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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

‘Only God, my dear’: being loved for oneself and creation from nothing

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Abstract

At least some people want to be loved simply for being the particular individuals they are, as distinct from any properties they might possess. However, the most prominent theories in contemporary philosophical work on love are framed so as to exclude that possibility. In this article, I argue that Christians have the resources to say that one can be loved for oneself if they appeal to the love God has for his creatures in making them from nothing. This article comprises four sections. In the first two sections, I introduce and characterize the desire to be loved for oneself, distinguishing the relevant desideratum from other, similar phenomena. In the third section, I note that the appraisal and bestowal views exclude the possibility that one *could* be loved for oneself in the relevant sense and note some other possible, initial objections. Finally, in the fourth section, I attempt to show one way in which God can be said to love his creatures *in* creating them – despite the fact that they do not exist before their own creation. I do so by attempting to show that, plausibly, there is a sense in which, if God engages in the creative act for its own sake and the creature itself is that act seen under a certain aspect, God can plausibly be said to create the creature for its own sake – and so, plausibly, to create it in love.

Keywords: love; creation from nothing; particularity; ipseity; God

The desideratum

In the poem ‘For Anne Gregory’, the titular woman says that she wants to be loved ‘for [herself] alone/And not [her] yellow hair’. Her interlocutor assures her, to her probable dismay,

> That only God, my dear,
> Could love you for yourself alone
> And not your yellow hair (Yeats 1932).

I want to consider what Anne is after. On one common reading, Anne contrasts ‘being loved for herself alone’ with being loved for shallow or inessential properties. That is how Tim Chappell seems to read the poem: Yeats’s point, says Chappell, is that ‘it is quite common for love never to get any further than’ its starting point in ‘some striking [but] superficial

feature or property' (Chappell 2004, 95; see also Bicknell 2010, 357). When Anne says she wants to be loved for herself, she means that she wants to be loved for the *right* properties, perhaps the ones she considers essential: her wit, her kindness, her artistic pursuits, or similar.

What the interlocutor says in response, however, makes such a reading difficult. If to be loved for oneself is to be loved for such 'essential' properties, it makes little sense to say that only God could love one for oneself: humans often *do* love one another for such properties. So, at least if we take him at his word, the interlocutor must think that what Anne is after is rarer and more difficult. My suggestion is that the interlocutor uses 'yellow hair' to stand in for properties in general. More than that, he thinks that Anne is also using the phrase that way. When she says that she wants to be loved for herself, Anne means that she wants her lover to love her as distinct from any and all properties she might possess.[1] She wants her lover to be able to say, to others, 'I love Anne because – well, it's Anne!' and, to her, 'I love you, Anne, because it's *you*'.[2] To put it another way, she wants to be loved for something like her bare identity.

While the Anne of the poem is a fiction,[3] her desire is not. It is at least common enough in real life to be widely recognizable and to appear in romantic literature. Yeats certainly considered it a familiar enough phenomenon that he felt no need to explain it in his rather terse poem. Outside the romantic context, this desire is perhaps most evident among religious authors. G.K. Chesterton and Thomas Traherne, just to name two, seem to hold that God creates each individual because he sees *that* very individual as worth giving existence to and that, in consequence, the desire to know that one is loved and lovable for being oneself is perfectly natural (Chesterton 1909, 96; Traherne 2014, 3).[4] They themselves also occasionally suggest that their delight in their faith is at least partially attributable to its meeting their deep-seated need to know that they are loved down to their very core, their very selfhood. On a final and more personal note, I suspect many people want to be loved simply for themselves. I know I certainly do. I am *not* suggesting that each and every person has this longing to be loved for being oneself, certainly not consciously. But it seems at least common enough that others can recognize it even if they themselves never feel it.

Given the deeply existential import attached to it, one might expect 'love for (being) oneself' to have turned up in philosophical literature more often than it has. It has only rarely been addressed by analytic philosophers.[5] If it *is* mentioned, it is usually only briefly considered before being dismissed.[6] Niko Kolodny says that 'bare identity … cannot serve as a reason for loving [an individual]' because '[t]he thought', for instance, 'that she is Mary simply identifies a particular with itself; it does not ascribe a property to that particular that might make a certain response to it appropriate' (Kolodny 2003, 142). Neil Delaney considers it 'altogether absurd' to think that humans even *want* 'to be loved for being us, not for … our attractive properties' (Delaney 1996, 346; see also Kadlac 2012, 34–35). Much less, the thought seems to go, should one think that one *is* ever loved for 'oneself alone'. Finally, T.S. Champlin, in an essay on action for its own sake, says that, if a person 'in real life' had worries about whether she was being loved for herself as opposed to being loved for properties such as personality traits, 'one natural interpretation would be that there was something mentally wrong with that person' (Champlin 1987, 39). All think that there is something mildly (or wildly) absurd about the idea that one could be loved for being oneself in the way that Anne seems to be asking about. Some give very briefly stated reasons for thinking so. (I shall consider them a little more in the next section.) But most simply say it is obviously false in some way and move on without further ado.

On occasion, one can find a philosopher who recognizes the phenomenon without dismissing it. Luc Bovens and Alexander Nehamas are two recent examples. But Bovens does

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not talk about the idea at any length, much less attempt to suggest how it might look to love another 'for himself alone' (Bovens 2019, 269). Nehamas says a fair bit more in his book *On Friendship*, but, when *he* talks about 'loving another for being himself', he means something like 'loving another because one wants to see his ineffable "style" unfold in the future', leaving it difficult to see how his view is not merely a standard properties view with the addition that *future* properties are among the possible reasons for love (Nehamas 2016, 118–139). Neither has set out to examine or defend the phenomenon that interests Anne. And even if they had, they would be the exceptions proving the rule: the subject remains seriously neglected.

This article aims to redress this neglect by taking seriously the desire to be loved for being oneself and exploring the phenomenon at which it is directed. That will involve, among other things, exploring the reasons for which love for being oneself has not been considered a viable possibility in contemporary philosophy. My suggestion is that this phenomenon has not been seen as worth engaging with at least in part because it is very difficult to say what it would even look like to take a bare identity – an object and not a fact – for a reason.[7]

This brings me to my article's second and more substantive aim. I am going to take a cue from Anne's interlocutor and suggest that the Christian tradition has the resources to suggest at least one instance in which love is directed at its object simply because it is *that* object: God's love for the creature when he creates it from nothing.[8] Christians thus have space for the idea that one can be loved for oneself and the resources to make such an idea, at least by their own lights, intelligible. I should clarify now that I do not intend to claim that *only* Christians can make space for such an idea.[9] I am simply interested in exploring how Christians might conceptualise 'being loved for oneself' and showing that their tradition can give them the resources to do so.[10] If, in the process, more general conceptual implications appear – implications, for instance, about what options are available in logical space if one wants to make room for love for oneself – so much the better.

I first make some clarifications with respect to my argument and what I take to be involved in the concept of 'love for being oneself'. In the next section, I note that the current theories on offer exclude our desideratum by their very nature and propose a reason why that might be so. I then turn to my own proposal, suggesting that God, in creating a creature, could legitimately be said to love the creature for being itself. There are some potential difficulties with the idea that God loves a thing without presupposing that the very thing he makes already exists. To answer those concerns and to further flesh out how one might understand God as creating things simply for themselves, I offer a speculative account. I suggest that, in an important sense, intention is always directed at concrete acts – at *this* very act one is performing.[11] Second, I suggest that actions performed truly for their own sakes are plausibly understood as serving as reasons for their own performance. Finally, I take it as plausible enough to say that, when God creates, he performs the creative act for its own sake; and the creature, being the creative act itself viewed under a certain aspect, is thus also created for its own sake. If that is correct, it is at least conceivable that the creature serves as a reason for its own creation without, therefore, having to exist logically *prior* to the creative act.

Clarifications and assumptions

Since I am attempting to start a new conversation in talking about love for being oneself, a few clarifications are in order.

First, a concern with being loved for oneself is not a worry about who or what is the object at which the love is aimed. In a famous passage in his *Pensées*, Pascal claims that,

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if one is loved 'for' one's properties – for one's beauty or one's memory or what have you – love has the properties, not one's self, for its object. To put it another way, it is Anne's yellow hair, not Anne herself, that is loved. This is not, I take it, Anne's worry. She assumes that it is she who is loved. What she wants to know is whether she is loved for herself – for being Anne – or for her yellow hair.[12] Secondly, being loved for oneself is not a matter of being loved for the 'right' properties. If Anne wants to be loved for herself and not for *any* properties, then being loved for her haecceity, her being self-identical, and so forth will fail to satisfy her.[13] These properties might be essential to her, but that does not change the fact that they are not *her*.[14] Thirdly, being loved for oneself is not about 'how' the love is. For instance, it is not the same as being loved unconditionally, enduringly, or exclusively. Nor is it the same as being loved as non-fungible, irreplaceable, or unique.[15] Love with these traits could be achieved by recourse to various properties: stable character traits can secure enduring love;[16] love based on a concrete history together, perhaps one in which one seeks to improvise a life (Bagley 2015) or draw forth from the beloved his inexhaustible future self (Nehamas 2016), could secure non-fungibility and irreplaceability; one could be loved as unique as long as one has at least one property that cannot be shared in a given history – Neil Armstrong would never have to worry if he were loved for being the first man to set foot on the moon; and wholly unconditional love, if it is built on properties at all, could easily be based on such features as humanity or self-identicality. (Alternatively, an unconditional love might not be based on anything at all, looking more like *agape* in Anders Nygren's (1953) work *Agape and Eros*. In that case, it would not be for a reason at all, which would fail to satisfy Anne in a different way.)

Fourthly, there is no cause to think that the desire to be loved 'for oneself' is necessarily a desire to be loved *romantically* for oneself.[17] One might interpret Anne as interested in romantic love in particular, but the exchange with her interlocutor makes more sense if one assumes that what she is after – being loved for herself – is an element that can be found in other contexts as well as the romantic. It certainly makes sense that she should want her lovers to love her for being herself, but that need not mean that the desire to be so loved can only be satisfied by them any more than the desire to be cared for because one is witty can be satisfied only by friends. Additionally, the interlocutor would have been offering a *non sequitur* if what Anne wanted were exclusively romance. Certainly, he cannot mean to suggest that God would *romantically* love her for herself alone! Setting aside what Anne desires for a moment, it is obvious that the religious writers mentioned earlier are not talking about romantic love when they say that God loves each creature for being that very creature.

It seems likeliest to me that what Anne and her fellows are talking about is something like care or concern: a disposition to take an interest in the beloved, to act for his good, and to desire union with her in whatever mode might be appropriate (e.g. friendship, romance, or familial love). Following them, I shall use the term 'love' for such a disposition as well. In so doing, I am not staking out a position in the literature on what is essential to the concept of love. I am simply abiding by the terms in which Anne frames the matter; if she wants to call the thing she is after 'love', I am content to do so as well.

A fifth clarification: to say that one wants to be loved for oneself is not to say that one does not want properties to figure into the love in any way. It seems likely that Anne would be dissatisfied if her lovers never admired her for her gentle personality; Traherne might well hope that God delights in him for his poetic abilities as well as cares for him for being himself; and I, personally, should like to hear God say, one day, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant'. And considerations besides the fact 'that it is Anne', for instance, *must* come into the picture when it comes to concrete, loving actions: it matters that Anne adores daffodils, hates chocolate, is allergic to cats, and was engaged to her lover on this very day

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some 20 years ago. A love based on one's being oneself need not exclude other reasons for action, admiration, and so forth.

Finally, I must mention an important assumption, without which the argument cannot get off the ground. Anne assumes that she is a subject distinct from any and all properties that she might possess. She is not her properties and her properties are not she. Since my aim is to show how such a love might be possible, I see no reason to doubt the terms in which the problem is framed. I shall assume, therefore, an ontology in which the subject is distinct from the properties it possesses.[18] That is not to say that the subject is propertyless if, by that term, one means 'without properties'. Obviously, the subject *does* have properties. The question is whether the logical subject *consists in* those properties, or is simply identical to them, whether severally or in sum. If the logical subject does not consist in its properties, then it makes sense to ask whether the individual is loved because it instantiates certain properties or because it is that individual.

I recognize this position is controversial and that, to defend it properly, I would need much more argument and a lengthy engagement with the philosophical and theological literatures on properties, identity, and objects; the literature on monism; and likely the literatures on intrinsic and extrinsic properties and relations. However, my argument is modest enough that I can responsibly make some assumptions in those areas: my project is primarily to explore whether the Christian tradition has the resources needed to explain how one might be loved for oneself. I am thus comfortable with assuming an ontology on which there is a self in the sense needed to get the problem off the ground. And I take that ontology to be one on which, at a bare minimum, there are subjects that *have* properties but are *not* those properties. If such an ontology is not plausible, then my solution will not work either; indeed, the very problem on which the argument is founded falls apart. I recognize and accept that fact.

Where, how, and why contemporary theories fall short

Unfortunately, contemporary philosophical theories of love tend to exclude the possibility of being loved for oneself from the outset. Consider two prominent theories: the appraisal view and the bestowal view. Appraisal views generally assume that the object's lovableness must be explained by reference to something else – namely, its properties. Bestowal views, in contrast, say love 'projects' value onto the beloved. It is not explained by reference to the beloved at all.[19]

Notice that these views share a key assumption: if love is to be characterized as having reasons and those reasons are to be found in the beloved, then those reasons must be properties the beloved possesses. The other option is to deny the beloved supplies such reasons.[20] Obviously, neither option works if one wants to say that one can be loved for oneself: being loved for oneself is to be loved for a reason (namely the self) but not for any property. Such a possibility is thus ruled out by the terms in which the debate is framed.

Why the assumption? One reason might have to do with doubts about intuitive knowledge. Plausibly, whenever I think about, have intentions toward, or otherwise have to do with an individual, it is under a certain, intelligible description; and for many, it might seem as though we never have 'the individual as such' there in our thought, serving as an intelligible content in addition to the properties we ascribe to the individual. Unless one posits that humans have an intuitive faculty that somehow apprehends individuals in their individuality, it seems as though we are only able to know or have intentions toward individual things so far as they present themselves to us under a propertied (and hence intelligible) aspect. So, one might be sceptical that humans can love an object for anything but its intelligible properties; and, since the philosophical literature on love generally focuses on love

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between humans, it would be natural enough for that literature to assume that one cannot *be* loved for anything but properties either.

Another difficulty is that reasons are usually taken to be something like facts or propositions. How an object or person could serve as a reason is far from clear, and most of the reasons we give and take in the course of our daily lives can be communicated in the form of something like propositions. So, any explanation of how one might be loved simply for oneself will have to tangle with the difficult question of how to think of objects and persons, rather than facts or propositions, as reasons.

Creation from nothing

I have set up the problem and laid out the desideratum. It is now time to turn to my second aim for this article: considering what the Christian tradition might bring to the table in thinking through this matter. In particular, I wish to suggest that the Christian can plausibly claim that God displays such a love for his creatures in creating them from nothing – at least if one assumes, with much of the Christian tradition, that God gives existence to each creature as a gift. I then wish to suggest one way in which the Christian might show *how* God can be love creatures for themselves in the creative act. Before proceeding, I must note two things. First, I am not attempting to prove that God *does* love us for ourselves; I am merely attempting to show one way the Christian who thinks that God *does* love us for ourselves might conceptualize that fact. Second, I assume that creation from nothing is something other than mere 'actualization'. It does not involve merely sprinkling actuality on prefab essences or merely possible individuals or worlds. As Austin Farrer puts it in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, God does not have a menu from which to pick and compare possible worlds or creatures (Farrer 1962, 61–64). For, as classically understood, creation from nothing involves no operation upon any object; any presupposed 'things' from which God could select some for creation would violate that understanding (Webster 2013, 162–165). With those notes in mind, let us proceed.

It has been common in the Christian tradition to say that God gives each thing its existence (and its very self) as a gift.[21] Likewise, it has been common to say that God gives this gift in love. God loves things into existence. This tradition lends itself to the idea that God loves his creatures for themselves. For if your properties are gifts to you, then it seems plausible that God has no other ground on which to give them to you than that it is *you*. Perhaps the whole cosmos is something like a stage play or dance that God wants to put on, complete with roles and parts, choreographed down to the minutest detail. It was still up to God whether to give those roles to you, me, and Bede the Venerable. He might (perhaps) have assigned you to another role; he might (certainly) have assigned somebody else the role that you in fact have. But, in actual fact, he has selected *you* to play your specific role. One might chock that decision up to whimsy on God's part; one might also consider the fact that it is you a mere side effect. But, if one thinks that God does give each person his existence and self for some reason, then the only plausible reason for his doing so seems to be that it be *this* individual that he somehow sees as worth giving those gifts.

There are, however, a few difficulties attending the idea that God loves his creatures in creating them. The first difficulty is presented by actualists such as A.N. Prior (1957, 391; 1960; 1978, 142), Richard Adams (1981, 9–10), and Christopher Menzel (1991). They have claimed that God cannot intend to create an individual because the individual is not there to be intended until after its creation (at least not unless one supposes that there are things like possibilia on which he operates by sprinkling a little actuality on them). If they are correct, God can only intend to produce *some* individual of a type. One could not, then, say that God's choice to create Anne has Anne as its intended object, much less that he considers Anne to be a reason for his act. Another potential objection comes from Mark Johnston and

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others who consider love and its reasons to be dependent on their object's existence. One cannot take Mary as a reason for creating Mary, the thought goes, because Mary does not exist to be a reason until *after* she has been created (Johnston 2019, 143–145). Likewise, one cannot say God creates Mary because he loves her, for love presupposes an existing object (Edwards 2008, 439; Johnston 2019, 145–148; Vitale 2020, 179–180, 190–1; Watt 2015, 148; Wessling 2020, 110).[22] Added to these difficulties is the difficulty mentioned in the previous section: how God could be understood to take an object or person, rather than a proposition or fact, as a reason to act.

My task in the next section is to suggest that God *can* intend the individual and that, when he does so, the individual can serve as a reason for the creative act. My suggestion comprises three parts: that one can intend particular acts; that, when an act is performed for its own sake, it is a reason for its own performance; and that the creature, as the effect of God's creative act, can be willed for its own sake as long as the act is willed for its own sake.

Intentions towards particular acts

I wish to claim that, at least in two relevant senses, intention is always directed towards particular, concrete acts.[23] In the first sense, intention is what one is seeking to bring about, how one would like the act to go. In this sense, to say something like 'I was intending to leap across that chasm but slipped and fell in' is to say that one was acting with the aim that the act constitute a 'leaping across a chasm', even if it did not end up doing so. In the second sense, on the other hand, intention is something more akin to embarkation upon or commitment to a concrete act. I shall say a bit more about what I mean by that phrase shortly.

With this distinction in mind, I can move on. I now wish to show that intention in the first sense is always directed towards particular, concrete acts. When one intends to perform some concrete act, what one wishes to bring about includes its being *this* concrete act. Consider what happens when the Lady Eve sees an apple and, being rather peckish, picks it up and eats it. Her desire is general with respect to its object. Any apple would do. (For that matter, any edible substance would do.) Yet when she intends to eat the apple, she does not intend merely to eat 'something'. The object intended is this specific apple.[24] My claim takes this insight about an act's object and applies it to the act itself. When I intend to perform concrete act q, it is not accidental to my intention that the concrete act I perform be q – as if, for all I know or care, concrete acts r, s, or t could be the result instead. I intend not merely to perform some concrete act but this very concrete act. That fact holds even if I am interested in q only insofar as it is an act token that exemplifies some act type (much as I might be interested in a specific apple only as an edible substance).

I consider this point intuitive. How could one intend to run, say, without intending to bring about the specific, concrete action that one commits to in starting to run? But in case one finds the intuition uncompelling on its own, I present as evidence cases in which one performs an act without knowing in detail what type it will be. When I commit myself to drawing, say, I put pen to paper and find myself confronted with an event, a process in which I am engaged, an effect unfolding in its object through time. I do not know immediately what the result will be – I have no blueprint in mind – because it is not till I determine where to draw the final line and declare it complete that it even has a determinate shape. Before that point, I know it only as *this* act, the one I am engaged in, lead where it may. This fact suggests, I think, that one can intend a concrete act without intending (solely) according to a type.[25] One might object that, even in a case like this, I have to have some act type in mind. For example, while I might not know exactly whether what I am doing is making a map or sketching the skyline, I do at least know that I am drawing. So, one might say, what I am

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intending is not really indeterminate: it is simply a broader-than-usual intention, namely to draw. My reply is that, while my intention might involve merely drawing 'something', it is not exhausted thereby. Otherwise, it would be satisfied by my having drawn, no matter the output. Then, merely putting a pencil to paper and leaving a dot would suffice; and that hardly seems plausibly to capture what my intention is. Rather, what I am intending is this concrete act, my drawing *this* (however *this* turns out). I want this act to reach its conclusion even before I know what that conclusion is, even though I am, in some sense, discovering what it is as I go. It is an exploratory intention but no less an intention for all that.

I now turn to the second sense in which one must always intend the concrete act. Intention in this sense is something like commitment to or embarkation upon the concrete act. It differs from intention in the previous sense in that it produces the act that is committed to. My commitment to q is sufficient to ensure that there be a concrete act q. That does not mean that commitment is enough to make the act belong to a certain *type*: one may want to cook a nice apple pie but botch the attempt so badly that one cannot even say one began making it; even in such a case, one still achieved at least one thing – namely, concrete act q. Indeed, it is the arguably the fact that one had intentions that q turn out in such and such a way that allows one to say it was a botched attempt at all.

Let me illustrate. Consider the gap between merely speculative thought about performing an act, any act, according to type x and the final intention with which one embarks on or commits to a concrete act. Say I have had a bad fight with my father, and we have stopped talking to each other. I know that I ought to talk to him. I feel a tug in my gut, an unease, every time I consider the fact that I still have not reached out to him. I ponder what I could say, imagine how the conversation might go. I say to myself that I *will* reach out to him – soon! Perhaps I feel some grim determination when I say it, setting my jaw and furrowing my brow to indicate that I *mean* it. I even make preparations: I write a letter, purchase the necessary postage, fill out the envelope, put the letter in it, walk to the mailbox – and suddenly, at the very last minute, walk back into the house and put the letter in the trash. In what sense did I intend to reach out to my father? I certainly imagined doing it. I probably had an appetite for it. I even planned and prepared to do it. But in the end, there remained a gap between all my imaginings and preparations and the final leap into the activity. What was wanting was an intention towards the particular, concrete act, an intention that would have issued in an act that, if successfully executed, would have amounted to my contacting my father.[26]

It makes sense that such a gap should exist. Plausibly, intentions in the relevant sense are logically directed towards things that can be performed; and one cannot perform an act type. It seems to follow that one cannot intend an act type – at least not in the same sense as one can intend a concrete act. Just as one cannot chase a generic 'something' but only a particular thing, such as the okapi that ran across the Kantstraße not two moments ago, so one cannot intend generic act types but only concrete acts.

Acts confront one

One might wonder whether the 'intentions' that I have been talking about are sufficiently similar to intentionality to be relevant to my aim. My aim is, after all, to show that God can have certain intentional stances towards his creatures – namely that he takes them as reasons for his love for them. One might think that, in contrast, an action is not sufficiently separate from the agent for the agent to have intentions towards it – not in the relevant sense at least. Can one have intentions for an act as one can have intentions for, say, an apple pie or a friend?

I would say that, phenomenologically speaking, it often *is* the case that I have intentions towards my own acts: things that I hope for them, practical stances that I take towards

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them, and so forth. This comes out especially clearly (though not, I think, exclusively) in improvised, productive activity. When sitting down and beginning to draw, I see the act as a process unfolding before me. It seems to be something external, something that I can have intentions towards. So, for instance, I can admire the work as it unfolds. On the other hand, it may dismay me. If it begins to go poorly, I may shift my practical stance towards it in different ways, attempting to change it or, if I realize it has degraded past a certain threshold, abort it. This experience becomes especially clear when one is improvising, as with the drawing example: in such cases, there is even a sense in which I am able to discover or learn from the act as I go. If we take seriously the fact that one's activity, in being intended concretely, becomes in some sense external to one, it becomes reasonable to think that one can indeed have intentions towards one's own concrete acts.

Temporal and logical priority do not hold between intention and concrete act

It is worth noting here that, when I intend an act *q*, I bring about the very thing intended *by* intending it. There is neither temporal nor logical gap between the intention and the object. Up until I perform *q*, I cannot be said to intend *q*; for if I end up not following through, what was I intending? Certainly not *q*: it does not exist because I did not intend it, so it cannot be what I intended. I can intend *q* only when I am in fact performing *q*. If I do indeed intend *q* but *q* does not exist until I intend it, then we have an instance where an intention and its object come to be at the same time; it thus turns out to be false that the object must precede the intention. The two can come to be simultaneously. To put it in slightly more literary terms, it is only once I step out into relation with the act, only once I commit myself to it, that it comes about. My taking the act as my intentional object is the occasion and the very moment in which occurs the act.

Actions for their own sake

When one performs an action for its own sake, the act serves as its own reason. When I decide to go for a walk or play music for its own sake, I need not be doing so to achieve any ulterior aims (Mele 1988). Likewise, there need not be any backwards-looking consideration that serves as my reason.[27] I am not responding to some demand made on me by the way the world is. Rather, the consideration in whose light I act is simply the concrete act itself. I perform the act because it is worth performing (at least in my eyes).[28] This point is essential because it suggests that there are familiar instances in which the reason for performing an act is nothing but the act itself, meaning that the reason is temporally and logically simultaneous with the act for which it is a reason.

Under most circumstances, at least on a certain level, even an act done for its own sake is desired only under a generic aspect. If I want to swim, I must intend and successfully perform an act token, but it generally matters not at all to me *which* token I perform, as long as it meets the criteria necessary to count as 'swimming'. That makes perfect sense: I like swimming because it is *swimming*, and it is swimming thanks to various characteristics or properties (e.g. cutting through the water, a certain weightlessness).[29] But I think that, at least in some cases, one may desire to perform an act for its own sake and simply as *that* concrete act. To illustrate what I mean, I return to my earlier example. When I set out to draw something without a blueprint in mind, I find myself confronted with my own activity, which appears to me as a concrete process in which I am engaged.[30] Though I may not have specific conditions in mind for the end result and hence do not know fully what act type it will exemplify when complete, I may still wish for it to go well, whatever its going well ends up consisting in. What 'going well' for it means will become clearer as I progress in the process.[31] As I end up settling on certain properties for the drawing, as I begin to sense

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its particular 'style', I begin to shape the activity in certain directions according to that vision. But it is because I was *already* committed to the concrete act that I care to give it these properties. It is so that *it* may be a good act.

Relationships supply another ready example. If I really love another person, I am going to want certain things for my beloved: good health, small and harmless pleasures, good character, and all the other things that contribute to a good life. In at least some cases, love will prompt me to act so as to help my beloved achieve those goods. But that need not mean that I perform those acts solely because I want things to go a certain way with my beloved. Instead, my intention may be an open-ended and exploratory desire to ensure that things go well, whatever that may end up looking like. If I have a child, for instance, I may very well seek to bring the child up in a certain way, shaping him according to a certain ideal. But the emphasis (one may hope) is on the child, not the ideal. I should wish to raise my child to be virtuous not primarily because I wish to produce virtuous persons – to which end my child is suitable raw material – but because I care for *this, my child*, and know that being virtuous is good.[32] Likewise, I do not merely wish to 'realize an act token under type *x*'. Instead, I find myself confronted with the fact that I now have *this* act in process, and I wish to mould it to be a good act – perhaps like the image I envisioned before setting out, perhaps different from my expectations.[33] So, I can be concerned with the act so that the reason I am performing it is simply a desire that it go well. In this case, it is reasonable to say that my reason for acting is the act itself, considered not under this or that description but as this particular act.

Admittedly, these examples have their limits.[34] While my commitment to my child's good might, in theory, be entirely open-ended, aimed at whatever it turns out my child's good consists in, the matter is not so clear in practice. I would probably not care so much for *x* if *x* were not my child but an unaffiliated frog. One might take that fact to suggest that I am engaged in my caring activities not for their own sakes but because some prior consideration demands them.[35] And in any case, one might argue, I am aiming at *some* type, however hazily understood or open-ended: namely my child's good. So, one might continue, while I have certainly shown that my intention for the act can be extremely loose, I have not shown that I am aiming at it merely because I want to perform *it*, want *it* to go well.

My examples from running and drawing have their own limits. As one reviewer has pointed out, if my activity were, at least at the outset, to involve my beating my head against a wall, I might not be so keen to keep it up to find out how it might unfold in other, better directions. One might therefore conclude that I never perform an act simply because it is *that* act but only ever because I see it as having certain properties that I see as making it worth the doing. Further, when beginning an artwork, even when I set out without a clear picture in mind, I have already set some parameters on what the result will probably be by putting a pen to paper in the first place. Even if there is not a fully determinate 'kind' to which I know the act will belong, I still have intended for it to start out, from the outset, with certain properties. I have chosen, as it were, to set out in a certain direction even if the rest of the journey is not yet clear.

In response, I first note that it need not follow, from the fact that I abort an activity based on its undesirable or harmful properties, that I did not engage in the activity for its own sake and simply because it was *that* activity. It is entirely plausible that I should cease from the act simply because, much as I would have liked to keep the activity up, being committed to its going well, there were countervailing considerations to prevent my doing so. Secondly, the fact that I have a (very loose) type in mind when setting out to draw does not undermine my point: that one can be concerned with ensuring that *this* act go well because one is committed to it, not merely as the 'stuff' that will eventually go into realizing an act token belonging to some type. As long as the priority runs from a concern with the

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act to the properties one wishes to bestow on the act, not (at least not entirely) the reverse, my illustrations remain secure.

Even so, I recognize the difficulty facing these examples: the problem is that one never sets out to perform a 'bare act' any more than one ever sets one's sights on a 'bare particular'. In actual practice, all the particulars one meets are robed in properties, and, in the acts one performs, one generally sets out with some initial idea about what the act will end up looking like. So, even assuming that one *does* perform some acts for their own sake and as particular, it is rarely if ever that one finds a 'pure' instance, unmingled with other reasons. For that reason, even those who hold that it is in principle possible to perform an act for its own sake and simply as *that* act might doubt whether there are any instances where an act *is* in fact performed for that reason. Given the limited space remaining in this article, I shall only gesture at a possible response. If there is one instance in which humans seem to have an almost completely open-ended desire to perform an act, whatever it looks like for that act to go well, it is life: the unified activity in which each person or thing 'selves, goes itself'. By the time I am aware that I am I, I am already always engaged in living life, and I live – am myself – simply for its, or my, own sake. It is only as I carry on that I tentatively learn what it looks like for my life to go well, and it is arguably always because I am committed to living that I care one way or another what it means for things to go well in my life; the properties matter because the life matters, not the reverse. Even if one thinks there may come a time when a life becomes so painful or wearisome that it is better to welcome its end, the reason is arguably that the shorter but less painful life is still a better life, and I care that it be better because my most basic desire is to live my life as well as I may.

Obviously, all that I have just said is highly contentious, but I think it has enough intuitive force to show that there is at least a plausible instance in which one performs an act that is (nearly) entirely open-ended and is performed for its own sake and as particular.

God's acts are (in part) simply their objects

I am now ready to move on to my final suggestion: that under one aspect, the divine creative act can be identified with its effect and its effect, in turn, with its product. To make this point, I draw on a framework found in Aristotle. (Note, however, that one need not hold to a thoroughly Aristotelian ontology to use the framework. It is loose enough to be compatible with multiple ontologies.) For Aristotle, an act can be seen under three aspects: the agent's actualization *qua* agent, the patient's actualization *qua* patient, and the act, or process, itself (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XI, 1065b–1066a and *Physics* III, 202b26–27). As an illustration, consider a fire and a kettle. While the fire is heating the kettle, the fire is being actualized in its potential to be heating the kettle; for its part, the kettle is being actualized in its potential to be undergoing heating. I shall call the aspect under which the object is being affected the act's 'effect'. Since the effect *is* the act under a certain aspect, to the extent that the act is intended, the effect too must be intended – that is, obviously, assuming that one takes 'intention' in the sense that I have been using it.

In most cases, one can draw a distinction between an act's effect and its object. When the fire heats the kettle, the kettle is an object with its own character distinct from the effect in it. The kettle is not exhausted by its character as heatable, much less its character as *being* heated. But there is good reason to think the case is otherwise when it comes to divine creation. Christians have traditionally held that God creates from nothing. Plausibly, in creation from nothing, there is no pre-existing object on which God operates. It is not a change in a thing already presupposed. Indeed, it is arguably not a change at all since, in it, there is no subject passing through a change from one state to another. It would be

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natural to conclude that the object has no character distinct from the effect and that the creative act has only one intelligible content: the creature-being-created and all its creaturely characteristics, which is simply to say the creature itself.[36]

This final step allows us to reach the following conclusion: if God (a) intends creative act *q* as particular (b) for its own sake (c) because it is *that* particular act and (d) some creature *is* creative act *q* under a certain aspect, it would seem to follow that (e) God intends that creature for its own sake and as particular. In a sense, the creature serves as a reason for its own creation.[37] One could very well say that God creates that creature because it is *that* creature. And that, perhaps, supplies an answer that will satisfy Anne.

Reasons to think that God engages in the creative act for its own sake

I must make one final point before concluding. Strictly speaking, all I have argued for is the claim that, if God creates for its own sake and as particular, he also does so for the creature. It remains to be seen whether it can be shown that God *does* engage in creative acts for their own sakes in the requisite sense. But I feel no need to argue here for the claim that he does: there are many traditions in which it makes sense to say that he does so. Whether one thinks God creates out of sheer artistic exuberance, an ecstatic love of his creatures, a sort of cosmic playfulness, or the desire to manifest his own glory, one can find a place for the idea that, in some sense, God engages in creative activity for its own sake – and so creates the creature for its own sake as well.[38]

Concluding thoughts

If the position I have put forward is promising, there are three upshots. First, there is a new category to add to appraisal and bestowal views: love that recognizes and affirms its object in its individual identity. Second, it raises questions about whether there can be such a love between creatures. Third, it gives a reason for looking seriously at the Christian tradition (and other traditions on which God creates from nothing) as presenting an answer to a deeply existential concern. My personal hope is that it will also open conversations about ways in which distinctive religious commitments might provide fruitful resources for thinking through topics in philosophy of love. At the very least, what I take myself to have shown that there is conceptual space in the Christian tradition for talking sensibly about being loved for oneself. Granting these premises, one can gladly say, 'God at least, my dear, can love you for yourself alone and not your yellow hair'.

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Notes

1. This is true whether one is considering qualitative, relational, or historical properties. I should also note that historical properties can come in two types: one can have *de dicto* historical properties and *de re* historical properties. The former can be resolved into qualitative and relational properties *x*, *y*, *z* at times t_1, t_2, t_3, and so forth and could theoretically be possessed by numerically distinct individuals if one subscribed to, say, the Stoic view that the universe 'repeats' itself (or if one allows alternative possible worlds where the only distinction between counterparts is their numerical identity). If one appeals to *de dicto* historical reasons for love, there arise problems like the ones that traditionally face more standard qualitative and relational property views. They just happen to be less troublesome in the day to day because one cannot usually meet a counterpart from another cosmic epoch. If, however, one appeals to *de re* historical facts, one is already presupposing that it matters that it be *this* individual with whom one had the history and not simply that such and such historical properties obtained between oneself and the *an* individual. Kraut (1987, 427) opts for the idea that love for the individual '*de re*' is based on her having a specific history; Rorty (1986) takes the other route, saying that love is based on *de dicto* historical reasons.

2. This poem has appeared frequently in articles on the philosophy of love, but none of those articles has, to my knowledge, made this point. See Bicknell (2010) and Rorty (1986).

3. The real Anne Gregory, for whom Yeats wrote the poem, seems not to have known what to do with it.

4. See also Farrer (1962, 99–101, 115–116). Farrer does not directly say that the self is a gift, but I take it that the view is implied by what he does say. Similar sentiments appear in Bernard of Clairvaux (1961, 29–30), who says that God, '[b]y His first work', i.e. the act of creation, 'gave me to myself'. Finally, see Cordner (2011).

5. Harry Frankfurt comes close to the idea in his essay 'On Caring' (Frankfurt 2014, 169–170). But, as Niko Kolodny points out, Frankfurt only says that the object is loved in its concrete particularity, not that it is loved *because* of its concrete particularity. He seems, in fact, to think that love is a matter of simply willing that the object be well and so forth. There are no reasons for so doing. It is simply a brute fact about the motivations one has. Rorty (1986, 405) briefly discusses it but sets it aside, partially because of an apparent confusion of the object of love with the reason for the love. Christopher Grau (2010, 257) seems to confuse the intentional object (the person) with the reasons for the loving that person as well. This confusion is perhaps due to the fact that one can say that one has a love 'for' something and mean the love is directed at that thing; but that is not what Anne Gregory is talking about. She assumes she is the one who is loved; the only question is whether the love is 'for' her: the 'for' in this case has to do with reasons, not the correctness of object.

The continental tradition has a different relationship with the subject of being loved for oneself. Jean-Luc Marion says that the beloved itself serves as the reason for loving it; in doing so, he mirrors in his own way the proposal I am making. (I discovered this only after this project was already begun.) Marion (2007, 117); see, in a similar vein, Drummon Young (2014), Drummond (2015), and Hart (2020).

6. See, in a similar but distinct vein, Steven D. Hales (1995). See also Simon Keller (2000), who says simply that 'it is not enough to love [an individual] for his property of being him, or of instantiating *his* haecceity'. This is a slightly different point in that it does not even consider that the subject of the properties, rather than its haecceity, might be the ground of love. That is perhaps fair, though, since his paper focuses on romantic love, which plausibly does depend on at least *some* properties that draw one to interact in specifically romantic ways with the beloved.

7. Adam Kadlac (2012, 34–35) notes the difficulty. Grau (2010) attempts to defend the idea that we should desire to love and be loved for ourselves but does not really address the problem of how one could come to know of and love another *for* that bare identity. Neil Delaney thinks the idea that one desires to be loved for a bare identity or the like is 'absurd', though his reasons for thinking so have more to do with whether one actually *desires* to be loved that way. His point is not to be sceptical of the idea that, assuming one does want to be loved for one's bare identity, one *could* be so loved.

8. A terminological note: in theological language, 'creature' means not 'non-rational animal', as it often does in everyday English, but 'created thing'. In traditional Christian theology, anything that is not God the Creator is a creature. I adopt the theological usage for this article.

9. Other theists, for instance, would almost certainly be able to take up a similar position.

10. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for cautioning me against any unnecessarily 'triumphalist' language.

11. I avoid saying 'act tokens' because I want to avoid suggesting that the concrete act must match up to a particular act type. For instance, I think that a duck that fails to cross the road because it was hit by a car halfway across was nonetheless engaged in a concrete act, though it failed to become a token of an obvious type. It is because the concrete act ends up not being a token of a type that one can talk of its being a failed act.

12. For concerns of this kind, see Vlastos (1981). Pascal seems to have had worries similar to Vlastos'. One can find some brief discussion of the topic in Wood (2010).

13. Obviously, the reason I care about myself for being myself is really only expressible by saying something like 'Because I am I'. But that is not to say I care about myself on the grounds that I am identical with myself, which

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is something that everything shares. See Henley (1977, 349) and Frankfurt (2014, 168–169) for a similar move. Grau (2010, 266) follows them in this regard. I disagree with Grau and Henley that this love for self or for the individual as such is 'unreasoned', unless they mean 'undeliberated'. I think the love directed at oneself is possible simply because one has direct, immediate access to oneself. It is only sporadically, however, that one comes to understand *others* as existing in the same way. That difficulty is a large part of why Iris Murdoch calls love the 'extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real' (Murdoch 1959, 51). For a representative of something like the idea that one might be loved on the basis of a haecceity, see Na'aman (2015).

14. This is perhaps the key distinction between my own interests and those found in, for instance, Hichem Naar (2022). Naar posits a unique property (basically a haecceity) whose existence allows one to be loved as unique, unrepeatable, irreplaceable, and so forth.

15. Rorty (1986, 399) seems to think that what is really at stake when one desires to be loved for something other than properties is whether one is loved with sufficient 'constancy or endurance'. For a discussion of whether this sort of enduring love is really what one is after in so-called 'unconditional love', see Cordner (2016) and Jollimore (2023).

16. Though even *these* may not be entirely certain: see Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnet 14 in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, in Bovens (2019, 267).

17. I raise this point because a few readers have mistaken this project for a project about romantic love in particular, not because I think that anything I have said lends itself to such an interpretation.

18. How this thought is fleshed out may differ. For instance, one might follow Wolfgang Fasching (2009, 146) in thinking 'that there is something about our being ourselves, respectively, that transcends every objective fact about our experiences and their relations, something that is not constituted by them but is in some sense their precondition', i.e. pure subjectivity. One might instead think that it is something akin to a pure 'thisness' in the Adamsian sense. Or one might connect it with the logical *suppositum* from Scholasticism or the *hypokeimenon* in Aristotle. What matters is that there be a distinction between the subject of which the properties are predicated and the properties themselves. It would *not* be sufficient to accept haecceities because these are still properties and need some subject in which to inhere.

19. Obviously, there are other views as well, but they are generally either mere variations on these two options (e.g. Eleonore Stump's (2006) view, which combines them) or are not strictly interested in whether love has reasons at all.

20. This view can be found historically. As Harvey (2000) writes, the medieval Jewish philosopher Albo seems to have thought that 'true love' is grounded in no reasons at all; instead, he thinks, much like Frankfurt, that the love is due only to the lover's will.

21. I present Faber (1961, 28–30; 123–124) as one (relatively) contemporary example. See also, again, of Bernard of Clairvaux (1961, 29–30).

22. For the rare explicitly opposed view, see Faber (1961, 120): 'He created us because he loved us', he says, though he is also committed to a strong interpretation of creation *ex nihilo*. See also his claim that 'the very act of our creation showed that His love for us existed before we did ourselves' (Faber 1961, 123).

23. I do not take myself to be defining the term 'intention' or exhaustively analyzing the concept.

24. I am adapting this point very loosely from one made by Ford (2018, 172–173).

25. Two further points: first, this is different from the examples common in specificationism. In specificationist examples, one has a definite goal *type* even if its exact content is indefinite. Millgram (2008) might call the goal 'thin'. Say that I want to be entertained for the evening. I still have to come up with a more definite idea – *what* I will do for entertainment – before I can start to act. When drawing spontaneously, though, the issue is not that I have a definite goal for which I have yet to fill in the necessary details. It is rather that what counts as a representable goal is simply not present, for what counts as the painting (and hence the criteria for its completion *qua* painting) are not determined before one decides it is finished. One not only does not but *cannot* have a specific goal in mind unless one specifically sets out to bring about a painting in line with some criteria one has in advance.

26. Admittedly, one could construe the situation differently: one might argue that the activity was already underway even if it had not yet come to fruition: I was already in the act of sending the letter to my father from the moment I embarked on the process by which I would send him the letter; that I turned aside at the last moment need not mean I did not intend the act. I have no quarrel with such an alternative take on the situation. I wish only to note that it poses no problem for me: if one wants to individuate actions in such a way that the whole process by which one eventually produces a certain effect is included in the act, one must admit that the intention is towards the act as *this* ongoing process, no matter whether it achieves the intended results.

27. Contrast with 'reasons for expression'. Arguably, actions performed for such reasons are non-instrumental but not truly done 'for their own sakes' insofar as they are responses to something that demands them. See Bennett (2022).

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28. Talbot Brewer (2006) argues that such desirability is not to be understood as attaching to the act type. It is not that, abstractly, I want to bring it about that I be realizing act type *x*. What makes it attractive is the concrete properties of the concrete act. When I eat an apple, the reason that the apple supplies me for eating is not abstract or general. It is not that 'apples are good for eating'. It is the fact that *this* apple is present, delicious, and nutritious – that *it* appears to me under the guise of the good – that gives me reason to eat *it*. See also Chapter 1 of Brewer (2009).

29. Maria Alvarez seems to think that, unless one can specify such a generic set of properties of the act, one has not done even act done for its own sake for a reason. (Alvarez 2009, 297–300).

30. Martin Buber says that, when an artist is confronted with 'the idea', or 'form', of his artwork, it summons him to 'body it forth' (Buber 1958, 9–10). It is not experienced, however, as a clearly outlined set of properties, a blueprint, but as a numinous 'this' that draws one out into communion with it. Something like this idea might suggest a way that God is 'enticed' by creatures that he has yet to produce – without giving them anything like a hazy 'merely possible' existence.

31. Brewer (2009) gives a number of examples throughout his work.

32. A similar but importantly different idea appears in Page (2022, 13–14). I came across this part of her paper only after having written this section. More similar still is a point made by Pruss (2012, 399–402). The main difference is that Pruss still thinks of God's selecting this or that individual in terms of its particular congeries of properties or capacities, which make it suitable for the fulfillment of certain vocations.

33. I recognize that the same point could be made differently. Plotinus (2018, V.7.3), for one, notes that a smith can have qualitatively identical ideas in mind maintained only by a 'logical difference', i.e. by pure numerical distinction.

34. Many thanks to a reviewer for pressing me on this point.

35. There are corresponding limits on how far my aims in pursuing my child's good can stretch: I may not be able to bring myself to revise my ideas so radically that I come to see my child's good as consisting in, say, crucifixion. However, I consider such limits to fall out from one's ideas about what one's child is. (a) It is because one thinks one's child's identity consist in her humanity and her good as human as consisting in her living long and healthily, for instance, that one cannot imagine aiming at her good by allowing her to be martyred, say. Alternatively, (b) it is because one is only interested in *x* if *x* has the properties making *x* one's child that one cares about *x*. If she were to lose those properties, one might think that what survives the change is not one's child at all. If a witch turns one's child, *x*, into a frog, what *x*'s good consists in certainly changes, but the goods in question are no longer those pertinent to one's child. In either case, though, the limit is not based on a desire to produce a certain result for which the child is, as it were, the raw material; both limits are compatible with one's being logically interested in bringing about one's child's good, whatever that happens to end up consisting in.

36. See, in this connection, García's article (García 2015), which identifies at least the properties that creatures have with divine acts.

37. If one felt inclined to object that it seems, on this picture, that God did not know the creature except through his (therefore necessarily blind) creative act, I must disagree. It is true, in one sense, that God does not know the individual before he creates it. That should come as no surprise: there is no 'it' for God to know till he makes it. But neither does his knowledge of the creature come from the creature he creates, as if he first makes the creature in a fit of divine madness, blindly causing things that he only then comes to know. Rather, to use Barry Miller's apt phrase, he knows the creature '*in* creating him, neither logically prior nor logically posterior to the creative act': (Miller 1991, 16). Or, to put it in terms more familiar to Thomists like David Burrell (1993, 1994), God 'knows things into being'.

38. Johnson (2022). For further discussion of the use of the idea of divine play, see Sax (1995). Ironically, the only major views that cannot so easily accommodate the idea that God engages in creation for its own sake are those that insist that God creates only in order to have something to love (Vitale 2020; Wessling 2020) or those on which God creates because unfolding into various forms is just what the One does. I find this ironic because those are precisely the views that most stridently insist that they free God's creation from envy (Plato, *Timaeus* 29E) or from selfishness (Vitale 2020; Wessling 2020).

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