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# Love of Creation: Exploring Diversity and Commonality among Religious and Philosophical Traditions

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Love is widely recognized as one of the most important, desired, and consequential aspects of the human condition, and thus has rightly been the focus of much academic attention. However, this interest has tended to concentrate on specific forms of love—especially romantic and familial forms—to the exclusion of others.

One such overlooked form is love of “creation”—of the world and the wider cosmos in which human beings find themselves. Throughout history and across cultures, this kind of love has been developed and articulated by religious and philosophical traditions in diverse ways. This article showcases a selection of ten such traditions, generally through the prism of one particularly important figure within each tradition, including Hinduism, Judaism, Zen Buddhism, Manichaeism, Christianity, Islam, Maasai thought, Cherokee thought, Romanticism, and secular reverence. Through these lenses, the diverse ways love of creation has been expressed can be appreciated. In the conclusion, we also try to find some common ground among these traditions by constructing a provisional set of items for a love of creation measure that would be applicable across traditions.

## Introduction

Few experiences are as cherished or sought after as love. Throughout history, it has animated and captured attention across myriad fields of endeavor, from philosophy to the arts. Scientific research on love—often focused on emotional experiences but also including acts of care—has gained traction in recent decades. Recent investigations have explored the dynamics of love across disciplines, from biochemistry (de Boer, van Buel, and Ter Horst 2012) to developmental psychology (Nosko, Lawford, and Pratt 2011). Despite this wealth of interest, the bulk of scholarship on love tends to be focused on a limited range of experiences and expressions. By far the most attention is either on romantic love (e.g., the kind of desire and passion one finds between people who have built a relationship around a sexual or sensual and emotional bond) (Asselmann and Specht 2020) or familial love (e.g., the kind of care and nurturing one finds within family settings, particularly the intimate bonds between parents and children) (Li and Meier 2017).

However, while these forms of love may be archetypal or prototypical, they are far from its only forms, at least insofar as the word is used in common language (Lomas 2018; VanderWeele 2023). After all, people can and do profess love for all manner of phenomena, from other beings like friends or pets to nonhuman entities such as places and objects to abstract phenomena ranging from ideas to principles. These loves are not usually or normatively romantic or sexual (except in rare cases, which tend to be regarded as "deviant"). But the term love is still appropriate, or at least is still widely used in common parlance (which may be the same thing). Indeed, the word encompasses a truly vast range of phenomena, spanning diverse spectra of intensity, valence, and temporal duration, and is used in relation to a panoply of relationships, objects, and experiences. To that end, Bernard Murstein (1988, 33) describes love as "an Austro-Hungarian Empire uniting all sorts of feelings, behaviors, and attitudes, sometimes having little in common."

Yet, as noted, most academic attention has focused only on romantic or familial love, with attention seldom paid to its other forms, particularly those not centered on other humans. This oversight applies especially to a form of love that historically has been widely celebrated across religious traditions but is all but absent from modern scholarship: love of creation. By "creation," we (the current authors) mean the entirety of existence, all that is. The only possible exception to this category is a "creator" in religions that posit one that stands outside and apart from creation, entirely transcendent to it. Not all creators meet this criterion: some traditions conceive of creators who are not only transcendent but also immanent; they are part of—or indeed wholly *are* —creation too. Thus, evidently, the notion of "creation" can be complex and nuanced. Nevertheless, some conceptual clarity is provided in a taxonomy presented by Alan Watts (1957), who suggests that across cultures, there have

been three main ontological perspectives regarding the nature of creation: constructed artefact, organic process, and divine play.

Each of these perspectives draws on different forms of creation humans see in their daily lives, the nature of which is then extended metaphorically to the cosmic arena. Thus, the first draws inspiration from the archetype of a potter fashioning works out of clay, and in that fashion suggests creation is similarly "made" by an all-powerful being (sometimes known by labels such as "demiurge"), as seen especially with the great monotheistic traditions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The second perspective does not involve a separate creator per se but regards "creation" as an emergent unfolding process that is somehow self-originating, self-directing, and self-sustaining. The metaphorical archetype here is a flower, which unfurls in all its complex perfection without being "built" by an outside creator pe se. This view is particularly prevalent in Eastern traditions that are generally regarded as nontheistic, such as Taoism and Buddhism. The third perspective depicts creation as a cosmic drama or play in which the creator themselves acts out the creation that is unfolding, therefore being immanent as well as transcendent. This stance is found, for example, in the beliefs and practices now referred to under the label Hinduism, which includes Vedic ideas such as *lila* (Sanskrit for "play"), capturing the idea of the cosmos as a divine play.

This article aims to reflect and encompass this diversity of ideas, offering a mosaic of different perspectives on love of creation—hailing from a wealth of religious and philosophical traditions—that together present a good picture of the phenomenon. We have selected—based on the interests and expertise of the authors assembled to work on this article—ten different traditions from a range of cultures and eras to explore the way love of creation has been broached within each. These are: Hinduism, Judaism, Zen Buddhism, Manichaeism, Christianity, Islam, Maasai thought, Cherokee thought, romanticism, and secular reverence. These traditions are presented in very rough chronological order according to their historical emergence, though each tradition has roots stretching much farther back than their ostensible "beginning." Indeed, some traditions are difficult to localize at a particular point in time—particularly Maasai and Cherokee cultures—and so do not sit easily within any given chronology; as such, these have been situated as later sections due to the modernity of the figures discussed as emblematic. To that point, each tradition of course hosts diverse ideas on this topic; indeed, one could easily devote an entire paper, or even a whole book, to any one of them. It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into this internal complexity; as such, we have limited our discussions to one seminal figure from each tradition, allowing their particular take on the topic to provide something of the spirit of their tradition more generally. This approach is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive with respect to specific traditions or human thought more generally, with many traditions not featured

here at all. This is not a flaw per se; we regard such a comprehensive and exhaustive account as far beyond the feasibility of one academic article, or even an entire monograph. Nevertheless, we suggest this kind of review—selective and partial as it may be—can still convey the diversity of views on this topic that have emerged across cultures, and together they can give a relatively complete and nuanced picture of love of creation.

Finally, we conclude by constructing a provisional set of items for a measure that endeavors to capture the spirit of all the perspectives on love of creation discussed here, such that whichever view of creation a person endorsed, they would be able to convey their love for it through this measure. This proposed measure is not complete or final in any sense, since that would require data collection, psychometric evaluation, and potentially factor analytic procedures, which are beyond our scope here. Indeed, the plan is for this article to serve as a foundation for precisely this kind of future work. Nevertheless, we hold that constructing a proposal for an initial scale is a useful way of summarizing the various perspectives in this article and drawing the disparate threads together.

## Hinduism: Loving All Is Loving God

Hindu religion and classical Indian philosophies are closely intertwined. The earliest Hindu scriptures—the Vedas—were not logically organized texts. Rather, they are claimed to be direct realizations of the seers and unmediated by human thought. Being oral traditions depicting deep spiritual experiential contents, these were expressed in symbolic language, where signs, objects, animals, and activities conceal profound meaning (Werner 1977). Hence, the Vedas have been multiply interpreted; each orthodox Indian philosophy rooted in the Vedas expounds its specific perspective about the relation between humans, the universe, and god. Such perspectives are offered as *darshanas*, the popular translation of the term "philosophy." But *darshana* means seeing or perceiving: thus, its etymological meaning is different from philosophy (i.e., love of wisdom). In that sense, *darshanas* can afford to be more tentative and mutually inconclusive than philosophy. Therefore, the coexistence of contradictory perspectives in the *darshanas* evolving on the Indian subcontinent is less threatening to the Hindu psyche than it would be in other traditions.

In ancient Indian thought, the creator and the created are simultaneously separate and identical, transcendent and immanent. The coexistence of such apparently contradictory premises may be integrated as stages of *sadhana* (or journey) toward wisdom at different levels, and the final integration may be made in terms of universal consciousness (*cit*) (Gupta 2003), known variously as *Brahman* or *Atman* (as in the Vedanta tradition) or *Purusha* (as in the Samkhya school) (Dasgupta [1957] 2009; Swami Ranganathananda 1968). There are four broad ways (*yoga*) to attain the experience of universal consciousness: *jnanayoga* (the path of knowledge), *rajayoga* (the royal path of control of inner winds

and mind), *bhaktiyoga* (the path of devotion), and *karmayoga* (the path of action without attachment). The four paths may be considered as tributaries of a river, all leading to the same goal of *moksha*, or salvation, though the experiential aspects of each are multiply shaded depending upon the path as chosen via one's disposition, and also upon the particular way one may have integrated it.

The essence of each path is to dilute or demolish the everyday conventional self or "I." This I (*ahamkara*), developed as a component of the inner structure (*antahkarana*), becomes the center of one's psychological universe. In most variants of the Indian religio-philosophical approaches, the everyday world is considered a delusion or illusion, the very primordial delusion being the I. Yet, a reality and an identity apart from the deluded reality attached to the mundane I exists as a potential in all beings. Every being possesses the potential of unification with the supreme spiritual existence, the absolute consciousness, and that state is the ultimate goal. Despite the implication of the integration of diverse paths made in numerous teachings and traditions, in practice, most spiritual leaders within Hinduism have pursued one specific path vigorously to attain this unification, only indirectly acknowledging, or sometimes criticising, other paths.

In the late nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa highlighted the significance and validity of all possible paths and their variants by pursuing multiple systems of practice and realizing that they all reach the same goal. His experienced religious systems included but might not have been limited to personal devotion to Goddess Kali, the Ramalala, Tantra, Vaishnava sectarian practice, Advaita Vedanta, Islam, and Christianity. His realization-based declaration that "there are as many valid ways [to salvation] as there are views" was a fresh way of looking at spirituality, especially in the context of the India then torn by political and religious feuds (Swami Chetanananda 2020).

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing, his disciple Narendranath Datta took the monastic vow and adopted the name Swami Vivekananda. He traveled to the United States to participate in the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. His speech was an immediate triumph. Subsequently, Swami Vivekananda delivered hundreds of lectures in the United States and England. Thus, he established Hinduism as a major and meaningful approach to personal, social, and spiritual life in the West (Burke 1985). In his lectures abroad, Swami Vivekananda often focused on the Vedantic and Yogic views, mainly to cater to the scholarly needs of the West. But he also established the Ramakrishna Mission in India, where apart from scholarly studies, he focused on devotional worship as well as service to all living beings seen as God. "Be grateful to the man you help, think of him as God," he said (Vivekananda [1947] 1979, 76). Service to others has always been a part of all religions. But Swami Vivekananda emphasized the Vedantic view that Brahman, or the ultimate consciousness, is

immanent in all beings and underscored this attitude as the basis for service to all humankind endowed with latent Godhood.

For him, service is not a love toward separate others but toward an extended self; Godliness is there in ourselves and others alike. Swami Vivekananda received this nondiscriminatory attitude in the form of a dictum from Sri Ramakrishna. The master once told that kindness to others is not the greatest virtue, as there is a hierarchy in kindness. Service should be given with love and the understanding that one is serving God and that the needy person is actually providing an opportunity to serve God directly in living form. Thus, through practical application of the Vedantic unification principles (Badrinath 2006), the creator and the creation become identical in the *darshana* of Swami Vivekananda, and the recommended way of dealing with this "reality" becomes the service of love.

## Judaism

Love permeates the Jewish canon, from the Torah (Hebrew Bible) to the thought of the twentieth-century rabbi and philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel. Contemplations and celebrations of love include the Psalms and the prayerbook, as well as rabbinic commentaries and philosophical examinations. Indeed, the Torah has historically been described as teachings that include laws; one might even describe love as a duty or responsibility, a moral imperative that is central to the realization of wisdom and order. The most common Hebrew word for love is *ahavah*, rooted in the Aramaic word *hav*, which means "to give." *Ahavah* represents a broad spectrum of love relationships, including familial, erotic, and divine love. Other Hebrew words denoting love are *chesheq* (passionate love) and *chesed* (loving kindness).

Love of creation in Jewish thought encompasses the Genesis story, which includes not only the creative process but also the creator's appreciation of His creations as "good." When considering the notion of "love of creation," the term "love" can also be translated as a deep pleasure of approval and satisfaction, as demonstrated by God's own evaluation of the goodness of creation. The story of creation in the Hebrew Bible exceeds six days. In Genesis 2:1–3, creation is crowned by the Sabbath rest and God's blessing of the day, making it holy. The concept of the creative pause, sanctified by God, contributes to the spiritual and social wellbeing of humanity and to nature. As it states in the commandment to keep the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8–11): "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates." The notion and practice of the Sabbath rest is an essential expression of love extending toward family, friends, guests, workers, land, and God—indeed, the creator and all His creation.

It is posited that the Sabbath—our pause from work, from manipulating and extracting the natural world's resources for our benefit—provides a weekly time for manifesting our deep appreciation for the beauty of the creation.

Love in the Torah is prominent not only in narratives and poetry but also as part of the 613 commandments. Deuteronomy 6:5 states: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." A common interpretation of the commandment to love God is through teaching, learning, and contemplating the Torah. Moses Maimonides, one of the most influential medieval Jewish thinkers, linked the love of God to love of creation and the natural world. The orderliness of nature manifests God's governance of the world. According to Maimonides (1990, Yesodei Ha-Torah 2, 2), "reflecting upon his great and wondrous works and creatures," one comes to see God's infinite wisdom and immediately comes to love God. The more humans observe the natural world, the more we revere the creator because the natural world manifests the presence of order and wisdom. Maimonides's emphasis on science as an independent enterprise of knowing nature provides an intellectual and rational perspective of knowledge as integral to love of creation.

A poetic and mystical approach to love of creation based on the importance of the Sabbath as enabling the expressiveness of the love of creation is provided by Abraham Joshua Heschel. He writes about the Sabbath as "a palace in time" (Heschel 2005). It is only when humans cease our work that we can enjoy the manifold gifts of creation. Explaining the notion of "awe," he says, "awe is more than an emotion; it is a way of understanding, insight into a meaning greater than ourselves. Awe enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance" (Heschel 1976, chapter 5).

Through the lens of the Torah and its hermeneutics, love of creation is embedded in the very story of creation in Genesis 1–2, which narrates the creative process and concludes with the designation of the weekly Sabbath as a holy day. Maimonides represents the medieval intellectualist approach to the love of God and His creation based on the wisdom and order of the natural world. In the twentieth century, Heschel offered in his theopoetics a portrayal of the Sabbath day as enabling the experience of awe and wonder of creation and love of God. These and numerous other teachings epitomize the expansive varieties of love from the divine to the human that have been contemplated and celebrated within Judaism.

## Zen: Playful Direct Seeing into the "Suchness" of Reality

Love of creation is suffused throughout Buddhism. One must tread carefully here though, as the truth of this statement will vary according to how one understands love. After all, a core tenet of Buddhism is nonattachment,

which some people may feel is antithetical to love. Yet, nonattachment in Buddhism does not mean cold, detached, disinterest from the world around. It is more about not clinging to particular people or phenomena, given that all life is ultimately ephemeral, and instead being more accepting of change and transition. Within that recognition, however, people are not only allowed but encouraged to cultivate feelings like *metta*—translated as loving kindness—for family and friends, humanity as a whole, and indeed all life.

In that spirit, love of creation animates many Buddhist traditions. Perhaps the exemplar is Zen (Lomas et al. 2017), usually thought of as originating around 520 CE, when Bodhidharma, an Indian monk, reportedly traveled to China to disseminate Buddhism. One influential interpretation of this origin is that Bodhidharma's teachings were shaped by, and interpreted through the lens of, ideas and practices dominant in China, especially Taoism (Suzuki 1961). Buddhism hitherto had been formed by the Brahmanic context in which it emerged, which included tendencies towards abstract metaphysical analyses (King 1999). By contrast, Taoist thought is regarded as more focused on the dynamics of the world, with liberation found by living in accordance with the *Tao*—which, although sometimes described in esoteric, mystical terms, is described by Lee, Yang, and Wang (2009) simply as "harmony with the natural world or the external universe"—that is, being as "spontaneous and free-flowing as the natural world" (Chuang Tzu, third century BCE).

Zen fully blossomed when these teachings were introduced in Japan in 1191 by the Japanese monk Eisai (1141–1215). Subsequent centuries saw an astonishing flourishing of thought and practice centered on these ideals. While this blossoming had myriad elements and bore many fruits, key among these are deep attentiveness and devotion to what is referred to in this article as "creation"—above all, the natural world. There are various reasons for this stance, but perhaps ultimately because it offers a direct pathway to the self-transcendence that is at the heart of Buddhism. Put simply, the greater one's focus on the world around, the less self-preoccupied and the more liberated one is liable to be. Thus, Zen places great premium on "direct seeing" into the true "suchness" of reality, relatively unmediated—insofar as this ideal is attainable—by one's biases and interpretations.

Many Zen masters are thought to have attained this psychospiritual zenith, known in English by terms like "enlightenment" or the Sanskrit loanword *nirvana*. One of the most famous such masters is Matsuo Bashō (1644–94), a poet who perhaps above all others in Zen has come to epitomize the love of creation articulated in this article, and who is arguably the foremost proponent of the art of haiku. Before delving into his work, it is worth noting the significance of art in Zen, in which myriad forms—from flower arrangement to swordsmanship, poetry to painting—are harnessed as supreme vehicles for attaining and expressing spiritual insights. Such art is regarded as uniquely able

to capture and convey the "suchness" of reality, far more so than conventional prose.

It is through art that the genius of Bashō can be appreciated. In his haiku, one can find the particular spiritual and aesthetic qualities and "moods" that are so highly prized in Zen. Consider his celebrated "frog" haiku, which is thought to have marked the attainment of his own enlightenment (Lunberry 2019):

An old pond
A frog jumps in
The sound of water

As Bai (2002) elucidates, this poem strips perception to its essence. There are no wasted words, just the bare facts of the event. Indeed, the semiologist Roland Barthes (1982, 78) argues that while humans usually perceive and understand reality through the medium of discursive descriptions, haiku aim for the "end of language," enabling direct "apprehension of the thing" in itself, an "awakening to the fact" of reality as it is. Moreover, the essential simplicity of the poem reveals not only a quality of the art itself but a comprehensive *way of being* attained by Bashō, hence it being an expression of his enlightenment.

Or consider another perceptual quality valorized within Zen, the concept of *yūgen*. Though famously hard to translate, Parkes (2023) defines it as profound grace and describes it as the most "ineffable" of aesthetic concepts. In philosophical texts, *yūgen* can mean "dark" or "mysterious," alluding to the unfathomable depths of existence and the fundamental inability of the mind to comprehend these. As Suzuki ([1959] 1973, 220–21) elucidates, "It is hidden behind the clouds, but not entirely out of sight, for we feel its presence, its secret message being transmitted through the darkness however impenetrable to the intellect." In that regard, the following haiku by Basho is often regarded as the ultimate expression of *yūgen* (Watts 1957), exemplifying a profound attentiveness to, and reverence for, creation that is unique in its direct simplicity (Record and Abdulla 2016).

On a withered bough
A crow alone has settled
Autumn evening now

## Christianity: Creation as Intrinsically Good and Originating from, Reflecting, and Pointing to God's Goodness

Traditional Christian understandings of love of creation are arguably most clearly grounded in the creation narrative in Genesis. In this account, the various days and aspects of creation typically conclude with the refrain, "And God saw

that [what was made] was good," and on the final day, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."

In Saint Thomas Aquinas's (c. 1225–74) understanding, the object of God's love is the good (Aquinas [1274] 1948, ST I.II.27.1), and so it is natural that human persons should love creation, which is good (ST I.5.3). All that exists, having been created by God, has a certain goodness (Aquinas [1274] 1948, ST I.5.3), and goodness and being are essentially the same, but goodness is being under the aspect of being desirable (Aquinas [1274] 1948, ST I.5.1). God causes all things to exist, and God creates in order to communicate his goodness (Aquinas [1274] 1948, ST 1.44.4). Something that exists is said to be evil only insofar as there is something lacking in it—some imperfection—but not on account of existence, which is good (Aquinas [1274] 1948, ST I.5.3). God loves all existing things as they are good by their existence, and their goodness thus calls forth our love, though God's love differs from ours insofar as God's love infuses and creates goodness (Aquinas [1274] 1948, ST I.20.2). Our love and God's love of creation extend to all of creation, but love for the nonrational world and creatures is different in kind from our love of rational beings (Aquinas [1274] 1948, ST II.II.25.3). Creation is thus not loved with the same love one has for God, which is charity, a friendship with God. One can have charity or "agape," a love of friendship, with God and with other persons. However, one can only have friendship with nonrational creatures in a metaphorical sense, though one can still love them out of charity and wish and work for their preservation (Aquinas [1274] 1948, ST II.II.25.3). Humans are thus to value, love, and care for creation, and see it as reflective of God's goodness and glory.

The reflection of God's beauty, splendor, and radiance in His works of creation is the central theme of Saint Francis of Assisi's (c. 1240–1302) "Canticle of the Sun." In it, Saint Francis praises the qualities of sun, moon, stars, wind, air, water, fire, earth, and human persons; he especially likens the sun's beauty, radiance, and splendor to that of God's and entreats that God be praised by all that has been created. Creation is beautiful and reflects God's beauty and glory, and God is thereby praised by it. Saint Francis lived connected to and in harmony with nature and animals, and he is considered by the Catholic Church the patron saint of animals and ecology.

The present pope took the papal name "Francis" for the inspiration and guidance of Saint Francis. In his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (Francis 2015), he comments that "Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically" and that:

> just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise . . . That is why he felt called to care for all that

> exists . . . If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously . . . What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.

In summary, much of the Christian tradition testifies to the intrinsic goodness of creation and to all creation having its origins in God, reflecting God's goodness, and pointing to God. The goodness of creation is a gift of love from God to human persons. That intrinsic goodness in turn prompts our love for creation, and for God, as we see its goodness, and as we see it reflecting God's goodness. Our love and God's love for creation, our connection with all creation, and our love for God prompt us to care for creation, cultivate or co-create within it, and give thanks and praise to God for the goodness of creation and God's goodness.

## Escapist Vegetarians: The Love of Nature in Manichaeism

Of all of the worldviews considered in this article, none comes so close to an absolute rejection of love of creation as Manichaeism, named for its eponymous founder, the Persian prophet Mani (216–76 CE). As such, it serves as a kind of limit-case in this study, for, notwithstanding their generally world-denying outlook, even the Manichees found much to steward and rescue in the world of matter.

Manichaeism reflects a creative blend of Zoroastrian dualism, Christian narratives and motifs, Second Temple Jewish myths, and perhaps even Buddhist ascetical practices (Baker-Brian 2011; Sundermann 1997; Hansen 2012). Though it now commands few if any adherents, Manichaeism flourished from the third through the thirteenth centuries, extending at its peak from North Africa to China (Brown 1969; Lieu 1998) and enjoying a century of patronage as the state religion of the Uyghur Khaganate in Central Asia (Beckwith, 2009). Unfortunately, most of what is known about Manichaeism is filtered through the voices of its opponents, notably Christian and Muslim heresiologists, though a growing number of fragmentary Manichean texts have been discovered in the last century from Egypt to China (cf. Gardner and Lieu 2004; Gardner, Alcock, and Funk 1999; Klimheit 1993).

Manichean cosmology is dizzyingly complex both in its intricate stages and its vast *dramatis personae*. (For primary sources regarding Manichean cosmology, cf. esp. the fragments of Mani's *Šābuhragān* (in Mackenzie 1979) and Theodore

Bar Khoni's eighth-century *Book of Scholia* (in Williams Jackson 1932, 222–54), which is likely dependent on Mani's original Syriac corpus; for a recent survey, cf. Baker-Brian 2011, 96–133.) In brief, however, Mani taught that the cosmos was fundamentally divided between the co-eternal principles of good and evil, presiding over kingdoms of light and darkness, respectively.

Their separation was unstable, however, because the darkness envied and longed for the light, and eventually waged war on it (Williams Jackson 1932, 222–27). Although "the Father of Greatness" remained untouched by this assault, one of his dependents, the "Primal Man," was imprisoned by the forces of darkness. The result is the material world we know, in which light is held captive by the gross entanglements of "matter," bound within interminable cycles of death and decay and subjected to demonic forces (Williams Jackson 1932, 228–49). The elect few who know the truth of their condition strive to free the light—both within themselves and in the world—from its bondage to decay and look forward to a day when "Jesus the Luminous"—the Father's emissary from the kingdom of light—will come in judgment to impose an everlasting *cordon sanitaire* between light and darkness (MacKenzie 1979, 505–9).

Manichean belief and practice were ordered primarily to withdrawing individuals from the cycle of life and death—notably through commitments to vegetarianism and lifelong celibacy—and enlisting them in the work of freeing light from its material prison, particularly through ritualized daily meals (BeDuhn 2002). In one sense, then, the Manichee seems to be motivated by a profound dislike and pity for the world of medium-sized dry goods that envelops us here and now. Nonetheless, even the world-denying Manichees could not bring themselves to reject all of creation: rather, they saw all of life as a kind rescue operation to free what is good in it—the fragments of the Father's "kingdom of light"—from its bodily shackles.

It is also interesting to consider that some of the Manichees's most self-consciously world-denying practices, such as their antinatalism and vegetarianism, are ones that people today often associate with love for the natural world. So, Mani "said: 'He who would enter the cult must examine his soul. If he finds that he can subdue lust and covetousness, refrain from eating meats, drinking wine, as well as from marriage, and if he can also avoid [causing] injury to water, fire, trees, and living things, then let him enter the cult" (quoted in Baker-Brian 2011, 122). Perhaps ironically, it was precisely the desire to bring an end to the physical world as we know it—the world of predation, sex, and birth—that motivated the Manichees's rejection of meat-eating and sex and birth, both of which find echoes in parts of the contemporary environmentalist movement (as explored in the final section of this article). Perhaps the moral here is that, in our relationships to creation as much as in our relationships to one another, only a fine line separates love and hatred.

## Islam: Submit to God, Submit to Love

*Bismillah Hir Rahman Nir Rahim* is the most frequently repeated Quranic verse by Muslims. It translates as, "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious (Rahim) and Most Merciful (Raheem)." The root word of *Rahim* is *rahm*, which in the Arabic language has connotations of nurturance and development and is associated with the womb. Thus, in Islam, the cosmological originator is more compassionate to human beings than their mothers (Haque 2014). Allah is described in the Qur'ān through ninety-nine names or attributes, each representing a human attribute. Despite being an omnipresent and all-encompassing entity, Allah shares some attributes with humans (Abdin 2004). In particular, consider two associated with love: *Al-Wadud* means the most loving, the most affectionate, someone who shows the purest form of love, the singular source of all love and kindness; *Al-Muhib* means being responsive and readily available to hear and answer supplications, invitations, needs, and prayers, especially when one is in trouble.

These two attributes signify that Allah is most loving and responsive when we are suffering. Love of Allah, however, is not unconditional. Through His Prophet, Allah commends clearly, "O Messenger, tell people, if you indeed love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you and will forgive your sins. Allah is all-forgiving, all-compassionate" (Qur'ān 3:31). In Islamic doctrine, loving Allah literally (and metaphorically) means submitting to God by following the path of his Prophet.

The love of the creator in Islamic tradition is arguably best represented by Persian scholar, theologian, poet, and Sufi mystic Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (1207–73 CE). The focus and goal of Rumi's poetry is love, which is essentially the love of God. Rumi's poems—such as "Love Is the Water of Life," "Lovers," "This Is Love," and "The Springtime of Lovers Has Come"—are his prolific articulation of the transformative power of love and its numerous benefits (Acim 2022). Rumi's poetic discourse has shaped an interpretive frame for Western minds as to how the lived practices of Islam can be seen as a longing for and love of God (Abraham 2018).

Rumi believes that all creation is a representation of God and that God-seeking and God-loving are fundamental to our human existence. Rumi invites us to reach within our hearts. Tucked in our hearts is our bond of love with the creator. This bond gets fractured when human beings pursue material goods. However, if we focus on love, we can connect or reconnect with God. For Rumi, connecting with God is the highest form of transcendence (Abraham 2018). At the same time, Rumi does not limit the notion of love to God (Golkhosravi 2001). Rather, love includes all elements of creation. He sees love as the superglue that holds all pieces together, a source of unity between the different elements of nature. Love, Rumi notes, enables us to see the beauty around us, and through love we are

able to ignore the flaws of others and perceive others beyond the superficial differences that divide us. When our love connections are broken, we suffer (Saddam and Abbas 2020).

This theme of universal love may partially explain recent American fascination with Rumi (Acim 2022). Universal love often includes the notion of one culture that unifies people, irrespective of their religion, race, color, or creed. This universal love is firmly rooted in the theory of identity and sameness, which posits that all humans are viewed as God's creatures and there is no distinction between them; they are made of same bones and blood, and all of them are respected and loved. This feeling of love enhances the sense of belonging and promotes peace and harmony. Love is the ultimate human attribute, which Rumi sees as uniting the physical and spiritual dimensions. This vision is encapsulated in the following poem, whereby the physical dimension is symbolized by the Earth, and the spiritual dimension is symbolized by love. As Rumi observes (Khalili and Rumi 1994):

> Friends,
> Look at Love
> How it tangles with the one fallen in Love
> Look at spirit
> How it fuses with earth giving it a new Life

## Maasai People

Love of creation permeates the culture of the Maasai, a traditionally seminomadic and pastoralist indigenous ethnic group of people who inhabit parts of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania in East Africa (McCabe, Leslie, and DeLuca 2010). For the Maasai, there are delicate, complex, and inseparable economic, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual connections between humans, nonhuman organisms (e.g., animals, plants), and the broader environment that shape their everyday ways of being (Davis and Sharp 2020). As one example of how the multilayered interdependency between human, nonhuman, and environmental objects informs the Maasai's love of creation, consider the central role livestock play in their culture. Cattle have historically been the primary source of subsistence for the Maasai (McCabe, Leslie, and DeLuca 2010), and they have relied on cattle as "the basis of the economic modes of production, social connections within and outside of Maasai communities, spiritual connections to God and the landscape, and physical nourishment" (Davis and Sharp 2020, 5). The Maasai believe that cattle were created, endowed, and entrusted to people by God; therefore, cattle are sacred to the Maasai, and the Maasai see themselves as custodians of these animals (Asiema and Situma 1994; Davis and Sharp 2020).

This explains why the Maasai's knowledge of and multifaceted connection to their livestock are intimately integrated into their daily life, and why afflictions that befall their livestock are perceived as having negative impacts not only on the livelihoods of themselves and their families but also on their relationship to the divine (Davis and Sharp 2020; Olupona 1993). Because the health of their livestock is so closely intertwined with their own health and wellbeing, the Maasai are also highly attuned to and invested in the health of the environment in which they and their livestock are embedded. Thus, as this brief illustration shows, the traditional lifestyle of the Maasai can be characterized by a deep understanding of how human life is precariously nested within the health of the broader environment. Moreover, it involves a recognition that, in the words of one member of the Maasai community, "nature takes care of us when we take care of it" (Jones 2022, para. 2), suggesting that love of creation ought to guide the way humanity approaches and interacts with the natural environment.

Amid growing concerns over climate change and environmental degradation, the love of creation espoused by the Maasai community is shaping efforts to promote environmental sustainability and preservation of indigenous ways of living. One important figure in this movement is Salaton Ole Ntutu, an internationally acclaimed Maasai community leader and elder who lives in Kenya. Recognizing the "need to create harmony between people and their natural surroundings, and between people and the animals that share the same land" (Abdelrahim 2015, para. 6), Salaton is involved in various initiatives focused on preserving the indigenous Maasai cultural knowledge—including ways of relating to the natural world—and environmental conservation, which are guided by an underlying love for creation.

For example, a key issue for Salaton is the increasing privatization of land that has taken place in Kenya over the last few decades, resulting in changes to the landscape (e.g., partitioning of land, property development) that affect the availability and quality of land for wildlife (Abdelrahim 2015). In many ways, Salaton has become an ambassador for the voiceless nonhuman species and environmental objects whose interests tend to be neglected because environmental decision making is too often skewed in favor of human self-interests. Shaped by the wisdom of Maasai culture, Salaton's perspective and endeavors signal a need for humanity to reflect deeply on its position within the environmental hierarchy and focus more attention on prioritizing the wellbeing of nonhuman creation: "The land is one of our first elders. Then, after the land, we came into the world. . . . So we are the children of the world, we need to show respect" (Abdelrahim 2015, para. 19).

## Cherokee: Love Is an Action Word

"None of what I say about indigenous things is ever universal, any more than any other human population is prone to universal truths. We are a varied group,

and, unlike Europe, our unifying event wasn't religion, it was colonization . . . Unless you are referencing a specific group, it's [Native American cultures] always plural. Sometimes in a specific group, it's also plural. If you get three Indigenous people in a room and talk about any topic, there are generally at least five opinions" (Kim Shuck, interview with author, July 1, 2023). Thus explains contemporary Cherokee and Polish poet and artist, Kim Shuck (e.g., 2022, 2023), about the vast diversity among Native American belief systems.

Renowned in Native communities as a fiercely loving elder, Shuck comes from an esteemed lineage of Cherokee traditional knowledge and has written extensively on love. She generously agreed to talk with me (one of the authors of this article) about love of creation in our worldview to give a glimpse into a Native pedagogical practice in which knowledge of cultural importance is primarily passed down through oral tradition and observation rather than the written record. While the Cherokee oral tradition predates colonialism by thousands of years, like many Indigenous cultures experiencing genocide, it continues to be essential for preserving knowledge and is also used, in conjunction with published works, to share knowledge outside Native communities.

When I ask Shuck about the Cherokee words for love of nature, she says, "A lot of it is kind of understood, so it needn't be talked about. No one ever told me to be respectful, to watch the birds, but I saw the grown-ups around me do it, so I did it. It's more than just respect, though. It's watching to know how to be in good community with living things." A tenet of Native epistemology is that our understanding is shaped by how ready we are to understand, whether we are deemed worthy to know a thing, and our powers of observation. Elegant Native vernacular summarizes this as "the way I was taught" to recognize that our understanding is, at best, local—to our family, our community, our biome—and not universal. Knowledge about the living world is the basis for Cherokee love of creation.

"Many of the culture groups indigenous to what is now referred to as the United States called themselves the people of the place they lived in. This later was often shortened to 'the people,' but I want you to sit for a moment with what it would mean to identify self as being the place you live in". Shuck elaborates, "Today, people think of themselves as the unit of life, but we might just be mitochondrial. We are not alone in this. We are cradled in the bosom of these hillsides. We provide what we provide, and they provide what they provide, and why wouldn't you need to know about that?" To be in good community with all of creation, we try to understand how we can be beneficial by observing what the living things around us—water, earth, plants, animals, people—need to thrive. Shuck explains, "See how things are on your block. Does that tree have lichen on it? Does it like that? The tree is acting in conjunction with everything in its environment, including you. The tree and animals are interacting with the environment with greater sensitivity than us, so it behooves us to listen." She

continues emphatically, "And they notice when we listen. That is important to understand. Nature is watching us and reacting accordingly." Creation is not merely an inert collection of beings and elements that are experienced by people. In these traditions, people are taught that all things, including water, minerals, and works of art, as well as plants and animals, have their own unique sentience. Each can communicate, consent, generate love, and react to love. While people work to understand creation, it is understanding us back.

Native thought does not consider mere knowledge accumulation about creation to be love. As Shuck said, "Love is a verb. Love is an action word. Our relationship to the world around us is work, like any relationship." Love is the accountability we show in all our actions to our inherent interconnectedness with all living things. We experience love of creation first as the beloved. We are continually given everything we need to make up our bodies by our mothers and the Earth. Then, we gain the power to reciprocate that love, albeit feebly, as our understanding expands. "When I'm disconnected, I get depressed and feel lonely. We are designed to be a part of this stuff. When I'm not disconnected from nature, no matter how bad things get, I don't get depressed. Joy is making sure you're not alone. Love is the joy of learning a thing. Part of the dance is that we have to empower ourselves to empower others."

## Romanticism: Finding Peace in Natural Sublimity

The eighteenth century saw the flowering of an artistic and intellectual movement, Romanticism, that placed appreciation of the natural world at the center of human life to a degree unprecedented in Western culture. Comprising a century's worth of debate among significant thinkers and artists from Germany, England, and beyond, Romanticism famously defies easy summary (Lovejoy 1924). The Romantics were, however, centrally united by a commitment to "the primacy of the aesthetic," the idea that "aesthetics should permeate and shape human life" (Gorodeisky 2016). As Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) put it, "The Romantic imperative demands [that] . . . all nature and science shall become art" and "art shall become nature and science" (Beiser 2003, xv).

Romanticism was in part a reaction against Enlightenment conceptions of nature. For René Descartes (1596–1650), for instance, the cosmos was a great clockwork mechanism within which the human body fit as a mere cog, while the spiritual intellect was essentially alien—and so only adventitiously related—to the natural world (Descartes [1644] 2017). By the late eighteenth century, this mechanical philosophy had borne substantial fruit in the accelerating pace of scientific, technological, and industrial development, turning cities such as London into—at least for William Wordsworth (1850, 199)—"a monstrous anthill on the plain," mere "anarchy and din, / Barbarian and infernal."

Romanticism was in part an effort to overcome humanity's growing alienation from nature, both in theory and in practice, by exalting a particular mode of

engagement with the natural world—neither coldly analytical nor graspingly practical, but rather contemplative and rapturous—as the pinnacle of human experience (Beiser 2003, 2). Their ambition was, as William Blake (1757–1827) put it, "To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour" (1988, 490).

Romantic aesthetics had many exponents in the nineteenth century, but the focus here is on the account given by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) in his magnum opus *The World as Will and Representation*. Schopenhauer identifies three fundamentally distinct human attitudes toward the world. In some cases, we seek to draw the world into ourselves through the understanding, the paradigm for which is the natural scientist's efforts to analyze the world into its constituent parts and fundamental laws. In other cases, we seek to spread ourselves upon the world through our practical mastery over it, as when we hew forests and scar the Earth with mines to serve our interests (Schopenhauer [1844] 1909, vol. 1 *passim*).

These two perspectives are not the only possibilities, though. However necessary and even noble each of these attitudes is, Schopenhauer, with earlier Romantics, thought either was ultimately an insufficient basis for a fully human life. On the one hand, the quest for pure understanding is alienating: "Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings," lamented John Keats (1795–1821), and "unweave a rainbow" (1820, 41). On the other hand, the quest for practical mastery is Sisyphean, since "all *willing* arises from want, therefore from deficiency, and therefore from suffering. The satisfaction of a wish ends it; yet for one wish that is satisfied there remain at least ten which are denied" (Schopenhauer [1844] 1909, 253).

For genuine peace and satisfaction, Schopenhauer thought, we must seek a different relation to the world, in "the state of pure perception, of losing oneself in perception" and "thus of entirely renouncing one's own personality for a time, so as to remain pure knowing subject, a transparent World-Eye (*klares Weltauge*)" ([1844] 1909, 235; [1844] 1977, 240). Schopenhauer illustrates this attitude with a quotation from Lord Byron (1788–1824): "Are not the mountains, waves and skies, a part / Of me and of my soul, as I of them?" ([1844] 1909, 235). When something thus "lifts us suddenly out of the endless stream of willing, delivers knowledge from the slavery of the will," we are able to observe the world "without personal interest, without subjectivity . . . Then all at once the peace which we were always seeking, but which always fled from us on the former path of the desires, comes to us of its own accord, and it is well with us" (Byron 1909, 254).

While Schopenhauer ([1844] 1909, 255) recognized that any object could become the occasion for "pure perception"—citing Dutch still-life painting as an instance of its application to daily life—he nonetheless took it that "that purely objective disposition is facilitated and assisted from without by suitable

objects, by the abundance of natural beauty which invites contemplation, and even presses itself upon us." But not all nature, he insisted, was created equal for such purposes.

Romantic aesthetics was centrally concerned with a distinction first made by Edmund Burke (1729–97) between the "beautiful" and the "sublime" ([1756] 1863). The beautiful—an attractive nude, a landscape of gently rolling hills dotted with fields and pastures—is fitted to our use or congenial to our way of being. As such, even as it absorbs our contemplative interest, the beautiful always threatens to revive the restless appetites that we look to it to still. The sublime, on the other hand, is essentially alien and even threatening to our interests: a craggy, snow-capped mountain; the tempestuous sea; or the vast expanse of interstellar space provokes not delight but breath-taking awe. Such vistas cannot be enjoyed as good *for me*, but only as good *in themselves*, and so to immerse oneself in them is to feel that freedom from striving which, for Schopenhauer ([1844] 1909, 258–67), is in fact our deepest desire.

This Romantic love of wild places and their sense that communion with them is the highest human good profoundly shape the modern world. This is evident not least in the movement launched by the belated Romantic John Muir (Simonson, 1978; Stoll 1993), who sought to found national parks as sanctuaries for the unspoiled wild amid urban encroachments. It equally lives on in the ongoing conservationist efforts of the modern environmental movement, to which this article turns next.

## Love Is Duty: Secular Reverence and the Protection of Nature by Any Means Necessary

> O world, as God has made it!
> All is beauty. And knowing this, is love,
> and love is duty.
> –from Robert Browning's poem, "The Guardian Angel"

In 1962, the marine biologist and conservationist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a secular book that did more than any other single work published up to that point to raise public consciousness in the United States about the adverse effects of the overuse of chemical pesticides. Its influence has been pervasive, helping to "inspire the modern environmental movement" (Kirsch 2023, 60). Carson hoped to thwart what she came to see as "biocide"—poisoning the Earth to the point that it was "unfit for all life" (Popova 2019, 478). Her efforts entailed two decades of committed work despite the ravages of health problems, including eye inflammation and the often-debilitating cancer that ultimately claimed her life less than two years after the book's publication (Popova 2019).

Her strenuous defense of the natural world was grounded in what might be understood as a secular reverence for all life, or what her critics have condemned as "environmental religion" or "secular religion," which they see as encouraging a dogmatic, unscientific "environmentalist cult" and "disastrous" regulatory policies, even as they continue to accept some of her "eventual conclusions" (Walker 2013). Carson did not attend church as an adult but was raised by devout Presbyterians and continued to read theology throughout her life (Rachel Carson Council n.d.).

Many of the secular environmentalists who have followed Carson's lead would likely affirm Browning's poem, even if they might be inclined to substitute the word "God" with "nature" (Kirsch 2023, 62). Following Browning, if love is understood as a duty—commitment to the good of the "other," in this case the natural world and all living creatures, including humans—then, for Carson, *Silent Spring* was indeed a labor of love in the service of a most noble end, undertaken despite great physical suffering. It is now common for scholars to include within their definitions of spirituality and transcendence a range of meaning-making activities that "may or may not include religion," such as a "natural spirituality" that is "a direct sense of listening to the heartbeat of the living universe" (Miller 2015, 25). Indeed, even some irreligious activists use terms like "sacred" to describe the "wilderness" because nonreligious terms are not powerful enough to express the depth of their feelings (Lee and Kychen 2010, 235). Love of nature becomes worship of nature in the antihumanist perspective, which celebrates a future without the natural ravages that derive from what is viewed as the "metaphysical egoism" of the Anthropocene: "Things will some day be the way they should be—there will be no people" (Benatar, quoted in Kirsch 2023, 62). The growing antihumanist (as well as transhumanist) social movement is, in the words of one observer, "a spiritual development of the first order" (Kirsch 2023, 60).

From some orthodox perspectives, displacing God with the worship of nature is an obvious form of idolatry, or disordered love. From some secular perspectives, the greater danger is to be "so heavenly minded" that one is "no earthly good," as Johnny Cash used to sing, drawing on a famous phrase attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. There is no inherent reason why science and religion must necessarily be adversaries in the expression of love of creation. Indeed, there are many examples of convergence. But observers have also pointed to the incongruent "absolute moral imperatives" (Kirsch 2023, 65) and "philosophical and conceptual bases" (Scarce 1990, 32) at the heart of conflicting ideologies. The argument seems to turn on the empirical question of whether the current state of environmental degradation has reached a crisis point. Rachel Carson did not advocate for

violence against people or the destruction of property. But her experience demonstrated that complacent institutions and groups will not be moved without a shock.

Multitudes today believe that legal regulations, social and political pressure campaigns, and religious wisdom and inspiration are all insufficient to break the "spell of numbness and cruelty"—as articulated in *The Love of Nature and the End of the World* by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (in Burton-Christie 2011, 45)—that has prevented meaningful action to protect the sacred "heartbeat" of Miller's (2015, 25) "living universe." Many affirm the call from a leading environmental spokesperson—Greta Thunberg—to use "extra-legal" methods to defend against an "existential threat" (Hays 2023). For those in the so-called "radical environmental movement," including Earth First! organizer Darryl Cherney: "This is a matter of war" (quoted in Scarce 1990, 13). From this perspective, crimes such as sabotaging bulldozers on construction sites are understood as forms of "property enhancement" because "the highest and best use of a place [is] to leave it in its natural state" (Scarce 1990, 12; see also Black (1983) on crime as the enforcement of norms rather than norm violations). Until national and global institutions respond with the hoped-for effectiveness, secular reverence for an imperilled planet will likely contribute to the escalation of a particularly dramatic expression of love: the duty to protect the beloved by any means necessary.

## Conclusion

This article has offered a mosaic of perspectives on love of creation as developed by diverse traditions across the world. Together, they illuminate the rich tapestry of thought on this topic, showing real and meaningful differences in the ways people have sought to enter into relationship with the world in which they find themselves. This concluding section aims to find common ground among these perspectives. It highlights what the authors believe to be some core ideas and beliefs that interweave the various traditions, guided by a spirit of what Ken Wilber (1995) called, without contradiction, "universal pluralism": while we can recognize and celebrate the nuances of cross-cultural diversity and difference (i.e., pluralism), we can still do so through a lens that also aims to see and cherish people's common humanity (i.e., universalism). From this perspective, the authors argue that reverence for "creation" is a quality that humans across the world have discovered and cultivated, even while the ways this vision has manifested are beautifully distinct.

Before articulating this common ground though, let us once again emphasise the pluralistic nature of love of creation articulated here. Across the traditions discussed, there is a considerable variety of ideas and beliefs, as briefly summarised in Table 1.

| Tradition | Key Figure | Key Points |
|---|---|---|
| Hinduism | Swami Vivekananda | The essence of all paths is to dilute or demolish the everyday conventional self or "I." Service is not a love toward separate others but toward an extended self; goodness is there in ourselves and others alike. |
| Judaism | Moses Maimonides; Abraham Joshua Heschel | To contemplate and view creation with a loving appreciation is an end in itself as well as an expression of love for God. This is aided by regularly taking a creative pause (observing the Sabbath). |
| Zen | Matsuo Bashō | Nonattachment but not cold, detached, disinterest from the world around. Direct apprehension of reality beyond language. |
| Christianity | Aquinas; St. Francis of Assisi | God created in order to communicate love, and all of creation originates from, reflects, and points to God's love and goodness. |
| Manichaeism | Mani | Cosmos is fundamentally divided between good and evil, light and darkness. |
| Islam | Rumi | God the Most Gracious (Rahim) and Most Merciful; God-seeking and God-loving are fundamental to our human existence. |
| Maasai | Salaton Ole Ntutu | Multilayered interdependence between humans and non-humans, and environment. |
| Cherokee | Kim Shuck | Love is the reciprocal relationship between creation and ourselves based in mutual understanding, benefit, and respect. |
| Romanticism | Arthur Schopenhauer | The highest human good consists of the disinterested enjoyment of unspoiled wilderness. |
| Secular reverence | Rachel Carson; Greta Thunberg | Love is understood as duty—a commitment to the good of others, including the natural world, sometimes expressed in the contemporary era through acts of destruction (e.g., of bulldozers, an expendable aspect of "creation") when conventional social processes fail to protect against biocide. |

**Table 1:** A summary of love of creation reflected in ten traditions.

From one perspective, some of these visions are radically different, and at a certain level could perhaps even be seen as incommensurate. This is especially the case in terms of the underlying metaphysics, particularly in whether the tradition invokes theistic conceptions of a creator being or alternatively presents other ideas of genesis and creation. Similarly, an antihumanist perspective would privilege some aspects of creation (e.g., a flourishing natural environment) over others (e.g., the existence of humans or the manifestation of the will of God as revealed in scriptures). However, we argue that most of the broader traditions reviewed nevertheless share much common ground, featuring ideas

and experiences that resonate across them despite their differences. We have sought to identify and articulate these commonalities in the form of a love of creation assessment that taps into this common ground. Such a scale would of course not be exhaustive and could not cover certain specific beliefs that might be found within a given tradition. For example, within theistic traditions, love of creation would often include love for the creator responsible. This kind of idea is not featured in our scale, since it would then exclude or be irrelevant to traditions that do not feature such a being. Nevertheless, we have sought to construct our scale in a way that a person with a strong love for creation would, regardless of their particular tradition, likely score highly on it.

Our process of scale construction had two main elements: adaptation from an existing template (John Templeton Foundation 2022; VanderWeele 2023), and item refinement through discussion, with each author guided by their expertise in the ten traditions represented in this paper. In terms of adapting an existing template, this article is situated within a broader psychometric project on love that involves creating scales for different specific forms (e.g., romantic love, parental love, love of neighbor, etc.). Each of these scales uses a common template involving twelve items grouped into two categories. The two categories have been derived from the work of Aquinas ([1274] 1948), Stump (2006) and others (VanderWeele 2023) and involve the idea that all forms of love feature two main aspects: unitive (i.e., whereby one desires to be experientially connected with the focus of one's love in some way); and contributory (i.e., whereby one desires to have benefit come to the object of one's love in some way). Each of these categories is then conceptualised as having six different manifestations or components of love, drawing on the work of Lomas (2018), who identified these components through a process of crosscultural linguistic analysis centered on interpersonal love. These are: passionate love (which we define here as a disposition towards desiring to be united to a person or desiring good for that person that is especially intense); connected love (a disposition towards desiring to be united to a person or desiring good for that person that is particularly concerned with union with that person); caring love (a disposition towards desiring to be united to a person or desiring good for that person that is particularly concerned with that person's wellbeing); intimate love (a disposition towards desiring to be united to a person or desiring good for that person that is particularly concerned with the deepest knowing or experience of or with that person); appreciative love (a disposition towards desiring to be united to a person or desiring good for that person that is grounded in an appreciation of that person's worth, dignity, or qualities); and committed love (a disposition towards desiring to be united to a person or desiring good for that person that arises from or results in commitment). As such, we sought to create a scale pertaining to love of creation following the same template. This template also features a five-point response scale centered on the frequency of experiencing

the various forms of love: "never true of me," "rarely true of me," "sometimes true of me," "often true of me," and "always true of me."

The second component of scale construction was item refinement through discussion. Throughout the project, our team conducted numerous conversations about the article in general (e.g., on our common aims and vision). Based on these discussions, the senior author created an initial iteration of the items. Subsequently, the team met twice to discuss and refine the items. The main points of deliberation were usually (i.e., for most items) around the main verb construction and the object of the sentence. Regarding verb construction, for instance, the third item for unitive love—U3, which centers on caring love—was initially phrased as "I try to take joy in every living thing." However, it was felt that overall the items were too focused on the feelings of the individual person and not enough on the relational dynamic. Moreover, there was a keenness to include the term "restoration" within one of the items, implying that people may be made more whole and complete through meaningful engagement with the natural world, as exemplified in the Cherokee tradition, for example. Furthermore, team members reached out to others for input and comment on the project, and in that respect, elders from the Cherokee community emphasized that love of creation inherently involves a reciprocal relationship between humans and the world around. As a result of these considerations, after much deliberation, U3 was changed to "I seek restoration through my relationship with nature."

Secondly, some refinements were also made in terms of the objects of the sentences, which revolved around options such as "creation," "all life," "all living beings," "nature," "the natural world," and "the environment." Overall, we sought to have a balanced distribution of these options throughout the items collectively. As a result, the final item selection is as follows. First, as with the other scales created within the broader love project, there is a single direct item, which could perhaps be incorporated into an overarching love scale (featuring all these single items). Then, there are six items for unitive love and six for contributory love.

**Single direct item**

I love all of creation.

**Unitive love**

U1 (passionate): I deeply desire to fully experience the natural world.

U2 (connected): I give up various things to more fully appreciate my environment.

U3 (connected): I seek restoration through my relationship with nature.

U4 (intimate): I seek to understand all aspects of nature.

U5 (appreciative): I seek to appreciate the whole of the universe because of its extraordinary beauty.

U6 (committed): I am fully committed to cherishing all of creation.

**Contributory love**
C1 (passionate): I deeply desire the wellbeing of all of creation.
C2 (caring): I make necessary sacrifices in order to care for my environment.
C3 (caring): My own wellbeing depends on meaningfully contributing to the natural world.
C4 (intimate): I seek to nurture other living beings.
C5 (appreciative): I seek the wellbeing of all of nature because it is so precious.
C6 (committed): I am fully committed to preserving the goodness of all things.

As noted in the introduction, we view this scale as preliminary and in need of empirical work to determine its utility. Indeed, we aim for this article to be a foundation for future cognitive testing, psychometric work, and evaluation that can be used to refine and strengthen the initial formulation proposed. Such future work can consider the relation of our construct and assessment to other, at least tangentially related, scales and measures. More broadly, we hope this article can help stimulate a wider and deeper conversation within academia around the idea of love of creation, one that ideally finds points of intersection and communality across traditions—even while we recognize and celebrate their nuanced differences—around this vital topic. To that point, we argue that while acknowledging and, moreover, cultivating this kind of love is perennially important, it is especially so today. The natural environment is almost universally acknowledged as being in peril, with concerns about a climate crisis already wreaking havoc upon the world. While this situation has many dimensions and factors, a crucial component is the often-destructive ways in which humans have interacted with the natural world. Over recent centuries, many cultures—particularly more industrialised and/or Western ones—have developed predatory and disconnected modes of interaction in which nature tends to be constructed as a resource to be exploited (rather than, say, a commonwealth to be protected). However, many peoples and cultures have historically cultivated less destructive and more appreciative modes of relationship, with not only the natural environment but also the broader cosmos, and of which some of the traditions featured in this article are the custodians (Lomas 2019). Addressing the climate crisis may require many different elements and remedies, from the political to the technological. However, we suggest that, at the heart of these endeavors must be movement towards a different relationship with creation (Lomas 2023), without which even the best efforts are likely to fail, or at least be limited in their effectiveness. To that end, we hope that the love of creation expressed in these traditions offers a way for humanity to engage with the Earth in a more mutually beneficial, uplifting, and sustainable way.

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