

(The varieties of) love in contemporary Anglophone philosophy

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ABSTRACT: This chapter assesses theories of the nature of personal love in Anglophone philosophy from the last two decades, sketching a case for pluralism. After rejecting arationalist views as failing to accommodate cases in which love is irrational, and contemporary quality views as giving love the wrong kind of reason, it argues that other theories only account for different subsets of what a complete theory of love should explain. It therefore concludes that while love always consists in valuing someone as a particular individual, there are multiple ways of doing this, corresponding to multiple kinds of love. (6,954 words.)

The example of love most discussed in contemporary Anglophone philosophy, originally introduced by Bernard Williams, is a man who saves his drowning wife over a stranger. Though clearly morally permissible under the circumstances, Williams argued that as far as the husband is concerned this should be beside the point. The alternative, he claimed, “provides the agent with one thought too many” (Williams 1981: 18). If the man were willing to save his wife only on that condition, his concern would lack something vital.

Williams meant this case to illustrate a general point, about the unconditional nature of the commitments—often but not always aptly described as matters of love—we necessarily have to whatever makes our lives worth living. (See e.g. Wolf 2015.) But it’s also been read more narrowly, as concerned with the justification of partiality in interpersonal relationships, and still more narrowly as concerned with the nature of love

for individuals. “It’s odd,” Derek Parfit once remarked, “that Williams gives, as the thought that the person’s wife might hope he was having, that he is saving her because she is *his wife*. She might have hoped that he saved her because she was *Mary*, or *Jane*, or whatever” (Murphy 2000: 140n36). In other words, she might have hoped that he saved her out of love for *her in particular*, and not just because he saw her as a generic locus of moral obligation or spousal concern. But what could it be to love someone in this way?

This chapter aims to assess representative recent answers to this question and tentatively defend a pluralist one. To love someone is to value them as an individual, but there are multiple ways to do this. Each is responsive to a different kind of value, and involves its own forms of response. This is important for two reasons. First, theories of love that might seem like competitors are often better understood as complements, such that each aims to describe different modes of love. Second, while prototypical cases of love often involve multiple modes at once, conflating these can lead to serious confusions.

1 Love as a topic in normative theory

Philosophers normally use “love” exclusively to refer to love for individuals as such. It’s worth asking what justifies this. Perhaps love is *essentially* for individuals as such—so anything less isn’t really *love*—but I don’t find this obvious. Maybe romantic love is socially constructed, as Carrie Jenkins (2017) claims, so that whether something can truly be called romantic love is a function of how well it plays the roles associated with the concept in the speaker’s society. Given what these roles seem to be in Jenkins’s and my society, it wouldn’t surprise me if seeing someone as a generic object of certain instrumental desires—say, as at once sexually desirable and someone it would suit one’s preferred self-image to be with—would qualify.

Nevertheless, there would still be good reason to single out love for the individual as an object of special interest. It involves a fundamentally different mode of concern for its object than that for generic objects of instrumental desire, and this is what makes love important to basic normative theory. Partly, this is because love's focus on the individual gives it distinctive normative significance, which we need to understand to assess its relationship to other normative domains. If the man in Williams's example saved his wife because he saw her as at once sexually desirable and someone it suited his preferred self-image to be with, the explanation of his act wouldn't "silence comment" (Williams 1981: 18) in anything like the way it should if he saved her out of love for *her*. Furthermore, it's famously puzzling how loving someone as an individual is compatible with loving them for reasons. Responses to this puzzle highlight basic issues about the nature and scope of rationality, which will be much of my concern below.

1.1 Irreplaceability, constancy, and reasons for love

"For someone who is eager to help the sick or the poor," Harry Frankfurt writes, "any sick or poor person will do. With regard to what we love, on the other hand, that sort of indifference to the identity of the object of concern is out of the question. Substituting some other object for the beloved is not an acceptable and perhaps not even an intelligible option. The significance to the lover of what he loves is not that of an exemplar; its importance to him is not generic, but ineluctably particular" (Frankfurt 1999: 166). Frankfurt thinks this element of *irreplaceability* means that love neither admits of nor requires reason. For reasons necessarily consist in "general and hence repeatable" (169) properties, Frankfurt argues, and any repeatable properties that could give him reason to love his children could give him reason equivalently to love someone else.

One response to this concern is to argue it's overblown. Perhaps the properties for which we love people are rare enough to make them irreplaceable in practice, and that's all that matters. It's not easy to find someone who is passionate about board games, has the brand of wit you most enjoy in people, *and* looks kind of like your celebrity crush; the possibility of finding another might seem moot. Among other problems, this reply conflicts with love's *constancy*. Love should persist through an indefinite range of changes in the beloved's personality, appearance, and other properties. But if reasons for love are general enough to imply this, how can they be specific enough to single an individual out?

Frankfurt's arationalism avoids this problem, but has consequences many readers find incredible. Perhaps the clearest counterexample comes from Troy Jollimore, who imagines a man who feels Frankfurtian love—an involuntary, non-instrumental, self-affirming concern—for a “1959 *Oklahoma Today* Mickey Mantle baseball card” (Jollimore 2011: 22). Realistically, the man fetishizes the card: he loves because of a value he erroneously attributes to it. Perhaps he's obsessed with it because it's so rare; perhaps he worships Mantle, and the card is the centerpiece of his shrine. Or perhaps he doesn't love it at all. If he really sees *nothing* about the card as giving him reason to care about it, his attitude seems less like love than a bizarrely internalized compulsive tic, akin to Warren Quinn's (1993) case of a man with a primitive urge to turn on every radio he sees.

This suggests that *pace* Frankfurt, love admits of and requires reason. Furthermore, it suggests that love is broadly speaking a mode of *valuing*: it consists in experiencing certain properties as giving you reason to respond to the beloved in certain ways.¹ Thus

1. Or, equivalently, Or, equivalently, to experience the properties as making such responses fitting. (It shouldn't be assumed that valuing in this broad sense is especially cognitive or self-conscious. See n. 3.)

the lesson of the baseball-card-compulsive is that attitudes that don't involve valuing aren't intelligible as love, and the lesson of the baseball-card-fetishist is that if the properties you treat as giving you reason to respond lovingly actually don't—that is, they aren't actually *lovable* to you in that way—then you love irrationally.

1.2 *Quality views and wrong kinds of reasons*

Obviously, this leaves us with the problems of irreplaceability and constancy. It also leaves us with another problem, which is less discussed but which I suspect more fundamental: generically admirable, attractive, or desirable qualities don't seem to constitute the right kinds of reasons for love.

Thomas Hurka puts the problem nicely. “It’s actually puzzling,” he writes, “why admirable qualities should be thought a reason for all the elements in love. That someone is virtuous or intelligent is certainly a reason to admire her, but why is it a non-instrumental reason to want her company or to want her to be happy?” (Hurka 2017: 170) That is, Hurka accepts a *quality view*, on which lovable properties include personal qualities that distinguish the beloved from others. For Hurka, these can be anything that makes someone admirable, attractive, or desirable. “Kindness, honesty, or, more generally, virtue,” (165) “intelligence, wit, or aesthetic sensitivity,” (165) or “the color of your beloved’s hair or her particular scent” (166) are all possibilities. Hurka recognizes, however, that love isn’t admiration or attraction, and that reasons of love aren’t instrumental. You can have instrumental reason to want an intelligent person’s company, or want a virtuous person to be happy because you think they deserve it. But the ways we normally have reason to value both properties seem unrelated to the ways we have reason to value beloveds.

Many quality theorists offer sophisticated accounts of irreplaceability and constancy, but equally puzzling lists of lovable qualities. Thus, Jollimore claims the lovable properties largely consist in “attractive qualities such as charm, intelligence, humor, physical beauty, moral virtue, and so on—the sort of universalizable qualities in terms of which a person’s attractiveness or desirability is typically assessed” (Jollimore 2011: 25-26). Sara Protasi (2014: 22) offers a similar list, albeit with the proviso that the properties are only lovable in the specific forms in which they’re experienced in a particular relationship or from a particular perspective. Simon Keller’s main examples are “graceful dancing, sensible conversation, and strength of will,” along with “being a good listener, being sensitive, being generous,” and “[knowing] exactly how to treat [one’s lover] when he is in a bad mood” (Keller 2000, 165-166). All these qualities can be admirable, attractive, or instrumentally desirable, but it’s obscure what—above and beyond this—makes them *lovable*. (Knowing exactly how to treat you when you’re in a bad mood is indeed valuable in a beloved, but it is likewise valuable in a valet.)

The problem is particularly acute with respect to other elements of love, like the special interest we take in a beloved’s evaluative perspective. Thus, Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett argue that a “process of mutual drawing is partly constitutive of [companion] friendships” (Cocking and Kennett 1998: 506)—wherein friends characteristically shape each other’s evaluative perspectives in light of their mutual interest and receptivity—and Jollimore proposes that love aims at “*identification with the beloved*,” as an “attempt to make contact with the beloved’s inner life, to unite her perspective on the world with one’s own” (Jollimore 2011: 26). But a beloved’s good looks don’t in themselves seem to give me any reason to “get infected by [their] enthusiasm for ballet” (Cocking and Kennett 1998: 504). Their aesthetic sensitivity might, but it’s

obscure how it can give me the right kind of reason—if I love the person, their enthusiasm is infectious because it's *theirs*, not just because it's objectively well founded. Similarly, why should someone's intelligence be a reason to unite their perspective on the world with one's own, other than in the sense of pooling information?

Hurka admits he lacks a solution to the problem, but seems to be optimistic that there is one. I'm not—at least not for the generically admirable, attractive, or desirable qualities he thinks are lovable. This is because treating these qualities as lovable in themselves strikes me as not only mysterious but objectionable. There's something fetishistic about noninstrumentally wanting someone to be happy just because they're charming or intelligent, as though that somehow made them matter more; treating someone's good looks as reason to get infected by their enthusiasm for ballet bespeaks a lack of integrity, since it would mean allowing one's interests to shift in response to transparently irrelevant factors. In themselves, then, generically admirable, attractive, or desirable qualities are just that. They give the wrong kind of reason for love. Some might warrant love indirectly or under special circumstances, but before considering this possibility, let's consider views that look elsewhere.

2 Agapic love

J. David Velleman (1999, 2008) and Kieran Setiya (2014) defend broadly agapic views of love, on which people are lovable in virtue of their humanity.² For Velleman, this means humanity in the Kantian sense: rational nature or moral personhood. For Setiya, it means

2. Yao MS develops a more nuanced agapic view appealing to a secularized form of grace, on which the beloved's humanity is importantly linked to their imperfections.

literally being human. For both, humanity constitutes *noninsistent* reason for love: it makes it rationally permissible, but not required, to love anyone.

This may seem radically to reject irreplaceability, but Velleman's analysis is trenchant. Irreplaceability consists in how beloveds are valued, he proposes, not how they are selected. To value you as replaceable is to value you relative to my prior ends, for which your contingent properties make you suitable; to value you as irreplaceable is to value you as an end in yourself. Kant's theory of rational nature lets us understand this distinction. Since rational nature is the source of value in general, heightened emotional receptivity to it in someone entails heightened emotional receptivity to whatever is independently normatively significant about them. This general suspension of emotional defenses, Velleman argues, is what love consists in.

On Velleman's view, then, beloveds are valued as special in the sense people are told they're special in preschool. It is a profound truth that everyone is special in this sense, but notoriously cold comfort to anyone worried about being special to certain people. One might therefore wonder whether the selective love we worry about in these cases is the same as that Velleman describes.

It certainly wouldn't be if humanity were insistent reason for love, since then loving selectively would be irrational. The problem, as Niko Kolodny argues, is that some reasons for love *are* insistent. Kolodny imagines what it would be like to stop loving your child or closest friend, in the absence of any relevant changes in either of you: nobody has done anything bad, undergone a shift in character, or forgotten the relationship. "You just wake up one day," he writes, "to find that [the person] means nothing to you" (Kolodny 2003: 168). Presumably, this would be irrational: "an inappropriate emotional response, analogous to the failure to fear what is patently fearsome. If this happened to

you, you would find it alarming, to say the least. Even from the inside, it would seem that something had gone wrong, that your emotional reactions were seriously dysfunctional” (168).

3 Loving attachment

Conceding the point, Setiya admits the agapic view may need to countenance relationships as additional reasons for love. This is Kolodny’s view. Love, Kolodny argues, consists in treating your relationship with someone as a source of reasons for partiality and emotional vulnerability to both them and the relationship, in ways appropriate to relationships of that type.³ This elegantly answers Frankfurt: the general and hence repeatable property that gives Frankfurt reason uniquely to love his children is just the relational property of being one’s child.

In my view, the relationship theory is a convincing account of what might be called *loving attachment*. This is not strictly speaking a species of personal love, since relationships to animals, activities, and things can ground partiality and emotional vulnerability in the same way. The only difference is that interpersonal relationships can introduce special considerations that justify correspondingly special concern. (See e.g.

3. This compressed formulation (from Kolodny 2003: 150-151) leaves out Kolodny’s claim that love “partly *consists* in the belief that some relationship renders it appropriate, and the emotions and motivations of love are *causally sustained* by this belief” (Kolodny 2003: 146), which leads some (e.g. Hurka 2017) to reject Kolodny’s view as overintellectual. However, this criticism is unfair. It does not target Kolodny’s core claim—that love consists in treating relationships as reasons—but rather his further claim that treating relationships as reasons involves robust regulation by one’s normative beliefs about them. I agree the latter is implausible, but the former doesn’t entail it.

Kolodny 2010.) This generality is a strength of Kolodny’s view, but it’s also symptomatic of its main weakness. Surely our really *personal* relationships are fundamentally about what the people we have them with are like—rather than our histories with them—as our relationships with cars aren’t, and our familial relationships aren’t always. Here the relationship theory gets things backwards: it “inverts the order of justification between love and loving relationships” (Protasi 2014: 215).⁴

There are two ways to articulate this concern. One is to object (with Stump 2006, Protasi 2014, and Setiya 2014) that the relationship theory makes paradigm cases of unrequited love irrational. Unsurprisingly, Kolodny anticipates this objection. He claims it conflates love and attraction. Love differs from attraction in essentially involving “noninstrumental concern” (Kolodny 2003: 171), and noninstrumental concern is indeed irrational in the absence of a relationship. I find the second claim plausible, but not the first. As Protasi argues, unrequired love is valuable because “it expresses the capacity of attributing a special role to a person in one’s emotional life without demanding that the other person do the same” (Protasi 2014: 218). Presumably, this can be more than just attraction, but needn’t involve unwonted concern.

This leads to the second, deeper problem. For Protasi, the special emotional role attributed to the beloved is grounded in the value of their qualities. The relationship theory denies this. It allows that love can—indeed, often should—involve specially valuing a beloved’s qualities, but only because they happen to be qualities of someone you’re in a relationship with. In some cases, this is the right result. Parents at school recitals are not connoisseurs. But in others, the value of the qualities comes first. Precisely

4. For similar complaints, see Abramson and Leite 2011, Zangwill 2013, and Bagley 2015.

in virtue of qualifying the beloved for their special emotional role, the beloved's qualities define the value a relationship with them would have.

Perhaps the best example is the most famous case of unrequited love in philosophy:

I don't know if any of you have seen him when he's really serious. But I once caught him when he was open like Silenus's statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden within: they were so godlike, so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing—that I no longer had a choice—I just had to do whatever he told me (*Symposium* 216-217).

Alcibiades loves Socrates for the singular beauty he sees in him. His attitude transcends mere attraction, because of the particularity of its focus—Alcibiades loves Socrates in his ineffable uniqueness—and the depth and generality of the significance it attributes to its object, manifested *inter alia* in Alcibiades's intense desire to know and be known by Socrates, and in his “naked vulnerability to criticism” (Nussbaum 1986: 189)—Socrates is the only person who can make him feel shame. Alcibiades certainly wants a relationship with Socrates, but only as a relationship *with Socrates*, individuated in terms of the qualities that define him. These are what set the conditions under which the relationship Alcibiades wants would persist as valuable, and explain how Alcibiades would have reason to respond to Socrates in its context.

Our really personal relationships are rarely as purely or intensely aspirational as Alcibiades's, but share its order of justification. Were our friends or lovers to respond to our qualities like parents at school recitals, we would feel patronized. We want them to

value their relationships with us specifically in virtue of qualities they find compelling, and would still find compelling without the relationship in place.⁵

4 Reactive love

This brings us back to the quality view. Recent quality theorists often aim to accommodate love's irreplaceability the same way Kolodny does, by arguing that you only have reason to love people with whom you stand in certain historical relations. The difference is that for them, the historical relations (which may or may not be relationships in Kolodny's sense) aren't *sources* of reason but *enablers*—a consideration that doesn't normatively ground a response directly, but enables other considerations to. So reasons for love consist in qualities that lots of people might have, but are only lovable in certain relational contexts. (See Jollimore 2011, Keller 2013, Protasi 2014, and Naar 2017.) This doesn't itself account for constancy, but since the qualities can be very general, defenders of this proposal often argue it wouldn't be rational to continue loving someone who lost them.⁶

However, this doesn't address the other problem from §1. Even if generically admirable, attractive, or desirable properties could somehow acquire special significance in the right relational contexts, this wouldn't necessarily turn them into the right kinds of reasons for love. It's here that Kate Abramson and Adam Leite's proposal stands out.

Love, they argue, is among what P. F. Strawson (1974) famously called the “reactive attitudes”—broadly emotional responses to properties of an agent's will that are

5. I give a somewhat more involved argument for this in Bagley 2015: 487–489.

6. Jollimore 2011 and Protasi 2014 explore other ways to accommodate constancy, along with unrequited love.

relevantly expressed in conduct. The “conduct” part is key: resentment is a response to malice or culpable indifference, and gratitude to goodwill, but only when their possessor has actually expressed them in mistreating or helping you. Similarly, Abramson and Leite propose that “reactive love” (Abramson and Leite 2011: 677) is appropriate in response to certain morally “laudable traits that are especially salient in the context of fairly intimate relationships” (679) that have been “expressed in a way directed towards the lover in an appropriate relational context” (696).

I think this is correct up to a point. Certain laudable traits can indeed warrant special attachment when appropriately expressed in relatively intimate contexts, but this is because they really warrant other reactive attitudes—namely, gratitude, trust, and admiration—rather than love *per se*. This isn’t entirely a bad thing: Abramson and Leite’s view highlights how these other attitudes can change what it’s like to relate to a person in a way that explains many of the reasons we prototypically have toward beloveds. There are, however, crucial reasons of love that transcend these.

One of Abramson and Leite’s main examples—from *Sense and Sensibility*—illustrates this. For them, the solicitude Colonel Brandon shows the Dashwoods during Marianne’s illness is paradigmatically lovable: it’s “precisely the sort of character trait that would be relevant to anyone in an intimate (familial, friendly, marital) relationship with the Colonel” (Abramson and Leite 2011: 679), and its expression “towards Marianne and those she loves is key to making sense of her growing love for him” (681). The problem is that there’s no textual evidence Marianne actually does feel growing love for Colonel Brandon at this point in the novel, or at any point before the epilogue. None of her remaining dialogue is addressed to him, and in fact she only mentions him in it once, as someone to borrow books from during her anticipated life of seclusion. When she marries

him, it is with “intimate [knowledge] of his goodness,” but “no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship” (Austen 1933: 378). Only “in time” does Marianne’s “whole heart” become “as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby” (379).

“Strong esteem and lively friendship” is an excellent description of the attachment that gratitude, trust, and admiration enable when jointly occasioned in intimate contexts. To see how, begin with gratitude. While we are typically grateful to strangers for discrete benefits we don’t expect to be repeated, our gratitude to closer acquaintances is paradigmatically for informal expressions of goodwill that blend together and shape our relationships over time. If our gratitude for these benefits was like gratitude to strangers—which involves something akin to the desire to settle a debt—we would be rejecting the friendly spirit in which they were meant. Instead, we feel friendly in turn: we are broadly sympathetic, warm-wishing, and willing to help. As these feelings are mutually reciprocated over time, they become responses to a shared history of beneficence, and settle into generalized concern for the other’s welfare.

This strikes me as the basis of a promising explanation of reasons for partiality in friendship. (Compare Kolodny 2010.) Other apparent reasons of love seem likewise explicable in terms of other reactive attitudes, in conjunction with our reasons for caring about intimate relationships. In intimate contexts, reasons for trust become reasons for the self-disclosure many writers have upheld as characteristic of friendship. (See e.g. Thomas 1987; for a defense of trust as a reactive attitude, see e.g. Holton 1994.) We want to share private and potentially embarrassing experiences and opinions, and be spontaneous with others without worrying about our conduct being held against us. This is particularly important with people we admire. Most of us have a basic desire for the

people we admire to think well of us, which gives us special reasons for self-disclosure and sensitivity to the other's judgments. (Recall Alcibiades's vulnerability to Socrates's criticism, or—since we're now in Austen territory—Emma Woodhouse's vulnerability to Knightley's.) Importantly, all these responses inform, enhance, and sustain each other. People who trust each intimately are normally positioned to care for and admire each other in ways others don't have access to. This in turn tends to engender deeper and more specific forms of intimacy, thereby constituting a unified form of attachment that deserves to be called love.

Partly, Austen would agree: goodness intimately known warrants strong esteem and lively friendship. Austen's implication that this isn't love is obviously tongue in cheek, a playful jibe at Marianne's immature romanticism. But in her subsequent description of Willoughby, she identifies precisely what it lacks. "In spite of his incivility in surviving her loss," she writes, Willoughby "always retained [for Marianne] that decided regard which interested him in everything that befell her, and made her his secret standard of perfection in women;—and many a rising beauty would be slighted by him in after-days as bearing no comparison to Mrs. Brandon" (Austen 1933: 379-380). In addition to making Willoughby an archetypal unrequited lover, this element of interested attention gives the best loving relationships—like Marianne's relationship with her older sister—their depth and vitality. Marianne may feel it for her husband eventually, but when she does it will be for reasons left to the reader's imagination.

5 Aesthetic love

That Willoughby loves Marianne is evinced in how she *determines* his standards rather than merely meets them. Alexander Nehamas (2007) offers a rich account of this

phenomenon as a response to beauty. While such accounts are hardly new, they're often taken—as in Gregory Vlastos's (1973) critique of Plato—to make beloveds essentially replaceable: loving someone for their beauty is loving beauty in them, which when done properly should shift one's love to beauty in general. For Nehamas, however, the truth is the opposite: beauty essentially demands loving attention to the individuality of its object.

To find something beautiful, Nehamas argues, is to experience it as calling for ongoing, open-ended, and emotionally receptive attention to as yet unnoticed or underappreciated properties of it, for reasons that necessarily outrun one's present conception of its value. As a consequence of this attention, one's conception of a beautiful object's value becomes increasingly deep, complex, and specific to that thing—while never becoming fully determinate—in ways one necessarily can't anticipate. Since this makes it impossible fully to specify any criteria by which anything distinguishable from the object would be equivalently valuable, beautiful objects are valued as irreplaceable.

Nehamas's view similarly captures how reasons for attraction and emotional vulnerability to beloveds can be appropriately particular to them. Earlier, we saw that aesthetic sensitivity wasn't in itself the right kind of reason to get infected by a beloved's enthusiasm for ballet because it should be *their* enthusiasm that matters, not the fact that it was well-founded. On Nehamas's view, claims like these “signify that [the property] functions aesthetically here: it is a factor that draws me to you and contributes to my finding you beautiful” (Nehamas 2007: 100). In these cases, my reasons for responding lovingly to you reflect a value I see in you that might depend on any number of your properties, but which I'll never be able fully to specify as long as I'm still responsive to it.

Saying a beloved's enthusiasm is infectious because it's *theirs* can thus be the best explanation available.⁷

That said, the example is in one respect infelicitous. It's possible to find someone's enthusiasm *beautiful* without finding it *infectious*—without experiencing it as something to be *shared*. But this is what distinguishes love that values persons *as* persons from love that values them as things. (Compare Frye 1983 and Langton 1997.) Socrates's beauty makes him lovable to Alcibiades in the first sense, but not all beauty is like this. A canonical example, which Nehamas discusses in depth, is *Death in Venice*. Aschenbach is an aging writer and Tadzio a teenage boy, whose beauty provokes in Aschenbach a desire so consuming as to lead him to abandon his dignity and, eventually, expose himself to the epidemic from which he dies. "Aschenbach's passion is fueled by a particular interpretation of Tadzio's beauty," Nehamas (2007: 104) writes, which is putting it mildly. It is a paradigm case of projection, transparently grounded in desires and associations for which Tadzio is a catalyst and screen. It regards Tadzio as an aesthetic object, and is basically insensitive to his interests. At one point, it occurs to Aschenbach that he ought to warn Tadzio's family about the cholera sweeping the city, but he finds himself almost totally unmotivated to: this would deprive him of his irreplaceable object of desire.

While it would be artificially moralistic to deny that Aschenbach loves Tadzio, his love is obviously imperfect, even as a mode of broadly aesthetic engagement. In my view, this is because it fails to engage specifically with the beloved's *agency*.

7. Nehamas 2016 attributes Montaigne's famous epigram—"if you press me to tell you why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed except by answering: because it was he, because it was I"—to this indeterminacy.

6 Aspirational love

It's often argued that the values to which we are fundamentally committed—our deepest principles, ideals, and aspirations—constitute our identities as agents. This would make someone for the values with which they identify a way of loving them for who they are in themselves—for their essence, rather than their accidents. Thus, numerous philosophers—often inspired by Aristotle's (1999) view of virtue friendship—argue that people are lovable in virtue of identifying with the same values as oneself. (See e.g. Nussbaum 1990, Whiting 1991, Westlund 2008, and Brewer 2009.)

Though consonant with the evident importance of shared values to loving relationships, this generates a special problem akin to that of constancy. Beloveds whose evaluations perfectly mirror yours are boring, and lovers who expect your evaluations to perfectly mirror theirs are suffocating. Both things seem essentially inimical to love. Unanticipated divergences from your own evaluations should seem interesting, exciting, to be welcomed. But how, then, would the other's values be lovable for being like yours?

What I will call *aspirational* views of love aim to resolve this problem by arguing that a beloved's values are lovable as *dynamic*, rather than *static*: not as what they now determinately are, but as what they are in the process of becoming.⁸ On the aspirational view I defend, this is because the contents of our values can be fixed by the particular responses we take to be expressive of them over time—on condition that they remain jointly intelligible as conforming to a unified norm (Bagley 2015: 491-496). I liken this process to musical improvisation, so that the experience of a particular way of playing as

8. For other accounts of reasons of love as dynamic, see Rorty 1986, Brewer 2009, Helm 2010, and Nehamas 2016.

inchoately expressive reflects the as-yet-indeterminate character of the musical ideas or themes in the process of being expressed. Love, then, is like improvising with a partner. It consists in valuing the beloved as improvisationally pursuing the same values as oneself, and therefore in attributing the same significance to the beloved's responses in determining one's values one attributes to one's own. In practice, this would make a beloved's enthusiasm for ballet infectious because you experience it emotionally as partly defining the values you're inchoately pursuing yourself. In this, aspirational and aesthetic love resemble each other: both involve experiencing the beloved as demanding essentially individualized attention and emotional engagement, for reasons that are never fully determinate but become increasingly sophisticated and specific over time. The difference is that the aspirational lover's attention is focused on the expression of an evaluative perspective loved as autonomous, independent, and equally authoritative.

Like its counterparts, however, there are essential features of love I doubt the aspirational view accounts for. First, though I argue aspirational love necessarily involves concern for the beloved's autonomous flourishing (Bagley 2015: 504), this concern is instrumental. My concern for my friends isn't, entirely: it's largely that of reactive love. Second, the aspirational view doesn't capture the diversity of the qualities for which we love. All kinds of qualities—including ones whose appeal is exquisitely perverse—can draw you to someone in their particularity and give them a grip on your attention and desire. Even when these include someone's values, the love they prompt may be aesthetic. I love my parents substantially for the values I see embodied in their lives, but I'm not sure I love them aspirationally: that would conflict with the distance that, like many grown children, I want to maintain between their perspectives and mine. My attitude is more like that toward characters in whose narratives one has become deeply invested.

7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I've sketched what I think are five plausible sources of reason for love, each represented in the current literature:

- (i) humanity, for agapic love,
- (ii) valuable historical relationships, for loving attachment,
- (iii) reasons for intimate gratitude, admiration, and trust, for reactive love,
- (iv) beauty, for aesthetic love, and
- (v) dynamically shared values, for aspirational love.

All constitute reason to value someone as irreplaceable—whether this consists in valuing them in their individuality (agapic and aesthetic love), in the context of a concrete historical relation (loving attachment and reactive love), or both (aspirational love)—and to respond to them in recognizably loving ways. As such, all constitute reason for love.

However, none is redundant. Each, I've argued, only accounts for different subsets of what a complete theory of love should explain. If this is right, theories that appeal to different of these reasons aren't really competitors. Rather, they describe different, mutually irreducible kinds of love. Any complete theory of love will have to be pluralistic, and include them all.

This is important, because conflating them yields confusion. For example, Kieran Setiya's (2014) affirmation of agapic love leads him to reject both any quality view and (more startlingly) the moral requirement to save the greater number. First, Setiya finds it "profoundly troubling" (Setiya 2014: 257) that it should ever be irrational to love someone. Because this requires that there be sufficient reason to love anyone, Setiya concludes that reasons grounded in qualities are "redundant" (258). I agree that this

situation would be troubling, but I would find it even more troubling if I had sufficient reason to love just anyone aesthetically or aspirationally, or if just anyone had sufficient reason to love me in those ways. Because these consist in different responses than agapic love, reasons for the latter don't—again—make reasons for the former redundant.

Setiya's argument against saving the greater number—which returns us to Williams's original case—rests on a similar but subtler mistake. Setiya insists that it is rational “to act for the sake of someone you love, moved by a concern for her that is not contingent on how she relates to you. This is how I would want my wife to act if she were in your place: to save me not because I am her husband or because we have the relationship that we do, but spontaneously, just because it was me” (Setiya 2014: 266). Largely, I agree. But one thing we've seen in this chapter is how thoughts of the form “because it was *her*” can stand in for complex individualized considerations grounded in multiple forms of love. Here, it stands in for the complex, individualized respects in which a partner's drowning can be unthinkable—respects that would give her screams a singular intensity, her struggles a singular wrenchingness, her loss a singular horror. In this situation, I imagine I would be moved by considerations like these. The facts constituting my reasons for love would not figure into my practical reasoning as premises, but “motivation [by belief in them] need not be self-conscious” (Setiya 2014: 267)—it can function as a background belief that makes intelligible the motivations from which one acts directly. We can see this applies here by comparison to adjacent, deficient cases. If the belief turned out to be false—if I saved the woman because she looked like my wife from a distance—I would retrospectively regard my singular concern as an emotional misperception corresponding to the visual one. And if I felt this concern for someone

absent any beliefs about who they were to me, I would regard it as a fit of insanity. (If someone felt that way about me, I would find it incredibly creepy.)

* * *

I suspect Setiya would recognize that his argument can be resisted in this way. His aim is less to “compel assent” (Setiya 2014: 276) than to formulate an ethics of agape in terms that capture its appeal. As such, his argument significantly adds to our understanding of how love can be a source of philosophical challenge and possibility, and is in that respect consonant with my main aim in this chapter. The case I’ve sketched for pluralism cautions against forcing a richly heterogeneous phenomenon into an artificially narrow mold. This would necessarily deny part of what makes love by turns grounding, uplifting, exhilarating, sublime, maddening, and dangerous.

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