

L'amour

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That love is valuable is not controversial. In addition to being valuable, loving itself involves a particular mode of valuing, one which can take on a disparate variety of objects as its focus: romantic partners, family, friends, pets, artifacts, objects in nature, groups (nation, culture), even abstract ideas (truth, beauty). Love's interrelations with other valuable goods (such as happiness or morality) and other modes of valuing (such as admiration or concern) is both obscure and complex. Accordingly, doing justice to the topic of love "as a value" in a short essay is probably impossible. Hence the scope here will be constrained to two fundamental issues: the sort of valuing involved in love, and the valuable aspects of love.

The Valuing in Love: Final Value & Intrinsic Value

What is love? As expected, philosophers disagree. Some claim it is best construed as a feeling, perhaps an emotion, others a disposition, still others a form of relationship. As is often the case in such disputes, there is some truth on all sides. We certainly talk of love as a distinct feeling, yet we do not limit attributions of love to those in a particular phenomenological state. One can be said to love another even if one is not currently feeling much of anything for the other. Accordingly it is probably preferable to characterize love as involving in part a disposition to certain affective states rather than as a particular occurrent sensation or feeling. We also tend to think of love as involving characteristic behaviors and dispositions to so behave. In addition, we speak quite often of love as involving (perhaps essentially) a special sort of relationship between lover and beloved.

Most fundamentally (and so perhaps least controversially) love seems to many philosophers to involve a form of *care*. It is something close to a conceptual truth to claim that one does not love x if one does not care for x . (On the other hand, it seems possible to care for someone or something in a manner that doesn't quite amount to *love*.) Further, to care about something seems connected to the idea of *valuing* it, but again, we are not dealing with synonyms. Indeed, one values money and

screwdrivers (useful things) but one need not care for these goods. While an attempt to offer a complete account of either love or care in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions is probably hubristic, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose both that valuing x is a necessary condition of caring for x and caring for x is in turn a necessary condition for loving x . If this is correct, then it makes sense to explore more deeply the connection between love and valuing.

One principal controversy is whether the valuing involved in loving should be understood as an *appraisal* of preexisting value or a *bestowal* of value. Echoing the dilemma in the *Euthyphro*, we might ask whether we love something because that thing is valuable or whether instead we value some loved thing because we love it. Again, the truth here seems likely to involve both notions, with an emphasis on bestowal making the most sense of parental love while appraisal seems more fitting when considering chosen friendships. Regarding the nature (rather than the source) of the value attributed to the beloved, a proposal common to several writers on the topic (e.g., [Aristotle], [Frankfurt, 2004], [Wolf, 2014]) is to see love as necessarily involving what is often called **final value**. In other words, to love something involves valuing it “as an end” or “for its own sake”. This notion is not entirely clear-cut, but it is perhaps best understood by reference to a contrasting mode of valuing, one in which something is valued **instrumentally**. To value something as an end is to value it in a manner that cannot be reduced to the value the thing has in virtue of its usefulness in securing some further value.

Matters are made difficult by the fact that such **final value** has often been conflated with **intrinsic value**, with the latter understood as value that is derived from the intrinsic qualities of a thing. (For discussion, see [Korsgaard, 1996], [Rabinowicz & Ronnow-Rasmussen, 1999]) As we shall see, why such a conflation is misguided comes out particularly clearly when we focus on the love of an individual.

The Valuing in Love: Irreplaceability & Unique Value

An account of love which requires caring for the loved thing for its own sake can be broad enough to encompass love of people, animals, places, objects, and even abstract ideas. When the object of love is a concrete, physically instantiated particular (such as a human being) such an account seems to necessitate a further commitment to acknowledging the *irreplaceability* of the beloved. For

whatever else it might also involve, valuing an *individual* “for its own sake” seems to presuppose a recognition that no substitute will do: the beloved is not so valued if she is regarded as fungible. After all, a willingness to accept a substitute suggests that what is valued was not that particular individual after all, but some cluster of qualities the individual happens to manifest. And if it turns out that what one is valuing is an abstract collection of qualities rather than a concrete individual, it is difficult to see how one could plausibly be said to value the beloved for *his* own sake. (This is not to say one could not value an abstract collection of qualities for *their* own sake, but this is a rather different sort of love.)

These thoughts, that love involves final value and that the love of individuals is characterized by the irreplaceability of the beloved, are sometimes conjoined with the idea that love is based on a recognition of the **intrinsic value** of the beloved, but as I hinted at earlier, caution is in order. On many understandings of what it is for something to be an intrinsic property, such properties are the sort of thing that could, in theory, be present in an “exact duplicate”. In other words, an exact duplicate of the painting *Mona Lisa* would be one that contains all the same intrinsic properties and thus all the same qualitative features. If this understanding of intrinsic properties is correct, it becomes very hard to see how intrinsic value (understood as value deriving from intrinsic properties) could ground the irreplaceability and final value of the objects of love. Substitutes with exactly similar intrinsic value are theoretically possible; it would seem that a love based on such value should then extend to them. Indeed, if *a* is valuable because of intrinsic features, then for every other object *x* that is exactly similar to *a* as regards to its intrinsic features, *x* too will be valuable. However, many find the possibility of the replacement of one's beloved with a perfect doppelgänger repugnant. They viscerally balk at the idea that the beloved is replaceable. It seems entirely legitimate (and perhaps even ethically mandatory) to resist substitution when the object in question is an object that is loved.

Accordingly, such love involves an attachment to the beloved that must be understood at least in part by reference to *extrinsic* qualities. Hence, equating love with an appreciation of intrinsic value, though initially tempting, is surprisingly backwards. In particular, the *origin* and the *history* of the beloved seem relevant to understanding how we take that particular individual to be irreplaceable. This is not to say the beloved is irreplaceable *because* of her history (in the manner of an irreplaceable historical artifact like the Liberty Bell). It would be more accurate to say that her history matters because *she* (as an individual) matters, and her history and origin are what differentiate her from even

qualitatively identical duplicates. Another way of putting this point: a love that is genuine is a love that cannot but involve recognition of the importance of the particular *identity* of the beloved. (By “identity” here what is meant is not “personality” or cultural identity, but rather the concept of (numerical) personal identity, that which marks out an individual as a singularity in the world.) In this way we can see that considerations of the value involved in loving cannot be easily separated from traditional metaphysical debates which might at first have seemed to be rather remote.

The mode of valuing in which the beloved is acknowledged as irreplaceable has been characterized as involving *unique value* -- unique not in the sense that the individual valued is necessarily one-of-a-kind, but in the sense that the value attributed to the individual is one-of-a-kind in not being transferable to another, even an exactly similar other. [Gowans 1996] [Grau 2006] Such valuing is viewed by some to be deeply problematic. That love can involve a willingness to value something as irreplaceable is taken as evidence that perhaps love is fundamentally irrational. This is because reasons, by their nature, generalize beyond the individual case, and any reason I give to justify love of one seems capable of (at least in theory) applying to another if the other is relevantly similar (see in this regard [Grau 2010] and [Smuts 2014]). Rational or not, love does often seem to characteristically involve a natural tendency to attribute unique value to the beloved.

The Value of Love

The focus thus far has been on the sort of valuing involved in loving, but what of the value of love itself? Some have attempted to justify love’s value in terms of happiness and self-interest. It is obvious enough that love can bring pleasure and joy, but there are also other benefits. For example, love can often provide one with valuable epistemic insights thanks to the capacity of the beloved to serve as a “mirror” and allow for self-knowledge which can lead to self-improvement [Helm 2013]. Such observations, while sensible enough so far as they go, get disturbing when pushed too far. To account for the value of love simply in terms of self-interest seems, in the end, both inaccurate and offensive. After all, love causes many of us as much or more pain as pleasure, and the supposed epistemic advantages of love seem at best a fringe benefit rather than a primary grounding. More fundamentally, there is something disturbingly narcissistic in seeking out a justification of love primarily in terms of personal gain. Of course, justifying the value of love in terms of its moral benefits is also fraught, as love famously manages to serve simultaneously as an incentive to noble

deeds and a spur to the worst sorts of unfairness and inequity. If a justification of the value of love is necessary, we need to look elsewhere beyond happiness, self-interest, or morality. One compelling suggestion is that the value of love can be understood in large part through its ability to provide *meaning* [Wolf, 2010] [Frankfurt, 2004]. Though many philosophers talk as though the realms of self-interest and morality exhaust the source of reasons, it is clear enough upon reflection that humans value not just the pleasurable and the moral but the meaningful. Love is a primary source of what Bernard Williams called “projects” and what Wolf more casually refers to as “reasons to get out of bed in the morning.” In coming to the aid of a friend I love it is implausible to claim that I am necessarily motivated by either self-interest or morality. Though perhaps either sort of consideration could play a motivational role in *some* such situations, in many others it would be better to say that I am simply motivated by my *love*, and in turn this seems paradigmatic of a *meaningful* event in my life. In this way we can see that a primary justification for the value of love is in love’s capacity to provide us with one important source of value: “reasons of love” which we might meaningfully pursue.

Conclusion

This brief investigation into the value of love and the type of valuing involved in loving has resulted in two tentative conclusions. First, if love can correctly be characterized in terms of a form of care that brings with it valuing the beloved for her own sake, then it seems to follow that love of particular individuals involves irreplaceability, a phenomenon captured in describing the relevant value as “unique”. Second, in seeking an adequate justification of the great value love has for us, a focus on either happiness or morality seems misguided; instead we are better off recognizing the crucial role love plays in providing meaning in our lives.

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