

LOVE POTIONS AND LOVE LETTERS

AN ARGUMENT THAT LIBERTARIAN FREE WILL ISN'T NECESSARY FOR LOVING GOD

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Some free-will defenses appeal to the intuition that the love of creatures who God causally determined to love him is less valuable than the love of creatures who chose to love God freely, in the libertarian sense. I challenge that intuition directly. I attempt to discredit the intuition in question by demonstrating that no analogies regarding human-related cases can support it. In each case I treat, I argue either that the case is disanalogous to God's case, or that granting the lover libertarian free will wouldn't make the love in question more valuable.

1. Introduction

Some free-will defenses hold that creaturely libertarian free will is necessary for creatures to be able to love God genuinely. In the following, I begin by briefly presenting this view and Kenneth Einar Himma and Laura W. Ekstrom's arguments against it. The main resistance to Himma and Ekstrom's arguments relies on intuition. If determinism is true, an omniscient world-creating theistic God who specifies the world's initial circumstances and dictates the laws of nature would *cause* creatures to love him. This intuitively implies that creatures who choose to love God freely, in the libertarian sense, can love God in a more valuable way than causally determined creatures. I challenge that intuition directly, attempting to shift the burden of proof to free-will defenders who appeal to it.

2. The Love-centered Free-will Defense

The free-will defense is a popular response to the problem of evil. Philosophers and theologians who invoke the free-will defense explain that the existence of suffering caused by evil actions isn't evidence against theism, because even being omnipotent, omniscient and infinitely loving and good, God allows evil to exist because God wills for creatures to have free will. If creatures have free will, free-will defenders argue, they can sometimes choose to act evilly, and God enables

these evil choices because creaturely free will is so valuable that its existence justifies enabling the suffering caused when people abuse their free will.

To explain why God could not bring about creaturely free will without enabling evil actions that cause suffering, free-will defenders commonly assume that the creaturely free will God is interested in is an indeterministic free will, what contemporary philosophers commonly call “libertarian free will”. This would make it so that God cannot predetermine that his creatures will never choose evilly. Assuming that God has good reasons not to prevent the unpleasant consequences of evil choices in a case-by-case basis,¹ giving creatures libertarian free will necessarily enables evil actions that cause suffering. This puts free-will defenders in a position in which they must explain why creaturely libertarian free will is so valuable that God sees fit to bring it about even at the cost of allowing suffering to exist.

One idea as to why creaturely libertarian free will is so valuable is that it is necessary for creatures to be capable of loving God. Peter van Inwagen appeals to this idea:

... love implies freedom: for A to love B is for A freely to choose to be united to B in a certain way. Now even an omnipotent being cannot *insure* that some other being *freely* choose *x* over *y*. For God to create beings capable of loving Him, therefore, it was necessary for Him to take a risk: to risk the possibility that the beings He created would freely choose to withhold their love from Him.²

Van Inwagen argues that for creatures to be able to love God, God must give them libertarian free will. This makes for a plausible free-will defense if love relationships between God and his creatures are so valuable that on balance, they make it worthwhile for God to enable the existence of evil. However, there are problems with the claim that creatures must have libertarian free will to be capable of loving God.

3. *Himma and Ekstrom's Arguments*

If van Inwagen is right that “for A to love B is for A freely to choose to be united to B”, libertarian free will is necessary not only for creatures to be able to love God, but for them to be able to love each other too. Despite this, it seems clear that some

¹ See Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 144-146, for a theory what good reasons God may have for this.

² Van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy”, 163, italics in original.

forms of love are possible even without libertarian free will. Kenneth Einar Himma points out that young children and pets have the capacity to love, even though they lack a developed capacity for free choice.³ Laura W. Ekstrom further points out that according to our normal conception of good parents, they don't need to choose to love their children, they simply do, and they often could not have done otherwise.⁴ Thus, even if a parent has libertarian free will, it seems to play no role in their love for their children.

The loves that Himma and Ekstrom describe show that the exertion of libertarian free will isn't necessary for love, but free-will defenders may argue that it is nonetheless necessary for loving God. However, even this more modest claim is problematic. As Himma points out, even in forms of love aside from those mentioned before, love is not something that human beings can normally choose freely, rather it simply "happens" to them.⁵ Moreover, romantic poetry often implies that one's love is deeper and more valuable when they feel compelled to love their beloved and "fall" in love with them, rather than freely choose to love them.⁶ This suggests that libertarian free will isn't necessary for any sort of love. Ekstrom agrees with this conclusion:

... it seems obviously true to me that I do love, and have loved, several people... Yet for all we know, determinism is true. Should a discovery that determinism is true, if it is true, make one think that what one believed to be an instance of genuine love was or is not an instance of genuine love? I cannot see why. The idea would be that my loved one was not freely chosen from among alternatives by me and, conversely, that I was not freely chosen from among alternatives by my loved one. Do we care?⁷

Ekstrom argues that if we found out that determinism is true, we would not conclude that all the love we thought we experienced was not genuine love. This, according to Ekstrom, highlights the fact that libertarian free will is not necessary for love.

Ekstrom further supports this conclusion by pointing out that even if we are causally determined to love each other, we aren't caused to act robotically against

³ Himma, "The Free-Will Defence: Evil and the Moral Value of Free Will", 400.

⁴ Ekstrom, *God, Suffering, and the Value of Free Will*, 53.

⁵ Himma, "The Free-Will Defence: Evil and the Moral Value of Free Will", 404.

⁶ For an extensive philosophical discussion that endorses this view, see Arpaly, *Merit, Meaning and Human Bondage: An Essay on Free Will*, 41-84.

⁷ Ekstrom, *God, Suffering, and the Value of Free Will*, 54.

our will. Even if determinism is true, Ekstrom argues, as long as people's rational and volitional faculties are functional, there is no reason for them not to be capable of loving genuinely.⁸ To illustrate this point, consider a few disparate philosophical definitions of love. J. David Velleman defines love as an awareness of the beloved's value in such a way that "arrests" the lover, causing them to lower their emotional defenses and open themselves to be vulnerable to the beloved.⁹ Other definitions of love emphasize mutual trust cemented by voluntary self-disclosure,¹⁰ the desire of the lover to share an association with the beloved¹¹ or the lover wishing well for the beloved.¹² If any of these definitions capture something in the ballpark of what genuine love is, it doesn't seem as though libertarian free will is necessary for any form of love.

However, even if an instance of love fits all the definitions above, it may be rendered ingenuine depending on how it was brought about. This point is crucial regarding creaturely love for God. If determinism is true, an omniscient world-creating theistic God who specifies the world's initial circumstances and dictates the laws of nature would *cause* creatures to love him. Many love-centered free-will defenders argue that even if God doesn't deceive people or make them love him robotically against their will, and instead people soberly and rationally come to love God in virtue of his benevolent ways, there is still something less valuable in that sort of love, simply for the fact that God himself caused them to love him and they couldn't have done otherwise. These love-centered free-will defenders conclude that even if libertarian free will is not necessary for any other form of love, it is necessary for genuine love for God, and that is what justifies God granting creatures libertarian free will, thereby enabling evil.

It is unclear to me why the simple fact that God deterministically caused someone to love him may make their love for him ingenuine. Nevertheless, this is an intuition that many thinkers share, including Christian theologians William King,¹³ C. S. Lewis,¹⁴ Charles Journet,¹⁵ Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston¹⁶ and

⁸ Ekstrom, *God, Suffering, and the Value of Free Will*, 55.

⁹ Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion", 360-361.

¹⁰ Thomas, "Friendship", 223.

¹¹ Green, "Is Love an Emotion?", 217.

¹² Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition and Love*, 165.

¹³ King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, 356.

¹⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 38.

¹⁵ Journet, *The Meaning of Evil*, 154, 252.

¹⁶ Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History*, 34-35.

Vincent Brümmer,¹⁷ and philosophers Peter van Inwagen,¹⁸ W. S. Anglin,¹⁹ John Bishop,²⁰ Daniel Howard-Snyder and Frances Howard-Snyder,²¹ Robert Kane,²² Richard Swinburne,²³ Gregory A. Boyd,²⁴ John Hick,²⁵ William Lane Craig,²⁶ Joshua L. Rasmussen,²⁷ Luke Teeninga²⁸ and Leigh Vicens.²⁹ Some make the narrow claim that the problem lies in the fact that God himself is the one who causally determines his creatures to love him. Others make the broader claim that despite Himma and Ekstrom’s arguments, the problem lies in the lover being causally determined, whether by their beloved or not. Many are ambiguous between the two different claims. Either way, it all comes down to the intuition that the love of creatures who God causally determined to love him is less valuable than the love of creatures who chose to love God freely, in the libertarian sense. It appears that no matter how vividly one illustrates that being causally determined to love God doesn’t mean that one loves God robotically against their will, the intuition that there is something “off” about God causing people to love him such that they couldn’t have acted otherwise still remains. Therefore, to support the arguments made by Himma and Ekstrom, instead of falling into a stalemate of simply reiterating the same arguments more vividly and being faced with objections appealing to the same raw intuition against them, I challenge that intuition, from here on referred to simply as “The Intuition”, directly.

4. *The Method*

Much of what theists believe about God is derived from how God is depicted in their respective traditions. However, regarding questions about what God may want, like or feel in cases where the answer is underdetermined by one’s tradition, theists commonly derive their answers from what we humans would want, like or

¹⁷ Brümmer, “Moral Sensitivity and the Free Will Defense”, 96.

¹⁸ Van Inwagen, “The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy”, 163.

¹⁹ Anglin, *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, 20.

²⁰ Bishop, “Compatibilism and the Free Will Defense”, 116.

²¹ Howard-Snyder and Howard-Snyder, “The Christian Theodocist’s Appeal to Love”, 185-187.

²² Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, 88.

²³ Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 201.

²⁴ Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy*, 53-57.

²⁵ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 272-275.

²⁶ Craig, “Response to Paul Kjoss Helseth”, 62.

²⁷ Rasmussen, “On the Value of Freedom to Do Evil”, 426.

²⁸ Teeninga, “God and the Value of Free Will”.

²⁹ Vicens, *God, Suffering and the Value of Free Will*. Laura W. Ekstrom. Oxford University Press, 2021. 248 pp., \$99.95 (hc.), 252-253.

feel in similar situations. In light of this, I find that an instructive way to evaluate the credibility of The Intuition will be attempting to ascertain what judgements about human-related cases give rise to it, and whether they can be applied to God.

My method of discrediting The Intuition is to attempt to demonstrate that no analogies regarding human-related cases can support it. In each case I treat, I argue either that the case is disanalogous to God's case, or that granting the lover libertarian free will wouldn't make the love in question more valuable. I cannot assume that the range of cases I cover is exhaustive, but I hope my thorough analysis can put pressure on thinkers who share The Intuition to feel that the burden of proof is on them to justify it.

Since different love-centered free-will defenders have different opinions as to what taints a causally determined creature's love for God, all the cases I treat feature a pursuer who acts in a way that causally determines that someone will love them. This enables the cases to accommodate both the narrow claim that the problem lies in the fact that the pursuer themselves is the one causally determining their lover to love them, and the broader claim that the problem lies in the lover being causally determined, whether by their beloved or not. Sometimes the analysis of a case will show it to potentially support only one of the two claims. However, either of the two claims can sufficiently support The Intuition, so love-centered free-will defenders should be satisfied with an adequate analogy that justifies either of the two claims.

It is tempting to turn to cases where humans program robots to love them, or cases where humans create a virtual reality with characters who gradually develop love for their creator, as these cases seem to mirror created beings loving a theistic God. Nevertheless, I refrain from turning to such cases for two reasons. Firstly, even if we stipulate that somehow the robots or the virtual reality characters are conscious sentient beings, the unignorable intuition that they aren't so may cloud our judgement and cause us to deem their love ingenuine for the wrong reasons. Secondly, cases that mirror causally determined created beings loving God too closely can hardly add substance to the discussion, they will simply provoke the same judgements we have about God's case without further thought.³⁰ Therefore,

³⁰ I agree, however, that cases that mirror God's case very closely can add substance to other discussions, for example, the discussion regarding genuine gifts. In "God and the Value of Free Will", 650, Luke Teeninga presents a case about a mother who genetically modifies her son's embryo and controls his environment to ensure that he ends up giving her a gift. Teeninga argues that the gift is ultimately from the mother to herself, and likewise gifts given to God by causally determined creatures are ultimately from God to himself in a sense that renders them not genuine gifts. I agree that Teeninga's case adds

the cases I examine are general cases about humans causing other humans to love them.

In the search for human-related cases that give rise to The Intuition, it is important to note that what makes the love less valuable according to The Intuition isn't the mere fact that God *causes* it. Whenever someone pursues a love interest, they attempt to cause someone to love them. What bothers people who share The Intuition is that God causes people to love him in a way that *guarantees* they will love him. Van Inwagen gives voice to this stressing that "... it was necessary for [God] to take a *risk*: to *risk* the possibility that the beings He created would freely choose to withhold their love from Him".³¹ Therefore, the guaranteeing nature of the causation should be featured in any case relevant to The Intuition.

Relating to this last point, being non-omnipotent and non-omniscient, human beings can never fully guarantee that their actions will successfully cause someone to love them. The closest we can get is near guarantee. Notwithstanding, for stylistic reasons, I use the words "guarantee" and "know" in a loose sense, although the cases I present really involve only near guarantee.

5. *Love Potions*

The first type of case that comes to mind featuring someone guaranteeing that someone else will love them is cases involving provenly reliable love potions. Joshua L. Rasmussen attempts to support The Intuition with such a case.³² Virtually everyone would agree that the love of someone under the influence of a love potion is less valuable than the love of someone who isn't, so this analogy can potentially support The Intuition.

However, one main factor that makes the love in love-potion cases ingenuine is that even if the love potion affects the consumer gradually and makes their love feel rational, love potions are manipulative in that they elicit the consumer's love towards their pursuer by directly altering the relevant chemicals in their body, bypassing their rational and emotional faculties. Love potion cases are

substance to the discussion regarding genuine gifts, and I concede that a case that didn't mirror God's case closely enough wouldn't adequately support Teeninga's argument. However, assuming that genuine gifts are not necessary for genuine love, I find that discussion irrelevant to mine. Consequently, the fact that intuitions regarding genuine gifts should be derived from cases that closely mirror God's case doesn't imply that intuitions regarding genuine love should too.

³¹ Van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy", 163, italics added.

³² Rasmussen, "On the Value of Freedom to Do Evil", 424-425.

disanalogous to causally determined creatures loving God, because although God creates the initial biological complexion of all created beings, God does not need to rely on manipulation through direct chemical programming to causally determine that they will love him. God can win the love of his creatures the same way ordinary people do, by displaying good character and performing loving gestures. The direct chemical manipulation that makes love ingenuine in love-potion cases doesn't characterize God's case, so love-potion cases can't provide a good analogy to support The Intuition.

The same holds for less manipulative love potions. Consider a love potion that functions like alcohol or certain psychoactive drugs and makes the consumer see things through rose-tinted glasses or makes them slightly lower their emotional defenses and open themselves to be vulnerable. Love that could not have been won or sustained without the effects of this type of love potion cannot provide an adequate analogy to support The Intuition either. The subtle chemical alteration that makes it easier to win the love of the love-potion consumer creates a disanalogy to an omnipotent and omniscient God who can causally determine that his creatures will love him even while they are fully sober. Therefore, love-potion cases of all forms can't support The Intuition, and neither can Gregory A. Boyd's case about someone planting computer chips in their wife's brain³³ or John Hick's case involving hypnosis.³⁴ This is because God can guarantee that causally determined creatures will love him without relying on the forms of manipulation that makes the love in those cases ingenuine.³⁵

³³ Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy*, 55.

³⁴ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 272-273.

³⁵ In "Love and Free Agency", Ishtiyaque Haji argues that incompatibilists should reject that there is a significant difference between causally determined love and love resulting from any of the manipulative means described above. Incompatibilists see no difference for moral responsibility between an agent being causally determined and an agent being coerced or intrusively manipulated – in any case the agent lacks moral responsibility. From this, Haji presumes that for incompatibilists, a causally determined lover's emotions are not "truly his own", since they are equivalent to emotions caused by coercion or intrusive manipulation (166).

Unlike Haji, I find that even incompatibilists can agree that there is an important disanalogy between love-potion cases and causally determined creatures loving God. Even if there is no difference for moral responsibility, the emotions of a causally determined lover who is not coerced or intrusively manipulated can reflect their character and values, making them "truly their own" much more than the emotions of a coerced or intrusively manipulated lover. This would make love that is causally determined yet uncoerced and unmanipulated more valuable than the love in love-potion cases.

An additional reason why love-potion cases can't support The Intuition is that the love in them may be rendered ingenuine due to the pursuer's sneaky behavior. Although someone may willingly drink a love potion to fall in love with someone, people usually think about love potions as being administered without the drinker knowing. There's nothing wrong with one advancing their goal of winning someone's love by performing certain actions where the potential lover is unaware of the pursuer's true intentions, such as the pursuer planning to be at a certain place at a certain time to meet the potential lover as if it were by chance. However, if some of the more crucial moments where the lover develops love for their pursuer are moments where the pursuer's intentions are hidden from their potential lover, there would seem to be something sneaky about the pursuer's behavior, undermining genuine love. One may think that God is not sneaky in the way the pursuer is in love-potion cases, because it is common ground among theists, especially those who invoke the love-centered free-will defense, that by means of divine revelation, God explicitly communicated his will to enter love relationships with his creatures. This makes it so that any creature who engages in a meaningful love relationship with God must first entertain the notion that God is interested in one. Nevertheless, a simple observation of the world does not make it obvious that God arranged everything in order to win our love, and it may seem sneaky that God withholds this further information from his creatures. However, God would be equally sneaky trying to win the love of libertarian-free creatures who don't know of his intentions or the means he employed. Therefore, the sneakiness that makes the love ingenuine in love-potion cases can't be what makes the love for God of causally determined creatures less valuable than the love of libertarian-free creatures. Accordingly, sneaky behavior shouldn't be featured in an adequate analogy to support The Intuition.

All in all, the love-potion cases demonstrate two important points. Firstly, an adequate analogy to support The Intuition must be a case where the pursuer doesn't rely on direct chemical alterations that bypass the potential lover's rational and emotional faculties. Secondly, an adequate analogy won't feature a pursuer who acts sneakily. Love-letter cases improve on love-potion cases in both of these aspects.

6. *Love Letters*

Consider a case where someone writes a heartfelt love letter that guarantees that the recipient will fall in love with the author. It may be unclear how a love letter may do so, and it may be unclear what may be wrong with someone winning someone's love in this manner. However, the case may be fleshed out in a way that resolves both of these unclarities. If the love-letter case can be fleshed out in

such a way, and if we assume that the love letter causally determines that the recipient will fall in love with the author, it can potentially support The Intuition.

One love-letter case with ingenuine love is a case where the love letter succeeds in making its recipient fall in love with the author only by means of momentary excitement triggered by the author's crafty writing. There is nothing wrong with getting someone's attention through an impressive display of penmanship, but there is something ingenuine about the recipient's love for the author if that's all there is to it. This love-letter case won't go wrong the way love-potion cases do, since firstly, unlike love potions, love letters don't manipulate their recipient through direct chemical alterations, and secondly, the author is upfront about their intention and means to win the recipient's love. However, once we spell out why the recipient's love for the author may be judged ingenuine, it becomes clear that the same judgement is not applicable to causally determined creatures loving God.

The love letter may have long-lasting effects due to the recipient associating good feelings with the author as a result of the initial momentary excitement. However, there is a lack of substance in the recipient's love for the author if it is solely derived from the initial momentary excitement and not sufficiently supplemented by the recipient's appreciation of the author's good character, displayed either in the love letter or on other occasions. Theists of different traditions believe that God sometimes performs miracles that aim at making himself known to his creatures and eliciting their awe, and this is analogous to a love letter that provokes momentary excitement and gains the attention of the recipient. However, God making himself known to his creatures and eliciting their awe is only one step towards building genuine love relationships with them. God's goal is only reached after his creatures become familiar with him and come to love him for his benevolent ways. Given that God is able to employ causal determination to guarantee this second step too, a love relationship derived solely from momentary excitement over a craftily written love letter isn't a good analogy for causally determined creatures loving God.

In a love-letter case more analogous to God's case, the author is guaranteed that the love letter will win the recipient's love because the author knows the recipient very well. The author is so deeply familiar with how the recipient thinks and feels that upon writing the love letter, they simply know that it will win them the recipient's love. Importantly, to avoid failing in the same way the previous love-letter case does, in this case, the author wins the recipient's sober and rational love through a display of good character, and not as a result of momentary excitement triggered by crafty writing. Nevertheless, this love-letter case can't support The Intuition since there is no reason to judge that the recipient's love for the author

would be ingenuine. On the contrary, it seems to support my own conclusion that the love of creatures who God causally determined to love him is no less valuable than the love of creatures who chose to love God freely, in the libertarian sense. Despite this, a small adjustment to this love-letter case may appear to help love-centered free-will defenders support The Intuition. I believe the best move for them would be to appeal to what I call “the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case”.

7. *The Unsophisticated-Recipient Love-Letter Case*

Consider a case where the author knows the depths of the recipient’s heart, not by being personally familiar with the recipient, but because the recipient is cognitively and emotionally extremely unsophisticated. There may be reasons to judge that the unsophisticated recipient’s love for the author is somewhat less valuable than it would have been had the recipient been more sophisticated and consequently less predictable. If it makes the judgement more compelling, one may stipulate that the author is far more sophisticated than the recipient, both cognitively and emotionally. This love-letter case appears to be a suitable analogy for God’s case because what makes the unsophisticated recipient’s love predictable and therefore predeterminable to the author is comparable to what makes the love of causally determined creatures predeterminable to God. Unlike love-potion cases or the momentarily exciting love-letter case, the predictability in the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case isn’t due to the potency of the means used, rather a result of the lover’s cognitive and emotional structure being fully understood to their pursuer.

Throughout this section, I consider three separate interpretations why the unsophisticated recipient’s love for the author may be somewhat less valuable than it may have been if the recipient was more sophisticated. Each interpretation suggests a different reason why the love of causally determined creatures may be less valuable to God than the love of creatures who chose to love God freely, in the libertarian sense. One may provide counterexamples against each of the interpretations or otherwise argue that they fail to point to a factor that reduces the value of a lover’s love. However, to make my point stronger, I grant for the sake of the argument that the factor that each interpretation focuses on does reduce the value of the unsophisticated recipient’s love for the author. Nevertheless, I argue that none of the three interpretations can support The Intuition, because even upon any of these interpretations of the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case, granting a creature libertarian free will cannot make their love for God any more valuable than it would be if they were causally determined.

Interpretation #1: Power Imbalance

Let us try to pinpoint what may make the unsophisticated recipient's love for the author less valuable than it may have been had the recipient been more sophisticated. The idea is not that the author takes advantage of the unsophisticated recipient or exploits their lower level of sophistication. To make the case analogous to an all-benevolent theistic God winning the love of his creatures, we must stipulate that the author has genuine feelings for the recipient and writes the letter with honest intentions to display their good character and convey their love for the recipient. The author can't help but know that their love letter will succeed in winning the recipient's love, but by no means does this imply that the recipient is deceived or cut a bad deal. Notwithstanding, even if the author doesn't exploit the recipient's lower level of sophistication to take advantage of them, one may feel that the fact that the author could do so if they wanted to creates a power imbalance that taints the relationship between them. Luke Teeninga gives voice to this idea.

Teeninga argues that creaturely libertarian free will can enhance relationships between God and his creatures by decreasing the power imbalance between them.³⁶ Power imbalances may not have any bearing on love per se, but they can influence the quality of a love relationship through other factors, so this may give God reason to give creatures libertarian free will, making for a relationship-centered free-will defense. Creaturely libertarian free will makes it so that creatures are not confined to a script that God wrote, and they can choose to freely withhold their love from God or to sin against God. Of course, an omnipotent God can cause finite creatures to do whatever he pleases, but he cannot cause them to do so *freely* in the libertarian sense. This ever so slightly decreases the power imbalance between God and his creatures, enhancing their potential relationship. By the same token, the power imbalance between the author and the unsophisticated recipient is decreased if the recipient's actions aren't fully calculable, making it so that the author would have a harder time trying to take advantage of the recipient if they wanted to, and consequently the author cannot be guaranteed that their love letter will succeed in winning the recipient's love. Therefore, the idea of decreasing a power imbalance can potentially explain why making the recipient less predictable can make their relationship with the author more valuable.

But let us examine exactly why power imbalances make relationships less valuable. Teeninga provides two examples to demonstrate how decreasing a

³⁶ Teeninga, "God and the Value of Free Will", 651-654.

power imbalance can enhance a relationship. The first example is a child whose relationship with their parents is gradually enhanced throughout their life as they grow older and the power imbalance between them and their parents decreases. The second example is a husband and wife whose relationship is enhanced when the husband stops having absolute authority over the household.³⁷ In both examples, Teeninga emphasizes that the more equal levels of dependence on one another is what enhances people's relationships,³⁸ however, Teeninga does not explain why.

I think what taints a relationship where one person greatly depends on the other is that the dependent may feel a need to please their benefactor for fear that if they upset them, they will lose the benefits for which they depend on them. The dependent may be acting out of self-interest in their relationship with their benefactor, or their love-related actions may seem slightly coerced, so decreasing the power imbalance can allow for the relationship to be both more authentic and less coerced. Upon this understanding, there is nothing wrong with the love letter itself, but ultimately the unsophisticated recipient's relationship with the author may be tainted by the fact that the recipient's actions are partially motivated by fear of upsetting the author, given that the recipient knows that the author can take advantage of their unsophistication if they want to.³⁹

However, if my understanding how power imbalances taint relationships is correct, it is not applicable to God's case. Creaturely libertarian free will can undercut God's ability to predetermine a creature's free actions, so it may decrease the power imbalance between God and his creatures to some degree. However,

³⁷ Teeninga, "God and the Value of Free Will", 651-652.

³⁸ In the child-and-parents example Teeninga writes: "... when I was a baby, I was dependent on my parents for everything. This (mostly) one-way dependency created a kind of power imbalance. As I grew up, I gradually became less and less dependent on them, until I became an adult... The power we [now] have over each other is much more *balanced*." (651-652, italics and parentheses in original).

In the husband-and-wife example Teeninga writes: "... when women became less dependent on their husbands... their relationships to their husbands were able to become closer..." (652).

³⁹ Note that according to this interpretation of the love-letter case, the recipient must be aware of the author's ability to predict their actions and take advantage of this. If a reader feels that the love would be less valuable even if the recipient didn't know this, I think the reader either interprets the case according to one of the next two interpretations that I suggest below, or perhaps the reader can't help but imagine that the author of the love letter is somehow taking advantage of the recipient or intending to do so later on. If the latter is true, I kindly remind the reader that we have stipulated that this is not the case.

the remaining power imbalance between God and his creatures is so colossal that it wouldn't make a difference if the power imbalance was marginally decreased in this way. Even with libertarian free will, finite creatures are fully dependent on God for their well-being, for at any moment an omnipotent God can harm any creature in infinite ways, so anyone who believes in God's omnipotence would have reason to fear upsetting him. Even if someone is sufficiently convinced that God won't punish them immediately, they have reason to fear upsetting God knowing that God may retaliate when he sees fit, whether in the near future or in the afterlife. This puts every finite creature's relationship with God in danger of being at least slightly motivated by self-interest or coerced, whether the creature has libertarian free will or not, so libertarian free will can't decrease the power imbalance in a way that makes creaturely relationships with God more valuable. Therefore, the first interpretation of the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case cannot support The Intuition.

Interpretation #2: Lack of Depth

Upon a second interpretation of the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case, the unsophisticated recipient's relationship with the author isn't in any way inauthentic or coerced. Nevertheless, their love lacks the additional depth that only a more sophisticated being's love can have – depth that inheres in love where the lover is deeply cognizant of all the little details and nuances that make their beloved who they are. According to the second interpretation, the problem with the unsophisticated recipient is that they can't know the author as deeply as a more sophisticated being can, and accordingly can't love the author as deeply. Likewise, what may be lacking to God in fully predeterminable creatures loving him is that they can't know him as deeply, and accordingly can't love him as deeply, as more sophisticated beings can.

If this is correct, however, creaturely libertarian free will wouldn't be valuable to God simply for making creaturely love for him not predeterminable, rather for making the creatures more cognitively or emotionally sophisticated. Hence, upon this interpretation, the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case can only support The Intuition insofar as possessing libertarian free will can make someone more cognitively or emotionally sophisticated and therefore capable of loving more deeply. Unfortunately for love-centered free-will defenders, it has yet to be shown that libertarian free will makes a person more cognitively or emotionally sophisticated than an otherwise identical person who operates deterministically, so this interpretation of the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case cannot support The Intuition either.

Interpretation #3: Mechanicalness

One final interpretation remains as to what taints the unsophisticated recipient's love for the author. The author fully understands the recipient's cognitive and emotional structure, so they can map it out in a flow diagram identifying how different circumstantial inputs can lead to different emotional outputs. This makes the recipient's love feel somewhat machine-like, perhaps too mechanical to be genuine love.

This interpretation provides grounds for love-centered free-will defenders to respond to Ekstrom's argument. Ekstrom argues that a discovery that determinism is true wouldn't make us think that in instances where we thought we experienced genuine love it wasn't really so. Maybe Ekstrom only thinks this because usually we don't fully understand the cognitive and emotional structure of our lovers, so the mechanicalness of their love isn't apparent to us. Nonetheless, as long as they are causally determined, a creature's love is arguably machine-like, especially to an omniscient God.

Let us examine why machine-like love may be of reduced value. Leigh Vicens argues that Ekstrom overlooks the value of the lover being the ultimate source of their love. According to Vicens, a causally determined creature loving God is not the ultimate source of their love and is accordingly "... simply a mirror reflecting God's self-love back to Him".⁴⁰ I find this claim too strong. In an otherwise identical world where God didn't love himself, creatures would arguably love God to the same extent they do in the actual world, making them more than just mirrors of God's self-love. Notwithstanding, Vicens' main point is that causally determined creatures aren't the ultimate source of their love. In that sense, causally determined creatures may seem like machines that testify to God's worthiness of creaturely love but can't sufficiently bear genuine love for God.

It would be wrong to compare causally determined creatures to machines in terms of their ability to love, because unlike machines, causally determined creatures can consciously experience the emotions, volitional dispositions and desires necessary for love according to the different definitions of love mentioned in section 3. Furthermore, causally determined creatures can also develop all of these on their own, rather than only have these implanted in them from outside. In that sense, causally determined creatures can surely be ultimate source of their love. However, for the sake of the argument, let us grant that there is nevertheless something machine-like about the love of causally determined creatures, and let

⁴⁰ Vicens, *God, Suffering and the Value of Free Will*. Laura W. Ekstrom. Oxford University Press, 2021. 248 pp., \$99.95 (hc.)", 253.

us grant that this reduces the value of their love for God. Even granting both of these points, the third interpretation of the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case cannot support The Intuition.

Even if the love of causally determined creatures is too machine-like to be genuine love, the same can be said about libertarian-free creatures. The ultimate sourcehood enjoyed only by libertarian-free creatures is that although factors beyond their control influence their actions, the final tipping of the scale is up to the creatures themselves. If this is all that being the ultimate source of their love adds up to, the love of libertarian-free creatures is machine-like too. Even if God cannot predetermine the outcome of a libertarian-free creature's decision, an omniscient God can perfectly map out a flow diagram delineating all the probabilistic factors and exactly how the probabilities are determined. If so, lovers with libertarian free will are just like machines with one or more probabilistic factors, or even probabilistic factors conditioned upon prior probabilistic factors, machine-like nonetheless.

Free-will defenders tend to simply state that they assume a libertarian view of free will without providing further details. However, if my argument is sound, a love-centered free-will defense requires an account of libertarian free will upon which even an omniscient God cannot map out a flow diagram delineating the cognitive and emotional structure of libertarian-free creatures. It is not clear that a philosophically plausible account of this sort exists. Importantly, it won't help love-centered free-will defenders to simply argue that libertarian-free creatures aren't machine-like because unlike machines, they can make conscious choices. This is because causally determined creatures would be equally not machine-like by the same logic. Lacking an account of libertarian free will that meets the criterion specified above, the third interpretation of the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case cannot support The Intuition either.

8. *Conclusion*

Having noted that the love-centered free-will defense relies on what I called "The Intuition", the intuition that the love of creatures who God causally determined to love him is less valuable than the love of creatures who chose to love God freely in the libertarian sense, I set out to challenge The Intuition directly. Assuming that intuitions about what is valuable to God in unclear cases largely come from judgements about what is valuable to humans, I searched for an analogous human-related case where what allows someone to predetermine that someone else will love them also makes their love less valuable. The only adequately analogous case I found is the case of a love letter written to an extremely unsophisticated recipient. I discussed three different interpretations as to what

taints the love in this case, and I argued that creaturely libertarian free will cannot make creaturely love for God more valuable upon any of these interpretations, so none of them can support The Intuition.

I conclude that the burden of proof lies on love-centered free-will defenders to provide an alternative analogy to support The Intuition, or to refute one of my arguments regarding any of the three interpretations of the unsophisticated-recipient love-letter case. If all of my arguments are sound, we have no reason to think that libertarian free will is necessary for loving God genuinely, and the free-will defense that relies on that notion fails.

My analysis should put pressure on love-centered free-will defenders to feel that it is not enough for them to simply invoke The Intuition without supporting it with an analogy or an argument. Three of the few philosophers who do provide analogies in an attempt to support The Intuition provide analogies that fail in exactly the same ways love-potion cases do – Boyd’s analogy describes someone planting computer chips in their wife’s brain, Hick’s analogy involves hypnosis and Rasmussen’s analogy is an actual love-potion case. This makes one wonder if at least some of the intuitive force behind The Intuition is unknowingly mistakenly derived from similarly flawed analogies. This wouldn’t be surprising, considering that intuitions regarding determinism and free will are highly liable to being muddled by such mistakes.⁴¹ I believe this undercuts The Intuition’s credibility, putting the burden of proof on love-centered free-will defenders to provide an adequate analogy to support it, rather than simply state The Intuition without further argumentation.⁴²

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⁴¹ Nahmias and Murray, “Experimental Philosophy on Free Will: An Error Theory for Incompatibilist Intuitions”.

⁴² I am very grateful to Aaron Segal, Shlomit Wygoda-Cohen, Eliad Idan, Little Eli Meyer, my wife Karina Ron and two anonymous referees at *Faith and Philosophy* for helpful comments and discussions on earlier drafts of this paper.

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