

THE COHERENCE OF LOVE

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Abstract

I examine three common beliefs about love: constancy, exclusivity, and the claim that love is a response to the properties of the beloved. Following a discussion of their relative consistency, I argue that neither the constancy nor the exclusivity of love are saved by the contrary belief, that love is not (entirely) a response to the properties of the beloved.

Introduction

Three propositions about human love are held by many persons and by some philosophers, theologians, and poets:

(1) love is constant, (2) love is exclusive, and (3) love is a response to the properties of the beloved.

In what follows I begin by stating these beliefs in a reasonably precise way. It turns out that (3) poses problems for the truth of both (1) and (2), and so I examine a number of ways to make them mutually consistent. Doing so is important because these beliefs are often meant to describe accurately the love between, say, two adults in a successful marriage or to provide a picture of an ideal, the best that humans can achieve in their intimately personal, sexual, love relationships. (The love I am concerned with does not always, and need not, result in marriage. Nor is it restricted to heterosexuals.) The question of the compatibility of these beliefs is, then, really a question about the coherence of ordinary thought about love. Note that even though the problems are caused by (3), not much is gained by rejecting it. As I shall argue, neither the constancy nor the exclusivity of love are saved by the contrary belief, that love is not (entirely) a response to the properties of the beloved.

I

Although *agape* (neighbor love and God's love) is the love most often described as constant ("Love never fails," 1 Corinthians 13:8), an intimately personal, sexual, marital love between a woman and a man has also been characterized as constant ("Love is not time's fool," Shakespeare, Sonnet 116). Despite the divorce rate these days, marriage is hardly out of favor, and love partners, probably sincerely, pledge themselves to each other in marital vows not for a specified period of time but "forever." The constancy of love is one of our ordinary central beliefs about it, whether it is meant as a *conceptual* claim about "genuine" love or as an *evaluative* claim about the quality or morality of love. Our initial definition of the constancy of love will be, then: if X loves Y at time t, then X loves Y at all times later than t.

Some modification of the initial definition of constancy is required. At the very least: if X loves Y at t, then X loves Y at all times later than t, as long as both X and Y are still alive ("till death do us part"). But Kierkegaard, for example, disagrees; he argued that the death of the beloved Y is an excellent test of the genuineness of X's love for Y; after Y's death, X can no longer expect any gain from Y, and the continuation of X's love shows that X's attitude toward Y had not been instrumental (Kierkegaard 1962, 322). Our ordinary beliefs about the constancy of love do not require, for either conceptual or evaluative reasons, that X loves Y after Y dies. Not even Pope John Paul II, who insists that a loving marriage must be lifelong and monogamous, prohibits a widow or widower from loving (and marrying) another person (*Love and Responsibility*, 212).

To say that if X loves Y, then X loves Y even after Y has died, entails that a disembodied soul can be the object of love. But the definition of the constancy of love should not be permitted to entail either that there are disembodied souls or that they can be loved; those beliefs should be defended in some other way. Mark Fisher argues (Fisher 1977) that love presupposes that the beloved is a "transcendental" self. I think that this commits Fisher to claiming that X can love Y after Y dies.

Nevertheless, a stronger modification of the definition is required: if X loves Y at t, then X loves Y at all times later than t, as long as Y remains Y—that is, as long as Y has not undergone a change in

identity and has become Z. It would be strange to insist that the constancy of love *requires* loving someone through radical changes in identity. If X no longer loves Y after Y has become the quite different Z, it seems better to say not that the love has failed to be constant, but that the love is gone only because its object is gone. (In this case, Y's changing into Z is like Y's dying.) I assume here that Y's identity through time is not merely a matter of bodily integrity or continuity; Y and the Z that Y has become may have roughly the same body, or the Z that Y has become may have the body that is causally continuous with Y's body, yet Z is not Y because Z's character, morally or psychologically, is quite different. The constancy of love means, then, that X loves Y for as long as Y is constituted by this moral-psychological identity, not that X loves whatever monster (or saint) of a person Y has become. Indeed, if X *does* love this brand-new Z that Y has become, just because X loved the earlier Y, there is reason to doubt that X had loved Y at all, for who and what the beloved is has little to do with X's attitudes (Rorty 1986).

II

The claim that love is a response to the properties of the beloved (is "property-based") means that X loves Y *because* Y has valuable properties A, B, and C (or set S of properties): Y's having S elicits X's love. More specifically, the claim that love is property-based means that the possession of valuable properties by the beloved is both necessary and sufficient for love, or at least that X's belief that Y has them is both necessary and sufficient. Properties are necessary in the straightforward sense that X would not love Y if Y were not, say, beautiful, charming, or intelligent, at least from the perspective of the lover. But if the possession of valuable properties is only a necessary condition, something else must be involved to ground the love. If the possession of valuable properties is not sufficient, then something other than *the beloved* is crucial in love, in which case the claim that it is Y that X loves becomes tenuous. Hence, "property-based" will mean also that these properties are sufficient. Some qualifications, however, are required. First, for the lover X, both the set A, B, and C *and* the set D, E, and F may be independently sufficient sets of properties, so that neither set is necessary, and no one property is

necessary, although Y's having some valuable properties or other is necessary. Similarly, property A may be necessary in the sense that every sufficient property set contains A. *Second*, when I say that a property set is sufficient for X to love Y, I do not mean that literally. The valuable properties in Y must be supplemented at least by an appropriate time and place. But these factors do not mean that love is not property-based; they are not the ground of love, but its occasion. And time and place do not figure in the reasons that X is prepared to give Y for why X loves Y. The claim that love is not property-based, or not entirely, means that something other than the properties of the beloved figures into its ground, if it has any ground at all, and those who defend this view do not argue that time and place are in fact the very items that ground love and make it non-property-based. (Ernest Gellner [1955, 160-62] argues that the logic of love *forbids* X from having as a reason for loving Y that X met Y at a certain time or place.)

Ordinary people, of course, do not say things like "Y's having S is both necessary and sufficient for my loving Y." Hence, despite the suggestiveness of the content of personal advertisements in *The New York Review of Books*, some argument is needed to justify the claim that love's being property-based is an ordinary belief about love. To start, consider what William Galston calls "the most natural and inevitable of all lover's questions: *Why* do you love me?" In part we ask this question because we want to understand the love rationally, or to make sure the other is not loving us out of despair, but also because we do want to know what it is about ourselves in virtue of which we are loved. A shrug of the shoulders, or "I really don't have the foggiest," in response to "Why do you love me?" falls flat. As Galston says, Montaigne's answer, "Because he was he, because I was I" does not satisfy (Galston 1980): it ignores the beloved's request for an accounting of her valuable qualities that elicit love, at the same time that it demonstrates a failure of self-knowledge or of candor on the part of the lover. Answering the "why" question with "because you have A, B, and C" provides the desired accounting by giving the sufficient conditions for the love. (Hatred in *this* respect is similar to love. If X hates Y, X must be prepared to say what it is about the behated that elicits X's hatred, and without which X would not hate Y. Hating for no reason at all is "pathological" (Hamlyn 1978, 16ff).

Loving without reasons may not be pathological, but it is queer nonetheless.)

It is a feature of human love, at least as we practice it, that the beloved *wants* to be loved for properties that he is proud of, or that both the lover and the beloved find valuable. When Michelangelo wrote, "If I love in thee, beloved, only what thou lovest most, do not be angry; for so one spirit is enamoured of another" (Sonnet 55), he did not need to be apologetic. People are not happy in their loves if they are not able to believe that they have, as beloved, valuable qualities that elicit love or if, as lover, they do not think there is something valuable about the beloved that makes her worthy of love. The reason for this concerns self-respect. Lovers are unable to think well of themselves if they have such a strong need to be loved or to avoid loneliness that they are willing to settle for anyone. And beloveds are unable to think well of themselves if they believe they have no properties capable of eliciting love, if they believe they are loved because the lover himself is so low in self-respect that he can manage to love only what he believes is the unlovable, or if they believe they are loved as a charity case. Beloveds want to hear that they are loved (in Plato's sense) *because* the lover finds their properties attractive, not that the lover (as in, perhaps, Sappho's view) finds her properties attractive *only because* he loves her. [The ancient clash between Plato and Sappho is reproduced today between William Lyons (1980, 73-74) and Jenefer Robinson (1983, 737-39)].

In *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer (1971, 257) writes: "The woman who complains that her behind is droopy does not want to be told, 'I don't care, because I love you,' but 'Silly girl, it's a perfect shape, you can't see it like I can.' ... The compliment is actually necessary reassurance that inadequacies do not exist, not merely reassurance that inadequacies do not matter." Given the social context in which our loves occur, a loss of self-respect often attaches to lovers who think of themselves as nondiscriminating, and to beloveds who either find themselves the object of someone's non-discriminating desire or who are nondiscriminating beloveds (those who crave being the beloved of everyone). This point applies as much or more to love as it does to sexual behavior. One who loves indiscriminately, without attention to the worth of potential beloveds, is not treating herself

with respect; one who is knowingly loved by a nondiscriminating lover has reason to doubt his own value. The fact that human love is believed to be property-based explains why people cannot comprehend an unconditional love like *agape*.

Being the object of an unconditional love, being loved regardless of any merit, is similar to being the object of promiscuous sexual desire, in which almost nothing about the object is important and anyone else could have served the same purpose. (I say “almost” because promiscuous sexual behavior is *trivially* property-based, in that “has a minimally attractive body” may be necessary and sufficient. But unconditional neighbor-love is also trivially property-based: objects of this love must be human beings.) People do not take fondly to being told by another that they are loved unconditionally, especially when they were hoping to be the recipient of a much different kind of love from that person, one elicited by their own prized valuable properties. Certainly, the unconditional lover can answer “Why do you love me?”—“because I am commanded to” or “because I am supposed to love everyone equally, and you are one of everyone.” But these answers are odd, if the question was “Why do you love *me*?” And in giving these answers, the unconditional lover is abandoning the exclusivity of love; that’s another reason we are uncomfortable with being loved that way.

The fact that human love is property-based also explains why people are forever urged to love unconditionally. The urging implicitly recognizes the harsh reality, that human love, at least as we practice it, is property-based; otherwise the urging would be pointless. (“For only God, my dear, could love you for yourself alone, and not for your yellow hair”—W.B. Yeats.) Those who urge unconditional love are not without good reasons, however. One can easily see in property-based love a devil’s temptation, an invitation to search continually for better properties in other potential beloveds, an endless endeavor. And Kierkegaard claims that a property-based love must ultimately fail, simply because humans have defects, i.e., unattractive properties. Even the most beautiful woman, who is thereby the most lovable, has somewhere a blemish, and so is unlovable. Seeing the defects must detract from any love that is grounded in the valuable properties of the beloved. From a different perspective, Kurt Vonnegut, in *God Bless*

You, Mr. Rosewater, worries what will happen to human love when, as technology advances, humans become useless and thereby unlovable—because love is property-based. His implicit solution is that humans had better be ready to progress from property-based to non-property-based love. And Erich Fromm, in *The Art of Loving*, lays out the dreary fact that in our society men love women in virtue of their beauty and women love men in virtue of their money, two property-based loves that can only end in disaster. Note that when women demand to be loved for their minds rather than (or in addition to) their bodies, they are not demanding an unconditional and non-property-based love. They want to be appreciated not merely sexually but as persons with a wide variety of valuable properties. So there is plenty of evidence that love is commonly recognized to be property-based, even if this fact is often regretted.

But a property-based love need not be an unKantian means-love or instrumentally motivated. Loving someone for her valuable qualities is not necessarily to love her for her usefulness. A property-based love need not be selfish; X can love Y, as X can admire Y, because Y has fine qualities, without X wanting something from Y. Let us not overlook, then, the virtues of a property-based love. This kind of love recognizes and responds to the merits of another person, and in that regard is uplifting. There is, however, a philosophical objection to contend with. Gregory Vlastos (1973) has argued that Plato's theory of *eros* makes no room for X's loving Y *the person*. Because, for Plato, X desires Y because Y possesses beautiful properties, X's love for Y never reaches the level of loving Y the person, but is stuck at the level of loving Y's properties. Now, Vlastos's argument might hold for a property-based love like Plato's, in which the goal of the lover, ultimately, is communion with the Good, and human loves are only stages in the Ascent. But if we drop Plato's grand vision, a property-based love does not have this objectionable feature. From the fact that X loves Y *because* Y has valuable properties, it simply does not follow that X *loves the properties* and does not love Y the person. Indeed, if a person is just the sum of her properties, there would seem to be no difference between loving Y's properties and loving Y the person (especially if the properties in virtue of which X loves Y are properties constitutive of Y's moral-psychological identity). Further, one might

even argue that loving the person *requires* that X love Y in virtue of Y's properties; in a property-based love, there is no divide between the fact that X loves Y and the fact that Y has certain properties.

If we do not always love a person in virtue of his significant, rather than trivial, properties; or if our loves are often based on artificial preferences; these facts show that we can at least conceive of a satisfactory property-based love, one that occurs within a cultural context that encourages significant, lovable human properties to blossom fully and allows us to retain autonomy in the development of our preferences (see Rapaport 1980, 386-87). "Oh hell!," says Shakespeare, "to choose love by another's eye" (*A Midsummer Nights Dream* I, i, 140). We should trust "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder," that is, only when those eyes have not been warped. Contrary to Vonnegut, our goal should not be to develop our capacity to give and receive non-property-based love, but to make sure that we are loving in virtue of the right rather than the wrong properties.

III

The belief that love is exclusive can be approached by considering the related notion that the beloved is not replaceable, which is illustrated by the following story (the story is taken from Ronald de Sousa [1978, 695], who borrowed it from J. A. Lee, who borrowed it from Morton Hunt). An anthropologist living among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia told them a folk tale about a young prince who climbed craggy mountains, crossed yawning chasms, and fought dragons, to obtain the hand in marriage of the maiden he loved. The natives were puzzled, and finally one asked, "Why not take another girl?" That the prince wanted this particular maiden and would not be happy with anyone else is what I mean by the *nonreplaceability* of the beloved. The Bemba, on the other hand, either do not have a concept of love in which the beloved is not replaceable, or they have no concept of love at all, but only a concept of sexual desire in which the object of attention is replaceable. (The folk tale might be alternatively construed, however, to illustrate the idea that love requires obstacles. If so, the Bemba's response does not indicate that they do not value nonreplaceability; rather, the value of love for them does not justify the risk of dragons. The folk tale can be modified to eliminate this

interpretation: imagine that the prince finds two equally beautiful maidens at the end of his journey, and that he loves one but not the other.)

Initially, I define the nonreplaceability of the beloved as follows: if X loves Y, then X loves only Y; i.e., $(x)(y)[(xLy \ \& \ (x \neq y)) \rightarrow (z)((y \neq z) \ \& \ (x \neq z)) \rightarrow \neg xLz]$. The clause “ $x \neq y$ ” is essential, otherwise the *definition* of exclusivity would make it true that if John loves himself, he doesn’t love anyone else. In other words, nonreplaceability is exclusivity. That love is exclusive is surely a common belief about the sort of personal love I am concerned with. Now, there are those who say that X’s loving Y does not rule out, either conceptually or evaluatively, X’s loving Z, that to claim otherwise is to assume, erroneously, that for psychological or moral reasons we can, or ought to, love only exclusively. And strictly speaking, to say that the beloved is not replaceable is not say that he is loved exclusively, for X might love both Y and Z and neither Y nor Z is replaceable from X’s point of view by Q or R. But these claims do justice neither to our prince nor to the ordinary phenomenology of love. Indeed, there is a way to formulate nonreplaceability that allows us to reduce it to exclusivity. We begin with: “Y is nonreplaceable” means that if X loves Y, then X will not love a Z who is sufficiently similar to Y. This is, for example, one of Robert Kraut’s definitions of nonreplaceability [1986, 422]. Suppose that Y has properties A, B, and C in virtue of which X loves Y, and suppose that X meets a Z who has these properties. The nonreplaceability of Y means that X will continue to love Y and will not love a Z, despite the fact that Z has Y’s lovable properties. But if so, we can assert a stronger claim: if X loves Y in virtue of A, B, and C, then X will not love Z who manifests A, B, and C to a higher degree. As Robert Nozick writes (1984, 168): “The love is not transferable to someone else with the same characteristics, even to one who ‘scores’ higher for these characteristics.” And, if we go this far, why not also say that the beloved is nonreplaceable if X loves Y and X will not love a Z who has *any* set of sterling properties?—which is just to say that if X loves Y, X loves only Y. In an intimate love relationship, the beloved is not replaceable by another who has the same properties, the same properties in a more excellent way, or even a different set of valuable properties. People as beloved are unsatisfied unless they are

taken as not replaceable in this sense by their lovers. W. H. Auden wrote, "For the error bred in the bone/ Of each woman and each man/ Craves what it cannot have,/ Not universal love/ But to be loved alone" ("September 1, 1939"). Even as he tells us we are doomed, Auden affirms that to be loved exclusively is what we desire and is our ideal. And it makes good psychological and cultural sense that people who want to be loved for their valuable properties are people who also want to be loved exclusively.

Whether or not nonreplaceability can be reduced to exclusivity, the notion of exclusivity is itself ambiguous. The basic idea is that love has only one object, but this is insensitive to time. Gellner (1955, 195) claims that love has "only one object," but does not explore the ambiguity. He also claims that the "very recurrence" of an attitude toward a second person means that the attitude is not love. This notion is compatible with (i) timeless constant exclusivity and (ii) timeless nonconstant exclusivity; but it doesn't illuminate (iii) timed (or serial, bracketed) exclusivity; and it clearly rules out only (iv) serial, overlapping nonexclusive loves and (v) contemporaneous loves. According to (i), if X loves Y, then Y was X's first love, Y will be X's only love, and X will love Y constantly. According to (ii), if X loves Y, Y was X's first love, and Y will be the only person X ever loves, although X may not always love Y. Both (i) and (ii) take "one object" quite literally. Timed exclusivity, in contrast, claims that $(x)(y)(t)[(xLy_t \ \& \ (x \neq y)) \rightarrow (z)((y \neq z) \ \& \ (x \neq z)) \rightarrow \neg xLz_t]$, which conceptually or evaluatively permits X to be a multiple lover, as long as the loves occur at different times (hence: serial, bracketed exclusivity). The exclusivity of love rules out, therefore, only multiple loves that overlap in time.

Or so it would seem. Timed exclusivity might appear to be, by avoiding extremes, the best conception; it permits X to love Y and Z at different stages of X's life without giving X conceptual or moral *carte blanche*. But timed exclusivity gets caught in the middle, attacked both by the defenders of pure exclusivity and the proponents of nonexclusivity, for serial bracketed loves can be seen equally as exclusive or as nonexclusive. The problems with timed exclusivity may outweigh its advantages. First, timed exclusivity places no numerical limit on the loves X can have, as long as they are kept temporally discrete. This is not exclusivity at all, claim the purists and

the defenders of nonexclusivity, both charging timed exclusivity with hypocrisy. Placing an upper limit on the number of bracketed loves X can or may have would seem to be arbitrary if not futile. Second, timed exclusivity places no lower limit on how long each love must last, or on how much time must elapse between each love. Again, setting such limits will seem arbitrary. Now, the defenders of timed exclusivity can avail themselves of two moves. On the one hand, they can incorporate into their notion of exclusivity a claim about the constancy of love, but this is to mimic timeless constant exclusivity and, besides, the result is bound to be messy. Or they can claim that what matters is not the number of X's loves or their duration or spacing, but their quality or intensity. But then timed exclusivity gives way to nonexclusivity, because that view has all along been arguing that it is the quality of love that matters, not the trivial fact that X's loving Y and X's loving Z occur at the same time. The purists, however, step in again: *that* is not a trivial fact, and if it's quality you want, love must be exclusive.

My impression is that a clear analysis of exclusivity will not be forthcoming. This is one motive for focusing rather on nonreplaceability and denying that it reduces to exclusivity. And to say that X loves both Y and Z nonreplaceably may not be as strange as saying that X's first love will be X's only love, or that X loves Q, R, S, and T, etc., as long as X waits a bit between each love. But it *is* as odd as saying that X loves Q, R, S, and T all at the same time, because it's the same claim, and so it runs counter to the ordinary belief that love in some sense is exclusive.

But X's loving Q, R, S, and T nonreplaceably (and nonexclusively) is quite expected in the cases of friendship-love and parental love; indeed, exclusivity in parental love is a defect. And God's love for humans is a nonexclusive love in which each of us is, from God's perspective, nonreplaceable. Even though we are in no position to define exclusivity accurately, this does not prevent it from being, as Auden says, one of our deepest desires. *Some* notion of exclusivity must make the experiences of the lover and the beloved credible.

IV

Shakespeare's "love is not love which alters when it alteration finds" indicates the tension between constancy and love's being property-

based. A love can be both property-based and not constant, as in Platonic *eros*. Or a love can be both non-property-based and constant, as in God's love for humans. But if in human love Y's having S is necessary for X's loving Y, then love could not be constant, since it would alter in response to the inevitable changes in the beloved. Love's being property-based does not *entail* that love cannot be constant, because if certain enduring properties of the beloved are the ground of love, then love will not alter. It is merely unlikely, and not ruled out theoretically, that beloveds have such enduring properties. Thus, if love's being based on enduring properties explains its constancy, there would not be much constancy to explain.

What Shakespeare must have meant is not that nothing about the beloved is relevant, but that love does not alter whimsically or because the lover has found trivial changes in the beloved. Suppose, then, we distinguish between physical and mental properties, but not to suggest (with Pausanias) that a love based on the latter is superior in quality to a love based on the former. For even if this claim is true, it does not solve the problem; that a love based on mental properties is a better love in no way preserves constancy. Rather, the idea is that a love based on physical properties cannot be expected to attain constancy while a love based on mental properties can. But this will not do; the assumption that mental properties are less alterable than the physical and provide an enduring foundation for love is not obviously true. Some physical properties endure, such as fingerprints, and some mental properties, such as allegiance to Cartesian Rationalism, come and go overnight. If what is loved is the other's soul, then the distinction between the mental and the physical solves the problem, if the soul is changeless and the seat of value. But let's try other solutions.

There is a common scenario in which both physical and mental properties are involved and which shows that in some cases there is no conflict between constancy and love's being property-based. The lovers are initially drawn to each other in virtue of their physical appearances, the anticipation of sexual activity, and shared intellectual interests. Later, when these properties no longer bear fruit, their love is sustained by the discovery that the beloved has other valuable properties, of a moral or psychological sort. But the point of this

scenario can be generalized, and the distinction between physical and mental properties becomes irrelevant. A property-based love can be constant, when the properties that elicit love at one time disappear, as long as the lover can now focus on different valuable properties, or the lover can discover new value in old properties, or even if the beloved has developed new lovable properties (either physical or mental). The love relationship is dynamic rather than static, the result of the development of the lovers, rather than the result of a permanent nature that is supposed to elicit love for all time. When X implicitly says to Y, "I will love you as long as you, along with me, try to become the best you can become," X is refusing to descend into post-nuptial lethargy. A similar idea is found in Platonic *eros*, at the second step of the Ascent, and in some romantic love views as well. Thus, the lovers need not be prepared to develop a non-property-based love for each other; on this dynamic view, it is false that *agape* or something like it must be called on to save a property-based love from its own shortcomings. (This point is contrary to the claims of C. S. Lewis [1960], Kierkegaard [1962], and Wojtyła [1981].)

I earlier defined the constancy of love as requiring that X love Y for as long as Y remains the same person. Therefore, love's being property-based does not contradict the constancy of love if X loves Y precisely in virtue of the moral and psychological properties that constitute Y's identity (see Badhwar, 1987). I do not think, however, that it is an adequate solution to say that love is constant because, or when, love is based on the properties that constitute the beloved's identity. Our loves are often grounded in a mixture of the other's essential and accidental properties. (George Moore wrote to Maud: "...it is sometimes your white hands that I remember, sometimes it is your joyous spirituality that enraptures me.") Occasionally, it is the accident of a mole (an enduring physical property) that makes an already beautiful woman the star of our dreams, and a merely accidental property (e.g., that one has become addicted to cigarettes) might make an otherwise lovable person a lesser candidate for our affections.

On my definition of constancy, how well does the dynamic view of love fare? If the changes in the beloved mark a radical change in his character, the fact that he might no longer be loved does not violate

the constancy of love; in this case it is not exactly love that has disappeared, but the object of love. X can say to the Z that Y has become: "You are not the person I *did* love and would *still* love, but someone different." On the other hand, if the changes in the beloved are developments of her psychological potential, then they are part of her continuing identity. In this case the dynamic view preserves constancy only when the lover is able to find value in these changes; otherwise, the beloved has remained the same person but the love has disappeared. The constancy of love is not, then, always secured if love is property-based.

But if love were not entirely based on the properties of the beloved, that would not guarantee the constancy of love. The general point is that no matter what love is based on, love can be only as constant as its basis, and there is little reason to think that a non-property-based love fares any better than a property-based loved. Non-property-based love is an inexplicable love insofar as it proceeds from the lover to the beloved without a sufficient basis in the beloved. It is often simply the *nature* of the lover that accounts for the love. Because it is not clear how a non-property-based love attaches to the beloved, not only is there no theoretical reason to expect constancy, but also the object of love may very well feel insecure about its constancy. A property-based love may come and go as the beloved alters, but at least we have some idea why the love has taken leave of us and we can attempt to prevent its loss by maintaining the properties on which it is based or by developing new valuable properties. But the appearance and disappearance of a non-property-based love are out of the hands of the beloved. If X loves Y unconditionally, as if X were loving Y in the style of God's love, this does not secure constancy; humans are notorious for their failures in maintaining a promised unconditional love. If love is granted as a pure act of will, only the will's constancy can maintain love's constancy. Or if love is granted because it has been commanded, only the constant fulfillment of the obligation makes love constant. The person who loves in a property-based way can be the victim of self-deception about the properties of the beloved he finds valuable, or even in finding value where there is none. But a person who claims to love unconditionally can be the victim of her own self-deception: believing falsely that it is not the

attractiveness of the beloved that grounds her love, or believing falsely that the obnoxious properties of the beloved do not continually threaten to destroy her unconditional love.

V

Let us turn now to the tension between the claim that love is property-based and the claim that love is exclusive. If love is property-based, then Y's having property set S is sufficient for X's loving Y. Even if we take into account the occasion factors, this implies that X has equally good reason for loving a Z who also has S. But to say that love is exclusive is to say that if X loves Y, X will not love Z; and to say that the beloved is nonreplaceable is to say that if X loves Y in virtue of S, X will not transfer or expand his love to a Z who also has S.

The conflict between love's being property-based and its being exclusive has been discussed in a wide variety of formulations (see Diorio 1982, Fisher 1977, Mendus 1984, and Newton-Smith 1973). The problem also has an analogue in aesthetics. A good copy of a painting has all the properties that make the original a valuable piece and that elicit aesthetic approval, and so a forgery should be thought just as valuable and should effect the same approval. And the solutions are similar: some claim that the forgery does have all the value of the original (which is replaceable), while others claim that the original is unique (at least in virtue of its history, if not other properties) and, therefore, nonreplaceable.

We could easily solve the problem by denying that love is property-based, or admitting that the phenomenology of nonreplaceability is an illusion or that love neither is nor ought to be exclusive. Before making these moves, let's examine some solutions.

Newton-Smith argues that if X loves Y in virtue of S, X will not love a later-encountered Z who also has S, either because Y was encountered *first*, or because Y has *already* done certain things for X (Newton-Smith 1973, 124). But that Y has done things for X is an inadequate solution. First, it solves the problem by claiming that both Y and Z have S, but Y has the additional property P—which sidesteps the issue. Second, since Z also has S, Z has the potential of doing those things for X as well, and we are left with a version of our original problem: because X gave Y the opportunity to do those things for X

in virtue of Y's having S, doesn't X have equal reason to give Z the same opportunity? To respond by claiming that X has no need to give Z the opportunity because Y has satisfied X's desires, is to solve the problem by denying the exclusivity of love. For that response entails that X *would* give Z the opportunity, and might even come to love Z (in addition to Y), if Y does not fully satisfy X's desires. And, as Ernest Gellner has argued, that Y came along first does not work: it implies that *had* Z come along before Y, X would have loved Z rather than Y, and the X who loves Y cannot admit this—for logical, not merely psychological, reasons. Further, to say that X distinguishes between a Y and a Z, who both have S, as objects of love merely on the basis that Y came along first, is to trivialize love and the reasons why X loves Y, because this criterion is arbitrary, having nothing to do with who Y is (Gellner 1955, 162).

Gellner's own solution is no better. On his view X loves Y in virtue of Y's having S, and does not love the similar Z, because X does not apply his reasons for loving Y to Z (Gellner 1955, 161-63). Exclusive love, for Gellner, involves the lover in a sort of irrationality: X has *good* reasons for loving Y, and these reasons entail that X should *also* love Z, but X doesn't, because X treats reasons for love as nongeneral or as nonuniversalizable. Roger Scruton's (1986, 98-99) solution is similar to Gellner's; it is based on an analogy between love and aesthetic response. If X enjoys the Beethoven Violin Concerto, X must be able to answer "why?" by specifying the features of the BVC in virtue of which X enjoys it. But these reasons do not commit X to enjoying *any* other piece of music, not even pieces having the same features. Scruton claims that X's loving Y should be understood the same way. What is wrong with Scruton's argument is that his claims about the BVC-enthusiast are unconvincing (see Nussbaum 1986). If X enjoys the BVC because it has those features, and does not enjoy any other music having the same features, we would be justified in asking X, "Pray tell, why *not*?" Aesthetic reasons, that is, are generalizable, so according to Scruton's analogy we *should* expect X to love both Y and Z. The picture of the lover that Gellner and Scruton ask us to accept is not flattering. Must we jettison the rationality of the lover to reconcile love's being property-based and its being exclusive? Must we

give this advice to the beloved Y—do not reciprocate X's love, on pain of being irrational?

There is, in fact, a fairly simple solution. Indeed, the solution is itself a fourth commonly-held belief about love. The beloved is nonreplaceable even though love is property-based because the beloved is unique. That love is property-based means that if X loves Y in virtue of S, then X has equal reason for loving any Z that also has S; but because there is no such Z, the sufficiency of S does not result in a proliferation of beloveds. That the beloved Y is not replaceable means that X will not love the similar Z; but there is no such Z that could be an alternative or additional object of X's love. *Some* tension remains between love's being property-based and nonreplaceability. For nonreplaceability implies that X *would not* love the similar Z *if* Z existed and if X met Z, and that love is property-based implies that X *would* love the similar Z *if* Z existed and if X met Z. The two beliefs are consistent only when the beloved is unique, and X is thereby never in a position to love the nonexistent Z. Nevertheless, lovers commonly think of their beloveds as unique, as if they were aware of the logical problem and assert uniqueness to solve it. And as beloveds, we want to be thought of not only as nonreplaceable, but also as unique. We do not want to hear that we are loved exclusively because we came first, or because we did things for our lovers, or because our lovers have a queer notion of reasons.

The uniqueness solution, at least in this naive version, is inadequate. Surely, people are unique because they are numerically distinct, or because they have their own genetic-historical properties. But in a substantive sense, people are not nearly as unique as the ordinary belief makes them out to be, or I see little reason to suppose they are. Ehman (1976, 19-20) frequently asserts the uniqueness of the beloved, but does not sufficiently argue that this uniqueness is substantive and not numerical or historical. I also find mysterious, for example, what the best-selling Leo Buscaglia (1972, 19-20) says:

It seems to me that ... we have not sufficiently celebrated the wonderful uniqueness of every individual. I would agree that personality is the sum total of all the experience that we have known since the moment of conception ... along with heredity. But what

is often ignored is an X factor. Something within the *you of you* that is different from every single human being.

But we all draw on the same stock supply of merits and defects in building our characters. It will not do to say that people are unique, even though these properties are widespread, because the manner or style of their combination makes each person different. For I do not find any evidence for sufficiently unique manners, styles, or combinations, but only for a limited set of family resemblances. Indeed, the complaints often expressed about the homogenization of personality (see Mill's *On Liberty*) and the conformism fostered by the media, and the attendant urging that all should strive to be distinct persons, presuppose that uniqueness is rare enough to be a matter of moral and social concern. If there is no foundation for a strong belief in personal uniqueness, the belief in the uniqueness of the beloved may be just a useful self-deception; unless the lovers can believe in each other's uniqueness, they would have to abandon either the feeling that they are nonreplaceable or the belief that they are loved in virtue of their prized properties. The three beliefs operate in tandem to sustain their love and their self-respect.

Further, it cannot be claimed that the beloved of a property-based love is nonreplaceable *because* the love is based on her unique properties. Many properties are unique but not valuable or lovable, and many properties are lovable but not unique. The properties in virtue of which we love are widely-shared properties: beauty, wit, charm, kindness, humor, moral virtue, intelligence, courage, and so forth. Properties that are unique—fingerprint patterns, the details of our teeth and bite—are not properties that ground love. Nor could the uniqueness of the beloved be a result of his exhibiting these fine qualities to a superlative degree; excellence may be statistically unusual, but it is not rare enough to produce the uniqueness required for exclusivity. Moreover, were all the remonstrations of moralists to be heeded, moral excellence would be the statistical norm, yet not for that reason any less effective or less worthy a basis of love.

Perhaps the failure to solve this problem explains why “All love is lost but upon God alone” (William Dunbar, *The Merle and the Nightengale*, ii). For if we want to participate in a love in which the

beloved is loved nonreplaceably because unique, in which the superior qualities of the beloved are the basis for love and there are no interfering defects, and in which the love is constant because the beloved does not change, the only object capable of satisfying these conditions is God. The love we attempt to practice with respect to other humans, as constituted by the four beliefs, is a copy of the way we love God. Or, the way we love God could only copy the way we love other humans. In a death-of-God era, it makes sense that the sort of love we would otherwise have for God (property-based, constant, nonreplaceability) is directed at mortals who often become god-like.

Before discussing a more sophisticated version of the uniqueness solution, I want to examine another view of love. As a criticism of men who search for the woman with the perfect set of properties, Shulamith Firestone (1971, 131) says that they never realize “that there isn’t much difference between one woman and the other, that it is the loving that *creates* the difference.” Erich Fromm (1956, 47-48) claims for similar reasons that it does not matter much whom we choose to love and/or marry. The idea that love involves a bestowal of value can be expressed in several ways. For example: Y has value because X loves Y; Y’s properties are perceived as valuable by X because X loves Y; Y is treated as unique (and/or nonreplaceable) by X because X loves Y. On this view, Y’s uniqueness, say, does not *consist* in the fact that X loves only Y (that would be a trivial sense of uniqueness, and it would beg the question by using exclusivity to explain uniqueness); rather, Y’s status as unique is a separate thing brought about by X *because* X loves Y. Because X loves Y, X asserts the uniqueness of Y counterfactually but not (in ideal cases) self-deceptively. X knows that Y is not unique, but X acts as if Y were special. This bestowal of value is not necessarily overestimation or an illusion. Treating the beloved as unique is not necessarily to attribute to the beloved, by projection or wish-fulfillment, valuable properties that she does not have. And bestowing value need not represent an agapistic element in human love, at least because the bestowal is preferential and exclusive.

As a description of many love relationships, the claim that the lover bestows value on the beloved is true. The question, however, is how to understand the phenomenon. The fact that in bestowing value on Y, X may be treating Y as unique or nonreplaceable, does not solve

the problem of how nonreplaceability is possible if love is property-based. The view is confronted with a dilemma: either X bestows value on Y because Y has valuable properties in virtue of which X loves Y (the bestowal of value is property-based), or X bestows value on Y independently of Y's properties. If X bestows value on Y in virtue of Y's valuable properties, or because X's love for Y is property-based, then we can ask why X does not bestow the same value on a similar Z. If X's love for Y is property-based, then X's bestowal of value on Y must be in virtue of something that differentiates Y from Z, and so Y must already be distinct in order to be treated as distinct. On the other hand, if X bestows value on Y *instead of* responding to Y's pre-existing value, then the bestowal is non-property-based and suffers all the problems of such a love. "Why," the beloved can ask, "have you bestowed the value of uniqueness or nonreplaceability on *me*? Why have you *bestowed* value on my properties rather than *responding* to their value?" Lovers are hard-pressed to answer such questions; beloveds are reluctant to accept silence.

VI

Another version of the uniqueness solution understands love for a nonreplaceable beloved in terms of the pleasurable shared history that lover and beloved have had together. The shared history is not a property of the beloved in virtue of which she is loved. Rather, the beloved is loved in virtue of her "second-order" properties of having contributed to, and having the capacity and willingness to continue to contribute to, that pleasant shared history. X loves Y not only in virtue of Y's "first-order" valuable properties that elicited love and have made their shared history pleasurable. Technically, the first-order properties of Y in virtue of which X originally loved Y may not be the same first-order properties of Y in virtue of which Y has been able to contribute to their shared history. X might come to love Y in virtue of the latter first-order properties *because* X loves Y in virtue of Y's second-order properties and in virtue of Y's ability to extend the history (doing so, in part, by maintaining or changing first-order properties). Because the shared history is unique, the ability and willingness to contribute to its continuation is a second-order property that only the beloved could have.

This version of the uniqueness solution explains how in a property-based love the beloved is nonreplaceable, and accounts for the constancy of love once its basis, the pleasant shared history, has emerged. But it does not provide a comprehensive picture that encompasses also love in its early stages, when shared history is meager. By drawing on several themes already mentioned, however, we can construct a comprehensive picture that describes a love satisfying all three beliefs. Love in its early stage, before the emergence of a pleasurable shared history, is elicited by valuable first-order properties. The trick here is for the lovers to admit that during the early stage constancy and nonreplaceability are always in jeopardy. In admitting this, the lovers avoid a mistake: providing reasons for love that are *ex post facto* rationalizations meant to justify what has no secure foundation and which cannot be justified, the selection of the beloved from equally attractive potential beloveds. During this stage the question “why?” is out of place as unanswerable. Indeed, declarations of love are themselves premature, merely expressions of hope. After the pleasurable shared history has emerged, the love is still property-based: X loves Y in virtue of Y’s first-order properties and in virtue of Y’s having contributed to the shared history. More importantly, X loves Y in virtue of Y’s *proven* willingness to continue to contribute to that history, a second-order property no first-order-similar Z has; X, therefore, has no reason to give Z the opportunity to generate a pleasant shared history with X. The constancy of love at this advanced stage of the relationship is secured as long as the lovers maintain or develop appropriate first-order properties and love each other in virtue of their second-order properties. None of this rules out the lover’s bestowal of value upon the beloved; but bestowal is ultimately grounded in a love that is property-based. It arises, perhaps, because the lover, in virtue of the beloved’s second-order properties, embellishes his or her first-order properties and wrongly considers *them*, rather than the second-order properties, to be the way in which he or she is unique.

But even this solution, obviously, does not secure constancy and exclusivity. It tells us only that under certain conditions a property-based love will be constant and exclusive, or it explains why loves that are constant and exclusive *are* that way. After all, the moral of our long

story must be that whether love is property-based or not property-based, constancy and exclusivity are not necessary features of love; it is wrong to take constancy and exclusivity as axiomatic or definitive of love. This conclusion is forced upon us not only by our ordinary experience of love, but even more so by the fact that neither a property-based theory of love nor a non-property-based theory of love has the logical power to induce us to expect that love will always be constant and exclusive. As much as we cherish those two features of love, we must admit that they are elusive, and that our loves are as fragile as any other aspect of our lives.

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Note

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