



## **The Philosophy of Love - Audio**

*What is love?*

### **Caroline Price:**

So if love can be rationally controlled, that suggests that we might have reasons for loving one person rather than another, does that imply there could be good or bad reasons for loving someone? Can love ever be unjustified?

### **Timothy Chappell**

Well love can be unjustified in a very simple way, if it rests on a mistake. If you love someone because you think that this person is going to make you rich and famous and in fact they don't succeed in doing that then you've just made a mistake but of course a lot of us would say that's not really love. There can be reasons which are bad reasons for loving in other ways, more interesting ways perhaps for example Yeats wrote a poem about Anne Gregory in which he said that the reason why men fall in love with her was because of her yellow hair. Now just to love someone because she has yellow hair or he has yellow hair, that doesn't seem a very good reason for loving someone. It seems more like an obsession or a fetish perhaps with one particular aspect of that person. And there is this interesting question about how your reasons for loving someone, not something about someone but someone can relate to the something's about them, the qualities that they have.

### **Caroline Price:**

Well of course there have been a number of different views that philosophers have had about that about the relationship between loving someone and valuing their qualities, I think in the symposium Plato presents a picture of love of as being justified by the good qualities of the person that's loved by their beauty and their goodness. Is that a view that you agree with?

### **Timothy Chappell:**

Basically, no. And I think we should consider the possibility that it's not Plato's own view because Plato reports Socrates, reporting Diotima giving this view, and the view is put in question by the way Plato himself constantly talks about love as a relation between individuals like Socrates and Alcibiades but the view that Diotima puts is that all you can ever love, all it's possible to love at least if you're rational is generalized qualities, like goodness of character, nobility, beauty of manners, things like that. The kind of things that might be platonic forms and I wonder very much whether we can love such abstract universals as that and I rather doubt Plato seriously thinks that we can love in that way at all.

**Caroline Price:**

There are some rather obvious counter examples to the claim as well, I don't know how for example Plato might explain a parents love for a new born baby because even the fondest parent might not think that there new born baby is blessed with goodness of character or beauty of manners for example. And it doesn't seem to be the babies qualities that sustain the parents love.

**Timothy Chappell:**

Exactly so, it seems like in loving a baby we're loving this particular individual and I'm pointing as I say that because there is one individual that we love and it has to be that individual. It's not sufficient to think oh there are just these qualities and it's these qualities that I love wherever they come up. Parents simply don't love in that manner and I think Plato in the Symposium is implicitly raising this question himself he's not blind to the problem about how it could be that we can love something abstract and universal when in fact most of the time what we actually seem to love always seems to be something incarnate some particular case of these qualities, however good the qualities in themselves may be they have to find a home somewhere.