

LOVING “NONPERFECTLY” TO LOVE PERFECTLY: THE MORAL ENERGY THAT ARISES FROM PARADOX

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From the strain of binding opposites comes harmony—Heraclitus¹

The two-fold commandment, defined as a principle² in this paper, that Christians love God and one another is foundational to the Christian faith. The announcement of this principle is immediately followed in the gospel of Matthew by what I define to be a methodological admonition to be perfect in the accomplishment of this principle and, by implication, all others. The successful application of this principle is demanded by Jesus Christ, affirmed by his disciples, and practiced by all those who affirm the discipline of the Christian. Unfortunately, the perfectionist methodology is now routinely ignored by most Christians. Those Christians assume that perfection is impossible. Therefore, a conundrum becomes clear for those individuals: the principle is affirmed while the methodology is ignored. To resolve or affirm this conundrum, one needs first to assess the principle and then to explore the methodology. This paper assumes that principles, such as this one, establish the basis for productive moral response. From this strong Principlist assumption³, the purpose of this paper—activating perfect love—will be developed with four linked propositions: first, the accomplishment of moral change is potentiated with an increase in moral tension; second, the greater the increase in moral tension, the greater the activation of sufficient energy to facilitate moral change; third, paradox optimizes the tension required for moral change; and fourth, moral tension activates potential moral energy that is available for use to power moral change. By understanding a principlist design and methodological technique of Jesus and later Christians, one can assess a significant source of power for moral change available to the Christian even if that power is rejected by most as incomprehensible. An even more difficult task may also be at hand: can those who strive to formulate a coherent understanding of love and perfection—you and me—act according to its demand to love perfectly? Is there something we should change? And finally, if we loved perfectly inverse to our rationality, non-rationally, would we love perfectly?

Change requires movement from a present position. However, the most rational action is usually to remain where one is or to resolve tension to return to stasis. In most civilizations, moral stability is expected and societal transformation often requires revolutionary proportions to energize dramatic social change. For movement to occur, energy must be infused into the stasis of the present. Therefore, the shift to change from a present position, physically or morally, requires energy, defined in this paper as moral energy in moral situations, to accomplish moral change. For generations, classic social stasis has framed an assumption of inherent stability in most peaceful societies. However, the most recent generations of young adults in western society, coined as GenX and GenY, have experienced a reversal of this assumption. These generations now experience inherent social change. Numerous authors have documented the persistent turmoil of these generations.⁴ One GenX author in particular, Tom Beaudoin, has noted not only the instability of the social structure of these generations, he has explored the ambiguity of the social structure for all existing generations.⁵ From the perspective of an older generation, Alasdair MacIntyre has attributed the incompatible positions that exist in society to the inheritance of fragmented moral theories from past

¹ Heraclitus, *Fragments: The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, translated by Brooks Haxton, forward by James Hillman (New York: Viking, 2001), 31.

² A discussion on Principles and Cases in the New Testament is found in David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 63-66.

³ Edwin R. DuBose et al, eds., *A Matter of Principles: Ferment in U.S. Bioethics* (Valley Forge Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1994), 1f.

⁴ George Barna, *Generation NEXT: What you need to know about Today's Youth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), 66. Jimmy Long, *generating hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 42-43.

⁵ Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*, foreword by Harvey Cox (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 121-144.

social contexts.⁶ The predominance of social ambiguity demands an exploration of this social phenomenon. The most radical form of ambiguity can be defined as paradoxical. This examination of the most extreme form of ambiguity will help to allow the present social situation to become a productive element in the moral lives of all generations.

A paradox is a crucial tool for many moral teachers. Paradoxical situations and their less volatile counterparts, ambiguity and moral dilemmas, destabilize the stasis of the present,⁷ a technique that many moral teachers have utilized throughout the centuries. Jesus of Nazareth was a master Rabbi and an exquisite moral teacher.⁸ His use of ambiguity, dilemma, and paradox to destabilize the moral setting is documented often in the gospels. In his teaching named the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus destabilizes his listeners by exploring the present understanding of a moral precept—"You have heard"⁹—and then reverses the expectation—"But I say"¹⁰—with formulaic rhythm. The climax to this catechetical section is a new understanding of the object of love, a demand for love of one's enemy. The moral structure defines the paradox of the claim, "You have heard that it was said (moral authority), 'You shall love (moral imperative) your neighbor (moral object) and hate (inverted moral imperative) your enemy (inverted moral object).'" 44But I say to you (inverted moral authority), 'Love (moral imperative) your enemies (moral object) and pray (moral imperative) for those who persecute you (moral object).'" The paradoxical nature of the moral injunction now becomes clear: the inverted moral authority demands that the initial inverted moral object—the enemy defined as those who persecute you—becomes the moral object. The immediate result of such a demand would have yielded a pathway of products that would be designed by Jesus to destabilize the present and result in moral change in the life of the listener.

The use of paradox by Jesus within this most important principle demands an evaluation of this technique for moral development. A proposal defining products of destabilizing moral techniques allows for an understanding of a pathway culminating in moral change. The first product of destabilizing the present is moral tension. Moral tension is defined as the emotional tension that results from the possibility of being unable to remain in moral stasis. One's present situation has been threatened with change and the result, if considered, is an elevation of moral tension, a sense that can be defined by a variety of emotions: anxiety, guilt, apprehension and other synonymous psychological expressions. Moral change will be initiated, and possibly accomplished, if sufficient moral tension is available for the change to begin. Therefore, increasing moral tension increases the likelihood of moral change. This understanding informs our first principle, coined as moral potentiation: the accomplishment of moral change is potentiated with an increase in moral tension. The principle defines what Jesus was initiating with his audience in Matthew 5. Jesus expected to change his listeners; however, he had to initiate an energy transformation. He had to elevate the available energy so that his listeners could move from their present position to a new way of living. Sociologist Max Weber, striving to understand bureaucracy and its external power, helps us to understand this form of energy transformation with his description of the revolutionary nature of charisma. Charisma "manifests its revolutionary power from within, from the central *metanoia* [change] of the followers' attitudes."¹¹ Charisma is disruptive to the stasis of tradition by infusing new ideas into the present. Ideas offered by the *charismata* are laden with the potential energy to accomplish their reality. The available energy can be sensed in any text with the emotions that are described: fear, awe, reverence, and love. The potential for moral change has been initiated; however, the change can be for the benefit or the detriment of the originator of the moral tension. For Jesus, the elevation in moral tension would eventually lead to a penalty—his death—for social instability for all, a return to social stasis for most, and transformation via the vehicle of love for a few.

⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 2.

⁷ Watts Wacker, *The Visioner's Handbook: Nine Paradoxes that will Shape the Future of your Business* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001),.

⁸ Affirmed by Nicodemus (John 3:2)

⁹ "Ἠκούατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη," Matt 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43. Verse 31 alters the formula by using the phrase "Ἐρρέθη δέ," "It was also said." All quotations will be from the Revised Standard Version unless noted otherwise.

¹⁰ "Ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν," Matt 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44.

¹¹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 2, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1116-7.

The commandment by Jesus to love your enemies needed to migrate into the next generation for it to maintain its moral power. Without affirmation by disciples, the commandment would be lost. The Apostle John gives us an example of how the principle was utilized in the next generations. In I John 2 (RSV), the Apostle documents the love commandment for the next generation: “7Beloved, I (moral agent) am writing to you (moral object) no new commandment (ancient moral injunction), but an old commandment which you had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 8Yet I (moral agent inverting direction) am writing you (moral object) a new commandment (new moral imperative), which is true in him and in you.” Once the passage is dissected, the old commandment and the new commandment are the same: we should love one another.¹² John does not activate the magnitude of moral tension with the demand to love one’s enemy as Jesus had done; however, he uses paradoxical phrasing by offering the command as both old and new, a temporal paradox. His technique is obvious, the paradoxical construction of the passage will elicit moral initiation; however, if my hypothesis is correct, he is unlikely to experience the moral response of Jesus’ initial command. Yet by comparing the two restatements of the love command, John helps us to develop a second principle, moral activation: the greater the increase in moral tension, the greater the activation of sufficient energy to facilitate moral change. John’s objective—loving those within one’s proximity—seems narrower than Jesus’. His phrasing is not as dramatic; therefore, one can assume that his audience’s moral response will be positive, yet less dramatic. Jesus’ technique—loving one’s enemy—seems designed to elicit a significantly higher level of moral tension. It can then be argued that he will elicit a higher moral response.

Future generations of Christians often defaulted to restating the principle of love without any ambiguity—let alone paradox¹³—in the presentation. Although this study would benefit from the ongoing presentations of paradoxical presentations of love, other usage of paradoxical statements by leaders will help to explain the methodology employed. With an extension to this paper, an adequate argument can be presented that defines a key mechanism of a *charismata* as one who utilizes a paradox. This mechanism is clearly utilized by Martin Luther in his development of Christian Freedom. In Luther’s best-known quote, offered to make the way of the unlearned smoother, he presents a perfect paradox, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”¹⁴ Luther understands loving perfectly through the lens of Christ’s paradoxical perfection: “in the form of God” and “of a servant” (Phil. 2:6-7).¹⁵ As well, Luther restates Paul’s perfectly paradoxical statement to the Corinthians, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more” (1 Cor. 9:19 RSV). Following Luther’s lead, we are beckoned to consider a paradoxical response when confronted with the demands of Christ to love perfectly. Offering a perfect paradox in the style of Luther or Paul creates extraordinary anxiety within the listener or reader. All one can do in the present is to conceive of one identity at any moment or act in one direction at any one time. To be asked to act within a paradoxical methodology demands one to go in two directions at once. Intellectual, moral, and social structures have rarely been designed to react cognitively or practically to the request to act in a paradoxical way. One might assume that the only reaction is inaction; one might assume that paradoxical methodologies result in ironic outcomes: one stops acting instead of acting. However, I would propose that the third principle comes into view: moral optimization, paradox optimizes the tension required for moral change. The tension that results from a paradoxical statement is a power that becomes available for moral reform. No greater moral tension can be imagined than the energy that is potentiated through a paradoxical statement. The demand is to act; however, the direction is in conflict and the result is extraordinary anxiety unless the precept is ignored.

¹² I John 3:11—“... message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 3:23—“... his commandment, that we should believe in the name of this Son Jesus Christ and love one another.”

¹³ In Lightfoot’s *The Apostolic Fathers* text offering many early church fathers and other early writings, only the Didache restates the commandment from the perspective of Matt 5:44, “You must love those who hate you.” J. B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, eds. and trans., *The Didache or Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992), 251.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 53.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Our study has explored the value of paradoxical statements in the moral development of others. An ongoing test of these principles is whether major leaders of social movements utilize this principle in strategies for social reform. The 18th century experienced the influence of John Wesley on the social conditions of England and then America. John Wesley's reaction against the injustices of his society has been documented in many sources. Wesley's weaving of competing tensions—coined the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of scripture, reason, tradition, and experience—has been well documented in theological treatises.¹⁶ However, social ethicist Manfred Marquardt has defined John Wesley's successful ethic in the form of multiple paradoxes. In his concluding observations, Marquardt defines the strengths of Wesley's social activity with four competing tensions: faith and works, love and reason, individual and society, and praxis and theory. The first, third and fourth tensions are routine polarities of human society, well documented in the annals of human discourse. Marquardt's matching of love and reason is a departure from the typical polar assumption of revelation and reason or love and justice. For him, love "gives the practical power to transcend the boundaries . . . and to recognize all persons as recipients of loving gifts."¹⁷ Reason allows "the freedom to adapt to demands of the current situation and to avoid perpetuating ethical patterns."¹⁸ Regardless of the competing tensions that are documented, the result was extraordinary social change that occurred as a result of Wesley's methodology, or methodism. An important feature of Marquardt's analysis is that he leaves each tension as a functioning characteristic of Wesley's ethic. He makes no attempt to resolve the tension that his analysis has determined is crucial to Wesley's power. Our analysis now allows us to bring the last principle into view: moral change, moral tension facilitates activated moral energy that is available for use to power moral change. Wesley's tensions—both the Quadrilateral and the Marquardt formulations—remain unresolved. It can be argued that these tensions energized Wesley and his later followers precisely because they remain intact. Resolution deflates the tension; resolving the tension dissipates the energy facilitated by the tension. Any potential of moral change must of necessity be energized for it to be optimized. Maximizing moral energy facilitates the activation of available moral energy to assist in the production of moral change.

An energizing concept for Wesley can be defined as the emphasis of this paper: accomplishing love through perfection. In addition to the extensive discussion of the topic in Wesley's own works, later theologians and scholars have penned voluminous discussions on the topic. A fascinating exposition on the topic is found in the work of D. Marsella Moore in his article "Development in Wesley's Thought on Sanctification and Perfection." Moore developed the five-step pathway in Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection and its activation of love. Starting with the Church of England's definition of Christian perfection, completed at death through rational exercises, Moore then outlines perfection by acting out one's duty, an understanding of William Law. The third concept, developed by authors like Thomas á Kempis, internalizes the process into "the individual subjective realm of self-denial and love of God."¹⁹ Union with God that absorbs the self into the will of God defines the fourth and begins the fifth. The Orthodox position extends this concept to then "return to the creaturely world to care for people and to administer the word of God."²⁰ Moore argues that Wesley chooses this last one, the most ambiguous explanation, as the preferred explanation. Wesley makes a complete connection between the two concepts later in his work, "The sum of Christian perfection . . . is all comprised in one word, love."²¹ Moore also knew Wesley must remain in paradox: "If perfection is only attainable in the next life, why press on in this life? Yet if perfection is attained simultaneously with justification, why do any good works at all?"²² Moore captured the resoluteness of Wesley in maintaining the paradox to energize those who followed his teachings. However, future writers will strain to resolve the

¹⁶ Albert Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20.1: 7-18. reprint, 1991, 22-37. As well, an excellent recent presentation of the competing tensions is found in Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 36-47.

¹⁷ Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, 136.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ D. Marsella Moore, "Development in Wesley's Thought on Sanctification and Perfection," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 20:2 (Fall 1985): 33-34.¹⁹

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1979): 6:411.

²² Moore, "Development," 48.

paradox in one direction of the other. The attempts at resolution will result in intense conversation on the instantaneous versus the progressive nature of perfection and sanctification. However, Wesley seemed content to offer his answer in the form of a paradox, "I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently, in an instant. But I believe a gradual work, both preceding and following the instant."²³ These conversations will define individuals, groups, and denominations within the Wesleyan tradition. However, we must ask ourselves whether we should resolve the paradox and mitigate the value of the paradox? Other moral teachers will assist us by suggesting the constructive benefit of paradoxes.

Moral teachers from before Socrates to those in the 21st century use paradox as a technique—"the thinker's passion"²⁴ for the 19th century's Soren Kierkegaard—for moral benefit. Although most philosophers have used the passionate energy from paradoxes as "cannon fodder" for rational development, some, such as Heraclitus, Hegel, Marx, and others, have accepted the reality of these contradictions.²⁵ A few, particularly theological ethicists,²⁶ have examined the usage of paradox in the life of the church. Those ethicists who have activated a paradox have activated a transformative power. Kierkegaard elevated his reflection with his understanding of the supreme paradox: "The attempt to discover something that thought cannot think."²⁷ In his attempt to present the absolute paradox, the knowledge of the unknown (God), he also offers an understanding of the paradox of love, "Man lives undisturbed in a self-centered life, until there awakens within him the paradox of self-love, in the form of love for another, the object of his longing."²⁸ The stasis of the nonmoral moment is awakened into the anxiety of the potential moral life. The anxiety of competing with self-love and loving another can be activated with the will to live in the paradox of the present. The willed activation of the available energy—optimized by experiencing the nonexperienced, honoring the human divine, knowing the unknown—allows for the change activating love of another to occur. Our discussion has centered on the development of principles on how paradox might be used for moral benefit. This position is an extension of those who accepted their reality. The most profound analysis of the reality of paradox may have come from the writings of Georg W. F. Hegel with his development of Being, Nothing, and Becoming. For Hegel, pure Being is pure thought and simple immediacy. He also conjectured that it includes the Absolute, pure egoism (I=I), or absolute indifference.²⁹ Being's absolute negative, Nothing, also defines the Absolute since the Absolute is defined as without form and content. As with all polar opposites, the one attempts to move to the other so that they become one. Hegel's dialectic, "the sinking into its opposite,"³⁰ becomes his understanding of Becoming as the unity of the two and yet the warring of the two.³¹ Becoming becomes the concretizing of the thought. "This Being which does not lose itself in Nothing is Becoming." And yet he had to emphasize the unity of Becoming or it would return to Being.³² The paradox is cognitively real, and yet it immediately resolves into a process of becoming. Other Wesleyan scholars have used Hegel productively in moral construction.

²³ John Wesley, "Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection," *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978): XI:446.

²⁴ Soren Kierkegaard. *Philosophical Fragments*. Original translation by David Swenson, revised. translation by Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 46.

²⁵ Roy Sorensen, *A Brief History of the Paradox: Philosophy and the Labyrinths of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xiii.

²⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 149-189.

²⁷ Kierkegaard. *Philosophical Fragments*. 46.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁹ Georg Hegel, *Science of Logic*, as cited in Frederick G. Weiss, ed., *Hegel: The Essential Writings* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974): 114-15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

³² *Ibid.*, 122.

Christina Gschwandtner has noted a dominant theme of Hegel's work as a mechanism of reconciliation. She offers a traditional understanding of Hegel's dialectic: the inability for the mind to rest in thesis or antithesis; the synthesis that result in the reconciliation of the two opposing movements; the incorporation of the two opposites to carry them both higher; and the result of a "better third that simultaneously preserves the essential truth of both by incorporating them into itself."³³ This feature of a paradox facilitates reconciliation of the divided. The power that unites the estranged, a key formulation of love for Paul Tillich,³⁴ is an essential power in Christian moral development. However, I am arguing that the desire to maintain the paradox is an even greater power for moral change. My analysis hypothesizes that the process of Becoming (or synthesis) should be countered for the maximization of potential energy. The maximum amount of energy will be generated with the maintenance of the polar positions. The nonresolution of the paradox, the counteraction of the forces of resolution via the addition of charismatic energy, allows for a resource of potential energy. Unfortunately, the utilization of a paradox has been a minority position in the history of philosophy.

Most philosophers have used paradoxes as a resource to challenge the weak intellectual positions of students or discussants. For those seeking a rational explanation of the moral universe, a paradox becomes a challenge for logical resolution. Therefore, rationalists have tended to deflate the power of paradox with their demand for its resolution. Nicholas Rescher logically describes the paradox and its demand for resolution, "A paradox arises when a set of individually plausible propositions is collectively inconsistent."³⁵ The resolution of this logical conundrum warrants the abandonment of "some or all of the commitments whose conjoining creates a contradiction."³⁶ Any or all of these premises must arise from a defect of *a priori* insights.³⁷ The abandonment of one of the premises becomes a key move by many in the confrontation of paradoxes. The rationalist response to paradox is consistent with our theory. The presence of a paradox infuses the setting with energy that demands a response. A natural tendency exists to eradicate a paradox to resolve the tension caused. A legitimate response is to deflate the paradox and remove the "nonrationality." However, this move has societal consequences that must at least be recognized.

A philosophical critique of the demand to rationalize the paradoxical can be built on Bernard Williams' frustration that the unprecedented "demands of the modern world on ethical thought" cannot be met with "the ideas of rationality embodied in most contemporary moral philosophy."³⁸ Williams noted that the philosophical thought of the ancient world was "less determined to impose rationality through reductive theory."³⁹ It must also be admitted that rationalist theories function to eradicate incongruities such as paradoxes while voluntarist theories, grounding values on the will or the divine, tend to retain paradoxical claims.⁴⁰ The recognition of these competing claims may also be noted as certainly polar and possibly paradoxical. To be consistent with our claims, we need to admit both have a role in the understanding of the moral power of paradox. Both induce power for reform.

The desire to eliminate the paradoxical premises of life has been a consistent feature of much of American society. This move by rationalism within philosophy has its counterpart in theology. Many theological responses to competing claims are structured around selecting one premise of a theological paradox and asserting that premise to be the correct one with the other defined as false. The evidence of this activity has been evident in the theological disputations of the vast arrays of Christian sects and movements. The

³³ Christina Gschwandtner, "A Wesleyan Model for Reconciliation and Evangelism? Conversation with Hegel and Levinas," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 37:1 (Spring 2002): 74-75.

³⁴ Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological analyses and Ethical Application* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 25.

³⁵ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷ Sorensen, *Brief History*, xiii.

³⁸ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), vii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴⁰ Christopher Gowans, "Introduction: The Debate on Moral Dilemmas," *Moral Dilemmas* (New York: Oxford Press, 1987), 5.

debates on the humanity or the divinity of Jesus Christ have been resolved by some with the selection of one of the competing premises and the anathematization of the competing claim. The desire to reduce the tension of the argument seems to necessitate the selection of one premise over the other. The desire for tranquility presses one to avoid the tension of the paradox and embrace one premise over the other. We also see this response to be the reaction to Wesley's paradox of perfection. One side defends gradualism while the other triumphs instantaneous results. This theological selection solves the paradox; however, it also deflates the power of the paradox. The energy that develops in the debate of the premises is dissipated; the moral power to activate into moral change is reduced. As well, the social environment often erodes the potential to maximize the propositions of this essay. Individuals, families, kin groups and communities often desire the tranquility of one premise over the other. As a result, positive moral change is restricted. This social defect also minimizes the potential power of perfection and the power of paradox inherent in Christian love. To confront this trend, extended reflection on moral energy and its byproducts may assist us in energizing social demands for moral improvement. GenX and GenY have been forced to attempt to function well in the midst of ambiguity and paradox. They may be prime candidates for this conversation.

Our work offers initial descriptions of moral energy and moral tension and constructs a pathway from moral potentiation to moral activation, on to moral optimization and ends with moral change. This pathway has been constructed within the call to utilize the power of perfection through Christian love. We now need to reconsider our response to Christ to love perfectly. Our work with the negation of an origin concept, a paradoxical methodology, cues us that we can love "nonperfectly" to love perfectly.

"Nonperfection" can now be defined as the potentially "nonrational," willed determination to reside in the midst of the paradox demanded by Christ. The utilization of paradox to help us understand God may be a sufficient cue to utilize paradox to act like God, perfectly loving one's enemy. The action that results from the unresolved paradox becomes the response to the demands of Christ to accomplish a task that is the inverse of rationality, defined as nonrational, and therefore loves one's enemy perfectly. The tension in the midst of this paradox serves as a resource for moral construction. One might choose to dissipate the available energy, ignore an enemy; to utilize the moral energy for the destruction of the environment of the paradox, fight an enemy; or to activate the energy for moral benefit, love an enemy. When acting out the principle to love one's enemy, the paradox of the situation becomes starkly evident: one acts well toward one who deserves the opposite. All common sense, rational development, and social training presses one trapped in this situation to react toward an enemy by utilizing the available energy to destroy the potential of the relationship. However, the energy available can be actualized to assist in the optimization of the relationship: a loving desire to remain in relationship even though the desire to destroy the relationship may remain. However, the relationship remains constructively paradoxical and the possibility of a greater community of paradox remains. We love "nonperfectly" and thereby love perfectly.

Our work together now implores us to consider the consequences of our position within other Christocentric paradoxes. On individual, professional, and institutional levels, we often feel pressure to choose to deflate these paradoxes. As Wesleyans, we may feel pressure to select instantaneous forms of sanctification and perfection versus gradualism or *visa versa*. We often do so to create identity and structure for any particular level. However, the price to be paid may now be perceived to be higher than the value of remaining in paradox and using the energy for the benefit of all. Our action may now include remaining in the paradox of the Christocentric concept. Each pole of the discourse deserves elevation and honor; each pole deserves a passionate spokesperson to articulate it carefully. However, a community of paradox affirms the need to come together to create a dynamic where the tensions can be productive in the living out of the concept of perfection or sanctification. If we can create this type of community, we are then acting according to our definition of "nonperfection" so that we can love perfectly.

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