

(Note: This RFP (request for proposals) was issued by the Fetzer Institute in 2000. Among the results are the projects featured in these "Compassionate Love" web pages.)

## Request for Proposals

Funding in the amount of \$1M.  
Future additional support is planned  
for this developing area of research.

## Scientific Research on Altruistic Love and Compassionate Love

Letters of Intent due March 1, 2001  
Applications due April 1, 2001

PLEASE POST

### Goals

- To better understand when, how, and under what conditions behavior and attitudes centered on the good of another might be fostered.
- To promote creative thinking resulting in excellent interdisciplinary research on the phenomenon of altruistic love, compassionate love, and other-centered love.
- To support methodologically rigorous research on other-centered love expressed in ways such as affirmation, understanding, care, compassion, and service.
- To discover ways to appropriately encourage the expression of other-centered love in the world.

**Research linking biological and/or social sciences with philosophical, ethical and religious understanding is particularly encouraged.**

### Mechanism of Support

The total amount of funds allocated for this research effort is \$1M. The funding for each individual research project is expected to range from \$30,000 to \$100,000, for a period of one to two years. The support provided may be used for personnel and supplies pertinent to the research proposal. Support can also be requested for travel expenses for the purposes of collaboration. No indirect costs will be provided.

All investigators of supported projects will be brought together for a meeting at the beginning of project funding.

### Eligibility

Proposals may be submitted by public or private nonprofit organizations such as universities, colleges, hospitals, laboratories, or research institutions. The proposed principal investigator must have a doctoral degree with sufficient training and experience to accomplish the proposed work. Given the scope of the proposed research, proposals from a broad range of academic disciplines are sought. Innovative interdisciplinary collaboration in projects is strongly encouraged. Research projects must exhibit the capacity to address these complex topics with adequate breadth and depth.

### Introduction/Background

The term "altruistic love" as used here, is meant to identify the kind of love that is a central feature in many religious traditions: a self-giving, caring, love that values the other highly and has the intention of giving full life to the other. Terms that have been used to describe this phenomenon include "unconditional love," "agape," "compassion," and "selfless love." It is not synonymous with empathy, attachment, or bonding, but can relate to these concepts. Research on altruism also has relevance to this work, but is not identical to the above. Research on romantic love may also have relevance to this work, but is not synonymous with the love of interest here. Much scientific research has begun with the assumption that all motivation is, at root, selfish, directly or indirectly. Are there truly motives centered on the good of the other, and if so, how might these be fostered?

In the interest of developing this topic, leading researchers from the biological and social sciences, along with key thinkers in theology and philosophy, were invited to address this topic at a meeting at MIT in October 1999. Oxford University Press is publishing an edited volume from that meeting. Perspectives from neuroscience, evolutionary biology, developmental psychology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, political science, theology, and philosophy were combined with perspectives of those actively doing the work of compassionate love in practical ways in the world. Insights inspired by that meeting have encouraged the Fetzer Institute and others to consider focused funding of research projects in this area.

### Scope of the Proposed Research

Scientific research in this area is underdeveloped compared with the thought given to this topic in religion, theology, and philosophy. Empirical research that links biological and/or social sciences with philosophical, ethical, and religious understanding is encouraged. We particularly encourage empirical research in the biological, medical, and clinical sciences, as well as the social sciences, including sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology, and political science.

### Research Methodologies

Research hypotheses must be clearly defined. It is anticipated that a wide range of methodologies will be utilized appropriate to individual hypotheses and relevant disciplines.

Methodologies to be used individually or in combination might include—

- **Observational Methods:**

Quantitative and qualitative assessment of actions and behaviors, or observational studies of experiments of nature such as genetic variation and neurological defects.

- **Experimental Methods:**

One example of this is social-psychological experimental design. This could possibly be linked with biological or other externally validated outcomes. Model systems to develop operational definitions for quantitative assessment are encouraged.

- **Biological Measurement:**

Physiological variables, biochemical markers, and neural imaging.

- **Self-Report Methods:**

Quantitative or qualitative, or exploration of other novel methods of illuminating motive and inner processing. The use of self-report measures should reflect the best technologies available in that realm and appropriately use these to obtain the most accurate and valid self-reports of motive and behaviors.

Although self-report methods will often be of great use in these projects, we encourage projects that include direct observations and if possible, biological measures. Developing procedures that can identify those with an index of propensity for other-centered love—using observations of behavior and effect—could be very important as this field develops. Such projects are welcomed.

Concepts relating to this topic of other-centered love are often nested in a religious framework. If a specific religious framework is used in the project, it is important that efforts be made to enable what is learned in the project to be understandable to those from other religious perspectives.

Clear definition and excellent measurements are critical for all studies, for all features such as initial conditions, mediating variables, and outcomes. Concepts referred to by various terms such as, "unconditional love," "compassionate love," "altruistic love," "self-giving love," "agape," all relate in some way to behavior centered on the good of the other. As an example, "agape" is a word used in a variety of traditions. In a research proposal dealing with "agape" as the central concept, it would be important to articulate whether agapic love, which is inspired by the divine, has a particular phenomenology relevant to scientific studies in this area. Explanation of choice of concept should be part of the proposal. Each proposal must include a clear definition of whichever term or terms is being used that describes the concept worked on as clearly as possible at the beginning of the project.

There are limitations to nonhuman research relevant to this topic. Research using human models will be given preference unless compelling rationale is presented.

Since there is a limited amount of scientific research in this area, it will be necessary to draw from a variety of other well-developed areas to further this work. All proposed research must be scientifically valid and methodologically rigorous, using the criteria of the particular fields involved.

## Sample Research Questions

The following questions are possible starting points for research projects. They are designed to be illustrative. Applications are not limited to these topics:

- To what extent do human individuals and societies manifest behavior that gives of self for the good of the other? What psychological, social, and cultural factors influence altruistic and caring, compassionate love?
- What developmental processes foster or hinder altruistic and caring attitudes and behavior in various stages of life from early childhood onward? What role does emotional and social learning play in the development of caring behaviors? How do the actions of peers influence compassionate behavior?
- How does the giving and receiving of altruistic love interact with personal well-being, quality of life, and/or health?
- Are there more effective ways to reliably distinguish those with higher propensities to give of self for the benefit of the other in such a way that these methodologies could provide tools for research in this area?
- What are the physiological correlates of altruistic love?
- What role does attachment, bonding, and/or empathy play in the expression of altruistic love?
- What are the neurological substrates for giving of self for the good of the other? How might these interface with cultural, religious, and social factors?
- What is the role of specific neurotransmitters in altruistic love? Which neural regions are actively involved in the experience of compassionate, self-giving love?
- How do emotions and altruistic love interrelate? Which emotions support other-centered love and in what circumstances? Which emotions in what circumstances inhibit altruistic love?
- How does altruistic love interact with other prosocial motivations?
- What means are available to expand or extend altruism and compassionate love to those thought of as outside one's social group? How do we define the "outsider" and how does that influence our actions?
- What role does the family play in encouraging or discouraging compassionate or altruistic behaviors? How is altruistic love expressed in close relationships?
- Are there aspects of group interactions that impede or encourage compassionate behavior? What organizational structures are most conducive to consistent organizational expression of altruistic love? What are organizational obstructions to the expression of altruism and how might they be minimized?

- How does our definition of self affect our attitudes and expression of compassionate or other-centered love?
- How do particular beliefs and worldviews affect attitudes and expressions of compassionate or altruistic love? Do narrative, symbol, and various views of reality influence our capacities to respond in a loving way to a specific situation?
- How does the balance of giving and receiving affect the quality of a compassionate act? Can feelings of indebtedness on the part of the recipient get in the way of the positive effect of a compassionate act? Are there ways of expressing compassionate love by enabling another person to give, rather than by oneself giving directly?
- How do we effectively balance mercy and justice as we try to express altruistic love and compassion?
- What can economic research tell us about the nature and expression of altruistic love? How do compassionate love and altruistic love affect our attitudes and behaviors toward money and the use of wealth? What can research on our use of money and other material resources tell us about the compassionate and altruistic behaviors and motives?
- How might models of human action (e.g. utility maximization/ profit maximization in economics, assumptions of dominance of selfish motivation in biology or social sciences) affect the expression of compassion and altruistic love in human relationships and social structures?
- What is the relationship between compassion, love, and philanthropic activities?
- What role does altruistic love or compassionate love play in various professions? Where is the place of giving of self for the benefit of the other in the current practice of law, teaching, medicine, or science? How could various professions benefit from the emphasis on, or space for, this feature and how might it be facilitated?
- Does compassionate love on the part of health care providers facilitate health in the patient? How is it manifested in the interface between provider and patient?
- Does compassionate love, altruism, or agape contribute to good leadership? If so, how? What positive effects might this have?
- What is the relationship of compassionate love or altruistic love to traditional models of social support? Can this construct enrich current understandings of social support and help create models that apply the concept of social support, such as those that consider the relation of social support to health?
- Can studies of specific areas of caring and altruistic love help with our abilities to deal with societal issues (e.g., family caregiving, adoption, hospice, and volunteers)? Can we generalize lessons from exemplars?
- In what ways might proper self-love and other-centered love reinforce one another? When do they conflict?
- Does the motivation for a compassionate act affect its impact? On the person to whom that compassion is addressed? On the moral growth of the person acting? If so, how?
- Do spiritual and religious experiences, beliefs, and practices influence the expression of caring love and altruistic behavior? If so, when and how?

What specific spiritual practices (e.g., types of prayer, meditation, silence, worship) might help to encourage altruistic love and how might this occur? How do these interact with the biological, psychological, social, and cultural substrates of the person?

## Application Procedures

Applications may be submitted by public or private nonprofit organizations. Women and minority investigators are encouraged to apply.

### Letter of Intent: Due March 1, 2001

Letter of Intent: Not to exceed two pages. Must arrive at the Fetzer Institute on or before March 1, 2001. No facsimiles or electronic submissions, please.

All applicants must submit a letter of intent that includes

- research aims;
- a brief description of the methodology;
- significance and potential impact of the work; and
- may include a list of suggested reviewers that applicant believes are qualified to review proposals.

This letter is not binding in terms of the final definition of the project as it appears in the applications, it is necessary, however, for the review process. **The Fetzer Institute will not provide feedback or notification regarding letters of intent. All applicants, upon submission of their letters of intent, should proceed with the preparation of their full applications.**

### Application: Due April 1, 2001

Please submit 7 unbound copies of the following. Only typewritten materials will be reviewed: no facsimiles or electronic entries, please. All applications must arrive at the Fetzer Institute on or before April 1, 2001.

#### COVER PAGE:

**Title of project**

**Name of P.I., degrees**

**Department of P.I.**

**Mailing address**

**Telephone, fax, and e-mail address**

**Dates proposed**

**Total** (amount of support requested)

**Approval date** of institutional review board (IRB) or pending date if this is the case. Note: IRB approval must be obtained; if approval is not available before submission of the application, documentation of IRB approval must be submitted before the funding date.

**Tax-Exempt Status Letter:** Please include documentation of your organization's tax-exempt status.

**Name of application organization**

**Address**

**Name, title, address, telephone number, fax number, e-mail address** of administrative official to be notified if award is made and address if different from address of applicant organization.

**Name and title of official signing for applicant organization** and address if different from address of applicant organization.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS PAGE:** please denote on which page(s) the following bold face items can be found.

**Abstract:** must contain a clear statement of purpose, explain why the work is important, and briefly describe the methodology to be used.

**Budget:** Direct costs only. Please detail costs and justification for budget items including personnel (role on project, length of appointment, percentage of effort on project, total salary including fringe), consultant costs, supplies, travel, subject reimbursement, other. Applicants may request funds for personnel and supplies only. Funds for travel may only be requested to facilitate collaboration of investigators. No equipment is to be purchased from these funds. The Fetzer Institute does not support indirect costs.

**Biographies:** biographical sketches of principal investigator, key professional personnel, and collaborators. Please include relevant publications and experience. Not to exceed 2 pages each.

**Statement of Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** proposals are encouraged to include interdisciplinary collaboration.

**Other support:** What other funding are you receiving that might also support this work (e.g., grants, institutional support)?

**Statement of Organizational Resources:** the contribution of organizational resources available to perform the work proposed.

**Research Plan:** Include sufficient concrete information to facilitate evaluation. The following information should be included: overall goal and specific aims; background; description of research design and procedures; description of how research results will inform subsequent work. This portion not to exceed 2,500 words.

**Appendices:** applicants may include appendices with relevant information necessary for the proposal. Please assist reviewers and the Institute staff by not overburdening the proposal.

**All applications must arrive at the Fetzer Institute on or before April 1, 2001.**

**Please send applications to:**

Dr. Lynn G. Underwood  
Vice President-Health Research  
Fetzer Institute  
9292 West KL Avenue  
Kalamazoo, MI 49009-9398

**Questions?**

E-mail [rfp@fetzer.org](mailto:rfp@fetzer.org) or call 616-375-2000, ext. 269.

**Selected Bibliography:** a list of selected articles is available on our Web site [www.fetzer.org](http://www.fetzer.org), including the full text of "The Human Experience of Compassionate Love: Conceptual Mapping and Data from Selected Studies," by Lynn G. Underwood [in press S.G. Post, L.G. Underwood, J.P. Schloss, W. B. Hurlbutt(Eds.), *Altruism and Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Dialogue*. Oxford University Press]. This paper provides a model that may be useful in planning research proposals. Please check [www.fetzer.org](http://www.fetzer.org) for possible updates relative to this project.