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Mortal Longings

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Christianity tends to contextualize love by appeal to some manner of immortal longing. This is a plausible approach for various familiar kinds of love. Yet there are important loves that do not fit at all well with the idea. They will be difficult to understand unless we recognize their acceptance of mortality, and the longing for something resolutely finite and transitory that they involve. This chapter attends to loves of this sort, with the attention in question shaped by personal reflection and philosophical sensibilities which are recognizably Wittgensteinian and concerned with matters which run deep within human lives.

Keywords: love, mortality, longing, physicality, Murdoch, Weil.

I. Ethics in the Wittgensteinian Tradition

One of the characteristic features of ethics in a broadly Wittgensteinian tradition is a concern with our mortality, although this is more evident in works which are influenced by Wittgenstein than in his own fragmentary texts. It is particularly clear in texts which look towards synergies between Wittgenstein and Simone Weil. It is there in Stanley Cavell (Cavell 1979) Rush Rhees (Rhees 1999); it is there in Raimond Gaita's deliberations about goodness and our common humanity (Gaita 2004); it is there again in Iris Murdoch, in both the directly philosophical texts and the novels (Milligan 2007); and it is there in David Cockburn as well, together with a sense of the importance of time and our temporality (2010: 2017). Mortality, and temporality too, are themes which help to bridge differences between Wittgensteinian-influenced work on ethics and traditions other than analytic philosophy. The same themes are ready to hand in Heidegger, and they shape texts from the Kyoto school, and the sources that inspired them, e.g., Dōgen's *Uji*/'Being-Time.'

Connections between Wittgenstein and these kindred traditions have been well noted, by George Wrisley (2012) and Rein Raud (2021) among others. When Wittgensteinians who know their Dōgen meet, it can be a little like a family reunion, without the friction and the wrong sort of drunkenness.

A multiplicity of things are shared across these traditions: a concern for lineage; a series of themes bound up with time and mortality; and a family resemblance shaped by philosophical sensibility, by an attitude towards what it is that good philosophy can do. Another way of making the point would be to saying that these are traditions in which depth is viewed as more important than formalism. A vaguely confessional text (like Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*) may disclose more than one mimicking a mathematical proof. However, what is shown is liable to be deep in a particular way. Not in a way that involves something hidden, but through a concern for matters that are difficult to articulate, yet they are situated at the heart of what we are and how we live our lives. On this approach, articulation itself becomes a major task, one that stands up on its own, rather than simply operating as a prelude to argument (Taylor 1992: 5-8). A concern for depth, and the difficulty of articulating it, spreads across these kindred traditions, but with a sense that what is to be said concerns something out in the open, or not concealed until we begin to theorize about it. At which point a great deal of concealment or loss (Forsburg 2013) becomes possible. If we are good Wittgensteinians, or even good students of Dōgen, there will be a sense in which we accept that none of the things that really matter to being human are hidden (Dōgen 1995; Wittgenstein *PI* 435), but for various reasons it remains difficult to speak about them in non-evasive ways. Mortality and love are like this. Their importance sits out in the open.

The upshot of such sensibilities, and the concern with articulation of what is deep, is that those who write in these traditions tend to avoid an over-valorization of fearless but utterly unrealistic thinking (Gaita: page number). Familiar examples from our own times include the argument that the universe is probably a simulation; that it is wrong to bring other humans into being; that all value bearers are equal, all sentients are value bearers, and so the killing of annoying relatives is morally equivalent to the killing of wasps. These are arguments of a sort that we do not present, even in the name of courageously going against the stream. Rather, our focus tends to drift elsewhere. In line with the search for synergies with Weil, the kinds of things written about in the kindred traditions include mortality and love. This latter is a perceived area of strength among Wittgensteinian influenced authors, and among others too. Others who are closer to the analytic tradition but who draw upon Weil, Iris Murdoch or both. Examples include David Velleman (1999) and Troy Jollimore (2011). My own work in the area of love (Milligan 2011) is similarly marked by the influence of Murdoch and Wittgenstein.

Weil is also more comfortable with Christianity and seems to have a far better feel for it than I could claim. It is a religion that I find both deep and perplexing, particularly on matters concerning love and, again, our mortality. Christianity tends to contextualize love by appeal to some manner of immortal longing, which does sounds correct, for various familiar sorts of love. I am not sure that I could even begin to understand the many and deep insights into love that are to be found in Saint Teresa of Avila or in St John of the Cross without acceptance that such a longing is both real and familiar. And, again, the latter of these authors is an important reference point for Weil and Murdoch. Often, we all seem to find something important in the same place. Yet there are important loves which do not fit at all well with the immortal longings idea. Indeed, it may be difficult to even begin to

understand certain kinds of love without recognizing their acceptance of mortality, and the longing for something resolutely mortal, finite and transitory that they involve. What follows below will be an exercise in attending to love of this sort, with the attention in question shaped by philosophical sensibilities which are recognizably Wittgensteinian-influenced.

II. Ways of Thinking about Love

It is tempting to say that love is one kind of thing or one kind of relationship. But this introduces the risk of an essentialism about love, a failure to recognize that use the concept in different ways, to perform multiple tasks. We speak about love in the context of intimate concern for others; in political contexts, as patriotism (love of one's country); in situations which involve erotic desire. I do not wish to suggest that there are no continuities or uniformities across the situations in question. Indeed, I suspect that there are many features of love which are common across them, and across many other contexts: belief in the uniqueness of the love object; the presence of a history of care; a certain patterning of desires (such that many other desires come to be conditional upon one's love); and various dispositions concerning feelings and emotional responses more generally. And I am far from denying the insightfulness of accounts of love which do attempt to distil it down to some sort of inner core, a song that remains the same while the singers and orchestration may vary. However, I do want to draw out some problems with a particular kind of essentialism about love, one that connects love *too closely* to religious notions of transcendence. But in doing so, I am challenging a way of connecting these things, rather than their standing as important.

There many ways of thinking about love in terms of transcendence, in terms of *reaching beyond*. Exactly what it is that we reach beyond is, of course, another matter. On

and approach which is simultaneously demanding and undemanding, love helps us to transcend the ego. Or it aspires to do so. It reaches out beyond egocentricity or selfishness. As a qualification, these two are not always the same. Preoccupation with self is not the same as greed. It may instead be sacrificial but still self-preoccupied. For convenience, we may also set aside the idea of a proper, appropriate, self-love as an inconvenience to be dealt with on some other occasion. The idea that love undermines the ego does not obviously entail the idea that all forms of self-love are thereby ruled out. This transcendence of the ego approach is *undemanding* in the sense that it does not require an appeal to any special ontology, or to views about the real existence of Good or a God. Love does not need to join us together in spiritual union with perfection, with a perfect being, or with an ideal Good. It requires only that we are as what we are: care-worthy but flawed beings. At the same time, it is *demanding* precisely because we are what we are: our egocentricity turns out to be intractable. Even our best attempts to rein it in end with what Iris Murdoch has called a fairly honorable defeat (Murdoch 1970). We can hold egocentricity in check, up to a point, but we can never entirely go beyond it. Love is part of a struggle against a relentless ego which never quite lets go because it too is partly constitutive of what we are.

Talk about love and transcendence is also often bound up with a second and different sort of approach: love involves (in the notorious phrase from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*) an 'immortal longing' of the sort alluded to in the opening comments.. A desire to overcome our limitations, which may ultimately be understood as our finitude, mortality, even our humanity, and instead to connect with God or with some idealized notion of moral goodness. Not just moral goodness, but *an idealized notion of it* as perfected. Some or all of our many ways of loving are then best understood as spiritual strivings. In Saint Augustine's terms, 'our heart is restless until it rests in you' (Augustine

2008 :3), or in the relevant idealized equivalent. And, of course, such spiritual strivings can be mistaken for something else. Cases of mistaken identity may even be the norm, especially in a world where open appeals to spiritual strivings are awkwardly situated within public discourse. Kierkegaard in *Works of Love* (1847) and Simone Weil, in *Waiting for God* (1943), both argued for this mistaken identity theory. Both claimed that love for others, who are clearly *very* flawed, is really a confused and indirect way of loving God, who is without flaw. Alternatively, and perhaps more in line with Kierkegaard than Weil, we might think of love as a matter of seeing the hand of God in others. And this is what we are drawn towards when we are drawn towards them. This is a story about love and transcendence which is rarely if ever separate from talk about love and the transcendence of the ego. Again, the ego must be resisted or overcome, but not just in order to connect up with others who are equally mortal and flawed or, in the terms of classical tragedy, creatures of a day, like ourselves. Rather, the overcoming of the ego clears a pathway to God or to a religion void. God may or may not sit somewhere on the other side.

This second and more Augustinian tradition has a certain kind of intuitive appeal. If anything has spiritual significance then surely love does so. And perhaps we need not worry too much about presupposed ontologies (about actual divine beings or real, separate, perfect Good). We may readily psychologize what is going on, and regard these objects of love as regulative ideas of reason, or as reality principles, or as something else that makes other aspects of life come out better than they otherwise would. Love can then be variously understood as part of a spiritual pilgrimage towards moral perfection or as a more covert form of egocentricity rather than a genuine overcoming of the latter. There is a more elevated sort of love, and a bargain basement love. The options for interpretation are multiple, some more optimistic, some more pessimistic. And so too are the concerns. If love

is thought of in terms of an immortal longing, a *reaching out* towards an incorruptible ideal, where then do we situate the real and far from ideal people that love more obviously seems to be about? If love is truly an immortal longing, where do all the mortals go?

A quick and easy solution, the classic Platonic one that we find especially in the *Phaedrus*, is that others are companions in erotic ascent. They have their own upward pilgrimage to take care of, but for various reasons progress requires us to *team-up*. A little like partners in the Wild West, with each partner in search of something a little different and beyond the other, something that eludes both as individuals or in combination. Others are not then *simply* a pathway to something more important. They are not loved only because they may hold our hand in the dark, or because of some particular property that they bear. That particular view of Platonic love, in which the other is a dispensable property carrier looks suspiciously like a convenient and clever story told to establish Christian precedence. The classic version of it, in Gregory Vlastos (1981), looks a little like this. But on a more plausible account of Platonic love, genuine care and love for the discrete particular other is *inextricably* bound into the longing for something else.

Perhaps it is, again, a matter of philosophical temperament, but I find two things especially attractive about the Platonic picture. The first is that the care is real, but it does not place an impossible burden upon the other. We may like to say that others complete us, that they make us whole, or that love conquers all, but we know well enough that it does none of these things. Human lives are incomplete. The scars of loss, failure and rejection are present everywhere. They do not go away, and nobody else can remove them. We may say this while acknowledging that *love conquers enough*. That it makes happiness possible. It makes our lives better, even wonderful, and *being-loved* is also a basic human need. Being loved is a key source of our sense of self-worth and matters more than the recognition of

autonomous rational agency. Reminding someone of the latter is unlikely to stop them from throwing themselves off of tall, and sometimes not-so-tall, buildings. It might do so, but it seems like a poor strategy. Being loved and loving others has saved many of us. But to expect love for, or by, another person to make everything better, and to magically heal what cannot be healed, or to round off the many voids of a human life, is unreasonably demanding. Augustine tells us this much about our love for one another, in the message of the biographical part of the *Confessions*, and on this occasion he happens to be right, but not necessarily in the way that he wants, in a way that must drive us to seek something more. Imagining that the person we love will make us whole will tend to mutate over time into a more workable conception of love, one which takes pleasure in simple things and the sheer goodness of being together, or else it will end in disappointment. Ultimately, human life and defeat go hand in hand, and our love for one another can do nothing to stop this from happening. It cannot reshape the wood that we are made from, even if it changes the way in which we see the defeats. We need not overdramatize matters. Most of our defeats are, after all, trivial. Some make our lives better. Only a few are important in deep ways. (Again, the idea of depth seems irresistible in discussions of love.)

There is a second feature of the Platonic imagery that strikes me as especially attractive. The idea of a partnership in longing can convey a sense of the mixed nature of love. This is, admittedly, a way of putting matters which would not have appealed to Plato. He was something of a puritan about 'the mixed' and 'the unmixed' and spent a good deal of time in his *Philebus* attacking mixture in favour of purity. Although, as ever with Plato, it is difficult to understand what to make of this, given the mixed nature of the text itself. Is he drawing out the gap between *what we want* and *how things are*? It is always difficult to tell.

Even so, the mixed nature of love is something that he seems sensitive to, and is part of its emotional character. Love is an emotion, or at least it involves emotion, or it has emotion-like features. I will remain officially neutral about which of these is the best description. Like emotions such as anger, jealousy, shame, contempt and grief, it is rarely if ever the case that love is about just one thing. The 'intentionality' of emotion is often (I am tempted to say *ordinarily*) mixed. Person x gets angry with person y after having been mistreated at the office by persons a_1, \dots, a_n . Are they really angry with person y ? Sometimes yes. But are they exclusively angry with person y ? Rarely, if ever. And love often seems to be like this too. Care for a particular other does not disentangle easily from care for other things and for other beings. Plato understood this. Freud too understood this: love draws from an entire history and is not just a response to what, and who, is immediately present. What and who we have cared for in the past shapes our patterns of care. We see this in the entanglement of loving others with the patterns of care shown in bereavement, when our ability to enjoy various simple things is for a time lost because a loved one is now gone. Yet what does our loved one, lost to time and being, have to do with the coffee that no longer tastes as good, the television program that no longer keep us amused, or the work which we are no longer motivated to complete? A pattern of care spreads through an entire life, and love for a particular person may be a crucial part of this larger pattern, with connections reaching out in different directions.

Those who say that they love God by loving others, and not just *through* the latter as a means, capture something of this point. Janet Soskice provides a nice example. The hard-pressed mother of a newborn infant, a woman who usually attends religious services, has visits from three priests. The first stresses the importance of religious devotion and suggests (in the nicest way possible, which is not altogether nice) that the woman should get up an

hour earlier in the morning for 'quiet prayer.' The second asks if her husband might get home earlier from work so that she could go to mass. The third tells her that care for her child *is* religious devotion. It *is* love of the sort that the Christian faith is all about. She is not only doing all she can. She is doing all that she needs to do at this point in time (Soskice 2008, 13-14). No doubt, this requires qualification. There is some very suspect stereotyping of gender roles. But after a little pruning, it is the more attractive picture. The love for the child is also, and clearly, not just a convenient pathway to a love of God. Not just a means. The child is genuinely loved, as Plato's companion in longing is loved. But the love in both cases is not separable from a larger pattern of care and spiritual longing which exceeds the particular individual who is thought of as the more immediate object or recipient of love.

This is not, of course, an approach that is restricted to the Christian tradition. Sufis have the tale of the Sufi master who is approached by a young would-be pupil. The master asks 'Have you ever been in love? Seriously, really?' And here he is not looking for signs of infatuation with the writings of Rumi. Rather, he means 'have you ever been in love with a person, with all of its physical longings and its initial sense of being ripped out of everydayness?' The would-be pupil, who admits that they have not, believing perhaps that this lack of experience may even be an advantage, is told to go away until they have the relevant experience. Without the self-transcendence, or ego-transcendence involved in loving another human, talk about the love of God will make little sense. Or worse, it will be a dangerous imitation of the real thing. Love for God, on such views, *requires* both mediation through love for persons and accompaniment by love for persons, and these two mix together in ways that do not disentangle.

A God who can be loved at all only if loved also in this way, through and with our love for one another, may be an attractive option for those who are theistically minded.

Although, I confess that I have little aptitude for dealing with matters of the greatest depth in such terms. I can, perhaps, see the depth when others speak about these things, but cannot reproduce it. The imagery of personalized deities leaves me dazed and confused. At times, I do not know quite what is meant. Yet matters of ontology may be beside the point here. Love might still be best understood as an immortal longing even if there are no special transcendent beings who answer to the longing in question. The fact that love does have mixed intentionality may even, with minimal additional claims, suggest that love does try to *reach beyond* in just this way. It is not only about the immediate object. I can accept that there may be some level at which my own love intimate personal love is like this. My love for Suzanne, who unwisely married me, has taught me most about what it is to love. And it may involve an immortal longing of sorts, although perhaps only in an attenuated way which is also compromised by routine egocentricity and does not entirely constitute a break from it. I even have a fondness for picturing idealized future versions of myself, but little inclination to work towards becoming such a person. In these respects, the love in question is normal and conquers enough, without demanding that the other make it conquer all, and satisfy longing that we have as a result of personal history and human history, but which bear little relation to anything that may be delivered within our kind of world.

III. A Sense of Physicality and Mortality

As a qualification, it does not strike me that this reaching beyond, this immortal longing, is the most important part of what is going on when we love another person. It may be in some cases, but not in others. In some respects, it does not speak well to my own experience of love. And here, again, philosophical sensibilities play a role in what I have to say. I might choose to make something hidden, to disguise the fact that writing about love is

often autobiographical, even when it is done by philosophers. But this seems unnecessary. Especially if depth is to be valued over formalism, in the way described at the outset, and in the way that shapes Wittgensteinian interests in Weil and Murdoch. (Neither of whom tend towards geometric precision.) And so I will simply try to say what it is that seems most important, and then we may move matters along. Although, at this point, my position does begin to look more like an argument than simply an exercise in attending.

I find it difficult to situating two things within any strong emphasis upon immortal longing. *Firstly*, a sense of love's physicality. A sense of where, in evolutionary terms, love comes from. A sense of our *creaturely* being. Put in terms familiar from the philosophy of emotion, it is all very well to acknowledge that emotions and similar states have a cognitive component, but this does not mean that we should model them upon their most cognitively demanding instances so that they are available only to people like us. We might instead model emotions upon their simplest instances. And if love is not so cognitively demanding then it makes sense to speak of the continuity between my love for Suzanne, or rather the love that we have for one another, and love among other non-human creatures who cannot easily be ascribed spiritual aspirations and immortal longings. The longings of such creatures are all too evidently mortal. Another way of putting the point is to say that too elevated a conception of love may be at risk of losing touch with the world in which love occurs and of which it is a part. Whatever else love does, it relates in some way to our being in the world.

This is not a point in favor of militant atheism, but a familiar spiritual concern. It strikes me that Plato was aware of the danger in the *Symposium*, one of his three great dialogues on love, although it takes a particular kind of reading of the text for this to make sense. Picture the scene. A dinner party where speeches on the nature of love are being delivered. When talk around the table takes on an artificially elevated tone there is a loud

banging at the door. Alcibiades, in his prime and drunk as a lord, bursts in and tells some home truths about the bodily longings and desires which are integral to the loves that we all know so well. They are not regular accompaniments of such loves, but built-in features. Alcibiades is not just in the text for reasons of historical accuracy, or in order to present a mistaken account of love as a foil to Socrates' brilliant insights. Rather, he is there as a reminder of love's physicality, as a way of puncturing ethereal constructs. Ignoring this requires us to miss a good deal, not least of which is the *Symposium's* relation to texts in which the body and norms of spirituality vie with one another in mutually constraining ways. Of course, such a puncturing move may be made while still appealing to a distinction between the wrong way of elevating love and the right way of doing so, and that is part of what Plato is trying to do. But physicality will have its due. Part of a story about love may include the point that we love as we do because we have the bodies that we have, and because of the animals that we are (Derrida 2006). If we are at all serious about this idea, then it will simply not do to set aside the numerous instances of non-human love that go on all around us, unhidden yet at risk of being concealed. Although it runs against various traditions, this is not a fearless thought, but rather an obvious one.

There are, of course, numerous spiritualized escape routes which will allow us to avoid the consequences that this line of thought has for any attempt to build a longing for transcendence into all love. We may, for example, appeal to a Buddhist rebirth story which will allow animal love to be part of a longer progression towards a future human love, and then something even better. This is an option that carries heavy ontological demands: multiple and supernatural claims about the ultimate nature of reality. Or we may draw inspiration from the thoughtful mysticism of St. Francis and St. Anthony of Padua and include other creatures within the creation that *in its entirety* longs to return to God. A

mysticism that may be hard to square with phenomenology, with our routine experience of what other animals are. Or we may simply go for a strong separation between ourselves and the non-human and insist that we love but they do not, at least not in the proper or philosophically interesting sense of 'love.' This is the option that plays well to our vanity and often tends to be favored. The thought that animals might genuinely love may even be received with incredulity, guilt and fear. It draws upon a view of other creatures that is by no means restricted to religious audiences concerned with transcendence, a view which occurs in a good deal of contemporary philosophical writing on love, particularly within the analytic tradition. It is there in Harry Frankfurt's *Reasons of Love* (2004), and in the related analytic literature (Velleman 1999; Kolodny 2003; Helm 2010). But it is cast in particularly instructive terms away from the analytic tradition of philosophy by Jean-Luc Marion, for whom we alone are the creature who loves 'Man loves - which is what distinguishes him from all other finite beings, if not the angels' (Marion 2007: 7).

If we make this move then love as *in all important cases* an immortal longing becomes far less problematic. Other creatures do not have such longing for the same reason that they cannot love. This too is a pathway towards an understanding of love that I find hard to square with familiar sorts of experience. It seems manifestly clear that other creatures are capable of grief and most of us will have witnessed it. But love is a precondition of grief. Indeed, we cannot make sense of grief without it. We can *only* grieve over the loss of what is loved (Milligan 2014). And so, where Marion sees a strict separation, I see a shared vulnerability to loss, a shared vulnerability that is an important commonality, a joining point between *us* and *them* in spite of the many things that separate us. And some of the things that separate us are ways in which *we* and *they* love. Not *whether* we love, but *how we do so*. Yet the diversity of love should not lead us to deny its genuineness, even if

spiritual longing also seems to be absent. And, contrary to Saints Francis and Anthony, genuinely absent. Really not there.

Secondly, while some loves *do* involve an immortal longing, regarding all love in this light or primarily in this light risks losing a sense of the ways in which love can be *all about* finitude and about the acceptance of incompleteness. The ways in which it can be bound up with a thankful recognition of those imperfections that go with another's humanity, with their standing as another being who hopes and dreams and suffers in the way that we ourselves do, without the need to point toward anything at all beyond their mortal life in order to see their worth. This understanding that love can be, and often is, *a mortal longing* also captures the sense that love's intentionality is mixed. But it does so in a different way from talk about transcendence, and loving God or the Good, or perfection by loving someone else, and in a way which is inseparable from the latter. It does so in a way which concerns being at home in the world, rather than by appeal to an apparatus of otherworldly aspiration.

IV. Firewood becomes Ash

My thought here, about the sense of mortal longing which is involved in a great deal of love between humans, runs against a familiar line of thought that stretches from Aeschylus and Plato to Teresa of Avila and beyond. A line of thought in which the transitory is devalued simply by being transitory. On a certain kind of metaphysical reading of Plato and Augustine, it may even be a mistake to speak about *being* transitory, for being is what the transitory lacks in its fullest sense. A metaphysical preference may drive us to the view that love of the deepest sort ought to attach itself above all to that which lasts, and perhaps *only* to that which lasts. This tends towards otherworldliness, but not necessarily towards an ethical

carelessness about the finite, limited and the mortal. Aeschylus in his *Prometheus Bound* (if it is his text and not merely attributed to him), has the sympathetic and rebellious Prometheus give humanity the gift of forgetfulness about mortality, so that the gift of fire may be seem worth using, rather than merely a way to delay the inevitable. The gift presupposes care for creatures of a day in the face of divine disappointment with the way that we have turned out, and the resolution of Zeus that it might be better to wipe us out and begin again. In a sense the gift simply *is* care for humanity. And it is only humanity who have the truth concealed. Prometheus does not forget what is openly there to be seen, that we are marked for death, and quickly too. Yet the gift must be given if we are to become forgetful of our mortality. An awareness of mortality is the default condition, mortality is continuously shown. Yet care continues.

Similarly, the god of Saint Teresa will not get jealous if we love our neighbour, even if he may be offended if we love our neighbour in the wrong way. Simone Weil is, at least temperamentally, similar. Love *of the deepest sort* attaches necessarily to that which is infinitely distant. It can attach only to such an object because all other love is inevitably and naturally tainted by the ego, by prospects of reward. But she too wants us to care for one another. And who would ever want something else? Thoughts of this sort, even with qualified dualist undertones and otherworldliness, are intended to lead us towards an openness to others, and to love for others rather than disdain for worldly being.

My worry about such texts is not that they lack insight or a genuinely loving attitude towards mere mortals. Rather, my worry is that such discourses shape the way in which others are to be loved, but do so in a manner that I cannot share. And I cannot share it because the conception of love that is in play is inseparable from a sense of the primacy of the immortal and the non-transitory. It is not simply that I disagree intellectually with their

preferred imagery of a transcendent deity or perfect Good, although that too remains a significant point of disagreement. Rather, I do not feel this way about love. I do not have the sense of the primacy that they affirm. They draw attention away from a particular kind of familiar, unhidden, experience of being together in the world. And love, if it is about anything, is about that.

In part, this is again a matter of philosophical sensibilities. To love the finite *always* in the light of something eternal strikes me as problematic partly because eternity provides too many hiding places for people such as myself. Others may manage the trick, but a flight towards the infinitely distant in order to escape the relentless ego may simply show someone like myself how relentless the ego really is. Imagine a man who has been warned about his demise, and then sees Death in the marketplace. He promptly leaves town, taking the road to Larissa. A good, safe distance away. A bystander and Death look on as the man races to be elsewhere. The bystander asks Death 'Who was that?' only to be told 'Someone I have an appointment with, later today, in Larissa.' Flight from a human flaw, or an embodied egocentricity, may lead us towards the very thing that we fear. More generously: perhaps others may manage to love primarily in the light of an immortal longing, without the love being taken over by dangerous forms of false consolation, but I do not feel that I could ever do so. And I do not have any sense that there is deeply hidden motivation. That the transcendent is with me, even if I am not with it. Rather, I have a sense that in the end we lose everything. And a sense of this is integral to my experience of being with another, my sense that I must love Suzanne without any hope that we will be joined spiritually for all time, except in the limited but deeply valued sense that it will always remain true that we have loved one another. That this will remain true when we are no longer around.

This is also not to be confused with the quite different idea that such love is unconditional, that it can understand all and forgive all, or that it can bear all things. I suspect that no love is ever truly like that. The humans who are capable of bearing all things, in the name of love are not the humans we meet in the streets but in uplifting narratives. This is another way of understanding limits and finitude, my own limits and those of humans in general. There is always something that may cause love to break, even during its brief experienced span. George Orwell's lovers in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) turn upon one another when faced with something that they find utterly unbearable. And this is not an image of humans as failures, or not only as failures or as the broken creatures who might reasonably be wiped out by Zeus to make way for another and better creation. Humans can always be broken, and our love is part of what breaks. We are like that, but it need not be seen as devaluing us or devaluing our love. Rather, it makes sense to think of our love more precious because it is vulnerable.

There may, of course, be equally good reasons why we might think that an attitude towards eternity is sometimes liable to involve a far better and more realistic attitude to the world than an insistence upon our finitude. Even finitude has its consolations and hiding places, evident in ways of thinking in which all failings are eventually and gratefully lost in time. It may also be worthwhile to consider these matters in a more historical way. Realism and attention to human finitude have not always paired well together. I can also readily accept that ethical worries about the potentially corrupting influence of notions of eternity (worries that figure strongly in Simone Weil's determination to place God at an infinite distance and not a reachable transcendent distance) draw as much upon their own aesthetic sensibilities as they do upon anything like a rigorous argument that might apply universally, to you, me, and everyone we know. But what speaks to me is nonetheless an emphasis

upon the ultimate transitoriness of things, Dōgen's thought that 'Firewood becomes ash, and does not become firewood again.' And with it the sense that whatever we wish to put right, whatsoever we wish to do, had better be put right and done sooner rather than later. 'Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it is ash, you do not return to birth after death' (Dōgen 2013: 30). At a certain point, there will be no later.

But it is above all my sense of *the reasons that we have for love*, and a sense of what we love others *as*, that drives my emphasis upon mortality and transitoriness, and with it the acceptance of each other's imperfections. Traits so distant from any ideal of what we might become if given an indefinite amount of time. Acceptance also looks like the wrong term, implying that we tolerate rather than embrace at least some of the imperfections in question. Some we accept, and some we embrace. Our reasons for love are bound up with at least some of these things, and this is a thought which is placed far more awkwardly in attempts to build transcendent longings into love. There is always in Saint Teresa and Saint Augustine an intrusion of the eternal into our reasons for loving particular others, even though particular others are loved in a completely genuine way. Their story about why they love is always going to look different from my own story about why I do so. Indeed, it strikes me that the reasons that Suzanne and I have for loving one another relate very much to matters which are contingent and temporal through and through, although I can imagine that Suzanne's reasons might differ from my own, and that they might have more to do with a sense of the transcendent, a sense that plays at best a minor role in my own feelings about the matter.

How then do I love Suzanne? I love her as the analytic literature on love suggests I should love her, as someone who is unique and irreplaceable. That is to say, I love her *rather than* various others, and would not trade-up for an improved model. Indeed, it is only in an

attenuated sense that I can make any sense of the notion of an improved model. I have no particular desire for her to change, beyond a desire that she becomes happier, and beyond the usual desires that each of us has that the other might stop doing something or other. Or start doing it. And these things have little to do with our sense of evolving, and the things that make us who we are rather than someone else. It is a contrastive move, concerning *why we love one person rather than another*, that gives the idea of reasons for love its greatest force. Of course, we are ordinarily lost when we try to spell out what this means in closer detail. If asked 'Why do you love Mary instead of Peter' we might appeal to some instantly present trait or feature. To use David Velleman's jazz era example: the way they wear their hat, the way they sip their tea (Velleman 1999: 371). But this is, as Velleman points out, merely a convenient placeholder for a different sort of explanation. What is unique about each one of us is not any physiological feature that might (in principle) be reproduced using special futuristic 3D printing biotechnologies.

But unlike Velleman, who wishes to put a Kantian twist upon matters, I also do not think that it then makes sense to fall back upon an appeal to our sheer personhood in order to provide the reasons for love, just as it provides reasons for certain kinds of respect. There are, after all, lots of other people, each of whom is just as much a person as any other and I do not love them all. This is a difficulty that may be answered, after a fashion, by appeal to love's erotic economy. But it is not a convincing move. It misses out something important, i.e. the insight that what is unique about each of us, what helps to explain our reasons for loving this person rather than that one, is bound up with our past. Someone may have my hairstyle or physical appearance, but no-one can have my personal history. And this is not even a matter of memories which might also be duplicated and which, in any case, fade. Most of them are already lost. We forget more about the past than we remember. Rather, it

concerns the sheer fact of *having* one past rather than another. Similarly, it is Suzanne's past rather than the way that she wears her hat and sips her tea that make her unique beyond any kind of duplication, beyond any concerns that she could be traded for a better, more elegant hat wearer or a more voluptuous sipper of peppermint tea.

Why then do I love Suzanne rather than Monica, Erica, Rita or Tina? The reasons that I can offer will always be at most contributory reasons rather than rationally compelling ones, and for the most part they concern matters that are contingent. Things there to be seen, out in the open. Those who imagine that reasons for love must instead *be* rationally compelling, and perhaps associated with universal traits are, I suspect, looking for something that probably is not there. Perhaps I would be figurative mad if I did not love Suzanne, given our shared past, but I would not actually be irrational. And so my reasons for love may be thought of as part of an incomplete story. Suzanne is the person that I met at the end of my teens, the one who sat out with me under the stars. She is the person who has seen me at my weakest and worst, at my most unreasonable, but who has not turned away. She is the person who has watched me as I have argued repeatedly with the television and have not always come off best from the exchange. She is the person that I have cared for in her own moments of weakness. We have, in a sense, propped one another up, but without the sturdiness of trees. She is the person whose loss I have come to fear the most, yet I know that it must one day come. Or, rather, barring joint accidents, one of us will lose the other and our shared life together will come to an end without a satisfying sequel or repeat performance. There will be grief, a hopeless and unsatisfiable longing for togetherness never to end. And this is, as noted already, part of the price we pay for love.

Thoughts which reach beyond mortality are still present in such thinking. Not only because of the fear of death, which is tolerable, but because of the fear of an ending of love

and its reciprocation, or the sharing of love that death will bring. While I have never figured out what the souls in Paradise are supposed to do with endless aeons of time, I can readily understand a desire that love itself might go on. Love, in this sense, wishes for more. Yet, at some point, there will be nothing left to give, no time left in which it might be given and no one there to give it to. Perhaps this places us, or those of us for whom love is at all like this, in territory where mortal and immortal longings vie with one another, without ever eradicating the other. Immortal longings would then remain part of the story, but not its most important part. Not the part that always does the main work. In such cases, their role within our lives might be better understood if they are not disentangled from the more mortal of our longings, or given an imagined *primacy* over the latter. In which case, any attempt to present love's mortal longing as confused, second-rate or indirect versions of *the real and deep thing* would do a disservice to longings of both kinds. Any subordination of our mortal longings risks misrepresentation of those longings which are of some other sort, the sort that we read about in Augustine, Simone Weil, and more transcendent approaches.

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