

SOME MYSTERIES OF LOVE

by

HARRY FRANKFURT



The Lindley Lecture
The University of Kansas
2000

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Some Mysteries of Love

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1. There has recently been quite a bit of interest among philosophers in issues concerning whether our conduct must invariably be guided strictly by universal moral principles, which we apply impartially in all situations, or whether favoritism of one sort or another may sometimes be reasonable. In fact, we do not always feel that we are required to be meticulously evenhanded. We treat the situation differently when our children, or our countries, or our most cherished personal ambitions are at stake. In many circumstances, we think it appropriate and perhaps even obligatory to favor certain people over others who may be just as worthy but with whom our relationships are more distant; and we quite often consider ourselves similarly entitled to prefer investing our resources in projects or institutions to which we happen to be especially devoted rather than in those that we may readily acknowledge to have even somewhat greater inherent merit. The problem with which philosophers have been concerned is not so much to determine whether preferences of this kind are ever truly legitimate as to explain under what conditions and in what way they may be justified.

An example that has been widely discussed in connection with these issues has to do with a man who sees two people on the verge of drowning, who can save only one, and who must decide which of the two he will try to save. One of them is a person whom he does not know; the other is his wife. It is difficult to suppose that the man should make up his mind, in this situation, by tossing a coin. We are not inclined to be disturbed by the thought that it would be somehow improper for him to put aside considerations of impartiality or fairness altogether and simply choose to rescue his wife. But what is his warrant for treating the two endangered people so unequally? What acceptable principle can the man invoke, which would legitimate his decision to let the stranger drown?

One of the most interesting contemporary philosophers, Bernard Williams, suggests that the man already goes wrong if he thinks it is

at all incumbent upon him even to look for a general principle from which he could draw the conclusion that, in situations of this kind, it is permissible to save one's wife. Instead, Williams says, "it might . . . [be] hoped . . . that his motivating thought, fully spelled out, would be [just] the thought that it was his wife." If he adds to this the thought that in situations of this kind it is *permissible* to save one's wife, Williams admonishes that the man is having "one thought too many". In other words, there is something fishy about the whole notion that the man needs to find some general rule from which a reason that justifies his decision could be derived.¹

2. I am very sympathetic to Williams' line of thought about this example. Nevertheless, I do have problems with a couple of the details. For one thing, I cannot help wondering why the man should have even the one thought that it's his wife. Are we supposed to imagine that at first he didn't recognize her? Or are we supposed to imagine that at first he didn't remember that they were married, and had to remind himself of that? It seems to me that the strictly correct number of thoughts for this man is zero. Surely the normal thing is that the man sees what's happening in the water, and he jumps in to save his wife. Without thinking at all. In the circumstances that the example describes, any thought whatever is one thought too many.

In addition, the example is seriously out of focus in a rather more fundamental respect as well. It actually can't work in the way that Williams intends if we stipulate nothing more than that one of the people drowning is the man's wife. After all, suppose that for quite good reasons he detests his wife. Suppose that she detests him for good reasons too, and that she has recently engaged in several quite determined murderous assaults on him. Or suppose that it was nothing but a marriage of convenience anyhow, and that they have never even been in the same room together except during a perfunctory five-minute wedding ceremony thirty years ago. Specifying merely a bare legal relationship between the man and the drowning woman appears really to miss the point.

So let us put aside the matter of their civil status, and stipulate instead that the man in the example *loves* one (and not the other) of the two people who are drowning. In that case, it would indeed be incongruous for him to look for a reason to save that person. If he

¹ Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality," in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 18.

loves her, then he necessarily has the reason he needs: it is simply that she is in trouble, and needs his help. The fact that he loves her, just in itself, entails that he already takes her distress as a more powerful reason for going to her aid than for going to the aid of someone about whom he knows nothing. The need of his beloved for help provides him with that reason without any thought of further considerations or of general rules.

To think of such things would indeed be to have one thought too many, because if the man does not recognize the distress of the woman he loves as a particular reason to save her rather than the stranger, he does not truly love her at all. Loving someone or something essentially *means*, among other things, taking its needs and interests as reasons for acting to serve those interests and needs. Love is itself, in other words, a source of reasons. It creates the reasons by which acts of loving devotion are inspired. As a matter of fact, that's precisely how it is that love makes the world go around.

3. This conception of the nature of love contrasts with another conception, according to which love is basically a response to the perceived value of the beloved. We are moved to love something, on that other account, by an appreciation of the unique or otherwise remarkable value that inheres in it. The appeal of its inherent value is what captivates us. Indeed, the idea is that we begin and that we continue to love it *for the sake of* that value. If we did not find it valuable, we would not love it.

This may be a legitimate conception of love, but the sort of love that I have in mind is something else. As I understand it, love is not essentially grounded in any awareness or appreciation of the inherent value of its object. It is quite possible that a person may be caused to love something despite recognizing that it actually possesses no particular value of its own at all; and it is also possible that a person may come to love something even despite recognizing that in its own nature it is utterly bad. In that case, the love may be a misfortune; and it may be a still further misfortune for someone to become aware that what he loves has no special worth. But such things happen.

It is true that the beloved is invariably valuable to the lover, and that the lover invariably appreciates its value to him. However, the perception of its value is far from being an indispensable *formative* condition of his love. The essential relationship between love and the value of the beloved actually goes in just the opposite direction. We do not love things as a result of recognizing their value and being cap-

tivated by it. What we love acquires value for us just because we love it. The value derives from and depends upon the love.

Consider the love of parents for their children. I can tell you that I do not love my children because I am aware of some value that is inherent in them independently of my love for them. The fact is that I loved them even before I had any especially relevant information about their personal characteristics or their particular merits and virtues. Moreover, to be candid, I do not believe that the value they do happen to possess strictly in their own rights would really provide me with a very compelling basis for considering them to have greater worth than many other possible objects of love that in fact I love much less.

At times, we speak of people or of other things as “unworthy” of our love. It is unclear to me just what this is supposed to mean. Perhaps it means that the cost of loving those things is greater than the benefit of doing so; or perhaps it means that loving them would be somehow demeaning. In any case, if I ask myself whether my children are worthy of my love, my quite emphatic inclination is simply to reject the question as inappropriate and misguided. This is not because it goes without saying that they *are* worthy. It is because my love for them is in no way a response to or based upon any evaluation either of them or of the consequences for me of loving them. If my children should turn out to be ferociously wicked, and if it should also become apparent that loving them threatened my hope of leading a decent life, I might come to feel that it was in some way regrettable that I loved them. But I suspect that after recognizing all this, I would continue to love them anyhow.

It is not because I have noticed their value that I love my children as I do. It is really the other way around. The reason they are so precious to me is simply that I love them so much. It is as a *consequence* of my love for them that they have acquired, in my eyes, a value that otherwise they would quite certainly not possess.

This relationship between love and the value of the beloved holds not only for parental love, but quite generally. Most profoundly, perhaps, it is love that accounts for the indispensably foundational and pervasively radiating value to us of life itself. Why do we so confidently take self-preservation as a good reason for preferring one course of action over another? Staying alive does not have this importance for us because we believe that there is some great value inherent in our lives, or in what we are doing with them — a value that is independent of any attitudes or dispositions of our own. Even when we do think

our lives may be valuable in that way, that is not normally why we are so determined to hang on to them. We take the fact that something contributes to our survival as a reason for doing it just because, presumably as an outcome of natural selection, we are innately constituted to love living.

4. Since there is going to be quite a bit about love in this lecture, I really must try to make clear what I mean when I talk about it. However, I cannot help reminding myself here of a rather unsettling bit of advice that I understand was offered by the quantum physicist, Nils Bohr. He is said to have cautioned that one should never speak more clearly than one can think. Now it is notorious that the category of love is so inchoate that it is exceptionally difficult to think clearly about it. I won't even attempt to provide anything like a comprehensive analysis of the range of diverse and complex phenomena that it includes. Nevertheless, I do want at least to point in the general direction of the sort of thing I have in mind.

The object of love is often a concrete individual: for instance, a person or a country. It may also be something more abstract: for instance, a tradition, or some moral or non-moral ideal. There will frequently be greater emotional color and urgency in love when the beloved is an individual than when it is something like social justice, or scientific truth, or the way a certain cultural group does things. But that is not always the case; and, in any event, it is not among the defining features of love that it must be hot rather than cool.

Roughly speaking, love is a *disinterested* concern for the flourishing of what is loved. That is, the lover desires the good of his beloved; and he desires it for its own sake, rather than for the sake of promoting any other interests. Someone might care about social justice only because it reduces the likelihood of rioting; and someone might care about the well-being of another person just because she cannot be helpful to him unless she is in good shape. For the lover, on the other hand, the interests of his beloved are important in themselves, apart from any bearing they may have on other matters.

Love frequently involves strong feelings of attraction, which are often supported by flattering descriptions of the beloved. However, these are not essential. As in other modes of caring, the heart of the matter is neither affective nor cognitive. It is volitional. Loving something has less to do with what a person thinks, or with how he feels, than with a complex structure of the will that consists in concern for the interests of the beloved. This volitional structure shapes the

lover's conduct with respect to whatever it is that he loves. It also guides him generally in designing and in ordering his purposes and his priorities.

It is important to avoid confusing love with various forms of infatuation, lust, obsession, and dependency. In particular, relationships that are primarily romantic or sexual do not provide very authentic or illuminating paradigms of love as I construe it. Relationships of those kinds typically include a number of distracting elements that do not belong to the essential nature of love, but that are so vivid and so confusing that they make it nearly impossible to sustain a suitably focused analysis. It seems to me that, among relationships between humans, the love of parents for their infants or small children is the mode of caring that comes closest to offering recognizably pure instances of love.

There is a certain variety of concern for others that may also be entirely disinterested, but that differs from love because it is basically impersonal. Someone who is devoted to helping the sick or the poor for their own sakes may be quite indifferent to the particular identities of those whom he seeks to help. What qualifies people to be beneficiaries of his charitable concern is not that he loves them. His generosity is not a response to their specific identities as individuals, but just to the fact that they are members of a relevant class. For someone who is eager to help the sick or the poor, any sick or poor person will do.

With regard to what we love, on the other hand, that sort of indifference to the identity of the object is out of the question. The significance to the lover of what he loves is not that of an instance or an exemplar; its importance to him is not generic, but ineluctably particular. It would make sense for a person who wants to help the sick or the poor to select his beneficiaries randomly from among those who are sick or poor enough to qualify. They are acceptable substitutes for each other, because the person does not really care about any of them as such. The situation of a lover is very different. There can be no equivalent substitutes for his beloved. It might really be all the same to someone moved by charity whether he helps this needy person or that one. It cannot possibly be all the same to the lover whether he is devoting himself disinterestedly to what he actually does love or to something else instead.

Finally, it is a necessary feature of love that it is not under our voluntary control. What we love and what we do not love is not simply a matter of choice; it is not immediately up to us. In these matters,

we are constrained by a volitional necessity that limits the will and that we cannot elude merely by choosing to do so.

5. Although the interests of his beloved are important to the lover in themselves, their importance to him is nonetheless conditional upon his love. It derives from his love, without which they would not have that importance. So far as he is concerned, however, their importance is inherent in them. That is what it means for him to care about them disinterestedly, or for their own sake. He does not consider them merely to have instrumental value as means to the acquisition of other goods. From his perspective, they have the terminal value that is definitive of things that are good intrinsically, and that are therefore suitable to be pursued as final rather than only as intermediate ends.

There is among philosophers a recurrent hope that adopting certain final ends might be shown to be somehow a requirement of reason. But this is a will-o'-the-wisp. Love is not the outcome of any process of reasoning. It is not dictated by the necessities of logic or of rationality. It is shaped by the circumstances of individual experience and character. The desirability of loving one thing or another cannot be decisively evaluated by *a priori* methods. It can be measured only against requirements that are imposed upon us by other things that we love.

The origins of normativity do not lie, then, either in the transient incitements of personal feeling or in the severely anonymous requirements of eternal reason. They lie in the contingent necessities of love. These move us, as feelings do; but the motivations that love engenders, unlike those of feeling, are not adventitious or (to use Kant's term) heteronomous. Like the universal laws of pure reason, they derive from and express something that belongs to our most intimate nature. Unlike those of reason, however, the necessities of love are not impersonal. They are constituted by structures of the will by which the specific identity of the individual is most particularly defined.

Of course, it is always possible to conceive loving things other than those that we do love, and to wonder whether that might not be in some way preferable. This does not mean that, in adopting and pursuing the final ends that love originates, our behavior is irresponsibly arbitrary. Those ends are not fixed by shallow impulse or gratuitous stipulation, nor are they determined by what we merely happen at one time or another to find appealing. The volitional necessity by which we are constrained in what we love may be as rigorously unyielding to personal inclination and choice as the more austere necessities of reason. We cannot help loving what we love. That the direction of our practical

reasoning is governed by final ends that our love defines is not up to us. We cannot fairly be charged with arbitrariness, or with a willful lack of objectivity, since these things are not under our control at all.

6. In the end, our readiness to be satisfied with loving what we do love does not rest upon the reliability of arguments or of evidence. It rests upon *confidence in ourselves*. This is not a matter of being satisfied with the adequacy of our information, or of feeling secure in the exercise of our cognitive faculties. It is confidence of a more intimate variety. The stability of our final ends can be assured only insofar as we have confidence in the controlling tendencies and responses of our own volitional character.

It is these non-voluntary tendencies and responses of our will that move us to love what we love. It is also these configurations of the will that most fully constitute our individual identities. The necessities of a person's will guide and limit his agency. They determine what he is willing to do, what he cannot help doing, and what he cannot bring himself to do. They set the boundaries of his practical life, and these define his shape as an active being. If recognizing what the character of his will constrains him to love makes him anxious or uneasy, the disturbance from which he suffers is a lack of confidence in what he himself is.

Love is often unstable, of course, and vulnerable to circumstance. Although we cannot affect it directly, it may at times be within our power to bring about conditions that would cause us to stop loving what we love. But suppose that our love is so wholehearted, and that we are so satisfied to be in its grip, that we could not bring ourselves to undermine it even if ways in which it could be undermined were available to us. In that case, the issue of whether it is a good idea for us to love as we do is one that we could not take seriously. As a practical matter, it cannot effectively arise.

Self-confidence consists in an integrity that can be undermined by radical discrepancies or disharmonies among the objects that we love. Disorders of that sort rupture the unity of the will and put us at odds with ourselves; they make it impossible for us to plot a steady volitional course. But if there is no conflict among the requirements that our various loves impose upon us, there is no basis within us for opposition to any of them. In that case, any deliberate reluctance on our part to accede to the motivations that love engenders could be aroused only by resorting to some contrived *ad hoc* maneuver. That *would* be arbitrary. On the other hand, it cannot be improperly arbit-

rary for a person to accept the coherent impetus of a well-informed love, for he has no basis for declining to accept it and he cannot help being moved to do so.²

7. What we love is inherently important to us because of our love for it. There is rather different further point to be made here as well: loving itself is inherently important to us. Quite apart from our particular interest in the well-being of the various things that we happen to love, we have a more generic and an even more fundamental interest in loving as such. Besides the fact that *my children* are important to me for their own sakes, there is the additional fact that *loving my children* is important to me for *its* own sake. Whatever burdens and distresses loving them may in the course of time have brought me, my life improved significantly when I began to love them.

Why is loving as such so important to us? Why is a life in which a person loves something, regardless of what it is, better for him — other things being equal — than a life in which there is nothing that he loves? Part of the explanation has to do with the importance to us of having goals that we consider to be worth attaining for their own sakes rather than as being important to us only for the sake of other things.

To the extent that we care about anything, we make various things important to us. This provides us with goals and ambitions, and thus makes it possible for us to perform actions that are not utterly pointless or to no end. It supports activity that is meaningful in the rather minimal sense that it has some purpose. However, activity that is meaningful only in this severely limited sense cannot be fully satisfying or even fully intelligible to us.

Aristotle observes that desire is “empty and vain” unless “there is some end of the things we do which we desire for its own sake.”³ It is not enough for us to understand that attaining a certain end is important to us because it will facilitate our attainment of some further end. We cannot finally make sense of what we are doing if none of our goals is important to us except for the sake of reaching other goals. There must be “some end of the things we do which we desire for its own sake.” Otherwise our activity, regardless of how purposeful it may be, will have no real point. Its results cannot bring us genuine satisfac-

² It strikes me that there is a notable similarity between this defense of accepting the dictates of love and Descartes's defense of accepting those of reason. I studied Descartes's work very carefully at one time, and it looks as though that may have left its mark.

³ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a18-21

tion. The actions we perform will truly seem empty and vain, and we will tend naturally to lose interest in what we do.

Practical reasoning is concerned with the design of effective means for attaining our ends. If it is to have a satisfactory foundation, we must have ends that we regard as something more than means to still other ends. There must be certain things that we pursue and that we value for their own sakes. It is easy enough to understand how something comes to possess instrumental value. That is just a matter of its causal efficacy in contributing to the fulfillment of some goal. But how do things come to have a terminal value that is independent of their usefulness in the pursuit of further goals? And how are our final ends established?

It is love, I believe, that satisfies these requirements of practical reason. In loving we provide ourselves with ends that we care about for themselves rather than only as means. Love is the originating source of terminal value. If we loved nothing, then nothing would be inherently valuable, and there would be nothing that could serve us as a final end. By its very nature, loving entails both that we regard its objects as valuable in themselves and that we adopt those objects as our final ends. Insofar as love is the creator of inherent or terminal value, then, it is the ultimate ground of practical rationality.

8. The relationship between the importance to the lover of loving and the importance to him of the interests of his beloved parallels a curious aspect of the relationship that obtains generally between final goals or ends and the means by which they may be reached. The fact that something is effective as a means to a certain final end is ordinarily supposed to entail only that it possesses an instrumental value, which derives from the value of the end to which it is a means. It is ordinarily also supposed that the value of the final end is unequivocally inherent in it and is in no way derivative from or dependent upon the value of the means that facilitate its attainment. Thus, the relationship of derivation between the value of a means and the value of its final end is generally understood to be asymmetric: instrumental values derive from the values of final ends, but not *vice versa*.

This way of construing the relationship may appear to be a matter of straightforward common sense. Nonetheless, it rests upon a mistake. It assumes that the only value that is necessarily possessed by a final end, just in virtue of the fact that it is a final end, must be identical with the value of the state of affairs that is brought about when that end is attained. In other words, the importance to us of a cer-

tain final end is supposed to be nothing but the importance to us of whatever would be brought about by successfully accomplishing that end. In fact, however, this does not exhaust the importance to us of our final ends. They necessarily have another kind of value as well.

It is not only important to us to *attain* our final ends. It is also important to us simply to *have* final ends. The obvious reason for this is that otherwise there is nothing worthwhile for us to do. If we had no final ends, there would be no point in developing or in employing any instruments or means. If there were nothing at which we aimed for its own sake, no activity on our part could be truly useful. Without final goals, nothing that we do would have any real purpose. Having final ends is an indispensable condition, then, of engaging in activity that is truly useful or that has any real purpose.

Similarly, while useful activity naturally has instrumental value, its value is not only instrumental. It is inherently important to us to engage in activity that is instrumentally valuable. Regardless of what our aims may be, we need to have something genuinely useful to do. It may be *possible* to lead a life in which no activity has a definitive goal. In a readily intelligible sense, however, the life of a person who has no final ends is empty of significant meaning.

9. It is an interesting question why a life in which activity may be locally purposeful but is nonetheless fundamentally aimless must be undesirable. What is necessarily so terrible about a life that is empty of meaning in this sense? The answer is, I believe, that an absence of final ends would drastically impair the reflexive connection to ourselves in which our distinctive character as human beings lies. Insofar as we might nonetheless continue to sustain a certain level of active self-consciousness, we would be dreadfully bored.

The avoidance of boredom is a profound human need. Our aversion to being bored is not a matter simply of distaste for a rather unpleasant state of consciousness. The aversion expresses our sensitivity to a much more basic threat. It is of the essence of boredom that we don't care about what is going on. We therefore experience an attenuation of psychic vitality or liveliness. In its most familiar manifestations, being bored involves a reduction in the sharpness and focus of attention. The general level of mental energy diminishes. Our responsiveness to conscious stimuli flattens out and shrinks. Distinctions are not noticed and not made, so that our conscious field becomes increasingly homogeneous. As boredom progresses, it entails an increasing diminution of significant differentiation within consciousness.

At the limit, when consciousness is totally undifferentiated, this homogenization is tantamount to the cessation of conscious experience altogether. When we are bored, in other words, we tend to fall asleep. Any substantial increase in the extent to which we are bored undermines, then, the very continuation of conscious mental life. That is, it threatens the extinction of the active self. What is expressed by our interest in avoiding boredom is therefore not simply a resistance to discomfort, but a quite primitive urge for psychic survival. I think it is appropriate to construe this as a variant of the elemental instinct for self-preservation. It is related to "self-preservation," however, only in an unfamiliarly literal sense — that is, in the sense of sustaining not the *life* of the organism but the persistence and vitality of *the self*.

I shall not pursue the topic of boredom any further here. Instead, I shall simply take it for granted (as I suppose we all do) that activity we consider to be worthwhile is important to us for its own sake. It turns out, then, that instrumentally valuable activity may possess intrinsic value precisely because it is instrumentally valuable. By the same token, intrinsically valuable final ends turn out to be instrumentally valuable in virtue of the fact that they are essential conditions for realizing the intrinsically valuable goal of having something worthwhile to do. In other words, final ends are instrumentally valuable just because they are terminally valuable, and effective means to the attainment of final ends are intrinsically valuable just because their instrumental value.

The structure of the reciprocal relationships between the importance to us of loving and the importance to us of what we love is similar. Loving is important to us for its own sake, but it has that inherent importance only because it is devoted to the well-being of what we love. The inherent importance of loving depends upon the fact that, just as a means is subordinated to its end, the activity of the lover is subordinated to the interests of his beloved. As for the beloved, the lover cares about it for its own sake; it is inherently important to him. In addition, however, it derives an instrumental value for the lover from the fact that it is a necessary condition of his enjoying the inherently important activity of loving it.

10. This may make it seem difficult to understand how the attitude of a lover towards his beloved can be truly disinterested. The beloved appears plainly to serve him as a means to an end that is intrinsically important to him; it is a condition of his loving something. What he loves enables him to enjoy the benefit of loving and to avoid

the intolerable emptiness of a life in which he has nothing to love. It appears, then, that the lover inevitably makes use of his beloved. How is it possible to avoid the conclusion that love is never really disinterested, but must invariably be self-serving?

Well, suppose a man tells a woman that his love for her is what gives meaning to his life. Loving her, he says, is for him the only thing that makes living worthwhile. The woman is surely unlikely to feel — assuming she actually believes this — that what the man is telling her implies that he cares about her only because it makes him feel better to do so. She will not think that, because he recognizes that his love for her fulfills a deep need of his life, he must therefore be exploiting her to his own advantage and failing to value her for herself.

It is possible, of course, that the man is a phony. It is also possible that although he honestly believes he is telling the truth about himself, the fact is that he doesn't really know what he is talking about. However, let us assume that his professions of love and of its importance to him are not only sincere but that they are also correct. In that case, it would be perverse to characterise him as merely using the woman as a means to satisfying his own interests. The fact that loving her is so important to him is entirely consistent with his being unequivocally wholehearted and selfless in his devotion to her interests. The deep importance to him of loving her hardly entails the paradoxical consequence that he does not genuinely love her at all.

The apparent discrepancy or conflict between pursuing one's own interests and being selflessly devoted to the interests of another disappears, in the case of love, once it is understood that what serves the self-interest of the lover is, precisely, his selflessness. It is only if his love is genuine that it can have the importance for him that loving entails. Insofar as loving is important to him, maintaining the volitional attitudes that constitute loving must be important to him. Since those attitudes consist essentially in caring selflessly about the well-being of a beloved, there is no loving without this. The benefit of loving accrues to a person, therefore, only to the extent that he cares about his beloved for its own sake and not for the sake of any benefits he may derive from it. He cannot fulfill his own interest in loving unless he puts aside his personal needs and ambitions and concerns himself with interests other than his own.

Any impression that this requires an implausibly high-minded self-sacrifice can be dispelled by recalling that, in the very nature of the case, a lover identifies himself with what he loves. In virtue of this identification, the interests of his beloved are necessarily his interests too.

They are not so plainly other than his own at all. Far from being austere detached from the fortunes of what he loves, he is personally affected by how its interests fare. The fact that he cares about the flourishing or well-being of his beloved means that he benefits as its interests are fulfilled and that he is harmed or diminished as its interests meet with frustration or defeat. The lover is invested in his beloved; he profits by its successes and he suffers when it fails. To the extent that he invests himself in or identifies with what he loves, its interests are identical with his own. It is hardly surprising, then, that for the lover self-interest and selflessness coincide.

11. Needless to say, the identification of the lover with his beloved is bound to be less than totally comprehensive. Their interests can never be entirely the same. The lover is certain to care about various things that have nothing much to do with what he loves. However important to him his beloved may be, it is unlikely to be the only thing that is important to him. There is generally a significant possibility, then, that disruptive conflict may arise between the lover's devotion to the well-being of his beloved and his concern for his other interests. Loving is risky. Among other things, lovers are vulnerable to profound distress if what they love does not do well. Therefore, they have to be careful.

For an infinite being, who would be absolutely secure in its omnipotence, even the most indiscriminate loving would be safe. God need not be cautious; there is no need for God, out of prudence or anxiety, to forgo any opportunities for loving. On some accounts, the creative activity of God is mobilised by an entirely inexhaustible and uninhibited love, which moves God to desire a plenum in which every possible object of love is included. What God loves is simply Being, of any and every kind whatever. Since the divine love is necessarily unconditional and indiscriminate, the creation in which it is expressed has no motive or purpose beyond an utterly promiscuous urge to love without boundary or measure. Insofar as we think of God as love, we must suppose that the universe has no purpose or point except simply to be.

Finite creatures like ourselves, of course, cannot afford to be so heedlessly extravagant. Omnipotent agents are free of all passivity. Nothing can happen to them, and so they have nothing to fear. We, on the other hand, incur substantial vulnerabilities when we love. So we need to exercise a defensive selectivity and restraint. It is important that we be careful to whom and to what we give our love. Our

lack of voluntary control over what we love is therefore a particular source of danger to us. The fact that we cannot freely choose what we love and what we do not love, means that we are susceptible to being more or less helplessly driven by the necessities of love into investing ourselves unwisely and into volitional commitments from which we cannot withdraw and through which certain of our vital interests may be severely harmed.

12. Notwithstanding the risks to which these constraints upon our will expose us, it seems to me that they also contribute significantly to the value that loving has for us. It is partly just because loving does bind our wills that we value it as we do. This may seem doubtful, given that we customarily represent ourselves as dedicated to the supreme value of freedom. However, the dissonance between desiring freedom and welcoming a submission to necessity is superficial. Its resolution lies in the apparently paradoxical, but nonetheless authentic, circumstance that the necessities with which love binds the will are themselves liberating.

There is a striking resemblance here between love and reason. Rationality and the capacity to love are, perhaps, the two most highly prized features of human nature. The former makes available the most authoritative guidance in the conduct of intellectual life, while the latter provides us with the most admirably humane motivation when we act. Each imposes upon us a commanding necessity, and yet each brings with it a sense of enhancement rather than of impotence or of restriction. When we accede to the irresistible requirements of logic or of love, the feeling with which we do so is not one of dispirited confinement or passivity. On the contrary, we characteristically experience in both cases — whether we are following reason or following our hearts — an expansion of ourselves.

What happens, I believe, is that the encounter with necessity eliminates uncertainty and relaxes the inhibitions and hesitations of self-doubt. When reason demonstrates what *must* be the case, that puts an end to any hesitation concerning what to believe. Bertrand Russell refers to “the restfulness of mathematical certainty.” It is restful because it relieves us from contending with disparate tendencies of belief and from struggling to make up our minds. As long as we are uncertain, we hold ourselves back. Discovering how things must necessarily be enables us to give up the restraint we impose upon ourselves when we do not know what to think. Then nothing stands in the way of steady and untroubled conviction, and we are freed to be-

lieve unimpeded by inhibition.

Similarly, the necessity with which love binds the will puts an end to our inability to settle definitively upon what to care about. In being captivated by our beloved, we are liberated from the impediment to choice and action that consists either in having no final ends or in being drawn inconclusively both in one direction and in another. The indifference and the wavering ambivalence that impair our capacity to choose and to act decisively are overcome. The fact that we cannot help being guided by the interests of what we love means that we no longer flounder aimlessly or hold ourselves back from wholehearted dedication to a compelling practical course.

The dictates of logic or the requirements of the beloved supersede any contrary preferences or impulses of our own. Once the grip of those necessities has been imposed, it is no longer up to us to decide what to care about or what to think. We have no choice in the matter. They preempt the guidance of our cognitive or volitional activity, and make it impossible for us to control, in any way we may happen to like, the formation of our beliefs or of our will. It may seem, then, that the way in which the necessities of reason and of love liberate us is by freeing us from ourselves.

That *is*, in a sense, what they do. The idea, of course, is nothing new. The suggestion that a person may be liberated through submitting to constraints that are beyond his immediate voluntary control is among the most ancient and persistent themes of our moral and religious traditions. "In His will," Dante wrote, "is our peace."⁴ The restfulness that Russell reports having found through discovering what reason required of him evidently corresponds, at least up to a point, to the escape from inner disturbance that others profess having discovered through accepting as their own the inexorable will of God.

⁴ *Paradiso*, iii.85.

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