

## “Something In Between”: On the Nature of Love

### Love’s Promise

Is it necessary to begin a book about love by arguing for love’s centrality, if not its supremacy, among the values at which human beings aim and by which they order their lives? This fact seems to be acknowledged on nearly all hands. If anything, it may be that we place too much emphasis on love—or, at any rate, that we expect too much of it. In his memoir *Kafka Was the Rage*, the essayist Anatole Broyard recalls telling his analyst that what he wanted was what many people want and think it reasonable to expect: to be utterly transformed. “In novels, I said, people are transfigured by love. They’re elevated, made different, lifted out of their ordinariness. . . . It’s not so much to ask, I said. I just want love to live up to its publicity.”<sup>1</sup>

But love’s publicity is impressive indeed, and it would be difficult for any emotion or experience to live up to that. John Armstrong announces on the first page of his book on love: “Love is one of humanity’s most persistent and most esteemed ideals.”<sup>2</sup> Robert Solomon writes that “love is the most exhilarating—and sometimes the most excruciating and destructive—experience that most of us have ever had, or will ever have,” and suggests that it is perhaps “even more profound and basic to our being than most of our talk about it would suggest.”<sup>3</sup> The notion of love as transformative, the idea that love initiates a new stage of life and that after falling in love things will never be the same again, is also common. Consider the following description, from a contemporary novel, of the process of falling in love:

But now she seemed different to me. I became aware of her special powers. How she seemed to pull light and gravity to the place where she stood. . . . At the same time that I was becoming conscious of her body, I was becoming aware of my own. A tingling feeling caught fire in my nerves and spread. The whole thing must have happened in less than thirty seconds. And yet. When it was

over, I'd been initiated into the mystery that stands at the beginning of the end of childhood. It was years before I'd spent all the joy and pain born in me in that less than half a minute.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps it is inevitable that we will find ourselves expecting great things of love, particularly in the midst of a society that is so obsessed with it, a society whose pop songs insist that "all you need is love" and whose romantic comedies, patterned after the novels of Jane Austen, nearly always view a marriage union with the beloved as a guarantee that the partners will live happily ever after. It is, moreover, a society deeply and profoundly shaped by the Christian faith and its particular conception of love. As Armstrong writes, Christianity's "account of existence places love at the center of life. We live in order to grow in love—that is the meaning and purpose of each individual life. Nothing matters as much as this."<sup>5</sup>

One need not be religious, of course, to place great importance on love. Indeed, in the absence of God, love may well become *more* significant, for what, if not love, can be expected to make us into complete, fulfilled human beings? Consider the following passage from a memoir by J. M. Coetzee:

How long before he will cease to be a baby? What will cure him of babyhood, make him into a man?

What will cure him, if it were to arrive, is love. He may not believe in God but he does believe in love and the powers of love. The beloved, the destined one, will see at once through the odd and even dull exterior he presents to the fire that burns within him. Meanwhile, being dull and odd looking are part of a purgatory he must pass through in order to emerge, one day, into the light: the light of love.<sup>6</sup>

Nor need one adopt a spiritual point of view to see love as some sort of fundamental force or principle of nature. In his book *Love and Its Place in Nature*, Jonathan Lear attributes to Freud the view that "love [is] a basic force in nature," identifies love as a "cosmological principle," and even claims that "the world exists because we love it."<sup>7</sup>

The idea of love as a cosmic force has been part of Western thinking for centuries. Contemporary philosophers such as Iris Murdoch pick up on the metaphorical links drawn by Plato between love, the sun, and the Form of the Good. Love, Murdoch writes, "is the energy and passion of the soul in its search for Good. . . . It is a reflection of the warmth and light of the sun."<sup>8</sup> Dante ended his *Divine Comedy* with a reference to "the Love that moves the Sun and other stars." Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote that "love is the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces."<sup>9</sup> And it is part of our contemporary stock of clichés, of course, that love makes the world go round.

These metaphors capture several elements of love as we experience it—its being active, powerful, fundamental, and at times irresistible. (Ortega y Gasset explicates Saint Augustine’s remark “My love is my weight; where it goes I go” with the comment “Love is a gravitation toward that which is loved.”)<sup>10</sup> Along somewhat similar lines, the references to the stars, like Murdoch’s metaphorical linking of the Good with the sun and Coetzee’s mention of “the light of love,” may remind us of the famous moment in *Romeo and Juliet* when Romeo identifies his beloved with that celestial body: “But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!”

This solar metaphor, which sometimes identifies the sun with love itself and at other times with the beloved, has pervaded popular thought, especially popular song, as titles like “Sunshine of Your Love,” “You Are the Sunshine of My Life,” and “Ain’t No Sunshine When She’s Gone” attest. A version of the metaphor is also implied in Martin Buber’s claim that “every actual relationship to another being in the world is exclusive. Its Thou is freed and steps forth to confront us in its uniqueness. It fills the firmament—not as if there were nothing else, but everything else lives in *its* light.”<sup>11</sup>

The metaphor is resonant and profound. Indeed, my approach to love in this book will be guided both by the thought that part of the effect of love is to place a person at the center of one’s life—one might well be pictured as revolving around one’s beloved as the earth does around the sun—and by the thought that love functions as a source of illumination, in the sense that it helps us to see what we could not see otherwise, so that the rest of the world must present itself to us in its light (or, what seems equally correct, in the light of the beloved).

Let me expand a bit on the latter thought, as it will be very important in what follows. There are many things that make you the particular person you are, but one of the most fundamental, surely, is your particular way of seeing. That you have a certain perceptual perspective that is occupied by no one else distinguishes you from all other individuals, and it would distinguish you even from a qualitatively exact duplicate of yourself. Thus, to say that love can transform one’s way of seeing the world is to open up certain possibilities for understanding how love can transform a person, and in doing so, to open up some possibilities of how love might live up to the promise of which Broyard speaks. If the world quite literally does not look the same to the lover as it does to the nonlover (or, for that matter, to the lover who loves somebody else), then there is a sense in which love causes the lover’s world to be transformed. But since the root of the transformation, the love itself, lies within the lover, it is equally correct to say that the lover has been fundamentally changed. What looks to the lover like a transfigured world is really the result of a transformed eye.

My view is not merely that love alters one's way of seeing but that that love itself *is*, in large part, a way of seeing—a way of seeing one's beloved, and also a way of seeing the world. On the level of common sense, this seems to me unassailable. One does not see one's beloved, or anyone about whom one has significant feeling, in the flat, distracted manner in which one tends to see most strangers. She occupies a special place at or near the center of one's attention; she has one's attention from the moment she enters a room. (If she does not, then we must wonder whether the love is still alive.) The lover notices things about his beloved—tiny, easily overlooked, but meaningful attributes—that would escape the notice of others. Yet at the same time there may be things about her that escape *his* notice or that he positively refuses to notice or dwell on. He appreciates, fully and generously, her better qualities and ignores, refuses to acknowledge, or at the very least deemphasizes her less-than-ideal attributes. Like any way of seeing, love is perspectival, meaning that some things are focused on and placed at the center of one's field of view, whereas others, if they are perceived at all, are relegated to the periphery.

### Love and Immorality

I propose an account of love that holds it to be largely a matter of vision and to be in large part guided by reason, while at the same time allowing that love is not *purely* a matter of reason. It must immediately be acknowledged, though, that holding love to be reason-guided in any deep sense runs counter to a view of the matter that has played a deep and influential role in Western thinking about the passions. The same can be said of the ideas, which I will also defend, that love is in an important sense a moral phenomenon and that it encourages accurate perceptions of reality rather than badly skewed perceptions or even illusions. Before launching into a defense of my view, then, it will be useful to start by laying out some of the reasons why people have doubted that love can be morally, epistemologically, or rationally justified or endorsed.

Let us start with the immorality; we will come back to the illusion and the irrationality.

Is love moral? We sometimes imagine, idealistically, that because they care so much about their beloveds, lovers will inevitably treat their beloveds better than they treat anyone else. "The lover not only wishes to see the beloved flourish and is pleased to see her happy," Ilham Dilman writes, "he is prepared to take responsibility for her welfare, to care for her. These are natural, moral impulses that belong to love."<sup>12</sup> Such a view naturally suggests that at least within the context of a given relationship, love is a moral rather than a nonmoral, immoral, or antimoral force.

Against this, though, is the knowledge that events in the real world do not always proceed in this manner. That love for a person does not necessarily involve wishing the best for that person—that at least in some cases it could instead involve wishing the worst—was known to Plato. Socrates says in the *Phaedrus*:

No one can be in any doubt—least of all the lover—that his dearest wish is for the one he loves to lose the closest, most loyal and most divine possessions he has. He would be happy for him to lose father and mother, relatives and friends, since he regards them as people who will obstruct and condemn that association which brings him most pleasure. . . . And further, in his desire to enjoy the sweet fruits of his own pleasure for the longest time possible, a lover would wish upon his boyfriend a life that was unmarried, childless and homeless for the longest time possible.<sup>13</sup>

Passionate love, at least sometimes, seems to involve the desire to have the beloved all to oneself, to remove him from society and put him in some isolated place to which only the lover has access. And it is natural to wish, alongside this, that one's beloved be weakened or rendered vulnerable so as to become dependent on oneself. Thus, while some philosophers have suggested that an essential element of love is a commitment to treating the beloved well and protecting and advancing his interests, it must be acknowledged that in the real world love—or what is at least claimed to be love—sometimes motivates people to inflict various sorts of harm or violence on those they claim to love.

At any rate, it is certainly not unheard of—perhaps it is not even uncommon—to find partners in long-term marriages treating each other with unkindness, hostility, and disdain. Long-term commitments often generate resentment; perceived reliability and constant togetherness can cause one to be taken for granted; and the very emotional intimacy that is, during the good times, love's greatest glory makes possible especially damaging and painful forms of cruelty. (We are frequently in an especially good position to help, but also to hurt, the ones we love, and the reasons why this is so are the same in each case.)

More common, though, and thus perhaps more worrying, is the thought that by requiring *excessive* kindness to, and an excessively narrow focus on, the loved individual, love leads lovers to ignore and neglect other people and perhaps even to harm them. It cannot be denied that love very frequently draws people into much smaller communities—privacies of two from which all others are excluded. (As Murdoch writes in her novel *A Word Child*, “The assertion made by a happy marriage often alienates, and often is at least half intended to alienate, the excluded spectator.”)<sup>14</sup>

Love's potential to draw people out of public life and to entice them to turn their backs on their larger communities causes many moralists to regard it with considerable suspicion. If morality demands a thoroughgoing impartiality—a common view in modern times—then love, which seems to demand nothing if not a powerful and uncompromising species of partiality, must be viewed as morally suspect. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, voices the worry that

love's partiality . . . seems to threaten any ethical approach involving the extension of concern. Intense attachments to particular individuals, especially when they are of an erotic or romantic sort, call attention away from the world of general concern, asking it to rivet itself to a single life that provides in itself no sufficient reason for this special treatment, as it imperiously claims all thoughts, all desires.<sup>15</sup>

The novelist Milan Kundera goes so far as to suggest (via one of his characters) that in this respect, at least, love may be less admirable—less social, less inherently democratic—than lust: “The gaze of love is the gaze that isolates. Jean-Marc thought about the loving solitude of two old persons become invisible to other people: a sad solitude that prefigures death. No, what she needs is not a loving gaze but a flood of alien, crude, lustful looks. . . . Those are the looks that sustain her within human society. The gaze of love rips her out of it.”<sup>16</sup>

Jean-Marc's position is, of course, a bit unusual; those whose morality leads them to be suspicious of love do not frequently hold up lust as a preferable alternative. Lust, after all, is commonly thought to be wild and uncontrollable and therefore dangerous. Yet Jean-Marc has a point: compared with love, lust is more widely and equitably distributed, more evenhanded, and therefore more democratic. My feeling lust for one person need not prevent my feeling an equally strong lust for someone else, but my loving a romantic partner may well prevent me from feeling that sort of love for anyone else. And, if it cannot make it impossible, it is at least supposed to make it *impermissible*. Although lust has often been the target of moral opprobrium, it is the demands of love that, in the long run, may prove to pose the more serious moral danger.

## Love and Illusion

I have suggested that love should be understood as largely a kind of vision in that it involves, and is largely constituted by, an appreciative attention directed toward the beloved's positive qualities. But this will immediately strike some people as false and possibly even as outrageous. It is an item of common wisdom that love is blind; it obscures one's vision, making it impossible to see the beloved in the cold, objective, dispassionate light of

reason. If so, then the idea that love is largely a matter of the lover's noticing and valuing the beloved's qualities may seem misguided. For what is really going on, at least if the most extreme version of this suggestion is correct, is not that the lover is noticing the beloved's qualities, but rather that she is *imagining* that he has certain qualities. She is projecting onto him the qualities she wishes him to have, and then she is valuing those.

As I am now interpreting it, the suggestion is that we should hold a version of what we might refer to as the imagined qualities view.

*The imagined qualities view:* A central and highly significant part of love is that the lover imaginatively projects certain positive qualities onto the beloved and values him for those qualities that she imagines him to have.

What philosophers sometimes call the quality theory holds that love is justified by the attractive or desirable qualities of the beloved.<sup>17</sup> The imagined qualities view holds on to the idea that this is what *seems* to be going on to the lover, jettisoning the requirement that her love be in any way an accurate response to the beloved's properties. And of course, if the qualities that are taken to be the justification for her love are not really possessed at all but only projected, then talk of any actual justification would seem to be out of place. The imagined qualities view, then, does not hold love to be a phenomenon of reason at all.

A classic statement of this sort of view comes from Stendhal, who uses the metaphor of crystallization to describe the way in which the lover's original perceptions of her beloved become laden with interpretations and projected properties to the point where the original can no longer be seen.

The first crystallization begins. If you are sure that a woman loves you, it is a pleasure to endow her with a thousand perfections and to count your blessings with infinite satisfaction. In the end you overrate wildly, and regard her as something fallen from Heaven, unknown as yet, but certain to be yours.

Leave a lover with his thoughts for twenty-four hours, and this is what will happen:

At the salt mines of Salzburg, they throw a leafless wintry bough into one of the abandoned workings. Two or three months later they haul it out covered with a shining deposit of crystals. The smallest twig, no bigger than a tom-tit's claw, is studded with a galaxy of scintillating diamonds. The original branch is no longer recognizable.

What I have called crystallization is a mental process which draws from everything that happens new proofs of the perfection of the loved one.<sup>18</sup>

In the most extreme version of this phenomenon, it is an imagined object and not an actual person that is loved; the person one loves does not even exist, literally speaking, since no one in the real world possesses the qualities one has attributed to one's beloved.

But perhaps focusing on this extreme, as the imagined qualities view does, somewhat overstates the point. Surely cases in which the beloved bears *no* resemblance to the lover's image of him—cases in which the qualities attributed to him are entirely the products of the lover's imagination—are somewhat unusual. (And such cases are, moreover, surely doomed to end in disappointment once the reality of the situation begins to assert itself.) More common is the situation in which the lover is able to see with at least some accuracy the qualities possessed by the beloved, but in which her love for him causes her to evaluate these properties in a more positive manner than she would otherwise. Stendhal suggests that after what he calls “the second crystallization,” “the original, naked branch is no longer recognizable by indifferent eyes, because it now sparkles with perfections, or diamonds, which they do not see or *which they simply do not consider to be perfections.*”<sup>19</sup>

The testimony of lovers gives evidence of the reality of this phenomenon. Dorothy Tennov quotes a subject who says that “once I fall, really fall, everything about her becomes wonderful. . . . I abhor the sight of toothmarks on a pencil; they disgust me. But not *her* toothmarks. Hers were sacred; her wonderful mouth had been there.”<sup>20</sup> This form of misperception seems, perhaps, less threatening than the original form suggested by the imagined qualities view. It allows, after all, that the lover does perceive the beloved more or less accurately, at least in factual terms; he is not, that is, deluded as to the qualities she possesses. Still, there is a serious epistemic concern here, since the lover seems to be deluded about something else: the *value* of the beloved's qualities. To regard someone's pencil, let alone the toothmarks on that pencil, as beautiful or “sacred” is not quite a form of insanity, but it is surely a species of delusion.<sup>21</sup>

As with the worry about morality, the epistemic worry that arises here accompanies not just romantic love but friendship as well. For friendship, like romantic love, demands of us that we believe certain things about our friends and that we see them in certain ways. As Simon Keller writes, “Good friends believe in each other; they give each other the benefit of the doubt; they see each other in the best possible light.” And this commitment, Keller goes on to claim, has clear and perilous epistemic implications: “When good friends form beliefs about each other, they sometimes respond to considerations that have to do with the needs and interests of their friends, not with aiming at the truth, and that is part of what makes them good friends.”<sup>22</sup>

If Keller is right, there is a second reason for thinking that romantic love and friendship are unreasonable and dangerous. Not only do these forms of attachment pose moral dangers, insofar as they can monopolize our concern and divert our attention away from the broader social world; they can also slant and skew our perceptions of reality and demand that we form and maintain certain beliefs about our beloveds even in the face of countervailing evidence. Love, then, might be beginning to seem not only morally risky but epistemically irrational.

### Love and (Un)Reason

Both from a moral and from an epistemic point of view, then, there are reasons to be somewhat wary of love. If love's moral critics are correct, love is dangerous insofar as it can inspire bad, selfish, and perhaps even evil behavior. If love's epistemic critics are right, love is dangerous insofar as it distorts our perceptions of the world—particularly those of the beloved—and encourages us to live in a substitute reality constructed from our own fantasies. These worries both encourage and are encouraged by what is in some ways the more fundamental thought that love, as one of the passions, is fundamentally irrational—perhaps even a kind of madness.

Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, calls love “the irrational desire which gains the upper hand over the judgment which guides men towards what is right.”<sup>23</sup> George Bernard Shaw, for his part, refers to love as “the most violent, most insane, most delusive, and most transient of passions.”<sup>24</sup> And Shakespeare writes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: “The lunatic, the lover and the poet / Are of imagination all compact.”<sup>25</sup> Marilyn French, Shirley Eskapa, and many other recent writers have picked up on this theme; in doing so they have reiterated the idea that love is a passion, a type of madness, destructive, chaotic, and in no way amenable to reason.

The idea that love has little or nothing to do with reason is closely connected to the idea that love has nothing whatsoever to do with *reasons*. Reasons, in the context of love, are frequently regarded as simply irrelevant. It is common to think both that one does not need reasons for love and that it is a misguided enterprise to try to provide them. Perhaps the easiest way of appreciating the impulse behind this thought is to imagine what would be involved if love did involve reasons in this way. Our first reaction to this thought experiment might be that love's involving and relying on reasons in this way would surely rule out the very possibility of *unconditional* love—or, at the very least, it would make such love automatically objectionable. For how could an attitude that is genuinely unconditional and that will therefore be felt and endorsed under any conditions (thus, regardless of what one's reasons are) leave

room for reasons to play any substantial role whatsoever? To say that love ought to be supported by reasons, and that its justification depends on these reasons, seems to be just another way of saying that love is justified only under certain conditions and therefore ought to be offered only conditionally. If, for instance, Alighieri's reason for loving Beatrice is his belief that Beatrice possesses property P, then his love for her will be reasonable and justifiable only if it is offered conditionally on her *really* possessing, and continuing to possess, property P. And might this not lead Beatrice to worry that she might one day *lose* P, or that she already might not possess it to the extent that the love-struck Alighieri (whose perceptions are quite possibly warped by love) believes her to possess it?

Thinking about what is involved in offering reasons for love, and in making love conditional upon these reasons, may also make such love seem objectionably self-centered or the lover seem objectionably cold and dispassionate. At least a few attempted appeals to reasons in the context of love go wrong in this way. Consider, for instance, Mr. Collins's proposal to Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*:

My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honor of calling patroness. . . . Thus much for my general intention in favor of matrimony; it remains to be told why my views were directed to Longbourn instead of my own neighborhood, where I assure you there are many amiable young women. But the fact is, that being, as I am, to inherit this estate after the death of your honored father (who, however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself without resolving to chuse a wife from among his daughters, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place.<sup>26</sup>

Admittedly, this is a particularly inept attempt to appeal to reasons, and it seems to me that we ought to resist drawing any general conclusions about the appropriateness of “reasons talk” in the context of love on the basis of such examples. What is striking about Mr. Collins's proposal to Elizabeth is how little it has to do with *Elizabeth*. She seems to appear only as a placeholder, a vessel for a set of properties that might just as easily, and just as appropriately, have been attached to someone else. Indeed, the first three reasons Mr. Collins offers do not refer to properties of Elizabeth at all—or at least they refer to properties Elizabeth would

share with any other single woman of marriageable age. His final reason at least succeeds in narrowing the class down to Elizabeth and her sisters, but he offers no reason to distinguish her from her sisters, and the general implication of his remarks seems to be that any of them would do just as well. This is insulting, and Elizabeth, of course, takes it as such.

The deep question, though, is, does Mr. Collins err by concentrating on the wrong sort of reasons, or does he err by attempting to offer reasons at all? If we take the former view, we might think, for instance, that he would do better by referring to properties that distinguish Elizabeth from other potential marriage partners, and (hopefully) properties Elizabeth herself would regard as important elements of her identity as an individual. As Neil Delaney has plausibly suggested, a necessary element of romantic love is that “a person *A* wants a romantic partner *B* to love him for properties that *A* takes to be central to his self-conception.”<sup>27</sup>

The opposing line of thought is that Mr. Collins’s mistake is not offering the *wrong* reasons for loving (or at any rate, marrying) Elizabeth but rather offering any reasons at all. On this view, love is not a matter of appreciating the beloved’s valuable qualities; indeed, one need not be able to point to any valuable or attractive property of the beloved in explaining or justifying one’s love, for after all love is simply a brute psychological phenomenon that does not stand in need of explanation or justification. This is not to say that we cannot sometimes provide a thoroughly psychological explanation of one person’s attraction to or interest in another. The point, though, is that the explanation need not and presumably will not be normative: its function is not to render the lover’s attitude reasonable or justifiable, but simply to explain by citing the causal mechanism responsible for his emotional response. Moreover, on this view there is no requirement that a lover be able to provide at least the beginning of a justification, and there is not necessarily anything wrong with the lover who cannot make a list of her reasons for loving.

Harry Frankfurt is an example of a recent, and influential, philosopher who has held a version of this view. In Frankfurt’s view, love may sometimes be aroused by the lover’s belief that her beloved has attractive or valuable properties. She is mistaken, however, if she takes her love to be justified by those properties (or to be rationally dependent on them or to constitute a rational response to them). Moreover, there is, in Frankfurt’s view, no reason why a person could not love someone who was perceived to have no such valuable properties at all:

Love does not require a response by the lover to any real or imagined value in what he loves. Parents do not ordinarily love their children so much, for example, because they perceive that their children possess exceptional value. In fact, it is the other way

around: the children seem to the parents to be valuable, and they are valuable to the parents, only because the parents love them. Parents have been known to love—quite genuinely—children that they themselves recognize as lacking any particular inherent merit.

As I understand the nature of love, the lover does not depend for this loving upon reasons of any kind. Love is not a conclusion. It is not an outcome of reasoning, or a consequence of reasons. It *creates* reasons. What it means to love is, in part, to take the fact that a certain action would serve the good of the beloved as an especially compelling reason for performing that action.<sup>28</sup>

But if this is so, then the question of justification referring back to the beloved's value simply does not arise. On such a view, love might be considered a response to the beloved in a very minimal sense—it is, at the very least, directed toward the beloved. But it is, in a sense, a predetermined response, one that is determined to emerge with a positive evaluation, no matter what it finds (which suggests, of course, that there is no genuine evaluation going on at all). On this view, then, the lover's valuing is not genuinely responsive to preexisting values: the lover creates value rather than recognizing it, and so there is no question of creating it inaccurately or wrongly.

The suggestion is, then, that the whole enterprise of trying to find or give reasons that justify one's love for another is misguided, if not thoroughly corrupt. Love is simply not dependent on reason in this way. Love is, rather, an attitude that is held for no reason at all and that therefore cannot be rationally defended or, for that matter, rationally criticized. Moreover, we need not see this as any sort of deficiency or problem for love. Indeed, many supporters of this position will insist that it is one of love's strengths to be unreasonable in this way. Who, after all, would want a rational lover? Who would want his lover to love him because she *ought* or had *good reason* to? Who would want his lover to be able to give *proof* that her love was justified and appropriate? Is not love precisely the context in which the part of the human being that acts without reasons and thus beyond reason, which does not demand explanations or justifications for what it does, ought to be allowed the full range of freedom? From a certain perspective—the perspective that tends to regard reason as cold, sterile, and dispassionate—the idea that love is not governed by the dictates and strictures of reason may strike us as a point in its favor. In providing possibilities for passion and spontaneous action, love may be seen as an enriching and liberating force.

Indeed, an account of love that made it out to be excessively reasonable and rationalistic would surely deform love and almost certainly rob it of some of its most vital attractions. Frankfurt's claim that "parents have been known to love—quite genuinely—children that they them-

selves recognize as lacking any particular inherent merit” is meant to be supported in part by the plausibility of the thought that the ability of parents to love in this way is a good thing, particularly from their children’s perspective. Especially in the parent-child context, a love that bases itself on a clear-sighted and objective assessment of the recipient’s worth, and is committed to withdrawing itself should that worth be judged to be insufficient, strikes us as ungenerous and judgmental.

I will use the term *antirationalism* to denote the position that denies that there can be justifying reasons for loving a person and thus holds that loving someone is not the sort of thing we do, or ought to do, for reasons. Strictly speaking, then, *rationalism* ought to refer to any position that affirms that love can be justified by reasons. The most common and, in my view, most plausible versions of this position hold that the attractive and otherwise valuable properties of the beloved are the most important and most powerful sources of reasons for love; they are, moreover, what the beloved is most typically loved *for*. In this project, then, when I use the term *rationalism*, it is this position I will have in mind.

## Problems for Rationalism

Antirationalism has struck many philosophers as a plausible, even necessary, position, one that seems to accord with certain basic intuitions about the nature of love. Love, as we have noted, strikes many as inherently unreasonable or irrational, an arbitrary matter of the heart. It is a matter of passion, and passion is understood by many philosophers and by nonphilosophical laypeople alike as something very close to the opposite of reason.

There are other reasons, too, for thinking that antirationalism must be true. As the example of Mr. Collins illustrates, it is all too easy to find instances of inept and insulting attempts to appeal to reason in order to justify romantic or marital desire. But such examples are not enough to establish the truth of antirationalism; it might just be that people like Mr. Collins are appealing to the wrong sorts of reasons. There are, though, more general arguments available. In particular, it is frequently felt that rationalism—again, the view that reasons *can* typically be given to explain or justify one’s love (and thus that there is presumably something wrong with a love for which reasons cannot be given)—seems to require us to say things about love that strike us as wrong or inappropriate or to think about love in a way that seems untrue to its nature.

For instance, it is sometimes thought that rationalism of this sort leads to the implausible view that love is a matter of obligation. After all, to give reasons for doing something is to provide considerations in the light of which one ought, rationally, to do that thing (if the reasons are strong

enough). This suggests that if it were possible to give reasons for loving someone, then it would be possible, at least in principle, to have reasons for loving that person that are strong enough to generate a rational obligation to love him. But to speak of love as a matter of obligation—particularly in contexts of friendship and romantic love—seems to go deeply counter to our experience of it.<sup>29</sup> This may be truer when speaking of positive obligations rather than of negative ones; perhaps we *can* think of cases, most likely involving a prudential interpretation of the word *ought*, where a person could reasonably, understandably, and sincerely say, “I ought not to love him.” (Of course, in our imperfect world, such statements are all too frequently followed with “but God help me, I do.”) But the idea of a positive *ought*—a requirement to love—strikes most of us as deeply wrongheaded. No matter how many of the beloved’s attractive or otherwise valuable properties we cite, they will never add up to an *ought*. I may be perfectly aware of the attractive qualities that Sally possesses and that Harry would cite in response to the question, what is it you find so attractive about Sally? Yet my awareness of these properties does not in any way obligate me to love Sally—not even as a friend, and certainly not romantically. As Adam Smith puts the point, “Our imagination not having run in the same channel with that of the lover, we cannot enter into the eagerness of his emotions. . . . We never think ourselves bound to conceive a passion of the same kind, and for the same person for whom he has conceived it.”<sup>30</sup>

The claim, of course, is not that I most certainly *will not* develop feelings of attraction or love on the basis of my understanding of what attracts my friend to his beloved, but that I *might* not and am not in any sense obligated to; my failing to develop such feelings does not indicate that my understanding of why he loves her is deficient or imperfect. As Frankfurt writes, “A declaration of love is a personal matter [in that] the person who makes it does not thereby commit himself to supposing that anyone who fails to love what he does has somehow gone wrong.”<sup>31</sup>

I will refer to this claim about the nature of love as the incompleteness thesis. For my purposes, the incompleteness thesis can be defined as follows:

*The incompleteness thesis:* Any list of properties identified as putative justifiers for loving some particular individual B will necessarily be incomplete, in the sense that no matter which or how many justifying considerations are cited, their totality will not *rationaly obligate* a person to love B. That is, no list of attractive or otherwise valuable features of B is such that a person cannot admit that B possesses all of those features and yet fail to love B without being irrational.<sup>32</sup>

The incompleteness thesis at least suggests that love is not a matter of rational obligation. Moreover, it is frequently taken as suggesting that love is not a matter of rationality or reasons at all: whatever it is that explains why I do, in fact, love this particular person, it must not be any set of reasons, for no set of reasons could obligate me to love her. Thus, the incompleteness thesis is commonly taken to provide strong evidence for antirationalism. After all, the move from “B’s properties do not obligate anyone to love her” to “B’s properties do not provide reasons for anyone to love her” may seem so straightforward as to be irresistible. If  $q$  (the set of D’s attractive properties, which B cites in “explaining” his friendship with D) is insufficient on its own to force me to love D, then how can they explain B’s doing so? The real explanation, then, must not be  $q$ , but  $q$ -plus-something else. It is for this reason that we may seem to find ourselves pushed very quickly from the denial that we can be obligated to love to the conclusion that, in speaking of love, it makes no sense to attempt to offer reasons at all.

The view that love can and should be supported by reasons and is justified in terms of those reasons—the view that I have been referring to as rationalism—thus seems to some to be vulnerable to a *reductio ad absurdum*, for it seems to require us to deny the incompleteness thesis, and that thesis seems undeniable. I will refer to this as the universality problem.

*The universality problem:* If Alighieri loves Beatrice for her valuable properties (if, that is, his love for her is grounded in an appraisal of her value), then anyone who accepts that Alighieri is justified in doing so is obligated to love Beatrice also.

This constitutes a “problem” for rationalist accounts for the very straightforward reason that love simply does not seem to work this way. If it did, we would not find the incompleteness thesis plausible and would not agree with Adam Smith that in accepting another’s account of his love, we do not “think ourselves bound to conceive a passion of the same kind, and for the same person for whom he has conceived it.”

This problem, that love’s “reasons” seem to fail the universality test in applying to some persons but not to others, is intimately connected with, and indeed mirrors, another problem: the considerations that provide “reasons” for a lover’s love—the attractive or otherwise valuable properties of the beloved—may show up in other people and yet *not* provide the lover with reason to love those people. As Nussbaum writes with reference to *Remembrance of Things Past*: “Erotic love is based on unequal concern, an unequal concern not explained by reasons: Marcel knows that there really is no rational basis for his choice of Albertine over the other cyclists.”<sup>33</sup>

The absence of such a rational basis is indicated by the fact that any feature of Albertine that might plausibly serve as a justification for Marcel’s

love will be a feature that is also possessed by others whom he does not love and so will not be able to serve to differentiate her from them. If we say, for instance, that it is Albertine's beauty that serves as Marcel's reason for loving her, we leave ourselves unable to explain why he does not love some other beautiful person—or, worse, love them both, and indeed *all* beautiful people. Thus, rationalism seems not only to require too many people to love a worthy beloved (the universality problem), but also to require each lover to love *every* worthy beloved.

*The promiscuity problem:* If Alighieri loves Beatrice for her valuable properties (if, that is, his love for her is grounded in an appraisal of her value), then rationality will require him to love anyone and indeed *everyone* who possesses those properties.

But rationality does *not* seem to require this; those who refuse to extend their love in this manner are not, in general, regarded as less than perfectly rational. As Roger Scruton has written, "Although there is, no doubt, some feature of James which is a reason (perhaps even *the* reason) why I love him, I am not obliged to love William as well, just because he shares that feature."<sup>34</sup> Those with antirationalist inclinations may wonder, though, whether Scruton's claim is coherent and will take the fact that we are not obligated to love those who resemble our beloveds as evidence that our beloveds' attributes do not, in fact, function as reasons for loving them at all; for if they did, then rationality surely *would* require us to respond in the same manner regardless of where the relevant feature was encountered.

A special version of the promiscuity problem is what we can call the replica problem. According to rationalism, it is sometimes claimed, the lover ought to love an exact duplicate of her beloved (an indistinguishable clone, for instance) in precisely the way she loves her beloved himself, given that the duplicate possesses *all* of the qualities, and exactly those qualities, that ground her love for the original beloved.<sup>35</sup>

There is a maneuver by which we might attempt to avoid the promiscuity problem. Suppose that it is psychologically impossible for the typical human lover to love very many people, and suppose that the word *ought* implies *can*. Then, it might be argued, the typical lover *cannot* love everyone who possesses the properties she values in her beloved—and so, since *ought* implies *can*, it follows that it is false that she ought to do so. The maneuver, though, falls well short of being fully satisfactory. For one thing, it is deeply and objectionably ad hoc. It would be better to come up with an account of love that did not entail the objectionable thesis to begin with and not have to resort to the statement "*ought* implies *can*"—and to what ultimately are contingent facts about human psychology—in order to defuse the objection.

Moreover, the suggested appeal to “*ought* implies *can*” would only open the rationalist up to a similar and, it may seem, equally damning objection:

*The trading-up problem:* If Alighieri loves Beatrice for her lovable properties and along comes Carmen, who has all of Beatrice’s lovable properties plus a few more, then reason will require Alighieri to abandon Beatrice in favor of Carmen (on the assumption, at any rate, that he cannot love them both).

The trading-up problem cannot be avoided through an appeal to “*ought* implies *can*” without committing ourselves to the very implausible view that human lovers cannot transfer their love from one person to another. But the thesis that is implied here—that one ought to trade in one’s lover for a better model as soon as the latter becomes available—is surely as counterintuitive, and indeed as objectionable, as the one that gives the promiscuity problem its teeth, for again, love does not seem to work in this way. Although lovers may sometimes transfer their love from one person to another, it seems false and objectionable to say that they are rationally required to do so wherever doing so picks out an object of greater value, let alone that such a requirement follows from the nature of love.

Why does the thought of a lover who is prepared to switch her allegiances in this way seem so objectionable? In part it seems to suggest that what the lover in question is really attached to is not his beloved at all but rather his beloved’s *properties*—properties that may turn up in greater abundance in somebody else. As Robert Nozick writes, “Love is not transferable to someone else with the same characteristics, even to one who ‘scores’ higher for these characteristics.”<sup>36</sup> Or at least, love does not seem to be transferable in this sense, and we do not want it to be. What we want, rather, is that a lover’s commitment be, if not thoroughly unconditional, at the very least quite robustly resistant to her objective assessment of her lover’s value. Indeed, the very use of the word *commitment* in this context seems to demand as much: the person who loves me only as long as she judges me to be the most valuable person in the vicinity is not really committed to me—and, I think we can safely say, does not really love me.

Even putting aside the worry about being cast off for someone else, the worry about being abandoned if the properties for which one is loved are changed or lost is sufficient to merit consideration as an independent problem for rationalism.

*The inconstancy problem:* If Alighieri loves Beatrice for her valuable properties, then rationally he ought to stop loving Beatrice when she loses those properties.

Once again the thesis is clearly at odds with our understanding of how love works and ought to work. “Eventually,” as Nozick writes elsewhere, “one must love the person himself, and not *for* the characteristics. . . . If we continue to be loved ‘for’ the characteristics, then the love seems conditional, something that might change or disappear if the characteristics do.”<sup>37</sup> Of course, just what it is to “love the person himself” might not be immediately apparent. But Nozick is surely correct to say that if Ali-ghieri’s love of Beatrice for her attractive characteristics—her beauty, her charm, her intelligence, or what have you—requires that he stop loving her as soon as there is any change in that set of characteristics, then love, as we understand it (and again, as we want it to be), simply does not seem to be a matter of loving a person for her characteristics. As Shakespeare famously wrote in Sonnet 116, “Love is not love which alters / when it alteration finds.”<sup>38</sup>

These four problems—the universality problem, the promiscuity problem, the trading-up problem, and the inconstancy problem—comprise a phalanx of challenges that the rationalist must meet. It is no surprise, in light of these difficulties, that many have turned to antirationalism, and in doing so they have rejected the idea that reasons can be given to justify love. We should not conclude prematurely, however, that the abandonment of rationalism will solve all of love’s difficulties, for antirationalism, as attractive as it may be in some respects, faces its own set of problems.

### The Limits of Antirationalism

I have tried to construct a plausible and to some degree compelling case for antirationalism. I want now to start *deconstructing* that case—not because I think that antirationalism is completely wrong—for I do think it gets some important things right—but because I think that rationalism also gets some important things right, and that what is ultimately needed is a more sophisticated and nuanced account that can somehow render these apparently opposed impulses compatible with one another. What is needed, that is, is an account that makes love rational in just the right ways while allowing it to be arational, perhaps even to some degree irrational, where *that* is appropriate.

Antirationalists typically claim that when a person is asked why she loves her beloved, it is completely appropriate for her to respond, “I just do, and that’s all there is to it.” And they often go on to claim that this fact provides strong evidence in favor of antirationalism. But both claims are disputable. It is true that “I just do” is *sometimes* an appropriate response. It is highly doubtful, however, that this response is *always* appropriate, let alone fully adequate.<sup>39</sup> And the fact that it is sometimes an appropriate response does not provide clear support for antirationalism.

To see why, let us start with the following formulation of the point by another antirationalist, O. H. Green. In support of his claim that love is most frequently not grounded in the desirable properties of the beloved, Green cites a song by Jerome Kern and P. G. Wodehouse that has the singer confessing, “I love him because he’s . . . I don’t know . . . because he’s just my Bill.” “The fact is,” as Green goes on to write, “the girl evidently has no beliefs which provide reasons for her loving Bill and connect Bill with her love as its object.”<sup>40</sup>

The sentiment the Kern-Wodehouse girl expressed (I will hereafter call her KW) seems to me perfectly intelligible. It is not, at any rate, wholly perplexing. It is the same sentiment Montaigne expressed in his famous passage from “Of Friendship”: “If someone were to urge me to say why I loved him, I should feel it could not be expressed except in the reply: ‘Because it was he; because it was I.’”<sup>41</sup> It does not seem to me, though, that Green has captured what we find compelling about such examples, which seem to express the *particularity*, the *complexity*, perhaps even the *inexpressibility*, of one’s reasons for loving another, without necessarily suggesting that there is no reason present.

Let us leave aside, for the moment, the difficult question of whether the lover in the Kern-Wodehouse song must have “beliefs which provide reasons for her loving Bill”; the question of what makes a particular consideration a *reason*, after all, is complex, and it is not clear that the fact that a consideration does not count as a reason must mean that it is completely irrelevant. Let us consider, then, the broader formulation: must the girl have at least some “beliefs which . . . connect Bill with her love as its object”?

It is fairly clear that she must. Given that her love is the love of a person, and that she herself conceives it as such, KW must at the very least believe that Bill is in fact a person. If she thought he was not a person but a lump of coal or a cleverly constructed robotic simulacrum in possession of no inner life, she would not love “her Bill” in the same way at all. Of course, it is doubtful that the sentence “Bill is a person” functions as one of her *reasons* for loving Bill; at any rate, it certainly is not a reason she is likely to cite. But it is precisely this sort of issue about what counts as a reason that led me to put that aside in favor, for the moment, of the broader formulation. Moreover, the fact that there exist certain considerations that *are* relevant to her loving Bill, but that are so basic and obvious that she would probably not think to cite them, at least suggests that there may also be certain reasons that similarly are too basic to cite.

Admittedly, “Bill is a person” is a very basic, and very minimal, consideration. It is for precisely this reason that such considerations tend to escape our notice; they are simply taken for granted as part of the context when we speak about love. But a consideration that tends to be

taken for granted and relegated to the contextual background does not for that reason cease to count or to matter at all; indeed, sometimes it is precisely these most fundamental considerations that matter most. And there are, after all, a good many other fairly basic beliefs about Bill that must also form part of the context if KW is to love him in anything like the ordinary way: that Bill is not conspiring against her, has not been paid by her father to pretend to like her, is not secretly a serial killer, and so on. No one, of course, would think to cite these facts in explaining her love for someone else; they are, rather, considerations whose obtaining *allows* for love, in that they would invalidate love if they did *not* obtain.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, they are real considerations about which lovers, including KW, will hold beliefs (though for the most part the beliefs will be implicit rather than explicit).

Let us press the point further. If the young woman truly loves Bill, then presumably she sees him as attractive in one way or another. Perhaps it is possible to love someone, even romantically, whom one does not see as physically attractive.<sup>43</sup> One might instead believe him to have an attractive personality. But suppose the young woman claims to believe that Bill has neither an attractive appearance nor an attractive personality. Her claim to love him might begin to seem somewhat less than plausible—unless, of course, she can cite some other aspect of Bill that she finds attractive or admirable or impressive. The point is that there must be *something* that she can cite as a relevant consideration. And indeed, now that we are dealing with, as we might say, the positive aspects of Bill's nature—considerations that are somewhat less basic than Bill's being a person and somewhat less negative than his *not* being a serial murderer—the case for considering such considerations to be *reasons* for loving Bill begins to seem somewhat stronger as well.

Responsiveness to properties is a salient feature of many of our love-related experiences and behaviors. One is attracted to and falls in love with certain people rather than others largely on the basis of what they are like, and the stories that lovers tell reflect this. Of course, it might well be difficult, even with respect to the beloved's attractive appearance or personality, to capture the nature of the attraction in words. It might be difficult, that is, to state these reasons in propositional form. We should acknowledge that capturing what is valuable about the individual Bill might be particularly difficult if we are not acquainted with Bill or if we are acquainted but do not see him at all in the way his lover sees him. If, however, we *are* acquainted with him and *do* see him in at least somewhat the same way, then Bill's lover will be able to communicate her reasons (unless, of course, she is inarticulate) simply by saying things like "I love his sense of humor, especially the playful way he teases me," or "I love his kindness—how he treats his mother, for instance." Such state-

ments do not fully capture the reasons involved. But *fully* capturing the reasons, in a way that would make them comprehensible to people who were not acquainted with Bill, would perhaps require the skills of a novelist, and even these might not be sufficient. That the reasons are difficult to capture in language does not mean that they do not exist or that they play no role in KW's emotional responses to Bill.

Within the circle of people who *are* acquainted with Bill, however, such statements serve adequately as shorthand for one's reasons—in much the same way that “he's just my Bill” can serve perfectly well as an even more concise shorthand statement for people who already know Bill very well indeed. In fact, it is difficult to see how “he's just my Bill” could function at all, or constitute an appropriate thing to say in the imagined circumstances, if there were not a fuller account of this sort on which the shorthand must be assumed to be, so to speak, parasitic. (What does “my Bill” even mean, if there is no meaningful statement that could be put in its place?)

At the same time, what we must not be led to think is that the phrase “my Bill” could be completely cashed out in neutral descriptive terms such that anyone who loved Bill—or, worse still, anyone at all—would be rationally obligated to love anyone who satisfied the terms of the description. This is simply the incompleteness thesis again. Another way to put the point, perhaps, is that it does indeed matter that Bill is not just Bill, but “*my* Bill”—there is an irreducible relational aspect present, so that no list of Bill's properties will get us to the point where love for Bill is not only justifiable but obligatory. What I insist on, however, is that we can accept this without accepting Green's implausible claim that people typically love one another without having, or thinking they have, any reason for doing so. Indeed, I do not think Green has given us any reason for supposing that this *ever* happens.

KW's resort to “I don't know, he's just my Bill,” then, might be diagnosed as serving a number of functions. It may be an expression of her doubt—in the light of her inarticulateness—as to her ability to make herself understood to an audience that, presumably, does not know Bill. It may also express her suspicion that some version of the incompleteness thesis is true: that she will not be able to make a case for her love that will not leave others entirely unmoved. What is not at all likely is that the claim is literally true, that the girl truly has no idea of what she finds lovable, attractive, or desirable in “her Bill.”

Related problems afflict Frankfurt's view—a view that nevertheless embodies and expresses some important truths. We all understand what a parent might mean when saying such things about his children as this:

If I ask myself whether my children are worthy of my love, my quite emphatic inclination is simply to reject the question as inap-

propriate and misguided. This is not because it goes without saying that they *are* worthy. It is because my love for them is in no way a response to or based upon any evaluation. . . . It is not because I have noticed their value that I love my children as I do. It is really the other way around. The reason they are so precious to me is simply that I love them so much. It is as a *consequence* of my love for them that they have acquired, in my eyes, a value that otherwise they would quite certainly not possess.<sup>44</sup>

But at the end of the day, this cannot be quite right; such a view would justify too much. If Frankfurt's view of love is right—that it really need not have anything to do with the value of the love object—then it should not matter *what* the object of love is. Frankfurt has indicated on occasion that he is willing to bite this bullet and accept that love *can* be directed toward any object whatsoever without becoming inappropriate or unjustified.<sup>45</sup> But he shies away from the implications of this extreme position, and thus avoids its most unpalatable consequences, in his choice of examples. His central example is of his love for his own children—a case where most people, including myself, would agree that his love is reasonable and justified. It is all too easy, however, to imagine less attractive examples. Consider, then, the following rewrite of the passage above, which I will ask you to imagine being spoken by a man who in fact does not love his children very much—he could not care less what happens to them, actually—but who does have something in his life he loves very much, say a 1959 *Oklahoma Today* Mickey Mantle baseball card:

If I ask myself whether this baseball card is worthy of my love, my quite emphatic inclination is simply to reject the question as inappropriate and misguided. This is not because it goes without saying that it *is* worthy. It is because my love for it is in no way a response to or based upon any evaluation either of it or of the consequences for me of loving it. It is not because I have noticed its value that I love my favorite baseball card as I do. It is really the other way around. The reason it is so precious to me is simply that I love it so much. It is as a *consequence* of my love for it that it has acquired, in my eyes, a value that otherwise it would quite certainly not possess.

We must imagine that the speaker is entirely sincere and that his feelings are manifested in his behaviors. We must imagine, that is, that he spends more time caring for the baseball card than for his children; that the thought of its being damaged is more upsetting to him than the thought of their suffering some harm; that if his house were to catch fire, he would rescue the card from the burning building before attempting to rescue them; and so forth. Clearly there is something deeply wrong with this

person, but we do not seem to have the resources to say what it is unless we allow ourselves to think that in fact the baseball card is *not* a worthy object of his love; it is a trivial thing, and to love it or care about it in any significant way (particularly in preference to his children!) just shows bad judgment or perhaps bad character. Indeed, this baseball-card lover seems to be making two mistakes: first, he loves his baseball card *too much*; second, he does not love his children *enough*.

Both mistakes seem to consist of a lack of correspondence, or a lack of fit, between the person's attitudes and the objects of these attitudes. The man's baseball card does not merit such passionate appreciation and devotion, and so he should not love it *that much*. His children do merit such responses, and as their father, he should love them more. This is a commonsense statement to make about such cases. But if it is right, then we must reject the antirationalist's radical separation between, on the one hand, the value of the object of love and, on the other, the reasonableness or justifiability of love.

### “Something In Between”: Love and Vision

Still, antirationalists are surely right in much of what they claim. They are surely right, for instance, to insist that Alighieri's love for Beatrice ought not to obligate him to love anyone with Beatrice's qualities, that it ought not to obligate him to replace her with an available beloved with better qualities, and that our acknowledging his reasons ought not to obligate *us* to love her. They are right, then, to demand that we reject what I call hyper-rationalist accounts of love—accounts that combine the thought that love is a response to the beloved's valuable properties with the claim that a rational lover must behave as a rational economic agent would behave. A rational economic agent who values *x* for *x*'s valuable properties ought to be willing to trade *x* in for *y* if *y* has similar but better properties. She ought to be prepared to value those properties wherever she may find them. She ought to be willing to give *x* up if *x* loses the properties in virtue of which it is valued. And so forth. All of this makes perfect sense in the sphere of economics. All of it seems deeply inappropriate in the realm of love.

Antirationalists are correct about this. They are wrong, however, to claim that we must therefore deny that love is in any substantial way a response to the beloved's properties, for not all valuing is like the valuing of the rational economic agent. There are other types of response to value that are far more appropriate when what is valued is a human being. An account of love built on *these* sorts of valuing avoid the excesses of hyper-rationalism and capture all of the plausible insights of antirationalism; at the same time it avoids the inherent flaws of *that* sort of

view by preserving the idea that love is a response to value and is guided by reason.

Or so, at any rate, I argue. As my guide in this endeavor, I take a passage from Plato's *Symposium*. In this dialogue, Socrates feels compelled to correct the overenthusiastic praise of love—or rather of Love, since the emotion is personified—offered by the speakers who have preceded him, and in particular that of Agathon, who has held forth that Love is perfect and divine.

It will be easiest for me to proceed the way Diotima did and tell you how she questioned me. You see, I had told her almost the same things Agathon told me just now: that Love is a great god and that he belongs to beautiful things. And she used the very same arguments against me that I used against Agathon; she showed me how, according to my own speech, Love is neither beautiful nor good.

So I said, “What do you mean, Diotima? Is Love ugly then, and bad?”

But she said, “Watch your tongue! Do you really think that, if a thing is not beautiful, it has to be ugly? . . . Don't force whatever is not beautiful to be ugly, or whatever is not good to be bad. It's the same with Love: when you agree he is neither good nor beautiful, you need not think he is ugly and bad; he could be something in between.”<sup>46</sup>

Love, Diotima goes on to explain to Socrates, is indeed “something in between”; neither divine nor human, neither mortal nor immortal, Love is a spirit, or *daimon*, that functions as an intermediary between mortals and gods. Indeed, Diotima goes on to identify Love as the offspring of a coupling between two deities, Poros (or “Resource”) and Penia (or “Poverty”).<sup>47</sup>

I suggest that we take advantage of Diotima's metaphorical scheme and explore the notion that love is, indeed, “something in between.” This will allow us to avoid the false dilemmas that tend to lead many thinkers astray with regard to love. It will allow us to say that love involves a special species of clear-sightedness that is nonetheless capable of propagating illusions; that it is a type of moral phenomenon nonetheless capable of inspiring immoral actions; and, most fundamentally, that love is in some important respects arational and yet involves reason in a fundamental way.

It will take some time to build the complete picture that establishes how these claims fit together. We can make a start, though, by returning to an observation I made in the first section of this chapter, that love is in

large part constituted by a certain way of seeing; the lover sees the world in a different light from that in which other people see it. We should take note right away that this view of love makes much of the connection between the two persons bound by the love relationship. Some philosophers treat love in a way that emphasizes the lover, almost to the exclusion of the beloved; after all, love is an emotion the lover feels and so might be viewed as a fact only about her. But love is a way of seeing, and, more than anything, what is seen is the beloved; it is a mistake, then, to allow him to drop from the equation. Indeed, a love that ignores the beloved, or substitutes its own fantasies for his reality, is not a genuine love; it is a fantasy emotion and nothing more. Love must be a genuine response to the beloved, and moreover a largely accurate and *reasonable* response. Indeed, I argue in this book that despite its various potentials in certain contexts to encourage illusion and inspire unreasonable behavior, love is fundamentally a reason-guided phenomenon.

It is worth noting, too, that other elements of the world are also brought into this picture: loving a person involves a change not only in how you see your beloved but also in how you see the parts of the world that affect or are affected by him. To see with love's vision is to see the world with the beloved at the center and to see his attributes in a certain generous light; but it is also to see the rest of the world, to some degree, through his eyes, to allow his values, judgments, and emotions to have an effect on *your* perceptions, similar, in important ways, to the effect they have on *his*. His concerns become, to a significant degree, your concerns; his hopes, your hopes; his fears, insecurities, and anxieties, yours. That love requires us to see things in this way is part of what people mean when they say that love demands that we identify with the beloved. And this element of identification is a very large part of what makes love the profound and potentially life-changing experience that it is.

The core of the account of love I will defend is thus made up by the following eight theses:

1. Loving someone is, in large part, a kind of positive, appreciative response to her in virtue of her attractive, desirable, or otherwise valuable properties. The way of seeing the beloved, and the world in which the beloved lives, places her at the center of the lover's field of vision.

2. Loving, then, is in large part a matter of opening one's eyes to the beloved and thus of opening one's eyes to the world. Yet at the same time, love requires us *not* to see, notice, dwell on, or be moved by certain aspects of the world.

3. The properties in virtue of which the beloved is loved are in large part attractive qualities such as charm, intelligence, humor, physical

beauty, moral virtue, and so forth—the sort of universalizable qualities in terms of which a person’s attractiveness or desirability is typically assessed.

4. Love is also a response to a nonuniversalizable, nonassessable property, that of *being a subject in the world*. The lover’s response to this property takes the form not of assessment but of *identification with* the beloved; it is an attempt to make contact with the beloved’s inner life, to unite her perspective on the world with one’s own.

5. Love is thus a matter of reason, insofar as it is a response to something external that attempts to be adequate to the nature of its object. (And there is, at least in principle, the possibility of failure; one might love an object—the Mickey Mantle card, for instance—that does not possess the right qualities to make it worthy, in which case one’s love will be inappropriate and unjustified.)

6. Alighieri’s love for Beatrice is thus about Beatrice, in the sense that it is a response to her qualities; but it is also, in an important sense, about Alighieri: the fact that he values and cares for her says something significant about *him*, and in particular about how he sees the world. Since love is largely a matter of how one person sees another, both parties play crucial, irreducible roles in the relation. Moreover, love is constituted by the fact that not only does the lover see the beloved in this way but that to a substantial degree she is *committed* to seeing him in this way.

7. Indeed, love can be seen as an expression of the lover’s identity. Part of the reason love matters to us is that our loves express and to a degree even constitute who we are. This makes love an important arena of freedom—an opportunity to make ourselves into certain sorts of people and to allow our identities and values to shape our lives and the world—and it is in part because love is not a matter of rational requirement that it is able to play this role. Love involves forming and expressing an identity by coming to value certain individuals rather than others, in a way that does not simply amount to choosing to maximize impartially determined value or to do what one has the most reason—as determined from a detached perspective—to do.<sup>48</sup>

8. Loving a person constitutes a specifically *moral* way of seeing, insofar as it is an attempt to recognize a person in her full individuality and involves a kind of generous attention. This is not to say, however, that love’s way of seeing is the *only* way of seeing that counts as moral. Nor is it to say that love is always, on balance, morally good.

I will refer to this view of love as the vision view. I take the vision view to be a form of rationalism, as (5), in particular, suggests. But I will argue that it can be developed in a way that avoids making it a form of hyper-

rationalism and avoids the various problems I outlined above. We can summarize the need to avoid these problems as follows:

1. The view must be compatible with the incompleteness thesis: no set of qualities or properties possessed by the beloved ever generates a rational obligation for anyone to love her. Thus it must not be the case that my recognition of Alighieri’s justification for loving Beatrice obligates me to love Beatrice, on pain of irrationality. (This is just to say that the universality problem must be avoided.)

2. Similarly, the promiscuity problem must be avoided also. That Alighieri loves Beatrice for properties A, B, and C must not obligate him to love *everyone* who also has A, B, and C.

3. The trading-up problem must be avoided. That Alighieri loves Beatrice for properties A, B, and C must not obligate him to abandon Beatrice in favor of someone who turns out to have A, B, and/or C to an even greater degree.

4. Finally, our account must avoid the inconstancy problem. That Alighieri loves Beatrice for properties A, B, and C does not mean that he is rationally required to stop loving her if these properties change.

The attempt to develop the vision view in a way that achieves these desiderata will proceed via a number of stages. First, we must come to understand the sense in which love involves, and can even be said to be, a kind of vision. This is the task of chapters 2 and 3. Second, we must clear away false assumptions and misperceptions involving the nature of practical and evaluative reasoning. This is the task of chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 6 assembles the complete view and attempts to answer lingering questions about the nature of love’s rationality. And in chapter 7 I will say something about the relation between love’s demands and those of morality, which I hope will make clear why, in spite of its moral dangers and its potential to inspire evil, love can be considered a moral phenomenon.

What we want is an account of love that can capture its various and to some degree conflicting aspects: its being both a moral emotion and a potential source of immorality, an emotion that encourages clear-sightedness in some contexts and delusion in others, and an emotion that involves, in significant ways, both reason and unreason. The vision view lets us have all of this, in a way that matches our fundamental pretheoretical intuitions about the nature of love.