



UNIVERSITY OF AGDER

Developing a Rigorous Theology of Love: A Case Study of Thomas Jay Oord's Love Theory

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This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

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Preface

‘Love’ is an important term. We know this by its frequent occurrence in everyday language, both in its nominal and in other grammatical forms. In fact, the extensive use of love terms means that ‘love’ connotes so many meanings it almost becomes devoid of it. This is something theologian and philosopher, Thomas Jay Oord, understands very well.

As a theologian, Oord is concerned with love because its understandings have great impact on Christian ethics. The 20th century theologian, Anders Nygren, demonstrated this in his reputable work, *Agape and Eros*.¹ He showed that the topic of love was the core issue of soteriology, and thus the primary reason for the splitting of the Catholic Church and the start of the Reformation Movement. The two different loves or “fundamental motifs” he identified were agape and eros. He believed they served as the core of religious practice by Reformed Christians and Catholics respectively.

As Nygren and Oord, I am too interested in love due to its dominance in Christian ethics. However, this is not the only reason. I also believe the very idea of love, as it pertains to God and humans, will cause feelings that can either be positive or negative. For example, while most Christians agree that God loves humans, individuals may be concerned with *how* God loves and *why* God loves them. These questions pertain to the essence of love – what it really is – and the answers are significant. They could also be asked in relation to humans’ love.

Because the interpretation of ‘love’ matters to many Christians, I believe it is important to embrace a theology of love that promotes overall well-being. The fact that perceptions of ‘love’ results in significant consequences, can be used as a ground to argue that a rigorous theology of love should include a pragmatic definition.

Concerned with the implications of love, the purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the development of theology. But my project is not to complete a theory. Doing that would require more freedom on my part than is granted by the academic rules for the master’s thesis. Instead, I seek to produce knowledge by doing a case study. My purpose with the case study is thus to complete preliminary work essential to obtaining a rigorous theology of love.

¹ This is the name of the translated edition of the book. The book was originally written in Swedish and contained a significantly longer title. The original edition consisted of two parts, of which the first part was published in 1930 and the second in 1936. The translated edition appeared as a complete volume in 1953.

1 – Chapter One: Introduction

As I specified in the preface, my project is to carry out a case study. However, there are several issues to consider before commencing it. In this chapter, I will make essential clarifications.

1.1 – The Nature of the Project

In this section, I will write about the case study itself. This includes presenting a problem formulation, a thesis, and the conclusions I will make to support it. In addition, I will also explain how I intend to reflect on the case study, and how this reflection lays the foundation for developing future theologies of love.

As I have implied in the preface, the theologian whose theory of love I will consider is Thomas Jay Oord. I have chosen to consider his theology because I am sympathetic to the goal he has in mind, namely to promote overall well-being. As will become clearer when commencing the study of his theory, the reason his theological goal is to promote overall well-being is because it is to this end he believes we should practice love.²

Despite the fact that Oord has a good intention to which I am sympathetic, there are certain weaknesses that prevent his theory from being rigorous – weaknesses that a rigorous theology must overcome. As a result, the reflection I will make in the aftermath of the study is to a great extent for the purpose of learning from Oord’s theological weaknesses. However, I will also reflect on strengths with his theology. That is also an important purpose for which to reflect.

Before going in depth on the reflections, I will give an overview of the case study itself. It consists of three important elements, namely a problem to be answered, a thesis, and conclusions that support my thesis:

² Based on his goal of overall well-being, Oord is possibly supportive of utilitarianism or virtue ethics.

Problem:

Is Thomas Jay Oord's theology of love philosophically rigorous?

Thesis:

(T₁): Thomas Jay Oord's theology of love *is not* philosophically rigorous.

Conclusions in Support of Thesis:

(C₁): Oord's metaphysics of love is considerably weak due to several problems.

(C₂): Oord's ethics of love is somewhat weak.

(C₃): Oord's epistemology of love is somewhat weak.

(C₄): Oord does not give a sufficient account of the implications of his theology.

As we see from the conclusions, Oord's theology of love can be divided into the following four fields: metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and implications.³ The first three can be regarded as primary fields from which the fourth one emerges. Therefore, everything Oord writes can be placed under the first three fields while the field of implications accounts for e.g. the emotional implications of his theology.⁴

The ground for making these conclusions is that I have prepared critical arguments prior to initiating the work on the dissertation. I therefore possess great knowledge of Oord's theology, and I would argue that C₁ is sufficient for T₁. But nevertheless, I will also discuss the theological components that support the other conclusions. The reason that the additional conclusions is important is because of the goal I have in mind: Since the goal with my case study is to produce knowledge important to developing theologies of love in the future, it is important to get a clear overview of Oord's theology.

³ For beginners: Metaphysics is concerned with what exists and how things in reality exist, ethics with theories of how to lead our lives, and epistemology with how we can attain knowledge. "Implications" is explained above and in the following footnote. This is not regarded as a traditional philosophical field.

⁴ The other things the field of implications accounts for include ethics and implications for other theological issues. The reason it includes ethical implications as well – despite the fact Oord makes explicit ethical statements – is that there could be implications of which he is not aware or has not mentioned in his writings. While the "primary field" of ethics as a whole could be regarded as a part of implications, I here use the field of implications to include everything pertaining to the primary fields that Oord does not cover explicitly. For example, there is a particular issue concerning the ethics of love that, instead, I will state is a weakness with Oord's theological reflection on the implications of his theology.

The problem formulation emphasizes the focal point of my case study, which is to discover whether Oord’s theology is rigorous. Regardless of how I would answer this question, I believe there would have been important knowledge to gain from the study. However, since I have taken the stance that Oord’s theology is *not* rigorous, this will necessarily shape the reflections I will make in the end.

Rather than focusing entirely on the strengths of his theology – although I will write about them as well – I will find explanations to why Oord’s theology is weak and provide ideas on how to avoid these weaknesses. There are three particular goals with the reflections I intend to meet: 1) To explain why Oord’s theology is weak; 2) to provide a list of checkpoints that will help theorists avoid these and other weaknesses; 3) to clarify the aspects of Oord’s theology that can be used for future theological projects.

Although it could be argued my project would have been valuable without the reflections, I believe its values will be more clearly perceived when making explicit the knowledge that can be drawn from it. As a result, I do not consider the extraction of knowledge a project on its own – in which case the dissertation would have featured two projects – but I consider the reflections to be essential to the project I have in mind. After all, in spite of writing a dissertation whose focus is to answer a particular question, the point of initiating the project reaches far beyond answering the problem formulation itself. Thus, it seems fair to keep in touch with this superior perspective and make statements that can contribute to the development of theology.⁵

Since the phrase, “philosophically rigorous”, is present in both the problem formulation and the thesis, it is essential to my study. I will therefore explain its nominal form, ‘philosophical rigor’, later in this chapter. In that section, I will also explain why I prefer the term ‘*philosophically* rigorous’ over ‘*theologically* rigorous’.

Without providing details, it is sufficient to say at this point that the reason I use the term is to express that the criteria on which I will evaluate Oord are mostly philosophical. It is important to note that evaluating a theology according to philosophical criteria does *not* run contrary to theological development – quite the opposite, I will argue.

⁵ I would also like to add that I feel more compelled to make explicit comments given the nature of my conclusion. If my opinion of Oord’s theology had been that it *is* philosophically rigorous, there wouldn’t have been the same need to make reflections since there would have already existed a rigorous theology of love.

Another thing to note is that I have not presented an antithesis. The reason is that my present knowledge of Oord's theology in relation with the criteria for philosophical rigor tells me there is no optional thesis. Being convinced of the conclusion, I do not want to imply the contrary.

To conclude, Oord's theology of love serves as an example of a theory with certain strengths that still falls short because of fundamental weaknesses. It is mainly for the purpose of identifying weaknesses that I will explain his theology in chapter two. Nevertheless, there are also strengths to be identified in the material I discuss, and also in the material I cannot consider due to the scope of the dissertation. In chapter four, I will discuss the strengths with Oord's theology that I believe can contribute to an optional theory of love. I will also make the other reflections in that chapter.

1.2 – Defining the Project Further

Because I am doing a case study of Oord's theology of love, it is important to give a presentation of the works I will consider. But it is equally important to define the field in which I place the project, and define "philosophical rigor" – an essential term of which to be aware when claiming Oord's theology of love is *not* philosophically rigorous. I will cover the issues in the following subsections.

1.2.1 – Defining Oord's Theology

As stated in section 1.1, I will not be able to account for all that Oord has written. His writings on love and related writings include at least five books and several articles. For this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on the five books I have in mind. They are also the only writings I have read of him.⁶ What matters is that the contents of the books constitute more than enough information for my purposes, and even more than I can explore in detail. In this section, I will define both his theology of love at large and the content I will consider in the analysis. I start by giving a presentation of the books in chronological order:

⁶ There is one exception to this. I have read a book he has edited called *God in an Open Universe*. However, I have decided this will not be used in my analysis. It is related to, but does not treat love as its primary topic. I do not think it contributes to my case study.

Science of Love was published in 2004. This is a book containing essays related to the phenomenon of love. The essays deal with the following topics: love and the world religions, creaturely freedom and the problem of evil, love as an activity of the mind, pacifism and altruism, the importance of friendship, the four fundamentals of love, love in relation to sex and romance, and growth in love.

Relational Holiness was published in 2005. The book explores love in relation to holiness and explains what it means to lead a holy life. Leading a holy life includes being in fellowship with others, thus the title that includes 'relational'.

The Nature of Love was published in 2010, prior to *Defining Love*. The book explores love and its three subtypes: agape, eros, and philia. It includes discussions with significant past theologians who have written about love. It also includes the following theological aspects that are related to a theology of love: open theism, a doctrine of creation, the problem of evil, and a doctrine of sin.

Defining Love was published in 2010, posterior to *The Nature of Love*. The book includes a presentation of love and its subtypes, and explains how the subtypes of love are often mixed in everyday life. For the most part, the book is concerned with love as a philosophical and theological phenomenon in relation with theories of the social, biological, and cosmological sciences.

The Best News You Will Ever Hear was published in 2011. This book is concerned with explaining the love of God for humans and the importance of love. It also touches upon the problem of evil and the doctrine of sin.

To classify the books according to the academic field to which they most pertain, *Science of Love* and *Defining Love* could be called works of philosophical theology. This is because Oord develops theology with reference to other sciences. *Relational Holiness* and *The Nature of Love* could be called works of systematic theology since they concern putting ideas of love in a system based on Scripture. *The Best News You Will Ever Hear* is clearly a work of practical theology since it is written to appeal to readers rather than explaining ideas based on Scripture (systematic theology) or studying ideas from a superior perspective (philosophical theology).

Because my goals with the dissertation include reflecting on difficulties in developing a rigorous theology (limited to the study of Oord's theology) and on checkpoints worth

considering in theological development, I will not be able to rely much on *The Best News You Will Ever Hear*, which hardly encourages the required intellectual activity. However, the book will be of *some* use in explaining Oord's theology and discovering weaknesses.

In the other works, there is much more to consider. They function as main sources for explaining particular aspects: I will use *Defining Love* to explain Oord's metaphysics of love and *Science of Love* to explain its fundamentals. These books cover the metaphysics of love. *The Nature of Love* will be used to explain the subtypes of love: agape, eros, and philia. This book functions as a source for the ethics of love. Finally, *Relational Holiness* will be used to explain what it means to lead a holy life. This book serves the main purpose of accounting for the epistemology of love.

Although the books mentioned above will be used for explaining different fields of Oord's theology, there are no explicit grounds for thinking they are written for the purpose of explaining particular fields, i.e. metaphysics, epistemology, and/or ethics. Obviously, a book about holiness covers ethics too, and may even be written solely for the purpose of ethics. It may just be a coincidence that I find *Relational Holiness* to be the only work of Oord's that clearly contains an epistemology of love, and almost everything pertaining to this field is found in chapter five of that book. So while the books might pertain to several fields, I will use them here to explain one field each (two books will be used to explain metaphysics, although one deals with love's conditions and the other with love itself). However, this does not prevent me from referring to them in other sections than the ones covering their "main fields".

Because I use the books to explain particular fields of Oord's theology, they will also pertain to particular arguments for my thesis, since the arguments point at different fields respectively. While I have mentioned books that provide a good explanation of the "primary fields" of metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology, I have not mentioned any book that explains the implications of Oord's theory. But with regard to the conclusion that Oord does not give a sufficient account of theological implications, *The Best News You Will Ever Hear* plays an important role. I will explain its role when discussing weaknesses in chapter three.

1.2.2 – Defining the Academic Field of the Project

As stated in section 1.1, the following question is the core of my case study:

Is Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love philosophically rigorous?

We find there are two terms of particular interest in this problem formulation, namely ‘theology’ and ‘philosophically’. At this point, I have strongly indicated my project falls within theology since a theological theory is the study object.⁷ However, I have also implied my project falls within philosophy by using the term, ‘*philosophically rigorous*’. I wrote earlier that the criteria on which I will evaluate Oord are mostly philosophical.

Since I can reveal that I consider my project part of theology, the question is to which of the following two branches the project belongs: systematic theology or philosophical theology? Both fields make use of philosophical methods – that is, applying philosophical criteria in arriving at conclusions. Therefore, it is not with respect to method that the fields can be distinguished. To determine whether my project belongs to systematic theology or philosophical theology, we must understand the focus of the fields.

A project of systematic theology is typically about developing or rejecting ideas based on Scripture. In such a project, the role of philosophical criteria will be to serve as a ground from which scriptural interpretations are made, and the combination of Scripture and philosophical criteria will either serve to develop a theology or to critically engage other theologies.⁸ One example of how philosophical criteria can be used in developing systematic theology is that systematic theology may include the criterion of consistency as one to which all interpretations of Scripture must agree. It follows then that if certain interpretations of Scripture are inconsistent with other interpretations, the result is not a rigorous theology. And for those who view Scripture as God’s infallible word, it is a goal that the entire Scripture must be interpreted as being consistent on the whole. In such an incident, the theologian must

⁷ Reflecting on and criticizing/defending theology also belongs to the domain of philosophy, for which reason the study object (a theology) does not necessarily determine the field of the study.

⁸ It is worth noting that while a person who does systematic theology would use philosophical criteria, he or she might not be aware they belong to philosophy in particular. In fact, all humans are likely to use philosophical criteria everyday in constructing arguments even if few are aware of it. It just goes to show the universality of philosophy.

in addition to understanding the material she is using for her current development, also have an overview of everything else in the Bible to make sure consistency reigns.

A project of philosophical theology could be many different things, since philosophical theology is a much larger field than systematic theology. However, one example of a project is that the theologian or philosopher will evaluate a theory based on the same criteria used in systematic theology. The difference from systematic theology, however, is that the criteria do not function exclusively as rules for how to interpret Scripture – if they are applied to Scripture at all. Instead, one who engages in philosophical theology – even if a systematic theology is the object of study – is concerned with whether the theory in its entirety agrees with philosophical criteria, which is not limited to scriptural interpretations. In fact, the theologian might be interested in everything but interpretations.⁹

It may sound peculiar I have implied systematic theology consists of more than interpretations of Scripture, because if it does, wouldn't it be equal to philosophical theology? The short answer is that Scripture or tradition is the focal point of systematic theology while philosophy is generally more concerned with reason and experience. Of course, although Scripture could be the focal point of systematic theology, reason and experience would still be used in making interpretations. As such, the analyses and conclusions by one who does systematic theology would consist of more than merely statements about the meaning of biblical passages. Therefore, one who evaluates a theory of systematic theology within the framework of philosophical theology would primarily be concerned with the parts that do not pertain to Scripture, while one who evaluates the same theory within the framework of systematic theology might focus on Scripture exclusively. Another important difference between systematic theology and philosophical theology is that the latter emphasizes the clarification of terms.

The above statements regarding philosophical theology are important to consider for my own project. I believe much of the material I will consider in chapter two belongs to systematic theology since the Bible seems to be the primary source. Yet, it is clear that reason is involved in making the interpretations that Oord does, and I have therefore more of his theology to evaluate than simply the relation between criteria and scriptural claims. I am also concerned with clarifying the terms he uses.

⁹ One reason for engaging in philosophical theology is to increase one's perspective. Therefore, the theologian might intentionally disregard everything pertaining to systematic theology.

Since my primary concern is to evaluate Oord’s theology as a whole according to the criteria I will specify in the next section, I define my project as part of philosophical theology. More specifically, I consider it part of Christian philosophical theology, mainly because Oord is a Christian theologian.

Although the term, ‘Christian’, might imply the project serves a theological agenda, this is not my intention. At least, the majority of my statements will be based on philosophical reasoning. The following quotation from *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* is a good example to demonstrate I can define my project as part of Christian philosophical theology without attempting to advance religious faith:

Any philosopher committed to thinking through topics such as the Trinity in the Christian tradition (critically examining different models of God’s triune life) is practicing Christian philosophical theology even if her or his intention is to argue for the incoherence or implausibility of Christian traditional beliefs.¹

In conclusion, the project is part of philosophical theology, but important comments have been made to clarify this. The problem formulation alone is not a sufficient indicator. I also want to note that the understanding of systematic and philosophical theology varies, and that I have made a distinction myself for practical purposes.

1.2.3 – Defining Philosophical Rigor

As stated earlier, establishing a list of criteria provides a ground on which to evaluate Oord’s theology. It is therefore important to formulate them clearly since my project includes arguing for the thesis. The criteria I consider essential to a rigorous theology of love are as follows:

- (1) A rigorous theology of love must be based on Scripture.
- (2) A rigorous theology of love must be credible based on available knowledge.
- (3) A rigorous theology of love must be clearly expressed.
- (4) A rigorous theology of love must be constructed on coherent arguments.
- (5) A rigorous theology of love must be thoroughly consistent.
- (6) A rigorous theology of love must not be metaphysically impossible.
- (7) A rigorous theology of love must promote overall well-being.

Of the seven criteria listed, criterion (1) is the only criterion I would connect explicitly with theology. Had Oord scored perfectly with respect to all criteria but this one, I would say he had presented a rigorous *philosophy* of love.¹⁰ In other words, criterion (1) is not necessary in order to obtain a rigorous theory, but it is necessary for a theory to be *theology*. Since I wrote above that one who does philosophical theology is not primarily concerned with scriptural interpretations, it is important to note that I am only concerned with whether Oord has made *references* to Scripture when developing his points, not with his *interpretations* of it.

Criteria (2), (3), (4), and (5) are standard criteria for good philosophy. As they make up the majority of the set, it is with these criteria in mind I call the list a prerequisite for *philosophical* rigor. Criteria (4) and (5) in particular are conditions for logic, which is crucial to all kinds of arguments.

Criterion (6) is an important addition to “the four criteria for good philosophy”. In certain instances there are statements whose content is impossible although the statements are not inconsistent or incoherent as such. I have mentioned the criterion here because I am aware of a statement in Oord’s theology that violates this rule.

Criterion (7) is included due to the purpose for which a theology of love should be developed. As I stated in the preface, Christian theologies of love can affect morals and cause feelings that can either be positive or negative, for which reason I argue they should result in the best possible morals and feelings. According to the wording of the criterion, it sounds like the theology of love I support should be developed within the framework of utilitarianism. I want to specify, however, that I do not think promoting overall well-being should be done at *all* costs. I believe a rigorous theology of love should be developed with consideration to different ethical theories. As such, criterion (7) is an important guideline, but not a hard and fast rule like the others.

Although most of the criteria are philosophical, I will emphasize again they can work for theology. There is no “objective” answer to which criteria work for theology and which do not. The reason I employ the criteria I do is because of my conviction they are important to determine the probability and usefulness of love theories.¹¹

¹⁰ It should be noted that criterion (1) is essential to a *Christian* philosophy of love, but not to a general philosophy of love.

¹¹ By ‘probability’, I speak of the possibility that a theological theory is true. By ‘usefulness’, I speak about the purposes a theological theory might serve, e.g. to promote overall well-being.

Doing a thorough discussion of the differences between theology and philosophy could have been interesting in discovering the extent to which my criteria are theological and philosophical. However, I believe my project is justified by stating that a strong connotation to *Christian* theology is that it assumes the existence of God and theories from the Bible as its core, while philosophy has at its core the rules of logic to which all theories must agree. Due to these two “cores” in themselves, we find that criterion (1) applies to theology – and also to Christian philosophy – while criteria (4) and (5) apply to all philosophy.

Although there are many philosophical criteria in the set, I am not sure if the set as a whole could be used to evaluate other issues within the framework of philosophical theology. What is important is that I consider it good enough as a ground on which to evaluate Oord’s theology and as a ground for developing a rigorous theology of love.

1.3 – Structuring the Dissertation

Before I commence the case study, there is one more issue to be clarified, namely how I will structure the dissertation. In this section, I will therefore account for such details.

As I specified earlier, my project is twofold: it consists both of completing a case study of Oord’s theology (which is completed by answering the problem formulation) and make explicit the knowledge that can be drawn from this. As I have stated, I believe the reflection is an important part of my project and not a project of its own – completing this reflection, which will not take up too much space, makes the values of the case study seem even clearer. Due to the twoness of the project, I will naturally divide between the case study and the comments that follow.

The case study will be split in two chapters. The first of these chapters – chapter two – will cover the presentation and analysis of Oord’s theology. Chapter three will cover the arguments for my thesis and is thus the chapter in which I evaluate Oord. To be specific, I will present and analyze the metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology of love in chapter two, while chapter three will contain an evaluation of these fields of Oord’s theology as well as of their implications. In addition, chapter two will also include theological issues that Oord considers essential to his love theory.

Chapter four, which contains reflections on the case study, will include an explanation of the weaknesses in Oord's theology, a list of checkpoints to consider when developing theology, and a discussion of how parts of Oord's theology can be used for further theological development. This makes three sections altogether in chapter four, except the conclusion at its end. The reason I include a whole chapter for the reflections rather than making them in the conclusion of the dissertation, is that I believe they deserve to be treated in a chapter of their own. Aside from their importance, I also think the reflections would be too extensive as part of the conclusion.

Chapter five – the concluding chapter of my dissertation – will include a brief summary of what is written and reflections that go beyond the project itself. The reflections tied to the case study will be complete in chapter four, for which reason I will not include extensive repetitions in the conclusion.

Regarding my use of notes, I will continue to use them the same way I have thus far. This means placing comments in footnotes and text references in endnotes. The reservation is intentional as I consider comments to be important notes that should be read immediately unlike text references. Using different types of notes for comments and text references will also make the dissertation appear more orderly. When discussing passages I have touched upon earlier, I may not provide text references again.

As I proceed with the project, I will make temporary conclusions in which I summarize and reflect on what is written. Further details on the contents and division of sections will be presented in the introduction to the respective chapters.

Regarding main chapters, I have decided to commence them at odd-numbered pages. The reason the preface appears at a numbered page as well is to emphasize it is an important part of my project.

2 – Chapter Two: Essentials of Oord’s Theology

This chapter covers a presentation of Oord’s theology of love and theological issues related to his love theory. The reason I include additional theological issues, is that presenting them are vital to making the arguments I will formulate in chapter three, and thus to information in chapter four. I will start by doing a thorough presentation of Oord’s theology of love.

2.1 – Oord’s Theology of Love

As I stated in the introduction, Oord’s theology of love consists of aspect of a metaphysics, of an ethics, and of an epistemology. To make things orderly, I will have one subsection for each of the particular fields. Thus, section 2.1.1 will cover the metaphysics of love, section 2.1.2 the ethics of love, and section 2.1.3 the epistemology of love. Because these fields are closely related, there will naturally be some overlap in the sections.

Due to the limitations of Oord’s texts, there is not an equal amount of information for each of the fields. Given the available material, the section on metaphysics and ethics will be about the same length, while the section on epistemology will be considerably shorter. An important reason for the differences of length is also that I will make analyses and comments as I move along instead of merely accounting for ideas. Due to the more extensive material on metaphysics and ethics, the sections that cover them will also include longer discussions.

For the sake of clarity, I will write a conclusion at the end of each major subsection in which I summarize what has been stated thus far and what is important for the arguments that follow. I can therefore use these conclusions as points of reference.

2.1.1 – Love and the Four Fundamentals

In this section, I will write about the metaphysics of love. This consists both of explaining love itself and explaining its conditions. For practical purposes, I will mostly focus on *Defining Love* to explain the being of love, which contains the best information on that aspect. When explaining love’s conditions, I will refer to *Science of Love*, in which Oord has written an essay on them. He calls these conditions ‘fundamentals’, and lists the four he has in mind. I believe accounting for the fundamentals are important to gaining a complete overview of Oord’s metaphysics of love.

To avoid the risk of neglecting important theological contents, I will also make references to other works when writing about metaphysics. The same applies to the sections on ethics and epistemology, in which I will also prefer particular works.

Although the conditions for love must logically precede love itself, I believe it is easier to understand their significance by first exploring love's being. I will therefore start by presenting Oord's thoughts on the substance of love.

2.1.1.1 – Oord's Metaphysics of Love

Since Oord considers love an important phenomenon for most people living today – both in religious and in secular settings – he engages it in theology, philosophy, and the sciences. As a result, there is a lot of material I can use. When it comes to his development of a metaphysics, however, this is done within the framework of theology and philosophy. For this reason, I am not concerned with other sciences in the dissertation.

What is peculiar about Oord's thoughts on love itself is that he does not use the terms of ontology or metaphysics when talking about it.¹² And as we shall see, he neither defines 'love' when he suggests he is about to do it.¹³ Judging by these facts alone, there seems to be no clear statements from which a metaphysics of love might be discovered. And it follows it might be incorrect to claim Oord develops a metaphysics of love within the framework of theology and philosophy.

Because Oord is not as clear about the substance of love or uses of 'love' as he should be¹⁴, one of the points of this section is to make explicit the information that implies there is a metaphysics of love in Oord's theology. In other words, I do believe it is possible to identify a metaphysics of love in his texts.

¹² He does, however, place the fundamentals of love within the field of metaphysics.

¹³ According to the philosophical doctrine of definitions, the term or phrase that is being defined is called the 'definiendum' while the set of words that clarifies the definiendum is called the 'definiens'. What Oord suggests throughout his works is that 'love' is to be the definiendum, although the definitions that succeed these statements clearly show that it is not 'love' Oord defines.

¹⁴ The philosophical doctrine of definitions also includes two main classes to which all definitions agree: real definitions and nominal definitions. A real definition is concerned with explaining traits of phenomena beyond language itself, which could mean to list the qualities of the phenomenon, love. A nominal definition is concerned with explaining the uses of a term. In Augustinian theology, for instance, 'love' means the same as 'desire'.

Throughout the works he has written, Oord discusses different understandings of love. Two theologians whose theories he discusses in particular are Anders Nygren and Augustine. He writes about them in *The Nature of Love* in order to develop his own viewpoints. In the same book, he also discusses other definitions of love introductorily which he thinks we should reject. To list a few, Oord rejects love as “relationality itself”, sex and romance, and devotion and worship.ⁱⁱ

In *Science of Love*ⁱⁱⁱ and *Relational Holiness*^{iv}, Oord presents different thoughts on love by third parties in order to show diversity of understanding. In *Defining Love*^v, Oord presents a list of questions that can come to mind when reflecting on love:

Is love a decision or feeling?

Is love blind or universally aware?

Is love sexual, nonsexual, or asexual?

Is love self-sacrificial or self-authenticating?

Is love unconditional or object-specific?

Is love best understood as agape, eros, philia, something else, or all of these and more?

Is love something that only God expresses?

Can we truly comprehend anything about love?

With these questions in mind, Oord is aware of the complexity of engaging this topic. This can help explain why Oord is concerned with science. As I have already specified, however, I will focus on Oord’s theological and philosophical grounds for defining love in the dissertation and will therefore disregard the data from sciences. With that said, I want to emphasize that I think it important to consider sciences in order to develop a rigorous theology. I am excited to find theologians who do this.

I will now write about Oord’s definitions of love, which are important to identifying a metaphysics.

As I stated above, Oord does not provide a real definition of love when ‘love’ is what he promises to define.¹⁵ Instead, the definiendum he uses (that which is being defined) is ‘to love’. As a result, Oord does not speak of the essence of love in his definitions, but rather of what it means to practice love.

Throughout the five books I have read, only four of them contain a “definition of love” (the other, as mentioned, is a work of practical theology and doesn’t concern itself with the heavier issues of theology). In his first book on love, Oord defines it this way: “To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.”^{vi} However, this definition undergoes change with the passing of time. In his next book, which is published the following year, Oord has reduced love to this: “To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being.”^{vii} And five years later, love expands yet again, but not into the same as it was initially: “To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic/empathetic response to God and others, to promote overall well-being.”^{viii} And within that very same year, love changes yet again, this time to its original phrasing: “To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.”^{ix} Here’s an overview:

2004 Definition (*Science of Love*) – To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

2005 Definition (*Relational Holiness*) – To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being.

2010 Definition (*The Nature of Love*) – To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic/empathetic response to God and others, to promote overall well-being.

2010 Definition (*Defining Love*) – To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

¹⁵ Given Oord’s context of wanting to develop a theology of love and the wording of his books, it seems it is a real definition (a definition of love’s essence) that should be included rather than a nominal definition (a definition of how love can or will be used as a synonym or as a replacement for a set of words).

Two noteworthy distinctions between the definitions above is that the 2005 definition lacks the terms of ‘sympathetic’ and ‘overall’ while one of the 2010 definitions includes the term, ‘empathetic’. I call these distinctions noteworthy because the former means the extent of actions that can be called love will increase while the latter suggests that ‘empathetic’ adds something new to love. The other differences are only with regard to phrasing and do not suggest any alteration on behalf of love’s metaphysics as I see it.

Considering the above differences, the question of which definition to adhere to raises immediately. Of course, one could settle for using all of them as long as they bring additional information to what love is and do not break the rules of a good definition. However, for the purpose of maintaining a clear discussion of Oord’s theology, it is important to settle for one of them.

Since the phrasings in *Science of Love* and *Defining Love* are identical, they are actually *one* definition and a single option. The next option is to adhere to the definition from *Relational Holiness* as the authentic one, and the third is the definition from *The Nature of Love*. I will argue, however, that the first option is the better one.

The first reason to prefer the first option is that Oord has used this phrasing in his most recent work. That implies the definition is the one that remains closest to Oord’s present understanding of love. The second reason is supportive of the first one. Regarding the definition from *The Nature of Love*, which includes the term, ‘empathetic’, Oord writes he doesn’t make any distinction between ‘sympathy’ and ‘empathy’.^x He uses these terms because he notes that psychologists and sociologists use the term ‘empathy’ in the same way that philosophers use the term ‘sympathy’, namely to express the phenomenon of “feeling with” another. The third reason to favor the first option is that it better contains the components of Oord’s theology. For example, we will see that the terms of ‘sympathetic’ and ‘overall’ are essential to understanding the four fundamentals which will be discussed in the next section. Oord also writes about the terms in explaining his love definitions in *The Nature of Love* and *Defining Love*.

Now that we have looked at Oord’s definition of love and preferred the one that sounds like this, “to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being”, we are still faced with the problem of understanding what *love* is. As I noted earlier, Oord doesn’t give a definition of love’s essence, but rather of what it means to express love. It is curious that Oord doesn’t seem to notice. For example, the

sentence that precedes the definition of love in *Defining Love* is formulated this way: “My own definition of love, and the one I will employ in various ways throughout the book, is this.”^{xi} This phrasing implies that a real definition follows.

Although Oord never defines ‘love’ in a whole sentence, he does explicitly write that love is an action.^{xii} Understanding love as an action is also implied by phrases such as “acts of love” and “loving acts”, which appear frequently in his works. Since love can be called an action, this means it is possible to reformulate Oord’s definition so that it becomes a real definition. To make explicit a metaphysics of love in Oord’s theology, I therefore present the following definition:

Love is an intentional action in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

Only by employing a definition such as this can we rightfully talk about a metaphysics of love. I do not think the definitions Oord have provided are sufficient to that end – they don’t even express Oord has any idea of what love *is* as a substantial phenomenon.

I believe that among the different phrases and word classes in which ‘love’ is used in everyday language, such as in its nominal form (i.e. ‘love’), in its verbal form, ‘to love’, and in its adjectival forms, ‘loving’ and ‘lovable’ – to mention some examples – it is the adjectival form, ‘loving’, that has been the key to Oord’s reflection on love. He strongly connotes promotion of overall well-being with “loving acts” and explicitly states that acts whose intention is not to promote overall well-being *do not* qualify as “acts of love”.

If we assume that Oord began reflecting on love by pondering about what makes an act loving, it makes sense that he created a verbal definition¹⁶ of love – which is only a definition of the manifestation of love, and does not explain what love is. By making this assumption, we also have a possible explanation to why he doesn’t distinguish love (the essence) from expressions of love (manifestations of the essence).

¹⁶ It is important to note that the phrase “verbal definition” states something about the grammatical condition of a definition and does not pertain to the philosophical language of definitions. According to the doctrine of definitions, I interpret “to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being” as a nominal definition. However, it is not true that it is a real definition or a nominal definition of *love*; ‘love’ is not the definiendum. For this reason, rather than making the wrong statement that Oord’s definition is a real or nominal definition of love (which pertains to the language of definitions), I prefer referring to it as a verbal definition of love (which pertains to grammar).

The explanation I have in mind, which I find credible, is that Oord does not differ between love and its expressions because his thoughts about the term, ‘loving’, are the core notions to his understanding of ‘love’. When comparing his best definition (*to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being*) with my own reformulation of it (*love is an intentional action in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being*), there is hardly any difference. It is possible most people conceive of love – a nominal term – as a mental or emotional entity rather than a type of action. But when Oord considers love to be the latter, there is little difference between the substance of and expression of love.

In spite of the various questions that Oord believes come to mind when reflecting on love, and in spite of his studies of love in different sciences, I find this to be a credible explanation. In fact, Oord argues that the definition he has presented can be helpful for “the love, science, and theology symbiosis.”^{xiii} He believes that a clear definition of love is a condition for engaging love in the sciences.

The last that needs to be said about Oord’s metaphysics of love before turning to the four fundamentals concerns the different phrases of his love definition. I mentioned before that Oord provides explanations of his definitions both in *The Nature of Love* and in *Defining Love*. Since I find that the latter work contains the best definition of the three he has presented, I will refer to this when explaining the phrases. It should be noted that the explanations in both greatly overlap.

The definition Oord presents in the particular book, which I have already quoted, is this: “To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.” Oord divides this into three phrases which he then explores further. The first phrase is “to act intentionally”, the second is “in sympathetic response to others (including God)”, and the third is “to promote overall well-being.”

When explaining the first phrase^{xiv}, “to act intentionally”, Oord writes that he has included ‘intentionally’ to refer to what he calls the three facets of love: deliberateness, motive, and self-determination. He explains that deliberateness means there is a decisional aspect of love. This reduces love to acts that are intended to promote overall well-being, while acts that “just happen” to promote overall well-being are not acts of love, despite the outcome being valuable. By motive, Oord means that the subject who loves requires a purpose for loving, which must be a good purpose. If the promotion of overall well-being is the result of an act that was intended for evil, this does not qualify as an act of love. Finally, Oord speaks

of self-determination to emphasize that love is meaningless if the subject cannot choose one action over another. He also mentions, however, that this does not mean total spontaneity on behalf of the subject as the various contexts in which we love limit the available possibilities.

The second phrase^{xv}, “in sympathetic response to others (including God)”, accounts for the participation in others’ experiences. Much of what is written here pertains to discussions of how to define sympathy and empathy, how close we are to the “other” with whom we feel, and how the phrase accounts for different theories of love presented by others. It may be natural to think that the “other” with whom we feel is the one that is the object of our actions. However, this could contradict with something Oord has written elsewhere, which is that “loving acts are influenced by previous actions and executed in the hope of increasing the common good.”^{xvi} This statement does not necessarily mean that the sympathy phrase accounts for sharing the experience of those who have loved in the past – that because of our ability to partake in their visions, those who have intentionally promoted overall well-being in the past inspire us to do the same in the present – but there are passages that imply this interpretation. One example I will mention immediately is the following: In *Science of Love*, Oord has referred to the part of his love definition which reads “in sympathetic response to the actions of others.”^{xvii} Of course, this is an erroneous reference since Oord has never provided a definition in that book, nor in any of his later books for that matter, that includes this exact phrasing. But the fact that Oord thinks he has made such a definition strongly suggests that the “others” with whom we sympathize are not the objects of our love, but the sources of our inspiration. It is important to be aware of this distinction. An even stronger reason for interpreting the “others” as sources of inspiration and not objects of love will be presented in section 2.1.2.1 about agape.

In explaining the third phrase^{xviii}, “to promote overall well-being”, Oord focuses first on the importance of ‘well-being’. He mentions different examples of what well-being entails, such as having met basic conditions for life and having attained the satisfaction of being cared for, and writes about different linguistic traditions that influence our love vocabulary. The reason for writing about these is to conclude that he belongs to the “*hesed* tradition”, in which well-being is a central term. The other traditions he mentions is the “proper/improper tradition” and the “mutuality tradition”. In the former tradition, love is simply a purposive act or desire and needs a modifier to describe whether it is love for good or evil things. In the latter, love is simply the reciprocity in any relationship. The term, ‘overall’, is also important to Oord’s understanding of love since actions that promote well-being for a few at the expense of many runs contradictory to the notion of loving acts.

As far as ‘love’ is concerned – without being further defined, which it will be in later sections – this is as much as can be written. According to my personal reading of Oord, I find there are two reasons his metaphysics of love has a theological foundation. The first is that he includes God in his love definition. The second is that he refers to Jesus’ deeds to explain that love is an act to promote overall well-being. The way he argues for his definition of love, can be formulated as follows:

- (1) Premise 1: If Jesus performed acts to promote overall well-being and set an example for how humans should live, humans should promote overall well-being.
- (2) Premise 2: Jesus performed acts to promote overall well-being.
- (3) Premise 3: Jesus set an example for how humans should live.
- (4) Conclusion 1: Humans should promote overall well-being. (From 1-3)

- (5) Premise 4: Jesus encouraged people to practice love.
- (6) Premise 5: Since humans should promote overall well-being and Jesus encouraged people to practice love, to love is to promote overall well-being.
- (7) Conclusion 2: To love is to promote overall well-being. (From 6)

It is important to note that Oord *does not* set up his argument in sentences like I have done here. It is for the purpose of clarifying Oord’s thoughts on the subject that I have made this argument. I will now make an analysis.

The first part of the argument (sentences 1-4) could be criticized for not being clear. The reason it is not clear is that (3) is ambiguous. For example, it is not given that absolutely *everything* Jesus did is something humans should do. Of course, given the positive connotations Christians have to Jesus, one could argue this worry is unreasonable – Jesus was perfect, and therefore all Christians should strive to lead their lives as closely to the life of Jesus as possible. The point I am making here, however, is that the statement itself does not include *what* aspects of Jesus’ life should be imitated or if *all* aspects of Jesus’ life should be. It is only due to factors beyond the statement itself that the “correct” interpretation is made.

Regarding the second part of the argument (5-7), (6) could be refuted on several grounds, although I will focus on one due to present purposes: the statement is not coherent with what has been stated earlier.

Even if we accept (4) and (5), it is not given that (7) is correct, which (6) apparently supposes. It is possible to consider Jesus' commandments to love as meaning something different than leading the life he did. But this is what Oord doesn't demonstrate clearly, namely that Jesus' acts (which humans should perform) is identical to love itself and not manifestations of love. It is because of this missing link that Oord's argument for love is insufficient according to philosophical criteria.

As far as I'm concerned, this is the only explicit argument Oord presents for his love definition. I would therefore say his theory is mainly theological. However, as he includes other phrases in his definition of love and chooses to elaborate on them, I would also say his metaphysics of love belongs to philosophy. As he is influenced by both theology and philosophy, I would define his theory of love within the crossing field of philosophical theology. Further defined, the theory Oord has presented is a philosophical theology in which theology has the upper hand, since the philosophical reflection is grounded on theological influence.

As mentioned in the introduction, Oord makes a distinction between three types of love that he respectively calls agape, eros, and philia. He believes they are all important to leading an abundant life. I will consider them in detail in section 2.1.2. But first, I turn to the fundamentals of love.

2.1.1.2 – The Four Fundamentals of Love

Now that we have looked at Oord's metaphysics of love and concluded that love is "an intentional action in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being", we have a clear ground from which we can study different conditions for love to exist.

In *Science of Love*, Oord has written a short essay about such conditions called "The Fundamentals of Love". Much of the contents therein is similar to the statements in the previous section about the phrases in the love definition. However, I choose to explain the fundamentals of love for four reasons.

First, Oord has deliberately chosen to write about the fundamentals of love in his first book about love instead of explaining the phrases of his definitions as he does in *Relational Holiness*, *The Nature of Love*, and *Defining Love*. The fact that Oord has made the distinction himself between explaining conditions for love in one book and phrases of his proposed

definitions in others is something I view as a sufficient reason to write about the fundamentals in a different section.

Second, since we can assume that Oord’s reason to explain the phrases of love has been to elaborate on love’s metaphysics, and his reason for writing about the fundamentals has been to explain the conditions for love to exist, so it is my reason to divide the sections of love’s being and love’s fundamentals for these purposes.

Third, I believe writing about the fundamentals of love brings additional information to what has already been stated. This information will possibly make it easier to understand what Oord means about the phrases above or reveal inconsistencies in his theology.

Fourth, I believe the content of the essay is still valid today. As we noticed above, Oord’s love definitions have changed throughout time. But when Oord wrote about the fundamentals of love in 2004, he stuck to the same love definition as he did in his latest work in 2010. That book, *Defining Love*, is the one I referred to above when explaining the phrases of Oord’s love definition. Since the explanation of the phrases in that book and the content of “The Fundamentals of Love” from *Science of Love* overlap, this suggests the respective parts of each book are consistent.

As Oord distinguishes four fundamentals in his essay, I have chosen to specify this in the section heading. According to my analysis, however, I find there are actually eight conditions for love that Oord make part of his “fundamentals” in the text. I will present them for the sake of clarification:

- (1) Individuals exist**
- (2) Individuals stand in relation to each other**
- (3) Individuals possess power for agency**
- (4) Individuals possess power for freedom**
- (5) Existing things possess genuine value**
- (6) God exists**
- (7) God possesses visions of well-being**
- (8) God calls creatures to enact these visions**

Since the conditions include claims about reality, they are metaphysical by nature. It is therefore they work as conditions for love, and it is important to explore their relations with Oord's love definition. I will commence this analysis after exploring Oord's essay. But prior to studying "The Fundamentals of Love", it is important to make some reflections.

First, I will alternate between the use of 'condition' and 'fundamental' in this section. 'Fundamental' will be used in reference to Oord's text while 'condition' will be used about any of the eight conditions above. Second, it is possible Oord deliberately uses 'fundamental' to express the *necessity* of the conditions he mentions, i.e. that love requires (but is not limited to) these conditions to exist. This is possible as Oord hasn't stated explicitly that these "fundamentals" are restricted to certain contexts. He states in the essay that the first fundamental is required for any love expression. We can read from Oord's understanding of love that the second fundamental too is necessary for love to exist. But in which way the third and fourth fundamentals are necessary for love is subject to doubt. I will get back to this later. Third, it is important to be aware that even if we accept Oord's metaphysics of love and the fundamentals he presents, we do not have to believe the fundamentals include all necessary or possible conditions for love. In addition to love's minimum requirements (necessary + sufficient conditions)¹⁷, there could possibly be other factors that shape love.¹⁸ Fourth, it should be noted that Oord's essay is indeed short. The ideas can be summarized in a few sentences, which I demonstrate in the following.

In the introductory passages, Oord writes that many philosophers give up on defining love and instead try to figure its meaning given the contexts or "language games" in which the term is used.^{xix} He moves on to stating there are also few who reflect on love's fundamentals. He believes that the dearth of love definitions go hand in hand with the failure to reflect on love's

¹⁷ 'Necessary conditions' are conditions that must be met for a product to exist. If, for instance, there are as many as ten necessary conditions for love and only one of them is not met, the product *is not* love whatsoever. But even if all ten conditions are met, they may not be sufficient for love by themselves. As a result, there is another category of conditions called 'sufficient conditions'. If, for instance, there are as many as twenty sufficient conditions for love, it is possible that any four of them will make up the minimum requirements for love when preceded by the necessary conditions. Despite the name of the categories, "sufficient conditions" are sometimes necessary in addition to other conditions for a product to be while they are not sufficient in themselves. "Necessary conditions", on the other hand, may also be self-sufficient for a certain product (when "sufficient conditions" are not required).

¹⁸ These factors may not be necessary to defining love well. For instance, a pizza could be defined as a pizza bottom, tomato sauce, and cheese, in which case the conditions for the pizza are also its constituents. In this case, the conditions are both necessary and self-sufficient. Therefore, anything that is added to these conditions or constituents is not required in order to attain a good definition of pizza. In the same way, additional factors to the necessary (and sufficient) conditions for love are not required to define love well.

“basic elements”¹⁹ and states later in the text that defining love well is “essential to identifying what love’s fundamentals might be.”^{xx} Since Oord has provided a definition of love earlier in the book, he therefore has a ground from which to argue retroductively about its conditions. He refers to his definition throughout the essay: “To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.”

The first fundamental of love is that individuals exist and are in relation to each other. He refers to it as “relational individuals”. He argues from experience that love requires at least two individuals, although one can also love in the presence of others. Oord believes that the individuals in relation – whether human or nonhuman – must be mutually influencing. He states one’s own intentional love is always a response to the influence of others – whether body members, humans, nonhumans, or the divine. Despite the statement that individuals must be in relation, Oord argues it is also possible to love oneself.²⁰ He also writes about self-sacrificial love. The fundamental is summarized in conditions (1) and (2).

The second fundamental of love is that a degree of power be present in individuals. He calls this fundamental “power for agency and freedom”. Just as the name implies, Oord specifies that power is necessary both for agency and freedom – which in turn are necessary for love. In other words, power is a condition for two other conditions for love. Since love is an act, it follows that agency is necessary for love, and Oord explains that freedom is necessary for love since love is intentional. This fundamental can be summed up in conditions (3) and (4).

The third fundamental of love is that existing things – “things” understood broadly – possess genuine value. He calls it “valued possibilities”. Oord explains that values pertain to that which we appraise as morally better or worse, more or less beautiful, or more or less truthful, which are the examples he presents. He writes further about the importance of values for promoting well-being and also refers to other theorists in discussing this fundamental. As I mentioned earlier, it is uncertain in what way this fundamental is necessary for love. It is quite possible it pertains to all love, but it may also pertain solely to the love form of eros.²¹ Condition (5) contains the essence of this fundamental.

¹⁹ ‘Elements’ is another term Oord uses when referring to love’s fundamentals.

²⁰ This fundamental is an example of one that is mainly a result of philosophy, since Oord refers to experience. While Oord writes it is also possible to love oneself, it might be more natural in light of Christian theology to argue that self-love is the more common love. This is implied by Jesus’ commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves.

²¹ This is due to the definition of eros. I will discuss this in section 2.1.2.2.

The fourth fundamental is that love requires divine activity, which Oord labels “an active and relational deity”. This is the fundamental he considers the most controversial. He argues for it by pointing to his love definition, which includes “in sympathetic response to others”.²² Oord states that God is one of the others to whom we respond and that God might be the only individual to whom all creatures must respond. Another argument he presents is that to attain a high degree of well-being, it is necessary that someone possesses a vision of such well-being and that this individual calls upon creatures to enact it. Oord believes only God can possess this vision and make such a call. However, there are at least three reasons to think God may not be necessary for love. The first pertains to how Oord argues for God’s activity by stating only God can have a vision of a *high* degree of well-being. Since the modifier, ‘high’, is part of the argument, Oord suggests that promotion of overall well-being is also possible when the result is not a high degree of it. The second reason to doubt God’s necessity is that Oord states humans can learn to love better in the final essay of *Science of Love*. If God loves perfectly and wants humans to do the same, wouldn’t God’s call to love always mean that he presents humans with the best possible options? An explanation to why humans don’t love perfectly, which does not mean God presents humans with anything less than the best options, is that humans sometimes (attempt to) love without first being called by God. Finally, the third reason for thinking God is not necessary for love pertains to another statement by Oord in the same book. We have already seen that Oord states “love is always a response to the influence of others – whether body members, humans, nonhumans, or *the divine*”, as I wrote above regarding the first fundamental. Assuming that the influence spoken of here pertains to the role of “others”, which is part of the sympathy phrase, this clearly expresses God may not be the only individual that influences humans to love. With this said, however, I believe Oord thinks of God as the primary condition of all love chains. According to my reading of Oord, I have found that he states God is necessary for all love, but as I just exemplified, it is uncertain whether he thinks God is always a direct condition. When explaining the doctrine of prevenient grace later on, we will see that Oord is likely inconsistent on the matter of whether God is a direct condition or not. It is also uncertain whether Oord has had the same stance to God’s role in love since the beginning of his career. The fourth fundamental is covered in conditions (6), (7), and (8).

²² Oord has mistakenly written “in sympathetic response to the actions of others” when referring to a phrase of his love definition, but has in fact never provided a definition with this exact phrasing. This is the same expression I mentioned above when discussing the second phrase of Oord’s love definition. Later on, we will see how this mistake, due to its implications about Oord’s metaphysics of love, will be of importance in both defending and revealing weaknesses in his theology.

To make it easier to compare the fundamentals of love to the phrases of love’s definition, I will present both of them here. I will use the conditions I listed above since they are more clearly formulated than the contents are in Oord’s essay. I will also include the definition of love in its entirety.

This is the definition of love from *Science of Love* and *Defining Love*:

To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

These are the phrases of the definition of love from *Defining Love*:

First Phrase – **“to act intentionally”**

Second Phrase – **“in sympathetic response to others (including God)”**

Third Phrase – **“to promote overall well-being”**

These are my own formulations of the conditions for love from *Science of Love*:

- (1) Individuals exist**
- (2) Individuals stand in relation to each other**
- (3) Individuals possess power for agency**
- (4) Individuals possess power for freedom**
- (5) Existing things possess genuine value**
- (6) God exists**
- (7) God possesses visions of well-being**
- (8) God calls creatures to enact these visions**

In comparing the phrases of Oord’s definition with the conditions I have presented, I will deal with one phrase at a time. Afterwards, I will make a conclusion about which conditions are necessary and sufficient, or which option is the more probable one regarding particular conditions.

The first phrase, “to act intentionally”, suggests that individuals who are able to carry out actions must exist. However, in order to act, one must also have the ability, energy, and knowledge to act, which I personally deem the components of power.²³ And acting intentionally – which Oord defines as acting with deliberateness, motive, and self-determination – means that freedom is required. In sum, we find that conditions (1), (3), and (4) correspond to the first phrase.

The second phrase, “in sympathetic response to others (including God)”, suggests that individuals stand in relation. It is important to keep in mind that the others with whom we sympathize are likely the sources of inspiration for loving acts and *not* the objects of our acts. However, Oord makes some claims regarding the second phrase in both *The Nature of Love*²⁴ and *Defining Love* – pertaining to ideas by other theorists – that imply sympathy is also directed towards love’s objects.^{xxi} If that is the case, the phrase in question could surely be explained more clearly to express the presence of both meanings. In spite of this uncertainty, there is still evidence that the sympathy is directed towards those who have loved in the past and to God’s vision of overall well-being. The term, ‘response’, assumes that there exists individuals and that these individuals are capable of responding, while the term, ‘sympathy’, implies that these individuals possess freedom. Therefore, conditions (1), (2), (3), (4), (6), (7), and (8) correspond to the second phrase.

The third phrase, “to promote overall well-being”, suggests that there exists individuals and that these are capable of promoting overall well-being. The phrase does not imply any kind of freedom in the loving subject or any relation to God and others. I find that conditions (1) and (3) are the only ones I can safely connect to the phrase.

According to the information above, the conclusion is that there is clear correspondence between the conditions for love and the phrases of love’s definition. The correspondences rely in certain instances more heavily on interpretation than in others. As far I see, there are no explicit inconsistencies in between the conditions and phrases. However, there are certain things regarding particular phrases and conditions that are unclear, which in turn mean that potentially consistent links between phrases and conditions may not have been identified.

The only condition I have not linked to any phrase is no. (5) about value. It is a pity, because Oord has made statements that imply value could pertain to all phrases. An example

²³ It is important to note that Oord does not give a definition of power himself and that I therefore interpret power according to my own understanding.

²⁴ The phrase in *The Nature of Love* is somewhat different than in *Defining Love*. It reads: “in sympathetic/empathetic response to God and others”.

of how it could be tied to the first phrase, due to the term, ‘intentionally’, is this: “an actor chooses from a set of genuine value-laden possibilities when choosing [to]²⁵ whether to love.”^{xxii} What has ultimately prevented me from connecting value to any of the phrases, however, is that Oord has emphasized the term specifically for the definition of eros, which suggests that value doesn’t apply to the general love definition. Neither has Oord made a clear definition of his own about the term, and it seems ‘value’ is almost as much a weasel-word as Oord has mentioned some think ‘love’ is.

Since the role of God is also uncertain, one could argue I shouldn’t have connected conditions (6), (7), and (8) to the second phrase. But this case of uncertainty does not pertain to whether God is only connected to certain forms of love. And although God may only be directly involved with particular cases of love, I still chose to connect the conditions with the phrase in question because we know that Oord thinks this connection is at least occasional.

With regards to whether the eight conditions above are necessary and/or sufficient for love, I am absolutely certain that conditions (1), (2), (3), and (4) are necessary. Oord argues condition (2) is present when we love ourselves because this can be interpreted as either standing in relation to our bodily members whose well-being we promote or standing in relation to our future selves.^{xxiii} Condition (5) is necessary for the love form of eros, and probably required for all forms of love. But I am not as convinced about this condition’s necessity as I am about the necessity of the former conditions. Conditions (6), (7), and (8) are necessary for all instances of love, but it is uncertain whether they are directly involved in all instances or whether they are the primary conditions in all possible love chains while (8) is only a direct condition on occasion. God’s call to love could hypothetically be expressed through secondary agents.

Regarding Oord’s use of and possible intention with the term, ‘fundamental’, my stance is that it is probably meant to account for the necessity of all conditions covered by the term, but the third and fourth fundamentals prevent certain knowledge. I cannot think of any minimum requirements for love that are not contained within the eight conditions, but can neither rule out the possibility they exist. Chances are slim, however, that there exist additional, unidentified “fundamentals”.

²⁵ Oord has probably forgotten to remove this infinite marker in the editing process.

2.1.1.3 – Conclusion

As we have seen, there is much uncertainty regarding the metaphysics of love in Oord's theology. Some of the uncertainties are particularly problematic since it could mean inconsistency on Oord's part, while others may not be too important. Given the discussion that has taken place, these are the concluding doctrines:

Love Definition

Love is an intentional action in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

Love Conditions

- (1) *Individuals exist.*
- (2) *Individuals stand in relation to each other.*
- (3) *Individuals possess power for agency.*
- (4) *Individuals possess power for freedom.*
- (5) *Existing things possess genuine value.*
- (6) *God exists.*
- (7) *God possesses visions of well-being.*
- (8) *God calls creatures to enact these visions.*

The definition Oord presents that I consider the best one is “to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being” from *Science of Love* and *Defining Love*. Although I have argued this is the best definition, it is unclear what is meant by its middle part, and it is therefore not perfect. Another reason it is problematic, is that it does not point explicitly at the essence of love, but instead at love's manifestation.

Due to the problem of how to interpret the middle part of the definition, Oord's theology is definitely unclear and possibly inconsistent as well. It is therefore certain that the philosophical criterion of clarity is broken. The criterion of clarity is further violated by the fact it is not clear how the definiens of the “love definitions” say anything about *love*.

Regarding the fundamentals of love, it is uncertain whether Oord thinks the third fundamental about value and the fourth about God’s activity are essential to all instances of love or only to some. If the latter is true, the term ‘fundamental’ is deceptive, and ought therefore to have been avoided.

Were it not for my eagerness to try and reconcile as much of Oord’s theology as possible, I would have already given in to my resolute tendency and deemed his theology inconsistent due to the reason presented. However, even if I had made this conclusion at present, I would have still needed to look at the other parts of his theology, given that my project extends that of arguing for my thesis – I am concerned with reflecting on Oord’s weaknesses (and strengths) to gain knowledge that is important for further theological development. Besides, I consider it my duty to do everything I have promised in the introduction. It is therefore necessary to look at the ethics and epistemology too.

I will now turn to explaining the subtypes of love.

2.1.2 – The Subtypes of Love

In this section, I will discuss Oord’s theology of the three forms of love he distinguishes: agape, eros, and philia. This can be viewed as a continuation of love’s metaphysics.

As was the case with the “general definition of love”, there are also definitions of the subtypes that are not real or nominal definitions per se. However, there are actually instances in which Oord have provided real definitions of the phenomena (definitions of the phenomena’s essence). For discussional purposes and for the purpose of emphasizing that the information pertains to love’s metaphysics, I will prefer those definitions.

In addition to being a continuation of the metaphysics of love, the section will also account for ethics. As we have seen, Oord defines love as a category of actions. Therefore, what is written about the metaphysics of love in the former section is also valuable to accounting for the ethics of love.²⁶ In other words, both this and the former section include information on metaphysics and ethics respectively, although I wrote the former with metaphysics in mind and will write this with ethics in mind.

²⁶ Due to love being a category of actions, the metaphysics of love in Oord’s theology will have strong ethical implications.

Since Oord states that all love types are necessary for a full-orbed love and thus to leading an abundant life²⁷, we will get a good grasp of the ethical implications of his theology by understanding the different forms. This says something about the importance of this section, since a rigorous theology of love should result in a good moral philosophy.

While *Defining Love* played an important role in discussing the being and fundamentals of love earlier, *The Nature of Love* will be the most prominent in presenting the subtypes. In spite of emphasizing the latter, I will actually prefer the definitions found in the former book when discussing Oord's theology since they qualify as real definitions. As I will demonstrate, referring to different books in explaining a particular phenomenon works quite well.

As with the general definition of love, the definitions of the subtypes have also changed throughout Oord's career. In *Science of Love*, there are no clear definitions of the subtypes, but there is at least one statement each about eros and philia that resembles the general definitions of love and the definitions of the particular love forms found in other works. As is the case for love in general, there is neither any definition of love's subtypes in *The Best News You Will Ever Hear*.

I will write about agape, eros, and philia in that order, and end with a conclusion.

2.1.2.1 – Agape

Agape is perhaps the love type that most Christians consider the “perfect” form of love. In the famous biblical verses that state “God is love”^{xxiv}, ‘agape’ is the Greek equivalent from which ‘love’ is translated. It is because of these verses in particular that agape has come to be known as “God's love” and by some thought to be superior to other forms of love. Anders Nygren is a well-known theologian who asserted that agape is God's love and differs fundamentally from the type of eros. But as we already know, Oord thinks of both agape and eros as manifestations of the general phenomenon of love. For the sake of clarity: Oord never states there is such a thing as a “general” love that differs from agape, eros, and philia. All acts of love belong to any of the three types^{xxv} or are mixtures of several types.^{xxvi} Because acts can belong to different types at once, the subtypes are not logically exclusive. To talk about love

²⁷ This follows from Oord's statement that love is essential to an abundant life.

in general is only to specify that agape, eros, and philia share important features, all of which are found in the general definition of love.

As mentioned introductorily to section 2.1.2, there is no clear definition of agape in *Science of Love*, and I have neither found any statement about agape that resembles any of its definitions in other books. But there are clear definitions in other works by Oord. In *Relational Holiness*, Oord defines agape this way: “acting to promote well-being when responding to actions that cause ill-being.”^{xxvii} Here, we see that the structure of this definition differs from the structure of the general love definition found in the same book (*to love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being*). We also see the same differences when comparing ‘love’ to any of the other subtypes, both in this and in other books. In *The Nature of Love*, Oord defines agape as “acting intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote overall well-being in response to that which produces ill-being.”^{xxviii} To easily recognize the different forms of love, Oord provides nicknames in this book. He refers to agape as “*in spite of love*”. In *Defining Love*, Oord presents the following definition: “agape is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being.”^{xxix} In fact, Oord has two definitions of each of the forms in this book, but emphasizes some definitions that he calls “clarifications”, which are also the ones I will present. Here is an overview of the definitions:

2005 Definition (*Relational Holiness*) – Acting to promote well-being when responding to actions that cause ill-being.

2010 Definition (*The Nature of Love*) – Acting intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote overall well-being in response to that which produces ill-being.

2010 Definition (*Defining Love*) – Agape is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being.

As we noticed when analyzing different definitions of ‘love’, there are also differences of greater importance between the definitions of agape. One of these differences is that the first definition on the list does not include a term that pertains to intentionality. One could argue it is not necessary to include all the terms from the general definition of love since we already presuppose the presence of these elements when talking about its subtypes. However, there is

a fine balance between keeping a definition short enough for practical purposes while keeping it long enough so that it can be recognized as part of a category. Another important difference is that the third definition on the list is a real definition of agape, while the others are nominal definitions of *the practice* of agape (*not* of agape itself). And last, it is noteworthy that the first two formulations lack a definiendum.

Due to my analysis, I therefore find two strong reasons to prefer the third option: it is a real definition (and thus a metaphysical doctrine of love) and it possesses a definiendum. In addition, it is also the latest definition Oord has provided, which suggests it corresponds better with Oord's present understanding of agape than the others.

With this definition in mind – “agape is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being” – I turn to presenting Oord's writings on agape.

In *Defining Love*, Oord makes a statement about agape that suggests agape is not only a response of goodness towards evil *directed at us*, but also at unnecessary pain. While most of Oord's examples of agape expressions means “turning the cheek”, Oord includes one example that differs from this, which is that agape could mean for a father to put a bandage on his child's wounded finger.^{xxx} Therefore, agape expressions can at least fall into these two categories.

Most of what Oord has written about agape is found in chapter two of *The Nature of Love*. In that chapter, though, Oord is more concerned with engaging theologian, Anders Nygren – with whom he greatly disagrees – than he is with elaborating on his own reflections on agape. Of course, he *does* make statements that define his point of view. But it seems to me that the main thing going on is not an elaboration of the phenomenon of agape, but rather a discussion of how best to interpret the term. In other words, Oord spends most of the chapter arguing with Nygren about the possible meanings of ‘agape’ and related grammatical forms.

As we talk about the structure of Oord's chapter on agape, it might be worth mentioning that Oord keeps to the same structure in chapters three and four of the same book, whose topics are eros and philia respectively.²⁸ This means he presents the definitions of the love forms at *the end* of the chapters, and not early on so that they provide ground for elaboration. The fact that definitions are saved for the end, enhances my view that Oord is

²⁸ It is not immediately clear the chapters deal with the topics of eros and philia since there are many issues at hand. It is the conclusions that reveal their presence.

first and foremost concerned with eliminating “wrong” uses of the terms and secondarily with presenting possible, adequate definitions.

The ground for having this view in the first place is that there is little information in chapter two, three, and four of *The Nature of Love* that hints toward the presentation of a certain definition. It is not that the definitions he presents are totally unrelated to what has been discussed previously. But the purpose of the chapters seems to be the same as the purpose for this dissertation: namely to present, analyze, and evaluate theories, and then reflect on them to attain important knowledge.

This is an extract from the last page of chapter two, covering the entire paragraph that precedes the agape definition. At this point, it seems to me that Oord is making reflections based on his discussion of Nygren, and I do not think it is obvious that an alternative definition will follow:

While no definition is perfect, a good definition of the *agape* love form should complement the general definition of love a theologian embraces. It should correspond with the general biblical witness to how God and creatures love. And it should be sufficiently distinct from how we define the other love forms, without rendering the other forms unintelligible or unnecessary by comparison.^{xxxii}

As we see from this paragraph, there is nothing that explicitly points to what the definition of agape must be like. However, it contains some criteria on which to evaluate a definition of agape, and it seems fair to put Oord’s definition to the test. The criteria can be formulated as follows:

- (1) The definition of agape must complement the general definition of love**
- (2) The definition of agape must correspond with the general biblical witness**
- (3) The definition of agape must be sufficiently distinct from other love forms**

With regard to the first criterion, we know it is the case that Oord’s definition of agape (*agape is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being*) shares important terms in common with the general definition of love (*to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being*), and therefore complements it.

With regard to the second criterion, Oord justifies agape as part of the love category by stating that Jesus, Paul, and Peter might define agape as a love that “repays evil with good”. He refers to passages in the Bible in which the persons in question encourage this behavior.^{xxxii} It is important to keep in mind that Oord is aware of the many translations of ‘agape’, and that it does not have a uniform meaning in Scripture.²⁹ So when he defines it as he does, this does not clearly follow from any preceding statements of his. However, since he spends the chapter discussing Nygren’s stance to ‘agape’ – who emphasized the fact Jesus loves sinners – it makes sense that Oord has chosen to think of agape as a particular expression towards sin and evil.³⁰

With regard to the third criterion on the list, I refer back to the fact that ‘agape’ has been translated to many things in the Bible. For example, Oord presents cases in which forms of ‘agape’ have been translated to forms of ‘eros’.³¹ It would be a waste of terms to consider ‘agape’ synonymous with ‘eros’ when the former (at least) describes a lot of phenomena. It is therefore Oord has chosen to narrow down agape.

To conclude the discussion of Oord’s criteria, it seems that Oord complies with all of them.

Now that I have presented Oord’s writings on agape, there are other things to discuss. One discussion follows from examining the statement, “God is love”, which Oord has made part of his own theology. I will show how this is a problematic statement for several reasons. Another discussion pertains to explaining why Oord’s thoughts on agape point at a certain interpretation of the second phrase of his love definition (*in sympathetic response to others (including God)*).

As I mentioned when discussing the metaphysics of love, I would use Oord’s thoughts on agape as a ground to state that the “others” in the sympathy phrase are not the objects of

²⁹ There are many passages in the New Testament in which agape is given positive connotations. For example, it is a verb form of the term that is used in the passages covering the love commandments (Mat 22:37-40; Mar 12:29-31). But in opposition to the positive connotations, there is an example of the opposite. In the second epistle to Timothy, Paul writes that Demas left him because he loved the world (2 Tim 4:10).

³⁰ Apart from the facts that biblical uses of ‘agape’ and related terms sometimes appear in the contexts of facing sin and evil and that agape is a subtype of love, it is not evident why Oord defines agape exactly as he does. Given that agape is used about God, and that God has acted self-sacrificially, one could possibly define agape as a self-sacrificial act in general whose intention is to promote overall well-being instead of limiting ‘agape’ to the contexts Oord have presented.

³¹ When writing about “forms” in this instance, I am not talking about subtypes within the particular love of agape. I am referring to grammatical forms in the Greek manuscripts.

love, but people who have loved in the past and inspire us to partake in their visions of well-being. When I write about this, I will also include some thoughts on the relation between agape and the fundamentals of love.

Regarding the statement, “God is love”, which I referred to introductorily, I wrote that the term for ‘love’ in the Greek text was ‘agape’. This is the reason I have chosen to discuss the statement in this particular section rather than as part of the earlier section on love’s metaphysics. There are, however, many reasons I could have discussed the statement in that section too. The following paragraphs explain this very well.

If we interpret literally the statement, “God is love”, it suggests that God is exactly what love is. The reason we cannot be certain of this interpretation is that those who make the statement could consider love a category to which God belongs. In that case, God would not be everything that love is, but *part of* love, in the same way that wine is not everything that beverage is, but *part of* the category of beverage. Given this possible interpretation, we can therefore make the conclusion that there are certain cases in which the definiendum is not completely identical to the definiens, but carries essential features of it. In conclusion, we can ask the following question: Is the Johannine statement, “God is love”, a case in which the definiendum only carries aspects of the definiens?

If we make the assumptions that “God is love” is a real definition and that the definiendum equates the definiens or carries features of it, we can come to a pretty wild conclusion. As demonstrated above, Oord’s definition of love can be reformulated into a real definition: “Love is an intentional action in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.” As a result, God must be identical with or part of the category, “an intentional action...”, in which case God *is not* a conscious spirit and not even a “who”.

Obviously, given the many statements by Oord that means God is an intelligent being, he does not consider “God is love” to be a real definition. Although I have never doubted what Oord means by ‘God’, I believe he could have made it even clearer in what way the meaning of ‘God’ and ‘love’ differs in various contexts. I have no doubts at all that Oord, just as other theologians, does not really think that the phenomenon of God equates the phenomenon of love – despite using the statement as part of his theology without bothering to

explain this aspect.³² However, even if the statement is not *misinterpreted* on my behalf, this does not mean it is *interpreted* as a meaningful idea I can relate to.

The second problem about the statement also arises from the literal interpretation of “God is love”. If we make this assumption, we can alter the real definition I presented above by exchanging ‘love’ for ‘God’. In other words: “[God] is an intentional action in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.”

The problem we see here is that the definiens presupposes the meaning of the definiendum since ‘God’ is being defined while ‘God’ is also part of the explanation. Alternatively, we could solve this problem by imagining a God₁ (the definiendum) and a God₂ (part of the definiens). But since there is no evidence for making such an interpretation, it does not seem to be a satisfactory solution. Besides, what meaning would we get out of God₂ (the term in the definiens)? Since we wouldn’t be able to have complete understanding of God₂, we would neither have complete understanding of God₁.

The third problem I can think about regarding “God is love” – which is actually a set of problems – is based on the presumption that love is God’s nature and not a synonym for God or a category to which God belongs.³³ According to this presumption, it is in God’s nature to act in response to others, including himself. This follows from the general definition of love (*to love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being*). In other words, if God is to love, there must be someone he can respond to.

Since the love definition suggests God can respond to himself, the potential problem could be solved by thinking that no one else than God is necessary for love to exist. That way, God does not depend on creation to love – love can precede creation, and God can still be a creator whose nature is love *prior* to creation. However, even if we assume that no one else than God is necessary for love to exist, it is still problematic that Oord conceives of love as part of his nature from eternity.^{xxxiii} For if love (a category of actions) is God’s nature from eternity, God must have acted without beginning. And this is simply impossible, something I will explain in chapter three.³⁴

³² It would have been wrong to state that “God is love” is not being discussed – it is. However, it is the relation between definiendum and definiens that is not being thoroughly discussed in Oord’s works and, as far as I’m concerned, neither in the works of many other theorists.

³³ This is my interpretation of Oord’s understanding of “God is love”.

³⁴ Explaining this requires a very extensive treatment, for which reason I will not delve into the discussion at this point.

Furthermore, arguing that God must necessarily have acted a first time also means arguing against Oord’s doctrine of creation, which presupposes the idea that God has acted without beginning. It is in relation to this doctrine I will argue that acting from eternity is impossible.

As we see, the problems with the statement, “God is love”, imply I could have discussed it in the above section on metaphysics. However, I have saved the discussion for the current section since Oord has some thoughts on the statement as it appears in the verses of 1 John that are connected to ‘agape’ in particular. I find it more practical to have the entire discussion surrounding the statement in one section.

The thoughts that Oord have regarding the statement seem to answer the implied question of how God’s love can be anything else than agape when ‘agape’ is the term that John uses in making the statement. This is a question that arises in Oord’s discussion with Nygren, who believes that agape is God’s one and only form of love, contrary to what Oord believes, namely that agape has multiple meanings in the Bible and is meant to account for all types of love when used in the Johannine statement.

What is peculiar, however, is that Oord does not express clearly that ‘agape’ covers all forms of love when arguing that Nygren’s interpretation of agape as God’s particular form of love is wrong. Instead, he writes that John’s intention for making the statement could possibly be to express that God’s mode of love³⁵ is necessity.^{xxxiv}

It is by analyzing Oord’s interpretation of the Johannine statement in relation with his criticism of Nygren we discover the implicit hypothesis that ‘agape’ accounts for all love in the case of John’s statement. For if “God is love” is interpreted as stating something about God’s *mode* of love rather than God’s *form* of love, it is possible that agape is only one form of love that God expresses by necessity. And given that Oord criticizes Nygren for not identifying the diverse uses of agape (Oord believes agape accounts for eros and philia meanings too), it seems reasonable to think Oord interprets “God is love” as “God necessarily expresses all forms of love”. At least, Oord has explicitly stated that God *does* express all forms of love elsewhere.

³⁵ Oord writes shortly about what he calls “modes of love” in this section. He writes there are three modes of love: necessity, contingent, and impossibility. The first mode means the subject necessarily expresses love, the second that the subject has a choice of whether or not to love, and the third that the subject is unable to express love. God’s mode of love is that of necessity, while humans’ mode of love is that of contingent.

Regarding the interpretation of the second phrase of Oord's definition of love, "in sympathetic response to others (including God)" – which I discussed in the section of love's metaphysics – I wrote that an additional reason for interpreting the "others" as sources of inspiration rather than objects of love would be presented when studying agape. To understand my argument, it is important to look back at the agape definition, which reads "agape is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being."

Although the definition does not contain any "others" or "God", we know that everything pertaining to the general love definition also pertains to the subtypes of love. We have seen that Oord explains this. Therefore, if we assume that "God and the others" are to be considered the objects of love in the general definition, it also means they must be considered possible objects of agape. This could lead to an important problem with Oord's theology. I will explain this by setting forth the following argument:

(1) Premise 1: Everything that is true for the general definition of love is true for the subtypes of love: agape, eros, and philia.

(2) Premise 2: If God can be the object of love in general, God can be the object of agape. (From 1)

(3) Premise 3: God can be the object of love in general.

(4) Conclusion 1: God can be the object of agape. (From 2 & 3)

(5) Premise 4: To practice agape means either to repay evil with good or to combat unnecessary pain.

(6) Premise 5: Since God can be the object of agape and to practice agape can mean to repay evil with good, it is possible God can be evil. (From 4 & 5)

(7) Conclusion 2: It is possible God can be evil. (From 6)

As we see from this argument, it does not follow by necessity that God *must* be evil if God can be the object of agape. However, the possibility that God *can* be evil, which follows from Oord's own premises, is a reason to interpret "in sympathetic response to others (including God)" in a way that does not make God the object of love. Therefore, it seems reasonable to make the alternative interpretation of the phrase, which is that God is a source of inspiration. But there is also another reason for this interpretation.

When I discussed the four fundamentals, I stated it was uncertain whether Oord always conceives of God as a direct condition for love, and concluded God is likely not a direct condition in all cases. But when it comes to expressing love for sinners (agape), which seems more difficult than expressing love for friends (philia) or for that which is valuable (eros), it makes sense that God’s role in agape expressions is more often or always as a direct condition for inspiration. Therefore, while the fourth fundamental might apply to God as the *primary* condition for all love and thus a necessary one, it might have an additional meaning for agape, in which God could also be a *direct* condition. However, if we do consider God the object of agape, this could also have positive outcomes.

Given that God could be the object of agape limited to contexts in which we combat unnecessary pain, this would fit well with Jesus’ statements that he identifies with those in need. In other words, what we do to those with whom Jesus identifies, we also do to God. And this is based on the presumption that Jesus too is in need whenever humans with whom he identifies are.

As we can see from the above information, Oord writes very little about agape in *The Nature of Love*, and most of the content in this section concerns my own reflections on what he has stated. The reason I have not referred to other works in my discussion, is that I do not see them adding anything substantial to what is already said. It is for the same reason I will focus on *The Nature of Love* when discussing eros and philia.

It might be questionable that I have used *The Nature of Love* as the main book of references since I have preferred a definition from another work. But as I have not found any inconsistencies between Oord’s statements about agape in *The Nature of Love* and his definition of the term in *Defining Love*, I have chosen to do it this way.

In conclusion, Oord defines agape as intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being, which falls into two categories: actions against intentional evil, and actions against unnecessary pain. Oord believes agape covers the meaning of love for friends and love for that which is valuable when used in different grammatical forms throughout the New Testament. It is because of the wide range of meanings for agape, that “God is love” may not be interpreted as “God’s form of love is agape” but as “God’s mode of love is necessity”.

There is much about Oord's writings on agape that provides ground for discussion in chapter three. The content of this section also motivates a presentation of Oord's doctrine of creation.

I now turn to the love form of eros.

2.1.2.2 – Eros

In the chapter on eros in *The Nature of Love*, Oord spends most of his time discussing Augustine's love theory. As I wrote earlier, Oord does little in developing his own theology of eros, but is rather concerned with explaining what Augustine believed and make a conclusion about the strengths and weaknesses of his theology.

Unlike the case with agape, there is a statement about eros in *Science of Love* that resembles the love definitions we have already identified. The exact statement is this: “[E]ros might be described as acting to promote well-being by affirming what is valuable and beautiful.”^{xxxv}

On the same page, Oord argues that since God created the world and called it “good”, this provides a basis for many Christians to think the world has some measure of value. When we consider this statement in light of the essay on love's fundamentals – in which Oord writes that value pertains to what is good and beautiful – we find that the statement supports the idea that the fundamental of value pertains to the love form of eros. This is also supported by definitions of eros in other books.

In *Relational Holiness*, Oord defines eros as “acting to promote well-being by affirming and enjoying what is valuable.”^{xxxvi} In *The Nature of Love*, Oord defines eros as “acting intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote overall well-being by affirming and/or seeking to enhance value.”^{xxxvii} In that book, Oord gives eros the nickname of “*because of love*”. Finally, Oord defines eros this way in *Defining Love*: “[E]ros is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when affirming what is valuable.”^{xxxviii} This is an overview of the definitions:

2005 Definition (*Relational Holiness*) – Acting to promote well-being by affirming and enjoying what is valuable.

2010 Definition (*The Nature of Love*) – Acting intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote overall well-being by affirming and/or seeking to enhance value.

2010 Definition (*Defining Love*) – Eros is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when affirming what is valuable.

Like the agape definitions, we see that the eros definitions also differ internally from the general definitions of love with regards to wording. Once again, the first definition on the list lacks a term that pertains to intentionality, while the last definition is a real definition and the only one that has a definiendum.

Regarding which definition to use for discussion purposes, I will prefer the one from *Defining Love* since it is a real definition, contains a definiendum, and is the latest definition Oord has provided.

As I mentioned introductorily to the section, Oord does not develop his own theology of eros in *The Nature of Love*, but discusses Augustine instead. His reason for doing it seems to be that Augustine’s understanding of love resembles Oord’s own understanding of eros.³⁶ Therefore, I have not found anything substantial to present of Oord’s theology of eros other than his metaphysical definition of it. For that matter, I will neither discuss Augustine’s theology in this section since it doesn’t add anything to Oord’s theology. As is the case with the chapter on agape, it is also the case with the chapter on eros in *The Nature of Love* that Oord seems focused on eliminating wrong understandings of eros (or love) rather than laying a clear foundation on which to develop a theory.

In relation to the fundamentals of love, the definition of eros (*eros is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when affirming what is valuable*) seems to correspond to the third fundamental of love in particular, which is summarized in condition (5) above (*existing things possess genuine value*). As I have already clarified, it is uncertain what Oord

³⁶ Augustine thinks of love as desire, and uses the terms of ‘cupiditas’ and ‘caritas’ to refer to it. Given that desire is only aimed at that which is valuable, Oord’s understanding of eros as expressed towards objects of value resembles the theory by Augustine.

means by value since he doesn't define it, but writes it pertains to that which is good and beautiful. However, given that the definition of eros alone contains a term pertaining to value, it is possible that the fundamental applies only to this form of love.

If we take seriously what Oord wrote in the section on agape (that it must be sufficiently distinct from other love forms without rendering the other forms unintelligible or unnecessary by comparison) this means it must also be sufficiently distinct from eros. And given that a form of 'value' seems to be the key term in the eros definitions, the only way the agape definition can differ sufficiently is if the phenomenon of agape can exist regardless of value. On the other hand, the principles that apply to agape could also apply to eros, in which case eros must be sufficiently distinct from agape and philia.

In conclusion, it seems that the focus on value is what gives eros its distinct character. Therefore, the third fundamental of love can only apply to eros lest Oord breaks with the principle of distinctive traits for the subtypes.

A problem that arises with Oord's theology due to the metaphysics of eros, is that it becomes questionable whether it is true that God expresses *all* forms of love. As is expressed in the eros definition, a subject loves due to the value of an object. However, Oord has also stated that God's mode of love is necessity, i.e. that God loves by nature. This means that we have two opposing views: God either loves by nature, or loves due to the value of the object.

Of course, we could interpret Oord's statement about God's necessary love as applying exclusively to agape and philia, but when Oord treats the statement, "God is love", in the chapter on agape, he states that 'love' doesn't mean agape in particular, for which reason he disagrees with Nygren.³⁷ As a result, it seems that Oord's theology is inconsistent, and that at least one of the following statements must be rejected: (1) the statement that eros is concerned with value; (2) the statement that God loves by nature; (3) the statement that God expresses all forms of love. However, just as I demonstrated that the agape definition could be further split into two categories, it is also the case that the eros definition can be. And given that there are two categories of eros, none of the statements above need to be rejected.

In addition to *enjoying* value, which is best emphasized in the definition from *Relational Holiness* (*acting to promote well-being by affirming and **enjoying** what is valuable*), an act of eros can also be to *enhance* value, which is best emphasized in the

³⁷ This implies God necessarily expresses all forms of love. It is clear that Oord believes (1) God loves by necessity and that (2) God expresses all forms of love. If the statement about God's necessary love does not apply to eros (but certainly it applies to more than agape given that Oord criticizes Nygren's interpretation), Oord should have clarified this.

definition from *The Nature of Love* (*acting intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote overall well-being by affirming and/or seeking to **enhance** value*). Enhancing value could mean to create valuable things, in which case God can promote values by nature without depending on the values themselves (which would contradict the “natural instinct” to create). As a result, it is possible for God to express eros without Oord’s theology being inconsistent.

To conclude, Oord defines eros as intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when affirming what is valuable. However, the alternative definitions of eros are also important to clarify that expressions of eros mean to enjoy and enhance (create) values.³⁸ It is likely that eros is the only form of love that pertains to the fundamental of value, and it is only by understanding God’s expression of eros as enhancing value that Oord’s theology of eros remains consistent.

I now turn to the love form of philia.

2.1.2.3 – Philia

Unlike the chapters on agape and eros in *The Nature of Love*, the chapter on philia is not a discussion on love in particular, but about a theological position called open theism. Oord explains this position, and states it is important to embrace it in order to have a foundation from which to develop an adequate theology of love. In short, Oord embraces open theism because the position holds that the future is not settled in God’s mind and, as a result, is neither metaphysically settled. He believes this position is necessary to adhere to in order to avoid the problem he perceives with conventional theology: namely that the future must be metaphysically settled since God has extensive foreknowledge of what will take place. The problem Oord perceives with conventional theology is the conclusion of the following argument:

³⁸ As I have specified, however, those definitions are bad for discussion purposes since e.g. they lack a definiendum.

- (1) Premise 1: If the future is settled in God’s mind, the future is metaphysically settled.
- (2) Premise 2: The future is settled in God’s mind.
- (3) Conclusion: The future is metaphysically settled. (From 1 & 2)

Further on, Oord argues that if the future is metaphysically settled, the concept of freedom in the human domain does not exist. But, as we have seen, Oord believes that freedom *is* necessary for love to exist.³⁹ Therefore, given that Oord believes (1) is true, he embraces open theism in order to reject (2) and thus (3) – which Oord considers the real problem.⁴⁰

As with eros, there is also a statement about philia in *Science of Love* that resembles other love definitions: “Philia ... promotes overall well-being by seeking to establish deeper levels of cooperative friendship.”^{xxxix} In the same book, Oord has also dedicated an essay to philia called “Why Can’t We Be Friends?”⁴¹

In *Relational Holiness*, Oord defines philia as “Love that promotes well-being by seeking to establish deeper bonds of cooperative friendship.”^{xl} In *The Nature of Love*, Oord defines philia this way: “acting intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote overall well-being by seeking to establish deeper levels of cooperative friendship.”^{xli} As with agape and eros, philia too has received a nickname. Oord calls philia “*alongside of love*”. In *Defining Love*, Oord presents the following definition: “[P]hilia is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being by cooperating with others.”^{xlii} Not counting the statement in *Science of Love*⁴², this is an overview of the definitions of philia:

³⁹ Part of the second fundamental of love (condition (4) above) is this: *Individuals possess power for freedom*.

⁴⁰ I do not think Oord’s argument to why conventional theology is problematic suffices, but I will not discuss this in the dissertation since that would take away the focus from the main project.

⁴¹ The essay is of no use in explaining Oord’s theology of philia since I cannot identify statements that clearly define Oord’s points of view. On the other hand, it seems the purpose of the essay is to argue that philia – as a form of love – deserves more attention than has been given.

⁴² There are two reasons I do not count it as a definition. The first is that it is not a real definition or nominal definition of philia – it says something about its manifestation. The second is that Oord has not referred to it as a definition himself.

2005 Definition (*Relational Holiness*) – Love that promotes well-being by seeking to establish deeper bonds of cooperative friendship.

2010 Definition (*The Nature of Love*) – Acting intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote overall well-being by seeking to establish deeper levels of cooperative friendship.

2010 Definition (*Defining Love*) – *Philia* is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being by cooperating with others.

When analyzing the definitions, we find that the first two include the term, ‘friendship’, unlike the last one. We also see that the last one is a real definition unlike the other two that do not even have a definiendum.⁴³

Although the last one does not include the term friendship, I believe it is the best one since it is a real definition (double meaning): it contains a statement about the essence of *philia* and it also qualifies as a definition.

Regarding the metaphysics of *philia*, there is little else to state than what the definition expresses. However, it is worth mentioning that Oord specifies *philia* expressions occur in friendships – although the latest definition excludes the term – and that friendships require mutuality.^{xliii} As a result, Oord understands friendships as relationships in which there occur an equal amount of take and give, and labels *philia* the kind of activity that takes place in *healthy* friendships.⁴⁴

In comparison with the fundamentals, the nature of mutuality that is required for *philia* expressions to occur (expressions of “... intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being by cooperating with others”) suggests that the first fundamental is aimed at *philia* in particular.⁴⁵ And if we make this interpretation, it would also seem that condition (1) (*individuals exist*) and condition (2) (*individuals stand in relation to each other*) – from which

⁴³ Despite the first definition starting with the subject, ‘love’, this does not automatically make it a real definition, or a nominal definition for that matter. In order to qualify as either, it should contain a definiendum.

⁴⁴ Oord does not think all friendships are good, i.e. friendships whose goal is to promote something evil. Therefore, *philia* is not expressed in all friendships.

⁴⁵ Although I didn’t include it as part of my conditions, I wrote the following when discussing the first fundamental: “Oord believes that the individuals in relation – whether human or nonhuman – must be mutually influencing.” I didn’t get a good grasp of what Oord really means about it.

the mutuality statement follows – are aimed at *philia*. It is obvious, however, that these conditions apply to all instances of love, and it is thus better to interpret the mutuality statement as directed at *philia* in particular, although this is not stated. If the statement is meant to account for all love, Oord’s theology would possibly be inconsistent since the *agape* (facing sin, evil, and pain) and *eros* contexts (facing value) do not suggest mutuality. For example, I cannot see how there is room for mutuality in the possible *agape* context of “repaying evil with good”.

According to my own interpretation of Oord’s writings on *philia*, I believe Oord is a virtue ethicist. It is mostly due to the end he emphasizes – overall well-being – that I am reminded of Aristotle’s idea of *eudaimonia*: something we attain in fellowship, through co-operation. Oord also refers to Aristotle and other virtue ethicists when writing about *philia*, which serves to strengthen my supposition.⁴⁶ It could also be, however, that Oord is a utilitarianist since other passages about love does not contain references to Aristotle or virtue ethics, although the goal is still overall well-being. Nevertheless, the term “overall well-being” makes me guess Oord is a virtue ethicist since utilitarianists would possibly talk about “maximizing the good” by their acts (and possibly not be as concerned with intention as Oord is). In other words, it is not the end to which love is practiced that makes me believe Oord is a virtue ethicist, but the wording.

In Oord’s ideology of overall well-being, God too is necessarily included. It seems to be for this reason Oord writes about open theism in the chapter on *philia*: Open theism is a theological position that reduces the difference between God and humans, for which reason we can relate to each other in mutuality and have a friendship.⁴⁷

In conclusion, Oord defines *philia* as intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being by cooperating with others. *Philia* can only be expressed in mutual relationships (i.e. friendships), and it is possible that the mutuality statement – which appeared in Oord’s

⁴⁶ Although Oord relates to other theorists in his writing, I do not find clear statements about what parts of their theories he agrees with (and sometimes, not even whether he agrees with them). This is also the case when referring to Aristotle and other virtue ethicists.

⁴⁷ If the traditional idea of God’s exhaustive foreknowledge is true, an interesting question to be asked is if God and humans can really be in a friendship. Will that be a good friendship? Some might claim that a good friendship is based on spontaneity and mutuality. But if God knows all details about the future in the life that succeeds the resurrection, it becomes questionable if humans can have a good relationship with God (given that spontaneity and mutuality are required). Conventional theology also holds we will not have spouses in the life to come (Mat 22:29-30). This gives birth to two important questions: Can we have meaningful relationships in the afterlife? How can the afterlife be said to be a good life given the premises I have presented?

discussion of the first fundamental – is intended for *philia*. If it isn’t, Oord’s theology is likely inconsistent since it is difficult to understand how mutuality is a necessary (and even a possible) element in the contexts of *agape* and *eros*.

2.1.2.4 – Conclusion

The essence of what has been discussed can be formulated as follows:

Love Definitions

Agape is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being.

Eros is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when affirming what is valuable.

Philia is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being by cooperating with others.

These are all real definitions that extend our knowledge of the metaphysics of love in Oord’s theology. But just as important, the definitions also convey important information on the ethics of love.

Apart from the definitions presented, there are also other definitions of the subtypes in Oord’s theology. However, it is questionable if these formulations qualify as definitions of love. As I stated early on, all definitions must either belong to the category of real definitions or nominal definitions. But in order to belong to those categories, the definitions must possess a definiendum (a term or set of words that is being defined). Since literally all “definitions” but the ones I have mentioned here *do not* include a definiendum, it is reasonable to conclude they do not qualify as definitions.

Considering further specified doctrines about the subtypes, both the agape and eros expressions are twofold: agape expressions can be divided into (1) actions against intentional evil, and (2) actions against unnecessary pain; eros expressions can be divided into (1) actions that enjoy values, and (2) actions that enhance values. Due to the twoness in the metaphysics of both love forms, I believe the definitions are insufficient in themselves.

Regarding philia, I have not identified anything that implies actions can be divided into further categories. What is clear, however, is that manifestations of philia are only limited to friendships in which the goal is overall well-being.

The discussion that has taken place provides ground for arguments in chapter three. For example, the statement, “God is love”, will weigh heavily in criticizing Oord because it implies a metaphysical impossibility. Due to the seriousness of this weakness, it is important that I spend much space on clarifying this and construct a rigorous argument. Apart from this weakness, most of the weaknesses with Oord’s metaphysics concerns lack of clarity, and arguing for them will not require providing more information than has already been done in the current section on subtypes.

I now turn to writing about love as the core notion of holiness.

2.1.3 – Love as the Core Notion of Holiness

In this section, I will write about love as it pertains to a life of holiness. This will be a continuation of the ethics of love, but will also include important facts about love’s epistemology. Unlike the section on love and the fundamentals and the section on the subtypes of love, this section will not consist of further subsections. There is too little information on the topic to make such divisions.

According to Oord, love is “the core notion of holiness.”^{xliv} He believes there are several passages in the Bible that reveal this, and refers to 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 as an example. The statement is first made in chapter three of *Relational Holiness*. Prior to that chapter, however, Oord discusses other ideas of what the core notion of holiness might be. These are (1) following rules and ethical codes, (2) being pure, clean, or without blemish, (3) being set apart, (4) total devotion or complete commitment, and (5) perfection.^{xlv} The reason he

discusses these ideas as well as the idea of love is that biblical authors use the terms of ‘holy’, ‘holiness’ and/or ‘sanctification’ to talk about these things.

In conclusion, all ideas but love are contributing notions to holiness. However, since they pertain to holiness – whose core is love – they also provide insight into Oord’s love theory. In other words, to love includes following rules and ethical codes, being pure, and being perfect.⁴⁸

Using the metaphysical definition of love I suggested earlier, the core notion of holiness is an intentional action in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being. With that said, I think it is better to talk about leading a holy life than to talk about “holiness” since Oord perceives holiness as a life of practicing love rather than as a state of being. Consequentially, the definitions whose definiendum is ‘to love’ will also be preferred when explaining what it means to lead a holy life.

Given the definition I consider the best one among Oord’s general definitions of love, leading a life of holiness means to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being. It is also clear that Oord believes a holy life consists of expressing all types of love. Therefore, leading a holy life means to promote overall well-being when facing sin, evil, and pain (agape), to enjoy or enhance value (eros), and to promote overall well-being by cooperating with others (philia).

When writing about the fundamentals of love, I discussed whether Oord thinks God is a direct condition for all instances of love or if he is merely the first condition of all possible love chains. One reason I mentioned as to why God might not be a direct condition in all instances, is that Oord has stated love “... is always a response to the influence of others – whether body members, humans, nonhumans, or *the divine*.” Since “the divine” is only one of more options, it is possible the other sources of influence might also be direct conditions.

The reason I bring this up now, is that I promised to show that Oord is likely inconsistent on this matter when explaining the doctrine of prevenient grace. This is an essential doctrine of Oord’s holiness theology.

According to this doctrine, God “walks ahead of us” and presents us with opportunities for action in each moment of our lives.^{xlvi} This can be likened to a guide that

⁴⁸ The latter has important theological consequences. Since love is an action, and perfection is connected with love, it means that being perfect is not identical with maintaining a condition, but is a result of performing a series of acts. I will come back to this point.

presents adventurers with directions on where to go, which is an example the authors⁴⁹ employ. However, this emphasis upon God's role in the life of humans makes it seem that God is a direct condition in all moments, since we are always called to love. Therefore, when we compare the doctrine of prevenient grace with my reflection on the fundamentals of love⁵⁰, we see that Oord is either unclear or inconsistent about the role of God.

Given that Oord thinks of love as a category of actions, we also know something about the epistemology of love, namely that we can perceive love (actions) through our bodily senses. However, this is not something Oord states explicitly when discussing his love definitions. There is actually very little in his theology that pertains to an epistemology of love. But as I have implied, his writings on holiness is the key to getting a clearer view of the field.

Of all the chapters throughout the books I have read, chapter five of *Relational Holiness* is the chapter on epistemology. It is very short, and the key points for our purposes can be summarized as follows: (1) God's love can be felt "in the heart by the testimony of the Spirit"^{xlvi}, and (2) be experienced in fellowship with others.^{xlvi} Both ideas have their root in Wesleyanism, which is often referred to throughout the book.

Since Oord considers God the source of love, it seems reasonable to think God's love can be felt, although one could ask in what way one can feel God's love (action). One explanation, however, is that God's love can be experienced as a feeling similar to how we feel sounds and images. Although they both have physical properties, they can be treated as emotions because of their ability to create spiritual feelings. In fact, sounds and images are interesting because despite hearing and seeing them, we do not enjoy them by our bodily senses in the same way we enjoy that which we taste, smell, and feel. Instead, they create spiritual pleasure.

Regarding the second statement – that God's love can be experienced in fellowship with others – Oord argues for this by pointing to scriptures in 1 John whose contents is that we should love one another just as God has loved us. Due to this argument, he moves on to stating that the church is the practice ground for love – a place in which we share the divine love with one another. Now, that is an interesting statement because it supports the idea there are other direct conditions than God. It does so because we can be reminded of others who

⁴⁹ I write "authors" because Oord has co-written the book with Michael Lodahl.

⁵⁰ When I discussed the fourth fundamental of love earlier, I provided some reasons as to why God may not be a direct condition for *all* instances of love.

have loved us in the past than God (people in the church), and they will therefore be the sources of influence for love in the present.

However, if it is true that others too can be direct conditions for love, this could be incompatible with the doctrine of prevenient grace, which I have already mentioned. But when speaking of this doctrine, Oord is clearly aware that others *do* influence how we act.⁵¹ It would therefore be peculiar if Oord has contradicted himself within one and the same doctrine to his own ignorance. Instead, one possible interpretation of the doctrine is that *both* God and others can be direct conditions at the same time.

Now, as I promised three footnotes ago, I will discuss the theological consequences of connecting perfection with love.

In philosophical traditions that predate Christianity, perfection has been thought of as a condition that logically succeeds the maintenance of a specific set of attributes. In other words, perfection has been a metaphysical idea, although there have been disputes on what set of attributes make up the “perfect condition”. A ground for stating that God *must* be perfect, however, is that God cannot be worshipped otherwise.⁵²

Because Christianity developed in a philosophically influenced context, ideas about perfection were adapted and attributed to the Christian God. Among those ideas, one was that God is complete in himself and has no need of external things to maintain his conditions of pleasure and satisfaction. In other words, the hypothesis claims that God’s experience is as good as it can be, and that the influence of others cannot do anything to increase it.⁵³

As a result of maintaining this idea about God, there were many in the time of Ancient Christianity who were skeptic to the fact Jesus was God incarnate. After all, why would God, who already possesses the very best, put himself in a situation of experiencing something less than he already does? Not to mention that the incarnate God willingly experiences a horrible death?

Beside the questionable idea that a perfect God – who lacks nothing and cannot have more in terms of positive experiences – incarnated himself, it is also questionable why God

⁵¹ In the example about the guide who calls out to the adventurer – which Oord calls the “Adventure Model” of holiness – Oord specifies that we are not like individual adventurers who relates to the guide alone prior to acting, but that we form a fellowship of adventurers, and can get help from others.

⁵² See the section called “Perfect and Worthy of Worship” in *Reason & Religious Belief* for a thorough explanation.

⁵³ The idea that God is impassible – incapable of being affected negatively by the condition of his creatures – was embraced by e.g. Anselm and Augustine. This idea is built upon the premise that God is self-sufficient, which can be interpreted as meaning God maintains ultimate pleasure, dependent on nothing but himself.

would choose to create the universe in the first place. Of course, the concept of free will could be attributed to a perfect God, in which case God has the will to bring something into existence although there is nothing in his nature that urges him to create. By faith, Christians might accept that God has chosen to create “for no reason”, which might be a somewhat credible idea given that humans can also choose to do things that are not in their nature, such as denying themselves that which brings pleasure.⁵⁴ However, it is certain that some hypotheses about a perfect God raise some critical questions regarding God’s relation to the world and even to the idea of God as Creator. The problem of which I speak can be formulated as follows:

- (1) Premise 1: If there is nothing more that God can gain in terms of positive experiences, God is perfect.
- (2) Premise 2: There is nothing more that God can gain in terms of positive experiences.
- (3) Conclusion 1: God is perfect. (From 1 & 2)

- (4) Premise 3: Since God is perfect, it is as a mystery that God has chosen to create the universe and to incarnate himself. (From 3)
- (5) Conclusion 2: It is a mystery that God has chosen to create the universe and to incarnate himself. (From 4)

Although the hypothesis of what perfection entails is only one of several that can be presented (when thought of as a metaphysical condition pertaining to God), it is the case that those who consider God to be perfect in terms of being self-sufficient also find it problematic to think of God in relational terms. It is for this reason (among others) I find Oord’s holiness theology particularly appealing since it claims that love is the core notion of perfection.⁵⁵ Due to the problems of creation and incarnation that follow the traditional ideas of God’s perfection (which also makes it problematic to connect the attribute of “love” to God, since “love” is usually thought of as requiring or giving birth to various types of relations), I believe Oord has provided a solution to an ancient theological problem. It is indeed interesting to consider perfection a condition that logically succeeds acts or behavior instead of a condition that

⁵⁴ Denying oneself pleasure (which humans can do) is arguably more *incredible* than to do something that neither adds to, nor detracts from positive experiences (which God has done if he is Creator).

⁵⁵ This is given by the fact that love is the core notion of holiness while perfection is a contributing notion to holiness.

logically succeeds a set of attributes. For this reason, Oord’s idea of perfection is not as a state that pertains to *metaphysics*, but as a state that pertains to *ethics*!

To conclude this section, Oord consider love to be the core notion of holiness. God’s love can be perceived as an emotion, and love from fellow Christians can be perceived as actions through our senses.

Of the contributing notions to holiness, the notion of perfection is the most interesting. Because love is the core notion of holiness, being perfect means therefore to practice love. In other words, the practice of love is a logical premise for divine and human perfection.

Regarding the question of whether God is only a necessary or also a direct condition in all instances of love, we have seen that the contents of Oord’s writings in his holiness theology clearly emphasize the latter. It therefore seems reasonable to settle for the view that *all instances of love are directly influenced by God*. I do not believe settling for this view necessarily entails inconsistency, but it certainly means that Oord could have clarified a few things.

I now turn to discussing issues that are related to Oord’s theory of love.

2.2 – Related Doctrines to Oord’s Theology of Love

Since Oord is concerned with additional doctrines when explaining his theology of love, I think it important to explore these relations. In particular, it is important since I am aware that my statements about Oord’s theology of love in chapter three will also affect the two doctrines with which I am concerned in the present section: the doctrine of creation and the problem of evil.

The reason these doctrines will be affected is due to Oord’s theology on the whole being coherent. That is, there are certain doctrines that are founded on others, for which reason the criticism of the *more* fundamental doctrines also echoes to the *less* fundamental ones.

I will refer to *The Nature of Love* and *The Best News You Will Ever Hear* in explaining the doctrines at hand. Both doctrines can be briefly summarized.

2.2.1 – Doctrine of Creation

In *The Nature of Love*, among other books, Oord explains a doctrine of creation he labels *creatio ex creatione a natura amoris* – creation out of creation through a nature of love.^{xlix}

This doctrine presupposes that God creates out of that he has previously created, something Oord is aware sounds unsettling due to its unfamiliarity. However, he states that nothing about the view is logically problematic since if God has existed from eternity, he can also have been creating from eternity.

In the particular section in which the doctrine is explained, Oord also clarifies his rejection of other doctrines of creation, including *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), creation out of preexistent materials God happened upon, and creation out of Godself.⁵⁶ He rejects these doctrines due to scriptural and pragmatic reasons.

When it comes to why Oord presupposes God has created from eternity past, the answer is that God's nature is love. As we know, to love means to act. Therefore, since God's eternal nature is love, it follows that God must have acted from eternity in a way that expresses this love, which has resulted in the universe. Oord also believes Genesis 1 supports the idea that God created the universe from something rather than nothing, for which reason *creatio ex creatione a natura amoris* is a possibility.⁵⁷

As I mentioned when discussing agape, the doctrine of creation is essential to understanding why the statement, "God is love", is problematic. The reason is that the statement includes the following two premises from which a problematic conclusion arises: (1) Love is God's nature from eternity; (2) God's nature as love necessarily makes God act (create). The metaphysically impossible conclusion that follows from these premises is that God has created from eternity. Explaining why this is impossible, however, is beyond the scope of this section. I will therefore save the discussion for chapter three.

⁵⁶ By affirming *creatio ex creatione a natura amoris* and thus rejecting doctrines that opens up for the possibility the universe *began* to exist, Oord implicitly rejects the Big Bang theory.

⁵⁷ It should be noted that this doctrine can be accepted by those who adhere to *creatio ex nihilo* for the initial act of creation.

2.2.2 – The Problem of Evil

The problem of evil is an issue Oord treats due to the fact it problematizes the idea of a perfectly loving God. The classic argument as to why God is not perfectly good is that if God essentially cares for the well-being of humans, and has the power to prevent evil, and is aware that evil will occur in a particular context, he will necessarily prevent evil things from happening. However, since evil is witnessed in the world, it would seem that at least one of these statements about God is wrong – and many attack the statement about God’s goodness. Because of this, Oord wants to defend the statement that God perfectly loves.

In *The Best News You Will Ever Hear*, Oord has written a chapter about the doctrine in which he presents various explanations to why evils occur.¹ One is that evil is a consequence of disobeying God. He explains this in another way by stating that we reap what we sow. The technical term for disobeying God is to sin, which Oord defines as failing to love as God wants us to love.ⁱⁱ Other reasons he points at to explain evil include the intended evils of people, natural evils, and deeds by spiritual enemies – that is demons. And at the end of the chapter, Oord points at our identity as a reason for evil: our own sinful nature.

In conclusion, Oord lists five explanations for evil: (1) Disobedience to God; (2) intended evils by humans; (3) natural evils; (4) intended evils by demon spirits; (5) evil due to own sinful nature. Of these explanations, I do not see a clear difference between (1) and (5), given that submitting to our own sinful nature *means* to disobey God. It should be noted once again that *The Best News You Will Ever Hear* is a work of practical theology and does not include academically substantial discussions. Except (2) and (3), which are credible even to atheists, the grounds for providing the other statements are weak according to philosophical criteria. Apart from suspecting likeness in meaning between (1) and (5), I am not sure what exactly it is that Oord *does* mean by these explanations.

Even if we were to accept these explanations, however, the argument against God’s goodness still remains unchallenged.

To defend God’s goodness, Oord presents three explanations of evil: (1) Humans and demons have free will and make wrong choices; (2) evils are a means of producing goodness; (3) creation does not always function correctly. While these statements on their own do not seem to explain why a perfect God does not override freedom, finds a way to solve problems

without causing problems, and has not created the universe without defects – for which reason they do not make God inculpable for not intervening – there is at least one possible explanation to causes (1) and (3) for evils.

As we already know, God’s nature is love. From this premise one could argue that God cannot override his own nature, which Oord states explicitly.^{lii} In other words, when God does not interfere to prevent evils in the world, whether they are intended evils or natural evils, it is because it *is not* in God’s nature to prevent such evils. Therefore, God should not be blamed for evil occurrences.⁵⁸

In conclusion, the explanation Oord presents is that God’s “program” is limited. However, I believe the argument Oord has presented is insufficient, since stating that God’s nature is love is not identical to stating that the only thing God can do is to love (*to act intentionally ... to promote overall well-being*). Is it not possible that God can both love and prevent evils simultaneously? And besides, is it not possible to interpret acts of promoting overall well-being as removing negative elements in life? I would especially expect an act of preventing evil and removing pain to fall under the category of agape, which is a love form God expresses.⁵⁹

Apart from the problem I have presented, there is also an additional reason Oord’s defense of God is likely insufficient. This depends on a problem with Oord’s doctrine of creation, for which reason I will not delve into it before chapter three.

2.3 – Conclusion

There are many important statements made in chapter two, which are either quotations from Oord’s texts or analytic conclusions by myself. Despite the extent of the chapter, I believe it can be summarized into a few sentences. I consider the following statements to be the most important:

⁵⁸ When treating Oord’s thoughts on the problem of evil, it should be noted that the renowned philosopher, Alvin Plantinga, has treated this in the essay, “Free Will Defense”.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that Oord does not seem to believe (according to what he writes about the problem of evil) that God does ever step in to prevent such evils, since that would mean God “breaks with the nature of love”. But as I questioned, however, it is uncertain if Oord does not break with his doctrine that God expresses all forms of love (which includes expressing agape, e.g. taking action against unnecessary pain) when adhering to the explanations of evil in their entirety.

Love Definitions

Love is an intentional action in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

Agape is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being.

Eros is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when affirming what is valuable.

Philia is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being by cooperating with others.

Love Conditions

- (1) Individuals exist.*
- (2) Individuals stand in relation to each other.*
- (3) Individuals possess power for agency.*
- (4) Individuals possess power for freedom.*
- (5) Existing things possess genuine value.*
- (6) God exists.*
- (7) God possesses visions of well-being.*
- (8) God calls creatures to enact these visions.*

Miscellaneous Love Statements

God is love.

There are three modes of love: necessity, contingent, and impossibility.

Love is the core notion of holiness.

Agents are perfect when they love.

God's love can be felt.

Love can be experienced in community.

Additional Doctrines

God creates out of creation through a nature of love.

Evil is due to factors God cannot control or is necessary for a greater good.

In addition to the statements themselves, a lot of analytical work has been done in the chapter. For instance, the love definitions have been explored in detail, as have the fundamentals for love (which I have formulated into a number of conditions).

Regarding the general definition of love, it is uncertain how to interpret its second phrase (*in sympathetic response to others (including God)*). However, as we have seen, there could be positive outcomes of interpreting “the others” either as objects of love or as sources of inspiration.

Regarding the subtypes of love, agape expressions can be actions against intentional evil or unnecessary pain; eros expressions can be actions that enjoy values or enhance values; philia expressions do not seem to be categorized any further.

Regarding the fundamentals of love, it is uncertain how the third and fourth fundamentals concerning value and God's role in love respectively apply to the contexts in which love is expressed. It is also unclear what Oord means by ‘value’.

Altogether, Oord's theology consists of statements that are part of a metaphysics, an ethics, and an epistemology of love respectively. Of those, there are some that make his theology weak because they break with the philosophical criteria to which a rigorous theology must apply. The strengths with Oord's theology – statements that qualify for a rigorous theory of love – will be presented and discussed in chapter four.

3 – Chapter Three: Weaknesses in Oord’s Theology of Love

As we have seen, there are particular issues that make Oord’s theology weak. Of the ones I have mentioned in chapter two, I will treat the following in this chapter: the statement that love is God’s nature from eternity, the uncertainty of the sympathy phrase, and the question about the validity of the fundamentals of love. These are the issues I consider the most important to discuss.

What is peculiar is that all of the above problems are connected to Oord’s metaphysics of love. As a result, it may seem that Oord’s theology is fine with respect to the other fields. However, as I will show, the problems about Oord’s metaphysics also affect his ethics and epistemology. There are also problems concerning the field of theological implications I have not discussed previously.

The chapter will consist of five subsections in its entirety: one about weaknesses in Oord’s metaphysics, one about weaknesses in his ethics, one about weaknesses in his epistemology, one about weaknesses in his theological reflection, and one in which I conclude the chapter. In that section, I will make a final evaluation of Oord’s theology, consisting of statements about how well his theory does with respect to the seven criteria I presented in chapter one.

As with chapter two, the different sections will not be equal in length. Due to one particular problem with Oord’s doctrine of creation that greatly impacts his theology, the section on metaphysics will be the largest one. The sections on ethics and epistemology will be very short due to the fact there is only one objection each to these fields. However, the section on Oord’s theological reflection will be somewhat larger.

3.1 – Weaknesses in Oord’s Metaphysics of Love

In this section, I will discuss both the fundamentals of love and the being of love. Since the problems connected to the fundamentals are less serious than the ones connected with love’s being, I will start by treating the fundamentals.

As I specified in chapter two, the four fundamentals Oord presents can be summarized in eight conditions:

- (1) Individuals exist**
- (2) Individuals stand in relation to each other**
- (3) Individuals possess power for agency**
- (4) Individuals possess power for freedom**
- (5) Existing things possess genuine value**
- (6) God exists**
- (7) God possesses visions of well-being**
- (8) God calls creatures to enact these visions**

We have already seen that the validity of conditions (5) and (8) are questionable. The reason we cannot know for the certain the validity of condition (5) is due to the fact that eros in particular includes the term ‘value’, in which case condition (5) might apply to that love form alone. It is also uncertain what Oord means by ‘value’ since he doesn’t give an original definition of the term.

The reason the validity of condition (8) is questionable is multifaceted. As we have seen, it is not the claim in itself that is questionable, but whether we understand the content of this condition (that God calls creatures to enact visions of well-being) as a direct condition for all instances of love or as a necessary condition for all love chains.

In addition to the conditions listed, there is a statement about the first fundamental of love, namely that individuals who stand in relation – whether human or nonhuman – must be mutually influencing, which suggests the first fundamental is partially exclusive to the *philia* love form.

Due to the discussions that have taken place in multiple sections of chapter two – to which I have nothing to add – it is reasonable to conclude that Oord’s theology is either unclear or inconsistent. Of the particular issues, it is the one about God’s role in love that is most probably inconsistent – for how can God be a direct source of inspiration for *all* acts of love when we can also act in response to ourselves?⁶⁰ However, in section 2.1.3 I argued that Oord is likely unclear on this matter rather than inconsistent and that *both* God and others can be direct sources of influence.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Oord has written that one’s own intentional love is always a response to the influence of others – whether body members, humans, nonhumans, or the divine. Therefore, it seems God is not the only option for a direct source of inspiration.

⁶¹ The argument I made for this was that God and others can altogether shape our love. Oord seems to point at this in his “Adventure Model” – he states we travel with “fellow adventurers”.

To explain the weaknesses in the being of love, I present the following definitions:

(1) *Definition of love in general:*

To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

(2) *Definition of agape:*

Agape is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being.

(3) *Definition of eros:*

Eros is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when affirming what is valuable.

(4) *Definition of philia:*

Philia is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being by cooperating with others.

Of the definitions presented, it is the first and third about love and eros respectively that I will consider.

First, as I noted in the section on love’s metaphysics, the argument Oord presents in which he implies the Bible clearly supports (1) is insufficient. In short, the point I made was that Jesus’ deeds and Jesus’ encouragement that people should practice love *do not* prove that love is an act to promote overall well-being. The premises Oord presents *do* imply, however, that acts whose intention is to promote overall well-being are *manifestations* of love.

Another problem with (1) is that there is reason to interpret the “others” in two ways: both as objects of our love and as individuals who have loved us in the past and have

therefore inspired us to love in the present. The discussion is accounted for well in the section on love's metaphysics.

Since I cannot claim to understand perfectly what Oord means by the middle phrase in the main definition of love, the most reasonable conclusion to me is that Oord is unclear on this matter. He often formulates himself as if the "others" have only one meaning, although he has made statements that imply it has two. *If*, however, the phrase has two meanings, this does not need to mean Oord's theology is inconsistent, but simply that Oord must explain which meaning it has in different contexts.

Regarding the definition of eros, there is the hypothetical problem that it ought to include something more specific than a term related to value if condition (5) (about value) is required for all instances of love. Additionally, this can be grounded on Oord's own principle that the definitions should point at the uniqueness of the love forms.

Another problem related to eros – which I have discussed earlier – is that according to its definition, a subject performs an act due to value. However, if this is true, it is uncertain whether God performs eros since he loves due to his nature. To me, it does not seem to be true that God loves due to his nature (subjective conditions) if he loves due to values (objective conditions). It might be possible to accept both statements by faith.

There is, however, a solution to how God can perform eros while still doing it due to his nature, which I also presented in chapter two. As I explained, it is possible that God expresses eros because he creates value – another type of act that belongs to the eros category. However, if God creates value without enjoying it, does he promote overall well-being?

There is arguably a difference between promoting overall well-being (creating good experiences) and creating values (creating the conditions for good experiences). Therefore, if God performs acts of eros by creating values that no one experiences immediately, it is questionable if these acts qualify as love.⁶² Again, it is possibly the case that Oord is unclear.

I now turn to discussing the doctrine of creation.

⁶² Of course, Oord could mean by promoting overall well-being to perform acts that at some point, whether in the near or distant future, will cause positive experiences or end negative ones. In that case, even if God's creative acts (acts of eros) do not promote overall well-being immediately, they will still qualify as acts of love.

The most problematic part of Oord’s theology pertaining to metaphysics concerns his understanding of love, his understanding of God’s nature, and his understanding of creation. In other words, there are three theological areas that are interwoven: a theology of love, theology proper, and a doctrine of creation. As a result of this, I could study the metaphysical problems of Oord’s theology of love from multiple perspectives.

While a theology of love is the topic at hand, I believe the best option is to do an extensive treatment of Oord’s doctrine of creation and study the problems from that perspective. There are two reasons I want to do it that way. One is that I believe it is easier to demonstrate the problems by choosing this perspective than another one. The other reason is that I feel obliged to explain why Oord’s doctrine of creation is problematic since I have included it in my case study. Either way, including the doctrine of creation would have been necessary to make the following conclusions, of which one must necessarily be true: **a) Oord’s definition of love is false; b) love is not God’s nature from eternity past.**⁶³

The reason for making either of these conclusions is that Oord’s concept of love is incompatible with the concept of beginninglessness. It follows then that either the concept of love must be altered so that it becomes compatible with beginninglessness or that the beginninglessness of love must be rejected (which means to reject love as God’s nature from eternity past) so that the concept of love stands. But choosing whether to redefine love (a major change in his theology of love) or to reject love as God’s beginningless nature (a major change in his theology of love / theology proper) is Oord’s choice.

The structure of the treatment is threefold: First, I will account for the doctrine of creation, then I will explain why it is problematic, and last, I will show how the problematic concept of beginninglessness in Oord’s doctrine of creation affects his theology of love.

As I explained in chapter two, Oord’s doctrine of creation is called *creatio ex creatione a natura amoris* and translates to “creation out of creation through a nature of love”. It is because of “through a nature of love” that the doctrine is tied to Oord’s love theory, which in turn is the reason I have included it in my dissertation. Apart from the name of the doctrine – which sums up the essentials – it is also worth noticing that Oord believes God has been creating from eternity.

⁶³ It is important to be aware of the phrasing. Stating that God’s eternal nature cannot be love might not be correct since “eternal nature” can be understood as a nature that comes into existence at one point and will always remain. In my argument, I am only concluding that God’s nature as love cannot have been without beginning – not that it cannot come into existence at one point and never alter.

For clarity's sake, I will present the constituents that altogether make up the part⁶⁴ of the doctrine of creation with which I am concerned:

- (1) God exists from eternity**
- (2) God has a nature of love from eternity**
- (3) God creates from eternity**
- (4) God creates out of creation**
- (5) God creates through his nature of love**

Of the five constituents listed, I believe all of them can be proven wrong when the terms of 'love' and 'eternity' are interpreted in a certain way, and when the constituents appear in a certain context. Due to Oord's interpretations and contexts, I will show that all constituents on the list are false.

Before I commence the analysis, it should be noted that constituents (1) and (2) can be true when the two terms I mentioned are interpreted in a certain way. I also believe that (4) and (5) can be correct, although they do not depend on interpretation of certain terms as much as they depend on the framework within which the statements are made. However, I cannot see how constituent (3) is possible given a specific context or any reasonable interpretation of 'eternity'. As a result, I consider this constituent to be the most problematic of all the statements made. Due to the complex argument required to show the impossibility of the statement, as well as the crucial impact of the argument, constituent (3) will be treated at the end.

Apart from constituent (3) (that God creates from eternity), there is another problem with Oord's doctrine of creation. This problem is only real when supposing that (3) is correct, and exists due to the relation between constituents (1), (3), and (4). But unlike the problem concerning constituent (3) alone, the problem about (1), (3), and (4) will not impact Oord's theology of love. The only reason I treat this problem is therefore that I consider it my academic duty to treat problems when spotting them, despite existing outside the project itself.

⁶⁴ There are additional statements concerning Oord's doctrine of creation that I will not consider. The reason is that I only want to focus on that which is necessary for the project.

The problem due to the relation between constituent (1) (that God exists from eternity), constituent (3) (that God creates from eternity), and constituent (4) (that God creates out of creation) can be formulated in the following argument:

- (1) Premise 1: If God requires creation to create and has created from eternity, creation⁶⁵ is from eternity.
- (2) Premise 2: God requires creation to create.
- (3) Premise 3: God has created from eternity.
- (4) Conclusion: Creation is from eternity. (From 1-3)

Due to the normal connotations of “creation” and “from eternity”, which respectively include “something that has a beginning” and “without beginning”, the conclusion of the above argument can be reformulated as follows: Something that has a beginning is without beginning.

Given this interpretation, we see that the conclusion is internally inconsistent and must therefore be rejected. As a result, there must also be a problem with the premises from which the conclusion follows by necessity. The problem can either come from (2), (3), or both.

Since (3) corresponds with constituent (3) above – which I have already stated is false – it may seem reasonable to reject this statement. However, it is not the fact that God has created from eternity that is the core of the problem I address. As I have already stated, the problem with which I am concerned exists *even if beginningless creation is possible*.

The problem with the doctrine of creation is therefore that in order to be correct, it must depend upon something from eternity that by definition *cannot* be eternal. Thus, it is the dependency that is the problem, for which reason (2) should be rejected.⁶⁶

Now that I have treated the first problem, I turn to explaining why God cannot have been creating from eternity.

⁶⁵ I here speak of ‘creation’ as created things – not as the process of creating.

⁶⁶ It must be noted that (2) is only false in the context of “from eternity” or “the first time”. In succession of those contexts, Oord’s statement is possible. Therefore, it is possible that e.g. God created Eve from Adam.

Since creation is a process, what Oord states in his doctrine is that a process from eternity past has been going on until the present. And this is the core of the problem: that Oord states a process is without beginning.⁶⁷ It should be noted that it is not the act of creation in particular that is problematic “from eternity”, but *all* kinds of processes. To make this point, I present the following example:

Let us consider that two objects have moved from eternity towards each other and will eventually collide. These objects will have no impact on our existence. However, when these objects do collide, the setting will be the present – and for the present to be exactly what it is, all preceding events must have necessarily taken place.

At the point in time when the objects collide, we could ask the following question: “How many meters have the objects moved from eternity at the point of collision?” This would be a reasonable question since the objects must have travelled a distance and since distance can be divided into meters. But despite being reasonable, the question brings us a dilemma: The answer would be unsatisfying whether we state that the objects have travelled a long, but finite distance such as 1,000,000,000,000 meters or an eternal amount of meters.

If we state the former, we also state that the travelled distance of the objects can be reduced to 1 meter, and then to 0 meters. And if the objects at some point have been travelling 0 meters (no distance at all), the objects must necessarily have been put into motion, and cannot have been part of a beginningless process. If we state the latter, we also state that the distance between the objects was eternal from eternity past. And if the distance between the objects at some point was eternal, the objects could never reach each other, and the hypothetical present would never be.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The renowned theologian, Thomas Aquinas, was also aware of this problem, for which reason he developed the doctrine of “the five ways” to God. In philosophy of religion, the doctrine is usually referred to as a “cosmological argument”.

⁶⁸ It would be interesting to discuss Zeno’s paradoxes of motion, which are examples of how one could counter my argument that eternity past is impossible. I believe there are different reasons these examples do not function well as counter arguments. However, in order to avoid complications, I have decided to skip this discussion.

Since the example concerns two objects and the possibility of counting, the skeptic would claim it has no force in proving that all beginningless processes are impossible since they need not concern two objects or be divided into sequences that can be counted. To this, I respond that there is something more fundamental in the above example that is applicable to all processes.

Even if we consider only one object that undergoes a process from eternity, we know that an eternal process can be divided into an infinite amount of sequences. Therefore, it is possible to number these sequences and count them. However, if we do not apply numbers, we can think of eternity past as a point marked “∞” and draw a line from that point to the point “P”, which stands for the present. Since we claim that eternity past develops into the present, this can be expressed with the following symbols:

$$\infty \rightarrow P$$

Without applying numbers to the process, we still have the same problem as in the above example, namely that an object must undergo an eternal amount of changes to reach the present. However, if the object must undergo an eternal amount of changes, the present can never be reached – for it is impossible to complete an infinite distance. And if the object must not undergo an eternal amount of changes to reach the present, then it has not been in a process from eternity past.

In conclusion, as the distance between eternity past and the present is eternal, it cannot be covered. This distance is one of time, and it is easier to demonstrate my point by using time units. However, by avoiding numbers, we also avoid the counter argument of Zeno’s paradoxes of motion.

Since the idea of a dynamic eternity past⁶⁹ is inconsistent with the idea of the present, it must therefore be rejected. I consider the present unquestionable as it is the frame of reference for our acts and experiences.

Given the conclusion that a dynamic eternity past or a beginningless process is impossible – two expressions for the same phenomenon – it remains to be explained how Oord’s theology of love is affected. As I stated above, the conclusion I have just made means that,

⁶⁹ I use the phrase of “dynamic eternity past” to refer to a time frame in which beginningless processes take place.

presupposing Oord's own statements about love's essence and as a beginningless attribute of God, God's nature of love is not without beginning or love is not a category of actions.

If we understand love as a category of actions, our observation of Oord justifies the following argument:

- (1) Premise 1: If love is a category of actions, and it is in God's nature from eternity to love, God must have acted from eternity.
- (2) Premise 2: Love is a category of actions.
- (3) Premise 3: It is in God's nature from eternity to love.
- (4) Conclusion: God must have acted from eternity. (From 1-3)

As we see from this argument, the conclusion follows by necessity. And since the concluding statement is impossible, there must also be an error with one or more of the premises. Given that (1) merely contains the conditions for the conclusion, there is no problem with this one. Therefore, the problem is necessarily due to (2) or (3).

At this point, when it is clear that either Oord's definition of love is wrong or the fact love is God's nature from eternity, central aspects of his theology start falling apart. Given that the definition of love is the very core of his theology, it seems better to state that love is *not* God's nature from eternity. But doing so would mean that God does not necessarily love humans, and that Oord's explanation to why God does not prevent evil is unsatisfactory.⁷⁰ Despite being a huge leap, my suggestion is to rethink love from the beginning. This is also due to the uncertainty of how to interpret the sympathy phrase of Oord's definition of love and how to understand the fundamentals.⁷¹

For now, it might be worth mentioning that defining love as a static rather than a dynamic phenomenon will also make it possible for love to be God's nature from eternity. Given that a dynamic eternity past has been rejected, only a static eternity past remains possible. And in succession of this fact, it is time to present the *very best* reason Oord should redefine love: the current metaphysics of love possibly means that love is by nature something that cannot exist!

⁷⁰ Understanding love as God's exclusive "program" is essential to accepting Oord's defense of God.

⁷¹ As I will demonstrate in chapter four, however, there are many of Oord's statements that suffice for an alternate theology.

As is included in the love definition, as well as in Oord’s writings on the fundamentals, love is always an act in response to past actions – whether to own body members. As a result, love cannot be the first act performed – an act of love must always succeed a previous act. It should be noted that this fact in itself is not sufficient to reject love as an existing phenomenon. For if an act of love can be a response to an act that *is not* love, an act of love in the present does not depend upon a beginningless process of loving acts in the past.⁷² However, given that an act of love in the present is “in sympathy” to the vision of well-being that was passed on by the agent of the previous act (even if that agent is one’s past self), the previous act must necessarily have been an act of love. Given this information, it must be true that present acts of love depend upon a beginningless process of loving acts. And since that which love depends upon is impossible, love too is impossible.

The argument I have just presented is indeed fatal to Oord’s theology. If the very core of his theology is wrong, how can anything else function when it presupposes this untrue core? But as I implied above, the argument I have proposed is done with a certain moderation on my part. For as I have also discussed, “the others” could possibly refer to objects of love. And if the first act of love on God’s part was in sympathy to created things⁷³ or something else, the content of Oord’s current definition of love does not depend upon beginningless processes.

As I promised earlier in this section, I will now explain why the following five constituents of Oord’s doctrine of creation are impossible given their framework:

- (1) God exists from eternity**
- (2) God has a nature of love from eternity**
- (3) God creates from eternity**
- (4) God creates out of creation**
- (5) God creates through his nature of love**

As I have clarified, Oord means by ‘eternity’ a dynamic eternity past. Since a dynamic eternity past is impossible, this means constituents 1-3 are impossible by (Oord’s) definition. If ‘eternity’ is interpreted as a static eternity past, however, all these constituents would be

⁷² If an act of love *always* requires an act of love to exist, we will end at a beginningless process, which is a metaphysical impossibility.

⁷³ This means God’s nature as love did not precede the act of creation, and was neither present in creation itself.

true, although it might be weird to claim that “God created from a static eternity past” (formulated from the third constituent).⁷⁴ A natural way of phrasing the intended meaning would be “God created *in the beginning*”.

To my understanding, Oord does not interpret any terms of constituents (4) and (5) in a way that make them impossible. However, (4) is impossible in the context of a dynamic eternity past, for which reason it is impossible as part of Oord’s doctrine of creation. Similarly, (5) too is impossible given the context of a dynamic eternity past.

In conclusion, all of these constituents are impossible as part of Oord’s doctrine of creation following the interpretation of certain terms or the contexts in which the constituents appear. However, it is also the case they can be true given optional contexts or interpretations of terms – except for (3), perhaps.

I now turn to discussing weaknesses in Oord’s ethics of love.

3.2 – Weaknesses in Oord’s Ethics of Love

In the former section, we have seen that problems with Oord’s metaphysics of love make it questionable whether Oord *does* have a working definition of the love category. In conclusion, his metaphysics of love is weak. And as a result of this, his ethics of love, which depends upon a metaphysics of love, is also weak.

The argument to arrive at this weakness can be expressed as follows:

- (1) Premise 1: If an ethics of love depends upon a metaphysics of love, then, if it is questionable whether Oord has a rigorous metaphysics of love, it is questionable whether Oord has a rigorous ethics of love.
 - (2) Premise 2: An ethics of love depends upon a metaphysics of love.
 - (3) Premise 3: It is questionable whether Oord has a rigorous metaphysics of love.
 - (4) Conclusion: It is questionable whether Oord has a rigorous ethics of love.
- (From 1-3)

⁷⁴ I stated earlier that regardless of the interpretation of ‘eternity’, the constituent is impossible. This is due to the peculiar wording of the only alternative that *could* work, which some might claim is wrong.

To put it another way, given that Oord may not have a metaphysics of love (supposing the phenomenon of love that Oord describes is impossible), Oord may not have an ethics of love in his theology.

In general, all theologies of love in which the metaphysics is weak will impact the ethics of love. However, given the particular way in which Oord defines love (as an action), *his* metaphysics of love will have even greater impact on his ethics than is true for the metaphysics of love in many other theories.

There is also an additional argument to why Oord’s ethics is weak, which I will instead treat in section four of this chapter. The reason I do it that way, is that the argument pertains to Oord’s lack of theological reflection.

3.3 – Weaknesses in Oord’s Epistemology of Love

Oord’s epistemology of love is weak for the very same reason Oord’s ethics of love is weak: it depends on a metaphysics of love. In addition, Oord’s epistemology also depends on an ethics of love, since an “epistemology of love” is a theory of both how the *essence* of love (metaphysics) can be known and how the *practice* of love (ethics) can be known.

The argument to demonstrate this weakness is similar in structure to the previous argument:

- (1) Premise 1: If an epistemology of love depends upon a metaphysics of love and an ethics of love, then, if it is questionable whether Oord has a rigorous metaphysics of love and a rigorous ethics of love, it is questionable whether Oord has a rigorous epistemology of love.
 - (2) Premise 2: An epistemology of love depends upon a metaphysics of love and an ethics of love.
 - (3) Premise 3: It is questionable whether Oord has a rigorous metaphysics of love and a rigorous ethics of love.
 - (4) Conclusion: It is questionable whether Oord has a rigorous epistemology of love.
- (From 1-3)

Because there is only one critical issue to present regarding Oord's epistemology of love, and that this depends entirely on other fields of Oord's theology, it is true that Oord's epistemology of love is not weak *by itself*. It should also be noted that the lack of arguments against Oord's epistemology is not because an epistemology is difficult to identify. In chapter two, I have provided a clear overview of Oord's epistemology when discussing his view on holiness.

In conclusion of this section, it should be noted that I find Oord's epistemology of love to be the strongest part of his theology.

3.4 – Weaknesses in Oord's Theological Reflection

As I stated introductorily to the chapter, this section is about exploring implications of Oord's theology that he is not aware of himself or has not reflected upon in his works. Although I have important points to make, it should be stated to Oord's defense that examining one's own theories critically can be quite difficult. To some degree, this could also explain weaknesses I have pointed at in earlier sections.

First, there is one problem pertaining to ethics that causes huge debate among moral philosophers. This problem is if it is always correct to promote overall well-being – which theorists in support of utilitarianism might argue – or if such actions should be regulated by theories of right and wrong. The latter would be argued by theorists in favor of deontological ethics.

Judging by Oord's definitions of love on their own, it may seem that promoting overall well-being is a loving thing to do even when innocents become victims. For example, one could argue for theft by stating that a certain object brings more pleasure to another person than the owner, and that to love sometimes means to steal. Oord's definitions could also mean that a person who deserves punishment is instead treated well because it results in overall well-being.

Since I stated earlier that Oord is probably a virtue ethicist due to the idea of overall well-being, the virtues Oord possibly thinks we should develop might reduce loving acts to contexts in which no innocents are made victims. Nevertheless, it is a weakness with Oord's theological reflection that he has not clarified where his theory of love stands in the ethical

landscape, for which reason the negative aspects of his theology (as it is currently defined) have not been justified.

Another problem with Oord’s reflection is that he has not provided a thorough discussion of humans’ needs, although he has made some statements regarding “basic needs” when discussing well-being in *Relational Holiness*.⁷⁵ As a result of not discussing needs, I am not convinced that it is in humans’ best interest that God loves us *by nature* instead of loving us due to *our value*.⁷⁶ It should be noted that even if our value is a necessary condition for God’s love in eros contexts (but, as I have stated, this might not be the case), humans may *need* to be loved due to their values in *all* contexts in which God promotes overall well-being. This includes contexts in which we are in a state of ill-being and when we are co-operating with God.

The problem I address is accounted for well in an essay called “The Concept of Love: Divine and Human” which is featured in the book, *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better*^{liii} – a compilation of essays that Oord regards as an important contribution to a theology of love.^{liv} The author of this essay, Gary Badcock, uses the example of a depressed person to state there are situations in which we *need* to know we are valuable to God.⁷⁷

As a result of these situations, Badcock believes we need to be loved by God *because* of our value; *not* because it is in God’s nature to love. He even goes as far as to claim that Nygren’s theology of love (which includes the claim that we are valuable *because* God loves us) is catastrophic for the purposes of developing a practical theology.

Similar to Badcock’s concern with Nygren’s theology, I am concerned with Oord’s theology for the same purpose, since Oord too considers love part of God’s nature and thus independent of human value (most probably in all cases). In other words, I am not certain if Oord’s theology is suited optimally as a practical theology of love given that Oord does not take into account what people *need* from God in order to achieve ultimate well-being.⁷⁸ But to

⁷⁵ This is accounted for in the section on love’s metaphysics.

⁷⁶ ‘Value’ is a term that holds little meaning in most contexts it is applied, provided it not defined. What I mean by value in this context, is the function of causing pleasure. In other words, to be loved because of our value means to be loved due to our function of causing pleasure to the subject who loves.

⁷⁷ It should be noted that Badcock does not provide a definition of value.

⁷⁸ It should be noted here that I believe the contents of Badcock’s point of needing “*because of value love*” far extends that of particular contexts. It is my personal stance that “*because of value love*” is *always* the best love possible, and that we need it in all instances when love is needed in the first place. Given that I make this argument based on own opinions, others have the right to disagree.

Oord's defense, it should be noted that he seems more concerned with anthropology⁷⁹ than does Nygren (and I have read Nygren's work too).

The final point I will make to demonstrate Oord's absence of theological reflection is based on the book, *The Best News You Will Ever Hear*. As I have already stated, the book is a work of practical theology, and doesn't concern itself with heavier theological discussions. And it is for this reason I find it problematic that the book implies its contents contain ultimate truths about God.

Since Oord doesn't dig deeply into the nature of love in this work, it may not be a problem that he makes the strong claims he does – at least, people will not be given wrong impressions about the essence of a phenomenon (love) that is not even defined. However, supposing that people who read this book come to think that Oord *does* possess the truths about love (which he strongly implies), these readers may possibly read other works of his with an open and uncritical mind. And as a result, they may come to accept all the statements I have just shown to be more or less problematic.

While this is not as much an objection to Oord's theology itself, it is important to consider the possible impacts of one's theories, and evaluate whether it is worth making big statements. If a particular theory is wrong, and the theorist should have known better than to use big words, it seems reasonable to hold him or her responsible for deluding individuals and making them victims to the negative consequences that follow the realization that a long-held belief is wrong.

I want to clarify that the above statement is made on a general note, and is not meant as an accusation against Oord. I believe Oord has been convinced of his love theory, and he has managed to show there are arguments that support his beliefs. However, the fact that Oord and many other theologians may not reflect on the possible consequences that follow from having made incorrect statements, is a good reason to shed light on the issue.

In conclusion, a charismatic attitude is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it makes it more tempting for an individual to accept a belief; on the other hand, the consequences of realizing one's beliefs are wrong might be even worse when they were

⁷⁹ Anthropology is the field of knowledge about phenomena pertaining to human experiences.

accepted uncritically and have made the person in question excited about these beliefs for a long period of his or her life.⁸⁰

This concludes my critical arguments to Oord’s theology.

3.5 – Conclusion

As we have seen, there are several and important problems with Oord’s theology. The biggest problems concern his metaphysics of love and his theological reflection. In conclusion, it is questionable whether there are sufficient metaphysical and pragmatic reasons to embrace his love theory.

As I stated in the introduction to the chapter, I will now evaluate Oord’s theory in light of the seven criteria for a rigorous theology of love I presented in chapter one. These are as follows:

- (1) A rigorous theology of love must be based on Scripture.
- (2) A rigorous theology of love must be credible based on available knowledge.
- (3) A rigorous theology of love must be clearly expressed.
- (4) A rigorous theology of love must be constructed on coherent arguments.
- (5) A rigorous theology of love must be thoroughly consistent.
- (6) A rigorous theology of love must not be metaphysically impossible.
- (7) A rigorous theology of love must promote overall well-being.

Despite the criticism presented, we can identify a few criteria to which Oord’s theology is strong, namely (1), (4), and (7). I believe Oord’s theology is strong with regard to the first criterion since Oord has many references to Scripture throughout his works. And since I have only identified one argument on Oord’s part that is incoherent (his argument for defining love based on Scripture), Oord’s theology is also strong in respect to (4).

Regarding (7) (that a rigorous theology of love must promote overall well-being), Oord’s theology is clearly strong in that respect – this is due to his very definition of love. However, it almost becomes a problem that Oord’s theology is strong in this respect because, as I noted in this chapter and in the introduction, there are times in which the principle of

⁸⁰ Given the possible danger of being charismatic, I invite people who are part of charismatic movements (across the religions) and those who are particularly fond of practical theology to reflect on their ideologies.

overall well-being should be regulated by theories of right and wrong. In addition, the amount of overall well-being might be higher if humans are loved “the proper way”.⁸¹

Regarding criteria (2) (that a rigorous theology of love must be credible based on available knowledge), (3) (that a rigorous theology of love must be clearly expressed), (5) (that a rigorous theology of love must be thoroughly consistent), and (6) (that a rigorous theology of love must not be metaphysically impossible), we have spotted several problems. The reason I deem Oord’s theology improbable based on available knowledge, is due to the reflections I have made – not the explicit grounds Oord presents. According to the reasons Oord presents, it seems at first reasonable to accept his definition of love. However, when his entire theology has been studied, it also seems reasonable to reject his definitions of love⁸², and probably the fundamentals.⁸³

Regarding criteria (3) and (5), it seems for the most part to be an either-or situation: Oord’s theology is either very, *very* unclear, or there are some terrible inconsistencies. In all cases but one – and that case didn’t pertain directly to Oord’s theology of love since it concerned the statement that God has created eternally from creation – I have concluded that Oord is unclear, wanting to interpret his theology as positively as I can. However, given the high chances that Oord’s theology of love *is* inconsistent, it seems reasonable to conclude that it is also weak with regard to criterion (5).

The final condition to be addressed – condition (6) about metaphysical impossibilities – is one to which Oord’s theology is weak due to the second problem about the doctrine of creation, i.e. that there is no beginning to God’s process of creation. As a result of explaining this possibility, I also showed that either Oord’s definition of love is false or the statement that God’s nature from eternity is love.

Due to the several and essential weaknesses in Oord’s theology, I make the claim I presented in chapter one, which is my thesis: ***Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love is not philosophically rigorous.***

⁸¹ This is based on the assumption that being loved due to one’s value means more to the object of love than to be loved due to other conditions.

⁸² It is really the general definition of love that is problematic. However, since this should possibly be rejected, it follows then that the definitions of the subtypes must possibly be rejected as well. In addition, there is also a problem with the definition of eros due to the inclusion of ‘valuable’.

⁸³ The fundamentals need not be rejected entirely since some could be true for an optional definition of love.

This statement is my answer to the following question, “Is Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love philosophically rigorous?”, and it is based upon the following conclusions:

(C₁): Oord’s metaphysics of love is considerably weak due to several problems.

(C₂): Oord’s ethics of love is somewhat weak.

(C₃): Oord’s epistemology of love is somewhat weak.

(C₄): Oord does not give a sufficient account of the implications of his theology.

Having made this statement, I consider the case study to be concluded. I will now make some reflections on the case study for the purposes of making explicit the knowledge that can be drawn from it.

4 – Chapter Four: Developing a Rigorous Theology

As I stated in chapter one, my project also includes reflecting on the case study, so that its values will become explicit. Given that I have discovered a number of weaknesses in Oord’s theology, I feel it is particularly important to make reflections that can help future theorists avoid these weaknesses. It is for the purpose of producing knowledge for future theologies I have named the dissertation “Developing a Rigorous Theology of Love”, and the name has also inspired the title of this chapter.

The three goals I mentioned introductorily, that I intend to meet here, are as follows: 1) To explain why Oord’s theology is weak; 2) to provide a list of checkpoints that will help theorists avoid these and other weaknesses; 3) to clarify the aspects of Oord’s theology that can be used for future theological projects. These goals will be met in one section each and in the same order they are listed. As a result, there will be three sections except the conclusion: one about reasons for weaknesses in Oord’s theology, one about things to consider for theological development, and one about strengths in Oord’s theology.

Given that the essence of the first two topics discussed can be expressed with few words, the sections will not be particularly long. However, the section on strengths in Oord’s theology will be more substantial.

4.1 – Reasons for Weaknesses in Oord’s Theology of Love

This section concerns explaining why Oord’s theology of love is weak, which corresponds to the first goal. (See intro of chapter)

In chapter three, we have seen there are many reasons Oord’s theology is weak. The reasons include (but are not limited to) the facts his theology is unclear, possibly inconsistent, and contains metaphysical impossibilities. In particular, his general definition of love seems very poor because it is unclear how to interpret part of it, and it is probably a definition of a phenomenon that by nature cannot exist. So to understand why Oord’s theology of love is weak means largely to understand the factors that made him settle for the following definition

of love: To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

As I wrote in the section on love's metaphysics, Oord moves from biblical grounds, namely scriptures about Jesus' words and deeds, to argue that love is an action. Thus, the Bible seems to be the fundamental source for Oord's love definition. As a result, it also seems reasonable to think that the role of Scripture is the fundamental problem with Oord's theory.⁸⁴

Given that 'love' is a term that can be filled with any meaning as long as it is used consistently and depicts an existing phenomenon, there is no problem with using the Bible as a source. However, the desire to stay as close to the Bible as possible when defining love – which does not have to be a problem at all – could result in neglecting philosophical reflection. In the case of Oord's definition, it seems very clear to me that Oord has not done enough reflection prior to presenting his theory.

The two essential weaknesses with the metaphysics of love (and on the whole) in Oord's theology are the statements that God has acted without beginning and that love in the present depends on others (which possibly means someone must have loved in the past in order for love in the present to exist).

When both statements are understood the way I understand them, their contents are impossible because they presume it is possible to move from a dynamic eternity past to the present. As I have explained already, the content of this claim is impossible because it would require the crossing of an infinite distance.

When Oord argues for the statement that God has acted without beginning⁸⁵, he does address the problem of human understanding – that we cannot possibly comprehend what forever is like (and Oord wrongfully supposes that "eternity past" necessarily means a dynamic eternity past: he argues it should be no problem to believe God has acted (created) from eternity when we already suppose he exists from eternity). But given that the outcome of his love definition is poor, it cannot be true that Oord has done a sufficient (philosophical) reflection. Instead, it seems he defends a theological statement (that God has acted eternally) by pointing to theology (the traditional doctrine that God is eternal). This means that an essential part of Oord's theology is not based on anything outside theology itself.

⁸⁴ I will not consider here the fact that Oord's argument for his personal definition of love based on Scripture is incoherent.

⁸⁵ Of the two statements concerned, this is the only one to which I have found an explicit argument.

Because of the above reasoning, my explanation to why Oord’s theory of love is weak is that he has trusted (his interpretation/formulations of) theological doctrines too much when developing his theory of love, for which reason philosophical reflection has been neglected. In particular, it is the sources of Oord’s theology (Scripture, Oord’s own reasoning) that have not been reflected on appropriately prior to Oord’s presentation of his love theory. In addition, I think it would have been helpful to do an extensive treatment on people’s use of ‘love’ and related terms in daily language in his works.⁸⁶ But the closest Oord comes to taking this superior perspective, is to list questions about love’s being in *Defining Love*, which I also presented in section 2.1.1.1.

To make it explicit, Oord’s theology of love is weak because his philosophy of love is weak. As I stated early on, Oord’s theory of love is a philosophical theology in which theology has the upper hand. However, I believe a philosophically rigorous theology (rigorous according to the criteria I presented) should be a philosophical theology in which theological doctrines come second to philosophical reflection. In other words, the theologian should not present hypotheses as truths before reflecting on them philosophically.

The reflection I have in mind must minimally include protecting the criteria for the theological theory from violation. And from this ground, it is possible either to develop a theory inspired largely by Scripture (or any other religious source) or from non-theological sources (which could still result in a theological theory as long as the theorist demonstrates that e.g. biblical passages about love are meaningful).

Protecting the criteria from violation also means to maintain clarity and possibly to make sure the theory promotes overall well-being (but not at any cost), which are issues I have not focused on in this section. However, the fact there are more things to consider than consistency and metaphysical possibilities is an additional reason to support philosophically superior theologies (theological theories approved by philosophical reasoning).

The reason for having used general terms when writing this section is that the points I have made do not only apply to a theology of love, nor solely to *Christian* theology.

⁸⁶ This might have made more people agree with his definitions.

4.2 – Things to Consider When Developing Theology

This section concerns explaining how theological weaknesses can be avoided, which corresponds to the second goal. (See intro of chapter)

Given that philosophical reflection is required for a strong theology, a theorist who is unused to such reflection may find it difficult to know what questions to ask. And even if a theorist is well-versed in philosophy, asking the right questions concerning the topic of interest (the topic he or she intends to write about) might be difficult.

Due to the case study I have completed, I believe I have a ground from which to present such questions. The point of presenting these questions is to help theorists gain deeper insight into their own theology, both its contents and implications. Naturally, the questions I will ask apply to a theology of love, since that is the nature of the theory I have studied.

As a result of my own reflection, I have identified five important questions – which I call checkpoints – that are important to look at frequently when developing a theology of love. Some could also apply to the development of other theological doctrines. To begin with, I believe the checkpoints should be considered in the order of presentation.

Checkpoint 1: How will my presumptions about God affect a theology of love?

In Christian theology, all doctrines come as a result of theology proper or indicate statements about God's being. The very idea that God is the primary cause of time and space is sufficient to make this point, since God's initial act of creation lays the foundation for how Christians understand the created realm: things that exist are either in accordance with or in contrast to God's will.⁸⁷

Given that God has a will and an intention, which pertain to theology proper, there is a foundation from which other theological doctrines are developed, such as the doctrine of salvation. This doctrine in particular exemplifies God's works in the human sphere and is therefore based on ideas about God's essence.

⁸⁷ This supposes a view of God that not all Christians would agree with. Some consider God to be entirely static or to be entirely different from humans.

Because Christian theology is particularly theocentric, it is important to be aware that the presumptions a theorist has about God will affect his or her development of additional doctrines. In fact, a theologian who dares developing a theology of love might realize the inconsistency between possible love theories and presently accepted doctrines within one’s own religious community. This is because, as Oord and many other theologians have noted, love has not been given its rightful attention in the history of theological development. Instead, other doctrines (and attributes of God) have been the topics of much discussion and development, which means the room for love has grown narrower with time. As a result, ending up with a rigorous theology of love might involve taking huge leaps from conventional theology.

One reason to argue huge leaps *should* be taken when developing a theory of love is that the Bible identifies love as an attribute of God’s. One example is the statement, “God is love”, which John makes twice in his first epistle. Due to this identification of love with God, there is a ground for arguing love should be the primary attribute of God’s and the theory according to which other theories about God’s attributes must correspond. In addition, there is also another important statement about God and love that supports the chief position of this attribute, namely that God sent his Son because he loved the world.

If love is not the primary attribute of God’s, then it is very possible that ‘love’ becomes meaningless given that the many connotations to the term, such as ideas about motive, intention and attitude, must yield to other divine traits that are instead the points of focus. Given that such traits have been largely discussed, the theorist may have to make an important moral decision when developing a theory of love: Does the value of tradition come first or the value of interpreting love in a certain manner?

One doctrine I mentioned in chapter two that, if accepted, means the idea of a loving God becomes questionable, is that God is perfect and cannot gain any more pleasure than he already possesses. As I demonstrated, it is not impossible to imagine a perfect God (perfect due to having the ultimate experience) who chooses to create a world and who develops love for humans. However, according to my own interpretation of this scenario, God will then have created the world “for no reason”, which seems like a claim one can only adhere to by faith.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ It is important to be aware that one’s own knowledge, such as that which is gained by experience, will greatly affect a subject’s evaluation of what is possible and the likeliness that something is possible.

In particular, ideas about God's being (rather than other doctrines) can imply a lot of restrictions on a possible theology of love. As a result, the checkpoint I have suggested might as well be framed this way: "How do my ideas about God's being affect a theology of love?" It is indeed an important question to ask. I believe it should be the first question to consider before initiating a theology of love, since the current ideas a theorist has about God and her willingness to reject them, lay the entire foundation for theological development.

Checkpoint 2: For what purpose do I develop a theology of love?

When developing a theology of love, the theorist could have many reasons to do it. Maybe the theorist gains pleasure from engaging an intellectual challenge? Or maybe the theorist has a desire to understand as much of the Bible as possible? Two possibilities that I find more credible, however, are the ones I call the "theocentric purpose" and the "androcentric purpose" respectively.⁸⁹

Since it is a fact that many people are religious because they are either concerned with God's reputation⁹⁰ or their own well-being – and possibly both – it seems reasonable to think that developing a theology of love is also motivated by these concerns.

The one who develops a theory of love for theocentric purposes will be interested in making God appear as great as he possibly can. This might mean making God perfect, which easily conflicts with traditional ideas of love. It seems then that 'love' must have a radically different meaning if it is to be consistent with particular ideas of perfection.

If a theory of love is developed for androcentric purposes, it may mean to define the term in a way that makes many uses of 'love' and related terms in everyday contexts become legitimate. Understanding what love means in the situations it is used is important to understanding the ideas and emotions people intend to express. But given that a theorist is concerned with developing a *theology* of love rather than a philosophy, he or she may first and foremost be concerned with making an important statement about God's attitude towards creation.

⁸⁹ 'Theocentric' means "focused on God" while 'androcentric' means "focused on humans".

⁹⁰ Being "concerned with God's reputation" could mean to think of God as being considerably different from everything that pertains to humans and animals. This could lead to apophatic theology – defining God in terms of negations. One such example could be to negate intentionality from God.

In the case of developing a theology of love, it seems impossible to unite the ideas of considering God a being who remains in a perfect condition (a condition of having perfect pleasure) and who also loves creation. It is therefore possible that the two purposes are contradictory, which can be expressed as follows:

- (1) Premise 1: If God loves creation, creation will impact God’s experience.
- (2) Premise 2: God loves creation.
- (3) Conclusion 1: Creation will impact God’s experience. (From 1 & 2)

- (4) Premise 3: Since creation will impact God’s experience, God will not always remain in a condition of perfect pleasure.
- (5) Conclusion 2: God will not always remain in a condition of perfect pleasure. (From 4)

Given the problem that seems to arise when combining the two purposes, it seems that ‘love’ and ‘perfection’ are almost contradictory terms. For this reason, it becomes all the more interesting to consider Oord’s claim that love is *the core notion* of perfection. If this statement is accepted, whatever meaning the term of love holds makes God great *because* he possesses love – not *in spite* of possessing it. That is a major difference from the concepts of love and perfection being contradictory!⁹¹

As a final point in the discussion of theocentrism and androcentrism, it must be noted that a person who *wants* to make statements about God to defend his greatness, is also developing theology for androcentric purposes (due to his/her wishes), since he or she is satisfied by the statements made. In conclusion, I therefore want to state that developing theology is often a theocentric and androcentric activity at once. This might also be the case for the development of love theories.

⁹¹ This also shows the importance of accurate definitions. As is demonstrated, it is not the case that perfection and love are contradictory concepts by necessity, and there could also be other ways to unite them than to think of perfection as something that logically succeeds love.

Checkpoint 3: Have I based my theology of love on a thesis without first researching it properly?

Given that Oord's theology of love is weak due to basing it on a doctrine of creation – whose contents are impossible – it is certainly important to research the theses on which one bases a theology. It is very possible that a theological theory based on faulty theses *is not* philosophically rigorous.

This checkpoint comes in addition to checkpoint 1 and is meant to account for all other theses.

Checkpoint 4: Does my theology of love comply with the criteria for good philosophy?

When the other checkpoints have been considered – which pertain to preliminary work with a theology – the theorist can more easily consider the material he or she develops himself/herself. Understanding the criteria for good philosophy and developing one's "inner critic" is important to attaining rigorous theories.

Examples of problems in Oord's theology pertaining to these criteria (clarity, consistency, coherence, reason) are the statements that (1) love is in sympathetic response to others and that (2) God calls people to love. The former statement is unclear because the "others" could mean objects of love or people who have loved in the past (and since there is evidence for both interpretations, it is possibly an inconsistent statement, but not necessarily). The latter is also unclear because it suggests God directly calls people to love, although there are also reasons to believe this is not the case. Therefore, this statement too might be victim to inconsistency.⁹²

I believe it is important to consider this checkpoint frequently in the process of theological development. Apart from that, there is little else to say than that practice (of philosophical reflection) makes perfect!

⁹² See my discussion on the fundamentals of love in chapter two for an explanation.

Checkpoint 5: Is my theology of love otherwise metaphysically impossible?

Apart from the case with the doctrine of creation, I might also have discovered another metaphysical impossibility in Oord’s theology, namely with Oord’s main definition. The reason this definition is impossible (if interpreted correctly) is that it depends on a dynamic eternity past, which is also the reason Oord’s doctrine of creation is wrong.⁹³

Although these are only two impossibilities, it is very possible that identifying one metaphysical impossibility⁹⁴ is enough to state that an entire theory is not rigorous. If interpreted correctly, both instances I have pointed at in Oord’s theology are sufficient in themselves to make this conclusion. Avoiding metaphysical impossibilities is crucial.

4.3 – Strengths in Oord’s Theology

This section concerns explaining the aspects of Oord’s theology that suffice for a new theology of love, which corresponds to the third goal. (See intro of chapter)

Now that I have accounted for weaknesses in Oord’s theology and completed the other reflections, it is time to account for the aspects of Oord’s theology that do work. The way I will demonstrate that certain aspects of Oord’s theology work, is to analyze definitions of love, fundamentals of love, and other statements, and then conclude that part of these components do not seem to violate the criteria for philosophical rigor and may even be argued for positively.

First off, let us consider Oord’s definitions of love:

(1) *Definition of love in general:*

To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God), to promote overall well-being.

⁹³ In addition, Oord’s doctrine of creation is wrong for another reason: it contains the implicit statement that created things are beginningless. This claim is contradictory.

⁹⁴ Metaphysical impossibilities also include cases of inconsistency.

(2) *Definition of agape:*

Agape is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when confronted by that which generates ill-being.

(3) *Definition of eros:*

Eros is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being when affirming what is valuable.

(4) *Definition of philia:*

Philia is intentional sympathetic response to promote overall well-being by cooperating with others.

Regarding the main definition of love, we have seen that there are four reasons it is problematic: (1) “God and others” is an ambiguous phrase; (2) if “others” is restricted solely to sources of inspiration, the content of the definition is metaphysically impossible; (3) “to promote overall well-being” does not take into account theories of right and wrong, and may violate these theories; (4) the definition does not, as Oord implies, follow logically from analyzing Jesus’ deeds and statements.

Although four problems with one definition may sound a lot, the definition is actually a good one as I see it. However, this is if it interpreted as defining *the manifestation* of love – not its essence. As I have already discussed, the definition is not a real definition of love, which is what Oord implies. But it is a nominal definition of ‘to love’.

Given that Oord is concerned with developing a *theology* of love, I would say the definition is not too bad. I *do* think Oord has a biblical ground for stating that ‘to love’, as Jesus thinks about it, possibly means to promote overall well-being.⁹⁵ Therefore, the last phrase of the definition stands.

⁹⁵ There is a difference between claiming the Bible supports the essence of love as a particular category of actions – *as if it was unquestionable* – and claiming the Bible provides grounds for how to consider the practice of love.

Furthermore, it makes sense that to love means to act intentionally, for which reason the first phrase also stands. Oord has given a good account of this phrase, and I have not discovered any problems with it.

In conclusion, I believe the following nominal definition of the practice of love suffices for an alternate theology of love:

To love is to act intentionally to promote overall well-being.

Given that promotion of overall well-being should be subject to theories of justice, this cannot be considered *the* definition of loving practice. It follows then that it is not a normative definition, but descriptive of some or many acts that qualify as acts of love. Apart from the concern with “overall well-being”, the above definition is a good starting point for developing a theology of love. But naturally, the definition will be even better once the essence of love is clarified (and verified philosophically). It may also have to be extended so that “the essence of love” is made part of the definition.

For the time being, I would avoid the middle phrase that Oord has originally included, due to the uncertainty of interpretation (for which reason the practice of love might also be metaphysically impossible). I would also avoid it since it states something about the relation of the subject to God and others... This is problematic when the essence of love has not been defined.

Given the suggested changes of the main “definition of love”, this will also affect the other definitions I listed. Therefore, the agape, eros, and philia definitions as they currently stand should be refuted. However, it is not unlikely that *expressions* of love – not *essences* – might be categorized as agape, eros, and philia given their context. In other words, there could possibly be only one *essence* – love – whose different *expressions* or *manifestations* have names, such as agape, eros, and philia. But how to define the content of those classical love terms is not something I would encourage without first defining love. With that said the contexts of ill-being, value, and co-operation – pertaining to Oord’s definition of agape, eros, and philia respectively – are good ideas for contexts in which love exists and is manifested.

Regarding the fundamentals of love, these are the conditions I have identified from Oord's essay, "The Fundamentals of Love":

- (1) Individuals exist**
- (2) Individuals stand in relation to each other**
- (3) Individuals possess power for agency**
- (4) Individuals possess power for freedom**
- (5) Existing things possess genuine value**
- (6) God exists**
- (7) God possesses visions of well-being**
- (8) God calls creatures to enact these visions**

When I discussed the fundamentals in chapter two, I wrote that Oord thinks defining love well is "essential to identifying what love's fundamentals might be." As a result of Oord's own thoughts – which are mine as well – it does not seem reasonable to discuss the fundamentals of love without having a clear idea about its essence. Nevertheless, there are certain connotations to love that make it reasonable to assume some of the conditions.

For instance, whenever we make statements such as "I love...", we suggest there must be an individual who loves – a subject – and that there is an object of love. Therefore, conditions (1) and (2) seem reasonable.

Condition (3) on the list is somewhat more problematic, because it seems to be based on a definition of love as an action. In other words, if love is not an action, I cannot see how "power for agency" is a condition for love to exist. Rather, I view it as a condition for the manifestation of love, which often requires acts.

Condition (4) is one that seems very dependent on the understanding of love's essence. For example, if love were defined generally as actions or attitudes (which would make it a synonym), freedom is not required by necessity: not all attitudes or actions require freedom. By choice, a theorist can choose to make the content of 'love' something that by nature cannot be coerced into existence. In that case, it also seems reasonable (but not necessary) to claim that manifestations of love require freedom.

Condition (5) seems reasonable to accept if love is by nature something that cannot be coerced. In that case, we could love things due to their value, either because the value automatically results in love (which means we love by nature) or because the value of things gives us a choice of whether or not to love (which means we love by freedom). This seems

primarily to be a condition for the essence of love, which in turn also makes it a condition for love’s manifestation.

Given my faith in philosophical reasoning – which has been strengthened by doing an analysis of Oord’s theology – I do not think it wise to speculate about the role of God *prior* to defining love’s essence. Therefore, I do not consider conditions (6), (7), and (8) to be strengths for the time being. While there is clearly biblical ground for attributing love to God, and to state that God and humans relate, it does not mean that God is a *condition* for love. In fact, it could very well be that God plays no more role in love than do all things and individuals who affect our lives – or possibly no more role than humans allow for God to play.

In conclusion, I believe Oord have provided several conditions that are either necessary or possible for the essence and manifestation of love. The conditions that are necessary or possible⁹⁶ for the *essence* of love are also indirectly necessary or possible for the *manifestation* of love. These conditions, which thus work for an alternate theology of love, are as follows:

Necessary Conditions for the Essence of Love

- (1) *Individuals exist.*
- (2) *Individuals stand in relation to each other.*

Possible Conditions for the Essence of Love

- (4) *Individuals possess power for freedom.*
- (5) *Existing things possess genuine value.*

⁹⁶ ‘Possible’ here means “possible but not necessary”. By definition, “necessary conditions” are also possible conditions.

Necessary Conditions for the Manifestation of Love

(3) Individuals possess power for agency.⁹⁷

Possible Conditions for the Manifestation of Love

(4) Individuals possess power for freedom.⁹⁸

Finally, I will account for miscellaneous statements about love that could work for an alternate theology. In chapter two, I made a summary of the following statements:

(1) God is love.

(2) There are three modes of love: necessity, contingent, and impossibility.

(3) Love is the core notion of holiness.

(4) Agents are perfect when they love.

(5) God's love can be felt.

(6) Love can be experienced in community.

Whether or not these statements are good really depends on the goal of developing a theology of love. If, for example, the purpose is to stay close to Scripture, (1) and (3) are good statements, given that biblical passages support them. If, however, the goal of a theology is to create a definition of love in which there *has to* be different modes of expression, (2) is a good choice.⁹⁹

Given that (2), (4), (5), and (6) are statements that presuppose a certain definition of love (one of several possible definitions), they are really not strengths. They are simply claims that require the presence of a love definition. But even if love is defined differently than Oord does, it could still be the case that there is a certain phenomenon that can be experienced in

⁹⁷ It should be noted this condition is required for most, but not all manifestations of love. In some cases, just behaving in a certain way (which does not require acting) could also be a manifestation of love.

⁹⁸ Although this condition is presupposed as possible for the manifestation of love given that it is possible for the essence of love, I think the condition might be interpreted as being possible for the manifestation of love on its own (not for the essence). It is therefore I have included it on the list.

⁹⁹ But I would humbly advise against it. Given that a theology is something that more people than the theorist himself/herself will adhere to, he or she should take into account the theory's implications on the lives of believers. The implications should, in my opinion, be the primary concern.

community (pertaining to (6)) and that a certain phenomenon pertaining to God can be felt (pertaining to (5)).

In conclusion, I consider the following statements to be strengths that qualify for an alternate theology:

(1) God is love.

(3) Love is the core notion of holiness.

This concludes my presentation of strengths in Oord’s theology of love.

4.4 – Conclusion

The reflections I have made in this chapter have been in response to the three goals I formulated in chapter one. The goals are 1) to explain why Oord’s theology is weak; 2) to provide a list of checkpoints that will help theorists avoid these and other weaknesses; 3) to clarify the aspects of Oord’s theology that can be used for future theological projects.

In response to the first goal, the conclusion is that Oord’s theology is weak because Oord has not reflected sufficiently on his own claims. I believe the severe weaknesses I discovered in Oord’s theory provide a good ground for arguing that philosophy provides important tools in attaining a rigorous theology.

In response to the second goal, I provided the following list of questions that theorists should consider when developing a theology of love:

Checkpoint 1: *How will my presumptions about God affect a theology of love?*

Checkpoint 2: *For what purpose do I develop a theology of love?*

Checkpoint 3: *Have I based my theology of love on a thesis without first researching it properly?*

Checkpoint 4: *Does my theology of love comply with the criteria for good philosophy?*

Checkpoint 5: *Is my theology of love otherwise metaphysically impossible?*

In response to the third goal, I find that the following claims suffice for an alternate theology of love:

Claims from the Definitions in Oord's Theology:

Nominal Definition of a Manifestation of Love

To love is to act intentionally to promote overall well-being.

Claims from the Conditions for Oord's Theology:

Necessary Conditions for the Essence of Love

Individuals exist.

Individuals stand in relation to each other.

Possible Conditions for the Essence of Love

Individuals possess power for freedom.

Existing things possess genuine value.

Necessary Conditions for the Manifestation of Love

Individuals possess power for agency.

Possible Conditions for the Manifestation of Love

Individuals possess power for freedom.

Miscellaneous Claims:

God is love.

Love is the core notion of holiness.

In the end, it seems there is indeed some substance to Oord's theology despite the many weaknesses with it. Although I have not used the terms of metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology when presenting the strengths with Oord's theology, it is perhaps worth mentioning that the ethics and epistemology of his theology are strong in themselves – the only reason they are weak is due to a weak metaphysics. For this reason, I will argue that much of what Oord has written will make sense once a clear essence of love has been defined. Providing a real definition of love according to philosophical criteria is Oord's primary challenge.

5 – Chapter Five: Conclusion

Now that the case study and the reflections are complete, I will conclude the project by formally taking a stance to Oord and making reflections beyond the project itself. I will start by making a formal evaluation of Oord’s theology.

5.1 – Taking a Stance to Oord

In the introduction to my dissertation, I presented the following problem formulation:

Is Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love philosophically rigorous?

In response to the problem, I presented the following thesis:

(T₁): Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love is not philosophically rigorous.

The conclusions I presented in support of my thesis are as follows:

(C₁): Oord’s metaphysics of love is considerably weak due to several problems.

(C₂): Oord’s ethics of love is somewhat weak.

(C₃): Oord’s epistemology of love is somewhat weak.

(C₄): Oord does not give a sufficient account of the implications of his theology.

Given the evaluation of Oord’s theology in chapter three, it is clear that Oord’s theology of love is weak. However, it is important to specify it is weak in light of the particular criteria I presented introductorily:

- (1) A rigorous theology of love must be based on Scripture.*
- (2) A rigorous theology of love must be credible based on available knowledge.*
- (3) A rigorous theology of love must be clearly expressed.*
- (4) A rigorous theology of love must be constructed on coherent arguments.*
- (5) A rigorous theology of love must be thoroughly consistent.*
- (6) A rigorous theology of love must not be metaphysically impossible.*

(7) *A rigorous theology of love must promote overall well-being.*

According to these criteria, it is certain that Oord violates (2), (3), (4), and (6), while it is *almost* certain that Oord violates (5).

The reason Oord violates (2) (that a rigorous theology of love must be credible based on available knowledge) is that, according to my reflection on Oord's theology, the available knowledge tells me Oord's theology *is not* credible. In other words, Oord's violation of (2) follows logically from his violation of other criteria.

The reason Oord violates (3) (that a rigorous theology of love must be clearly expressed), is due to several reasons, e.g. that it is uncertain how to interpret the middle phrase of his general definition of love and that it is uncertain whether God is a direct condition for all occurrences of love or only for some.

The reason Oord violates (4) (that a rigorous theology of love must be constructed on coherent arguments) is that he argues for his definition of love on insufficient grounds, for which reason his argument is incoherent.

The reason Oord very possibly violates (5) (that a rigorous theology of love must be thoroughly consistent) is that he makes statements that, given my natural interpretation, are clearly inconsistent. However, due to the principle of making interpretations in favor of the theory (to make the theory appear as rigorous as possible), I have concluded Oord is unclear. In one instance, I found that Oord's theology actually *is* inconsistent. However, this pertained to Oord's doctrine of creation¹⁰⁰ and not to his theology of love.

The reason Oord violates (6) (that a rigorous theology of love must not be metaphysically impossible) is that the statement, "God's nature from eternity is love", cannot be true, given that Oord considers love a category of actions. I also argued that regardless of this statement, love itself might be a metaphysically impossible phenomenon. The reason that the statement is untrue (which is possibly the case for the definition of love as well) is because it supposes it is possible to move from a dynamic eternity past to the present.

Regarding the other criteria, it is clear that Oord's theology stands strong with regard to (1) (that a rigorous theology of love must be based on Scripture), since there are many scriptural references in his works. It is also clear that his theology stands strong with regard to (7) (that a

¹⁰⁰ See chapter three for a thorough discussion on this.

rigorous theology of love must promote overall well-being) since literally *all* of his love definitions include “overall well-being”.

The formal argument to why Oord’s theology of weak given the four conclusions (concerning metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and theological reflection on implications) can be formulated as follows:

- (1) Premise 1: If Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love is weak with regard to metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and theological reflection on implications, Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love is not philosophically rigorous.
- (2) Premise 2: Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love is weak with regard to metaphysics.
- (3) Premise 3: Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love is weak with regard to ethics.
- (4) Premise 4: Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love is weak with regard to epistemology.
- (5) Premise 5: Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love is weak with regard to theological reflection on implications.
- (6) Conclusion: ***Thomas Jay Oord’s theology of love is not philosophically rigorous.***
(From 1-5)

In spite of the weaknesses with Oord’s theology, I have also shown there are parts of it that suffice for an alternate theology of love. These parts are as follows:

From Oord’s Definitions of Love

To love is to act intentionally to promote overall well-being.

From Oord’s Fundamentals of Love (My Reformulations)

Individuals exist.

Individuals stand in relation to each other.

Individuals possess power for agency.

Individuals possess power for freedom.

Existing things possess genuine value.

From Oord's Miscellaneous Love Doctrines

God is love.

Love is the core notion of holiness.

The information that is presented in this section covers the most important points from studying and reflecting on Oord's theology of love. I have nothing additional to state than has already been presented. But regarding next steps on Oord's behalf, it is clear that the first thing to do is to arrive at an essence of love by use of philosophical criteria and, from there on, develop a rigorous theology of love.

5.2 – The Future of Love as a Theological Issue

In accordance with what has been stated in the dissertation, it is my hope that people will understand and take seriously the problems at stake when developing a theology of love, so that their theories will be rigorous.

In chapters two and four, I discussed the possible conflict between a perfect God and a loving God – a hypothetical conflict that theorists who seek to develop a theology of love should be aware of. Not taking a stance to God's perfection when developing a theology of love may possibly result in inconsistent beliefs among those who embrace the theory.

Theorists should indeed be aware that, as of today, there are many Christians who do not reflect properly on their beliefs. As a result, there are many that can be deluded by inconsistent and otherwise metaphysically impossible theories.

It is first and foremost with concern for potential believers I encourage theorists to reflect philosophically on their theologies, whether they presuppose the criteria I have presented as conditions for philosophical rigor or something similar. But if theorists *do* apply the criteria I have, they may find the checkpoints I have presented to be particularly useful. Considering these checkpoints at regular intervals is important to stimulate critical reflection.

Apart from understanding the importance of philosophical reflection when developing theology and the implications on the lives of potential believers, I also think it important to understand how the phenomenon of love fits with other phenomena pertaining to human spiritual life. Other terms that are used to address such phenomena are 'value', 'need', 'desire', 'pleasure', and 'satisfaction'. It is my hope that those who develop theologies of love in the future do it with regard to gaining insight into the bigger picture of human experiences. To that end, love is not all there is. It is only an entrance.

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Notes

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- ⁱ Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (The United States of America: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xiii.
- ⁱⁱ Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (The United States of America: Chalice Press, 2010), 22-23.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas Jay Oord, *Science of Love: The Wisdom of Well-Being* (The United States of America: Templeton Foundation Press, 2004), 1-2.
- ^{iv} Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love* (The United States of America: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005), 72-73.
- ^v Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement* (The United States of America: Brazos Press, 2010), 12.
- ^{vi} Thomas Jay Oord, *Science of Love*, 9.
- ^{vii} Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness*, 73.
- ^{viii} Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 17.
- ^{ix} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 15.
- ^x Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 22.
- ^{xi} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 14.
- ^{xii} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 18; Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 29.
- ^{xiii} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 29-30.
- ^{xiv} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 15-18.
- ^{xv} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 19-23.
- ^{xvi} Thomas Jay Oord, *Science of Love*, 59.
- ^{xvii} Thomas Jay Oord, *Science of Love*, 64.
- ^{xviii} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 23-29.
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- ^{xx} Thomas Jay Oord, *Science of Love*, 59.
- ^{xxi} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 21-23; Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 24-25.
- ^{xxii} Thomas Jay Oord, *Science of Love*, 62.
- ^{xxiii} Thomas Jay Oord, *Science of Love*, 60.
- ^{xxiv} 1 John 4:8,16.
- ^{xxv} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 32.
- ^{xxvi} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 51.
- ^{xxvii} Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness*, 79.
- ^{xxviii} Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 56.
- ^{xxix} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 43.
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- ^{xxxiii} Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 130.
- ^{xxxiv} Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 55.
- ^{xxxv} Thomas Jay Oord, *Science of Love*, 8.
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- ^{xxxviii} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 47.
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- ^{xli} Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 115.
- ^{xlii} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 50.
- ^{xliii} Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 115.
- ^{xliv} Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness*, 69-70.
- ^{xlv} Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness*, 48-49.
- ^{xlvi} Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness*, 81.
- ^{xlvii} Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness*, 110.
- ^{xlviii} Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness*, 113.

^{xlix} Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 134.

ⁱ Thomas Jay Oord and Robert Luhn, *The Best News You Will Ever Hear* (The United States of America: Russell Media, 2011), 27-39.

ⁱⁱ Thomas Jay Oord and Robert Luhn, *The Best News You Will Ever Hear*, 31.

ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 141-142.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Gary D. Badcock, "The Concept of Love: Divine and Human" in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (The United States of America: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 35-36.

^{iv} Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love*, 188.