

**Holding on to Reasons of the Heart:  
Cognitive Degeneration and the Capacity to Love<sup>1</sup>**

**I. Introduction**

The documentary *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* opens with a close-up of a woman in her eighties with white hair and glasses; she is reminiscing about the relationships she had had with her parents. From off-screen, a younger woman's voice asks who she was closer to, her mother or her father. "I think I was closer to my mother." "Yeah," the woman off-screen observes, "that usually happens." The older woman kindly returns the question, "Were *you* close to your parents?" "I was closer to my mother," the younger woman replies, her voice insinuating some deeper significance in this. Then she follows up, "Do you know who my mother *was*?" The older woman seems to wonder whether she *should* know but simply shakes her head. "*You*," the younger woman says. The older woman is clearly taken aback. "*I* was your mother?" she asks in disbelief. She tries to make sense of the revelation: "You mean your mother liked me and decided I should be something?" The younger woman brushes off the explanation and insists, "You *are* my mother!" "How can I really be your mother?" the older woman asks, perplexed; "I don't know," she continues in a tone halfway between exasperation and amusement, "something went wrong in there." But then, diplomatically, she concedes, "Well, we did something peculiar, to say the least."

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This is the viewer's first glimpse of the relationship between the filmmaker Deborah Hoffman (who goes by Debbie in the film) and her mother Doris. Suffering from Alzheimer's Disease, Doris is progressively losing her memory of her past, including just who her daughter—and now primary caretaker—is. "All along the way, there were certain milestones," Debbie explains. "There was the first time she said to me, 'How exactly are we related?' Or the first time she asked me if I had any siblings. Or if I had ever been to New York (where I was born). Or if I had ever met Banesh (my father). There was the first time she asked if we had gone to elementary school together." That her mother would forget who she is, would forget everything about their family and their shared life—that, Debbie says, was "a little hard for me to take." One gathers that Debbie is not merely feeling anxiety for her mother, but is also worried about being robbed of her mother's love. And a time will come when Doris's capacity to love is destroyed, for eventually Alzheimer's Disease lays waste to almost every mental capacity. But, watching the film, one wonders how long the capacity to love can survive a neurodegenerative disease like Alzheimer's. To speak meaningfully of love, how much must someone remember and appreciate about another person and their relationship? Philosophical accounts emphasizing love's cognitive character, its dependence on recognizing reasons for love, may imply that a person like Doris has already lost the capacity to genuinely and reasonably love another. But moments in Hoffman's film give us pause. In a poignant scene, Doris tries with considerable difficulty to articulate how she feels in having Debbie and Debbie's partner Frances with her:

I did have a warm feeling for what... the few of us made a sentence here or a sentence there go. And I, just now, just recently, just within the last hour or so, I began to think, we are all parties together. And that simply hit me today, just now. And I'm happy it's here. And I'm not sure where everyone lived and so forth, but there's something close that's still with me and I'm grateful for it.

These serene remarks suggest that Doris knows these individuals are important to her—she feels a strong emotional bond with them—but she cannot any longer place them in the world. In this

essay, we outline a way of thinking about love that is modest enough in its cognitive requirements to explain our intuition that, in spite of her impairments, someone of Doris's profile retains the capacity to love and (in the relevant sense) to love for reasons. In doing so we hope to provide a better understanding of how love does, and does not, depend on higher cognitive faculties particularly vulnerable to a condition like Alzheimer's disease. These include (a) capacities necessary for directed thinking (e.g., executive functioning, attention, and working memory) that enable extended reasoning, abstract thinking, and self-reflection, as well as (b) two kinds of explicit or declarative memory: the ability to recall experienced events (episodic memory) and the ability to recall factual information or concepts (semantic memory) (Stern 2011, Mandell and Green 2011).

Why, however, does it matter how we define the threshold for the capacity to love, so long as someone like Doris still experiences warm, affectionate feelings? As a clue observe that we wouldn't take animals like prairie voles or geese to *love* one another although they pair bond and raise their young. We think of love as a particularly deep and sophisticated attitude which is characteristically human (though possibly shared with our most sophisticated fellow creatures), and we imagine that it occupies a wholly different plane of value from mere affection and attachment. It is this deeper emotional connection that we suppose to be central to human flourishing (Finnis 1980; Nussbaum 2000; Hurka 2011). And if humans and their well-being matter more in comparison with other animals, this seems partly explained by the human capacity to love.<sup>2</sup> Finally, since we value being loved, we are concerned with whether loved ones afflicted with dementia still retain the capacity to love, or whether our relationship of mutual

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<sup>2</sup> Jaworska (2007a) argues that the capacity to care is sufficient for the moral status of a person, but does not consider whether the inability to care *for the right reasons* compromises this capacity. It is somewhat easier to approach this question focusing on love (which involves caring), since there is a more established literature on the reasons for love. While the arguments of this article have bearing on these questions about the capacity to care and moral status, they ultimately merit a separate investigation.

love is now a bygone. Of course, there may be room for disagreement about the best place to draw the line between genuine love and proto-love, but our discussion should at least illuminate the major conceptual contours that must guide any account addressing how long love can endure cognitive decline. To look ahead, in Section II we offer an analysis of what loving is in terms of certain characteristic concerns. In Section III we outline arguments suggesting that, even if a person retains the concerns characteristic of love, the capacity to love may still be undermined by the inability to remember or appreciate reasons for love. In Section IV we respond to those arguments and contend that love is less dependent on an explicit appreciation of reasons than some philosophers suppose. Finally, in Section V we consider whether such cognitive impairments may nonetheless diminish love's value.

## **II. What Is Love?**

Love, as we conceive of it, is a rich emotional dispositional attitude of significant temporal extension born paradigmatically toward other people. Whereas some philosophers focus on a particular type of love like romantic love or the love of friendship or kinship, our aim is to address the sort of love that these more specific forms presumably share, which warrants giving them a common name.

Love is sometimes characterized as a distinct emotion comparable to fear, joy, or anger, but it is better understood as a “sentiment” (Broad 1938) or “syndrome” (de Sousa 2015): an organized complex of dispositions for various individual emotions, thoughts, desires, patterns of attention, and so on. We can fill out this more nuanced picture of love by starting with the more basic notion of *caring*. On our conception, to care about someone or something is most fundamentally to be *emotionally invested* in it: to be disposed, as circumstances elicit, to undergo a rationally cohesive pattern of interrelated emotions focused on the good or flourishing of the object of

concern (Helm 2001; Jaworska 2007b). For example, if you care about a university, you are disposed to worry when it is in trouble, to get angry at those who harm it, to feel relief when trouble is passed, to mourn its demise, and so on. The pattern is rationally cohesive at least in the sense that each of these emotional responses is only intelligible as a part of the broader pattern of emotional dispositions that jointly construe the object as something that matters.

For some writers, you care about something whenever it anchors a cohesive pattern of emotional responses over time (Helm 2001). Following Frankfurt (1999), we adopt a more restrictive view that distinguishes between simply desiring or having feelings about something and caring about it or regarding it as *important* to yourself. For instance, a person might find herself emotionally attuned to the local sports team (feeling glad when they win, suspense when the game is close, disappointment when they lose), and yet it is not something she really cares about—it just isn't important to her. How precisely to spell this out is a vexing question.<sup>3</sup> At a minimum, when something strikes you as important, the emotional dispositions involved are *pervasive* and *enduring*: your attention is continuously “on a lookout” for changes that trigger these emotions, the feelings involved tend to color your whole mood, and the dispositions toward a full range of forward- and backward-looking emotions (like hope or grief) are present continually (not just cyclically) over a long stretch of time. Further, emotional attunement that construes its object as genuinely important informs and structures your practical reasoning: you tend to *perceive* actions conducive to the good of the object as “to be done” (even if you explicitly *believe* they are not worth performing) and you tend to be reluctant to even consider acting in ways that harm the object.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Here we supplement Jaworska (2007b).

<sup>4</sup> See Seidman (2008), (2009), (2010), though we reject his assumption that caring must involve perceiving *normative* reasons.

With this sketch of caring in hand, we can analyze love in the paradigm case as comprising a cluster of characteristic concerns. Typically, when A loves B, A cares for its own sake about: (a) B's good or well-being; (b) being in the company of B, sharing certain activities with B, or otherwise interacting with B; and (c) B's appreciating A's love and loving A in return (though not necessarily in just the same way). The second and third of these might also be thought of as two parts of A's concern for her relationship with B (or the relationship she would like to have with B).<sup>5</sup> Though the above concerns are *characteristic* of love, we do not insist that all are essential to it; in non-ideal cases, some may be missing.<sup>6</sup> However, since genuine concern for the beloved's good is an important part of why we esteem love, we adopt the moralistic view that this concern is necessary for love: a self-centered passionate attachment is insufficient.<sup>7</sup>

How might dementia or other cognitive impairments affect a person's capacity for these concerns? Centrally, love requires rich emotional engagement with other people. Some dementias critically impair emotional functioning early on, but in Alzheimer's disease empathy and the social emotions are often unaffected—or even enhanced—until very late stages (Sturm 2013).<sup>8</sup> On the cognitive side, love foremost requires having a sense of the beloved as a distinct, persisting individual with her own mental states and interests, so severe impairment of the ability to represent another's mind would undermine the capacity for love. But it seems that someone like Doris in mid-stage Alzheimer's can still understand that others have interests and can track

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<sup>5</sup> Thus, we agree with Kolodny (2003) that love *typically* has two foci: the beloved and the relationship. However, we allow that the relationship may not actually exist and that in non-ideal cases love might have only one focus.

<sup>6</sup> In analyzing love in terms of these characteristic concerns we delimit our subject matter, but we leave it open here whether love just is this cluster of concerns, or whether some additional feature is necessary to distinguish love (see Jaworska and Wonderly forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Caring about something is not only not the same as desiring it, it doesn't even require desiring it. If a loved one is unpleasant enough, you may not desire her company, but if this pains you, then this is still something you care about. This helps address Velleman's (1999) argument that no desire or end is essential to love.

<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, some Alzheimer's patients can nonetheless become extremely hostile.

these emotionally. To be sure, deficits in memory, extended reasoning, abstract thinking, etc. limit Doris's ability to appreciate what affects Debbie's flourishing, especially when complexities of career or personal dynamics are involved. But in the film she shows signs of an enduring concern for Debbie's happiness and physical well-being, and she is certainly concerned about Debbie's presence and love, so there is reason to think that someone of Doris's profile retains the capacity for the concerns characteristic of full-fledged love. Henceforth, we will assume this is the case and focus instead on whether the Alzheimer's patient's capacity for love is further threatened by her inability to grasp the reasons for love.

### **III. Cognitive Impairment and Reasons for Love**

Many philosophers believe that we generally have reasons for loving the people we do, which are usually thought to be rooted in the beloved's inherent qualities and/or in certain aspects of a relationship or shared history (Keller 2000; Kolodny 2003). But what if cognitive impairment seriously compromises a person's capacity to appreciate those reasons? Might this undermine her capacity to love?

To examine this issue, we need to clarify what a "reason for love" is. For some writers, to speak of "the reasons A loves B" is to chiefly refer to the properties (whether inherent, relational, or historical) the cognizance of which *motivates* A's love of B. Thus, when Robert Solomon says that "Beauty, fame, wealth, breasts, glamor, feet, even convenience can be reasons for love," he is simply listing the things one may believe about a person that might inspire one's love (Solomon 1980, 172).<sup>9</sup> We cite these *motivational reasons* for love to explain, by way of the

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<sup>9</sup> To quibble, it's hard to imagine *convenience* motivating love (though it might motivate a desire to love), but set that aside.

subject's relevant beliefs, the subject's feelings, not to justify or criticize them.<sup>10</sup> When you explain why you love someone, this is not the same as *justifying* your love, just as articulating why you prefer one cuisine over another (citing, e.g., the spices it uses) is not to justify your taste (Hurka 2011, 187). Sometimes a person's love is *consciously* responding to certain properties of the loved one or the shared relationship, but, as with other emotions, it seems we can also love someone without being aware of what it is we see in her that triggers our feelings (cf. Greenspan 1988; de Sousa 1987).

Reasons for love may, by contrast, refer to *normative reasons* meant to justify or criticize the presence or absence of love. There are of course normative reasons deriving from morality or prudence, but the normative reasons at issue here concern whether the attitude is fitting to its object.<sup>11</sup> We do, after all, generally assume that emotions can be unfitting if the empirical beliefs they are based on are false, or if the evaluative appraisal they embody is unreasonable, or if the associated feelings are disproportionate (Nozick 1989). As in other domains, the normative reasons *for love* may be assessed from an objective or subjective perspective. Thus, a woman's love for a man may be objectively groundless if there is nothing lovable about him, but whether her love is subjectively justified depends on whether the woman believes that the man has some lovable properties that justify her love and whether these beliefs are warranted given the evidence available to her.

What a person takes to be a normative reason for love can of course be his motivational reason. Thus, I may love you because I regard your kindness a good reason to love you. Call this

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<sup>10</sup> The motivational/normative reason distinction is borrowed from the theory of practical reasoning (cf. Smith 1987). Motivational reasons, notice, differ from *mere explanatory reasons*, which might adduce psychological mechanisms as brute causes.

<sup>11</sup> Plausibly, some normative reasons make love mandatory while others make it appropriate but not mandatory, but this distinction is irrelevant to our argument.



a *normative motivational reason*. However, it does not seem that what we are motivated by are always our perceptions of normative reasons (though this is controversial). I may love you for your kindness without worrying about whether that is a *good* reason for loving you. More subtly, what a person takes to be a normative reason may operate as a second-order, but not a first-order, motivation. Thus, I love you simply because you are kind, not because I judge your kindness to be a good reason for love. However, I do reflectively endorse my love for you because I think your kindness is a good reason for love, and this motivates me to sustain that first-order motivation.

Having sorted out these different senses of “reasons for love,” let us consider three ways an impaired ability to grasp these reasons might be thought to undermine a person’s capacity for love. First, suppose A’s love for B has long depended on motivational reasons p and q, but now cognitive impairment robs A of the ability to believe p and q (or, in a different scenario, to find p and q appealing). Kolodny suggests that in such a case, where for instance an amnesic patient has lost “cognitive access to the reasons for his love,” we would expect this to “extinguish love” (Kolodny 2003, 141).<sup>12</sup> Kolodny’s example illustrating this point is part of his argument that the reasons for love are rooted in valuable relationships, not in the good qualities of the beloved. He has us imagine an author who meets, falls in love with, and eventually marries the subject of his previously published biography—a book that admiringly portrayed her character in intimate detail. Years later, the biographer suffers an accident and loses his memory of this relationship, but still remembers, admiringly, his book’s profile of the woman’s character. Kolodny submits that “We would not expect him to love her [anymore], and indeed it is hard to see how he could” (Kolodny 2003, 141). Kolodny regards this as evidence that the real reasons for love rest on

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<sup>12</sup> Since Kolodny thinks that the desires of rational agents typically “consist, in part, in representations of what is desired as worth obtaining in some respect” (Kolodny 2003, 143), he is talking about normative motivational reasons. But if there are non-normative motivational reasons, the present point applies to them too.

relationships, and that people's valuable inherent qualities, while no doubt good grounds for admiring them, are not even intelligible reasons for loving them—much as finding something adorable is an incoherent reason for fearing it.

Second, suppose as before that A's love for B has long depended on motivational reasons p and q, and again that cognitive impairment robs A of the ability to believe p and q or to find them appealing. But this time assume that A's love for B does not dry up, but instead A's reasons for loving B change. Ordinarily this would not be a problem, but what if A is mixing B up with someone else or with figures on television and these new reasons have nothing to do with B? In that case, even if A is still capable of love, we might worry that A is no longer capable of *loving B*.

Third, suppose that A loves B for the explicitly normative motivational reasons p and q: he thinks p and q are good reasons that make his love appropriate.<sup>13</sup> But then cognitive impairment robs A of the ability to appreciate the distinctly normative aspect of p and q, though he still has affectionate feelings toward B motivated by the non-normative motivational reasons corresponding to p and q. On a *constitutively normative* account of love, this affection would no longer count as genuine love, because it says that the belief that we have reasons that make our affection appropriate or worthwhile is partly constitutive of what love is (Kolodny 2003; Taylor 1975; Raz 2001). Affectionate feelings not motivated by normative motivational reasons would be better described as infatuations, obsessions, or mere animal attachments. To take Kolodny's view again as illustration, he holds that A's loving B is partly constituted by A's belief that, since A and B stand in a relationship that is of a generally valuable type (like that between siblings, spouses, friends, or parents and children), A's loving concerns for B are appropriate (Kolodny

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<sup>13</sup> Consistent with our previous distinction, these reasons might be first- or second-order motivations.

2003, 150-51). This makes love a rather cognitively demanding attitude, since one must, for example, recognize that it is possible to love for the wrong reasons and that (normative) reasons are inherently generalizable. Kolodny observes that, strictly speaking, this means that children without the conceptual resources to appreciate these things are incapable of genuinely loving their parents; they are only capable of proto-love, a “love by analogy” (Kolodny 2003, 187, n. 22).<sup>14</sup> Presumably the same point applies to adults with cognitive impairments, especially impairments of directed thinking, severe enough to undermine critical reflection. If Doris cannot appreciate that her relationship with Debbie is an instance of a generally valuable type or that such a relationship justifies loving concerns, then she is incapable of genuine love, even if she still exhibits the relevant concerns.

#### **IV. How Dependent on Reasons is Love?**

How much does the capacity for love really depend on a grasp or appreciation of the reasons for love? To address this question, let us first revisit Kolodny’s amnesic biographer. Kolodny is right that the example casts doubt on the notion that mere “cognitive access” to reasons grounded in another’s inherent qualities could be sufficient to motivate love for her. But if we develop the example only a step further, it cuts just as deeply against Kolodny’s rival relationship theory. Suppose the biographer learns from a trusted friend or his own detailed diaries that he has been happily married to the subject of his book for the last ten years. Assuming he retains his general understanding of marital relationships and their value, he would then have precisely what Kolodny says he needs to ground and sustain his love: cognitive access to a belief that he has a

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<sup>14</sup> Kolodny thinks this is just an instance of the more general truth that many kinds of psychological states—including “belief, desire, and fear”—require the ability to appreciate normative reasons and concepts. “To have a belief, for example, one needs the concept of truth.” While this is surely correct for some psychological states, it is a highly intellectualistic understanding of belief—not to mention desire and fear. Therefore, it bears noting that a constitutively normative account of love could be held independently of this broader intellectualism, since one might think that love—unlike belief, desire, and fear—is intrinsically normative in being a form of valuing.

relationship of a generally valuable type with the person. And yet, unless this new information triggered some kind of recognition or recall, we still would not expect the biographer to suddenly love this woman.

What's missing? A first thought is that we need to distinguish between mere factual beliefs, including those about our own lives, and first-personal, episodic memories which include "*experience-near details*—the specific sounds, sights, tastes, smells, thoughts, and emotions that accompany a unique event" (Corkin 2013: 224; cf. Brewer 1986). The distinction is cleanly illustrated in the tragic case histories of severe amnesics like K.C. and H.M. For instance, K.C., who suffered severe brain trauma in a motorcycle accident, was utterly incapable of remembering "any events, circumstances, or situations from his own life," though he knew "many true facts about himself" dating from before his injuries (Tulving 2002, 13-14; on H.M., see Corkin 2013, 222-230).

If some kind of "beliefs" about the person or relationship are necessary to motivate love, it would seem that these must be rooted in our first-personal, episodic memories and not in our memory of mere facts (semantic memory), since the former tend to be more emotionally charged and imbued with personal significance (Allen 2008). This is why you would not expect the amnesic biographer to love his wife if he simply knew about their relationship without personally remembering it.<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, once this is appreciated, much of the force of Kolodny's objection to the quality theory dissipates, and it becomes plausible that personal memories of the beloved's inherent qualities can also motivate love. After all, experience teaches us that we can revive waning emotions by dwelling on the properties that initially triggered them, and often you

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<sup>15</sup> Kolodny does say that the belief that A has a relationship with B must be held "in a first-personal way," but by this he means that "A identifies himself as A" (Kolodny 2003, 151). Suppose you find an old photograph of several newborns in a nursery, and your mother tells you, "This unhappy-looking baby is *you*." Now you gain first-personal knowledge in Kolodny's sense, even though you lack any first-personal recollection of the episode.

can intensify loving feelings toward someone by vividly recalling episodes when she exhibited the qualities you like or value as well as the relationship you share. While the former personal memories naturally implicate a shared history, that need not be their focal content.

These observations make it look as if love is even more vulnerable to an amnesic condition like Alzheimer's than Kolodny's view suggests, since episodic memories are generally *more* vulnerable to deterioration than our store of facts; often people lose the rich experience-near details of an episode while retaining a propositional summary of it (Nadel and Moscovitch 1997; Mandell and Green 2011). However, this assumes that, since episodic memories have an emotional resonance that mere factual beliefs often lack, sustaining an emotional connection with someone depends on the survival of episodic memories. While plausible from the armchair, there is clinical evidence that this assumption is mistaken.

Suzanne Corkin studied the famous amnesic patient H.M. for almost fifty years and relates several incidents showing how emotional traces can linger independently of episodic memory. For instance, when H.M. was about forty, his mother, with whom he was living, entered the hospital for surgery just as H.M. was departing for a lengthy visit to Corkin's lab. Corkin recalls that "He quickly lost the factual content—*Mother is in the hospital having minor surgery*—but the vague emotional content—*something is wrong*—lingered for days" (Corkin 2013, 100). Corkin also discovered that, while H.M.'s ability to form new explicit memories was virtually nil, he did develop feelings of familiarity and fondness for certain places and people, including herself, whom he figured he must have known from high school (Corkin 2013, 147-150, 272).

Similar evidence comes from Daniel Tranel and Antonio Damasio (1997) who studied a patient with extensive brain damage including the hippocampal region (also affected first and most severely in Alzheimer's). This patient was unable to retain new information or episodic

memory for longer than about forty seconds, and could not even recognize as familiar any of his caretakers, with whom he had had daily contact for the prior ten years. However, the patient did demonstrate a consistent but unconscious preference for one aide. To study the nature of this preference, the researchers cast three staffers previously unknown to the patient into the roles of Good Guy, Bad Guy, and Neutral Guy. The Good Guy was friendly to the patient: complimented him, granted small requests, never administered burdensome tests. The Bad Guy acted in just the opposite ways. The Neutral Guy was cool and business-like but avoided asking the patient to do things that annoyed him. After five days, the patient predictably showed no sign of recognizing any of the staffers, but on an emotional level was noticeably wary of the unfriendly staffer, even hesitating to enter a room with her (Damasio 1999, 46). When presented with photos pairing one staffer with a stranger and asked to “Choose the person that you would go to for a treat [like coffee, soda, or gum],” the patient chose the Good Guy more often (88%) than the Neutral Guy (56%) and much more than the Bad Guy (22%). This striking experiment suggests that it is possible to retain emotional memories of people, memories that guide one’s emotional reaction based on past experience, without either explicitly remembering them (in an episodic or semantic way), or even consciously recognizing them as familiar.<sup>16</sup>

What bearing does this evidence have on the capacity to love of someone with a neurodegenerative condition like Alzheimer’s? We conjecture that the following dynamic is common. As a person progressively loses her ability to recall her life, beginning with her more recent past, she predictably finds it difficult to recall who certain loved ones are since she no longer has reliable access to episodic or semantic memories associated with that person. Thus, in the film, Doris is confused about who Debbie is because she no longer remembers being a

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<sup>16</sup> This experiment is cited, in the context of a different argument, in Jaworska (unpublished).

mother or much else from her adult life. Struggling to remember who Debbie is, Doris asks whether they were classmates in elementary school or perhaps sorority sisters. Crucially, these do not seem to be random guesses; it is not as if she thought Debbie might have been an arms-length acquaintance like a neighbor or teacher. Instead, she seems to implicitly recognize Debbie, and has the feeling that they have an important connection, that they “go way back.” When she tries to make sense of what this connection could be, she naturally draws from the memories she still retains from childhood and early adulthood. This emotional connection, therefore, appears to *precede* any definite ideas about Debbie and the type of relationship they share. This is especially evident at that point in the film cited above where Doris, trying to express the affection she feels for Debbie and Frances, resigns herself to having only a vague sense of their relationship and history, that they “are all parties together,” and together “made a sentence here or a sentence there go.” If we take these words seriously, we can understand Doris to be describing a general feeling of connection, communion, or belongingness that is the common denominator underlying the many different types of loving relationship—something that persists despite her confusion about which of these more particular types of relationships she actually shares with the person. In this way, even though Doris often cannot say just who Debbie is or enumerate her qualities, she does seem to consistently recognize her on an emotional level as someone she likes, trusts, has cared about, and with whom she has a deep bond. Her ongoing concern that Debbie be happy, that they spend time together, and that Debbie return her affection is rooted in this emotional recognition. This is broadly analogous to the way Tranel and Damasio’s patient’s emotional recognition of a staffer as friendly motivated his choices and interactions.<sup>17</sup> However, since what the patient emotionally remembers about the other person is

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<sup>17</sup> Note, though, that Doris, like H.M. but *unlike* Tranel and Damasio’s patient, does consciously recognize the people from her past as familiar. This is crucial to our claim that she retains the capacity to love.

very different in the two cases, the specific pattern of emotions and comportment going forward is also very different, just as Doris would treat Debbie very differently from the way she would treat a nurse who has been kind to her (e.g., she may be quite distraught by Debbie's, but not the nurse's, bad mood or prolonged absence).

In fact, Doris might be capable of more specific forms of love than our talk of love's common denominator lets on. We have posited that the actual history of interactions leaves distinct emotional traces, that is, dispositions to emotionally react to a person in the future based on the particular nature of those past interactions. When these dispositions are manifested in the amnesic patient's current nuanced and idiosyncratic reactions to a person, this gives the patient an implicit sense of what the person is qualitatively like (e.g., trustworthy) and of the importance and general contours of the relationship. For example, although Doris recognizes both Debbie and Frances, she appears to realize that Debbie is the more important connection. While emotional memories may include specific emotional dispositions that are appropriate to distinct kinds of relationships—e.g., especially worrying about the beloved's safety or decisions if the beloved is one's child—it nonetheless would usually be impossible to isolate such details from the sea of emotional memories and work back from them to reconstruct the precise relationship type.

Our central claim thus far is that what is really indispensable to motivating love are certain emotional traces which can endure the loss of associated semantic and episodic memories. This picture, we believe, constitutes a persuasive response to the first two arguments outlined in Section III suggesting that a person like Doris must lose the capacity to love—or love a particular person—if she loses her beliefs about what her loved one is like or the nature of their



relationship. Quite the contrary, loving concerns can not only exist independently of related explicit memories, but those concerns can successfully track a particular individual.

Someone might grant this much, but still deny that these concerns really count as *love* as opposed to the simpler attitudes of concerned affection or attachment. This is the crux of the third argument in Section III. On this view, love in the strict, characteristically human sense is a form of valuing; as such, love must partly be constituted by the belief that the attendant emotions are justified by good reasons. Therefore, someone who can no longer access or appreciate the normative motivational reasons for love cannot retain the capacity for genuine love.

We have a three-layered response to this demanding view.<sup>18</sup> First, we call into question the basic assumption of the constitutively normative conception of love. The proponents of this picture often suggest that the only alternative to understanding love as a form of valuing is to conceive of it as a powerful brute desire, a kind of compulsion or fixation. But why assume that valuing and mere desiring are the only relevant options? We have argued for the need to recognize a third attitude-type, caring, that is intermediate between valuing and simple desiring. Unlike various conceptions of valuing, caring need not involve normative judgments nor reflection upon one's own mental states. Therefore, on our conception, to care one does not need beliefs about the normative reasons for caring. But caring is a much more sophisticated attitude than mere desiring, since caring involves a complex, pervasive, and enduring emotional orientation to the flourishing of the object of concern, which in turn structures the subject's practical reasoning. So understood, caring is a sufficiently complex attitude to be plausibly regarded as characteristic of the agency of persons (Jaworska 2007a, 2007b). If this is correct,

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<sup>18</sup> One might also argue that part of the meaning of what something is depends on what it was. We have a different attitude toward stones strewn across a field if these are ruins of an ancient monument rather than detritus dropped by a retreating glacier. Similarly, a person's affectionate feelings might have a different significance depending on whether they are the remnants of a once deep loving bond or simply the casual warmth anyone might feel for an acquaintance. Nonetheless, we focus here on inherent, not historical, features of love.

then so long as an affectionate attitude involves caring, it need not involve valuing in order to qualify as a characteristically human attitude.

For those unpersuaded by that argument we add a second layer of response. Consider a person's sense that her connection with another is important or meaningful to her. Doris seems to convey this when she says that, in spite of forgetting "just where everyone lived and so forth, . . . there's something close that's still with me and *I'm grateful for it.*" Even if Doris did not seek to make sense of what grounded her love, this sense of its importance to her life would be sufficient to mark it as a distinctively human sentiment, dramatically different than the affection and attachment of animals and infants. Note that to speak of love's importance to a person is to add something to our claims in Section II about the kinds of concerns characteristic of love. There the idea was that if A loves B, then A will regard as important B's well-being, companionship with B, and B's reciprocal feelings. The present thought is that A may also regard as important her own appreciation of these things: her caring itself, not just the things she cares about. Because this requires a person to reflect on her own attitudes, it is more demanding than caring alone, but it still need not involve an evaluation of her concerns as appropriate.

These points notwithstanding, it may be that matters are different for agents who are *capable* of evaluating the normative reasons for their attitudes versus those who are not. Perhaps valuing is not necessary for love when an agent is incapable of valuing, and yet an affectionate concern that is not valued by an agent capable of valuing might not count as genuine love. After all, agents capable of valuing generally also think that their love is normatively appropriate. Indeed, in Hoffman's film, we witness Doris struggling to make sense of the emotional connection she feels with Debbie, making guesses about what sort of history might explain it. Even when she is completely at a loss to account for the exact nature of their connection, she continues to assume

that it must all fit together somehow; she does not regard her feelings as brute happenings with no rationale. To have such an interest in understanding one's affection seems to be a clear mark of love as a form of valuing. This brings us to our third layer of response. To whatever extent valuing *is* necessary for loving, what seems sufficient for this valuing dimension of love is that the *question* how a love that appears appropriate can be justified presents itself to the individual; she need not have any very definite or stable ideas about how to *answer* that question. Therefore, whether or not you accept our first two responses, it's still reasonable to conclude that someone who is confused about what makes her loving concerns appropriate retains a distinctively human capacity for love.<sup>19</sup>

#### **V. Does Cognitive Impairment Diminish Love's Value?**

Even if an impaired ability to grasp the reasons for love does not undermine the capacity to love, one might nonetheless think it diminishes love's value (to the lover, to the beloved, and in an impersonal way). Without pretending to exhaust this rich topic, let us briefly consider four distinct worries.

First, if love is susceptible to rational justification, you might think it less valuable when it is unjustified. As we have observed, the justification has an objective and a subjective face. It is easy to see why someone would think that love's value is diminished if the beloved objectively lacks the properties motivating the love (perhaps the beloved is a false friend)—even if the lover had no reason to suspect the truth. In Doris's case, this isn't an issue, since Debbie is a perfectly fitting object of love. But what if Doris began to love a brusque nurse as her sister? We might indeed judge this love much less valuable, though we could also regard it as a case where she has mistaken the nurse for her sister, who *is* an appropriate object of love.

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<sup>19</sup> The capacity to conceive of something as appropriate or not, and the capacity to reflect on one's own attitudes, are still rather demanding cognitive achievements that normally develop after the capacity to care (Jaworska 2007b, unpublished). Jaworska (1999) argues that mid-stage Alzheimer's patients retain the capacity for valuing.

What about the subjective justification of love? Isn't a person just lucky if she succeeds in loving someone whom it is appropriate for her to love, if she no longer grasps the reasons that make it appropriate? After all, if we administered Doris a dose of oxytocin while she was with strangers, she might begin to feel warm feelings for them too, and then infer that something must render *those* feelings appropriate. Doesn't this show that the mere presence of these feelings is an inadequate basis for assuming that those feelings are justified? And wouldn't such faulty subjective justification also diminish love's value?

Whether the value of love depends on its being subjectively justified is unclear, but for the sake of argument, assume it is true. Does the love of someone like Doris really lack subjective warrant? It is worth reminding ourselves that Doris's emotional memories are dispositions engendered by the particular long history with Debbie, so they would likely be much more targeted, nuanced, and emotionally compelling than any generic warm feelings induced by oxytocin. They would also be responsive to actual properties of Debbie. It is nonetheless certainly true that the presence of special feelings of closeness and comradery is not infallible for inferring love's fittingness. But subjective justification does not require infallibility and, moreover, must take into account the limitations of the person's epistemic circumstances. A blind person is justified in relying on her other senses to make inferences about her surroundings, even if these are less reliable. Someone with a cognitive impairment like Alzheimer's is in an analogous situation. If her explicit memory is insufficiently intact to identify who is important to her, she is justified in relying on the other epistemic resources she has available, including her emotional memory. Further, one must keep in mind that Doris is not identifying her loved ones in isolation; she is also receiving feedback from others. While a relation like Debbie will embrace Doris's affection as fitting and reinforce it with a loving response, an arms-length

acquaintance will respond with more reserve. In this way, interactions with others would help calibrate Doris's perception of whether her emotional responses are appropriate.<sup>20, 21</sup>

Other reasons for worrying that severe cognitive impairment may diminish love's value are harder to dispose of. For one thing, even if the person with the impairment does hold onto a basic emotional connection with loved ones, she may lose what is valuable about the more particular forms of love. For instance, if the Western ideal of romantic love depends on certain culturally specific ideas and associations, then someone who has lost cognitive access to those things would therewith lose the capacity for that specific kind of attachment.

Another concern is that impairment may diminish love's value by eroding the individual's ability to truly know her loved ones. This has two facets. First, the impairment might diminish the person's ability to appreciate what is especially good about the loved one. This idea is rooted in the general principle that it is good/valuable to love or appreciate what is itself good/valuable (Hurka 2001). This principle explains, for example, the plausible thought that A's appreciation of Coltrane is more valuable than B's if A can appreciate more of the virtues of his music than B can. Similarly, if part of loving someone is perceiving what is good in them (Jollimore 2011), then love's value appears damaged as the lover progressively loses her capacity to appreciate the beloved's good qualities. After all, we believe the reverse: that love becomes more valuable as we come to appreciate more of what is good about the loved one. It makes some difference here whether we believe that a valuable love of the good depends on an intellectual appreciation

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<sup>20</sup> Note, therefore, that we are not claiming that love is somehow self-justifying—that so long as you feel the loving concerns via your emotional memory, your love can be justified in your epistemic circumstances. What matters is sufficient evidence that the beloved has properties that justify love, and, under the circumstances of cognitive impairment, this can be supplied by the emotional memories combined with feedback from the beloved.

<sup>21</sup> Love's value might also be diminished if its subjective warrant does not match the objective one: for example, A loves B on the grounds that B is loyal—something which is false, but which A is justified in believing; nevertheless, objectively, there are still good reasons for A to love B, though these do not actually motivate A's love. Notice that this is not a problem in Doris's case: while the subjective warrant is not exactly the same as the objective one, the subjective warrant is not false, but simply weaker than the objective warrant.

*under the guise of the good* or is a more rationally unmediated, emotional response (Hurka 2001). To the extent that love's value depends on an intellectual appreciation of the good *as good*, love's value will be diminished insofar as the lover loses the ability to make objective value judgments. An immediate, emotional appreciation of the beloved's virtues is much less demanding, though something that cognitive degeneration could still incrementally erode as the individual's picture of the loved one is progressively simplified.<sup>22</sup>

The other facet of knowing loved ones simply has to do with having a thorough, intimate acquaintance of them, especially valuable to both lover and beloved. In many kinds of relationship, love's bond is partly constituted by rich knowledge of the other person's life and character, acquired through everyday interaction and disclosure. Reflecting on the life of H.M., who was unable to form new memories from the age of twenty-seven until his death at eighty-two, Suzanne Corkin makes this remark:

One great gift that memory bestows on us is the ability to know one another well. It is through shared experiences and conversations that we form our deepest relationships. And without the ability to remember, we cannot watch these relationships grow. Although Henry [H.M.] had acquired many friends during his life, he was unable to feel the true depth of these connections. He could not get to know others well (Corkin 2013, 285).

An Alzheimer's patient like Doris differs from H.M. in that she did once know her loved ones well, but if H.M.'s life was missing a great good, then presumably the Alzheimer's patient must be vulnerable to losing one. As Corkin's observations indicate, there is a dynamic dimension here as well. As Amelie Rorty (1986) has argued, while love should not alter with *every* alteration of the beloved, neither is love at its most valuable when it remains the same in the face of important changes of the beloved. Thus, the love that parents have for a grown child should

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<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, as a person loses the capacity to engage with life's other goods, her personal relationships will often occupy a more central role in determining her quality of life. Thus, while the love may be less valuable in an absolute sense, it may become more valuable relative to the individual's life.

not be exactly the same as it was when the child was young, nor should someone's love for his spouse simply reflect what she was like thirty years ago. Inasmuch as a cognitive impairment robs an individual of the ability to really know the loved one, it seems that her continued love will no longer possess this valuable dynamic character.<sup>23</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

How long can the capacity to love persist in the face of cognitive decline? Our answer has two parts. Love, as we conceive it, typically involves a suite of concerns: caring about the other's well-being, caring about being with the other person, and caring that the person appreciate and return that love. Losing the capacity for these concerns, then, is one way of losing the capacity for love. For those whose emotional functioning is relatively spared despite a cognitive decline another worry remains. Many philosophers have emphasized that love is an emotional response to certain reasons grounded in the beloved's qualities or in certain aspects of a shared relationship or history. So it might seem that losing cognitive access to these reasons would undermine the capacity to love. However, we have argued that a person can retain a loving emotional connection to others in spite of having lost a cognitive grip on who precisely they are or how she is related to them. Her love is nonetheless not blind but is rather motivated by certain facts about the loved ones—their qualities or (more likely) her relationships to them—which her emotions track. This emotional connection is characteristically human inasmuch as it is constituted by a cluster of cognitively sophisticated concerns, and the case for categorizing it as genuinely human love is only strengthened when the person also recognizes the connection as

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<sup>23</sup> That said, dementia can also eliminate sources of conflict in a relationship. In the film, Debbie explains that her relationship with her mother had always been complicated by Doris's attitude toward Debbie's sexual orientation. "But once she had this disease, she was down to basics, and the basics were that I had a friend, Frances. This person was very nice to me; this person made me happy; that was a good thing. This person was very nice to her; made her happy; that was a good thing. It was just very simple."

important in her life. If, however, you think that a concern cannot count as love unless the person has certain beliefs about the normative fittingness of the attitude, then we suggest that it is sufficient that the person thinks that there must be reasons that justify the concern, though the person may have little grasp of what those reasons actually are. While we have argued that genuine love can endure cognitive deterioration longer than more demanding accounts would suggest, one must not minimize the damage that conditions like Alzheimer's can do to personal relationships, and thus we have acknowledged several ways in which cognitive impairment may diminish love's value.

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