

Universal Love as a Moral Ideal

by

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## ABSTRACT

Moral philosophy should create concepts and formulate arguments to articulate and assess the statements and behaviors of the morally devoted and the traditions (such as religious and ethical systems) founded by the morally devoted. Many moral devotees and their traditions advocate love as the ideal to live by. Therefore, moral philosophy needs an account of love as an ideal. I define an ideal as an instrument for organizing a life and show that this definition is more adequate than previous definitions. Ideals can be founded on virtues, and I show that love is a virtue.

I define love as a composite attitude whose elements are benevolence, consideration, perception of moment (importance or significance), and receptivity. I define receptivity as the ability to be with someone without imposing careless or compulsive expectations. I argue that receptivity curbs the excesses and supplements the defects of the other elements. Love as an ideal is often understood as universal love.

However, there are three problems with universal love: it could be too demanding, it could prevent intimacy and special relationships, and it could require a person to love their abuser. I argue that love can be extended to all human beings without posing unacceptable risks, once love is correctly defined and the ideal correctly understood.

Because of the revelations of ecology and the ongoing transformation of sensibilities about the value of the nonhuman, love should be extended to the nonhuman. I argue that love can be given to the nonhuman in the same way it is to the human, with appropriate variations. But how much of the nonhuman would an ideal direct one to love? I argue for two limits to universal love: it does not make sense to extend it to nonliving things, and it can be extended to all living things. I show that loving all living things does not depend on whether they can reciprocate, and I argue that it would not prevent one from living a recognizably human life.

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“Well you know I have a love  
A love for everyone I know”  
—Bonnie Prince Billy

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## CHAPTER 1

### IDEALS, VIRTUES, AND THE USES OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY

#### **Introduction**

My goal is to explain and justify universal love as a moral ideal—to explain its logic and to justify its moral acceptability. Whether it is the best ideal, if there is such a thing, or whether one ought to live by it, is up to the reader. I am embarrassed to say that, regarding those further questions, I have reached no conclusions.

In this chapter, I first explain what I take to be an urgent purpose of moral philosophy: to articulate, assess, and perhaps justify the beliefs, value systems, and traditions of moral devotees. I show that many moral zealots enjoin us to live according to love. I then suggest that they mean we should take love as a moral ideal. I offer an account of ideals that I take to be more complete and basic than those offered heretofore: an ideal is neither a perfected self-conception nor a means of comparing the real world to a perfect world but is rather a means of giving structure to life. I conclude by showing that some ideals are based on a virtue and that the ideal of universal love is based on universal love as a virtue.

A word about love's variety: Few words in English are as messy and recalcitrant as "love," if only because it is put to so many different and sometimes conflicted purposes. As might be clear from my insistence in a later section that moral philosophy is not a branch of applied linguistics, I decline the project of defining the English word or relying on its everyday uses. There will be many cases of an attitude that an English-speaker could correctly call "love" that do not faintly resemble the attitude discussed in this dissertation. If, at any time, it seems as if I have dismissed an attitude as not counting as love, or falling short of the best way love



can be, remember that I am using the word in this dissertation to refer to the kind of attitude that moral devotees have enjoined, not to each of its manifold referents.

### **Love outside the Academy**

There can be contrast between what academic philosophers most thoroughly discuss as important and what people outside academic philosophy take as important. It behooves moral philosophers to consider such contrast.

In my opinion, the merit of doing so is not that philosophers must turn back to the simplicity of ordinary language or, in the grating parlance du jour, “the folk.” There is no harm in refining a thought experiment like the trolley problem ever finer, or in trying to describe the process of agential decision-making ever more completely. And, although academic philosophy could turn greater resources toward the discussion of pressing problems, there is no reason to abandon abstracted projects so that everyone will be doing something “applied.” But both abstracted and applied ethics can benefit from paying attention to what other kinds of people care about. This can remind us of what really matters, not just to colleagues who have assented to the assumptions proposed in a paper we have all read, but to people whose decisions get dirt under their fingernails.

Which people? Emphatically not anyone and everyone, the supposed holders of “intuitions” to whom Anglophone philosophy often professes to appeal.<sup>1</sup> As Iris Murdoch (1970: 50) says about moral philosophy that attempts nothing but the systematization of everyday utterances, “it is...not surprising that a philosophy which analyses moral concepts on the basis of ordinary language should present a relaxed picture of a mediocre achievement.” Moral philosophy can turn upon moral matters a set of powerful instruments, sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> See Tobia, Buckwalter, and Stitch (2013) for reservations about philosophical appeals to intuitions.

destructive, sometimes creative, always critical and rational. It should do so not in order to reaffirm the complacent commonplaces of ordinary speech but in order to assess, qualify, systematize, and sometimes support what is said by individuals outstanding in their devotion to morality.

If one wanted to know the procedures, successes, failures, and standards of science, then, philosophers as different as Thomas Kuhn and Imre Lakatos agree, a good place to start is to study the doings and utterances of people who have spent a lifetime on scientific work. Quine might be right that such scientific work is sometimes a refinement of reasoning of which all people are capable and that is exercised in daily life. But, if everyone can once in a while produce an explanation that links an obscure cause to a surprising effect, such occasional fitful gestures of a common “intuitive” scientific ability will not be as good an example as, for instance, the researches of a Lavoisier or a Faraday. If moral understanding is the discovery of laws, analogous to scientific understanding, then someone who consistently spends life experimenting with and inquiring into moral laws, whose life and vocation is concentrated on this purpose, should be a better resource for moral philosophy than the rest of us, who use it now and then.

Or, to take what I think is a better analogy: If one wanted to understand beauty and art, the best starting place for systematic reflection would be the labors and thoughts of great artists. I have been surprised how many people put beauty into their lives and fashion things into artwork; perhaps most people can and do. But most people do not devote a life to broadening, or sharpening, their artistic powers. The people usually called “artists” make their life’s work the perfection of technique and the power to communicate meaning necessary for great art. The moral devotee is someone who directs their life toward the perfection of moral technique and the importation of moral value into material conditions.

An artist need not make consistently good art. Some of the greatest artists produce some of the worst failures, in addition to their best work. Nor is it the case that they always exhibit a good artistic sense and love of beauty or art in every aspect of life. A painter whose paintings display a flawless minimalism might choose to live in cluttered squalor. But there is much to be learned from the failures of great artists, and there is something to be learned about the artistic vocation from a discrepancy between public achievement and private life. The same is true of a moral devotee. We will later talk about the failures and hypocrisies of some people who spent their lives trying to make the world more just. We can learn from the failures of the moral devotee just as we can from their successes.

For this reason, a moral devotee is not the same as a moral exemplar. Real people are not flawless models for moral imitation. But the complexities of the challenges they face, and the reality of these challenges, can be more instructive than the nuanced, intimate, but artificially constructed lives of fictitious characters, just as the achievements of a real scientist are usually more instructive than the achievements of a protagonist in science fiction.

As I conceive of it, then, moral philosophy should aim for more than an account that justifies and systematizes what passes for common sense. Rather, it should respond to the voices that cry in the wilderness. In short, it should pay special attention to moral devotees or to the schools or traditions they founded.

This gives us even more reason to philosophize about universal love, because an unusual number of moral devotees and the traditions that accrued around them regard love as the most important part of life. This is true of major religions and of recent attempts at racial justice.

Christianity might come first to mind. The Christian emphasis on love goes back to its foundation. Jesus of Nazareth is reported as saying that the most important of all

commandments is to love God wholeheartedly and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:29-31, quoting Deuteronomy (Devarim) 6:4-5 and Leviticus (Vayikra) 19:18). To the thought of the Johannine author(s) whose gospel and letters comprise a good portion of the Christian Testament, love is the only test of righteousness (e.g. 1 John 4:7). Paul of Tarsus, the other major contributor to the Christian Testament, likewise regards love as "the most excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). This teaching is not left buried in the text but is frequently espoused in popular Christianity. Christians in America, for instance, might be found singing the Gospel song "Old-Time Religion" as sung by Etta James: "Give me that old-time religion / ...Makes me love everybody, / It's good enough for me."

Love is a central part of morality in Judaism also. A form of compassionate, loyal, and benevolent love, called *chesed*, is key to Jewish ethical thought. For instance, the canonical Hebrew prophet Mikha writes that *chesed* is one of only three things God requires; the other two things are justice in human affairs and humility before God (Micah 6:8). The Babylonian Talmud, the central non-biblical text of Judaism until modern times, quotes Rabbi Simlai as saying that "Torah [God's moral law] begins with *chesed* and ends with *chesed*" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sotah 14a).

In the Hindu tradition, the Bhagavad Gita refers to a form of love as *bhakti* and treats it as one legitimate spiritual and ethical ideal along with others such as contemplative practices (*jnana*). Lord Krishna, the god whose speeches make up most of the book, even says that nobody knows the divine better than those who arrive at the divine by the practices of love (9:34 and 12:2; see Singh 2005).

Among Americans attempting racial justice, some of the most respected have treated love as central to morality. This affects the way they attempt to create racial justice.<sup>2</sup>

Martin Luther King Jr (1958, 1963) adopts the ethic of nonviolence promoted by Leo Tolstoy (1960 [1894]), Mohandas Gandhi (1949), and fellow American civil rights thinker Howard Thurman (1949). He argues that what he calls “creative love,” based on the Christian conception of *agapé*, would resolve America’s racial conflicts and injustices. If we could love one another, we could overcome the habits of contempt and mistrust we have been trained into. If white people could learn to love people of color, then they could escape their race prejudice and learn to respect people of color. If people of color could love white people, then they could invoke or create white people’s capacity to love them. Thus, love—respect for a person as an individual plus a committed desire to help them be the best they can be—could resolve the conflicts in small-scale, intimate relationships and could cure the society-wide diseases caused by oppression and bad ideology.

Of course, for King, this is not easily accomplished. Nor is it a matter of submission or complacency. It involves confronting the ignorant with hard truths, being willing to work alongside allies, opposing or interfering with oppressors. The point is that, for King, activism should be the result of a deep, internalized love for all people.

King is the most famous (and popularly misunderstood) advocate of universal love in the American civil rights movement, but he is not the only one. James Baldwin (1963) similarly advocates a love ethic which includes forgiveness, beneficence, and well-intentioned confrontation with oppressors—in the American context, white people. Baldwin further

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to the authors considered at length here, see Cornel West (1982) and Kristie Dotson (2013) among others.

emphasizes the need to approach white people as individuals, not assuming that they are opponents when they might be allies.

While there is obvious political prudence in doing so, Baldwin seems more interested in the moral value of encountering all people as individuals. By extension, by default we might say, this includes white individuals too. In one memorable passage of *The Fire Next Time* (60-79), Baldwin contrasts his own approach with what he perceives as the appealing but dangerous racial hierarchy promoted by Elijah Muhammad. At a dinner party, Elijah Muhammad characterizes all white people as devils beyond redemption. Baldwin is at the same dinner party but is later going to spend time with some white friends. Baldwin regards his own perspective as less attractive given the history of white supremacy; at the same time, he regards it as more morally insightful and more attentive to the complex details of interpersonal life than a dogmatic attribution of group traits to each individual within the group.

More recently, bell hooks (1994, 2000) advocates a love ethic on a number of grounds. She treats love as a means to transforming American society. Only with love, she argues, can we create relations which are not based on domination or hierarchy. This is because, she says, only love allows us to be humble and vulnerable enough to counteract our impulses toward projecting our faults onto the other or despising the other (1994: 243-250 and 2000: 163-166). She also explores the ways it can heal the soul of the oppressed. It can help them undo the bigotry and self-hatred which society has caused them to internalize (2000: 243-250). Further, for hooks, the vulnerable honesty, trust, and mutuality of love make it a necessary part of human happiness. The struggle is not so much to find it in one's heart to love one's enemies as it is to find the strength to overcome habits of mistrust, self-reliance, and a focus on lower-order pleasures, all of which are self-destructive habits inculcated by histories of betrayal or oppression.

Have philosophers heard these calls to love and responded with extensive, thorough theoretical work? Or is there a gap that needs to be filled?

### **Philosophers Talk about Love**

Philosophical treatments of love fall into two groups. Some philosophers do not consider love a part of morality. They take love to be extra-moral, outside morality. Other philosophers consider love intra-moral, a part of morality.

This division is not wholly exhaustive, because it does not account for philosophers who probably do not share the usual contemporary understanding of morality. For instance, Aristotle devotes books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to *philia* (φιλία), a kind of love. But Aristotle is mainly concerned with the ingredients of a good life. Although there is something in common between his understanding of ethical investigation and ours—he is not in a wholly alien conceptual space—it is doubtful whether he shares the way of conceiving morality which we have inherited dually from Roman and Christian thought (Anscombe 1958). Nevertheless, the division can serve as a guide to much modern and contemporary work.

Extra-moral theories of love fall into two groups. Some say little about the relation of love and morality or treat them as unrelated. Some say that the relation is one of opposition.

For some philosophers who study love, the best thing to do with morality is to ignore it. If they discuss moral questions, it is mainly to dismiss these questions as irrelevant to their project. For instance, in Irving Singer's (1984) three-volume history of the concept of love in the west, he devotes a chapter to Martin Luther (Vol. I Ch. 14) but an entire volume to the medieval poets of courtly love and the Romantic poets (Vol. II). This is because Singer's main concern is how much of love is appraisal, the appreciation of certain kinds of value already present in the beloved, and how much is bestowal, the conferring of value on the beloved.

Similarly, Alan Soble in *The Structure of Love* argues that the erosic tradition (which treats love as based on appraisal) is no worse off than the agapic tradition (which treats love as based on bestowal) but has little to say about whether one morally ought to love in a certain way.

There is a good reason for this reticence. Singer and Soble investigate the way people love, and they focus on the way people form loving attachments such as romantic relationships. Soble calls this kind of love “personal love.”<sup>3</sup> This does not necessarily have any connection to morality. Arguably, Bonnie and Clyde had deep personal love for one another, but they appear to have had greater concern for each other than for what was right or good. Singer and Soble would be going out of their way, talking about something irrelevant, if they spent much of their investigation discussing morality.

Immanuel Kant (1996 [1797]) is another extra-moralist. He distinguishes between love as an affect (pathological love) and love as a characteristic of conduct (practical love). According to his moral theory, only rational considerations are moral reasons. Since pathological love is affective rather than rational, it is not a source of moral reasons. There is nothing wicked about pathological love, according to Kant, but it should not be mistaken for a moral sentiment. Practical love, on the other hand, is just a phrase for the intention to promote another person’s good; although this is part of morality, calling it “love” does not pick out any special motive or character trait other than benevolence.

Singer, Soble, and Kant treat love and morality as mutually indifferent. Some extra-moral theories treat considerations of love as opposed to considerations of morality. Most

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<sup>3</sup> “Ostensively defined, my object of study is the love that one person has for another person (usually not a blood relation); that may exist between two people when it is reciprocal (which is often, but not always, the case); that today often leads to or occurs in marriage or cohabitation (but obviously need not); that often has a component of sexual desire (in varying degrees); and that occasionally, for heterosexuals, eventuates in procreation.” *Ibid.*, p. 2.



often, this is because they treat morality as a system of impartial rules and love as a private reason or even an affect.

Bernard Williams (1981) argues that considerations of personal integrity can outweigh moral considerations. For instance, if morality bids one be impartial between a loved one and a stranger, it is justified to dismiss morality and be partial toward the loved one. It is justifiable (though not morally justifiable) to prefer happiness and integrity to morality in some cases.

Susan Wolf (1982) makes a similar point when she argues that moral sainthood is not an especially appealing or fulfilling ideal. According to Wolf, the moral saint cannot spare time for any personal projects or loves which would contribute to their own personality. Therefore, anyone who wants to be a unique individual or who wants to have a fulfilled life has good reason not to be a moral saint.

Harry Frankfurt (2004) makes a similar argument. He says that care or love gives meaning to life because it makes possible the long-term projects which keep a life from being aimless. If one did not love anything, then one would be a rational agent, but one would not have any cohesive self or identity. Moral considerations can confer such long-term projects, but, from the point of view of someone who wants a meaningful life and a healthy identity, there is no reason to prefer morality to the exclusion of extra-moral projects.

Those are the main groups of extra-moral approaches. They stand in obvious contrast to an intra-moral approach, which would treat considerations of love as moral considerations, or would regard a person's love as part of their moral life, or would treat love as a means to moral improvement. These positions fall into two main groups: those who discuss love in moral epistemology, and those who discuss love in normative ethics.

Within moral epistemology, there is interest in the idea that love is a way of perceiving value. Iris Murdoch (1971) treats our capacity to love as a means of opening up to goodness

different from ourselves, and therefore regards it as an antidote to egoism. Alison Jaggar (1989) and Martha Nussbaum (1990) point out the way love involves an attentiveness to the particular: the personality of an individual beloved, for instance. Such love of the particular can make us sensitive to moral considerations which we would be likely to miss otherwise. In keeping with Iris Marion Young's (1990) argument that particular situations matter just as much as general rules, Nussbaum and Jaggar understand love as a source of important moral insight. This argument is echoed by Rolf M. Johnson (2001: 104-106, 117) and Troy Jollimore (2011: Ch. 3-4). J. David Velleman (1999) ingeniously and eloquently argues that one kind of love gives us an appreciation of the universal value of rational agency by teaching us to appreciate it incarnate in a particular person.

Within normative ethics, there is disagreement as to love's place. Some regard love as a consideration competing with justice. Others within normative ethics treat love as the basis of morality or at least as the supreme moral motivation.

Sometimes interest in a particular person is seen as conflicting with interest in general welfare or with impartial justice. Unlike Williams, who conceives of a conflict between love and morality, these philosophers conceive of a conflict between different moral considerations. John Cottingham (1983) and Nel Noddings (1984), along with other care theorists, argue this way and favor reasons of love, while Peter Singer (2004) favors reasons of justice, possibly with some regular exceptions such as the love of parents for children, if these can be shown to best promote general welfare.

Sometimes love is regarded as the keystone of the moral life. Philosophers who treat love this way often conceive of it primarily as benevolence. While Kant, as discussed above, rejects affective love as a moral motive, he commends love as benevolence. John Stuart Mill (2001 [1863]: Ch. 3), as a utilitarian, does not regard love as the ultimate justification of

morality, but he does argue that universal and impartial benevolence is the best moral motivation we can cultivate—best because it will most reliably lead us to think like utilitarians. One reasonable and highly influential interpretation of a tradition of Chinese ethics descended from Kongzi (Confucius) regards benevolence toward all people as a central feature of a good person (Chan 1963: Ch. 2; Yao 1992).<sup>4</sup> The later philosopher Mozi asserts that benevolence should be not only universal but impartial. He argues that this seems unattainable only because no society has yet sufficiently incentivized it; once a society does so, people’s nature is adaptable enough to learn universal and impartial benevolence (Chan 1963: Ch. 9).

Most of these philosophers treat love not as the basis for justifying morality but as the best motivation for morality. Michael Slote (1998, 2001, 2007) regards love as both. He aims to base all morality in the motives of the individual agent. He then argues that benevolence is the best motive. Therefore, morality is based on benevolence. However, unlike Mozi or Mill, Slote agrees with care theorists that a benevolence that plays favorites, by preferring special relationships, is better than impartial universal benevolence.<sup>5</sup>

Another tradition in European thought comes from European Christian theology, which often closely touches the borders of philosophy. Augustine of Hippo argues that happiness is found in participation with God. During this life, healthy relationships with other people serve a sacramental function, bringing us nearer to God (and those who tempt us further from God are bad for us). Augustine regards erosic aspiration toward God, a kind of love, as the most important human impulse (*Christian Doctrine* Chapters 22-23). Thomas Aquinas treats love as a combination of benevolence and friendship (*Summa* II-II Q23 A1)

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<sup>4</sup> There is some reason to think of his ethical theory as analogous to virtue theory (Yu 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 2 will discuss benevolence as a component of love but an inadequate substitute for its entirety.

with its ultimate object being God while humans are loved for their resemblance to God (II-II Q24). Anders Nygren (1953), a Lutheran theologian, asserts that human beings by themselves are capable of nothing but erosic love, which is based in the human need for happiness and which responds to a value found in the beloved—what Singer calls appraisal. Only divine love is totally disinterested and bestows value beyond that which it finds.

These various approaches have philosophical value of their own. However, few of them address the moral devotees who regard love as a moral ideal. Of course, the extra-moralists do not. Nor do those who discuss love in the context of moral epistemology. Those who treat love as the basis of morality or the best moral motivation usually treat love as primarily benevolence. However, as the next chapter shows, love as a moral ideal is not reducible to benevolence; benevolence is only one of several distinct components. The theologians come closer to treating love as a moral ideal. However, their focus on love for the divine takes up much of their discussion, so that love for the earthly is not discussed fully. If asked whether love can be a moral ideal for those who are not committed to a spiritual discipline or a religion, whether an account of love for earthly things (humans, other animals, and so on) be articulated independent of heavenly matters, theologians are too often either silent, dismissive, or boring.

Moral philosophy, then, has not done much to investigate love as a moral ideal. No wonder, for there is seldom a discussion of moral ideals as such.<sup>6</sup> This is a regrettable lacuna.

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<sup>6</sup> A rare explicit discussion in the historic philosophical canon can be found in Kant: “This holiness of will is nevertheless a practical *idea*, which must necessarily serve as a *model* to which all finite rational beings can only approximate without end and which the pure moral law, itself called holy because of this, constantly and rightly holds before their eyes; the utmost that finite practical reason can effect is to make sure of this unending progress of one’s maxims toward this model...” (Kant 2015 [1788]: 29-30) Singer (1994) and Martin (1996) discuss love as the living out of an ideal, and differentiate between different ideals and therefore different loves, but they do not lay out a clear definition of an ideal as such.

While philosophers do good work carefully defining concepts of obligations, normative principles, and other features of morality understood as non-optionally binding, there is little work about how a person might fill the permissible space bounded by these “side constraints.” Once obligations have been met and normative principles obeyed, there remains the living of a good life. More, one might hope for something to believe in. An ideal can be a polestar by which to navigate the sizable hinterlands of the morally permitted. An account of universal love first needs a definition of a moral ideal.

### **Love as an Ideal**

An ideal is a plan according to which one can arrange one’s life. To follow an ideal is to arrange one’s life accordingly.

Some recent philosophical discussions of ideals focus on the self-conception of the person living by the ideal. “I am a philosopher,” or “I am an artist,” says the person who wants to be a philosopher or an artist. Such a self-conception, aspirational but not yet manifested, is understood to create a puzzle: How can a person think of themselves as an excellent philosopher or as a great artist when they are just beginning their studies? How can they rationally justify simultaneously knowing about their shortcomings and conceiving of themselves as the kind of person they want to be?

This focus on utterances of self-conception leads philosophers to conceive of ideals as having to do with non-standard or non-propositional uses of language, especially with artistic or creative uses of language. Philosophers want ideals to be justified rationally, but they recognize that an idealized self-conception is untrue. Therefore, they try to explain an idealized self-conception as a rational form of expression that does not rely on truth in the usual sense.

Thus Velleman (2007) conceives of ideals as a kind of make-believe. When someone tells themselves that they are a philosopher, or an artist, or a φρόνιμος, they are doing something like when a child says “I am a bear that is also a princess” even though the child is neither. Or, to use Velleman’s example, they are like a person who enters a dojang and takes on the role of deadly combatant, even though they are sparring with colleagues in a safe, controlled school of martial arts. Although make-believe is irrational in the sense that it silences some reasons that are relevant to forming an accurate judgment (such as a child’s humble lineage or a Tae Kwon Do student’s bodily safety), it is rational whenever it can accomplish some end (such as having fun or developing strength and skill). Ideals are an especially rational form of make-believe, because the temporary irrationality of believing oneself to be morally excellent can build up habits that lead to the stable rationality of being morally excellent.

Velleman is concerned primarily with what happens when a person adopts an idealized self-conception. His main point is that one can entertain an irrational fantasy if it leads to one’s becoming more rational. It is curious that he calls this a form of make-believe analogous to child’s play or Tae Kwon Do training. In his classic study of play, *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga points out that play almost always lasts in limited sessions within a controlled environment: there is a playtime and a play-space, whether it is a simple game of cops and robbers or an elaborate dance involving the adoption of ritual personae. Most theatrical performances also take place during a limited showtime in a carefully bounded theater. Other types of performance art are not as obviously make-believe as classic theater is, and this is partly because one does not enter the “magic circle” that enables the make-believe. For instance, as I know from familiarity with local theater groups, the point of “found theater” is to mystify the boundary between reality and pretend, to create a nearer approximation to real responses

from the audience. Its potentially greater effects on the conduct of the audience are because found theater is less make-believe than classic theater. Velleman treats the adoption of an idealized self-conception as temporary but as ongoing and pervasive, without clear boundaries. He also treats it as having great effects on the conduct of the make-believer. Velleman makes insightful observations concerning the adoption of a self-conception, how it can interact with other considerations and knowledge and goals, and how it can motivate us to become more rational in the long run; but his use of the concept of make-believe is ancillary and, in light of research like Huizinga's or a greater experience with make-believe and theater, misleading.

Riggle (2017) compares the idealized self-conception to a metaphor. A metaphor says something that is literally untrue. For instance, Juliet is not the sun. Despite its uneasy relationship to truth, a metaphor can draw attention to features of an object by comparing the object to another object in a way that highlights some features and ignores others. The features it highlights are often more abstract, the ones it ignores more concrete. Thus Juliet is the sun because she brings to Romeo's world warmth, brightness, and growth, not because of her chemical composition and material density. An idealized self-conception is a metaphor, then, since it compares a messy, imperfect, actual person to a clean, perfect, archetypal person, in order to draw out some features of the actual person and to ignore others. This metaphor can have motive power because it allows one to proceed from what one knows to be true about oneself and to act consistently with that, rather than with other things one knows to be just as true about oneself.

Riggle's use of metaphor, like Velleman's use of play, is curiously accidental to his main point. His main point is that an idealized self-conception can motivate one's conduct by drawing attention to certain features one already has and to act in a way that aspires to consistency with or enhancement of those features. Thus, for example, if I was tempted to

lose my temper and be harsh toward a child, I could quickly call to mind times that I have been patient with children, and this will motivate me to be kind by motivating me to be faithful to that part of myself. Riggle is right that this can have great motivational power. It has little to do with metaphor. As with Velleman's use of play, Riggle's use of metaphor transposes a verbal behavior from one context (poetry, drama, lyric) to another (decision-making) when the same point could have been made without the transposition.

Whether Velleman needs to discuss narrative play and Riggle needs to discuss metaphor is not the central problem with their accounts of ideals. If one wants to offer the essential definition of an ideal, then a focus on self-conception, and on the conflict between an idealized self-conception and one that includes all one's faults, is a red herring. It comes from philosophers paying attention to what happens when one faces the kind of temptation either to betray an ideal or to give up on it, temptation that requires a pep-talk. But this is a stopgap measure in times of emergency, and an ideal is more than a response to an emergency. Just as important are things like making decisions about how to spend one's future time in light of the ideal, reflecting on which of several options equally good in themselves best accord with the ideal, and so on.

Someone whose ideal is to have a long, healthy life—the kind of person who carefully regiments a diet, who takes lots of vitamins and other supplements, who engages in a lot of cardio and stretching—will spend far less time in self-imagining than in planning and routinizing. But they are following an ideal just as much as when an aspiring artist whispers to herself in her garret, “I am an artist,” and muscles through a period of despondency.

I personally find very little motivation in telling myself what I am. Sometimes it will do, if I can't think of another way to motivate myself. But, just as often, it leads me to get caught up in a flurry of abstracted images and in fruitless searches through my psyche for the



genuine “feel” I expect an idealized person would have. Far better, in my experience, to ignore whether I really am what I want to be and instead to think about what I can do today, without an intimidating cost, to be that way. I make lists, I draw up plans of discrete manageable tasks, I make myself do the next thing without letting myself consider the big picture (in case it leads me to despair). In this I am following an ideal just as much as if I entertained flattering narratives about myself.

The imaginative work of pretending to be something you are not can serve a role in temporary motivation, but it is not the central standing motivation for following an ideal. Nor need pretending be incorporated into an ongoing narrative, as Velleman depicts it, since it can be a very limited, targeted pretend, as when I pretend that I am almost at the end of a long run. It is a desperate measure to remain loyal to the ideal, not the central feature of that loyalty.

An ideal is not primarily a self-conception. Following an ideal is not primarily the attempt to live by such a self-conception. An ideal is primarily a structure or a form that can be imposed on the elements of a life, perhaps otherwise inchoate and random, arranging them into coherent order. Living by an ideal is primarily the persistent attempt to order or arrange one’s life in accordance with it. Thus an ideal is more like a plan, a design, a blueprint of a way of living than it is like a portrait of who one wants to be. This is why the person who arranges everything around having a long, healthy life is following an ideal just as much as the aspiring artist who reminds herself of her vocation. Indeed, if the artist merely reminded herself of her vocation and did not arrange her life accordingly—if she did not practice the techniques of her crafts, if she did not explore her memories and emotions to find something powerful enough to express, if she did not sit down and make art—she would not be living by an ideal, no matter how often she had recourse to her self-conception.

Other philosophers would say that an ideal is not primarily a means of self-conception but is a way of measuring the imperfections of one's life against a rule or standard. Thus P. F. Strawson (1961) thinks of an ideal as a mode of perfection toward which an individual aspires, their aspiration sometimes hampered by the requirements of obligations to a wider society and its interests. Nicholas Rescher (1989) regards ideals as standards against which to measure the imperfections and compromises of the real world. Kimberley Brownlee (2010) similarly thinks of an ideal as a goal toward which a person directs their life.

Although an ideal can serve as a foil against which to contrast the present, imperfect life, this is not its primary purpose. Rather, when a person uses an ideal to measure the difference between how they live and how they want to live, this is a way of getting feedback, a quick check-up. It finds its place within the larger project of ordering life according to the ideal. Thus trying to arrange the messy materials of life into a coherent form is the broader, deeper project within which measuring the present against the perfect is one subsidiary task.

An ideal is often centered on a virtue or cluster of virtues. For instance, a person might try to be a great warrior, or a great judge, or a great scholar, or a great parent. These will involve virtues: courage, probity, intellectual integrity, the skill to nurture. One can even take a virtue as the ideal itself. Thus the character Spider Jerusalem in Warren Ellis's *Transmetropolitan* orders his entire life around his desire to be a truth-teller; Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* arranges his life around the virtue of Christian mercy. What counts most for each of them are the practices that characterize the virtue: for Spider, journalistic investigation and a commitment to publish what can hurt his career; for Valjean, charitable projects such as running a rehabilitation program or caring for an orphaned child. As Aristotle says, virtues are acquired through repeated practice. This involves arranging one's life with some measure of discipline and structure far more than it involves thinking about the virtue in the abstract.

When an ideal is based on a virtue, rather than a morally neutral excellence like longevity or being a good storyteller, it can become a moral ideal. Virtues are morally evaluable in that they are reckoned morally good, and they are themselves means of morally evaluating a person's character in that to ascribe a virtue to someone is usually to ascribe to their character a moral good.<sup>7</sup> If the structure of a person's life is based on a virtue, this is a third means of moral evaluation: the person's life is based on a moral good.

One would hope that an ideal based on a moral good would not encourage or allow for an egregious violation of basic moral norms. For instance, one would hope that it would be a betrayal of the ideal to destroy or mar the agency of another person. It need not conform to the details of a philosophical moral theory, such as a generic rule utilitarian's demand for humanitarian self-sacrifice. But neither can it countenance obviously immoral practices, like torture or exploitation. So, if an ideal is moral when it is based on a moral good, then it is morally acceptable when it is well-behaved by common pre-theoretic moral standards.<sup>8</sup>

If universal love is to be an adequate moral ideal, it will involve arranging one's life in such a way that one engages in practices characteristic of love. We could say that a person who lives in accordance with universal love will repeatedly choose individual acts and recurring patterns of action that express love. We would be right, although we would leave anyone hoping for a specific plan of action dissatisfied. What sorts of acts, what patterns of action, will depend on the circumstances of the person. Someone with the right skills might live out universal love by becoming a medical nurse; someone else might choose a career like plumbing

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<sup>7</sup> Debates about the unity of the virtues are partly over whether a person can have genuine virtues that are not bounded and permeated by the other recognized virtues (such as whether a person can be brave without being compassionate) and partly over whether "virtues" can be good in isolation without such bounds and permeations. See Badhwar (1996) and Sreenivasan (2009). I assume that virtues can be good in isolation, even if they do not suffice to make the person virtuous overall.

<sup>8</sup> This will be the principal concern of Chapters 3 and 4.

or academic philosophy but try to treat customers and employees, as well as friends and family, with love; someone else might make ends meet with one job and most express love during their off-hours volunteering somewhere. Among ideals, it is one of the most versatile. What matters is that it will involve ordering life around decisions, practices, and selections that accord with the ideal.

So, it would not make sense to prescribe a single way to order one's life in accordance with love. A more helpful project would be first of all to establish whether love is a virtue or is an ideal of another kind; if it is a virtue, then to discuss what are the essential characteristics of this virtue; and then to discuss its scope and applications.

First of all, then, is love a virtue? Thinking in the most general terms will show that it is. The kind of love that serves as a moral ideal fits a definition of virtue which is amenable to several competing theories of virtue. Therefore, on any of these theories, love counts as a virtue.

### **Love Is a Virtue**

Something is a virtue iff it is a morally admirable disposition of character involving the whole person. Love is a morally admirable disposition of character involving the whole person. Therefore, love is a virtue.<sup>9</sup>

A character trait is morally admirable if one rightly aspires to it as a way to be morally good. Thus, justice is morally admirable while injustice is not, because aspiration to justice is a correct way to aspire toward being morally good. Some measure of moral admirability can be determined by critical reflection. For instance, being macho might seem morally admirable

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<sup>9</sup> Long after writing this argument I discovered a similar argument that care is a virtue, by Raja Halwani (2003).

until one reflects on the harm that machismo has done. This work will not offer a definite criterion of moral admirability, nor is it necessary for this project.

A disposition is a complex of behaviors reliable across different times and circumstances. For instance, guessing answers in a game of trivia and getting several right answers, but not getting right answers any other time the game is played, is not a disposition to answer trivia questions correctly.

Reliability makes something a disposition. But what makes something a disposition of *character*? The small intestine has dispositions, but they are not part of a person's character. A disposition of character results in acts that belong to the person, acts one must own if one is honest with oneself. This does not necessarily mean that one could have done otherwise, or that one is free, or that one is to blame, or that one is responsible according to some filled-out theory of responsibility.<sup>10</sup> But it does mean that an honest explanation of the act would trace back to oneself. If someone grabs my arm and makes me start hitting myself, as children like to do, then that behavior is not something which belongs to me and which I must own. However, if I hit people whenever they make me lose my temper, then it is dishonest of me to say that they made me do it in the way the child made me hit myself; it would be more honest to admit that my acts belong to me rather than to someone else using me. What explains the act is my temper and my violence.<sup>11</sup>

In this way, virtues must both be reliable and belong to the agent. To be kind and peaceable in a good mood but not any other time, to have an unreliable kindness and

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, those of Scanlon (1998), Shoemaker (2011), or Smith (2012)

<sup>11</sup> Thus, what I have in mind here is similar to the idea of attributability as explained by Scanlon and Smith. However, I want to keep my comments here separate from their fuller theory, which involves a theory of reasons and agency I do not necessarily wish to endorse.

peaceability, is not virtuous. Nor is it virtuous to be kind and peaceable because of a euphoric drug, with a kindness and peaceability that do not belong to one.

Virtue involves the whole person: judgments one holds, decisions one makes, and affects with which one responds. For instance, the virtue of kindness might prompt one to perceive someone's pain, judge that what they need is consolation or companionship, decide to sit down next to them, to be saddened by their pain. If, judging that they were in pain, one was wholly unaffected, that would not be virtuous; if one was affected but could not bring oneself to do anything about it, that would not be virtuous either. For that would involve part of oneself, but not the whole person. Another way of putting this: a virtue involves the intellect, will, and emotions.

This definition accords well with different theories of virtue. Notable examples are those proposed by Aristotle, Julia Driver, Christine Swanton, and Robert Adams.

The most common theory of virtue is that of Aristotle or of the neo-Aristotelians such as Rosalind Hursthouse (1999). Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, defines a virtue as a habit that causes one to make the right choice for the right reasons, those reasons which would appeal to the person who has practical wisdom (II.6).

According to Aristotle, practical wisdom ( $\varphi\rho\delta\omicron\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ) is the virtue on which all the other virtues depend (VI.13): the ability to perceive a situation, weigh all of the competing values in it correctly, and then decide on aims and means appropriate to those competing values. For instance, the person of practical wisdom who must choose between going to a work dinner and spending an evening at home with the children will not make the choice out of ambition or filiality alone; they will correctly understand the relative importance and likely outcomes of each option (VI.5).

Aristotle argues that a virtue is characterized by deliberate, intentional acts. The virtuous person does the right thing not by absentminded routine or pure accident but by choice. Mistakes can be made, but the good life itself cannot be a mistake (III.1-5).

If Kant treats emotions as extra-moral chaff to be separated from the wheat of a rational will, for Aristotle the emotional straw is meant to be spun into moral gold. He treats nearly every virtue as the right management of some desire, feeling, or other passion: courage as the management of fear, temperance as the management of sensual pleasure, and so on.<sup>12</sup> Further, Aristotle treats enjoyment as a moral motivation for the virtuous.<sup>13</sup>

This account goes well with the definition. Of course, Aristotle thinks that virtues are morally admirable. He thinks that a habit is a kind of disposition of character. Further, according to Aristotle, a virtue involves the whole person. The intellect governs the virtues, by means of practical wisdom; the will is involved because virtuous behavior involves decision; the emotions are involved as the matter to which the virtues give their optimal form. Neo-Aristotelians, such as Hursthouse, would on the whole agree.

According to Aristotle, practical wisdom unifies and directs all the virtues. Christine Swanton (2003) disagrees with Aristotle about this. Although in many ways her account is compatible with his, hers is more pluralist. Swanton argues that Aristotle's account is inadequate because practical wisdom is a goal-oriented virtue. There is nothing wrong with having a goal-oriented virtue, but to treat all virtuous behavior as goal-oriented is mistaken. Many virtues respond to a situation without formulating and pursuing a goal. For instance, she says, it is virtuous to experience wonder at something beautiful or majestic. But this does not

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<sup>12</sup> See John Cooper (1999: 108-109). Bernard Williams (1981) argues that Aristotle either is unclear or does not describe justice as the right management of a characteristic affect, but Drefcinski (2000) offers an interesting interpretation.

<sup>13</sup> EN II.3. See also Hursthouse (1999), Ch. 4 and Ch. 5.

involve a goal or purpose; it is a passive response rather than an active response. Therefore, Swanton proposes including several other dispositions as bases of the virtues.<sup>14</sup>

Swanton would agree with the definition. While she rejects Aristotle's attempt to make all virtue goal-oriented, there is nothing in the definition to decide this disagreement between them. The non-goal-oriented virtues which she discusses, such as wonder or awe, can be understood as morally admirable dispositions of character involving the whole person.

It might seem unlikely that a responsive virtue involves the whole person. Wonder might appear a matter of affect, or possibly of intellect, or possibly of both, without having a volitional component. But this is incorrect. In order to experience wonder, usually, a person has to decide to stand still and experience the wondrous thing. The will is involved, although the process is not characterized by deliberation with a future goal in mind.

Robert M. Adams (2006), like Swanton, tries for a more pluralist theory of virtue than Aristotle's. He defines a virtue as "an excellence in being for the good," where "being for" the good can include "loving it, liking it, respecting it, wanting it, wishing for it, appreciating it, thinking highly of it, speaking in favor of it and otherwise intentionally standing for it symbolically, acting to promote or protect it, and being disposed to do such things" (15-16). In other words, morally admirable dispositions of character. Although he leaves out a stipulation that a virtue involve the whole person, a similar conviction comes through in his later comments that a virtue is an intentional state, i.e. based on an understanding of the good object (16-18), and that it must involve the will (17).

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<sup>14</sup> Swanton's argument is not merely a quibble with Aristotle. It challenges an assumption common to many virtue theories, including those which are neither Aristotelian nor neo-Aristotelian. For example, Kant restricts his ethical considerations of virtue to the domain of goal-directed action (1996: 149).



Julia Driver (2001) argues for a different definition of a virtue. According to Driver, a virtue is any disposition which leads to the best long-term outcomes. Driver argues that what counts as a virtue can depend upon the time and place, because some dispositions will lead to the best outcomes in some societies but not in others. For instance, in some societies it will lead to the best outcomes to assume the best of everyone, but in a society threatened by fascism it would not lead to the best outcomes to assume that the fascists are not really as bad as they seem.

If Driver is correct, then the most accurate definition of virtue is not in terms of a person's psychic features or interior dispositions. What counts is how the person's dispositions relate to the outcomes of their behavior. Driver calls this an externalist account of virtue.

Driver emphasizes this point: virtues do not necessarily involve cognitively reliable processes. She argues that there are virtues dependent upon systematic cognitive errors. For example, she says, modesty is essentially the state of being mistaken about one's own merits or importance; "blind charity" (her own unfortunate phrase) is essentially the state of being mistaken about whether people are good. Because these are virtues, it is not an essential feature of all virtues that they are based in respectable cognitive processes.

The proposed definition might appear to be in tension with Driver's. The definition is partly in terms of the internal dispositions of the person: judgment, decision, affect. Driver argues that such internal dispositions are not what makes something a virtue. Therefore, Driver might argue that the definition is poor. She might conclude that, insofar as we rely on this definition to treat love as a virtue, we have no good reason to treat love as a virtue. However, this is not really a problem, as I now show.

First, Driver agrees that virtues are morally admirable dispositions. Indeed, she relies on our judgments of what is morally admirable as evidence for what counts as a virtue. Her

argument begins with the judgment that modesty and “blind charity” are virtues because people admire them. (I do not admire either, but let’s grant her the point for the sake of argument.) She uses this to support her argument that not all virtues involve reliable cognitive processes. Therefore, Driver would agree that, since love is often judged to be a morally admirable disposition, it is a good candidate for a virtue.

What about Driver’s reliance on consequences rather than internal dispositions? Even on Driver’s account, specific virtues can be defined in terms of internal dispositions or cognitive processes. Driver allows that some virtues involve reliable cognitive processes. For instance, she allows that prudence is a virtue. Prudence, whether thought of as judging the best means to an end or as being able to look after one’s own self-interest, involves reliable cognitive processes. Any adequate account of prudence will involve deliberation and judgement. Driver argues that what makes it a virtue is its relation to outcomes rather than these processes, but this is a metaethical point about what makes something count as a virtue, not an argument against giving accounts of virtues in terms of internal dispositions.

So, Driver agrees that cognitive processes are essential to some virtues such as prudence. These processes are not what makes the disposition count as a virtue, according to her, but they have to be part of the disposition. In that case, all such virtues belong to a subclass of virtues.

With all these theories in sufficient agreement, virtue can be defined as a morally admirable disposition of character involving the whole person. Does love fit this definition?

Love is often taken to be morally admirable. The preceding recapitulation of its place in numerous traditions showed as much. Whether or not it is admirable, it is widely admired. Whether it deserves this admiration will be shown in a later chapter.

Is love a disposition of character? Is love reliable across times and circumstances? The kind of love which serves as a moral ideal is supposed to be. It often involves forgiving someone for wrongs and offenses. It involves continuing to look after a person's interests even when it is difficult. It involves expanding the scope of one's love, so that ideally one would have love toward everyone all the time. (I will discuss the scope of love in a later chapter.)<sup>15</sup>

Does it make sense for someone to own the acts which they do out of love? Do those acts belong to them? Many people understand themselves at least partly in terms of what they love and how. A person's life can be defined by an incidence of love: a caring parent, or the birth and rearing of a child, or being accepted into a circle of friends, or a marriage. Because it is such a part not just of what happens to a person but of who they are, love is a disposition of character.

Does love involve the whole person—that is, does it involve intellect, will, and emotion? Love involves characteristic judgments: charitability, readiness to perceive the goodness in someone, appreciation of the real value to be found in the person. It involves characteristic decisions, especially those in favor of a person's well-being. It involves characteristic affects, indeed many diverse emotions: concern for the beloved, joy in the beloved, fascination with the goodness she perceives in the beloved, sometimes anxiety or sadness. So, love involves characteristic traits of intellect, will, and emotion. Therefore, love involves the whole person.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A famous Christian example is the father of a wayward son, who waits for his son's return and welcomes him back as soon as he returns. Even the width of love's scope is addressed here, since there are two sons and the father is portrayed as loving them both. The parable is found in Luke 15.

<sup>16</sup> Pettigrove (2012), Ch. 5, offers a useful discussion of this point.

Love is a morally admirable disposition of character involving the whole person. Therefore, it makes sense to treat it as a moral virtue. In the succeeding chapters, I will use the resources of virtue theory, and this will help a good deal in showing that love is a good moral ideal.

## **Conclusion**

A project in moral philosophy, a project I regard as urgent, is to make sense of the testimony of morally great people and the traditions they leave behind. Because so many of them propose living according to love, philosophy needs an adequate account of living according to love. This dissertation is designed to be an attempt toward such an account.

In this first chapter, I argued that love is an ideal and that it is a virtue. In other words, I argued that it is a structure according to which one can give order to one's life and that it is a morally admirable disposition of character involving the whole person.

What comes next, then, is to describe love the virtue. What dispositions of intellect, of will, of emotion, define the kind of love that serves as an ideal to so many moral innovators? What kinds of behavior does it express? That is the subject of Chapter 2. I argue that love as a moral ideal is composed of four attitudes: benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity. Through the combined powers of these four attitudes, a person practicing love can avoid the mistakes people often make when they act out of love but lack the full suite of its components. I show especially that, with all four attitudes, a person is less likely to be paternalistic, intrusive, or deluded—three problems common to many people who try to love.

If love is a virtue whose anatomy is clearly delineated, and if it is to be a morally acceptable ideal, then the next question is to how many people to extend this attitude. Should

a person living by the ideal try to love everyone? What would it mean to love everyone, since a person cannot even know everyone? If there is a clear sense of loving everyone, nevertheless it seems to be too demanding an ideal. It could impose great costs on a person's thoughts and energy. It could require a person to treat everyone the same, making special relationships impossible. And it could require a person to love hurtful, dangerous people. I respond to these objections in Chapters 3 and 4. I argue that a right understanding first of the "demands" of moral ideals in general and second the characteristics of universal love reveal these objections to be mistaken. It is a good moral ideal because of the benefits I outline in that chapter, and its costs are often exaggerated.

Finally, having established "universal" love among human beings as an acceptable ideal for a person to live by, I consider making love more universal by extending it to the nonhuman. Since ecology and environmental ethics have emphasized that not only human beings matter, and since we approach an era of climate crisis in which anthropocentrism will be both morally repulsive and inauthentic, I use the last chapter to consider how universal love as a moral ideal can accommodate itself to a concern for the nonhuman. I argue first that, since it includes benevolence and only living things have a good, love can be extended to living things only. I argue next that love can be extended to all living things, not limited to some. I argue this mainly by addressing objections to the idea, especially whether reciprocity is necessary for love and whether loving nonhuman beings with lives fundamentally different or even inimical to human lives would alienate a person from their own humanity. I show that an ideal of universal love can meet these concerns.

Here, then, are the central assertions of this book: (1) Love is a morally admirable disposition of character involving the whole person—a virtue—around which one can organize one's life. (2) This virtue is composed of benevolence, consideration, perception of

moment, and receptivity. (3) This virtue can be directed toward all people without unacceptable cost to the person practicing it. (4) This virtue can be directed toward all living things without unacceptable cost to the person practicing it. What we turn to next, then, is the structure of love.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE STRUCTURE OF LOVE

#### **Introduction**

Virtues are usually understood to be complex. They involve intellect, emotion, and will. They have multiple parts: typical judgments, affects, and desires, usually standing rather than occurrent since virtues are long-term dispositions. A good account of a virtue will display an anatomy of these parts and some of their relations.

For example, Aristotle usually treats a virtue as having two essential parts. There is a desire typical of that virtue, usually a basic human desire, and then there is a judgment or standard which limits that desire so that it is morally appropriate. This is the point of the discussion of the golden mean: the desire is neither defective nor excessive, and it manifests in behavior neither too often nor too infrequently, but only when appropriate (EN II.6). For instance, in the case of courage, the natural human desire for self-preservation is limited by considerations such as “the noble” and the survival of one’s larger community (EN III.6-9).

How should we determine the structure of love? What evidence can serve to support an account of its structure? The sources of evidence are twofold. The traditions that espouse a love ethic thereby suggest the virtue necessary to live by it. And moral philosophy demands basic criteria of moral acceptability that a disposition of character must meet in order to count as a virtue.

The resources of tradition are plentiful. Those discussed in Chapter 1 do not stop at the injunction to love; they go on to offer examples, paragons, scenarios, poetic descriptions. For instance, the example of Jesus serves as a central influence on Christianity (at least in theory), while the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Dhammapada* (although not the sole or dominant

canonical work, as there is no such work in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions) contain utterances close to the hearts of the religions to which they belong.

There is some risk that these guidelines might turn out to be contradictory or even irrelevant. Not only do the traditions vary (because, after all, Christianity and Hinduism are not the same), but the traditions were founded in times and places different from the present, and many of their moral concerns can seem obsolete. The ancient religions especially seem morally inadequate to a world regularly manufacturing goods like birth control on the one hand and evils like nuclear weapons on the other.

Since this is a work of philosophy, not history or theology or religious studies, it will not be occupied by problems of religious aggiornamento. However, some aspects of the traditions can set the compass points of love, and that surprisingly well. The basic idea of love, as these traditions enjoin it, remains beneficial. This does not mean that the traditions got everything right about love or that they have the correct answers to current problems. But their central insight is the identification of a loving attitude as a viable candidate upon which to base an ideal.

Tradition, then, offers some guidance. What about moral philosophy? If love is to be a virtue, it must pass a number of tests for at least basic moral acceptability. For example, it will not allow a person to be horribly negligent, because then the person has not virtue so much as a faint gesture toward morality. It will not count as a virtue if it makes living a recognizably human life impossible, because that is not a virtue any actual human beings can aspire to.

Drawing from these sources, I present the structure of love the virtue as composed of four basic parts: benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity. I explain each of these elements of love. I also present the problems with each element, and I show



how the other elements can correct for these problems. The problems which are most pressing and most common, I think, arise from benevolence, consideration, and perception of moment; so, I save the explanation of receptivity for last and pay lengthier attention to the problems it resolves.

## **Benevolence**

By “benevolence” I mean the desire for another person’s good.<sup>17</sup> Investigation makes clear both that benevolence is part of love and that, in order to understand its place in love, no more stringent definition of benevolence is needed.

The desire for the other’s good is an essential component of any variety of love, because an attitude of either indifference toward the good of the person or sheer malice cannot be reasonably construed as love. True, a certain amount of malice or indifference might be unavoidable in even the best relationships between any human beings. Each person is possessed of an amygdala and a range of childhood traumas, and this can lead to some of the more ignoble desires. And it might be that a person is capable of great benevolence and great malevolence toward the same person, at the same time, and this might count as love in some fashion. But a relationship of strict malice or indifference would not be love any more than it would be tenderness. Therefore, at least some benevolence is necessary for love.

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<sup>17</sup> More complex accounts of benevolence are discussed in the following chapter. Some philosophers, such as Frankena (1987), Kekes (1987), and Livnat (2004), discuss a virtue of benevolence such that a person wants what is good for people in general. The attitude I am calling benevolence can be directed at a single person. Such a focused sense is a standard use of the English word. Arpaly (2018) seems to use it in just this sense.

The necessity of this component has been long recognized by the traditions that espouse love as an ideal. Benevolence is associated so strongly with love the virtue that, as discussed below, this ideal is often confused with an ethic of pure and unrelenting altruism. The proponents and poets of a love ethic often draw attention to benevolence, though perhaps none so eloquently and simply, if hyperbolically, as Thomas Traherne in *Centuries of Meditation*:

True Love as it intendeth the greatest gifts intendeth also the greatest benefits. It contenteth not itself in showing great things unless it can make them greatly useful. For Love greatly delighteth in seeing its object continually seated in the highest happiness. Unless therefore I could advance you higher by the uses of what I give, my Love could not be satisfied in giving you the whole world.

If a desire for the other person's good is necessary for love, what exactly does it necessitate? Need this desire be for the other's good for the other's own sake? Need it involve commitment to a specific kind of well-being? Need it succeed in bringing about the other person's good?

Benevolence need not be the desire for the other's good for the other's own sake. When we love someone, it can be difficult to separate out what is desired for their sake and what is desired for our own. The difficulty arises not simply from inattention but from the way the interests and benefits of two people can become entangled. The idea that for every desire there is a neat difference between the two sakes if only our observation were keen enough to discern it is, given the way human beings can take on others' interests, suspect at best.

This does not imply that love represents a total loss of self-interest or an entire inability to distinguish between sakes. Although it is impossible to distinguish *some* interests as exclusively one person's or exclusively the other's, this is not the same as its being impossible so to distinguish *every* interest. Although with some interests there is no clear boundary between loving self and beloved other, there can be whole fields of other interests, contributing to one's happiness, that are fenced off from the interests of the other person. Therefore, the impossibility of perfectly distinguishing one's sake from the other's does not imply that to love another person one cannot be happy unless they are happy.<sup>18</sup>

Nor does a benevolent person necessarily have a theory of well-being by which they judge what will do another person good. Philosophers debate whether a person's good is the satisfaction of desire (Sobel 1994, Murphy 1999, Shemmer 2011, Bruckner 2016, and see Lin 2016); acquisition of goods on a definitive list (Kagan 2009, Fletcher 2013, Hooker 2015); functioning well, i.e. being eudaimon (Hursthouse 1999); or simply the accumulation and successful management of pleasures (as with the utilitarians such as Mill). A benevolent person need not subscribe to one of these theories. Indeed, most do not.

Usually, a benevolent person responds to a particular person's need in a particular situation. Benevolence is often adequate if one is willing to meet such a need. Sometimes the need is simple, such as a thirsty person's need for a drink. Sometimes it is more complex, such as a student's need for help in adjusting to college work instead of high school work. Sometimes it extends for a long period of the person's life, such as a need for accepting and

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<sup>18</sup> This will be relevant in a later discussion of differentiation as a healthy part of love. See Robert Nozick (1989) for a much-cited account of the idea that love is a union of persons and Alan Sobel (1997) for an argument that the "union theory" makes genuine altruism impossible.

stable relationships. But the willingness to respond to such needs, either by meeting them or by promoting conditions necessary for them, does not depend on a theory of well-being in general.

This is partly because such needs and responses are so basic to everyone's life. It does not take much to think of examples of one's own needs and how others were willing to meet them, or to think of one's perception of someone else's needs and one's willingness to meet them. If benevolence were an unfamiliar phenomenon, then one might have to put it in a broader theory of well-being in order to understand it—for instance, if one were an invulnerable and isolated spiritual being trying to understand human life. But, living on earth, one can get a sufficient grasp on the concept by thinking of some familiar examples and extending one's thought to other similar examples.

Likewise, a person can be mistaken about what constitutes well-being while still being benevolent. If John Stuart Mill was mistaken in taking the amount of pleasure in a life to determine how well the life went, that by itself does not mean he was any less benevolent toward Harriet Taylor. Since Taylor was, by all accounts, a hedonistic utilitarian, the same is true of her beliefs and her benevolence toward Mill.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, a person can be benevolent while being mistaken about what is good for the particular person they are benevolent toward. For instance, one might stop to help someone who has collapsed on the side of the road and, mistakenly thinking that her heart has stopped, do her more damage by performing CPR. One would be benevolent by wanting to help. However, one would be mistaken about what would help her.

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<sup>19</sup> Their love is recorded in Mill's *Autobiography*.

Indeed, this is why benevolence, though a necessary component of love the virtue, is not the entirety of love. By itself it cannot ground a moral ideal able to give a reasonable measure of protection against serious moral failure, and that of an unloving kind. The wide range of ways one can be benevolent leaves possibilities for a benevolent person to be gravely and injuriously mistaken about another's good. A benevolent person, arguably, can be controlling, asserting their judgment of a person's good as more legitimate than that person's own judgment.<sup>20</sup> Or a benevolent person can be careless, wishing people well but not putting much thought into what will actually help them. The problem of control meets its solution in a later section of this chapter. The problem of carelessness can be addressed now.

Although one might wish a person well because of benevolence, one still needs the disposition to think of her when one is deciding what to do. Otherwise, one might ignore her interests, and in that case all well wishes would not lead to any helpful action. And one needs to think about it carefully, not negligently or cavalierly. One needs to practice consideration.

### **Consideration**

Consideration for someone is attention to her interests and the attempt to incorporate these interests into one's deliberation when relevant. If one is considerate of someone, one will notice how one's decisions will alter their state of being, and as one tries to figure out what to do one will take her interests into account, as reasons if you like.

Being able to do this, and learning to do it regularly and reliably, is an important step in moral maturity. Many small children have difficulty treating another person's interests as

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<sup>20</sup> It might be unwise to rely too heavily on the term 'paternalism', since there is so much disagreement about the correct definition of paternalism, with competitors for the title offered by Gerald Dworkin (1972), Richard Arneson (1980), David Archard (1990), Seana Shiffrin (2000), and Bernard Gert and Charles Culver (1976, 49-50). Which definition, if any, is correct is irrelevant to the main question here, whether the various forms of control described in the definitions count as moral failures. Hence I prefer to speak of "control" or being "controlling."

relevant. So, for instance, a small child might bop her baby sister on the head with a toy because she does not appreciate the way this is counter to her baby sister's interests. As the child matures, she will learn to take her baby sister's interests into account, stopping to consider whether her act will hurt her sister. In adulthood she will probably have a powerful mental technique of deliberative negotiation, appreciating long-term interests and complex interests and best interests, all while her own decisions become more long-term and complex.

Consideration, then, is a normal and easily recognizable component of moral maturity in general. But is it an essential component of love the virtue? It might seem unnecessary for two reasons. On the one hand, it might seem redundant, doing a job already done by benevolence. On the other hand, it might seem too mild—an important part of respect, but not strong enough to count as an essential part of love, too weak for fair competition against altruism.

First, consideration is not redundant. Its work is not already done by benevolence. Benevolence toward someone is to will her good. But willing someone's good does not guarantee attention to how a person will be affected or the attempt to incorporate into one's deliberation how a person will be affected. There are plenty of people who have nothing against me and, if asked, would probably say that they wish me well. But many of them have only a passing acquaintance with me. Reasonably enough, they do not take my interests into account when they decide where to get lunch, which house to buy, or what direction to take their career.

As discussed in the following chapter, some philosophical accounts of "benevolence" incorporate consideration as part of it. This is less desirable than treating them as distinct. Having one term for desire for a person's good and another for the suite of cognitive

techniques by which one takes their good into account makes a tidier inventory. In general, it is more useful to distinguish separable phenomena, less useful to conflate.

Second, consideration is not too mild to count as an essential component of love. Rather, consideration is better suited to a life of love than a demanding form of altruism.

The word ‘altruism’ is given many senses. This is partly because different disciplines use it to investigate different phenomena. For a useful discussion, see Wilson (1992) and Clavier and Chapuisat (2013). In philosophy, it is sometimes used in a sense that makes it a stronger and more disinterested version of what I have called benevolence, as in Neera Badhwar’s (1993, 110) definition: “(1) the desire to bring about [a] person’s good, and not merely to be the agent of the altruistic act, and (2) the desire to bring it about as an end in itself.” In biology, “behavioral altruism” involves acting in a way that promotes another’s interest rather than one’s own. This can be done with any kind of motive, including unhealthy dependence on that other person, arrogance because one believes one is superhumanly strong, an interest in preserving one’s genes or traits, and so on. Both proponents and detractors of love sometimes merge these two definitions and take love to involve the promotion of another’s interests rather than one’s own, where this sacrifice is motivated by a desire for the other person’s good as an end in itself.

Some measure of this form of altruism is, perhaps, essential to good human life. Parents have to give up some of their interests for the sake of their children’s interests, even if the parents do not get much reward for it. It is merely decent, not even admirable, for one to let someone at the grocery store go first who has only a few items to buy. And so on.

But love is often associated with going beyond such ordinary altruism. We might say that love is often expected to impel the lover into extravagant altruism.<sup>21</sup> It is associated with early Franciscans tending to lepers, of Jesus on the cross, or of the Hindu sage who persistently plucks a scorpion out of the water even though it keeps stinging him (recounted in Easwaran 1972: 190). Is extravagant altruism such as this an essential part of love the virtue?

One might think this because of well-known features of the religions and social movements that adopt love as an ideal. For instance, Jesus, the Christian standard of love, sacrifices himself (for reasons theologians are still trying to determine); Hinduism and Buddhism are often thought to advise us to be selfless and to take every living thing's interests to be as relevant as our own; and leaders of social movements, such as King, caution nonviolence even when it might be in one's private interest to be violent.

However, there is countervailing evidence in each of these traditions. None of them counsels a wholesale abandonment of self-interest, and none of them counsels extravagant or unmeasured altruism.<sup>22</sup> A brief sketch, inevitably doing some disservice in its brevity to each of the traditions discussed, can gesture toward this more measured interpretation.

Jesus most famously sums up his teaching as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12). Now, only a megalomaniac would have others be pure altruists toward oneself. If the golden rule is really a summary of Jesus' ethical teaching, as the Jesus of the gospels certainly seems to claim, then it seems that Jesus does not hold us to a standard of pure or extravagant altruism.

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<sup>21</sup> King (1963, p. 31) speaks of "excessive altruism," although he (in my opinion excessively) commends it.

<sup>22</sup> One has to keep in mind that religious traditions frequently employ hyperbole, a rhetorical device which is ill-suited to more cautious philosophical statement. A close attention to the entirety of the tradition's core teachings, rather than the selection of statements which might appear in hortatory or poetic texts, can sometimes help save us from misinterpretation.



In the Pali canon of Buddhism, *Dhammapada* 12 enjoins the value of self-governance and with paying attention to one's own cultivation before trying to help others mature. This allows for self-interest in a sense—at least the careful tending to oneself.

Finally, although King urges nonviolence, this is not primarily because of the value of altruism. King conceives of each person as a contributor to the sum of moral value in the universe. Insofar as violence is inherently bad, whenever a person does something violent they contribute to the moral badness in the universe. This is one of his primary reasons for nonviolence: “To retaliate in kind would do nothing but intensify the existence of hate in the universe.” (King 1958: 85). Another reason is that he believes that processes inevitably continue into their effects; as he puts it, the end is in the means. Violent means will contaminate results, leaving open the opportunity for further violence: “Violence often brings about momentary results...But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem; it merely creates new and more complicated ones” (189). When it comes to the question of altruism and self-interest, King comes down on the side of self-respect, protecting one's own dignity, and asserting that dignity against anyone who would infringe on it. Throughout his account of the Montgomery bus boycott, for example, King repeatedly casts it as a struggle for black self-assertion and dignity, and he praises individuals who made this their motive. This discourages extravagant altruism.

So, extravagant altruism is not an essential component of love, as it is understood in these traditions. As discussed in a later chapter, this is fortunate, because it helps answer some of the concerns that love as an ideal is too demanding.

Consideration, then, is neither benevolence nor altruism. It is also not the consideration of another's interests the same as fulfilling moral obligations toward the other. The relationship between consideration and moral obligation or *prima facie* duty is tenuous.

If one is morally obligated to do something, then one morally ought to do it, according to whatever moral norms pertain. For instance, if one is obligated to save an imperiled child, then one morally ought to do it because of some relevant norm such as “One should always save a child” (with appropriate caveats and qualifications). It would be wrong not to save the child in such a case.

The concept of prima facie duty is similar to the concept of moral obligation. Best known from W. D. Ross (1930), prima facie duty is supposed to be a moral claim that produces an obligation unless it is overridden by one or more other moral claims. For instance, one has a prima facie duty not to break promises. This means that one is obligated to keep one’s promises unless this prima facie duty is overridden. It can be overridden by another prima facie duty. For instance, one might have a prima facie duty to meet a friend for lunch because one promised to do so, but this can be overridden if one has a small child who is sick, because of a stronger prima facie duty to take care of one’s children when they are sick.

Consideration is a disposition that affects how one deliberates. This can include deliberation about one’s obligations or about one’s prima facie duties toward other people. However, even when there is no obligation or prima facie duty, consideration still takes the other’s interests into account. For instance, suppose that every time I visit my father he makes food which I don’t much like. It would be silly to think that he has a moral obligation to make food which I like rather than food I dislike. The benefit of having food I like and the “harm” of having food I dislike are so negligible that he has no moral duty in this case. But, the more considerate my father is, the more my culinary preferences will enter into his deliberations. He will consider my interests even when my interests are too weak to generate any morally obligatory force.

Sometimes, then, the considerate person has to do with people's interests in which the moral stakes are high, involving obligation or prima facie duty. One might have to arrive at a decision after much anguish and indecision. Other times, however, the considerate person has to do with people's interests in which the moral stakes are low and do not involve obligation or prima facie duty. One might arrive at a decision while taking everyone's interests into account without even being fully aware that one is doing so, as a parent of multiple children sometimes does in serving portions of food according to the age and needs of each child, or as a friend might do in deciding on a weekend outing with friends who have disparate preferences. Consideration has to do with matters small and great alike.

Is such an attitude rightly directed toward all people, however? Just now, I have used examples having to do with one's children or friends. Is consideration appropriate only in the context of such a relationship? If so, isn't it ill-suited to a virtue meant to extend to a much wider circle, such as love as a moral ideal?

No, consideration is not limited to one's friends and family. For example, it is important in driving on the highway. We all know, and often have little patience for, people who do not practice consideration while driving a two-ton metal machine going sixty-five miles per hour. It would be inappropriate for such a driver to protest that, since we are not her friends, she does not have to consider us when she drives. This is one example showing that consideration can and often should apply to people one does not know, if it is to be perfected.

## Perception of Moment

The third element of love is perception of moment. 'Moment' here is used in an old sense, meaning great importance or significance. Perception of moment is to perceive someone or something as momentous.<sup>23</sup>

Perceiving a person as momentous can cause many different affects: joy over coming in contact with such an important being, delight at the ways in which the person is momentous, fascination, anxiety over a matter of great importance. Not that love requires the constant tension of such perception. There might be long periods in which the momentousness becomes assumed, taken as given, so that it is not vividly present to awareness.

If I am merely benevolent and considerate, then I might try to do good for the person and take her into account in my deliberations. But, as the history of various oppressions show, benevolence and consideration turn out to be rather soulless ideals when left to themselves. One can be benevolent and considerate toward those whom one considers inferiors. Perception of moment gives our attitudes towards others a soul.

Further, from perception of moment comes the conviction that loving the person is worthwhile. One could be benevolent and considerate while thinking it is such a bother or inconvenience to have to take care of someone unremarkable. Someone who is merely benevolent might be sad when a person suffers, and someone who is considerate might be despondent when attempts to take everyone into account are frustrated. But benevolence and consideration can treat this as a matter of little concern, hardly the great good or great ill that it is to the loving person. Perception of moment does not make this attitude impossible at every moment. But it provides the standing conviction, apart from occurrent feelings, that

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<sup>23</sup> I choose the word 'moment' as one of the few which lends itself to both adjectival and nominal form and which has no misleading connotations from previous usage in moral philosophy.

loving the person is worth it. Mere benevolence or consideration might lend little drama and can leave the weal or woe of another person in faint pastels. It is perception of someone as momentous, significant, greatly important, that colors the outcomes with such pronounced chiaroscuro.

Different examples of love show that there is no single property always leading to the perception of moment but rather plural sources of moment. For instance, J. David Velleman (1999) argues that perceiving rational agency, as it is incarnate in a particular person, is the source of his wonder and awe at the people he loves. On the other extreme, parents might feel overwhelmed by a newborn baby's vulnerability rather than because of any rationality or agency. Then, there are lovers in Plato's *Symposium* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, who perceive beauty in the psyche of another person and therefore vest the person in importance. A fourth and different case is that of Francis of Assisi, who perceived something momentous in a wolf, despite the wolf's aggression toward a small nearby town; Francis is said to have addressed the wolf as a person and to have brokered an arrangement by which the wolf would live peaceably with the townspeople.<sup>24</sup>

Rational agency, vulnerability, beauty of psyche, and whatever Francis perceived in a violent wolf are irreducibly plural properties. But each of them prompts perception of moment. Therefore, the sources of moment are irreducibly plural.

For this reason, moment is distinct from moral worth or moral considerability. Usually, moral philosophy looks for some property that every morally considerable thing has in common. Candidates for this role include the ability to govern oneself (Kant 2015, 30), the

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<sup>24</sup> The story is rendered less miraculous if one remembers that Francis encouraged the people to treat the wolf rather like a community dog, feeding it their scraps. Satisfying the wolf's appetite with scraps could easily explain why it stopped attacking their livestock and threatening their children. The story of the wolf of Gubbio is recorded in the influential hagiography titled *Fioretti di San Francesco*.

ability to suffer (Bentham 1789, Ch. 17), and the ability to participate with others in community or contract (Scanlon 1998).<sup>25</sup> The next step is to find out which things have that property. Or, alternatively, one can begin with a list of things believed to be morally considerable and then try to find out what property they have in common. This is a worthy project, but it has little to do with an account of the perception of moment. The list of the sources of moment ought not to be based on a common unifying property but to be left open and plural. A love that recognized no value in a person besides moral considerability would be not merely odd but, what is worse, pallid. So, an account of love approaching any adequacy of richness must allow for the recognition of a host of values.

How to determine what counts as a suitable or unsuitable case of perception of moment? There are multiple suitable prompts to perception of moment: beauty of soul, rational agency, infant vulnerability. There are multiple unsuitable prompts: wealth, good looks, machismo, what the psychopathy checklist calls “superficial charm.” But what makes these unsuitable? One might be tempted to construct an axiology here, to name some properties “worthy” of admiration, to found the criterion in some value that will legitimize their admiration. Or one might suspect any such definitive account, or at least desire to sidestep such controversies. The following is one possible answer that performs a nimble sidestep.

Momentousness is not the sort of “property” that a moral realist might reify in things themselves, nor is it arrived at through the gathering of data, the elucidation of concepts a priori, or contemplation by an intuitive faculty. Rather, what makes perception of moment suitable is its subsequent tendency to develop virtue in the perceiver. Perhaps the best way to

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<sup>25</sup> Interesting examples regarding nonhuman animals include Diamond (1978) and Anderson (2004).

understand momentousness is narratively: at some point in the story, one encounters something that is surprising, or that demands a response either in decision or affect, or, if it is especially momentous, that changes the rest of the story; in any case, something that impels one closer to or farther from virtue. It is not quite right to ask, “Is this perception of moment justified by a property in the thing perceived or is it an error?” It is better to ask, “Does the perceiver’s character lead them to perceive moment in a way that pushes them toward greater virtue or toward greater vice?” The question is not “Did they see things right?” but “Where does this take their character arc?”<sup>26</sup>

The features of a person usually thought of as suitable for admiration—a good personality, intelligence, kindness, and so on—tend on the whole to make an admirer more virtuous. Those usually thought of as unsuitable—wealth, good looks, machismo—tend on the whole not to do so.

This is not because of the properties themselves but because of the usual motives that underly the admiration. The motives for suitable perceptions of moment are usually those that motivate a tendency toward virtue. Appreciation of and desire for virtue is prominent among them: someone who wants to be virtuous admires someone else who wants to be virtuous, and someone who wants to be virtuous is more likely to become virtuous than someone who loves money. By contrast, the most common causes of unsuitable perceptions of moment are either careless assumptions or compulsive needs.<sup>27</sup> Someone raised in a wholly pecuniary

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<sup>26</sup> One’s interlocutor might insist that, if this is one’s way of sidestepping axiological questions about momentousness, it will not work because what counts as a virtue, or what makes virtue good, must be justified by some axiological stance. One can reply that one remains neutral between the competing theories of the justification of virtue, that for now one relies on broad consensus and ostension. Then the sidestep becomes a foxtrot. If held down and kept from dancing, one might confess one’s suspicion of such principled normative foundations, one’s inclination toward pragmatism and coherentism about ethics.

<sup>27</sup> These terms are defined below.

culture might be taught to admire wealth and might never question this admiration. Someone who has felt in powerless danger since childhood might admire someone cruel who seems strong and protective. Careless assumptions and compulsive needs do not usually move one closer to virtue.

### **Three Elements, Three Problems**

Benevolence, consideration, and perception of moment are three elements of love. Each is necessary for love. However, with only these three elements, there remain severe moral problems. A morally acceptable ideal must have some way of keeping its adherents from going in a wrong direction. The ideal must not horribly misguide its adherents. The ideal must not allow for, or be silent concerning, something atrocious or grossly immoral. Insofar as the three elements already presented could allow for such atrocity or such gross immorality, the ideal is unacceptable. Each element has an attendant problem, and a fourth element is necessary for their solution.

### ***The Problem with Benevolence***

Benevolence by itself does not prevent a person from being too controlling. There seem to have been agents of domination, oppression, and colonialism/imperialism who genuinely believed that they were benefiting their victims. These stand out as especially atrocious cases. However, for now, take an example less totally destructive of persons via systemic arrangements but still a grave harm. Imagine a father who is convinced that his daughter is far too silly and feminine to be a mathematician but that he is mistaken in this conviction. He actively discourages her choice to study mathematics, refuses to pay her expenses, and, when given the chance, interferes in her academic efforts. He is benevolent



toward her. He wants what is best for her. But he is incapable of appreciating what is really best for her.

No doubt all of us make mistakes similar to the misguided father's, at least once in a while. Probably even someone who had attained a high degree of love would make such mistakes once in a while. However, a morally acceptable ideal should take this possibility into account and offer a way of making sense of it and preparing against it. An ideal, if somehow attained, should greatly reduce the chances of ending up morally unlucky in the way the misguided father is unlucky (and thereby help prevent the likelihood of harms such as those undergone by his daughter).

### ***The Problem with Consideration***

The problem with consideration is that it can be excessive or inappropriate. It is sometimes inappropriate to take another person's interests into account in certain ways. For instance, if one has a crush on someone who has a merely passing acquaintance with me, one should not decide which city to move to next based on the way it will affect my crush's interests. There are more sinister examples in which stalkers structure a good part of their lives around those with whom they are obsessed. It is unhealthy and dangerous to take another person's interests into account in this way.

So, although consideration can and sometimes should take everyone's interests into account, there are inappropriate ways to do this, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness seems to depend at least partly on how close the person is. How to determine the appropriateness or inappropriateness?<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> I am indebted to Elizabeth Brake for pointing out this problem.

### ***The Problem with Perception of Moment***

As explained above, suitable perception of moment tends to bring a person closer to virtue while unsuitable perception of moment tends to bring one further from it. The first is a response to a person by appreciating the good in them; the second, a response conditioned by careless expectations or compulsive needs. The problem is that, by itself, perception of moment is powerless to choose between them.

Perception of moment is what Christine Swanton (2003) would call a mode of moral response or acknowledgement. Other modes of moral response are promoting, honoring, and appreciating. The problem with perception of moment is that, like these other modes of moral response, by itself it is powerless to select its object. Just as a person can promote, honor, or appreciate something bad if they believe it to be good, so a person can perceive someone as momentous for reasons that are crass, thoughtless, or servile. Perception of moment as such can be either good or bad; what makes it good or bad depends on how it is directed; and the reason it needs other attitudes is that in itself it has no way to direct itself well.

The problem with perception of moment, then, is that by itself it cannot protect a person from perceiving someone or something as momentous that will hinder, prevent, or mislead the development of virtue. The solution is to supplement it with another disposition of character that can prevent such unsuitable perceptions.

There is probably no way to prevent every possible mistake in perception of moment. It is enough if on the whole the most common mistakes can be avoided. And these can be avoided by preventing, or at least mitigating, their most common causes. These are careless assumptions and deep-seated needs. What a person needs, if they are to avoid the most common mistakes of this kind, is another character trait by which they can manage the careless assumptions and deep needs that so often control one.

So, each of the elements of love discussed so far has a characteristic problem. These problems have a solution. That solution lies in the fourth and final element of love the virtue: receptivity.

### **Receptivity**

Receptivity can be roughly characterized as the ability to have one's cognitive, desiderative, and emotional interior in good enough order to notice (to be "receptive of") what is really the case, either about others or about oneself. There are, then, at least two main components: awareness of external conditions having to do with a person, and sufficient control of or independence from internal conditions to allow this awareness. But such a characterization remains rough. There is already considerable literature on receptivity, although, as will become clear, there is need for clarification and a firmer conceptual foundation.

It has of late come to philosophical attention through Gilligan's (1982) psychological study of care and rose to prominence through the care ethics of Noddings (1984). Noddings highlights receptivity as a trait of a caring person. As a kind of particularist, she declines to give a general systematic definition, but Noddings uses "receptivity" to mean a style of "affective engrossment," something like prereflectively taking on another person's feelings or concerns as one's own: "I see and feel with the other...I have been invaded by this other" (30-35).

Other feminist philosophers became interested in recognition, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity. Sometimes utilizing the thought of Hegel (Aboulafia 1983, Oliver 2002) or deploying psychoanalytic theories of the production of a self (Meyers 1994), they argue that

only when a person recognizes other people and is recognized by them can the self be formed. According to these arguments, the capacity for mutual recognition is a necessary condition for selfhood.

More recently, receptivity has been of interest to some political theorists interested in the emotional and cognitive dispositions most likely to improve the character of citizens and thereby the democratic process. A pioneer in this overall project is Martha Nussbaum (2013), but Nussbaum focuses more on imagination, sympathy, and love than on receptivity as such.

In his theory of political agency, Nikolas Kompridis (2011) discusses ‘reflective receptivity,’ the ability to engage with new conditions of intelligibility. That is, a receptive person is willing to reconsider the conceptual framework with which they understand ideas, reasons, or conversations. This is not uncritical openness but the willingness to set aside one’s preconceptions and pay close attention to something new, such as a new voice making new demands on the public. An example of a failure to do so, I think, would be to join the “All Lives Matter” movement.

Jennifer Nedelsky (2011) contrasts receptivity and judgment. Following some ideas scattered throughout the works of Hannah Arendt, she takes judgment to be something like Aristotle’s *φρόνησις*: a form of discriminating evaluation that allows us to assess particulars in a way that can guide action. She takes receptivity to be in contrast to this, a way of being attentive to particulars without having to sort them into categories, including the categories of good and bad. Nedelsky compares receptivity to the practice of mindfulness, and in reading her conception of it one recalls the non-judging frame of mind praised in the Daodejing, the Dhammapada, and some of the Upanishads.

These studies have done the indebted work of giving receptivity its own plinth in the hall of philosophically respectable concepts. However, the accounts of receptivity could be improved in two crucial ways: by being further distinguished from accounts of related concepts, and by more fully explaining not simply what behaviors characterize receptivity but what its psychological and even neural bases are.

The feminist work on receptivity does not sufficiently distinguish the concept from a family of related ones. It is common to find receptivity conflated with attentiveness, reciprocation, or empathy when it ought to be kept distinct from each. For instance, Joan Tronto (1998), in her discussion of “caring about” as one form of care, says that it includes “attentiveness, that is, of being able to perceive needs in self and others and to perceive them with as little distortion as possible.” She counts the absence of distortion as part of attentiveness. But receptivity is distinct from attentiveness and is not a necessary component of it. Nobody is as attentive as the relentlessly critical. Overbearing parents and venomous frenemies devote great cognitive focus to us, often to our needs as well as our faults, but we would rightly call such impositions the opposite of receptive. Likewise, a person can reciprocate through an attitude of transactional advantage or manipulateness without being receptive of the other person. And empathy (a notoriously complex and contested concept<sup>29</sup>), whether understood as an experience of emotional connection or as an imaginative

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Empathy’ refers to several mental phenomena, at least including emotional contagion, taking the perspective of another, sharing their emotions, and simulating what might be going on in their mind (see Hoffman 2000, Preston and de Waal 2001, and Dullstein 2013). The widespread notion that empathy is a good moral motive is challenged by Prinz (2011) and Bloom (2016) in philosophy and by Decety and Cowell (2015) in neuroscience.

identification with the other person, is usefully distinguished from receptivity, understood as the ability to know people as they are rather than trying to inhabit their experience.

The political accounts of receptivity would be more complete if they attempted an account of receptivity that more fully employed the work of psychologists and neuroscientists. Defining receptivity in psychological terms offers advantages. It provides a fuller account of what is going on when a person is being receptive—not simply in the operationalized terms of moral or political outcomes but in terms of what goes on, so to speak, in the person’s head. Further, a psychological account can suggest ways that a person might become more receptive. By understanding receptivity on a psychological and even neuropsychological level, a person can more easily think of ways to modify behavior and monitor mental processes in a way that can increase receptivity.

The twin needs to distinguish receptivity from related attitudes and to offer a psychological account of its internal workings have prompted me to offer the following definition of receptivity: being with someone without having to place expectations either carelessly or compulsively. Each of the elements of the definition needs explanation: *being with*, *careless expectations*, and *compulsive expectations*. The explanations of these terms draw on psychology and neuropsychology, including developmental psychology, psychotherapeutic theory, and cognitive and behavioral science.

### ***Being With***

To be with someone, in the sense that is relevant here, is to participate in some activity for a stretch of time in a way that includes the other person. Being with includes working with, hanging out with, marrying, killing time with, talking with, being present to (as in counseling

or chaplaincy), and so on. It need not involve a goal-directed activity, nor need it involve an intrinsically collective project such as co-authoring or tango. It can include activities, or perhaps it would be better to say passivities, that are non-deliberate and in which awareness is minimal. Perhaps the only requirement is that one be doing something while another person is connected to one in some way. Being with can be short-term, such as building a shed in the backyard, or long-term, such as lifelong cohabitation.

There are philosophical traditions surrounding conceptions of being with. For example, Buber (1937) examines something similar in the I-Thou relation, while Levinas (2000) studies what it means to encounter the other face to face. Perhaps the modern investigation of being with began with Hegel (1977 [1807]), who treats encounter with the other as the beginning of self-awareness.

Everyone has to be with other people at least some of the time. Even extremely isolated people need allies or caretakers, at least until automation is more universal and reliable. But one can be with others in many ways. One can be with others without noticing that one is with them; while having trouble noticing anything but being with them, as when we undergo limerence in the presence of a crush or a lover; for their sake, for one's own, or for both, or for neither. Being with, in itself, does not presuppose compassion or attention or intention.

It can be tempting to define receptivity in terms of a smaller set of interactions. Care ethicists might focus on receptivity in specifically caring action such as playing with a child or taking care of someone who is sick. Political thinkers have considered its role in conversation, especially in public discourse. But conceiving of receptivity as an attitude that can inform any way of "being with" has advantages.

Notably, it allows for the fact that a person can be receptive in cases where the receptivity is not as obvious. Most people can understand the need for receptivity in limited, obvious circumstances: tending to wounds, gazing into another's eyes, having to listen to something difficult to accept. But less obvious opportunities for receptivity can be just as necessary. As in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, where well-meaning but arrogant Henry aims to please his wife Margaret but fails to notice whenever she is serious, receptivity is often most needed when it is least expected by the person who must exercise it. The need is clearer if being with is conceived of as a feature of any interaction rather than restricted to the showier instances.

Further, a highly receptive person is not always showy about it and does not manifest this trait only in the obvious circumstances. The ability to be with someone without imposing expectations can often go unnoticed precisely because it is done so well. An adequate account of receptivity will bring such cases to our awareness rather than relying on the cases we are already aware of.

Thus, it is less desirable to limit the scope of the account to conscious experiences in which receptivity is easily noticed. The best definition of receptivity includes interactions in which it might escape notice entirely.

### ***Careless Expectations***

An expectation is careless when it is imposed without duly considering whether it is an appropriate expectation. Although most careless expectations are therefore simply because of oversight, they can result in grave harms. Even if during abstract reflection it is clear that one has careless expectations, it can be difficult to recognize and prevent them in the moment.



The most obvious cases of careless expectations result from bias. Everyone has biases instilled by society. Some of the most well-known and egregious examples of carelessly placing expectations come from biases about sex, gender, race, class, “ability,” neurotypicality, and other such troubled categories. When people unreflectively depend on a female coworker for nurturance or support, when people are startled at the justified anger of a black person, when people are indignant at any pushback from someone in the service professions, and so on, these come from carelessly placing expectations on the other. Sometimes these are called implicit biases. But Edouard Machery (2016) persuasively argues that they do not belong in a special category, as if they were ontically different from explicit biases. They are not implicit mental states; they are simply dispositions that often go unnoticed.

There is evidence from psychology that biases are manifestations of cognitive tendencies basic to the human mind. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) and Kahneman and Frederick (2002) argue that, in addition to the cognitive “system” that operates by careful rule-based thinking, there is another “system” that operates by heuristics—unreflective cognitive moves that make it easier to solve problems. On this account, many biases, including many based on social stereotypes, are manifestations of heuristics. The psychologists pay special attention to what they call “representativeness,” a heuristic that works by substituting difficult questions such as matters of probability for the relatively easy task of comparing things in order to check for similarity. Thus, instead of figuring out the probability that someone will have good intentions by gathering information about their character, the heuristic would work by comparing their outward appearance to a set of stereotypes and finding the closest match.

These psychologists assert that this heuristic is used across all sorts of domains of knowledge. It is not specific to a set of questions about oppressed classes or even about social

classes or identities as such. Thus, it can arise in any instance: in comparing people's personality traits to those stereotypical of different professions, in deciding how much someone should pay for a harm they have caused, or in picking which of two unpleasant sensations the decider must undergo a second time. Because they are so pervasive, the biases can arise even in intimate relationships where stereotypical thinking might seem to have no place.

The account of bias proposed by Kahneman, Tversky, and Frederick is not the only psychological theory that can offer exposition of careless expectations. Schank and Abelson (1977) first proposed and Bower, Black, and Turner (1979) provided some empirical evidence for the idea that human beings learn a large number of "social scripts." A script is an arrangement of narrative elements, such as a cast of typical characters, a collection of typical props, and a series of typical actions, that allow one to understand both stories and real-life interactions. The idea is that human beings do well when they can interpret situations by classing them into familiar narratives. When a person recognizes a social situation as an instantiation of a script that is already known, this allows them to bypass the time-costly work of figuring out what is expected of them. They are already familiar enough with the situation that they can fill in a lot of details never made explicit. For instance, one knows, even if one is not told, that if Joe entered a restaurant and ordered soup then he probably sat down and looked at a menu.

We can think of cases of identity bias, such as race bias, in terms of scripts. A racist in the old South would have learned a script according to which "Walking on the Street" includes as one of its story elements "Any black people passing by must step out of my way." We can think of the racist's expectation to be treated with deference by a black person as the racist's reliance on a script learned from society. The racist sees themselves as playing the role of one

of the characters in a script—the White Lady or the White Man—and the black person as playing the role of a different character; the racist expects both self and other to respond to what one might call, borrowing another term from theater, their cues.

But people learn many scripts that are not based on racial or other broad group identities. People learn scripts having to do with the family: the Thanksgiving dinner script, the bedtime story script, the sex talk script, the curfew script.

Similarly, people learn scripts having to do with love, sex, and romance. As with the troubled social categories, which are often influenced by socially entrenched value systems and prejudices, loving relationships are often scripted by themes and tropes about love found in songs, poems, novels, movies, and the arts. Lovers often get their scripts from each other, or from the family in which their relationships occur, or from other elements of their history together. They sometimes get their scripts from previous relationships that they believe to be analogous to the present one. For instance, accustomed to a boyfriend who listens to one, when one has a new boyfriend one might give him cues so that he can listen.

### ***Compulsive Expectations***

An expectation is placed compulsively when someone places it on another person because of a strong need or desire. To take an extreme case from the DSM, someone with narcissistic personality disorder has a deep-seated fear that they are without worth. This compels them to exact a measure of praise and admiration from everyone around them. They will try to denigrate other people and to exalt themselves. Because of their strong need for adulation, they place compulsive expectations on everyone else.

Compulsion need not be the sort the DSM describes. That is, it need not present itself as something that disrupts the person's life or that is recognized as irrational or that seems to be out of control. If a person feels a strong need or desire to do something, that can count as being compelled, as the word is used in ordinary language, even in the absence of the DSM's criteria.

Compulsive expectations, then, are not the special property of people with a diagnosable condition. We all have strong needs or desires. For example, everyone, at least when stressed or low, feels as if there is something they have never received enough of: success, esteem, attention, care, mercy, concern. And everyone has things that they very much want. Thus most people need a moderate amount of praise and sometimes will fish for compliments if they do not get enough. If one is feeling especially low, then sometimes this can distract one's attention from everything else until one is encouraged a bit.

Most people are habituated to more deep-seated, long-term expectations. For instance, although it can be healthy to withdraw from social contact if people are asking too much of one, my own impulse to withdraw activates too early and too often; if I regularly gave in to this impulse, my behavior could count as compulsively placing expectations on others (I both assume that they are being too demanding and expect them to give me more space).

People sometimes compulsively place expectations in order to buttress or shield their conception of themselves. Carl Jung suggests that, since people value their own integrity and want to see themselves in a good light, they have a tendency to ignore those character traits in themselves which they deem unflattering. Ignored by the conscious mind, these character traits become the person's "shadow." People frequently "project" these unflattering character traits

onto another person or group. If a person's shadow continues to be ignored and projected, it paradoxically gains stronger control over their behavior, both the way they treat others and the way they conduct their private affairs (Jung 1959, Ch. 2). For instance, if one is secretly afraid of being cowardly, then one will refuse to admit the times one has been cowardly and instead will seek out ways to interpret others' behavior as cowardly.

Further, everyone begins life ill equipped to confront it. Our capacity for affective response develops far ahead of our capacity for extended rational thought. We all know pain before we can understand it. Psychologists have long theorized that we develop “defense mechanisms”—behaviors by which we attempt to survive whatever it is that threatens us as children, behaviors formed at an impressionable and hasty age that can persist unrecognized by us for the rest of our lives (Freud 1937). For instance, a person might be overly suspicious of everyone who offers help, or deliberately provoke people to see how forbearing they will be, or perpetuate other unnecessary habits for the sake of greater safety.

Neuroscience has begun to show that the human brain develops chemical and electrical patterns to deal with danger and need long before these patterns can be shaped by rational reflection. A recent volume of the journal *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* consisted of literature reviews concerning basic human behavioral and emotional patterns for avoiding danger or meeting basic needs. Some theorists argue that, in order to learn and preserve these patterns, human beings have “survival circuits” that reliably activate the brain and nerves in the required way. In some ways, we learn these patterns from experience, including what we are taught by society (Fanselow 2018; Olsson et al. 2018; Chaniotis 2018). Yet, to some degree, we inherit such patterns through natural selection (Mobbs and Le Doux 2018), especially through the evolution of the amygdala (de Voogd et al. 2018) and hypothalamus (Canteras

2018; Yamaguchi and Lin 2018). Although neither learned nor inherited patterns are immutable, even when they are based in the structures of the brain (as Fine et al. 2013 stress in their essay debunking attempts to justify gender norms using neuroscience), it is worth keeping in mind how strong they are and the kind of deliberate work we must put in if we are to shape ourselves rather than to be shaped by them.

These patterns can cause us to place compulsive expectations on others. We have strong desires to stay safe and avoid danger. Even when we are not in danger, situations that appear threatening to us can activate the defense mechanisms or survival circuits whose purpose is to preserve the life of the animal at all costs. Few desires are harder to resist, few behaviors are harder to unlearn. If our response to danger is either to control or to submit in the hope of remaining secure, then we might impose expectations bequeathed to us by an ungainly genetic heritage. Hence expectations such as finding someone strong who can take care of one, or someone weak upon whom one can exercise one's strength; hence the unreasonable demands of unhappy lovers; hence the bitterness toward parents who could not be everything needed; hence the pressure on children to bring peace and satisfaction to a parent's fragile precarious life; and so for many of our compulsive expectations.

It is salutary to remember that receptivity is not (pace Nedelsky) the absence of expectations. It is the absence of imposing expectations carelessly or compulsively. Sometimes expectations must be placed; even the consummately receptive may insist on being treated as a person, for example. The difference between the consummately receptive person and the nonreceptive person is whether one is in the grip of an expectation that dictates behavior or whether one has achieved a measure of freedom.

## **Receptivity and Benevolence: The Problem of Control**

Consider again someone who controls, or attempts to control, another person because of misguided benevolence, such as the father who discouraged his daughter from the study of mathematics. A person does so because of expectations placed either carelessly or compulsively.

They might think that their role in the script they have learned is to make decisions for the good of the other person. In that case, they might be living out a societal norm or one that they learned and took for granted in the past. Maybe their parents or a former lover controlled them, and, now that they are older, they think that they are filling the role. They might even feel gratitude toward the person who controlled them in the past and believe that they deserve gratitude for not dropping their cue in the present.

They might control because of a deep desire or pattern of behavior that they rely upon as necessary. Maybe they believe that they must control the people around them so that they can ensure their own bodily safety, as someone might who spent childhood in a violent or unpredictable environment. Maybe they believe that they must control in order to protect their integrity as a person, if for example they had very controlling parents and are used to thinking of loving relationships as a power struggle. Or maybe what can be true of the person with careless expectations—that they believe they are being generous—can be true of the person with compulsive expectations: whether they are aware of it or not, they might need to be needed. For example, they might feel worthless unless they feel useful, and the only way they feel useful might be if they can direct someone else's life. It is a familiar problem, the person who believes the only way to help one is to manage one. Indeed, all of these scenarios are

familiar, either to personal experience, or to secondhand knowledge from a friend's life, or to literature, biography, and history.

Through receptivity, one can avoid the temptation to control another person. Receptivity toward the other person is to be with them without imposing careless or compulsive expectations. This is to be aware of the scripts one has learned, or at least to be willing to confront, acknowledge, and manage them when they are revealed. It is to labor at the discovery of and familiarity with the patterns one has developed, as psychologists would say, for defense mechanisms, or, as some neuroscientists would say, along one's survival circuits. In addition to this awareness, it is the cultivation of the willingness to make decisions based not on these expectations but on what becomes evident about the person and about what they need once these expectations have been unmasked.

Thus the person who has learned the script that to love is to control can be made aware of this script and can discern beyond it the respect that the other person needs. Thus the person who has escaped dangerous parents or abusive lovers, and who believes that they need a certain kind of power in order to preserve themselves, can know this to be untrue and can loosen their grip on that power. Thus the person who believes that they have carefully considered the other person's independence but decided they know best can ask themselves again whether this is true and furnish opportunity to dig up other, less generous, motives. And in these ways control over another's life can be given over to the other, to whom it belongs.

### **Receptivity and Consideration: The Problem of the Stalker**

Receptivity allows one to apprehend the appropriate level of consideration one should take of another's interests. Recall the stalker. She might plan her life around the schedule of another person, trying to accommodate and satisfy the other person even though this attention



is unwelcome. She might expect this of the victim too: she might want the victim to plan life around the stalker's interests.

One way to articulate the stalker's mistake is to say that the stalker is caught in a pattern of compulsively placing expectations. There is some need in the stalker for a life-shaping relationship with someone whom she does not really know. Very likely, this need comes from some deep psychic disturbance. It is, then, a kind of compulsion; the stalker is not acting as an agent in full command of herself.

Part of receptivity is that one does not compulsively place expectations. Therefore, if receptivity is part of love the virtue, behavior such as the stalker's is incompatible with love the virtue.

### **Receptivity and Perception of Moment: The Problem of Mistakes**

The problem with perception of moment was that it does not contain the resources necessary to direct itself. It does not enable someone to choose between genuinely admirable qualities, such as kindness, wisdom, maturity, and spurious graces such as wealth, pizzazz, or machismo.

Recall that the genuinely admirable qualities are usually appreciated because of the person's appreciation of goodness, or virtue, or other values. And recall that the spurious graces are usually appreciated because of careless or compulsive expectations. Thus an Isabel Archer can admire a Gilbert Osmond,<sup>30</sup> or a Dorothea Brooke to an Edward Casaubon,<sup>31</sup> if she has ideas about elegance or intellect the origin and justification of which she does not carefully examine. Or a Bonnie can admire a Clyde if she has a deep-seated need to be famous in order to value herself and if he promises to make her famous.

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<sup>30</sup> In Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*

<sup>31</sup> In George Eliot's *Middlemarch*

Receptivity, as the recognition and management of such expectations, can grant a person the self-awareness and the distance from their expectations necessary to avoiding such errors. If Isabel or Dorothea cultivated greater receptivity, they would understand the biases or scripts they had picked up and would not be controlled by them. If Bonnie cultivated greater receptivity, she would know the patterns of survival laid deep in her psyche and would have greater freedom from them.

Receptivity by itself does not confer right judgment about values. Nor does it produce perfect vision in the discernment of such values. But perception of moment is an appropriate response to a plurality of values, many of which either everyone or many people already recognize. Receptivity need not grant mystic knowledge of an esoteric ground for admiration. It is enough that it dispels the power of those interior forces that usually distract us from the genuinely momentous and misdirect us to the fake.

## **Conclusion**

Love the virtue has four components: benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity. When love the virtue is characterized this way, it meets the normative demands that one is correct to place on it. As the subject of an ideal, love the virtue has to be adequate to our moral situation: it cannot be excessively permissive or excessively stringent. If any of the four components are left out, the ideal easily falls into one or the other of these extremes. Further, if any is left out, the ideal is ill equipped to deal with the distortions to which the other components are liable. However, when all four are in place, love the virtue emerges as an ideal that renders one capable to meet many different moral challenges.

Some of these challenges await us in the next chapter. If universal love as an ideal urges us to love everyone, then this seems to produce serious problems with living a good

human life. Is one expected to love dangerous people, such as malicious people and abusers? Is one allowed to have intimate relationships, or would this be loving some people more than others? Is loving everyone too demanding—are the costs too high?

## CHAPTER 3

### UNIVERSAL LOVE: BENEFITS AND CONCERNS

#### **Introduction**

The preceding chapter established the dispositions of character that compose love as a virtue. It was silent concerning the scope of love. In order to complete an account of the ideal of universal love, we need to consider in what sense love could be universal. In order for the ideal to be morally acceptable, we need to consider whether it would be good for love to be universal. Although the ideal is widespread, it can be met with philosophical suspicion. Most of this chapter is to allay these suspicions.

In this chapter, I begin by arguing that an ideal of love as a virtue is an ideal to be disposed to approach everyone with love. This is distinct from maintaining loving relationships with everyone. I then show that this ideal promises benefits both to people in general and to the person following it. These benefits do not depend on any detailed theory of value; they are reasons admissible by anyone.

I then argue that similar ideals, such as those of care and benevolence, are no substitute for an ideal of love. My argument is a dilemma: insofar as care and benevolence are simpler than love, they cannot replicate its richness; insofar as they are as rich as love, they approach identity to it.

Finally, I address two concerns raised by an ideal of universal love. The first is that universal love might be too demanding. The second is that loving everyone might alienate a person from loving particular people in special ways, which is taken to be an important part of human life. Each of these concerns can be met. Ultimately, the way to meet them is not to

lay out a definitive decision procedure but to think more deeply about the creativity in balancing competing considerations.

### **How to Love Everyone?**

As the first chapter showed, an ideal does not necessarily restrict one to a particular career, set of practices, or personal style. This is true of the ideal of universal love. It does not require becoming an activist, a humanitarian, a mendicant. It does not determine whether to be soft-spoken or brassy, to stay busy or to have slow and quiet times, or similar matters of self-presentation and lifestyle. A person can exercise benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity with all manner of personal traits and preferences.

Almost everyone is a stranger. Is it fair to expect one to love so many strangers?

The ideal does not demand that one cultivate a loving relationship with every person alive. The ideal is to possess the virtue universal love. This is a disposition, not the formation of actualized relationships.

Consider an analogy to courage. Virtue theory does not hold that a person is courageous by actually facing every possible danger. Courage is not characterized by actual relations to the totality of dangers. Rather, it is characterized as a disposition to approach with bravery any dangers one encounters. This is true not only of someone who is somewhat brave. It is true of someone who is completely brave. Complete bravery, then, is still a disposition rather than the maintenance of a set of relations.

The same is true of universal love. The ideal is to acquire the virtue as completely as possible. One is to have a disposition to approach every other person with love: with a desire for their good, with the skill to take their interests into account when they will be affected,

with the tendency to notice what makes them significant, with the ability to be with them without carelessly or compulsively placing expectations.

Since nobody loves everyone else effortlessly, this will involve considerable effort to monitor and manage oneself. In order to love everyone, one must notice when one does not, when one is either malicious or indifferent, and develop techniques to counter malice or indifference. It might mean the exercise of firm resolve and the cancelation of severe disgust. It would certainly include the labor of detecting and unlearning whatever prejudices one had, whether against the well-recognized sources of prejudice such as race, class, gender, or other sources such as those against people with personalities one finds abrasive. Here, we might think of Iris Murdoch's (1971) example of the mother-in-law who dislikes her unmannered daughter-in-law and tries to overcome this dislike.

Some people might find some components of love more easy to habituate than others. For example, an older sibling in a large family, used to being busy and not having much time for self-examination, might find it easy to incorporate multiple interests into their deliberations and therefore might find consideration easier to practice than receptivity. Different people, then, will need to learn universal love in different ways.

### **How to Love Strangers?**

Thus the ideal does not require having a loving relationship with someone thoroughly remote. But, if one wanted to love a stranger, how would this be possible? In Alan Moore and David Lloyd's graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, the lesbian actress Valerie, imprisoned by a fascist government, writes a letter on toilet paper addressed to whoever will occupy her cell after she is executed: "I am me, and I don't know who you are, but I love you....I don't know who you are. Or whether you're a man or a woman. I may never see you or cry with you or get drunk with you. But I love you." Does Valerie's word of hope make any sense? If so, how?

The example is fiction. But writing a letter with materials ill-suited for self-expression, while imprisoned in isolation, for a person one has not seen is an apt symbol of the way early LGBT predecessors left behind a testament to those who came after them. Thus the example is not *merely* fiction.

The possibility of remote love is made more pressing by the Internet. A person can donate money to a crowdsourced fundraiser, or amplify the voice of an online advocate, or accept someone into an online forum. There is no doubt that many words and deeds on the Web are done lovelessly, often spitefully, grandiosely, cruelly, or stupidly. Can they be done lovingly?

Certainly they can be done with benevolence and consideration. One can will the good of a person with whom one has not the slightest acquaintance. One could take their interests into account in one's deliberations, for instance by trying to decide whether to spend money on an expensive soap or one mosquito nets. (More on this later.) But perhaps one cannot perceive the momentousness of a person without perceiving the person. And certainly one cannot be with another person absent careless or compulsive expectations without being with the person. If so, how can one love them?

If love is a virtue, understood as a disposition, then one could act with love for someone without making contact with them. The elements of love can stand on their own without the surrounding scaffolding of intimacy. One can direct benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity at a person on the street corner, or on Twitter. In other cases, total separation might prevent one from having a loving interaction with the person—how could Valerie be receptive toward someone without being with them?—but one could have the disposition to respond with love if the other person was present. Thus it would be correct to say that one loves them, if this means that one acts from the disposition of character

that would love them if they were present. Likewise one could be acting from courage by surveying a battlefield on a day before the enemy has arrived, if one acted from a courageous disposition that will motivate one during the battle.

Thus is possible not only the love of strangers encountered briefly but of strangers never encountered. It begins to look more feasible for a person to love everyone.

But why would they? If an ideal is a guide for shaping one's life, what makes a life of universal love a life with an appealing shape? Would a person conforming to it have to mold their life in a way unrecognizable and discontinuous with life before the ideal? On the other hand, would it make a difference—would it produce more good than a life with no ideal? An ideal suitable to guide life would be neither a code harsh and alien nor an ineffectual ornament.

### **What Good Is Universal Love?**

Universal love can serve as a suitable ideal for at least two reasons: it is continuous with portions of life separate from the ideal, that are both significant and valuable, and it can increase and enhance what is valuable about those portions of life. More specifically: since love is already part of a person's life, an ideal of universal love can preserve that love and can make it a greater part of a life than it would otherwise be.

Although bell hooks (2000) is right to point out that many people's lives are all but loveless—even some people who think this is not so—love is a basic part of human life. Many people know, or believe they know, other people whom they love deeply and who love them. Love for parents, children, siblings, friends, and lovers is, as philosophers point out in support of care ethics, among those elements of a life with which most people are most preoccupied.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Noddings (1984), Calhoun (1988), and Held (2012) among others.



People who have escaped cruel and loveless families often construct a “chosen family” and try to discover the love they never knew.<sup>33</sup>

There is some reason to think that, however many features of human life are open to the chances of social conditioning, the potential to love is inalienable to our nature. Evolved as social creatures, with social creatures as our nearest evolutionary relatives, we are possessed of brains that shortly after birth detect and respond to the emotions and desires of others. We are incapable of the social coordination necessary to our survival unless we can consider one another’s interests. We are inclined to notice and assess what is useful, skillful, or marvelous about our conspecifics. We have inherited a predisposition for the very traits (benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity) that characterize love as a virtue.<sup>34</sup>

For this reason, to try to love everyone would be to base an ideal on an attitude already familiar and already recognized as valuable. There would be no break with what we already try to do. Instead, there would be an attempt at unity and coherence. To follow this ideal, to extend love more broadly than a haphazard and unreflective life would do, is to invest in the inheritance with which we find ourselves already endowed.

If this is an inheritance already given, the question remains whether it offers any profit. Grant that following this ideal would be an attempt to unify life under an element already present in it. The question remains whether this would be good. Sleep, too, comes naturally, but one could not live a full and valuable life of universal sleep. What makes love a better ideal than sleep?

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<sup>33</sup> This has been crucial to queer people of whatever acronymic designation. See for example Michael Warner (1999), Oswald et al. (2009), and less academic discussions such as those of the “house” system in *Paris Is Burning*. See also Brake (2012).

<sup>34</sup> In support of this, see for example reviews of the scientific literature by Robin Allott (1992) and V. Griskevicius et al. (2015) and philosophical discussions of emotion such as that of Paul Griffiths (1997).

There are at least two ways an ideal can be beneficial. It can benefit the world at large, by adding more value to it.<sup>35</sup> Or it can benefit the person who follows it. An ideal of universal love can do both.

A person who tries to approach everyone with benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity would benefit other people. These attitudes mitigate cruelty, negligence, spite, vengefulness, domination, and a host of other damaging vices. So, there are many ways a loving person would not harm others. In addition to refraining from harm, such a person would add many goods to people's lives. They would try to promote people's good. They would take people's interests into account, which would respect people's interests even though it would not guarantee fulfilling the interests. They would value people, and, arguably, it is good to be valued.<sup>36</sup> They would not manipulate, exploit, punish, or otherwise harm people because of their own careless or compulsive expectations; as discussed before, they would tend to nurture rather than to hamper the autonomy of others. It will often be the case that a person who wants what is good for another and takes their interests into account will direct them toward other people who can help them more; that is to say, a loving person not only helps others but connects them to each other. This would increase the amount of loving relationships in the world, and it would increase the amount that the other people have in their lives.

And a person who practices universal love would benefit themselves. A life is better when one can skillfully maintain loving relationships. It is better still when these relationships

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<sup>35</sup> It is a question for a different project whether this comes down to benefiting people or whether there are goods that do not benefit people.

<sup>36</sup> For a review of some psychological literature on acceptance and rejection, see DeWall and Bushman (2011). This is a truth that breaks through even in unsentimental liberal political philosophy. John Rawls (1971) treats the "social bases of self-respect" as a "primary good" and Christopher Bennett (2003) argues that acceptance by others is necessary for the cultivation of autonomy.

multiply, as they would when a person approaches everyone with love and therefore has more opportunities for them (although, as will be emphasized below, there is no obligation to maintain a close relationship with everyone). And the opportunity to love other people can itself make people happier.<sup>37</sup> This is why people who are lonely often get pets, not only so that they will have someone who loves them but also so that they will have someone to love. In addition to all these benefits are the decrease in stress—the decrease in an experience of being harried called “stress” by a psychologist and the decrease in those chemical and muscular processes called “stress” by a physician—that result from a decrease in the fear, worry, anger, and bitterness of those attitudes one mitigates by loving.<sup>38</sup>

Although universal love promises to benefit both the world at large and the person who lives by it, it would not be an acceptable moral ideal if it foundered on either of two obstacles. If there were a simpler ideal promising the same good, then love would be needlessly complex. Or, if the risks of living by universal love threatened to destroy or degrade whoever lived by it, then love would be excessively costly.

### **Are Benevolence and Care Better Ideals?**

There already exist ethics of care and accounts of benevolence. These might seem suitable moral ideals, accomplishing the same good as love. If these turn out to be simpler, then love is not an ideal so much as a Rube Goldberg.

But this is not a problem. A virtue that is to serve as an ideal must be versatile enough to organize a life. If either care or benevolence is sufficiently limited to be distinct from love,

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<sup>37</sup> For psychological research that agrees with this ordinary impression, see Post (2005) and Doré et al. (2017). For political philosophy pointing this out, see Kim Brownlee (2016).

<sup>38</sup> See Seeman et al. (2002) and Umberson and Montez (2010).

then it will not have this versatility. To the extent that it increases in versatility, it will become less distinguishable from love.<sup>39</sup> Some examples will help illustrate the point.

Some consequentialists are concerned with benevolence as a motivation to promote the optimal (Mill 2001 [1863], Smart 1980, Mulgan 1997). They tend to define benevolence as simply the desire to do what is good for others, or even as the act of doing good to others. They tend to treat this as ultimately about increasing the amount of good in the world, perhaps optimally. Although the project of optimizing the good in the world is sufficient to occupy an entire life, it is a wholly future-facing and goal-directed attitude, subject to what Christine Swanton calls “the hegemony of promotion” (2003: 48). It lacks the versatility of a project that can incorporate into itself activities such as appreciating good qualities about a person (as perception of moment does) or being present to someone without having to promote their good (as receptivity does). Compared to love, strict optimization is thin and pale.

Some accounts of benevolence treat it as a much richer virtue. For instance, Yuval Livnat (2004) treats benevolence as involving the whole person—cognition, volition, emotion. He includes a range of elements, such as attentiveness to the needs of others, careful consideration of the best means to meet needs, and concern. In this way benevolence begins to resemble love. The difference might end in mere semantic preference.

It might be objected that not all anatomies of benevolence will match the anatomy of love from the previous chapter. For instance, Draper (2002) seems to include compassion, empathy, and concern, which do not neatly accord with consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity. However, I think that the components I list are distinct from each other and necessary to the ideal. Accounts that fail to distinguish between, for instance, consideration

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<sup>39</sup> Remember that here, as elsewhere, I mean love as I have described it, especially in Chapter 2.

and receptivity will lack the clarity that is desirable when offering people a catalogue of dispositions to cultivate. Accounts that fail to include any of my four elements will face the problems of the preceding chapter.

Some philosophers make no clear distinction between benevolence and love. Sometimes they seem to describe love as merely desiring the other's good. Sometimes they seem to describe benevolence as the kind of rich disposition that I describe in my project. Joseph Butler (1726), in his first sermon, lists as aspects of benevolence "friendship," "compassion," "parental or filial affections," and "love of another."<sup>40</sup> I count this as an alliance in favor of my ideal.

Care ethics faces a similar dilemma. Care ethics is by now too wealthy a theory for easy summary.<sup>41</sup> There is no principled way to cover even the principal authors without straying far from the path of this discourse. Paradoxically, this calls for even briefer treatment.

There are multiple distinct accounts of what care is. There are disagreements about whether it is best defined as a practice, a virtue, or a quality of relationship. To the extent that it is defined as a virtue, either it is focused within narrower bounds than love (as would be the case, for instance, if the labors of a nurse were taken as the paradigmatic carer) or it is difficult or impossible to distinguish from love (as would be the case if an intimate were taken as the paradigmatic carer).

Universal love has a further advantage over care, and that is its universality. Care ethics recommends confining care to people with whom one is either intimately associated or

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<sup>40</sup> See Rorty (1978) for commentary on Butler's conception of benevolence. John P. Reeder Jr (1998), like a fair number of religious ethicists, treats benevolence and love as synonymous.

<sup>41</sup> For a start, see Gilligan (1982), Noddings (1984), Ruddick (1989), Slote (2001, 2007), and the anthology of essays in Held (1995). For a useful summary of the many attempts to relate care ethics to virtue theory, which might have a special bearing on my project, see Steyl (2019).

connected by people with whom one is intimately associated. This has, from Claudia Card (1990) onward, led to complaints both that it is an insufficient guide to life and that it can be morally undesirable, because of the insularity and communal selfishness it can encourage, if it is left without complements.<sup>42</sup> Universal love does not have this problem.

So, love is promising qua ideal, and it cannot be replaced by benevolence or care insofar as these are distinct. This promise rests on the likely good outcomes of living according to universal love. But no ideal, whatever its benefits to self and world, comes without a cost. Are the costs too high? One might worry that universal love is too demanding a standard. Or that it alienate oneself from special relationships.

### **Cognitive and Motive Costs**

Consider the effort that universal love would require. In addition to family and friends, one would have to love roommates, coworkers, people on the sidewalk, vendors, and whatever chance acquaintances one might ordinarily have trouble offering common courtesy. Extending love to that many people could cost a fortune in cognitive, motivational, and affective resources.

The distinction between an obligation and an ideal will not relieve this burden. Although an ideal cannot impose the moral penalty an obligation can, this does not necessarily imply that an ideal makes milder demands. Treating universal love as an ideal rather than an obligation does not thereby transform it into a suggestion for occasional love. The ideal is to love everyone. Of course, this does not mean to love everyone all the time, to the exclusion of sleep or eating. But it means arranging one's life in such a way, and cultivating the character

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<sup>42</sup> Such concerns led Virginia Held (2006) to suggest care as the dominant motive in intimate matters and a supplementary motive in broader matters.

traits such that one is disposed to extend benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity toward everyone.

Some ideals are more demanding than others. One could take moderation as an ideal and arrange one's life so that one never exceeds the bounds of temperate desire, never gives one's whole life to a single unifying motive. This might not be as easy as it sounds, but it is not as demanding as, say, an ideal of uninterrupted service of the poorest people. Some ideals can in themselves be too demanding. That of universal love might turn out to be one. It demands that one approach every person by desiring their good, by considering how one's action will affect their interests, by perceiving them as momentous, and by being with them without carelessly or compulsively imposing expectations.

Demandingness, literally understood, is a problem only as long as we think of the ideal as requiring action rather than offering guidance for action. The tendency to think of an ethic as demanding action, as forcing us to do what goes against our prudential interests, belongs more to ethical models involving law or obligation than to those involving an ideal. While in one sense a "rule" can be a command that must not be violated, in another sense it can be a device for determining apt proportions; an ideal would resemble the latter metaphor more than the former.

Since an ideal is a structure for ordering one's life according to a value, an ideal that enables one to order one's entire life is more useful than one that enables one to order only parts of one's life. An ideal that offers guidance how to approach business transactions, familial relationships, political participation, the enjoyment of the arts, and casual brushes with people on the street is more useful than one that leaves any or all of these parts of life unmapped. For this reason, what at first appeared to be undue stringency turns out to be greater helpfulness.

So much for demandingness as such. However, a deeper problem remains. Even if the ideal is an instrument for organizing a life, and even if conformity to it is not “demanded” as conformity to an obligation would be, it might seem that someone wholly committed to the ideal, someone who had entirely inculcated love as a virtue, would find themselves overwhelmed by the needs of the world. If someone succeeded in perfectly assuming the habits of love, wouldn’t they find that they had become the kind of person who bore an intolerable burden of concern?<sup>43</sup>

The main problem is not, as one might think at first, consideration. With practice, it can become easy not only to coordinate multiple interests but to determine whose interests to coordinate and whose are too great or too remote to fall under one’s decision. The real risk of being overwhelmed comes from benevolence and perception of moment. They would saddle a person with the desire for everyone’s good and the perception of everyone’s weal or woe as charged with significance—an intolerably sharp and vivid attitude, as long as there is widespread poverty, disease, and suffering.

### **Impartiality and Alienation**

Universal love would be extended to neighbors, siblings, parents, lovers, friends, and strangers alike. What would such a love do to special relationships? To people’s sense that they are special? To one’s ability to live a life of healthy intimacy?

First, if universal love is loving everyone equally, would this allow a person to have intimate relationships? If love is extended to everyone, and if love treats everyone as equal, does this require equal intimacy with everyone—which is to say, either an impossible

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<sup>43</sup> This point was made clear to me by Cheshire Calhoun.



magnificence of intimacy or no intimacy at all? If one loves everyone in general, could one prefer anyone in particular?

For example, John Cottingham (1983) asks whether someone who loves universally would have reason to paint their own house rather than their neighbor's. More plausibly, Virginia Held asks whether an impartial person who works as a teacher would spend more time helping "troubled young children succeed academically" than with their own child (2006: 97). John Stuart Mill (2001) famously boasts that universal impartial benevolence would give one no reason to prefer saving one's drowning wife over saving a stranger, a boast that Bernard Williams (1981) takes as evidence that universal impartial benevolence would be bad.

In fact, there is some evidence that great humanitarians and altruists tend to neglect their special relationships. Larissa MacFarquhar's book *Strangers Drowning* documents people who devote their lives to helping hundreds among the most unfortunate, often expecting great sacrifice from and occasionally becoming estranged from their families. More detailed biographies of Leo Tolstoy,<sup>44</sup> Mahatma Gandhi,<sup>45</sup> and other voices advocating extreme altruism testify to the same tendency.

Williams takes this as obviously bad. A person living a good life, he thinks, will prefer their wife, not for any morally justified reason but simply because she is their wife. Cottingham makes a related point. A world full of impartial people would lack one kind of value, the value that comes from special intimate relationships and cannot be got any other way. Insofar as these relationships are valuable in themselves, a world without them is deprived of a unique good, just as a world deprived of rational creatures would be deprived of the goods that come

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<sup>44</sup> For example, his habitual unkindness to his wife Sofia Andreyevna is told in her autobiography, translated by John Woodsworth and Arkadi Klioutchanski (2011).

<sup>45</sup> For Gandhi's at times high-maintenance and at times dangerous failings, see Rajmohan Gandhi (2007) and Joseph Lelyveld (2012).

from rationality. What's more, such a person, with no friends, no family ties, no tenderness for those they have known long and well, would be strange, almost unrecognizable, barely human; as Aristotle says of the solitary, they would be either a beast or a god (*Politics* I.2).

Second, if one wanted to have intimate relationships with some people and not others, how would one's near and dear feel about sharing one with the entire world? Alan Soble (1990) argues that one reason intimate relationships matter to us is that they are necessary for our self-esteem. We do not want to feel like just any other person. We want to be special to someone. Even if someone could love all people and still maintain intimate relationships, would the people in those relationships feel loved or would they feel cheated?

### **How Are these Concerns Understood?**

The way to alleviate these concerns depends on how they are understood to be related to the ideal. Is the worry that these costs are inherent to the ideal, that there is no way to live by the ideal without bearing these costs? If so, then the way to address the worry is to reveal the space between the ideal and these costs, to draw attention to certain overlooked distinctions.

The first concern, of expending too lavishly one's limited cognitive and motivational budget, rests on the supposition of a close tie between love and emotional investment of a specific kind. It supposes that human beings, even in their most intimate relationships, are incapable of extricating their own happiness and emotional stability from their concern for other people. But this is not the case.

In psychology, the ability to separate one's own happiness, basic needs, and emotional stability from those of other people is called differentiation. Mostly following the work of Murray Bowen (1974) and using a scale developed by Elizabeth Skowron and Myrna Friedlander (1998), some psychologists suggest that differentiation in intimate relationships is

important for a healthy ability to voice one's needs, to regulate one's own emotions, and to manage conflict in the relationship (Olver et al. 1989, Skowron and Dendy 2004). Empirical research seems to bear this out in a wide variety of settings: among homosexual couples (Spencer and Brown 2007), among different races (Skowron 2004), and in multiple countries,<sup>46</sup> although the studies are inconclusive.<sup>47</sup> Bowen's theory suggests that a relationship will be more loving and healthy if its members are able to find happiness and emotional stability partly independent of their investment in the other members.

In my own experience, this is true. I have often been fooled into thinking that I love someone to the extent that I worry about them. I have been able to give people better benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity when I force myself to reflect on my apparent concern for them, when I am able to distance myself from the overwhelming emotions I sometimes feel on their behalf, and when I plant myself in some measure of emotional independence.

True, affect will remain part of love. And it will, at times, be overwhelming. But to be overwhelmed is not the same as to be damaged. The word "overwhelmed" literally means to be submerged under a wave, and irresistible, sometimes unpleasant, waves of emotion can rise in the most oceanic love. Although far from the perfect embodiment of love, I sometimes feel anxiety, despair, pity, and sorrow when I think of how many people are hungry, oppressed, or alone. But waves pass. The human psyche is incapable of remaining under a wave continuously, and through the careful practice of differentiation such waves can be swum.

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<sup>46</sup> In Jordan as reported by Alaedein (2008), China as reported by Lam and Chan-so (2013), and Spain as reported by Rodríguez-González et al. (2015).

<sup>47</sup> See Miller et al. (2007) for some observations about the inconclusiveness of research based on Bowen's theory.

Nor is differentiation a wholly extraneous force that can be imposed on love. Insofar as differentiation is a separation from certain kinds of careless or compulsive expectations, it can be motivated by or perhaps part of receptivity. In this way, it belongs to the ideal of love, either because receptivity demands it or because it is a part of receptivity.

The second worry, that to love everyone is to erase the boundaries between one's dearest friends and merest acquaintances, rests on a kindred mistake: thinking that loving everyone means to love everyone in the same way. To put the same degree of motivational force behind one's love for each person and to express one's love for each person in the same style would make it impossible to distinguish between a friend and a casual acquaintance, between a dear lover and a passing stranger. But this is not required in order to love everyone, since there is a difference between love and intimacy.

Not every person is equally easy to appreciate or difficult to endure. Everyone finds some people more likable than others. Their personalities are more congenial, their ways of living in the world make more sense. These people do not take as much effort to love. When this happens, it is usually easy to tell. It generates a feeling of greater intimacy, of appreciation, of being kindred.

I am sometimes asked whether some people deserve more love than others. Questions linking love to desert, in my judgment, usually require a more precise paraphrase. Sometimes the question turns out to be whether one has to love those who do great evil, a question addressed in the next chapter. When it is not about evil, I think this question is usually whether everyone deserves to be granted equal intimacy and friendly regard. No. Whether through constitutional sympathies, shared interests, occasions for gratitude, many are called but few are chosen.

This would not be any less the case if one also put in the effort to love the people with whom one was not simpático. One can extend love universally and friendship selectively, just as one can be kind to many but marry only a few. Friendship would be possible for someone practicing universal love.

Even among people whom one loves just as easily, one loves them in different ways. I relate to my sister differently from my parents. We tell different jokes, exchange different confidences, enjoy different activities. Among my friends, with some I listen more carefully and protect their feelings, with others I am more brusque, with others I can complain more.

These are some of the means of intimacy: common livings, occasions for joy, easy genuineness. These means of intimacy are what make the sorts of human relationship that total impartiality apparently threatens to efface. Not only are these intimacies conceptually distinct from the four components of love (benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity), they vary in ways that are not necessarily correlate to variances in love. Even when one loves two friends to the same degree, the opportunities for intimacy can differ. Since variations in intimacy and in love are independent of each other, to love everyone would not be the same as to be intimate with everyone. So, the attempt to love everyone would not threaten to erase the chances of healthy intimacy in the way that total impartiality would.

Further, anyone beginning to follow the ideal of love would begin already situated among intimates, and in their deliberations they can take into account this greater familiarity. By exercising consideration and receptivity, they would be able to appreciate reasons for either helping someone, perhaps even intervening, or giving them some distance. If someone practices love as it is articulated in the preceding chapter, they will not need to be needed. They will recognize when they do not know a person well enough to spend much time helping. They will focus more effort on the people whom they know well. Such considerations not

only license but positively encourage more regular involvement in the interests of intimates than of strangers. Recall that this was the way in which receptivity obviated the problem with consideration.

On the other hand, this does not strictly prioritize intimate relationships. In the debate between partialists and impartialists, between those philosophers who think that one ought to put the interests of one's near and dear above the interests (even the graver interests) of strangers and those who do not,<sup>48</sup> a love ethic would come down as moderate: a loving person will respond to the greater appropriateness of loving their intimate friends, but they will also respond to the grave needs of strangers.

These considerations prise apart the ideal and the harmful or inhuman patterns of behavior that at first seemed lodged in it. Insofar as the concerns rested on the assumption that the ideal inherently fostered these harmful or inhuman behaviors, this is a sufficient answer.

But perhaps the worry is, in a sense, the opposite. One might worry, not that the ideal enjoins both overtaxing and alienating oneself, but that it is powerless to recommend the right degree of effort and impartiality. In other words, not that the space between the ideal and these behaviors is too tight, but that there is now too great a gap between recommendations the ideal is capable of making and the answers a person would demand regarding how much to take on the burdens of the world, what balance to strike between intimacy and universal kindness. For instance, can the ideal tell one how hard to labor for the good of others? Can it tell one how much time to spend on public welfare and how much to spend at home?

### **Ideals, Variety, and Creativity**

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<sup>48</sup> See John Kekes (1981), John Cottingham (1983), Marcia Baron (1991), Marilyn Friedman (1991), Susan Wolf (1992), Cynthia Stark (1997), and Amartya Sen (2002) among others.

There would be undeniable comfort in a series of lexically ordered principles that would specify when to give to intimates and when to give to strangers. But there are life-structuring practices, perhaps entire regions of human action, that cannot authentically rely on such an algorithmic decision procedure. I take the living of an ideal to be such a practice.

But there is more to be said. I find myself irritated when I read a philosopher arguing that a problem cannot be solved by science, or that there is something indefinable about humanity, unless the philosopher can provide some concept or metaphor or observation that brings me to a better understanding of such an elusive corner of human experience. If I intend to do so myself—in other words, if I intend to say something useful—I should sculpt a model of non-algorithmic human decision in a way that would help you, the reader, better understand how to better undertake such action.

I think the solution can be dug out of experiences of creativity. To live by an ideal is to live creatively: to take inchoate materials and to arrange them into a structure in accordance with human intention, an intention itself in accordance with values. This is a reason that it does not admit of algorithms. One might creatively use an algorithm, as perhaps Mondrian could, but one cannot formulate an algorithm that will itself reliably produce creativity. My suggestion how to balance the interests of intimates and the interests of strangers, then, is that one attend to features of successful creativity.

One place to find creativity is in artistic work, the creation of beautiful things. A plain feature of such creative work is that there is no closed set of definitive expressions of beauty. Indeed, a single expression is impossible. How could one combine the splendors of Michelangelo with the simplicity of Rothko, the sonic spirituality of Coltrane with the verbal earthiness of Neruda? In the same way, living by an ideal like universal love does not commit one to a closed set of definitive expressions of love.

Rather, what counts is to consider the materials with which one starts and to devise the best way to utilize these materials. For simplicity of exposition, I have chosen two of the main features of life a person should look at when creatively expressing an ideal: capacities and circumstances.

Different people can live out the same ideal in different ways because they differ in capacities. These could be inborn talent, or acquired in the course of life; in either case, they are resources one can bring to the work. For instance, if the ideal is to live the life of intellect, a person with strong deductive powers might become a mathematician while a person of interpretive subtlety might study literature. Someone having a mixture of both powers might occupy a niche requiring both, perhaps chemistry.

The choice of expression will depend not just on capacities but on circumstances. For example, people trying to live out the ideal of justice will find themselves differently suited to bring out justice in different conflicts of human interests. Different circumstances demand different kinds of efforts. Someone from an oppressed community who has had to engage with injustice their entire life might dedicate themselves to justice at a much younger age. Someone else could awaken to the problems of their society at a later age, because of relative privileges. Then there are people who are raised in an oppressive community but inhabit a false consciousness and later in life have to unwind the layers of propaganda and self-deception that swaddle them, while someone else might be raised in a safe wealthy family with a zeal for justice but need to unlearn assumptions that make them conceive of themselves as a savior or patron. Such differences require, in addition to different efforts, different commitments formed prior to taking up the ideal, which impose different limitations. For instance, someone seeking justice later in life might have married and borne children, while someone starting earlier might not be similarly attached.



Capacities and circumstances must be integrated into the ideal in different ways. If someone who excelled at deduction but had trouble understanding the words of other people were convinced that the life of intellect demanded a career in letters, such a person would be both unsuccessful at the ideal and probably unhappy. If someone who had to take care of an elderly relative believed that the only way to work for justice was to be a full-time activist or to move to the capital to be a lobbyist, this would necessitate either despair of the ideal or betrayal of prior commitments.

But this does not entail a simple rule such as “Be an activist if you have the right capacities and if you are unattached, or stay at home if you lack the capacities or have prior commitments.” For instance, a person gifted with hospitality and friendliness, committed to a family that requires care, could open up their home or another place as a space for safe, supportive, justice-minded community. Activists need such places to rest and to refill themselves after they have been emptying themselves in the political struggle. Finding such creative expressions will depend on integrating many more capacities and circumstances than I have named here.

There are skills one can practice, not necessarily themselves part of the ideal, that can help one recognize and integrate the materials of one’s life: self-knowledge, understood as the ability to know one’s deepest desires and commitments and one’s capacities; and practical wisdom, understood as the correct apprehension of particular circumstances.

An ideal is, by its very nature, successfully lived only within the particular circumstances of a life, because it is an arrangement of a life ordered according to its values; it makes no more sense to say a specific pattern of life is more successful than it does to say a sculpture of marble is a more successful sculpture than one of bronze. The processes of planning, executing, and assessing an ideal are non-algorithmic and creative, suited more to

the model of artistic work than legal procedure, and demanding a different exercise of human powers. If only I could conclude that such exercise was easy and definable! Instead, the most I can do is name some of its rudiments, hoping that this makes it more understandable.

### **Conclusion**

The present chapter argues that the disposition to love everyone is a suitable ideal, both in that it produces good and that the main concerns about its potential to harm can be allayed.

Before this argument can be completed, it must respond to what is surely the gravest difficulty faced by an ideal of universal love. What would a person trying to love everyone do when confronted not with tolerable problems like limited time but with intolerable harms? What does the ideal say in response to evil? That is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### LOVE, FORGIVENESS, AND EVIL

#### **Introduction**

If one takes up the ideal of loving everyone, the worst obstacle is the prospect of loving people who do great evil. Can one be expected to love the war criminal? The child abuser? Worse, what if one is the victim against which a crime is committed or an abuse is enacted? Does the ideal of universal love transform itself from a guide to life into a second torturer? Worst of all, would it demand remaining intimate with someone who is dangerous?

It might be rightly pointed out that an ideal is not a set of obligations. This means that it does not demand total adherence on pain of immorality. An ideal is more optional than an obligation, and departing from an ideal under great strain does not incur the guilt that breaking a moral obligation might.

However, an ideal can be lived fully or less fully, perfectly or imperfectly. Even if it is lived out in different ways, there must be some decisions that count as following it and others that count as betraying it, or it is a trivial and useless standard. Thus the worry remains: would living perfectly by the ideal of universal love force a person to love, to forgive evil, to forgo resentment, to endanger oneself in maintaining a relationship of abuse?

In this chapter, first I consider the depths of evil with which we have to deal. Second, I argue that, insofar as forgiveness involves more than the restoration of goodwill, universal love does not require forgiveness. Then, I show that, although perfectly living up the ideal of universal love requires loving evildoers, a failure to love evildoers is not necessarily a failure to live by the ideal. I conclude not by considering how individuals can love evildoers but by arguing that society should be arranged in a way that makes it safer to do so.

## Evils

Claudia Card (2010: Chapter 1) defines evil as a reasonably foreseeable intolerable harm produced by inexcusable wrongdoing. An intolerable harm “prevents the party harmed from doing minimally well, from enduring at a certain threshold of well-being” (102). Within the bounds of this definition are evils that vary in goal, source, and effects.

Some evils are done for ends that are in themselves good, so that, although the wrongdoing by which the person tries to achieve them is inexcusable, the goal is approvable in the abstract. For instance, a government might torture dissidents with the goal of preserving civil order. But “diabolical evil” is “extremely cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment as means to an evil end” (Card 2010: 58). A paradigmatic case is the torture, rape, or moral corruption of individuals belonging to a group targeted for genocide: the mistreatment is itself evil, and it is done to further the goal of genocide, also an evil. Someone who commits diabolical evil need not and probably does not regard it as evil, but it is evil nevertheless.

Some evils originate with government action. The most representative cases are what happens in concentration camps. The horrors of Auschwitz are too well-known for repetition here. One could mention Vlakplaas, the farm used as a black site for interrogation and murder by anti-apartheid operatives. Or the Villa Grimaldi, used to torture thousands of political prisoners under Augusto Pinochet in Chile. In addition to running over people’s legs with cars, electrocuting them on “the grill” (“la parilla”), and near-drowning them in buckets of ammonia and excrement, officers of the regime forced prisoners to engage in sexual activity with “another prisoner or a family member,” introduced “rats, spiders, or other insects into the mouth, anus, or vagina” of prisoners, or “forced them to have sex with dogs especially trained

for this task” (Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura: Chapter 5).<sup>49</sup> Or the concentration camps used to detain immigrants in the United States, in which prisoners are forced to drink from toilets<sup>50</sup> and in which thousands of children, detained in separate facilities from their parents, report being sexually abused.<sup>51</sup> At the time of this writing, agents of ICE at the Adelanto ICE Processing Center in San Bernardino are using HDQ Neutral, a disinfectant sold by Spartan Chemical Company, so frequently that it is causing prisoners to have respiratory afflictions, bleeding from the nose and mouth, headaches, and blisters, among other symptoms; the long-term effects on health are not yet known.<sup>52</sup>

Other evils take place not in concentration camps controlled by the state but in homes controlled by parents: among others, rape of children, beatings, Munchausen by proxy, and the cruel punishments often enacted upon LGBT children. There are several convicted cases (and therefore, one assumes, even more unreported cases) of parents locking children in closets or cages at all times, often in conjunction with starvation and sexual abuse.<sup>53</sup> Siblings, whether in childhood or adulthood, can be astonishingly cruel to each other, whether by one

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<sup>49</sup> The report is in Spanish. Translations are my own. The Comisión originally published the report, popularly known as the “Valech Report” and a sequel to the earlier “Rettig Report,” online at <http://www.comisiontortura.cl/>

<sup>50</sup> One article by The Guardian covering the story can be found here: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/03/migrant-detention-centres-us-border-patrol>

<sup>51</sup> The New York Times published one of many articles on this: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/27/us/immigrant-children-sexual-abuse.html>

<sup>52</sup> Here is a URL to the official complaint by activist groups: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6923000-Adelanto-CRCL-Complaint-052120.html>

<sup>53</sup> Notable cases include the children of Sylvia Jovanna Vasquez (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-jan-11-me-cage11-story.html>); Lauren Kavanaugh, imprisoned by her mother and stepfather (<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/crime/2019/03/01/girl-in-the-closet-lauren-kavanaugh-indicted-after-admitting-she-sexually-assaulted-a-teenage-girl/>); and Michelle Stevens, notable for becoming a psychologist and public speaker who studies trauma (<https://scaredselfless.com/index.html>).

forcing incest on the other, or through bullying and torture, or through emotional manipulation.

In addition to these evils, which can destroy the chances of a happy life for their victims, people inflict serious injuries of many kinds that permanently distort the personality or hamper one's pursuit of happiness. Many parents who end their marriage (or who should end it but stay in it anyway) manipulate their children, coaxing them into being diplomatic mediators or trying to win them over to one side of the conflict. This can produce deep-set habits of taking on the emotional burdens of other people, of finding it difficult to trust, and more. One parent can injure not only the child but the other parent in this way, if the child is manipulated into favoring one parent and being estranged from the other. People raised in fundamentalist churches, or by Republicans, or in other bigoted ideologies often need years to unwind the layers of bad faith and hatred wrapped around the heart, often have to rethink their most fundamental personal values. Siblings who do not work evil can nevertheless be hurtful, and, since they are often among people's first and most formative relationships, can affect one's chances of relating in healthy ways to other people. Even strangers can ruin domestic happiness, not for any political or even selfish reason, but through the carelessness of driving drunk.

### **Forgiving Enemies**

When I tell people that I argue for the acceptability of universal love, they often want to know whether this means evil people should be loved. And it usually transpires that they think of this as whether evil people should be forgiven. No doubt this is because many people associate universal love with the words of Jesus in the Gospel according to Luke: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, offer the other also..." (6: 27-29), often conflated

with or taken to mean the same thing as his injunction to “forgive others their trespasses” (Matthew 6: 14, 15).

Would loving an evil person require forgiving them? Perhaps the question can be answered by first determining which attitudes and behaviors are necessary in order to forgive and whether one can love without those attitudes and behaviors. To take an analogy: If one wanted to know whether being a great architect required zeal for architecture, one could try to determine which attitudes and behaviors belong to such a zeal. If zeal for architecture includes being deeply moved by at least some architectural masterworks, an eagerness to learn about its principles, and the behaviors of actually learning when given the chance, then one could first determine whether being a great architect required one to have these attitudes and perform this behavior. If it turns out that one or more of these are not required to be a great architect, then one would have shown that, because the part is not required, neither is the whole, and therefore that zeal is not required. With universal love, then, one could decide whether it requires forgiving evil people by first asking which attitudes and behaviors belong to forgiveness and then finding out whether the ideal requires those attitudes and behaviors.

Forgiveness is a complex and contested notion. Philosophers’ definitions of forgiveness usually focus on either the overcoming of some emotions or a change in intention. It is often distinguished from pardon, the simple waiving of a right to demand compensation or to enact punishment. It is more than that. The proposed definitions vary both in their components and in their emphases, with competing definitions gathered around a few central but disputed features.

Jean Hampton (1988: 83) emphasizes respect for the evildoer as a person. She argues that forgiveness, as a change of heart, is when a person “‘washes away’ or disregards the wrongdoer’s immoral actions or character traits in his ultimate moral judgment of her, and

comes to see her as still *decent*, *not* rotten as a person, and someone with whom he may be able to renew a relationship.”

Many definitions involve the elimination of emotional hostility. McNaughton and Eve Garrard (2017) define it as “the overcoming of *hostile* feelings toward the wrongdoer and their replacement by an appropriate degree of goodwill” (96), the hostile feelings to be overcome including “hatred, schadenfreude, malice, spite, rancor, bitterness, vengefulness,” “froideur,” and “disdain” (111). David Novitz (1998: 303) lists as necessary conditions to forgiveness that one believes oneself to have been harmed, that one has anger or resentment toward them, and that one tries to overcome both claims to compensation and the anger or resentment.

Cheshire Calhoun (1992) beautifully brings these two conceptions together. She treats forgiveness as a change of heart in which one forswears “resentment, anger, or other hard feelings” (77) and suggests that the way to do this without giving up one’s conviction that the person acted wrongly is to make sense of their choice, not as an acceptable moral option, but as a piece of a narrative about the coherence of their motivations as a person.

Some philosophical accounts focus on forgiveness and the relationship between the victim and the evildoer. Martin Luther King Jr (1963) says, “Forgiveness means reconciliation, a coming together again” (49), that “the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship” (48). Barrett Emerick (2017) distinguishes the two: forgiveness, dependent on the forgiver and not the forgiven, is “the partially active forgoing of negative emotions for moral reasons” (118) while reconciliation, a negotiation between both parties, is “being able to coexist and not do violence to each other, the normalizing of relations, building or rebuilding trust, and being able to get along with each other to work toward some collective end” (123).



Glen Pettigrove (2012: 17-19) argues for a difference between minimal forgiveness, which might be either a loss of resentment or other hostile feelings or acting in non-punitive ways, and “aspirational forgiveness,” the forgiveness everyone would like to have, which would include the forgoing of hostile emotion, the lack of punitive action, and the commitment to maintain both in future. Pettigrove thus combines many of the elements of the other definitions without insisting that each case of forgiveness instantiate them all.

Here, then, are elements commonly alleged to be necessary to forgiveness: the renunciation of resentment, the attempt to understand, efforts toward reconciliation, and the restoration or maintenance of goodwill. If forgiveness requires one of these elements, and if the ideal does not require that element, then neither does the ideal require forgiveness.

The restoration of goodwill is certainly part of love, because universal love includes benevolence and is incompatible with entire malice. What about the renunciation of resentment, the attempt to understand, and efforts toward reconciliation? Further investigation will show that none of these is required by the ideal. Insofar as forgiveness is nothing but the restoration of goodwill, it seems to be required for perfect universal love; insofar as forgiveness includes one of these other three elements, it is not required.

### **The Merits of Resentment**

In an afterward to his memoirs, Primo Levi, the chemist and survivor of Auschwitz, responds to the question whether he has forgiven the Nazis:

My personal temperament is not inclined to hatred. I regard it as bestial, crude, and prefer on the contrary that my actions and thoughts, as far as possible, should be the product of reason; therefore I have never cultivated within myself hatred as a desire for revenge, or as a desire to inflict suffering on my real or presumed enemy, or as a private vendetta....All the same...No, I have not forgiven any of the culprits, nor am

I willing to forgive a single one of them, unless he has shown (with deeds, not words, and not too long afterward) that he has become conscious of the crimes and errors of Italian and foreign fascism... (458)

Levi argues for rationalism about forgiveness and hatred. Forgiveness can be merited by repentance; hatred is unacceptable because it is irrational.

Jean Améry, likewise a survivor of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, resists this rationalism in favor of what he calls “not only an unnatural but also a logically inconsistent condition” (68). In the essay “Resentments,” from his book *The Mind's Limits*, Améry reflects on his unwillingness not merely to pardon the Nazis but to let go of his resentment. He describes his resentment as an expression of his unwillingness to relinquish morality in favor of conformity and as a necessary protection of his dignity.

He considers morality, in part, an affirmation of human values in defiance of the natural or inevitable:

Man has the right and the privilege to declare himself to be in disagreement with every natural occurrence, including the biological healing that time brings about.....The moral power to resist contains the protest, the revolt against reality, which is rational only as long as it is moral. The moral person demands the annulment of time—in the particular case under question, by nailing the criminal to his deed. (72)

Here he reverses the commonsensical idea that resentment is natural and forgiveness, as Pope would say, divine. Rather, it is natural for time to lessen resentment; what requires human agency, what requires the integrity of a continued judgment of value, is persistence in resentment. According to Améry, then, resentment is moral, while “lazily and cheaply” forgiving, when this is “induced by social pressure” or is simply the process of emotional healing rather than because of satisfaction rendered, is immoral (72).

But what is the value that resentment upholds? For what reason does a person exercise this moral power to revolt against reality? Discussing his own torture in the camps, his knowledge that an SS-man who had beaten his skull with a shovel had been executed, and the only partial appeasement this execution brought him, Améry says this:

The experience of persecution was, at the very bottom, that of an extreme *loneliness*. At stake for me is the release from the abandonment that has persisted from that time until today. When SS-man Wajs stood before the firing squad, he experienced the moral truth of his crimes. At that moment, he was with *me*—and I was no longer alone with the shovel handle. I would like to believe that at the instant of his execution he wanted exactly as much as I to turn back time, to undo what had been done. (70)

Améry here anticipates the sentiments of several prominent philosophers who treat resentment as a justified demand for respect (e.g. Novitz 1998, Hieronymi 2001, Schott 2004). As Pamela Hieronymi (2001) puts it, one has trouble forgiving another person because unforgiveness serves a protective function: it preserves one's sense of worth, and it warns one not to trust a person in the future. Améry is unique in the eloquence with which he reveals this demand to rest on the importance of other people's judgments. For him, the world of the camps was a thorough epistemic manipulation and a convincing reversal of ordinary human relations: "The power structure of the SS state towered up before the prisoner monstrously and indomitably, a reality that could not be escaped and that therefore finally seemed *reasonable*" (12). So thorough was the manipulation, so convincing the reversal, that his own belief in his dignity and in the wrongness of his persecution could not be fully vindicated unless the Nazis, such as the SS-man, were brought to share these beliefs. Everyone's

conviction regarding many beliefs depends upon agreement with the beliefs of at least some other people. The world of the Auschwitz victim, for Améry, is a world in which that universal human dependence has become too powerful to be met unless it is met by the guilty.

While recognizing the exceptional features of Auschwitz, one can draw a broader lesson here. What makes resentment a plea for vindication, what makes its satisfaction rest in punishment of the guilty rather than recompense by a third party, is the necessity to bring the evildoer's assessment into alignment with one's own. Hobbes may have had this in mind when in *Leviathan* he defines "revengefulness" as "desire, by doing hurt to another, to make him condemn some fact [sc. deed] of his own" (Chapter 6).

Is it possible to hold fast to one's dignity in this way without giving up an ideal of universal love? Or, to put the question in reverse: Does love require the renunciation of anger or resentment? If one is going to love someone, is it impossible to hold a grudge?

No, a person can love someone and yet be angry at, even resentful toward, them. As Pamela Hieronymi (2001: 539) argues, an intimate whom one undoubtedly loves can often make one the most angry precisely because one cares so much about them. And a closer examination of universal love shows that it is compatible with resentment.

Universal love requires benevolence, but benevolence is compatible with resentment. Resentment is essentially anger at being disrespected and the desire to have one's dignity acknowledged. This need not involve the desire to harm anyone. If it does involve the desire to harm, then this desire is motivated not by malice but by concern for one's own dignity. There is a difference between malice on the one hand and the need to affirm one's dignity, and seeing no way to do so except punishment, on the other. One is contrary to benevolence and therefore to love; the other is a response to desperation. The resentful person would just as soon choose a non-punitive course to restore dignity if it seemed available. This desperate

choice of means can allow for one's ultimate motives to include the continued desire for the well-being of the other. The choice to punish, then, is a tragic resolution of a tension between two competing ultimate motives, benevolence and self-respect, rather than a conflict between benevolence and malevolence as equally ultimate motives.

Universal love requires consideration, but consideration is compatible with resentment and even with punishment. Consideration is not the unconditional commitment to the interests of another person. It is taking those interests into account in one's deliberations. This allows for one's own interests to outweigh those of the other person, for example in a case threatening the affirmation of one's dignity.

Universal love requires perception of moment, but this is compatible with resentment. Indeed, as Améry shows, one resents a person not because they are unimportant but precisely because they, and their judgment of one's dignity, are greatly important.

Universal love requires receptivity, but receptivity is compatible with resentment. One can be with a person without having to impose careless or compulsive expectations on them and yet resent them. Not all expectations are careless or compulsive. When one has recognized and managed the biases, the social scripts, the defense mechanisms, and the survival circuits that can secretly dominate one's personality, still one should expect one's dignity to be honored, and it is possible to judge correctly that someone has failed to do so.

If people sometimes insist that one cannot genuinely love and resent a person, this is probably because it is not the kind of tension anyone would prefer in a loving relationship. It is easy to slide from talking about the most desirable loving relationship to what love has to be like in order to count as love. For instance, consider the repeated insistence of the poets that love has to last forever. Is this true of anyone's actual experience of love—that, every time it ends, it is revealed to be false? The poetic insistence is, rather, a wish, an expression of

yearning for the kind of love about which a person might daydream. The same is true in this case: one would like a loving relationship of uninterrupted sweet concord, but that does not mean anyone who bears a grudge is failing to love or even is loving less than someone who doesn't.

So, love does not require the absence of resentment. Does it require understanding?

### **The Perils of Understanding**

David Novitz (1998: 309) argues that, in order to achieve forgiveness, one must have empathy and compassion toward, must be able to inhabit the perspective of, the guilty. And this is often treated as how a loving person must respond to evil.

This might be true of ordinary wrongs and ordinary forgiveness. But in what way could a person inhabit the perspective of a Nazi, or an abusive parent? Novitz himself says that sometimes empathy can make forgiveness even more difficult, if empathizing with the guilty reveals the extent to which they were malicious or selfish (311). Can this difficulty be overcome and empathy achieved without temporarily convincing oneself that the authoritative interpretation of events is located between the evildoer's ears? And is this morally acceptable or, what it might appear to be, morally repugnant?

Pumla Gobodo-Makidizela is a psychologist who served on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. In her book *A Human Being Died that Night*, she records her interviews with Eugene de Kock, an agent of Botha's and later de Klerk's apartheid forces who was responsible for many of the worst atrocities of the conflicts.

She recognizes the same concern as Améry: "forgiveness can signal acceptability, and acceptability signals some amount, however small, of condoning" (103). Numerous philosophers distinguish between forgiveness and condonation; on the contrary, genuine or "uncompromising" forgiveness must commit to the end of hostility and insist upon the

wrongness of the injury (Calhoun 1992, Novitz 1998, Hieronymi 2001, though see Norlock and Rumsey 2009 for disagreement). Despite such meticulous distinctions, the possibility of keeping one from being contaminated by the other in practice is frighteningly difficult.

Gobodo-Makidizela brings up another worry about coming to understand the guilty. The action of a brief moment, her response to de Kock showing regret and distress while reliving some of his crimes, causes Gobodo-Makidizela to question herself both at the time and years later in the writing:

Relating to him in the only way one does in such human circumstances, I touched his shaking hand, surprising myself...I felt guilty for having expressed even momentary sympathy and wondered if my heart had actually crossed the moral line from compassion, which allows one to maintain a measure of distance, to actually identifying with de Kock. (32-33)

Gobodo-Makidizela, who spent uncounted hours enabling the victims of racist violence to tell their stories, who in another incident in the book is unable to restrain herself from crying during a public hearing of the TRC when a woman named Mrs. Khutwane recounts her sexual assault by apartheid soldiers (90-92), returns again and again to “the frightening prospect” of closing “the easy distance of hatred” and “connecting on a human level with a monster,” with its necessity “to confront the potential for evil within ourselves” (123).<sup>54</sup>

The worry is not the odious false equivalency that everyone is equally guilty. Gobodo-Makidizela questions whether she can understand de Kock’s motivations and regard them as

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<sup>54</sup> The perils of forgiveness are not for the victim alone. Third parties, neither the guilty nor the victim, can face the risk of taking the injury too lightly. On the possibility and legitimacy of third-party forgiveness, see the strong arguments present by Pettigrove (2012: Chapter 2).

human without, if only temporarily, appreciating them. This can pose a risk to moral character, if one believes that some things ought to remain unthinkable. As John McDowell (1979) says, perhaps in some cases a virtuous character “insulates” one from even considering a course of action (27); perhaps some reasons for pursuing a course of action “are silenced altogether” in virtuous deliberation (26). In this case, perhaps, in order to be virtuous, a person must be unable to appreciate even in the abstract the motives or beliefs that actuated atrocities like those perpetrated by de Kock.

There is the question whether this worry is justified or whether Gobodo-Makidzela was right to disagree with her critics and strive to understand de Kock. Setting that aside, there remains the question whether understanding is necessary for love.

It is a commonplace that love and understanding must go together: that, to love a person, one must know them, one must be able to take up their position. That it is a commonplace should give us some reason to suspect it. In my opinion, just as one can understand a person without loving them, one can love them without being able to step into their shoes. I can have benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity toward a person without being able to appreciate their motives or their approach to life.

But what about receptivity? If it is a component of love, how can one love a person without understanding them?

Receptivity is to be with a person without imposing careless or compulsive expectations. Recall, I argue in Chapter 2 that receptivity is not empathy. While empathy is an inhabitation of the other’s perspective, receptivity is the power to manage one’s own expectations. The need to understand, the need to enter into the skin of another before granting them legitimacy, is an expectation, and it (like many expectations) can be placed either because of unnoticed habit or deep-seated need. To recognize and manage this expectation,



to let go of the requirement that a person either be or become comprehensible to one's own limited powers of comprehension, is often a necessary step toward better love.

In the novel *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson, this is one of the last and most difficult lessons that pastor John Ames must learn in his old age. He is forced by circumstance to reflect on two of the greatest challenges to his endeavors to love: his quarrels with his father and his long-held grudge against his best friend's son Jack (who is, in many ways, like a son to him as well). He meets these challenges differently. Jack returns unexpectedly years later, so through a series of conversations Ames achieves better understanding of Jack's motives and how he has changed as a person. His father died long ago, so Ames never succeeds in understanding him. Despite this lack of empathic access, he is able to find peace about his father through his memories of their good times together and by his humility about his own attempts at fatherhood. As he says early in the novel, "A man can know his father, or son, and there might still be nothing between them but loyalty and love and mutual incomprehension" (Robinson 2004: 7).

So, love does not require an attempt to understand. Does it require efforts toward reconciliation?

### **Reconciliation and Distancing: Loving Abusers, Loving Oneself**

When Nel Noddings (1984) proposed abandoning justice and principle to found an ethics based on care, engrossment, and empathy, Claudia Card (1990) objected. Card argues that an ethics of care bids us to nurture others, to become engrossed in their concerns, and to pre-rationally empathize with them but lacks the conceptual resources to show what is valuable about guarding one's own integrity or breaking off a relationship that is exploitive or abusive. The problem is not simply that care ethics is silent about this. Even if it had something to say, an ethic that makes relationships the central locus of non-instrumental value will regard

breaking off a relationship as worse than maintaining it. So, even if it permitted and approved of leaving an abusive relationship, an ethic of care would treat as tragic what might be triumphant, would mourn what ought to be celebrated. And that is care ethics at its most permissive. It is conceivable that an ethic of care would do worse: that it would enjoin one to find a way to maintain and manage an abusive relationship, for the sake of the cared-for, rather than breaking it off.

An ethic of universal love faces a similar problem. If one is to extend love to every person, why not love those who abuse one? Why not stay in their lives, helping them as best one can?

Here, the quick answer is that enabling an abuser does not help them. Abusers act out of distortions deep within their own psyche that require rehabilitation and treatment, not continued permission. To allow abuse to continue might appear to do what is best but actually enables their dysfunction. It is to harm rather than to help not only the abused but the abuser.

But quick answers, as usual, do not say enough. For it is not enough that one be permitted, or even enjoined, to decline docility. If the only answer is that one must do what is really best for an abuser by rehabilitating them, this can still demand of the battered spouse or damaged child that they reach out a broken hand, again and again, to help the person who hurts them. It can demand that they commit their time, their resources, even their bodily and mental safety, to the rehabilitation and treatment of the cruel. And that cannot be required. It has to be all right to wash one's hands, to wipe the dust off one's feet, to get the hell out of Dodge if necessary.

Permission is not enough when it comes to escaping abuse. As with care ethics, permission is not all that one should ask from an ideal. The best ethic, whether of obligations or of an ideal, whether of love or otherwise, would permit keeping one's distance from

dangerous people; would not mourn this as inevitable failure but would commend it as protection of integrity; and, at its most accomplished, would provide a way of conceiving the situation that motivated this choice. Can a love ethic do all this? Can a love ethic offer not merely permission, not merely approval, but motivation for protecting oneself? Here, I think, the answer is self-love.

To love oneself is to bear the same virtuous attitude toward oneself that one would bear in loving others: benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity. A person cultivating love as a virtue cares about their own good; considers their own interests in making decisions where their own interests will be affected; is ready to perceive what is important, significant, or momentous about themselves; and can be with themselves without carelessly or compulsively placing expectations on themselves.

What will such a person do when endangered by an abuser? They will want to protect themselves for their own safety. They will take that safety into account in their deliberations. They will appreciate why they are important, and this especially can lend greater affective and motivational force to their desires. And, since they will not be in the grip of unquestioning scripts and biases or the tighter grip of deep unaddressed needs or compulsions, they will be able to avoid taking on any roles or self-understandings, including ideas about a dutiful wife or a person who doesn't deserve better, that expect them to stay.

Further, a person with this virtue will often prefer their own safety over helping the abuser. For consider again what was said before, that a loving person understands their own limits and recognizes for whom they can do the most help. As John Stuart Mill (1859: Ch. 3) pointed out in his case for political liberalism, one is often most sure about what one can do for oneself. Mill says that no one else is as sure about oneself, and one is never as sure about others.

This is an overstatement. Sometimes we can notice another person's faults better than they can. There are times and places where friends need to point out these faults to each other, and that is one of the benefits of friendship. But, in a case where one is in danger and one's abuser is acting from a firmly established disposition to abuse, it should be clear to someone who has cultivated receptivity that the person who can be helped the most is oneself.

This does not mean that it is easy to recognize, or that we can blame people who stay with their abusers. It means that a love ethic implores people to cultivate receptivity, even when it is difficult, even when it is painful to unwind the coils of a learned helplessness or internalized self-hatred, and that a love ethic then emphasizes not only the allowability but the preferability of protecting oneself.

Nor need a person hold out hope that an abuser will change. As Kathryn Norlock (2017) argues, even if one is obligated to treat every person as capable of controlling their own life and becoming a better person, one can have enough evidence to conclude that someone's moral transformation is so unlikely as to be unworthy of serious consideration. To recognize this hopelessness can be a moral improvement instead of moral failure.

Two literary examples might help here. One is from the sacred texts of Christianity, one from a modern classic of literature.

Perhaps unexpectedly, if one wants to maintain distance from an abuser, one has a friend in Jesus. While Martin Luther King Jr insists on the necessity of reconciliation, the Jesus of the gospels, usually regarded as demanding forgiveness for everyone, says, "If your brother [sc. intimate] wrongs you...and if the offender refuses to listen [to requests to change]...let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"—evidently meaning, let such a one be regarded as a stranger instead of an intimate (Matthew 18:15-17).

Both the goodness of breaking free and the victory of giving up hope are well illustrated in Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred*. The protagonist, a black twentieth-century writer named Dana, is repeatedly pulled hundreds of years back in time to rescue her ancestor, a white slave owner named Rufus. While being forced into the role of guardian angel from Rufus's childhood into his young adulthood, Dana gradually develops understanding and care, perhaps love, for someone who is by turns kind, vulnerable, innocent, selfish, malicious, and manipulative. Part of the tension of the novel is that Dana continues to hope that Rufus will turn out better than his parents. However, it becomes clearer and clearer that Rufus has been irreparably distorted by his racist environment. When he attempts to sexually violate her in the attic of his plantation, Dana at last severs their relationship, gives up on him, painlessly kills him, and is returned to the twentieth century, in what is undoubtedly a moment of relief and liberation rather than tragedy.

Universal love, therefore, does not require forgiving evildoers, if this means anything besides the restoration of goodwill. But does it require loving them?

### **Classes of Imperfection**

Universal love requires benevolence, consideration insofar as one's decision affects a person's interests, willingness to perceive what is momentous about them, and the ability to be with them without careless or compulsive expectations. Someone who perfectly lives by this ideal would bear these attitudes toward every human being. There is no way to evade the simple implication that living perfectly by this ideal means loving evildoers.

Maybe some people are especially suited to this difficult and terrifying work. For instance, in her work as a spiritual adviser, Sister Helen Prejean (1993) believes she was able to extend love to (and receive love from) confirmed serial rapist and possible murderer Elmo

Patrick Sonnier. But not everyone can. What of someone who lives by the ideal but cannot bring themselves to bear such attitudes toward an evil person? Is this hypocrisy? Is it failure?

Not necessarily, because there are different ways to fall short of an ideal. Not every case of imperfection is a case of failure. Consider three different imperfections: omissions, shortcomings, and betrayals. This distinction is meant to be not an exhaustive or normative organization but merely a nonce taxonomy.<sup>55</sup>

Sometimes one lives by an ideal but omits some pattern of behavior that is not required by it but would amplify it. For instance, Michelle Alexander has devoted herself to activism against mass incarceration in the United States. She has not devoted much effort to addressing inequalities faced by LGBT people. Such omission is not a failure at all. It is just as often a question of time. Alexander's use of her efforts is understandable, because a carceral state is a full-time adversary.

Or a person might live by an ideal and overall fulfill its requirements but have the opportunity to live by it more fully and fall short of this opportunity. For instance, after dedicating his life to creating historical testaments of and urging opposition to genocide, Elie Wiesel raised awareness and condemnation of genocidal practices against Jewish, Bosnian, black South African, Miskito, and Kurdish people. However, he was silent regarding genocidal activities against Palestinian people by the nation of Israel. This is different from simple omission because opportunity was available. Wiesel had time and effort available to make statements regarding Palestine as he did regarding other cases of genocidal practices. Despite

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<sup>55</sup> The term "nonce taxonomy" comes from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's book *Epistemology of the Closet*. It refers to means of classification devised in order to make pragmatic sense of one's social environment, usually with the knowledge that the social phenomenon being taxonomized is too complex and variant for definitive categorization.

his otherwise consistent, honorable, and emotionally honest work, in this case there is an undeniable shortcoming.

At the time of this writing, there is a habit (at least on the Internet) of taking a shortcoming as evidence of wholesale hypocrisy. This seems to me to rest on a naïve and simplistic demand for consistent infallibility. A shortcoming can be a serious flaw, as it was with Wiesel, but it would be folly to treat such a person's efforts as wasted, or their commitment to an ideal as insincere.<sup>56</sup>

But a fundamental betrayal of an ideal is possible. For example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman devoted her career and literary talents to liberating women and gaining women's social and political equality to men. Her private life too was lived in resistance to subjection, for instance in her defiance of patriarchal psychiatric practice that forbade her to write because of her postpartum depression. However, Gilman also lifted her voice loudly and unambiguously in support of white supremacy, believing that the alleged Anglo-Saxon race was superior to others. Insofar as this endangered and oppressed women of color, especially black women, despite coming a generation after the witness of such black feminists as Sojourner Truth, Gilman betrayed her own feminist ideal of justice.

The difference between shortcoming and betrayal is the extent to which one is inconsistent with one's ideal when given a crucial opportunity to live by it. Wiesel was silent when he could have been vocal; Gilman was vocal in saying the exact opposite of what she should have said. Wiesel passively but deliberately failed to uphold his ideal in one case; Gilman actively worked against it.

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<sup>56</sup> This does not mean that the struggle and sufferings of the Palestinian people matter less than those of other peoples. The purpose of this discussion is not to assess the importance of Palestinian liberation, which I support. It is to measure an individual's commitment to an ideal.

With universal love as an ideal, too, there can be omission, shortcoming, and betrayal. There are always more ways a person could practice love, but everyone is constrained by human finitude. There are many ways a person can overall live a life of universal love but turn down easily available opportunities. And there are ways a person can do something that goes against love so completely, or so comprehensively, that it betrays the ideal.

Which is the case when one fails to love an evil person? It would depend on the details.

Someone could fail to love evil people because they are fully occupied in loving in other ways. For instance, someone take care of their family and spend so much time bringing companionship and consolation to the lonely or isolated that they have no inner resources left over for evildoers. This would be a case of omission.

Someone could extend love to many different people and groups, perhaps laboring intensively to accept and love people whose identities they do not understand; yet, when given the opportunity to love an evil person, they might find themselves incapable of loving someone who has misshapen or destroyed innocent lives. This would be a case of shortcoming. Neither would count as betraying the ideal.

Yet full betrayal of the ideal of universal love is possible. What if a person devoted their life to loving everyone but always suffered great compassion for the victims of evil? What if such a person nurtured anger on behalf of these victims? And now, after giving such love but nursing such anger, what if such a person found themselves with the power either to rehabilitate or to punish some horrific evildoer? The ideal by which they have lived requires that, even if they cannot eliminate their anger, and even if they cannot love him, they should choose to make the evildoer into someone new, someone who will not do evil. But what if they turn down this option—and not merely to abandon the evildoer, but to punish him? What if someone who has structured a life around loving others finds that, for the war criminal



or the abuser, they harbor such malice that they authorize his slow and repeated torture? This would go beyond omission and even beyond shortcoming, which might say, “I know, if I could follow my ideal perfectly, I would love this person; but the most I can do is walk away.” Instead, this person would be saying, “I know, if I could follow my ideal perfectly, I would love this person; but the least I can do is hate.”

### **Systems of Support and Individual Perfection**

In addition to the juridical question whether a person has succeeded in living up to their ideal, there is the practical question how a person can manage to do so. What helps a person love evildoers? Can some inner movement, some allocation of motivational force?

Since evil poses such threats and its aftermath weighs down with such harm, I am inclined to ask not how the individual person can suit themselves to this task but how their environment can equip them for it. How perfectly a person can live by an ideal sometimes depends not on individual effort but on the resources that a community makes available.

If one wanted to live surrounded by as much beauty as possible, one’s success might depend partly on one’s access to material resources. If one wanted to devote one’s life to intellectual excellence, one might require at least some leisure and access to education (though not necessarily the university model). A society that ensures prosperity for all its members will better enable individuals to live out these ideals. In order to live according to love in such a way that one could muster goodwill for the evil, one might need to live in a safe, supportive community.

As philosophers have argued (Schott 2004; Norlock and Rumsey 2009) and some psychological studies evidence (Armour and Umbreit 2006; Walsh 2007), the range of safe responses to an injury can be expanded when a person who has been injured is within a community that recognizes the injury as wrong, affirms the worth of the person injured, and

offers means of overcoming the injury that do not depend on direct transactions with the guilty. This can to some degree obviate the worries that restoring goodwill toward the guilty will trivialize the injury or dishonor the injured party. By contrast, a person who has to decide the best response to injury or evil on their own is at greater risk of putting themselves in danger, giving up on their integrity, or holding onto resentment in a deleterious fashion.

To ensure the best chance of squaring the ideal of universal love with the best response to evil, a person should have as many options as possible. Therefore, the best chance of responding to evil according to the ideal of universal love will depend not on individual effort but on the freedom and safety afforded by such a community. In other words, the ideal is unlikely to be lived out fully by the individual person's efforts alone but instead requires an amenable society and suitable social supports. Anyone who dares ask someone to love an evildoer must first ask whether such support is offered and whether there is such a society.

## **Conclusion**

In sum: Insofar as forgiveness is simply the restoration of goodwill, universal love requires it; insofar as it involves the abeyance of resentment, the attempt to understand, or the effort to reconcile, universal love does not require it. However, universal love means loving evildoers too. Despite there being no way around this, it is not the case that everyone who fails to love evildoers has betrayed the ideal or is even guilty of a full shortcoming, as I use the terms here. Finally, if one is concerned about the way universal love is often not extended to evildoers, the best remedy is to construct an environment of safe options for such love.

We now have in place the fundamentals of the ideal of universal love. The first chapter established what an ideal is, that an ideal can be based on a virtue, and that the kind of love taken as an ideal is a virtue. The second chapter laid bare the anatomy of this virtue, showing its four essential components: benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and

receptivity. The third chapter argues that the disposition to love everyone is a suitable ideal, both in that it produces good and that the main concerns about its difficulties can be allayed. The present chapter completed this by addressing the most concerning of all difficulties, the response to evil.

With these fundamentals in place, the ideal of universal love has been articulated and justified. But so far the discussion has been confined to loving other human beings. This ignores an area of concern to philosophy, that of the nonhuman, a concern that grows with the approach of a climate crisis of unknown severity. That is the subject of the final chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### LOVING THE NONHUMAN

#### **Introduction: Why Love the Nonhuman?**

In the past three centuries, and at considerable acceleration in the past seventy years, the mainstream in moral philosophy has widened enough to include sober preoccupation with the nonhuman.<sup>57</sup> Since the close of the twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first, the deliverances of ecology and the recognition of the climate crises have made the human treatment of the nonhuman a matter of pressing—and, for some, of ultimate—concern.<sup>58</sup> The researches of ecologists and climate scientists have disclosed the habits of other species, previously unsuspected interdependencies, and the range of destructions consequent from careless human action. For many people, these have been revelations that there are values beyond the human.

It is my settled conviction that no comprehensive project in moral philosophy can be legitimate unless it can include the nonhuman in a way that respects these revelations. Moral philosophy of reasonably limited scope—questions about appropriate circumstances for lying, attempts to construct a passable justification of punishment—might never so much as brush against the wilderness, and reasonably so. But any project offering an account of a guide to life, any outline according to which a life could be shaped, hence any investigation of an ideal, needs to say something about how a person can incorporate the nonhuman into a life.

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<sup>57</sup> Roderick Nash (1989) presents a history of the main trends of this change within Anglophone philosophy.

<sup>58</sup> Something's being of "ultimate concern" to a person is what theologian Paul Tillich (1957) means by its being that person's god. For an influential review of ecologically informed religious and spiritual movements, see Bron Taylor (2010).

Otherwise, it is as incomplete as a political approach restricted to the economic at the expense of the ecological.

An ideal of love has precursors at the very beginning of American environmental ethics. For example, Joseph Wood Krutch (1954) argues that “conservation is not enough” because we must transform our anthropocentric and exploitive disposition into one of appreciation and love. Perhaps most notable is Aldo Leopold (1949), who argues that we must give up the idea of land as an economic resource and replace it with the idea of land as both a member of and a site for ecological community. Leopold believes this to be a natural expansion of our ethical concern. Just as humanity progressed from regarding only one’s own family with moral concern to eventually regarding all humans as worthy, so we will progress to regard all members of the ecological community as worthy. We must change from treating the land with an attitude “based solely on economic self-interest” to treating that land as something that we can “see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” (214). Information about ecology is insufficient without “an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions” (210).

The proposal to love the nonhuman did not go away as environmental ethics progressed. It was recently advocated by Dale Jamieson, who argues, “although the motivation to protect, nurture, and respect comes from many sources, none is more powerful than love,” which makes love a crucial moral motivation during an era when protecting, nurturing, or respecting the environment can seem unfamiliar, its concerns remote (494).

This is an argument beginning with the nonhuman and ending with the usefulness of love. An argument from the opposite direction is that, if one wants to fill the world and one’s own life with love more thoroughly, one way to do this is to extend love to more than human beings. Love is such a great good that reasons for its multiplication are almost a welcome

excuse. Few complaints would be as odd as the complaint that the world contains enough love, but one still odder would be that a person's life does.

In this final chapter, I extend the ideal of universal love so that it includes love toward the nonhuman. I show that there is opportunity for a love that is truly universal, since it can be extended toward all living things.

First, I discuss differences and similarities between loving a human and loving nonhumans. I take each component of love in turn: benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity. I show that not only can these attitudes easily extend beyond the human, they often do already.

Second, I argue that universal love is appropriate toward living things only. This is because love involves benevolence and consideration, and one cannot desire the good or consider the interests of something that has neither goods nor interests.

I propose allowing the ideal to include love toward every living thing. This makes the scope of universal love so broad that it risks being irrational or untenable. I therefore conclude by responding to two worries. First, can one reasonably love something that cannot love one back? I argue that this is not a problem, by explaining the place of reciprocity in loving relationships and by reiterating what kind of love serves as the ideal. Second, would loving something foreign or even detrimental to human life make it unmanageably difficult to live a recognizably human life? I argue that this is not a problem because, although loving both the human and the nonhuman can lead to conflicts within oneself, a good human life requires not the absence but the management of interior conflict.

## **How to Love the Nonhuman?**

By now the essential components of love should be familiar: benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity. These attitudes have clearly defined motivations and intentions. They have recognizable tendencies, such as the tendency to help rather than to harm. The attitudes and tendencies remain the same when love is given to the nonhuman. But the relationship of a human being to a nonhuman being is different in important ways from that between human and human. Some of these differences are worth discussion.

### ***Benevolence***

There is not a formal or structural difference between willing the good of a human being and willing the good of a nonhuman being. In either case, one wants what will benefit and perhaps is averse to what will harm the object of one's benevolence. But there can be considerable differences in content. What is good for an adult human is different from what is good for an adult horse, bearded dragon, or African violet. Just as what is good for a human is different from what is good for a nonhuman, so among nonhumans there is great variation in the good: a fish needs water to breathe, a bird needs air.

For this reason, loving the nonhuman calls for more knowledge and careful discernment than confining one's love to the human. One has to know, at least in general terms, what is good for the loved one. But this does not make such love impossible or preventively daunting. After all, there are many variants among what is good for human beings: there are probably differences in what is good for a small child and for an intellectual academic who has depression, in what is good for a cis white woman and a trans woman of color. Human beings can manage to be benevolent toward each other despite these differences. In

many cases, their benevolence successfully furthers the good they desire. The same can be true when it comes to love across species.

### ***Consideration***

In practice, many people take into account the interests of nonhuman beings.<sup>59</sup> People write budgets with dog food in mind, or place furniture in an arrangement suitable to give sunlight to plants, or rescue injured squirrels and provide for them. The caretaker of a national park has to consider the interests of the plants in the park. What the caretaker does for pay, the gardener does for pleasure.

It might seem as if the interests of nonhumans are more difficult to determine than those of human beings. Our conspecifics can tell us what they want. Perhaps other animals, and certainly all plants, cannot. Does this make it presumptuous, even invasive, to plan according to their perceived interests? Is there a risk that one will be incapable of distinguishing one's own interests from theirs, of reading into them whatever one wants, like a circus master who thinks his elephants enjoy being caged and used in performances as long as they are fed peanuts?

As with their skill in benevolence, people can do surprisingly well at considering the genuine interests of nonhumans. One reason is that many of the most crucial communications of something's being for or against one's interests are nonverbal. As Peter Singer (1973) says about pain, humans and nonhumans often display their true state through behavior rather than

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<sup>59</sup> What it means for nonhumans to have interests, and which nonhumans have interests, will occupy a later section. For this section, I am content to delineate the contours of a disposition.



through words. A human being with tears in their eyes, a dog shying away from something painful, a plant turning brown and withered all tell the careful eye of their distress.

And human beings can rely not only on the direct communication of the loved one but on the expertise of the human community. One need not pay constant attention to a Russian blue or a cyclamens to make sure their interests are being met; one can ask cat breeders or expert gardeners. That way, one can provide for their interests without the trial and error that might be costly to the loved one or the continuous vigilance that might be costly to the one loving.

Remember, consideration is not extreme altruism. To consider the interests of an animal is not the same as to give up one's own interests for its sake. A person need not, in order to love, offer oneself to mosquitos to be drained of blood.

Some measure of consideration is appropriate and would make a noticeable difference in behavior: it is appropriate not to go out of one's way to destroy living things, even if they are disgusting or bothersome, and it would alter most people's conduct if they took seriously the interests of the many living things they kill either through inaction or negligence (for instance by using fertilizers irresponsibly). The ideal of universal love at once permits people to protect their own vital interests and invites them to alter their lives for the sake of others.

In the adjudication of these interests, I am inclined to resist codification. Other virtues, such as prudence, can enable one to exercise better judgment. And by learning, sometimes by succeeding and sometimes by failing, a person can store up knowledge that can be brought out in difficult cases. A lexical ordering of principles for the negotiation of conflicting interests is foreign to the project of explaining an ideal based on love as a virtue.

### *Perception of Moment*

There are many nonhuman things it is easy to regard as having great importance or significance: the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, the first flowers of spring, an exquisitely wrought spider's web. Perceiving the momentousness of the nonhuman is so common that Rosalind Hursthouse (2007) suggests we recognize as a virtue the right management of "wonder."

So, perceiving nonhumans as momentous, as such, is not difficult. But a chief difficulty facing anyone who would love universally is to find something momentous about more of the nonhuman than is ordinarily noticed. If the ideal is universal love, one has to search out what is momentous about everything within its scope, not only a magnificent peacock or a flourishing birch but also a rat or a weed (and more exact questions of scope concern us in a later section).

Fortunately, not every perception of moment must result in wonder. Perception of moment is a broad attitude. It includes the respect for incarnate rationality articulated by Velleman, the tremendous responsibility engendered by infant helplessness, Saint Francis' response to the wolf of Gubbio, and more. It could include an indefinite and diverse repertoire of responses to the nonhuman: delight at rodent agility, awe at insect resilience, care for floral delicacy. Remember that perception of moment is not an acknowledgement of non-instrumental value, ultimate worth, or any such philosophically informed criterion of inclusion in moral considerability. It is a disposition to respond to whatever lends weight to the importance of its object. It is a tendency to recognize the heightened significance of something closely observed instead of carelessly passed over. There is no demand that one respond to all nonhuman things with equal respect, still less with equal liking; all that perception of moment requires is a certain class of appreciations.

## *Receptivity*

Receptivity, as the ability to be with someone or something without the need to impose careless or compulsive expectations—the awareness of those expectations and the willingness to manage those expectations—is a fitting attitude to bear toward the nonhuman, upon which we often impose such expectations.

Ecofeminists such as Ynestra King (1983), Corinne Kumar D'Souza (1989), and Karen J. Warren (1990) argue that our society treats women the way it treats the environment: both are reduced to exploitable resources treated as less valuable than a man who is allowed to dominate them. The treatment of women and of the environment are similar because the “logic of domination” (Warren 1990 *passim*) is in both cases a patriarchal logic. Warren regards them as based on male bias. Murray Bookchin (1982), whose writings influenced the egalitarian eco-anarchist new social order in Rojava, concurs. As we treat other human beings, so we treat the nonhuman world; insofar as we treat women, people of color, poor people, foreigners, as resources for either profit or disposal, so we treat forests, rivers, and nonhuman animals. Our misvaluation and maltreatment of both othered humans and of the nonhuman arises from our current social order and its practices of domination and exploitive hierarchy. King argues that the otherization of women and nature depends on men denying their own mortality, embodiment, and irrationality and projecting it onto the other—a Jungian shadow cast across the planet and half its human population. If Warren and Bookchin are right, then the exploitation of “nature” is a case of imposing careless expectations on the nonhuman; if King is right, then it is also a case of imposing compulsive expectations.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See McGregor (2018) for a comparison between ecofeminism and the indigenous approaches discussed later.

There are examples resting on less controversial premises. One might coddle a little dog as a substitute for responsible intimacy. One might be unable to experience a forest or mountain as it really is because of a need for it to be a pure, unspoiled relief from urbanism. While they produce distorted perceptions of their object, such expectations can do the worse harm of ignoring the best interests of living things. A dog kept inside on a tight regimen and dainty diet might become sickly, neurotic, lonely. The trees of a forest forced to play the role of site of escape might be polluted, deprived, dying. Receptivity toward the nonhuman, then, is not merely for the sake of accuracy but also for the sake of combating harmful sentimentalism and responding to needs.

### **How Much of the Nonhuman to Love?**

Loving the nonhuman is possible and often already done. But the ideal of universal love goes far beyond such ordinary practices. When one structures one's life around the disposition to approach everyone with love, including the nonhuman, one faces the question of scope. This was easily answered when the ideal was restricted to humanity: be disposed to approach all human beings with love. But what are the bounds when this restriction is lifted?

Whether or not a definitive criterion is possible, there is at least one limit. If something can fall within the scope of universal love, it must be an appropriate object of love. It is reasonable to take some things as objects of love and unreasonable to take other things as objects of love. To love an arbitrary collection of spatiotemporally bounded particles that do not form any recognizable object, for example, would be embarrassingly difficult to justify.

What counts as a reasonable object of love is minimally determined by the components of love and to what objects these attitudes can be appropriately directed. Most important here are benevolence and consideration. If something does not have a good, then one cannot will

its good; if something has no interests, then one cannot take its interests into account. Hence the inappropriateness of loving a scatter-shot collection of particles.

***Only living things***

Nonliving things appear not to have a good or to have interests. Insofar as this is true, then nonliving things are not appropriate objects of love, even if that love is universal. This would rule out things like rocks, rivers, hammers, and paper.

This is a matter of controversy between indigenous and non-indigenous systems of understanding the world. The indigenous understanding of environmental ethics has much to recommend it. The upright ecological sensibilities and robust environmental ethics of indigenous peoples are well known. Consider an oft-quoted statement made by the consummate statesman Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt (known as Chief Joseph), of the Nūmūpū people:

The earth and myself are of one mind. The measure of the land and the measure of our bodies are the same...Understand me fully with reference to my affection for the land. I never said the land was mine to do with as I choose. The one who has the right to dispose of it is the one who has created it.<sup>61</sup>

His credo precedes Aldo Leopold's by some sixty or seventy years and, as the oratory of a conservative statesman and often outward-facing spokesman rather than the prophecy of an innovator, expresses a public tradition rather than a private novelty.

In commending the ethics of indigenous peoples, one must firmly reject the myth that this ethics has vanished. The work of the indigenous peoples, a long labor of recovery and preservation, continues into the present. For instance, Winona LaDuke in *Recovering the Sacred*

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in many places without clear citation, in this case by The Nez Perce Tribe (2003: 22) itself.

documents efforts such as that of Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt's descendants to return to the unsurpassed horse breeding that colonization interrupted; of the Haudenosaunee to preserve their way of growing and harvesting the “three sisters,” corn, beans, and squash; and of her own people, the Anishinaabe, to preserve and rejuvenate the wild rice (*manoomin*) that they harvest from lakes.

Several of the multifold indigenous ontologies that support these efforts might regard nonliving things as having a good, an interest, and even a will or a consciousness (e.g. Fiola 2015, Stonechild 2016)—or, if not, then as sacred in another way that makes a form of love an appropriate response (Deloria 1994, Taliman and Zwinger 2002). If so, then indigenous environmental ethics might dispute the first limit imposed on an ideal of universal love, that it can be extended to living things only.

Despite the power of indigenous environmental ethics, perhaps the safest response to these ethics, for someone outside of its tradition, is to honor it and to craft an alternative that can bear many of the same pragmatic fruits—for instance, one recommending “utmost respect for plants” (Armstrong 2018). Whether indigenous ethics can be taken up by non-indigenous peoples, in a way that does not exploit its originators and that adequately understands its broader hermeneutic basis, is a difficult question. If ethicists treat indigenous environmental ethics as resources to be extracted from indigenous communities, they risk the error with which Kyle Whyte (2018) charges climate scientists: treating indigenous forms of knowledge as having “supplemental value,” as being valuable not to the community that constructed it but to those outside the community. This already happens, as Tsosie (2018) says in her discussion of the political and legal rights of indigenous communities concerning this knowledge.

Further, if non-indigenous peoples could import indigenous environmental ethics without exploiting the communities that crafted them, there is still the risk that these ethics will not make sense wrenched out of the ontological and ceremonial contexts in which they originate. Robert M. Adams (1987) argues that the best way to make sense of the notion of moral obligation is to assume a theism in which one is obligated to God. Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) similarly thinks that moral philosophy should abandon the notion of moral law unless philosophers are willing to posit a divine lawgiver. Analogously, I doubt that moral philosophy can adopt the environmental ethics of indigenous communities without ascribing agency or at least spirit to rivers, trees, and rocks, and without developing the kind of ritual interpersonal relationship to these entities that indigenous communities attempt. It might make little sense when it is adopted by people who do not accept the controversial metaphysics that it implies.

And there is some question whether these approaches aim for the same understanding as mine. Perhaps these systems of understanding are trying to understand something different from my concerns. Perhaps they are playing a different language game (Wittgenstein 1953) or using a different grammar of faith (Holmer 1978).

In any case, the most dispute possible concerns not whether nonliving things have interests but which things count as nonliving. The border remains, but exact its placement is disputed. That indigenous ontologies and non-indigenous ontologies might class rivers, rocks, winds and places on opposite sides of the border is one dispute. Among non-indigenous understandings, there might be dispute about viruses and other microbes. It would be hasty to settle these disputes in a few paragraphs.

### ***All living things***

The outermost limit to universal love, then, is that it is appropriate toward living things only. That is the “only”; what is the maximally suitable “all”? Universal love can fill the entire

region within the outermost limit: it is appropriate to love all living things. More specifically, since these are the two attitudes at issue, it makes sense to have benevolence and consideration toward all living things.

This is because, as Paul Taylor (2011 [1986]) says, every living thing has a good of its own. As discussed already, although plants and many animals cannot verbalize when they are being helped or harmed, it is often easy to tell. Daily, heavy watering is good for some plants, like the iris, and bad for other plants, like the saguaro. Insects live better lives when they have all their legs and adequate food than when they do not.

There has been debate whether all animals, and whether any plants, have interests that ought to be respected. However, as a brief discussion shows, this is debate about the best application of terms of art designed for a specific theoretical purpose and is irrelevant to the question whether one can be considerate toward all living things in a more general sense.

Peter Singer (1975) and Edward Johnson (1981) say that an animal has interests only if it is sentient. They require sentience because it carries with it the capacity for pleasure and pain.<sup>62</sup> In response to the deep ecologists such as Arne Naess (1989) and George Sessions (1987), who regard even nonliving things and ecological aggregates like species and biomes as having interests, Singer and Johnson merely express eloquent bafflement: what could it even mean for the treatment of something to matter morally, for something to have interests, unless it has to do with the increase of pleasure or mitigation of suffering?

Joel Feinberg thinks that even fewer animals have interests. He asserts that nothing has interests unless it has “desires,” “aims,” and “cognitive awareness” of its own aims (1974:

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<sup>62</sup> Singer (1993) has since argued for preference utilitarianism.



52). Anyone else's assertions to the contrary he interprets as the result of a confused use of ordinary language.

When the deep ecologists and some legal scholars, such as Christopher D. Stone (1972), posit the interests of animals without reflective powers, and animals with at best low-grade sentience such as oysters, and plants with neither reflection nor sensation, they mean that there are considerations about what will promote and what will hinder the life, growth, or integrity of the thing. They go on to argue for the recognition of these interests in the granting of rights, whether as moral equals or as legal subjects. They disagree with Singer, Johnson, and Feinberg in two respects: both whether all living things have the potential to be benefited and harmed and whether this potential is the basis of rights.

Thus the dialectic between those who render interests as coextensive with preference or sentience and those who render it more broadly is often a debate over whether these alleged interests should count as much as a human being's. This can confuse the issue whether there are such interests with the issue whether they ought to be the topic of inviolable moral principles.

But the question for the present project is whether an insensate animal or a plant has a good that a person could will, and an interest that a person could consider, lovingly rather than deontically. In approaching an oak, could one desire to benefit it and take into account in one's deliberations what would benefit it and what would not?<sup>63</sup>

The answer to this more pertinent question is an easier affirmative. The affirmative is given even by those philosophers who are most stingy with their rights. For example, Tom

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<sup>63</sup> The distinction between the question asked in debates between the philosophers sometimes called "sentientists" and the deep ecologists, on the one hand, and my question, on the other, resembles but is not identical to that made by Kenneth Goodpaster (1978) between the question how many things have rights and how many things are morally considerable.

Regan (1983) grants rights to animals only if they can live a life made coherent by ongoing aims, such as the aim to continue living. But he agrees that anything counts as a benefit if it is a necessary condition for living well and that flowers, having “basic biological need,” can live well and be benefited in this sense (88-89).

It is easier, then, to accept that all living things have goods and interests once one’s hands are not full of charters for the allocation of rights, and this is probably why Aristotelians have an easier time accepting it than deontologists and legal scholars. Aristotle himself restricts ethics to humanity because he grants only humanity the capacity for εὐδαιμονία, which depends on the capacity for “noble acts” (I.9). But, feeling no modern egalitarian pressure to design ethics for the general welfare rather than the ennoblement of the warrior or the glory of the πόλις, Aristotle can assign without shame a variety of needs, benefits, and harms to the souls of plants and animals in his work *De Anima*. Rosalind Hursthouse, one of the chief reanimators of Aristotle and one of the chief proponents of virtue ethics, likewise recognizes in part a broad species-norm account of well-being (1999: Ch. 10).

In sum, it is easy to resolve the concern whether benevolence and consideration can be directed at all living things. There remain two more practical concerns: whether it makes sense, and if so whether it is healthy, to love something incapable of loving one back, and whether loving all living things would hamper one’s ability to live a human life.

### **Is Reciprocity Necessary?**

Reciprocity is an important part of many loving relationships among human beings. To love a spouse or other lover who does not love in return can ruin a person’s life. To be despised by one’s circle of friends can be base and damaging.

Human beings could love one back, even when they don't. When the object of love could not love one back, when it lacks even the potential to love anything, it might seem as if love is both unhealthy and irrational. For example, Erika Eiffel (née LaBrie), a world-class archer, married the Eiffel Tower in 2007. Many people think of this as a case of mental disorder, and they do so because the love seems to be unjustified in principle, since the Eiffel Tower does not have a personality such that it could love her back.<sup>64</sup>

This concern does not immediately rule out loving more living things than the human. Reciprocation is possible from more nonhuman animals than one might think. As Anca Gheaus (2012) says, when we live in some measure of familiarity, for instance with a pet dog or a farm animal, we are involved in the vulnerabilities and expectations of the animals, so that we can literally betray or humiliate them or, on the other hand, build them up; they respond to how we treat them. Many animals can be aware of us, correctly interpret our intentions and emotions, and return their own intentions and emotions in at least some way. We not only recognize but share many of their needs and vulnerabilities, including the need for acceptance and sociality. Empathy is risky ground for moral philosophy, but Lori Gruen's (2015) proposal that humans should empathize with members of other species makes sense partly because humans can recognize such commonality.

This is probably because of our common animal heritage. The first impulses toward love, within our intimate circle, are based on such ineradicable and (as Gheaus points out) embodied features of human life as birth, sex, childrearing, cooperation, and the exchange of

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<sup>64</sup> See her website advocating for "object love" (<http://www.objectum-sexuality.org/>). Note that I say many people regard this as irrational. For my part, given the continuing upheaval of sexual norms and the present incompleteness of our understanding of sexual love, I do not commit myself to the dismissal of paraphilias.

ideas in community practice. Love's frequent origin in the body and the social unit, and its commonality across species, are evidence that it can make sense outside a particular human social structure. The work of primatologist Frans de Waal (2009, 2011, 2012) suggests that empathy, concern, and other cousins of love exist among our primate cousins and extend back far into the evolutionary past—an exciting rediscovery of the work of Pyotr Kropotkin (1902). There is some reason to think that even the more distant primates are similarly capable (Pelagi et al. 2009).

Love is common among social mammals. At least since Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer published *The Great Ape Project*, there has been widely known evidence that we share some version of love with the other primates. There is some scientific evidence of empathy in dogs and wolves (O'Hara and Reeve 2011; Custance and Mayer 2012; Cafazzo et al. 2018), and even rats (Bartal et al. 2011; Panskepp and Lahvis 2011; Sato et al. 2015), though some support for this last is disputed (Silberberg et al. 2013).

Other animals besides mammals seem capable of reciprocation. The philosopher Charles Hartshorne (1973) argues, based on observations made in his second career as an ornithologist, that birds have a rich emotional life, though there is no space here to reproduce his arguments. There is evidence that this emotional life can be shared with humans. In her memoir and ethological study *Birds as Individuals*, musicologist Len Howard writes about opening her home to the blackbirds, titmice, and other avian inhabitants of her extensive garden. Howard writes that the birds would play rudimentary games with her, would seek her out when one of their company was in danger or wounded, and would display grief or elation

in response to the vicissitudes of their lives. Some recent studies, such as Edgar et al.'s (2011) study of birds' maternal responses to chicks, offer scientific support to Howard's memories.

But even though many mammals, birds, and perhaps some reptiles can return love in some measure, there are many living things that cannot approach a human being with love or even kindness. Is love for a snake, a bumblebee, or a protozoan inappropriate? Since they cannot reciprocate, is loving them unhealthy and irrational?

Reciprocity is not necessary for universal love to be appropriate, because reciprocation is important to certain kinds of relationships, not to certain kinds of attitudes. Love without reciprocation is misplaced when it occurs within a relationship built on expectations of reciprocity: a marriage, a friendship, a family. Unreciprocated love within these relationships is irrational in a prudential sense if it goes against the interests that can justify such a relationship (like being in a marriage where one is supposed to be honored and helped but isn't), or irrational in a cognitive sense if it deludes one into imagining a reciprocal relationship where this is none.

But this irrationality is a symptom of certain kinds of mutual relationship gone wrong. Universal love is not a commitment to have an intimate loving relationship with everyone. Universal love is the virtuous disposition to approach things with benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity. If one has this attitude toward something that cannot have those attitudes back, no error in self-interest or right understanding need have occurred. Isabel Archer is irrational for marrying Gilbert Osmond, but Rachel Carson was not irrational in directing love toward birds.

## **Alienation Again**

There is a further worry: whether extending love so broadly would result in a person who was alienated from what matters most about human life. The risk of alienation from the normal features of human life, noted in a previous chapter as a risk of impartiality, is greater when it comes to loving everything from bonobos to lobsters than when it comes to loving humans only.

Pets, it might seem, fit without trouble into a recognizable human life. Cora Diamond (1978) argues that different animals can be valued differently because our social practices confer special value, just as we confer special value upon babies by naming them. Therefore, what appears to be an unprincipled preference for a dog over a pig makes sense because the preference is the result of customs by which human beings make meaning. Elizabeth Anderson (2004) argues that different animals can be treated differently, depending on whether they are benign or inimical to human ways of life—thus a dog can be treated better than a rat, which is a “pest” in our current practices of housing and our current understanding of the partition between the home and the wild.

However, the reason to love some animals and not others cannot be simply the attitudes made familiar by customs. It can be taken as a reliable maxim, well confirmed by history, that every human society practices some customs as a result of ignorance, stupidity, bias, and general mediocrity. For this reason many of the most self-actualized people are those who do not conform snugly to a place in their society. If the risk is merely that loving the nonhuman would alienate us from convention, that could be reckoned in its favor.

One might worry that loving the nonhuman would make one indifferent toward finding a place not in particular human customs but in one’s identity as a member of human

civilizations. Coming to terms with one's humanity is an important part of healthy identity formation. We need to form preferences for distinctively human activities. We need to have preferences regarding some social activities, e.g. dining with others, engaging in sincere conversation, and less gregarious but still social activities such as sex. We need to have preferences for some private activities, whether it be reading, exercise, crafts, or something else.

The importance of forming such an identity is not unique to the modern west. It can be found in Babylonian poems like the Epic of Gilgamesh, in which the wild man Enkidu has to reshape his preferences, and in Chinese essays like the Tea Classic, in which Lu Yu celebrates the tea ceremony as a distinctively human activity.

Someone who cannot tell the difference between human activities, like dining at table or around a fire, and nonhuman activities, like eating from a trough of slop or killing an animal in the wild and eating it raw, has not formed a healthy human identity. A person like that would be alienated from her humanity. If love for the nonhuman makes one love the nonhuman just as much as the human, and if loving the nonhuman as much as the human means being indifferent between the two, then loving the nonhuman could make us alienated in that way.

But this is not ground for serious concern. One does not form a healthy human identity by denying one's kinship to the nonhuman. If I form my identity as a human being by closing myself off from my membership in the animal kingdom, or by preventing myself from loving anything that is not human, this is not ideal identity formation. It is self-deception. We are supposed to form a human identity by loving what is distinctively human. But membership

in the animal kingdom is distinctive of humanity. (It distinguishes us from, for instance, magnetic fields.) Therefore, confining my love to the human is a denial of something distinctive of humanity. If Evelyn Fox Keller (1983) is right in her argument that cytogeneticist Barbara McClintock made great scientific achievements partly through her ability to identify with microorganisms, then perhaps connection to the nonhuman is the opposite of alienation, is instead a means to exercising some of our most distinctive capacities.

For this reason, loving the nonhuman does not alienate one from a healthy human identity. Rather, it is a necessary part of forming such an identity. Refusal to love the nonhuman is the alienating alternative.

The real concern has to do not with loving something other than humanity but with loving something whose interests are hostile to humanity. Would an ideal of universal love demand consideration toward those nonhumans so adverse to human interests that they are often seen as enemies of humanity? In order to live by universal love, would a person need to take on the interests of mosquitos, wasps, venomous urchins, wild tigers? Can this be reasonably expected of a person?

The risk here is that loving the nonhuman could alienate us from fundamental valuations such as concern for human emotions or the resolve to protect human life. If someone tried to love all living things, then concern for human well-being might become one among many irreconcilable concerns. Perhaps this would set one out of tempo with the rhythms of human life and leave one with an intolerable ambiguity about human values, unsure whether to prefer killing a man to killing a snake, or confronting a deadly bacterium and an infected human with indecisive allegiances.



But let us shun fancy. The risk cannot be a total loss of appreciation for the human. It is unlikely that loving the nonhuman will replace or crowd out one's love for the human. Our love for what is human is deeply entrenched. If for no other reason, it is entrenched because we inevitably spend a lot of time around other humans in the context of a human society. We are a social species, and this can consistently renew our love for our kind.

The more likely outcome is that loving the nonhuman will cause a conflict within a person. Insofar as loving two beings with incompatible ways of life leads to interior conflict, someone who loves a human being and a mosquito will have interior conflict.

An ideal of universal love certainly involves such conflict. But a conflict of motives or allegiances, brought on by the appreciation of multiple values, is a symptom of any life interesting enough to be worth living. How to choose between simplicity and variety, between ambition and contentment, between control and spontaneity, is basic to human living. To love more than one human being is to invest in more than one set of aims, which may contrapose themselves at any time. Such conflict does not distort or degrade a person. Rather, it is a result of being the kind of person who can be in touch with multiple values at once.

It is a commonplace in psychology (Rank 1945, Jung 1959, Rogers 1961, Kuhl et al. 2015) that a person will have conflicting elements of personality. Integration is not about eliminating but about managing interior conflict. The conflict is inevitable, but healthy people can manage and sometimes even appreciate or enjoy it. In any case, they can enjoy the multiplicity of values and the complexity of personality that leads to conflict.

Mistaken dreams of emotional harmony might rest on a Platonic, or Neoplatonic, conception of happiness as the contemplation of a unitary good that lends coherence and stability to the world and to the inner life. I can think of no reason to endorse this conception. In me the titanic conflicts of Beethoven's symphonies find a sympathetic ear, and the aphorisms of Oscar Wilde (1891): "Who wants to be consistent?" (5); "[W]e are never more true to ourselves than when we are inconsistent" (150). Why shouldn't the best life be one in which, from time to time, an interior conflict brings one distress?

As Alexander Pope says in the *Essay on Man* (I.165-170),

Better for us, perhaps, it might appear  
Were there all harmony, all virtue here;  
That never air or ocean felt the wind;  
That never passion discomposed the mind.  
But all subsists by elemental strife;  
And passions are the elements of life.

George Meredith aphoristically condenses the same thought in his novel *Diana of the Crossways*. Diana remarks, "I thank Heaven I'm at war with myself," to which her friend Emma replies, "At war with ourselves means the best happiness we can have."

## **Conclusion**

If an ideal of universal love is to meet the ethical challenges of a world in which anthropocentrism is obsolete, then the virtuous disposition at its heart will have to extend beyond the limits of the human. In this chapter, I argued that it would not make sense to extend this kind of love to nonliving things but that it would make sense to extend this love

to any living thing. This is the case whether or not the object of love can reciprocate and whether or not its form of life is radically different, even counter, to human life.

## CONCLUSION: SOME METHODS OF ETHICS

This work has outlined an ideal of universal love. The basic outline is this: An ideal is an instrument for organizing a life. Love is a virtue that can serve as such an ideal. Love in this sense is a composite attitude whose elements are benevolence, consideration, perception of moment, and receptivity. This attitude can be extended to all human beings without posing unacceptable risks. Because of the revelations of ecology and the ongoing transformation of our sensibilities about values, this attitude should be extended to all living things if this is tenable; and it is tenable.

I have presented this outline within the parameters of an academic style, but I have the pragmatic purpose of subjecting the ideal to critical reflection and systematization precisely so that it may be followed better in the world outside those parameters. The work thus has a dual purpose: as a philosophical exercise to grant the ideal intellectual legitimacy and as an ethical practice to better understand and live by it. I close with some final reflections on the methods here employed, since I think of them as directions for methods in further ethical projects.

On the one hand, this project has been general and programmatic. It is a proposal for understanding a popular ideal in philosophical terms, and has therefore stretched itself to accommodate a wide range of materials, including virtue theory, the civil rights movement, multiple religious traditions, feminist ethics, indigenous thought, and environmental ethics. If this sometimes requires hand gestures in place of solid demonstrations, the gestures are meant to form shapes that can be filled in, not to bedazzle with legerdemain.

Although general on the one hand, it has been particular on the other. I have unapologetically cited my own experiences and sometimes pulled from poetry, novels, or

journalism. Keeping so close to reports of particulars can grant one kind of evidence at the expense of another, the vivid reality of lived experience at the expense of confidence in general applicability. I am content if a work of good ethics is in this way sometimes a work of poor sociology.

At the same time, I have used as much psychology, including psychotherapy and psychiatry, as seemed fitting. I would not insist on a total and clear bifurcation between ethics and attempts to heal the soul. If psychotherapy and psychiatry are thought of as the treatment of conditions so abnormal as to be ethically irrelevant, if ethics is thought of as the study of mentally healthy (perfect?) individuals, neither will engage in fruitful thought or practice. Before consigning psychotherapy and psychiatry to an amoral realm of treating mental conditions conceived of as outside ethical concern, it is wise to keep in mind Nietzsche, at once an advocate for psychologically informed ethics and a founder of European psychological theory: “For man is more sick, uncertain, changeable, indeterminate than any other animal, there is no doubt of that—he is *the* sick animal...” (*Genealogy of Morals* 3.13)

My method, then, is eclectic, and my reason is a pragmatist suspicion that rational inquiry is not partitioned into separate disciplines but should employ whatever conceptual tools can get at the unspoken realities to be understood and evaluated. There is, you might be glad to know, not the space here for me to say more in support of this position. However, insofar as the results of this study have been fruitful, that fruitfulness can afford my method some recommendation.

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