CHAPTER 7 – ON LOVING SOME PEOPLE MORE THAN OTHERS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One I explained an argument by Augustine in *De doctrina christiana* that all people should be loved equally. I summarized the argument as follows:

(1) The degree to which we love something should be proportional to the value it has.

(2) Every person has equal value.

(3) Therefore, we should love all people equally.

In Chapter One I suggested that premise (1) seems false, but that it is hard to say exactly what is wrong with it. I also suggested there that the argument prompts us to seek an explanation of why we should love some people more than others (e.g., our own children more than a new friend).

In this final chapter I aim to address these two issues directly. Although I explained what I take to be the central error of Augustine's argument in Chapter Five, here I will complete my account of what is wrong with the argument by explaining what I take to be the correct relation between the degree of our love for people and the value to which love might respond, and in particular what sort of proportionality holds between them, if any. I will argue that while the degree of one's love need not be proportional to the value of qualities possessed by the beloved, the degree of one's love should be proportional to the value of certain relationships between lover and beloved. Since closer relationships of the relevant sort are generally more valuable than more distant ones (as argued in Chapter Six), the claim that love should be proportional to the value of certain relationships will amount to the claim that we should generally love those we are relationally closer to more than those we are relationally more distant from. Finally, I will conclude by suggesting that such preferential love is called for by the fact that we should obviously choose better goods over worse ones, and the fact that such preferential love just is, in part, a tendency to choose a more valuable relationship over a less valuable one.

7.2 LOVING ONE PERSON MORE THAN ANOTHER

Before addressing Augustine's idea that the degree of one's love should be proportional to value in some way, we will need a clearer understanding of the kind of proportionality in view here and of what it might mean to love one person more than another. In this and the next two sections I will address these topics. I will take them in reverse order.

There are many senses in which one might be said to love one person more than another, and thereby to exhibit preferential love. First, one might feel certain emotions more intensely toward the one than the other, or one might have stronger occurrent desires for the good of, and union with, the one over the other. While I think it makes some sense to talk of preferential love in these terms, strictly speaking I do not think preferential love *consists* in feeling such emotions or having such desires. Recall that in Chapter Two I argued that emotions and occurrent desires (along with intentions) are downstream effects of love that do not constitute the attitude itself. Thus, if that account of love is correct, preferentially intense emotions or occurrent desires are possible effects of love that do not constitute preferential love itself. For this reason, I will set aside this possible view of preferential love.

Second, one might be said to love one person more than another if one loved the one but not the other. Although I think such cases are genuine cases of preferential love, I will also set aside this account of preferential love since I do not think there are norms suggesting that we should love some people more than others in this sense. Insofar as I think we owe at least a thin kind of love to any human being we encounter—a kind of love I called "love for neighbors" in Chapter Two[291]—I see no case in which we should love one person but not another. Thus, I will set aside this possible view of preferential love.

Third, one might be said to love one person more than another if one has certain "ordinal preferences" for the one over the other. By calling the preferences "ordinal," I mean to suggest that such preferential love amounts to a tendency of will to rank people in a certain *order* with respect to certain of one's choices. This sense of preferential love takes cues from Augustine's view as explained in Chapter One. There I claimed that Augustine thinks that to love one person more than another is primarily to be willing to benefit the one over the other in cases where one cannot benefit both. In light of my account of love in Chapter Two, we might say that loving one person more than another in this sense amounts to having a tendency of will to prefer or prioritize the good of the one over that of the other in such cases. However, in Chapter One I suggested that Augustine also seems to think loving one person more than another might consist in preferring, or being more willing, to "belong to" the one than the other. In the terms of Chapter Two, we might say he thinks that loving one person more than another in this sense amounts to having a tendency of will to prefer or prioritize union with the one over union with the other in cases where one cannot pursue it with both. This third kind of preferential love—

[291] I also tried to motivate the idea of neighbor-love somewhat in Chapter Two, though my treatment there was nothing like a complete case for it since that kind of discussion would have taken me too far afield. In any case, here I simply assume that we owe such love to all.

preferential love as “ordinal preference”—thus has two modes, the first related to the good of the beloved and the second related to union with him.

Fourth, and finally, one might be said to love one person more than another if one were willing (from love and not merely from duty) to expend more resources for the good of the one, or for the sake of union with him, than for the good of or union with the other. For example, suppose you have two friends and that you love each one. Because you love them, you would be willing to do various favors for each of them and you would be willing to make efforts to sustain your union with each. For example, you would gladly lend either of them a book, if needed, and you would gladly get coffee with either of them. However, if the second friend asked you for a ride to the airport at four o’clock in the morning you would politely decline (or perhaps you would do it from a sense of duty but feel slightly put out), whereas if the first friend asked for the same favor you would happily agree. Similarly, if both friends moved to equally distant cities, you would not go and visit the second while you would go and visit the first regularly. In these cases, your willingness (from love) to expend resources for the sake of the first friend’s good and union with him would exceed your willingness (from love) to do so for the second; this willingness to expend more for the first than for the second would amount to a kind of greater love for the first over the second. Like the third sense of loving one person more than another, this fourth sense—preferential love as a willingness to expend more resources in pursuit of love’s targets—exhibits two possible modes, the first related to the good of the beloved and the second related to union with him.

The fourth sense of preferential love is different from the third. For example, it is possible that you would be willing to expend equal resources in pursuing the good of or union with two friends that you love, but you might still prefer some aspect of the good of or union with one friend over another if you could not pursue both. Nevertheless, despite this possibility, it seems that more often than not the two senses of preferential love would track together: if you rank someone's good (or union with him) more highly in your order of choices than the good of (or union with) another person, then it seems likely you would be willing to expend more resources for the sake of the first than the second.

At the end of this chapter I will offer an account of why we should love some people preferentially over others. My focus, there, will be on preferential love in the third sense described above—preferential love as ordinal preference—since I think an explanation of why, in some cases, we should love in that way is easiest to see. For this reason, I will primarily (though not exclusively) have the third sense in mind throughout the chapter, and I will explain the third sense further in the next section by way of several examples that I take to be paradigmatic. However, at the end of the chapter I will also return to preferential love in the fourth sense described above, and I will suggest why it too might be called for in relevant cases.

7.3 PARADIGM CASES OF ORDINAL PREFERENCE

Recall Bernard Williams's famous case in which two people need rescuing but you can only rescue one of them.[292] Departing from Williams's specific example, suppose one of the needy people is a new friend and the other is your own child. Suppose further that you love both of them to some degree, but that you choose to rescue your child. I submit that, for most parents, rescuing your child over your new friend in this admittedly terrible situation would be one possible expression of (one mode of) greater or preferential love for your child over your new friend. In other words, such an act might express your tendency of will to prefer or prioritize the good of your child over that of your new friend in cases where you cannot pursue the good of both.

[292] Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 18–19.

Of course, your act would not *have* to be an expression of preferential love. It might be that you act, in that case, from a sense of greater duty toward your child than toward your new friend. We may plausibly suppose that you have *prima facie* duties to rescue both people; indeed, it seems plausible that you would have a *prima facie* duty even to rescue a stranger in such a situation. However, it also seems plausible that your duty to your child would be more stringent and might override the duty you have to your new friend. Thus, if you rescued your child while motivated by this more stringent duty to him, your act would not necessarily be an expression of greater love for him over your friend. Rather, it would simply express your assessment of the relative duties you had to the two people.[293] Nevertheless, for most of us I assume such a result would be neither typical nor desirable. Rather, thoughts of duty—and perhaps even unconscious motives of duty—seem worse in this case than motives of love. Indeed, this seems to have been part of Williams's point in the original example.[294] In any case, regardless of whether the motive of duty or love is more desirable here, my main point is that it is both possible and plausible that you would rescue your child in such a case from a motive of love, and that such an act would express your preferential willingness to pursue his good over that of your friend—i.e., that it would express one mode of preferential love for him. If such were the case, then, on my view, you would love your child more than your new friend. I take this case to be a paradigm of one mode of preferential love as ordinal preference.

Consider, now, a case that exemplifies the second mode of preferential love as ordinal preference, i.e., greater willingness to pursue union with one person than another. Suppose you have been seeing two people in a romantic sense and that you love both of them to some degree.

[293] There is, of course, the possibility that motivation by duty could also be an expression of love. While I think this possibility is interesting and worth exploring, my working view is that motivation by duty and motivation by love are two distinct (though perhaps compatible) motives. In any case, if a motive of duty just were a kind of loving motive then the sort of worry about the rescue case that I raise here would not actually be a worry at all: preferentially rescuing one's child from duty would also be an expression of preferential love, and so the case would still illustrate preferential love.

[294] See also Harry Frankfurt's reading of the case in Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 35–37.

Suppose further that exclusivity in romantic relationships is important to you and that the two relationships have progressed to the point where you no longer feel comfortable seeing both people. Now suppose that you choose to continue seeing one person and that you break it off with the other. I submit that such an act of continuing to see the one and breaking it off with the other could be an expression of your greater love for the one over the other—in this case, your tendency of will to prefer or prioritize union with the one over the other in a case where you could not pursue the relevant kind of union with both (while also maintaining your values). Again, as for the rescue case, such an act *need* not express preferential love. After all, you could have non-loving motives for acting this way: perhaps you are the queen and partnering with the one will yield more useful political alliances than partnering with the other, and so you choose for political or strategic reasons. Nevertheless, under more ordinary circumstances, it seems quite possible and plausible that your choice would express a tendency of will to prefer union with the one over the other, and thus greater love for the one over the other. I take this case to be a paradigm of the second mode of preferential love as ordinal preference.

These two paradigm cases are, of course, quite momentous and rare. I have chosen them because I think they isolate well the condition of will that I take preferential love as ordinal preference to be. Nevertheless, we might also point to a whole range of more ordinary cases that could reflect the greater willingness to pursue another's good or union with him that I have in mind. For example, it might be that two friends need a place to stay. Although you love both of them to some degree, you cannot host them both, and so you choose to host one over the other. In such a case, your choice could be an expression of your greater willingness to pursue the good of the one over the other. Or, it might be that two friends are performing on opening night at a festival, but their performances are scheduled for the same time. Although you love both of them to some degree, you must choose one over the other and so you attend the performance of one and not the other. Again, your choice in such a case could be an expression of your greater willingness to pursue union with the one over the other. And we could, of course, multiply ordinary examples like these.

The problem with these more ordinary cases, though, is that the range of good reasons for choosing the relevant course of action seems much wider than for my paradigm cases, and so it seems far less obvious that the ordinary cases might be cases of preferential love. For example, it could be that you host one friend and not the other simply because the other has a good alternative to staying with you while the one does not. In that case, your choice would simply solve a problem of coordination and need not express preferential love. Or, it could be that both friends come to town fairly frequently and that you hosted the other last time. In that case, your choice might express your relatively *equal* love for both of them. Or, it could be that the one friend has never traveled outside her home town before and that she is making her first trip just to see you, while the other friend is in town on a regular business trip and her employer would gladly put her up in a hotel. In that case, your choice might reflect the fact that your hosting the one friend would amount to a much more important good for her than would hosting the other and not the fact that you loved the one more than the other. We could obviously imagine parallel permutations of the case in which you choose one friend's performance over the other. Thus, it seems much less clear that the more ordinary cases above reflect preferential love.

Nevertheless, it does seem that preferential love as ordinal preference structures the ordinary choices and decisions of our lives to a significant extent. Although it is easy to doubt whether any one ordinary choice or decision really reflects preferential love as ordinal preference, it seems almost a truism that the cumulative pattern of our ordinary beneficence and our ordinary pursuit of union with the various people in our lives reflects our greater love for some over others. Most of us structure our lives to some extent around the people we love.

However, some of those influence more of this structure than others. Cumulatively, we spend more time and energy aiming at the good of these people, and union with them, than we do for others we love. What accounts for a large part of this cumulative pattern, it seems to me, is that we have a greater willingness to pursue the good of some people we love than others, and that we prefer union with some people we love to union with others. In short, for most of us the cumulative pattern of our ordinary choices reflects preferential love as ordinal preference.[295]

Given the two senses of preferential love that I wish to carry along—"willingness to expend more resources" and "ordinal preference"—each of which has two modes, it is of course possible, and perhaps likely, that there will be cases in which it is indeterminate whether I love one person more than another. Most obviously, there could be cases in which I am willing to expend equal resources in pursuit of the good of or union with two people, or in which my loving tendencies of will toward the good of or union with two people would not clearly prioritize one over the other in cases of conflict. In those cases, it would be indeterminate, on my view, whether I loved the one person more than the other. Similarly, there could be cases in which the two kinds of preferential love cut in different directions, or in which the two modes of either kind of preferential love come apart. For example, perhaps I am more willing to benefit person A than person B from love when I cannot benefit both, yet I prefer to pursue union with person B over person A in cases where I cannot pursue it with both. In that case, again, it might be indeterminate, on my account, whether I love either person more than the other. However, that my account would be indeterminate about these cases seems to me the right result: it really would be indeterminate, in such cases, whether I loved one person more than the other. Thus, insofar as there are likely many such cases in which it is, in fact, indeterminate whether we love

295 Of course, preferential love is not the *only* thing that the cumulative pattern reflects. In addition to concerns for duty, convenience, coordination, equity, and personal utility, as suggested by the examples above, the cumulative pattern also reflects the nature of the different kinds of relationships we have with different people. For example, the aims of a relationship with one's mother are different from the aims of a relationship with one's spouse. Mere differences in such relational aims also play some role in forming the cumulative pattern of our ordinary choices.

one person more than another, it is a virtue of my account that it yields indeterminacy in those cases.

7.4 LOVE AND THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS

At this point, it will be helpful to take stock of where the discussion has led us. In Chapter Five, after suggesting that Augustine's argument assumes too narrow a view of the kind of value to which love is properly a response (i.e., only the value of a human being as such), I raised the question of whether premise (1) of his argument—"The degree to which we love something should be proportional to the value it has"—would make sense if we allowed it to apply to further kinds of value. For example, should the degree to which we love a person be proportional to the value of a relationship we have with him, or to the value of certain qualities he possesses?

In Chapter Six I laid groundwork for addressing these questions. First, I explained my view of "good relationships" (i.e., those that might serve as proper grounds of love), and I suggested that such relationships have both final and non-final value. Next, I gave an account of what it is for a good relationship to be close, and I argued that (under ordinary conditions) both the final and non-final value of good relationships are generally proportional to the closeness of the relationship. Then, in the first few sections of this chapter (Chapter Seven), I explained what I mean by "loving one person more than another," i.e., either having an ordinal preference for the good of or union with the one over the other (third sense), or being willing to expend greater resources in pursuit of the good of or union with the one over the other (fourth sense).

With these pieces in place, I am now in a position to defend the following version of Augustine's premise (1), broadened to apply to a kind of value beyond what he imagined: the degree to which one person loves another should be proportional to the value of the good relationship between them. Given my claim that the value of such relationships is generally proportional to their closeness, I may be understood as claiming that the degree to which one person loves another should generally be proportional to the closeness of the good relationship between them. In other words, I claim that, in general, we should love more those we are relationally closer to, and we should love less those we are relationally more distant from.

So, for example, I hold that one should love a close friend more than a distant one. Similarly, one should love a close aunt, brother, grandmother, or parent more than a distant one. Also, one should love a spouse to whom one is close more than a more distant friend or family member. But, it also seems quite conceivable that one should love a very close friend or family member more than one's spouse, if one were not very close with one's spouse. All these cases are so, I take it, because close relationships are (under ordinary conditions) generally more valuable than distant ones, and because in cases where one person loves another the degree of that love should be proportional to the value of the good relationship between them.

7.5 PREFERENTIAL LOVE, CLOSENESS, AND COMMITMENT: AN EMPTY CLAIM?

One might worry that the view I just stated is empty or uninformative in some way. I claimed that the degree to which one person loves another should be proportional the closeness of the good relationship between them, which amounts to the claim that we should love more those we are relationally closer to, and that we should love less those we are relationally more distant from. But, recall from Chapter Six that relational closeness may partially consist in a loving commitment, which, as explained in Chapter Three, is simply a kind of love. Now, if my accounts of these concepts ("closeness" and "loving commitment") are correct, it might seem that in claiming we should love more those we are relationally closer to I am effectively claiming that we should love more those whom we love. But, this claim seems at best empty or uninformative and at worst obviously wrong: why think the fact that we love someone entails that we should, for that reason, love him *preferentially*?

This objection glosses over several important distinctions which render it ineffective. First, and perhaps most importantly, it is not mere love that makes for a loving commitment, and hence for a close relationship; rather, as explained in Chapter Three, it is a particularly *firm* or *fixed* kind of love that makes for loving commitment and closeness. Moreover, it is the stability or fixedness of the love involved in a loving commitment that calls for preferential love. Put another way, it is the fact that our love for someone is firm and fixed that implies we should be willing to expend greater resources in pursuit of that person's good or union with him and that we should be willing to rank his good and our union with him higher than that of others in our order of priorities. And that claim—that the firmness or fixedness of our love might call us to expend more for someone and to prioritize him more highly—does not seem uninformative or obviously wrong. Indeed, by my lights it has a plausible ring to it.

Second, a loving commitment (i.e., firm love) is only one of several factors that might make a relationship close. As described in Chapter Six, closeness may also consist in substantial mutual knowledge of (and by) the people in the relationship, a substantial pattern of mutual sharing of relevant aspects of each person's mental life, and a substantial pattern of mutual attentiveness to each other. Thus, boiling relational closeness down to mere love—even the firm, fixed kind of love that makes for loving commitment—is unwarranted. In some cases, then, my claim that we should love more those we are closer to might amount to the claim that we should love more those (a) whom we know better and who know us better; (b) with whom we share more of our mental lives and who share more of their mental lives with us; (c) to whom we are more attentive and who are more attentive to us; *and* (d) to whom we have a stronger loving commitment and who have a reciprocal loving commitment to us.

Third, and finally, clause (d) of the compound sentence above suggests a further reason that my claim is not merely that we should love more those we love, or even that we should love more those we love more firmly. Rather, the claim is (at worst) that we should love preferentially those with whom we share a *mutual* loving commitment, i.e., a mutual and particularly fixed kind of love. Thus, in addition to the fixedness of my love for the beloved, the fixedness of *his love for me* is part of what justifies my preferential love for him.We can add, here, that my own *past* loving commitment to the beloved (and his to me) may also call for my *present* preferential love for him.

Thus, in the end, the objection that my claim is empty or uninformative seems unwarranted. It fails to take into account the nature of a loving commitment as a particularly firm or fixed kind of love (as explained in Chapter Three) and it leaves out of account several of the multiple factors that might make a good relationship close, including mutual attentiveness, mutual sharing of aspects of each other's mental life, and mutual knowledge or understanding. With this objection dispatched, I will turn, now, to a further worry about my claim that the degree of one's love should be proportional to the value of one's relationship to the beloved, and so to the closeness of that relationship.

7.6 PREFERENTIAL LOVE FOR INFANTS

The case of a parent's preferential love for his infant child seems to be a counter-example to my claim that we should love more those we are relationally closer to, and that we should love less those we are relationally more distant from. As I argued in Chapter Six, a parent cannot achieve union with his infant child, let alone a close union. Nevertheless, it seems there are many cases in which I should love my infant child more than someone with whom I can achieve a union of some degree of closeness. For example, it seems that I should love my infant child more than a new friend. Indeed, this is the intuition that set me worrying about Augustine's argument in the first place, in Chapter One. Given this intuition, the case seems to be a counter-example to my view since the relationship I have with my new friend is, in fact, closer than that I have with my infant child.

In response, I am inclined to think that parental love for infants *is* a counterexample to the claim that we should love more those we are relationally closer to and love less those we are relationally more distant from. However, I do not think it is a counterexample to my more general view that the degree to which one person loves another should be proportional to the *value* of the good relationship between them. Indeed, as I suggested in Chapter Six, the parent-infant relationship is incredibly valuable insofar as the infant's well-being depends heavily upon it. Thus, proportionality between the degree of love and the value of the relationship might sensibly hold also in this case. What makes the case different is simply that—as I claimed in Chapter Six—the value of the relationship is not proportional to its closeness. One upshot of this difference between a parent's preferential love for his infant child and an adult's preferential love for another adult is that the account of why we should love preferentially will be different in each case. I will elaborate on this upshot in the final sections of the chapter.

7.7 LOVE AND THE VALUE OF QUALITIES

Having argued that the degree of one person's love for another should, indeed, be proportional to the value of the good relationship between them (and so to the closeness of that relationship, with the exception of parental love for infant children), one might wonder whether the same should be said for the other kind of value that may properly ground love—namely, the value of certain qualities. Should the degree of one's love for a person be proportional to the value of his qualities? In this section I will argue that it is *not* the case that it should be. Thus, I will claim that there is no norm with respect to qualities comparable to the norm counseling proportionality between the degree of love and the value of good relationships.

At the outset, it is important to notice that the fact that qualities may serve as proper grounds of love (as I argued in Chapter Four) does not *entail* that the value of qualities demands the sort of proportional degree of love that the value of relationships seems to demand. Whether something is a proper ground of love is a distinct question from whether something is such that the degree of one's love should be proportional to its value. I have argued that relationships may serve both roles, but it should not be assumed that qualities also may serve both roles simply because they may serve the first.

Indeed, a consideration of concrete cases suggests that there is no norm demanding that the degree of one's love for a person be proportional to the value of his qualities. Suppose I have met two people recently and that I do not yet have a good relationship with either of them. The first person has a smile that is very attractive to me while the second does not, but the second is kind while the first is not. Suppose further that each of these qualities has stirred in me a new love for each of the people, i.e., each quality is an operative ground of my love for its bearer.

Now, as I argued in Chapter Four, such new love seems perfectly appropriate in each case, and so such qualities, we may suppose, also serve as proper grounds of my love. In this case, the quality of kindness (a character virtue by some measures) seems much more valuable than the quality of an attractive smile. Indeed, in the terms I used in Chapter Four, kindness is relationally-conducive in a more robust sense than an attractive smile. Even if an attractive smile makes a person pleasing and is thereby conducive to a relationship with him in some way, relationships can go on without attractive smiles; there are myriad other qualities that we might find pleasant about a person. In contrast, without kindness a relationship will be quite difficult. Thus, kindness seems much more valuable, both in general and specifically as a proper ground of love.

If there were a norm suggesting that the degree of one's love for a person should be proportional to the value of that person's qualities, the case I have described above seems like a case in which the norm should come into play. In other words, if there were such a norm, it seems that I should love the kind person more than the person with the attractive smile. However, in fact, it does *not* seem that I should love either person more than the other. Indeed, it seems artificial to think that questions about whom one should love preferentially arise at all in such cases. I *may*, it seems, love either person preferentially without any impropriety. But, there just does not seem to be a fact of the matter about whom I should love more in such a case. That there is no such fact of the matter seems true despite the fact that kindness is a more important and valuable quality than an attractive smile. Thus, the case seems to suggest that the degree to which one loves a person need *not* be proportional the value of the person's qualities.

Another kind of case in which we might expect the purported norm to have some bite is one in which two people have the same valuable quality but bear it in differing degrees. For example, suppose again that I have met two people recently and that I do not yet have a good relationship with either of them. Suppose further that the sole proper ground of my love for one of the people is his average degree of kindness while the sole proper ground of my love for a second person is his *exceptional* kindness. In this case, I am again inclined to say that there is just no fact of the matter about whom I should love more. The question never arises, despite the fact that exceptional kindness seems more valuable than average kindness. Thus, again, it seems that the degree of one's love for a person need not be proportional to the value of a person's qualities.

The upshot, here, is that there does not seem to be a norm suggesting that the degree to which we love a person should be proportional to the person's qualities. I have considered two cases in which, if there were such a norm, it would come into play and tell us who we should love more. But, on my reading of the cases, no such norm actually comes into play. Thus, if my reading is correct, we can safely assume that there is no such norm. With this conclusion in place, I will now turn to the final task of the dissertation, which is to explain why there are, nevertheless, some people we *should* love more than others.

7.8 WHY WE SHOULD LOVE PREFERENTIALLY, PART 1: NON-INFANT RELATIONSHIPS

Here it will again be helpful to pause and reflect on where we are in the discussion. Since Chapter Five, my quarry has been an analysis of premise (1) of Augustine's argument: "The degree to which we love something should be proportional to the value it has." In Chapter Five, I suggested what I take to be wrong with the premise—namely, that it assumes too narrow a view of the kind of value to which love may properly be a response. In Chapters Six and Seven I have explored the extent to which the degree of one's love should be proportional to the different kinds of value to which love may properly be a response, such as the value of good relationships and the value of personal qualities. My central conclusion with respect to this second point is that there is an important norm suggesting that the degree of our love for a person should indeed be proportional to the value of our good relationship to him, and thus that we should love preferentially those with whom we have more valuable relationships. I also concluded that there is no comparable norm suggesting that the degree of our love for a person should be proportional to the value of his good qualities. However, even with such conclusions in hand, we might still wonder *why*, exactly, we should love some people more than others. What is it, exactly, about good relationships that calls for preferential *love*? As a final installment in my effort to illuminate the connection between appropriate love and value, in the next two sections I will try to answer this question.

The account of why we should love some people preferentially begins with what I take to be a basic principle of practical reason: (P) If we are faced with a mutually exclusive choice between a more valuable object and a less valuable object, and if it would be appropriate in all other ways to choose either one,[296] we should choose the more valuable over the less.

Now, recall from Chapter Six my claim that closer relationships are more valuable than more distant ones, except for cases of parent-infant relationships, which are highly valuable despite not being close in the sense I have explained. If both this claim and (P) are correct, it follows that if we are faced with a mutually exclusive choice between a close relationship and a more distant relationship, neither of which is a relationship with our own infant child, we should choose the close relationship over the more distant relationship.

Next, recall that in Chapter Two I argued that love is, in part, a tendency of will toward union with the beloved. In Chapter Six I further claimed that union with a person *just is* a kind of good relationship with him. Thus, love is, in part, a tendency of will toward such a relationship. We might, then, say, as I suggested in Chapter Four, that love is a kind of attitudinal "glue" that draws us into good relationships and holds them together. Now, *preferential* love, in the third sense I have described (in Section 7.2), is, in part, simply a tendency of will to prefer or prioritize union with one person over another in cases where we cannot have union (or aspects of it) with both. But, given my account of love, we may re-describe preferential love as, in part, a tendency of will to prefer or prioritize one good relationship over another, since union just is such a relationship. The question about why we should love some people preferentially in cases not

[296] E.g., there are no moral reasons to refrain from either.

involving parent-infant relationships then becomes, why should we have a tendency of will to prefer or prioritize *closer* instances of good relationships over more distant ones?

At this point, I trust that the answer is fairly obvious. If, in such cases, practical reason tells us to choose the closer good relationship over the more distant good relationship (since the former is more valuable than the latter), then of course we should have a tendency of will to prefer or prioritize closer instances of good relationships over more distant ones since such a tendency is simply a tendency to choose in the way that practical reason dictates. Thus, in cases not involving parent-infant relationships, preferential love of someone with whom we have a close relationship over someone with whom we have a more distant relationship is called for by the fact that such love is a tendency to choose the more valuable relationship over the less valuable when we cannot have both, as practical reason says we should.

What about the fourth sense of preferential love described above—preferential love as willingness to expend more resources in pursuit of love's targets? What might call for this sort of preferential love? I take it that the story is similar to that I have just told for preferential love as ordinal preference. Suppose you already have a close friendship and so a close union with someone. Expending resources in pursuit of love's targets with respect to that person, then, will be (in part) a means of sustaining that union. *Preferential* love for your close friend—in the fourth sense under consideration here—over someone with whom you have a more distant relationship, then, is a tendency to choose greater expenditures of your resources in sustaining the union than you would in sustaining your union with the other person, if need be. This tendency is called for by the fact that the union you have with your close friend is more valuable than the more distant union you have with the other person. It is more worthy of being sustained, and so you *should* be willing to go to greater lengths in sustaining it—i.e., you should love your close friend preferentially, in the fourth sense.

Importantly, my justification, here, of preferential love in cases not involving parent-infant relationships should not be construed as an argument that human beings should exhibit preferential love full-stop. Rather, all I have argued is that *if* I love two people, and *if* I am relationally closer to one than to the other, then preferential love of the person I am closer to is called for by the facts that (a) my closer relationship to him is more valuable than my more distant relationship to the other person, (b) *ceteris paribus* we should choose better goods over worse if we cannot have both, and (c) such preferential love is a tendency to choose in just this way. This claim is consistent with a world in which I have only two good relationships, both are always equally close, and preferential love is never called for. In such a world there would be no sense in exhibiting preferential love for its own sake. However, in the actual world we tend to have many relationships of differing closeness that sometimes conflict with each other. Under these circumstances preferential love for those closest to us will be called for by the greater value of our relationships with them.

7.9 WHY WE SHOULD LOVE PREFERENTIALLY, PART 2: INFANT RELATIONSHIPS

What about cases involving parental relationships with infant children? Why, for example, should I love my infant child preferentially over my new friend? Since, as I argued in Chapter Six, a parent cannot achieve union with his infant child, and since closeness of union depends on there being a union in the first place, it cannot be that such cases of preferential love are called for by the fact that my union (or relationship) with my infant child is closer than my union (or relationship) with my new friend. Rather, I take it that what demands preferential love in this case is the crucial importance of the parent-infant relationship for the infant's well being.

As noted in Chapter Six, without a parent's[297] care an infant's well-being would be gravely threatened. Since such care is a benefit of the parent-infant relationship, the relationship is very non-finally valuable, and, under ordinary conditions, it is more valuable than my relationship with my new friend. For this reason, then, I should have preferential love for my infant child over my new friend: such love is a tendency to choose a more valuable relationship over a less valuable one when I cannot choose both—a choice that practical reason tells me I should make.

We should pause here, though, since I have glossed over a layer of complexity in my last claim. Recall that love is a tendency of will toward *union* with the beloved. But, then one might worry that when I say, above, that preferential love for my infant child is a "tendency to choose a more valuable relationship over a less valuable one," the "more valuable relationship" in play could not be a more valuable *union*, since (according to my account) I do not yet have a union with my infant at all. In other words, it might seem that the tendency toward a more valuable relationship that I have identified as "preferential love" for my infant is not actually love at all, since it could not be a tendency toward union (since union with my infant is not possible).

However, the worry here is off target. A parent's love for his infant child is (in part) a tendency toward a genuine union; it is just that the union is not (yet) extant. As such, it resembles love for someone who is dead or has severe alzheimer's disease: love's target of union cannot be achieved. However, the parental case differs from these other two in that over time (and under ordinary circumstances) the child will develop such that union between parent and child comes about, assuming the parent plays his role. In the meantime, a good parent and his infant child have a kind of relationship that is neither a *mere* familial relationship (since the parent exhibits the activities and states constitutive of union, and so there is more between the two than simply a biological or adoptive relation) nor a familial friendship (since the infant cannot exhibit the

[297] Again, as described in Chapter Six, I take a "parent" to be a person who, either via biological relation, adoptive relation, or some other relevant set of circumstances, is primarily responsible for a child's care.

activities and states of union). Thus, a parent's preferential love for his infant child over a new friend is a tendency to choose a *future* union with his child over a present union with the friend, in cases where he cannot choose both. This choice of a future union includes choosing, here and now, the elements that *would* be constitutive of union (if the infant could reciprocate), since they are the means to that future union. Thus, it remains true to say that the parent's preferential love for his infant child over a new friend is a tendency to choose a more valuable (future) union over a less valuable (present) one, and is thereby called for.

The distinct form of normative explanation applicable in cases of preferential parental love for infants helps explain what might otherwise seem puzzling: that parents should love their children equally. If preferential parental love for children were demanded for the same reasons that preferential love is demanded in other cases—i.e., because of the closeness of the relevant relationships—once children were capable of union with their parents it might seem that parents should love preferentially those children with whom they have closer unions. Perhaps a parent is able to connect more easily with one child than another, and so his relationship with that child becomes closer than his relationship with the other. Now, if we suppose further that the parent begins to love the first child preferentially, the line of normative explanation I have offered for cases *not* involving parent-infant relationships would suggest that the parent's preferential love is as it should be. After all, his love would be a tendency to choose a closer (and hence more valuable) relationship over a more distant (and hence less valuable) relationship, which practical reason seems to counsel.

But, preferential parental love for one child over another is not, by my lights, as it should be: parents should love their children equally. But, why is that? Again the point seems to hang on the tremendous importance of the parent-child relationship for the child's well being. Not only is the parent-child relationship important for a child's well being, but it is *equally* important for each of a parent's children. Especially when they are young, children need their parents roughly to the same extent. For this reason, a parent that tends to prioritize the good of or union with one of his children over another has gone wrong. Moreover, even as children get older, the experience of equal parental love itself—a feature of a good parent-child relationship—seems to be important for the child's sense of self-worth. For example, parental favoritism has been shown to yield anger, depression, and feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem in non-favored children.[298] The equal importance, then, of the parent-child relationship for the well being of each of a parent's children—including the importance of equal love for each child, which is a feature of good instances of such relationships—explains why parents should love their children equally.

7.10 CONCLUSION

The aims of this chapter have been twofold. First, I aimed to complete my assessment of premise (1) of Augustine's argument, which states, "The degree to which we love something should be proportional to the value it has." In Chapter Five I argued that the premise goes wrong by assuming that the value of a thing according to its nature is the only value to which love may properly be a response. Drawing on my pluralist account of love's proper grounds in Chapter Four, I argued that love may also properly be a response to the value of certain qualities of the beloved and to the value of a relationship between lover and beloved. Here, in Chapter Seven, I considered the idea in premise (1) that love should be *proportional* to value in some way. For example, if we broaden the kinds of value to which love is properly a response to include the value of qualities and relationships, should love be proportional to such value?

[298] See Irving D. Harris and Kenneth I Howard, "Correlates of Perceived Parental Favoritism," *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 146, no. 1 (1985): 45–56; Linda J. Zervas and Martin F. Sherman, "The Relationship Between Perceived Parental Favoritism and Self-Esteem," *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 155, no. 1 (1994): 25–33.

I argued that if the proper grounds of love for two people are our good relationships with them, our love should be proportional to the relative value of the two relationships. Furthermore, since I argued in Chapter Six that the value of good relationships is generally proportional to their closeness—with the exception of parent-infant relationships—I further claimed that the degree of our love for the two people should generally be proportional to the *closeness* of the relationships we have to them. In other words, if we have a closer relationship to A than to B, we should love A more than B, i.e., we should have a tendency of will to prefer or prioritize the good of, or union with, A over B in cases where we cannot realize these aims with both. Coupled with my conclusion about the central problem with Augustine's argument (noted above), my conclusion, here, about the proper proportionality between the degree of love and the value of relationships represents the culmination of my effort to illuminate the correct relation between love and value—a central aim of my dissertation.

Finally, I ended Chapter Seven by offering an account of *why* preferential love is called for in the cases where I have claimed that it is. For example, I offered an explanation of why we should, in general, love those we are relationally closer to more than those we are relationally more distant from. The explanation began by noting that since love is a tendency of will toward union, and since union just is a kind of good relationship, preferential love may be understood (in part) as a tendency of will to prefer or prioritize one good relationship over another. I then suggested that since closer instances of such relationships are generally more valuable than more distant ones, it follows from a basic principle of practical reason that we should (*ceteris paribus*) choose a closer relationship over a more distant one, if we cannot choose both. Finally, then, preferential love for those we are relationally closer to is called for by the fact that such love is, in part, a tendency of will to choose those closer and more valuable relationships over more distant and less valuable relationships. This conclusion answers the second question raised in

Chapter One regarding why, exactly, we should love some people more than others, and thereby settles the second and final aim of the dissertation.