



The Philosophy of Love - Audio

The doppelganger Problem?

Caroline Price:

Well there's a notorious problem in the philosophy of love and it's a problem that's loved by science fiction writers as well, and that's the doppelganger problem. The easiest way to explain it is just to think of an example. So let's use Prince William and Kate Middleton as our example, suppose that Prince William meets another young woman who just has all the loveable qualities that Kate Middleton seems to have, we don't need to imagine that she's identical with Kate in any other way. Just that all the things that William loves about Kate are there in that woman as well in that case doesn't William have exactly the same reasons to love Kate's doppelganger or her twin, that he has to love Kate and if that's true then isn't he rationally obliged to love this other young woman as well. Maybe in insisting on loving just Kate William is being to picky

Timothy Chappell

Well there is a strange fortuitousness about love quite often, I think it's strange how I happen to meet one very present very loveable person and I happen to be married to her but we can always see how love is contingent, how you might have met someone else and married them instead. Life is full of opportunities, possibilities that we didn't explore and the doppelganger problem brings that out amongst some other things, rather nicely. There is this problem about what you should say if you've got two people with just the same qualities and what people do in fact say I think is very instructive because it does look like ordinary people when you present them with that kind of case will react to it quite differently from some other cases. And suppose another case that happens in families the kids goldfish dies you sneak out to the pet shop and substitute another indiscernibly identical goldfish for that goldfish, this happens in families don't ask me how I know but I do know that it happens. Now there's a bit of discomfort about doing that when the parents substitutes one goldfish for another we feel we're cheating the kid a bit, we have that sense that we're cheating someone far more in the case of substituting one human being for another. And what people actually say if you put that kind of suggestion to them is I think exactly the right philosophical thing to say they say first of all, look it's not about the qualities the person has. It's about that individual, it's about the person not the qualities and the other thing they say is but the history is different, this is Kate Middleton. She has a particular history it's her, the prince knows going back over time. It's not this other person with identical qualities and I suppose if the identical qualities were really identical then maybe this doppelganger would have the same memories but they'd be false memories not true memories. So we distinguish people from one and other as objects of love

largely by reference to their histories, we say look this is the person with whom I've shared my life the fact that someone else may be just like her is neither here nor there because that other person wouldn't be the one I've shared my life with.

Caroline Price:

I think I agree with a lot of what you just said; I actually don't want to deny that qualities can be reasons for love, I think I want to say that Prince William does have a reason, some reasons to love this doppelganger Kate. But he doesn't have the same reasons that he has to love Kate because the things that he shared with Kate, their history, their experiences together are also reasons for him to love her.

Timothy Chappell:

There's a strange dialectic isn't there between knowing what qualities somebody has and discovering those qualities so when you're not actually in a loving relationship with someone you can just admire from a far and say he or she has got this quality and that quality and the quality and aren't they all round wonderful. Whereas if you're married to someone for example then you go on discovering things about them that you wouldn't have discovered unless you were married to them, and you see them in a favourable light in a very particular way and you begin to ask yourself the chicken and egg question, do I see this person as so wonderful because I'm married to her or is it because she's so wonderful that I rightly chose, this is a bit smug of course to get married to her. I think when you're married to someone those to different questions become locked into a kind of cycle.