

1 Love

The Vision View

Troy Jollimore

1 Love and Its Reasons

Some people think that there are no reasons for love: one simply loves whom one loves, and one cannot be justified or unjustified in doing so. (We are talking about love for persons here, which is in certain significant ways unlike other forms of love.) Others, including myself, think that there are reasons for love: typically, we love other people for reasons, and when we lack such reasons there is something wrong with our love. Admittedly, one may or may not be aware of one's reasons; one might sometimes be unable to articulate them. And one person may love another although she does *not* have good reason to do so (though, of course, she might believe that she does—people do make mistakes about these things).

To say that we love for reasons, then, is not to say that people always love with reason. Nor is it to say that people in love always act reasonably. That claim is clearly false; it is a familiar fact that love is compatible with, and sometimes prompts, very unreasonable behavior. Still, even unreasonable behavior is often behavior for reasons, and the fact that love sometimes drives people to irrationality hardly shows that we cannot distinguish between cases of reasonable and unreasonable love. After all, people are often unreasonable in the grip of anger, but it does not follow from that that there is no difference between justified anger and unjustified anger, or that anger is not a reason-governed response.

Nor does saying that we love for reasons mean that we love for *self-interested* reasons. Some people assume that all reasons are self-interested and automatically hear any 'why' question as some version of 'what's in it for me?' But this is a mistake, and we should not understand the claim that we love for reasons as the claim that a lover always has some ulterior motive. What makes loving someone reasonable is not the fact that loving him brings some benefit or is a good idea given one's desires and goals. Indeed, love for ulterior motives is not love at all. What makes love reasonable is, rather, some feature of the beloved that makes him a suitable object for such an emotional response. If Beatrice loves Benedick, and does so reasonably, her reasons must be, or be grounded in, qualities that

1 Love

The Vision View

Troy Jollimore

1 Love and Its Reasons

Some people think that there are no reasons for love: one simply loves whom one loves, and one cannot be justified or unjustified in doing so. (We are talking about love for persons here, which is in certain significant ways unlike other forms of love.) Others, including myself, think that there are reasons for love: typically, we love other people for reasons, and when we lack such reasons there is something wrong with our love. Admittedly, one may or may not be aware of one's reasons; one might sometimes be unable to articulate them. And one person may love another although she does *not* have good reason to do so (though, of course, she might believe that she does—people do make mistakes about these things).

To say that we love for reasons, then, is not to say that people always love with reason. Nor is it to say that people in love always act reasonably. That claim is clearly false; it is a familiar fact that love is compatible with, and sometimes prompts, very unreasonable behavior. Still, even unreasonable behavior is often behavior for reasons, and the fact that love sometimes drives people to irrationality hardly shows that we cannot distinguish between cases of reasonable and unreasonable love. After all, people are often unreasonable in the grip of anger, but it does not follow from that that there is no difference between justified anger and unjustified anger, or that anger is not a reason-governed response.

Nor does saying that we love for reasons mean that we love for *self-interested* reasons. Some people assume that all reasons are self-interested and automatically hear any 'why' question as some version of 'what's in it for me?' But this is a mistake, and we should not understand the claim that we love for reasons as the claim that a lover always has some ulterior motive. What makes loving someone reasonable is not the fact that loving him brings some benefit or is a good idea given one's desires and goals. Indeed, love for ulterior motives is not love at all. What makes love reasonable is, rather, some feature of the beloved that makes him a suitable object for such an emotional response. If Beatrice loves Benedick, and does so reasonably, her reasons must be, or be grounded in, qualities that

render Benedick an appropriate object of love. Again, the comparison with anger is helpful: what justifies your being angry is not some fact about what you get out of it, but facts about the agent at whom your anger is directed that render him an appropriate target of anger. Even if you were in such control of your emotions that you could make yourself feel angry at will, the fact that an eccentric millionaire offered you fifty thousand dollars to feel angry at Pete does not, if Pete has done nothing that merits anger, make your anger a reasonable response in the relevant sense.¹

It seems to me a plain fact that we ordinarily take ourselves to have reasons for loving those whom we love. Ask Beatrice why she loves Benedick, and she will likely, though not necessarily, have something to say. (Not necessarily, since she might be inarticulate, or lacking in self-knowledge.) This supports the view that love is for reasons, as does the fact that we would find some cases of love baffling. If Alice claimed to love a bottle cap as intensely and committedly as Beatrice loves Benedick, we would probably disbelieve her; and if she acted in a way that supported that claim we would likely conclude that she was insane. A bottle cap, unlike a human being, simply cannot possess the sorts of qualities that make a thing worthy of love.

What kinds of qualities are relevant here? It isn't hard to name some. You might love someone for her kindness, her sense of humor, her physical beauty, her compassion, her skill at drawing, her beautiful voice, her courage, how much fun she is—or, more likely, for some combination of these and other qualities. What is difficult is not to provide a list of examples, but to come up with a comprehensive list, since there are thousands of qualities that might render a person lovable. (This is not to say that anything goes: we would at the very least need some sort of explanation if one person claimed to love another because she was five foot six inches tall, because she had been to Philadelphia, or because she had once touched a certain bottle cap.²)

I will refer to the view that when we love a person we do so for reasons as **Rationalism**. Rationalism claims that this is both how love should work and how it usually works. (It is a different question whether there can be cases in which a person loves but does not take herself to have reason to love. If they exist at all, these are, I am convinced, deviant cases. But Rationalism does not, strictly speaking, rule them out.) And I will refer to the claim that it is the beloved's attractive qualities that justify love as the **Quality Theory**. There may be other ways of making Rationalism work, but for the purposes of this paper, I will assume that it involves the Quality Theory: the reasons that we have for loving people are grounded in, and perhaps even identical with, their attractive or valuable qualities.

The view is subject to some familiar objections, many of which are based in the thought that reasons, by their nature, must be universal. The view may seem to imply, for instance, that if A's love for B is justified by Q—where Q is some set of B's qualities—then Q must give *everyone*, not just A, reason to love B. But then it may seem that all of us are obligated to love

B—and this does not seem to be the way love works. Call this problem the *Universality Problem*:

The Universality Problem. If Beatrice loves Benedick for his loveable qualities, then anyone who accepts that Beatrice is justified in doing so must be obligated also to love Benedick (if Rationalism is true).

Moreover, if Q really is a good reason for A to love B, then it may seem that A herself must be obligated to love anyone who has Q. This, too, seems to follow from the idea that reasons are universal:

The Promiscuity Problem: If Benedick loves Beatrice for her loveable qualities, then rationality will require him to love anyone and indeed *everyone* who possesses those properties (if Rationalism is true).

But rationality does *not* seem to require this; those who refuse to extend their love in this manner are not, in general, regarded as less than perfectly rational. A special case of this problem is what we can call the *Replica Problem*, which claims that the Quality Theory would commit the lover to extending her love to any exact duplicate, such as an identical clone, of her beloved. Such a duplicate would, after all, have all the same qualities as the beloved himself.

The combination of Rationalism and the Quality Theory might also be accused of encouraging, and indeed rationally requiring, lovers to swap their beloveds for others who possess even better, more attractive qualities:

The Trading Up Problem: If Benedick loves Beatrice for her loveable properties, and along comes Viola, who has all of Beatrice's loveable properties plus a few more, then reason will require Benedick to abandon Beatrice in favor of Viola—on the assumption, at any rate, that he can't love them both (if Rationalism is true).

Indeed, not only should the lover be prepared to exchange her current lover for a better model, Rationalism may seem to imply that she should stop loving her current lover as soon as he loses his love-justifying qualities—whether or not a replacement is readily at hand:

The Inconstancy Problem: If Beatrice loves Benedick for his valuable properties, then rationally she ought to stop loving Benedick if and when he loses those properties (if Rationalism is true).

One might try to defend Rationalism by biting the bullet, and claiming that the rational lover *would* exchange her partner for a superior one, love everyone who happened to possess the same qualities that draw her to her beloved, etc. But this is an unattractive strategy: a lover who behaved in

these ways would not seem genuinely to *love* at all. Love seems to involve, and indeed require, forms of commitment and dedication that are deeply at odds with the sorts of behavior that would be exhibited by this sort of rational maximizer. To properly defend Rationalism, then, we need to show that, despite appearances, that theory does not have the counterintuitive implications these objections allege it does.

My way of meeting this challenge has been to put forward what I have called the Vision View of love, which argues that love is, primarily, a way of seeing the beloved and the world that he inhabits (Jollimore 2011). To see with love's vision is to see the world with the beloved at the center, and to see his attributes in a certain generous light; but it is also and at the same time to see the rest of the world, to some degree, through his eyes, to allow his values, judgments and emotions to have an effect on *your* perceptions similar, in important ways, to the effect they have on *his*. His concerns become, to a significant degree, your concerns; his hopes, your hopes; his fears, insecurities and anxieties, yours. That love requires us to see things this way is part of what people mean when they say that love demands that we *identify* with the beloved. And this element of identification is a very large part of what makes love the profound and potentially life-changing experience that it is.

Love is a response to, and is rendered reasonable by, its object's attractive, desirable, or otherwise valuable qualities. Love places the beloved at the center of the lover's field of vision and places him in the spotlight of a kind of especially generous, empathetic attention. The empathetic element is largely constituted by the recognition that the beloved is a subject, not just an object. We are, after all, talking about love for persons. The beloved, then, has his own vision, his own perspective on things, and so loving him—placing him at the center of one's field of vision in the relevant sense—also involves seeing the world, to a significant degree, from that perspective. Since love involves the ability to see the world as the beloved sees it, and the beloved is part of the seen world, love involves a significant degree of identification with the beloved. But there are limits to this identification; sharing perspectives, in the sense of being able to adopt each other's perspective to a degree, does not mean that the lover and her partner become one. Indeed, just as the lover often sees her beloved more clearly than other people do, she sometimes sees him more clearly than he himself can manage.

Of course, the idea that love has *anything* to do with clear vision and sharpened perception will sound odd to many. The cliché “love is blind” expresses the common assumption that love is primarily a distracting, distorting, and disorienting influence on our cognitive relations with the world. If this assumption is correct, then a view like the Vision View must represent a deep error. Before we see how the Vision View helps us solve the standard objections to Rationalism, we need to look more closely at the perspectival nature of love, in order to see just what is wrong—and, at the same time, what is right—about this common thought.

2 Epistemic Partiality

The idea of love as a way of seeing draws our attention to the fact that love, like vision in general, is perspectival. We never see the complete picture at once, or even all sides of an object; we see things from one particular spot, and focusing on one thing involves not focusing on others. Since the attention the lover gives her beloved precludes her giving the same degree and sort of attention to everyone, there is a close connection between the fact that love is perspectival and the fact that it involves certain forms of partiality. Just as a person at a loud party must make himself deaf to the many conversations that are going on in order to hear a single voice, a lover, in focusing his attention on his beloved, must turn away from a great deal else that is going on in the world. The popular saying that "love is blind" captures an important truth.

Some differences in perceptual perspectives are relatively shallow and can be altered simply by turning one's head, changing the physical location from which one observes the situation, or reorienting one's hearing. Other differences, however, go very deep indeed. How things look to a person depends not just on the objective features of the situation—her position relative to what is seen, the lighting, etc.—but also on what she brings to the act of perception in terms of her own subjectivity. An X-ray does not look at all the same to an untrained observer as it does to a person who knows how to read them, who will literally see things in them the rest of us will not see. (It is important to notice that we do not need to say that either observer is seeing the X-ray *inaccurately*.) Similarly, a painting looks different to an art historian than to someone who has never before looked at a picture; a contemporary musical composition, or a John Coltrane record, sounds entirely different to someone who knows how to listen than to an untrained ear; wine tastes different to a connoisseur than to an inexperienced drinker; and so forth. The point to stress is that these are not just matters of decoding, as if we were all given the same raw perceptual experience and then went on to draw different conclusions from it. The experiences are different from the point of inception: the world just doesn't *look* (or sound, or taste) the same to the one person as to another.

One can learn to hear jazz, to see an X-ray, or to taste wine. Just so, one can learn how to read a person. A lover will be able to read his beloved—her facial expressions and gestures, the tone and lilt of her voice—and will see and hear in these things that will entirely escape the notice of others. He will know what she is trying to communicate, what she is feeling, and in general be able to interpret her expressions and gestures as events in the larger context of her physical, mental, and emotional life. Where there is some degree of doubt or ambiguity, he will be inclined to interpret these things in certain ways: more charitably, for instance.³ The development of one's interpretive abilities is not the only thing that affects one's perceptions in evaluative contexts; various forms of inclination and interest—and, sometimes, of bias

and prejudice—both arise from the process of development and encourage that very process. Learning to hear jazz is learning to hear it in such a way that it sounds good, and thus leads naturally to wanting to hear jazz. At the same time, both the ability to take pleasure in jazz and the desire to do so alter the way one listens to it. Thus, the effects of bias and those of training cannot be entirely distinguished, or set in a linear cause-effect relationship. In the case of love, the lover's inclination to regard her beloved in a positive light will both encourage and be encouraged by the development of the ability to 'read' him.

Such inclinations can sometimes inhibit and obscure one's ability to perceive, rather than sharpening it. The point at which it begins to do so is the point at which we begin to speak not just of interest and inclination, but of bias and prejudice. An ability to see the value in the works of some particular artist can become a bullheaded insistence on seeing every one of that artist's works as a masterpiece, regardless of its actual artistic merit. Just so, some parents are unable to see their children as possessing any flaws, and some patriots insist on seeing the country of their allegiance as incapable of doing any wrong. But the inclination and interest involved in perception—particularly in forms of perception connected to evaluation—need not constitute bias or prejudice; there is a rich middle ground between closed-minded disinterest and closed-minded advocacy. That some people cannot stably inhabit this middle ground is an unfortunate reality. But the fact that some people are so delusional that they cannot be said genuinely to *perceive* their beloveds at all does not obligate us to deny that this is neither the way love usually works nor the way it should work.

Moreover, while the dangers of idealization and other forms of epistemic partiality are obvious and frequently emphasized, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that detachment carries its own risks. Kierkegaard (1847/1995) at one point writes the following:

We human beings have a natural fear of making a mistake—by thinking too well of another person. On the other hand, the error of thinking too ill of another person is perhaps not feared, or at least not in proportion to the first.

(232)

To see with love, then, is to see in a way that is interested and actively engaged; but an inclination to view all persons impersonally and from a distance constitutes its own form of bias. Idealizing a person *can* mean not seeing her at all, but ordinarily it need not mean that; it means, rather, that one sees the best version of a person that is consistent with the available evidence.

Part of what love offers, then, is a way of seeing the world that makes possible insights and understandings that cannot be achieved through less involved, more dispassionate modes of engagement. As Robert Wright

points out, a parent who sees someone else's child misbehave is likely to think "What a brat!" whereas the same behavior from her own child would more likely provoke a thought such as, "That's what happens when she skips her nap." But the latter is frequently the more adequate explanation; as Wright (2009) observes, love "at its best brings a truer apprehension of the other, an empathetic understanding that converges on the moral truth of respect, even reverence, for the other" (456–457).

It may be true that most people act at least somewhat badly once in a while. And it may well be that our friend-favoring epistemological bias will sometimes prevent us from seeing these occasional bad actions for what they really are. But it might also be true that most people act quite well, and not at all badly, a good deal of the time, and that even many of their criticizable actions result from what are fundamentally good intentions, the deployment of faulty judgment in the unsuccessful pursuit of laudable goals. Our grasp of the truth of this fact may well be obscured, when the agents in question are strangers, by various sorts of biases and blindnesses toward *them*—most significantly, perhaps, our habitual lack of interest in the large majority of human beings we encounter. The practice of assuming the best of a person may indeed lead us astray in those occasional cases when a person is in fact acting badly; but the tendency to abandon too quickly the effort of seeking after an explanation that can rationalize someone's behavior and render it intelligible and even admirable, can also act as an impediment to our efforts to form a true picture of the world. It is very easy, when thinking about the actions of strangers of whose conduct we disapprove, to conclude that they had no reason whatsoever for their behavior and did what they did simply because they were selfish, or insensitive, or cruel, or in some other way bad people, and that there is nothing more to be said of the matter. It is much more difficult to reach such a conclusion with respect to a person one knows well, or whose perspective on life one manages to imaginatively occupy. But explanations like 'He is just a bad person,' while they do sometimes capture part of the moral truth of a situation, very rarely succeed in capturing all of it.

The common worry that love makes us blind to our beloveds' faults, then, tends to miss the fact that such "blindness" is actually a consequence of the lover's ability to see his beloved more clearly and to understand her more deeply. It is not that the lover pretends that the beloved's flaws—or, we might say, the features that others take to be her flaws—do not exist. They are there, but they are merely elements in a complex, composite truth; and it frequently happens that his grasp of the entire picture transforms his perception of those particular elements, much as a visual element that might be unremarkable or even displeasing on its own—a little patch of gray paint, for instance—might gain aesthetic value in the context of the overall composition of a painting.

Thus, it is not simply that the lover excuses or forgives his beloved's faults; rather, the special light in which he sees her makes it the case that, as

he sees it, many of them are not faults at all. Some of them may even be seen as positive, while others are seen as bearing little or no normative charge in either direction; they simply cease to matter. The lover will, of course, recognize that others do not see either the particular feature or the overall picture in just the way that he does. What is more, there may be occasions on which more distant observers will see truths to which the lover will be blind. Love's vision is not a guarantee of accuracy (but then, what is?). But there is considerably more than is commonly realized to be said for the view that the generous, empathetic attention that is provoked by love—the attention I have urged we should regard as being a large part of what love is—will lead more often to insight than it does to error.

3 Love and Comparison

We can now return to the standard objections to Rationalism. One common thought here is that if we love people for reasons, then we ought also to be able to give reasons for failing to love those we do not love. Thus, if Yoko loves John because he is witty, and if George is also witty, then Yoko ought to be able to answer the question "Why do you love John *rather than George*?" If this is correct, then the Vision View is in trouble—as is, presumably, any view that claims that we love people for reasons. In almost every real case, the reasons a person might cite in explaining why they love another will not be reasons that exclude everyone else she might have loved. (How many of your friends are married to or dating the most beautiful person they know?) The chances that John is the funniest person in the world, or even the funniest person Yoko happens to know, are fairly slim.

The version of Rationalism I defend is committed to the view that if John loves Yoko, then there should, and ordinarily will, be some reason why he loves her. But it is not committed to the view that if John loves Yoko more than he loves Barbara, there should be some reason why he loves the former more than the latter. According to this view, the following exchange is perfectly appropriate:

Ringo: John, you love Yoko. Why?

John: Well, for starters, she is very creative, she is witty, and she is politically committed.

Ringo: But Barbara is also creative, and if anything wittier than Yoko; and she is equally politically active.

John: (*shrugging*): Even so.

John's "even so" might stand for any number of things. Perhaps he simply met Yoko first, or met her at a time when he was ripe for falling in love. Perhaps Yoko's particular species of charm or wit speaks to him more than does Barbara's. Perhaps Yoko is more similar to him in certain important respects than is Barbara—or perhaps she is less similar. (Either can be attractive.) These are reasons, in a sense, but they are a certain sort of reason,

reasons that explain rather than justify or rationalize. The fact that John met Yoko before he met Barbara, and at a time when he was ripe for falling in love, does not make it the case that he *ought to* love Yoko rather than Barbara, though it helps explain why he does.

Yoko's charm, on the other hand, is the sort of justifying reason John might offer as *support* for his loving her. In general, justifying reasons of this sort make certain individuals fitting objects of love, but they do not guarantee that they will be loved, for there will be other individuals who are equally eligible, and which attachments end up being formed is in part a matter of such things as who happens to meet whom when. There is no cosmic guarantee that people will find the most eligible or appropriate love partner that exists at any given point in time, and love's rationality does not demand that we try, or say that we have failed if we don't. If the person one loves merits one's love, then it is reasonable to love her; the thought that someone else might merit it more is not only a thought that will not carry much motivational force for the lover, it is very likely a thought he will not even find himself entertaining.

This is simply to state the obvious fact that whether or not John's way of seeing the world picks out Barbara as a potential object of his love depends not only on her qualities, but also on such things as whether and in what way he already loves someone else. (This particular effect is present in all forms of love but is especially pronounced in romantic love, where it is commonly expected that a person will have just one lover at any given time.) Just as the lover's perception of his beloved's flaws is conditioned by his love—so that, as noted in the previous section, a lover does not simply excuse or even forgive (many of) his beloved's faults, but tends to see those particular features as not constituting faults at all—his love also influences his perception of other people's attractive qualities.

It is useful, here, to bring in a notion developed in another context by John McDowell (1979): what McDowell refers to as the "silencing" of certain reason-giving features. The idea of silencing is that, in certain contexts, a consideration that would ordinarily be motivating can fail to motivate, insofar as it is silenced by some other consideration. The reason is not simply outweighed or overridden; rather, in being silenced it disappears from the space of motivation altogether. Having been rendered irrelevant and hence inert, it exerts no force whatsoever on the agent. An example will help. The fact that some action would increase someone's happiness is ordinarily a reason for doing it—so that, for instance, there is ordinarily at least some reason to buy my nephew ice cream or take him to the movies. Of course, these are only *pro tanto* reasons; if my nephew were lactose intolerant, for instance, my reason to buy him ice cream could be outweighed by my reason not to do so if my nephew's immediate pleasure were itself going to be outweighed by the painful stomachache he would experience later. Here, although the reason in favor of the action is outweighed, it is not silenced or erased: there is *some* reason to buy him ice cream, but there is a stronger reason not to.

Suppose, though, that my nephew would also enjoy seeing me beat up his classmate, Ronald, whom he dislikes. It is plausible, here, to hold that the pleasure that he would experience gives me *no reason at all* to beat up Ronald (which explains why I would not even consider doing so, or be slightly tempted to do so). It is not simply that the pain Ronald would experience *outweighs* the pleasure my nephew would enjoy; the idea, rather, is that in this context the fact that a certain action would give my nephew pleasure is completely irrelevant to my deliberations, as the potential pleasure provides no reason at all. That making people happy is often, and indeed typically, a good thing to do need not imply that there is always at least some reason to do a thing that would make somebody happy.⁴

In the context of love, reasons often appear to be silenced in this way. The ideal of romantic love, as commonly understood in our culture, involves the idea that lovers should be faithful to one another, meaning not only that the partners refrain from having sex with other people, but that they should not even be tempted to do so. (That, at any rate, is what people frequently desire from their romantic partners; I am not committed to saying that the ideal is achievable or reasonable.) Or consider the sort of “drowning wife” case discussed in Bernard Williams (1982), in which a husband must choose between saving his drowning wife and saving a stranger who also happens to be drowning near him. Williams claims that the husband who stopped to consider whether impartial morality permitted him to give priority to his wife before diving into the water to save her would be guilty of having, in his famous phrase, “one thought too many”; and it seems to me that this idea is best understood precisely in terms of silencing: in such a situation the truly loving husband will find his deliberations so dominated by the fact that the person he loves is in immediate mortal danger that the demands of impartial morality will simply be silenced: it simply will not occur to him to wonder whether saving her is permissible from a moral standpoint.⁵

The idea that love involves silencing helps show what is wrong with the standard objections to Rationalism. Supposing that Yoko loves John because he is funny, we can say that what is necessary is not that Yoko has noticed that John is the funniest person she knows. She need not even *believe* that he is the funniest person she knows. She need not ask herself that question at all—that is, she need not perform the comparison—because it is enough that his humor simply move her in a special way. John’s sense of humor *is* special, and worth valuing, but it is not special in a way that picks it or him out uniquely; what does that is Yoko’s vision, which focuses on *John’s* characteristics to the exclusion of others. Many of Rationalism’s critics—Harry Frankfurt, for one—get this latter point right, but wrongly conclude from it that John’s wit cannot function as a reason for Yoko’s love at all.

Let us, for the moment, drop our narrow focus on love and approach these issues from a broader perspective. In holding that there are some contexts in which practical reason does not require that agents attempt to maximize value (so that Yoko, for instance, is not required to seek out the

objectively funniest human being in existence) we are rejecting a view I refer to in *Love's Vision* as the Comprehensive Comparative Survey View, or CCSV. Briefly, the CCSV holds that a rational agent, when evaluating, must attempt to occupy a detached and neutral standpoint—uncontaminated, as much as possible, by partiality, bias, or emotion—from which to compare the values of the various options under consideration. The point is to reach a decision as to which option is, from that standpoint, most valuable—it is this option that will ultimately be chosen—and in order to reach the optimal result, as wide as possible a range of options ought to be surveyed. It is only if we assume that all evaluations and decisions must be made from an impersonal standpoint of this sort that we will think that Yoko cannot take John's wit as a reason to love him without committing herself to responding in the same way to any other comparably witty person.

The CCSV may sound innocuous, or the height of common sense. In fact, it is a mistake to assume that comparing and maximizing from a detached standpoint—which is, admittedly, a perfectly rational response to many sorts of value—must always be the best available response, or even an appropriate or reasonable response, to all types of value. Indeed, we should not even assume that taking such a stance is always possible, particularly where what is being evaluated is something fairly broad and encompassing—a way of life, for instance. Imagine an utterly detached and as yet unencumbered observer, someone who has not been brought up in any particular tradition or with any particular set of values. Suppose that this “blank slate” agent tries to evaluate various ways of life, as per the CCSV. Even though such an impartial evaluator is already a highly idealized creation, she would still fall short of the requirements of the CCSV. For she will have to try out different ways of life in a temporal sequence; that is, she will have to try some before others. And unless we are to imagine her entirely unchanged by each experience—in which case, how can it be possible for her to *compare* them?—we must acknowledge that the order will matter: changes wrought on her character and preferences by earlier experiences may make her more or less disposed to respond favorably to later ones. A blank slate that undergoes any sort of experience will not remain blank for long.

But blank slates don't exist anyway. The CCSV seems to demand that we dip in and out of different ways of life as one might sample different courses at a buffet. To think this is possible, let alone desirable, is to forget that there exist values that can be appreciated or enjoyed only as a result of a long-term and dedicated commitment to a certain sort of practice or even a certain mode of life. The appreciation of some values involves the acquisition and honing of certain skills, or a process of education, or the long-term training of one's sensibilities. A way of life must be experienced from the inside in order to be fully evaluated, and from inside a way of life one is hardly an objective evaluator; moreover, there are obvious limits on how many such modes an individual can experience at one time, or even in the course of a life.

The point is not that two different ways of life cannot be compared at all. A religious believer who loses his faith and becomes an atheist, or an atheist who converts to some religion or other, has experienced two deeply different ways of orienting oneself toward the universe and will likely be in the position to say some meaningful things regarding their similarities and differences. But the order of experience is different for each, and the experiences themselves will be different in their details, and at no point during the process will either of these people find themselves occupying a genuinely detached and objective Archimedean point from which the values of the two competing stances can be neutrally assessed. Conversions and other changes of mind just don't work that way.

Moreover, the problem with neutral, detached comparisons is not just that they are impossible, given human psychological limits. There is the further fact that some goods demand to be appreciated from a standpoint that is anything but detached and comprehensive, that this is the only way to genuinely apprehend their value (or, perhaps, to apprehend one sort of value that such value-bearing objects bear). Such objects call for a response that is anything but neutral or calculating. Consider, for instance, the Notre Dame Cathedral. The proper response to such an object, it would seem, has nothing whatsoever to do with promotion or maximization. What would it even *mean* to maximize the value of the Notre Dame Cathedral? To build duplicates in other locations? To add on to it so as to make it larger? Either of these, or any other such response, would in fact be incompatible with appreciating its value in the proper way; rather than maximizing its value, they would cheapen or diminish it. Whatever the proper response to an object like the Notre Dame Cathedral is, it is a response that is not directly linked to action—not in any straightforward and obvious manner, at any rate.

Nor is it a response that seems to be thought from a detached and impartial standpoint. Indeed, the person who stands before Notre Dame thinking thoughts like "How many times more impressive is it, exactly, than the Salisbury Cathedral?" is failing to appreciate it as it ought to be appreciated. There is something deficient in the response that insists, in the midst of one's direct experience of some such object, on its being compared with something else—or, indeed, on its being objectively measured, assessed, or judged at all. The comparative stance is generally out of place with respect to objects to which the proper response is wonder, reverence, or awe, be they objects that are one-of-a-kind and thus literally cannot be compared with anything else (the "starry heavens above," the earth's ecosystem) or objects that are not unique in this way but that can nonetheless inspire a focused attention that precludes comparison with other members of their class (a mountain, *The Starry Night*, a human being).

The CCSV, then, should not be taken as an ideal for all of our evaluative reasoning. Individual persons, in particular, are not the sort of object one ought, ideally, to take a *detached* view of. Why not? In part, because

individual persons, like sublime landscapes or great works of art or architecture, are entities that call for respect, reverence, and awe. The fact that there are so many, and that we are for the most part constantly surrounded by them, may tend to blind us to this fact, but human individuals are quite unlike anything else that exists in the world, and the world would be an incomparably poorer place without them. Moreover, individual persons possess something extraordinary that even the most impressive landscape or the greatest work of art or architecture lacks: a self, an interior life. We might be struck dumb by the Saharan sand dunes or filled with quiet joy by the Notre Dame Cathedral, but we cannot converse or interact with them, we cannot inquire after their thoughts or wonder whether their experience of the world is like ours, or whether it is different in potentially fascinating ways.

The desire to be loved is the desire to be seen for what one truly is: an individual person who possesses certain particular virtues and valuable qualities, who occupies a unique perspective on the world, and who, by virtue of these facts, is a thing that possesses a genuine significance regardless of how many other such persons there might be—regardless, that is, of how tiny a thing one's existence is, relative to the world as a whole, and how many larger world-events might compete for attention and threaten to drown out one's own claims to attention. It is the desire to be seen as a thing of incomparable value: a thing that—to borrow a bit of Kantian terminology—has not just a price, but a dignity (Kant 1785/1998, 42–43) Such a way of seeing, which is precisely what love offers, is obviously incompatible with the detached, impartial perspective from which the claims of any individual would have to be balanced in a neutral way against the claims of all others, and in which, given the sheer number of individuals in the world, no one person's claims could possibly be viewed as having much intrinsic significance at all. From that perspective, in the words of *Casablanca's* Rick (Humphrey Bogart), the problems and concerns of individual people “don't amount to a hill of beans.” How awful it would be, though, if there were *no* acknowledged perspective from which the concerns of individuals could be seen as amounting to more than a hill of beans!

As an attitude that we take toward human individuals, loving is justified, not because the object of one's love is especially valuable in relation to other persons, but because each individual person deserves to be especially valued. Such valuing is a response to her value, but it is not the sort of response that justifies itself by insisting on comparing her value with others. It is, rather, a response whose refusal to allow comparison is itself justified in terms of the beloved's value, since it is the sort of value whose proper appreciation forbids detached comparisons. To love a person is to respond appreciatively to the value of an object that deserves not to be subject to the indignities of comparison, and the nature of one's valuing is determined precisely by this fact about the beloved. The true lover will not only not choose to perform actions that are incompatible with the appreciation of

this sort of value—actions including, for instance, the making of detached, coldhearted comparisons with other value-bearing objects. Since the reason-giving considerations that would otherwise motivate such actions are, for her, silenced, the true lover will not feel their motivational pull: she will not even be tempted to perform them.

4 Love's Commitments

These observations undermine the assumptions that motivate the Universality, Promiscuity, and Trading Up Problems. Since Beatrice's appreciation of Benedick's attractive qualities will silence those qualities as they are manifested in others, reason does not require her to respond to them as she does to him. She can recognize that others have the same sorts of valuable qualities, but she will not feel their motivational pull. Loving Benedick in virtue of his cleverness, then, does not commit her to loving any clever person, nor to exchanging Benedick for a more clever partner should one become available. And by the same token, I can accept that Benedick's cleverness is a good reason for Beatrice to love him, without thereby committing to loving him myself.

What are we to say about the fourth standard objection to Rationalism, that it would render the lover's commitment inconstant and unstable? If what I have said so far is correct, we should expect lovers to be naturally inclined to form and maintain commitments with their partners. (These inclinations will not, at any rate, be disturbed by the appearance of other, similarly attractive individuals; that, again, was supposed to be the Trading Up Problem.) If Benedick has noticed Beatrice's valuable qualities, and finds himself especially receptive to them, then it will be natural for him to want to be around her, to want to treat her well, to act in ways that help her to flourish, to learn to appreciate and read her even better than he is already able to, and so forth. But what if Beatrice's valuable properties change over time? What if she loses some of them? "Love is not love that alters / when it alteration finds," wrote Shakespeare; but the Vision View might be thought to suggest that altering, when the beloved's valuable properties alter, is precisely what love should do.

We might start by observing that Sonnet 116 surely overstates the case. If Benedick goes on to become a despicable, evil person—suppose he gets involved in politics, joins a cadre of fascist despots, and gleefully commits reprehensible atrocities—we would not expect Beatrice to continue loving him, nor would we blame her if she didn't. (We might well blame her if she did.) And if she stopped loving him, as she should, we would not take this as evidence that she never really loved him at all. Most of us, in fact, do not think that love should be genuinely unconditional, or think that there is a general rational requirement that a lover should continue loving her beloved no matter what.

The real worry is not that the Vision View would *permit* such a loss of love, but that it might *require* a lover to stop loving her beloved, and that it might do so under circumstances less extreme than those we have just imagined. Most of us will lose at least some of our valuable qualities over time—particularly those closely connected with youth, such as physical attractiveness or health. If these were what justified the lover's love, doesn't this love lose its justification when these properties are lost?

We must be careful here. Are we to imagine a person who has lost all of his valuable properties, or merely some of them? There are, after all, a great many things one might love about a person. We tend to notice some before others, partly because some are displayed more frequently. A person's physical beauty might strike you right away, her sense of humor may take a bit more time to be appreciated, and it might be some time before you are in a position to see how kind she has been to her difficult sister, or how her habitual conscientious actions manifest a quiet kind of quiet integrity in the face of general resistance and corruption. The long list of qualities for which the typical person might be loved is a long list indeed. Again, this list will not only include those respects in which the person in question is exceptional. Part of love is the ability to appreciate values that might go unnoticed to a less generously attentive gaze, so that even an average-looking person will look quite good to his lover, and the occasional humorous remarks of a person of no great wit will nonetheless be warmly appreciated by his friends.

That a person might lose all of the properties for which she might be loved, then, seems highly unlikely. She may well lose some, but she will also retain some—and what is more, she will almost certainly develop others. These new qualities will not go unnoticed by the attentive, committed lover. Indeed, the same generous attention that enables a lover to discern a beauty in a face that might go unremarked by many will allow him to continue to see that face as beautiful even as it ages—among other things, he sees in that face the younger face he still remembers—and at the same time to appreciate the new forms of beauty and value that will make themselves perceptible in his lover as time goes on.

We also must not assume that qualities that a person no longer possesses cannot possibly be relevant to the justification of love. To assume this would be to treat lovers as if they had no memory at all; and while theorists often do speak this way, it is very far from the truth. Holding that what one does when one loves is largely a matter of responding to the valuable qualities of the beloved is perfectly compatible with holding that one is responding not only to current qualities but also to past qualities—particularly those qualities that the beloved possessed during past stages of one's relationship, and which one therefore was able to have direct experience of at the time. People are often loved (in part) for being beautiful, but it is also possible to love someone for having been beautiful. A lover is often able to see, in a way that no one else can, the vestiges of former beauty in the face the beloved

has today. She may well be able to see that face *as* beautiful, and thanks to love's blindness she may be largely unaware of the effects that time has had on it. "Even the very simple act that we call 'seeing a person we know' is in part an intellectual one," as Proust (1913/2003) wrote. "We fill the physical appearance of the individual we see with all the notions we have about him, and of the total picture that we form for ourselves, these notions certainly occupy the greater part" (19–20). While some of these notions come from imagination, a great many come from the lover's memory: past events, deeds, and experiences shape one's perception of a person so that there is a quite literal sense in which it is frequently the case that two people looking at a third person are not seeing the same thing at all.

Given this role of memory in perception, there is no reason whatsoever for restricting the Vision View to qualities that are currently possessed. One may well be loved, valued, honored, respected, admired and so forth not only for what one is at the present moment, but also for what one has been and done. This is particularly clear when speaking of deeds and achievements: having been the person who made a discovery that saved many lives, or who risked her career, reputation, or life in taking a courageous stand, is something for which one may well be admired for the remainder of one's days. Moreover, valuing for past properties is common with respect to certain types of inanimate objects. A certain otherwise ordinary pen may be valued because it *was* owned by a significant personage, or used to sign an important historical document. A person might well think more highly of herself because she once was physically attractive, or made an important discovery, or used to possess a razor-sharp wit. And there is no clear reason why our appreciation of the values of others ought to diverge in a deep way from the manner in which they tend to conceive and appreciate themselves.

So long as we distinguish between *accidental* properties (properties one might not have possessed, had one's life gone differently) and *impermanent* properties (properties one will not, or might not, always possess), the Inconstancy Problem will not seem deeply threatening. Beatrice may perhaps cease at some point to be beautiful, but she will never lose the property of having been beautiful, and this will always be a (potential) reason—one among many—that Benedick, as her lover, will have for continuing to love her. Of course, if Benedick's love for Beatrice were based *only* on Beatrice's beauty, and could not expand beyond this one feature of hers, then Beatrice might indeed have reason to worry—even if, as I have suggested, he would be able to continue to value her for having been beautiful once she has ceased to be beautiful. (She would also have reason to regard him as being excessively narrowly focused and shallow.) But the account of love I have developed not only allows, but indeed strongly suggests, that a love that was based *only* on the beloved's physical beauty would not only be highly unusual, but would most likely not count as genuine love at all. This is not to say that love cannot be provoked by a person's beauty; in the early stages of a relationship, indeed, a person's being beautiful can constitute one of the most powerful

sorts of enticement. But if the initial attraction is to develop into full-fledged love, it must generate the sort of commitment discussed above: a commitment to coming to be able to see and appreciate all of the values instantiated by the beloved. And if this development is able to take place, the result will be an emotional attachment and appreciation that ought to be able to survive certain significant changes in the beloved—including, one would hope, the loss of his beauty. An attachment of this sort will make it likely that the lover will continue to see her beloved as beautiful even under conditions in which others would be more likely to judge that his beauty has faded, while also encouraging the lover to see and appreciate the other species of value her beloved instantiates.

5 Conclusion: Love's Reasons

Love is a complex and confusing emotion. A simpleminded Rationalism—one that saw lovers as assessing the attractions of their beloveds in much the way that shoppers assess the desirability of vehicles at a used-car lot—fails badly to adequately capture the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize love. But the flight to arationalism is no solution. Denying that reasons have anything to do with love leaves us unable to explain many of the basic phenomena of love, and would seem to commit us to the view that much of what lovers say, and many of the things they do, are in essence simply nonsense.

The Vision View claims that when one person loves another, he does so for reasons. If we thought that the lover had to value his beloved in accordance with the Comprehensive Comparative Survey view, then this would indeed be problematic. We would be led straight into the Universality Problem, the Promiscuity Problem, and their ilk. But as we have seen, that view of the way values and reasons function is applicable only in some contexts, and precisely because of the special nature of the individual human being, it is not appropriate, let alone mandatory, in the context of personal love. Love involves forms of silencing that forbid a lover from occupying an impersonal standpoint from which to engage in objective comparisons of his beloved's virtues with those of others. The qualities that provoke and justify love are among the types of value-bearing qualities that are correctly perceived and evaluated from a standpoint that is committed, involved, and engaged, a standpoint that is anything but detached, impartial, and objective. Indeed, an agent who could *only* respond to values from a detached perspective of this sort would be quite hampered in her relationships with various values, particularly those connected with personal, intimate relationships.

“There is always some madness in love,” as Nietzsche (1883/1976, 153) acknowledged. But as he went on to say, “there is also always some reason in madness.” Love, we must acknowledge, sometimes inspires unreasonable behavior; and while the close, engaged perception it involves is often a means to the appreciation of truths that could not be grasped from a

detached, objective standpoint, it can also warp and distort one's grasp of the plain facts of reality. Moreover, there is, as my version of Rationalism acknowledges, something deeply arbitrary about the history of our loves. As strong as my reasons for loving those whom I love might be, it remains true that, had my life gone differently, I might have come to love entirely different people—and with equally good reason for doing so. Some of them, indeed, might be people whom I now, in the actual world, know and yet do not love. Perhaps, here in the actual world, I do not even realize that I could have loved them. Unpredictable, arbitrary, random forces exert a powerful influence here, as they do throughout much of human life, and we are, as always, in the dark about a great deal of it. None of this, though, implies that we cannot have reasons for loving those whom we love. Love, like perception, can be a deeply cognitive phenomenon—a phenomenon in the context of which we have (and sometimes fail to have) good reasons for what we see, what we think, how we feel, and what we do—even though, like perception, love is conditioned by circumstances of our existence that, frequently, are as they are for no good reason at all.

Perhaps some will resist the conclusion that love involves reason, and reasons, for a different reason. They have fallen victim to the popular prejudice that reason is dry, logical, and cold. Don't we want a *passionate* love, as opposed to being loved for *reasons*? But this simplistic distinction between reason and passion, between the head and the heart, is really no more than a banal cliché. Like a lover of nature who stands in awe before a beautiful landscape, or an art lover awash with enthusiasm for an aesthetic masterpiece, the person who really loves a human being is overcome by passion without having abandoned reason. She sees the world as it really is, and, in thus seeing it, she loves it. When we love—when we are lucky enough to love well—the head and the heart not only work together, they reveal themselves to be one.⁶

Notes

- 1 That is, the anger itself is not reasonable. One could conceivably argue that if one had that sort of control over one's emotions, then the decision to become angry at Pete, given the financial rewards of doing so, would make the decision to become angry reasonable. If this is so, then it can sometimes be reasonable to choose to feel an unreasonable emotion.
- 2 Interestingly, cases of neutral, indifferent properties such as these are more puzzling than cases of positively bad properties. We don't understand the person who claims to love another because her social security number ends in a 7, whereas we may, in a sense, understand the person who claims to love someone else because she is cruel, or because she is racist. These are bad reasons for loving, of course, but it makes sense that if those were your values—if you yourself were a racist—they would look like good reasons. Such cases do not provoke (the same sort of) incomprehension, and so do not invite further explanation; rather, they demand rejection.

- 3 That said, lovers may sometimes be less charitable than others; or at least, they may be more critical. (Perhaps being critical, in the right way, is compatible with being charitable.) Consider the passage in Jane Austen's *Emma* in which George Knightly tells Emma that her treatment of Miss Bates was "badly done indeed." If Knightly were not in love with Emma he would not be nearly so strict with her.
- 4 For more discussion of the sort of particularism about reasons I am gesturing toward here, see especially Dancy (1993) Chapters 4–6, and Dancy (2004).
- 5 Although I consider love to be a moral emotion, I stop short of the claim that this sort of silencing can never lead to bad or immoral results. Acting out of love without stopping to consider the moral status of one's action may be what love sometimes requires, especially in emergency situations. It would be simplistic, though, to assume that love's demands must always coincide with those of morality.
- 6 For valuable comments and suggestions I owe particular thanks to Rick Furtak, Christopher Grau, Eric Schwitzgebel, and Howard Wettstein. I would also like to thank Princeton University Press for permission to make use of material from *Love's Vision* in writing this paper.

References

- Dancy, Jonathan. 1993. *Moral Reasons*. New York: Blackwell.
- . 2004. *Ethics Without Principles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Jollimore, Troy. 2011. *Love's Vision*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. (1785) 1998. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated and edited by Mary Gregor. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. (1847) 1995. *Works of Love*. Translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- McDowell, John. 1979. "Virtue and Reason." *The Monist* 62: 331–350.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1883) 1976. "Thus Spoke Zarathustra." In *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books.
- Proust, Marcel. (1913) 2003. *Swann's Way*. Translated by Lydia Davis. New York: Viking Adult.
- Williams, Bernard. 1982. "Persons, Character, and Morality." In *Moral Luck*, 1–19. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wright, Robert. 2009. *The Evolution of God*. New York: Little, Brown.