



King's Research Portal

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Milligan, T. (2021). Abandonment and the Egalitarianism of Love. In R. Fedock, M. Kühler, & R. Rosenhagen (Eds.), *Love, Justice, and Autonomy: Philosophical Perspectives* Routledge.

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Abandonment and the Egalitarianism of Love*

Tony Milligan,

Anthony.milligan@kcl.ac.uk

Cosmological Visionaries project,

Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London

Abstract: What follows will focus upon love as an emotion, and do so upon the assumption that it is central to various forms of religious commitment. Particularly so, in the case of the Christian tradition which appeals to an egalitarian worthiness of love's recipients. However, I want to suggest, and to some extent argue, that appeals to love's unconditionality and to constancy which are at home in Christian discourse work better in some domains than in others. More specifically, an unconditional constancy in the context of intimate sexualized love can be problematic by reinforcing submissive gender roles, by conflicting with a concern for equality and by clashing with a reasonable concern for agent well-being. There are loves which we ought to end insofar as we are able to do.

I. Introduction

In what follows I focus upon love as an emotion and do so upon the assumption that while love itself need not be thought of as a religious emotion, it is nonetheless an emotion which is often central to religion and which occupies a privileged place within Christianity. It may even be just as central to religious experience as 'awe' or less flatteringly, 'oceanic feeling', concepts which form part of the familiar discussions of the emotional dimensions of religious life (for example in Heschel 1976, 77-78). With Howard Wettstein (2015, 6-7), I will take it that love under some guise (*ahimsa*, *metta* and so on) is equally part of the picture. This is a point about religious experience, but one which draws us rapidly into the domain of the political, given the prominent role that power relations play within religion and how they may be reinforced or undermined by religious conceptions of the rules governing 'how we ought to feel.' (More formally, the 'normative' dimension of religious talk about love, and emotion in general.) And here I reach beyond the Christian tradition quite deliberately in order to suggest that it has no

* Published in Rachel Fedock, Michael Kühler, and Raja Rosenhagen, *Love, Justice, and Autonomy: Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

monopoly on situating love at the heart of religious life or, more ambiguously, spirituality. Even so, there is a special kind of explicit textual and liturgical prominence which Christianity gives to love, a 'hypervaluation of love', in the terms favored by John Corrigan (2004, 19), with a certain kind of unconditional and constant love taken as the model. It is a model which casts a shadow over abandonment and the ending of love. Love which is love of the right sort, or an admirable sort, once begun, ought to go on.

This is a position which raises concerns about possible complicity in the continuation of relations of dominance, especially so if one ought to remain constant in the face of serious moral transgressions and a realization that the other person 'is not who I thought they were'. Yet it is easy here to slip from a simple critique of the way in which love's unconditionality really *can* be problematic (both personally and politically) into some more generalized hostility towards Christianity as such. The latter is not at all my aim. Although, here I write from outside of this tradition, as a stranger to it. A stranger who is perplexed by it but not, I hope, hostile. Instead, I want to suggest, and to some extent argue, that appeals to love's unconditionality and to constancy which are at home within Christian discourse, and which may be well placed there, should not be territorially ambitious. There are areas of life and love where such appeals ought not to go. In line with this, the primary focus here will be upon the normativity of talk about love rather than upon the phenomenology of experiencing love. However, it is not obvious that the one can be understood without the other. A sense of *what it is like* to be a religiously engaged agent, subject to disciplining norms and traditions, will be at work throughout.

A feeling of abandonment is one of our great fears and simultaneously one of the risks that we enter into through the love of another human. Even the love of a god, or the idea that we may be loved in turn by a god, does not escape from this danger. The few final words attributed to Jesus which appearing in more than one of the canonical gospels (Matthew 27.46;

Mark 15:34) are a lament for, and questioning of abandonment by, God. Such a sense of abandonment, the definite sense of a loss of love, is familiarly associated with certain aspects of a crisis of faith and with feelings of 'void' of the sort described in successively less Christian terms by St John of the Cross, Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch (Milligan 2014). Nothing, not even the faith of Jesus, protects a religious agent from a terrible sense that love has been withdrawn. Indeed, vulnerability of this sort, coupled for a desire for constancy, seems to be integral to an openness to love such that we cannot have one without the other. Openness to love is a virtue, or a moral accomplishment, precisely because it comes at such a high risk.

In and out of religious orders, we desire to love and to be loved constantly, with no transfer or removal of affection. It is love of this lasting sort which figures in St. Paul, a love which hopes all things, bears all things and never fails (I Corinthians 13.4). But what happens when we try (as some commentators have done) to shift the idea of such constancy over from a clearly Pauline or *agapic* love to love of a more intimate, sexualized or erotic, sort? And here I will take it that the relation between these two loves (the *agapic* and the erotic) is complex rather than a matter of exclusion in all cases (Milligan 2011, 59-72). I want to narrow my claim, and make it more precise, by suggesting that the shift from religious contexts in which love's unconditional constancy seems admirable, to more intimate erotic contexts, is a move which carries too many problems. And these are not simply a matter of acknowledging that talk of unconditionality is perhaps more figurative than literal. What I want to say is that if unconditional love belongs anywhere, then it still belongs elsewhere than intimate relationships. Here, I use 'intimate' in a familiar sense which typically involves or, at times, tends towards physical, sexual engagement. There are other senses of intimacy, including those associated with the life of religious devotion, or notions of a personal relation to a god, which are not in play.

I will suggest that a love which is not unconditional, and does *not* bear or forgive all, is *normatively* more appropriate as an exemplar of such intimate love. In our personal love lives few of us, perhaps none of us, can truly be saints. (As much as I admire him politically, Gandhi was a terrible husband, and even worse as a father.) The attempt to spread the proper bounds of love's figurative unconditionality is liable to result in harm to others, harm to self, and block our pathway to better gender relations than those we have enjoyed in recent times. Yet, the idea of constancy which may be in place elsewhere, as a piece of spiritual imagery, haunts our understanding of intimate love such that the ending of a genuinely intimate love, even when appropriate, may well be a reasonable source of regret, something to be mourned. In practice, the ending of any love is also liable to be influenced by less-than-admirable considerations. Loving well is difficult, ending love well may be entirely out of reach.

II. Love's Egalitarian Constancy

Familiar articulations of Christianity do not simply hold out the promise of an affective connection to the transcendent (however understood) they also tell us how we *ought* to feel in relation to that which is worldly. Although, an attitude towards the worldly can itself be read as, *indirectly*, an orientation towards the divine. Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* (1847), and Simone Weil's *Waiting for God* (1951) advance precisely this view, with Weil drawing upon Kierkegaard. Both extend this in a way which threatens to make the indirect love of God more genuine than the love for the intermediary. 'The world can never get through its head that God in this way not only becomes the third party in every relationship of love but essentially becomes the only loved object, so that it is not the husband who is the wife's beloved, but it is God' (Kierkegaard 2009, 125). This exclusivity is, however, uncharacteristic of Christian approaches which also *require* a genuineness of felt love for other humans. The relevant Christian norms for feeling include a generalized requirement for love. To lend plausibility to

the case for such a conception of love, I will treat it as (i) something which can be at least partially disentangled from any heavy ontological commitments; and as (ii) a requirement which can, up to a point, be fused with liberal sensibilities in the best sense of the latter, a sense which is consistent with the acceptance that there are moral truths. In particular, it can be fused with a valuing of others *as equals*, as equally worthy recipients of love.

While the sheer generality of the requirement to love others may suggest that it is best understood as a non-cognitive response, perhaps expressive rather than a way of tracking some properties of the world, the Christian tradition provides narratives which suggest (and perhaps entail) that this is not so. Love is embraced as a *recognition* that self and others are part of God's creation, indeed that we are *equally* a part of God's creation or, more figuratively still, that we are *all* God's children. Yet even with such narratives in place, the lack of variability, the very fact that the requirement for love does not change from situation to situation, meshes poorly with our familiar experience of feeling and caring. Our regular patterning of emotional experience, and especially of love, is context sensitive, partial and particularistic. We feel in very different ways towards different individuals on different occasions. Phenomenologically, loving x does not feel quite the same as loving y, even if x and y are both loved as close friends, or as one's children or as others with whom we are sexually engaged. It would be odd, even a little unwelcome, if my love for the friend from university who still sends me Christmas cards, feel the same as my love for a lost friend, someone from primary school, someone now dead but still loved. And the difference here is not only the presence of grief in the one case and its absence in the other. The feeling of love itself alters with contingency and circumstance. And so, while the Christian injunction to love may be uniform, love itself feels anything but uniform. Of course, the phenomenology of love may differ, while the love remains the same. Anger too feels very different from case to case without ceasing to be anger. The whole point of appealing to a cognitive component of emotions is so that we do not have to segment them

by appeal to the sameness of feeling. However, with other emotions, such as anger, we are not called upon to feel it towards everyone. Nobody says ‘be angry at everybody’. There are bounds to the different sorts of anger that we may feel towards others, and how we experience it. When love follows this same pattern of seeming very different from case to case, we may expect it to be similarly bounded, and linked to contingency and circumstance. Also, perhaps, vulnerable to changes in the latter.

Yet there is something beautifully appealing about the Christian vision of love's unwavering constancy. It offers a guarantee that we may all remain suitable recipients for love, no matter what we do, and no matter how far we may fall from grace. The appeal of such constancy is all the stronger when we see what it looks like in generously constructed exemplars which situate love in ordinary, everyday, contexts. Rai Gaita, in an example which is regularly cited in discussions of the philosophy of love, and which draws upon a modified Christian paradigm of love, recalls his early years as a hospital porter. He watched in the background while medical staff treated patients with respect, but such respect did not entirely or fully exclude a sense of personal superiority (2002, 17-24). Gaita's suggestion is not that the doctors were callous. Many of us have felt much the same when visiting a dementia ward. Our respectful care is mingled with something else: relief, apartness, a sense of the world of the dying as thankfully alien. And here, the respect for the other, and the reassuring apartness of our belonging to the world of the living are not easily disentangled.

In the Gaita case, such a respectful response, with its attendant sense of apartness, compares poorly with the attitude of a hospital visitor, a nun whose love for the patients carried no trace of condescension or superiority, no sense of *ressentiment* or *being better than they*. Hers was, in each instance, a response to an equal, a reassurance of care no matter what, a love which was ‘unconditional’ (Gaita 2002, 22). The story is agapic, with an acknowledged connection to Christian theology, but secularized by Gaita via the idea that such love is a

response to, and recognition of, a common humanity rather than a mode of relating to God (Gaita 2002, 20-21). However, the dominant line of religious influence upon this conception of love is clear and it might be argued, with Kierkegaard and Weil, that such love has a mixed intentionality, that it is partly about the humanity of the other, and partly an implicit attitude towards God. Alternatively, we may even rethink or demythologize accounts of Christian agape in the light of this approach, not as an impossible desexualized ideal, but as attempts to tell a tale about our shared humanity, or at least about the shared and apparently egalitarian lovability which each of us retains when all else is gone, and when all other hope is lost. And here, talk about our all being God's children may seem to capture matters better or 'more naturally', than forced talk about our 'lovability'. We may then understand why direct talk about love and humanity sometimes fails, and why a more indirect route may be preferable.

While it requires no worrying ontological commitments, the loving response of Gaita's nun still points in the direction of a peculiarly saintly conception of love even if it is not itself love of this sort, love of the most absolutely demanding kind. We might even be tempted to wonder about whether it is appropriate to think of it as love at all, rather than some proximate emotional response such as compassion. What, after all, is there to connect such a felt identification with virtual strangers in hospital beds to our familiar understanding of love as a response to a history which is usually shared, a response which is inseparable from a genuine grief upon the death of the other? Perhaps we might grant that Gaita's nun was very good with the patients, and had a better bedside manner than any of the doctors. Perhaps she was compassionate and truly egalitarian towards them, but it would be odd to imagine that she would have experienced a genuine sense of bereavement upon their death. Sadness yes and a reminder of her own standing as equally mortal. But there is a significant difference between feeling sad over the death of a stranger or acquaintance, and experiencing the terrible void of grief upon the loss of someone we love. Yet here, we may argue that the love of the nun is, in

a sense, a love of humanity (with which we all have a long history) rather than a more or less sudden love of the stranger in the bed. The price that we would pay for such a move is the loss of some of the admirable particularity of the nun's loving response, the sense that it is not simply a *response to* an individual but also *about* that individual more than it is about anything else. Love's recipient fuses instead into the democratic mass of humanity where they become more anonymous.

Let us now suppose we shift the focus of our own attention away from anything so directly, outwardly, spiritual as the nun's love. Let us do what Gaita does not do and shift it towards a kind of love which is altogether more intimate (in the specified paradigmatically sexualized sense) yet tries to retain the same sense of absolute unconditionality. This may seem to take us not only beyond Gaita's nun, but beyond the bounds of St Paul and into the erotic, an arena in which a Christian or Christian-influenced conceptions of love are not always comfortable. This is, of course, a subject on which a great deal of ink has been spilt, and so I shall simply affirm what has been said many times before: that an overly-strong separation of eros and agape presents an entirely implausible, ungenerous, and unlivable account of Christian love (Benedict 2006, 24). Those, such as myself, who are in some sense outside of the Christian tradition, not by standing (impossibly) outside of its influence but in the sense of rejecting core doctrines or (in my case) feeling unmoved or hopelessly confused by some of its imagery, do the tradition a disservice and do not understand it if we latch onto this as an easy line of attack. Yet there are contexts (such as the love of Gaita's caring nun) which are more clearly agapic, in the Pauline sense, than intimately erotic. And what is involved here is not simply a matter of bodily engagement, or spiritual love versus a flesh-bound longing. True, the nun may be ready to take the patients' place, but she does not want to climb into bed with them. However, there is more to the difference between her love and intimate sexualized love than this. At the risk of presupposing 'what we all know', the boundary here is a familiar matter of different

ways of being emotionally engaged, and differences in the lived-experience of love more generally.

III. Transferring Spiritual Constancy into the Intimate Domain

Gaita's nun loves admirably and well. Or, at least she does so if she truly loves at all. There is a great deal to be said for loving in this way, however difficult it may be to accomplish. It seems far beyond me, but still a real possibility. What I regard as problematic is not this, but rather the temptation to make sense of love in the domain of a more intimate love in a way which mirrors the unconditionality of love in Gaita's more religiously shaped exemplar. The best, or at least clearest, example of this is a move which Kamila Pacovská has made in a paper on 'Loving Villains: Virtue in Response to Wrongdoing' which extends Gaita's love into the intimate domain in order to argue that a more saintly agent will defensibly respond to others as equals through an unconditional *intimate* love, even where the beloved has been guilty of some dreadful transgression. 'What enables saintly characters to treat such people as equals, without superiority or condescension, is a belief in equal human worth that doesn't derive from deserts and a conception of themselves as equals and fellows even of the least deserving.' (Pacovská 2014, 138). I will take it that Pacovská is tapping into a more widely held intuition about how Christianity might inform a conception of intimate love, and doing so in an effective way. Indeed, St. Paul's guidance on love often seems to be read in just this way, as a guide to how we ought to treat our nearest and dearest rather than a guide to human conduct more generally.

Drawing upon the Christian-influenced account of love set out by Gaita, Pacovská has tried to bring the demanding idea of a saintly or near-saintly *intimate* love into sharper focus. Love, of the relevant sort must persist even in situations of disillusionment about the other. It is patient and does not abandon even the most dreadful of criminals, even those who have been

guilty of awful transgressions up to and including moral evil. Instead, it recognizes the flawed, imperfect but abiding humanity or lovability of the other. Pacovská's examples are literary and my response will draw upon the same literature. Such love is approximated by the patient and forgiving wife of Banker Bullstrode in *Middlemarch*, a woman who has to cope with the disclosure that her very proper and religious husband made his money by criminal means. (She must also cope with the suspicion that he may have, in some sense, permitted a former accomplice to die.) Such unconditional, or at least unwavering, love is approximated even more closely by another of Pacovská's examples: the long-suffering Sonia in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The man she loves, Raskolnikov, has killed a money-lender and he has killed Sonia's only friend at the scene of the crime in order to cover up the first dreadful deed. He has done something terrible to his own life and, in the process, has wounded Sonia dreadfully. Yet Sonia continues to love Raskolnikov, even in his failure to repent and even though, in her case, the wounding is deeper and more personal than it is with Bullstrode and his wife. Sonia does not know how to love distantly. There is a raw immediacy to her pattern of care.

The more such characters have to understand or to forgive, the more saintly their love has to be. When each in turn finds out that the person they love has transgressed, they do not withdraw their affection. They do not cease to love. Nor is the continuity of their affective response simply a matter of propriety, even in the case of Bullstrode's wife, Harriet. They do not continue with an outwardly correct but inwardly cold attitude toward the transgressor. Rather, love's passion deepens as they embrace a joint suffering with their beloved. Such sharing is expressed in all manner of simple ways. This is a love which seems to endure a great deal, understand a great deal, and forgive a great deal. And, notwithstanding a certain fear about romanticization, how could we not admire such a love? Yet Iris Murdoch, who we expect always to be on the side of love, suggests something which, very pragmatically, points in a quite different direction: 'Falling out of love (with a person, possession or activity)

is a skill we should all have access to' and in her own novels we see this skill regularly deployed (Murdoch 1993, 331). But how could we not admire something more constant than a love which permits (perhaps requires) inconstancy or even abandonment? The very possibility of the latter may seem to suggest that what we may have regarded as love has been, all along, flawed in its intentionality, mistakenly attached to something inessential, to a quality such as good looks which may easily be lost (Vlastos, 1981). There is, after all, something suspect about at least some loves which are withdrawn after changes to the beloved, or after the disclosure of new information.

To see what such a flawed attitude might involve in practice, Pacovská contrasts the above, differing, examples of loving constancy with the shifting affections of Miss Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth begins to have feelings for the charming Mr. Wickham when he is well-regarded by all around him, but then abandons those feelings as soon as she finds out his true, i.e. manipulative, cunning, self-serving and dishonest, character. Elizabeth's inconstancy, upon the discovery of Mr. Wickham's true character, although it carries no overtones of betrayal, looks suspiciously like an instance of what has been called '*trading-up*' in the literature on the philosophy of love. That is abandonment of an emerging attachment in favor of a better deal, a love object which is more worthy (Jollimore 2011, 17). Yet, curiously, this may serve as an example of a transferal of affections *at its best*, in a case where our sympathies are utterly engaged. We, the reader, tend to think that Elizabeth has made the right move. She ought not to be with Wickham, but with someone else. Perhaps even the much-misunderstood and rather handsome Mr. D'Arcy. However, the example is used by Pacovská to highlight the greater accomplishments of the constant lover. In particular, the accomplishment of seeing the wrongdoer as an equal. The valuation of the other does not waver upon the discovery of a great fault.

Instead, I want to suggest that while there really *is* an illuminating shortfall in Elizabeth's affections, it is *not* a shortfall which involves any lack of saintly persistence. Elizabeth is *quite right* to shift her affections, even though what motivates her to do so is arguably mixed, and may not be entirely admirable. But I also want to concede that there is a problem here, a gray area involving cases of very different sorts. It makes perfectly good sense to say that there is *often* something bad about no longer loving someone in an erotic way when one finds out a new piece of information or even if they undergo certain kinds of character change or identity change. If someone asks about the small green prayer book on the bookshelves, then says 'I could never love a Jew', and promptly leaves their partner, something has gone badly wrong. Or, if someone can no longer love their spouse because the latter has come out as transsexual and they happen to hold to some rather unpleasant views about gender, then the end of the love is surely reprehensible. The *reasons for no longer loving* in both cases are bad reasons. If, on the other hand, someone takes steps to end an intimate love or perhaps to change it into love of another sort, because of their own sexuality and the fact that the kind of desirable intimacy which is integral to their contentment can no longer be achieved under new conditions, that is a different matter. The heart wants what the heart wants. Under changed conditions, it may not want what we or a previously loved other have to offer. The changes need not involve moral transgression, although they do need to be major enough to change the way that one sees the other. (If Suzanne leaves me because I have watched Australian rules football more often than Gaelic football, that would be odd. Or, if she leaves me because a new book has been badly received by critics, that would be odd as well.) My point here is *not* however, about the value of constancy in the face of certain kinds of alteration, even alterations which are bound together with transgression. Rather, it is about a problematic transfer of saintliness into the intimate domain. The transgender case just mentioned relates to a major change of identity, but does not call for saintliness. Similarly, there would be something very

worrying about any attempted saintly response by Elizabeth Bennett. She should not be in the business of ‘saving’ Mr Wickham, nor should she endure his dishonesty with love intact.

IV. Articulating Concern about a Saintly Intimate Love

There are significant reasons for concern about the kind of saintly, or near-saintly, love which Miss Bennett conspicuously fails to show. Most obviously, it is all very well for a character in a novel to love in this unconditional and egalitarian way, but we might not want anyone we truly cared for to do so in real life. This familiar point, from Susan Wolf (1982), is an objection to the pursuit of moral saintliness more generally although it does not detract from our admiration for moral saints, but only from the *promotion* or *pursuit* of such saintliness. The fact that a certain pattering of affective response is simply too demanding to be either recommended or required need not, after all, detract from the accomplishment of those who, somehow and against all odds, make the grade. We might not want a loved one to lead such a life of sacrifice, even though such a life could itself be admirable. Other concerns may lead us to believe that Iris Murdoch may be right about the deep importance of learning how to fall out of love, a standpoint which happens to be convenient for Elizabeth Bennett. It would, after all, be deeply egocentric to desire that someone we love should continue to love us even if we should betray ourselves by becoming morally monstrous. It is tempting to say that we *ought* to want them to protectively cease their loving, or at least cease to love us in the same intimate erotic way, if such a thing should ever occur. This may even be integral to intimate love, as it is ordinarily understood. Part of my loving my wife Suzanne, in the intimate erotic way, is that I desire her well-being, and do so in a deep manner. But if I truly desire her well-being then there are counterfactual circumstances under which I would desire her to walk away for her own sake. (Even if my desires might also conflict if such a moment were ever to arrive: I would want her to, and not want her to. My heart would be so unsure.)

Considerations of this sort can, of course, be used to suggest a self/other asymmetry: Suzanne should not love a monstrous me, but perhaps I should still love a monstrous she. The reader admires Sonia for continuing to loving Raskolnikov, but our opinion of Raskolnikov would not be improved if, at the end of the novel, he felt that he was still entitled to her love. However, perhaps this option, of lifting a self/other asymmetry from such imagined scenarios runs too great a risk of a slippage towards a self-aggrandizing conception of what we expect ourselves to deliver in comparison to the imperfections of others. And this may lead us to lean more in the direction of regarding an unconditional constancy, on the part of either party to an intimate relationship, as a commitment of the wrong sort. We may then suspect that a continuing intimate love, upon the disclosure of some terrible transgression, is often inappropriate because (i) the transgressing agent simply ceases to be an appropriate object for the *kind* of love in question, although a shift towards something less personal and more akin to the agapic love of Gaita's nun may still be possible (even if its wisdom is a contingent matter); or (ii) the transgressing agent remains a suitable object for such love *but perhaps not from the person in question*. The very attempt to sustain an intimate love with the transgressing agent could involve hubris, a reaching beyond our limited erotic capabilities. Instead, and in love of the intimate sort, perhaps we should respond *at, or close to* what Murdoch intermittently refers to as our own moral level. Just as Elizabeth Bennett does, although her attachment to the rogue Mr. Wickham may be weaker than a true intimacy of sufficient depth for the problem to fully arise.

Does this introduction of conditionality within intimate love leave us only with a love that is second rate, unstable or otherwise unreliable? This is one way of picturing matters, but not necessarily the most generous way. Alternatively, we may embrace the fact that a love which is continually renewed even though it carries no ultimate guarantees, and does not promise everything, has its own kind of fragile beauty. I may not want Suzanne to love me

unconditionally, but I certainly want her to continue to love me indefinitely, into a shared future in which I give her no great reason to walk away, beyond the ordinary reasons that humans give to one another on a daily basis. I may even suspect that any love which was structured otherwise, any truly unconditional love, of Suzanne for me, was not really about me at all, the me who changes significantly over the course of time, and often within a single afternoon. 'There is,' as Martha Nussbaum points out, 'a beauty in the willingness to love someone in the face of love's instability that is absent from a completely trustworthy love' (Nussbaum 1986, 420). Here, we may again run an argument that risk is the price of accomplishment, an intimate and personal love without risks, with guaranteed constancy, may then seem to be the kind of love which is actually lacking in an important way.

Something of this sort may be true, but even these considerations do not entirely go to the heart of what is *most obviously* worrying about cases like those of the admirable, forgiving and sacrificial Mrs. Bulstrode and Sonia. They do not go to the heart of concerns about gender which the image of loving feminine sacrifice raise. It is, firstly, notable that all the obvious exemplars of such a sacrificial love, even Gaita's nun who contrasts with the male doctors, are female. Their kind of constancy may then look worryingly like a license for the continuation of abusive relationships. Constancy of this sort may even lend itself to a strong 'feeling rules' reading of love as a religiously-informed emotion where the feeling rule in question is that *thou shalt stand by thy man*, and where the formulaic language of 'feeling rules' itself seems appropriate because it carries overtones of an affective subservience to authority: the authority of institutions, the authority of God, the authority of a husband, the authority of love itself (Hochschild 2003, 56-75). The role of women within such a picture of loving agency is pivotal, not marginal, but it is captured by the pieta and by dolorous resignation. Again, this may be good imagery for a novel, we may like Sonia more than Elizabeth Bennett, but that is not

enough to turn her way of loving into a good design for life, at least not for those we love (in any sense).

Less obviously, a concern may be raised about equality and about the extent to which such a love can truly be married to liberal egalitarian norms. This is, perhaps, a problem of a deeper sort. One which strikes at the heart of secularized versions of any attempt to take an agapic, Gaita-style love out of the place where it is at home and to use it as the model for loving intimately. Unlike the situation for Gaita's nun where equality with the other is absolutely pivotal, in cases such as that of Mrs. Bullstrode and Sonia, there are senses in which the possibility of a genuine relationship of equals has been irretrievably lost. (Unless they too have evil-doing histories about which their authors say nothing.) In these texts, love may continue, and it may continue as intimate love and not the *agape* accorded to strangers, but the nature of the love *does* change, and must change in order for the texts to remain exercises of the imagination rather than sheer fantasy. There is a shift into the relation of lover to loved as something maternal, albeit paradoxically so. Paradoxically, because, in the case of Sonia, the sacrifice also expresses something child-like (although perhaps not anything innocent). Here, as parallel cases, we may think also of the prominent late-19th and early 20th century French exemplars of spiritual and erotically-charged female sacrifice: the images of Bernadette Soubirous and Theresa of Lisieux, true unto death, simultaneously childlike and maternal, with the model of Joan of Arc at no great distance in the background. Similarly, the forgiving Harriet Bullstrode is strictly maternal but the more complex, saintly and childlike Sonia, who has herself endured so much, *becomes* the 'little mother' both to Raskolnikov and to his fellow offenders.

This retains an appealingly sacrificial dimension, but it does not look at all close to the best way for intimate relationships to go. It does not look like the kind of love which anyone ought to recommend or cultivate as the best of its kind. Instead, it is what is left when one of

the partners fails to grow up, or else when something goes dreadfully wrong and a great imbalance is then introduced. Egalitarianism may be a great strength of the Christian influenced agapic loving response of Gaita's nun, but it turns out to be far more problematic with an intimate love whose unconditionality is brought into the open as a result of some manner of radical moral failure.

These critical points about gender and equality are simultaneously ethical and political. They may jar with an outlook which seeks to keep intimate love and politics rigidly apart from one another, or which is altogether more suspicious of the idea that a broadly liberal outlook upon life constitutes the right kind of politics. They also clash with a deep level of admiration for the saintly Sonia, and for the long-suffering Mrs. Bullstrode, which is there because their authors tap so effectively into our attitudes. Not only our attitudes towards femininity and sacrifice, but also our own personal abhorrence of (and no doubt also our fears of) abandonment. In a sense, it is easy for us to admire Sonia more than we admire the sensible Elizabeth Bennett (who has been less challenged by life), but this may say more about what it is to fear abandonment than it does about what is involved in loving intimately and in the best way. The very thought of abandonment is so terrible a prospect that we hesitate always to endorse its legitimacy. In this sense, ideas of constancy from more agapic images of love and devotion exercise their force. We are even familiar with narratives, perhaps even personal experiences, in which a former partner, the one who has *actually* walked out, nonetheless feels drawn to say 'You left me years ago', or 'Our marriage was over long before I went', in order to avoid the impression of deserting a living relationship, or abandoning another who remains worthy of love. And when someone, again someone awkward like Murdoch, someone with the power to slip a little sand under our shells, asserts that 'Heavenly love is unlike Earthly love. Christ broke up families' (Murdoch 1993, 144), that the apostles effectively *walked out on* their loved ones in order to follow a spiritual leader, we insist that the texts be read otherwise, in a

more generous manner. It is abhorrent that this should be, in any straightforward sense, simply true. Similar tales of Buddha's abandonment of his wife and child cannot be allowed to stand on their own, they must be rescued, redeemed by the supplementary narrative device of a later encounter where both heartily endorse his wise decision. My point here is not to say that this was the wrong thing to do in either of these very special cases, and there is certainly a better argument in favour of these instances of abandonment than there is for someone leaving their family to go off to a tropical island in order to paint and make merry with the locals. Even so, the harsh side of *moving on* is difficult to come to terms with. Abandonment of any sort has a bad reputation, and we might wonder how the curtailment or redirecting of love away from those we love in an intimate manner could ever escape from such worries.

V. The Trouble with Elizabeth

As a partial, incomplete, response to such concern I will suggest that we need to distinguish between the ending, or redirecting, of love and its regular disreputable accompaniments. That is, false narratives, misrepresentation, recrimination, defensive hostility and dubious motives. A sensitivity to the latter can constitute a strong line of defense for saintly constancy even in the face of situations of disillusionment. It is, I want to suggest, sensitivity of this sort, rather than love's inconstancy per se, which warrants concern even in the Elizabeth Bennett case. If we begin to suspect that the constant, loving Mrs. Bulstrode and Sonia (who loves not just a flawed being, but an axe murderer) really are dangerous exemplars, and that Elizabeth Bennett was quite right to curtail her emerging love for a mere scoundrel, what then? Does it follow that Elizabeth's motives for curtailment were necessarily of the right sort, that she was implicitly or explicitly following a better set of norms or (more narrowly) rules for feeling, or in some way escaping from the constraint of such rules? This is far less obvious. Perhaps what drives our sense that, in this contrast, the constant and saintly lovers are *more* to be admired, is

the recognition that in a case such as that of Miss Bennett, a problematic pattern of affective response really is in play.

More specifically, I want to suggest that a disturbing parallel may be drawn between her affective responsiveness and a similarly problematic pattern of affective responsiveness identified by John Corrigan in his classic study of feeling rules among the mid-19th century Bostonian Protestant elite (Corrigan, 2002). Corrigan draws out the respects in which an ideology and practice of emotionally-charged religiosity was shaped by the model of the stock exchange, with the enthusiasm of the black revivalist congregations constituting a dangerous threat of speculative boom and bust, while the dissipation of the Irish Catholics threatened stability. Within this order of things, love of the right, moderate and rewarding sort, constituted a suitable investment of one's limited emotional currency. To marry well was to make a good investment in one's future. To marry badly was to slide from a reasonable risk-taking into sheer gambling. This is a far cry from our familiar shaping of preferences in line with a conception of what, and who, can make us happy. Instead, the market is a model for morality. Again, the lines between norms of intimacy and political critique of societal norms becomes blurred.

Does any of this critique sound familiar in the case of Miss Elizabeth Bennett? There is certainly nothing so crude as the financial calculations of surrounding characters: friends, relatives, acquaintances. Guidance by explicit financial projection would be too obvious and cut-rate. It would involve one or several thoughts too many. Deliberation of the sort that her mother continuously and rather too openly makes. Instead, Elizabeth follows her heart, but exactly what does her heart follow? Partly, her heart tracks virtue, or at least good looks and virtue. But this alone does not remove suspicion. The hearts of agents often look for love in places which still give us reasonable grounds for concern. We may think here of those who sincerely and wholeheartedly come to love others who look suspiciously like themselves, or like younger versions of a favored parent. We may be inclined to suspect that although she

follows her heart, and the heart wants what the heart wants, there is nonetheless a deep level at which Elizabeth remains mired in the same affective predicament as the novel's other financially insecure agents. Hers is not a marriage of convenience, but it is nonetheless a very convenient marriage. Indeed, this too is an aspect of Austin's novel as social critique. It is part of her genius that she shows us a character who falls in love with precisely the person that we, the reader, want her to fall in love with but who, in doing so, shows a keen appreciation of the rules of the game.

There are even tell-tale points in the novel where a disturbing set of rules for emotional engagement seem very close to the surface: in Elizabeth's resistance to her mother's favoured ordering of a good match followed by love afterwards; in her response to her sister about *when* she first realized that she loved D'Arcy, she replies, jokingly, that it was upon seeing his grounds at Pemberly (respectively in Chapters 6 and 59). We may also note the reasonable concern of her father after she finally accepts D'Arcy's proposal, concern that she really is sacrificing herself nobly for the good of the family by marrying someone proud, disagreeable but well-off (Chapter 59). Austin repeatedly directs our attention to the fact that Elizabeth has done exactly what the socio-economic realities of the day tell her to do, and exactly what other characters see her as doing. She has genuinely and wholeheartedly fallen in love with the best and happiest of all investments in the future. Her prior inconstancy may be justified, and she does get the right man in the end, but a deep level of her motivation remains open to question. This, I suggest, is an utterly familiar phenomenon, a justified redirecting of love from here to there, from one person to another, which is accomplished in a way that brings ordinary and familiar human flaws into play.

There are, of course, all manner of problems which might be raised with the example. We can reflect that Elizabeth's earlier attachment to the wrong man was only in its early stages when it was nipped in the bud, and that she did not abandon a life partner of many years

standing. But can we not just as readily think of cases where 'staying the course' is also destructive? Are we not familiar with loves which can do no good for those involved, and old loves with which we ourselves could do nothing good? Loves which stood no chance of leading anyone upwards? Destructive attachments, loves that agents like us are not obviously equipped to turn into something better, attachments in which agents like us may even become addicted to the suffering. Less generous readings of Sonia's love may lean in this direction: she wants to punish herself for the way in which she has been forced to earn her living. In such cases, the sharing of a protracted history may even make matters worse, more bound to inertia, and less likely to succeed. There may be people who can only hurt or only be hurt by us because of the way in which the relationship has become sedimented over time. And here, while it may always seem open to us to continue to love only from a safe distance, the love itself can tend to draw agents together. The least harmful option which is also workable may then be to follow something much closer to Murdoch's approach and to fall out of love, or rather give ourselves the opportunity to do so, and not to resist so much if, over the course of time, the bonds of love begin noticeably to dissolve.

Acknowledgements: The publication was supported within the project of Operational Programme Research, Development and Education (OP VVV/OP RDE), "Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value", registration No. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/15_003/0000425, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the state budget of the Czech Republic. An earlier version was delivered as the "Situating the Human" conference held at the University of Pardubice in September 2017. Thanks go to Kamila Pacovská for comments at earlier presentations of the paper, and to Rai Gaita for clarification of the scope of his account of love.

Bibliography

Benedict [1996] 2006. *Deus Caritas Est*. San Francisco: St Ignatius Press.

- Corrigan, John, ed. 2004. *Religion and Emotion: Approaches and Interpretation*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Corrigan, John. 2002. *Business of the Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gaita, Raimond. 2002. *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice*. New York: Routledge.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. 1976. *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2003. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*.
- Jollimore, Troy. 2011. *Love's Vision*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. [1847] 2009. *Works of Love*. H. Hong & E. Hong (trans). New York: Harper Perennial.
- Milligan, Tony. 2014. "Love in Dark Times," *Religious Studies* 50.1: 87-100.
- Milligan, Tony. 2011. *Love*. Durham: Acumen.
- Murdoch, Iris. 1993. *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. London: Penguin.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 1986. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pacovská, Kamila. 2014. "Loving Villains: Virtue in Response to Wrongdoing." In Maurer, Christian, Tony Milligan and Pacovská, *Love and its Objects: What Can We Care For?* Palgrave Macmillan: Houndsmill, 2014: 125-139.
- Vlastos, Gregory. 1981. "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato." In *Platonic Studies*, 2nd edition. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1981: 3-42.
- Weil, Simone. 1951. *Waiting for God*, E. Crawford (trans.). London: Routledge.
- Wettstein, Howard. 2015. *The Significance of Religious Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wolf, Susan. 1982. "Moral Saints," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79.8: 419-39.