

## LOVE LIKE WILD HORSES

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Augustine's belief that we could only love God and each other by renunciation, so that we would "tame one's body as one would a wild horse" can be an accurate comparison, and one that C.S. Lewis strongly validates in *The Four Loves*. By definition, the word renounce means: to give up (a claim, right, belief, etc.), usually by a formal public statement; to give up (a pursuit, practice, way of living or feeling, etc.); to cast off or disown; refuse further association with; repudiate. Of course, many questions arise by comparing love to wild horses: what does it mean, and why is it necessary to renounce one's loves? In order to understand the analogy, it is necessary to understand what nature is— nature of loves, nature of horses.

Of course, when thinking of what the meaning of the word is, it would typically be thought that nature is how something is created, raw and uninfluenced by anything but its instincts and untamed, unlearned spirit. However, Lewis describes nature as quite the opposite— nature being not what something originally is but what it is meant to become. When he speaks of the natural loves— affection, friendship, eros, and charity— he speaks of the loves as what they are meant to become and not the original form of what they are, untamed and uninfluenced. Without the taming of our loves and the renouncing of them as loves only second to what must ultimately be the first and highest of loves, love of God, Lewis says that our loves become demons. "Love ceases to be a demon only when he ceases to be a god" (6). For our loves to be pure and good, they must be humble. But our loves are

not humble when “we give our human loves the unconditional allegiance which we owe only to God,” “for natural loves that are allowed to become gods do not remain loves. They are still called so, but can become in fact complicated forms of hatred” (8).

Now as to the comparison, when would a horse be in its natural state? Is a horse more natural when tamed and broken, or when left alone to run wild of its own free will? Of course, a horse born in the wild would be “naturally” unbroken and undisciplined. It would abide by its instincts. It would not know man and would not know discipline or direction. But by Lewis’ definition of natural, the horse would in fact not be natural until it was tamed and disciplined and domesticated. It would only be natural in this way because it would be achieving that which it is meant to be, and not what it is. A horse that is wild obeys no being or law or force, only its own desires—its “nature.” But an animal’s or a human’s nature, in Lewis’ context, would be an oxymoron. That which we think of as “nature” is actually the exact opposite of how Lewis defines it.

In his novel *All the Pretty Horses*, Cormac McCarthy describes a herd of wild, three-year-old colts, about sixteen in number, which are penned in and exposed to a world that is foreign to them—the world of man.

“They were bunched against the fence at the far side of the enclosure and they were a mixed lot, roans and duns and bays and a few paints and they were of varied size and conformation. John Grady opened the gate and he and Rawlins walked in and he closed it behind them. The horrified animals began to climb over one another and to break up and move along the fence in both directions.

That's as spooky a bunch of horses as I ever saw, said Rawlins.

They don't know what we are" (98).

The horses in this scene have never seen man afoot. They don't know what he is and are therefore afraid, because they don't know what to think. They are automatically threatened. They don't know what man is, and their fear is the result of their instinct to protect themselves, because this unknown thing, walking upright on two feet, might harm them. It is their fear that causes them to behave so wildly. They fear because they are wild. They don't know any different. They fear because they are untamed— alien to the domesticated world, which the humans are introducing them to.

Like these horses, our loves are also wild when untamed. They abide by their own desires and wills, and by doing so they offer nothing that is ultimately good— no productivity, nothing. They exist for themselves and for their own fulfillment. They give nothing, only take what they covet— attention, reinforcement, obsession, sex, etc.— and in this greed they ultimately gain nothing. These loves are searching for some truth, and without the knowledge that Lewis says our loves need in order to remain loves, they believe they can find this truth in other things. They place themselves above all else, and “in the name of love” they commit crimes against themselves. Lewis states that “nature does not teach” (20). Of course nature does not teach, and in its own ignorance it destroys itself. Ignorant loves are destroyed. They are transformed, like the demons Lewis describes them as, into things such as hate, selfishness, pride, vanity, abuse, displaced anger or pain, self-loathing, despair, and burden. At any rate they become a thing or a number of things which only hurt and destroy themselves.

“My old daddy always said that the purpose of breakin a horse was to ride it and if you got one to break you just as well to saddle up and climb aboard and get on with it,” says Rawlins in *All the Pretty Horses* (103). What good is a horse to a man when it is unbroken, untamed? What good is a love when it is untamed? Just like a horse, it ends up and great deal of pretense and fuss and beauty and excitement, but produces, gives, enables nothing. When untamed, a horse or a love, can hurt. Neither, in its ignorance, knows its boundaries. Neither knows what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, what is good and what is bad. And neither can know how to behave properly without becoming broken—that is it must become submissive to the higher authority and be obedient. The loves without charity, without the divine gift love of God, are incomplete. Try as they might to fill themselves, they can never achieve the naturalness that Lewis speaks of—that love which they are intended to be—without being humbled.

This doesn't imply that one's loves cannot be great, or that they need be a lesser love. Lewis explains, “It is probably impossible to love any human being simply ‘too much.’ We may love him too much *in proportion* to our love for God, but it is the smallness of our love for God, not the greatness of our love for the man, which constitutes the inordinacy” (122). And even the loves that have become too prideful and full of themselves are not so wrong as no love at all. Lewis also explain that even “the most lawless and inordinate loves are less contrary to God's will than a self-invited and self-protective lovelessness” (122). Humans were designed to love, although by loving at all one must be made vulnerable and is exposed to pain which he will certainly have to endure at some point if he is to have the experience of love. But to not love at all and not allow oneself to be loved is a graver

offense than reckless and detrimental love.

It is with the same ambivalence of the horses when approached by Rawlins and John Grady Cole that the untamed loves may behave when approached by the notion of being humbled and disciplined. But there is a greater reward for the loves that allow themselves to be disciplined, for it is then that they will become better loves themselves. An undisciplined love knows not how to behave for its own good. But a disciplined love—a love that realizes it is incomplete—becomes natural. It becomes what it is meant to be. It is only then that a love can be the things which are required for it to not be self-destructive. A natural love, ordered under charity, is not selfish—it is selfless. A natural love thinks not of itself but of others. It acknowledges in *agape* a far greater love than it can ever become. It is patient, kind, and all of the things described in that most appreciated description of love in chapter thirteen of First Corinthians.

John Grady Cole had a great love of horses and he believed that they were to be tamed: “But there were two things they agreed upon wholly and that were never spoken and that was that God had put horses on earth to work cattle...” (127). Cole knew that once a horse was tamed, it needed continued attention in order to remain broken, obedient, and manageable. So the loves, like horses, need continued attention in order to remain natural. Left alone they grow impulsive, wild, and free-willed.

A domesticated horse can serve. A disciplined love can do the same. It is only with that discipline and that direction that the love is enabled to achieve its potential—that natural love that Lewis describes—the love that it was meant to be.