



The Philosophy of Love - Audio

Love as a Duty

Timothy Chappell

Another question you often hear people ask about Love of course is can there be a duty to love and sometimes people raise sceptical questions about marriage in the marriage service implies that you have a duty to love the person that you're marrying and people wonder how can there be a duty to love someone and even if there is a duty to love someone how can you promise at the age of twenty two, let's say that you will go on loving them for the rest of your life, that's a question which I think people particularly think about at the time of royal weddings like Charles and Diana, or Kate and William.

Caroline Price:

Yes it's a puzzle because it raises a relationship between a duty to do something and our ability to do it. So we promise that we'll love someone, but it's not clear that we're able to deliver on that promise. Well I think once again it helps here to think about what love is, what's involved in loving someone, love involves motivations, wants and desires in relation to the person. Perhaps love involves thinking of them in a certain way as well. But I think there's a really important element of love and that's something that's mentioned by the philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch. Iris Murdoch describes love as a kind of attention we give to someone, well I don't think that sums up all of what love is, but I certainly think attention plays a really important role in love, that to love someone involves paying attention to them in a certain way. And I think that is something that's controlled by the will to an extent, it is something we can decide to do. So even if we can't promise that we will love someone, I think we can at least promise to give them the kind of attention that's likely to foster and sustain love.

Timothy Chappell:

I think you're absolutely right Caroline to focus on the role of attention in love in the way that Iris Murdoch does because love is not just one thing, it's not just an emotion, it's not just a feeling that you have, it's not just a kind of fuzzy warm glow that you get about somebody else. It can be all those things and it can be lots of other things to as those that are married quickly find out one of the things that is essential, is as you say this ability to attend to someone else and to go on being interested by them, and attending to someone else is something we can control. There are other things that we can't control, I mean it's not up to us whether we find someone else interesting of course you just have to hope that you will go on

finding some one interesting and that you won't find them really boring but you can do things which will make it likelier that you'll go on being interested by someone else. And you can do things which will build up your disposition to love the person that you're married to just as if you want to do something on the athletics track like run a five minute mile, you need to train for that you need to build up the muscles. So if you're going to be with someone long term then you need to have the right kind of dispositions, the right kind of virtues to make that easy for both of you and as the old Klee shay has it 'you have to work at it' It's absolutely true that you have to try and make yourself the kind of person who is easy to be married to.