

# Annette Baier

*Unsafe Loves*

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Destroy love and friendship; what remains in the world worth accepting?

*David Hume<sup>1</sup>*

What is it to love another person, and is it ever a good idea? The ones who have told us most or most insightful things about love are poets and novelists. Philosophers, although they are supposed to be lovers of a sort, tend to be all thumbs when it comes to handling love. But since I am only a philosopher I will look at some of their attempts. According to a recent book-length philosophical analysis of love, "what makes love unusual among the emotions is the human inability to do without it."<sup>2</sup> If this is right, then let us hope that love can be a good thing for us, otherwise it will have to count as an unfortunate addiction, something we cannot do without but that does not bring us anything positively good, either, and that may bring us much sorrow. Robert Brown, the philosopher I quoted, thinks it does usually bring "an immense amount of satisfaction" and yet "often produces as much pain as pleasure. For love is always subject to frustration and rejection, and commonly bound together with such dangerous emotions as jealousy, hate, fear."<sup>3</sup> We could in a sense "do without" those emotions—that is, we might prefer to be without them, but we would not, Brown believes, choose to be without the love that commonly brings them. Nor is it only emotions dangerous to our fellows, the aggression-feeding emotions of jealousy, hate, and fear of rivals that love commonly brings with it. There are also those more "dangerous" to the lover than to others, paralyzing grief or reckless despair at the loss or death of loved ones, retreat into a sort of psychic hibernation when cut off from "news" of them, crippling anxiety when they are in danger, helpless anguish when they are in pain, crushing guilt when one has harmed them, deadly shame when one

fails them. All of these "dangers" to the lover must be weighed against that immense satisfaction love can bring. And then there are the dangers to the ones who are loved—the danger of overprotection, of suffocation, of loss of independence, toughness and self-reliance. When love is reciprocal each faces the dangers of lovers combined with those of beloveds. As we catalog the risks of loving, we may begin to sympathize with the conclusion of Jerome Shaffer, who in an article "assessing" the role of emotions in our lives comes down against the lot of them, and in particular against love: "The world might have become a better place when Scrooge found love, but perhaps not in the case of Anna Karenina, and probably not in the case of King Kong. Love like other emotions has no general claim to value or importance in our lives."<sup>4</sup>

Nor is Shaffer alone among what we might call the philosophical "misamorists," the distrusters of the claims of love. Kant too more or less advises us to keep ourselves to ourselves, *not* to link our fate unnecessarily closely with that of other persons, to remain detached—respecting others, but not getting too mixed up in their lives. Kant does recognize a moral duty of philanthropy, love of our fellows, yet he construes this not as involving feeling or emotion, but solely as goodwill, benevolence, willingness to do things for others, to draw close enough to them to help them. Kant says that in the moral world there is an analogy to the attraction and repulsion that operate in the physical world. "The principle of *mutual love* admonishes men constantly to *come nearer* to one another; that of the respect which they owe each other, to keep themselves at a *distance* from one another."<sup>5</sup> Although he finds room for a duty of love as well as a duty of respect, a duty to draw close and a duty to keep one's distance, his way of harmonizing them is to weaken the "law of love" into a duty to help one's neighbor, with the understanding that one's neighbor does *not* want to be any closer to one—one helps him best by helping him keep his self-respect, keep his sense that he merits respect, is a person one would hesitate to come too close to. So, says Kant, if we express our philanthropy by being generous to a poorer person, "it is our duty to behave as if our help is either what is merely due him, or but a slight service of love, and so to spare him humiliation and maintain his self respect."<sup>6</sup> This recognizes another danger in love, or rather in being loved—the danger of humiliation, of being seen to need the services of others. Beware lovers bearing gifts—they may be gifts of what you need!

Kant finds another danger closely associated with humiliation lurking in the vicinity of love, especially of emotional and felt love—the danger of

self-exposure and vulnerability to harm from others. He speaks in his *Lectures on Ethics* of friendship as "a man's refuge in this world from his distrust of his fellows,"<sup>7</sup> and advocates caution in taking such refuge. "We must so conduct ourselves towards a friend that there is no harm done if he should turn into an enemy."<sup>8</sup> Kant grants that "we all have a strong impulse to disclose ourselves, and enter wholly into fellowship; and such self-revelation is further a human necessity for the correction of our judgments. To have a friend whom we know to be frank and loving, neither false nor spiteful, is to have one who will help us to correct our judgment when it is mistaken. This is the whole end of man, through which he can enjoy his existence. But even between the closest and most intimate of friends there are still things that call for reserve."<sup>9</sup> Reserve is called for, Kant says, as much for the other's sake as for one's own since "we have certain natural frailties which ought to be concealed for the sake of decency, lest humanity be outraged. Even to our best friend we must not reveal ourselves in our natural state as we know it ourselves. To do so would be loathsome."<sup>10</sup>

A great danger in loving friendship, as Kant describes it, is that it will tempt the friends into too great a candor, a candor that is both inconsiderate and imprudent. Polite and prudent reserve, carefully measured "disclosure," is what Kant recommends even toward one's best friends, those toward whom one is frankest and most loving. Kant says that true friendship is merely an Ideal, or an Idea, in Plato's sense. At least twice he quotes the ancient Greek adage, "My dear friends, there are no friends" (once attributing it to Socrates, once to Aristotle). In the real world there are false friends and lovers and ex-friends and lovers, ones who either from carelessness or from spite reveal to others what was disclosed to them alone, whose love is likely to turn to loathing if the once-loved person fails to keep defects secret or at least out of view. In the real world hot-headed intimates turn confidences into weapons; an intimate can "be capable of sending us to the gallows in a moment of passion, while imploring our pardon as soon as he cools down." Kant clearly thinks that the duty of respect, of keeping due distance, trumps the ideal of loving fellowship. "The whole end of man" is correct judgment, not fellowship. Fellowship is merely a means to this end, and a risky one.

Kant's ambivalence about love—his simultaneous acceptance of a "true" and "very necessary" idea of mutual love and friendship and his "misamorism" as far as human love goes, his warnings to us not to expect to find any examples of real love in our experience—is the culmination of a long philosophical tradition, which we could call the theological tradition.

In Plato, in St. Augustine, in Descartes, we get a similar sort of combination of a very strong definition of what the real thing would be, and a claim that no love between human persons will satisfy this definition. All human loves are doomed to failure. At their worst, they degenerate into mutual loathing, betrayal, and enmity; at their best, they are interrupted by death and end in separation and bereavement. The moral, for these "theological" pessimists about human love, is not the very drastic moral that Shaffer draws—that we should try to discover and then to take a medicine that would make us "love-proof"—but rather that we should restrict our love for the "right" object of love, namely God. Love of God will be a sort of live vaccine that will block any riskier loving. We are to find a person who because omnipresent cannot "forsake" us, who because already all-knowing cannot be surprised or shocked at what we reveal of ourselves, who because all powerful has us already in His power, whether or not we give love, so that in loving Him we renounce no independence that we ever had or could have.

Not every variant of this theological tradition, that advises us that love of God is the best love for us, says that it will be in any way a reciprocated love. Even the orthodox Christian version of the tradition, which does say that human love of God is to be a response to God's love for man, cannot say that there is much in common between the way we love God and the way God loves us. For our love is love by the ignorant of a fully knowledgeable one, love by the powerless of an all-powerful one. It would be impossible for us even to try to love God in the way God is claimed to love us—powerfully, knowledgeably, generously; the highest being condescending to love lesser beings. If we were to try to imitate that sort of love it would have to be by ourselves loving less powerful and less knowledgeable beings—our infant children, or our domestic pets. So if we are to try to imitate divine love for us, to let it serve as an ideal or example for us, we will *have* to love someone besides God; we will have to find some even more vulnerable being to love. There is some tension in the Christian story about the sort of reciprocity love at its best involves and about the relation between human love for God and our love for other mortals. If God's love is the best love, *which* of God's loves is the best—that of the Father for other Persons of the Godhead, or that of God for human souls? Which, if any, should we try to imitate?

Tensions in theology are, if Feuerbach and Freud are right, reflections of tensions in our understanding of our own human situation. Love of an all-powerful God may be seen as a displaced version of love of a more pow-

erful human father. Uncertainties about reciprocity, about whether it is appropriate to expect return divine love, and if it is, if that return love should serve as a model for one's own love, will reflect uncertainties about the human father-child relation. Retreat to love of God after disillusion with human adult loves may be a sort of nostalgia for some recalled or fantasized infant security in the strong arms of a loving parent. Thus we can learn something about our own ambivalent attitudes to love by looking at the tensions in the theological tradition, even if we want eventually to demystify it, to bring it back to earth.

Descartes, who can be said to be a heretical adherent of this tradition, gave us a pretty full account of our passion-repertoire and gave love pride of place in his account. He describes it as an emotion that impels us to "join ourselves willingly" to the loved thing or person, and he adds a gloss on this willingness: "I mean the assent by which we consider ourselves henceforth as joined with what we love in such a manner that we take ourselves to be only one part, and the thing loved to be the other."<sup>11</sup> He later adds that in many sorts of love, such as parental love and deep devotion to a nobler person, the lover may take himself to be not the *better* part of the imagined whole, so as not to be afraid of sacrificing himself to save the loved one, even giving his life. But many male lovers take themselves to be the better parts of the unions they make with women and can be ambivalent about any such union, any treating of oneself as mere "part."

Descartes gives an example of such a love when he portrays for us a grief-stricken husband mourning his dead wife, a husband who while he weeps with sincere distress, also experiences "at the same time a secret joy in his innermost soul," and "would be sorry to see her brought to life again."<sup>12</sup> Descartes seems to be ambivalent about love, or at any rate about love of fellow human persons. He defines it in strong and apparently approving tones ("Love can never be too great," he says), but he also seems to endorse a cautious avoidance of it and shows sympathy with the person who rejoices at escape, at regaining his freedom, after experience of the sort of willing union that at least marriage involves. This is not surprising after his sardonic account of adult heterosexual attraction, whose willing endorsement counts as heterosexual love: "Nature . . . brings it about that at a certain age and time we regard ourselves as deficient—as forming only one half of a whole, whose other half must be a person of the other sex. . . . Nature represents, in a confused manner, the acquisition of this other half as the greatest of all goods imaginable."<sup>13</sup>

Descartes says almost nothing about reciprocity in love. He mentions

return love only in passing, and Spinoza, who had read him carefully, spells out explicitly what Descartes had implied both by what he said and by what he did not say: that the one who loves the best object of love, namely God, cannot hope for return love, but at best for modest participation in divine self-love. Love of God, on this account, is ultimately a form of prudent withdrawal from human loves, especially sexual ones. Even if it does not lengthen our earthly life, it is at least safe from any nasty surprises of the sort we sometimes get from human loved ones, when their response, even their return love, takes forms that upset, distress, or harm us.

I have labeled Kant's, Descartes's, and Spinoza's accounts of love "theological" and called them "misamorists" as far as love between human beings goes. The common feature is a strong sense that human persons are unlovable. We can love, but only our betters, and our fellow persons are rarely much better. So Kant can suppose that respect depends upon averting one's gaze from the possibly "loathsome" full actuality of the respected person. Friendship and love between human persons is dangerous because it risks mutual knowledge. Descartes, although he does not, like Kant, give such free rein to expressions of disgust for normal human persons, does not encourage us, even when lovers, to expect to be loved. Presented in this (admittedly unsympathetic) way, this sounds pretty sick stuff. What features of the human situation might explain this peculiar theological ideal of love of a superior who must not be expected to love back and this conviction that we are too defect-filled and inferior to be loved once fully known? Were these great philosophers of our tradition the victims of early childhood traumas of parental rejection, of exposure to scorn and contempt? Did they never experience the great satisfactions of reciprocated love between parent and child, or between human lovers? What soured them? Human persons are of course faulty, but roughly equally faulty, so they need not scorn or be disgusted by each other once they know each other. Nor do we have to be perpetually intent on mutual fault finding and shaming—there can be time also for some mutual admiration and some mutual teasing. I am not going to try to diagnose the causes of the misamorism of these philosophers, tempting though it is to speculate, on the basis of what information we have (Descartes's mother's death in his early infancy and his daughter's early death, Spinoza's rejection by his own community, Kant's puritan upbringing). Rather I am going to turn to some less theological thinkers, ones who do not conceive of us primarily as souls in relation to other sinful souls or to a sovereign God, but rather as intelligent mammals, at birth literally "attached" to a mother, who then may feed us at her breast. I turn from the

*supernatural* theological philosophers of love to the naturalist philosophers of love, those who take umbilical cords, navels, and other basic anatomical reminders of our mammalian condition more seriously than they take our immortal and sinful souls.<sup>14</sup>

David Hume stands out as a philosopher who gives a purely naturalist account of human love. In his *Treatise of Human Nature* he devotes Part 2 of Book Two (about 70 pages, almost as much space as he gives to causation) to analyzing its forms (and those of hate). What is striking in his account, if we compare it with that of Descartes and Kant, is that he takes the forms of human love to be variants on what he calls "love in animals." (Earlier he had related our reason to "reason in animals," our pride to "pride in animals.") Our biological nature, as well as our social organization, sets the stage for our loving. Hume devotes a section to *Love of relations*. He calls "the tie of blood . . . the strongest tie the mind is capable of," and he associates our understanding of all "relations," in however abstract a sense, with this one "relation of a different kind," the blood tie. He makes some interesting remarks about a child's love for his mother, his limited toleration of brothers and sisters sharing that love, his intolerance of stepfathers, calling these "pretty curious phenomena." He gives a glowing description of the sort of intimacy loving friends, loving relatives, loving parent and child, may have, and of our need for such intimacy. In the company of a loved and trusted intimate, he says, the mind "awakes as from a dream: the blood flows with a new tide: the heart is elevated: and the whole man acquires a vigor which he cannot command in his solitary and calm moments."<sup>15</sup> We rejoice, he says, in the presence of a "Being like ourselves, who communicates to us all the actions of his mind; makes us privy to his inmost sentiments and affections, and lets us see, in the very instant of their production, all the emotions which are caused by any object."<sup>16</sup> Kant might well have been lecturing the ghost of Hume in his warnings about the danger of unguarded intimacy and the likely fate of such unashamed and trusting fools as Hume describes. Hume seems unconcerned that these candid intimates may find what is revealed "loathsome." Where Kant issues the rule "Don't treat your friends in ways you will regret if and when they cease to be your friends," Hume in fact gives the reverse rule: "Don't treat strangers in ways you will regret should they become your friends."<sup>17</sup> Hume's account of love, and his apparent recommendation of its delights, must seem *reckless* to the Kantian. Risks of betrayal, of looking silly or even loathsome, of getting caught up in others' troubles, of being attacked while your guard is down are not mentioned at all by Hume. For him these risks of love

seem to be outweighed by the evil of solitude. He echoes what Seneca and Boethius said, "A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer. Every pleasure languishes when enjoy'd apart from company."<sup>18</sup> Is it that Hume does not see the dangers that Kant finds in human loves, or is it that he accepts those risks as a fair price to pay for waking from the bad dream of solitude? "Let all the powers and elements conspire to serve one man . . . the sun rise and set at his command. . . . He will still be miserable till you give him one person at least with whom he may share his happiness and whose esteem and friendship he may enjoy."<sup>19</sup>

Hume seems not to share Kant's worries that close friendship, with the mutual candor that it encourages, will destroy mutual esteem. "Love," in Hume's wide sense, has esteem as one of its forms. To love someone, by Hume's definition, is simply to find something attractive or "fine" in that person. He distinguishes different sorts of love both by the *sort* of fine thing found (power, beauty, wit, good nature) and by the perceived social or biological relationship of the lover to the one in whom he finds "fine" qualities. So we "respect" those we consider our superiors but feel other sorts of love for equals, or for "weaker" ones. Parental love is for those who depend upon us in ways we do not depend on them. Hume thinks adults *do* depend on their children, and on other relatives, in many other ways. Children can be "subjects" of their parents' pride and can sustain their parents' pride, whatever it is taken in, by their sympathy and love. Hume thinks that a person's family's opinion of her matters to her in a special way. "We are most uneasy under the contempt of persons who are both related to us by blood and contiguous in place."<sup>20</sup> He tries to give us an account of love that fits in with his account of proper pride. One of the benefits of mutual love is the mutual sustaining of proper pride.

Hume's account of sexual love is pretty straightforward and brings into prominence a basic biological fact about it that links with his earlier discussion of "the tie of blood." Parental love is the first of love's variants that he discusses, and he ends with "the amorous passion or love betwixt the sexes." What he takes to be distinctive in this form of love, a form which deserves our attention in part "on account of its force and violence," is that it combines three passions—general good will arising out of esteem for "the merit or wit" of the loved person, admiration for the loved one's beauty, and what he calls "the appetite for generation," "the bodily appetite," or lust. Whether or not there is a felt desire for "generation" as such, the satisfaction of this appetite is, at least in the forms of the amorous passion tolerated in Hume's culture,<sup>21</sup> likely to have that result.

Hume, the biologically realistic philosopher of love, puts "generation" pretty squarely in the center of his account of human love (and of his account of marriage as an institution).<sup>22</sup> This love is not merely, as for Descartes, a matter of a willing uniting with one other person to form "a whole," it is also a matter of willingness to jointly generate a third person, as children's love of parents is a response to those who generated them, to parents and progenitors. There is no "one whole"; there are ongoing families and successive generations. Hume does not of course *restrict* love to love between those linked or about to be linked by some "generative" tie (any more than he restricts lust to procreative intent), but he is very clear that, to understand love, we must understand our "blood ties," and the mammalian nature of our "descent" and our genealogy. He discusses the way we like to trace descent and boast of the antiquity of our family; he wonders why we care whether we descend from notable ancestors through the maternal or the paternal line and why we take our father's, not our mother's, family name.<sup>23</sup> One might almost say that Hume is *obsessed*, in his account of love, with the circumstances of human generation. But that comes as a relief after the careful avoidance of or disdain for such "unspiritual" matters that we get in Descartes and in Kant.

Darwin read Hume and quotes him with approval, and Darwin's disciple T. H. Huxley wrote a book about Hume's *Treatise*, with particular praise of its naturalism and particular emphasis on the short chapters on reason, pride, and love in animals. Darwin discusses human love not just in the *Descent of Man* but also in *The Expressions of Emotion in Man and Animals*. Naturally his main focus is on the sexual love that is "generative," and on parent-child love, particularly mother-child love, and its expression. Although he does not find love to have the typical "face" that anger, fear, and disgust have, he does suppose that it shows in the eyes and in the voice, and he suggests that the power of music to rouse emotions may lie in its power to dimly evoke memories in us, race memories of mating cries as well as individual memories of the intonations of soothing motherly voices. Darwin postulated, indeed, that before we were a talking species we were a singing species. Our first songs were without words; later came songs with words, and lastly, intoned sentences. Our first songs would be love songs, but there would also be marching-off-to-the-hunt rhythmic songs, rousing battle hymns, and so on, which exploited the innately expressive power of tone of voice and of repetition of calls. Here Darwin could have called on Descartes for support, for Descartes had both explored the inner and outer bodily effects of love and other emotions (love "speeds the digestion" and

produces a warm, steady heat in the chest) and had noted how music stirs emotions and how, for this purpose, the human voice is the best musical instrument.

What Darwin says about mother-child love echoes Hume's discussion of it. It is not so much that there is a special face or posture which is the face of mother love, nor even one voice the voice of mother love. It is rather that there is immediate responsiveness to the *range* of faces and voices that the child displays. Love makes us more *aware* of the emotions of the loved one than we would otherwise be and makes us quicker to make helpful responses. So the face of mother love will be a mobile face—anxiety, relief, pride, contentment will show there, coordinately with the expressed emotions of the child. Similarly, the child will follow the mother's face and voice—love is as much this sort of coordination of emotions between lovers, as itself a special emotion. Hobbes, Descartes, Hume, Darwin, and many others included love on their lists of human emotions, but, like a mood, it seems as much an activator of other emotions and of response to the other's emotion, as itself an emotion. Hume treated sympathy not as a special emotion but as a disposition or "principle" that communicates emotions from person to person—that "spreads" our distress or our joy to sympathetic companions. Love may be as much like sympathy as it is like the emotions that sympathy can spread. It is a *coordination* or mutual involvement of two (or more) persons' emotions, and it is more than sympathy, more than just the duplication of the emotion of each in a sympathetic echo in the other.

A sympathetic person tends to share the sorrows and joys of all her fellows, as far as she is in a position to recognize them. Sympathy increases joys and sorrows in much the same proportion. Only the person whose own personal ratio of joy over sorrow is exceptionally high or who is surrounded only by those whose misery is exceptionally great will "lose" anything by being a sympathetic person, one whose psyche reverberates, in Hume's phrase, to others' fates. A sympathetic person may in an age of mass communication come to bear the world's sorrows on her shoulders, but also share the world's rejoicings (except that they are less fully reported—weep and the TV world weeps with you, laugh and you laugh alone). One's life will be enriched by a capacity for sympathy, and the more enriched the wider the scope of one's sympathy, but the overall balance of joy and sorrow one experiences need not be affected by how prone one is to sympathize in Hume's sense, that is to empathize, with others. Love is different. It *will* make a difference to the balance, and it is risky and "unsafe" precisely be-

cause one does not know, cannot know, just how one's life will be affected by the strong sort of involvement in the life of another that it brings. It is "for better, for worse." It is not just that one takes on an extra set of joys and sorrows to one's own—one does that if one has sympathy for a person over a period of time whether or not one loves her. When one loves, one's occasions for joy, sorrow, and other emotions will become "geared" in a more complex way than just sympathy to those of the loved person, and this may indeed affect the balance of joy over sorrow in one's life. The loved person's indifference will hurt, her boredom will disappoint, her premature withdrawal will grieve one. Her enthusiasms also may shock and disturb one, the intensity of her embrace may maim one, the diseases she carries may kill one, and one may know that they are killing one.

Even in the womb the child may be affected not just by the mother's physical state but by her changing emotional states. The child may then show a certain kind of psychophysical "sympathy" to the mother's state of mind. Its states may correlate with her states, but not in the complex coordinated way they will correlate when, say, the mother and child *play* together when the child is about one year old. The response then is not just sympathetic sharing of expressed emotions, it is also appropriate *follow-up* responses to what one knows by sympathy that the other is feeling—mischievous delight at the other's temporary bafflement, a frisson of fear at their feigned aggression, glory in the other's surrender. There will be a heightened ability to anticipate the next emotional move of the other, to watch for it and to be ready for it.

The coordination of emotions between intimates, in fun and in more serious contexts of repentance and forgiveness, is a much more complex matter than just a duplication of the expressed emotion of one in a sympathetic echo-emotion of the other—and indeed it may not even require sympathy on both parts. Some sort of knowing how the other feels that stops short of sympathetic fellow-feeling may be all that is needed for these mutually responsive feelings—just as when the cello replies to the violin in a duo it need not first re-sound the violin's notes. When lovers forgive one another (or one the other) there need not first be felt sympathy with the other's repentance, simply familiarity with that feeling and recognition that this was an occasion for the other to feel it. When lovers laugh at each other's familiar endearing weaknesses—and lovers do laugh at the sorts of weakness that it would be offensive to draw attention to in a stranger—they need not each laugh at *hirself*.<sup>24</sup> Each laughs at the other, but neither need laugh *with* the other, finding lovably ridiculous what the other so finds.

Otherwise love would entail self-love and "self so self-loving were iniquity."<sup>25</sup> We do not invite others to empathize or sympathize with our loving of our beloved,<sup>26</sup> and we do not expect it of the beloved either. "Love me, love my dog," "Love me, try to love my other loved ones," maybe. But not, or only for metaphysical poets, "Love me, love all my loved ones, and so love yourself." As Hume put it, "when we talk of self-love tis not in any proper sense, nor has the sensation it produces anything in common with that tender emotion which is excited by a friend or mistress."<sup>27</sup> Hume may be optimistically ignoring narcissists who do feel tenderly about themselves, but surely he is right that love proper is for another, and what we hope for is that the other *reciprocates*, rather than sympathizes with, our love. So we can find tender amusement in our loved ones' harmless faults without wanting them to be tenderly amused at themselves. Lovers clown for each other or are willing to be cast as clowns, but clowns are not expected to be amused at their own antics. The capacity to laugh at oneself which we welcome in each other is not exactly a capacity to find oneself an amusing spectacle. As it is bad form to laugh at one's own jokes, so it is at least dubious form, incurring risk of a charge of narcissism, to laugh with real amusement at oneself, even on those occasions when one welcomes a lover's amusement. If one laughs with one's lover at oneself and one's defects, it should be un tenderly, "against that time, if ever that time come, when I shall see thee frown on my defects."<sup>28</sup> To love is to give another the permission to laugh at one, hopefully tenderly, when no one else, not even oneself, has quite that same permission. One of the risks of love, as Kant rightly saw, was that the permitted laughter may lose its tenderness, may take on more of the tough, unamused, almost sardonic character it is supposed to have when we are sometimes urged by character-improvers to see how ridiculously we are acting and reacting, to do a bit of unfriendly jeering at ourselves. Love complicates the occasions for laughter as greatly as it complicates the occasions for anger, for curiosity, for disappointment, for shame at failure, for sorrow. It adds to the varieties of all of these and so to the degree of delicacy needed for showing the right variety on the right occasion.

Love is not just an emotion people feel toward other people, but also a complex tying together of the emotions that two or a few more people have; it is a special form of emotional interdependence.<sup>29</sup> That love involves some sort of tie, relationship, attachment is a commonplace. Both the theological and the biological accounts relate love the felt emotion to some sort of more-than-emotional tie between persons. For the Christian tradition it is the creator-creature tie which *grounds* love of God, which is a feeling en-

dorsing that ontological attachment. For Descartes, felt love is a will to be or remain attached in a strong, ontological way with a more perfect being. For Hume, Darwin, and after them Freud, one form of felt love, the fundamental form, is grounded in the human child's past, literally physical, tie to a maternal parent, and hers to the child; and other forms of felt love create an actual dependency, at least of emotions and occasions for emotions, which goes beyond any that is "willed" by the lover. The fact of the attachment grounds the feeling of attachment and may exceed the desire for attachment. Love the emotion is not the wish for a relationship, it is the acknowledgment and endorsement of one. Love the tie is not produced by our feelings of love, it is what is endorsed and sustained by them. We may have no say in the coming into existence of the tie—children do not choose their mother, nor she them. Adolescent and adult love is something we are said to "fall" into (and out of), something that happens to us. There may always be some choice about sustaining it, but not always about initiating it. As Richard Wollheim says, we choose our friends, make friendships, but "love is a response to a felt relation,"<sup>30</sup> and one we may have had no say at all about initiating.

It may be objected that this may make sense for mother-infant love, but less good sense for mature sexual love. Surely we *do* initiate sexual relationships (these days it had better be the woman who does the proposing, the man the accepting or refusing). Yes, but as Hume pointed out, sexual desire, or "the appetite for generation" is only *one* component of "the amorous passion." The "felt relation" to which sexual love is a response is not just the temporary and voluntarily entered into "relation" of sexual intercourse. A one-night stand is not the sort of relation whose acknowledgment and endorsement would count as love, otherwise gigolos and other prostitutes would count as lovers. The "relationship" that, when felt and positively responded to, is sexual love is a mutual involvement that is physical, emotional, cognitive, and conative—it is mutual dependency in pleasures, in hopes, in griefs, in intentions for the future. This is not to say that it must be for a very long future—there are "brief loves" that are from the start known to the lovers as likely to be brief. But they are not mere agreements for mutual erotic services for a limited time. (Kant notoriously took marriage to involve such a mutual agreement, for life.) Where people do "use each other" for erotic pleasure, without any other mutual dependency, there all the current advice about "safe sex" will be appropriate, especially as these pleasure-seekers will often welcome the contraceptive "protection" these health protecting measures will also bring. But will *lovers want safe*

sex? Their unsafe sex may be a fitting expression of their in any case unsafe love. Risking their own health is something lovers have always done. Think of all the women who died in childbirth, and who in loving knew quite well the chances that they would so die. Think of the venereal and other diseases that spouses got from one another and passed on to their children. Our loved ones inherit from us, and sometimes inherit our diseases. Of course a lover will, if she lovingly can, avoid "communicating" any disease to her loved one and to her child, but if it takes withdrawal from the love relation to do that, then she will not have opted for "safe loving," however "safe" her sexual and other practices.

It is not very "safe" to love another. If safety is what one values most, the womb or the grave are the best places for one, and, between them, one will want the best approximations one can get to these places where one is sheltered from or beyond hurt. One will opt for places where one cannot respond emotionally to the emotions and other states of mind of others, cannot be pleased by their pleasure, disappointed at their lack of pleasure, hurt by their indifference, angry at their failure to be angered by insults, saddened by their choice to withdraw rather than forgivably harm, and so on. There is no safe love.

Should we therefore avoid love? We should of course do what we can to "protect third parties," and in love there are always third parties, future lovers, children who may be born to one of the lovers, their lovers, and their children. Love tends to be generative and cannot be confined to romantic Romeo and Juliet couplings. The mutual love of couples like Romeo and Juliet is not secure from the generations before them, nor are later generations secure from their love. So of course some sort of "third (or fourth or fifth) party insurance" is incumbent on lovers, and they will want health for the children of their love, but neither venereal nor any other kind of safety is something they can promise each other, their future children, nor other persons affected or infected by their love. If all the world (except misamorist philosophers) is to keep loving lovers, it will have to come to accept risk, too, and to be willing to share the risk, and to help care for the victims of the worst risks.

Only in the theological tradition has love ever been thought of as life-prolonging for the human lover, as a measure against mortality. On a biological view, mortality and natality go together, setting the framework for human love. Human love sometimes generates new lives and has generated some great sonnets. It typically tries to sustain the flourishing life of loved ones, and it makes memorials for dead loved ones, but it does not aim to

lengthen the lover's life. Risk of earlier death because of their love is a risk lovers always had to be willing to run and still must (just as seafarers risk shipwreck, promiscuous seekers of sexual pleasure risk venereal diseases, city dwellers risk air pollution, and citizens risk being involved in their nations' wars). Women were once taught to accept the risk of dying in childbed as a risk that went with their honorable station as loving wives, as prostitutes and their customers accepted the risk of an early death from venereal disease contracted from their less honorable (and contractual) activities, and as all able-bodied men were taught to accept the risk of dying on the battlefield as an occupational risk that went with their honorable station as protective males. There were always of course also some civilian deaths in wars, some virtuous wives whose marriage settlement from their husbands included venereal disease, and many children who were bequeathed their parents' diseases. (No men died in childbirth.) Now the risks are less concentrated on special groups. Death in childbed is not so frequent, and the other threats are fairly widely spread. We all, not just male militants, now have to accept the risk of dying in the quarrels our motherlands and fatherlands get into. The main health risk in loving lies now not in childbed but in other painful beds that may come after the love bed. This risk is not so high for "true lovers" as for mere promiscuous pleasure seekers, but it is not negligible. Love is now as risky to the health for all of us as it has always been for women. Now all is fairly fair in love and war, no more special exemptions.

Most of us believe we should do what we can to reduce the chances of war, especially as we have little reason to hope to be able to confine the risks of unprevented war to a limited population of professional militants. Should we do what we can to reduce the chances of love, given that its risks are also hard to confine? We surely should do what we can to reduce those health risks, but to try to confine them by attempted quarantine would be to restrict love, to outlaw some loving relationships, as some feminists want to morally outlaw love of men, the ones whose forefathers so long oppressed women, infected women, exploited women, and wore them out bearing children to carry on their father's name. Such responses to the risks of love amount to a retreat from generative love, a retreat which, carried to its extreme, would be an attempt to be a monad, to withdraw into safe solitude, into solitary vice. We need not fear nor expect many to respond this way—as Brown says, love is something some form of which we cannot do without. And as Wollheim says, love is a response to a felt relationship between oneself and another or others, a relationship we find there to be responded to.

Both the relations of interdependency and our responses to them, when we will their continuation, are fraught with risks—risks of mutual maiming, of loss and heartbreak, of domination, of betrayal, of boredom, of strange fashions of forsaking, of special forms of disease, and of disgrace. But they are also big with the promise of strengths united,<sup>51</sup> of new enthusiasms, special joys, of easy ungloved intimacy, of generous givings and forgivings, of surprising forms of grace. And as in justice, so in love, it may be impossible to separate the good from the ill.<sup>52</sup>

I said at the start that philosophers have a bad track record when they talk about love, and my own discourse has degenerated into a sermon. My sermon secularized and naturalized a very old story. My endorsement of the “biological” approach of Hume, Darwin, and some Freudians seems to bring me to a perhaps surprising agreement with the natural law tradition that they had little time for, agreement in putting generative love, and love of progenitors and of progeny, at the center of the cluster of kinds of love. It makes a pretty big difference, however, when we drop not just the theology but the patriarchal bias of that version of love. Just how much of a difference this will make we are still finding out. Experiments in loving, in love without domination, are a feature of our time. They may succeed not just in eliminating the special sort of domination that contaminated love in its patriarchal and phallocentric versions but in reducing the danger of any sort of domination in love. But even without domination there will still be some power play, for that seems to be essential to the play we all enjoy. Sometimes the play will turn vicious, sometimes the love will go sour. Those are risks we lovers run. Even if some loves are unlucky loves, some loves false loves, still,

The water is wide, I cannot get o'er,  
And neither have I wings to fly;  
Give me a boat that will carry two;  
And both will row, my love and I.<sup>53</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Hume, “Of Polygamy and Divorces,” in *Essays Moral Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985, p. 185).

<sup>2</sup>Robert Brown, *Analyzing Love* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Jerome Shaffer, “An Assessment of Emotion,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2 (April 1983), p. 171.

<sup>5</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1964), Part 2, sec. 24.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., sec. 23.

<sup>7</sup>Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. L. Infield (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 207.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>René Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), arts. 79 and 80.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., art. 147.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 3, art. 90.

<sup>14</sup>I am drawing a sharp contrast between theological and naturalistic views, but they can be combined in one philosopher. St. Augustine is a good case of a thinker who takes our natural condition seriously enough, but goes on to superimpose a supernatural framework on it, in a platonistic way working up from childhood experience of love between mother and child, through love of comrades, experience of sexual love, and what he in the *Confessions* calls “the madness of raging lust,” to transcend all these in eventual love of God.

<sup>15</sup>David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 353.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>See Ibid., p. 581. “A man that lies at a distance from us may in a little time become a familiar acquaintance.”

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>21</sup>In “A Dialogue,” (Hume, *Enquiries*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975]), Hume discusses homosexual love as Plato knew it and treats it much more sympathetically than he elsewhere (for example in “Of Polygamy and Divorces”) treats some forms of heterosexual love, such as that of a sultan for his harem.

<sup>22</sup>See Hume, *Treatise*, “Of Chastity and Modesty” and “Of Polygamy and Divorces.”

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 308–9.

<sup>24</sup>Hirself = her or him self.

<sup>25</sup>William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Sonnet 62 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977).

<sup>26</sup>I discuss this feature of love in “What Emotions are About,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 4: *Action Theory and Philosophy of Mind*, ed. James E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1990).

<sup>27</sup>Hume, *Treatise*, p. 327.

<sup>28</sup>Shakespeare, Sonnet 49.

<sup>29</sup>A similar view is taken also by Robert C. Roberts, in an article which came to my attention after I had written this paper. He writes “the responses characteristic of such attachment are too various and conflicting for it to be an emotion. They can be joy when the beloved is flourishing, indignation when she is insulted, gratitude when she is benefited, fear when she is threatened, hope when her prospects are good, grief when she dies and much more. Love in this sense is not an emotion but a disposition to a range of emotions” [“What an Emotion Is: A Sketch,” *Philosophical Review* (April 1988), p. 203].

<sup>30</sup>Richard Wollheim, *The Thread of Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 279; see also p. 212.

<sup>31</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Everyman's Library, 1973), Chap. 10. "To have friends is power, for they are strengths united."

<sup>32</sup>Hume, *Treatise*, p. 497.

<sup>33</sup>This is a revised version of a talk given at a conference on "Love" organized by John O'Connor, held at William Paterson College in February 1988. I have been helped by the discussion on that occasion, by perceptive criticisms by Lynne Tirrell, and by editorial suggestions from Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins. Would that they, or some other transforming agency, could have effected a magic replacement of my preachy prose by a pointed short story, a well-turned sonnet, or a simple telling lyric, like this Elizabethan song whose first verse I have borrowed.

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# The Philosophy of(Erotic) Love



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