Emails on Unconditional (from late 2011 and early 2012)

Its coming on Christmas and just a greeting to all of you. Thanks so much for the stimulating input over the past months. It seems that economic issues grip our attention intensely and we have such a variety of perspectives on what this area should be about and how it should be handled and what goals it should serve. Its good that we can debate it all, disagree, seek points of agreement, and wherever we are on whatever spectrum, still remain civil toward one another. What an expression of human freedom and decency in this very discussion. I love Herb’s little qualifier “This group excluded, of course” as he takes on the great Leftist monster with gusto. And those who disagree with him feel ‘equally’ (no pun intended) that they are taking on the great Right Wing monster. Ha. Me...I just sit in the middle, neutral, and enjoy the battles. <: Oh, I am such a slippery liar.

But to get to my point, my mind has been brought back again and again to the core wonder of the universe, life, and consciousness, that it all manifests an underlying, surrounding, and interpenetrating love. All of it. And that everything is safe in this love. That it is unconditional love adds more brilliance to the wonder of it. And in this love someday all suffering, pain, disillusionment, and whatever else human spirits feel they endure, will make sense.

Einstein was fascinated by light and wanted to spend the rest of his life studying light, exploring light. One physicist suggested that everything is made of light. Light is behind all things. I like to think this is true because love is behind all things. All things consist of love and light at their most essential core. Love and light being simply different ways of describing the same essence of all things, most especially the human spirit.

I find myself drawn to explore this thing of unconditional more and more. It gets one to what love is really to be about. What love really means. What really defines it most essentially. Its not so much a New Year’s resolution as an ongoing rest-of-life resolution. I guess it speaks to me of the story or narrative of life, whether personal or at a larger scale of humanity. That we are here to experience freedom from the animal in order to enter into the experience of the human, that promised land. We are here to conquer the animal in order to live as human. And what does that mean, to be human? Unconditional offers the deepest meaning to this grand question.

And from something I read the other day, it appears this thing of unconditional is most important in the mundane aspects of daily life. Howard Storm talks of his NDE and life review. He says that in the love  he experienced during his review all the things that he had worked to achieve, the recognition, all meant nothing (sand castles washed away in the end). What mattered was how he had interacted with other people, in a loving way. This is not to say all the other things aren’t important, all the things we work toward in life to make life better. But in the end...

But I wander.... have a great holiday season with your family and friends.

When I read these NDEs I get a sense of getting to the essence of what the historical Jesus was really on about- this thing of unconditional love. Its in that story of vineyard workers who are all given the same pay at the end of the day even though they all worked different amounts of time. When some hardworking regular workers complain about the late arrivals doing so little and yet getting the same pay, the owner says basically, why are you upset if I am generous? Or when good moral religious people argue that an ‘immoral’ lady should be punished there is little response from Jesus except to say, who of you is any better, really? He tries to encourage a scandalous forgiveness and acceptance, no matter what another has done. Or that irresponsible son who demanded his inheritance then blew it all and yet on returning home he is welcomed fully and without any demand for repayment or any other condition. He doesn’t even have to apologize. The older brother is really pissed off at such unconditional acceptance. It is simply being too generous, offensively generous.

All of this teaching was so upsetting to the good moral people of that time, people grounded in a strict payback view of reality and life. Good should be rewarded, and bad should be punished. Payback was the center of a good, moral worldview. It was so common sense and right and just. Yet this Palestinian sage blew it all away with this new view of love as scandalously unconditional.

And the NDE accounts offer even more scandalous detail on this unconditionality. In terms of current thought patterns and perceptions. Its like getting a real up-to-date account of the essence of the Jesus tradition (and that qualifier again- I am referring to the historical person not the Christian Christ who is something altogether different).

In the NDE accounts people who have committed suicide or done horrible things are welcomed with overwhelming love and acceptance as specially prized children. All the nasty behaviour is dismissed as unimportant and instead the focus is on what was learned and even this is reviewed in an atmosphere of overwhelming love.

It still amazes me that today we are getting all this fresh update on unconditional in all these very recent experiences of people all around us.

The Genesis story expresses some powerful themes that the ancients put forth to explain many things. That we have failed miserably, that we are responsible for the mess that appears to be on earth, that we deserve punishment for being bad, that life was once better and now is in decline toward something worse, that we are now corrupted, defiled creatures, that women are to blame, and so on. It is very similar to much other ancient mythology, notably Zoroaster’s separation between good and evil, and the decline of life toward disaster. Other ancient themes held that early people were composed partly of demonic and divine substances and were responsible for the fall and decline of life toward something worse. Others- that the gods were angry and retributive toward people and their failings.

Early conscious people were trying to make sense of life around them and offered such explanations. There was disaster everywhere and they believed gods/spirits/forces were behind all elements of life, so obviously the gods must be angry and punitive.

I like to think that they missed something very important because they were new at all this and still learning. And after all, life developed/evolved into a very animal existence and among natural forces that were not always pleasant. And as early conscious persons responding to all this, they came up with some very dark explanations. They were young and inexperienced and still learning.

But over time with their consciousness they started to see something else- it is there in the early Sumerian belief systems- comments on the need to forgive enemies, not to retaliate. Or in Egypt in the comments that there was kindness and mercy in the Pharaoh/gods. The Hebrews also spoke of a new more humane reality in their comments on God seeking mercy, not sacrifice. Or God as liberating the oppressed and delivering from misery and slavery and promising something new and better.

In this view consciousness is seen as emerging into a dark reality and gradually bringing light and love into that darkness and bringing humanity out of slavery and into a promised land. A better future. And this is  a long, gradual trajectory of rise toward something better (advance, progress, development, improvement are all ways of viewing this).

This is not about separation which was so central to the old dark mythological explanations but about God incarnated in early humanity at the very beginning and involved intimately in the rise of humanity toward something better. Separation was a mistaken interpretation of early people based on their myths of seeing divine anger in the natural disasters of life.

Others, like Jesus, saw a different reality behind nature- love and generosity. He did not see disasters as evidence of divine anger- the tower falling and killing people, the son born blind. Rather, he looked at things like sun and rain given generously to all, at flowers clothed beautifully, and so on. All evidence of love and goodness behind all. This was a new breakthrough way of seeing the world and interpreting it. It was about optimism not despair. Love not anger. So he lifted consciousness to an entirely new perspective. And we have never been the same since.

Jan. 7/12

A few more thoughts on this fascinating thing Ellen raised. Some stories are summaries of previous mythological themes and become iconic in history and hold immense sway over public consciousness, like this Hebrew story of origins and fall. Unfortunately, for following generations, early people focused on the theme of separation in this myth. That God was angry and had rejected humanity and punished people. And worse was yet to come. This spawned all sorts of things such as salvation or restoration myths. The ongoing endeavour to heal the separation or rupture and to appease the angry, punitive deity with blood sacrifice of innocent victims. Christianity developed a particularly gory version with violence and blood all over the place as necessary to placate offended deity. And what about the fear, shame, and even despair associated with all this? What an impact on human consciousness, a darkening, defiling impact. What does all this do to human confidence, self-image, and valuation of one another? Carrol (Constantine’s Sword) for one has traced the sad history of violence and antagonism associated with this mythology.

On the other hand, take the other grand  narrative now becoming more clear. That there never has been a separation of God from humanity. Never. Not one drop of evidence for such a thing. God has never been angry with imperfect humanity. Rather, the emergence of consciousness we can associate with God incarnating in all humanity. A God of love bringing uniquely human features into or with this consciousness- generosity, love, peace, and whatever we consider genuinely human. This incarnation resulted in the grand venture of humanity to leave our animal background and to find a more human existence. This has been the natural impulse of people all through history.

This is the story of liberation, exodus, and the entry into a promised land of a better future. This is about humanity humanizing life. Overcoming the animal to live as human. This is about hope, optimism, and other liberating emotions. This is a story replicated endlessly in each human life in all sorts of diverse human experiences. And each person trying to be something better is taking a unique part in the overall grand narrative of exodus and liberation and discovery of a better future.

My main point- the incarnation of Consciousness in humanity began the struggle of humanity to conquer the animal and to begin living as human. This has been a multi-millennia endeavour to understand right and wrong, good and evil and to take human civilization in a more humane direction. This is the Exodus story, the journey to a promised land, the story of liberation from slavery (slavery to animal drives), and whatever other analogies we employ to express our journey toward something better in the future.

Jan.16/12

Why refer to love as primary or fundamental? There are so many other elements to being human as Herb noted. Why focus on the importance and primacy of love?

There are two basic elements to the old narratives constructed by the ancients that have formed a dark background to people’s perceptions the fundamental nature of reality and life. One of these basic elements of the mythical/religious narratives was that there was something threatening, punishing, harmful, and angry behind all natural reality/life. This threatening reality (God/gods) needed to be placated  or appeased and this was a never-ending endeavour motivated too often by guilt and fear. Tied directly to this was the belief that people were corrupted, nasty creatures- evil, and even demonic. These two beliefs formed a general background environment to a lot of other belief (the salvation systems of religions are founded around these two core beliefs). And this was true of Eastern traditions also as Eliade noted History of Religious Ideas. I think it is important to grasp the darkening impact these elements have on human consciousness.

And some people long ago tried to counter this with new insights that there were also humane features in the gods (e.g. kindness in the pharaohs). It could be argued that the real breakthrough came with the Palestinian sage  Jesus and his insights on a good and generous Father behind creation, though Armstrong has noted that similar breakthroughs were also made in the Axial Age (700 to 500 BCE) regarding lovingkindness (this theme emerged in all the major religious traditions).

But here is my concern/interest- What has been the impact of these beliefs on human consciousness over the millennia? This may explain something of my own personal emphasis on the centrality and primacy of love, especially the element ‘unconditional’. This element liberates utterly from all the burdensome obligations of religion, from the demands for appeasement, propitiation, or payback. Unconditional as taught by Jesus undermines all religious obligation and darkness.

Just by way of example regarding the impact on human consciousness: I shared some years back some very terrifying experiences I had (that was around the time Bob shared his strange hotel experience).  There is a lot of research on these darker experiences and they have been referred to by some as possibly related to the ‘entity experience’ which has a long history- the sense of being possessed and pulled down to somewhere dark and terrifying. Others try to explain this in terms of the brain mechanism which leads to a letting go of the body as you fall asleep and this can give a sense of falling. This one never resonated as a full explanation to what I experienced.

My experience was not a dream. It was very real and intense for the several times that I went through it, notably only during the years of my religious adherence. My original religious interpretation of that experience was that it was demonic. This was how my religion taught me to view such things. I have tried to understand it more over the years and what it might have possibly been about. I think the NDE researchers may have come up with some more plausible explanations as they have tried to understand some of the darker  NDEs (hellish ones). They have explained these in terms of religious beliefs (hell) and suppressed fears and what not. Things that we as people cannot handle so we suppress them somewhere in the back of our minds.

Part of this darker impact on consciousness arises from the fact that I had been taught a God in Christianity that was quite frightening. That religious God had become in a very real sense the ultimate monster, a threatening, all-pervading darkness, even a terror at times. One who sent people to hell. And maybe I had to go right to the gates of hell to experience firsthand the full darkness and terror of that belief system. Only then would “Don’t be afraid, don’t be anxious” or something like unconditional love come through in its full liberating meaning (something valued only can be appreciated in contrast with its opposite). I also wonder now if those dark terror experiences were something like an epitome experience- a condensation of all the dark things shoved back in some repressed manner- of all that I had been taught about divine anger, hell, demons, punishment, human unworthiness, and all the rest.

And yes, the qualifier- there was also love taught in the Christian tradition that I was part of but it was so often mixed in with the other darkening stuff that it resulted in confusion and distortion of basic categories of meaning (e.g. unconditional love but this was highly conditioned with such things as don’t fellowship with unbelievers, unless they convert, and prerequisite payment to an offended deity).

So this theme of unconditional love has resonated as something essential to me and it has led me to change entirely my views of the great creating Reality behind all else. And to change entirely my views of what we are as human persons. I have come to understand that there is no darkness in God, the great creating and sustaining Spirit or Source or Consciousness in all things. There is no threat, nothing to fear in this Ultimate Reality. God is indeed Love and Light. And just as important- so are we also beings of light and love. Pure and perfect in our essential nature, in what others call our real selves.

And as Armstrong and Schwartz note, anything in us that is less than human comes from an old animal inheritance in our brain and it is not from our true self or person. This is an important and helpful distinction.

To re-affirm this point that the Source behind all reality is love and the essential human self is similarly love and light, let me quote these sections below from Ken Ring’s Lessons From the Light. This first part is the experience of Peggy Holladay (there is a lot more in the context from which these quotes are pulled).

“I can remember not knowing where I was while I was floating until I saw a small but bright light...as everyone says who has ever seen this light, it looks like the brightest blue-white light in your imagination- multiplied by 10,000...I clearly and instantly knew the light was not just a Light but was ALIVE! It had personality and was intelligence beyond comprehension....I knew the light was a being. I also knew the light being was God and was genderless...”

(Peggy  then  began to experience the energy of the light) “ I knew completely and without any shadow of a doubt that it was the strongest force in existence. It was the energy of Pure Love....It showed me the world is an illusion...there are invisible things that are far, far, far more real...the mind was paramount...time was also an illusion....”

(Ring interjects- but of all the things Peggy took in, in this state of tremendously expanded consciousness, the most meaningful had to do with the all-pervading and primary nature of love in the universe) “...I continued to see other amazing truths...one was when the light told me everything was Love, and I mean everything. I had always felt love was a just a human emotion people felt from time to time, never in my wildest dreams thinking it was literally EVERYTHING!...I was shown how much all people are loved. It was overwhelmingly evident that the light loved everyone equally without any conditions. I really want to stress this because it made me so happy to know we didn’t have to believe or do certain things to be loved. WE ALREADY WERE AND ARE NO MATTER WHAT! (capitals hers). The light was extremely concerned and loving toward all people. I wanted to cry I felt so deeply for people...If they could only know how much they’re loved, maybe they wouldn’t feel so scared or lonely anymore....”

(Ring interjects again- then as if to drive home the incomprehensible immensity of this love Peggy received and infusion of the light’s energy) “...I vividly recall the part where the light did what felt like switch on a current of pure, undiluted, concentrated, unconditional LOVE. This love I experienced in the light was so powerful it can’t be compared to earthly love, even though earthly love is a much milder version. It’s like knowing the very best love you feel on earth is diluted to about one part per million of the real thing. As this stream of pure love went through me, I felt as if the light was saying simultaneously, ‘I love you completely and entirely as you are, because you are’...it was like being bathed in energy particles of pure love...I knew there was nothing wrong with me in any way. NOTHING! I was PERFECTION. I wasn’t just with the light. I became the light...”

(Ring- Peggy feels she took home an important lesson about the healing power of unconditional love) “...upon feeling even one moment of this pure energy, any human being alive would fall to his or her knees and deeply sob with unbridled and uninhibited joy at the perfection of the universe....one thing I learned was that we are all here to do an ‘assignment of love’”.

Ring adds this- “The individual realizes the perfection of the universe and that this is the realm of pure, unconditional love and acceptance, a primordial womb of light blazing with beauty and glory beyond measure, where all knowledge is revealed and where one becomes aware with a sense of incontrovertible certitude, that this is our true and eternal home...and the primacy of expressing empathic love and concern for others”.

He later sums up with these comments- “Of all the teachings in the world, the greatest is love. And of all the lessons of the NDE, none is greater than the importance, indeed the primacy of love. What the NDE teaches about love is that everything is love and is made of love and comes from love...We, too, are conceived in and by love. Love, therefore, is our true nature. Why do so many of us fail to experience this love in our lives and even come to feel so unlovingly toward ourselves at times? Why do we have such difficulty connecting to this molten core of love or even believing that it exists within us? What keeps us so estranged from the essence of what we are?...we have forgotten our true home...our connection to the Source...we need to be restored into the arms of Love...since Love is the essential truth of the NDE, it can set us free”.

And this from another person’s experience (Nancy)- “I became aware of a light- it was warm, it was radiant, it was peaceful, it was accepting, it was forgiving, it was completely nonjudgmental and it gave me a sense of total security the likes of which I had never known. I loved it. It was perfection, it was total, unconditional love. It was anything and everything you would wish for on earth”.

Ring again- “NDEers do not lose sight of their shortcomings...but despite them, they know that as persons they are loved infinitely by the Light and they are ultimately okay as they are and always have been...bathed in this all-accepting love...they learn with undeniable certainty that whatever harsh judgments you have imposed upon yourself for your perceived failings and inadequacies, these harsh judgments are not shared by the Light. What a liberation from the tyranny of your own judgmental self...the lesson of self-acceptance confers a tremendous liberation upon the individual in that he or she is now able to begin to shed the judgmental self that when stripped away also reveals one’s underlying essential being...’I found a central core within me, a spirit’...”

Further in relation to this lady’s experience- “(She experienced) deliverance from the bondage of other’s opinions about and expectations of her...free to be herself...once the old self begins to unravel the threads woven by a lifelong history of judgmental conditioning, the natural core self of the individual is free at last to emerge...The light of one’s own true nature, like the sun shining on the plants of the earth, brings forth what was primed to develop but only lacked the catalyzing stimulus. In short, the absolute and unconditional love of the Light reveals the essence of the individual’s true self...”.

These excerpts speak to these two fundamental dark themes of the old narrative- that God is a threatening, judging reality to be feared because we are sinful, defiled creatures deserving of punishment. They present an entirely different view of these two consciousnesses- the divine and the human. And this is about an entirely new and radically different narrative of reality and life.

So this is why I make a case for the centrality and primacy of unconditional love. Something I know so little of but wish to experience so much more of.  Love is about the essence of reality, the essence of what we really are in our true selves. It is what life is all about and why it all exists. Love answers the most profound questions and the most profound impulses for meaning. It responds to the deepest of human desires and longings. It is at the heart of a grand narrative of reality and life. It drives out all darkness from the great Ultimate Reality that creates and sustains all visible reality. And it drives out all darkness from the essential human self.

A further note- Schwartz notes the five basic things: the qualities and gifts that all human beings seek from others. They are attention (genuine interest), acceptance (genuinely embraced), affection, appreciation (encouragement and gratitude), and allowing (safety to be yourself and express all you feel). Love answers all these basic human needs and longings.

Biblical literature and other past literature of many forms tried to come to grips with some of this but did not provide the graphic detail that modern NDErs are providing. We miss something helpful in not paying attention to all this fresh input from so many people all around us.

And yes, I get it that I had a problem- I took my religion too seriously and hence its more damaging impact on my consciousness. Others were fortunate to not do so.

Jan.19/12

A list of theses breakthroughs? How about writing a new creation story of Someone personal incarnating in a species of bipeds with big brains, Someone bringing the wonder of consciousness into biological life. The purpose being to have this grand exodus out of the darkness of animal reality, out to create a promised land of a more humane existence, human civilization. This grand venture to struggle against animal drives and thereby learn their opposites (we learn from adversity and struggle and suffering).

All those breakthroughs could be embedded in such a story- no authority over this new species of conscious persons. They would be granted freedom to live as equals, to escape the domination and pecking orders of the animal and show what freedom could be. Each contributing something unique to better the human condition or civilization. A new species that would eventually discover the  wonder of unconditional, in absolute contrast to the payback, retaliation and punishment of the animal. This is the brilliance of light against darkness.  Freed from the animal by consciousness, to make a great exodus and create a new promised world or life. A truly human or humane world.

All those great break through insights could be embodied in a new creation story- outlining the purpose of creation in those breakthroughs.

Jan.20/12

It will take someone with a poetic flair to write it properly. But let me do something like Susan Boyle’s I Dreamed a Dream or Jackie Evancho’s believing, hoping for a better world.

I think of Bishop Kalistos Ware’s suggestion that Love must express itself, it must create as it is the nature of love to be outgoing, to share with another, to create a world for others to enjoy. It must share life, existence. It must share itself.

So Love created a universe. And we can see the purpose of it all from where we are now. From  how far we have come. And in it all- universe, life, civilization- we see what we have hoped for, what we have dreamed of and longed for. These dreams and longings are the very impulses and desires of God in us. We are the very image and likeness of God, co-creators, co-dreamers.

Central to the dream of a Creator has been love and freedom, the inseparable two, the primary human values.

Love first gave life the urge to be, to exist, to express its unique nature in freedom. This has resulted in immense diversity of all the forms of life. Life exploring every possible option of being. But without advanced consciousness life learned to feed on others (the earliest cells), to dominate and use others in order to thrive. Life explored all options and ended up in many dead ends. It became dark nature and this too was from the freedom to choose. And it is essential to learning.

But Love still dreamed of a better way. It still hoped and believed.

And Love incarnated its very likeness- consciousness- into this darkness. Into one species in particular. It buried itself in the human species (not entirely alone as other species have varied levels of consciousness also).

This is the heart of the creation story- the wonder of consciousness in biological life. Mind in meat.

Humans were  honoured to be made co-creators, stewards of the universe. A vast 3-dimensional realm of energy, all sorts of energy forms created to experience life and learn, and always to desire something better. To experience imperfection and be restless in searching for a better future.

Humanity would eventually emerge to lead all life into a promised land of a better existence. To experience a grand exodus out of the darkness of animal existence and create a promised land of a more human or humane world. The very darkness of the animal is necessary to value something better (Simon- our problems inspire us to find solutions, to be passed on to the benefit of others). All the cruelty, fighting, disease, all the suffering of the dark existence of the animal is a background of experience to spur desire for something better. To create a longing for something better in contrast to such darkness. To urge us to struggle against the animal and thereby learn better behaviours, opposite behaviours.

And Love knew this could only be accomplished in absolute freedom, again freedom being so opposite to the animal with its domination, coercion, subjection, and following.  And because it  has been accomplished in freedom it has been a slow process of learning. There has been no coercion, no domination, no overwhelming intervention to spare suffering. The freedom of each individual has been respected supremely.  This has been critical to learning and to accomplishing the dream of a more human future. Each person has been free to choose a better way, to create a better existence. This freedom of choice is supremely valued by Love.

The height of this long process is the dream of unconditional. This is so entirely a brilliant light compared to the darkness of payback, retaliation, and punishment of the animal world. This is the ultimate freedom from base animal drives. The ultimate freedom to be truly human. In this unconditional we achieve the brightest image and likeness of the Creator who is Love.

Ahh, there are many elements to a new creation story. It is so entirely different from the old story. The story of prohibited curiosity, prohibited learning. No freedom of choice.

Jan.20/12

This below was too much verbiage to say just this- I would offer that the creation story is about Consciousness embedding in the human to bring about an exodus out of animal existence in order to create a human existence. The ultimate goal of human existence to be found in unconditional love. This is the promised land, manifest in all the diversity that is human endeavour.

This grand narrative is repeated endlessly in each human life, with all the struggles of individuals to conquer the animal (base animal drives) in order to live as human.

Jeffrey Schwartz gets into the nitty gritty of how to do this.

Jan.22/12

And out of this battle each of us faces daily- conquering the animal inheritance within us- comes the wonder of free choice for more human response and behaviour. That prize (prized highly by Deity- my assumption or belief) can only be won in the battle with dark nature, dark nature within us.

And each life then becomes a microcosm of the great exodus from animal existence toward the creation of a promised land of a truly humane civilization, human culture.

So each day gives fresh opportunity to learn something new in this grand struggle and to make new gains. And dare I repeat that the ultimate prize, the ultimate liberation, the ultimate promised land, is to engage unconditional love?

Jan.31/12

Herb, the rip roaring debate goes on, as does all sorts of research. Note for instance Sam Parnia’s group and world-wide project. And of course, we have noted repeatedly Van Lommel’s summary of research and sceptical counter arguments.

As you look at the research, the explanations, the many varied accounts themselves, you come up with some personal guidelines as to what elements appear truthful and what comes down to subjective personal interpretation (though still based on some reality), and what is shaped by  memory and culture and belief, and on and on.

For myself, I have found an endless source of good insight, much of if affirming personal belief from my own study and reflection on varied issues. What the NDEs do is offer some more personal detail (filling out things we have thought of) and for that we can be thankful.

And most important to paying attention to this still emerging phenomenon- it is laying a death blow to humanity’s long held fear of dying and death. And this is liberating. It is liberating many to more fully live now. And this may presage some significant shift or advance in public human consciousness. Who knows.

And even more important than the most important point above- this NDE thing is once again reviving a focus on unconditional love, something long ago advocated by that Palestinian sage, a profound insight and message that was buried by subsequent Christianity. Ouch. <:

|Feb.1/12

I have felt something distasteful in reading Storm’s account of his NDE. Don’t get me wrong- he offers lots of good insights and gems along the way. But there is something else going on in his account that is discomfiting. He presents a view of a God that is somewhat Noahic (like Noah’s or the Genesis author’s view). A God frustrated and disappointed by what he has created. This appears to be somewhat silly human projection onto Incomprehensible Mystery. And it appears to demean infinite Love and Intelligence.

But this is not my point- his comments sparked something else in relation to our little think-tank discussion group. Let me try to express it. All through our human history, since consciousness was embedded in the human species, we have been trying to find our way out of darkness and into light. We have been learning to think and see right so we could then live right.

Now if we can imagine some good, some better way, some better state of existence, whether it be more freedom from fear, freedom from bondage, then don’t you think that Infinite Love could do even better, infinitely better than the best we can imagine? And will it into existence and approve of our seeking it?

Hence, are we not right to battle all forms of darkness whether mental, emotional, or whatever they are and wherever we find them? Even if it feels like blasphemy at times (this leftover feeling deeply embedded perhaps from our religious past). It may take courage to press on into further light. But this is the entire history of humanity- this seeking, learning, growing. We just happen to be here at this stage in the human venture, the human exodus out of animal reality and march toward a better promised land.

So while Storm’s account has elements of Christian belief, and he claims to have heard this from the angels that taught him (these darker elements), well, it somehow seems off. It is not really love and light as we could imagine from an Incomprehensible Love and Light. Unconditional Love and Light.

And  if we can imagine that something better, some better form of love and light, then what must actually exist?

Feb.1/12

Storm is an interesting case as he had such a “hellish” experience at the beginning. He was atheist at the time and tries to explain it in such terms. Though other atheists have had no such experience.

The notable contradictions in his account are sometimes almost in the same paragraph- a reference to unconditional then the setting forth of conditions, “The choices we make in this world determine whether we are candidates for heaven or not”. He makes numerous references to Jesus but appears to miss the essence of the message of Jesus, the unconditional nature of generosity. This is common to Christian use of Jesus (holding a message about the man as Savior, but missing the message of the man).

He spends a lot of time castigating people for refusing God but does not appear to grasp that the nature of that refusal may be a healthy rejection of base human projection onto God. Overall, his account has a somewhat Evangelical tone to it.

Feb.3/12

There is one clear way to understand unconditional. Check Jesus own words on this.

The vineyard owner and workers  hired over the day. All receive the same pay. The earlier workers are incensed with this generosity. They hold to standard payback- you get what you  put in. The owner says no. Why are you upset with my generosity.

The prodigal son- wastes everything and on returning he tries to apologize and ask for forgiveness. The father shuts him up and welcomes him back as fully accepted and forgiven, without needing to apologize or make things right. This incenses the older brother who believes in strict payback justice (good is rewarded, evil is punished).

And those many sayings of Jesus, such as forgive without limit. Don’t wait for a request for forgiveness. Or don’t expect someone to pay you back, just lend freely. Or just love enemies, freely and unconditionally. Even Paul caught something of this scandalous unconditional love in his love hymn in 1Cor.13. “Love does not keep a record of wrongs”. It is unconditional.

Now if we are expected to live like this, do we really think God holds himself to a lower standard of love?

As someone said, a God who requires full payment before he will forgive (a blood sacrifice to make amends) is a God who knows nothing or true forgiveness. Fortunately, the historical Jesus taught a different view of divinity as scandalously and unconditionally forgiving and loving. He said if we did these things, forgive, accept, love enemies, then we would be like the Father. In other words, this is what God is really like.

Many of the NDEs (Near-Death Experiences) capture some sense of this unconditional love. Even those committing suicide experience total unconditional acceptance and love. It matters not what they have done.

Feb.4/12

I just read Storm’s book on his NDE and realized why it made me so uncomfortable. It re-introduced me to the old  deity and all the threat and darkness around that monster. All the darkness and terror of hell, and threat of careful how  you think and act or you may end up down under  (and as Herb always qualifies- present company already down under excluded <:).

But I respond just like Tom Petty in his song Won’t Back Down. “You can stand me up at the gates of hell and I won’t back down”. Whatever Tom meant, I know what that means to me. I refuse all such darkness, all that darkens human consciousness with anything less than that incomprehensible unconditional Love that most NDEs give us some glimpse of. That is where true deity exists (any other has always been a straw God).

Jesus pointed to the true reality of ‘God is love’ and ‘light’ in his own way with those superb little stories and aphorisms and other comments on unconditional forgiveness, unconditional acceptance, unconditional generosity, and all the rest that was so scandalously unconditional. Just little glimpses into something unimaginably wonderful, liberating, and light giving. It points to another entirely new advance in consciousness, a progression upward to something far better. We are still only toying around the edges of this. It is something more truly human than we can fully grasp.

Just to think- that Palestinian sage had the courage to challenge all the mighty religious beliefs of his time, with all the threat of a terrorizing, punishing God, and he did not back down. He insisted there was something unimaginably better. Something about which he could tell others, Don’t fear, Don’t be anxious (I’m paraphrasing from other contexts).

So my little aha moment on the way up Thornhill the other day is still reverberating around in my head or wherever my mind is located. We can imagine some better reality than all this mythically-based darkness and we are on the right path in pursuing it. We should not back down.

Feb.4/12

Storm is an interesting case as he had such a “hellish” experience at the beginning. He was atheist at the time and tries to explain it in such terms. Though other atheists have had no such experience.

The notable contradictions in his account are sometimes almost in the same paragraph- a reference to unconditional then the setting forth of conditions, “The choices we make in this world determine whether we are candidates for heaven or not”. He makes numerous references to Jesus but appears to miss the essence of the message of Jesus, the unconditional nature of generosity. This is common to Christian use of Jesus (holding a message about the man as Savior, but missing the message of the man).

He spends a lot of time castigating people for refusing God but does not appear to grasp that the nature of that refusal may be a healthy rejection of base human projection onto God. Overall, his account has a somewhat Evangelical tone to it.

Feb.4/12

Mark Fox (Religion, spirituality and the near-death experience), Atwater, and others are all pointing something in the mind and experience of people that influences what they see, and how they perceive. I think you stated it right in saying that human minds have been “corrupted by dark nature and eons of dark myth-making”. This is behind these darker NDE experiences.

And corollary to this, infinite Love does not overwhelm and coercively change that perception but respects human individuality and freedom of choice and learning ability. Change in outlook is therefore a process (sometimes slow) like any other. And this goes a long way in explaining these dark NDEs.

Where they open themselves to challenge is when someone like Storm presents his experience publicly to others as affirming Christian truth. This then reinforces the darkest of mythology, corrupting mythology and this does not liberate others into the light of unconditional love. Not to say how far it misses the core message of Jesus, Christianity’s claimed founder.

This mental, spiritual slavery is a terrible slavery because, as you noted, all that mythology hides under the canopy of the old deity and that makes it very difficult to abandon (people become locked in). It is a slavery very difficult for many to escape for fear of punishment, divine retaliation, and eternal damnation. It is the worst form of slavery, slavery of mind and spirit.

All the more need for courageous spirits to challenge it all and liberate consciousness from such darkness. More than Deutsch’s vision (and I have not yet read him), I find this vision of liberating the human spirit and mind from such darkness to be the real source of infinite progress. You can be like Stephen Hawking and get the science/knowledge thing so right and yet still be enslaved, as Hawking is, to apocalyptic and other darkness.

Feb.4/12

The Jesus Seminar has done some helpful research on what the historical Jesus actually said and did. One of their principles of interpretation is consistency among core sayings. Unconditional is at the very heart of the message of Jesus. Paul ignored that core message and instead created a message about the man, not focusing on the message of the man. And Paul drew from surrounding mythology- Roman virgin birth, Egyptian dying and rising gods (Isis, Osiris), and Greek mystery religion and Mithraism. The Bible is no  more inspired than what any one of us says today. We are responsible to do as Jesus did, “It was said long ago (OT), but I say to you”. We evaluate what is truly humane or not and accept or discard accordingly. Just as Jesus did.

Feb.4/12

Just to explain where I am coming from. I was doing a search on unconditional and your site popped up among others. It seemed so typically Christian in that reference is made to unconditional and then the endeavour is made to change the meaning of unconditional to something else highly conditioned.

Also, I was raised Evangelical, graduated from an Evangelical theological college, and worked overseas for 11 years establishing Evangelical churches quite successfully (hundreds of converts).

Along the way certain things always hit me with their inconsistency. I would argue with tribal people about their flood legends being wrong and satanic when they hardly differed from our own. Later Crossan of the Jesus Seminar would note this, that Christians claim other virgin birth legends are false and demonic but only ours is true. This, he rightly noted, is unethical. They hardly  differ in substance.

Years of research into ancient mythology showed me the roots of varied myths- angry gods, blood sacrifice to appease anger, demands for subservience, threats of punishment for free thought, and on and on. I came to the conclusion Christianity was hardly different from all the rest of ancient mythology and belief systems.

But this does not mean you throw out the baby with the dirty bathwater. No. The historical Jesus said some very useful things, especially about unconditional acceptance, unconditional forgiveness, and unconditional generosity and love. Paul never quite got his message and wandered back into typical ancient mythology of his time. Jesus’ own followers missed the heart of what his message was and that we see in the gospels and elsewhere in the NT.

Get ahold of the plain meaning of unconditional and it will blow your socks off.

Feb.5/12

And Julia, I have been trying to express in recent posts my aha moment the other day while walking up Thornhill, this is similar to a point that Bob has made in the past about an unknowable Deity. Whatever is the best that we can imagine, the actual reality is infinitely better.

Take unconditional love as the prime example. We can catch glimpses of what this means in the life of Jesus. And it points to something so scandalous to traditional payback thinking- payback that argues that we have done bad, we deserve punishment or loss. All that darkness expressed over history in myths of angry gods, demand for sacrifice, hellfire, and all the rest.

Then this sage points in an entirely new direction to something that takes away all fear, all worry, and gives peace that passes understanding, acceptance that is simply too much to grasp, and that love that overwhelms the ability of the mind to imagine.

The best is  beyond comprehension.  And that is what God is. That is what is behind all reality.

While going up Thornhill I was thinking of the darkness that Storm wrote about in his NDE. I don’t doubt he experienced that hellishness. But it seemed so wrong. When God is something so much better. And later in the book he talks about his Christian upbringing that he left and felt bad about leaving. So I can see where that darkness in his spirit comes from. I have felt all that stuff too.

But it is so  wrong when God is something so other than that. And that gets to the point of our lives- to find liberation from that darkness and to live in light. To fight all that darkness engendering mythology that has cursed human consciousness for so long. To liberate one another from that.

And it came to me also in Tom Petty’s song. What we are doing in leaving all that darkness is right. It is what God is all about. Despite at times feeling one is committing heresy. Like the pastor who wrote to me the other day to tell me my points about unconditional as taught by Jesus were a distorting heresy. That sort of comeback now bounces off like water off a duck’s back.

No. We are on the  right track because what we are pointing to is love and light. It is good and right. In fact, what  we are pointing to in our discussions is only toying around the edges of something so infinitely much better that even we can imagine.

Feb.6/12

We now have a fairly decent appreciation of the grand universe story/narrative. That there was progression from a Big Bang toward a more organized environment with all sorts of infinite fine tuning to make it suitable for life (this being evidence of the great care shown to provide for later life- the multi-billion year process of birthing and dying stars to produce carbon, the basis of life). And on at least one small planet situated just right (distance from sun, relation to moon, on a perfect place in the Milky Way) life began to emerge and develop. And then the greatest of all things to happen- conscious persons emerged (were embedded, created, emerged) and this began the exodus toward a promised land.

This is the great background to what now becomes more personal. People, conscious persons, then barely above the animal, began to feel these urges, impulses for something better. They fully experienced the horrors of the violence of their lives. The intense selfishness, hatred, retaliation, and all the rest. And they also felt stirring in them these other impulses, what they felt toward their families, spouses, children. Something better. Some better form of existence than the small band exclusion, retaliation, and destruction.

And as Bob has outlined, this becomes evident in the writings of the prophets. The Buddha was also active at this time in another part of the world, as were others. Human persons feeling the desire for something better than what was. Armstrong- compassion emerges as a major theme in all the main religious traditions of this period.

And then it can get down to one personal story- Joseph and Jesus is as good as any.

It would be good if someone with a flair for writing short stories could capture and express these grand narrative themes in new stories such as the Joseph/Jesus story. Bringing this larger narrative context down into a personal story of someone exodusing surrounding darkness and creating a new promised land in their life and family. Each life is a microcosm of the larger exodus from animal darkness toward the light of something better. With all the struggle and fun that is human story.

And each life has to wrestle with the major beliefs that inform the consciousness of every generation. Whether religious, philosophical, scientific. These beliefs shape human worldviews or perspectives and how people will act in that generation to improve the human condition or worsen it. This gets to issues of courage, bravery, the fighting spirit, sacrifice, personal cost, and so much more that makes personal story so interesting.

Feb.8/12

In one of those extracts on Jesus studies there was this sentence at the end, “We are studying subjects of fundamental importance to religion and society, topics with profound implications for theology and piety, as well as for politics, philosophy, and the very self-image of western civilization”.

This is fascinating- what beliefs have shaped human consciousness or self-image. And how these beliefs then shape a society, its relationships, its behaviour, and its future. This has been at the back of our complaint about the darker themes of past mythology/belief and the push for a new more humane narrative.

And this is where the central insight of Jesus has the potential to most explosively change human consciousness. I refer to his core emphasis on unconditional love.

That has to be the most potent insight in all the long history of developing human thought and perspective. Most potent for liberating consciousness (from dark animal impulses) and setting it sailing toward the infinity of progress.

How unfortunate that Christianity aborted this great discovery by enshrouding it in payback mythology. But it has continued to leaven through consciousness till today it is enjoying another renaissance, significantly through the NDE movement, even though many engaged in that movement, while referring often to it, do not seem to grasp the full power of what it means. People often state it as a surprising personal discovery, an overwhelming experience. But it needs to be shown for what it really is- the central human insight, the most liberating of all human insights, the most important discovery in the entire history of human consciousness.

Am I overstating the case for unconditional? No. I haven’t even got started. Its that big.

Feb.9/12

What we have been trying to do is focus on human perceptions about reality that have been harmful  to human progress and contrast these with other perceptions that have been beneficial to human progress. Many of the harmful  perceptions (ideas, beliefs) happen to have been expressed in mythical/religious belief. This is due to the fact that what we call religious belief is simply what most of early humanity embraced as the almost sole public expression of human thinking. Religious ideas where not compartmentalized as they are today as just one arena of human ideas (others being political, economic, social, scientific, and so on).

But the perceptions that over much of history that were expressed via religion, are still perceptions found all through public thinking even today. Apocalyptic would be one example. You can find this in cosmology, environmentalism, politics, economics, and all over.

But let me get back to unconditional. I would argue that it is the animal inheritance that most holds back humanity from infinite progress. Those impulses to small band loyalty, exclusion of outsiders, fighting over ‘scarce’ resources, revenge, violence, war, domination/status (alpha male), and all the rest. This is the essence of darkness in consciousness. And much past mythology sought to incorporate these impulses and affirm them in terms of gods/God. The animal has long been protected under the canopy of the sacred. Note the payback theology of Christianity as an example.

Unconditional as taught in Jesus put an axe to the root of the old animal. This has been affirmed by the later discovery that the animal inheritance is not what we really are. We are something new and free of the animal. We are consciousness. And this consciousness is most essentially love and light.

But yes, its always an ongoing struggle (struggle being essential to learning and development). We have the old inheritance in our core brain emitting those old impulses.

Unconditional love offers the way of utter liberation from all those old impulses. And from all the fear associated with the embodiment of those animal impulses in forums like religion. Fear of retaliation at a divine scale. Fear of punishment for the imperfection of human existence.

There is nothing so entirely opposite to the old animal inheritance than unconditional. Nothing so entirely liberating. Unconditional gets to the core of what love means. Right to the brightest part of that divine light.

Ahh. We are just getting started in understanding all this. And this is what leads to the infinity of progress. Unconditional is the root or basis of the beginning of infinity.

Feb.9/12

I have been thinking along this line for quite a while now. That “fear of death is due to religious belief”. I have seen this at an intensely personal level in various religious friends and relatives. A terror of death. Numbing, life-denying fear of death. Religion does not liberate people to live fully here and now, because they are too enslaved to the endeavour to appease a frightening divinity who  holds the fear of death over them. They feel obligated to spend too much time fulfilling the demands of their religion in order escape any threat of punishment around death and what might happen after.

Feb.9/12

I put up those summaries on Jesus’ studies to lead to this thing of the message of the man. And I recognize that some have argued that his central message was about the kingdom. But I think there is something far more potent in his teaching- a theme that does more to affirm the grand exodus out of animal reality and toward a new existence than any other single theme he taught. And this is his repeated teaching on unconditional love.

Lyle Watson refers to this new thing that enabled humanity to move away from animal behaviour and existence and toward human culture. And reference is made to morphic fields which some have compared to Van Lommel’s use of nonlocal consciousness and memory.

I suggest that the  grand exodus from animal reality began with the embedding of consciousness in humanity (a supernatural spiritual creation) and consciousness is something that develops and matures and advances through human persons engaging ideas/perceptions/beliefs over the long history of human thinking and discovery. We create a new future by our own imagining and envisioning and exploring. We dream it up and then create it here on earth. We are the creators.

And this sets up this point about the most significant insight in human history, the one insight that has resulted in the greatest advance out of darkness, to the greatest leap forward in consciousness, the greatest point of liberation for humanity. Yes, I am using hyperbole to make a  point. Like Mohammed Ali. But I would argue that nothing comes close in liberating potency than what Jesus was on about in regard to unconditional forgiveness, acceptance, and love.

It points to the best of human insight over the long history of human thought. It may be the most important thing Jesus ever said. And it may produce the most significant advance in  human consciousness and culture in all history. I also believe that this insight on unconditional may be more key to the beginning of infinity than anything else in science. It has more to do with infinite human potential and progress than all scientific knowledge, important as that is. Why? Because it liberates the depths of the human spirit and mind in ways that nothing else in human knowledge can. And I am referring to human advance in terms of overall progress, not just physical advance, important as that is.

At an obvious level, the embracing of love as a guiding  principle for life liberates people from slavery to the animal and the darkness of animal existence (payback,  hatred, violence, and so on). These are features that have hindered and set back human progress all through our history. Love goes to the heart of ideas, beliefs, and practices related to such animal features and liberates people at the very core from all such things. Love goes to the deepest and most profound form of liberation- liberation of the  mind, spirit, and heart. And this is where any infinity of progress really springs from. Deep within human consciousness.

Christianity buried this core insight of Jesus with an elaborate theology of payback justice. To illustrate, just recently I had a conversation with an Evangelical pastor about unconditional as taught by Jesus. The pastor did what so many Christian people do, claim unconditional love as part of their system of belief but then set about defining it with all sorts of conditions (you are forgiven, but only if you forgive- Matt.6). This payback approach to defining unconditional then nullifies any common sense understanding of unconditional. Christians then re-establish payback justice as central to defining the Christian view of Jesus’ message (including the unconditional element). And this pastor told me that my presentation of unconditional as meaning simply unconditional, was heresy.

Unconditional forgiveness, acceptance, and love is so out of the realm of conventional views of justice that it automatically becomes a scandalous offense to all our ingrained animal sense of payback, our sense of justice as reward for good, and punishment for bad. Unconditional, as Jesus taught, just upsets all common sense perception in a cause/effect world. It is just too offensive to be right, true, or just.

Hence, I would suggest that the scandal of  unconditional as presented in the Jesus tradition, this appears to be the breakthrough of all breakthrough insights. It is the hardest of all hard sayings. Such love overturns all common sense understanding of justice as payback and this is just highly offensive to most  people just as the stories of Jesus related- the older brother to the wasteful son, the hardworking vineyard labourers who toiled all day, the accusing men with the woman caught in adultery, and so on. Such teaching was insulting, embarrassing, and simply offensive to common or conventional sense.

And unconditional is the one feature that lays the axe to the root of most old  conceptions of deity, based as they were on payback justice. It is a death blow to most human mythology over history (mythology being the expression of human thought and perception in the ancient world). It is arguably the feature that leads to the greatest reshaping of consciousness possible, if one considers how prominently human consciousness has been shaped by payback thinking over most of history. Unconditional may be the epitome point of human discovery and insight.

Some may question the place and valuation of such love in human systems of thought and belief (not practical). But I would suggest that such love as taught by Jesus may hold the key to a more profound and effective understanding of the universe, life and human civilization, more than any single other element in  human worldviews. It appears to be at the heart of the human impulse for meaning.

So let me suggest that this insight on unconditional love may be the final liberating breakthrough that consciousness needs in order to break free into the infinity of  progress. It frees the human spirit from any unwarranted fear of the surrounding reality that sustains all. It frees from any fear of death and all fear of the future (awaiting threat and punishment and the need for systems of appeasement). It liberates the human spirit to fully engage life.

Just musing....

Feb.10/12

In all the unconditional settings that Jesus spoke to, not only was there some person/persons being shown something unconditional (forgiveness, acceptance, love), there was also others who were scandalized by Jesus’ anti-payback approach. This is important to all these stories in order to bring out what exactly is happening, the point he is making. If no one is scandalized then the point is not made properly or fully- how contrary and offensive unconditional is to conventional payback thinking.

So this is something so contrary to the animal inheritance in humanity. So opposite. And in this oppositeness is its liberation of humanity. The animal inheritance is what has enslaved us and brought darkness to consciousness. This is the heavy burden on conscious creatures. Therefore, we are most liberated and most enlightened when we engage fully all the elements of unconditional.

Feb.10/12

What we have been trying to do is focus on human perceptions about reality that have been harmful  to human progress and contrast these with other perceptions that have been beneficial to human progress. Many of the harmful  perceptions (ideas, beliefs) happen to have been expressed in mythical/religious belief. This is due to the fact that what we call religious belief is simply what most of early humanity embraced as the almost sole public expression of human thinking. Religious ideas where not compartmentalized as they are today as just one arena of human ideas (others being political, economic, social, scientific, and so on).

But the perceptions that over much of history that were expressed via religion, are still perceptions found all through public thinking even today. Apocalyptic would be one example. You can find this in cosmology, environmentalism, politics, economics, and all over.

But let me get back to unconditional. I would argue that it is the animal inheritance that most holds back humanity from infinite progress. Those impulses to small band loyalty, exclusion of outsiders, fighting over ‘scarce’ resources, revenge, violence, war, domination/status (alpha male), and all the rest. This is the essence of darkness in consciousness. And much past mythology sought to incorporate these impulses and affirm them in terms of gods/God. The animal has long been protected under the canopy of the sacred. Note the payback theology of Christianity as an example.

Unconditional as taught in Jesus put an axe to the root of the old animal. This has been affirmed by the later discovery that the animal inheritance is not what we really are. We are something new and free of the animal. We are consciousness. And this consciousness is most essentially love and light.

But yes, its always an ongoing struggle (struggle being essential to learning and development). We have the old inheritance in our core brain emitting those old impulses.

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Ahh. We are just getting started in understanding all this. And this is what leads to the infinity of progress. Unconditional is the root or basis of the beginning of infinity.

Feb.10/12

Born of a rape (perhaps), shamed throughout his life (“who is your father”, “he is insane”...and on and on, some of this from his own family). Below ordinary in that he was not allowed to be normal. And out of his shame and probably from a decent father (Joseph) who showed him something of unconditional acceptance and love, he then made this insight of his re unconditional into a life message. Did he think he had stumbled upon something that would change the entire consciousness of much of humanity? Probably not at all. Perhaps died thinking it was all to no avail. Nobody seemed to get it. Blockheads.

And despite the twisted endeavour of his followers to reshape his message in terms of payback, there is still something shining out of that burial endeavour (the dunghill that is Christianity) that many people intuitively find attractive. Something there resonates with the deepest recesses of consciousness. But many remain confused by the surrounding theology of Christianity and keep pulling back from what he actually said to something safer and more common sense and just. Payback. And so the  full liberation of consciousness is aborted.

But when the penny drops....wow. And these NDE accounts will help you get it if you read enough of them. It keeps coming through and literally stuns people who don’t think they are worthy.

Feb.10/12

Punch in on Google, ‘biblical teaching on hell’ and what a lot of pages you will get with all the back and forth arguing over what the varied Greek and other words mean and the varied viewpoints on this particular Christian teaching. Fortunately, a lot of contemporary  Christian teachers try to downplay, ignore, or dismiss outright this dark and depressing doctrine. But it still lurks in the background, or what else is the point of offering salvation and the need to convert? What is Jesus for then? What then is the point of Christianity? What was the death as payment- blood sacrifice- all about?

This gets you to the darkest recesses of human consciousness and the darkest impulses of people to punish, to retaliate, to hurt others. All under the canopy of the sacred. What a shameful, sick thing to have foisted on humanity.

This is why some of us go on about unconditional as part of a still needed endeavour to cleanse human consciousness of such twisted darkness.

Is the contemporary effort of various Christian teachers to ignore  hell simply embarrassment at having such a sick, twisted doctrine still on the books?

Feb.11/12

Just to add- that a grasp of unconditional frees people from fear of the future and liberates people to fully engage life. Note, for instance, how environmental apocalyptic creates fear of the future and fear to engage life and the world more fully. Behind that- in some strains of environmental belief- is fear of offending GAIA and suffering payback punishment of some sort. In this way, nature has been protected under the canopy of the sacred with lots of hocus pocus beliefs about vengeful nature gods and this restrains the infinity of progress. It holds humanity back. And who will argue that these environmental beliefs are not all over the place infecting contemporary human perceptions in all areas?

So an appreciation of unconditional does liberate the human spirit at its core and frees humanity to enter new levels of progress in this world.

And I am not discounting the need for a full understanding of nature and proper engagement of nature. Any grasp of unconditional will also lead to more respect for all life.

Feb.11/12

This was a good summary Julia- of how mind coming into meat is now humanizing the entirety of life. Easterbrook spoke to this in A Moment on the Earth, that life has longed for what we bring- mind (or consciousness, or human spirit). Something fully aware of better things. Able to imagine and dream and then  create. And with the discovery of unconditional love (beyond the best that can be imagined), the ability to now say to all life- don’t be afraid. You are safe in love.

This post from Bob Brinsmead:

Wendell, unconditional love is the kingdom of God - that is what the reign of God is all about!  This is the treasure hid in the field, which, when a man finds it, he gladly goes and disposes of everything he has in exchange for it. This is the mustard weed that you can't get rid of, you can't dig it out, it will spring up and grow where you least expect it -

Feb.11/12

This is a great perspective- unconditional love is the kingdom. This provides a broader perspective to the larger meaning of unconditional. And this unconditional element permeates all of HJ teaching. The many direct utterances about doing good to those who curse you, giving to whoever asks and not demanding back, not judging others, forgiving endlessly, not holding grudges, and on and on.  No conditions on how we treat others with generosity, forgiveness, and acceptance.

It is evident in the unconditional embrace of all others- eating with tax collectors and “sinners”. Touching the prohibited leper. Embracing the anointing by the “sinful” woman (I use quotes in deference to the perspective of the time) despite condemnation by others. The unconditional embrace of the wounded man by the good Samaritan. The unconditional embrace of life and solution to human need by an unconditional approach- e.g. his quote of David and his men eating the consecrated bread in the temple and his own colleagues eating with unwashed hands. Disregard for all law or religious prescription. An unconditional approach to all life.

This kingdom of unconditional has permeated much of  human civilization, even today. You see it all over amongst the larger payback oriented culture.

Feb.11/12

In Cherie Sutherland’s book on children’s NDEs there is this great account by one woman who died that illustrates this feature of unconditional acceptance and love, graphically. She talks of meeting the Light and says some interesting things such as “I could feel its personality...it was a really fun type of person... it was non-judgmental, it was the sort of person you could have a good time on the dance floor with...it was coming towards me and giving out this feeling of welcome, and an extreme amount of love and compassion”.

Then she adds this, “I thought, ‘Uh-uh, I’m in trouble. It thinks I am somebody else, and when it gets closer and sees that its me, its not going to be  happy at all’...I wanted to run away and hide, but I couldn’t. I didn’t know what to do...(later)...I had this amazing feeling of being picked up like a baby and covered in something warm and soft- totally surrounded by love...the emotions are just so overwhelming...I had the feeling of being wrapped in total love and acceptance...”

Despite her sense of herself as imperfect and unworthy she is overwhelmed by unconditional love and acceptance. This is common to many of these accounts. And they offer the most graphic illustration in contemporary language of what HJ (historical Jesus) was trying to communicate.

Feb.13/12

1. Mark Fox in his book Religion, Spirituality, and the Near-Death Experience notes that theology and philosophy have largely ignored the near-death phenomena. They have responded with a "deafening silence". He suggests this may be due to the fact that people having an NDE are privileged to have an encounter with a divine reality, an encounter that is not dependent on faith or adherence to any particular creed or religious tradition. People from all sorts of backgrounds- religious, non-religious, atheist, sceptic, or whatever- are all accepted with the same unconditional love, no matter what they a have believed or done or not done.
Because of this unconditional generosity of the divine, it appears that the NDE presents a huge threat to religious traditions. Its theological implications are significant. The above article points to this threat in that the divine presence encountered in NDEs is not angry, threatening, or punishing. This is directly in contradiction to the theology of religions like Christianity based as it is on a angry deity demanding full payment- blood sacrifice- for offended holiness.
NDEs offer no support for traditional beliefs in divine displeasure, demands for payment/appeasement, and consequences for rejection of salvation (hell).
While Fox's statement on religion largely ignoring the NDE is probably correct, there has been some response to NDEs from various religious traditions such as Mormonism and Evangelical Christianity. The Evangelicals tend to stress the negative NDEs as supporting Christian belief in such things as hell. This is unconvincing in light of the overwhelming number of experiences that show the Being of Light to manifest an incomprehensible unconditional love. And even the minority of negative NDEs most often end positively with the same features as most other NDEs.
It appears that Christians on viewing this NDE phenomenon, are reacting much like Jonah when told that God would not punish his enemies. Jonah was quite upset with such generosity. Such has been the general Christian response to NDEs- offense at the unconditional love shown to all irregardless of beliefs or behavior. This places the Christian response directly in line with the position of the elder brother in the Prodigal Son parable of Jesus- upset with the generous unconditional forgiveness of the father. Or the hardworking laborers in the parable of the vineyard who were upset with the generosity of the owner toward latercomers. Or the accusing men in the story of the woman caught in adultery. Or the men offended with Jesus' acceptance of the "sinful" woman who washed his feet. All these people expected a more conventional payback response- punishment for bad behavior, reward for good behavior (heaven for acceptors of 'true' religion, hell for rejectors). And they were upset when that harsh response was not forthcoming.
This NDE phenomenon is proving to be perhaps another and perhaps unprecedentedly more powerful death blow to religion. We are discovering in this movement that there is no such thing as an angry God waiting to punish. This truth undermines one of the most potent weapons of religion in its control of minds and spirits- the threat of punishment and need for payment or appeasement as provided by religious salvation plans.
What we find in NDEs is that there is absolutely no coming punishment or payback.
The death blow to religion, and to Christianity in particular, is the truth that God is actually love. Unconditional love. Forgiveness and acceptance are unconditional just as Jesus taught. There is no need for the salvation schemes of Christianity or any other religion.
The NDE movement has been a fresh affirmation of the core message of the historical Jesus that love is actually unconditional. This NDE movement appears to be a renewed call to get back on track with what the historical Jesus was on about.

Feb.13/12

1. Not to wear out this theme of unconditional but it can be endlessly probed for new angles. It is such a powerful term in its threat to the fundamental concept of payback justice. Without getting overwrought about definitions, it simply means no conditions. None. No prerequisites, no payment or payback. Nothing. It is so refreshing in its ability to take liberation to a whole new arena, to take enlightenment to an entirely new brilliance. It is just so opposite to so much of human perception over the entire history of humanity.
I guess it really came through to me in the NDE accounts. This is where it really hit home. Even people who had committed suicide were welcomed with a generous acceptance and love. No judgment whatever was expressed toward them, as one lady said. Nothing negative.
It appears that in the ultimate embodiment of unconditional love- God- it matters not what you have done or not done in life. You are as accepted and loved as anyone else.
And oh yes, this is where you can see the cautionary attenae going up in many people's minds, the conventional reaction raising hackles. Uh oh. This is going to lead to all sorts of lawlessness and carelessness about our behavior. Such a thing will kill the motivation to live right.
No it won't. Quite the opposite. As one NDEr said, "Experiencing that unconditional love just made me want to love more, to love just like that". So with the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her hair. One commentator said, she responded with such love, not because of any law or threat, but because she had been shown such unconditional love.
Wendell Krossa

Feb.13/12

One thing I would encourage all with is that on the new site, now more exposed online, all sorts of strangers can wander by and drop in where they could not in the email discussion. This opens us to the wider public marketplace of ideas and we can hopefully draw in like-minded spirits on similar journeys. Sure a few crackpots will gain entry once in while and possibly scorch us with non-conventional speech as some in the past have done. But that is all right too. It keeps one up to date with varying expressions of the vernacular. Like we say here in Canada before using the F word, “Pardon my French...”.

Feel free to request help in the transition if you need it.

We are just getting started in this journey toward an infinitely open and advanced future. Things like unconditional love, the  incomprehensible unconditional love that we have all glimpsed in varied places- HJ (historical Jesus), NDEs, or wherever- is an infinite universe itself to be explored. Its one that liberates the spirit and mind as one explores.

Feb.13/12

It is quite interesting to Google topics like “unconditional forgiveness” or “unconditional love” and check out the discussions online. Numerous Christian sites wrestle with this ideal and usually resort to explaining it in terms of traditional Christian theology which then eviscerates the plain meaning of unconditional. There is always that deity in the background who demands a perfect sacrifice be first made before any unconditional can be expressed toward anyone. And then proper repentance, acceptance of the sacrifice, and on and on.

The ideal of unconditional obviously captivates and intrigues but appears simply too dangerous to fully embrace. As one pastor warned, it will lead to lawlessness. People sinning boldly like Luther. <:

Feb.14/12

I was just musing over our input into the marketplace of ideas and discussion. This is occurring in a time in history that has seen great advances in human consciousness and how we live as human. All the major trends affirm this advance (Ultimate Resource offers a summary, as do similar works). Much of humanity is embracing this advance such as the move away from violence to more humane ways of  living together and relating.

But even as some sections of humanity are embracing advance there remains a lot of darkness still lingering all over in public/private consciousness. You can see this in people continuing to embrace themes in their  worldviews that promote darkness and fear. Apocalyptic is one example. People keep falling for this in new versions such as Green apocalyptic or cosmological apocalyptic. Sectarian barriers also continue in all sorts of forms- religious, political, and other. And there is the lingering influence of religious beliefs such as that of Christianity. We are told that surveys continue to reveal that something like 70% of Americans still believe in hell.

Moving outside the West you can see even more severe forms of  sectarian exclusion and violence.

The old narratives still infect much of human consciousness with a darkening and enslaving influence. This is evident in the impact of ideas of separation and opposition, threat from ultimate reality, coming catastrophe, need for systems of appeasement, insecurity over ultimate destiny and purpose, a basic corruption of humanity, and so much more.

Without apology we have a pearl of great price, a series of insights, that can bring light and liberation to human consciousness. Something that can counter the darkness of the themes noted above.

We have been toying with- experimenting with- new narratives, stories that might serve as a vehicle to bring these insights to the public consciousness. Julia has suggested new stories in terms of contemporary examples and offered some, and Henry offered one on the boy born of an unwed mother.

And no, the insights we focus on are not unique to our discussion. We are in the long historical tradition of the prophets and the Palestinian sage with these themes of Exodus, liberation, promised land, dreams of a better future, of freedom, of more compassionate and peaceful societies, of more inclusive and accepting forms of human relating, of unconditional love. These are themes embraced by many in our societies and expressed in unique ways through all sorts of media.

We also understand more today how important human consciousness is and we grasp something of how the realm of ideas and perceptions influence and shape consciousness and behaviour, and hence all of life. So we have gone after residual ideas, perceptions that continue to darken and enslave human consciousness. This has been one of the purposes of our little think tank forum or discussion group. We have been about sharpening an axe to lay to the most fundamental root of all- those ideas that influence the deepest recesses of human consciousness and how to liberate that consciousness so we can all progress together toward an infinitely better future.

This is just musing on what we have been about over the past years and where we might be moving in a new forum.

Any ideas from others?

Feb.15/12

Bob recommended to us Patricia Williams’ little book Where Christianity Went Wrong and What You Can Do About It. It is a thought-provoking and inspiring book.  Especially so in regard to this all-too-human attitude of superiority toward others, and the endeavour to create exclusion between ourselves and others; believing our beliefs, our practices are right and others are wrong. And God is on our side and will vindicate us in the end against our enemies. This is the essential nature of much religion and end-time dreaming. And it is also something found all over in economic theories, political movements, even scientific movements.

Countering this is the simple kingdom of God as envisioned by Jesus. And I will paraphrase a bit further than Williams is willing to state things- all humans get the same full forgiveness (even without repentance, as Williams conditions it on, as too often repentance has to do with return to religion and other misperceptions). All people get the same full acceptance, the same full generosity. All are welcomed and get everything anyone else gets, even if they don’t believe the same things or live the same way as other’s perceptions.

And this just touches the edges of things so scandalous, so much better than can be imagined, that words can not convey even the beginnings of such infinity.  Such unconditional love.

And this ought to cause real offense to any residual sense of fairness, just recompense, justice, rightness, or whatever else we judge things by in a payback world.

In this scheme, the kingdom of God needs not just no sacrifice at all, it needs no religion, no mediation, no joining of anything, or believing of anything (correct beliefs that is), or correct lifestyle (whatever anyone believes this to be, whatever laws one advocates). It is a kingdom of unconditional love, acceptance, forgiveness, generosity.

And what will it lead to? It will inspire a similar response toward all others. By its fruits you will know it.

Feb.15/12

To clarify- yes, to Williams’ use of repentance if it means turning away from the religious arrogance of viewing oneself as right and representing God, and the religious stance of setting oneself aside from all others as commonly human. To turn from this is genuine repentance no matter how one expresses it.

But no to religious repentance as leaving common humanity to join some specialized belief system and lifestyle.

Obviously, to embrace the kingdom of God as taught by Jesus will mean embracing its values of unconditional forgiveness, unconditional acceptance of all others, unconditional generosity toward all  (everyone gets anything and everything everyone else gets), and all that can be imagined of good things, unbounded things.

Feb.15/12

I instinctively react to the word repentance with visceral abhorrence. A hangover from my religious past, I guess. It connotes too much grovelling self- flagellant and self-punishment and a return to religion.

However, in its simple meaning as changing one’s mind and behaviour for the better, well, that’s not so offensive. As long as this is clear. Some people change their minds while laughing and joking and mocking.

More than anything- seeing something of the nature of unconditional love and wanting to experience and live that, well, that is the most genuine form of repentance. And another word would express such change better.

Feb.15/12

Williams’  book is a refreshing and challenging look at the historical Jesus (HJ) and where Christianity went wrong in its subsequent understanding of Jesus. But even Williams cannot entirely free herself of a residual religious thinking and adherence. Her’s is a call for reformation, not abandonment of religion. And she continues to advocate a sort of conditionality in her approach. For instance, this statement is repeated often, “God always forgives, those who ask (or repent)”. But what about the atheist who tries to live a decent life and never bothers to seek forgiveness? Or the secularist who engages life fully and also never bothers with too much self-reflection and judgment, but again, tries to live as humanely as possible?

Williams needs to widen her grasp of Jesus’ message to a more scandalous sense of unconditional. Something entirely non-religious, unconditional. This scandal of unconditional- none of us is really getting anywhere close to how actually scandalous it is, how offensive to all our sense of culpability, responsibility, justice, or whatever. It is something beyond comprehension in that it is better than anything we can even imagine or express. Such is anything related to an unknowable, incomprehensible Reality that is essentially unconditional Love.

And the fruit of such scandalous unconditionality? I would offer all those “sinners” caught in embarrassing situations by the “righteous” who then exhibited the same unconditional response toward others afterward. Such is the response evoked in people by mercy shown toward them. This is a very human response. I would not worry about the outcome of a too radical interpretation of unconditional. In fact, it may evoke an even more humane response.

Feb.17/12 (email response to Howard Storm)

Howard, I have been in a discussion group that has looked closely at the historical Jesus and what he taught. This relates to the Jesus Seminar which has done some useful work on the historical person and what he actually taught in comparison with the version we have in the New Testament that is the product his follower’s interpretation of him, and that involved putting a number of things in his mouth that stand in contrast to his core message.

I believe that core message is still clear in the New Testament and can be summed up in the terms unconditional forgiveness, acceptance, and love.

I am always amazed how people having NDEs find this to be a startling discovery- that the Light (God) is unconditional love. And of a type of love that stuns them.

The people Jesus spoke of in his stories on this element of unconditional were also stunned by unconditional love, but more often they were offended and even outraged by the real nature of this unconditional love. They wanted a world that made sense with payback justice ruling- good rewarded, bad punished. Jesus said it just wasn’t so and it appears many NDErs find this same to be true. Full acceptance, forgiveness and love for all, whether a suicide or whatever kind of rascal in life.

Jesus, having experienced this love himself, tried to express it in his generous forgiveness, acceptance, and love toward all people, especially the worst and least deserving in society.

To respond to your question do people get what they want....I think many people do not really know what they want and may desire something out of a twisted experience of life, perhaps twisted by others. I think of the many people who have reacted to religion due to nasty experiences with such. That is perfectly understandable. And the God that many atheists react to is nothing more than a projection from not very enlightened minds, primitive minds from long ago that projected some of the worst features of human  existence onto deity. That is why Karen Armstrong has noted that atheism in the past was often a reaction to a God that no longer made sense and the shift to a new understanding of God. Even the early Christians were called atheists for rejecting the Roman gods. So there are different kinds of atheism. The modern version is out of whack with past atheism.

But once people experience the unconditional love that is the real God, I think what people may have desired may change. As some NDErs say, that love washed over them and healed them in their deepest being. That may change a lot of things.

If we really got what we deserved then there is no hope for most of us. Fortunately, the unconditional forgiveness, acceptance, and love that Jesus spoke to did not respond to people on that level. It gave everyone the best, not what they deserved. Sun and rain were sent on all alike. Love was offered to all alike. That makes us all safe in Love.

Feb.18/12

What image of God are they reacting to? I now consider the  God of my past Christian upbringing to be a monster and would not want to hang around such a God. Fortunately, God is love beyond all imagining, despite much of the payback theology of Christianity that clouds that love. I doubt anyone alive could resist the unconditional love that is God.

I’ll tell you what Howard, I am working on a piece for our  discussion group and new website, about the core message of Jesus on unconditional love and the reaction of even his followers to that offensive, scandalous love. Jesus’ stories captured the offensiveness of that unconditional generosity of God and how it offended others. I will send you a copy for your reaction if you don’t mind.

And agreed- God will not coerce anyone. Love values freedom supremely.

Feb.18/12

Howard,  here is a story from a friend, Bob Brinsmead that illustrates God’s love toward even his enemies.

Perhaps the greatest of all Jesus sayings, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."  This shows that in his heart, Jesus had already forgiven those who were in the act of killing him. Talk about praying for those who persecute you and despitefully use you!

Real forgiveness is unconditional.  It does not wait for the offender to repent. The forgiving spirit brings about repentance.

Allow me to tell a story of my early childhood.  I can vividly remember the day I became extremely angry with my mother and was determined to hurt her. She had just cleaned the house, polishing the floor so that the passage way from the front door into the house shone sparkling clean.  I saw my big chance to vent my anger. I scooped up a big double handful of dirt/mud and chucked it right through the front door on to that shiny floor that had just cost my weary mother (I was the youngest of a large family) a lot of effort.  I watched her take the cleaning materials and re-do the floor. So I promptly scooped up another load of muck and defiantly threw it inside again, only to see my mother patiently repeat her remedial action.  A third time I scooped up a load of dirt, and this time came so close that I was almost inside the house - a position from where I could inflict the maximum damage.  My mother hid behind the door, and just as I was about the throw the stuff inside, she caught me red handed. I was sure that a mother of a threshing was forthcoming, and so I braced myself to receive what I knew I deserved. But I never heard her laugh so much, and in this spirit she cuddled me and told me what a wonderful little fellow I was and how much she loved me - and she kept this up until I was laughing too - and then she let me go. I found that I did not have it in me anymore to repeat what I had been doing.  I was completely surprised, outwitted and cured by her generosity of spirit. Here is just a little image of divine love.

You can pick this spirit up in the OT prophets.  To a wayward, rebellious Israel God assures it that all its sins have been cast behind God's back, that they have been removed as far as the East is from the West - and in many such instances such things are said when the repentance of Israel is not even in sight or contemplated because the people are so religious,  so taken up with their feasts and sacrificial worship that they are not even aware that they need of repentance for grievous wrongs.

Bob Brinsmead

Feb.21/12

Here’s a thought- was the darkness of religion allowed in order to create a desire in humanity for liberation, to create a background against which the love that Jesus spoke of would shine all the brighter? Kind of like the darkness before the dawn.

Howard Storm’s ‘hellish’ experience epitomizes how dark can be the experience of religion. Against that backdrop unconditional shines so much brighter.

Feb.21/12

There’s a good reason for engaging superlatives on this issue of unconditional, just as Jesus did (not “exaggeration” which carries negative connotations). The reason is this- if you take the best of  Jesus’ teaching on unconditional love and the best of, say, the NDEs, and also account for the fact that God is love and God is transcendent (incomprehensible, good, beyond knowing), then we can be certain that the best that we can imagine of something good like unconditional acceptance, forgiveness, generosity, love...well, the actual reality has to be infinitely better than can be imagined or expressed. This is just a logical conclusion.

And it works both ways- it means that all the metaphysical darkness imagined by people over history is false beyond description. All the threat, fearful scenarios (retribution, punishment, hell), anything inhumane...is false to transcendent and infinite degree. I think this was what Jesus was getting at in his zeal for the kingdom as unconditional and those stories of people selling everything to obtain this transcendent wonder.

Feb.23/12

Many of the NDEs give the sense that we are not  even beginning to approach the incomprehensible, unspeakable wonder of what it (unconditional) really means. All we say about it is just the beginning of infinity, the outer edges. Like anything really divine, it is transcendently above what can  be imagined. That is why I would hesitate to use exaggeration in regard to Jesus’ comments on this as exaggeration carries the connotation of something inflated falsely. This is something where the truth or actual reality is so far above what can be comprehended that no superlative can do proper justice.

And the ‘surprise’ element is always just starting.

That essay needs a major rewrite and will get it. And I will do a compromise with Bob’s suggestion- I have more I want to add in that piece so I will break it up into four parts (thanks for the help on this Henry) and put it on the new site a bit at a time. And then do a brief summary (just a few pages) for weaponry or axe use as per Bob’s suggestion. Something to send out around the Net as a time bomb.

Its such a neglected topic with such vast potential for liberating humanity and moving us all toward the better unlimited future we all want. And I dare suggest it gets to the very heart of why we are here for this little venture of human life and story. It speaks to the very reason the universe exists and why conscious persons exist. So, sorry  Stephen Hawking but you have missed the real theory of everything. A Jewish peasant got it right long ago. And sorry Christianity but you  also missed with your theory of everything oriented to payback.

Is this arrogance? Nah. Some things are just right...and what is the point of apologizing for stumbling across such treasure. <:

Feb.23/12

To imagine the superlativeness of this issue, think of this great Being of Light that NDErs speak of. This Being that fills the entire vista of the Beyond with an indescribably brilliant light and an overwhelming and inexpressible sense of unconditional love. Then think that this Being is the Source of all, the Creator of an infinite universe of energy and uncountable, innumerable galaxies. What power this must be that holds all this in existence. Then take this incomprehensibility back to this issue of unconditional love. What love that really must be coming from such incomprehensible infinity and greatness and power. And as Campbell says, such thoughts are not even beginning to grasp what actually is. What actually is, is beyond all concepts, all thoughts, all ideas, all comprehension, beyond even the term God.

Ring notes this  one lady named Peggy who tries to express something of this wonder (see quotes below). As Ring says in The Near-Death Experience: A Reader, “No wonder the ordinary person returns from the  NDE stammering hyperbole”. Peggy below tries to express the inexpressible using capitals extensively.

She was shown, “The all-pervading and primary nature of love in the universe...’The light told me everything was love, and I mean everything. I had always felt love was just a human emotion people felt from time to time, never in my wildest dreams thinking it was literally EVERYTHING!...I was shown how much all people are loved. It was overwhelmingly evident that the light loved everyone equally without any conditions! I really want to stress this, because it made me so happy to know we didn’t have to believe or do certain things to be loved. WE ALREADY WERE AND ARE NO MATTER WHAT! The light was extremely concerned and loving toward all people...if only people could know how much they’re loved, maybe they wouldn’t feel so scared or lonely anymore”.

“Then as if to drive home the incomprehensible immensity of this love so that she would never forget it, Peggy received an infusion of the light’s energy: I vividly recall the part where the light did what I felt like switch on a current of pure, undiluted, concentrated unconditional LOVE. The love I experience in the light was so powerful it can’t be compared to earthly love, even though earthly love is a much milder version. Its like knowing that the very best love you feel on earth is diluted to about one part per million of the real thing. As this stream of pure love went through me, I felt as if the light was saying simultaneously, ‘ I love you COMPLETELY and ENTIRELY as you are, BECAUSE YOU ARE...It was like being bathed in energy particles of pure love....I knew there was nothing wrong with me in any way. NOTHING! ...I WAS PERFECTION”.

Ring adds, “Peggy...took home an important lesson about the healing power of unconditional love” (p.45-46).

Feb.27/12

Tracing unconditional love through such forums as Wikipedia, you get this interesting outplay of defining- it starts out well with references to the highest forms of love between family members and then makes a comparative link to God’s love, which is explained as follows, "In this the *love of God* was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him"; etc.

God loved and revealed this by sending his son. This immediately weakens the original definition of unconditional with a dependence on payment and all else that is attached to such definition. Acceptance of the payment, faith or belief in the salvation plan, request for forgiveness (not forgiven unless you  ask), and on and on.

A general Google of something like “the meaning of unconditional love” pulls up some interesting discussion. You get the usual Christian responses that God’s love must be “moral”. It cannot be unconditional. And you get others who wrestle with what this really means, such as one person who posts under the title “The meaning of love” (below).

The interesting thing is how people are wrestling with this supreme human value and what it means.

Feb.27/12

Among the varied contributors to The Near-Death Experience: A Reader, is one by Carol Zaleski who specializes in Medieval other world journeys and their place in religious movements. She does a comparison between the Medieval and modern experiences. It is overall an interesting discussion of the theological and religious response to the modern NDE. However, I think she misses something critically important to this discussion and it  may just be her own orientation to traditional religious belief and the concern to maintain some position for that tradition. In trying to do that, it appears that she seeks to tame this personal experience and in so doing takes the life out of it, and misses the essential wonder it points to and is about.

Rather than setting the focus on how these personal experiences are culturally conditioned and explained (thereby diminishing the value of a personal experience), it would seem more helpful to accept the personal as real but then note how it is interpreted by belief, culture, and ideology (much like Fox does in Religion, Spirituality and the Near-death Experience). In this article she appears to do just what she claims the theologians do- “attenuate the visionary virus until it is so weak that it produces immunity instead of contagion”. She sucks the life and wonder out of the experience with her explanatory approach.

She notes that theologians have responded negatively to the NDE in order to “avoid having to weigh testimony that either conflicts with accepted religious and scientific principles or brings the mysteries of life, death, and the hereafter embarrassingly close”. Theological discomfort with experiental claims continues, she says.

Some further interesting points she makes- theologians initially reacted to Moody’s book, Life after Life by claiming he was “selling cheap grace”. Others claimed such accounts were satanic, designed to lure people into false security about the future life. It was an effort to “sell people a secular bill of goods without Christ”. Other theologians argued that instead of the new portrait of death as pleasant, gentle transition, it was important to affirm the sting of death as essential to the Christian message. As some responded, “There is no need for Easter if we are immortal”. They wanted something that affirmed the need for conversion.

Still others saw the value in such experiences as offering comfort to bereaved relatives.

She traces out well some of the main responses to NDEs by theologians and religious conservatives.

She also does a valuable explanation of the role of symbol and what it points to. Good points here, “I do not believe that any of our notions of God, the soul, or the other world are likely to be true in the ordinary sense of the word. One reason for this is human weakness: we are too thick-headed, twisted, or frightened to see clearly...There is no sensory, imaginative, or intellectual form capable of fully expressing the transcendent”.

Another interesting comment- “homo religious has never found it sufficient to orient himself solely in terms of his place in local history, in the rat race, in private concerns that devour his energy. The imaginative cosmologies and eschatologies of different cultures testify to our human need to find a place to occupy in a wider universe”.

Feb.27/12

I was thinking of something along the following lines.

Just some mental tinkering...musing. What about an Unconditional manifesto similar in spirit to Karen Armstrong’s Manifesto of Compassion? We could all contribute, point form, about a page, just for general circulation around the Net. Focusing on this liberating concept of no conditions. No Hell. No punishment. No exclusion. No pre-requisite demands. Whatever we think encapsulates unconditional humanity.

Statement of Unconditional

The highest human value that we can aspire to is unconditional love. A love that forgives everyone and everything, especially enemies. It is a love that includes and honours everyone equally. A love that gives generously and expects nothing in return.

Unconditional simply means no conditions, no demands, and no payment. Absolutely none, whatsoever.

Unconditional means no retaliation, no future threat, no judgment or punishment, and most importantly no Hell.

Unconditional liberates from all the fear and all the worry engendered by the payback justice that has darkened human consciousness for millennia.

Unconditional liberates humanity from the base animal drives that have enslaved us in the dark world of enemy versus enemy with endless cycles of revenge, domination, small band exclusivity, violence, and retaliatory warfare.

Unconditional unleashes human consciousness into the infinite and unlimited potential of progress toward something better.

Unconditional love meets the deepest needs of human persons for acceptance and approval.

The point of a brief statement- series of statements- would be to directly confront some of the basic themes that have darkened consciousness over history. For instance, a brief statement to counter some of the most damaging strains of religious myth- “Unconditional love liberates human consciousness from all fear of future divine retaliation which has been a dominant theme in religious mythology as expressed in myths of judgment and hell”.

Something plain and straightforward, point form, to shock and inform (shock and awe) <:

Feb.28/12 It would be nice to re-emphasize unconditional showing how a Christian payback context has defused it’s explosive potential. And highlighting its ability to liberate consciousness (rather than a risky, dangerous thing that causes loss to the initiator, showing how it benefits all with new liberty and progress). And to show it is an ancient insight that keeps getting buried and lost in payback perceptions (the natural human tendency to interpret all in light of payback justice thinking).

Feb.29/12

Even those who for whatever reasons do not "open their hearts" will still be surprised. That is the scandal of unconditional. Many have been so hurt by religious mythology that they simply react negatively to any and all that appears related in any fashion to religious thought. I question culpability in such situations. Much of the militant atheist reaction can be understood in this way. I know people who react in such a manner. And the unconditional love that we poke around (at the outer edges) is something so incomprehensibly better than all we can imagine that it will surprise even those who think they have begun to understand it. That is what the NDErs are telling us.

Suicides, atheists, and others are all surprised by it.

Feb.29/12

Good one Henry. And yes, a ha of disbelief to the short statement. Nonetheless, I will try the impossible. <:

I am working on a hand grenade short summary to toss out into the Net and public marketplace of ideas. Something to tackle the Christian response to unconditional- Yes, God loves us unconditionally and therefore sent his son to die for our  sins. This grand pre-condition, pre-requisite so God can then love people “unconditionally”, eviscerates/evacuates (?) the meaning of unconditional with the great Christian condition that supports all other conditioned love. It is the heart of Christian belief and keeps consciousness locked in payback thinking and all the darkness and fear of such a perspective.

Isn’t it all about real freedom at the deepest core of human consciousness? Real liberation into the infinity of progress. Light in the darkest recesses of human consciousness.

Feb.29/12

This is a particularly valuable point Julia- “Unconditional love is the other side of forgiveness.  It lets the other go free. Where there are wrongs unconditional love bears the hurt and so ends the harmful potential. (Paul said, “Keeps no sore of wrongs”)”

Unconditional sets offenders free. It chooses to bear the pain of any offense and so squashes the impulse to get even. This reverses potential slides down into tit for tat. It starts a new positive cycle upwards towards something better. This gets into the smallest details of interpersonal relationships. Like Bob’s mom choosing to have some fun with Bob instead of chasing  him with a belt (over his dirty deeds) <:

Feb.29/12

I think a key point to wrestle with is this Christian tendency to accept unconditional love (it resonates with our consciousness of what is true and right) but to then interpret it in terms of God then sent his son to pay for our sin first so he can show unconditional love. This is pure payback and defuses the explosive potential of Jesus teaching on unconditional. It renders the core message of Jesus ineffectual and meaningless.

Some Christians respond to the unconditional issue with the claim that nowhere does the Bible use the word unconditional in relation to love. But this misses the point of what Jesus’ teaching was pointing toward which we can now summarize and define in this term unconditional.

Mar.5/12

I am working on something similar to Getting a Grip but this time arguing this point that Christianity embodies history’s greatest example of cowardly retreat and missed opportunity. The early Christians backed away from the scandal of unconditional as taught by Jesus and retreated to the safety of the old pagan payback thinking (safety in that there is comfort in old habits and old ways of structuring relationships and societies). This was a missed opportunity on a grand scale to lead an exodus to a grand new liberty of truly human existence.

So rather than, as it claims and like to portray itself, to be bringing salvation to humanity, Christianity has reinforced the enslavement of humanity to payback thinking and even taken it to new heights (embedding it in divinity in new ways with all sorts of new legal reasoning). This is the opposite of salvation, the only salvation that matters, which is the freedom to live in unconditional existence. Christianity has damned humanity to further enslavement in the ongoing darkness of payback thinking. Christianity is a form of hell.

Oh, this is a bit of extreme talk but maybe enough to stir some thinking and reaction. And the question is- is it true or not?

Ha. It was a rhetorical question. Just my Canadian politeness, eh. <:

Christianity aborted the potentially greatest exodus ever in terms of freeing human consciousness and taking humanity into a promised land of truly human existence. Oh, many since have found their way there- to the kingdom of God- despite Christianity blocking the way, along with other religious and other blockages.

And apologies to Bob, I haven’t yet got to the short version I was seeking. Got sidetracked in another longer version.

Ah, there is so much to explore at the shores of this infinite ocean.

Lets get busy.

Mar.7/12

Blown opportunity- that is my point in my latest project- that humanity was offered this  amazing opportunity for exodus from primitive payback into the promised land of unconditional existence. But early Christians in an historical act of cowardice reverted to payback thinking to redefine Jesus and his message (it made their system more acceptable to the  pagan thinking of their time).

This reversion to payback is especially to be noted in their interpretation of his death as a sacrifice for sin, a payment before God could forgive. This is the supreme condition that distorted the entire message of Jesus about unconditional. All the other conditions surround this one. Christianity aborted a grand opportunity for exodus into the liberation of unconditional existence. And Christianity has continued till today to distort and nullify the core message of HJ. This is a far bigger scandal than the recently discovered bones of Jesus.

I would like to hear Bob also weigh in on this. I see a consistent theme running through the precepts, stories, and behaviour of Jesus. And it is this unconditional theme. Christians, trying to dismiss this, argue that the word is not used in Scripture. Misses the point, and the central message (its instructive to go through the debates going on across the Web under such topics as unconditional, unconditional love in Jesus, unconditional forgiveness, and so on)

This unconditional theme is there in his unconditional acceptance, unconditional forgiveness, unconditional generosity and all through his core material. Even in more peripheral things like the  account of David and his men eating the prohibited (consecrated) food. Unconditional approach to meeting human need. Its hard to miss the dominance of this theme.

I will try to get this next one up after some cleaning up. And then still looking to write a short version for more general circulation. Each time new thoughts come in and new emphases come to the fore.

Had Christianity grabbed hold of what Jesus actually emphasized, the religion would never have formed (not like it did). But the message would have shaken societies thoroughly and lifted humanity to new heights. It is something that eventually would rise to the surface of human consciousness some way or other. And we can find traces of it all over today.

Mar.8/12

A significant part of the discussion is what does forgiveness mean and there is discussion all over the place on this. When you add unconditional forgiveness as in the HJ tradition you would think you have solidified a point that is self-evident by the very term used. But not so. I just read a newspaper report of a school banning some Evangelicals from proselytizing students too zealously. The Evangelicals replied that they were just teaching them the “Unconditional love of God”. Why proselytize then? What do they need to be converted to or saved from?

Part of the response to this religious use of unconditional is to point out the evident contradiction of attaching unconditional to a system that demands the supreme condition be met first before unconditional forgiveness can be shown to others (the sacrifice of Jesus). This precondition on divine forgiveness reveals that the Christian God is then held to a lower standard of forgiveness than people are held to. He gets to demand a condition be met first before showing forgiveness. We are told to set no conditions on our forgiveness. We then are asked to express an authentic unconditional forgiveness while God is not. Kind of grates on the senses that the Deity is held to a lower standard than imperfect humans are held to.

And yes, most will see this contradiction but a true believer will not be convinced as the religious  mind is tightly locked into payback in supreme form.

Mar.10/12

Bob, here is a shorter version of my redone essay that is now on my site under Unconditional. I am still working on a brief one-page summary of points for discussion.

What I am trying to do in all this “huffing and puffing”  is to emphasize a larger context of missed historical opportunity. A great abortion of an offered exodus into the promised land. This rejection of the grand opportunity for exodus into promised land expresses a cowardly retreat or ignorance of HJ message, or both. Ever since, Christianity has continued to block that exodus and needs to be held to account. This is the greatest blunder of the Christian movement, far more scandalous than any other. This is worse than finding the bones of Jesus.

Mar.12/12

Yesterday was a day of remembering the Japanese tsunami. Various Japanese were interviewed. One lady, about 50-60, told her story of loss and gave her thoughts on the horrific tragedy from the earthquake and tsunami. She said, “Was it retribution because God was angry at us for being too happy?”

Did Calvin teach in Japan?

Mar.12/12

This article below from the Greatnewstory.com site on the death of Jesus as payment for sin. This cornerstone belief of Christianity is arguably the most damaging blow to the message of Jesus.

The death of Jesus was nothing more than a tragic act carried out by Roman soldiers. But it has become the central Christian belief that nullifies the message of Jesus.

I am not sure that this belief was not central in Christian consciousness from the beginning as the author suggests below. But he offers a good basic question- Why a sacrificial offering instead of just offering forgiveness? And this is the point made by Jesus- forgiveness was unconditional. Instead, Christianity has developed the supreme condition before forgiveness, one that nullifies the meaning of unconditional forgiveness. Christianity, built around this belief, is a nullification of the message of Jesus. Jacques Ellul said something similar, though on a different point, is stating that Christianity was on all points the opposite of what Jesus stood for.

Mar.13/12

Just an interesting aside on sacrifice- one of the articles I had posted here a while back on sacrifice noted that various sacrifices were offerings of thanks for harvest and what not. This may have been the stated formal belief for the offering though I doubt this was the motive in the minds of many common people offering such sacrifices (gratefulness to the gods). At the grass roots level things often are not what they are made to appear by elites.

One way anthropologists get a sense of what people in the past actually believed, aside from paleontology, is to go as far from modern civilization geographically as they can. This they believe, gets them closest to the past. For instance, one anthropology professor I had, in his own fieldwork in Tonga, went to the farthest islands from the center of this nation state. That, he said, would get to the most ancient beliefs of the Tongans.

So with our ventures in the Philippines. We were in the most remote regions of upland Mindanao, with the most remote tribal groups (Manobo).  This was a look at the most ancient beliefs of people regarding sacrifice.

There- sacrifice was blatantly about appeasing angry spirits (“they eat the blood so they won’t eat our souls”, as one tribal man told me). It was about appeasement of anger and to avoid punishment.

Mar.13/12

Julia, I don’t need one page to make the central  point. Here it is- “The core belief of Christianity nullifies the core message of Jesus”. And I will leave out the explanation of nullify (make invalid, cancel out the effect of). The core belief of Christianity being that Jesus’ death was a sacrifice for sin.

This great contradiction of Christianity ought to be highlighted everywhere. The contradiction centers on this message of unconditional taught and lived by Jesus.

Additional points to illustrate- Paul preached Christ crucified-his central message- which showed the centrality of this even in early Christianity.

But Christianity in essence is the creation of a supreme condition, the arguably most supreme condition ever created by human minds to nullify unconditional. Yet Christianity still tries to encompass these contradictory themes in one theology. Christians all over the place use the term unconditional love of God (one of the most famous contemporary Evangelicals- the guy who wrote Purpose filled Life or something like that, is in conflict with others over unconditional). They recognize intuitively this theme in Jesus and its value as a humane standard, but then create this horrific contradiction in tying it to the greatest condition ever imagined (infinite sacrifice to appease infinite offense). As you  have argued Bob, early Christians got caught up in a message about the man (a payback understanding) instead of focusing on and trying to understand the message of the  man.

In all this I see that we are building toward something important in a grand new narrative and we are still just getting started. I feel lets get busy getting this out. To liberate from the inner darkness and enslavement that continues in human consciousness. Like that poor woman in Japan trying to make sense of the tragedy and blaming herself and others for being too happy and thereby suffering retribution from God. You can be physically free but still enslaved horribly to such ideas.  Lets go to the very depths of consciousness and liberate there where it impacts life the most. Freeing people from the darkness to see the glory of what Jesus saw. Unconditional- we need nothing to enjoy the full acceptance and love that all are beneficiaries of by just being human. Just treat all others with the same unconditional love.

My own aha moment while walking up Thornhill last month or so was about the courage to challenge all darkness that dims and nullifies this glory of unconditional.  To believe this is true and anything that dims it in any way is false and not of God. To stand at the gates of hell and not back down from this grand breakthrough Jesus insight.

I wanted to add- this Christian message has held  humanity in bondage and darkness for two millennia now. It has been embedded in divinity which makes it sacred and untouchable to many people. It will take great courage to tackle this great God of Christianity and to challenge this sacred belief in the sacrifice of Jesus. It will be costly.

Julia- the point of this one sentence summary is to include the  contrast with the Christian condition that brings out the brightness of unconditional all the more. Again, that point of Nicole Kidman in a long ago interview that we need the contrast with the bad parts of life to help us value the good parts more (something to this effect).

Mar.14/12

On the main page of my site (wendellkrossa.com) I have about a 2 page summary at the bottom re this unconditional argument. Under the Unconditional button there is a 5 page summary- Liberation Into Unconditional Humanity (short), and then two longer versions. Something for everybody.

This should be presented as a much bigger scandal than the Jesus ossuary discovery with far more damaging consequences for human society and freedom.

Mar.15/12

An important element to deal with in relation to unconditional love is the concern of many that this central theme of Jesus is simply too  idealistic, impractical and unworkable in real life. It needs to be explained that an embrace of unconditional is not at all incompatible with the growing sensitivity to all forms of inhumanity and a robust defense of people from the inhumanity of others who cannot or will not control their worst impulses.

Any good ways of explaining and expressing this?

This contrast thing is also well done in several of the main HJ parables- the contrast of the older brother with the wild child younger bro. And in the full shift guys versus the short shift guys in the vineyard story. These other actors are vital to the point of these stories. To provide contrast.

And in response to the Christian argument that unconditional is not used anywhere in Scripture- there is a consistency in how HJ used this throughout his precepts, parables and personal treatment of others. It is a clearly detectable strain all through pointing to this obvious outcome of unconditional treatment. This is true despite the distorting contexts of payback.

I’ve added this paragraph to the main page of my site. It makes another important point in relation to unconditional that needs a lot more exploring. This relates also to Bob’s point that we only know God in and through humanity.

“Christianity has also distorted entirely the nature of the ultimate reality upon which we base all our other perceptions of material reality and life. But there is no better insight into what that ultimate reality is than unconditional love. There is no higher point of enlightenment or more clear view of deity than this. This is the essence of the light that is God. So if you want to know God, as many claim, then explore unconditional love for all you are worth.”