



The Philosophy of Love - Audio

Love and relationships: a function or an illusion

Caroline Price:

We've been talking a little bit about the connection between love and relationships, but there's a question about how close that connection is, let me try this on you. Here's a view that I'm quite sympathetic to and this is the idea that love can be understood in functional terms as having a certain kind of functional purpose and the purpose of love is to create and foster relationships so not only is there some kind of connection between love and relationships. In fact that's what love is, love is an emotion that's all about creating and fostering close personal relationships.

Timothy Chappell

I'm not sure I agree with that, I think there are two points I'd like to question, first I think love is an emotion sure, but it's not just an emotion there are other things that love is, as well as an emotion. And secondly it sounds when you say that, as if when my wife asks me why do you love me I should reply in order to foster our relationship and that just sounds to me like a weird thing to say.

Caroline Price:

Yes I agree, that would be a very strange and probably very unwise thing to say. Well I'm not making a claim about how love feels from the inside, I'm just making a claim about the function of love, where it comes from. I certainly think there's a lot more we can say about how love feels from the inside and the sorts of things that we want and care about when we love someone. For example I think love involves wanting to be with the person that we love, it involves wanting them to love us back, I think it involves wanting their good, their welfare and I don't think that when I love someone I want those things just because I want to have a close personal relationship with them. The claim I'm making is just that if we can understand the function of love, from the outside we can then understand why love takes that form. Why love involves the wants and desires that it does and what kind of things can be reasons for love. So it helps us to solve some puzzles about love, but there's still a lot more we can say about how love feels from the inside and what it's like to be in love with someone else.

Timothy Chappell:

But this does rather sound to me as if you're implying, that love is really just an illusion, it's a kind of trick that's played on us by our genes or our culture.

Caroline Price:

Well I think that if you take that line, then you'll end up saying the same thing about any of the motivations and feelings we have, after all they've all got to come from somewhere. You might say for example that hunger is just a trick that evolution plays on us, to try to get us to eat. Well of course it's possible to stand aside from our motivations and our emotions to criticize them from our own personal point of view. But we don't have to reject them then, we can still choose to endorse them. We could just as easily take the view that our relationships with other people and our love for other people is part of what makes life meaningful for us. And it makes life meaningful for us because we're human beings.