Loving Relationships and Conflicts with Morality

NINA BREWER-DAVIS *Auburn University*

ABSTRACT: Loving another person requires that we set that person apart from others, but morality is often thought to require that we view everyone as equally important. I argue that two approaches to the nature of love, robust concern and special perception, both miss crucial aspects of loving relationships: sensitivity to the beloved's response, and history of the relationship. Love depends on the beloved's attitude as well as the lover's. Shared history as a necessary condition of loving relationships addresses these problems, and points the way to more productive analysis of conflicts between loving relationships and impartiality.

RÉSUMÉ : Aimer une personne exige que nous la considérions à part des autres, mais l'on croit souvent que la moralité exige de voir chaque personne comme également importante. Je soutiens que deux façons de concevoir la nature de l'amour, le souci robuste et la perception particulière, passent à côté d'aspects cruciaux de la relation amoureuse, soit la sensibilité à la réponse de la bien-aimée et l'histoire de la relation amoureuse. L'amour dépend de l'attitude du bien-aimé et de l'amant. L'histoire commune, comme condition nécessaire de la relation amoureuse, tient compte de ces problèmes, et ouvre la voie à une analyse plus productive des conflits entre les relations amoureuses et l'impartialité.

Introduction

In *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the prince discovers a garden of roses, and at first he is unhappy to find hundreds of flowers just as beautiful as the one that he had left behind, and which he had thought was special. But later, after learning some important lessons from a fox, he returns,

***Dialogue* 52 (2013), 359–375.**
© Canadian Philosophical Association/Association canadienne de philosophie 2013
doi:10.1017/S0012217313000498

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and says to them: "You are like my fox when I first tamed him. He was only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But I have made him my friend, and now he is unique in all the world." What makes the fox unique? When the prince first meets the fox, he asks the fox to play with him, but the fox responds that he cannot, because he has not been tamed. When asked what that means, the fox says: "It is an act too often neglected. It means to establish ties." In the context of the story, "to tame" is "to love" (and describes a reciprocal and roughly equal relationship). So, the fox is unique because he is loved.

This raises a moral puzzle. In one sense, the fox surely still is just the same as any other, but after being tamed by the prince, in another sense, he is now unique, irreplaceable. Morality is often thought to require that we view everyone as equally important, and count no one's interests greater than any other. But, as the relationship between the prince and the fox illustrates, the way that we set certain others apart (and the way they set us apart) is tremendously important—there is possibly nothing more important than this in a person's life. Yet this seems to be in direct conflict with morality. How can something so central in our lives be immoral? Another way to put the moral puzzle is: does loving someone conflict with morality?

This question challenges a feature of morality many people assume to be central, impartiality. Impartiality, at least on a simple view, refers to valuing everyone equally, giving preference to none. Loving someone sometimes seems to appropriately override impartiality, while at other times it should not. If the little prince brings treats to his fox that he would not give to others, this seems moral even though not impartial, but he should not push other foxes from their den to give his fox a nicer home.

I start with the assumption that love is not an emotion, or not simply an emotion. It is possible to love someone while having many kinds of emotions towards her: I might be angry, proud, resentful, or compassionate, all while my love does not change a bit. I intend the discussion to apply to many kinds of love relations, including but not limited to romantic love relationships, parent-child, brother-sister, or friend to friend.[1] My focus is especially on loving relationships, that is, interpersonal relationships in which love is an essential feature. This is more useful and relevant to the puzzle about love and morality than considering love as an abstract concept, I will argue.

Rather than tackle this difficult question directly, I propose to start with a prior one: what does it mean to love someone? In some way, love seems to make the beloved special. In the first section, I consider two approaches to love that imply a variety of explanations for this specialness: robust concern and special perception.[2] In the former approach, love is characterized by certain desires or goals toward the beloved, while on the latter, love is a special way of paying attention to the beloved. In the second section, I argue that these approaches share two problems: they consider love to depend only on the perspective of the lover, and they are ahistorical. These omissions make these approaches inadequate for a theory of loving relationships. I suggest that one

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

way to resolve these problems is to include a shared history component. In the third section, I consider David Velleman's solution to the conflict between love and impartiality, which follows from his theory of love as special perception.[3] But this only resolves psychological conflicts between love and impartiality, not practical conflicts—in fact, Velleman's account of love seems to exacerbate practical conflicts. As a result, Velleman's view seems not to offer any substantial progress toward resolving the conflict between loving relationships and morality.

When the shared history condition for love is considered, it raises the question whether shared history with a beloved has moral value. Surely such history is valuable, but is it morally valuable? I suggest that the value of shared history lies in the personal changes that history brings about, which call for both gratitude and special responsibility. This makes progress on the apparent conflict between love and morality, which reduces the significance of remaining conflicts with impartiality.

1. What Sets the Beloved Apart?

One way to begin asking about love, appropriate for our ultimate question regarding the apparent conflict between love and morality, is to ask what it is that sets the beloved apart from others for the lover. Part of what it means for a lover to love someone is that, for the lover, the beloved is different from others. This difference might be explained by the lover's response to the beloved, or by some feature of the beloved's character, the beloved's compatibility with the lover, or the special value the beloved has from the lover's point of view. Another related question is the value of the beloved: whether the beloved acquires a distinctive kind of value, either subjective or objective, by virtue of being loved, or the lover is merely more keenly aware of the value that the beloved already has.

Some argue that the lover cares for the beloved in a particular way: she has 'robust concern' for the beloved. Robust concern is the idea that concern of a sufficiently robust degree is an essential feature of love. This is not to be understood only as a feeling or emotion, although emotion certainly plays some role. 'Concern' is a word that can describe a range of attitudes, and I use it here deliberately to describe both accounts that take love to be a certain kind of desire (specifically, the beloved's well-being) and accounts that take love to be characterized by certain goals (specifically, furthering the beloved's well-being). I combine these into one approach because 'desire' itself has a similar ambiguity: it can imply both a longing and an aim or goal, so the second type of account could be seen as a version of the first. Some views emphasize the lover's desires for the beloved, such as that good things happen to her. Hugh La Follette writes that close personal relationships "are marked by mutual desire to promote the other's interests."[4] Sigmund Freud is associated (perhaps unfairly) with a degenerate version of love as desire, where desires that appear to be love really mask other desires (i.e., sublimated sexual

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

desires).[5] In other versions, robust concern emphasizes certain goals, like wanting to further the beloved's well-being. Love, in this version, is a kind of commitment or goal. Harry Frankfurt, for example, writes that love "is neither affective nor cognitive. It is volitional."[6] The lover's concern must, of course, be for the beloved, not for herself, and the lover's beliefs about what the beloved's well-being consists in must be mostly accurate.

This approach does not directly address the question of whether the lover takes the beloved to have special value over and beyond strangers or whether the lover is simply especially aware of his value. It does suggest that the lover has greater concern for the beloved than for strangers, however, and this special concern might imply special value, at least in a subjective sense, if it gives the lover reason to act in ways that benefit her beloved rather than a stranger.

Velleman's objections to robust concern are effective, I believe. Love cannot amount to desire, he argues, because there are cases of love without desire, like loving a tiresome aunt. One does not desire to be with this aunt and, in fact, is regularly exasperated by her, but loves her all the same. Furthermore, love that constantly exhibited itself as desire would be a nightmare for the beloved, since the lover would be constantly interfering with the beloved's decisions.[7] He also argues that love need not be goal-oriented,[8] because it is possible to do something 'for the sake of' a person without aiming at any particular result. Someone might attend a church service for the sake of his dead mother, who would have wanted him to go to church.[9] He does not aim at any result in particular—he does not expect his own beliefs to be changed by the experience, and he certainly does not aim at pleasing his mother, who is dead. But he goes for her sake anyway.

In contrast to robust concern, love might be a kind of special perception or attention.[10] Velleman takes this position, drawing on an interpretation of Kant. According to Velleman, love is "a state of attentive suspension, similar to wonder or amazement or awe."[11] Most of us, Velleman thinks, erect "emotional defenses" to protect ourselves from seeing others as people just like us. What is special about the beloved is that somehow, she overcomes these defenses, even if not consciously or intentionally.

What is it about the beloved that overcomes our defenses? Velleman believes that love does not hold in virtue of anything distinctive about the individual. He writes, referring to a poem of Yeats', "We are like the girl who wants to be loved but not for her yellow hair—and not, we should add, for her mind or her sense of humour, either—because she wants to be loved, as she puts it, 'for myself alone'."[12] Love should attach to a feature of the beloved that endures while other things change, and what endures, Velleman thinks, is one's 'true and better self,' or in Kantian language, her rational nature. Velleman's gloss on rational nature is that it is the capacity to recognize others' inherent value.[13] All people share this capacity, but at the same time, each person is uniquely special, because the value of persons is a "dignity, not a price", which prohibits comparing or substituting him or her.[14]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This account of love does not imply that we must love everyone the same way, even if all people have a rational nature.[15] Rational nature demands merely respect, not love. Love is something more that comes with the 'arresting awareness,' or special perception, of a particular person's nature. By contrast, Velleman thinks that respect restricts what one may do, rather than providing a reason to do something.[16] Velleman suggests that respect and love are at two ends of a spectrum: respect is the required minimum attitude one may have toward peoples' rational nature, while love is the optimal maximum.[17]

2. How Shared History Sets the Beloved Apart

Both the robust concern and special perception approaches to love share some common features. They depend only on attitudes in the lover, and thus hold independently of the beloved's responses to those attitudes. They are also ahistorical, describing a particular condition or attitude that one might have at a given moment, rather than a pattern, and without explaining how it fits into a context of shifting attitudes toward the beloved. I think both of these features are problematic. They certainly reveal the inadequacy of these approaches to love for explaining loving relationships, in which love is an essential feature of a relationship between two people. I suspect that they are also problematic for conceptual accounts of love, but I won't be arguing that claim here.

Both of these approaches to love are startlingly one-sided: the beloved need not act or feel any way in particular. Whether love is accounted for as a special kind of awareness or as a special kind of desire, the attitude of the beloved is irrelevant. This is a problem for explaining loving relationships. Loving relationships could come in many forms: both parties may have attitudes of love for each other that are similar in intensity and quality (such as romance or friendship), or their love for each other may differ in intensity or quality, or one party may have love while the other is unable to return that love, prevented by physical or psychological conditions, or simply finds the lover distasteful or displeasing. In any of these forms, however, the beloved's response changes the nature of the loving relationship. The beloved's response ought to affect the lover's attitude in some way—if it did not, this would be problematic, if not pathological.

To see this, imagine a man who loves a woman. He devotes himself to her, learning about what she likes and finds interesting. She is a ballet dancer, so he learns to enjoy ballet as well. She likes silent movies, so he starts going to see them too. He is entirely giving and is considerate of her real needs and well-being, rather than what he imagines her well-being to consist of or what he thinks it ought to be, and he never makes demands on her. He enjoys simply walking down the streets where she has lived, as a way of being closer to her. He exemplifies both robust concern and special perception for this woman.

This describes how Benigno, the main character in the film *Talk to Her,* feels about the woman named Alicia. However, the description thus far leaves out an

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

important aspect of their relationship: Alicia has been in a coma for eight years. Benigno is her nurse, and never met her before the coma. Benigno's feelings for Alicia have developed during her coma, as he has cared for her, and in many ways he is the perfect boyfriend: he is caring, affectionate, and he has taken the time to learn about her actual interests before her coma, rather than making them up or transferring his own interests onto her. Yet he never meets her when she is awake, and he eventually crosses a line in the way he cares for her; he acts in ways that are clearly inappropriate for a nurse-patient relationship.

It is part of the fascination and challenge of this movie that Benigno is a sympathetic character who truly loves Alicia. We see the developing relationship from Benigno's point of view, so we appreciate the sweetness of his affection for Alicia. Viewed in this light, her coma appears as an incidental hurdle, not unlike the challenges faced by couples who live in different cities. But, at the same time, we know that her coma is not merely an incidental hurdle, and Benigno's attitudes and behaviour are deeply inappropriate.[18] This is what makes the film interesting and challenging to watch: the audience is led to see the relationship from Benigno's point of view, while at the same time being aware that there is something definitely inappropriate about it. This tension is, in a way, the point of the film. Benigno displays both robust concern and special perception of Alicia, but there is something wrong in the way he does it. His love for her is entirely unaffected by the fact that she is in a coma, and this makes it wrong.

The robust concern and special perception approaches to love are also ahistorical, in that they describe one particular attitude the lover may have toward the beloved without any indication of how that attitude may come about, or how long it should last, or how it fits with other attitudes someone might have toward the same person. By describing the lover's attitudes time-independently, both accounts of love leave open the possibility that the attitude is fleeting, which is inadequate for an account of loving relationships. It might even be that to have such an attitude just for a moment could not actually be called love. For a connection between two people to be a relationship, it must be over an extended period of time. A momentary exchange of glances between strangers could lead to something more, but in itself it could hardly be called a "relationship."

Perhaps relationships are simply more complicated than the concept of love alone, and these approaches to love are taking on the more modest task of describing the concept, rather than explaining how it fits into the shifting dynamics of interpersonal relationships. But there is a problem with this, if we think that love should describe a state that is steady throughout the normal changes of feeling and expression in a relationship. If we want to say that love remains constant through, for instance, arguments over whose turn it is to do the laundry, this suggests that love cannot consist only in one type of attitude, on a conceptual level. Even people who truly love each other

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

feel angry or annoyed at each other sometimes, and at such times probably would not describe themselves as having robust concern for the other's well-being, or being in a state of 'attentive suspension' or 'awe.'[19] The 'true and better self' Velleman discusses is certainly stable enough, but the lover's perception of it is what matters for his view, and there is no reason to think that would be stable.

Advocates of the robust concern or special perception approaches to love might modify or adjust their accounts to accommodate the ahistorical problem by saying that a state of love is to be found where the appropriate attitude is felt most of the time, or enough of the time, or as part of a pattern. This would be a significant shift, though, since in that case, the attitudes they focus on would be more like indicators of love than an essential feature. Moreover, it would still not address the reciprocity problem, i.e., that loving relationships ought to be sensitive to beloveds' responses. Another possibility is that an account of loving relationships is to be found in some feature of relationships other than the attitudes that the two parties have toward one another. This has its own problems, however, in that it would then be possible for people to be in a loving relationship while unaware of it. It might be possible for people to be in love without knowing it, as with the title characters in the film *When Harry Met Sally*. Even though Sally and Harry were confused about how they felt, they at least knew they had a relationship. A third possibility is that a loving relationship consists in some combination of attitudes and other, attitude-independent features.

I suggest that the shared history between two people is itself this additional feature. The significance of shared history for love is one message of the fox and the little prince's story. Recall that in *The Little Prince*, "to tame" means "to love." In this chapter, the fox goes on to explain that taming "is an act too often neglected. It means to establish ties."[20] Taming, the fox explains, is something that takes time; it requires patience, and it cannot be rushed. It happens slowly, over a series of interactions in which the fox and the prince will gradually come to know and understand one another. This part of the story, which is in many ways the central lesson of the book, takes the position that shared history is necessary for loving relationships. Shared history is also what is missing from Benigno's attitude toward Alicia: he has spent so much time caring for her while she was in a coma that he imagined they had a shared history, when, in fact, they do not. The shared history between two people is an important part of their love for each other.[21] Shared history, like love, is something that happens between both people, not only to one. It is a feature of the *relationship between* two individuals, not of one or the other of them alone, and thus it does not make the beloved a passive receiver, the way the desire and perception accounts of love do. In this respect, it represents not so much an alternative account of love as a different way of thinking about the sort of answer that is required. We cannot understand what it means to love someone without understanding what it means to be part of a loving relationship.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

3. The Conflict between Love and Morality

The puzzle introduced at the start of this paper was between love and morality. Loving someone seems to set him or her apart as special and different from others, while morality is often thought to call for us to consider all people equally, giving preference to none. One attraction that the special perception account of love may hold for some is that it seems to offer a solution to the puzzle. Along these lines, Velleman argues that love and morality converge. Velleman's position has two parts: 1) love is conducive to the impartial point of view, because 2) love is like impartiality. If Velleman's account of love is problematic for loving relationships, as just argued, this undermines his claim of convergence. His account of how they converge, moreover, raises additional problems for his account of love.

Velleman argues that love and impartiality converge because what it means to love someone is to value her rational nature.[22] Furthermore, to love someone is to *appreciate* his rational nature, not to *bestow* him with value.[23] Love involves awareness of the value that the beloved already has, rather than creating a new kind of value. So, Velleman will reject the supposed conflict between love and impartiality by denying that love is a kind of partiality; that is, he denies that love involves valuing the beloved more or differently than other people. Love does involve some differences between the beloved and others, but the difference is that of focus or attention, and not a difference of value, not even from the perspective of the lover. Velleman claims that love is a moral emotion *because* it is conducive to the impartial point of view. This way of solving the moral puzzle has two problems: it overstates the connection between love and impartiality, and it commits Velleman to the position that love actually makes practical moral conflicts, such as choosing between a beloved and a stranger, *more* difficult to solve, rather than less.

The first part of Velleman's claim holds a truth about love and the impartial point of view: loving someone can make one more aware of the value of strangers. However, love does not always give rise to a greater awareness of the value of strangers, as Velleman seems to think; in fact, sometimes (perhaps even most of the time) it does the opposite. Moreover, even when it does foster awareness of the value of strangers, it would surely be rare for this awareness to rise to the same degree of awareness of the beloved. Perhaps there are a few exceptional individuals who can succeed in becoming just as aware of the value of every individual on Earth as they are of the value of their loved ones, simply by reflecting on that love, but for most people, even those whose awareness of value is expanded by their love, the awareness of the value of strangers will probably be less than the awareness of the value of loved ones. So even if love does tend to foster impartiality, this is unlikely to rise to the degree of impartiality that is required for morality.

Not only is what connection there is between love and impartiality inadequate for morality, it is also inadequate for love. In other words, the second part

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Velleman's claim, that love is like impartiality, misses something important about love. The very special and very particular bonds that we have with those to whom we are closest are wonderful in their own right, not only because they can help us see the humanity in strangers.[24] It is something very specific about two individuals that they are able to connect with each other in that way. Velleman's account does not value this part of love, the connection between two individuals, except insofar as it enables the impartial point of view. He commits himself to this in his assertion that love is not only conducive to impartiality, but it is impartial itself. This position excludes the possibility that there could be anything more to love than its impartiality. His position suggests that love does not involve attributing any special value to the beloved, only a special attention to the value that the beloved already has. He thus must deny that the special attention has value in itself, or, in other words, that there is anything valuable about love other than its impartial aspect.

A shared history account of love gives an alternative explanation of the way love can lead to impartiality, without the implausibly strong assumptions. Recognizing a bond of shared history between oneself and a beloved can help to make one more aware of the importance of similar bonds, including bonds one already has with others. These bonds can extend quite widely, since most individuals' networks of shared histories are dense and complex. If one values these other bonds, one may come to love the people associated with them.[25] One might even start seeking out ways to connect with people and develop more or deeper bonds.

Shared history can also lead one to better appreciate the value of strangers, specifically the value of the histories they share, which may resemble one's own. The value we place in our own histories can make us more sympathetic to others' histories. One might come to see similar bonds between two strangers as valuable through imaginative identification, so that, for example, if one has a bond with one's child, one comes to sympathize with other parents' concern for their children. Learning about a parent's loss of a child, for example, can lead other parents to imagine what a similar loss would mean to them, and through that imagination, have concern for the bereaved parents.

In this way, shared history can be conducive to impartiality, even though this is not its primary importance. The value of shared history should not lie in this, since the concern for strangers that comes about through imaginatively identifying with someone else's history is unlikely to produce equal concern for all. Imagining the loss of my own child gives me some idea, for a moment, of what someone else is going through, but it is no more than a shadow of what it is like to experience it. Our relationships cannot, and should not, bear the full weight of motivating impartiality. If we were to attempt to have equal concern for all, we could be led to feel deeply about no one, leaving us only with a "watery kindness," as Henry Sidgwick put it.[26] So, although love understood as shared history can be conducive to impartiality, this is not its only value, which means that conflicts between love and impartiality can arise.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Velleman's account of love as not conflicting with impartiality commits him to strange conclusions regarding the influence of loving relationships in practical moral dilemmas. Velleman's account of the convergence of love and impartiality resolves the psychological, but not the practical conflicts, between love and morality.[27] Psychological conflict is the felt tension between concern for a beloved and concern for humanity, whereas practical conflict is the conflict in action: between acting on behalf of a beloved and acting impartially. Velleman's account addresses the psychological conflict in that it shows how loving one person may not produce tension with concern for all.

Yet the practical conflict is surely the more central concern for the moral puzzle of the apparent conflict between love and morality. Insofar as ethics is concerned with questions of how to act rightly, and love raises complications for these questions, a position on the relationship between love and impartiality must address the practical conflict. Surely an adequate resolution to the moral puzzle should at least be conducive to resolving the practical conflict between love and impartiality, even if not a complete solution; at any rate, it should not make that conflict *more* difficult to resolve. The psychological conflict may also matter, if one takes an individual's intentions or reasons for acting to be important to determining whether she acts morally.

In Bernard Williams' famous example, a man must choose between saving his drowning wife and saving a stranger. The practical conflict is that he cannot save both, while the psychological conflict is that, on one hand, he wants to save his wife, but on the other, he thinks that it would be wrong to give her special preference just because she is his wife. In the example, he finally concludes that in such cases, it is permissible to save one's wife, perhaps because it is better to save one rather than none. Or, imagine a young man who learns that his father has been embezzling, and must decide whether to turn him in to the authorities. He may experience a psychological conflict between his loyalty to his father and his sense of justice. Additionally, he has a practical conflict in that he cannot both shield his father and turn him in.

Velleman's interpretation of Williams' case reveals the problems in his account of convergence. If someone must choose between rescuing his drowning wife or a stranger, as in Williams' dilemma, Velleman thinks it is clear that he should save his wife, but not because of his love for her. So, Velleman does not think love can help resolve this conflict.[28] In fact, love actually makes the distraught husband's decision more difficult because being reminded of his wife's value as someone with a rational nature "would merely remind him that she was no more worthy of survival than the other potential victims".[29] Notice the oddness of this: Velleman is saying that for the man to reflect on the love he has for his wife would actually make him *less* disposed to rescue her.[30] On his view, then, not only does love fail to help resolve the practical conflict between love and impartiality, it actually makes that conflict more difficult to resolve. Instead, he suggests that the reasons the man has for saving his wife have to do with the "mutual commitments and dependencies

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of a loving relationship," and that the wife should "invoke their partnership *or shared history* rather than the value placed on her by his love".[31] So, while love poses no conflict with impartiality, according to Velleman, loving relationships do. One might wonder, after reading this, how much he has accomplished.

Velleman acknowledges that his account of love does not help the man choose between his wife and the drowning stranger, and that other considerations are relevant. But this result significantly reduces the value of the convergence he has argued for, while at the same time increasing the importance of other considerations that are actually helpful for resolving practical conflicts between loved ones and strangers, like shared history.

4. Shared History and Morality

If shared history is necessary for loving relationships, what implications does this have for the moral puzzle? In other words, does love conflict with morality on this account? Shared history alone does not give a complete answer to this question, but it does raise important related questions, which ought to be the subject of more sustained attention. This way of addressing the moral puzzle takes a different approach than does Velleman insofar as it does not primarily ask about whether there is a conflict between love and impartiality. Morality may or may not coincide with impartiality, and it is premature to assume that it does. Indeed, not all moral theories do make this assumption: approaches falling within the ethics of care do not, for instance.[32] Although love, as shared history, is inconsistent with the simple view of impartiality, it is consistent with other ways of thinking about impartiality, such as that we can all agree that people's histories appropriately influence their thoughts and behaviours. But even if we accept this way of thinking about impartiality, it is a separate question whether impartiality, so understood, is properly moral. Rather than getting ourselves tied up in this question, I'd like to focus on how the history shared with another person might have moral value.

Shared history between two people has significance in light of the changes and influence that they experience and bring about in the other in the course of that history. Through interacting with others, we may come to have new and different beliefs, desires, and goals, and to bring about similar changes in the other person. In a loving relationship, that history is of a sort that brings about positive changes. In loving relationships that are only partially or non-reciprocated that influence is correspondingly asymmetrical. With the right sort of shared history, that which goes with loving relationships, the influence to which love opens us has moral value, because who we are as people has been changed, and because we change the other.

What is distinctively valuable about the change in a person that is brought about through interaction with a loved one, as opposed to change that comes about internally, through self-development or personal choice? The former requires a kind of openness to others that the latter does not. This openness has been called receptive awareness, emotional vulnerability, or in Velleman's

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

words, an overcoming of emotional defenses.[33] I believe this openness is valuable, as it is better to have it than not, but it is not sufficient in itself for the value of love, since it is a pre-condition rather than a result of the kind of change that comes through interaction. It would be possible (though sad) to be open in this way and yet love no one. It is important to have that openness, but it is even more important to succeed in making that connection with another. Change that comes through loving interaction is different from self-motivated change in other ways. Loving relationships overcome solitude in a way that self-propelled change does not, insofar as the growth that comes out of shared history in a loving relationship involves *growing toward* another person, bringing both closer together.[34]

This does not yet explain why we should consider the change that comes through shared history with a beloved distinctively moral, as opposed to non-morally valuable. I think there are two ways this change can be considered moral: responsibility for one's role in changing her, and gratitude for the ways one has been changed by one's beloved (or more precisely, by the history one shares with her). If both parties in a love relationship are changed by each other, each party participates both in changing the other and being changed. This reciprocity is what's missing from Benigno's 'relationship' with Alicia: he is changed by knowing her, but she is not. In fact, Benigno is not even really changed *by* Alicia, in the sense that it is not her agency that brings out these changes in him, but merely facts about her before she fell into the coma. The fox and the little prince, on the other hand, change each other in the course of the time they spend together, and this gives them reason for special concern for each other that they would not have for strangers. Together, gratitude and responsibility provide the moral grounding for special obligations to loved ones.

This account of how loving relationships give rise to moral obligations can help explain what is at stake in conflicts between love and impartial moral obligations. A husband whose wife is drowning has obligations to her, of gratitude for how she has influenced him, as well as responsibility for the ways he has influenced her, which he does not have to a drowning stranger. A son whose father embezzled money must weigh the gratitude and responsibility he has toward his father with his responsibility to justice. If relationship duties sometimes outweigh impartial moral demands then whether they do depends on the closeness of the relationship and the significance of the impartial demand. A shared history account helps explain how to assess that closeness. The closeness of relationships depends on the degree of influence each member has on the other's mental state. In some situations, the degree of influence may be strong enough to outweigh some impartial moral demands, in the same way that helping someone based on a promise of mutual aid may be strong enough to outweigh other people's claims based on their greater needs. Sons who are close to their fathers may, all things considered, do better not to turn in their delinquent fathers, depending on the severity of the crimes.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Instead of a conflict between love and morality, we have a conflict between special obligations arising through shared history and the universal obligations we have to all in virtue of their humanity. This is not merely a change in terminology, because it challenges the view that universal obligations comprise the whole of morality. I've tried to show some relevant considerations for resolving conflicts, but this account of love does not eliminate conflicts by definition, the way Velleman tries to do. Velleman thought that this conflict could be resolved, or rather, shown never to have existed, by giving a fuller account of what it means to love someone. I have argued that his account of love, as well as special perception and robust concern accounts more generally, are mistaken, and therefore his account of the resolution between love and morality is mistaken as well. I then sketched an alternative account of loving relationships based on shared history. Shared history gives some better results, especially in practical conflicts between love and impartiality, but it raises new and more productive questions about the limits of morality.

Notes

1 For lack of more general terminology, I refer to the two members of a love relation as 'lover' and 'beloved,' despite the connotation that the former is active and the latter role passive, although it is precisely this with which I will take issue later in the paper. I also alternate pronouns for each of these relations independently, such that the lover and beloved may each be either 'he' or 'she' at any point. I think awareness of gender pronouns is particularly important in a discussion of love, to deliberately avoid the trap of thinking of the lover as male and the beloved as female, which is not even true of the heterosexual romantic relationship, let alone others.

2 The robust concern view is famously held by Harry Frankfurt, among others, while love as perception is held by David Velleman. I borrow the label "robust concern" from Bennett Helm.

3 While there have been a number of critical responses to Velleman's account of love, my response calls attention to a different aspect of his account from theirs. Most critical responses to Velleman's view expand on problems with Velleman's position that the quality of the beloved that inspires love is something that all people share, rather than a quality that is distinctive about the beloved. For other critical responses to Velleman, see (in order of publication): Kolodny, Millgram, Callcut, Kennett, Harcourt, and Landrum. While I agree that this is a serious problem with Velleman's account, I think there is an even deeper problem with his view of love, a problem that is shared by special perception and robust concern approaches.

4 See La Follette, Taylor, Soble.

5 See Erich Fromm.

6 Frankfurt 1998, 129.

7 Velleman 1999, 353.

8 Badhwar also criticizes what she calls the "teleological" account of friendship.

9 Velleman 1999, 356.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

10 This need not be incompatible with love as a kind of desire, since it could be that both are characteristic of love. However, this view does take perception to be the most important characteristic.
11 Velleman 1999, 360.
12 Velleman 1999, 363. Velleman alludes to yet another approach to love in this section, namely that what makes the beloved unique is her physical and character traits, and love holds in virtue of these. I agree with Velleman that while these traits can help love along, love is not conditional on such traits, because these can and often do change while love endures. For a defense of this approach, see Badhwar.
13 Velleman 1999, 365.
14 Ibid., 366.
15 Velleman does not discuss the controversy in Kant's moral thought over the possibility that some human beings do not have a rational nature, or whose rational capacity is limited by circumstance, such as being very young or very old, or disability, such as mental limitation or illness. This issue might complicate his view, since it does happen that people love those whose rational nature is limited in some way. This is the focus of Jeanette Kennett's objection to Velleman.
16 Velleman 1999, 359-60.
17 Ibid., 366.
18 Robert Pippin has also discussed the ambiguity of this movie in "Angels and Demons in Almodovar's *Talk to Her*." Benigno is portrayed as a sympathetic character, even while his actions are disturbed and even horrific when viewed in another light. The writer and director, Pedro Almodovar, has confirmed that, in his view, Benigno does love Alicia, in an interview in the *Guardian* newspaper.
19 Robust concern includes both the idea that one desires the beloved's well-being and one takes the beloved's well-being as a goal. The latter version of robust concern holds up better against this objection than either the desire or the perception accounts, since one may be irritated by someone while still taking her well-being as one's goal, but I think even one's goals may temporarily change during an argument.
20 St. Exupéry, 80.
21 Niko Kolodny also argues, against Velleman, for a shared history approach to love (2003). Kolodny's account differs from mine in the way he takes shared history to matter: in particular, his account assumes that the content and weight of obligations is the same for all structurally similar relationships. I think this gives insufficient weight to the particular history of two individuals—the differences in the history between one pair of sisters and another may be so significant that they have different obligations to each other as a result. Another shared history approach to love is given by Christopher Grau, though he denies that history matters because of the mutual influence both parties have (p. 251, 265); instead, he argues for a Kripkean approach to irreplacability. Another account of love as connectedness, based on Kant, is given by Rae Langton.
22 Velleman takes "rational nature" to mean "capacity to respect others" (1999, 365). This is not an intellectual ability, according to him, but a kind of caring or appreciation,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in a way that is distinctive of self-conscious beings. He bases this interpretation on Kant's equivalence between rational nature and the capacity for a good will.

23 Velleman 1999, 367.

24 For development of this idea, see Jennifer Whiting.

25 I am not taking the further step here of suggesting that one ought to cultivate love for all, but this is certainly an option, and maybe even an ideal.

26 Sidgwick, 433-434.

27 These are Velleman's terms (1999, 338, footnote).

28 Velleman 1999, 373.

29 Ibid., 373.

30 Callcut similarly expresses surprise at Velleman's treatment of the Williams example, even going so far as to call it "tantamount to a *reductio*" to Velleman's account of love (2005, 41). On the other hand Kennett, in a footnote, expresses agreement with Velleman that reasons for action "may result from relationships, rather than love," suggesting that she agrees with Velleman's interpretation of the dilemma, though she does not explain why (2008, 216, footnote 8).

31 Velleman 1999, 373, italics mine.

32 Some theorists have explicitly argued against impartiality as fundamental to morality. Kolodny, for one, argues that relationship obligations are non-reductive, by which he means they are not reducible to universal obligations (2010).

33 Badhwar uses "receptivity" (1987, 11, footnote); Kolodny, "emotional vulnerability."

34 Langton similarly argues that love is a remedy for solipsism, though her account is Kantian and not historical, in the sense I am using it here. I think that an historical account of love works even better than a Kantian one to support overcoming solitude in that this overcoming is a gradual process rather than a switch.

References

Almodovar, Pedro

2002 Talk to Her. Sony Pictures Classics. Film.

2002 Interview by Jose Arroyo. "Interview with Pedro Almodovar." The Guardian 31 July 2002. Retrieved May 24, 2011 from http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2002/jul/31/features.pedroalmodovar

Badhwar, Neera K

1987 "Friends as Ends in Themselves." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48 (Sept): 1–23.

Callcut, Daniel

2005 "Tough Love." *Florida Philosophical Review* 5 (1) (Summer): 35–42.

Frankfurt, Harry

1998 *Necessity, Volition, and Love*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fromm, Erich

1956 *The Art of Loving*. New York: Harper and Row: 70–89.

Grau, Christopher

2010 *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*. Volume 48 Issue 3 (September): 246–71.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Harcourt, Edward
2009 "Velleman on Love and Ideals of Rational Humanity." *Philosophical Quarterly* 54 (235) (April): 349–356.
Helm, Bennett
2009 "Love." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2009 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Retrieved August 7, 2011 from http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/love/
Kennett, Jeanette
2008 "True and Proper Selves: Velleman on Love." *Ethics* 118.2 (January): 213–227.
Kolodny, Niko
2003 "Love as Valuing a Relationship." *Philosophical Review* 112.2 (April): 135–189.
2010 "Which Relationships Justify Partiality? The Case of Parents and Children." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 38.1 (Spring): 37–75.
La Follette, Hugh
1995 *Personal Relationships: Love, Identity, and Morality*. Wiley-Blackwell.
Landrum, Ty
2009 "Persons as Objects of Love." *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 6 (4): 417–439.
Langton, Rae
1997 "Love and Solipsism." In *Love Analyzed* ed. Roger E. Lamb, 123–152. Westview.
Millgram, Elijah
2004 "Kantian Crystalization." *Ethics* 114 (April): 511–513.
Parfit, Derek
1984 *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Pippin, Robert
2008 "Angels and Devils in Almodovar's *Talk to Her*." In *Talk to Her* ed. A.W. Eaton, 27–44. Routledge.
Reiner, Rob
1989 When Harry met Sally. Castle Rock Entertainment in association with Nelson Entertainment. Film.
Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de
1943 *The Little Prince*. Trans. Katherine Woods. Harcourt Brace.
Sidgwick, Henry
1981 *The Methods of Ethics*. Hackett,
Soble, Alan
1997 "Union, Autonomy, and Concern." In *Love Analyzed* ed. Roger E. Lamb. Westview.
Taylor, Gabriele
1976 "Love." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*.
Velleman, J. David
1999 "Love as a Moral Emotion." *Ethics*, 109 (January): 338–374.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press

2008 "Beyond Price." *Ethics* 118.2 (January): 191–212.

Whiting, Jennifer

1986 "Friends and Future Selves." *The Philosophical Review* XCV (4) (October): 547–580.

Williams, Bernard

1976 "Persons, Character and Morality." In *Identities of Persons* ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, 197–216. Berkeley: University of California Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217313000498 Published online by Cambridge University Press