Last pre-print draft. Please quote original version from:

Lopez-Cantero, P. (2022). Falling in Love. In A. Grahle, N. McKeever and J. Saunders (eds.), *Philosophy of Love in the Past, Present and Future.* London: Routledge

7 Falling in Love

Pilar Lopez-Cantero

Most philosophers would agree that loving one's romantic partner (i.e., being in love) is, in principle, a good thing. That is, romantic love can be valuable. It seems plausible that most would then think that the process leading to being in love—i.e., falling in love—can be valuable too. Surprisingly, that is not the case: among philosophers, falling in love has a bad reputation. Whereas philosophy of love has started to depart from traditional (and often unwarranted or false) tropes surrounding romantic life, this tendency has not yet reached the analysis of falling in love. The phenomenon continues to be looked at mostly through a compendium of generalisations taken as metaphysical truths—the view of falling in love being akin to 'losing one's mind' or 'not being able to think about anything else'.

Here, I analyse some of these generalisations to show that although they may reflect some experiences of what falling in love feels like, they wrongly reduce falling in love to two related, but distinct, phenomena: limerence and infatuation. My aim is to refine the current terminology to lay the foundations for a *neutral view* of falling in love.

1. The Negative View

Poems, novels and films about love sometimes give descriptions of the process of love itself. Take, for example, the following passage in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*:

> Love is a temporary madness, it erupts like volcanoes, and then it subsides. And when it subsides, you have to make a decision. You have to work out whether your roots are to become so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part. Because this is what love is. Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the promulgation of promises of eternal passion, it is not the desire to mate every second of the day, it is not lying awake at night imagining that he is kissing every cranny of your body. No, don't blush, I am telling you some truths. That is just being 'in love';

> which any fool can do. Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away, and this is both an art and a fortunate accident.
>
> (De Bernières 1995, p.285)

De Bernières offers here a well-known literary trope. The idea is that true, valuable love is precluded by a period of time where we are temporarily 'mad'; a period of irrationality that results in something (more) valuable once it goes away. The literary trope is often reproduced in philosophical analyses of love, too.

José Ortega y Gasset (1939 [1957]) identifies the "madness" initial period of love as 'falling in love'. Ortega is, in fact, one of the few philosophers who gives an in-depth, extensive analysis specifically on falling in love as a phenomenon. He sees falling in love as a "frantic zone" (Ortega, 1939 [1957], p.77) and "an inferior state of mind, a form of transitory imbecility" (Ortega, 1939 [1957], p.51). Ortega explicitly distinguishes falling in love from love: he explains that falling in love is "a single phase of the great amorous process" (Ortega, 1939 [1957], p.77), and warns that *love* is not to be understood as synonymous with *falling in love*—"Let us not confuse … the part with the whole" (Ortega, 1939 [1957], p.77). Why launch this warning? Because very much like we saw in the *Corelli* passage, Ortega thinks that falling in love compromises our rational and/or epistemic abilities: "'Falling in love", initially, is no more than … attention *abnormally* fastened upon another person" (Ortega, 1939 [1957], p.48). These ideas, which coincide largely with the literary trope, are accepted truths that have carried through to contemporary philosophy of love.

For example, David Velleman describes love as a way to appraise the other's incomparable value (1998, p.365). It is, then, a good thing (in fact Velleman even believes love has a role in morality). This appraisal of value, however, does not happen in "blind, romantic love" (Velleman, 1998, p.351). For Velleman, when we are in this state "we bring to bear on him [the beloved] our infantile needs and all of our imaginative resources for casting him as a source of our satisfaction" (Velleman, 1998, p.351). We do this through "overvaluation and transference" which needs to be "outgrown" (Velleman, 1998, p.351). It would be quite uncharitable to read Velleman as stating that love for a romantic partner is not valuable. What is not valuable is the initial stage that he defines in those terms. Although Velleman calls it 'romantic love', we can consider him to be referring to the initial phase of romantic love, which for Ortega was 'falling in love'. The inconsistent use of love-related terminology is common to most accounts I discuss in this section, and it is something I come back to in §4.

The problem with the initial stages of love that Velleman points at is explained in more detail in Christian Maurer's (2014) analysis of love at first sight, which is, I believe, also understandable as an analysis of falling in love with a stranger.[1] According to Maurer, falling in love in this situation is a process characterized by high emotional intensity and vulnerability (2014, p.165), as well as a lack of a shared history and scarcity of information about who the other person is. Like Velleman, Maurer points out that falling in love requires a great deal of imagination and projection (Maurer, 2014, p.175) and is thus not grounded on true concern for the other—it is "rooted in the intensity of the emotional experience and has little or nothing to do with caring about the well-being of the other, or with intimacy" (Maurer, 2014, p.169).[2] Maurer also points at a second related, but different, feature of falling in love:

> Other persons are seen as less attractive, or are not seen at all. This state may be diagnosed as a form of epistemic 'blindness', as an *inappropriate* and extremely selective perception of only some attractive features at the cost of not seeing potentially unattractive features in the object or as a form of emotional 'silencing' of other potentially attractive objects.
>
> (Maurer, 2014, p.166; emphasis mine)

Here is the second of philosophers' worries about falling in love: that when we are falling in love with someone, they are not perceived impartially, i.e. their beauty is exaggerated, their flaws are minimised, excused or not even apprehended. The novelist Stendhal called this "crystallization". Crystallization is a focus on the positive properties of the loved person simultaneous to a lack of attention to or apprehension of their negative properties (1822 [1975], pp. 45–46). In other words, seeing only the good in the person one is falling in love with. This is another worry for philosophers, who have sometimes argued that such partiality towards the object of love is not rationally justified—and love on these grounds is morally and/or epistemically suspicious. The worry is that such partiality may lead people to abandon their moral principles when they are going through this phase (Sie, 2018, p.41); or that, like Maurer

---

[1] While 'falling in love' is usually understood as the initial stage of love, 'love at first sight' is usually understood as love with a distinctive origin. Maurer calls the latter "LAFS" (in quotation marks), which he distinguishes from his object of analysis, *LAFS* (in italics). For Maurer, *LAFS* is a process of high emotional intensity and focused attention (2014, p.165), which belongs to a cluster of concepts on the emergence of love, such as "falling in love" (2014, p.160) and is sometimes mistaken for infatuation (2014, p.163). I think it is then warranted to bring in his claim into the analysis of falling in love with a stranger.

[2] 'Intimacy' is used here devoid of sexual and/or physical connotations. In philosophy of love, 'intimacy' can be loosely understood as deep concern for the loved person which resembles the concern one has for oneself (for example, see Helm 2010).

points out, our epistemic abilities get compromised (i.e. we do not see the facts of the world, or certain facts are wrongly apprehended).

The third worry is also related to the effect that falling in love has on our epistemic abilities. Ortega specifically says that falling in love is "a phenomenon of attention" (1939 [1957], p.60). In his description of a woman falling in love, Ortega highlights not only that her attention "will gravitate by its own weight towards that man" but that " it will require a great effort on her part to tear her attention away from that direction for one moment and *orient it towards life's obligations*" (Ortega, 1939 [1957], pp. 48–49; emphasis mine). This conception of falling in love as an all-encompassing grasp on attention is also supported by Robert Nozick (1989). For Nozick, "romantic love" is the desire to form a 'we' with another: a pooling of autonomy and well-being (1989, p.419). Romantic love is preceded by an "intense" phase that he describes in the following way:

> Being 'in love', infatuation, is an intense state that displays familiar features: almost always thinking of the person; wanting constantly to touch and to be together; excitement in the other's presence; losing sleep; expressing one's feeling through poetry, gifts, or still other ways to delight the beloved; gazing deeply into each other's eyes; candlelit dinners; feeling that short separations are long; smiling foolishly when remembering actions and remarks of the other; feeling that the other's minor foibles are delightful; and … finding *everyone* charming and nice, and thinking they all must sense one's happiness. Other concerns and responsibilities become minor background details in the story of the romance, which becomes the predominant foreground event in life.
>
> (Nozick 1989, pp. 417–418, emphasis in original)

Nozick still offers what I consider at least partly a negative view of falling in love in similar terms as Ortega's. For Ortega, falling in love is clearly distinct from love proper, which is "a wider and deeper operation, more seriously human, but less violent" (Ortega, 1939 [1957], p.77). However, the focused attention of falling in love is necessary for arriving at love proper (Ortega, 1939 [1957], p.59). Falling in love is then not disvaluable, but valuable instrumentally. For Nozick, second-stage love, which he calls 'romantic love', is valuable: "Seeing the other happy with us and made happy through our love, we become happy with ourselves" (1989, p.421). Nozick does not discuss the value of first-stage love: it either results in the desire to form a 'we', or it disappears (1989, p.418). Again, first-stage love is valued instrumentally.

Although this is not technically a worry, it is a potential reason for overcoming falling in love—since only then we arrive at valuable love or 'love proper'.

From all this, we can extract what I call the *negative view* of falling in love. This is the view that falling in love is a phase which has to be overcome in order to arrive at valuable love, due to one or several of the following reasons: a) when we are falling in love, we do not see the object of love for who they really are; b) falling in love is irrationally partial; and c) falling in love diverts us excessively from the world.

2. Deflating the Worries

There are plenty of reasons to believe that these worries have been exaggerated, since there are many cases where the experience of falling in love does not correspond with the picture painted by the negative view. Let us start with the first worry, i.e. the worry that due to the lack of shared history and high intensity of emotion, falling in love does not consist of real concern for the other.

The first worry is that when falling in love, one is not really apprehending who the other person really is. One is mostly imagining or projecting the other person's characteristics, so one's concern for the other is not the genuine concern of love proper. Troy Jollimore calls this approach "the imagined qualities view" (2011, p.7). Velleman's stance on falling in love, which is partly aired by Maurer, follows from the adherence to a common philosophical approach to love: the view that love is grounded on characteristics of the loved person. These are not just any shallow, changeable characteristics like hair colour or favourite ice cream flavour, but the characteristics that make the person who she really is. These characteristics are the *reasons for loving* that person. This commonly accepted feature has been extensively debated by philosophers of love, and has as many adherents (Delaney, 1996; Kolodny, 2003; Naar, 2019; Protasi, 2016) as it has critics (Frankfurt, 2004; Thomas, 1991; Zangwill, 2013). It is not necessary to deviate towards that discussion or take a stance on the reasons of love here: it is enough here to acknowledge that the characteristics of the loved person *matter* for love. Without having to go as far as saying that love is necessarily grounded in the loved person's true nature, it can be acknowledged that if my partner says they love me for being a forest-loving socialist when I am actually an urban alt-right rioter, there is something suspicious about that love. So, indeed, it may be a worry if falling in love universally implies a lack of knowledge about the characteristics of the object of love.

However, as Jollimore points out, this is a rather infrequent occurrence. In most cases of love there is at least some accuracy about the other person's characteristics, and cases where *all*

characteristics are imagined—or are fundamentally misguided—are unusual (2011, p.7). This could be the case if one is falling in love with a complete stranger—that is, indeed, Maurer's claim. But many people do not fall in love with complete strangers.

For example, romantic love can stem from friendship (Maurer, 2014, p.172). Think of the main characters of the film *When Harry Met Sally*. Sally and Harry do not even like each other that much when they meet. Over time, they end up developing a deep friendship; by the end of the film, they are in love with each other. But they already knew a lot about each other before falling in love—arguably, they knew each other better than their respective romantic partners did. Another relevant example are people who start a partnership—share their lives, their resources, even start a family—without being in love. This is the case of some arranged marriages, or unexpected pregnancies where people did not know each other very well before entering a partnership. Some people who are in these situations end up falling in love once they know each other well and have a significant shared history. Finally, many people start falling in love after dating for a while, i.e. meeting up and sharing time with each other and thus acquiring knowledge about each other. Harry and Sally, people in arranged or unexpected relationships have a significant shared history, and even people who date and in general anyone who does not fall in love at first sight (if that is at all possible) may know each other fairly well and may have genuine concern for each other *before* falling in love. In those cases, concern can genuinely be based on real characteristics of the other person and need not be imagined or projected. These examples show that the negative view overlooks a wide array of cases where it is just not the case that concern is not grounded on the loved person's characteristics.

The second and third worries are about the effect that falling in love has on our rational and epistemic abilities: firstly that falling in love is partial, and secondly that it grasps too much of our attention. Jollimore offers a plausible answer to these. Instead of seeing these as worries, or hindrances to the value of love proper, Jollimore sees partiality and grasp of attention as defining features of love proper.[3] Let us start with partiality, that is, the fact that we tend to see the good and not the bad in the people we love (which is arguably accentuated in the initial stages of love). For Jollimore, loving someone requires a certain amount of blindness to their negative characteristics or to the positive characteristics of other people (2011, p.45). This "epistemic partiality" is not to be seen in the way that it is usually portrayed: it is not a matter of "simply deciding that the beloved is valuable, and then treating him as such regardless of

[3] The idea of love as vision is extensively discussed by Iris Murdoch (1971), from whom Jollimore draws often. See also Wolf (2015) for a discussion of Murdoch's loving attention.

one's reasons for doing so, and in particular regardless of any particular fact about him" (Jollimore, 2011, p.68). It is, instead "a matter of looking for value … the lover is specially determined to *find* value in the beloved and to appreciate the values that are there" (Jollimore, 2011, p.68; emphasis in original).

Put in these terms, partiality is not as worrying as the negative view shows. Loving someone *is* seeing them partially, but this partiality does not require complete obliviousness to facts. This is a feature not only of romantic love, but of friendship too (Jollimore, 2011, p.8). One may be more understanding with a friend's flaws, but that does not mean that if a friend does something that is clearly wrong, we will not be able to see the facts of what they have done. If partiality is a feature of love, like Jollimore suggests, and it is not a bad thing that we see loved persons in a kind light, there is no reason to believe that this is a bad thing when we are falling in love with someone.

Now let us turn to the third worry, which is also epistemic: the worry that by putting the lover at the centre of attention, we become blind to the rest of the world. For Jollimore, love is a way of seeing the world (2011, p.4). In this new perspective, things that are related to the object of love become more salient:

> Love is largely a matter of paying close attention to a person, and paying attention to one element of the world always involves a comparative lack of attention with respect to other elements; focusing on one object means that other objects are *not* in focus. Just as a person in a loud party must make himself deaf to the many conversations that are going on in order to hear a single voice, a lover, in focusing his attention on his beloved, must turn away from a great deal else that is going on in the world.
>
> (Jollimore, 2011, pp.29–30)

Again, focusing on something is not the same as *not seeing anything else*. Jollimore—like Maurer—puts epistemic partiality in terms of "silencing" features of the world that are unrelated to the loved person, but this is not to be understood as these features becoming completely invisible. I think that it is instead better to conceive of this grasp of attention as a lens that colours the world in a certain way, where the loved person and the things related are seen in a brighter shade, to continue with the metaphor. The rest of the world may be a bit faded or less colourful, but it is still perceived.

Jollimore, then, not only is not worried about love's partiality and grasp of attention, but argues that that is precisely what love is. There is no reason to believe that if partiality and focalized

attention are not *flaws* but *defining features* of love, that this is not the case from the beginning. It is true that in the first stages of love, one's focus on the loved person may be at its peak, and features of the world other than the loved person may become less blurry with time. However, the dangers of this heightened attention have been greatly exaggerated by the negative view. The picture of a person sat down formulating constant thoughts about how charming, intelligent and pretty someone else is, picturing sequences of the object of love skipping through wheat fields to the point of leaving the rest of their life unattended, cannot be anything but a caricature. Contrary to Nozick's and Ortega's remarks, people fall in love while maintaining their focus on other preoccupations like work, childcare, activism, or disability (or several of those at the same time). For these people, even if their focus is heightened in the beginning of love, falling in love does not detract from living their lives. Focus of attention is not, by itself, a good reason for claiming that falling in love needs to be overcome in order to arrive at love proper.

The worries of impartiality and focus of attention, then, are not good reasons in favour of the negative view. If love is seeing the other kindly and being focused on them, it seems very odd to say that this grasp of attention is disvaluable when it happens at the beginning of love. So far I have shown that the negative view exaggerates these three worries, but this is not the only problem with the approach. The negative view completely ignores the positive effects that the same issues they identify can have on the person falling in love. To begin with the partiality worry, it can be a really nice experience to have someone in your life whom you experience as being the bee's knees, even if you are not completely justified in thinking it. Susan Wolf puts it in the following terms:

> Falling in love tends to involve finding the person delightful, as well as admiring them, seeing them as good. And so the chance to be with them, even time spent thinking about them, is a source of intense pleasure. A further, often equally intense, pleasure comes from the perception that the person you love loves you back—"he chose me!"—can be, among other things, an incredibly strong compliment and an enormous boost to one's self-esteem.

(Wolf, 2015, p.185)

The same can be said about the grasp of attention, even in some cases where it is truly all-encompassing and leaves no space for anything else. For example, falling in love can be a source of inspiration: artists inspired by muses, who capture their whole attention for extended periods of time—like Susie Gilbert for Emily Dickinson, or Gala for Salvador Dalí. This is not

only valuable because it will feel good for them or because of the resulting aesthetic value that we all enjoy. For these people, falling in love actually motivates them to invest themselves in their work (which, let us remember, is something that according to the negative view falling in love prevents us from doing). Also, falling in love during difficult times can immensely benefit people. Colouring of their attention may offer a needed distraction from otherwise grim facts of life, for example, during war or during illness. People in these situations undoubtedly still perceive the violence in the streets or the pain in their bodies, but falling in love may allow them to see *more than* the violence or the pain, precisely because their attention is focused on the object of love. The following testimony is from Nayyef Hrebid, a US Army interpreter who fell in love with his partner (at the time a soldier) during the Iraq war:

> I was based in Ramadi, which was the worst place at that time. We would go out on patrols and people would be killed by IEDs [roadside bombs] and snipers. I was asking myself: "Why am I here? Why am I doing this?'… One day I was sitting outside and this guy came out of the shower block. I saw his hair was shiny and very black and he was smiling. I just thought, "Oh my god, this guy is really cute". I felt like something beautiful had happened in this very bad place.
>
> (Bates, 2017, n.p.)

This side of falling in love as something that gives hope in dire times is also ignored by the negative view. It is not a matter of merely being "something beautiful in a very bad place", but it can genuinely act as motivation to overcome adversity and as something to 'cling onto' while trying to make it to the other side. There are countless stories in this sense among people fleeing and living during conflicts, such as the Syrian displacement or the Balkan wars.

In summary, all these examples show that there are reasons to believe that the worries of the negative view are misguided. The first worry—projection—seems uncommon; the second and third worries—partiality and abnormal grasp of attention—are exaggerated and are actually features of love proper; and in any case these can be a source of happiness, even if temporary. So it does not seem, so far, that it is fair to claim that the phase of falling in love has to be overcome in order to arrive at love proper.

3. The Truth of the Negative View

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the negative view does pick up some cases of falling in love. Indeed, the negative view is not completely misguided with regards to the problems of

imagined qualities, partiality and focused attention, which are indeed worrying in some cases of falling in love.

Firstly, the imagined qualities view does apply to some cases. Some people do claim to have fallen in love with someone about whom they knew little; even with someone with whom they did not even share a language to communicate. I am not going to try to discern here whether those are cases of falling in love at first sight or something else—that is a question for another time. The relevant fact here is that in cases with such a high degree of projection we can object that concern is not genuinely focused on the other person, and that this is thus not love proper—or at least it is defective in an important way. One famous example is that of Dante and Beatrice. Dante Alighieri (the author, not the character) met Beatrice Portieri when he was nine, and 'fell' for her then. Although in his work he develops a great love story between him and Beatrice, which we are led to believe was a reflection of his actual feelings for her, Dante only saw the real Beatrice twice during his life (the second time, she greeted him and he basically ran away). Dante's love was not really grounded on Beatrice's characteristics: he did not know her. The qualities she had in his imagination were not the qualities of the real Beatrice (and if they were, it would have been by chance). In this case, the worry of the negative view regarding imagined qualities is justified.[4] This worry is even more acute if we move from Dante's probably inoffensive unrequited love to cases of stalking of celebrities by fans, where actual damage (threats, house invasion or physical violence) is done to the object of supposed love.

Secondly, there are cases of people who blatantly ignore negative facts about the object of love, in which the worry of partiality is founded. Elizabeth Kendall, who was the partner of serial killer Ted Bundy, initially believed him innocent when he was first accused of kidnap. Although Kendall would go on to collaborate with the police, she found facts about her former lover hard to believe even after finding out the extent of Bundy's crimes. In a recent interview, Kendall regrets the not completely critical portrayal of Bundy she wrote in her memoir years after his arrest and trial:

> I still viewed him as the Ted that I thought I knew, because I just couldn't wrap my head around what they were saying he had done. And so many years later, after much

[4] Stalking cannot be reduced to obsessive unrequited love where the stalker has a completely fictional view of the victim (i.e., an imagined qualities issue). In fact, a commonly used taxonomy of stalkers distinguishes, for example, a desire for revenge after rejection, or "predatory" stalking where the stalker takes pleasure in their sense of power over the victim (Mullen et al., 1999, pp.1246–1247). This example only applies then to what is known as "intimacy seeking stalking", which is aimed at establishing a relationship and usually features the erotomania of the kind of stalker I have in mind (Mullen et al., 1999, p.1246).

> counseling [sic], praying, and growing, I've accepted that he is who he was accused of being. He's a violent, rageful sexual deviant. I just could not wrap my head around that in the beginning.

(Miller, 2020, n.p.)

Thirdly, the grasp that love inflicts on attention can be really detrimental for some people who are in imbalanced relationships. The negative effect that love can have in women's autonomy has in fact been one of the focuses of the critique of love by feminist thinkers (De Beauvoir, 1949 [1956]; Friedman, 2003; hooks, 2000; Illouz, 2012). This can include an imbalance on attention, where the person falling in love silences everything that is salient for her in the world (her career, her friendships, her aims) in favour of the object of love. If we look at the negative view, this is exactly what it warns us against. In §1 we saw that one of the worries about falling in love is that people become almost unable to concentrate on everyday tasks. If we incorporate the feminist critique, then falling in love can be clearly disvaluable in this sense. Heterosexual women are not only often expected to focus on their male partners' interests (their career, their hobbies, and so on). They can themselves experience (falling) in love as an effective silencer of their own interests, and a partial focus on their partner's interests as counting more, or being more interesting, than their own. They can even see the absence of such a grasp of attention as an absence, or a deterioration, of their own love. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949 [1956]) notices, the demand for attention which has traditionally shaped women's experiences of love in Western cultures is not only oppressive to herself but can also be "tyrannically" damaging for her male partner:

> [A]s soon as he looks at something other than her, he frustrates her; everything he sees, he steals from her; far from him, she is dispossessed both of herself and of the world; even seated at her side, reading, writing, he abandons her, he betrays her.

(De Beauvoir, 1949 [1956], p.621)

Again, if these are valid worries about love, there is no reason to believe that they are not worries about falling in love, particularly if we accept that projection, partiality and attention may be accentuated at the initial stages of love. There are two more reasons to support the main claim of the negative view—i.e. that falling in love is something to be overcome—which are not explicitly identified as such by its proponents. The first one is that for some people going through the experience of falling in love can be a source of emotional suffering. This is the case for people with anxious attachment styles, for whom the uncertainty of whether the person

they are falling in love with is reciprocating can be a source of negative emotions and leave them unable to concentrate on other life tasks (Stanton and Campbell, 2014). Falling in love can also be a source of suffering for people who are already in an exclusive relationship with someone else where monogamy is expected. Finally, queer experiences of falling in love can be destabilizing, particularly if the person lives in a place where non-heterosexuality is legally or socially prohibited, or if they themselves have not accepted or acknowledged their queerness. Ami Harbin cites coming out as a type of *disorientation*: "temporally extended, major life experiences that make it difficult for individuals to know how to go on" (2016, p.2). While it can be exciting to discover one's queer desires, it can at the same time cause fear, for example of losing relationships with loved ones or work opportunities, as well as exposure to damage such as homelessness and homophobic violence (Harbin, 2016, pp.110–111). These cases offer support to the claim of falling in love being something that it may be best to overcome.[5]

Another reason to not completely dismiss the negative view is that it does have some explanatory power over the experience of falling in love. As I explained at the beginning, the negative view largely reproduces a literary trope of falling in love as "temporary madness", to put it in De Bernières' words. But this trope is not only present in literature: it is part of many people's expectations about the experience of falling in love. In fact, Jollimore warns that there is a Western ideal of "mind-filling, quasi-obsessive love" which directly influences people's experiences of love, especially at the initial stages (2011, p.42). This ideal is so prevalent that people have the expectation of being in a state of high emotional intensity and all-encompassing attention all the time while they are in a romantic relationship, to the point of *pretending* that they in fact cannot see positive characteristics in anybody else (Jollimore 2011, p.42).

We are then in the situation where the negative view neglects a large number of experiences, while at the same time picking up on some of them. The issue, then, is not that the negative view is false, but that it is *incomplete.* I believe this incompleteness arises from the terminological confusion I briefly pointed at in §1, and that clarifying this confusion will clear the way towards a *neutral* view that can accommodate the whole range of experiences of falling in love I have presented so far.

---

[5] It should be noted that Harbin does not believe that disorientation is by itself bad, and that it can transform our moral experiences for the best. I agree with this. It should be noted however that Harbin does not think that disorientation is always good either, and it is in these cases when I believe disorientation may be a reason to believe the initial stage of love needs to be overcome (although there may be other defeating reasons in support of the opposite).

4. An Important Distinction

Jollimore uses the term "infatuation" when referring to the Western ideal of high emotional intensity and all-encompassing attention characteristic of the initial stages of love (2011, p.42). Above, we saw that Nozick also uses "infatuation'—which he considers synonymous with 'being in love'—for first-stage love. For Velleman, it is 'romantic love' that refers to an initial phase that needs to be overgrown; this phase has also been referred to as 'limerence' (Sie, 2018; de Sousa, 2015). But all these terms are not synonymous. I think that the main problem for the negative view is not that its claims are *never true*, but that the cases or the features of experience they pick up pertain to a subset of phenomena that can be part of, but are not analogous to, falling in love. To discern what falling in love is, then, a more precise terminology is needed.

We can start by setting apart 'romantic love' as a specific way of expressing or experiencing love—what usually has been called a 'type' of love. Also, let us consider 'being in love', what in the context of this paper I have been calling 'love proper' in the romantic form. Hence, we already have two terms which are *not* synonyms with falling in love, and should not be used as such:

i) romantic love: a specific way of expressing or experiencing love.
ii) being in love: a state of loving a particular individual romantically.

Next, the term 'limerence' was coined by psychologist Dorothy Tennov for a state consisting in focused attention, overvaluation and dependence which is very similar to how the negative view portrays falling in love. Limerence, according to Tennov, has certain "basic components" which include intrusive thinking about the limerent object; acute longing for reciprocation; mood dependency on the limerent object's actions; exclusivity; fear of rejection; buoyancy or "a feeling of walking on air" and intense emotional phenomenology, among others (Tennov, 1979, pp.23–24). Although projection and favourable perception are definitely features of limerence (Tennov, 1979, pp. 29–33), most of Tennov's attention is put on high emotional intensity and focus of attention: "limerence is first and foremost a condition of cognitive obsession" (1979, p.33).

Tennov put together her study of limerence drawing from hundreds of first-person testimonies on experiences of love. From her research, Tennov concluded that limerence lasts between 18 months and three years (1979, pp.97–98), after which it can transform into "genuine love or affectionate bonding" (1979, p.99). Hence, limerence occurs in the initial stages of love, which is the period commonly referred to as 'falling in love'. "Affectionate bonding", which she uses as synonymous with 'being in love', consists in the sharing of personal experiences and mutual

compatibility without the intrusive thinking and the obsession characteristic of limerence (1979, p.130). Tennov says that affectionate bonding represents the ideal of "loving in the 'true sense' of the term" (1979, p.130). This then coincides with the general approach of the negative view, where falling in love is a phase of intense phenomenology and focused attention that needs to be overcome in order to arrive at valuable love or love proper.

However, Tennov did not find in her research that limerence was a universal experience. In that sense, her analysis departs from the negative view, which made a universal claim about falling in love described in very similar terms to limerence. According to Tennov, some instances of love proper begin with limerence and others do not (1979, pp.130–131). She identified a group of people, the "non-limerent", who can experience sexual attraction, friendship and affection "without the compulsive and intrusive fantasizing or the exclusivity" that characterizes limerence (Tennov, 1979, p.114). This does not mean that non-limerents necessarily fall in love dispassionately. The subjects interviewed by Tennov who identify as non-limerents report similar focused attention on new lovers as limerent ones. The focused attention of non-limerents, however, is more like "like the kind of interest a person may have for a new hobby or possession rather than like true limerent obsession", and it is mostly pleasurable (Tennov, 1979, p.115). What non-limerents are lacking is not emotional intensity or focus of attention, but just the obsessive component that for Tennov comes with limerence.

Tennov's identification of non-limerents corresponds with one of the criticisms I made of the negative view, namely that not all people who fall in love see their attention grasped in a way that does not allow them to concentrate on everyday chores. Now we can plausibly call those people *non-limerents*. The introduction of this discussion allows us to see falling in love as something that *can* be exactly like what the negative view described, but that it can also lack all the elements of the negative view. The portrayal that Nozick and Ortega make of the beginning of love is not false—it is an accurate description of a limerent person falling in love—but it is also not universal—it does not explain the experience of non-limerents. Hence, the first flaw of the negative view is that it reduces falling in love to limerence, when limerence is actually a non-necessary element of falling in love.

The second flaw of the negative view is that limerence is seen as detrimental. I already gave some examples where high emotional intensity, partiality and focused attention can be beneficial. Tennov also observes good effects of limerence in some people in terms of self-improvement, both physical (1979, pp. 123–125) and psychological (1979, pp. 127–128). She also shows that limerence is not something that is necessarily "overcome", but that it can

gradually transform into love proper while still sharing some of the features of limerence. One of her interviewees says the following about her husband of 15 years:

> We were completely in love when we married and, the honeymoon was something out of a storybook. The intensity faded of course. After a year or so, we could tolerate brief separations, but Frank still phones me every day from the office just to see how I am, and I would still rather be with him than anyone else in the world. If I don't love him exactly the way I did those first few months and years, I don't love him any less. The love is different and still intense.

(Tennov, 1979, p.145)

This gradual transformation, where limerence is not 'left behind' but is the actual basis for what later becomes love proper, is not acknowledged by the negative view. So cases of falling in love with limerence need not be worrying either, and thus the fact that a person is limerent is not a good enough reason for claiming that this is a phase that has to be overcome.

I think that it would be best to reserve the term 'infatuation' for cases where it is clearer, for one reason or another, that the focus of attention, the excessive partiality or excessive projection needs to be overcome. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines infatuation as "possession with extravagant folly; an extravagantly foolish or *unreasoning* passion" ("Infatuation", 2020, n.p.; emphasis mine). Ronald de Sousa (2016) also distinguishes "mere infatuation" from love proper on the basis of a deficiency of reason: "the right reasons [for love] must be ones that are not merely superficial, ephemeral, or, above all, merely projective, unconnected with the essential properties of the beloved" (2016, p.147). This reminds us of the imagined qualities view, where falling in love entailed mainly projection and did not apprehend the characteristics of the object of love.

Tennov makes a distinction between limerence and infatuation following this line of thought. Among her study subjects, we find the example of a teenager, called Cynthia, who is in an unrequited limerent state towards musician Paul McCartney. Cynthia constantly fantasizes about McCartney, has a whole imagined life with him, and is in "a state of total absorption", mistakenly believing that the sheer strength of her feeling may attract McCartney (Tennov, 1979, p.85). This is a different situation from the imagined qualities view, but it shares the feature of infatuation as a profoundly *irrational* experience (since one does not have any reason to believe one will attract the object of love).

The examples I gave at the beginning of this section of the woman who cannot believe facts about her serial killer ex-partner or the person who gives all her attention to her partner's aims could also be understood broadly as *unreasonable* attitudes. Without having to delve much deeper into what count as appropriate reasons for attitudes and actions, there seems to be a common thread between these experiences which the negative view portrays accurately. For this reason, although it is possible to fall in love with infatuation, falling in love is not analogous to infatuation.

Given that one of the flaws of the negative view was that it exaggerated the extent of certain worries, it makes sense, I believe, to use the term 'infatuation' where the worry of unreasonableness is justified. We could probably also call these cases 'bad limerence', but given the widespread terminological confusion, it is best to separate all these terms from each other. On that basis we have our last terminological distinction:

i) limerence: a state of high emotional intensity, increased partiality and increased focused attention directed towards an individual.
ii) infatuation: an *unreasonable* state of high emotional intensity, increased partiality and increased focused attention directed towards an individual.

5. Towards a Neutral View

Now that I have made these terminological distinctions, it becomes apparent that the negative view is primarily focused on limerence and infatuation. Falling in love is synonymous with neither. We know now that falling in love can involve high emotional intensity and focalised attention, but that it does not have to (i.e. falling in love can be limerent or not limerent). We also know that the worry of falling in love being unreasonable is exaggerated, but that it can happen (there can be falling in love with infatuation).

I have already explained that falling in love cannot be reduced to either, given that these terms only capture a subset of experiences of falling in love, but that is not the only reason. Although Tennov gives limerence a determinate duration, and in many cases limerence and/or infatuation transform into being in love or they wear off, they can also exist independently. Tennov acknowledges the existence of "lifelong limerences" (1979, p.142). For example, people in unrequited limerence—like Dante—or people in toxic relationships who maintain their obsession for their partner for years. There are people who, unlike Elizabeth Kendall in the example above, never get to see the facts about the harmful things the object of their love has done. We may or may not want to call these cases of love, but they are definitely cases of long-lasting limerence or infatuation. Also, limerence and infatuation can also last for a short time and not evolve into affectionate bonding or love proper—what is popularly referred to as a

'crush'. Finally, in the same way that Jollimore believes that partiality and attention focus is as characteristic of romantic love as it is of friendship, I also think that one can be limerent or infatuated towards a friend.

With my study of the variety of experiences of falling in love and my proposed terminological distinction, I hope to have accomplished two things. The first one is to lay the foundations for a *neutral view* of falling in love, which abandons the claim that falling in love is something that needs to be overcome. It is best to define falling in love merely as the initial stages of romantic love. Sometimes it has to be overcome if it is damaging and/or unreasonable, but other times it can be left to gradually transform into something else or merely enjoyed. The second accomplishment is to have put into focus what is the actual underlying worry which the negative view gets right. The worry is not so much that falling in love is damaging, but that the social script—what Jollimore calls the Western ideal of infatuation—needs to be questioned. Tennov herself noted that people were desperate to feel limerence, and that even non-limerents tend to "romanticize the whole thing" (1979, p.81), that is, to report their experience of falling in love in the terms portrayed by Nozick—as walking on air and gazing at each other, rather than, for example, gradually developing respect and fondness for another. This is precisely what Carrie Jenkins (2016) found in scientific studies on love, where subjects are prompted by researchers to frame their experiences of love in a certain way, and themselves feel the need to "tell the right story" about their love to others. So far, philosophers have largely been guilty of re-enforcing these stereotypes in their analysis of falling in love: for that reason, they undoubtedly get some things right. Falling in love, however, is more diverse than the ideal, so this will hopefully be the first step towards a more objective view of the phenomenon.

References

Bates, C. (2017) Falling in Love in Wartime Iraq. *BBC World Service*. https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38506269. Accessed 29-01-2021.

De Beauvoir, S. (1949 [1956]) *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M. Parshley. London: Jonathan Cape.

De Bernières, L. (1995) *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*. London: Random House.

Delaney, N. (1996) Romantic Love and Loving Commitment: Articulating a Modern Ideal. *American Philosophical Quarterly 33* (*4*), pp. 339–356.

De Sousa, R. (2015) *Love: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

De Sousa, R. (2016) Love and Reasons. In *Art, Mind, and Narrative: Themes from the Work of Peter Goldie*, ed. J. Dodd, pp. 138–152. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Frankfurt, H. (2004) *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Friedman, M. (2003) *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harbin, A. (2016) *Disorientation and Moral Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Helm, B. (2010) *Love, Friendship, and the Self: Intimacy, Identification, and the Social Nature of Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

hooks, b. (2000) *All about Love: New Visions*. New York: Harper.

Illouz, E. (2012) *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

"Infatuation" OED Online, Oxford University Press, September 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/95253. Accessed 29-01-2021.

Jenkins, C. (2016) Knowing Our Own Hearts: Self-Reporting and the Science of Love. *Philosophical Issues*, *26*, pp. 226–242.

Jollimore, T. (2011) *Love's Vision*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kolodny, N. (2003) Love as Valuing a Relationship. *The Philosophical Review*, *112*, pp. 135–89.

Maurer, C. (2014) On "Love at First Sight". In *Love and Its Objects: What Can We Care For?*, eds. C. Maurer, T. Milligan and K. Pakovská. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Miller, L. (2020) Ted Bundy's Longtime Girlfriend Finally Speaks, and Finds (Some) Relief. *Vanity Fair* [online edition]. URL https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2020/01/ted-bundy-girlfriend-elizabeth-kendall-interview. Accessed 29-01-2021.

Mullen, P.E., Pathé, M., Purcell, R., and Stuart, G.W. (1999) Study of Stalkers. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *156*, pp. 1244–1249.

Murdoch, I. (1971) *The Sovereignty of Good*. London: Routledge.

Naar, H. (2021) The Possibility of Fitting Love: Irreplaceability and Selectivity. *Synthese 198*, pp. 985–1010.

Nozick, R. (1989) *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Ortega y Gasset, J. (1939 [1957]) *On Love: Aspects of a Single Theme*. New York: Meridian Books.

Protasi, S. (2016) Loving People for Who They Are (Even When They Don't Love You Back). *European Journal of Philosophy 24* (*1*), pp. 214–234.

Sie, M. (2018) All You Need Is Love(s): Exploring the Biological Platform of Morality. In *Neuroexistentialism: Meaning, Morals, and Purpose in the Age of Neuroscience*, eds. G. Caruso and O. Flanagan. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stanton, S.C.E., and Campbell, L. (2014) Can't Get You Off My Mind: Relationship Reflection Creates Cognitive Load for More Anxiously Attached Individuals. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 32* (*4*), pp. 441–455.

Tennov, D. (1979) *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love*. New York: Stein and Day.

Thomas, L. (1991) Reasons for Loving. In: R.C. Solomon, and K.M. Higgins (eds.), *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*. Lawrence: Kansas University Press.

Stendhal. (1822 [1975]) *Love*. London: Penguin.

Velleman, J.D. (1998) Love as a Moral Emotion. *Ethics 109* (*2*), pp. 338–374.

Wolf, S. (2015) *The Variety of Values: Essays on Morality, Meaning, and Love*. Oxford: OUP.

Zangwill, N. (2013) Love: Gloriously Amoral and Arational. *Philosophical Explorations 16* (*3*), pp. 298–314.