

Love In Spite Of¹

Erich Hatala Matthes, Wellesley College

Forthcoming in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, Vol. 6

Penultimate draft, 11/10/15. Please cite final version.

I. Identity and Well-Being

We all want to be loved for who we are. But what if fundamental aspects of a person's identity are bad for her? Is it morally acceptable to love people for reasons that are in tension with their well-being? Is it consistent with the requirements of love? These are the questions that set the agenda for this essay.

The philosophical literature exploring objections to the "property" view of love has been instructive.² Although the idea that we love people for their lovable properties has intuitive appeal, some philosophers have leveraged off-putting examples about *Doppelgängers*, trading up for "better" beloveds, and the impermanence of properties to put pressure on the idea that appeal to such features could provide a rational basis for loving attitudes as we typically conceive of them. However, these critiques have also had the less fortunate consequence of diverting attention from the role that properties can play in our commonplace understanding of love and loving relationships, even if they cannot tell the whole story about love. This essay is about those properties. But it is not primarily about the many properties that are often cited when we think about the reasons why we love someone: that the object of our love is intelligent, clever, humorous, beautiful, etc. Sara Protasi has recently pointed out that the literature on love has focused almost exclusively on an ideal vision

¹ This paper has benefited greatly from feedback and discussion at the Sixth Annual Arizona Workshop in Normative Ethics. Special thanks to Alison McIntyre for extremely helpful comments on a previous draft. Thanks are also due to Max Gee, Stephen Thurman, and Peter Epstein, who helped prompt my thinking on this topic. Finally, thanks to Jackie Hatala Matthes, for loving me in spite of it all, but not in spite of who I am.

² For examples of the property view, see Simon Keller, "How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Properties," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2000); Neil Delaney, "Romantic Love and Loving Commitment: Articulating a Modern Ideal," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1996). For critiques of various kinds, see J. David Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999); Niko Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," *Philosophical Review* 112, no. 2 (2003); Christopher Grau, "Love and History," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 3 (2010). For a recent defense of a new version of the property view, see Sara Protasi, "Loving People for Who They Are (Even When They Don't Love You Back)," *European Journal of Philosophy* (2014).

of love.³ But love often isn't ideal. One reason love isn't ideal, which Protasi thoughtfully explores, is that love can be unrequited, and our theory of love ought to make sense of that phenomenon.

Another reason is that people don't *only* possess those story-book properties that are typically trotted out in discussion of the property view. My focus here will be on those aspects of a person that may be bad for her, but are nevertheless significant, even central features of her sense of self.

I will assume for the sake of discussion that love is a species of *valuing attitude*. In other words, I will assume that to love someone is (perhaps among other things) to have a range of pro-attitudes towards that person that are viewed as warranted in virtue of facts about that person: there are reasons for love.⁴ These reasons need not depend on facts that are intrinsic to that person, and can include extrinsic features pertaining to their past and their relationships. Thus, as has been emphasized throughout the literature, I can love *someone* for some set of properties that provide the basis for loving him so: the fact that a person's properties provide my reasons for loving him does not entail that it is only those properties, as opposed to *he*, that are the focus of my loving attitudes.⁵ Bearing this in mind, I will speak interchangeably about treating a property as a reason for loving someone and adopting loving attitudes towards a property.

I take no stand here on whether there is a single attitude called love, or whether love comprises a range of evaluative attitudes. As should be clear from the examples that I discuss, I am construing love broadly so as to include, romantic love, filial love, love between friends, etc., but I will follow the literature in referring to the object of one's love as "the beloved" regardless of the kind of love in question. I will refer to "loving attitudes" as a proxy for whatever set of positive

³ "Loving People for Who They Are."

⁴ Thus I put to the side here the "no reasons" view espoused by Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (USA: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁵ For example, see Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 154; Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," 368; Grau, "Love and History," 260. Also, see Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 19. For some further discussion, see Erich Hatala Matthes, "History, Value, and Irreplaceability," *Ethics* 124, no. 1 (2013).

evaluative attitudes the reader thinks provide the most accurate picture of love under the assumptions stated here.

Discussion of identity in this essay refers to a person's *practical identity*; that is, "a description under which you value yourself."⁶ I am not concerned with matters pertaining to a person's being the self-same individual over time. Your practical identity concerns those aspects of your identity without which you wouldn't be *you*—not metaphysically, but evaluatively, by your own lights. Some aspects of your practical identity may include character traits, dispositions, or passions; others might include your "social identity," or how you conceive of yourself as belonging to a certain social category.

Identity plays a particularly important role in our thinking about love. As Bennett Helm writes: "What is needed for the sort of intimacy characteristic of love, apparently, is a kind of identification with my beloved *herself*: I must take her identity 'to heart'" and, moreover, "we should come to understand what is distinctively intimate about love in terms of a distinctive kind of concern for the identity of another as the particular person he is, a concern that is the same in kind as the concern you have for your own identity..."⁷ Love that is not properly responsive to the beloved's identity would thus, at least in this regard, be an impoverished form of love. Call this the *Identity Requirement*. It captures the common intuition that we should love people *for who they are*.

⁶ Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 101. I am not concerned with giving a Kantian reading of practical identity, but I find Korsgaard's description illuminating. There are also alternative conceptions of practical identity on offer. For instance, we might adopt an account of practical identity that includes properties that can be attributed to the person, though not necessarily those that play a role in her self-conception (thanks to Kirsten Egerstrom for this suggestion). In the paper, I favor accounts of practical identity, like Korsgaard's, that focus on the *evaluative* stance that an individual takes toward her identity. Practical identity as a description under which you value yourself helps to motivate the Identity Requirement and explain why someone would care about it. It's not clear why one would care about being loved for properties that others attribute to you, but that you do not yourself value or conceive of as essential to your self-conception, and thus such an account bears less clear of a relation to the intuitive concerns behind the Identity Requirement.

⁷ Bennett W Helm, *Love, Friendship, and the Self: Intimacy, Identification, and the Social Nature of Persons* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10, 18.

However, this is only one of the requirements that love must live up to. Another oft-cited element of love is its concern for the beloved's well-being. So, as Helm writes: "Both love and compassion are directed at particular persons and involve a concern for their well-being as such."⁸ David Velleman provides an extensive list of philosophers' views on love, and the concern for well-being emerges as a common element among these views.⁹ Call this the *Well-Being Requirement*. Love seems constitutively to involve a concern for how one's beloved fares, and perhaps reasons to promote their well-being. To love someone without being concerned for his well-being would be a callous, perhaps immoral, kind of love.

It is important to make clear that these are not requirements concerning how we *come to* love people. Love, I assume, can arise in all sorts of ways: haphazardly or deliberately, intensely or subtly, over years or over minutes. I offer no theoretical account of this process. Rather, the Identity and Well-Being Requirements are requirements that hold *when* you love someone, or at least when you take yourself to love someone. As should be clear from the descriptions of these requirements, I do not take failure to fully satisfy them to entail that love is absent in such cases. Moreover, there are many "metrics" according to which we assess love that may register very highly even when one of these requirements is compromised. For instance, you can love someone quite intensely, while compromising on the Well-Being Requirement, or think of your love for someone as the purist or most meaningful love, while compromising on the Identity Requirement.¹⁰ But when you fail to fully satisfy either of the requirements under discussion here, I will suggest that your love may be *incomplete* in that regard, where this is compatible with its being felt intensely or regarded as

⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁹ Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," 352. Velleman registers disagreement with the outcome-oriented focus of these views, but I do not mean for the Well-Being Requirement to necessarily be outcome-oriented. Concern with the beloved's well-being might very well be analyzed as concern for respecting their Kantian personhood.

¹⁰ Thanks to Hallie Liberto and Kenny Walden for discussion on these points.

meaningful to you. As we will see, sometimes such incompleteness may in fact be good or fitting, all things considered. Sometimes, though, that incompleteness will have a distinctively immoral cast.

As is wont to happen when we have two requirements in view, the Identity and Well-Being Requirements can come into direct conflict. This occurs in cases where an aspect of the beloved's practical identity is contrary to her well-being, or what I will generically call "bad for her." In such a case, you have reason to love her for who she is, but doing so appears in tension with the requirement that you be concerned for her well-being. After all, to love someone involves taking positive evaluative attitudes towards her that are responsive to her practical identity, at least insofar as you meet the Identity Requirement: you love her for who she is. If some aspect of a person's identity is bad for her, how can you regard it as a reason for loving her and still claim to be fully concerned for her well-being? Putting aside matters of identity for the moment, consider the following: would it be fully consistent with concern for a friend's well-being to regard his chronic pain as a reason for loving him? Or his weakness of will? Or any other property that is bad for him? "I love that guy! He's kind, funny, and completely lacking in self-esteem!" Those might be good reasons to love a comedian, but the last is a strange and callous reason to love a friend. I will take such cases to establish at least a *prima facie* tension between, on the one hand, treating properties that are bad for someone as reasons for loving him, and, on the other hand, robust satisfaction of the Well-Being Requirement (though we will return to the tension in a bit more detail in Section III). If we would typically find it problematic to regard properties that are bad for someone as reasons to love him, then in any case where an aspect of a person's practical identity is bad for him, we appear to be faced with a dilemma. We can love someone for their whole self, the bad and the good, and skimp on the Well-Being Requirement, or we can live up to the Well-Being Requirement by ignoring some of the aspects of the beloved's identity that are bad for her, thus failing to fully embrace the Identity Requirement.

I have been deliberately vague so far about the kinds of problem-cases where the requirements of Identity and Well-Being might actually come into conflict. Formally, the conflict has the potential to arise whenever a subject *S* has a practical identity *P* such that some aspect of *P* is bad for *S*. Views on what cases qualify as satisfying this formal requirement will vary widely, and will, in particular, vary with one's substantive views about well-being and practical identity. In the next section (II), I will focus on aspects of a person's practical identity that are inconsistent with his well-being because they are *moral* failings. In these cases, I will argue that we should compromise on the Identity Requirement, and I will attempt to clarify what such a compromise involves in terms of evaluative theory. In particular, I will develop an account of what is involved in loving someone *in spite* of something. This account will be essential in addressing conflicts between the Identity and Well-Being Requirements. However, as I will go on to demonstrate, cases where we should love in spite of do not set the agenda for solutions to the conflict in general. In the subsequent sections, I turn to aspects of a person's practical identity that are sometimes regarded as bad for her, though they are clearly not themselves moral failings. In particular, I will discuss cases of disability and bodily difference. If disabilities are viewed as bad for merely *social* reasons (Section III), I will argue that there is in fact no tension between the Identity and Well-Being Requirements: on the contrary, in these cases, both requirements work in concert to favor embracing the beloved's identity. If disabilities are viewed as "objectively" bad, however (Section IV), then the argument provided in Section III will not serve. Nevertheless, I argue that the Identity Requirement takes precedence in such cases, and that distinguishing between a disability and the harm that it can cause mitigates the conflict with the Well-Being Requirement.

Before we arrive at these defenses of the Identity Requirement, we will first consider cases where that requirement appears to be weakest. Our test subject for the next section will be the otherwise lovable individual who unfortunately harbors racist attitudes, but owns these attitudes and

treats them as part of his identity. Perhaps you have a relative like this? Let's call this character the Racist Uncle.¹¹

II. Compromising on the Identity Requirement

Let's say you have an uncle who is racist, and moreover identifies with his racism. That is, he is proud to adopt hateful attitudes towards members of other racialized groups. However, let's assume that he is otherwise a thoughtful and loveable guy, that you've grown up loving him, and only now that you are an adult have become cognizant of his racism. This seems like a case where we might naturally favor compromising on the Identity Requirement. Surely, it is bad for *others* when a person has racist attitudes, but presumably it is also bad for the person who has these attitudes: having morally reprehensible attitudes is, I will assume, not conducive to your flourishing as a person, and is thus at odds with your well-being.¹² So we repudiate the uncle's racist attitudes, and refuse to treat them as a reason for loving him.¹³ If we love the Racist Uncle, we love him, as we might say, *in spite of* his racism.

What is involved in loving someone *in spite of* something? How do we characterize the success case of living up to the Identity Requirement, and how does loving someone in spite of an aspect of their identity fall away from that ideal? Because I am assuming that loving attitudes are a species of valuing attitudes, it will be instructive to think about these questions in a broader evaluative context. Implicit in the Identity Requirement is a demand to love someone for the *right reasons*, where those reasons are assumed to include a person's practical identity, a description under

¹¹ Apologies to my own uncles, who do not themselves identify with racist attitudes!

¹² I take this claim to be consistent with any of a range of views about human flourishing, but if you don't find it plausible, feel free to substitute some other aspect of practical identity that you do think is both morally objectionable and bad for a person in the sense employed here.

¹³ What is involved in refusing to adopt a given evaluative attitude will depend on the extent to which one thinks that people have volitional control over their attitudes. Refusing to adopt an attitude may, for instance, be an indirect matter of cultivating dispositions to the contrary.

which she values herself. The Identity Requirement itself is silent on whether there is anything problematic about loving someone for reasons that don't pertain to his identity, such as, say, his house in Budapest; but it holds that one *at least* ought to love someone for who he is. If your reasons for loving someone included his house in Budapest but not his practical identity, you would not love him for the right reasons. So what does it mean in general to value something for the right reasons?

In answering this question, I will adopt a framework proposed by Julia Markovits in recent work on acting for the right reasons. Markovits argues in favor of *The Coincident Reasons Thesis*: "An action is morally worthy if and only if—and to the degree that—the noninstrumental reasons motivating the action coincide with the noninstrumental reasons that morally justify its performance."¹⁴ That is, an action is morally worthy if it is performed for the *right reasons*, a scenario that is achieved when you are motivated to act by the very considerations that make an action worth performing. We can translate this thesis into the evaluative context as follows:

Valuing for the Right Reasons: A person values *X* for the right reasons if and only if—and to the degree that—the noninstrumental reasons motivating her evaluative attitudes coincide with the noninstrumental reasons that justify valuing *X* (i.e. the reasons in virtue of which *X* is worth valuing).

This analysis will, of course, apply specifically to things that are noninstrumentally valuable:

instrumental reasons would not be likewise out of place in the context of instrumentally valuable things. Supposing that a Rodin sculpture, for instance, has noninstrumental artistic value, to value it as a coat rack would not be to value it for the right reasons. This is not to say that the Rodin might not be valuable as a coat rack: indeed, it might be an excellent coat rack. Rather, claims about the

¹⁴ Julia Markovits, "Saints, Heroes, Sages, and Villains," *Philosophical Studies* 158(2012): 290; "Acting for the Right Reasons," *Philosophical Review* 119, no. 2 (2010). To be clear, Markovits's goal is to give an account of morally worthy actions, those deserving of praise, whereas I am adapting this framework for a different purpose. That being said, though I am not concerned here with whether one's loving attitudes are praiseworthy per se, there is a dimension of moral assessment that my application of Markovits's framework shares with her original purpose. We do tend to think that you are open to moral condemnation when you don't love someone for who he is, or when you lack concern for your beloved's well-being. Aside from matters of worth and praise, though, the issue at hand here is precisely the relationship between one's attitudes and various reason-giving features, and I find Markovits's framework quite illuminating on that score, even if I am repurposing it. Thanks to Grant Rozeboom for pressing me on this point.

right reasons for valuing some *X* will be made relative to a given evaluative category, a particular way of being valuable.¹⁵ So, relative to its artistic value, valuing a Rodin as a coat rack would not be valuing it for the right reasons. It is essential to note that this is *not* an account that *determines* the right reasons for valuing some *X*, but rather, is predicated on the assumption that such reasons have already been identified. This account simply concerns the relationship between the valuer's attitudes and the relevant reasons.

Sometimes (often?) we do not know what the right reasons are for valuing something, but we may have a sense of the right *kind* of reasons. Building on the framework above, we can specify this as follows:

Valuing for the Right Kind of Reasons: A person values *X* for the right kind of reasons if and only if—and to the degree that—the noninstrumental reasons motivating her evaluative attitudes coincide with the kind of noninstrumental reasons that would justify valuing *X* (i.e. the kind of reasons in virtue of which *X* would be worth valuing).

So even if we cannot specify in virtue of what the Rodin is artistically valuable, we may be able to identify the kinds of reasons that might bear on that value. For example, being to the left of your sister is not the right kind of reason to value the Rodin, at least with respect to its artistic value, though it may well be a good reason to value it for a photo-op. Moreover, you can value some *X* for the right *kind* of reasons even if the *particular* reasons in virtue of which you value *X* are not the right ones (i.e. they do not in fact justify valuing *X*).

Given this understanding of what it means to value some *X* for the right reasons, and to value some *X* for the right kind of reasons, we are in a better position to see what it means to value *X in spite* of a reason. As a first pass, it seems that to value *X* in spite of a reason *R* is to value *X* in a manner that rejects any potential contribution (positive or negative) that *R* might make to the

¹⁵ For further discussion see Matthes, "History, Value, and Irreplaceability."

justification for X 's particular value. So, valuing the Rodin merely as a coat rack might be described as a case of valuing the sculpture in spite of reasons to value it as an artwork. By comparison, we can imagine a case in which the sculpture is valued in spite of considerations that detract from its artistic value, e.g. valuing a Rodin in spite of the fact that it has been vandalized and covered with neon paint. To apply, then, the framework of Valuing for the Right Reasons, we might offer the following account:

Valuing in Spite of: A person P values X in spite of reason R if and only if the noninstrumental reasons motivating her evaluative attitudes do not include R , where R is among the noninstrumental reasons P acknowledges as relevant to whether X is worth valuing.

So, if you value the Rodin merely as a coat rack, your motivating reasons for valuing it do not include the reasons in virtue of which it is worth valuing as an artwork, and thus you value it in spite of those reasons. If you value the Rodin, ignoring that it is covered in paint, your motivating reasons for valuing it do not include a consideration that detracts from its artistic value, and thus you value it in spite of that reason. Note that valuing in spite of requires the acknowledgement of the potential contribution that a given reason might make to the justification for valuing some X . This is what establishes the tension that makes fitting the locution “in spite of”. If you do not even entertain the possibility that R is relevant to the value of X , we might say that you are *missing* R , or oblivious to it. A third-party might note that you value X *despite* R , but you could not acknowledge this from your own subjective perspective, since you are unaware of R .¹⁶ It should be noted that in order to be a candidate for relevancy to the value of X , R has to be among the right kind of reasons. You don't value the Rodin in spite of its being to the left of your sister, because being to the left of your sister is not among the right kind of reasons for artistic evaluation.

¹⁶ Thanks to both Steve Darwall and Alison McIntyre for emphasizing the distinction between ‘despite’ and ‘in spite of’.

We can now begin to apply this general framework to the more specific evaluative case of love. The Identity Requirement characterizes the right kind of reasons for loving someone, namely, in virtue of his practical identity. We can now state the Identity Requirement more precisely:

The Identity Requirement. A person *P* loves *S* only if—and to the degree that—*S*'s practical identity is among the reasons *P* loves *S*.

So, if Patrick does not regard Soren's practical identity as a reason to love him, then he fails to satisfy the Identity Requirement, and we can chart the extent to which his love falls away from satisfaction of the Identity Requirement by noting aspects of Soren's identity in spite of which Patrick loves him.¹⁷ Now, in the case of the Racist Uncle, the Well-Being requirement entails that you should not treat his racism as a reason for loving him. Moreover, you have strong moral reason not to adopt pro-attitudes toward racism, matters of love aside. To say that in this case you ought to love your uncle in spite of his racism is to say that you should ignore an aspect of his practical identity, and hence that you should compromise on the Identity Requirement.¹⁸ You ought not completely love your uncle for who he is, because who he *is* is a racist. To be clear, then, I am indeed claiming that to love your uncle in spite of his racism is, in this regard, an incomplete form of love: it does not fully satisfy the Identity Requirement. Saying that your love for your uncle is incomplete can sound like a criticism of you, but in this context, it is in fact the opposite: when people embrace morally objectionable attitudes as part of their practical identity, they give us reason not to love them wholesale. Whether this holds for aspects of a person's practical identity that are bad for them for non-moral reasons remains to be seen.

¹⁷ It seems plausible that the *centrality* of a given aspect of one's practical identity will also be relevant to charting the extent to which *P* satisfies the Identity Requirement, assuming that some properties are more or less central to one's identity. But I largely put this matter aside here.

¹⁸ If you completely *missed* your uncle's racism (i.e. you were oblivious to it), you would not be meeting the Identity Requirement in the first place, and you might plausibly be thought of as violating the Well-Being Requirement in a different way.

While your uncle's racism is part of his practical identity, which, insofar as you love him, the Identity Requirement says should be among the reasons you love him, it is important to note that there are no claims being made to the effect that your uncle's racism is a good-making feature of his identity: this follows *a fortiori* because there are in fact no claims being made about what it is to have a "valuable identity" or a "good identity" at all. The Identity Requirement does not set parameters regarding which identities are worth loving: if there's something that it is to be worthy of love, the Identity Requirement itself does not tell us what that consists in. Morality may well set some of these parameters, but the Identity Requirement does not. All it says is that if you are to qualify as loving someone for who he is, then your love must be responsive to your beloved's practical identity. To draw from the discussion above, the Identity Requirement does not ultimately tell us which are the right reasons for loving someone, but only which are the right *kind* of reasons: those pertaining to the beloved's practical identity. In other words, loving someone requires treating his identity as justification for loving him, independently of whether it in fact provides justification for loving him.¹⁹ This makes sense of a phenomenon that any theory of love should accommodate: that you can truly love someone who is not worthy of your love. I assume that there can be value in meeting the Identity Requirement, in truly loving someone for his whole self, "warts and all" as some people say. But while this involves taking positive evaluative attitudes towards who he is, it is not an evaluation of his identity relative to some standard of identity goodness.²⁰

So we ought to love the Racist Uncle in spite of his racism. This much seems obvious. More broadly, though, it seems like there are all kinds of cases where we ought to love people in spite of some reason or another. Applying the analysis of *valuing in spite of*, loving someone in spite of a

¹⁹ Compare with Protasi, "Loving People for Who They Are."

²⁰ This also explains why citing the reasons in virtue of which you love someone is not subject to the problem of "trading up." According to the Identity Requirement, taking positive attitudes towards your beloved's identity is a formal requirement of love, and not necessarily an actual justification based on reasons that need to generalize to other persons.

property involves rejecting the potential contribution that a property might make to their being worth loving, and that includes negative contributions as well. We love family, friends, partners, etc. in spite of their being neat-freaks, gossips, couch-potatoes, know-it-alls, and worry warts. If we couldn't love people in spite of *some* things, then we couldn't love people at all. I'm pretty sure no one would love me, at least. We might actually think that loving in spite of is love's natural state. It's what makes love possible. To insist otherwise would be a bizarrely puritanical and unrealistic picture of loving behavior, requiring the simpering endorsement of every obnoxious quirk our beloveds possess.²¹

However, I hasten to point out that these kinds of traits are not typically those that feature in someone's practical identity, as I've defined it here: they are not part of descriptions under which we value ourselves, even if they are part of who we are in the sense that they are attributable us. As I suggested above, I take it that we're often happy to be loved in spite of some of these traits, which is further evidence of the distinction. But we should not allow these cases (or the case of the Racist Uncle) to mislead us into a failure to recognize what an affront it usually is to love someone in spite of their practical identity. Consider an unfortunately common scenario. A gay teenager comes out to his homophobic parents. They say, "We love you, but we can't accept your lifestyle." This is a paradigmatic case of loving someone in spite of an aspect of his practical identity, and it should be clear that in this context it is a devastating rejection. Naturally, their son might respond: "You don't love me for who I am." And here, the parents should hear that charge as a powerful and heart-wrenching criticism.

III. Apparent Conflicts

²¹ Thanks to Alison McIntyre for helpful discussion on this point.

The Racist Uncle presents us with a case where an aspect of someone's practical identity is in conflict with his well-being, but primarily for antecedent moral reasons. In examining our loving attitudes toward the Racist Uncle, significant weight is borne by the fact that treating his racism as a reason to love him not only violates the Well-Being Requirement, but violates other moral requirements as well. However, many cases where there is a conflict between the Identity and Well-Being Requirements will not coincide with antecedent moral norms, and thus we are faced with a purer conflict between love's requirements that is not influenced by independent moral matters (which is not to say, as we will continue to see, that failure to meet love's requirements itself lacks any moral implications). We turn to such cases now.

Many people believe that disabilities are bad for the people who have them. They hold what Elizabeth Barnes has recently called "bad-difference" views of disability, according to which having a disability makes you worse off.²² However, many people also identify with their disabilities: being deaf or having cerebral palsy, for instance, may be essential to their practical identity, and feature prominently in descriptions under which they value themselves. Consider Sarah Eyre, who writes: "There are all these unexpected lovely things that are awesome about being me, Sarah-Who-Has-MS."²³ One could not ask for a clearer example of disability figuring in a description under which a person values herself. Thus, in such cases, if some bad-difference view of disability is correct, it appears that loving a person in virtue of her practical identity will involve treating a property that is bad for her as a reason for loving her. We have assumed so far that treating bad properties as reasons for loving someone is inconsistent with the Well-Being Requirement, but I now want to suggest that this is not always the case. Specifically, when the badness of a property is socially

²² Elizabeth Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability," *Ethics* 125, no. 1 (2014); *The Minority Body* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

²³ Sarah Eyre, "A Few Awesome Things About Being Disabled," *noJane*, 2012, as quoted in *The Minority Body*, 87.

mediated, the Well-Being Requirement may in fact entail that we *ought* to treat such properties as reasons for loving someone.

According to the “Social Model of Disability,” disabilities are not bad in themselves, but can be a detriment to well-being based on the construction of social spaces and attitudes.²⁴ More precisely, on the Social Model, people have impairments, and the social harms associated with these impairments are what *make* them “disabilities.” According to this view, if society were not ableist, then disabilities would not necessarily make you worse off: indeed, they wouldn’t count as disabilities at all. Of course, we do live in an ableist society, and consequently, having a disability can indeed detract from a person’s well-being. Does that entail that taking loving attitudes toward disabilities, treating them as reasons for loving someone, is in conflict with the Well-Being Requirement in the same way it seemed to be in the case of racism, weakness of will, or low self-esteem?

To answer this question, we need to reflect on what seemed plausible in the first place about the idea that it is inconsistent with the Well-Being Requirement to treat a property that is bad for someone as a reason for loving her. There seem to be at least two reasons why this might be so. For one, it seems to follow from a broader moral requirement not to take positive attitudes towards bad things. For instance, admiring torture or praising murder seems, other things being equal, morally objectionable, and even *schadenfreude* can feel morally icky, to employ a technical term. To be positively disposed towards a property that is bad for someone seems to be an instance of this more general morally questionable behavior. Let’s call this *endorsing the bad*. Second, it appears that positive attitudes towards properties that are bad for someone can enable further negative consequences.

Taking loving attitudes towards your uncle’s racism is likely to embolden it, and hence perpetuate his

²⁴ For an overview and critique, see Tom Shakespeare, “The Social Model of Disability,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006). So, according to Barnes, the social model is not a bad-difference view, though for her critique of the social model, see Barnes, *The Minority Body*.

identification with that bad trait. The same goes for weakness of will. Let's call this *enabling the bad*. Both of these considerations help explain why treating properties that are bad for someone as reasons for loving her may be inconsistent with the Well-Being Requirement.

However, if we assume that what makes a disability bad for someone is a function of social attitudes and actions, then these considerations do not appear to apply. To take a different case of social stigma, if having red hair is bad for you because it is socially scorned, treating someone's red hair as a reason for loving her does not seem to be an instance of endorsing the bad, no doubt because the social mediation places distance between the property and the way in which that property might make you worse off in conjunction with adverse social circumstances.²⁵ Moreover, contrary to enabling the bad, adopting loving attitudes in such a case seems likely to help mitigate the bad effects. Surely, if everyone adopted loving attitudes towards a property that is socially scorned, then it would no longer be socially harmful. More practically, even one person treating a socially harmful property as a reason for loving you can help to make those social harms more bearable. To bridge this case with the case of disability, I want to illustrate with reference to my own experience of bodily difference. Moreover, since I am discussing a certain kind of social experience, it is useful to appeal to an instance of that experience with which I am actually acquainted. Not all bodily differences need be classified as disabilities, and I would not characterize my own condition as such, though others might.²⁶ However, since the idea that disabilities are bad for a person *only* for social reasons may seem implausible to some, it will be useful to employ a case that may read more easily as an instance of social harm, but appears more similar to the case of disability than having red hair.

²⁵ Coincidentally, Barnes also employs the example of red hair in *The Minority Body*, Chapter 3.

²⁶ On some versions of the Social Model, it's not clear what would prevent it from being classified as a disability. Indeed, this is part and parcel of an over-generalization objection to the Social Model. For discussion, see *ibid.*, Chapter 1.

I grew up with a “congenital chest wall anomaly” called *pectus excavatum*.²⁷ It is often associated with Marfan’s syndrome, which I was evaluated for, but do not have.²⁸ People with pectus excavatum have differently formed ribs and sternum that cave in towards the body. It’s possible that you’ve seen someone with this condition before (the occurrence is 1 in 1000), though it can be slight enough to go largely unnoticed.²⁹ My condition, on the other hand, was fairly severe. It looked like someone had punched me in the middle of the chest, and that my body had simply crumpled in like a piece of tin. The difference became accentuated during puberty, which is of course the time when you start caring about how your body looks. Needless to say, those were difficult years. At the pool, in the locker room, anytime I had my shirt off (and sometimes when it was noticeable through clothes), people would say ‘What’s wrong with you?’ and since I had never seen anyone else who looked like me, I thought there *was* something wrong with me. Comments usually escalated from there. I was lucky insofar as I was generally successful at hiding the way I looked through strategic clothing choices, but I stopped swimming and avoided shirt-free scenarios. Around 14, I finally got fed up and talked to my parents about going for a surgical consultation. The doctor was an advocate of the Ravitch procedure, an extremely invasive surgery that involves cracking the sternum down the middle (the similarity to the word “ravage” is illustrative). Full recovery takes two years. I don’t think it was until they saw my enthusiasm for going ahead with the procedure that my parents realized how deeply I had been affected by my experience of bodily difference. I believe it shaped me in ways that I am still trying to understand.

I did end up having surgery, though not the Ravitch procedure. My parents identified a doctor performing a newer, less invasive procedure that involved the use of an internal surgical bar,

²⁷ Michael J. Goretsky et al., "Chest Wall Anomalies: Pectus Excavatum and Pectus Carinatum," *Adolescent Medicine Clinics* (2004): 455.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 455-6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 458.

which I carried in my chest for two years (though I don't want to undersell the extent of the procedure: I was in the hospital for a week). Now, clearly, having *pectus excavatum* was bad for me. However, this was for psychosocial reasons. Many persons with bodily differences will experience those differences as harmful because of social attitudes and behaviors, and according to the Social Model of Disability, this is the same reason that disabilities can be harmful: indeed, the harms will typically be far more extensive than in my case, since they will adversely affect an individual's ability to navigate and access spaces, secure meaningful employment, etc. Moreover, as I have noted, many people with bodily differences and disabilities identify with those features, and this makes the social harms that stem from them all the more destructive. Even though I was deeply frustrated by the social stigma associated with my body, it was still *mine*.

Just as in the example of red hair, then, it does not seem at all contrary to an individual's well-being to treat as a reason for loving him a property that is bad for him precisely because of negative attitudes that others adopt toward it. On the contrary, it seems like a productive way of counteracting what makes the property bad. If I had been loved for my sunken chest, or believed I might have been, I doubt I would have felt so compelled to engage in extensive surgical alteration of my body.³⁰ But note, this is not a case where being loved *in spite of* how I looked would have done the trick. Who wants to be loved *in spite of* how they look? Recall that loving someone in spite of a property involves rejecting the contribution that it might make to their being worth loving. On the one hand, at least loving someone in spite of a property rejects the possibility that it is a reason *not* to love him, so it does not appear to be an instance of enabling the bad. But I would suggest this is not a particularly effective way of mitigating social stigma. It reads as a kind of indifference, which may be well and good when we love someone in spite of her being a worry-wart or a neat-freak, but cuts deeply when it comes to aspects of our practical identity. After all, aspects of our practical identity

³⁰ Obviously, this is a case where I was more concerned with romantic love than parental love.

are things we value about ourselves, and when people love us in spite of them, they are saying that those things are not worth valuing.

It may be pointed out that there are contexts in which it seems odd to treat people's disabilities or bodily differences as reasons for loving them. For instance, a soldier who has lost her legs in combat may not want this bodily change to be treated as a reason for loving her: she might simply not want it to factor in the loving attitudes held towards her at all.³¹ Indeed, we can imagine her saying to her partner: "Do you still love me in, in spite of what's happened?" where she would not regard an affirmative response as a bad thing.

However, I believe cases like this are the exceptions that prove the rule.³² I have been working here with a conception of practical identity as a description under which you value yourself: it thus has a strongly subjective dimension. It may be that the idea of having a particular property treated as a reason for being loved grates precisely because it is not a property that you yourself would cite in a description under which you value yourself.³³ In which case, not being loved for that property is not a violation of the Identity Requirement in the first place. Consider this in light of another kind of property that can be bad for you; say, alcoholism.³⁴ It seems strange to think of treating someone's alcoholism as a reason for loving him, but I suspect that is because people do not typically value themselves *as* alcoholics, but rather as *recovering* alcoholics, etc. The same might be said of cancer patients who value themselves as cancer *survivors*. Thus it is crucial in these contexts to defer to an individual's own practical identity, as opposed to an identity that consists in properties

³¹ Thanks to Susan Wolf for raising this worry.

³² In addition to the response below, I would suggest that part of the strangeness here stems from isolating one specific reason for loving someone. This is an artifact of theorizing about love that we do not typically confront in practice. Until we begin reflecting on it in earnest, love is a far more holistic phenomenon. Indeed, this is one of the challenges we face in picking it apart.

³³ Though perhaps the fact that someone regards that property as a reason for loving you may lead you to reconsider its value.

³⁴ Thanks to Erin Beeghly for suggesting this case.

that can merely be attributed to them. A person may well not include properties that can be attributed to her in a description under which she values herself. Importantly, as we have seen, many people with disabilities and bodily differences *do* include those properties in descriptions under which they value themselves, which is precisely why the concern about fulfilling the Identity Requirement arises. The examples in this section suggest that when an aspect of someone's identity is bad for her only for social reasons, then the Well-Being Requirement and the Identity Requirement align, as they ideally should.

IV. Compromising on the Well-Being Requirement (but just a bit)

Not everyone thinks that disabilities are bad for a person for merely social reasons. Those who hold the “bad-difference” views introduced above are those who believe, as Barnes puts it “not only is having a disability bad for you, having a disability would still be bad for you even if society was fully accommodating of disabled people.”³⁵ For instance, disabilities often end up on the “bad” lists generated by Objective List Theorists about well-being.³⁶ Moreover, Guy Kahane and Julian Savulescu note that the “everyday” concept of disability identifies it with “misfortune.”³⁷ I take no stand here on whether such views are correct. However, if they are, they undermine the argument I presented in the previous section. That argument was predicated on the idea that disabilities are only

³⁵ Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability," 89.

³⁶ For example, see Seana Valentine Shiffrin, "Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm," *Legal Theory* 5(1999); Elizabeth Harman, "Harming as Causing Harm," in *Harming Future Persons*, ed. M. A. Roberts and D. T. Wasserman (Springer, 2009). Shiffrin places disability on a list of “evils,” and Harman includes it in a list of “harms.” Cf. Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability," 91. Shiffrin's considered view is intriguing in light of the dialectic in this paper. At 123, she writes: “Although harms differ from one another in various ways, all have in common that they render agents or a significant or close aspect of their lived experience like that of an endurer as opposed to that of an active agent, genuinely engaged with her circumstances, who selects, or endorses and identifies with, the main components of her life.” On this view, it seems that identifying with a property makes it *ipso facto* not harmful. If that's true, then it's not clear that tensions between the Identity and Well-Being Requirements will ever arise. And yet, Shiffrin seems to regard disabilities as harmful.

³⁷ Guy Kahane and Julian Savulescu, "The Welfarist Account of Disability," in *Disability and Disadvantage*, ed. Adam Cureton and Kimberley Brownlee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26.

bad for a person because of the construction of social space. However, if disabilities are objective “bad-differences,” then that argument doesn’t go through, and the tension between the Identity and Well-Being Requirements seems to reemerge. For instance, compare with other properties that might be considered objectively bad, like pain, or weakness of will. To treat these properties as reasons for loving someone seems like the instances of endorsing the bad that we considered in the previous section (in the case of weakness of will, enabling the bad would no doubt be relevant as well).

If it is the case that an aspect of someone’s practical identity is objectively bad for her (but where there is no antecedent moral reason to reject that aspect, as in the case of the Racist Uncle), then I contend that one ought to compromise on the Well-Being Requirement and embrace all the aspects of the beloved’s identity anyway, even those that are objectively bad for her. Though such cases do not allow for perfect alignment between the Well-Being Requirement and the Identity Requirement, many other considerations discussed in the previous section remain salient. To love someone *in spite* of an aspect of her practical identity is, on the account I have provided, to take a property that figures centrally in a description under which she values herself and to reject it as a reason for loving her. It is not just a rejection of what she values, but a rejection of what she values about herself, of the very idea that what she values about herself is worth valuing. In this light, it is difficult to see how other reasons one might have to satisfy the Well-Being Requirement could trump the Identity Requirement in such a case. Even if there are reasons not to adopt positive attitudes towards objectively bad properties (as instances of endorsing the bad), it is plausible that the harm done by compromising on the Identity Requirement itself would be even worse. This is a case where it is again essential to take the perspective of the beloved. The idea that it would be contrary to a person’s well-being to adopt positive attitudes towards a disability, for instance,

because this would be an instance of endorsing the bad seems particularly precious and abstract in the face of the harm involved in loving someone in spite of a core element of who they are.

It turns out, moreover, that whatever damage is done to satisfaction of the Well-Being Requirement in these cases can be mollified: although one should not love the beloved in spite of his practical identity even if an aspect of it is bad for him, one can love him in spite of the harm this aspect causes. This, of course, requires distinguishing the bad property from the harm it causes. Is such a distinction viable? I believe so.

Consider an account of disability that links it directly with a reduction in well-being. According to Kahane and Savulescu's "Welfarist Account of Disability," a disability is "a stable physical or psychological property of subject S that leads to a reduction of S's level of well-being in circumstances C."³⁸ If any conception of disability will create a tension between the Identity and Well-Being Requirements, we should expect it would be one like this. However, on this account, we can still distinguish the "harmful trait" from the harm that it causes. This is borne out by Kahan and Savulescu's own comment that the Welfarist account is distinct from the everyday concept of disability in an important way. They note that the everyday concept of disability is normative, in the sense that a disability on this view "is a misfortune to those who suffer from it and gives reasons to correct it."³⁹ In contrast, on the Welfarist account: "If something reduces well-being, then what is intrinsically bad is the harm it does—the reduction of well-being. But what reduces well-being is only instrumentally bad. And this means that while we may have some reason to correct it *as a means* to removing harm, we can equally remove the harm by changing the circumstances. There is no intrinsic reason to correct a condition that counts as a disability [on the welfarist account]."⁴⁰ Or compare Barnes's comment in the PEA Soup discussion of her recent paper: "I think it might be

³⁸ Ibid., 25.

³⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

plausible to say that DMD [Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy], for example, is bad-difference, but bad-difference in virtue of its correlated shortened lifespan, not bad-difference just in virtue of being a disability. If you could eliminate the shortened lifespan, you could eliminate the bad-difference (without thereby eliminating the disability).”⁴¹

This distinction allows us an inroad to explaining why it is not morally objectionable to treat a property that is bad for someone as a reason for loving her, at least in the case of disability: we can indeed distinguish the basis for love (the property) from the harm that it causes. If the property is not intrinsically linked with the harm, then it seems we can avoid the implication that regarding a disability as among your reasons for loving someone (even if it is construed as objectively bad) is an instance of problematically *endorsing the bad*. This, of course, does not obviate the fact that the property is instrumentally bad, and is thus directly associated with production of harms for the beloved. So, at best, this distinction may help to mitigate the tension between the Identity and the Well-Being Requirements without completely removing it. However, that mitigation, in conjunction with the goods involved in satisfying the Identity Requirement, helps to explain why it is not, all things considered, objectionable to treat properties that are supposedly objectively bad as reasons for loving someone, provided they are part of a person’s practical identity. Indeed, it seems clear that this is what you ought to do.

V. Conclusion

⁴¹ Barnes also writes: “Similarly, we can think that a disability itself is mere-difference while still thinking that some aspects of that disability are themselves bad, or stuff we’d want to get rid of. I think people find this tricky because they tend to think of being disabled as just a cluster of ‘symptoms’ (in a way we obviously don’t for things like sex or gender)—so to value being disabled just is to value those symptoms. But I think that’s an implicitly medicalized view of disability, and that (implicitly or otherwise) medicalized views of disability don’t really capture what it is to be disabled.” <http://peasoup.typepad.com/peasoup/2014/11/ethics-discussion-at-pea-soup-elizabeth-barnes-valuing-disability-causing-disability-with-critical-p.html>

The discussion here obviously grants a special role to agency in our understanding of love. I have talked about adopting attitudes or not, for some reasons versus others, as if these are phenomena that we can control. Yet many have noted that love appears non-volitional: we don't choose whom we love or why, it just happens to us. But the recommendations considered here can be married with intuitions and observations about love's non-volitional nature. Indeed, it is this very feature that explains why love can be demanding. Finding that we love someone, we also find ourselves subject to requirements on the attitudes that we ought to hold, attitudes over which we may have limited direct control. Nevertheless, our attitudes are susceptible to training, persuasion, and education. It may follow from this discussion that love is hard work, but I do not believe that I have claimed that it requires anything of us that is impossible.

It wasn't until years after my surgery that I developed a sense of comfort with my body that allowed me to see that the surgery was, perhaps, unnecessary. I have at times even regretted it. The right atmosphere of evaluative attitudes might have allowed me to better assess whether it was a change that I wanted, an atmosphere with which love *in spite of* is inconsistent. After all, I abandoned an aspect of who I was. As Barnes has noted, these kinds of changes are not ones that we undertake on behalf of others lightly, no matter the valence of the change, and the same hesitance can of course be found when we face such decisions ourselves.⁴² As Kahane and Savulescu have argued, on a Welfarist account, we can remove instrumental detriments to well-being by changing the circumstances that make them harmful. At the individual level, I have argued that changing the circumstances through adopting loving attitudes towards difference and disability comes at little cost, and it has the important benefit of affirming the beloved's identity. Where aspects of a person's practical identity are at stake, even if they are viewed as objectively bad for her, we should not love in spite of.

⁴² Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability," 98.