

Niebuhr says that "the limitations of nature and the sin of egoism make it impossible for me to love the neighbor as the self" (*Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics*: 136; cf. 154). But if realization of the love ideal is really an impossibility, as he says, because of "the contingencies of nature" as well as "the sin in the human heart," how can it possibly be *the* ideal for human beings as such, as distinct from "pure spirit"?

Niebuhr is, of course, entirely justified in thinking that self-interest and interest in others perfectly coincide only in God, who alone is relative as well as absolute to *all* interests in *all* aspects. But this is no reason to deny that, as I've put it, "the love demanded from us, like the love given to us," is, "*in its own way*, unbounded." Although we cannot possibly love as only God can love—so that self-love and love of others completely coincide—we cannot legitimately exclude any creaturely interest from our interest, any more than we can employ anything less than all our powers in trying to realize them.

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