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Love as Intense Liking

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ABSTRACT *Love is a broad mental phenomenon, its objects not restricted to thinking beings. Yet most philosophical theories of love focus on some case of interpersonal intimacy. Such theories ignore a wide range of relevant instances and thus fail to capture what is distinctive of love generally. I explore a straightforward alternative hypothesis that deserves a hearing but has been discussed less often: love consists in intense desire for and delight in its objects. The account is defended against various objections, among them the claim that caring concern is what is most characteristic or central in loving.*

RÉSUMÉ: *L'amour est un phénomène mental bien large dont les objets ne se limitent pas aux êtres pensants. Pourtant, la plupart des théories philosophiques de l'amour se concentrent sur des relations intimes entre personnes; ces théories laissent de côté un grand nombre de cas pertinents et donc ne réussissent pas à cerner l'amour en général. J'examine une hypothèse alternative peu étudiée: l'amour consiste en un désir intense et du plaisir. Cette analyse est défendue contre diverses objections, par exemple celle qui suggère que l'amour est surtout caractérisé par une préoccupation bienveillante envers son objet.*

When we begin to think philosophically about love, one of the first things that becomes noticeable is love's diversity. People say, at least, that they love things of very different sorts, and they behave in very different ways towards those things. For instance, people will often say that they love a place or an activity, or the traditions of their homeland; and while exaggeration is common, it is tempting to think that they are sometimes telling the truth. One can love a work of art, perhaps also certain states and achievements, such as those concerned with knowledge or justice. And of course, people also frequently love the animals, friends and family members near to them. Probably most of us love ourselves in some respects.

What we love can thus range from inanimate things to persons, actions, even abstract entities.¹ Sometimes anything of a certain type is accepted by the lover, but sometimes what is loved is an irreplaceable individual. Moreover, the actions and

attitudes of people towards what they love also vary. Party lovers seek out social gatherings, those who love their pets or children often nurture them, take pleasure in spending time with them, worry about them and delight in their flourishing. Friends strive to please or to win the respect of their friends, while those in the grip of *erōs* may experience longing, despair and the angry pains of jealousy.

I. Does Love have an Essence?

Faced with this apparent diversity in both objects and responses, some thinkers have written is if no single characterization will capture all and only cases of love. Authors seeking an overview sometimes take their cue from several Greek terms: *storgē* (affection), *erōs* (love involving passionate, especially sexual, desire), *philia* (friendly feeling) and *agapē* (charity).² Bishop Nygren, for example, drew an influential distinction between *erōs* and *agapē*.³ But what if anything is characteristic of all of these *qua* love? Irving Singer, taking stock after many years of thinking and writing about the philosophy of love, says in a recent book, “For me, love is something that can happen in any number of different, pluralistic ways”. He continues:

*You may not love your girlfriend exactly as you love you[r] wife, but you can love both simultaneously. Neither love is the same as your love for apple pie or a beautiful painting or musical composition, or your country, or God if you are religious. These are all different kinds of love that have to be understood in terms of their own variability and their own individual dimensions.*⁴

And elsewhere in the same work we read, ‘*I don’t think that large-scale terms like love...are able to have any one definition*’ (p. 14).

However, one may feel dissatisfied with the claim that nothing characteristic is shared by different cases of love. To begin with, it is not likely that the use of the same word in the above contexts has multiple senses. Some evidence for this comes from ordinary linguistic transformations. Take, for instance, the following examples of verb deletion:

- 1a) *Manfred loves his friends and he loves his books.*
- 1b) *Manfred loves both his friends and his books.*

- 2a) *Eun Mi loved children, as Gino loved his stamp collecting hobby.*
- 2b) *Eun Mi loved children, as did Gino his stamp collecting hobby.*

These transformations occur without linguistic oddity, even though the persons named will behave quite differently towards the different targets of thought.⁵ We could not say such things naturally if the word ‘loved’ had multiple semantic values in regard to friends, books, children and stamp collecting. Compare the genuinely polysemous ‘bank’ and ‘ball’ in the following:

- 3) *?After takeoff the plane banked, as Marla once did with Citibank.*
- 4) *?Junior threw a ball against the building, and the Johann Strauss Jr. Society threw one in the Vienna Hofburg.*

Certainly this simple semantic test cannot establish that the varied cases of love have some real common nature. But given that the use of the same verb ‘to love’ in different instances is not accidental, the exercise should stimulate us to try and say in some more or less systematic way how these cases are conceptually related and what (if anything) distinctive they may share. Many who have theorized about love have failed to make this effort. When we ask ‘What is love?’ it is not enough to be told that love is just romantic love, and charity, and love is what people have for their children and friends,

etc. To this answer one can hear the ghost of Socrates saying “You are very generous. I’ve asked you for one thing and you’ve given me many. You say that *philia* is a kind of love and so is *storgē*, and *erōs* and *agapē*. But you weren’t asked what things are loved, or how many different kinds of love there are. You were asked what love itself is. So try again, and tell me what all these have in common.” (Cf. *Meno* 72a,b; *Theaetetus* 146d,e)

A sophisticated challenge to the question about love’s nature is offered, however, by Ronald de Sousa, who speaks of the myth of essence: ‘There is no essence of love’. Instead, there are individuals whose endless variety of stories and situations gives rise to infinitely many individual emotional possibilities. Words like ‘love’, ‘hate’, ‘jealousy’, ‘anger’ and so forth are more or less convenient ways of imposing boundaries on a multidimensional emotional continuum, “cutting it up” to yield salient regions which can drift over time. We should therefore abandon the essence anxiety that leads us to try and find something definitive of love itself.⁶ On this view, talk of love suffers, not (or not only) from ambiguity but from vagueness and shifting convention. ‘Love’ is a common term imposed on some more or less salient region of a complex spectrum, a bit like a simple color term like ‘red’, vaguely and somewhat arbitrarily applied to a region of color space located within the dimensions of hue, brightness and saturation.

The de Sousa objection brings up broad and difficult philosophical issues about vagueness, classification and convention in natural language, as well as narrower issues more proper to love and its close relatives. Without pretending to settle the wider problems, the best way to address the narrower ones is probably just to look closely at cases of love to see what they actually do have in common. “Look and see!” as

Wittgenstein advises, and those who quote him sometimes fail to do.⁷ But suppose we cannot find anything that is characteristic of love generally. It would still be risky to conclude that there are no unifying factors. Philosophy is hard, arguments from ignorance are inconclusive, and it may be that we just have yet to pick out such unifying features as exist. And even if we settle for a set of cases loosely related by “family resemblances” of some sort, we should still try to say something worthwhile about what these resemblances consist in. The fact that we use the word ‘love’ with confidence in new contexts inspires a hope that there is at least some order to be found.

II. The Core Meaning

Here then is a hypothesis about what is characteristic of love more generally, a proposal helpful in bringing some unity to the scattered instances. Love is a limit case of liking: it is a liking of a certain intensity and duration. The required strength and duration of the liking is not specified and may be context sensitive and indeterminate, but that is a desirable consequence of the proposal, since the criteria for love are indeterminate in the same way. Liking is of course a common sense notion that may cover a range of more and less self-aware mental states, and liking something intensely is also consistent with disliking it in certain respects. One can love something even while having mixed feelings about it. Since it is possible to reject and disown some of one’s desires, it may also be the case that love has a certain volitional element to it such that one must endorse, or be willingly committed to, one’s liking of the beloved object.⁸ It is

in any event not purely volitional, since we do not simply decide what we will and will not love. These are matters which may be left for further discussion without denying the main claim.

The claim is controversial. It must be tested against putative counterexamples and competing theories, but before doing so let us try to understand more about what it entails. True, we are sometimes unwilling to say that we like something when we love it, but this hesitation is due to our reluctance to make a weaker claim when we can make a stronger one. Alternatively, some might prefer to say that liking disappears when it passes into love at some stage. Either way, love lies in a region along the same scale as liking, and any satisfactory account of love must bring out the continuity between them. Loving and hating in this common usage are extremes on a range of attraction and repulsion, other stages along the road being 'like it a lot', 'fond of it but not passionate about it', 'don't especially enjoy it', 'can take it or leave it', and so forth. We can thus say, 'Such and such is an annoyance but I don't hate it', or 'I like such and such but I don't absolutely love it'. We must also allow differences of intensity within the extremes themselves, since one can love or hate more or less intensely. Attraction of a sufficient intensity is thus at the core of loving. Theories which fail to recognize the relationship between love and attraction are nonstarters.

I can think of no better way to understand what it is to like something than in terms of desiring and delighting in some aspect of it. To put the proposal in another way, then, the fundamental meaning of 'x loves O' is 'x desires and delights in O'. We love what we are strongly drawn to: those fascinating and delightful objects which we find

ourselves intensely admiring or hoping for. The intensity may be very great indeed, which is why lovers sometimes speak in terms of insanity: “crazy about so-and-so” is a typical phrase, and Plato’s Socrates classifies love as a mania of a special sort, a madness given by the gods to ensure our good fortune (*Phaedrus* 245b). But whatever else love may entail, being a pet lover, a doting parent or a sports car aficionado entails that something about the loved objects is desired or brings delight. To desire and delight in something is to desire and delight in its effects, its well being or in some interaction with that thing. For example, a lover often delights in the physical presence of the loved object, strongly desiring to contemplate it, or to associate or interact with it in some way.

Those who are attentive to precedents in the history of philosophy will notice that Thomas Hobbes has a somewhat similar conception of attraction love and a corresponding aversion hate, for he says in *Leviathan* Ch. VI:

That which men Desire, they are also sayd to LOVE; and to HATE those things, for which they have Aversion. So that Desire, and Love, are the same thing; save that by Desire, we alwayes signifie the Absence of the object; by Love, most commonly the Presence of the same. So also by Aversion, we signifie the Absence; and by Hate, the Presence of the Object.

Hobbes has a point here, in that desire requires some privation in order to exist. He fails, however, to capture the intensity of love and he is also mistaken insofar as one can love or hate something which is absent. Presence and absence of an object, therefore, cannot be markers which distinguish hate and love from aversion and desire. Better to say instead that love consists in both desire and delight, including desire for the absent object, delight in the present one.

Among more recent authors, a version of the delight/desire view is set out in an engagingly forthright way by O. H. Green, who characterizes love as a complex conative state, that is, a set of desires:

*Love is identical with a set of desires: desires are constitutive of love, not just caused by love; and desires are essential to, not just typical of love.*⁹

Thus, for example, on Green's view person A has a romantic love for person B if and only if A desires to share an association with B which typically involves a sexual dimension; A desires that B fare well for his or her own sake; and A desires that B reciprocate these desires.¹⁰ Other forms of love involve different desires.

Since objects of delight and desire differ greatly one from another, there are many differences in the ways that love can show itself. This helps to explain the various taxonomies of love that have been offered, including its classification as *erōs*, charity, affection and friendship. We can accommodate such special cases by granting that what one desires from a lover is not exactly what one desires in one's children, in a close school friend, a faithful dog or a comrade in arms. The pleasures and activities involved are very different, the complexity and intensity of the desires can differ as well. So there is no problem with saying in this respect that love takes different forms: indeed, the desire/delight thesis reveals why this should be so, since we desire different interactions with different objects.

III. Some Objections

One may wonder whether love can exist without liking. For, people sometimes confess to loving certain individuals while actively disliking them. You can love parents or siblings, for example, even while they annoy or distress you to no end, and even though you do not like spending time with them. “I love her dearly, but I can’t stand her!”: surely this is an understandable remark. Does it not follow that loving and liking are very different things?

Further reflection should dispel this doubt, for it is natural to describe persons in such situations as having *mixed feelings* about the loved one. There can for instance be a sense of filial or fraternal devotion and gratitude together with a dislike of certain behaviours. Feelings, attitudes and emotions of aversion can coexist with a powerful desire for the continued well being or approval of the loved individual, a desire whose power is shown (for example) by deep grief at a death. Affection and resentment, loving and disliking can wax and wane, mingle and succeed each other. We must be careful in such cases to distinguish among the multiple objects of desire and aversion. There is of course also the unpleasant possibility of self deception. One may strongly believe in the desirability of loving someone, persuading oneself that one does love and failing to admit that at bottom one is really more or less indifferent, resentful or even hostile. But if it should turn out that one does not intensely like anything about the individual in question, or feel any delight at or strong desire for (say) their continued well being, then one cannot be said to love that person after all. This is entailed by the desire/delight account and it is

just what we should expect. In fact, the account helps us to describe what is going on in such cases.

Someone might also be tempted on the following grounds to doubt that desire and delight are characteristic of love. It is obvious that there is a negative side to love, namely worry and pain at the loss of a loved object, or disappointment at rejection. Every parent knows the anxiety that swells when a child who is late fails to call. How can worry and pain and frustration enter into love, if desire and delight are at love's core? One might see in this association with aversion and pain a problem for the definition of love in positive terms of delight and desire. Yet it is because we love something that we are worried and pained over its loss. It is not conversely the case that we love it because we are worried and pained by the prospect of its loss. Desire and delight are therefore prior for loved objects, while worry, pain and frustration are secondary. Although those who love other persons are often full of anxiety, resentment, jealousy, anger, grief and so on, it does not follow that such pains are part of the love itself. This is true even though having a central object of intense desire and delight snatched away can leave a life grief stricken and bereft of meaning.

Again, the desire/delight thesis might be thought to run aground on a distinction set out by Irving Singer. As we saw, Singer believes that loves are irreducibly plural in form. Two quite different strands which he finds (often, admittedly, interwoven) in cases of love are the strands of appraisal and bestowal. In some instances, an appraising mind understands and responds to what is valuable in a thing. Appraisal love involves a recognition of beauty or moral goodness, for example, in what is loved. By contrast,

some who love are not reacting to a found value at all. Parents do not harbour a special love of their own children because they have detected some special excellence in them. If their love were proportionate to merit, they might well prefer the offspring of other people to their own. Instead, they love the child that is theirs, sometimes even before it is born. In such cases Singer will say that the value the loved one has is not discovered in a favourable appraisal, but is instead bestowed upon it by the loving agent. Hence his claim that there is an ineliminable distinction between appraisal and bestowal in love.

Singer must be right in stating that favourable evaluation can create or strengthen love. Love, as Plato stressed, is an appropriate response to the beautiful (*Symposium* 210a-212c). Judging that something is beautiful can put one into a receptive and appreciative state of mind, in the mood for love. And the remark that some love, by contrast, including some parental love, does not depend on such evaluative judgments also seems true and apropos. However, these points do not conflict with the account that is being tested here. The desire and delight that is love may be generated in different ways, sometimes preceding evaluative judgment and sometimes following it. In short, some love is immediate and instinctive and some love is caused and reinforced by the belief that the beloved is good, beautiful or somehow desirable; but all of this is consistent with the claim that love is a special case of desire and delight. There is a complex relationship between desire and what is desirable, neither being completely independent of the other. We may come to desire a particular thing upon grasping that it is sufficient, or such as, to be desired.¹¹ At the same time, nothing could be desirable, or sufficient to be desired, if no one were ever capable of desire. Value may be due

ultimately to the interests that individuals have, but this hardly precludes things from being evaluated. So, while love can be generated and reinforced in different ways, we have not yet seen any fatal difficulty for the account under investigation.

IV. Love and Caring Concern

It would be a misunderstanding to think the desire/delight thesis entails that all love is selfish. It would likewise be a mistake to think that a love consisting in the lover's own desire and delight is too self-centred to be genuine. For, nothing has been said which requires the desires of love to be directed at lovers themselves or at states of their own minds. Not all love is love of self, though mental states of the lover are certainly essential to love. In particular, there does not need to be anything self-centred about a desire directed at someone else. Parental love for a young child is partly expressed in satisfaction at the child's successes, but it doesn't follow that the parents really just love their own satisfaction.

However, a significant criticism of the desire/delight thesis takes up Singer's bestowal theme and suggests that it is selflessness in the sense of disinterested concern for an object's welfare which is the mark of genuine love. William Blake memorably personifies such concern in a humble Clod of Clay who sings: "Love seeketh not Itself to please/Nor for itself hath any care/But for another gives its ease/And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair".¹² Those who stress caring concern may differ over whether it is the defining feature of all love or simply a central case; but on one view (often associated with the Christian doctrine of *agapē*) the mark of the highest and most genuine form of

love is selflessness.¹³ In the paradigm instance, God is thought to love humankind, not for any merit in ourselves, but solely as a manifestation of the divine nature, bestowing blessings and mercies on what is intrinsically worthless. Human love, insofar as it reaches its most developed form, is an imitation of this divine charity and it is distinguished by its willingness to give unconditionally in response to need. The Apostle Paul's great sermon on *agapē* in 1 Corinthians 13 says little about desire and delight but observes that love "seeketh not her own", stressing its patient unselfishness. This scripture text and others which emphasize God's love for humanity suggest that it is selfless concern for welfare that is essential to love.

The caring concern view holds such appeal and is so influential that it deserves extended consideration. It gains support from prominent works of moral instruction East and West. Thus, in the *Analects of Confucius* 12.22, Fan Chi asks about the central virtue of humanity. The sage replies, "Love all persons". In the book of *Leviticus*, we read "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (19:18, cf. 19:34). This command is later repeated by Jesus of Nazareth (*Luke* 10:27; cf. *Matt.* 19:19, 22:39) and illustrated with an anecdote about a certain caring Samaritan. It is natural to gloss the word 'love' here with 'care for', 'respect' or 'be concerned with'. Jesus treats love for God and humankind as the greatest of commandments, upon which hang all the law and the prophets (*Matt.* 22:36-40). We seem to be enjoined in these and other canonical passages to treat people with a love that involves caring for them, suggesting that disinterested concern for others is both the fundamental characteristic of love and a guide to morally praiseworthy behavior.

And in fact every thoughtful person recognizes that there is moral value in at least sometimes placing the interests of other people alongside their own and treating those interests as reasons for action.¹⁴ The most prominent and praiseworthy cases of interpersonal love tend to be accompanied by a deep concern for welfare. At any rate, it is usually preferable to be loved by somebody who cares about one's welfare than by somebody who does not. So religious tradition, moral instinct and the desire for human companionship all combine to bring caring concern to mind when we think of love.

V. Resolution of the Dispute

The view that love is essentially disinterested concern for welfare is inconsistent with the view defended here, which entails that such concern, welcome though it may be, belongs to a special case of love rather than being its essential feature. So, to bring the question to a point, which of these two competing claims is right? Which is more fundamental to loving something: desire and delight, or well wishing concern for it?

Desire/delight is more fundamental. For, the welfare of a beloved is among the things that may be intensely desired. What has to be remembered is that love itself is a broader phenomenon than morally admirable interpersonal love, in spite of the latter's salience. Liking, in turn, is broader than loving. Philosophers sometimes disdain love that is not interpersonal as mere liking or as an inferior imitation of love, because they wish to hurry on to the morally more exciting and challenging cases of interactive benefit love, such as friendship, parental affection, divine grace and erotic love. Such philosophers are like entomologists who interest themselves only in butterflies and have

no time for caterpillars, ants and roaches. Just as you cannot fully understand a butterfly without understanding its ancestors, its more basic forms and its close relatives, similarly, the more complex and developed forms of love have to be considered against a background of other mental phenomena, including those of desire, hate and dislike. Not all love is interpersonal, and morally indifferent or appalling love can still be love.

If we ignore the entire range of love to focus on, say, interpersonal love or some special case thereof (as theorists of benevolent concern tend to do), we risk mistaking what is accidental for what is truly distinctive of the whole. The more general desire/delight account of love explains cases of caring concern in a way that caring concern does not explain the broader cases of delight and desire. Those who think that love is essentially well wishing concern must be puzzled when reading Plato, for example: since he does not say much about such concern, whatever can he be talking about in his rhapsodies on love? On the more plausible view defended here, the link between desire and well wishing lies in what is desired: in loving other persons one can desire and delight in their well being. It is a fact that people who are delighted by something are often disposed to treat it well and that we are typically inclined to return benefit for benefit. “Why do you care about my well being?” “Because I love/like you”. This reply provides a real explanation, and not just a tautology.

Given the natural plausibility of this view once it has been clearly expressed, one would expect it to be more widely examined than it has been. N. K. Badhwar observes that ‘...with the notable exceptions of [C. S.] Lewis and [Irving] Singer, the idea that love centrally involves pleasure in the valued individual’s existence and wellbeing is

conspicuous by its absence from modern and contemporary discussions of the topic.’¹⁵

But is it always true that love of persons entails a desire for their well being? The idea that love of individual persons must involve pleasure in their welfare stands in contrast to a point urged by David Hume. According to him a tender impulse to benefit the beloved—what Hume calls “benevolence”—is no part of the nature of love, although he thinks love is invariably followed by this benevolence:

If nature had so pleased, love might have had the same effect as hatred, and hatred as love. I see no contradiction in supposing a desire of producing misery annexed to love, and of happiness to hatred.¹⁶

Most of us are inclined to assist people whom we like or love and to perform favors for them, in conventional ways involving various forms of reciprocity. This is not part of the bare nature of love itself, and matters could have been otherwise.¹⁷

Still, something should leave us uneasy here. Hume has overstated the point, because sometimes ‘I love you’ is short for ‘I love you as a person’ or ‘I love you for yourself’, where the ‘for’ and ‘as’ indicate more precisely the objects of desire. Loving someone *as a person, as a friend and for their own sake* (whatever this turns out to mean upon analysis) really does entail willing their welfare. Loving people as friends or companions necessarily involves desiring certain cooperative interactions and communications with them. Even a cannibal could conceivably love people in the way gourmets love fine wine or fresh scallops, for their flavor as food. “I like you” or “I love you”, spoken by the sadist to his captive, may be a chilling harbinger of fresh tortures. But loving others as persons, as friends or for themselves means taking pleasure in their society and welfare, hence considering their interests alongside one’s own as motives for

action. That is, if not a sociopath or otherwise emotionally unusual the lover will want to interact with the beloved in some specific ways that involve communication and reciprocal benefits.

There are some inevitable borderline cases which leave us unsure about what to say. Suppose you have a regular chess partner whom you greatly look forward to meeting each week. In fact, these intense encounters, pleasures and activities play such a central role in your life that you are inclined to say that you love that person as a chess partner. But do you love the person in respect of those abilities and acts, or do you just love playing chess? The durability of the relationship, whether or not you enjoy and admire other things about that individual, and especially whether or not he or she is readily replaceable by another partner might help decide the question, which might after all be indeterminate at some level.

If you love someone as a friend, it pleases you to please the object of your friendship, and pleases you to know that the friend has entered into certain reciprocal relations with you. You have a disposition to empathize. Loving others only for their beauty, their money, their utility or their entertainment value, on the other hand, is loving them for something accidental to their personhood and is incompatible with the practice of friendship. This arises from the institution of friendship and its demands, rather than from the bare nature of love itself.¹⁸ A friendship, it should be stressed, is not love nor any emotion but rather a complex relationship into which love and friendly feeling may enter.

Aside from confusion about the various objects of desire, perhaps the main source of resistance to the desire/delight thesis is the vague sense that it is somehow too thin: that it does not capture the emotional depth that is often involved in love. This unease is partly a result of focusing too narrowly on the complexities of interpersonal relationships, partly a result of conflating the effects of love with love itself. It should be clear by now that we ought to be alert to the difference between love's intense desire, on the one hand, and, on the other, the empathy, concern and other emotionally rich states that love often brings.

I close this section with a test case. Imagine some cruel persons, schoolyard bullies, let us say, with a favorite victim whom they enjoy tormenting. As they take pleasure in his suffering, so they are delighted to see him and interact with him. The question now arises: do they love their victim, hate him, both love and hate, or neither love nor hate him? Is it love because the torturers desire his presence and delight in the interaction, or is it hate because they will his harm and the relationship is painful for the object of their attentions?

It is natural to say that they love having him around because they love to torment him and watch his reactions. They delight in his distress because of the feeling of power it gives to them. But while they love having him as a victim, they do not love him as a friend or as a person, because they are averse to his welfare. They may even be said to hate him as a person if it pains them greatly to see him strong, happy and flourishing. So love in respect of one object of desire can coexist with hate in another, and the appearance of paradox disappears.

VI. Love of Self and Love of One's Neighbor

In his 2004 book *The Reasons of Love*, Frankfurt argues that love is primarily a disinterested concern for the well being of its object.¹⁹ I have offered reasons for thinking that this is not a good general account of the matter. By and large, we have a caring concern for the welfare of things because we love them, not vice versa. But Frankfurt draws a striking consequence from his claim: self-love turns out to be a case of pure love *par excellence*, since people are disposed to care deeply about their own welfare with a concern that is in a certain way disinterested.²⁰ That is, self-love is said by Frankfurt to be disinterested, not in the sense that the lover's interests are independent of the object's interests, but rather in the somewhat peculiar sense that the lover identifies her or his own interests entirely with those of the beloved, and that the good of the beloved is not chosen for the sake of anything else. Frankfurt emphasizes that few people are actually able to achieve the most successful and enlightened form of self-love, because few are able to muster the requisite knowledge and discipline, but he treats it as an ideal to strive toward. The idea that we do or ought to love ourselves also seems to be presupposed by some of the moral teachers whom we consulted earlier, namely those who say that we ought to love others as we love ourselves. On one reading, they mean that we do and should continue to love ourselves while loving others in the same degree. This raises some questions about self-love for the desire/delight thesis. Do most people really love themselves? In what respect is it natural or desirable to love oneself?

Narcissus loves himself. He likes nothing more than to contemplate his appearance and think about his own excellence. He fills his mind only with thoughts of himself. In these ways he obviously desires and delights intensely in himself. But his vanity is unappealing, so if there is a proper self-love it must take a form different from that of Narcissus. There is however a respect in which most healthy people do love themselves, for they deeply desire their own successes and take pleasure in their own well being. Moreover, we all have overriding concerns, including concerns about the things we love. To some extent one identifies one's own interest with the existence of those beloved things. An attack on what I love can be an indirect attack on me, because my deep attraction to those objects is a significant aspect of myself. As Frankfurt observes, in loving and pursuing what we love, we are actually also expressing our self-love: "The most perspicuous characterization of the essential nature of self-love is simply that someone who loves himself displays and demonstrates that love just by loving what he loves."²¹ Perhaps this needs to be qualified. Merely loving what one loves is not sufficient for loving oneself, as some second order reflection about the self and its desires is probably necessary. We must also leave room for the possibility of self-sacrifice in defense of what one loves. But self-consciously pursuing what one loves is one way to practice self-love.

The delight/desire thesis can therefore accommodate the claim that people usually love themselves, insofar as it is usual to desire and delight in one's own flourishing and to deliberately pursue what one loves. This brings us back to the idea of loving others as we do ourselves. Is it reasonable to expect people to love everyone else in their community

(their “neighbors”) in the same way? Perhaps the thesis can shed some light on some of the New Testament passages advocating charity. We saw that St. Paul’s Corinthian sermon on *agapē* is best understood, not as defining love, but as describing how a morally admirable lover behaves towards a beloved person: with patience, unselfish kindness, trust, modesty, endurance and so on. But if the delight/desire claim is right, some of what is called ‘charity’ or more tendentiously ‘Christian love’ towards one’s neighbor probably isn’t love of individuals at all. Instead it is a general love of humanity, or else it is sympathy, or dutifully trying to give the interests of other people the same weight as your own interests when acting. This may cover a certain amount of inspirational literature including the Good Samaritan parable, which leaves unclear the extent to which the benefactor is motivated by human sympathy or religious duty as opposed to love proper.

We should thus distinguish love of individuals from both a benevolent well wishing towards people, which one can feel even towards those whom one has never met, and from sense of duty to treat people well. One way to tell the difference between benevolence or duty, and genuine love of individuals, is that objects of benevolence and duty could as well be selected at random. It does not matter exactly to whom the good deeds are done, so long as someone benefits. But the individuals that are objects of love are not interchangeable in the same manner.²² The loss of one who is loved as an individual person is felt with grief, while the disappearance of some object of benevolence need not be felt in the same way. People who do not recognize this difference between loving individuals (on one side) and treating them dutifully, with sympathy or benevolence (on the other), fall into absurdity when they try to explain how

we can love individuals without knowing them personally, or without particularly liking them. On the more plausible view endorsed here, if you don't like them at all, you don't love them, even if you feel obliged or otherwise disposed to treat them well.

It may be useful to contrast the doctrine of *agapē* as universal love with a moral ideal that developed independently of it. Confucian tradition as passed on through Mencius has a different attitude toward love of one's neighbor. It is true, as we saw, that at one point in spelling out the requirements of the virtue *ren* (humanity, *Analects* 12.22) Confucius recommends universal love. But other texts suggest that instead of loving everyone equally there should be gradations of treatment, and that rather than giving of oneself without limit there should be a Mean between too little and too much self-sacrifice.

In a passage which will perhaps be unfamiliar to many Westerners, but was for many centuries known to every literate Chinese, Mencius contrasts two extremes:

The principle of the philosopher Yang was—"Each one for himself." Though he might have benefited the whole kingdom by plucking out a single hair, he would not have done it.

The philosopher Mo loves all equally. If by rubbing smooth his whole body from the crown to the heel, he could have benefited the kingdom, he would have done it. (7A26)²³

Yang Zhu has too little love for others, according to this passage, while Mozi has too much. Mencius goes on to recommend a middle course, while warning against holding to it too rigidly. On his view, which he takes to be that of Confucius, there should be discrimination. For example, unlike the path endorsed by the Mohists, one should love and care for one's own parents more than the parents of other people.

The New Testament idea of loving enemies brings out a further contrast between moral traditions. The Sermon on the Mount tells us “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” (*Matt. 5:44*). Kierkegaard derives love for enemies from the same source as neighbor love, namely blind love for every person.²⁴ Confucius offers different advice:

Someone asked, ‘What do you think of the saying, “Requite injury with kindness”?’ The Master replied, “With what, then would one requite kindness? Requite injury with uprightness, and kindness with kindness.” (*Analects 14.34*)²⁵

Love of enemies is replaced on this policy with justice or rectitude, on the plausible ground that friends deserve better treatment than do enemies.

VII. Conclusion

Love, that powerful force in human life, has been much praised and discussed. Its importance to human happiness is not in doubt, but disagreements continue over whether there is any common nature of love, whether one ought to try and love everybody around one, whether we ought to love ourselves, and whether caring concern is a phenomenon completely different from attraction love. The emotions that accompany love, and its diverse objects and relations, seem to defy the classifying instinct, and this has led to confusion about love’s nature.

Seeing love as intense desire and delight brings out this nature by locating love within a wider landscape of desire and liking. If we take the varieties of love to be variations in what is desired, we can explain the apparent diversity which is sometimes

left as a simple fact. In particular, since among other things we often intensely desire the welfare of individual persons, the desire/delight thesis helps explain why caring concern for persons has often wrongly been thought essential to love. Unlike the view that caring concern or general benevolence are necessary and sufficient for love, the desire/delight view helps us avoid the absurd notions that one can love something without desiring or liking anything about it, and that the individual objects of one's love could be unknown or interchangeable. The vague and possibly shifting border regions of love remain open to dispute, but philosophical inquiry can help map out this important part of life's terrain.

Notes

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1. For some reflections on the ways in which universals and particulars may be objects of love, see Stephen Leighton, 'What We Love', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 71, No. 2, June 1993, pp. 145-58.
 2. E.g. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Harper Collins, 1998). As a matter of classical Greek usage, the terms do not have just the senses Lewis adopts in this widely read book. The word *agapē* is an ordinary term not specially reserved for charity or unselfish love. Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (New York: MJF Books, 1989), 50, notes a 6th or 5th century Attic vase with the word *agapē* inscribed next to a half-naked woman on a bed. *Philia* goes beyond friendship, since it is used by Plato and Aristotle to cover familial love. A famous passage in Plato's *Phaedrus* 241d has Socrates (admittedly not in the course of stating his own view) using the verb *agapaō* to describe the attitude of wolves towards lambs and *phileō* for cool sensualists who are after sex. In Plato and elsewhere the verb *philein* sometimes broadly conveys a liking or being apt to do something, and so on.

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3. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, Philip S. Watson tr. (London: S.P.C.K. 1953). See Ch. 3 'The Fundamental Contrast Between Agape and Eros'. Nygren's treatment of Plato's *erōs* as egoistic is open to dispute. Related struggles between spiritual and sensual love have often been represented in works of art, as in Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, for example.
 4. Irving Singer, *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing Up*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 75.
 5. Cf. semantic tests for ambiguity which employ noun and verb deletion in James D. McCawley, *Everything that Linguists have Always Wanted to Know about Logic*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1993), Section 1.3.
 6. See 'Love Undigitized' in Roger E. Lamb, ed. *Love Analyzed*, (Westview Press, 1997), 204. On "essence anxiety" and the multidimensional continuum of emotions see pp. 193-5 and passim. To be fair, Socrates himself, presumably the star representative of essence anxiety, seems not to have been an unusually anxious man.
 7. *Philosophical Investigations*, G.E.M. Anscombe, tr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §66.
 8. Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 10-18, 42-43.
 9. O. H. Green, 'Is Love an Emotion?' in *Love Analyzed*,. 216. Green's views about emotion are worked out in greater detail in O. H. Green, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Theory* (Dordrecht: Kluwer 1992). For reasons having to do with a seeming absence of belief-based intentionality and rationality in love, Green denies that love strictly qualifies as an emotion, but I will not take up that view here.
 10. Green, *The Emotions*, 216.
 11. The importance of understanding the '-able' suffix in terms of adequacy and sufficiency was stressed to me by Richard Bosley in conversation.
 12. William Blake, 'The Clod and the Pebble', in *Songs of Experience*, 1794. The hard little pebble sings a different tune. Neither is right about the nature of love, as we shall see, since love can take both selfish and selfless forms.
 13. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*. Howard and Edna Hong tr. (London: Collins, 1962) is an eloquent defense of this view. Nygren 1953 also explores it at length. Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1972) surveys a body of literature on the same theme. A more recent discussion of selflessness in love is Gary Foster, 'Romantic Love and Knowledge: Refuting the Claim of Egoism', *Dialogue XLVII* (2008), 235-51.

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14. Confucius tells us that the Way is summed up in not doing to others what we would not like to have done to ourselves. Some relevant passages in the *Analects* on love and reciprocity include: 4:15; 5:12; 6:30; 12:2,5,22; 14:34; 15:24; 17:4. In the *Four Books* of classical Chinese philosophy, see also the *Mencius* 7A:17, Chapter 13 of *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and the beginning of Chapter 10 of *The Great Learning*.
 15. N. K. Badhwar, 'Love' in H. LaFollette, ed. *Oxford Handbook of Practical Ethics*, (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 45.
 16. Hume (1739), *A Treatise of Human Nature*. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, eds. (Oxford University Press, 2003). Bk.2 Pt.2.Sect.6.Para.6.
 17. Worth stressing once more is the fact that the well wishing concern story cannot explain such expressions as 'I love the colour of your coat', 'We love the ocean view'. Cf. 'I'm crazy about the decor/the latest pop sensation/the new dance'. Are you crazy? Are you certifiable, ripe for sedation, fit to be restrained? Of course not: it's just that your enthusiasm exceeds some norm. Exaggeration is a peripheral form of usage, but those focused on well wishing should not therefore excuse themselves from accounting for it. Why do expressions of love for (say) Korean food have nothing to do with solicitude for the pickled cabbage?
 18. This characterization of loving someone as a friend has some clear similarities to Aristotle's account of virtue friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII-IX. and his description of the friend as a "second self".
 19. Frankfurt, *Reasons*, 42.
 20. Frankfurt, *Reasons*, 80-82.
 21. Frankfurt, *Reasons*, 85.
 22. Pace Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, in the chapter 'Love of Neighbor': "Since one's neighbour is every man, unconditionally every man, all distinctions are indeed removed from the object" (p. 77). And "...he is every man, the first the best, taken quite blindly." (p. 79)
 23. In *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. II, James Legge, tr. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1895), 464. See also 3B9.9-10 (Legge 282-284); 3A5 (Legge 257-60); 7B26 (Legge 491).
 24. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 77-80.
 25. Confucius *Analects*, *With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, Edward Slingerland tr. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003). *Analects* 4.3 says that only the good person is capable of loving people, and of hating people, indicating that hatred is sometimes appropriate. And to be disliked by bad people is more praiseworthy than being liked by everybody (13.24, 15.28).