

ABSTRACT: *On Loving Some People More than Others*

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Most of us think we should love some people more than others. If we did not love our own children more than a new friend, something would be wrong. However, in *De doctrina christiana* Augustine makes the following argument, which I explain in Chapter One of my dissertation:

- (1) The degree to which we love something should be proportional to the value it has.
- (2) Every person has equal value.
- (3) Therefore, we should love all people equally.

Obviously, Augustine's conclusion conflicts with the intuition that unequal or preferential love is, in fact, called for in certain cases. Thus, it seems there is something wrong with his argument. Premise (1) seems like the obvious point of attack. However, as I suggest in Chapter One, the problem with the first premise is not immediately obvious. Indeed, it seems there is *some* connection between appropriate love and value. Thus, even if premise (1) turns out to be false, it is worthwhile trying to say just what is wrong with it, since that effort promises to illuminate the connection between appropriate love and value. The first aim of my dissertation, then, is to point out the central problem with Augustine's argument and thereby illuminate this connection. The second aim of my dissertation is to offer an account of why we should love some people more than others.

I take the main problem with Augustine's argument to be an unstated assumption underlying premise (1): that love for a person should be a response to the value *possessed by that person as such*. My argument for this claim begins in Chapter Four, where I consider different views of love's "proper grounds"—those valuable features in response to which love properly arises or is sustained. David Velleman agrees with Augustine that mere personhood is love's sole proper ground. Niko Kolodny argues that only certain relationships between lover and beloved (e.g., friendships, and romantic and familial relationships) may serve as proper grounds of love. Both Velleman and Kolodny oppose the view that qualities like wit, talent, or virtue might play this role. In Chapter Four I reject the views of Velleman and Kolodny, arguing that love's proper grounds are plural and include, in addition to mere personhood and relationships, certain valuable qualities. With the pluralist view in hand, in Chapter Five I argue that Augustine has misunderstood the connection between love and value. Love need not be a response to the value of a person as such; rather it may appropriately be a response to the value of certain qualities of the beloved, or to the value of a relationship to the beloved, neither of which necessarily constitutes his value as a person. Thus, in the end, Augustine, Velleman, and Kolodny all take too narrow a view of love's connection to value.

Having understood the main problem with Augustine's argument for equal love, we might still wonder why we should love some people more than others. Since addressing this aim requires an account of what love is, in Chapters Two and Three I give such an account. Harry Frankfurt and Eleonore Stump have argued that love consists in certain desires. Velleman holds that love is a certain emotion, while Kolodny has argued that love partially consists in certain standing intentions. In Chapter Two I claim that none of these views are adequate. I begin with Thomas Aquinas's claim that love aims at two targets: the good of the beloved and union with him. I then argue that love could not consist in occurrent desires for such things, or related emotions, since love often remains steady while desires and emotions come and go. It seems more plausible that love consists of two standing intentions: to bring about the beloved's good and to bring about union with him. However, since the lover cannot always achieve love's two targets, it seems love cannot consist of intentions either, since we only intend things that seem achievable to us. For example, if the good of your beloved includes her promotion at work and you cannot bring this about, then you cannot intend this aspect of her good. Nevertheless, love involves some motivational attitude toward such goods.

Thus, in the end, I follow Aquinas in claiming that love consists of two tendencies of the will—toward the beloved's good and toward union with him. Consider, for example, love's tendency toward the beloved's good: if some aspect of the beloved's good is lacking or threatened, and if it seems both possible and appropriate for the lover to remedy the situation, then the lover will intend to do so. If it seems either impossible or inappropriate to do so, then she will merely desire it for him. If no aspect of the beloved's good is lacking or threatened, then love's tendency toward the beloved's good simply remains in the background until relevant circumstances arise. On my view, then, the occurrent desires, emotions, and intentions often associated with love are all downstream effects of love and do not constitute the attitude itself.

Given this account of love, in Chapters Six and Seven I explain why we should love some people preferentially. I begin by arguing that properly love-grounding relationships consist in union between lover and beloved—a collection of states (e.g., knowledge of one another) and activities (e.g., attending to one another) that make the people “one” in some sense. Since love is (in part) a tendency of will toward such union, *preferential* love may be understood as a tendency of will to prefer or prioritize one properly love-grounding relationship over another. I then argue that since closer instances of such relationships are more valuable than more distant ones, we should (*ceteris paribus*) choose a closer relationship over a more distant one, if we cannot choose both. Finally, then, we should preferentially love those we are relationally closer to since such love is, in part, a tendency of will to choose those closer and more valuable relationships over more distant and less valuable ones.