



## The Philosophy of Love - Audio

*Can love be rational?*

### **Caroline Price:**

What is love? And what is it that makes us fall in love with someone? Most of us have experienced love at some stage in our lives, whether that's love for a parent, a partner, a friend or maybe a pet. These are all very different kinds of love, but is there something these different kinds of love have in common? I'm Caroline Price; I'm a senior lecturer in philosophy at The Open University and with me is Professor Timothy Chappell who's Director of the Ethics centre here at The Open University and we're here to explain the nature of love. Tim it might seem a bit strange that philosophers are interested in the subject of love. Philosophy is about thinking things through rationally but love on the face of it might not seem very rational. Isn't love a subject for poets rather than philosophers?

### **Timothy Chappell**

Well of course for one thing, there's nothing to stop someone being both a poet and a philosopher. For another thing you said rightly that philosophy is about thinking things through rationally and the rationality if fine but we have to think about the things to, what are the things that we're thinking through rationally and the best answer to that seems to be we're thinking about the things which together make up human life. And in human life, love as you pointed out is everywhere. Philosophers have taken very different views of love down the centuries. Many philosophers have thought that love, especially erotic love is some kind of madness, this is something the great Greek philosopher Plato talks about way back in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC and you find in more modern writers the same idea, that love is a kind of madness and again not just philosophers but also a lot of the poets and novelists who have written. If you look at the contrast between some of the Romantic poets like Keats and Shelley and Oscar Wilde, all of whom talk in different ways about the destructive power of love, the danger of love a theme that's familiar in modern lyrics when you look at pop music. People talk there about how love can be destructive, love will tear us apart, I hate myself for loving you, that kind of thing. And on the other side you have people who think that love is something which can be rationally controlled and that is perhaps a temptation that philosophers are particularly prone to and the age of reason the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Enlightenment concentration on reason just before the romantics came along, there were a lot of people then who seemed to have thought that love was something you could switch on or switch off like a tap. Mr Collins in Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* is a good example of that, he seems to think that he can talk about the most violent affections of love towards you, you being one of the young ladies that he's addressing of course. He seems to think that, that kind of thing of thing can be

just switched on and switched off according to the dictates of reason. And I think all good philosophers have always understood that it's not quite that simple, the relationship between the head and the heart, between reason and the emotions and in particular this very complex and very controlling emotion of love.