Finite Love

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Pre-print draft -- Forthcoming in *Inquiry*. Please cite published version.

Abstract: It seems like a problem to say that love can be merited—its value is located in its transcendence of comparative judgments. However, we commonly make judgments about who is and is not worth loving. We deem certain romantic partners, friends, and family members as worth or not worth our loving time, attention, and effort. In this paper, I argue that love can be merited, and it is merited because of a person's intrinsic valuable qualities. However, it is not the fact that such qualities can be compared that is relevant. What is relevant is the fact that such qualities are gradable, and what it means for someone to merit love is that their qualities meet a threshold or standard of value for love. Moreover, love requires some amount of practical wisdom in discerning these thresholds and when someone meets or fails to meet them. This is important to recognize since we are creatures of finite love. We do not have the capacity to love everyone who is both worthy and unworthy of love. Given our finite capacities, I argue that making wise and discerning judgments about whom to love should be kept in mind when philosophizing about love.

Keywords: grace, love, practical wisdom, satisficing value, worth

Introduction

It may seem odd to say that love can be merited. This is partly because if love can be merited, it can also be unmerited, and it appears morally misguided to say that someone does not merit love or is unworthy of it. Moreover, if my love is contingent on my beloved's meriting it, then it may seem like I do not properly love them, or possibly that I do not *love* them at all. What if they fail to merit it at some point? Should I stop loving them? Furthermore, if love is merited, then why should I see the people that I love as worthy of it? Shouldn't I seek out someone more worthy of my love? As a result, some philosophers have denied that love can be merited.[1]

[1] (Lord Forthcoming; Naar 2023; Setiya 2014; 2022; Velleman 1999; Yao 2020)

But also consider that love is a significant cognitive and emotional investment in another person. When I love someone, I am willing to dedicate significant parts of myself and my life to them—sometimes love even becomes a lifelong commitment. Given this, it seems that I can give it to the wrong people. If someone is cruel to me, deceptive, or dull, they are not worth this deeply personal investment. They do not merit my love.

In this paper, I will argue that it is appropriate to think about love as responding to worth or merit, and someone is worth loving when they have valuable qualities that make them good enough to love. My focus will be on romantic love, various kinds of familial love, and friendship love.[2] What binds these together is that the persons in question have characters to which qualitative assessments intelligibly apply.[3] It excludes love for children. I take this view to be less absurd when applied to children than it is sometimes taken to be.[4] I believe it is even a defensible view, although the controversial nature of this thesis would require a defense that is beyond the scope of what I will argue here.[5]

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[2] This designates the extension of the concept 'love' I cover in this paper. This sets it apart from other gradable qualities views, which tend to focus on romantic love, e.g., (Delaney 1996; Keller 2000). For comparable extensions, see (Helm 2010, 4; Jeske 2008, 47; Kolodny 2003, 137; Naar 2023, 5).

[3] Part of my focus is on what Kate Abramson and Adam Leite have called "reactive love," which includes qualities related to the beloved's quality of will and moral character toward the lover (Abramson and Leite 2011). However, qualities that do not arise within the context of a relationship (e.g., the way they treat others) may make someone worth loving. Furthermore, I am not restricting love as a response to the capacity for practical reason, like in (Velleman 1999). For a moving series of examples in which love, even understood as an awareness of another's capacity to value, is not necessarily focused on rational agency, see (Kennett 2008). See also (Yao 2020, 13). Finally, nothing in my account excludes non-human animals from being lovable, although they are not the focus of this paper.

[4] For example, see (Frankfurt 2004, 29–31, 39–40; 2006, 25; Stump 2006, 25, 34).

[5] While I am not providing a defense of this view here, it is worth motivating its plausibility. Against this view, Harry Frankfurt argues, "The fact is that I loved [my children] even before they were born—before I had any especially relevant information about their personal characteristics or their particular merits and virtues" (Frankfurt 2004, 39). But there are qualities one can know even before a child is born that merit love for them. These are often fairly simple and repeatable in some respects (e.g., their innocence, vulnerability, or dependency). Once they are born some of these remain simple and widely repeatable for a while, but they quickly become more fine-grained and unique as a child's personality develops (even very early on). Importantly, Frankfurt also claims that "It is quite clear to me that I do not love them more than other

In section one, I focus on merited love and discuss two prominent accounts of what grounds it. One of these accounts, the gradable qualities view, has received criticism for several reasons. I will focus on one of these criticisms, namely that this view makes those whom we love exchangeable based on their gradable qualities. I maintain that several attempts to address this problem are unsuccessful. In section two, I argue that what is most significant about valuable qualities in love is the fact that such qualities are *gradable*, not *comparable*. I then argue that someone is worth loving when their valuable qualities meet a satisficing threshold of value. This grounds non-comparative judgments, which are judgments of the right kind. It also provides the right way of valuing somebody in love, which involves both being satisfied with and affirming the beloved. In section three, I discuss the relation between particular qualities and loving a whole person, and I argue that some people can fall short of worthiness of love. In section four, I argue that while there may be reasons to love someone even when they do not merit it, the importance of this kind of gracious love is often overestimated. This is because whom to love is a question for finite creatures with finite capacities for love, and as such, questions of the worthiness of love should be sensitive to this fact of our finitude.

1. Fitting Love

Imagine your partner, friend, or family member asking out of curiosity, "Why do you love me?" How might you answer? You may cite facts relevant to explaining how you met, like the fact that you sat next to each other in homeroom during high school, or you were born into the same family. Or you may cite contemporary research in the evolutionary biology of love and explain that your attachment to them is rooted in millions of years of human evolution that have given rise to

children because I believe they are better" (Frankfurt 2004, 39). As I will argue throughout this paper, this point is not in conflict with the gradable qualities view I defend in this paper.

tendencies for pair bonding or the need for intimate associations. It is possible that they were asking for the causes of why you love them, and if so, these answers would be relevant. However, they may be rightly dissatisfied with your response. They may not want to know what caused you to love them, they may want to know what normative reasons you have for loving them.

Some philosophers argue that such reasons cannot be given. There are only causes that explain our love (Han 2021; Frankfurt 2004; Smuts 2014a; Zangwill 2013). I will briefly discuss these views in the final section, but arguing against the skeptical views will not be my focus. I will assume that there are such reasons for now. Among those who argue that there are reasons for love, there is disagreement about which facts or properties are reasons for love. For instance, some argue that valuable relationships—the historical series of mutual interactions between persons—are reasons for love (Jeske 2008; 2017; Kolodny 2003; Scheffler 2004; Raz 2001). Others argue that such reasons are intrinsically valuable qualities (Abramson and Leite 2011; Bagley 2015; Clausen 2019; Delaney 1996; Jollimore 2011; 2017; Keller 2000; Lau 2021; Naar 2023; Setiya 2014; Shpall 2020; Velleman 1999). These reasons might include the beloved's kindness, the endearing way that they wrinkle their nose when they find your antics mildly disapproving, or simply their humanity. The question of which intrinsic qualities qualify as reasons is also a subject of significant debate.

Others have argued that reasons for love are some mix of these (Howard 2019; Hurka 2017). This may be true.[6] As defenders of such hybrid views are aware, only some of these reasons are what make a person *lovable* or *fitting to love*. For example, a past relationship does not make someone lovable. This is because what makes a person worth loving will be some intrinsic facts about them, not facts about how they relate to something else of value, such as a relationship. However,

[6] Whether it is true depends on whether there are so-called "wrong kind reasons." For an overview, see (Gertken and Kiesewetter 2017). My claim is that if there are reasons for love not grounded in lovability, this does not solve some of the relevant problems for the gradable qualities view.

continuing a relationship may still be valuable, and this value may give one reasons for preserving it and for valuing the beloved for their own sake.[7] To illustrate this distinction, consider an analogy to aesthetic appreciation. Let's assume that aesthetic appreciation is one way to value an aesthetic object for its own sake. An exact replica of Picasso's *Guernica* has the same intrinsic aesthetic properties as the original. This would mean that they are equally worth aesthetic appreciation, but they are not equivalent in terms of reasons to value them for their own sake. The original has a certain extrinsic, historical property, namely the fact that Picasso painted it.[8] This fact is a reason to value the original for its own sake (albeit for its historical, not aesthetic value). There is no such historical reason to value the copy for its own sake, even though there are intrinsic aesthetic properties that are reasons to value the copy for its own sake. Similarly, a relationship may give one special reasons for valuing a person for their own sake, but it does not follow that they are more worthy of love than others.[9]

A terminological note is important here. I use the terms 'merit love', 'worthy of love', 'lovable', or 'fitting to love' to be roughly interchangeable.[10] With that said, I will tend to use the terms 'merit' and 'worth' for properties that apply to a whole person. I will also tend to use

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[7] This is a feature of Niko Kolodny's influential view (Kolodny 2003). Following Elizabeth Anderson (and others, such as Kolodny), I understand that "To value something is to have a complex of positive attitudes toward it, governed by distinct standards of perception, emotion, deliberation, desire, and conduct" (Anderson 1993, 3). Moreover, valuing is dispositional (Kolodny 2003, 150), and it includes a judgment that one has reasons for such valuing (Kolodny 2003, 150; Scheffler 2004). To value something *for its own sake*, is to value it independently of whether it brings about some other value (Kolodny 2003, 150–53) or whether it is mere instance of some greater possible instantiation of that value (Adams 1999, chap. 6). I will discuss this more in the following section.

[8] This example is similar to reasons to value historical artifacts, which are grounded in extrinsic properties (Kagan 1998). See also (Kolodny 2003; Korsgaard 1998; Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2000).

[9] For versions of this criticism, see (Keller 2013, chap. 3; Howard 2019; Naar 2017, 203–4; 2023, 100–103; Protasi 2016, 216–17; Yao 2020, 12).

[10] I will not use the term 'deserved' because it is often associated with effort or achievement. Somebody can be worth loving for qualities that have little to do with effort, like one's natural kindness. It's not that the beloved necessarily needs *to do* something to merit love, but they do need *to be* a certain way to merit it. See also (Hooker 2021, 14; Naar 2023, 72n11).

'lovability' and 'fitting to love' to refer to the way that individual valuable qualities of a person contribute to whether that person merits or is worth loving. This use is artificial and meant to track a contributory versus overall property of lovability.

Two likely candidates for what makes someone lovable will be their valuable qualities either of a gradable or non-gradable kind. By "gradable," I mean that the qualities which make someone lovable come in varying amounts. Gradable qualities are also comparable. By "comparable," I mean that two or more evaluands can exist in meaningful comparative relations with one another.[11] These include relations of *better than*, *worse than*, or *equally good*.[12] For instance, one person can be kinder than another, have a worse sense of humor than them, or wrinkle their nose as endearingly as someone else. All of these relations can meaningfully bear between two or more objects that possess gradable qualities. By "non-gradable," I mean valuable qualities that do not admit of degrees—an object either possesses these qualities or does not. For example, Kieran Setiya argues that the value of a person's humanity makes them sufficiently worthy of love (Setiya 2014). While one person can act more or less humanely, they cannot instantiate humanity to varying degrees. Or on J. David Velleman's view, a person's rational capacity for valuing makes them worthy of love (Velleman 1999). Persons may exercise their rational nature to varying degrees, but whether they are a rational being is not a matter of degree. Errol Lord argues that the relevant value is dignity (Lord Forthcoming). Lord argues that dignity is determined by gradable qualities, but the value of dignity itself is non-gradable. Alternatively, one may argue that a person's unique point of view makes them

[11] I take this conception of comparability from Ruth Chang (Chang 1997). Comparability is distinct from commensurability. Two evaluands are incommensurable when they lack a common cardinal scale of measurement (Chang 1997, 2). Two objects that are comparable but incommensurable can be said to bear comparative relations without specifying on a cardinal scale how much better one is than another.
[12] There may be other relations, such as being "roughly equal" (Parfit 1984, 431) or "on a par" (Chang 2002). These relations cover cases in which A's qualities are neither better nor worse than B's, A+'s qualities are better than A's, and A+'s qualities are not better than B's. Whether there is this fourth relation is not central to the arguments here.

worthy of love (Naar 2023; Yao 2020).[13] One person can have a more appealing or interesting point of view than another, but either a person has a point of view or they do not. Importantly, non-gradable qualities are comparable, but they are limited to *equally good* comparisons. For example, one person cannot have more humanity than another or the most amount of humanity. But two persons can equally instantiate the value of humanity. The same applies to other non-gradable properties.[14]

One may wonder whether a hybrid view about the fittingness of love could be adopted such that both gradable and non-gradable qualities make a person lovable. This is unlikely since these views tend to emphasize incompatible aspects of why love is important. Consider Sigmund Freud's observation that "A love that does not discriminate seems to me to forfeit a part of its own value, by doing an injustice to its object; and secondly, not all men are worthy of love" (Freud 2010, 82). Freud is not claiming that love needs to be a recognition of one's complete uniqueness. Rather, an integral component of the value of love is in the fact that it picks one out as fitting for such special treatment. Part of this "picking out" involves the exercise of the lover's evaluative discriminatory capacities. This is usually framed as a person being picked out as worth loving in comparison to others.[15] Conversely, one attraction of the non-gradable view is that it says all persons are worth loving. One might claim that the importance of love is located in its salvation from typical human concerns of merit and hierarchy. On this view, one cannot fail to be worthy of love. Love is recognizing the value of someone "regardless of their merits" (Setiya 2022, 56).

[13] Yao's view is complicated on this point as she distinguishes between meriting love and being fitting for affection. I discuss this in section four.
[14] Naar argues that a unique point of view instantiates a unique value that is incomparable and unrepeatable (Naar 2023, 125–36). So, one may contend that this point does not apply to his view. However, multiple points of view may still be comparable since they may still have the same "covering value," namely the fact that they are both points of view (Chang 1997, 5).
[15] For example, (Keller 2000, 163; Naar 2017, 201).

Another purported attraction of the non-gradable valuable qualities view is that someone's incomparable value explains their irreplaceability. Velleman describes this in the following way, "Valuing [a person] as irreplaceable is a mode of appreciation, in which we respond to her value with an unwillingness to replace her or to size her up against potential replacements" (Velleman 1999, 368).[16] Thus, loving someone is a matter of valuing them in a way that is incompatible with some types of comparisons to others because such a comparative basis would justify swapping the beloved when someone else better fits the bill. But that simply wouldn't be love. Therefore, the gradable qualities view is seemingly susceptible to this problem because a greater amount of some valuable quality (or more likely qualit*ies*) would provide a rational ground for judging someone else as more lovable. In Robert Nozick's turn of phrase, if some person's valuable qualities were more valuable than one's beloved, this seems like a reason to "trade up" to someone else (Nozick 1989, 76).[17]

The problem of trading up is often viewed as a problem relating to valuing. However, we should now say something about the relationship between *judgments* of worth in love and loving understood as a kind of *valuing*. Velleman is correctly sensitive to this distinction, and he argues that in love judgment of a person's worth is a recognition that "all persons should be judged to have the same value" (Velleman 1999, 367). According to him, this is their capacity for rational valuing. Valuing a person as irreplaceable is the right way of valuing them because of the judgment that the beloved has the same value as everyone else (Velleman 1999, 367). Thus, Velleman's answer to the

[16] See also (Howard 2019, 132–35; Kolodny 2003, 178–79; Naar 2019; Raz 2001, 25–27; Smuts 2014b).
[17] The trading up problem is only one of the "big four" problems for the gradable qualities view, but not just for this view (Howard 2019; Jollimore 2011, chap. 1). These include the problem of inconsistency, which says that on this view one has a reason to love someone only to the extent that they have the same qualities. Another is the problem of universality, namely that it would be fitting for anyone to love your beloved. Finally, there is the problem of non-substitutability. This is the problem about why we are not permitted to switch to someone else who is equally worth loving. These problems are often treated with a singular solution. However, they are quite distinct from one another in what makes them problematic. I will discuss the problem of inconsistency in section two, but the others are beyond the scope of this paper.

trading up problem is that comparative judgments *of the right kind* ground valuing the beloved as irreplaceable.

Those looking to defend the gradable qualities view have argued that valuing someone irreplaceably can be grounded in other comparative judgments (i.e., *worse/better than* judgments). I cannot run through all of these solutions here, but I will focus on a few that have been influential. For example, Nozick entertains the option that transition costs, like heartbreak, may provide us reasons not to trade up (Nozick 1989). Presumably these costs could also give the lover reasons to value the beloved as irreplaceable. In such cases, one may recognize that treating the beloved as irreplicable is instrumentally valuable because treating someone as if they are irreplaceable may be the only way to sustain a relationship that has lasting value. However, a judgment that the beloved is *worth* loving does not ground this valuing attitude.[18] A satisfying response to the trading up problem will not merely provide sufficient reason for not trading up. For even if one has sufficient reason not to trade up, one still *judges* that the beloved is vulnerable to such comparisons.[19]

One common response to the problem is to claim that the relevant gradable qualities are relational.[20] Knowing the particular ways how to treat someone who is in a bad mood is an example (Keller 2000, 166). However, the relevant relational properties are subject to the trading up problem. This response often focuses on whether two persons can have the same property, rather than the fact that similar properties can vary in degree. One can imagine finding someone else who knows how to treat them when they are in a bad mood better than their current partner even if it is not in

[18] For more on this point, see (Howard 2019).
[19] This is why it is not adequate simply to provide merely justifying reasons for not trading up. It may be that reasons for love are merely justifying (Abramson and Leite 2024; Jollimore 2011, 14, 125), but as long as one judges that trading up would be justified, the problem remains (Naar 2023, 86–87). Cf. (Shpall 2020, 429)
[20] See also (Hurka 2011, 152–54; 2017; Jollimore 2011, 75). For others who employ such qualities as a response to trading up, see (Bagley 2015, 504–5; Delaney 1996, 346, 355n.31; Keller 2000, 170–71; Naar 2017, 209–10; Protasi 2016, 220–22; Shpall 2020, 428–30).

the exact same way. Such properties may be incommensurable, but they are still comparable.[21] Moreover, the trading up problem can apply to a whole person, not just a single quality. The lover may wonder if someone is better than their beloved on the whole. Alternatively, it is possible that "relational" properties refer to the relationship itself.[22] However, as we have seen, while a relationship can be a reason to value someone for their own sake, it does not make them worthy of love. And the trading up problem is a problem concerning comparative judgments of value about the beloved themselves.

One particularly compelling response to the trading up problem comes from Troy Jollimore (Jollimore 2011; 2017). Jollimore argues that properly loving someone includes valuing them in a non-comparative way. Thus, even if other individuals besides one's beloved are lovable for similar (or even better) qualities, the considerations in favor of loving someone else are no longer reasons in virtue of the proper appreciation of one's beloved. Jollimore argues that even if someone else is qualitatively better than one's beloved, reasons for loving that other person are *silenced* (Jollimore 2011, 35–43; 2017, 8–14; McDowell 1979). When a reason is silenced, it loses its status as a reason. The ideal lover on this view does not consider other persons to be in competition with one's beloved because valuing somebody as irreplaceable is a matter of not paying others heed. Therefore, even if there are others with comparably better qualities, love prevents comparative judgments from mattering or playing a role in the lover's overall deliberations about love.

Jollimore's claim is that comparative judgments are antithetical to valuing someone in the right way. However, it is unclear why a *mere comparison* of qualities would be unloving. Consider an analogy to aesthetic appreciation of art: If I were to view *The Starry Night*, for example, I ought to

[21] See fn. 11. Moreover, I assume that such relational qualities are not agent-relative valuable, which is a concept fraught with problems (Howard 2019, 126–27; Schroeder 2007).
[22] See also (Protasi 2016, 221).

appreciate it non-comparatively, according to Jollimore. However, let's say I compare *The Starry Night* with *Vase With Twelve Sunflowers*, and I judge that the latter instantiates a more brilliant use of yellow than the former. It is not clear why this comparison of valuable qualities is itself an issue. In fact, this comparison may enrich my appreciation of one in virtue of the other. I may gain a new appreciation of Van Gogh's use of yellow in *The Starry Night* which I did not notice until I compared the two. It would be a problem to say that one is no longer worthy of aesthetic appreciation because it is more or less beautiful than another. That is, if I end up concluding that *Vase With Twelve Sunflowers* is more beautiful than *The Starry Night*, and therefore, this detracts from my appreciation of one over the other, I have then failed to properly appreciate the less beautiful painting. What I have failed to do in this case is notice that *The Starry Night* merits appreciation.[23]

The same applies to love. Say I take my beloved's creativity as a lovable property. I can judge that they are not as creative as somebody else, like a notable poet or musician. In virtue of making this comparison, I haven't failed to love them or love them properly. It is not the presence of the comparative judgment of value that is the problem. A problem would arise if I took this comparative judgment to entail that my beloved is not worthy (or less worthy) of my love.

Comparative judgments can also make a person better at loving in a way analogous to aesthetic appreciation.[24] For instance, my greater understanding of creativity in general may enhance my ability to appreciate my beloved's creativity, and I may acquire this understanding through attending to the creativity of others. As such, these comparisons can put me in a better position to appreciate and love my beloved for their creativity.

[23] See also (Van Fossen 2022).
[24] See also (Adams 1999, 169).

Finally, there is an assumption in Jollimore's response to the trading up problem that if one is lovable for their gradable qualities, they are lovable only to the extent that those qualities are better than the qualities of others.[25] Consider that by silencing the valuable qualities of other people as reasons for judging them to be lovable, one limits the domain of people being considered for love to one person. We can say that some instantiation of a quality is the best when there are no other instantiations of that quality that are better than it.[26] Since the domain of whom is worth loving is a single person on the silencing view, they would *de facto* be taken have the best qualities. However, the central problem with the gradable valuable qualities view is not whether the beloved is in competition for the lover's love but whether the lover judges their beloved as a competitor. The non-gradable view seems to explain why this is: If everyone has the same value, then there are no competitors.

2. The Satisficing Qualities View

The gradable qualities view appears to be in trouble. It seems as if what makes a person worth loving on this view will vary with the gradation of qualities, and therein lies the fundamental problem. Notice, though, that the problem discussed above is not that someone is lovable for their gradable valuable qualities but rather in the thought that facts about how those qualities compare to others matter for one's love. Such a thought is indeed very strange. For instance, say I love my friend in part because of his trustworthiness. Of course, he could be more or less trustworthy than he is. But if he's sufficiently trustworthy, then I can cite this as a reason for why he is fitting for my friendship. What does not matter is whether someone else exists who is more trustworthy or as trustworthy as my friend, nor does it matter whether my friend is the most trustworthy person that

[25] For others who hold this assumption about the comparative qualities view, see (Keller 2000, 171; Kolodny 2003, 155; Velleman 1999, 366–70). For dissent, see (Schaubroeck 2014, 117).
[26] And an instantiation of a quality is the worst if there are none worse than it!

exists. The trading up objection reveals the absurdity of thinking that the qualities of others matter for whether one's beloved is worth loving, not in the view that what makes a person lovable are their comparable features.

When it comes to love, what is most relevant about such qualities is not that they are *comparable* but rather that they are *gradable*. Of course, the gradation of value in a token occurrence of a gradable property can be compared to the amount of some other token occurrence of that property (or a sufficiently similar property), but grades of value are meaningful independent of comparisons. To use an analogy, I can weigh two objects against one another. This weighing may result in the comparative judgment that one object is heavier than another. Alternatively, I may weigh one object to check whether it meets some threshold of weight. In doing so, I am not making a *comparative* judgment. I am making a judgment of *measurement*. I am judging whether it has a certain property that meets or exceeds a threshold, not how that property relates to some other property. Likewise, a person's valuable qualities may be gradable, but this does not mean that such qualities must be compared to the qualities of anyone else to make someone lovable. Rather, what is relevant is whether a person's qualities meet a standard or threshold of value.

The view just described says that judgments of lovability are grounded in *good enough* or *satisficing* qualities. Michael Slote's application of satisficing value within the context of teleological moral theories and theories of rationality is the most notable employment of this concept in normative ethics (Slote 1989; 2001; 2004). Consider that one can order acts according to their value without committing to the principle that one ought to act in a way just in case its value is higher in that ordering (Broome 1991, 10–13). A reason that one may want to do this is to distinguish between acts that one ought to do and supererogatory acts, which are acts that are praiseworthy in virtue of being better than what is obligated (Slote 1989, 3). In the context of love, satisficing value

is not teleological; rather, what is valuable about a person makes love for them fitting when this value meets a certain threshold.[27] Therefore, if one person has a greater degree of valuable qualities than someone else, this would not necessarily mean that the former would be more lovable. In this way, how a person compares to others does not affect whether they are lovable. Robert Adams makes this point nicely when he observes that "being placed on a scale, even at the top of it, is as such quite different from being loved or appreciated for oneself" (Adams 1999, 169).[28] Rather, a person is worth loving when their valuable qualities meet a threshold of value. Therefore, on the satisficing view, the relevant judgments of worthiness of love are mensurative but not comparative.

It is important to distinguish a common use of "good enough" from its meaning in the context of satisficing value. Colloquially, when someone is "good enough," this means the lover could have done better but they merely settled for someone adequate but not fantastic. However, this usage indicates the opposite of the satisficing view. It means that someone was not good enough to love, but there was no one else available. Instead, the relevant conception of satisficing is that there is some absolute threshold of being good enough love, not a threshold relative to the available options (Hurka 1990).

By claiming that a threshold is "absolute," this does not mean that it ignores particularities of individual personality or relationship types. The relevant threshold in a given case is most likely vague, and where it is set is a matter of complexity. One complexity is that factors like the type of love will affect where the threshold is set. For instance, the threshold of loving one's brother will

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[27] Importantly, we need not assume that such concepts will be relevant in every possible domain in which a satisficing structure can be applied. For instance, it makes little sense to say that loving someone with better qualities is somehow praiseworthy or above and beyond the call of duty.

[28] Adams endorses the notion of satisficing value in this context, but he resists the idea that satisficing qualities make someone *worth* loving (Adams 1999, 165). I will argue that this is a problem in the final section of this paper. See also (Hurka 2011, 151–52; Jollimore 2011, chap. 4). Although Jollimore discusses satisficing, his focus is on valuing somebody non-comparatively, not satisficing judgments, which as I argued above, is a mistake.

generally be less demanding than the threshold of loving a friend. There still can be a threshold to love one's brother. Imagine you're the brother of Nero, for instance. But standards for someone being worthy of your friendship can be quite a bit higher—someone may not be worth one's friendship even if they are quite a bit better than Nero.

Some amount of practical wisdom is thus required in love. This is true both in properly judging when somebody meets a threshold but also where the relevant threshold is in any given case. In fact, an Aristotelian conception of the virtuous mean is helpful here (Aristotle 1984, bk. II.6 & 7). A threshold can be set too high or too low. In cases where it is set too high, one may be insufficiently attentive to the lovability of others. Iris Murdoch famously discusses one case in which a woman unjustly interprets the qualities of her daughter-in-law in an unloving way. After coming to view her in a loving light, "[her daughter-in-law] is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on" (Murdoch 2013, 17). Murdoch argues that the woman comes to see what is lovable in her daughter-in-law by properly coming to see the valuable qualities she possesses, whereas before she was blind to the sufficiency of their value in meriting her love.[29] We can interpret such cases in two different ways. First, as someone setting their standards of love too high. Alternatively, it may be that one's standards are right, but one fails to see how somebody meets these standards. In either case, judging whether those qualities make her worth loving takes a level of critical discernment.

This threshold can also be set too low. For instance, a person may have a distorted conception of which kinds of people are worth their love. In other cases, one's standards may be

[29] I am not suggesting that this is precisely how Murdoch understands the case, and my goal in this paper is not to interpret her view. In fact, some defenders of a Murdoch-inspired views would take Murdoch to be defending a non-gradable valuable qualities view (e.g., (Setiya 2014; Velleman 1999)).

appropriate, but one may be deceived about how much another person is worth their love. The lover sometimes sees the beloved in a way that abstracts from any accurate descriptions of what they are like. These distortions undoubtedly are present much of the time, especially in the early stages of romantic love or when we take biological ties more seriously than we should. They can mask what are otherwise regrettable aspects of a person, and cruel uncaring people can seem worth one's deepest investments. Part of learning how to love is developing the capacities to learn how to set the relevant standards of value and the discernment to know when they are or are not being met.

This last observation highlights that the non-gradable qualities view faces a significant problem when considering cases where one has set the threshold too low. Love's irreplaceability cannot be a categorical rule of love, and there are cases in which one may have good reasons to "trade up." For example, if a person is in a relationship with a hateful and abusive partner, and there is a kind and caring person whom they could love instead, then trading up would be justified. Notice that the latter is not worth loving *because* they possess better qualities than the former. Rather, the latter is worth one's love, and the former is not. Irreplaceability is an important moral feature of our loving relationships, but there is also the risk of moralizing it to the point of losing other important moral goods, like self-respect or adequate care for one's own well-being. In contrast, the satisficing view explains when trading up is justified—it is justified when one is trading up to someone with satisficing qualities from someone who fails to meet this threshold.

The satisficing view also properly grounds the nature of valuing in love. To value someone lovingly is in part to non-instrumentally care about them such that this care does not rest on its bringing about something else of value (Kolodny 2003, 150–53). In addition to non-instrumental caring, valuing somebody in a loving way is a matter of not treating them as, what Adams calls, a

"mere instance" of some value (Adams 1999, chap. 6).[30] Valuing someone as a mere instance is valuing them as a less-than-worthy placeholder of some greater instantiation of value that could be realized. Thus, non-instrumental valuing is a species of a broader kind of valuing in which one recognizes that the beloved is worth one's care independent of any greater amount of value that may be possible. Since judgments of worthiness are recognitions that someone does not need to be better than they are to merit love, valuing them in a loving way involves, as Michael Slote describes, "*not wanting, not feeling the need for, anything more or better*" (Slote 2004, 16).[31] "Better" may refer to some benefit the beloved is expected to provide instrumentally or as a mere placeholder. Therefore, satisficing judgments in love render certain desires or needs unfitting.[32]

In addition to being satisfied with the beloved, some amount of *positive affirmation* of the beloved is also important (Calhoun 2018, chap. 7; Katsafanas 2023, chap. 9; Wallace 2013, 65–77). Consider the idea of being content with how one's life has turned out. This may be a reaction involving the judgment that things could have been better than they are, but one may deny that this is cause for disturbance. They may come to this state by reflecting on the fact that regretting the past is bad since it cannot be changed. Mere contentment is thus compatible with reasons to avoid these emotions because they are unpleasant or disturbing. Alternatively, one may see how their life has

[30] See also (Frankfurt 2004, 79–80).

[31] Slote distinguishes between instrumental and non-instrumental satisficing (Slote 2004). He focuses on teleological practical reasons. On an instrumental conception of rational self-interest, making moderate choices regarding particular decisions often will be the best way of maximizing happiness over the course of one's life. In opposition to this, Slote argues that moderation is itself good for an agent because it is a non-instrumentally good state of being satisfied. I do not officially endorse this view within teleological theories of rational self-interest or morality. But I do endorse the idea of loving somebody worth loving because they are good enough independently of whether this may lead to other valuable outcomes.

[32] Frankfurt similarly argues that love is a kind of self-satisfaction (Frankfurt 1992, 12–13; 2004, 97; 2006, 16–17). However, love is not a satisfaction *with oneself*. A person could be ambivalently torn between two beloveds, each of which the lover does not see as needing to be more than they are. Such a person would be satisfied with who the beloveds are but would not be self-satisfied. Of course, such a feeling of satisfaction is one's own, but given that loving attention is an attitude directed at another person, it is wrong to say that one's own volitions explain how such satisfaction is a fitting response.

turned out as itself worthy of having been lived that way such that regret and forlornness are unfitting. For instance, if they had the choice to live it again, they would choose to do so. One cannot actually do this, of course, but whether one would choose this reflects not simply that they are content with their life but that they affirm it (Calhoun 2018, 155–57; Wallace 2013, 55–65). This does not require seeing one's life as *the best* possible life but rather as a life worth affirming.

The same applies to love. If the lover judges that the beloved is worth loving, they do not value them as a sufficiently good alternative in contrast to someone else they could have loved instead.[33] To do so is still to love the beloved based on a comparative judgment. To judge that the beloved is worth loving renders valuing them in this affirmative way fitting, where "affirmation" refers to an attitude of taking joy in who the beloved is because of their valuable qualities. This judgment likewise renders regret and forlornness unfitting (and not merely bad). When the lover judges that the beloved is worth loving, the deepest expression of this is a willingness to choose to love the beloved again, if they could, based on the beloved's worthiness for this choice. For instance, imagine romantic lovers who are willing to fall in love with each other "all over again." Or sometimes it is expressed that one does not choose their family members. It matters, though, whether one would have chosen their family members if given the choice. Even though this choice is never an option, this willingness speaks to the affirmative quality of one's love.

To summarize, what makes a person worthy of love is the fact that their gradable valuable qualities meet a certain threshold or standard of value. Locating this threshold is a matter of practical discernment. Judgments of loving worth are thus evaluative, but they are mensurative, not

[33] Frankfurt argues that attitudes that reflect on how things could have been differently are not to be taken seriously since they do not "make a difference" (Frankfurt 2004, 25–26; 2006, 22–23). McTaggart suggests a similar view (McTaggart 1927, II:159). But even if these judgments ultimately may not make a difference for how we act, they may make a difference regarding the quality of how we love.

comparative. Finally, these judgments render valuing the beloved as fitting both in the sense of being satisfied with the beloved and affirming them.

3. Addressing a Potential Problem for the Satisficing View

One possible problem for the satisficing view is that merited love can be lost, and it seems regrettable to say that we should stop loving a person once they lose their valuable qualities. This is the "problem of inconsistency." However, the satisficing qualities view does not say that the relevant qualities need to be the same qualities. What is important is the persistence of somebody as the bearer of valuable qualities, not the persistence of individual qualities.[34] Such qualities can change, and they sometimes do. My reasons for loving my friend when we were children will change as we grow. We will continue to be worthy of one another's friendship as long as we continue to mutually bear valuable qualities but not necessarily the same qualities. For example, if I became exploitative, jealous, and deceptive as a young adult, I would no longer be worthy of my friends' friendship. In fact, it is important to be receptive to changes in such qualities as not doing so runs the risk of loving who your beloved used to be rather than who they are now (Delaney 1996, 349).[35] Moreover, given that people are dynamic and changing through time, one should hope that one's beloved does change albeit in a way that they continue to have qualities that are valuable.[36]

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[34] See also (Keller 2000, 167–68).

[35] It sometimes matters how those past qualities were lost. For instance, if one's parent suffers from dementia and loses parts of their personality, this lost quality may justify present love. See also (Jollimore 2017, 16). Conversely, if a person played an active role in the loss of valuable qualities, such past qualities would have less of a bearing on the present than the case of dementia. Thank you to Daniel Star for this suggestion.

[36] It is possible on a psychological conception of personal identity that enough changes in one's qualities entail a change in person's identity (Parfit 1984). However, the problem of inconsistency only applies when we assume that the same person persists through certain changes to their qualities (Kolodny 2003, 165–66). If the person is no longer the same person, then one would need to account for how love of some person in the past makes some distinct present person worthy of love. But the gradable qualities view does not purport to account for how the lovability of one person can make another person lovable, nor should it.

One may also object to the very notion that evaluative thresholds play the role of establishing whether someone is worthy of love. For instance, Simon Keller has argued that "It is surely misguided to imagine that there is some threshold quantity of desirable properties that we must exceed in order to become appropriate objects of love" (Keller 2000, 171).[37] He argues this is because "We are only ever lovable relative to a certain lover." The objection here is that worthiness is an agent-relative property—there is no universal threshold of lovability. Keller argues that this property is determined by the attractiveness of these properties. Therefore, in addition to being agent-relative, such properties are grounded in facts about subjective attraction.

Keller is right to highlight the importance of attraction in these contexts, and it would be absurd to say that attraction in love is unimportant. One purported virtue of the qualities view is that it picks out those qualities that we are attracted to when we first fall in love (Kolodny 2003, 138). This is especially true in romantic love. However, attraction to some quality cannot explain lovability because somebody can be attracted by properties that do not merit that attraction.[38] Attraction is not what makes those qualities lovable. For instance, I may be attracted to someone because they belittle me and make me feel small, but being belittled and made to feel small is ultimately something that undermines what makes somebody worthy of love. Rather, attraction is important because it often puts us in the position to appreciate someone's lovable qualities.[39] As one matures and becomes

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[37] Keller cites Nozick's comments on this point. Nozick argues that no one is unworthy of love because they fall short of some standard (Nozick 1989, 76n). Instead, he claims, "We do sometimes say someone is 'unworthy' of another's love, but by this we mean that person cannot respond appropriately to being (romantically) loved, cannot respond in a loving way. […] To be worthy of romantic love, then, is simply to have the capacity to love in return" (Nozick 1989, 76n). Nozick then recognizes that while we may hope for such mutual receptivity when we love somebody else, it is not always the case that they are capable of loving in return. So, someone can be unworthy of love, namely when they cannot reciprocate it. But the relevant sense of "can" must mean somebody who lacks some of the relevant valuable qualities that lovers generally expect in a beloved. For instance, imagine a person who insufficiently reciprocates affection. This is just to say that this person is not sufficiently affectionate, and being affectionate is a valuable quality. This quality is unlovable precisely because it falls short of a certain evaluative standard.

[38] See also (Naar 2017, 207; Wolf 2002).

[39] For more discussion on how we come to possess reasons of love, see (Lau 2021; Naar 2017, chap. 6).

practically wiser as a lover, to whom they are attracted and whom they judge to be worthy of their love hopefully begin to overlap. This is not guaranteed—sometimes it is wise to be suspicious of our attractions.

Of course, different people have different needs, and different people are able to fulfill different needs—some people just don't fit together (sometimes despite their strong attractions to one another). This agent relative sense of lovability tends to correlate with different kinds of valuable qualities and with varying degrees of those qualities. For instance, a willingness to care and share is a general enough property that some amount of it will be important for grounding worth in most cases. Too much of this can be overbearing and meddlesome, but some people may want, and even need, heavy amounts of caring and sharing for their love—some people might need a meddlesome love.[40] The trick is finding somebody who is caring and sharing in the right kind of way and to the appropriate amount. This applies to other valuable qualities, as well.

Keller's criticism of thresholds in this context has another aspect. By claiming that somebody is unworthy of love in this sense, I am not simply denying they are a good fit *for me*. I would be denying they are a good fit *for anybody*. Saying someone is worthy or unworthy of love can carry with it an aspect of agent neutrality.[41] It is often this agent-neutral sense that people reject, e.g., (Naar 2017, 208–9; Schaubroeck 2014, 110). However, there are reasons for thinking that lovability in the sense of being good enough to love is sometimes agent-neutral.[42] Consider a case of someone who has many good qualities, all to a satisficing amount, such that they are worthy of love—they are affectionate, caring, kind, funny, etc. However, they are tragically never loved by anyone. Keller

[40] Cf. (Velleman 1999, 353)
[41] The claim is not that agent-neutral and agent-relative worthiness are two different kinds of worth. Likewise, reasons can be either agent-neutral or agent-relative, but these do not pick out different senses of "reason."
[42] To be clear, the denial that all persons merit love is not the denial that all persons are worthy of moral concern (Shpall 2020, 435n.72; Sidgwick 1981, 245).

claims that we cannot say that anyone has done an injustice against such a person (Keller 2000, 171). That may be true, but they have suffered a significant misfortune. This misfortune is not merely that they have never been loved (which is its own kind of tragedy). Rather, it is that they are worth loving and have never been loved. Compare this to someone who tragically is unworthy of love. Both are tragic but of distinct kinds. The former is tragic because something of worth has never been properly valued, the second is the wasted potential for being properly valued. This sense of worth does not relativize to any particular lovers.

It is unlikely that someone is unworthy of love in the agent-neutral sense due to possessing insufficiently valuable qualities. There is too much variety among possible lovers concerning whether some individual valuable quality meets a satisficing threshold for lovability. It is likely that there is someone who is a good fit for them. However, it is important to consider the nature of bad qualities in this context since good and bad are what Selim Berker has called "polar" opposites, meaning that the lack of something good (and we can add failure of being sufficiently good) does not entail it is bad (Berker 2022, 27). Consider that a physically or sexually violent abuser is not lovable because of their wrath or lust, a liar is not lovable because of their deception, etc. Such qualities do not merely fail to meet a threshold of being good enough. They are positively bad. Let's call these *wicked qualities*. Wicked qualities count against a person's overall lovability—these are unlovable qualities.[43]

4. Loving Someone as a Whole and Gracious Love

The notion that certain qualities are unlovable is controversial, and whether there are such qualities is at the heart of whether someone can be unworthy of love even in the agent-neutral sense.

[43] Kolodny argues against such qualities: "although my love may lapse if [my beloved] becomes monstrously evil, her not being monstrously evil seems more like a background condition than a positive reason for loving her. It would be odd to answer the question, 'why do you love her?' with the reply, 'Because she is not monstrously evil'" (Kolodny 2003, 140, 165). This would be odd. But a reason that counts against some verdict does not entail that the absence of that reason counts in favor of the opposite verdict.

In this section, I will defend the view that wicked qualities are unlovable, and therefore, some people may be unlovable.

To begin, consider that worthiness of love is a property of a person taken as an evaluative whole. Throughout this paper, I have used examples citing individual qualities. This has been a useful argumentative abstraction, but the reality is that love is love for a whole person. Those who are considering whether to "trade up" are usually not focused on a single quality but rather whether one person has better qualities overall than another. Moreover, it is helpful to think about the collection of valuable qualities in this sense as an "organic whole" and not merely a sum of evaluative parts (Moore 1903). As Ginger Clausen has argued, persons are lovable as organic wholes in a way that particular qualities can become valuable within the context of a person as a whole (Clausen 2019).[44] For instance, one person's forgetfulness may be difficult to tolerate given the context of their whole personality, but the same quality may be cute or endearing in another person. Such alterations to the value of an individual quality within a whole will typically occur with insufficiently valuable qualities. An insufficiently good quality is a quality that taken in isolation would not contribute any value to the whole. But within the context of the whole, its value can change. For instance, the way somebody holds their fork at brunch is by itself not a sufficiently valuable quality to contribute to their overall worthiness to be loved, but within the context of all their other valuable qualities, it may be. Wicked qualities will typically be immune to this kind of change. Take an act of betrayal from a close friend. If this act is indicative of a person's untrustworthiness (and not merely a lapse in judgment or weakness of will), this quality will remain disvaluable even within the context of their entire personality.

[44] See also (Hurka 1998).

With that said, given that love is love for whole persons, we can love people with a clear vision of their wicked qualities (Wolf 2014). On the whole, they may be judged worth loving, even though some particular qualities count against that judgment. For instance, my sexist uncle may still be on the whole worth my love. I do not need to pretend he is not sexist, when in fact he is, nor do I need to deny that his sexism is unlovable. Nor do I need to see this sexism as somehow charming. I can do this while admitting that on the whole, he is worthy of my love. In such cases, I love him despite this flaw, not because of them. Therefore, satisficing thresholds apply both to individual valuable qualities, but they also apply to persons taken as evaluative wholes. A judgment that someone is worth loving can keep these qualities squarely in mind.

Vida Yao has provided a compelling alternative conception to this view by examining the concept of grace (Yao 2020). Yao argues that "Because affection is not based on merit (and is thus a "free gift" to the beloved), it avoids encumbering [someone] with the presupposition that he is what he isn't, or the faith or trust that he can become what he cannot or will not" (Yao 2020, 17). In this way, gracious love is a kind of attentive affection to loving a person for who they are, where "who they are" refers to who they are considered as a whole, including the parts of them that do not contribute to the overall story of why they are *worth* loving.

An important feature of Yao's view is that it says some intrinsically bad qualities based in human nature make someone the appropriate object of affection, yet they do not merit it (Yao 2020, 15). This may include wicked qualities. These are qualities of human nature because, Yao claims, that such bad yet human qualities are "a reminder that such people are, after all, mere human mortals" (Yao 2020, 16). By this, Yao means that such qualities are "primitively intelligible," meaning that "we are able to see [another person] as another human being with a point of view, thoughts, feelings, and

emotions of his own, vicious though he may be" (Yao 2020, 17).[45] Gracious love is responding to such qualities—not in necessarily a blameless way—with fitting affection, and they are fitting in virtue of their primitive intelligibility.

Yao does not claim that *all* bad qualities need to be fitting for affection. Rather, her view is that bad qualities grounded in human nature are. However, maintaining a category of qualities that are wicked and external to human nature runs into a problem. Consider Mary Midgley's warning that if we think about wickedness as something external to human nature, we risk thinking about wickedness as "an alien being, a demon which has taken possession" (Midgley 1984, 116). Her concern is rooted in the observation that human nature is capable of wicked things, and wickedness is primitively intelligible (although she does not use that term). It may be that motivations and emotions of wickedness are human-all-too-human features of moral psychology. As such, it may be that everyone experiences them, or is at least disposed by nature to experience them. It is possible to know what it is like to act on a motivating reason of wrath, lust, deceptiveness, cruelty, etc. It is also possible for such reasons to explain actions even if one sees them as not even approximating a normative reason (Setiya 2010, 99–101). For instance, imagine a man who tells an embarrassing story about his wife to a group of friends because he has contempt for her and enjoys making her feel shame. She may ask why he does such things, and his answer may be that he "thinks it's funny" and nothing deeper. One can imagine what it is like to act from this reason, or at least recognize the potential for doing so in human nature given that contempt and joy are primitively intelligible. This quality is not fitting for her affection, nor in his current state is it fitting for anyone's affection. Depending on what other features he may possess, he also may be unworthy of love.

[45] Yao borrows the term "primitive intelligibility" from Peter Goldie: "An emotional thought or feeling is primitively intelligible if it cannot be better explained by anything else other than the emotion of which it is part" (Goldie 2000, 43).

Given Midgley's view, we should wonder to what extent primitive intelligibility makes affection fitting. If I can understand why somebody would be wicked, or what it is like to be wicked to someone, this does not necessarily make that wickedness fitting for affection. Whether a motivation or emotion is natural or primitively intelligible is not sufficient for determining its value. Therefore, humans are neither inherently fitting nor unfitting for affection—they can be either depending on whether they meet the relevant standards of value. When it comes to wicked qualities, the relevant threshold is not whether they are good enough to be lovable by a particular person but whether such qualities are bad enough to be unlovable by anyone. Therefore, if someone has enough wicked qualities, they may be unworthy of love on the whole even in the agent-neutral sense.

Adams provides a different conception of grace (Adams 1999, chap. 6). He argues that grace is freely given in the sense that it is not proportional to the goodness of its recipient. There are reasons for grace even when it is unmerited. Notice that on this view gracious love is in certain aspects structurally analogous to supererogatory acts. A supererogatory act is praiseworthy because better than an obligatory action. The goodness of a supererogatory act is not proportional to the goodness of what is obligated. Similarly, gracious love is not proportional to what it is about the beloved that is good. Grace does not go above and beyond what is obligatory, but it does go beyond what is merited. This conception of grace operates on the fact that somebody can *fall short* of being worthy or fitting to love. On this view of grace, if everyone were worthy of love, there could be no grace (analogously, if one adopts a maximizing form of consequentialism, there is no room for bringing about more good than one ought). It may even be that grace is a "gift" precisely *because* it is unmerited and unfitting.[46] While such gracious love is not merited love, it can significantly benefit

[46] Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

the person who receives it. Therefore, some people may be unworthy of love, but accepting the idea that somebody is unworthy of love does not entail a rejection of the notion of grace.

5. Finite Love

Being unworthy of love is undoubtably tragic, so why not go for grace? Sometimes one may have most reason to do just that. For instance, Kate Abramson and Adam Leite discuss a case in which one person has become no longer worth loving, but the lover is in a unique position to benefit the person given their intimate relationship with one another (Abramson and Leite 2011, 688–89). However, grace should not be thought about as a *free* gift. This makes it seem as if gracious love is an option on par with merited love. I will argue that this is not true. Gracious love comes at a cost (or at least a risk). There is something uniquely at stake in gracious love.

Whether a person is worth loving indicates whether a person (taken as a whole) is worth the significant exercise of various volitional, cognitive, and emotional capacities that is love. Sometimes this is disinterestedly caring about their well-being.[47] At others, it is wanting to maintain a relationship or "union" with them.[48] It can also involve wanting to know them deeply.[49] Sometimes this is not about wanting anything at all but rather feeling affection for them,[50] giving them our undivided attention,[51] and opening ourselves emotionally to them.[52] It also includes complicated dynamics of identity: The lover identifies with the beloved's weal and woe,[53] and they may share the

[47] (Abramson and Leite 2011, 682–84; Adams 1999, chap. 6; Cocking and Kennett 2000, 284; Frankfurt 2004, 42–43; Hooker 2021, 4; Jeske 2008, 50–52; Kolodny 2003, 149; Stump 2006, 27; Wonderly 2017, 236)
[48] (Abramson and Leite 2011, 683; Cocking and Kennett 2000, 284; Delaney 1996, 340–43; Jeske 2008, 54–56; Keller 2000, 164; McTaggart 1927, II:151; Nozick 1989, 71; Plato 1989; Sidgwick 1981, 245; Stump 2006, 27). For a helpful overview of this, see (Helm 2010, 13–16).
[49] (Hooker 2021; Jeske 2008, 56–58; Naar 2023; Ross 1930, 141)
[50] (Aristotle 1984, 1155b30; Cocking and Kennett 2000, 284; Hooker 2021, 4; Jeske 2008, 47–48; Keller 2013; McTaggart 1927, II:148; Shpall 2018; Stringer 2021; Yao 2020, 6–9)
[51] (Adams 1999, chap. 6; Buber 1970; Jollimore 2011, chap. 1; Murdoch 2013, 71–72; Velleman 1999, 360; Yao 2020)
[52] (Kolodny 2003, 152; Shpall 2018, 98; Velleman 1999, 361; Wonderly 2017, 243)
[53] (Blum 1980; Kennett 2008, 217; Nozick 1989; Smith 2017, 149–50; Wonderly 2017, 243)

beloved's aims.[54] They are even willing to direct one another's identities[55] and contribute to one another's self-conceptions.[56] While sometimes love is a matter of simply being devoted to the beloved.[57]

This list provides a general picture of love.[58] No one item is sufficient to characterize love, although some may be necessary.[59] Moreover, love is the disposition to experience or undertake one or more of these elements for a particular person. The way these are expressed and the degree to which they are expressed can change depending on the type of relationship. On any particular version of this general picture, loving someone is a matter of expending substantial time and effort for their sake, including the use of significant cognitive, volitional, and emotional resources, and often in a way that involves an indefinite commitment to continue doing so.[60] Let's call these one's *loving resources*.

This notion of loving resources fits into the picture of judgments and valuing I have presented thus far. Judgments of worthiness of love are judgments that somebody is good enough to love in the satisficing fashion. The term "good enough" invites the question of "good enough for what?" Now we have an answer: To be worth loving is to be good enough for the expenditure of the lover's loving resources. Moreover, valuing the beloved in a loving way reflects this judgment. The lover is satisfied with giving their care, loyalty, vulnerability, attention, etc. independently of whatever other values may be realized in doing so. They also affirm the beloved such that giving these resources to them is not a source of regret or forlornness.

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[54] (Ebels-Duggan 2008)
[55] (Cocking and Kennett 2000, 284–85; Smith 2017, 154–56)
[56] (Cocking and Kennett 2000, 285; Keller 2000, 169–70)
[57] (Shpall 2018; Stringer 2021)
[58] For comparable lists, see (Stringer 2021; Hurka 2017, 163–64; Jeske 2017).
[59] In this way, I consider love to be a "syndrome" (Hurka 2017; Stringer 2021).
[60] See also (Helm 2010, 20, 193).

There are different reasons for how and why to divide up this love. For instance, a person may be monogamous on the principle that one and only one person is worthy of their love, but monogamy may be less principled than this. Monogamy may also be reasonable simply due to a limit of capacities. Conversely, some people are capable of spreading such finite resources among multiple people. This may be done out of a principled commitment to polyamory, but it can also be achieved through having the capacity to give a lot of love accompanied by the ability to manage this abundance across multiple people. Almost everybody is capable of doing this when it comes to friendship. People are not polyamorous in friendship out of a principle of polyamory but rather the fact that most people have the finite capacities to balance and be sufficiently invested in multiple friendships. Moreover, there's a great deal of practical wisdom that is needed to navigate these demands—friendships can fade away if one no longer makes proper room for them. This aspect of loving wisely is about the management of one's love, given multiple people who are worth loving. For creatures like us, love is finite.

Love's finitude can be contrasted to the conception of a God who is infinite in love. Love for all—whether worthy or not—makes sense if one has the capacity to love all. God would not need to develop practical wisdom about whom to love in the way that you or I do. We can contrast the finitude of love to a being with infinite love. Harry Frankfurt illustrates this point with characteristic elegance: "There is no need for God, out of prudence or anxiety, to forgo any opportunities for loving. For those of us who are less extravagantly endowed, on the other hand, our readiness to love needs to be more mindful and more restrained" (Frankfurt 2004, 62). Therefore, not only do we have an interest in giving our love to the right people, this interest is circumscribed by the fact that getting it wrong has a significant cost for finite creatures like us. One's love is a valuable finite resource, and being profligate with a limited valuable resource is a kind of practical mistake. Love would be free for God, but it isn't for us.

This immediately may sound like a problematic suggestion because defenders of the no-reasons view do not deny that love can be good. In fact, they often agree that it is (Frankfurt 2004; Zangwill 2013, 306). However, defenders of this view can only make this argument if merit plays no role in explaining what makes love valuable since they deny that anybody can be worth loving. There is good reason to think that worth does play this role. If it does, then getting love right is *constitutive* of well-being, and this explains why getting it right should be important to us. There is something of value at stake when loving someone unworthy of it.

Brad Hooker has recently discussed two ways in which this happens within the context of well-being (Hooker 2021).[61] First, judgments of worth play an important role in sustaining the pleasures of love. Pleasure is plausibly one constitutive elements of well-being, and love is often—although by no means always—pleasurable. It is reasonable to think that a life on the whole is usually more pleasurable with love than without. Love (merited or not) can have hedonic value. For instance, one can imagine a person taking a love potion, which results in the feeling of strong loving affection for someone, and this may feel good. While it is possible that such pleasure could be sustained by purely causal means (a daily dose of a love potion!), judgments of worth often sustain the pleasures of love. While it is common to find someone pleasurable without thinking they are worthy of love, it is more difficult to imagine cases where someone is in a long-lasting relationship that is pleasurable but the lover believes the beloved to be unworthy of their love (Hooker 2021, 21).

Second, it is bad for the lover if they believe the beloved to be worth loving when they are in fact not. Hooker describes the case of Titania and Bottom to illustrate this. Bottom is unworthy of love, and Titania mistakenly believes he is worthy of love and loves him. Titania's love is bad for her given that she falsely believes someone to be worthy of love. This is not simply because having false

[61] See also (Wolf 2015).

beliefs is bad, but because her love does not see the beloved for who they are. She never actually appreciates who Bottom is. Thus, as Hooker argues, "To the extent that she devotes her affection, attention and time to him, she wastes limited resources on an undeserving person" (Hooker 2021, 21).[62] Of course, Titania's love may be instrumentally valuable. Maybe she learns about Bottom, realizes her mistake, and learns from this wasted love. However, whether this love is constitutively good for Titania depends on whether Bottom is worth loving. Titania has *wasted* her love.

Finally, we can expand on Hooker's argument by focuing on cases in which the lover correcly believes the beloved is unworthy of love. This also comes at a cost. Say Titania believes Bottom is unworthy of her love, but she gives it to him graciously. We can question whether gracious love is actually love in the sense that love is constitutive of a good life. The judgment that someone is unworthy of love is incompatible with valuing them in a non-comparitive way. In gracious love, loving attitudes (e.g., care, loyalty, appreciation, etc.) may be fitting in virtue of the fact that the lover seeks to benefit the beloved, but this judgment excludes valuing them in a loving way, namely being satisfied with and affirming the beloved. In gracious love, it is fitting to want the beloved to be unlike themselves. As such, we can question whether gracious love is *love* at all.

Those who argue that love is not a constitutive feature of well-being will disagree with this picture of its value.[63] This option is also open to defenders of the no-reasons view. It may be that Titania is deeply deceived about what Bottom is like, but as long as this love is subjectively appealing, it makes her life as good as any love could. I cannot provide a knockdown argument against hedonism here, but it is important to note that if Hooker is correct, then the finitude of love

[62] See also (Raz 2001, 39–40)
[63] For example, (Crisp 2018).

can explain why being selective about love is so important. We want to get it right because getting it wrong means missing something constitutively valuable of a good life.

Conclusion

To conclude, I will say something about the conceptual origins of satisficing value. The notion of satisficing value was originally developed within the context of bounded rationality in decision theory (Simon 1955; 1957). It has even seen application within love-adjacent topics, like the context of mate selection (Todd and Miller 1999). In such cases, satisficing is a good strategy for off-loading a process that would otherwise be very taxing on important resources. Searching for and investing in a good partner takes time and effort. In Simon's words, satisficing is useful "because [humans] have not the wits to *maximize*" (Simon 1957, xxiv). On this view, satisficing takes moderation in local decisions as the best way to maximize value overall. It is a helpful heuristic for making the best decision in a non-ideal epistemic situation.

I have already rejected this view. Loving someone is a matter of being satisfied with who they are and not for the promise of some greater unrealized value. However, the finitude of love reveals a striking similarity between the conception of satisficing I have defended and the instrumental conception. We are in a bounded situation compared to God, not just in terms of what we can know, but also in terms of our loving resources. An important difference between these two conceptions of satisficing is whether one views such boundedness as non-ideal or itself a description of the nature of love. Given this, I doubt that God is an *ideal model* for how to love (whether or not God exists), and it seems like a misnomer calling our situation "non-ideal." Our ideal for love should be someone reflectively experienced in finite loving, not someone who can afford to be profligate with their love. It is thus important when reflecting on love not to ignore the fact that "these are the only life and the only friends that we shall ever have" (Williams 2006, 80).

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