

WOMAN'S SELF-INTEREST OR SACRIFICIAL
MOTHERHOOD: PERSONAL DESIRES, NATURAL
INCLINATIONS AND THE MEANING OF LOVE

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ANYONE WHO STUDIED moral philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s," Fergus Kerr writes, "would remember being confronted with a choice: utilitarianism or deontology, John Stuart Mill or Kant, the right course of action decided by calculating the benefit to others or by considering one's duty."¹ Within the context of these limited parameters, it is not surprising that desires would be suspect by moralists. In the utilitarian framework, they threaten to pit the individual against his neighbor by setting the former's interests against the latter's and vice versa. In the context of deontology, they threaten the same by setting "base" nature against "enlightened" reason. In both cases, they clearly lesson the impetus for self-giving love. Lost, in both cases, is the notion that desires—precisely as expressive of a God-given nature—might serve as an impetus for virtue, by "naturally" leading us to the end for which we were created: human happiness. In its place is the perpetual conflict between love of self and love of neighbor, which can be resolved only by the sacrifice of one or the other.²

¹ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Alden, Mass.; Oxford; Victoria, AS: Blackwell, 2002), 115

² For more detail, see Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), especially 240-53; 327-53; and idem, *Morality: The Catholic View*, preface by Alasdair MacIntyre and trans. Michael Sherwin (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 65-81; Michael Sherwin, "Happiness and Its Discontents," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and*

Remarkably illustrative of this conflict—between utilitarianism and deontology, on the one hand, and between love of self and love of other, on the other hand—is what the French philosopher Elisabeth Badinter has recently presented as the “conflict” between “the woman,” ruled by reason and the will to choose in the absence of both natural inclinations and social pressures, and “the mother,” who succumbs to the call of duty heralded by Mother Nature and a patriarchal society. Badinter, who has recently been acclaimed as France’s “most influential intellectual”³ and its “most prominent voice on feminist topics,”⁴ is encouraging “the woman” in her battle against “the mother.” I, on the other hand, refuse to choose between the two, since I am convinced that the premises of Badinter’s argument are mistaken at the outset.

In defense of my position, I will present an exposition of Badinter’s argument in part I, before arguing in favor of a natural maternal desire, which—far from being an animal-like inclination, or instinct, as it is understood by Badinter—is, I will argue, proper to woman *qua* rational. This inclination, I will maintain in part III—after clearing up certain misunderstandings concerning the meaning of desire in part II—should be understood in terms of a woman’s love for her children or of her desire to love children whom she only yet imagines as her own. To be sure, this natural inclination to love is to be understood—and with this I am in perfect agreement with Badinter—not in terms of a naturally masochistic or self-effacing spirit that would belong to woman *qua* female, but rather, as we shall see in part IV, as a spontaneous affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of children.⁵ Hence a

Culture 13:4 (2010): 35-59; Albert Plé, *Par devoir ou par plaisir* (Paris: Cerf, 1980). To contextualize this tension, see Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

³ Poll CSA-Marianne 2010. See “Têtes, la star des intellos,” *La Liberté* (Fribourg, Switzerland), 12 October 2010.

⁴ See “Picking a Fight with Motherhood,” *International Herald Tribune*, 7 June 2010.

⁵ This is not to deny original sin, in virtue of which children are “deprived of original holiness and justice . . . subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin,” as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 405) teaches. However, the

woman's spontaneous love for children may be said not only to precede but even to motivate her desire for maternity.⁶ In other words, her desires—rather than being simply haphazard—might be understood as orientated at the outset by certain goods or ends: a child or children, in the case at hand. This in turn implies that desires need not simply be haphazard; nor must they be limited to what is subjective or assertive. Rather, or more positively, they might also be seen as *responsive* and thus *objective*.⁷ Finally, after arguing for what Josef Pieper calls “the creative power of human love,” I will conclude, in part V, that there need be no “conflict” between the woman and the mother, between a woman's happiness and her maternal vocation (or maternal “function,” as Badinter would have it), between self-love and authentic love of the other, between the way of nature (properly understood) and the way of love.

Catechism also teaches that “human nature has not been totally corrupted” thereby (*ibid.*). Hence, I suggest we call upon the Thomistic principle according to which goodness is “coextensive with being.” There nonetheless remains one difference: “What good adds to being is a reference to desire or appetite; something desirable is simply a being viewed as the object of desire” (David M. Gallagher, “Goodness and Moral Goodness,” in *idem*, ed., *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994], 37-60, at 41).

⁶ As such, this understanding is compatible with Daphne de Marneffe's presentation of maternal desire: “It is the longing felt by a mother to nurture her children; the wish to participate in their mutual relationship; and the choice, insofar as it is possible, to put her desire into practice.” This, more specifically, she instructs us, is “the authentic desire to mother felt by a woman herself—a desire not derived from a child's need, though responsive to it; a desire not created by a social role, though potentially supported by it; rather, a desire anchored in her experience of herself as an agent, an autonomous individual, a person.” (Daphne de Marneffe, *Maternal Desire: On Children, Love and the Inner Life* [New York, Boston: Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, 2004], 3, 4).

⁷ As I have argued elsewhere: “I am, firstly, drawn *inwardly* (or subjectively) toward that which (or toward one whom) I passionately or instinctively desire or, more nobly, toward that which (or toward one whom) I willfully—that is rationally—esteem as *good* and thus desirable. Secondly, I am at the same time—hence the priority is not temporal but ontological—drawn *outwardly* (or objectively) as it were, by an *actual* attraction whose force lies less in me than in the objective goodness of the person or thing whom I love.” (Michele M. Schumacher, “Feminism, Nature and Humanae Vitae: What's Love Got to Do with It?” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 6:4 [Fall 2008]: 897-900, here 886).

I. BADINTER'S CONFLICT

Elisabeth Badinter is certainly not new to the scene described above. The sixty-nine-year-old feminist, humanities scholar, philosopher, and business woman has also authored and edited some twenty books, so she is well positioned to act as a strategist in this “battle” for woman’s freedom to self-determination. Having witnessed the “180-degree turn” of feminism⁸ within the space of about ten years—from Simone de Beauvoir’s emphasis on sexual equality by downplaying differences to the consideration, by so-called essentialist feminism, of femininity as both an “essence” and a “virtue”⁹—Badinter clearly invites us to return to that “golden age” when women were encouraged to seek autonomy from their anatomy.

In those early years, following the publication of Beauvoir’s famous book, *Le deuxième sexe* (*The Second Sex*), in 1949,¹⁰ women’s battle for the preservation of their freedom was clearly conducted on two fronts: on the one hand, against nature and the argument for biological determinism—or the reduction of woman to what lies within the realm of her body and its working—and on the other hand, against cultural determinism, or the pressure to live up to a culturally promoted ideal of womanhood, orchestrated largely by men of a macho mindset seeking to keep woman in her place within a man’s world. Today, however, Badinter observes that these two forces have combined to form a single powerful enemy to which feminism itself has succumbed. To be sure, it has always been in the interest of a patriarchal society, Badinter recognizes, to present nature as being on its side. The presentation of woman as created to be docile, submissive, and maternal is thus recognized by Badinter as nothing more than cultural conditioning

⁸ See Elisabeth Badinter, *The Conflict: How Modern Motherhood Undermines the Status of Women*, trans. Adriana Hunter (New York: Metropolitan Books / Henry Holt and Co., 2011), 55 (*Le Conflit, la femme et la mere* [Paris: Editions Flammarion, 2010], 83).

⁹ See *ibid.* (*Le Conflit*, 84).

¹⁰ See *Le Deuxième Sexe: I. Les faits et les mythes, II. L'expérience vécue* (Paris, Gallimard, 1949). The original English translation is by H. M. Parshely (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952, 1953, 1956; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1974, 1989). Newly translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011).

dressed in the form of natural determinism. Today, however, this strategist for women's rights has recognized a dangerous change on the battlefield. This time it is as if nature has the strongest voice, thus co-opting macho-style men on its side, together with feminists of the essentialist mode—that is, those who emphasize sexual differences, in contrast to the feminism of equality, based upon likeness, to which Badinter subscribes. These essentialist feminists,¹¹ together with thinkers in ecology and human sciences, have united, Badinter mournfully observes, in proposing a common ideology oppressing young mothers, or those who would be mothers, under the banner “Mother knows best.”

In Badinter's view, this well-knowing Mother is *not* to be found within woman herself; for Badinter believes that she has already destroyed “the myth” of the maternal instinct in one of her previous books, *L'Amour en plus* (translated into English under the title, *Mother Love*),¹² although she admits—with frustration—that it keeps popping up in public discussion.¹³ Rather, this well-knowing Mother is yet another enemy of women's freedom of self-determination. This time it is “good” old Mother Nature who is under attack by Badinter; for She has called for a return of the traditional model of maternity,¹⁴ which is “obviously” opposed to the emancipation won for women by feminists under the influence

¹¹ The most obvious name that comes to a fore among French feminists is Luce Irigaray, although Badinter's argument is constructed in opposition to Alice Rossi, Carol Gilligan, and Antoinette Fouque. See Badinter, *The Conflict*, 56-60 (*Le Conflit*, 83-92).

¹² Elisabeth Badinter, *L'Amour en plus: Histoire de l'amour maternel, XVIIe à XXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980, 2000). English translation: *Mother Love: Myth and Reality* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1981). For her conclusion that the natural instinct is a myth, see *Mother Love*, 327: “A review of the history of different forms of maternal behavior gives birth to the conviction that maternal instinct is a myth. No universal and absolute conduct on the part of the mother has emerged. . . . Everything depends on the mother, on her history and our History. No, there is no universal law in this matter, which transcends natural determinism. Mother love cannot be taken for granted. When it exists, it is an additional advantage, an extra, something thrown into the bargain struck by the lucky ones among us.” It is particularly interesting to note that this last phrase (“something thrown into the bargain struck by the lucky ones among us”) does not appear in the French original. See *L'Amour en plus*, 439. Similarly: “Women who refuse to sacrifice their hopes and ambitions for their children's well-being are too numerous to be categorized as pathological exceptions who only confirm the rule” (*Mother Love*, 307 [*L'Amour en plus*, 415]).

¹³ See, e.g., Badinter, *The Conflict*, 44-50 (*Le Conflit*, 68-83).

¹⁴ See, e.g., *ibid.*, 4 (*Le Conflit*, 13).

of Simone de Beauvoir. To be more specific, this “all-knowing” Mother is oppressing poor human mothers by way of her “good” counsels: natural childbirth,¹⁵ nursing on demand,¹⁶ attachment parenting (preferably “skin-to-skin”),¹⁷ biodegradable or cloth diapers,¹⁸ sleeping with baby,¹⁹ abstinence from all alcohol during pregnancy (“zero tolerance”²⁰) and likewise from all smoking (even after pregnancy),²¹ to say nothing of sexual relations. On that last point, Badinter cannot help but add sarcastically that “good” Mother Nature counsels her daughters not only to sleep with their babies, but also to give priority to the mother-child relation over that of the couple.²²

In short, with the return of naturalism, Badinter witnesses “the tyranny of maternal duty,” not without the help of “innocent infants” who, “quite unwittingly,” have become “the best allies of men’s dominance.”²³ So strong, in fact, is the influential power of “saintly” Mother Nature today, that Badinter poses the question: “What mother would not feel at least a twinge of guilt for failing to follow the wisdom of nature?”²⁴ Decrying such backwards-leaning traditionalism, Badinter surmises that: “Just as Jean-Jacques Rousseau [1712-78] succeeded in doing, troops of this movement intend to persuade women to return to nature, which means reverting to fundamental values of which maternal instincts are a cornerstone. But, unlike in the eighteenth century, women now have three options: embracing motherhood, rejecting it, or negotiating some middle ground, depending on whether they privilege their personal pursuit or a maternal role.”²⁵

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, 38-42 (*Le Conflit*, 58-65).

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 42-43, 67-84 (*Le Conflit*, 65-66, 101-26).

¹⁷ See, for example, her treatment of bonding theory in *ibid.*, 46-50 (*Le Conflit*, 70-77).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43-44 (*Le Conflit*, 66-68).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101: “co-sleeping” (*Le Conflit*, 153: “cododotage”).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 64 (*Le Conflit*, 97).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 63-67 (*Le Conflit*, 97-101).

²² *Ibid.*, 101-6 (*Le Conflit*, 152-59).

²³ *Ibid.*, 97 (*Le Conflit*, 146). See also Badinter, *Mother Love*, 4 (*L’Amour en plus*, 28).

²⁴ Badinter, *The Conflict*, 61 (*Le Conflit*, 93).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5 (*Le Conflit*, 13). On Rousseau’s philosophy, see *ibid.*, 168 (*Le Conflit*, 251-52); and Badinter, *Mother Love*, 30, 134-42, 166, 180-83, 186, 201, 208-16 (*L’Amour en plus*, 60, 127, 193-203, 235, 252-55, 260, 279, 287-98).

Badinter would thus open our eyes to what she judges to be social conditioning dressed in the form of natural (or biological) conditioning, so as likewise to awaken within us the will-power to rise above animal-level (prerational) inclinations towards maternity and *rationally* to choose or to reject it. This in turn requires, Badinter reasons, that women discern behind the current counsels of "Mother knows best" an ethic of constraint or obligation based upon an identification of the natural and the good. But on what, Badinter insists, are we to base that identification of the good and the natural, if not on what she esteems a "scandal"? After all, as she contends in her previous book, "to say that nature does things well cannot be admitted without difficulty. Its work is not without defect. And to be convincing, one must work hard to defend its cause, which for many is God. The whole problem consists in demonstrating that we live in the best possible world, which, after all, is not evident."²⁶

Not evident indeed; for Badinter believes that she has already proven in *L'Amour en plus* that huge numbers of French mothers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were willing to sacrifice the lives of their newborn children by confiding them to wet nurses, all the while knowing—or so Badinter believes—that their chances of survival, already relatively low, were thereby further endangered, and significantly so. Although the mortality rate was, more specifically, generally doubled for children who were nursed by women who were not their mothers, "this did not prevent the majority of mothers from continuing the practice when the necessity of their own work prohibited them themselves from nursing."²⁷ Badinter thus concludes that "the wet-nurse system was 'objectively' a disguised form of infanticide."²⁸

²⁶ Elisabeth Badinter, "Avant-Propos," dated July 1981, in *L'Amour en plus*, 16-17: "Car, dire que la nature fait bien les choses ne va pas sans difficulté. Son ouvrage n'est pas sans défaut. Et pour convaincre, il faut plaider durement sa cause qui est, pour beaucoup, celle de Dieu. Tout le problème consiste à démontrer que nous vivons dans le meilleur monde possible, ce qui, après tout, n'est pas évident." This preface does not appear in the English translation, which appeared in that same year.

²⁷ Badinter, *Mother Love*, 113 (*L'Amour en plus*, 166). See also *ibid.*, 109ff. [*L'Amour en plus*, 159ff.]; *idem*, *The Conflict*, 162-63 (*Le Conflit*, 244-45).

²⁸ Badinter, *Mother Love*, 112 (*L'Amour en plus*, 164).

To be sure, Badinter admits that there is more to this picture than a woman's important social role, which was unquestionably hindered by a nursing child. Cultural pressures also exercised an important influence in favor of "family cohesion,"²⁹ which doctors and moralists judged was endangered by prolonged sexual abstinence, as was counseled during both pregnancy and the nursing period.³⁰ But what of those mothers who, upon the weaned child's return to the family home, quickly confided him or her to a governess or sent the child to a boarding school?³¹ And what, still, of "the cheaters" ("*les tricheuses*")³² who later—under the important influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau—kept their newborns and infants at home, presumably under their "careful," "loving regard," but hired poor young mothers from the countryside who left behind their own babies to serve as wet nurses in these affluent homes? And—still more heart wrenching—what of those same poor women, barely recovered from child birth, who all-too-willingly (Badinter presumes) abandoned their own newborn babies to nurse instead the children of these affluent women?³³ Why, Badinter asks, even in the event of extreme poverty, did they not at least wait until their own children were several months old before venturing on such a mercenary endeavor?

May we not surmise, even if caution forbids any final judgment, that these women put their own lives and interests ahead of their children's, demonstrating that devotion was still not a value thoroughly embraced, even by a society that loudly proclaimed it as a fact of nature? And such a hypocritical society at that—simultaneously celebrating the virtues of the happy homemaker, championing the child, and at the same time closing its eyes to the false pretenses of some and the very real misery of others?³⁴

²⁹ Badinter, *The Conflict*, 161 (*Le Conflit*, 242); cf. idem, *Mother Love*, 70 ff. (*L'Amour en plus*, 110ff.).

³⁰ Sperm was thought to spoil a mother's milk. See Badinter, *Mother Love*, 70 (*L'Amour en plus*, 110); idem, *The Conflict*, 161 (*Le Conflit*, 242).

³¹ See, Badinter, *Mother Love*, 103-8 (*L'Amour en plus*, 147-59).

³² *Ibid.*, 196 (*L'Amour en plus*, 273).

³³ Badinter points to a mortality rate of 64 to 87 percent. See *ibid.*, 197 (*L'Amour en plus*, 274).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 199 (*L'Amour en plus*, 277).

Badinter is in fact convinced that, in the absence of social pressure to the contrary, women clearly prefer, and even opt for, their own self-fulfillment over the good of their children, even when the very lives of their children are at stake.

Neither poverty nor ignorance explains such infanticides—only indifference, which until almost the end of the eighteenth century was not really frowned upon as a violation of the moral or social code. This last point is essential, for it seems to indicate that in the absence of any outside pressure of this kind the mother was left to act according to her own nature—a self-centered nature excluding the remotest hint of self-sacrifice for the good of the child she had just brought into the world.³⁵

Having thus destroyed—or so she believes—the “myth” of a natural maternal instinct some thirty years ago, Badinter’s purpose in her most recent book is to save women from the cultural image, built upon this myth, of the “good mother.” We don’t need to be “good” mothers, Badinter argues, for if we hold up this kind of an ideal we shall never be mothers at all. Contemporary motherhood, due to readily available contraception and abortion, has become a matter of *choice*,³⁶ resulting in a certain predicament: on the one hand, a new consideration of the “responsibilities for the children they have chosen to have”; on the other hand, the elevation “of the concept of personal fulfillment.”³⁷ Such are the terms that Badinter supplies to “the conflict” of the women of our time, who find themselves prey to a still larger conflict between naturalism, with its ethical constraints and obligations promoted by patriarchy, and hedonism, which she apparently views as the authentically human means to self fulfillment.³⁸ “The greatest enemy of naturalism is individualism and its hedonistic promise,”³⁹ which “wants the pleasures without the pains.”⁴⁰ In fact, from

³⁵ Ibid., 113-14 (*L'Amour en plus*, 166-67).

³⁶ See Badinter, *The Conflict*, 1, 17, 128, 153 (*Le Conflit*, 9, 31, 188, 229).

³⁷ Ibid., 1 (*Le Conflit*, 10). Badinter admits, “Making the choice to be a parent is no guarantee of being a better one” (ibid., 15, [*Le Conflit*, 28]).

³⁸ See ibid., 12-14 (*Le Conflit*, 24-25).

³⁹ Ibid., 168 (*Le Conflit*, 252).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 169 (*Le Conflit*, 253).

Badinter's perspective, if women are still choosing to be mothers today, it is only because they view this as somehow contributing to their own satisfaction or pleasure.⁴¹

Badinter thus points out, in a matter-of-fact sort of way, that women are currently opting for one "instinct" over another: on the one hand, a so-called maternal instinct, which naturalism would assign to women in virtue of a particular feminine "nature," or on the other hand, an instinct, drive, or appetite for pleasure. Hence, the fundamental option that she sets before us: self-fulfillment in the form of egotistical pleasure, typifying "the woman," or self-sacrifice, typifying "the mother"; the realization of woman or her loss.

Presented with such an option, one might rightly wonder who, other than the martyr, would willingly choose motherhood. It is not motherhood that Badinter suggests that we abandon, however, but "martyrdom": living for our children rather than living for ourselves. This stark contrast (the "woman" or the "mother"-martyr) serves, in other words, the particular purpose of awakening in women the desire for rational decision-making, so that they might move beyond their desires and act in service of what they deem their true self-interest.⁴² Badinter's argument thus suggests that our desires, precisely as *prerational*, are also *irrational*. Hence, much of our choosing is only an illusion, deriving "more from emotional and societal factors than from any rational assessment of advantages and disadvantages."⁴³ As a case in point, she reads a recent French national poll as revealing—falsely, in my opinion⁴⁴—that "first among the

⁴¹ See, e.g., *ibid.*, 2, 12-13 (*Le Conflit*, 10, 22).

⁴² See, e.g., *ibid.*, 13-14 (*Le Conflit*, 25).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11-12 (*Le Conflit*, 22).

⁴⁴ This is the conclusion that she draws from the following responses: "A child improves daily life and makes it happier"; "A child means continuing the family, handing down its values and history"; "A child gives love and affection, and company in one's old age"; "A child makes a couple's relationship more intense and stable"; "A child helps you become an adult and take responsibility"; etc. (*ibid.*, 10-11) (*Le Conflit*, 21). All of these reasons are, it seems to me, compatible with what I will present as the motive of love, especially love understood as an affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of the child. In other words, far from competing with affirmations regarding the intrinsic worth (goodness) of the child, such references to the pleasure (or delight) that a child evokes within (or even outside of) a family

motives” for having children is “hedonism . . . with no mention of self-sacrifice.”⁴⁵

The real problem, then, as Badinter thus sees it—that is to say, once we have done away with social conditioning—is that of our desires themselves. Surely, she reasons, they should be followed to the extent that they conform to our hedonistic principles, which she ironically does not call into question, but far too often these desires actually lead to the contrary: “The future mother tends to fantasize about love and happiness and overlooks the other aspects of child rearing: the exhaustion, frustrations, loneliness, and even depression, with its attendant sense of guilt.”⁴⁶

It bears repeating that despite such apparent dissuasion, Badinter—herself a mother of three—does not simply maintain that we ought not to have children. Rather, she suggests that children should be rationally chosen in accord with one’s freely chosen program or lifestyle.⁴⁷ On the other hand, she also warns young women against walking blindly into the motherhood “trap,” for this is a path of no return: “[T]o admit that you are not cut out to be a mother, that it gives you little satisfaction, would brand you as a reckless monster.” It is thus not the case that choosing to be a mother guarantees a happier maternity. “For one thing, our belief in having chosen from a position of freedom might be illusory; for another, this assumed freedom burdens women with greater responsibilities at a time when individualism and a ‘passion for the self’ have never been stronger.”⁴⁸

might be understood as a confirmation of his or her intrinsic goodness. This means that it is not our desires that render children lovable. Rather, our desires are a response to the fact that children *are* lovable. Hence also these desires are “not only entirely ‘in order’” but are also “the indispensable beginning of all perfection in love. . . . What is more, all human happiness (which we instinctively desire, but not necessarily selfishly, and therefore with rightfully clear consciences) is fundamentally *the happiness of love*” (Josef Pieper, “On Love,” trans. Richard and Clara Winston, in *idem, Faith, Hope, Love* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997], 139-281, here 223, 224).

⁴⁵ Badinter, *The Conflict*, 11 (*Le Conflit*, 22).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 (*Le Conflit*, 25).

⁴⁷ It is worth mentioning that Badinter’s motherhood has not stopped her from authoring nine books, which have won for her a certain renown, as I mentioned above.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28: “Choisir d’être mère ne garantit pas, comme on l’a cru au début, une meilleure maternité. Non seulement parce que la liberté de choix est peut-être un leurre, mais aussi parce qu’elle alourdit considérablement le poids des responsabilités en un temps où

What women *really* desire, Badinter seems to suggest, is not motherhood as such (i.e., children), but rather the pleasure that it accords (or they accord) us. Hence, when the pleasure dies, or is outweighed by sacrifices, women are quickly disenchanting, and they must admit that they have been duped by false expectations, reinforced, Badinter suggests, by an idealistic notion of motherhood orchestrated by naturalists, feminists of the essential mode, and the residues (or so she hopes) of patriarchy and its macho sorts.⁴⁹ So what is a poor women to do?

Given the serious weight of the responsibilities that motherhood entails—at least in terms of social expectations—Badinter urges us to make clear-headed decisions for or against motherhood in light of “the pleasures and the pains, the benefits and the sacrifices” and in consideration of our “altruist capacity.”⁵⁰ In short, because we are free to decide for or against maternity, we should do so *rationally*. This in turn means that we should carefully consider whether or not it accords with our most profound subjective desire for self-fulfillment in the form of maximized pleasure. For Badinter this means that—and this is one of my major points of contention with her reasoning—*rational* motherhood (maternity specially chosen for its ability to promote one’s own pleasure) is opposed to *natural* motherhood (motherhood that is chosen in accord with social pressure, and is thus under the spell of naturalists and patriarchy).

II. CLEARING UP MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT NATURAL DESIRE

Of course, not everyone would agree that self-fulfillment is to be obtained by way of maximized pleasure, and often enough Badinter’s brand of feminism has “freed” women from the

l’individualisme et la ‘passion de soi’ n’ont jamais été si puissants.”

⁴⁹ On this subject, see also Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women* (New York: Free Press, 2004); Miriam Peskowitz, *The Truth behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?* (Emeryville, Calif.: Seal Press, 2005); and Susan Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood: How Becoming a Mother Changes Our Lives and Why We Never Talk about It* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 2000).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25: “des plaisirs et des peines, des bénéfices et des sacrifices”; “capacité altruiste.”

“drudgery” of housework and childcare to that of the factory, office, or corporation. And while she willingly denounces various forms of cultural conditioning that present an idealistic picture of maternity, she ironically hails the current cultural ideal of individualism and hedonism. The more important objection to Badinter’s argument, however—and the one I will consider in what follows—is the clear lack of any reference to that simple four-letter word, which most of us, I believe, still consider the most fundamental and certainly the most significant reason for choosing motherhood (or fatherhood for that matter),⁵¹ namely, *love*. Why, I cannot help but ask, would anyone opt to be a mother, if not for love?

In responding to this important question, it is important first to clear up a number of misunderstandings concerning our desires. Far too often it is assumed, as Badinter has done, that anyone holding to the position that a woman is naturally drawn to children or that she naturally desires to be a mother has *de facto* fallen into the trap of biological reductionism: the assumption—based on the empirical observation that women are biologically orientated (by way of physical capacities and hormone-led desires) to bearing and nourishing children—that women are ethically obliged to be mothers, at least if we hope to realize our destinies and to be fulfilled. How can it be otherwise, it is maintained by naturalists, when nature has outlined our perfection in these terms? Indeed, naturalism, in contrast to natural-law theory, which has traditionally dominated Catholic moral teaching,⁵² would reduce nature—including so-called feminine nature—to its lowest common denominator: that which is physical, material, or

⁵¹ The same argument holds for men, but Badinter has good reason to argue that much more is at stake for the woman than for the man. Hence, as Pope John Paul II expresses it, “Parenthood—even though it belongs to both [man and woman]—is realized much more fully in the woman, especially in the prenatal period. It is the woman who ‘pays’ directly for this shared generation, which literally absorbs the energies of her body and soul. It is therefore necessary that *the man* be fully aware that in their shared parenthood he owes a *special debt to the woman*. No program of ‘equal rights’ between women and men is valid unless it takes this fact fully into account” (Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, *Mulieris dignitatem* [15 August 1988], no. 18).

⁵² See, for example, John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, nos. 47-50; and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1954-60.

biological. Hence, that which is most natural is presented by naturalists as that which is also perfective, but—and herein resides its problematic character from my perspective no less than that of Badinter—this perfection is thought of as lying, even in the case of the human being, strictly outside of reason’s domain. It is thus argued, for example, that because woman was created with the natural capacity to bear and educate children, she is likewise endowed with a sort of maternal instinct, by which is meant that she possesses a natural propensity, or weight, drawing her irresistibly towards mothering as toward her own perfection, not unlike a planet which is naturally brought into orbit around a sun. Given the complete absence of rational choice in this account, it is hardly surprising that feminists would object to such an idea. As for Badinter, she rightfully insists that “a woman can be ‘normal’ without being a mother, and that not every mother has an irresistible impulse to care for the child born to her.”⁵³

As a case in point, Badinter points to the recent and ever-growing phenomenon today—corresponding to women’s new power to refuse maternity—of the “childfree”⁵⁴ as distinct from the “childless”:⁵⁵ those who seek to be “free” of children and the responsibilities of maternity in favor of “conjugal and professional satisfactions.”⁵⁶ She underscores the childfree lifestyle as also

⁵³ Badinter, “Avant-Propos,” 9: “une femme peut être ‘normale’ sans être mère, et que toute mère n’a pas une pulsion irrésistible à s’occuper de l’enfant qui lui est né.” (Again, this preface does not exist in the English translation, *Mother Love*).

⁵⁴ See Badinter, *The Conflict*, 18–21, 124–26, 141, 143, 153 (*Le Conflit*, 24, 31ff., 182–84, 210, 213, 229). See also Laura S. Scott, *Two Is Enough: A Couple’s Guide to Living Childless by Choice* (Berkeley, Calif.: Seal Press, 2009); Corinne Maier, *No Kids: 40 Good Reasons Not to Have Children*, trans. Patrick Watson (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd.); Jeanne Safer, *Beyond Motherhood: Choosing a Life without Children* (New York: Pocket Books, 1996); Susan S. Lang, *Women without Children: The Rewards, The Regrets* (Holbrook, Mass.: Adams Media Corporation, 1991); Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Irene Reti, ed., *Childless by Choice: A Feminist Anthology* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: HerBooks, 1992).

⁵⁵ Badinter explains that in France, for example, one third of women without children claim to have made a deliberate choice. See *The Conflict*, 124 (*Le Conflit*, 182).

⁵⁶ I have purposefully altered the published translation more accurately to refer to the original text. Badinter does not address “familial” satisfactions, as her translator proposes (cf. *The Conflict*, 144), but “conjugal ones” (“Les satisfactions conjugales et professionnelles” [*Le*

better for children by rehearsing in gory detail the sorry fate of infant French children whose apathetic mothers left them to die with wet nurses. Contemporary readers cannot help but be reminded of similar atrocities in our own day, not the least of which is abortion.⁵⁷ Badinter recounts these examples to defend her claim that the natural desire for maternity is “natural” only in the sense of being a biological impulse overlaid by a social construct, not as a reliable guide to fulfillment (either for women or for children). However, the empirically observable phenomenon of child neglect need not imply that an objectively “good” maternal instinct is merely an illusion. Hence, according to a Thomistic natural-law perspective, for example, human beings are capable of choosing among desires and prioritizing them according to any number of factors, orientations, or mindsets: including both the authentically fulfilling orientation to love and the dehumanizing orientation to sin (as seen in the case of child neglect).⁵⁸

Indeed, the human person does share various appetites, inclinations, or desires with the animals and even with lesser beings, such that we might distinguish three orders of natural inclinations:⁵⁹ those we share with beings without sense knowledge (such as the inclination to preserve our own being and thus to ward off danger), those we share with other animals (such as sexual reproduction and the raising of offspring), and those proper to us as rational beings (such as knowing the truth about God and living in society). Yet reason is said to govern them all,⁶⁰

Conflict, 215]).

⁵⁷ As anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy reasons: “If women instinctively love their babies, why have so many women across cultures and through history directly or indirectly contributed to their deaths? Why do so many mothers around the world discriminate among their own infants—for example, feeding a son but starving a daughter?” (*Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They Shape the Human Species* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1999], xviii).

⁵⁸ Such, in other words, is what Daphne de Marneffe rightfully refers to as “the whole complicated arena of mothers’ competing desires” (De Marneffe, *Maternal Desire*, 5).

⁵⁹ See Aquinas, *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, ad 3.

without thereby usurping the Creator's jurisdiction, of course.⁶¹ Reason governs the other natural inclinations by way of the specifically rational appetite of the will—"rational" because it is naturally inclined to that which the intellect presents as true and thus good⁶²—whereby we naturally desire our own perfection, which is none other, St. Thomas teaches, than our happiness.⁶³ Reason, after all, is capable of discerning among the various goods to which the will is drawn.

Like St. Thomas, Badinter holds that human beings should act responsibly. For Badinter, however, women are responsible in their choices concerning motherhood by giving primacy to themselves and their most fundamental desire for a pleasurable life. In particular, a woman acts most rationally when she subverts her merely biological "desire" for motherhood (which animals also share) in favor of her more authentically human desire to live in society: indeed, to be active in the world and out of the house where she is the so-called slave of her children. By contrast, while St. Thomas would certainly favor following rational inclinations over merely biological impulses, he would also contend that practices intrinsic to mothering (the sexual act, bearing and raising children) are always undertaken by human beings as rational

⁶¹ See *STh* I-II, q. 6, a. 1, ad 3. Just as reason cannot control involuntary biological functions, so also it cannot determine the natural orientation of the rational appetite: man cannot do otherwise than will his own happiness. All in being "mistress of its act" (*domina sui actus*)—in contrast to that "which is determinate to one thing" (*determinata ad unum*) (*STh* I-II, q. 1, a. 5)—the human will "tends naturally [and necessarily] to its last end; for every man naturally wills happiness: and all other desires are caused by this natural desire; since whatever a man wills he wills on account of the end" (*STh* I, q. 60, a. 2: "Unde voluntas naturaliter tendit in suum finem ultimum. Omnis enim homo naturaliter vult beatitudinem; et ex hac naturali voluntate causantur omnes aliae voluntates, cum quidquid homo vult, velit propter finem"). See also *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 2, ad 2. For a thorough development of this thesis in St. Thomas's teaching, see David M. Gallagher, "Desire for Beatitude and Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 58 (1996), 1-47.

⁶² See *STh* I-II, q. 17, a. 5; q. 10, a. 1.

⁶³ *STh* I, q. 62, a. 1: "By the name of beatitude is understood the ultimate perfection of rational or of intellectual nature; and hence it is that it is naturally desired, since everything rationalis seu intellectualis naturae: et inde est quod naturaliter desideratur, quia unumquodque naturaliter desiderat suam ultimam perfectionem"). See also *STh* I-II, q. 10, a. 1, ad 1; and I, q. 60, a. 3.

agents: hence the practice of mothering is always, at least in part, a rational activity.

Many contemporary women tend to agree with St. Thomas. Contra Badinter, it is hardly the biological act of engendering life that most women have in mind when they speak of a maternal desire; nor is it a simple desire for sex.⁶⁴ Nor does one commonly understand by maternal desire—indeed, the thought is almost ridiculous—the desire to contribute to population growth, to do one’s part for the preservation of the species, nor even—at least not in most cases—to preserve the family name, its “blood,” or its properties. There is something far more human, as it were, in this desire: something which, to be sure, most women—at least those who admit to having it—understand as contributing to their personal happiness or fulfillment, but only secondarily, or consequently. The proper object of this desire is not—and here I beg to differ with Badinter—a woman’s happiness, nor even her pleasure (though there may be a correspondence between this and the proper object).⁶⁵ Rather the proper object of this desire is a child, or children.⁶⁶ Thus I return to the question: why would anyone choose to be a mother, if not for love?

III. MOTHERHOOD: WHAT DOES LOVE HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

In responding to this important question, one might first of all grant to Badinter that women might well, in fact, be duped into

⁶⁴ De Marneffe puts it in rather matter-of-fact terms when she writes: “As common wisdom would have it, ‘mother’ and ‘desire’ do not belong in the same phrase. Desire, we’ve been told, is about sex. Motherhood, we’ve been told, is about practically everything but sex” (ibid.).

⁶⁵ As de Marneffe puts it well: “Many mothers feel torn up inside being apart from their babies and children many hours a day, yet they feel realistic or mature when they are able to suppress those feelings. The terms of the discussion don’t admit the possibility that pleasure is a reliable guide, or that desire tells us anything about truth” (*Maternal Desire*, 13).

⁶⁶ Marie-Joseph Nicolas has good reason to argue, with reference to Thomas Aquinas, that “the intention of nature in human sexuality is not like that of animal sexuality to safeguard the species: it is to procreate a human person who is significant in him- or herself (*etiam individua sunt de principali intentione naturae*), and consequently to lead him or her to full stature and autonomy by means of education” (Marie-Joseph Nicolas, “L’idée de nature dans la pensée de saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue thomiste* 74 [1974], 533-90, at 571. Cf. *STh* I, q. 98, a. 1.

mothering by way of guilt bound up with social constraints and expectations, which have, often enough, been presented in the form of moral obligation. This is obviously what neither she nor I have in mind by a *free* choice for motherhood. One might further object to my question (“Why would anyone *choose* to be a mother if not for love?”) that it is impossible to speak of love in the case of desire, precisely because maternal desire precedes the fact of being a mother. “Desire,” as St. Thomas appropriately notes, “implies the real absence of the beloved,”⁶⁷ but in the case at hand the beloved (one’s future son or daughter) is not only absent, but is also unable to present him- or herself as the object of a desire. The very question being entertained, after all (beside that of whether we naturally seek the good of our children—already born—over our own good), is whether or not women naturally desire to call children into existence in cooperation with the Creator. How, indeed, can one love children that exist only within one’s imagination?

This very objection serves as a helpful introduction to my response to the previous question: Whether women naturally desire to procreate. Precisely by invoking love as a motivation for motherhood, I have in mind a classic understanding of love, such that its object (in this case the child) is present not only as the fruit (or *end*) of desire, but also as its inception, as that which gives birth to desire.⁶⁸ “The end corresponds with the principle,”⁶⁹ St. Thomas reasons, because the good (the object of our desires) “has the aspect of an end.”⁷⁰ It is, in other words, that which desire seeks as its goal. Indeed, as Jan Aertsen explains, “A movement towards an end is only possible when the terminus in some way

⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 28, a. 1, ad. 1.

⁶⁸ See, for example, H. D. Simonin, “Autour de la solution thomiste du problème de l’amour,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 6 (1931) (Paris: Vrin, 1932): 174-274.

⁶⁹ Cf. *STh* I-II, q. 2, a. 5, ad 3: “Quia finis respondet principio.” Cf. , I-II, q. 26, a. 2; q. 1, a. 4.

⁷⁰ *STh* I-II, q. 25, a. 2: “Bonum autem habet rationem finis.” See also part II (“La doctrine de l’amour et la causalité finale”) of Simonin, “Autour de la solution thomiste du problème de l’amour,” 199-245.

determines the movement.”⁷¹ Hence, there is a certain “beginning of the end” (*inchoatio finis*),⁷² or an orientation, which may be said somehow to determine the movement towards the end within the subject who desires it. Or to put it another way, underlying every natural desire is a certain “anticipatory unity”⁷³ or affinity⁷⁴—what St. Thomas calls “connaturality”⁷⁵—between a nature and its object or the end (the good)⁷⁶ towards which it tends. This is not to say that desires are simply subjective—determined by the subject—for it is rather the object of our desire (the good or the beloved) which is said to be its cause.⁷⁷ The beloved object or the beloved person—whether present or absent, whether existential or imaginary—causes the inclinations we refer to as desire by arousing an affection towards itself (or, in the case of a person, toward her- or himself), which St. Thomas calls love (*amor*) or complacency (*complacentia*).⁷⁸ And indeed, as rational creatures, we most especially act *for* ends, or on account of our desires: we will (and thus we choose) to be united to that which we love. Hence we know from experience the truth of St. Thomas’s insight, “love precedes desire.”⁷⁹ Or as Pieper very aptly puts it:

⁷¹ Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’s Way of Thought* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1988), 343. Hence, even though an end is rightly considered *last* in the order of execution (whence its name), it is *first* in the order of intention. See *STh* I-II, q. 25, a. 1.

⁷² The reference here is to Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 14, a. 2.

⁷³ Aertsen, *Nature and Creature*, 343. See also *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 1.

⁷⁴ Love, in other words, supposes a certain likeness in virtue of which the beloved may be considered another “self.” See, for example, *STh* I, q. 60, a. 4. Or, as Pieper explains with regard to the etymological development of the term, “love includes and is based upon a preexistent relation between the lover and the beloved” (“On Love,” 159).

⁷⁵ Literally, that which is in accord, or agreement, with (*con*) nature. See, for example, *STh* I-II, q. 26, a. 2, corp. and ad 3.

⁷⁶ “The good has been well defined as that at which all things aim” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1.1094a1-3). “It is clear that the good has the nature of an end” (*STh* I, q. 103, a. 2: “Manifestum est enim quod bonum habet rationem finis”).

⁷⁷ See, for example, *STh* I-II, q. 27, a. 1.

⁷⁸ See *STh* I-II, q. 23, a. 4, where it is argued that “good causes, in the appetitive power, a certain inclination, aptitude or connaturalness in respect of good: and this belongs to the passion of love” (“Bonum ergo primo in potentia appetitiva causat quamdam inclinationem, seu aptitudinem, seu connaturalitatem ad bonum, quod pertinet ad passionem amoris”). See also *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 2.

⁷⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 25, a. 2 (“amor praecedit desiderium”). See also *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 1.

[L]ove is the underlying principle of willing and comes first both in temporal succession and order of rank. Not only . . . is love by its nature the earliest act of will,⁸⁰ and not only is every impulse of the will derived from love,⁸¹ but love also inspires, as the *principium*, that is, as the immanent source, all specific decisions and keeps them in motion.⁸²

As for the case at hand—that of the “love” that women might be said to have not only for the children they already have but also and even for still unconceived children—we might thus distinguish between the “real union” (*secundum rem*) of the lover and the beloved (woman and child) and the “union of affection” (*secundum affectum*),⁸³ arising from a perception of unity between the object loved (the child, in this case) and the lover (the woman longing to be a mother), which gives rise to (maternal) desire.

Such a “union of affection” has the particular advantage of answering to the objection that the idea of maternal desire violates a woman’s dignity by way of biological reduction. Indeed, far from arguing for a biological impulse or a physical suitability for motherhood, this understanding of desire as arising out of love bespeaks the rational nature of a woman, for it implies not only her power of volition, but also her intellectual powers of understanding and imagination—powers that she, of course, shares with man. On the other hand, one might object that while this solution would thus save a woman’s dignity, it hardly saves the dignity of the child, who is apparently instrumentalized

⁸⁰ See *STh* I, q. 20, a. 1.

⁸¹ See *STh* I, q. 60, prol.; I, q. 20; and *ScG* I, c. 4.

⁸² Pieper, “On Love,” 166. Similarly, Servais Pinckaers argues: “The first movement of the ‘appetite,’ which is at the origin of all other movements and remains constantly present in them, is love, which we can define as a direct and simple delight in the object perceived and known as good (this object and its good can obviously be a person, as when one says: this or this person gives me joy, intrigues me, touches me, etc.). Different species of love correspond with different species of desire” (Servais Pinckaers, “The Natural Desire to See God,” *Nova et Vetera* 8, Eng. edition [2010]: 627-46, at 639).

⁸³ *STh* I-II, q. 28, a. 1. Saint Thomas reasons, more specifically, that “when we love a thing, by desiring it, we apprehend it as belonging to our well-being. In like manner when a man loves another with the love of friendship, he wills good to him, just as he wills good to himself: wherefore he apprehends him as his other self” (“cum enim aliquis amat aliquid, quasi concupiscens illud, apprehendit illud quasi pertinens ad suum bene esse. Similiter cum aliquis amat aliquem amore amicitiae, vult ei bonum, sicut et sibi vult bonum; unde apprehendit eum ut alterum se”).

thereby, for he is thus invited into this world as the object of his mother's dreams or of her project for self-fulfillment. Hence beyond the question of maternal desire, we find ourselves faced with the still more important question of love itself.

IV. LOVE AS THE POWER OF AFFIRMATION

What, then, we might ask, is love, *qua* human, and even *qua* maternal? What do we mean when we speak of this "commonsense" notion of maternal love which—although it inevitably conjures up many happy, if not idealistic, pictures in the minds of even those who have known unhappy childhoods; whence Badinter's insistence upon the term "myth"—is not so easily defined? All too often we are tempted to save love from instinct by presenting it as an act of the will, by which we mean a choice or a decision, an engagement, even an effort. In short, it is presented as an active power, whence the term *will-power*. Almost entirely lost to this discourse—unless, of course, we are addressing erotic or sexual love—is the ancient idea of love as a *passion*, and thus as largely receptive (and thus passive) with regard to its object, the beloved. In this sense, love is better understood, as Pieper has fittingly argued, as "something that comes over us and happens to us like an enchantment."⁸⁴ He thus has good reason to ask: "Who, strictly speaking, is the active subject when someone 'pleases' us or when we find someone 'enchanting'?"⁸⁵

To be sure, a mother's love is inevitably characterized by what Pieper admits as likewise proper to love, namely, "self-forgetful surrender and giving that precisely 'does not seek its own advantage'."⁸⁶ From this perspective, it is obvious that a woman's love for her child will be largely one sided for a good number of years. Love in the passive sense of enchantment, however, is reciprocated much sooner, even within the first months of a child's life, as Hans Urs von Balthasar explains in image form:

⁸⁴ Pieper, "On Love," 163.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

After a mother has smiled at her child for many days and weeks, she finally receives her child's smile in response. She has awakened love in the heart of her child, and as the child awakens to love, it also awakens to knowledge: the initially empty-sense impressions gather meaningfully around the core of the Thou.⁸⁷

If a smile of delight can “produce” a smile of delight in return, this, I would like to suggest, is merely the effect or recognition of a certain “connaturality” between a mother and child, a fittingness or a suitable communion⁸⁸ (animals, for example, do not smile), which is simply given at the outset and not created by human willing. The will's role, in this case, is precisely that of affirmation, or consent, which Pieper insists is just as proper to the will as the more common understanding of the act of “deciding in favor of actions on the basis of motives.” In the first case, the will's act is better expressed as “agreement, assenting, consenting, applauding, affirming, praising, glorifying and hailing.”⁸⁹ Indeed, far from exercising objective neutrality, the will is thus “touched” (or “bent”), as it were, by the objective goodness of the beloved person or object precisely because—and with this insight we return to the idea of connaturality, proportionality, correspondence, or suitedness (*convenientia*) between a nature and its inclination—“love not only yields and creates unity” but also *presupposes* unity,⁹⁰ a unity that is, as it were, simply given. In other words—it bears repeating—before we consider the real union of lovers (or, in the case at hand, mother and child, although the same reasoning could be used with regard to father and child) which gives rise to joy or pleasure, we might address that affective union which St. Thomas calls love (*amor*) and which he further defines as “complacency in good” (*complacentia boni*), consisting in “an aptitude or proportion of the appetite to the

⁸⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. by David C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 76.

⁸⁸ See, on this subject, chapter 3 (“La similitude cause de l'amour”) of H. D. Simonin, “Autour de la solution thomiste du problème de l'amour,” 246-70.

⁸⁹ Pieper, “On Love,” 164.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

good”⁹¹ in virtue of which one is already in some sense united to that which (or to the one whom) one is thus inclined—for one loves his like.⁹² This means, as Michael Sherwin explains, that before love is a principle of action, it is “a response to goodness,”⁹³ particularly in the form of “a pleasant affective affinity”⁹⁴ that St. Thomas calls *complacentia* (literally, “with pleasing assent”: *cum + placentia*). Or, as Pieper would have it, such is the spontaneous awareness of goodness that naturally affirms, “It’s good that you exist; it’s good that you are in this world!”⁹⁵

With this beautiful insight we return to the earlier objection concerning maternal desire: how can one love, with a spontaneous, affirming love, a child who does not yet (and perhaps never will) exist? The answer is also supplied by Pieper, who recognizes in these words of delight (“It’s good that you exist!”) “a continuation and in a certain sense even a perfecting of what was begun in the course of creation,”⁹⁶ when, that it is to say, God saw what he had created and proclaimed it “good” (cf. Gen 1:9, 12, 18, 21, 25) and even “very good” (Gen 1:31).⁹⁷ In other words, the fundamental affirmation “It’s good that you exist,” is,

⁹¹ *STh* I-II, q. 25, a. 2: “Ipsa autem aptitudo sive proportio appetitus ad bonum est amor, qui nihil aliud est quam complacentia boni.” See also *STh* I-II, q. 26, a. 2; and q. 28, a. 1, corp and ad 2. Pieper, in his etymological study of the term *love* in various languages, points to “a long suspected and almost consciously known semantic element: that ‘love’ includes and is based upon a preexistent relation between lover and beloved” (Pieper, “On Love,” 159). It is thus not surprising that A. N. Williams recognizes as a “basic assumption” undergirding all of St. Thomas’s thought about charity “the Platonic insight that love implies a kind of likeness” (A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* [New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999], 75).

⁹² See, for example, *STh* I, q. 60, a. 4; I-II, q. 27, a. 1; and q. 63, a. 2.

⁹³ See Michael S. Sherwin, “Aquinas, Augustine, and the Medieval Scholastic Crisis concerning Charity,” in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 181-204, at 199; and idem, *By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), especially 63-118.

⁹⁴ “This affinity,” Sherwin specifies, is “the aptitude, inclination, or proportion existing in the appetite for the loved object” (*By Knowledge & By Love*, 70).

⁹⁵ Pieper, “On Love,” 164.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁹⁷ See *ibid.*, 177, 178.

Pieper explains, “an imitation of the divine creative act by virtue of which the human being . . . exists,” and is “simultaneously ‘good’, that is, lovable.”⁹⁸

In thus addressing the creative power of our love, Pieper has in mind the good that it calls forth from the heart of the beloved, such that he or she might thereby recognize his or her own intrinsic goodness and act accordingly,⁹⁹ even to the extent of loving in return (to echo Balthasar’s insight). In the case at hand, however—that of women drawn to motherhood—it is particularly appropriate to call upon the creative power of human love as cooperating (by way of procreation) in God’s own creative work. To be sure, there is an important principle that we cannot violate in our analogy between divine love and human love: unlike the human will which is moved by the good pre-existing in things, the divine will actually creates the good in things and persons.¹⁰⁰ Hence, no woman should mislead herself into thinking that she is

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁹⁹ Helpful in understanding this is another image from Balthasar: “Love is creative for the fellow man; it produces an image of him with which the beloved would not have credited himself, and when love is genuine and faithful it gives him the power to come closer to this image or make himself like it. He does not want to disappoint; he wants to show himself grateful that someone takes him so seriously and expects so much of him” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Convergences: To the Source of Christian Mystery*, trans. E. A. Nelson [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983], 128-29). Similarly, John Paul II argues in his commentary of Ephesians 5, “The good that the one who loves creates with his love in the beloved is like a test of that same love and its measure” (General Audience of September 1, 1982; in John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. and ed. Michael Waldstein [Boston: Pauline Books, 2006], 484).

¹⁰⁰ *STh* I, q. 20, a. 2: “Hence, since to love anything is nothing else than to will good to that thing, it is manifest that God loves everything that exists. Yet not as we love. Because since our will is not the cause of the goodness of things, but is moved by it as by its object, our love, whereby we will good to anything, is not the cause of its goodness; but conversely its goodness, whether real or imaginary, calls forth our love, by which we will that it should preserve the good it has, and receive besides the good it has not, and to this end we direct our actions: whereas the love of God infuses and creates goodness” (“Unde, cum amare nihil aliud sit quam velle bonum alicui, manifestum est quod Deus omnia quae sunt, amat; non tamen eo modo sicut nos. Quia enim voluntas nostra non est causa bonitatis rerum, sed ab ea movetur sicut ab objecto; amor noster, quo bonum alicui volumus, non est causa bonitatis ipsius; sed e converso bonitas ejus, vel vera, vel aestimata, provocat amorem, quo ei volumus et bonum conservari quod habet, et addi quod non habet; et ut ad hoc operemur. Sed amor Dei est infundens et creans bonitatem in rebus”). See also *STh* I-II, q. 110, a. 1; and Aquinas, *In Ioan.* V, lect. 3 (753).

capable of actually creating the good in children: hers is the role of *pro-creation* (*cooperation* with God's creative work). This means, however, that she is not simply endowed with the bodily capacity passively to receive life within herself, as it is planted (as it were) therein by the Creator. Rather, she is also and most especially endowed with the particular rational capacity, which she shares with man, willingly to choose life. This involves not only that she pose no obstacle to the development of a new life within her, but that far more positively—and with far more dignity—she might actually delight in her child's conception, proclaiming in echo of the Creator: "It's good that you exist! How marvelous that you are in this world!"

V. LOVE AND SELF-FULFILLMENT

This (Pieperian) presentation of love has the particular advantage of pointing to the intrinsic goodness of the beloved (the child, in this case) rather than the desirability of any number of his or her specific traits or usefulness. Surely each of us desires to be affirmed in this way rather than to be "loved" instrumentally or by way of obligation or even duty. The real lover cannot, of course, give answer to the question, "Why do you love me?," for in so doing he or she risks admitting to having instrumentalized the beloved. Furthermore, just as the human will is not sovereign in determining good, we ourselves are not, as Pieper rightly insists, "'sovereign' in love."¹⁰¹ It is not our love that makes anyone or even anything lovable. Rather, our love is an estimation of the beloved's intrinsic goodness.

Beyond this significant advantage of conceiving of love as affirmation, moreover, lies the unity that is thereby implied between self-love or fulfillment and authentic love of the other: a point that is, of course, of no small importance in addressing Badinter's concern. She assumes—precisely by exposing the shocking egoism of women throughout four centuries of French culture whenever such egoism was socially permissible—that she has *de*

¹⁰¹ Pieper, "On Love," 220.

facto destroyed not only the “myth” of maternal instinct¹⁰² but also the idea that a woman might be “naturally” fulfilled by motherhood. If women seek to be mothers, Badinter argues, this has nothing to do with nature, nor with natural inclination, but rather with sociocultural pressures arising from an ideal wherein motherhood is esteemed a woman’s duty or honor. Or, when these pressures are lacking—as follows the swing of the pendulum—motherhood is chosen for simple egotistical reasons, such that pleasure or some sort of self-fulfillment is sought therein. Hence in our time, for example, Badinter says, “The individualism and hedonism that are hallmarks of our culture have become the primary motivations for having children, but also sometimes the reason not to.”¹⁰³

In response—or as a counterargument—we might again call upon Pieper’s important insights, developed largely in opposition to a certain Protestant presentation of love (by Anders Nygren,¹⁰⁴ for example), wherein self-love and authentic love of the other are thought to be in radical opposition.¹⁰⁵ When love is conceived in the sense in which it was described above as consent, approval, or affirmation, Pieper reasons, joy and happiness are rightly conceived as “our response to partaking of something we love; and if loving, simple approval, is something beloved in itself—then it must likewise be true that our desire for happiness can be satisfied precisely by such affirmation directed toward another, that is, by ‘unselfish’ love.”¹⁰⁶ In short, “no gulf” separates the giving sort of love from the affirming sort of love.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, “the longing for fulfilled existence” is presented by Pieper as “actually

¹⁰² See *supra* n. 12.

¹⁰³ Badinter, *The Conflict*, 2 (*Le Conflit*, 10).

¹⁰⁴ See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹⁰⁵ Kerr has good reason to note that “some philosophers, in the van of virtue ethics, notably Bernard Williams and Martha Craven Nussbaum, think that, in rejecting Kantian duty-for-duty’s-sake ethics, they are rejecting Christian ethics as such” (*After Aquinas*, 116).

¹⁰⁶ Pieper, “On Love,” 241.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 242.

and legitimately the root of all love.”¹⁰⁸ This longing is, he maintains, “simply the elemental dynamics of our being itself, set in motion by the act that created us.”¹⁰⁹ Hence, the desire for happiness “is not only ‘in order’ but is the indispensable beginning of all perfection in love.”¹¹⁰ Or as Marie-Joseph Nicolas would have it: “Pleasure, joy, life’s spontaneity are absolutely not to be rejected, but on the contrary [to be encouraged], because they are the sign of the accomplishment of nature, of God’s creation.”¹¹¹

From this perspective, a woman can, as it were, have her cake and eat it too. There need be no disparity between her authentic joy in mothering and her authentic love of her child or children, nor between the happiness that comes from loving her child and her own authentic self-fulfillment.¹¹² The point is well made by Badinter that we ought in no way to belittle the very real sacrifices that are entailed in mothering—whence the validity of her argument for lightening the load by bottles, daycare, disposable diapers, and/or devoted fathers. But this does not necessarily lead

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 208. What is framed here as a statement is presented by Pieper in the form of a rhetorical question. Hence, the more straightforward formulation: “Need-love, whose goal is its own fulfillment, is also the nucleus and the beginning of all our loving” (*ibid.*, 222).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 223. For a very thorough treatment of this theme from an ethical perspective, see Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*; *idem*, *The Pursuit of Happiness – God’s Way: Living the Beatitudes*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble (Staten Island, N.Y.: St. Pauls, 1998). See also Plé, *Par devoir ou par plaisir*; David M. Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude and Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas,” *Mediaeval Studies* 58 (1996): 1-47; *idem*, “Goodness and Moral Goodness”; Craig Steven Titus, *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude: Aquinas in Dialogue with the Psychosocial Sciences* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), especially 98ff.; Michael Sherwin, “Happiness and Its Discontents”; Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011); and Denis J. M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good. Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas’s Moral Science* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), who argues that the will is “the secondary source of natural law” (323). “For Aquinas, the natural law has an intellectual and an appetitive source, and although the latter is secondary and subordinate, both sources must be kept clearly in view” (*ibid.*, 325).

¹¹¹ Nicolas, “L’Idée de nature dans la pensée de saint Thomas d’Aquin,” 569.

¹¹² A similar point is made by Marie-Joseph Nicolas with regard to human sexuality: “that which is properly human in sexuality, that which surpasses the ‘generic,’ animal, end of procreation, is not only that of making of ‘procreation’ a personal act and one aiming at the person, but of thereby realizing oneself and one’s couple: secondary but specifically human ends” (*ibid.*, 572).

to her conclusion that satisfaction in mothering requires a decision based upon a good calculation of costs and benefits from the outset.¹¹³ We can, furthermore, applaud her contesting of the Rousseauian vision of woman—to the extent that her representation of his thought is true—as “by definition masochistic.”¹¹⁴ And we can only abhor the idea that the meaning of a woman’s existence lies in self-abnegation rather than self-fulfillment, as Badinter maintains was rampant throughout much of the history of France:

In this sacrifice of self, woman found her reason for being and her pleasure. The mother was indeed a masochist. Later, the religious aspect of her role would receive greater emphasis but this time in an attempt to cast light on the difficulties women regularly encounter. Good mothers didn’t just magically materialize at society’s bidding. An entire spiritual and Christian set of values paved the way to her acceptance of self-sacrifice, which in turn elevated the good mother above her spontaneously selfish human condition. The enormous effort required to overcome her flawed state made a saint of her.¹¹⁵

If, on the contrary, the human (and not merely the feminine!) way to perfection is the way of love with all its sacrifices and pains, then this, St. Thomas and Pieper suggest, is only because the joy of love itself allows us to endure them. What is primary, then, is not “to give until it hurts,”¹¹⁶ as Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta often suggested, not even for the Christian. Rather, as Pieper would have it, the lover “does after all attain his own, the reward of love.”¹¹⁷ For the Christian, this necessarily entails the joy of having obtained the pearl of great price, which more than merits its price. Indeed, *even* in the case of the supernatural love of

¹¹³ See, e.g., Badinter, *The Conflict*, 14 (*Le Conflit*, 25).

¹¹⁴ Badinter, *Mother Love*, 232 (*L’Amour en plus*, 319).

¹¹⁵ Badinter, *Mother Love*, 232, 235 (*L’Amour en plus*, 318-19).

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, “Address to the National Prayer Breakfast” (Washington D.C., 3 February 1994), published in *Crisis* (March 1994), 17-19; and in Matthew Levering, ed., *On Marriage and Family: Classic and Contemporary Texts* (Lahnham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

¹¹⁷ Pieper, “On Love,” 244-45.

charity, it is not sacrifice that comes first, Pieper suggests, but the joy that comes from being loved and of loving in return.¹¹⁸

This joy of loving and of loving in return points to a final consideration, which will push our conclusion beyond resolving the conflict between personal fulfillment and love—or, as Badinter puts it, between “the woman” and “the mother.” When we speak of love returned—as in the case of a child smiling back at his or her mother—we have passed beyond the domain of personal perfection. In precisely this example, we might speak of love as perfective not only of the lover, but of the beloved as well. Pieper does not hesitate, in fact, to address this mystery in terms of a continuation of the work of creation, when God proclaimed all that he had called into existence “good” and even “very good.”¹¹⁹ By this the renowned German philosopher means more than that the Creator has equipped us with an intrinsic dynamism in the form of certain natural inclinations, causing us to desire what is good and thus perfective of us (whence the Thomistic teaching that the process of creation is not completed until we have effectively returned [*reditus*] to God, perfected in virtue).¹²⁰ Pieper admits (with reference to Plato) that the lover is “more divine”¹²¹ than the beloved, but he also insists that “to be capable of loving without being dependent on being loved in return” is “a divine privilege.”¹²² As for us, precisely as creatures—and human creatures at that:

[W]hat we need over and above sheer existence is: to be loved by another person. That is an astonishing fact when we consider it closely. Being created by God

¹¹⁸ Pieper argues, in fact, that love “‘by nature,’ that is, ‘by virtue of creation’” is “so closely interwoven” with the supernatural love of charity that “the seam can scarcely be detected. Or at least it cannot so long as all three impulses, that which springs from nature, that which springs from ethical freedom and that which springs from grace are in harmony with one another. If you row your boat in the same direction as the wind is driving it—how are you to distinguish between the motion that is caused by your own efforts and what is caused by the wind?” (*ibid.*, 242). See also *ibid.*, 260, 277, 280.

¹¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 172.

¹²⁰ See ScG III, c. 20; *STh* I, q. 6, a. 3; and Oliva Blanchette, “The Logic of Perfection in Aquinas,” in Gallagher, ed., *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy*, 107-30.

¹²¹ The reference is to Plato, *Symposium* 180b.

¹²² Pieper, “On Love,” 184.

actually does not suffice, it would seem; the fact of creation needs continuation and perfection by the creative power of human love.¹²³

This statement—astonishing indeed—requires that this creative power lies uniquely in affirmation. The moment we begin to think that our love has the power of rendering the beloved lovable, we have *de facto* ceased loving, for at that moment we have ceased affirming the beloved in the depths of his or her being, precisely as he or she is. “Love is not love, which alters when it alteration finds. Or bends with the remover to remove,” Shakespeare rightly insists. “O no! It is an ever-fixed mark / That looks on tempests and is never shaken.”¹²⁴

Such is the Pieperian notion of love—and that of all true lovers, Shakespeare suggests—and such, sadly, is also what Badinter’s argument ultimately calls into question. By denying women’s natural affections for their children, she is not simply intervening—with good reason!—to prevent the sacrifice of women to either the “goddess” of Mother Nature or the whims of social expectations. By arguing that love is not spontaneously called forth from a mother’s heart for her child, Badinter is calling into question the very foundation of the argument upon which might effectively be obtained not only these good and righteous objectives (of preventing either form of the unjust sacrifice of women), but also the Pieperian objective of preventing an inhumane division between self-love and an authentic love of the other, and even—and still more importantly—between the inalienable dignity of every human person and the natural human love which spontaneously affirms it as such. The only human love that is truly “creative” in the Pieperian sense of the term is a love that is *responsive*. Any other human “love” is destructive.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 174. Interestingly enough, Badinter admits to the same when she argues (in *The Conflict*, 168-69): “Contrary to the claims of naturalism, love is not a given, not a mother’s for a child, nor the child’s for its parents, who might find themselves enfeebled and alone in old age with no recompense for their sacrifice.” And she adds in the French edition the key phrase, which is left out of the English translation: “In fact, one cannot give what one has not received” (“En effet, on ne peut donner que ce que l’on a reçu” [Badinter, *Le Conflit*, 253]).

¹²⁴ William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116.

Such is the fundamental choice before every woman: a choice far more significant than that posed by Badinter of a woman's identity as woman or as mother. It is the choice of what meaning she will give to love; for as Pieper (with reference to St. Augustine of Hippo)¹²⁵ put it so well, "whether for good or evil, each man lives by his love. It is his love and it alone that must be 'in order' for the person as a whole to be 'right' and good."¹²⁶ This choice also implicates the choice of our alliance with the independent and essentially egotistical mindset of Elisabeth Badinter, or with Mother Nature, or still, and more properly, with God, our Father-Creator.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Augustin, *Contra Faustum* 5.10 (Migne, *PL* 42:228): "quia ex amore suo quisque vivit, vel bene vel male."

¹²⁶ Pieper, "On Love," 166.

¹²⁷ I wish to express my thanks to an anonymous reader of *The Thomist* for his or her excellent suggestions for improvement.

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