4 A Minimalist Account of Love

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Introduction

One roadblock to furthering discussions about the moral value of love is the conflation of two different concepts: love and loving relationships. When we construe all discussions about love as being about the value of loving relationships, we not only overlook the variety of ways that love plays a role in how we relate to others, but we thereby mischaracterize the nature of love. The most common victims of this conflation are those *personhood* accounts of love, which hold that we love others in virtue of their *humanity*, as opposed to their particular qualities or the relationship we happen to bear to them. Starting from our commonplace ideas about love, it can be easy to hold that David Velleman's view of love as "attentive suspension," triggered by the recognition of a person's rational will, is laughable (1999, 360). Similarly, when we consider Kieran Setiya's or Kyla Ebels-Duggan's view that love is a sort of "appreciation" of another's personhood, removed from their character traits, we may consider it to be simply false (Setiya 2014; Ebels-Duggan 2019; cf. Bagnoli 2003; Jollimore 2011, 15–18, 25–26).

In contrast, I argue that personhood views are largely right about the phenomenon of love, regardless of whether they accurately describe our commonsense idea of loving relationships. At first blush, this apparent disregard of commonsense may seem like a weakness of these accounts; still, a chief aim of discussions about love is to determine whether love has a *distinct* moral value, separate from the values of commitment, marriage, shared agency, etc. In order to settle these issues, we must then look past cases of loving relationships.

An additional worry about personhood views is that they tie love too closely to respect. We can respect those whom we do not love and can love those whom we do not respect.[1] While each personhood account treats the relationship between love and respect differently, they all consider these two attitudes to be deeply connected. This impulse seems correct to me.[2] Still, I am largely dissatisfied with the existing accounts of how these values intersect.

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In this chapter, I will draw upon insights from the writings of the 18th century British moralist Damaris Masham to offer an account of the relation between love and respect.[3] For Masham, love is nothing more than the pleasure felt at perceiving, or considering, the continued existence of another self-subsistent being.[4] Respect connects to love since respecting another person requires, at minimum, that she is not the subject of domination. To respect another is to recognize that they possess a degree of authority, both over themselves and over matters of judgment.[5] Loving another is a precondition of respect. From here, one better appreciates how one's beloved expresses their personhood through thought and action. Masham also gives us the tools to show how autonomy, too, is an outgrowth of love. It is through loving another that we acknowledge their autonomy; without love, respect is merely abstract, possessing few action-guiding qualities and little motivational force.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss Masham's account of love, which I refer to as a *minimalist account*. In the second section, I consider the extent to which love is a moral achievement. In the third section, I tackle the connections that exist between the minimalist account of love, respect, and autonomy and show how Masham's work supplements other personhood accounts of love. In the fourth section, I examine two objections to the minimalist account of love: first, that all matters of intimacy seem absent from the view; second, that it fails to account for love as, to some extent, a discriminatory attitude. In the last section of the chapter, I end by considering the implications that the minimalist account of love has for how we ought to view our loving relationships.

Love in the 18th Century

Damaris Masham (1658–1708) was an English philosopher. The daughter of Ralph Cudworth, the foremost Cambridge Platonist, Masham received an education not enjoyed by many women at the time. She cut her teeth on the great rationalist philosophy of the period, including works by her father, Henry More, John Norris, and others. Masham also made the acquaintance of John Locke sometime in the early 1680s, which began a lifetime companionship—Locke even resided in her household from 1688 until her death. The details of Masham's education, philosophical or otherwise, are scant, though it is clear that she discussed philosophy with Locke, as there is a record of their correspondence (Broad 2006). Masham also corresponded with Leibniz, initially about her father's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), and eventually about a number of points in Leibniz's own writings, including his ideas of substance and free will (Sleigh 2005). Masham is best known, however, for publishing two treatises: *A Discourse Concerning the Love of God* (1696) and *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or*

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Christian Life (1705). She offers her account of love in the *Discourse*, which will therefore be my focus here.

The background of the Discourse are the writings of John Norris, who is largely responsible for the introduction of Nicolas Malebranche's philosophy to Britain, and in particular a work titled *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (1695), which featured a published correspondence between Norris and Mary Astell about love and its proper object.[6] In these letters, Norris argues that God is the *only* proper object of love. To make this argument, Norris first draws a distinction between what he calls the "love of desire" and the "love of benevolence"—the former leads us to seek union with the beloved, while the latter leads us to promote the beloved's well-being (Astell and Norris 2005, 100–105). Norris thinks that it is sinful to love God with a spirit of benevolence since God does not require our assistance or charity. More importantly, however, it is improper to seek union with our fellows because God is the ultimate source of our happiness (Norris 1693, 13, 19; Astell and Norris 2005, 70).[7]

Let us say that my friend picks me up from the airport. I might rightly express gratitude at his doing so and return the favor if I can. The goodness, however, that motivated my friend to perform this deed is, according to Norris' view, the product of God. Without my friend receiving the goodness placed in him by God, he would be incapable of such benevolence. And so, after I thank my friend for his generosity and perhaps even buy us dinner, Norris expects me to return home and express my thanks to God for having made my friend and for being responsible for the workaday goodness that exists, even in that limited and inconstant manner in which it does. To the extent that I feel drawn to my friend and find him worthy of love, it is only because of his being the product of God's goodness. Norris warns us that any desire we have to conjoin with our fellow beings inevitably leads us into sin and disrepair.

Masham takes issue with Norris' and Astell's characterization of love and offers the *Discourse* as a reply. Masham argues, first, that it is infelicitous to posit two forms of love: love as desire and love as benevolence, each of which has different proper objects. For her, Norris and Astell tie love and desire too closely together. It may be that when we love someone there is a set of desires which typically follow this love. But one might argue that the connection between love and such desires is tenuous. I love a number of my friends, which causes me to desire their happiness, to seek out joint projects, and motivates me to spend time with them. But I do not always feel this way, regardless of the friend. It is possible that I love one of my friends but avoid the prospect of joint projects and limit the amount of time I spend with him. I may desire his happiness, abstractly, but take issue with many of his choices, even if they issue from his character. It does not follow that I hate my friend.

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It is important not to connect desire too closely with love, which gives rise to innumerable types of action. Instead of identifying these actions as expressions of love, thereby overcomplicating the concept or disregarding particular acts of love, we should seek to give an account of love as an emotion, or as an "act of mind," separate from these considerations.[8] In a similar vein, Masham identifies love as complaisance, or a kind of pleasure or pleasing state of mind:

> When I say that I love my Child, or my Friend, I find that my Meaning is, that they are things I am delighted in; Their Being is a Pleasure to me. When I say that I love God above all, I find I would express that he is my chiefest Good, and I delight in him above all things. Again, when I say that I love myself, I likewise mean by it that my Being is dear, and pleasing to me. To say one loves a thing, and that it is that which one has Complaisency in, is just the same: Love being only a Name given to that Disposition, or Act of the Mind, we find in ourselves towards anything we are pleased with.
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> (Masham 1696, 18)

For Masham, love is the name that we give to the pleasure we experience when considering another as a self-subsistent being, as one who is importantly separate from ourselves. It is important here that in love, we do not seek unity with the beloved or desire to possess them. In either case, to do so would be not to *appreciate* the beloved's being. Instead, Masham claims that "we necessarily annex'd a wishing to it whatever we conceive may either continue, or improve it" (Masham 1696, 22). In love, we wish that the beloved continues to *be itself* in some meaningful sense: to the extent that we interject ourselves into the beloved's nature, we do so only so that they will continue to exist as themselves.[9]

Love as a Moral Achievement

One might think of love as a moral achievement, a view that goes back at least to Plato. As the story goes: in love, we are taken outside of ourselves and led to embrace the other; what begins as a consuming desire develops into an appreciation of the beloved and the ways in which they partake in the form of beauty (Plato 1994, 210a–212a; 2002, 245c–257b, 253c–257a). When we recognize our beloved's approximate perfection, our desire is redirected to the aim of attaining infinity with them, either by reproduction or through the activity of mutual self-discovery (Plato 1994, 206e–208e; 2002, 265a–e). For Plato, love undergoes a transformation by our coming to see the other as they are—a transformation that allows us to treat them as a self-subsistent being (Plato 2002, 251a–252a).[10] On this view, love gives rise to respect only by becoming what it is not.

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Consider the view that in order to love someone one must attend to them properly—a view illustrated by Iris Murdoch's example of the mother-in-law coming to appreciate traits possessed by her daughter-in-law that she originally found to be distasteful (Murdoch 2001, 23–24). Murdoch presents this example as a drastic change that takes place in the mother-in-law; by learning to set aside her preconceptions and prejudices, she comes to see the daughter-in-law for "who she is" in some meaningful sense. Murdoch identifies this manner of attention as love. The transformation required to go from looking at another selfishly to considering them lovingly is thought to be the result of a hard-fought battle. As one scholar notes, the "loving look is the upshot of a difficult moral journey," as the obstacles to providing this loving attention are numerous (Bagnoli 2003, 506).

Of course, the difficulty of this transformation can be easily overstated. We often have the experience of *seeing* others. Consider the following example. You leave your office to stretch your legs, intending to take a walk around campus before your next class. On your way out of the building, you pass by a classroom where your colleague happens to be holding a class. The door is open, and you catch a glimpse of them in the middle of coordinating a discussion. You cannot recognize the topic of this discussion, but your colleague is managing the class in a seemingly effortless fashion, exuding both confidence and joy as they field questions, giving the students just enough to whet their curiosity. You walk away with a smile on your face and the thought, "I really loved that." When you go home that evening you might think about your colleague; how you never happened to notice them before and how this one moment has caused you to see them in a new light or, in fact, to really see *them*.

One might respond that your shift in perspective about your colleague's teaching, or even your colleague more generally, is hardly justified by your seeing them in that moment. A momentary glance cannot serve as evidence for thinking your colleague is a skilled lecturer. But this objection misses the point. You might recognize that you do not have insight into what is *really going on* in the classroom; perhaps you caught your colleague in a good moment and that they spent the previous thirty minutes thinking to themselves, "why am I even doing this? I was never meant for this! Perhaps I should just quit." Let us say it was not a good day for them. The students were overwhelmed with the material and lost by your colleague's lectures. None of these observations undercut your stated love at having seen your colleague teach, or even the love you experience when considering them afterward.

What you have recognized in your colleague, and what you love in that moment, is them and the way in which their personhood is expressed in the activity of teaching.[11] You would not feel any differently were you told afterward that your colleague was, in fact, not having a good day.

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Now, it is certainly possible that if you were to see your colleague fumble their discussion that you may be less likely to *see them* in that moment. You might think "What an embarrassment!" or "Well, that's awful; I feel terrible for them." In either case, you are too narrowly focused on the activity in which your colleague is engaged as opposed to them, as a person. There may be a similar result if you witnessed them succeeding on a particular day—you may feel jealous or self-conscious of your own abilities. Regardless, it seems as if the actions of others give us a window into their personhood.

Now, one could point out that "love" in this context is merely colloquial: you cannot mean that you love your colleague any more than a person does Yasujirō Ozu or the Bad Brains when they say, "I love Yasujirō Ozu's films" or "I love the Bad Brains." In this case, the critic fails to recognize that, given the difference in objects (person, film, album), what it means to love that thing will depend on its nature. As Masham points out, "our desiring of what we love, or only wishing well to it, or both, follow that act of Love; the Nature of the lov'd Object alone Determines" (Masham 1696, 24–25). If I love Ozu's *An Autumn Afternoon*, I may desire to watch it one evening or to share it with others; if I love my friend, I wish that they continue to be the person I happen to love. The difference lies not in the love but in our proper response to that object of our love. I do not find anything problematic about referring to both cases as love, even though they warrant vastly different responses from us.

I return to these concerns later in the chapter, when considering what I call the *exclusivity objection* in the third section, which targets the permissiveness of the minimalist account of love. For now, I turn to how this account helps explains the connection between love, respect, and autonomy.

Bridging the Gap

On the standard personhood account of love, love is seen as the beginning of moral education. Now, one might argue that we can come to see that human beings possess value in virtue of their humanity by, say, reading Kant's *Groundwork*. From this study, we might recognize that all human beings are worthy of certain treatment, and that their humanity prohibits us from acting in certain ways toward them. It follows that *every human being* deserves respect, which demands that we allow them a degree of autonomy over their deliberations and actions. However, as Ebels-Duggan points out, it is possible to affirm that human beings possess value while also failing to *appreciate* the moral significance of this affirmation (Ebels-Duggan, forthcoming). And so, she claims, in order to transform this affirmation into a sincere moral commitment, we have to come to *directly appreciate* the value of human beings by experiencing

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love for another person (Ebels-Duggan 2019, 623).[12] Only by our experiencing love for this person can we come face-to-face with their presence and learn to take their value seriously.

While we are not able to love each and every person, we can recognize those we do not love as, nonetheless, actual or potential objects of another person's love. So, the thought goes, we love *some* people and consider them worthy of respect; we recognize others whom we do not love as potential objects of love and as being worthy of respect on these grounds. We must therefore see each and every person as possessing value and as being the proper object of respect. In this way, love is meant to educate us about the humanity and dignity of our fellows, something which cannot be done through reasoning from principles alone.[13]

So, love is based in our recognition of another person's humanity, which provides insistent reasons for respect and also the grounds for the value of autonomy. I agree with the thrust of this argument, though I detect a gap between the love we have for certain individuals and the recognition of others as *someone's* actual or potential beloved and thereby possessors of value. The connection between love and respect is said to be made by our direct appreciation of another's humanity through the experience of love. Without love, we have to settle with the belief that everyone is lovable. But how does this belief compel our respect? Let us say that I find a person to be particularly distasteful. I will assume that others do as well and also see this person as possessing unlovable qualities. The possibility that someone *could* love this person will not compel me to take them or their interests seriously, especially as I will see any person who loves them as mistaken, deluded, or even as unlovable themselves.

The problem with inferring the value of a person from the fact that someone could love them is that we lose the centrality of *attention*, creating the gap between love and respect. We cannot respect another simply on the grounds that someone hypothetically loves them, particularly if we have more salient interests for not doing so. It is here where Masham's account of love can help bridge this gap between love and respect and ground the moral value of autonomy. For Masham, love is the pleasure we feel when we observe, or consider, the existence of a self-subsistent individual (Masham 1696, 18). Our only obstacle to loving others is our not properly attending to them. Overcoming this obstacle is not always the result of great moral fortitude; rather, we often find ourselves attending to others in this manner even when it is least expected (as in the case of seeing your colleague teach a class).

The question, for Masham, is not how we extend the lessons we receive from loving particular individuals to people more generally, but how we cultivate the disposition to attend to our fellows. If we are at least moderately successful in our task, we can love people more often than not, and so see them as the objects of respect, thereby compelling us to recognize

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their autonomy. To see how Masham's account of love is meant to help us here, we have to look back to the *Discourse*. Here, she takes issue with the idea that God is the only proper object of love. The problem with this position is its unintuitive nature: after all, the fact is that we do love our parents, our children, our friends, our lovers (Masham 1696, 18). Surely, God would not make us capable of such a thing if it were wrong for us to do so. The bigger issue for Masham, however, is the way that this view cuts us off from our fellows. To be detached in this manner means to be unable to answer to those around us.

Masham argues that when we are accountable only to ourselves, we engage in flights of fancy and entertain unsociable views: "the passions where they are strong, argue by a Logic of their own, not that of Reason, which they often and significantly enough, invert to serve their own Purpose. And when Religion is in the case … they can easily advance this so far, as to dress out an entire System, intelligible only by Sentiment, not to Reason" (1696, 28). When one is severed from others, one risks becoming an enthusiast, thereby adopting principles and systems of belief that are prejudicial and encourage our distrust of others and foment discord. Masham recognizes that this state is one to which we are all disposed. After all, there is little in our common lives that support the precepts of "true religion" and the dictum that one must love one's neighbor as one does oneself (Masham 1696, 29). Given the opportunity, we often find convenient excuses not to extend this love to others.

We see here why the gap exists between appreciating the value of one person by loving them and inferring the value of another by recognizing that they are or could be loved by someone. If we are disposed to find our fellows defective or under suspicion, the inference will be blocked by countervailing factors (i.e., this person associates with X group or enjoys Y as a pastime; is ignorant, insensitive, or morally ugly). We are judging this person to be undeserving of love and therefore of proper consideration, though we recognize that their status as such is largely contingent. Consider the matter of retributive justice. We might hold that causing pain to others, physical or otherwise, is wrong, generally, but fitting in circumstances where individuals *deserve* this treatment. We make a similar determination when we consider a person to be unworthy of our extended love. The problem is, as with retributive justice, that we are often unwarranted in our judgments about the desert of others. Though we all appeal to standards of desert, we, as Aristotle reminds us, are often incorrect in our application.

Because of these considerations, we need to find a way to extend our attention in order to broaden our commitment to the value of others, lest we be left with this gap. But how can this be done? It seems like the only option is to cultivate a disposition to attend to other people. By doing so, we increase the possibility that we end up truly *seeing* others, instead of considering them under the lens of our own self-interest or

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by ignoring them altogether. One might argue that this solution seems hardly perfect. We cannot maintain undivided attention for all those with whom we encounter. In this manner, such an idea appears foolish, as if we are setting ourselves up to fail, or subjecting ourselves to endless guilt. However, respect for another person does not require our undivided attention. The fact that I have been in a position to *see* this person is enough to institute a shift in my perspective. Consider the example of you having seen your colleague. Your future interactions with your colleague will be altered by the experience of having *seen them*, which laid the seeds of respect. In the next section, I turn to consider two objections to the minimalist account of love.

Intimacy and Exclusivity: Two Objections

There are two significant objections that come to mind when considering the minimalist account of love. The first concerns the lack of intimacy present in the account. When we love another, the objection goes, we are drawn to them in a distinctive manner; we wish to be with them, to express ourselves in a manner we often fail to do, to share in the beloved's woes and victories alike. However, the account of love I have sketched sees our relation to the beloved as detached and cold—as if they were a piece of art or music as opposed to a person. The second objection is connected to the first—when we love another, there is meant to be something special about this attitude. If my partner claims to love me, each of their friends, their entire family, and all their co-workers, there is something lost in their expression of love for me. I might think to myself, "well, this does not mean a whole lot."

These objections are rather serious. I take it that you, the reader, have been in love before and are noting that your experience of having been so is hardly captured by the account sketched above. I concur. When I think of the times that I have uttered "I love you" in a romantic context, there is hardly anything in the minimalist account of love that tracks my experience. At this point, I might remind the reader that this account does not take romantic love as its paradigmatic case of love; I might then remind the reader of our problematic tendency to conflate love and loving relationships. Still, if this account of love that runs roughshod over our experience of romantic love, discounting one of the most significant forms that love takes in our lives, then what is such an account worth? In what follows, I hope to mitigate both of these concerns, serious as they may now appear.

Before confronting these two objections, it is important to point out the problem of drawing on cases of romantic love in these discussions. In this chapter, I aim to give an account of the *distinctive* moral value of love. Like in similar treatments of pride, anger, sadness, and contempt, it is important to differentiate love from similar sets of emotions. In our

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experiences of romantic love—where we run across lower Manhattan to declare our feelings to our beloved before the opportunity to do so slips through our fingers—there are multiple emotions running through our head (e.g., anticipation, fear, excitement, joy, etc.). It can be difficult to distinguish these emotions from one another because we associate that particular cluster of emotions with romantic love, especially at its early stage. But these cases end up confusing the discussion. Given that we associate these experiences with a certain stage of a loving relationship, they are far from representative of the value of love more generally.

Keeping this in mind, let us return to the question of intimacy, which extends past romantic love, though it is commonly associated with the latter. In the examples that I have given throughout the chapter, there is little talk of intimacy. In the case that I noted above, of seeing a colleague teach a class, there was no desire to be near them, to seek a friendship with them, etc., at least not solely on account of that experience. One might think that this lack of intimacy is enough to disqualify the view. After all, on Velleman's account, a characteristic feature of love is the desire to be vulnerable in the presence of the beloved (1999, 361). One may argue it is intimacy that marks our interactions with beloved as distinctive, and that this reveals the particular significance of romantic love in our lives.

I would avoid making too close a connection between love and vulnerability, as I take the latter to be a fundamental desire of all human beings, one that would be more frequently expressed were we not concerned about rejection. In fact, one can often find it easier to be vulnerable with strangers than with family or loved ones. Though this impulse may appear aberrant, one need only consider the role that a good therapist can play in one's life. An upshot of speaking with a therapist is receiving professional advice; still, we also find it valuable on the level of finding someone with whom to speak. Certain vulnerabilities may put undue stress on those we love, and so it can, at times, be prudent to save our emotional vulnerability for others. Also, complete vulnerability with our beloved can be suffocating. By saving some degree of vulnerability for others, we can resist the urge to abuse the patience of those whom we love, or to engage in emotional warfare with them.

Of course, not all intimacy takes the form of vulnerability. For example, there is the warmth we feel for someone whom we love. One may feel this warmth at unexpected moments. Imagine seeing a woman swaddling a child in a crowded mall, or a couple sharing a falafel and laughing at each other's terrible puns, or a man watching the sunset from his porch while lazily petting his dog. Each of these moments is apt to produce a sense of warmth and overflowing in us, provided we are in a position to experience them. Importantly, our ability to feel at home in these cases is determined by our attention, that is, whether we are attending to the environment and to our fellow inhabitants.

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Often, we are not in a position to partake in this experience because we are attending to other matters. This reality is less a vice and more a fact of modern human existence. We are almost always otherwise occupied, which makes it significant when we are not. Notice: the intimacy we feel in those moments I noted above is hardly cold or detached. Like our experiences of art, music, or nature, our experiences of people can be genuinely moving. These experiences, I argue, are nothing less than love. And in those moments, we feel no need to intervene; to greet the woman, to share our favorite pun with the couple, or even to pet the man's dog. Instead, we wish only that these moments persist and become moments for others as well. Rather than lacking room for intimacy, the minimalist account of love provides ample opportunity to feel genuine closeness with our fellow beings, though it, at the same time, recognizes the fragility of this experience and our difficulty of attaining it in any degree.

At this point, the second objection becomes salient: love presumes some degree of exclusivity. On the minimalist account of love, it seems that we may experience love for anyone at any time at all. There seems to be a great fluidity and variability with this attitude. Assuming that the account is true, it is therefore difficult to make sense of how we love a particular person—say, our romantic partner—differently than we do the man watching the sunset with his dog. Further, if we claim that there are particular duties of love, then our obligations will be as fluid and variable as the love itself. This result would no doubt be disastrous. The most pedestrian point to make here is that love comes in degrees, which may well be true. Presumably, we are looking for some feature that type-distinguishes loving my partner from loving a stranger. Here, I argue that the stable basis to which we can refer is commitment, an endorsement of the love that we experience for another, regardless of its degree.

When we make this commitment to the beloved, we are not committing to loving them at each moment or promising never to fall out of love with them; we are committing our attention to them. Knowing the extent to which thoughtlessness and selfishness enters our lives, obscuring the beloved from view, we commit to always remind ourselves of the person that we have seen and loved. While there may be norms for making such a commitment, settling this issue goes beyond the scope of this chapter. One thing that can be noted is that such a commitment typically happens only in the context of a relationship.[14] It would be problematic for me to commit myself to the pun-telling couple or to the woman swaddling her child. My commitment is rightly placed elsewhere, to one who similarly commits to me. In the case of strangers that we happen to love, the most it seems correct for us to do is to wish they will be loved in a committed way by someone else, who sees them as we have.

As we can only reasonably make such a commitment to a small number of people, the worries about exclusivity can be mostly set aside. Those

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concerned about the promiscuity of love can therefore be helped by the thought that commitments cannot be similarly promiscuous if they are of any weight. Likewise, when it comes to the so-called duties of love, we can see now that they are no different than the duties of partiality. When we commit to attending to a particular person or set of people, there are those who are necessarily overlooked. Given the mutuality condition of this commitment, the relation between us and the beloved will be governed by positional duties. The question of how we fit these duties into a moral view that does right by constraints of impartiality goes beyond the considerations of love. I do not propose to settle this issue. Instead, I can only hope to advance our understanding of the relationship between love, respect, and autonomy, and of the value of love generally.

Let us take stock. According to Masham, our love for another is indicative of our respect for them. We appreciate this person as a self-subsistent being and find joy in their existence. Loving another means that we wish only that the beloved continues to be who they are. Insofar as love compels us to interject ourselves into the beloved's life, it is only to this end. Often, like in the case of seeing your colleague teach a class, this course of action is unnecessary, though love also plays a role in the context of romantic relationships. I turn now to the topic of loving relationships.

Loving Relationships

From what I have sketched above, it may seem that on the minimalist account of love, the majority of our romantic relationships hardly count as loving. Now, I do not find this conclusion to be particularly troubling. Our romantic relationships are largely governed by the norms of partnership. We feel jealous when our partner receives attention from another because we see it as threatening to the commitment made to each other. Love may explain our decision to make such a commitment, but there are countless other factors involved here, which is precisely why romantic love is an object of curiosity. However, these complications make romantic love a poor test case for a theory of love. The deeper we delve, the more we recognize that our romantic relationships are distinctive from more workaday conceptions of love, making romance the exception and not the rule.

Still, there are lessons we can take from the minimalist account of love for our relationships. First, it reminds us to see our partner; second, it teaches us about the contingency of connection; third, it gives us a more realistic view of relationships. Most of us do not *see* the persons with whom we are in a loving relationship. Prudential value is a natural outgrowth of partnerships and joint projects. As such, people begin to see each other as useful in some regard. One person handles the bills, while the other does the shopping; one does the cleaning, while the other does

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the gardening, etc. At some point the two become a well-oiled machine. While there is beauty to that which is useful—especially a well-ordered household—these two may proceed for years in this manner, into the years of having children, when it is all too easy to disappear into one's roles. They may go days, months, or even years without recognizing anything awry. All the while, each are there, present to the other, ready to be seen.

We will surely lose the appreciation of the way our partner expresses their personhood if we are not in a position to see them. The constraints of the household may even give us reasons to obscure our vision of the beloved, lest we discover anything that threatens the stability of what has been built. We may find ourselves trying to convince our beloved that a particular aim—say, entering a language immersion program—is not worth their time. We might argue it costs too much and requires them to be away from home an abnormal amount. In making our case, we may appeal to the duties of the household, which, we will remind them, outweigh considerations of self-interest, all while not grasping our failure to see our beloved. Though we will surely continue to fall short even with said knowledge, we can perhaps develop strategies to minimize our doing so.

One aspect of seeing the beloved as a person is recognizing the contingency of our connection. This does not require us interacting with our beloved as potentially slipping through our fingers at any moment—such a perspective is unsustainable. We also need not view each moment with them as imbued with great significance. An attitude of radical gratitude is equally unsustainable, if also a bit schmaltzy. Rather, by coming to grips with the contingency of our relationship with the beloved, we appreciate the ways in which, even given the forces and distractions to the contrary, people are able to love one another. Because these experiences of clarity are also temporary, we also know that it will soon pass and can only hope to find ourselves back there in due time. In this way, the minimalist account of love gives us a more realistic view of the scope and limits of our loving relationships.

There have been two recent challenges to our view of traditional, monogamous relationships: one from Carrie Jenkins and another from Julian Savulescu and Brian Earp. Jenkins argues that our traditional views of romantic love are suffocating (Jenkins 2017). Given our nature, it is likely that we can love multiple people at once, even in a romantic sense. Instead of allowing for this possibility, we shame people into accepting a constrained form of pair-bonding that only breeds dishonesty, infidelity, and unhappiness. Jenkins claims that we have to rethink our ideas about love to allow for alternative forms of living. Savluescu and Earp concur, though they see another solution to the problem. They argue that merely allowing for the permissibility of ethical polyamory will not solve the problems that underlie our troubles: namely, that

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people are prone to jealousy in a manner that cannot be explained by our norms of romantic relationships. For them, the only way out of this mess is to control these darker aspects of our nature through advances in technology (Earp and Savulescu 2020).

I welcome both of these challenges, though I think they fall short in different ways. By allowing for the possibility of ethical polyamory, and by gradually deconstructing those norms responsible for producing cycles of confinement and self-hatred in our romantic lives, we will not necessarily make ourselves better lovers. Savulescu and Earp recognize this shortcoming in Jenkins' positions, noting that the most common obstacles to us having healthy romantic relationships are not social norms, but we ourselves. While we can work to change these norms, the impact will not be felt if we are unwilling to confront the more problematic aspects of our own nature. Setting aside the larger worries associated with the use of biomedical interventions to better our romantic relationships, this strategy also misses the mark. Both of these challenges to traditional romantic relationships assume that we have to place more focus on how to be better romantic lovers. As I have shown throughout this chapter, the only way we can hope to be better romantic lovers is to learn how to love more generally.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter, following Masham, that love is nothing more than the pleasure felt at perceiving, or considering, the continued existence of another self-subsistent being. As Simone Weil notes, "belief in the existence of other human beings as such is *love*" (Weil 2002, 64). This account of love chaffs against some of our intuitions: that love should be exclusive, in some sense, and that it involves a degree of intimacy. I have tried to meet these objections and showcase the strengths of this account of love: that it captures our experience of seeing others, and that it explains the connection between love, respect, and autonomy. In doing so, we let go of the idea that romantic relationships are the paradigmatic case of loving, but we have made room for a less celebrated conception of love. This love is not often the subject of books or film: it often goes unseen, being attributed to forces internal and external, from a cheery disposition to the weather. Still, it is this love that binds us.

When we learn to see others, we come to appreciate their humanity, if only for a few moments. If we allow ourselves to live in these moments, we begin to learn the lessons of attention. Only through attention can we become better lovers of people. The difficult part is bringing these insights home, to those with whom we spend most of our time, romantic partners or otherwise. But we cannot learn to be better lovers at home prior to our trying to do so elsewhere, with others we may never see again. Perhaps at some point our romantic relationships will be rid of

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those most unfortunate aspects of ourselves. Until then, we can remind ourselves of Kurt Vonnegut's plea in *Slapstick*: "I wish that people who are conventionally supposed to love each other would say to each other, when they fight, 'Please—a little less love, and a little more common decency'" (Vonnegut 2010, 3). At least it is a start.[15]

Notes

1. It may be necessary to have *recognition-respect* for another in order to love them. My focus here is on *appraisal-respect*, that is, viewing another with esteem or considering them praiseworthy (Darwall 1977). Certainty we love our children without feeling esteem for them. It would be odd if our love for them was conditioned on whether they were praiseworthy. Further, we need not view our children as valid claim-makers in order for them to be the objects of our love (Darwall 2004, 43, 44).
2. Velleman (1999) is the first recent work to posit a connection between love and respect. He presents the view as building on Murdoch (2001), a claim with which some scholars have taken issue (Millgram 2004; Jollimore 2011). Other scholars (Setiya 2014; Ebels-Duggan 2019) defend modified views of Velleman (1999). I consider my own view to be largely following suit.
3. For more literature on the life and work of Damaris Masham, see Broad (2002, 114-140); Broad (2003, 2006); Hutton (2003); Buickerood (2005); Sleigh (2005); and Hammou (2008).
4. At this point one might reasonably ask, "who are the proper objects and subjects of love?" Masham does not consider this question in her work, though she would likely hold that persons are the only proper objects and subjects of love. I argue that her account of love is more permissive, allowing for the possibility that *any object* is a proper object of love (which is to say that the only constraints on who we can love are psychological as opposed to normative). When it comes to the proper subjects of love, my sense is that the minimalist account of love is more restrictive, though perhaps not to the degree that Masham considers. Any being with the capacity to perceive other beings as self-subsistent and to consider the being of others as a constraint on their conduct (in some manner or another) is properly thought of as a *potential* lover. This being only counts as a lover insofar as they do, in fact, love.
5. My aim in this chapter is not to defend a full-bloodied account of respect. I instead rely on what I take to be two uncontroversial aspects of respect for persons: non-domination and autonomy.
6. The larger intellectual context for this discussion is the debate between John Norris and John Locke about the status of Malebranche's occasionalism. For Locke, the occasionalists were little more than enthusiasts, and dangerous ones at that, a view that was shared by Masham: "If once an unintelligible way of practical religion become the standard of devotion, no men of sense and reason will ever set themselves about it; but leave it to be understood by mad men, and practiced by fools" (1696, 6–7).
7. For more on Norris' argument and its connection to Malebranche, see Mander (2008, 130–145).
8. For a different take on how love can be construed as an emotion, see Abramson and Leite (2011). For a congenial alternative to this view, see Pismenny and Prinz (forthcoming).

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9. For more on how we are meant to be an agent to our beloved's interests, see Vellemen (1999, 353) and Ebels-Duggan (2008, 162–163). For different, more open-ended, models of how we are meant to relate to our beloved's interests, see Bagley (2015) and Kreft (forthcoming).
10. Presumably Alcibiades' issue in the *Symposium* is that he cannot stop himself from wanting to *consume* Socrates as opposed to recognizing him as a self-subsistent being. However, as Socrates points out in the *Phaedrus*, being in the grips of love's madness may be necessary for properly appreciating another's autonomy (Plato 2002, 243e7–257b6; cf. Kreft, forthcoming). This chapter is an attempt to make sense of Socrates' seemingly paradoxical claim. I argue that Masham's account of love can get closer to understanding the connection between love and autonomy than have many contemporary views.
11. For more on love as the "appreciation" of someone's personhood, see Gaita (2004, 26–31, 146–156, 211–213). For more on the ethical importance of appreciation, see Brewer (1999, 158–163, 180, 220).
12. Ebels-Duggan notes, "when you appreciate something directly, you may come to embrace a value that you did not grasp prior to the experience in question. Moreover, it seems that in a large and important subset of cases you could not have full appreciated the value absent some experience. In these cases, you could not have come to value the thing as you do merely by considering a report of the reasons or arguments that purport to justify your attitude. It follows that, even in the wake of the experience, you will remain incapable of fully communicating to someone who lacks the experience the reasons grounding your own affirmation of values" (2019, 623).
13. According to Ebels-Duggan, practical reasoning operates on the basis of normative commitments that are grounded in the direct appreciation of the value of a person, object, or end: "The only way to then be fully rationally secure in one's commitments is to trace such a line of reasoning back to commitments that are not subject to any intelligible challenge" (2019, 628).
14. Kolodny (2003) provides an intuitive account of the norms associated with a relationship, though it falls short in offering a plausible account of love. While I agree with the criticisms of the account of love found in Setiya (2014), Kolodny (2003) presents a more reasonable model of what it means to act from considerations of love. Exploring this matter further goes beyond the scope of this chapter.
15. I would like to thank Raja Rosenhagen, Rachel Fedock, and Michael Kühler, for their feedback and for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this volume. I would like to thank Raja Rosenhagen in particular for introducing me to Iris Murdoch's work, which has been rewarding both professionally and personally. I would like to thank Kyla Ebels-Duggan, for a conversation that encouraged me to move forward with my thoughts on Damaris Masham. Thank you to Kieren Setiya, whose writings on love greatly influenced the writing of this chapter. Thank you to Aaron Garrett, for introducing me to the writings of Damaris Masham. Thank you to Lisa Shapiro and Marcy Lascano, for organizing the Intensive Seminar on Early Modern Women Philosophers at Simon Fraser University, which gave me the opportunity to engage with others about Masham's work. Thank you to Charles Griswold, for teaching me that historians of philosophy should contribute to contemporary debates where possible. Thank you to the unnamed colleague, for inspiring the chief examples

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