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ARTICLE SECTION

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A Passion for Life: Love and Meaning

Abstract

Does one's love for a particular person, when it is pure, also constitute a love of life? The significance of speaking about leading a passionate life, I submit, is found in the spontaneous, embodied character of opening up to and finding meaning in one's life rather than in heightened fleeting feelings or experiences of meaning that help one forget life's meaninglessness. I contrast this view with Simone Weil's suspicion that our passionate attachment to another person is an obstacle to attending to him or her from the distance proper to love and friendship. From that perspective it appears as if the meaning with which personal love endows life is mostly illusory, including the loss of meaning characteristic of grief. I question whether Weil's view should be seen as an unconditional, though for most unattainable, ideal of love, or if it is rather expressive of a rejection of one of the central features of love: the vulnerability that ensues from the recognition that when we love there are times where we stand in need of the other's love to be able to embrace life as meaningful.

Introduction

Why should we not think of love as one of life's greatest passions? Certainly, it is difficult to contest the obvious truism that "love is great", at least not without at the same time revealing a cynical view of the possibilities inherent in human relationships. Mentioning love as one of the passions also seems to be a truth verging on, if not clearly succumbing to, the trivial.

Yet, ordaining love the greatest passion, invokes a range of philosophical responses. First, there is the terminological issue of whether we really should speak of love as a passion. Should we not rather think of it as an emotion, or perhaps in line with more psychological parlance, as an affect? The term passion, philosophically often taken as the anti-thesis to reason, can seem appropriate when talking about love, since it reminds us that love is sometimes spoken of as something to which we surrender or succumb. However, the term, as Robert Solomon suggests, can be misleading, since it carries with it a "myth of passivity" that merits criticism. He writes,

> So long as the 'passions' render us 'passive,' the most important and vital attitudes and actions of our life fall beyond the scope of our doing and our responsibility, and so we find ourselves with an elaborate and convenient system of excuses, for our feelings, for our behavior, for our Selves" (Solomon 1993: xv).

Thinking of passions as passive for Solomon then serves us in our self-deception that we are not accountable for what we feel. Certainly such a take on love, as a passive experience we undergo, renders unclear the ways in which we are actively engaged in love, the ways in which love does not only call for a *response* but for taking *responsibility*. Is it then perhaps better to think of love as an emotion, taking note of the different ways in which it sets us in motion? This, for philosophers, such as Solomon (1980: 1993), involves considering emotion as something that cannot be reduced to an affect, as opposed to cognition, but as something that itself relies on cognition.

Furthermore, one may ask how love stands in comparison with the other passions or emotions. Does love occupy a specific place among the emotions, so that it is not just one of the emotions but provides us with reasons to feel other emotions, say, joy, grief or jealousy? On such a view, love is the over-arching frame of mind, which allows us to discern what meaning we are to attribute to our other emotional responses to the one we love. An example of this could be saying "I'm angry because I care", or "I'm ashamed of my envy because I should rather be happy for you". Is it, on the whole, problematic to think of love as an emotion, and not, say, as a

commitment, a bond, a shared identity? Solomon makes the final suggestion in two other books (1990, 2001).

In this discussion I will not take a stand on these issues. I refrain from doing so because I believe that the role of philosophy is not to serve as an arbiter in deciding what choice of words is best used in attempts to depict different phenomena in our life. What is more, I do it out of the conviction that any answer we may give to whether love should or should not be seen as one of the emotions, will be dependent on how we define both "love" and "emotion". For a given purpose, it may be fruitful to consider love in relation to other emotions, for another to consider it in distinction to them. Any attempt to articulate a general answer beyond the contexts of these purposes will necessarily leave out significant aspects of love. A better task for philosophy, in my view, is to bring out the different features of our language use that at times incline us to think of love as a passion or an emotion, as well as the features that at other times bring us to think it is not.

The question I approach here, however, does make use of the notion of love as a passion by asking whether one's love for a particular person, when it is pure, also constitutes a love of life or, if you will, a passion for life. Does loving someone also entail finding one's life with that person meaningful, or does love only create an illusion of sense and meaning? This way of framing the question will also bring me to partly answer the question whether love, as a passion, should be seen as passive or as active.

I proceed in two steps. First, I consider what is entailed in leading a passionate life, or a life in love. I submit that the significance of speaking about passion here lies in the spontaneous, embodied character of opening up to and finding meaning in one's life rather than in heightened fleeting feelings or experiences of meaning that help one forget life's meaninglessness. Second, I contrast this way of perceiving a link between the love for a person and a love of life with Simone Weil's suspicion that our passionate attachment to another person is an obstacle to attending to him or her from the distance proper to love and friendship. From that perspective it appears as if the meaning with which personal love endows life is mostly illusory, including the loss of meaning

characteristic of grief. I read Weil in connection with Rush Rhees's reflections on this theme in her thinking, and also use some remarks by Ludwig Wittgenstein to illustrate a similar difficulty of distinguishing aspects of love that are pure from more impure varieties.

1. Being passionate about life

If a passion for life is, as I submit, internal to love, then what is entailed in being passionate about life? A first thing to note is that in many situations it is worthwhile to take the expression "being passionate" literally and think of it in the mode of *being* rather than as a matter of *having* something. Gilbert Ryle, already, pointed out the problems involved in thinking about our passions, or emotions, as inner occurrences accompanying our actions. He suggested that for some emotion words, such as interests, it is better to think of them in terms of inclinations to act or as motives for action rather than as bodily feelings. Consider what he says about the interest a person has for Symbolic Logic, and remember that among philosophers, this is certainly something for which someone may nurture a passion.

Ryle writes:

> A man is interested in Symbolic Logic. He regularly reads books and articles on the subject, discusses it, works out problems in it and neglects lectures on other subjects. According to the view which is here contested, he must therefore constantly experience impulses of a peculiar kind, namely feelings of interest in Symbolic Logic, and if his interest is very strong this interest must be very acute and very frequent. He must therefore be able to tell us whether these feelings are sudden, like twinges, or lasting, like aches; whether they succeed one another several times a minute or only a few times an hour; and whether he feels them in the small of his back or in his forehead. But clearly his only reply to such questions would be that he catches himself experiencing no peculiar throbs or qualms while he is attending to his hobby. He may report a feeling of vexation, when his studies are interrupted, and the feeling of a load off his chest, when distractions are removed; but there are no peculiar feelings of interest in Symbolic Logic for him to report. While undisturbedly pursuing his hobby, he feels no perturbations at all.

> Suppose, however, that there were such feelings cropping up, maybe, about every two or twenty minutes. We should still expect to find him discussing and studying the subject in intervals between these occurrences, and we should correctly say that he was still discussing and studying the subject from interest in it. This point by itself establishes the conclusion that to do something from a motive is compatible with being free from any particular feelings while doing it. (Ryle 1955: 87-88)

I quote at length, since Ryle is an exemplary ally in disposing of the idea that emotions are feelings, in the sense of bodily sensations. He has a good eye for the quite ordinary situations in which words such as emotions, passions, moods and interests find their natural home, even if one may suspect that this particular choice of example, Symbolic Logic, is something about which many have difficulties imagining themselves being passionate.

The passion that concerns us here, however, is not the passion for Symbolic Logic. It is the passion for life that I claim is a central feature of personal love. The images we may conjure up in this case are not of someone immersed in working on a problem. A more fitting image is the couple in love – it is perhaps most easy to think of them as just having fallen in love (note the passive fall) – immersed in conversation, bubbling with enthusiasm, amazed that suddenly there is this person whose every word, gesture and movement is filled with meaning, something to dote on and listen to, something at which to look and wonder. Furthermore, we may think of how this, suddenly incredibly interesting person, does not only come into one's life as a new center – what is most important is no longer the I but the you (cf. Osborne 1996: 318) – but also adds colour and richness to every aspect of one's life. As I write this, I look out the window at a grey, rainy autumn day, and I see a couple walking by, under an umbrella, her hands on his arm, both smiling and laughing as if the sun was shining just for them. "How wonderful life is now you're in the world." Elton John sings, recording the sense of wonder and gratitude for the mere fact that you (the one I love) exist, the wonder and gratitude that there can be such a love. Elaborating on such ways of describing the experience of falling in love, to borrow Wittgenstein's word, is one way of offering reminders of how we talk about love (PI §127).

Is this the image of a passion for life in love that I want to lean on in the rest of the discussion? It is part of the picture, but it is not the whole picture. I sit at my computer right now. I am not out walking and talking with the one I love. We did not have the time to exchange many words this morning before I went off to teach a class, leaving her to take the children to school and day-care. We had no time to immerse ourselves in conversation about our inner-most dreams and expectations, failed hopes and disappointments, to look each other in the eyes, to touch each other or embrace. Perhaps this is also testimony of the way in which a love of life will also, by necessity, consist in more than two people falling in love with each other. Our life also needs to include an engagement with the outside world, a job one finds satisfactory, friends, political commitments.

Still, there is that longing to see her again, to find time if not today or this week then in the future, to have such conversations again. There is the knowledge that when I come home today and see her and our sons – two of the greatest sources of meaning in my life – then everything, or at least a lot, will feel as if it is falling into place. There is the recognition that when she goes off on one of her travels for work, the house will feel empty, and me and the children will in some small ways struggle with that emptiness. When she comes home we will all be thrilled and excited and anxious to see her stepping off the train. Furthermore, there is that certainty that if anything were to happen to her or the children, that would be the end of my life as I know it, although I know that I would still be alive.

Is this picture more true to the experience, the meaning of which I try to remind you? As we will see, it is not the only picture we may conjure up to remind ourselves of how questions of meaning enter a life with respect to love. Someone may worry that it is still overly idyllic, and in response to that, it needs to be said that it is not meant to be ideal. For now, it only serves as a context in which to orient ourselves in the task of clarifying one place in life for thinking through questions of meaning.

To Ryle, the philosophical point of the examples of someone having an interest in Symbolic Logic was to relieve us of the

impulse to consider these aspects of life as necessarily referring to a feeling that constantly accompanies the actions. Such a clarification is as valid in relation to love, for certainly there is no one feeling, that needs to accompany any of the situations above for us to be able to speak of love sensibly in relation to them. Here, one can easily see the connection with Wittgenstein's remark that "[l]ove is not a feeling" (Z §504). Nevertheless, the competing suggestion, offered by Ryle, as well as by Wittgenstein in his tentative classification of the use of emotion words (RPPII §154), that we instead think of the role of these words in our life as denoting a disposition, does not necessarily take us much further in understanding the role of love in the meaning we see in life. It only takes us from the notion of an inner going on to hypothesizing about possible outer going-ons, from thinking that the word love denotes a way of feeling, to thinking that it denotes a way of behaving and acting. Here, our concern is still too much on what the word love denotes, as if it would be possible to define the meaning of "love" by searching for what the word designates. A better way of thinking of the issue is to recall Wittgenstein's remark that "'Joy designates nothing at all. Neither any inward nor any outward thing" (Z §487), for is not love similar to joy in this respect, not least in the sense that it in many cases takes the form of a joy? It is "a joy mixed with pain, but a joy nevertheless", as Wittgenstein writes in a note to which we will return (BEE: MS 133, 8r, 26.10.46, translation by Monk 1991: 505).

The point here is not to deny that there are both inward and outward manifestations of joy or love, many of which can be found in my previous examples. Reflecting on how love shows in what we say, feel and do, is one way of spelling out the sense in which as Rush Rhees remarks, "the person in love is different; life is different for him, or the whole world is different for him" (Rhees 1969: 124-125). Yet, to think that the meaning of love is reducible to any of these features, to think that they alone make the difference, is to misrepresent the ways in which the word love operates in our life. It also fails to acknowledge the significance a life with another person has to us, in the sense we make of life, and in the meaning we find in the concept of love. This meaning is also

not necessarily connected with moments of delight, exhilaration and enthusiasm. At times, and such times may extend over a person's whole life, the flavour love gives to one's life is one of loss, abandonment, insecurity, an unfulfilled longing and thwarted desire.

Combating the inclination to identify the meaning we see in something with experiencing a bodily feeling is significant not only because it constitutes a categorical mistake, as Ryle suggests. It also merits consideration since it testifies to a moral difficulty in finding one's life meaningful. Solomon points to this difficulty when he calls out the idea of passions as passive for failing to account for our accountability in relation to what arouses our passion. This moral difficulty is as apparent if one thinks that finding life meaningful only consists in doing certain things, in other words, if one thinks that the significant thing is what is being done, or *what* is to be done, and not *how* it is done, the spirit in, or the attitude with which, it is done.

This point finds illustration in the film *Adaptation*, where one of the characters, the journalist Susan Orlean is portrayed as a woman whose only passion in life is finding out about people who are passionate about something. The film revolves around the adaptation of her book *The Orchid Thief*, a depiction of a man whose main objective is to "steal" rare orchids. Her meetings with him culminate in a swamp in a reserve where she follows him to spot a particularly beautiful and exceptional orchid bloom. In her book the story ends without them finding the orchid, but in the film it turns out they actually did. It is revealed, however, that the experience was not as breathtaking for Susan as everyone had said it would be. Faced with the flower, she states with disappointment, "But it's just a flower".

The theme of orchids is not completely coincidental. Although most orchids are not the parasites they are sometimes alleged to be, they usually grow on trees and bushes. It also becomes clear that Susan's odd passion, or better yet lack of passion, if it does not exactly feed on, in many ways grows on the passions of others; she appears unable to conjure up any real passion for life herself. Her inability to be touched by what happens in her own life drives her

to look for what touches other people, in the hope that she too, would find something that makes her life meaningful.

At least two features of the relation in which Orlean stands to her life need to be considered here. The first is how detached she is from her own life and the people in it. She is not engaged in any of the things she is doing, she is not into them, unable to share the joys and interests of others, observing even her own life from a safe distance. For that reason it is difficult for the viewer to see anything she does as a spontaneous expression of her. This distance can also be described as a fear of letting go of the control she so fervently tries to hold of her life. It is a refusal to be taken in by something, losing herself or losing her head. But leading a passionate life – and I now take it as evident that loving means living if not "passionately", with all that might be connected with such descriptions, then at least with passion, whether this passion in individual cases is best described as a roaring fire or an inner glow – means opening up to fortune and failure, not knowing what to expect.

Her fear of passion is even that which reveals her lack thereof. When there is passion, there is no mention of the risks involved in being passionate. When it is lacking, however, the risks involved in letting oneself go stare one in the face. Trying to calculate with these perceived risks to find a way of having passion without the risks, again, runs counter to finding any real passion. What one looks for if one *attempts* to muster up a passion that may not involve loss, is not true passion but a substitute.

This leads us to the second significant feature of her relation to her life. Her failure to find meaning and passion, it is clear, is not due to a lack of will, in the sense of having her mind set on something. Rather her desperate determination to find what makes a life meaningful itself comes to stand in her way of living such a life. It becomes, in Søren Kierkegaard's words in *Purity of Heart* (1956), an example of double-mindedness. Kierkegaard also warns against conflating the wholeheartedness he promotes in speaking about "willing the good in truth" with a form of single-mindedness.

> … willing one thing does not mean to commit the grave mistake of a brazen, unholy enthusiasm, namely, to will the big, no matter whether

> it be good or bad. Also, one who wills in this fashion no matter how desperately he does it, is indeed double-minded. Is not despair simply double-mindedness? For what is despair other than to have two wills. (Kierkegaard 1956: 61)

Susan Orlean heads to the swamps with the wish of finding a flower that could give her life meaning. Thus she searches for something specific, as if the meaning would reside in an emotional episode or an activity. The temptation to think that it must reside in an extraordinary experience is particularly revealing of what may seem a considerable lack of meaning in her ordinary life. For if she does not find meaning in her regular doings, what makes her expect to find it in a swamp? There is, however, nothing in particular one needs to do to find life, and love, meaningful. On the contrary, finding meaning in many cases involves refraining from doing anything in particular, and rather being responsive to the possible meanings of the situation in which one finds oneself. I speak of responsiveness here to keep in view that although it is problematic to reduce what is involved in seeing meaning to an emotional occurrence, this perspective is nevertheless spontaneous and embodied in character.

Orlean's failure, therefore, is not a failure to find the object that excites the right passion, but to live passionately in the sense of opening up to the meaning life could have for her. It is, in this respect, a failure to love life. In the best of cases personal love also brings us to such love of life. It opens us to the realization that your reality is other than my own desires, and provides occasion to wonder at that reality. Here, however, the distinction between truly finding something meaningful, and only experiencing an illusion of meaning, also serves as a significant contrast within love, or perhaps rather between falling in love and loving.

There are cases, in which the intoxication of falling in love does not really do anything to relieve a person's sense of meaninglessness but only creates the illusion of sense. Such a case is to be found in Anton Chekhov's short story "The Duel". There Chekhov portrays a character who can only stand people when he is in love (Chekhov 2003). He needs the feeling of being in love in order to be able to bear having relationships with other people and

find joy and meaning in them. He is drawn to the intoxicating experience of falling in love – in which the whole world takes on a rosy color – because it appears to give him an opportunity to escape the dullness of his world.

Though Chekhov's character, in opposition to Susan Orlean, has an *experience* of meaning, this experience of meaning is no good guide to whether he truly does find his life meaningful. The music critic Hans Keller reportedly said that Vivaldi made him forget that life lacked meaning, whereas Schubert made him see that life has meaning. It can be said that the experience of falling in love did to Chekhov's character, what Vivaldi did to Keller. It made him forget the lack of meaning he experienced in life. It created the *illusion of meaning* and beauty in an otherwise monotonous life. The failure of this character to care for people and find meaning in life after the first raptures of falling in love had faded, furthermore, reveals his incapacity to love other human beings as well as life. Conversely, his failure to find life meaningful reveals a lack of love for life.

2. Meaning and detachment

So far I have brought to the fore a distinction between having an experience of meaning that may be illusory, and finding meaning in one's life in a way that is internally related to loving life. I have, however, not questioned the assumption that being passionate about life, in the sense of finding it meaningful and turning toward the world, is an integral part of love. It may therefore be good to consider a possible objection to this idea. Rush Rhees phrases this objection, in an attempt to make sense of some of Simone Weil's remarks, in the vein of "If you love anyone, then always think of him as though he were dead" (2000: 105.) (The formulation is Rhees's and is not to be found in Weil's work in the exact same way). In struggling with such phrases, Rhees formulates Weil's position like this,

> If in your love for someone you are possessed by the thought of seeing him again – by thoughts of what the future may bring, and of the joy of his company – then the love is not pure. It is not purely a love of him; it is contaminated by imagination. Perhaps she would say that your love is then not concentrated on him; you have not

> disregarded yourself. Or she might say: Your love is not a love of him; it is a love of life. (Rhees 2000: 106)

The concluding sentence, of course, is in stark contrast with my discussion so far. If this is indeed what Weil wanted to say, and she is right about it, it appears that we would be wrong to bring together loving someone with a love of life. Rather we should do best to keep the two apart. Now, the remarks with which Rhees struggled all concern a certain form of detachment, which, for Weil, was of utmost importance for attaining purity in love. It concerned in particular the love of God, which she considered to be the purest form of love. But is there, Rhees asks, any room for personal love in such an account? Is not the kind of personal concern we may have for others excluded in remarks such as the following?

> To love whilst remaining detached. To endure the thought that those we love, on whom we think lovingly, are mortal, are perhaps dead at the very moment we are thinking of them – this is an anguish. We must not seek consolation for this anguish but endure it. The greater our love, the greater our ability to endure this thought. We should never think of a human being, unless he is by our side, without thinking that he is perhaps dead. (Weil 1956: 218)

> Friendship is a miracle by which a person consents to view from a certain distance, and without coming any nearer, the very being who is necessary to him as food (Weil 1977: 370). (See e.g. Dilman 1998: 91-92, for a further discussion of this remark.)

Weil here criticizes a certain form of attachment, which in one way or other may contaminate our love. If I, in my relationship with you, take my own wishes, idealizations or expectations of what you should be as the object of my emotion, it is, as Rhees says, not a love of you. It is a form of selfishness. The same is true if I take you for granted in thinking that I, say, know everything there is to know about you, or try to mold you to fit my taste. If I do that, then I place myself at the center of my love, and what is specific about love, as I said, is that somebody else comes to have this place in my thinking about the world (cf. Murdoch 1992: 17). Weil's thought can in these respects be read as a call to scrutinize my relations to the ones I love, to constantly raise the question about

what attachments I need to give up for my love to be pure. These questions about what we are bound to in love, or about what lies at its center, you or I, have a moral character, and cannot be dealt with simply in epistemic terms.

Nevertheless, this is not yet saying anything about the place attachment on the whole should hold in love, and this is the critical point in Weil's discussion. The contrasts I have drawn are between different forms of attachment, where the crucial question is to *what* we are attached. It is in no case an encouragement to always stay detached. If we look at Weil, however, it sometimes – and, of course, it is important that it is not always – seems as if she slips into thinking that attachment on the whole is problematic. She speaks about our personal attachments as if they rendered our love of God less pure. This is one of the criticisms Rhees levels against her.

> Once again, the attempt to identify the love of men and the love of God. 'All you can really (or unconditionally) love in men is their love of God.' Then you hardly love them as men." (Rhees 2000: 120)

In Weil's thought, then, Rhees identifies an attempt to transcend our personal relations. This criticism is similar to the one directed at the love described by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium* (Vlastos 1981; Nussbaum 1986), and indeed one can spot clear influences by Plato in Weil. This is seen e.g. in her treatment of the allegory of the cave, which she reads as a moral lesson about love's connection with seeing reality. In the image of the sun and sight, she sees love as the eyes that put us in relationship with the sun, i.e. the good (Weil 1998: 134). This again, indicates that what is central for Weil, both in her own understanding and her understanding of Plato, is to reflect on the attitude we take to others. The moral call is a call for a transformation of our relationships, not a call to transcend them.

Yet, if we again look at the quote by Rhees, does the "thought of seeing [the one we love] again [or the] thoughts of what the future may bring, and of the joy of his company" (Rhees 2000: 106) constitute a contrast to love? If these thoughts take the form of an obsession, certainly I am well advised to rid myself of them. But what about the cases in which they are part of my ways of rejoicing

in someone, and entertaining hopes for the future in love? Should we not rather say that these ways of rejoicing in each other is at the core of love? It looks as if we are creating a distinction rather than marking one, if we distinguish this joy in each other from a joy in life, since one way of rejoicing in each other is exactly rejoicing in (the possibility of) sharing a life.

Furthermore, what are we to say of grief, the experience of unbearable loss that overwhelms us by the death of someone we love? This is an important reminder that the ways of finding direction and meaning in personal love to which I have drawn attention also alert us to the vulnerability of love. Placing my happiness in your hands, or finding it there, opens for the possibility that I may lose my center, the ground beneath my feet, in losing you. It is of course possible to take, what may appear as quite a Stoic attitude to death, and say that if we truly love our love cannot be lost. Not even death is an end to love for I always carry you with me. There is some truth, perhaps a poetical truth, in such ways of speaking. Certainly a person's death may be an occasion for considering the meaning one's relationship with that person had. It may in some situations function as a source of strength, notwithstanding how weak it also makes one feel. But although we may find comfort in such "poetical truths", they can also be perceived as a form of mockery of the real loss to which grief testifies, the real sense in which you are no longer here. Although I want to, I cannot be with you. I cannot feel the soothing calm of your presence, I cannot hear your voice. In this respect grief also constitutes something in between finding meaning in one's life and losing one's sense of meaning. On the one hand, it is an affirmation of life having meaning, on the other, it is experienced as a loss of meaning, which, of course, it is. Like few other things, death has the power of revealing to us what it means for another to be a unique individual.

What leads Weil into a position from which all attachment seems to contaminate love is her tendency to connect all our desires with interests and inclinations. This is also one of my reasons for hesitating to think about love merely in terms of an inclination. Consider, however, Hannes Nykänen's remark that in

love there is "nothing *in particular* we want, rather we want just anything and everything" (Nykänen 2002: 110). To Weil, it seems as if simply wanting something from the other makes our love impure. Nykänen's remark, on the other hand, reminds us that the longing for each other that characterizes love constitutes a different *kind* of desire than that which is expressed in talking about interests and inclinations. The emphasis on not wanting anything *in particular*, or anything specific, is an important moral move in discussing love. Any attempt to provide a general answer to what we seek in love, faces serious problems. It presumes that we could spell out the reasons why we love as identifiable qualities in the other. Thus it does not take seriously the suggestion that when I say, "I love you", my love is really for you as someone that cannot be easily defined. Nevertheless, we should not forget what is brought out by the second part of the quote, that is, the everything and anything that I come to care for in love. Our personal love always latches on to our particular lives; it gains its specific meaning through our life together. Thus, I see no conflict between loving you and attending to your particular ways of being. Something similar can be said in relation to my attitude to life. There is no way of separating you from life, for however I think of my life you will be part of it.

The criticism that Weil directs at love comes from within. It is directed at certain aspects of our personal love that, considered from a certain perspective of love, makes it less pure. She shows one way in which in personal love we may turn away from the true center of our world, that is, turn from the love of God towards the world. In a similar manner, Wittgenstein criticizes the purity of his own love, when he writes:

> Can you not be cheerful even without his love? Do you have to sink into despondency without this love? Can you not live without this prop? For that is the question: can you *not* walk upright without leaning on this staff? Or is it only that you cannot give *resolve* to give it up. Or is it both? – You mustn't go on expecting letters that don't arrive. But how should I change it?* (BEE: MS 133, 43, 27.11.46, transl. Monk 1991: 506 and author*).

> It is not love that draws me to this prop, but the fact that I cannot stand securely on my own two feet alone. (BEE: MS 133, 43, 27.11.46, transl. Monk 1991: 506)

The passage is preceded by a series of diary notes, written in October and November 1946, in which Wittgenstein's struggles with coming to grips with his relationship with Ben Edwards. Among these he juggles personal confessions, "In love I have too little faith and too little courage" (MS 132: 205, 21.10.46; transl. Monk 1991: 504, cf. also BEE: MS 133:7r), with more general remarks about what love offers and demands of us. "For real love one needs *courage*" (BEE: MS 132: 205, 21.10.46, transl. Monk 1991: 504).

> Love is a *joy*, perhaps a joy mixed with pain, but a joy nevertheless. If the joy is missing, or if it shrinks in a flicker, then love is missing.* In love I have to be able to rest secure […] A person cannot come out of his skin. I cannot give up a demand that is anchored deep inside me, in my whole life. For *love* is bound up with nature; and if I became unnatural, the love would have to end. – Can I say: "I will be reasonable and no longer demand it?" (BEE: MS 133, 8r, 26.10.46, (transl. Monk 1991: 505 and author*.)

> Don't be too cowardly to put a person's friendship to the test. If a prop does not stand one's leaning on it, it is not worth anything, however sad that may be.* The walking-stick that looks pretty so long as one carries it, but bends as soon as you rest your weight on it, is worth nothing. (BEE: MS 133, 35v-36v, 15.11.46, transl. Monk 1991: 506, and author*.)

These notes suggest attitudes one both can and should take to love. Untangling the personal voice from the philosophical remarks about love, and exploring how these attitudes may matter to us personally and philosophically, would be of great help in clarifying my concerns. Being unable to address such a task appropriately in this setting, I want to direct your attention to Wittgenstein's identification of what pulls him to another as a form of weakness rather than as love. This thought expresses the recognition that although we may think of something as love, it may not really be love. This is the gap Wittgenstein ponders between the "real love" for which one "needs courage", and the recognition of his lack of it, or better yet the real love for which one needs courage, as the

standard or ideal, against which his actual feelings of love, or his preparedness to continue the relationship, appear lacking. The question of conscience with which he struggles, "Is there anything else but weakness to my love?" also testifies to a kind of despair about the kind of meaning a person is to find in his or her relationships with others that is characteristic of the concept of love. "The frightening thing is the uncertainty" (BEE: MS 133:9r, 26.10.46, transl. Monk 1991:505).

This question about whether one's love is pure, sincere or deep, cannot be given an ultimate answer independently of one's own very personal understanding of what these relationships to another entail, of what one is prepared to say and accept responsibility for, both spontaneously and on closer reflection. Should one, as in Wittgenstein's case, trustingly lean on the other for support, since the love of a true friend will carry one's weight, or should one refrain from relying on the other out of the realization that one needs support for the wrong reasons? Nothing in one's feeling will settle the matter, for the longing for support can be taken both as an expression of love and as an expression of one's lack of it. Every possible answer to what constitutes real love here will thus bear the stamp of ourselves. It shows what we are able to see as meaningful uses of the word love, and as authoritative demands in those conceptions. What we feel compelled to say, or hesitant to say, speaks of the faith we have in love, and our courage to love. It belongs to the concept of love, or what Wittgenstein would call grammar, that we can vacillate between the meaning we are to see in our own responses; love or weakness, faith or despair?

This possibility of vacillating between perspectives also introduces itself in what we consider a good description of the role this kind of despair may have in someone's life. It is possible to see both Weil's and Wittgenstein's descriptions as expressive of pure and unconditional love. Perhaps one feels that the conceptions of love with which they work, embody demands that turn love into an unattainable ideal. Despite that, one may present the struggle for this ideal as worthwhile. However, the tendency to regard all forms of vulnerability to and dependence on others as an impure attachment, can also be viewed as a ruthless and harsh judgment

both on oneself and on one's relation to others. One may even think that a constant pondering on one's love makes it self-obsessive. What such views conceal, one can argue, is that being vulnerable and leaning on each other for support does not necessarily have to be perceived as a weakness in one's love, or as an impurity in one's attachments. It can also serve to illuminate a central feature of love. This is the realization that one may sometimes stand in need of another's love to uphold one's perspective of life as meaningful. Such a realization – "I depend on you for my well-being" – is difficult for a person who values his or her independence. For another person it can be an occasion for gratitude and forgiveness. Gratitude in the recognition that one does not need to face everything on one's own, forgiveness in the realization that one does not always need to live up to one's own demands to be loved. One can rest securely in love, even in the knowledge that one sometimes fails to love. Considering this, we may also hesitate in our description of Weil's and Wittgenstein's attitudes to love. Do they testify to an understanding of love that is exceptionally pure, or do they advocate an understanding that renders suspicious too much of our vulnerability and our need to reconcile with our failures?

3. Conclusion

The obvious philosophical question about love is undoubtedly "What is the meaning of love?" It is similar, not only in sound, but in scope and aim, to the question often considered the philosophical question *per se* by non-philosophers, "What is the meaning of life?" So far, I have resisted raising any of these questions. My reason for this is that they too easily arrest our thought with concerns that lead us nowhere; the first in the search for a reference, the second in a longing for an ultimate explanation of existence. Yet, the considerations I have raised here also bear on these questions, by illuminating the possible senses speaking about what is meaningful in life has in the context of love. In the best of cases they also enable us to think more fruitfully about what is sought in either question, loosening up the conviction that a search

for meaning has to be concerned either with reference or with explanation.

A driving thought in my discussion was that the meaning of love cannot be enclosed in a definition, where the word is thought to denote a bodily experience or a set of behavior. Rather love shows itself in the meaning different aspects of life, or life itself, have for us. It is constitutive of our greatest joys and fears. It provides us with reasons for thinking, acting and feeling in certain recognizable but indefinite ways. Another motivation was to show that the question about what is really meaningful in one's life, and whether the aspects of life to which we attach meaning in love are really meaningful, is equally constitutive for the meaning of love, and conducive to seeing something as truly love or not. In other words, inquiring into whether one's affections and attachments are directed at something real or illusory, and caring for that question being answered properly, is one characteristic of loving. Inquiring into these questions, can also lead us to question whether a meaningful life consists in searching for experiences of meaning, or whether finding meaning in life is better captured by considering the attitude we take to life, and to the ones we love. This attitude, I have submitted, is one that renounces control, but embodies faith in others as well as courage to open up to the vulnerability inherent in our loving relationships with each other.[1]

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