

## Article

## Prolegomena to the Study of Love

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**Abstract:** Consider this propositional function which includes the dyadic predicate “loves”: “X does not love Y unless Y loves X” (or “if Y does not love X”). This function may be treated in four ways. (1) If universally quantified, it states a (purported) conceptual truth about “love” or the nature or essence of love. Love is necessarily reciprocal. (2) If universally quantified, it may alternatively be a nomological generalization stating an empirical or factual truth about human nature, i.e., about a pattern of reciprocity that occurs among people who are independently identified as lovers. (3) If instantiated with constants, it is an empirical proposition about the attitudes or behaviors of particular individuals (*a*, *b*, *c*). Finally, (4) the function may be treated axiologically; it expresses a normative judgment about what love ought to be or what lovers ought to feel or do. Other propositional functions may be constructed for the constancy, exclusivity, and benevolence of love. This essay investigates the implications of these understandings of the function and how they are logically related to each other.

**Keywords:** love; reciprocity; benevolence; J. David Velleman; metaphilosophy

They didn’t have the same interests. Liz spent her leisure time riding, kept her mare Polly in the backyard. Brian liked visiting museums and galleries. Liz enjoyed a good steak; Brian was a non-obnoxious vegetarian. Brian liked culture-vulture holidays in Greece; Liz rather fancied white-water rafting. It had to be love: there was nothing else keeping them together.

Jo Bannister, *Broken Lines* (1998)

What follows is a contribution to the metaphilosophy of love. In Section 1, the fundamental categories—conceptual (or analytic) philosophy, empirical (or factual) science, and normative (moral, ethical) judgments—are explained, contrasted, and illustrated. In Section 2, the benevolence of love, its nature and extent, provide an amenable topic for the application of these categories. In particular, J. David Velleman’s well-known take on love is examined. Section 3 contains general conclusions and final observations.

### 1. The Terrain

Consider this reciprocity formula, in which “Lxy” means “x loves y” and for which the domain of discourse is persons (hence Polly is excluded):

$$(x)(y)(\sim Lxy \rightarrow \sim Lyx)$$

That is, x does not love y if y does not love x, or x loves y only if y loves x<sup>1</sup>. The formula may be deployed in various ways.

( $\alpha$ ) *Individual Psychology*. The formula may be instantiated with a constant “a”, the name of a particular person. The purpose is to focus on the psychological facts or, more broadly, the nature or character of “a”. In this case, the truth of  $(y)(\sim Lya \rightarrow \sim Lay)$  may be investigated, a formula which says that person “a” loves no one unless “a” is loved in return, no matter who that other person is. It may be discovered empirically that “a”, or the psychology of “a”, demands this universal reciprocity, which prohibits Lab &  $\sim Lba$ , Lac



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&  $\sim$ Lca, and so forth. Or the truth of the less elaborate factual claim  $\sim$ Lba  $\rightarrow$   $\sim$ Lab might be investigated, which states that “a” does not love the specific person “b” if “b” does not love “a”. This assertion does not prohibit the conjunction Lac &  $\sim$ Lca. In the psychology of “a”, sometimes loving another is conditional on being loved in return, but sometimes “a” might love another person without being loved by that person. It may be empirically challenging to determine how frequently—or how intensely—“a” loves someone with or without reciprocity strings attached. The need to dig into and probe their private or turbulent emotional love life makes relying on what “a” reports problematic. They may not know themselves well enough to be aware of their tendency to love conditionally on reciprocity or be too embarrassed to admit it to themselves and others, or they may be proud of it and exaggerate its power and incidence. Their psychology is not transparent. (Whose is?)

Love may end for various reasons. Brian, for example, becomes an obnoxious vegetarian, muttering “vulture” under his breath, or he starts to parade what had usually been a well-hidden obnoxious vegetarianism, now loudly mock-barfing during their meals, and this change pushes Liz to her limit, never again able to savor steak joyously in peace. Provoked, Liz’s love for Brian slowly evaporates. Brian, if he is a reciprocity-conditional lover, ceases to love Liz, encouraged also by “culture-vulture” muttered by Liz annoyingly, ironically, tit-for-tat, no longer spoken with habitual gentle sarcasm. The only thing keeping them together, their reciprocal love, has disintegrated. The type of love being discussed here should now be clear, even if not with analytic rigor: it is not parental love for children, not patriotism, not love for God, not God’s love for Her creations, not love for one’s neighbor, not passionate or romantic love, not philately, but what may be called “personal love”, a settled mixture of romantic attraction and friendship<sup>2</sup>. This love, which had been exhibited by Liz and Brian in better times, is similar to, yet apparently not as solid as, the love between Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill, who by contrast had many shared interests. Like France.

In two other deployments of the formula, the instantiations are only derivatively significant and the original formula is at center stage:

( $\beta$ ) *Nomological Generalization*. According to the formula, persons love someone only if they are loved in return by the person or persons they love. The hypothesis can be grounded and confirmed biologically, psychologically, sociologically, anthropologically, or a mixture. In any event, the nomological generalization is an empirical factual assertion, as are statements about individual psychology. Indeed, from an accumulation of individual facts, or by extrapolating from a representative pool of subjects, a nomological generalization may be fashioned. If the nomological is perfectly universal, it would rule out the existence of persons who love in the absence of reciprocity, in the way that empirical investigation rules out the existence of unicorns. Nomologicals are often not universal, but may nonetheless succeed in describing predominant patterns. Metaphilosophically, it is beside the point whether any large accumulation of data for the reciprocity conditionality of love has actually been arrived at for populations living in Manhattan or Dakar, or whether we have discovered any statistically significant differences for reciprocity conditionality between Red and Blue States.

A nomological generalization about the reciprocity of love need not focus on momentous situations in which a person’s love or love-related behavior is acutely conditional on being loved in return. It may simply collect data about how frequently personal love is reciprocal (producing a correlation), without committing itself to the additional (causal) feature of conditionality. Although less enlightening, that would be a more tractable task. Just don’t replace studying this “brute reciprocity” of love with keeping track of marriages inaugurated by a reciprocated “I do”.

( $\gamma$ ) *Conceptual Truths*. The formula  $(x)(y)(\sim$ Lyx  $\rightarrow$   $\sim$ Lxy) may attempt to assert a necessary truth about the nature of love or a truth about the concept “love”<sup>3</sup>. By contrast, the subject matter of ( $\alpha$ ) is the psychology of particular persons, and the subject matter of ( $\beta$ ) is humanity or a clearly specified subset. Neither ( $\alpha$ ) nor ( $\beta$ ) is about *love*. Indeed, they

assume that love is already understood well enough to be picked out (and studied) when it purportedly exists. Whether “a” is a reciprocity-conditional lover cannot be investigated, and nomologicals cannot be generated, unless it is known what “love” means or to what it refers. Philosophical definitions and conceptual analysis play a significant role here<sup>4</sup>.

The formula  $(x)(y)(\sim Lyx \rightarrow \sim Lxy)$ , then, can state a conceptual or nomological thesis, the first about a necessary feature of love, the second about the character of persons who love. Neither entails the normative claim that reciprocity from a beloved person is morally obligatory, unless “love” is defined to yield “anyone who is loved has an obligation to return that love”. (Personal love is unlike God’s love for humans, which is sometimes characterized as demanding reciprocity—or as, through its power, necessarily invoking it.) The conceptual thesis asserts that love cannot exist in the absence of reciprocity. Therefore, “a person who loves another without being loved in return” would be contradictory; this person does not exist the way a round square does not exist. Cases in which an apparent lover “a” does not receive love from their beloved would be handled by a redescription that withheld “lover” from “a” or retracting the observation that the beloved did not reciprocate. (A: If we’re in love, why are we unhappy? B: Guess we’re not in love. A: Wait. Maybe we’re not unhappy.) In the best scenario, the person “a” fails to satisfy another necessary condition of love, avoiding a disingenuous “not a real” lover<sup>5</sup>. Of course, clever counterexamples to definitions are often troubling. If love is reciprocal, by its nature or conceptually, it is impossible for Brian to stop loving Liz *because* she has already stopped loving him. Lbl & Llb occurring at  $t_1$  and  $\sim Lbl$  &  $\sim Llb$  occurring at  $t_2$  are consistent with the formula, but it prohibits only one person loving the other at  $t_3$ . That situation is required for  $\sim Lbl$  occurring as a response to, hence after,  $\sim Llb$ . The imagined history of Liz and Brian may be an effective counterexample to a conceptual reciprocity thesis<sup>6</sup>.

The nomological thesis asserts that it is a fact of human nature or social psychology that loving a person is conditional on being loved in return. Love may also be conditional on something else—not being an obnoxious vegetarian—but that consideration is not relevant here. The nomological thesis is that persons, whatever the proximate or ultimate causes, do not have the skill, inclination, or inner resolve to love if their love is not returned. Someone who claims to love without being loved in return may lack self-awareness or would be lying or dissembling. On the other hand, this person’s insensitivity to reciprocity may be a perfectly allowable exception. Indeed, studying anomalies rather than ordinary cases may be scientifically fruitful<sup>7</sup>. If many individual exceptions arise, the nomological thesis could be trimmed, stating “some persons require reciprocity, some do not”. To be interesting, specific percentages about particular populations should be ascertained. Ideally, explanations why those who do, do, and why those who do not, do not, are forthcoming; these groups may be correlated with other significant parameters.

All three approaches may examine not reciprocity but a *desire* for reciprocity: If “a” loves “b”, then “a” wishes or yearns that “b” love “a”. The individual case is illustrated or satirized by the French *effeuiller la marguerite*. Having witnessed hot and cold, poor, tortured Castle recites, “Beckett loves me, she loves me not”, flicking jelly beans one by one. (Did the beans deliver the wrong answer? Try another bag.) The conceptual thesis asserts that a necessary feature of love is the lover wanting to be loved by the beloved; the phenomenon would not be love in the absence of this desire for reciprocity. A nomological thesis may propose that all or a percentage of persons desire to be loved by the persons they love or, instead, would be satisfied, although not jubilant, with an occasional affectionate hug after meeting for coffee. Note that what may be studied is a “brute desire for reciprocity” (analogous to “brute reciprocity”), yielding a correlation between “a” loving “b” and “a” desiring that “b” love “a”. In this case we remain silent about the causal link between love and a desire for reciprocity, which allows that the desire may arise some other way. This possibility is interesting because it naturally leads to studying, by itself, the desire to be loved rather than the desire to be loved in return.

It is not difficult to construct similar formulae which speak about the exclusivity of love, its benevolence, or the irreplaceability of the beloved. As another example, consider

the constancy of love. One conceptual thesis is that once a person loves another, that love never ends. It is not time's fool, as the poet says<sup>8</sup>. If Liz's love for Brian ends when Brian becomes an obnoxious vegetarian, she had never loved him. Suppose that Liz insists that she had loved Brian, with all her heart. The reply would be, "Sorry, Liz, if you had loved Brian, with all your heart or not, you would still love him", perhaps adding informally, "and resist blowing him off for being no more obnoxious than you, equally fallible, must be".

A nomological thesis that persons love constantly, or tend to love that way, built upon observations of the actual loves of couples, permits exceptions. Depending on the latitude of the nomological, it may still judge Liz's insistence suspiciously. However, "some persons love constantly and some persons do not" is bland; statistical details (say, the percentage of persons who love for  $N$  years) must be established. I am not acquainted with any social science research which studied the constancy of love to balance or correct the armchair or amateur reflections of scholars and grandparents. Durations of marriages and divorce rates are hopelessly indirect. Interesting would be studies which correlate the constancy of love with age, sexual orientation, ethnicity (and so forth) of lovers. Something new emerges here. Those who throw "resist blowing him off" at Liz may not be (only) conceptualizing or nomologizing her but (also) moralizing at her. "You *ought* to have remained love-committed to Brian". Append "intolerantly unforgiving" to Liz's flaws and the normativity becomes explicit. Nevertheless, if these accusations are true, they may persuasively imply that Liz did not love Brian or is too plagued with character defects for her protests to be taken seriously. The value-ladenness of "love" (through virtue ethics, for example) has made its appearance.

One more important example. Some theorists of love believe that persons love others in virtue of the valuable properties possessed by the beloved or perceived as valuable by the lover. Some persons may love God in response to God's perfections—a being than which no greater can be conceived. Other theorists contend that the relationship between love and the beloved's value is different. The lover bestows value on or creates value in beloveds as a result of loving them<sup>9</sup>. God does not love humans because of their merit. God's love is a gift through which God makes humans valuable. Reciprocal love between God and humans may be a mix of two types of love.

Thus ( $\alpha$ ), speaking about *individual psychology*: Person "a" may love "b" in virtue of the beauty of "b", or "a" may perceive "b" as beautiful because "a" loves "b"; anyone, "b" and "c", and so forth, whom "a" loves is loved in virtue of the attractive properties they possess; "a" loves "b" because "b" is beautiful, but "a" perceives a different person "c" as beautiful because "a" loves "c"; or "a" never loves anyone in virtue of the attractive traits they possess, always perceiving value in beloveds because "a" loves them. How these judgments about the style of an individual's love for particular persons or in general are to be empirically studied and confirmed is worth discussing. Persons who profess their love are often stumped or embarrassed by the "Why" question, whether "Why do you love me?" or "Why do you think I'm beautiful?"

Or ( $\beta$ ), speaking about *nomologicals*, it may be a universal feature, or nearly so, of human nature that persons love others in virtue of their attractive properties. The underlying processes may be biological or social. A combination of factors may not only produce the pattern, but determine the qualities that persons deem attractive and to which they respond with love. The investigation may find, instead, that people rarely or never love in virtue of their beloved's beauty. As God does, they typically bestow value on beloveds as a result of loving them. How such nomologicals are to be confirmed empirically is similarly worth discussing. Asking persons to report their inclinations in intimate matters is doubtfully reliable or illuminating<sup>10</sup>.

Finally ( $\gamma$ ), speaking about *conceptual analysis*, it is a logical matter whether personal love is essentially a response to value or, instead, bestows value. How such a thesis about the nature of love is to be substantiated philosophically is not obvious. Transcendental Deduction? What is obvious is that there are philosophers on the one side and just as many on the other, and the theologians and psychologists have had their say. Not much of this

literature contains argumentation instead of proposals and hunches. This theorizing often includes a moralistic “Thou Shalt Not Love (For) Properties”. Raise your children to love *de re*, not *de dicto*. They will then love the physically or spiritually ugly for themselves (if that actually means anything) and not because your kiddies perversely perceive the humanly ugly to be beautiful and love them for that preferred alt-property.

## 2. The Logical Status of Benevolence

Let us return to ( $\alpha$ ) individual psychology, by contemplating a Humbert Humbert soliloquy in Nabokov’s *Lolita* ([13], 259–60):

I loved you. I was a pentapod monster, but I loved you. I was despicable and brutal, and turpid, and everything, *mais je t’aimais, je t’aimais!* And there were times when I knew how you felt, and it was hell to know it, my little one. I recall certain moments . . . when after having had my fill of her . . . I would gather her in my arms with, at last, a mute moan of human tenderness . . . and the tenderness would deepen to shame and despair, and I would . . . mutely ask her blessing, and at the peak of this human agonized selfless tenderness . . . all at once, ironically, horribly, lust would swell again.

“*Je t’aimais*” declares Humbert, while confessing his brutality. Is this not an odd combination? Because he was pained by the torture Lolita experienced and felt tenderness toward her, Humbert is not altogether heartless or inhumane and manifested a state similar to love. Lust—or overwhelming sexual desire for a particular person, not mere horniness—can be phenomenologically deceptive. It may also be embryonic love. Nevertheless, a crucial piece of love was missing from Humbert’s psychology, viz. his wanting Lolita to flourish, which implies that even had Humbert not been brutal, he would not have been a lover, or not a good one, although the brutality itself is sufficient for withholding “lover” from him.

No progress in mapping love conceptually or nomologically can be made from individual cases such as Humbert’s, unless many persons exhibit his odd combination. What if most lovers were nomologically brutal in Humbert’s way? How lovers are *identified* in the first place would be mysterious, as the centrality of concern as a love-hook is compromised—similarly, if love were by its nature Humbertian brutal or, conceptually, “love” did not prohibit, without batting a logical eyelash, his combination. Contemplate a syllogism: “Sexual interaction, even fully free and informed sexual activity between adults, is often brutal, by its appetitive urges and consumptive maneuvers. To the extent that sexuality is an ingredient of love, brutality is not surprising. Humbert’s ‘*Je t’aimais et je t’ai brutalisé*’ is not a contradiction”. So goes a small normative exercise for the benefit of anyone who does not believe that substantial concern and the absence of cruelty are conceptually necessary features of love. Or we have uncovered why many philosophers, psychologists, and theologians argue that “true” love eliminates lust.

Nomologicals are ordinarily based upon an accumulation of individual cases. However, the favor is returnable: data from individual cases generate nomological generalizations which may be used to pass ontological judgment on other individual cases. Were benevolence toward beloveds and concern for their flourishing found to be nomologically characteristic of lovers, the individual cases of Liz and Humbert could be redescribed, corrected. Liz and Humbert are not lovers of Brian and Lolita, although the ways they are deficient are different. The relationship, then, between individual cases and nomologicals is dialectical. Formulating nomologicals without individual cases is futile, but so, too, is attaining comprehensive understanding of individual cases in a nomological vacuum.

Note the analogy between brute reciprocity and “brute concern”, that is, benevolence exhibited by loving partners, but not *because* they love each other. An empirical correlation may be found according to which persons who love each other are also, with statistical probability *P*, concerned for or benevolent toward each other. If the originating source of brute concern is something other than love, “love” cannot be analyzed in terms of concern, although if *P* is high enough, benevolence may be employed to estimate the incidence of love. Operational definitions of “love” may sometimes have value.



Suppose that lovers express benevolence toward their beloveds. The claim has the form:

$$(x)(y)([Lxy \ \& \ \sim(x = y)] \rightarrow Bxy),$$

in which “B” stands in particular for “has robust concern for”, which means “*x* desires for *y* that which is good for *y*, *x* desires this for *y*’s own sake, and *x* pursues *y*’s good for *y*’s benefit and not for *x*’s (a corollary: sometimes at a possible loss to *x*)”<sup>11</sup>. For reciprocal love, the formula becomes:

$$(x)(y)([Lxy \ \& \ Lyx \ \& \ \sim(x = y)] \rightarrow (Bxy \ \& \ Byx)).$$

(See Note<sup>12</sup>).

Is this better taken as a possible conceptual truth about love or as an empirical claim describing persons who love? There is no need to qualify “love” in the assertion with “genuine” or “proper”; it is clear enough. However, qualification by “morally ideal”, “morally obligatory”, or “virtuous” is perfectly acceptable if the intention is to propose a normative thesis about how persons ought to love. Of course, its moral content may fail to correspond to the way persons behave in their love relationships. If the normative version is true, so much the worse for these slackers.

“Robust concern” is not clear enough to everyone. J. David Velleman, in his famous [17], is one dissenter. Although he does not use “personal love”, he speaks about something close enough to put us on the same page: “[W]hat I have in mind is the love between close adult friends and relations—including spouses and life partners, insofar as their love has outgrown the effects of overvaluation and transference” ([17], 351, italics added). This account of his subject matter may clarify what I called the “settled” aspect of personal love. Velleman dislikes how love and its concern or benevolence have been treated by many philosophers. He conveniently assembled this collection of, for him, misguided philosophical claims ([17], 351–52)<sup>13</sup>:

- (i) “Love is not merely a desire to do good to the object beloved, although it always involves such a desire” (Henry Sidgwick [1838–1900], *The Methods of Ethics* [1874]).
- (ii) “Roughly . . . love is feeling anchored in an intense and nonfleeting (but not necessarily permanent) desire to engage in mutual caring . . . with the individual in question” (Laurence Thomas [1949–], “Reasons for Loving” [1991]).
- (iii) “What I have in mind in speaking of love is . . . a concern specifically for the well-being or flourishing of the beloved object that is . . . disinterested and . . . constrained” (Harry Frankfurt [1929–], “Some Thoughts about Caring” [1998]).
- (iv) “If *x* loves *y* then *x* wants to benefit and be with *y*” (Gabriele Taylor [1927–], “Love” [1976]).
- (v) “For *X* to love *Y* . . . *X* must want . . . to please *Y*, to cherish *Y*, to want *Y* to return the love” (William Lyons [1939–], *Emotion* [1980]).
- (vi) “What is common to all love is this: Your own well-being is tied up with that of someone (or something) you love” (Robert Nozick [1938–2002], *The Examined Life* [1989]).
- (vii) “Love clearly has among its main elements the desire to advance the other person’s good” (John Rawls [1921–2002], *A Theory of Justice* [1971]).
- (viii) “When *x* loves *y*, *x* wishes the best for *y* and acts, as far as he or she is able, to pursue the good for *y*” (Alan Soble [1947–], “Union, Autonomy, and Concern” [1997])<sup>14</sup>.

What is Velleman’s grievance about these seemingly innocuous passages? He begins his critique with this explanation ([17], 353):

Before I elaborate on what these statements [i–viii] share with Freudian theory, I want to register my dissent from the statements themselves. . . . In my opinion, the foregoing quotations express a sentimental fantasy—an idealized vision of living happily ever after. In this fantasy, love necessarily entails a desire to “care and share”.

Are his collected statements meant as nomologicals, conceptual truths, or normative claims? Just as important, how does Velleman categorize them? His phrase “Love necessarily entails

a desire” implies that he sees them as conceptual truths about love. However, that the claims “express a sentimental fantasy” implies that he sees them as false nomologicals, akin to illusions or delusions about love bearing no relation to human reality. And his phrase “an idealized vision” suggests that he senses normative encouragement. I think views [ii] through [v] and [viii] were meant conceptually and the passages from Sidgwick, Nozick, and Rawls ([i], [vi], [vii]) are ambiguous between the nomological and the conceptual. Velleman does not raise this question, apparently uninterested in the logical status of these assertions. This negligence is unfortunate, because his complaints about “the statements themselves” are phrased literally in terms of his own *individual* psychology, experiences, and relationships ([17], 353):

[T]he authors quoted above seem to be thinking of a blissful family in which caring *about* others necessarily coincides with caring *for* them or taking care *of* them. Certainly, love for my children leads me to promote their interests almost daily; yet when I think of other people I love—parents, brothers, friends, former teachers and students—I do not think of myself as an agent of their interests. I would of course do them a favor if asked, but in the absence of some such occasion for benefiting them, I have no continuing or recurring desire to do so. At the thought of a close friend, my heart doesn’t fill with an urge to do something for him, though it may indeed fill with love.

In most contexts, a love that is inseparable from the urge to benefit is an unhealthy love, bristling with uncalled-for impingements. . . . Of course, there are occasions for pleasing . . . the people one loves, just as there are occasions for caring and sharing. But someone whose love was a bundle of these urges, to care and share and please and impress—such a lover would be an interfering, ingratiating nightmare.

A handful of points should be made immediately. (1) Velleman’s interpreting “the authors quoted above” as “thinking of a blissful family” converges with his unearthing in them an “idealized vision of living happily ever after”, but it is fabrication. As far as I remember their work, the authors never had that thought. (2) Velleman limits, without offering a justification, the breadth of his critique: “I think of other people I love—parents, brothers, friends, former teachers and students”. Strangely missing from this congress of beloveds is a large, significant set of persons which Velleman already declared was included in his subject: “spouses” and “partners”. This sleight of hand leaves a big hole in his case against how the benevolence of love is handled by these views. A critique of the concern of love that does not apply to personal love is fatuous. (3) Velleman thinks the views are wrongly committed to a “continuing or recurrent desire” or “urge” to benefit the beloved. That is another misrepresentation. Who among these authors used the queer word “urge” to speak about wanting to perform caring acts? Other expressions—“disposition”, “proclivity”, “tendency”—would have been fair and sympathetic<sup>15</sup>. (4) Velleman makes the surprising judgment that “the urge to benefit is an unhealthy love”. It would be awesome to know whether he intends a naturalistic reading of “unhealthy” (as a bio-logical or psychological malady) or as a deviation from social or cultural norms. (5) Regarding the last sentence: Is Velleman disclosing that he would not want someone to care for and please and impress *him*, because he would feel impinged on in an “uncalled-for” way? Or that were he to care for and please and impress someone, the other person would feel impinged on? Hence, he (Velleman) would not engage in any caring or pleasing or impressing, in order to spare—*hence, we can note, care for or please*—the other person. Velleman’s view generates the paradox that not caring for someone is to care for them.

Much of Velleman’s critique of these views about love and benevolence is framed in the first person, as if reciting a Humbertish soliloquy:

- “[my] love for my children leads me to promote their interests”
- “other people I love”
- “I do not think of myself as an agent of their interests”

- “I would of course do them a favor if asked” His mother? His partner? My goodness, I would have thought that a love as stingy as *this* is “unhealthy” or not love at all. Robust concern calls for responding to requests for favors, but it goes well beyond that—a willingness to make sacrifices, small or large, without having been “asked” for the “favor” of a sacrifice or expecting anything in return.
- “I have no continuing or recurring desire to do so”
- “my heart doesn’t fill with an urge to do something for him”

The string of “I”, “me”, and “my” suggests that Velleman’s arguments against these views are based on his own individual tastes in these matters. Velleman takes himself to be a killer counterexample to the views he opposes. Imagine Humbert responding to the authors of [i]–[viii], “*Je t’aimais et je t’ai brutalisé*, hence your conceptual analysis is wrong or I am a significant exception to your nomological”. (Humbert may find solace in “It is a sad fact of life that people harm their loved ones<sup>16</sup>.”) No, the rebuttal to Humbert goes, you *are* unhealthy. “*Je t’aimais*” from the likes of you is not probative. Just as *voir dire* in court proceedings may exclude potential jurors, pre-study examination of potential subjects in love research may weed out the suspicious.

Velleman’s autobiography may be meant not merely as a Humbertian counter-example or exception, but as a sly moral imperative, as exhortation or encouragement<sup>17</sup>. “*Be like me!*”<sup>18</sup>. Alternatively, in using the first person, Velleman may believe that a homogenized readership concurs with him about curtailing benevolence. “This is what is true of me and, I gather, true of y’all as well”. He may as well have written, “We would of course do them a favor if asked”. Elsewhere in his essay he employs locutions such as “you” and “your mother” (would do or say this or that), in which the “you” is grammatically singular, but makes sense only if plural and could be replaced, *salva veritate*, with “we” and “our mothers” ([17], 355, 359).

Velleman is incrementally circling his way to that universal view from nowhere. He eventually arrives there ([17], 362):

That human beings are selective in love matters more to us in our capacity as objects of love than in our capacity as subjects. We want to be loved, and in being loved, to be valued, and in being valued, to be regarded as special. We want to be prized, treasured—which seems to entail being valued discriminately, in preference to or instead of others.

This wanting to be loved, wanting to be “prized, treasured”, however, is the complement of the care or concern Velleman rejects as an ingratiating nightmare. If “a” would be thrilled being someone’s treasure (which everyone wants, he says), “a” would be thrilled to receive a lover’s generous (Velleman: “interfering”) robust concern. Further, the prized “a” would be wounded and confused were a lover merely to do, if asked, favors for “a”, because “a” would expect a lover’s heart to overflow with a desire to please “a” (Velleman: “uncalled-for infringement”). Finally, if “a” is prized, “a” is worth a sacrifice now and then, which is missing from Velleman’s anemic benevolence. Anything less is an emotional and cognitive nightmare for an “a” who wants to be valued “as special”.

Velleman began this passage with the universal, homogenizing “human beings” and asserted a bunch of things about the “we” persons who make up this group. However, these “we” persons may well insist on changing his final sentence, replacing “We want to be prized, treasured—which seems to entail being valued discriminately, in preference to or instead of others” with “We human beings—professor, please do not speak, or do our thinking, for us, about the meaning of ‘special’—want to be prized and treasured, which surely *does* entail, we say, being valued in preference to or instead of others”. Velleman eventually explains why he wrote “[only] seems to entail” rather than “entails” ([17], 370):

Kant’s theory of value reveals that being valued as a person is not a matter of being compared with others. . . . If you assimilate Kant’s insight, you will realize that being prized or treasured as special doesn’t entail [*after all*] being



compared favorably with others; it rather entails being seen to have a value that forbids comparisons.

Reveals to whom, exactly? Not to the homogenized mass of “human beings” to which Velleman refers when he writes that “we” want to be loved, prized, and regarded as special. Velleman insists, requires that “we”, here addressed as “you”, embrace *his* Kantian insight about the meaning of “special” instead of their own meaning. Nothing doing: “We”, if the pronoun is used consistently, will resist Velleman’s pleading that “we” relinquish the derivation of “in preference to others” from “prized”, nor will “we” be easily persuaded by the high distinction between value as price and value as dignity. It is difficult to decide whether Velleman is making the stringent conceptual point that if we, human beings, decline to “assimilate Kant’s insight”, we cannot *be* genuine lovers, no matter how many or where we live—difficult at least because the apparently conceptual finger he wags at us may be normative, or because he is proffering his own “idealized vision” of love.

The notion that “we” want to be loved, valued, and prized is stated as a full-blown nomological. (To whom does the nomological refer? Velleman’s universal “human beings” must be wrong.) What is the empirical evidence for it? What is Velleman’s evidence? I do not know. What I would really like to know, however, is this: assuming that the nomological is roughly true, what brings about a pattern in which “we” want to be loved, valued, and prized? What are the causal antecedents and mechanisms that fabricate persons who attach such significance to being loved and prized? It is equally vital to inquire about the status and genesis of the psychology of persons who are not covered by the nomological. Are those who do not want to be prized or treasured, and those who do not want to receive ingratiating benevolence, merely different, so that smooth alternative causal stories can be told about them, or are they unhealthy, in which case their causal stories contain broken chains or dysfunctional elements? There is less of a problem understanding why persons need or want to be loved, period, without “valued” and “prized”, if by “love” something including robust concern is meant.

According to Velleman, “love is an arresting awareness of value in a person” ([17], 362). So, when he proclaims “we want to be loved”, does he mean that we want to be loved in his sense? If not, anyone who wants to be loved is free to substitute, in “I want to be loved”, any favorite definition of “love”, which may, or may not, endorse an anti-polyamorous trip from “I want to be loved” to “in preference to others”. Consider a case in which “I want to be loved” is filled in two ways:

**A:** I love you.

**B:** Oh? Waddaya mean?

**A:** I have an arresting awareness of your value as a person.

**B:** WTF?

**A:** That’s what love is, or what love should be. Can you love me that way? I hope so. At least give it a try?

**B:** Sugar, just be good to me, and I’ll be good to you.<sup>19</sup>

Persons “A” and “B” do not, despite the nudging done by “A”, agree on the meaning of “love”<sup>20</sup>.

To return to reciprocity, the topic with which we began: if “a” and “b” are free to fill in the meaning of “L” using their own definitions, I wonder whether the occurrence of  $L_{ab}$  and  $L_{ba}$  at the same time is a reciprocal love. Does reciprocity require that “a” and “b” love each other the same way or in the same sense? (Recall the asymmetrical reciprocity between God and humans.) My intuition is that this matter is conceptual, not empirical. The loves of persons who love each other in the same sense of “love” might be more constant than the loves of persons who do not. The latter partners may get caught up in incommensurable disputes of the sort, “if you loved<sub>a</sub> me, you would do it”, “if you loved<sub>b</sub> me, you would not expect me to do it”, while disputes of partners who embrace the same meaning of “love”

and have a joint understanding of the fundamentals may be more amenable to solution. These questions about the relationship between constancy and individual meanings of “love” are empirical. Other investigations could compare the constancy (or exclusivity, or benevolence) of those partners who share the same right meaning of “love”, if there is one, with the constancy of those partners who share a pretender.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

Seven thoughts wrap up these explorations.

- (1) When philosophizing about love, or anything else, recognizing the differences among claims that are conceptual, factual (general or particular), and normative is important. Identify the logical status of various theses proposed before offering criticism. Distinguish between using the conjunction “Fa & ~Ga” as a counterexample to a conceptual thesis and as an exception to a nomological hypothesis.
- (2) It is prudent not to accept conceptual or normative theses only because they arise by discovering, or are consistent with, empirically well-confirmed nomologicals. On the other hand, do not reject conceptual or normative claims only because they run afoul of well-confirmed nomologicals. Be agreeable to modifying conceptals and nomologicals in the face of unusual individual observations; also be prepared to modify descriptions of single cases in light of plausible conceptals or nomologicals.
- (3) Acknowledge that proving a conceptual thesis about love is inevitably a stubborn if not unmanageable project. It is illuminating to investigate, instead, logical relations among conceptual theses, embracing a coherentist rationale for analysis. Scrutinizing the internal consistency of a philosophical, psychological, or normative theory of love is a worthwhile conceptual task<sup>21</sup>.
- (4) When studying humans, social science should proceed with safe doses of paranoid self-protection and sympathetic trustfulness. Philosophy, too, should be wary of self-reports without ignoring them altogether. A difficult balancing act.
- (5) Philosophical accounts of love must not strain ordinary understandings. If a sincerely puzzled “WTF?” is the reaction to a philosophical proposal, that is a sign that something is fishy. “Love is an arresting awareness of value in a person” may be true. However, defend that this is what people who love are actually doing, even if they do not realize it or have no idea what it means, without implying that love is scarce<sup>22</sup>.
- (6) Avoid using personal experiences as evidence for anything that is not trivial. “I” should appear only in benign anecdotes. “I was once told by a new acquaintance that she loved me. I felt prized for a full minute—until I realized she was a proponent of ἀγάπη and loved everyone. Not only was I mortified, but her cult flooded my mailbox with literature (‘Children of God’ comics) and requests for donations”.
- (7) The fates of the *dramatis personae*: Liz and Brian remain together, although Liz is on the verge of taking a carnivorous lover. Castle and Beckett get married and live happily ever after. Humbert kills his nemesis, Quilty; Lolita dies during childbirth. A and B go to a flick.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The conjunct  $\sim(x = y)$  may be inserted to ensure that the persons are different. Doing so is unnecessary, for  $\sim\text{Laa} \rightarrow \sim\text{Laa}$  is tautologous. The reciprocity of self-love is uninteresting, in contrast to the constancy of self-love: Laa at time  $t_1$  does not imply Laa at a different time  $t_2$ ;  $\text{Laat}_1 \rightarrow \text{Laat}_2$  is not tautologous.
- <sup>2</sup> “Personal love” is a term I have used before ([1], 3). I borrow “settled” from Halwani ([2], 10), who uses it along with “companionate”.
- <sup>3</sup> The conceptual necessity of reciprocity can be rendered as  $(x)(y)(F)(t)[((\sim\text{Fxyt} \vee \sim\text{Fyxt}) \ \& \ \sim(x = y)) \rightarrow \sim(F = L)]$ , where “t” ranges over times, “F” ranges over human relational phenomena (emotions, attitudes, sentiments—whatever type of thing love is), and “L” is the dyadic predicate “loves”. See my ([1], 359n2).
- <sup>4</sup> Similarly, empirical assertions about, for example, the causal effects of pornography depend on analysis; further, some terms employed in this social scientific research are value-laden (see my [3]). Value-free operational definitions of “love” would be helpful in social scientific research. Although I was excited when I first came across Rubin’s attempt ([4]), I was crushed by too many doubts.
- <sup>5</sup> Instructive is Hale, the section “You’re Not a Real Woman” ([5], 96–97), and, of course, Austin ([6], 62–77). I wish he had done *A Plea for Love*.
- <sup>6</sup> I once examined the arguments of proponents of the conceptual reciprocity thesis ([1], 238–43). I found all unconvincing.
- <sup>7</sup> Tolstoy ([7]) begins: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way”. Each dysfunctional family deserves its own study.
- <sup>8</sup> The conceptual necessity of constancy can be rendered as  $(x)(y)([at]\text{Lxyt} \rightarrow (t')\text{Lxyt}')$ , in which “t-prime” ranges over all times after but continuous with “t”. See my ([1], 345n5).
- <sup>9</sup> For an introduction to this topic, see my [8]. It is discussed at greater length in my ([1], 128–32) where it is called love’s “*Euthyphro* Problem”: the dilemma of “Lxy because y has value” or “y has value because Lxy”. An innovative approach is Moore [9], which aims to overcome “the stalemate gripping the starkly opposed traditional views” (87). See also Foster [10].
- <sup>10</sup> The findings of Meston and Buss [11], “Why Humans Have Sex”, are based on a questionnaire filled out by 1549 undergraduate Intro Psych students at the University of Texas at Austin; 96% were aged 18–22. Yet their title refers to the bloated “Humans”, not “A Guadalupe Fragment of Adolescents”. The authors candidly lay out four “limitations” of their research (501–502), which are sufficiently powerful to make the study (in my opinion) nearly otiose. In my ([12], n23), I reveal a fifth problem.
- <sup>11</sup> From my ([14], 68), where I examine the implications of robust concern for the viability of “union” theories of love. I opined, “I find it plausible that robust concern is, if not a conceptual requirement of love, a common [nomological] feature of personal love or . . . at least *possible* within love”. My technical term “robust concern” has been misappropriated by Helm [15] to categorize, confusingly, a wide variety of philosophical views of love.
- <sup>12</sup> This formula includes  $\sim(x = y)$  to avoid tangles about self-love. Indeed, Baa is a contradiction, asserting “a pursues a’s good for a’s benefit and not for a’s”. See my [16], in which I argue that this contradiction ruins Frankfurt’s thesis about the purity of self-love.
- <sup>13</sup> I trimmed Velleman’s passages to focus on concern and I omitted Greenspan, who is irrelevant in this context. Velleman provides full bibliographic information; I added the Roman numerals and life dates.
- <sup>14</sup> Item [viii] was copied by Velleman, lazily, from the first line on the first page of the essay [14] to which he refers. Three pages later in that essay, I state the definition more precisely; see endnote 11, *supra*, and its text.
- <sup>15</sup> On Velleman’s “uncharitable” word “urge”, see Halwani ([2], 122).
- <sup>16</sup> Hamilton ([18], 244), who is excellent on the difficulty of pinning down love conceptually and empirically.
- <sup>17</sup> See Millgram ([19], 511) on Velleman: “The Kantian element [in Velleman’s account of love] is that you are supposed to love that person as a rational being or, more precisely, an ‘idealized, rational will’ (p. 344); what you are supposed to love in them is ‘the capacity to be actuated by reasons,’ the ‘capacity to care about things in that reflective way which is distinctive of self-conscious creatures like us’ (p. 365)”. Is “supposed to”, twice, an *ought* or *should*?
- <sup>18</sup> “I would that all men were even as myself”, wrote Paul (1 Cor. 7:7). But he flexibly recognized that others, with God’s blessing, would do things differently.
- <sup>19</sup> Person B is not convinced that Velleman’s “distinctively Kantian idea . . . that love is a moral emotion directed at instantiations of rational agency” is “luminous” (Shpall [20], 99).
- <sup>20</sup> Pismenny ([21], 208) touches on this topic: “[I]t is up to the lovers to decide how they will love and what love will be for them”. By “the lovers”, she means a couple who are discussing love (as persons A and B were). How should we conceive of this discussion? As prolonged bargaining and negotiation that, with optimistic hope and after some painful moments, culminates in agreement? Here is a different approach: A single, autonomous person decides, calling on the lessons of experience, what love is or should be, and then seeks out other people for love who already, and autonomously, agree.
- <sup>21</sup> For a coherentist approach, see my [14], where I argue that union theories of love cannot make logical room for robust concern. My [16] argues that one popular (even faddish) philosophical account of love is internally inconsistent.
- <sup>22</sup> A relevant metaphilosophy of sex: “We all know what sex is, at least in obvious cases, and do not need philosophers to tell us” (Goldman [22], 270).

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