Diane Enns
Love in the Dark: Philosophy by Another Name
New York: Columbia University Press, 2016 (ISBN 978-0-231-17896-9)

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Diane Enns's *Love in the Dark: Philosophy by Another Name* weaves poetry, philosophy, literature, and memoir into a philosophical reflection on erotic love that is as lovely as it is agonizing. Enns's reflection is a concentration on love as lived experience, and it highlights what we might call miscreant modes of love: passion-filled love that, according to Enns, is often excluded from the legacies of love left by the liberal tradition, Western philosophy, and Christianity. Fluctuating among first-, second-, and third-person perspectives, Enns's reflection gets painfully close to readers and invites them to ponder their own experiences with love and its loss. Along with passion, as the book's title effectively conveys, Enns's portrayal of love suggests that it is also accompanied by considerable risks, risks that, for one's "self," may prove fatal.

Feminist readers will be particularly interested in Enns's discussions of women's role in Western liberal societies and in a Western Christian tradition. Enns maintains that the influence of liberalism creates less than ideal, asymmetrical power relations between heterosexual and heteroromantic men and women; as a result, women in this position are routinely less powerful and more vulnerable. Relatedly, Enns elaborates on how women have occupied positions of suffering, self-sacrifice, discipline, and obedience in the Western Christian tradition. Thus she captures how these legacies work in tandem to reinforce these asymmetrical power relationships portraying women as passive and inessential.

Enns resists conditioning love on relationships of equality as she is skeptical of the representations of love that emerge from the liberal love tradition, a tradition that idealizes "the context or conditions thought necessary for love to occur" (7). Under liberal accounts of romantic love, love is reciprocally balanced and is carried out by an "autonomous, or sovereign self, vulnerable enough to let the other in, yet secure enough in itself to be free of jealousy" (7). This tradition prioritizes a discrete sense of self that is aware of itself as such, and it extracts love from the nonideal and unequal conditions of vulnerability under which love actually occurs. As a result, those who belong to this tradition mistakenly believe that "[w]e do not love when we love jealously, obsessively, or when we shamelessly abandon ourselves to one another" (7). Instead, Enns believes that love and intimacy share a necessary condition: vulnerability. She says, "[t]he conditions for loving are dependent not on the relationship as reciprocal or equal but on one's ability to remain vulnerable enough to love" (85). She goes on to say that it is "[i]n the encounter with another's raw vulnerability, with [their] exposed wounds and sensibilities, we open ourselves to the transforming power of love" (85). In love and for the sake of it, many people

https://doi.org/10.1017/S2753906700002539 Published online by Cambridge University Press

shed layers of protection and defense and become exposed to their beloved in ways that they are not exposed to mere strangers. This is what gives vulnerability some of its transformative potential.

Enns's resistance to conditioning love on relationships of equality presents a surprisingly hopeful picture about the possibility of love for our own lives. It paints love as universally accessible for all people, regardless of how they are positioned in society. No matter who you are and how you are positioned, insofar as you can remain vulnerable, you can love and be loved. Support for this may come by way of the belief that children and parents can love each other in spite of occupying asymmetrical positions of power. However, this view does not prioritize the ways that love relationships are shaped in an unequal social world, leaving certain people more vulnerable by default to others. This includes people who are Black, queer, trans- or gender-nonconforming, or polyamorous.[1] To be fair, much of Enns's reflection, and intentionally so, proceeds from personal experience(s) with erotic love as a white woman.[2] Consequently, her ideas about love speak to her experiences. Perhaps she is aware of this. Still, it generates pressing questions about risk in varying contexts of embodiment. Is the risk the same for lovers positioned differently in society? Might dating polyamorously mediate (by way of distribution) or exacerbate the risks attendant to love?

The vulnerability upon which love and intimacy are conditioned is Janus-faced: on the one hand, it enables our capacity for love; on the other hand, it exposes us to the conditions that are often responsible for the erosion of that capacity, and this sets up the *paradox of risk*. Enns rightly observes, "[v]ulnerability is the condition of love, yes, but it is also the condition of abuse" (106). She continues: "We have a relationship of absolute vulnerability with those we love because we believe the person who loves us will not harm us at the same time that we think this person is the only one who can do all the harm in the world to us. Experience bears this out--our dearest love might abandon us, leave us by dying, or even kill us" (106). Since the relationship that we stand in with the beloved is one of complete vulnerability, when we love we inherently take a certain kind of risk. This risk is of being severely hurt, abandoned (whether by the termination of a relationship with a living beloved or by the death of a loved one), or even total destruction (by losing ourselves and/or our capacity for loving others).

Enns takes both love and vulnerability--or, the process of opening ourselves up to the beloved--to be freely given. Under this account of love, we are not only open (to the susceptibility of being affected by how the beloved and the relationship fare), but *we open ourselves up* to the beloved and, therefore, to love. It is concerning that it is not altogether clear just how much volition is

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[1] It is worth pointing out that because Enns's reflection leaves these perspectives out, it also leaves out consideration of risks located at the intersections of these identities. For example, although Enns's reflection extends from her embodiment and position as a white woman, and so gives voice to some of the risks associated with being positioned as a woman in love, it leaves the reader to wonder about the quality and degree of risks associated with being a woman in love positioned at the intersection of "Blackness" and "Womanness."

[2] It is also worth noting that there are some passages in the work that may suggest that Enns is also heteroromantic or heterosexual. For example, on page 95, Enns says "I was falling in love with this man who walked before me, talking about his anger toward me after I said something that displeased him."

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involved in this process. At times, Enns implies lovers occupy more of an active, volitional role in loving. For example, in one place, Enns writes, "[l]ove must be given freely, outside the bounds of any law; otherwise it is not love but something else" (61). Yet in other places, it appears that the lover is more of a passive participant in love and falling into it. For example, "[s]omething in another captivates us, draws us in--vulnerability exposed in an open face, something familiar yet different, the aura of a person that we cannot quite identify" (42). Perhaps there is some room for the resolution of this tension in the context of an analytic essay on love as lived experience.

The potential of loss is a theme that looms large in this work. Enns not only acknowledges the quite literal destruction of the body as she reflects over her partner passing away to disease, but she also carefully sketches more acute forms of self-destruction, frequently reminding readers how easily and quickly we can lose ourselves in our attempts to love another. There is a heightened risk of the loss of one's self in love because "[i]n love relationships, it is not always apparent where one self ends and another begins. Our perspectives are not independent of each other; they slip into one another through shared language and a shared world. . . . Extract one significant love relationship, and we are different persons" (68). So love fundamentally involves an entanglement of one's self with another self. This inherent risk of loss casts a dreary light on love relationships: in the case that we ever lose them--which we often do--they become events that our selves, altered by the beloved as they are, must struggle to survive without.

As risk is a central theme in the work, Enns's comments on limits are difficult to ignore. "And there is a limit of love," Enns writes. "If love requires more of us, if our love for another demands that we sacrifice what has allowed us to love, we must save ourselves, pull back from that precipice before it is too late" (119). Enns's words here are cautionary. If love begins to ask us to sacrifice ourselves for its sake, we must act so as to save ourselves from such destruction. Strikingly, Enns does not specify how one should go about setting these boundaries. What should these boundaries look like? How much distance from the beloved is too much distance? How much is not enough? Even more, one cannot help but wonder how such a caution escapes what Enns finds problematic about the liberal tradition of love: the prioritization of a discrete, autonomous, sovereign sense of self that is aware of itself as such.

The book is composed of four parts: "Legacy," "Love," "Limits," and "Loss." Aside from "Legacy," each part captures some part of a progression of love as lived experience. In part I, as I mention above, Enns lays out two "powerful" legacies--Christianity and liberalism--that love must work against in Western societies (6). These legacies envision love as symmetrical, dyadic relationships that prioritize sacrifice and equal autonomy between persons (6-7). For Enns, these legacies mistakenly "idealize the context of conditions thought necessary for love to occur" (7). The subsequent three parts of the book subtly draw readers in to reflect on their deepest experiences of romantic love. In part II, for example, I found that Enns's sections on "Beautification" and "The Interworld" aptly construe how I have come to share in the lives and loves of my lovers. More than an observer of Enns's experiences, I found myself smiling at words on the page as I reflected on a plethora of joyous moments of my own loves past. The subtlety of Enns's invitation to readers to consider their own love relationships is also responsible for an increasing agony as one progresses through the work. Parts III and IV, "Limits" and "Loss" respectively, document the many challenges and risks that loving encompasses. We are

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reminded that sometimes "our deepest love [is] for the most flawed person," and unless we set limits, we risk losing love ourselves and losing ourselves in love (81). Readers who find resonance in these parts are called to do the very agonizing and gut-wrenching work of thinking about when, why, and how some of their most powerful loves fail, have failed, and may be failing.

Amid Enns's weighty discussions of risk and loss, we realize that love as a lived experience demands a sizable amount of courage and bravery. I maintain that the bravery of lovers' hearts should be neither undermined nor overlooked. If, as Enns's says in the very first line of her preface, "When we love, we move in the dark," I suggest that we do so bravely.

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