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Author(s)	Ó Murchadha, Felix
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Love's Conditions

Passion and the Practice of Philosophy

FELIX Ó MURCHADHA

To speak philosophically of love is to be doubly entangled. While our everyday, non-philosophical lives are already in multiple ways entangled in love, a certain dominant tradition of philosophical practice directs the self to love, but to love without passion. Such a practice of philosophy is one rooted in self-reflexivity and self-reflection, where philosophical thought reflects back on its own conditions within the philosophical life. Such self-reflection is grounded in a principle of self-responsibility first declared by the oracle of Delphi as γνῶθι σεαυτόν, know thyself, which is at the roots of Socratic irony and therein can be found a certain skeptical moment that, as Husserl rightly saw, lies at the origins of transcendental thought.¹ To take responsibility for my thoughts it is not enough to judge them to be true, it is also necessary to know their source. This requires a new and indeed unnatural disposition toward things, which understands them not in terms of their actuality, but rather with respect to their possibility: to things in the possibility of their appearance to thought, to things as justified in their being on the grounds of their possibility for thought. Such unnatural thinking requires a certain discipline, a discipline premised on radical self-examination. Self-responsibility is for that which is within the self's power.

From ancient Stoicism and Skepticism through Montaigne, Descartes, and Spinoza to Kant and Husserl, such an account of self-responsibility is

premised on an understanding of a capable self which functions both as a precondition for philosophical reflection and as the goal of philosophical practice, an understanding of the self which claims at once to be descriptive and prescriptive, and which presents the self as self-relating, auto-affecting, and immune from heteronomy. This account of the self presupposes a dualism which is both a methodological and an ontological principle: all things are understood as either within the power of the self (i.e., each self-responsible philosophical practitioner) or within a realm of necessity indifferent to the self's desire. This fundamental duality lies at the core of the stoic discipline of thought and of the skeptical deflation of philosophical absolutism; it is a common claim of both absolutism and skepticism.²

There emerges in the philosophical tradition both in antiquity and in modernity a Skeptical-Stoic understanding of a self (for all the distinctions between Stoicism and Skepticism), which informs philosophical practice in essential ways. This is so because the philosophical project of self-understanding is forever threatened by a certain alterity in the self, that of the passions. Self-knowledge, responsible selfhood, self-legislating reason: all terms cluster around the formation of a self capable of philosophical reflection and all are rooted in an ascetic discipline of control, perhaps even elimination, of the passions. Informing philosophical reflection in its transcendental movement is a fundamentally Stoic reflection on the self which, taking Socrates also as its source, thinks of the self as integral and sees this integrity as finding expression as apatheia, feeling without passion, action in the suspension of passivity.

But can such an integral, apathetic being love? Is love possible for a being concerned with his own self-responsibility in thought? St. Paul responds in a radically negative manner to this question: for Paul, the call to love is a call to give up the seeking after wisdom, the seeking after self-responsibility in thought.³ This most radical critique of philosophy, this critique of the sense of self and the project of the self underlying philosophy, in the end sees philosophy as loveless. But conversely, without self-responsibility, without a self which knows itself and which knows its own being, can there be love?

Eros: Loving Indifferently

To think love philosophically is to think its possibility. While love may be actually present in many ways and in many relationships, the philosophical question of love cannot take that actuality for granted. It cannot do so


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for many reasons, but above all because of a fundamentally transcendental movement in philosophical reflection. To think love transcendently is to think its conditions, to think that without which it would not be. To radically think love is to think it as not being, as not made possible, as that which would not be possible. In short, it is to think love in its reducibility, that is, to think its conditionality. Such a project assumes that there are conditions to love, that love is conditional, yet love seems to have a certain unconditionality.

Unconditionality with respect to love can mean at least two distinct things: either that love is *sui generis*, that is, depends on no prior conditions outside of itself, or that though conditioned by different factors (desires, inclinations), once given, love remains despite changes in the self and its object. Leaving aside the question of whether either of these forms of unconditionality is sustainable, it would appear that both are conditional at least in one sense: they depend on a being capable of loving and a being capable of being loved. Even if love is *sui generis*, it is something which a self does and, as such, it would seem, must be something of which such a self is capable. The first step then is to explore this conditionality of the “unconditional,” the self capable of loving.

A self capable of loving would be one which had within itself the power to love. But to have a power to do something is at the same time to have the power not to do that same thing. A self which can love can also not love, can refrain from loving. To refrain from loving would not mean to hate. Rather, it would be to disengage from the dynamic of love or hate. In exercising its capacities such a self is affirming its own capacity to be. Such an affirmation cannot—on pain of self-contradiction—destroy its self-capacity. This Spinozistic insight into the *conatus essendi* must be affirmed here: the being of the self derives from the power of its own essence.⁴ The exercise of this capacity cannot be a self-destructive action, and as such the capacity not to love differs fundamentally from, say, a disengagement from nutrition or other things necessary for existence. The exercise of this capacity must rather affirm the power of the self. The power involved, however, is neither the power of the body, either perceptive or kinesthetic, nor the power of the intellect. The intellect cognizes that which can be known in its conditionality; it knows in terms of reasons. However, beyond such reasons is the choice for or against reasons, for or against the objects of sense (either in terms of their reality or in terms of their worth). The capacity to choose such reasons and such objects, to affirm or deny, has traditionally been associated with the faculty of the will.

In suspending all relations of love (and hate), the self finds within itself that capacity to love and to hate. But such a capacity must be free from love or hate, must be prior to the difference of love or hate, the difference of affirmation or negation. The self discovers in itself an indifference between love and hate: before all preference, before all choice, is a will which is indifferent to that which is to be chosen. This is the fundamental Stoic insight into the self.⁵ The capacity to love or not to love is as such a capacity indifferent to all which is to be loved, is a will to nothing. In discovering this faculty within itself, the self opens up the possibility of a radical disengagement with the world; precisely at the source of its love the self finds its firmest anchorage in the world and its possibility to weigh that anchor. The choice to love is a choice which at least potentially subjects the self to an other. In finding within itself the capacity to subject itself in that manner the self discovers itself as its own subject. The Skeptic's denial of cataleptic force,⁶ the denial that impressions are compelling and binding, is here a matter not of neutral sense impressions, but rather of that in the object which gives itself as lovable (or repelling). Affirmed here is will as ultimate arbiter, a will which expresses the fundamental, indeed divine, capacity of the human, a capacity of Epicurean divinity: that capacity of sublime indifference.

Such a will is at once apathetic and skeptical, impassable and sovereign. It is a will which begins with itself, but itself as empty, as without content, without passion. This is a free will, but free precisely in its absolute capacity to decide, a freedom necessarily compromised in the act of decision itself, an act which depends for its very possibility on phenomena which affect the self and give it cause for action. Such a self is prior to all experience, is, so to speak, a court which judges the witnesses  which experience from a serene distance. This is a will not to power or to truth, but an indifferent will to nothingness, a will which does not love, but which at most chooses to love. Indifferent to the world, indifferent to all others, this self in choosing its objects of love chooses without passion and chooses with no criteria outside it. An indifferent will needs be indifferent also to itself. Its love of its own idols is a love without passion, a love of pure act.

While neither the Stoic nor the Skeptic necessarily affirms such a will, tendentially however  both of these ways of philosophy tend toward an understanding of the self as guarding itself from passion, blocking off the heterogeneous; its love of wisdom is founded on an immunity from all which originates beyond the self. But can there be love without passion? In other words, is a self understood from itself capable of love? The indifferent will excludes the stimulating presence of the other. The indifferent will

in seeking to motivate itself is sovereign to the extent which it has control over the criteria of its own choice. It is here that intellect functions with will to choose. The choice of the will, guided by intellect, is the choice of that which the intellect can affirm from itself as preferable.⁷ We can understand this choice in practical or theoretical terms, as good or as true; in each case the criteria is in the self, namely, in its positing of the true or good. But what such a choice of preference gives is an appropriable object, an object of erotic desire understood as desire for incorporation of the preferred thing in the self. But this drive to incorporation must derive from a sense of incompleteness, of lack.⁸ Whether out of melancholic despair or ravenous greed this sense of lack motivates such erotic desire which begins in the auto-affecting self. Such a self is motivated by its own self-relation and finds in the other nothing beyond the occasion for the exercise of its own masturbatory needs.

Agápe Being Loved Overwhelmingly

The aporia of the loving will, capable of choosing to love but as an indifferent will not able to fulfill that capacity, mirrors impotency: possessing all that is necessary to make love, but unable to respond to the stimulating presence of an other. The experience of being loved, however, seems one which is saturated by the presence of the other. This is expressed in Greek myth by the figure of Eros shooting arrows at unsuspecting “victims.” To be “wounded” by love is to be overcome by an other, to be acted on and subject to an other. This other is experienced not through an inferential move from an impression to the source of the act of being impressed on, but rather a sense of the other as more immediate and real to the self than it is to itself.

Love understood in terms of the Judeo-Christian account of agápe begins not with a capable being, but rather with one who recognizes herself as nothing in the face of the lover. But such nothingness is higher than any being, because it is a receptivity to the other beyond herself. The “organ” for such receptivity is understood already in the Hebrew scriptures as the heart. The heart begins not from itself but, so to speak, from before its own being touched. In other words, the heart is not strictly speaking a faculty at all but rather a sense for that which has already happened. As such a sense it needs to be capable of receiving, but this is a capacity for incapacity, an ability to be outside itself. Paradoxically this is a capacity not to be, a capacity which, far from affirming itself in the manner of the conatus essendi, denies

itself. Overwhelmed and surprised by love, the self reflecting on itself can find no justification for that love. In receiving love it is taken aback, thrown back not on itself as the basis of that love, but on the lack in itself of a cause for being loved. Not knowing the will of the lover and finding its own belovedness not in any capacity of its own, but rather ungrounded in itself, such a self is engulfed in the unconditionality of an other's love.

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Loved unconditionally in this manner, the self cannot recognize in itself any value to justify that love. Rather, the self finds itself loved but unworthy of that love. As such the self in experiencing the other as loving experiences itself as not only unworthy of being loved, but also as incapable of loving in return. This is so for two reasons. First, the act of love requires an affirmation of the self as capable of loving, but it can find in itself nothing which is lovable and love remains intangible for it, a mysterious gift which it receives without any warrant. Second, if that gift is without warrant in the self, then love is greater than the self is. It precedes the self in a fundamental sense: it is experienced as a creative love, as that love in and through which it is. Such love is strictly nothing, nothing in or of the world, a nothingness which the self contaminates in its very being as an entity. As such the very being of the self as a self, its affirmation of existence, which for it is inescapable, removes it from the love out of which it comes, and leaves it in a constant agony of withdrawal.

Being loved in this way is the extreme case of agapeic condescension, whereby the self loses itself in the source of its being and becomes alienated from its own capacity to be. Such a radically incapable self cannot justify itself, nor does it have the means for goodness and fulfillment. It is a self fully dependent on love or, in more theologically charged terms, on divine grace. It is a self which in the very exercise of its will cannot but be guilty and for which all decision remains in the end arbitrary, totally dependent on an inscrutable love and forever anxious of betraying that love in its very being.

Being in Love

It is remarkable that the Greek and Christian traditions, beginning in some of their fundamental movements in hymns to love (Plato's *Symposium* and Paul's 1 Corinthians 13), contain within themselves the tendency toward love's dissolution. Taken to its extreme in absolutely unconditional love, *agape* brings us to a remarkably similar situation to the erotically conditioned love: an arbitrary will and a situation of radical separation of lover

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and beloved. Yet this is not to understand but to dissolve the phenomenon of love: in both cases the relational quality, love as binding of two, the duality of loving and being loved, is lost. Furthermore, in both accounts there occurs distinct but nevertheless related movements of disembodiment: in the one case disembodied, indifferent will that as such is prior to any being set in an embodied relation, prior also to any enticement of embodied allure, and in the other case, the disembodiment of a love which has no bodily, hence conditioned, source and also no bodily, hence attractive, object. To avoid this dissolution it would appear necessary to eschew any priority of the self—either as capable or incapable. The transcendental assumption of conditionality in the self or the faith in a transcendent source of love undermines or mystifies the unconditionality of love. It is vital now to attempt to think that unconditionality, but at the same time to displace it: the unconditionality of love not so much a matter of the will or of unmotivated grace, but an event which refigures the world for those who find themselves touched by it.

The previous discussions suggest that the attempt to think *agape* without *eros* or *erōs* without *agapē* issues an essential messiness in love, a lack of purity, a contamination in love. Such contamination puts thinking itself at risk, or rather puts the self at risk in the responsibility of one's own thought. To approach that risk what may be needed is a thinking of conditional unconditionality, or perhaps unconditional conditionality.


In beginning again to think love—thinking love in its relationality—what is immediately apparent is the diversity of the objects of love: parents, children, siblings, teachers, wives, husbands, lovers, god or gods, saints, pet dogs, sheep, insects, ideas, paintings, seasons, countries, and so forth. The objects of love are not just human; they have nothing in common except that they are or can be loved. As such, not one of these objects can claim priority. Let me begin then with one such object, chosen without any compelling reason: one of Cézanne's paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire,¹⁰ which I love. I do not simply like it or appreciate its qualities or enjoy looking at it. To love a painting is to say more than this. It does not mean I wish to possess it. I want of course to have access to it, but in loving it I don't believe I could possess it—it remains beyond me, outside my grasp. If asked why I love it or what about it I love, I can make an attempt to respond, point to the shades of greens and blues, the way the scene slowly takes on substance as I view it, the remarkable stillness of the landscape. But very quickly my discourse becomes neutral, critical, and I break off, admitting that nothing I said really explains my love for this painting. The painting simply is for

me and when I am in its presence it becomes the center of my world. Did I choose for that to happen? That seems unlikely. How does love arise? This painting provokes in me a response. That response was not an automatic one—like a reaction to a stimulus—but rather was a response to the allure¹¹ of the painting, to that which attracted in the painting. That which attracted in the painting is not reducible to the qualities of the painting, not because it has nothing to do with them (if not them, then what makes it lovable to me?), but rather because these qualities are not attractive as qualities that which can be expressed propositionally. Rather, it is as if a space opened up between me and the painting, a space in which, before I knew it, the painting with all its qualities conspired, colluded with secret feelings and preferences in me, and brought me out to find myself already in love.

Being in love (with a painting, a landscape, a person, an idea) is to find myself already there, already within love. It is a sense of being-in, which can be a sense of expanse and openness, but also as contracting, smothering. Being in love is being-in as we are beings in the world: to be in love is to exist relating not simply to the object of my love, but to myself and my object as they relate to love. While I say, “I love you,” to my lover, I can say also, “I am in love with her,” as “I am in love with Cézanne’s Mont Sainte-Victoire,” or “I am in love with justice,” or “I am in love with sunflowers.” Despite the variety of these loves, each can be expressed by the prepositions “in” and “with.” In love, I find myself with an other. To be with that other is not primarily to recognize that other’s qualities, nor even to address that other as “you,” but rather to find myself in a relation of being-with that other. “With” comes from the Old English word meaning “against.” The with-relation is both an association and a separation, a finding oneself in relation to the other, but not because of her or it or him, but because of that which binds us together even as we find ourselves placed over against each other: that event of love which associates us and yet toward which we relate separately, perhaps in opposed ways.

In the case of a painting or (even more so) of sunflowers or a landscape, the relation of the other to this event of love is a dormant one: the Cézanne painting is not relating of itself to the love between us. But with a person it is otherwise. Again, we can think of different modes of these relations: child to parent, young lovers to each other, friends, a follower to an inspiring figure (politician, artist, teacher, etc.), a carer to a sick or vulnerable person, and so on. Again these relations differ in their manifestations, but in each case there is the sense of being-with “in” that which encompasses us. The

“us” is, nevertheless, contestable and contested. The space opened up by love may not be a tranquil one, as with the child attempting to break from the confines of his parents’ love, responding against that love in his claustrophobia, or the beloved who does not requite the love which she unknowingly entices in her lover, or the manipulative politician secretly despising those whose love he inspires. Yet in each case the rebelling or manipulative or unknowing lover or beloved is implicated in the loving relation, even the unknowing beloved unaware of her shy and unapproaching lover’s intentions participates in an event of love, if only in her lover’s fantasy.

This relation of “in” and “with” is one in which there is love, but there is love only for a self which is in love. The self which finds itself in love is directed lovingly toward the object of its love. Such directedness is irreducible to need. To need something is to relate to it as a more or less sufficient object of satisfaction; the claim to love, however, appears to exceed all need, all interest, all solidarity or generational duty. It calls on a desire in the self to be toward an other as excessive to its needs and interests. Such desire responds to the excessive claim of love, but the latter calls forth not an immediate response, but rather a hesitation on the part of the self, a hesitating in response to her undoubted biological needs and interests. In that moment of hesitation, in the capacity to defer (perhaps indefinitely) response to such needs (and as such to make this a response rather than a reaction), the self develops into itself. Such a self is no longer self-sufficient but is in the full sense of the term a person. The person emerges when the movement to and away from stimuli is interrupted such that the stimuli are recognized as alluring for the self. Without that hesitation there would be no relation of return, and without such a relation the self would not recognize in itself any surplus of its simply animal being, but would remain at the surface of those things which stimulate its reactions. Being a person, the self finds itself in relation with other things and persons in which it finds them to be more than their surface being, finds them rather disclosed in the singularity of their being as moments of exteriority within relations of pleasure and pain. Such singular exteriority is that which makes the entity excessive to the generalizing sway of need and inspires in the self a personal relation of attraction or repulsion at the inappropriable selfhood of the object. Faced with such an object, which attracts and remains beyond its power, an entity experiences its  relation to that before which it hesitates and stands in awe.¹² Standing in awe it finds in itself more than simply a needy being, it finds in itself an interiority of being-in its desire for that entity which stands before it as a surface being marked with interiority. The personal emerges

from this hesitation of the movement of self-projection. Such a hesitation is a being toward others which responds to other entities as they appear to it in their hidden depth. Such a being toward others as possessing hidden depth allows the self to be toward an other beyond the observable factors which constitute its own needs as a natural being. It is here that passion emerges, precisely as a personal relation to others.

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In relation to the hidden depth of an object the person can only await the sparks of that being in the space opened up by its own hesitation toward it. Therein the entity appears as more than its surface being, it appears namely as that which has affective power. A self open to affective power is a passionate self, a self which allows itself to be drawn into the transcendent by that which affects it. Such passion is not without auto-affectivity, without the passion of self with respect to itself. Yet such auto-affectivity is not of a self immanent to itself, but rather to a self which is being affected by itself in its own being drawn outward toward the alluring object of its passion. The self comes to itself in finding itself always already with others in the world opened up in its depth by the affective power of that which appears to it. Love is not simply one passion among others here, but is rather the gateway to the passions, because to allow itself to be drawn into affective space is not simply to be acted upon, but to trust the world as that place in which it can be in excess of itself. Such trust is already a movement beyond itself, a movement toward the other as that which is beyond the power of the self, and is at that fundamental level a finding of itself in love. So understood, being in love is a being in relation to an other as that which allures it beyond the satisfaction of its needs toward the exercise of its personhood as a being with an other. Far then from love being the choice of an indifferent self or being a gift to an unworthy self, the self becomes fully itself, becomes, that is, a person, only in love. To be a person is to be in love.




If we return to the roots of the Christian and Greek traditions, we see this acknowledged. “God is love,” says St. John (1 John 4:8), but how are we to understand the copula? Do we understand this as a predication—God is love as the cat is black—or as a statement of identity—God is nothing other than love? Clearly John wants to express more than one accidental quality of God. “God is love” states something essential about God. Furthermore, as John’s letter goes on, “whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 John 4:16). To be in God is to be alive, not in the sense of surviving, but in the sense of being a self in living the source of life in oneself.¹³ “God is love” means that God has being out of love, that God is first a relation of love. This is expressed in later Christian thought by the account of

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the Trinity. At the core of that account is a relation of love and fecundity in God: the creator God is not first a sovereign will which then decides to create; God is only in relation to his own loving relation—father and son are only in the spirit, which is the love in and through which they and all things are. In other words, at the core of the Christian account of God is an understanding of being as love: nothing is except out of love, and this is the case for God and for creatures. Understood in this way creation, fecundity, is at the core of the divine. The creation of the world is an expression of love: *creatio ex nihilo* a *creatio ex caritate*. To say then that the divine love is unconditional is to say that all being, to the extent that it is, is conditioned by love. To love and be loved, in such a view, is to feel in the being of the self a source beyond itself, a source of itself as a prior gift.

The agapeic element in love is its gratuitousness, its lack of reason. But such lack of reason shows not the worthlessness of the self, but rather that the self in his personhood originates before all worldly economy: to be a person as nothing other than to find oneself in love. To find oneself in love is to find oneself in relation to an event which is not itself subject to other beings, but is the source of what is. But that event is always a binding to an other, to an other with which the self first is, with which the self finds itself love. But that sense of agapeic gift at the source of the self is at the same time an erotic movement toward an other, in which the self in praising the situation of finding itself in love directs itself toward the object of its love as that which allures it, as that which draws the self out toward an other as a being in depth. In and through being so drawn toward an object of her desire, the self's own interiority first emerges. Finding herself in relation to her desire's object the self recognizes herself through her being in relation to that object, understanding her world as centered in that object, the erotic response seeks two things: to find an intimate space with that object and to gain and retain the love of that object. While agapeically the self finds herself in a relation of gift without reciprocity, that is, the gift of her own self as a being-in-love, in the erotic relation she is driven to find that intimate reciprocity from the object of her love.

The erotic relation is one which seeks a response, seeks the other's desire. As such, it is a relation between persons—or is experienced as with a putative person (hence the personification of nonpersonal objects of love, countries, cars, animals). This seeking for reciprocity responds to the attraction of the other and seeks to be attractive for the other in turn. Objectification is essential to the erotic relation, but an objectification first of the self as the one who loves: the self makes itself into the object of

another's love, it is for itself that object—I want her to want me as an object of her love. In that sense I bring myself  of  flesh, to  before the one I love and offer myself to her as that object. I desire the other in the love in which I find her and subject myself to that love, make the project of my life nothing other than being-in that love. To be in that love is to be a self in the interiority of my being, but at the same time to be convulsed into the open, placed in absolute vulnerability in the presence of the beloved. The interiority of my self found in love is my interiority as given to her, is there only for her. But the self which is founded in love is in this sense in danger of losing itself, being enveloped—devoured—by the other.

Capacity, Vulnerability, and Beauty


The self is fully itself only in love, but love threatens to devour the self. Finding herself in love, the self is as vulnerable to that with whom  she finds herself in love. The being-in of love oscillates between expansion and contraction, joy and horror. The self which finds herself in love renders herself vulnerable in her very being, not primarily in terms of survival as a physical being but in living her body as a personal being. The self in love, feeling herself devoured by the other, loses above all else her sense of her own autonomy. This vulnerability is not only a matter for the self, but is crucially an issue for philosophy itself. If philosophy is in one sense characterized by an erotic movement of desire, equally we can detect the tendency, driving in particular the transcendental movement of thinking, within philosophical practice to protect and preserve the self from possible loss in the erotic relation. At the core of the erotic movement of philosophy is disclosed a fundamental anxiety for the self, which motivates a securing of the self against the alterity set loose in erotic relations. The love of youths, the carnal and spiritual relation to contingent and passing others, is disclosed as a pale image of an eternal beauty, which draws the self away from the earthly and hence from its own earthiness and vulnerability, to that which is “neither more nor less, but still the same inviolable whole.”¹⁵ Philosophical accounts of the self are as much about preserving the self as they are about describing it. But while the danger of the erotic is undoubted, an overly robust defense of the self as an autonomous self-willing being undermines the very originating force of the self as its being-in-love. The self thrown back to its own capacities to be cannot know whether its objects of love are anything other than its own idols. Kant responded to this problem through the principle of universalization, but given radical evil we can never know that we have used






this principle correctly, we can never know that self-love has not secretly motivated our acts.¹⁶

Kant's metaphysics of morals responds to a concern which can be traced back to Augustine, namely, that the philosophical aim toward truth is secretly corrupted by (self-)love. But if we begin with being-in-love, which is to say, beginning with the heterogeneous, with the self as emerging out of heterogeneity, another picture emerges. This can be understood in terms of two issues: the command to love and the beauty of things. Love in Christian thought is a command: "You ought to love." But this is a command which the self is not capable of obeying. The command to respect others as ends can be obeyed. But the self cannot obey a command to feel something, cannot be commanded to be in love with an other. The command overpowers the capacity of the self, shows the self its own incapacity. "God bids us to do what we cannot, that we may know what we ought to seek from him," says St. Augustine.¹⁷ The command to love is a command to seek beyond the self for the source of the self's own being and action. It is a command to make the self fundamentally vulnerable to the other—to all others—so that it can let itself be led by others, by all others, such that every other becomes the center of its being, so that it sacrifices itself for all others, that it never places itself above the other.


The question of love is one of motivation, of what motivates the outward movement toward an other not in the striving to fulfill need, but in the hesitant, self-forming movement of desire. Paradoxically the modern striving to give firm foundations for knowledge, culminating the transcendental philosophies of Kant and Husserl, have obscured that inner striving.¹⁸ Husserl in his account of intentionality brought to its culmination the history of forgetting surrounding this movement of subject to object. But precisely in so doing he made this forgetting evident and in his analysis of passive synthesis discovered at the heart of knowledge the affective movement of being drawn to the object, the pull of the object which is not simply a matter of brute impressions but an attraction through excess in the object.¹⁹ Such attraction, however, is systematically discounted in transcendental philosophy, which begins with the self's capacity and hence with the will. But this points to a loss in the very notion of the transcendental itself, which serves to undermine the possibility of thinking love.

Rooted in Plato's understanding of the ideas of goodness, justice, and beauty as belonging to all the forms, as being characteristic of forms as forms, the medieval idea of the transcendentals developed an account of those qualities which transcend any particular genus or species.²⁰ The

transcendentals are the most abstract of qualities, belonging as they do in each thing which is, but at the same time they are also the most concrete. While general terms such as animal, tree, and water are qualities abstracted from individual beings, the transcendentals are manifest each time differently in each being. What the transcendentals make manifest—that which is not immediately obvious in the general concepts—is the attractiveness of every entity, an attractiveness which for the medievals is the being manifest of their creatureliness. This attraction is not simply a contingent factor of my likes or dislikes, but rather that in the entity which shows itself to me as intelligible, as capable of being known. It shows itself to me both sensibly and intellectually, to both  once. It is this mixing of the sensible and the intellectual which suggests that God the Son be understood as beauty. The Son by bringing pure form and matter together embodies the ambiguity of beauty as splendor which appeals from the entity to the incarnate being of the human intellect.²¹

Stoic and Skeptic philosophical tendencies are rooted in ascetics of the self: practices of self-discipline which work against the fundamental attractiveness toward the world, in the end work to diminish and qualify the beauty of the world. But prior to its ascetic exercise of apathe  prior to its discovery of its capacity for indifference, the self finds itself as loving, but loving in response to that which entices and allures it. At the core of Platonic philosophy is such allure. The figure of Socrates is not primarily ironic but rather erotic, or his irony is a form of his erotic seduction. In a Platonic er  y indifference of the will is excluded and the prospect is opened up of wonder in the face of goodness in which all that is participates and yet is beyond being; Christian agá  lls all things back to the source of their being and goodness in the loving gift which is the being of God. What is glimpsed here in both traditions is being as being drawn away  being as movement without end but with purpose. It is this being which requires phenomenological elucidation. Before all ascetic practice, before all scriptural exegesis, there is a being drawn forth, a being allured and enticed. All practice and all tradition depends on this enticement, which is nothing less than becoming a self as pers  s person the self finds himself in love; the self is from the beginning subject to the call of this love, a prior, constituting call. To be called is to be attracted; to be is to desire. But to be a person is not first to be sovereign and self-affective; it is in responding that the self is constituted in its own desiring. The openness to that which entices is not itself a prior condition; rather the attractive thing tears open the self, gives it to itself as heart. The object as

attractive awakens the self as attention.²² This movement begins with the object, and the heart knows it as such. The heart responds to the object as the source of this attraction, and in responding to this source outside itself knows love, but knows it as a response to a prior gift. Far from finding in itself the conditionality of love, the self in her heart finds love as that for which she has no conditions and no capacity within herself. The attractive object is both enticing and forbidding, draws out and yet remains inappropriate, gives itself and yet cannot be taken. The object is experienced agapeically as that before which the self hides at the very moment when she is drawn in.

The self finds himself in relation to selves, to that which gives itself in person. The other, whether as thing or as person, gives itself as self; it both gives itself to appearance and as a self remains hidden in the depths of its own being. As selves entities remain hidden, phenomenologically understood are things which are only as horizontal beings. The self in its being-toward lives in that which makes on it a claim as that which radiates its allure—actually or potentially—toward a desiring being. The attractive object—whether person or thing—shows itself as expressing a loving gift, as a self which gives itself, but in its giving itself discloses itself as in excess of its very appearance. That excess is the agapeic nature of entities in their givenness, to which the self responds in a love which is one of self-dispossession, a sacrificial act, which in a moment gives up everything, every sovereign claim, for the sake of the beloved object. The making receptive of the heart is an infinite task which undermines every limit placed on it. Love is experienced as coming not from me but from the beloved in its being with me in the space of love: love is experienced not as my doing but as that which has been placed in the self, as an infection, an acting in (in face  the self of what is not itself.

What this means is that a self who loves is called to that for which he is incapable, because he is called beyond his own being from the very source of his being. As such the moral claim is a claim of beauty, which is a claim to be loved, one which primarily addresses the heart.²³ This claim calls forth desire as an obligation. Such a calling commands love, commands a love which begins not from the self but with it, a love which seeks to find itself transformed in the other which calls. The turning of the heart toward the other is a turning which happens only through the other, obeying a logic of grace, where the self's turning begins not with it but with an other. But this turning is itself gratuitous, because the infinity of the object in its being inspires in the self a desire which cannot be justified, is a turning beyond all

need and as such beyond all economy of exchange. In turning toward the other, the self finds itself in love as in a world.

Conclusion

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To be in love is to be a self and to be a self is to be overtaken with passion, that is, ruled by an alterity both transcending and within the self. To follow such desire in trust is for the self to give itself to that alterity, to trust in a passionate feeling which remains always in part opaque. To respond to such desire is to trust first the alterity in the self, while all the time conscious of possible destruction. The will to love and be loved does not begin with itself, but is a response to that which entices and allures it. It is a response to a heteronomous logic. The philosophical impulse to sovereignty and autonomy forgets the source of self-responsibility, which is not in the self but in the place from which the self emerges, the between space of being in love. In this sense philosophy in its transcendental movement of self-responsibility remains always in tension with the call to love, for the most part sensing it only in fleeing from it. The will to suspend this love is a will to deny a prior dependence of love. It is a will to begin, to initiate; a will, in short, to freedom as self-determination. Such a will to freedom denies agapeic love, perverts erotic desire, and remains closed to the primordial being-in: the being in love. To think love philosophically is to begin in and with passion, to begin as already in love. It is to practice philosophy otherwise, beyond the stoic-skeptical inheritance which continues to inform the ascetics of philosophical reflectivity.

NOTES

1. Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie* (1923/24): *Erste Teil: Kritische Ideengeschichte*, in *Husserliana*, vol. 1, ed. Rudolf Boehm (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), 7–8.
2. Spinoza, “Discourses,” in *Discourses and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. R. Dobbin (London: Penguin, 2008), 14: “Whoever desires or avoids things outside their control cannot be free or faithful, but has to shift and fluctuate right along with them.” See also Descartes, “Passions of the Soul,” in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 379: “Regarding those things that depend only on us . . . our knowledge of their goodness ensures that we cannot desire them with too much ardour. . . . Regarding the things that do not depend on us in any way, we must never desire them with passion, however good they may be.”
3. 1 Corinthians 2:6–10.
4. For Spinoza, love is fundamental to the self, but such a love is one which expands the self and as such is subject to the self’s own self-realization. See Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. E. M. Curley (London: Penguin, 1996), bk. III, prop.

- 13, 78: "Love is nothing else than pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause."
5. See Epictetus, *Discourses*, 45: "You have a will incapable of being coerced or compelled . . . your will cannot be hindered, forced or obstructed."
 6. See Sextus Empiricus, *The Skeptic Way*, trans. Benson Mates (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
 7. See Descartes, *Meditations and The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 41: "It is clear by the natural light that the perception of the intellect should always precede the determination of the will."
 8. See William Desmond, *Perplexity and Ultimate Reality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 105.
 9. See Catherine Osborne, *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1996), 61–65.
 10. One of the last paintings of this subject now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
 11. See Husserl's account of allure with respect to passive synthesis in his *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, trans. Anthony Steinbock (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, 2001), 196: "By affection we understand the allure given to consciousness, the peculiar pull that an object given to consciousness exercises on the ego."
 12. See Klaus Held, "Fundamental Moods and Heidegger's Critique of Contemporary Culture," in *Reading Heidegger: Commemorative Essays*, ed. John Sallis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 295–96, 299.
 13. Michel Henry in his account of auto-affection takes up this fundamental feeling of life in the being of the self in what he terms "transcendental affectivity." See Henry, *L'incarnation* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 268–69. Henry's analyses here are profound but suffer from a certain dualism of life and world, which reinforces the stoic/skeptical philosophical practice (in a Gnostic mode) I am here critiquing.
 14. See my *A Phenomenology of Christian Life: Glory and Nigredo* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 74.
 15. Plato, *Symposium*, in *The Complete Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 211b3.
 16. See Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56.
 17. Augustine, "On Grace and Free Will," in *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6, 32.
 18. See my *A Phenomenology of Christian Life*.
 19. See Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, 15.
 20. For a brief introduction to the problem of transcendentals among the scholastics, see Francesca Aran Murphy, *Christ, the Form of Beauty* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 216.
 21. Possibly the subtlest account of this incarnate splendor we have from the medievalists is from Bonaventure's *The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996).
 22. See Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge, 1999), 118: "Attention is bound up with desire. . . . Attention alone—that attention which is so full that the 'I' disappears—is required of me. I have to deprive all that I call 'I' of the light of my attention and turn it on to that which cannot be conceived."
 23. See Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'appel et la réponse* (Paris: Minuit, 1992), 23–24.