrick and Hendrick conclude that both passionate love and friendship love are the most important predictors of quality in adult relationships.⁴⁴ They also conclude that agape probably contributes to these aspects of love while also sometimes being an independent predictor. In a study of the parent-adolescent relationship Jeffries found that both

giving and the perception of receiving virtuous love were positively related to relationship quality.⁴⁵ Two other studies of the parent-adolescent relationship showed that both virtue and attraction were strongly related to quality. Attraction was more important in the explained variance in quality, but virtue had an independent effect.⁴⁶ Building on these research findings, a theoretical analysis of the marital relationship by Jeffries suggests that virtuous love is most important in the stability of the marital relationship, while attractive love is most important in influencing quality.⁴⁷

A more adequate understanding of the quality and stability of relationships is basic to the revitalization of marriage and the family. The integral perspective focuses upon benevolent love as virtue as the central concept in understanding these aspects of relationships. When benevolent love and other dimensions of love are adequately conceptualized and measured, it is likely love would emerge as the most significant predictor of quality and stability. A static analysis would focus on the relationship between the dimensions of love and quality and stability at points in time. A process model would examine why changes in the manifestation of the dimensions of love take place and if and how such changes influence quality and stability.

Conflict. The importance of understanding family conflict has received increasing attention in recent years.⁴⁸ The integral perspective focuses attention upon the influence of benevolent

love upon conflict, particularly upon conflict management. Gottman maintains that the most important finding of his years of research on marriages is that marital stability results from spouses ability to resolve their inevitable conflicts.⁴⁹ A recent paper by Jeffries relates the virtues to effective conflict management in marriage.⁵⁰ The contribution of each virtue to conflict management is considered in relation to findings in the research literature and Turner's theory of crecive bonding.⁵¹ Crescive bonds emerge because of a process of long term interaction which makes each spouse irreplaceable to the other. Such bonds are regarded as contributing to marital stability by locking spouses into a continuing relationship. Temperance is regarded as producing a crecive bond of security, fortitude of certitude of sacrifice, justice of fairness, charity of being loved, and prudence of ability to resolve conflicts. A static model would focus on the relation between the components of benevolent love and attractive love and various aspects of conflict such as its incidence, severity, management, and effects, at particular points in time. A process model would focus on whether and how changes in benevolent love and in attractive love influence changes in the aforementioned aspects of conflict.

Marriage and Family as an Institution

Two broad theoretical and research problems can be derived from

an institutional approach focusing on the relations between family and society and culture. The first is the influence of the prevailing culture and society upon the degree to which the family system effectively socializes its members into the practice of benevolent love. The second is the influence of the practice of benevolent love in the family system upon the practice of this love in the larger social and cultural system. In both of these instances the integral perspective focuses attention upon theoretical development and research pertaining to the causes and effects of benevolent love. In each problem a static model focuses attention on how the characteristics of the family interact with other institutions and with the prevailing social organization and culture at a given point in time to influence the level of benevolent love. A process model focuses upon the relationship between subsystem and general social and cultural change and changes in the level of benevolent love.

Influence of culture and society. The influence of culture and society upon the level of benevolent love in families constitutes an extremely broad and diverse area of theoretical development and empirical research. A major focus is upon the characteristics of the prevailing culture. John Paul II has noted the cultural emphasis placed on individualism and ethical utilitarianism in contemporary culture.⁵² This value and normative complex is centered on the attainment of happiness in terms of pleasure and immediate gratification for the individual.

It stresses freedom without responsibility. Such an individualism is egocentric and selfish, and thus is opposed to love. When this viewpoint becomes prevalent in society, it "quickly allies itself with varied forms of human weakness" and "proves a systematic and permanent threat to the family."⁵³

In a similar vein, Zimmerman maintains that the domestic family system, characterized by strong bonds between its members, begins to decline solely because of causes which are external to the family system itself.⁵⁴ Chief among these are cultural ideas of individualism, freedom, and private rights which erode support for familism as a system of values. From another perspective, Sorokin maintains that the sensate conception of liberty, which consists of an expansion of sensory values and the means of satisfying them, eventually leads to conflict.⁵⁵ A continual expansion of "wants" and "rights" leads to a constant struggle with others for the available sensate values. This conception of liberty contributes to a contractual view of marriage, in which the grounds for dissolution expand to the option of either spouse. The weakening contractual ties binding husband and wife are conducive to further weakening of the bonds between parents and children and nuclear family and relatives.⁵⁶ In a general theory which has applicability to family relations Sorokin maintains that cultures which stress egocentric values and competition will have more numerous and intense interpersonal and intergroup antagonisms than will cultures stressing alternative

values.⁵⁷ In a similar vein, Bellah and his associates have described how varieties of individualism which are not linked to the idea of responsibility for the social whole contribute to the loosening of bonds and the creation of a culture of separation.⁵⁸ Within the family these individualisms have weakened obligation and commitment to marriage.⁵⁹

The aforementioned observations and findings indicate the importance of further research pertaining to the degree to which the prevailing culture and society are contradictory to the essence of benevolent love, which is the free giving for the good of the other. A second important theoretical and research question is how families can be insulated from the anti-love influences in the prevailing culture. In this regard Zimmerman and Cervantes have described how networks of friend families provide this insulation from negative external pressures.⁶⁰

A particular focus within the problem area of external influences on marriage and the family is the connection between religious and family institutions. The relationship between family and religion has been a focus of recent research and theory.⁶¹ On the basis of historical data Zimmerman maintains that while religion has never succeeded without a familistic doctrine, familism has never succeeded without the acceptance of basic religious values which link notions of faith to relations within marriage and family.⁶² An integral perspective points toward a focus on the degree and manner of influence of religious

values, doctrine, and participation upon the practice of benevolent love in marriages and families. Integralism also directs attention to whether and how love within families is related to the maintenance of religious observance and adherence to religious moral codes and doctrine.

Influence of the family. From an integral perspective the major function of the family is the effective socialization of benevolent love. The level of love in marriage and the family system has direct implications for the larger systems of society and culture. John Paul II maintains that the family is the source of love in the general society: "Through the family passes the primary current of the civilization of love, which finds therein its 'social foundations'."⁶³ The practice of love to each other which is the duty of spouses is regarded as the foundation of love in the wider society.⁶⁴

Considerable evidence indicates that the family is the most suitable institution for socialization into the practice of benevolent love.⁶⁵ Zimmerman's historical study of the family in Western Civilization analyzes the causal influence of the family in this regard.⁶⁶ Zimmerman maintains loyalty, self-sacrifice, and respect for other human beings are the essence of familism.⁶⁷ Such orientations can be likened to the virtues of benevolent love. When this love is not practiced in the family by the parents toward each other and their children, increasing numbers of individuals do not learn it. As a result, the moral fabric of

society is weakened and various social problems develop which reflect the fact that people are no longer willing to do things simply because they are "right". In this sense the welfare of civilization is dependent upon love.

Two theoretical and research problems emerge from these considerations: (1) The conditions influencing the degree and extent to which the family system influences the development of benevolent love in the larger societal and cultural systems; (2) The identification of the specific social mechanisms through which such love is transmitted from family interaction to other social systems. Cooley's theory of sympathetic introspection in primary groups and the development of cultural values such as loyalty, truth, service, and kindness provides a starting point for the scientific investigation of both of these problems.⁶⁸

PRACTICAL AND REFORM ASPECTS OF THE INTEGRAL PERSPECTIVE

The integral perspective provides a basis for furthering the relevance of the social sciences to social practice. It also provides a basis for overcoming the relative isolation of the social sciences from general public discussions of social problems or social reform. The concept of benevolent love as virtue is central to both these tasks.

The practical tradition. Turner and Turner note the persistence of a tradition of practical expertise, illustrated by the involvement of sociology in the development of social work and other areas such as penology, organizations, and marriage and

family counseling.⁶⁹ The focus on benevolent love in the integral model provides the potential for research and theoretical development which could be directly relevant to areas such as marriage and family counseling and pastoral direction.

Gottman and his associates maintain that a theory which explains both functional and dysfunctional relationships is likely to be most productive in the understanding of marital quality and stability and in developing effective approaches to marital therapy.⁷⁰ If research shows that benevolent love as virtue is as fundamental to marital and family interaction as maintained in this article, this concept of love should be a viable foundation for such a theory.

An analysis of the virtues can be combined with diverse theoretical perspectives, such as symbolic interactionist, conflict, and exchange theories.⁷¹ This gives it great versatility in the practice of therapy. The idea of benevolent love is one that many people are familiar with in some form. This idea is central to all major world religions.⁷² It is also basic to religious ideas of the perfection of human nature.⁷³ It thus provides a set of familiar ideas which can readily be incorporated in practical direction in various forms of marital and family intervention, ranging from premarital pastoral direction to therapy. Instructing couples or family members in the virtues as part of such programs can have added import because the idea of benevolent love links the content of

intervention to religious teachings and ideas of spiritual perfection.

The reform tradition. The ultimate aim of integral social science is providing the knowledge and understanding necessary for the effective reconstruction of persons, society, and culture toward greater benevolent love.⁷⁴ Integralism thus includes the reform tradition noted by Turner and Turner, in which social criticism and proposals for amelioration are the logical outgrowth of scientific knowledge and understanding.⁷⁵

Social science does not have the resources, organization, or direction to bring about reconstruction on a major scale.

However, a perspective on how such reconstruction can begin is provided by the following quote from Sorokin:

From the integralist standpoint, the present antagonism between science, religion, philosophy, ethics, and art is unnecessary, not to mention disastrous. In the light of an adequate theory of true reality and value, they all are one and all serve one purpose: the unfolding of the Absolute in the relative empirical world, to the greater nobility of Man and to the greater glory of God. As such they should and can cooperate in the fulfillment of this greatest task.⁷⁶

Integralism provides a basis for the cooperation of religion and the social sciences in personal, social, and cultural reconstruction. By focusing on benevolent love as virtue, the integral perspective establishes a common consensus between

social science and the world religions. Concentrated scientific effort will increase knowledge and understanding of the causes and effects of benevolent love. The major world religions can benefit from this knowledge and understanding and disseminate it through their numerous and powerful communication networks. Thus science and religion can cooperate in creating a civilization which encourages to the fullest the manifestation of benevolent love.

CONCLUSION

A comprehensive concept of the nature of benevolent love as virtue is the foundation of the integral approach to family studies. Temperance focuses on the control of desires and appetites, fortitude on the overcoming of fear and sadness, justice on attentiveness to the basic rights of others, charity on the free giving to the other irrespective of merit, and prudence on the commitment to the good as defined by the other virtues and the use of reason to ascertain the best means to realize them. This concept of benevolent love potentially links the knowledge and understanding which social science can provide to a view of love embedded in religious thinking and tradition pertaining to the nature of the good and to spiritual perfection.⁷⁷

This multi-dimensional concept of benevolent love applies to all love relationships. It thus unites the study of marital love

with the study of parent-offspring love and love between other family members such as siblings or extended family members. It can also be applied to love that is manifested outside of the family. It thus provides a basis for micro and macro levels of analysis within the context of both static and process models.

This comprehensive focus on love would link the study of the structure and dynamics of the family directly to more general concerns such as societal patterns of interaction and institutional and cultural characteristics. Thus analysis of the family would assume a central place in general theoretical analysis. Such a broad approach to the study of love would refocus, expand, and revitalize the scientific study of marriage and family.

NOTES

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