

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT
WHEN WE TALK ABOUT

LOVE

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*To the memory of my grandmother Ruth Kronqvist,
who showed me what it means to live a life in love,
and to her great-grandson Måns who has given us life.*

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ABSTRACT IN SWEDISH SVENSKT SAMMANDRAG

VAD VI TALAR OM DÅ VI TALAR OM KÄRLEK

Vad kan det innebära att säga "Jag älskar dig", "De älskar inte varandra", "Kärleken är inget beslut", "Jag lovar att älska dig", "Kärleken är meningen i mitt liv"?

Utgångspunkten för denna begreppsliga undersökning av kärlek är att vår förståelse av begreppet kan fördjupas genom reflektion kring de olika samtal vi för om kärlek. Angreppssättet är inspirerat av Ludwig Wittgensteins senare filosofi, där reflektionen kring de olika sätt på vilka vi talar om kärlek är ämnad att tjäna som påminnelser om hur vi använder våra ord i syfte att upplösa vissa specifika förvirringar som uppstår då vi börjar att filosofera kring kärlek. En sådan ofta förekommande förvirring är tanken att våra ord främst används för att referera till något specifikt.

Avhandlingens tre delar bemöter dylika förvirringar om kärlek genom att närma sig begreppet i ljuset av filosofiska diskussioner om (1) känslor, (2) personlig identitet och (3) mening. Ett genomgående tema är att visa att många frågeställningar som inom filosofin främst betraktats från ett epistemologiskt perspektiv har en moralisk karaktär. Följaktligen är det utmärkande för många av de utmaningar vi möter i reflektionen kring kärlek att de inte kan ges ett för varje enskild människa giltigt, vetenskapligt svar, utan att de ställer oss inför en fråga om vilken plats kärleken har i vårt eget liv.

Den första delen behandlar vilket slags förståelse känslor kan sägas utgöra och hur denna förståelse förhåller sig till kärlek. I motsats till de dominerande diskussionerna inom dagens emotionsfilosofi som försöker definiera vad en känsla, såsom rädsla eller vrede, *är*, och fastslå kriterier för att avgöra vad som utmärker en given känsla, visar den diskussion som förs i avhandlingen på en konstitutiv obestämdhet i vårt känsloliv. Vad vi förstår som kärlek i en enskild situation är i sig uttryck för vilka vi är och vad vi känner. Den svårighet vi kan uppleva med att avgöra om något är kärlek är dock inte enbart uttryck för denna obestämdhet utan sammanhänger med de moraliska svårigheter vi har att vara närvarande och uppmärksamma i mötet med andra människor, samt att ta ansvar för

vad det innebär att acceptera olika beskrivningar av våra liv som riktiga.

I de två följande delarna utvecklas och fördjupas dessa tankar. Del två vänder sig mot föreställningen att det är möjligt att bestämma vad kärleken riktar sig mot eller grundar sig på. Min älskades egenskaper, såsom den skönhet hon förkroppsligar för mig, kan inte ges som förklaring till min kärlek, eftersom hur jag ser henne i sig är ett uttryck för min kärlek. Diskussionen belyser på vilket sätt det är meningsfullt att betrakta frågan om vem jag, du och vi är i kärlek som en i första hand moralisk fråga, och visar hur denna fråga internt hänger samman med frågor om godhet och sanning och om den roll dessa begrepp kan ha för hur vi betraktar kärlek.

Del tre tar upp frågor om dels den mening vårt liv kan sägas ha eller få i kärlek och dels den mening våra ord har, speciellt då vi talar om kärlek. I diskussionen tillbakavisas såväl idén att den mening kärleken har i vårt liv bestäms av inre eller yttre tillstånd som är oberoende av vårt förhållningssätt till dem, som idén att vi själva avgör vilken mening kärleken ska ha i vårt liv. Kärlekens perspektiv, förkroppsligat i kärlekslöftet, utmärks snarare av att vi öppnar oss och tar ansvar för den mening som våra förhållanden till andra människor kan uppenbara för oss, utan att vi för den skull försöker pressa in dem i mönster som motsvarar våra egna önskningar eller förväntningar.

De här reflektionerna kastar också ett ljus på hur vi ska förstå den filosofiska undersökningen av ords mening. I diskussionen föreslås att en strävan efter att inte i förväg försöka bestämma undersökningens förlopp, utan att i stället vara öppen för de olika betydelser ord har i våra liv, bäst motsvarar den klassiska beskrivningen av filosofin som en "kärlek till vishet".

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Jakobstad, 20.8.2008, Camilla Kronqvist

INTRODUCTION

LOVE AND PHILOSOPHY

I

DOUBTS ABOUT LOVE AND LANGUAGE

“Can philosophy possibly say anything of relevance about love?” That is a question I have been asked more than once. “Can I, as a philosopher, say anything relevant about such a vivid manifold phenomenon as love?” That is a question I have asked myself at times. Is it not almost the same as draining this dynamic, living relationship of life to try to put it on paper?

As enticing as such considerations may be, tempting one to think that it would be better to leave out love as a subject for philosophical discussion, I believe there is much for a philosopher to say about love or about love and philosophy. Not only in the sense that philosophers have been said to be “lovers of wisdom” but also in the sense that when we love we all become philosophers; we are all confronted with questions about what it is or what it means to love, what it means to be a lover or a friend, a parent or a child, a brother or a sister. What does it mean that our lives in different ways are touched by the lives of other people? What place do and should we give to the responsibility we have for other people, as well as to the joy and sorrow we may experience with them? What does it mean to be alive and present to the concerns of others or to shut ourselves away from them? These questions are in many ways an integral part of being in love, and are not only of personal but also of philosophical concern.

Moreover, I believe philosophers have much to learn about philosophy through an investigation of love. This is true of the sense in which an understanding of the presuppositions for philosophizing about love may deepen through a reflection on love. Asking what it might mean to philosophize about love, as it were, cannot be separated from becoming clear about this subject. It is, however, also true of the sense in which we as philosophers, in virtue of being the

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lovers of wisdom I mentioned before, may benefit from thinking about the practice of philosophy in the light of love. What kind of self-understanding may recognizing this as a central aspect of our philosophical practice involve? For me, the question about what it may mean to take seriously the suggestion that philosophy is a form of love has surfaced repeatedly throughout working on this dissertation. I will return to the implications of contemplating the practice of philosophy in this light.

These are part of my reasons for introducing this work with a discussion of the different relationships between love and philosophy. In particular, I want to turn to the ways in which our claims about love can be seen as personal or private. I do this, because many of the concerns people raise about the possibility of philosophizing about love take the form precisely of wondering how a philosopher could say anything general about something as personal as love. Assuming, of course, that this is indeed what a philosopher is supposed to do.

The concerns about the possibility of philosophizing about love take at least two different forms. First, they may be quite a justified reaction to the fact that love is not a uniform phenomenon. There are many different kinds of relationships that we can talk about as love; the love between parent and child, the one between brothers and sisters, friendship or erotic love. In addition to this, every love, every relationship, can be said to take a different, individual or personal form. Is it not impossible, then, to say anything definite about what love is? Apparently it can be so many things. What, one may ask, makes all of these cases instances of love? Second, people often express a doubt or wonder as to how we can ever know what others mean when they are talking about love. This question often reveals the disappointments they have experienced in relation to love, as well as the puzzlement they have felt about what other people might mean by using the word. "She says she loves me and then she goes and does such a thing!"

Now, undoubtedly love is personal in many ways; in a philosophical investigation of love it is important to become clear about just how. Yet, it is unclear why the personal character of love should be a reason for thinking that we cannot talk about it. The gist of my suggestion will rather be that such a view gives expression to a confused conception of what it means for something to be personal, and, by the same token, what it could mean to make a philosophical remark about love. When speaking about the personal or private aspects of love, as well as the more general aspects of it—universality,

rules, grammar—one often runs together different notions of what it is for something to be personal or private, without noticing that we may use the word to make several different distinctions. On the one hand, we may think of “privacy” as denoting something that is for “your ears only”. Similarly in a social discussion, we may refer to certain questions as belonging to the private, by contrast to the public, sphere. On the other hand, we may call something “personal” which touches us deeply. To anticipate a distinction I will return to in the following discussion, we may speak about something as personal in the sense that it is connected with our lives as historical and psychological beings. We may, however, also speak about the ways in which certain questions address us as persons, requiring that we take responsibility for the answers that we give. Here, we are speaking about what is personal in a moral sense. This tendency to run together different senses of a word reveals a normal confusion when one starts philosophizing about a subject. One takes the use of a word in one situation as a model for how the word is to be used in other situations in which it is not so clear what using the word could mean.

In what follows, I will argue that the question whether we are able to say something general about anything as personal as love originates in certain preconceived notions of what human beings and emotions are and what role language has in our life. Accordingly, the remainder of this work is an attempt to bring back the different things we may say about love to the different conversations we may have about it in our life to clear away certain misunderstandings.¹ As Ludwig Wittgenstein (1997), whose understanding of philosophy has served as one of my main sources of inspiration in this work, famously remarks, I aspire to “bring back words from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (§ 116). The following introductory remarks serve as first instances of this move, showing the different ways in which one may think of love as personal, as well as *what* sense we may find in them. Rather than thinking that the personal character of love is to be found in some private experience, which raises an *epistemological* question about how we can reach the inner life of another human being, I show the *moral dimension* of our personal involvement *in* speaking, as well as in speaking *about*, the language of love.

¹ The title of this work, which gives an indication of this move, is taken from the collection of short stories by Raymond Carver (1989).

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The doubts about love mentioned above are very seldom meant to be expressions of strictly held philosophical positions. However, there is a great similarity between them and some views that have traditionally been held in philosophy. Even if these two sources of doubt give voice to slightly different attitudes to the difficulties involved in discussing love, they both express a kind of everyday scepticism about the possibility of understanding others, and what they mean by their words. The feeling that love is personal here seems due to the fact that the meaning of love, because of the diversity of the phenomenon, or its inner character, is essentially private or hidden. What love means, one thinks, is out of reach for others than the one who loves. This way of putting the question is similar to the classical "problem of other minds". This question about how I can know what others think or feel, and how I can be justified in thinking that there are others like me has been discussed by many philosophers. Different answers have also been given to it; Descartes is perhaps best known for giving one kind of answer to it. Furthermore, the thought that we cannot say anything about what love is since the word "love" either refers to some patterns of behaviour that we cannot define, or to some inner experience that is inaccessible to us, reflects a common misconception about language in philosophy. This is the thought that our words are primarily to be taken as representations, the only function of which is to designate objects, processes, events, states, and so on.

Thus, one is convinced that in every situation in which we talk about love, or any other emotion, there must be one thing, one single feature, which we could identify as the emotion in question. This conviction has also led philosophers to postulate the existence of "inner" or "mental objects" in the case of thoughts and emotions, since there are no other or "outer" objects to which the words can be seen as referring as there are in the case of "houses", "chairs" or "trees". If we consider such a view of language, it is quite evident why any philosophical attempt to become clear about love, or to say *what love is*, as one normally formulates the question, would be expected to fail, since the word "love", on this view, refers to objects that appear to be essentially private, in one way or another.

This picture of language, or of what it is for words to mean something, is a powerful picture, holding philosophers and laymen alike in a strong grip. It is, however, highly problematic. It is not even an exaggeration to say that Wittgenstein dedicated most of his philosophy to combating this kind of conception of language. In the

criticism he directed both at the problem of other minds and at the idea of a private language he showed the ways in which our words do not always represent objects, but have other roles in our life with each other.²

II PRIVATE LANGUAGE

Wittgenstein's radical break with the referential view of language is brought to the fore in his discussion of the problems involved in imagining a private language (1997, §243-315). This notion of language as something essentially private also figured in the above mentioned doubts about how I can ever know what someone means when he or she says "I love". Here again, one thinks of the word "love" as naming some inner process, a sensation or some such thing, and consequently concludes that we cannot know what love is, since we may never know what happens inside somebody else. Wittgenstein, however, questions the *intelligibility* of the whole idea of a private language. He suggests that we cannot even think of a language in which individual words "refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language." (Wittgenstein 1997, §243). Thinking of sensations as "private" is in one way wrong, and in yet another nonsensical.³

Wittgenstein asks us to think of a person who keeps a diary in which he marks "the recurrence of a certain sensation". For every day on which he has the sensation he writes "S" in his notebook (Wittgenstein 1997, §258). What Wittgenstein wants to point out, among other things, is that the whole process of picturing what such a private language would be depends on the meaning, the *use*, the words have in our common language.

What reason have we for calling "S" the sign for a *sensation*? For "sensation" is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. So the use of this word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands.—And it would not help either to say that it need not be a *sensation*; that when he

² For a clear exposition and development of Wittgenstein's thinking in these matters see e.g. Cockburn (2001) or Dilman (1987).

³ "In what sense are my sensations 'private'?—Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it.—In one way this is wrong, and in another nonsense." (Wittgenstein 1997, §246)

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writes “S”, he has *something*—and that is all that can be said. “Has” and “something” also belong to our common language. (Wittgenstein 1997, §261)

Even to be able to describe this private language we must use the common language that we share with others. We can only articulate the idea of a private language, and what that could be, in (relation to) the language that we share with other people. Thus, the whole attempt of imagining such a language becomes empty.

If we take a closer look, this is also evident with regard to love. Regardless of what one may say about the difficulty of knowing what other people mean by love in particular situations, it is crucial for a declaration of love that I trust you to understand what I am saying. Moreover, I want you to understand it, and not, say, only make an approximation or take a guess at it. In order for a declaration of love to be just that, it is essential that we share a language, that you may understand what I mean, even if there may, of course, be misunderstandings and situations in which you and I find it impossible to reach a common understanding. But even in such a case, it is important to see that the problem we may have in understanding each other is *not* a theoretical one. It has a *moral* form.⁴

It is not that our psychological make-up, for instance, prevents us from ever understanding what another person thinks, in the sense that I cannot reach into your mind. At times you may exclaim, “I just can’t understand you!” or “I’ll never know what goes on inside your/his head”. Such exclamations, however, do not testify to a failure of communication in principle. Rather they may be a way of saying, for example, that I could not see myself saying or doing the things you do, that I do not find myself in you.⁵ In these cases, the words mark a distance between me and you. They are expressive of the ways in which I find you strange or of my exasperation at repeatedly saying something which apparently does not resonate with you. In this they may mark off either a failure in your reactions to me and my situation, or a failure in my response to you. This is even more apparent in situations in which my lack of understanding is a result of or an expression of my not trusting you.

⁴ See e.g. my discussions of Rosamond and Lydgate in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* in chapter 2 and 7.

⁵ We may also regard Peter Winch’s (1997) remark that we may not be able to imagine what it would mean to take certain things in another culture or our own seriously in one’s own life in this light (199).

However, my experience or yours of such a distance makes sense only against a background of situations in which I do understand or find myself in you and in which there is no distance between us. It is only against the background of all the things we do understand that certain things stand out as misunderstandings. Think only of the multitude of situations in which it is quite clear to me what it is you are saying—so clear even that I try to deny it—or in which the question whether I understand you normally does not even arise, such as being asked to pass the salt or being offered some coffee, asking what you did this weekend or suggesting that you turn left at the following stop. Contemplating the ways in which we may find comfort in the thought that we are understood, we may only try to imagine what it would be like truly to doubt the possibilities of understanding.

When Wittgenstein tries to draw our attention away from some inner process that the words designate towards the life we live with each other, a life in which we express feelings and emotions, share thoughts and so on, he is not simply moving from something inner to something outer, such as our behaviour, nor for that matter a life or a form of life. He is “not really a behaviourist in disguise” which his imaginary interlocutor suspects him of being (Wittgenstein 1997, §307). In other words, he is not, as the behaviourists are, suggesting that our mental concepts can be explained simply by providing criteria of outward behaviour, with no reference to what may be called our “inner life”, our thoughts, feelings, desires, and so on. Rather, he is criticizing a philosophical picture of what the distinction between “inner” and “outer” amounts to. This is, for one thing, thinking that the “inner” constitutes a realm of objects that are inaccessible to others than the person whose “inner” it is. Or, for another thing, thinking, as the current emphasis on neuropsychological research may make us inclined to think, that it represents a realm of objects that advanced technology has now finally given us the means of exposing. To clear away one possible misunderstanding, this is not to deny that it may be perfectly meaningful in a situation to say, “I had to retain my calm on the outside, but inside I was in total turmoil”. It is only that the distinction that is made here is very different from the philosophical picture of the inner, or for that matter, the outer, that Wittgenstein criticizes.

A central object of this criticism is the thought that our language primarily functions to name or describe things, that mental concepts, for instance, are used to *report* inner states or, for that matter, outer

behaviour. This thought is expressive of what Wittgenstein (1965a), in other places calls our “craving for generality” (17-18), which he suggests we need to rid ourselves of when doing philosophy. We need to give up “the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts – which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything you please” (Wittgenstein 1997, §304). Rather he encourages us to think of the multiplicity of ways in which we use language, such as, to name some examples he gives, giving and obeying orders, reporting an event or speculating about it, forming and testing a hypothesis, making up a story and reading it, play-acting, singing catches, making jokes, asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying (Wittgenstein 1997, §23). When reflecting on the meaning of our words, we should remain aware of the different practices and activities in which they have a role. It is by considering our words and sentences in their context, not by searching for some object behind the word that it signifies, that we see what meaning it may have.

Instead of thinking about the words “I am in pain”, for instance, as the report of a sensation, Wittgenstein suggests that we think of it as similar to the natural expression of pain, say, a cry or a groan.

[H]ow does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in it is place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour.

“So you are saying that the word ‘pain’ really means crying?” –

On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it. (Wittgenstein 1997, §244)

In a similar manner, I have often found it illuminating to contemplate the ways in which saying “I love you” may in some situations have the same meaning (by which I mean have the same role in our life) as hugging or kissing someone. We may also note that we often tell children we love them when hugging and kissing them; this is one of the countless situations in which the child learns what it is to love. Now, if we think of this use of the words it becomes less tempting to think of them as a report of an inner state or of a process. In what way could we understand a kiss or a hug as a report? It becomes obvious that we *do* things with words, that our words have different roles in

our relationships with each other. Consider only the different uses of the words “I love you” in the following story.

You were careful not to say those words that soon became our private altar. I had said them many times before, dropping them like coins into a wishing well, hoping they would make me come true. I had said them many times before but not to you. I had given them as forget-me-nots to girls who should have known better. I had used them as bullets and barter. I don't like to think of myself as an insincere person but if I say I love you and I don't mean it then what else am I? (Winterson 2001b, 11)

The quote brings out how the words, “I love you”, may be of significance to us, in the same manner that hugs and kisses are, and the different kinds of significance the words may have in different situations. Saying “I love you” may be a comfort or a confession, a promise or a prayer. It serves as a reminder that language does not have to be seen as something essentially different from our other doings but can be seen as an extension of them. Words, very often, are also *actions*. The quote also shows how expressing or confessing my love for someone may raise questions about whether I am true to the sense of my words. This is a question that I will return to shortly.

III “THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE”

It is against this background that I want to take the different conversations we may have about love as the object of my study. I will not attempt to answer the question “What is love?”, but approach the subject of love by discussing the different things we may say about it. What is it that we say to each other when we say, “I love”, “you love”, “he or she loves”, “we love each other”? What may it mean to say that love is a “feeling”, a “commitment”, and so on? At different points of the work I speak about this as an attempt to clarify the *language* or the *grammar* of love. I will on several occasions return to the question of what such a clarification may and may *not* involve. I also believe that the kinds of remarks I make about language and philosophy are best served by being considered in the contexts of the particular problems out of which they arise. To give some indication of the directions in which these discussions will move, however, I will say something about these issues here already. This will also allow us to see some of their connections with my present concerns in these introductory remarks.

My intention in speaking about the language or grammar of love is *not* to provide a definition of love, neither to discern any underlying principles or conditions for correctly using the word. Nor do I want to suggest any rules or criteria for meaningfully applying the word in a concrete situation. On the whole, I will question the intelligibility of these kinds of endeavour, as well as question the idea, inherent in them, that philosophy should be making *normative* claims about how our language is and should be used. In that way, I do not intend to present us with a general overview, least of all a complete one, of how we go about speaking this language of love. I will, at times, emphasize the need for philosophy to be *descriptive* (cf. Wittgenstein 1997, §109), but this is not to be understood in the sense in which an empirical, or lexical, study can be said to describe our usage of a word, nor as an injunction to map out meaningful or meaningless conversations we may have about love. It is, as it were, not predetermined what our words may mean in a new situation. What sense they have, or do not have, has to be seen in the particular situation in which we find ourselves. A guiding thought in this work, therefore, is that our language does not constitute a delineable system that can be described independently of what *we*, who are speaking it, might say, and what is more, what *we* mean with our words.

In the light of this, I want to emphasize the context-dependence of grammatical remarks. In line with Wittgenstein's (1997) remark that "[t]he work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose" (§127), we may say that our remarks on grammar in particular cases are not to be generalized. Contemplating the roles different expressions of love and utterances concerning love may have in our life does not put us in the place of drawing general distinctions between different uses. Rather these reminders of how we may talk about love address the particular problems with which we are struggling. They serve to dissolve specific problematic pictures of love that may turn up when we begin philosophizing about love. In this sense, I align myself with readings of Wittgenstein that regard his philosophy as primarily *therapeutic*.

This, again, connects with the sense in which Wittgenstein regarded philosophical problems as centrally arising out of our difficulties to recognize how our language is used, or better yet, how *we* use our words outside of the philosophical context. When we move about in our ordinary life, we do not normally experience any problems understanding what our words mean, even if at times we may ask what *someone* means with her words, in the sense of

wondering about her reasons or motives for saying some particular thing. When we are confronted with a question such as “What is love?” or “Is love a feeling?” in a philosophical conversation, however, the ease with which we otherwise speak about “love” or “feelings” gives way to bewilderment. Asked to explain the meaning of a word in abstraction from the concrete contexts in which it is used, we fail to call up the situations in which the words come alive. Or, then we are convinced we know the answers to the questions, but confounded when we encounter uses of these words that speak against our conviction.

“A philosophical problem”, Wittgenstein (1997) says, “has the form: ‘I don’t know my way about’” (§ 123). To find our way out of this confinement, Wittgenstein, as I have already said, recommends that we remind ourselves of different ways in which our words are at work in our everyday life. Another one of his remarks about finding one’s way in language states: “Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about” (Wittgenstein 1997, §203). Using this picture, we could say that the task of philosophy, when we are confused about the use of words like “thoughts”, “beliefs”, “feelings”, “emotions”, “desires”, “intentions”, or about sentences containing these words that taken individually or combined with other sentences do not appear to make any sense, is to show the familiar ways into speaking about these aspects of our life and what light that may throw on the sense or nonsense we experienced these sentences as expressing. If we, say, are faced with a question such as “Is love a feeling or a decision?”⁶ we may feel that we are forced to opt for one of the alternatives. Here, reflection on the different kinds of concerns that may lead us to emphasize on the one hand the spontaneity of our desires and on the other our responsibility for the other in love may help to dissolve the felt conviction that some of our ways of speaking about love are of necessity paradoxical.

These last remarks also alert us to the sense in which the dissolution of philosophical problems suggested by Wittgenstein’s writings cannot be separated from recognizing the ways in which we as philosophers have entrenched ourselves in certain problems. Finding one’s way out of a philosophical problem is in that way also a

⁶ I address this question in further detail in chapter 3.

matter of knowing where to halt, not to turn around and enter the same kinds of confusion one had just freed oneself from. This is not to deny that we often do precisely this when philosophizing. The sense in which one may be inclined to turn a grammatical remark that has helped one out of one philosophical muddle into a rule for our language use constitutes such a confusion. In this respect, philosophy is as well a reflection on one's own involvement in different questions and a call to become aware of and question one's own demands on what a philosophical question or discussion should look like (cf. Wittgenstein 1997, § 107). Indeed, it is a way of seeing how one is, oneself, continually confused about one's use of language.

One might be tempted to think that this way of looking at the language of love is a way of avoiding the question. One might feel that occupying oneself with linguistic matters does not give the necessary weight to the questions one is interested in solving. (Cf. Stenlund 2000, 223.) This appears to be the position of the philosophers who regard the practice of analyzing or investigating our mental concepts as a form of folk psychology, in other words, as a proto-scientific theory of what happens in our minds. Attending to our conversations about love, the thought goes, does not show us anything of value since it only shows what one currently *believes* love to be. It does not show us love as it really is.⁷ As I have already indicated, however, it is far from clear what question we think that we are asking when we ask what love *is*. The real difficulty in philosophizing, as it were, is *not* finding the means of defining what appears too elusive to be defined, but gaining clarity about what exactly one's problem is, and what one oneself demands of the question one is raising.

What is more, if we think of focusing on the "language of love" as a way of avoiding the "real" question, we still do not see the fundamental role that language plays in love. We are still caught up in the picture of language as designating objects, thinking that language is somehow separate from love, or from what love really is. Our words are taken only as reflecting or describing the underlying processes of love, and why not, then, "go for the real thing" rather than settling for merely talking about it. This way of looking at things, however, ignores that it is only in or through language that we live

⁷ See chapter 1 for a closer discussion of this theme.

love. The ways we speak about love are *internal* to what we understand as love.

Commenting on this internal relationship, Rush Rhees (1969) remarks, “*just as little* [as there could be religion without the language of religion] could there be love without the language of love” (121). We would not have the sense of love that we have now unless “people used language in their lives—or to put it the other way around, unless they lived the kind of lives that people live with language” (Rhees 1969, 121). This remark bears resemblance to one of François de La Rochefoucauld’s (1959) maxims: “Some people would never have fallen in love if they had never heard of love” (§136). Nevertheless, there are important differences between what he is saying and what Rhees wanted to say.

The comment made by La Rochefoucauld is reminiscent of the things one might say about advertising, say, that no one would think they need this brand of washing detergent or this soft drink if it had not been advertised everywhere. This statement appears to be true up to a point. There is nothing in the desire for a drink or for having clean clothes that demands that it is satisfied by a certain product. Rather one could say that the desire is stirred by the advertisement. Likewise, we may imagine someone listening to a romantic song or going to a romantic film being stirred by the thought, “I want to be in love”.⁸ The person may even imagine that he is in love, and not, as others may suspect, “in love with being in love”.

My point here is not that whenever someone intoxicated by a film or a song falls in love it is not love. For now we may leave the question whether the person is actually in love, and what that means, as it stands. My point is only that such a description of the relationship between hearing love being talked about and love, presents the relationship between the language of love and love as an external one. It invites us to think of the ways in which the language of love that we encounter in songs, films and literature may induce love in the listener, spectator or reader. Rhees, however, states quite clearly that this is *not* what he has in mind.

⁸ A song by Melissa Etheridge (2001) captures this love-sick feeling well: “In front of total strangers won’t you kiss me, flowers for no reason but you miss me, I want to be in love.”

It may sometimes be said that [...] love does something to you. All right; but not in the way in which psychoanalysis does something to you, for instance. The point is that the person in love is different; life is different for him, or the whole world is different for him. [...] I do not mean that the language of love brings about or induces that difference. [...] The language does not bring about the 'difference' of being in love, but the language is a part of that difference—I had almost said is that 'difference', because the language is not the words on paper nor even reciting them, the language is the way it is used and the role it plays, the language is all it means to him in using it and to her in listening. (Rhees 1969, 124-125)

This I take it, is as close as one may get in formulating the insight that the language of love is not anything distinct from love, but internal to it. The language in which we speak about love is itself expressive of our love. Gaining an understanding of the language of love is not anything different from gaining an understanding of love. Or even, the only way we may understand love is through the language of love. "Knowing what that language means is knowing what being in love is." (Rhees 1969, 124-125).⁹

If we take up this attitude to language, there is nothing strange in the suggestion that philosophers could have something to say about love. If we think of philosophizing about love as a way of clarifying to ourselves the language of love—how it is used, what it means, in our life—there does not seem to be anything that must be seen as necessarily hidden to us in love, since the language in which we express it is something that we fundamentally share.

IV

PERSONAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS IN LOVE

I have rejected one way of thinking about the personal character of love that I believe is misleading. That is thinking of love as some private, inner object that we cannot reach by means of language. I now want to turn to the ways in which it strikes me as right to say that love is personal in order to see what impact this may have on what philosophy can or does say about love. The first question to which I turn is what we may regard as philosophical problems in love.

⁹ Cf. Wittgenstein (1997): "For how can I go as far as to try to use language to get between pain and its expression?" (§245).

No one would probably challenge the claim that philosophizing about love is not the same as loving. It is quite possible for me to raise philosophical questions about being in love or enter philosophical discussions on the topic without being in love myself. I might, as Rhees (1969) says, “in one sense, learn the language of love and never be in love” (124). The emphasis here, I take it, is on *my* being *in* love, since it is less clear what it would mean to learn the language of love without myself experiencing love in other relationships, such as with family and friends, as well as experiencing other people being in love. Following the same line of thought one may also conclude that the personal problems we encounter in love are different from the philosophical questions we may raise about it. It is, however, important to note how the two may also converge. Our personal problems may give rise to philosophical questions, and working through philosophical questions about love may clarify, or perhaps sometimes even cloud, what is at stake for us personally.

I have already distanced myself from the suggestion that the philosophical question concerning love is defining it or deciding what may count as love in a specific case. The task of philosophy, as I will argue, is rather to elucidate what it may mean, say, to see something as love or not in different situations. This marks one distinction between personal and philosophical problems in love. Even if we recognize the problems involved in raising the questions “What is love?” or “Is this love?” within philosophy in the belief that there must be one general feature running through all the instances in which we talk about love, we do not need to reject the idea that these questions may meaningfully arise in other contexts of our life. The important point is only to recognize how very different the role of asking such questions in our life may be from identifying such a general denominator. In this work, I will repeatedly return to the significance of recognizing the contexts in which a question arises for clarifying what kind of question it is.

A teenager may raise the questions “What is love?” or “Is this love that I am feeling?” with curiosity. Someone experiencing his first love may express the wonderment he is feeling by saying, “Is this what everyone has been talking about?” A person suffering rejection may utter the words, “What is love anyway?” with a dismissive gesture. Against the background of a long relationship in which the daily routines have taken over the initial romance, the question, “Is this love or just a friendship?” may be asked in disappointment and despair: “Is this as good as it gets?” Now, rather than longing for a

general answer to her question the teenager may be seen as longing for an experience—an experience, one may add, that may be tightly connected with the desire to become an adult. Similarly, the one who wonders over his budding feelings can be seen as primarily speaking out of his experience, and not in search of any particular answer. For the ones who, in one way or another, entertain doubts about love, the question actualizes a felt need to change one's life, or a possible reason for changing aspects of it. The cynic's rejection of the whole question, however, can be seen as a categorical avoidance of the realization that there are ways in which she too may be in need of change.

The meaning these questions have in our lives cannot be isolated from what they tell us about these same lives. *They are questions about the life we lead.* They are *personal* and *moral* questions in the sense that they face each of us with a question about the place we are prepared to give to love in our life. What do I see as love or as failures in my love for someone? Do I need to love better or open myself more to other people? It is my responsibility as an individual to take them seriously and try to give them a sincere answer. This does not mean that I cannot turn to others for advice, or that I cannot learn from others' experiences. In the end, however, I am the one who has to find an answer to them. I *cannot* turn to philosophy or science for an answer to whether or not I love. This is not a limitation of philosophy or science. It is not as if one day we could find an answer to the question what love is in philosophy or science, but have not done it yet. It is rather a reminder about the language of love and about the fact that it is not clear what it would mean for philosophy or science to answer these questions.

What philosophy *can* do, however, is to deepen our understanding of what the different answers I may give might mean. What could count as an answer to my question? What difference does giving one or the other answer make in my life? What attitudes do my questions express? In what ways may I deceive myself by looking at things in one way or another? This is one sense in which philosophy can be said to elucidate the meaning of love, not by exposing the referent of the word, but by clarifying the different moves available to us from within the language of love. It is, however, *we*, or *I*, that have to speak this language. Philosophy does not live our life for us.

Halting at this point provides us with the opportunity of marking two distinctions between questions of meaning and other kinds of question, first, against the idea that it is in any way predetermined in

language what we may say, and second, against the idea that we, ourselves, determine the meaning of our words.

(1) Within continental philosophy there are strands of thought that harbour the fear that language, in virtue of being a conventional system of signs, determines the meaning our life should have for us. By providing us with the categories with which we make sense of our life, it prevents us from making any other sense of it.¹⁰ I think this fear rests on very uncertain grounds. First of all, it is not clear what one wants to say with a general statement, such as “language determines what we should say or think”. I do not exclude the possibility that there may be situations in which one could succeed in giving the sentence a meaningful use, by, for instance, speaking about language in a very specific sense to denote, say, certain linguistic practices. One may, for instance, think that Wittgenstein’s (1997) distinction between “surface grammar” and “depth grammar” (§ 664) shows how the form of language may lead us to think in particular ways. It provides us with one example of how a similarity in the construction of sentences may mislead us to conclude that there is a similarity in use. Just think of the conviction that I already discussed according to which the question “What is...” always serves the same purpose of looking for a definition. One may also come to realize how certain uses of language, certain descriptions of our situation that may even extend to a whole culture’s self-understanding, are oppressive, such as speaking about human beings in terms of “races”, or indeed “different cultures”, or discussing homosexual love in terms of an incurable or curable disease, or more moderately as a biological or psychological orientation or disposition.

However, these are aspects of our language use that can be criticized from within our linguistic practices. They are not aspects of language as a whole. Indeed, we may ask from what point we are to criticize these aspects of language, if all of language shares this problematic feature, as well as from what point of view the philosophers who criticize language in its entirety for being oppressive take themselves to be speaking. Furthermore, speaking

¹⁰ It appears that a similar thought is expressed in the hopes within some branches of analytic philosophy that conceptual analysis could reveal the underlying logic (or principles, or conditions) of language and thereby supply one with rules for correct language use. Only the notion that one could regulate language in this way does not appear to fill these philosophers with the unease experienced by their continental counterparts.

about “language as a whole”, or as a closed system that has power over its speakers, presupposes that one may give a general description of the character of language. (Or then the saying is just meant as a more or less poetic expression of an existential experience.)

(2) The experience that what we say is determined by the language we speak seems to be a reaction to the recognition that we are not the ones to decide what our words should mean. Where one goes wrong, however, is in thinking that this means that somebody or something else determines the meaning, when it would be better to say that questions of meaning are not settled by a decision, or by a convention. I earlier remarked upon the personal character of the questions of what place I am willing, prepared and able to give to love in my life. I am, as it were, responsible for giving an answer to these questions in accordance with how I live, and for living in accordance with the answers that I give. The personal dimension here, however, does not extend past my responsibility for the answers I sincerely want to or am able to give. Although I am the one who has to answer these questions, I am not free to decide what could constitute an answer to the questions I am posing. If we think about it in that way we are back with the idea that language is something private and that *I* give meaning to language. Yet, the question whether something is love is not only a question about what I choose to call love. It is a question about what I, or anyone, can intelligibly understand as love, and about how certain ways of talking about love can be seen as meaningful or not.

I cannot, as it were, decide whether something is or is not love by making a stipulation. My falling in love with someone other than my wife does not become less of a problem in our marriage just because I did not intend to do it, or would wish that it did not have as dire consequences as it did. Furthermore, if I cheat on my wife, but insist that she should not feel hurt because I did not mean to hurt her, although I agree that cheating is a hurtful thing to do, I am taking my words in a direction in which it is no longer clear that I am making any sense. Reflecting on meaning, therefore, is a matter of reflecting on what I could *possibly* say, and further a matter of responsibly taking on the question of what I *want* to say.

V

PERSONAL QUESTIONS AND MATTERS OF PERSONALITY

This relates to the second question I want to raise about the way I am personally involved in love. In other words, in what ways can my philosophy of love be seen as expressive of my own thoughts on the matter? I want to begin looking at this question by considering a quote from Simone Weil (1977). In the essay "Human Personality" she writes:

If a child is doing a sum and does it wrong, the mistake bears the stamp of his personality. If he does the sum exactly right, his personality does not enter into it at all.

Perfection is impersonal. Our personality is the part of us which belongs to error and sin. (Weil 1977, 318)

The tone in Weil's example is merciless, and we may well ask whether indeed we always need to look at what is personal as erroneous or sinful. Nevertheless, we have to understand this comment, against the background of the distinction she makes between someone's person or personality and someone as a human being. Compare, for instance, this statement with the introductory remarks of her essay:

'You do not interest me.' No man can say these words to another without committing a cruelty and offending against justice.

'Your person does not interest me.' These words can be used in an affectionate conversation between close friends, without jarring upon even the tenderest nerve of their friendship. (Weil 1977, 313).

By saying this, Weil is criticizing modern attempts to identify human beings with their personalities. This is bound up with her thinking that there is something sacred in another human being which cannot be reduced to his or her personal traits. It is him or her, "no more and no less" (Weil 1977, 314). A similar notion will be crucial for the discussion that follows in part two. With Weil and with other philosophers, I argue that we leave out an important dimension of human life if we think that it is possible to reduce human beings to some features of their personality. It is a failure both in our personal life with other people and in our thinking about love and moral philosophy to conceive of the bond of love as a bond between

personalities, and not as a meeting between two human beings who cannot be contained in some historical or psychological facts.¹¹

Simone Weil approached these matters from a religious point of view, speaking, for instance, about our eternal obligations towards other people. Whether we completely agree with this perspective or not, it appears right to say that by laying down conditions for what it means to be a person, we fail to capture the unconditional character that seeing someone as a human being, or loving another human being, may have in our life. It gives the concept of a human being a *relative* character, making it dependent on certain features of the person, whereas Simone Weil introduced the human being as an *absolute* limit to our thinking and being. This absolute dimension of Weil's thinking is important for understanding in what ways she thinks the child's mistake bears the stamp of his personality. It may also help in clarifying what it may mean to be true to one's words and the ways in which it is not up to me to determine what love is.

Think first of the boy doing mathematics. It is easy to conceive how some aspects of his personality, such as a lack of concentration, or a lack of understanding of the problem may come to stand between him and the task at hand. He may have misunderstood the problem, thinking that it was similar to the previous one, and, therefore, applied the wrong rule in solving it. In respect to the task of philosophizing, I may sometimes also need to work against aspects of my personality that prevent me from gaining a clear view of how certain words are used. I may need to work past what my history and psychology make me inclined to say since that may reveal significant delusions in me. It may sound like a simple point indeed, but one of the most important lessons I have learned in the study of philosophy is that the first thing we may be inclined to say in a matter, is often not what we want to say on closer reflection. This is one way of reading Wittgenstein's (1998) remark that "[w]ork on philosophy [...] is really

¹¹ The failure to appreciate this is apparent in much of today's applied philosophy, or applied or practical ethics. It is generally believed that the moral problem lies in capturing what makes a person, what capacities are needed for someone to qualify for personhood. Thus one starts with the realization that we attribute certain rights to persons, and continues by asking whether different groups of beings, such as animals, fetuses or infants, or gravely handicapped people also qualify as persons and thus as legitimate bearers of such rights. See e.g. most of Peter Singer's writings, and various articles on abortion or euthanasia, such as Judith Jarvis Thompson (1971) and Michael Tooley (1983). One can only imagine how much Simone Weil would have abhorred hearing these kinds of arguments.

more work on oneself. On one's own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them)" (24). In this sense it may also be said that philosophical problems are always personal problems. The confusions we need to work with are in the first place our own, and only in the second place, if at all, those of other people.

Emphasizing the need to work on our personal confusions also shows why discussion and dialogue are so important in philosophy. I may turn to you in order to become clear about my own thinking. By seeing in what ways you and others agree with me, or would say the same, and in which respects there are blind spots in what I want to say, the continuing conversation provides room for thinking things through. By seeing how far certain strands of thought can be pursued, what different thoughts imply and so on, we reach a deeper understanding of the question at hand. Saying that I should not let my personal convictions come into philosophy may in this manner be a way of saying that I should not let certain tendencies rule my thinking on some matter. I should not make hasty judgements, but see *what the question is truly about*. In that sense, philosophy is not a matter of voicing opinions. Coming to see what a question was truly about means recognizing this as something that is not dependent on me. What I can intelligibly say in a matter is not relative to what I believe I want to say. Rather it may be said to constitute a *limit to my thinking*.

However, this does not mean that I am only personally involved in my thoughts in so far as they are clouded or flawed. If we again turn to the boy doing a sum, it sounds harsh to say that *he* in no way comes into doing it right. It is true that there is nothing in his person or personality that determines whether the calculation is correct. That the answer is correct is an aspect of mathematics and not of him finding it. Yet, he plays a role in solving the puzzle in various ways. It is he who concentrates on the assignment, he who listens to his teacher, applies the correct rule and carefully does the operations. It is he who finally succeeds in getting the calculation right. Saying that he does not enter into it because he does not determine what the right answer is, ignores what it may mean to do something right. It does not acknowledge that we hold people responsible not only for their shortcomings, but also for how well they succeed in a matter. Furthermore, we could say that he only gets the sum right *when* he understands that it is right and is able to continue solving similar tasks, and not when he only does what he is told, or tries to guess what the teacher would accept.

This also holds true for what I come to say in philosophy. On the one hand, it is possible for me to elevate my own thoughts. I can emphasize that it was “*I*” who thought of something, or that they were “*my*” thoughts. This may in many ways be a dubious matter. However, there are other situations in which it is less clear that emphasizing the personal aspect of one’s thinking constitutes a wrong. This is the sense in which I am responsible for what I am saying, by considering what I really want to say, and when I come to this, stand for what I believe. This addresses a second sense in which philosophical problems can be said to be personal, in that they are directed at us as persons. The reflection on our use of language in philosophy is in that way a call to reflect, in very particular ways, on our own uses of words as individual speakers of our language. What do I see as possible uses of our words, behind what uses do I stand in attempting to make sense of our life, which is also mine? In philosophy, as in our personal life, then, we are faced with a demand for sincerity, asking whether we really mean what we say. In the discussions to follow in this work, I will also emphasize that it is only by living up to this demand, by our meaning what we say, that our language has any meaning.

This aspect also brings out an important difference between philosophizing about love and doing mathematics. Although the truth of mathematical propositions also depends upon mathematics having a place in our life—our doing things with it—there are settled standards for judging whether something is right or wrong in mathematics. When it comes to love, however, the question of what we can meaningfully understand as love is expressive of *who we are* in other ways. First, the question about how far I can stretch my understanding of different relationships and for which descriptions and expressions of love I am prone reveals something about who I am. Furthermore, my philosophical investigations are personal in the comparisons I choose, the examples I find illuminating, the emphases I make, and the spirit in which I write. What place, say, am I prepared to give to failures in love? In this manner, philosophizing about love can be seen as a moral activity: it tells us something about what place we, as philosophers, are ready and able to give to love in our own life. Recognizing something as a meaningful description of love involves recognizing the demands that are made on us in the light of this concept.

VI THE MORAL DIMENSION OF PHILOSOPHY

Simone Weil warned us against reducing human beings to personal characteristics. In a similar manner I have argued that we should not reduce questions of philosophy to personal opinions, or products of a person's history or psychology. This could also be seen in connection to what some philosophers have spoken of as the moral dimension of Wittgenstein's writing. (See e.g. Diamond 1991e.) Underlying much of his philosophy appears to be a thought that the way in which we look at philosophy, and at what philosophy can or should do, is expressive of an attitude towards life. In his criticism against a metaphysical use of language, there is a suspicion that in doing metaphysics, in trying to fit the world into a system, or reducing language to one graspable thing, we are exercising our will on the world in an improper manner. We are, as it were, trying to control it, by turning it into a thing that we can define. Furthermore, he attempted to open our eyes for how, when doing philosophy, we are often in the grip of this kind of metaphysics. We force our investigation in a specific direction according to our own preconceptions of the questions we are facing.

We may also read Wittgenstein's remark that philosophy "leaves everything as it is" in the light of these vain attempts to make the world conform to our will (Wittgenstein 1997, § 124). Now, it is well worth discussing exactly how we should understand this remark. For one thing, it is clear that not everything remains as it is when doing philosophy; in most cases, the ways the philosopher comes to see things and his or her own thinking changes. This thought, of course, is also expressed in another of Wittgenstein's remarks, which I already mentioned, that "[w]ork on philosophy [...] is really more work on oneself". Yet, I would agree with Wittgenstein that philosophy leaves everything as it is in the sense that it should *not* be aimed at constructing systems or theories, or at inventing new concepts. Instead, the task of philosophy, as I see it, inspired by Wittgenstein, is to start with how we use our concepts and thereby with ourselves. Our philosophizing should not be aimed at making new discoveries but at reminding ourselves of how we, as individuals in our individual lives, use words and what role these words have there.

In these respects, we can also see similarities between love and philosophy, or why it makes sense to think of philosophy as a form of love. In the same manner as we, in love, should not try to reduce other human beings to our picture of them, nor try to define or control

them, we should, when philosophizing, not try to reduce the phenomenon under discussion to fit our pre-conceived notions of it. Just as I cannot decide or determine who you are, I cannot determine how a word should be used. This is also why I am wary of giving definitions in this work. Giving a definition is an attempt to narrow things down and close in on a concept. However, I want to open our eyes to the different uses we make of the word “love” in our life. I want to learn to know the word in its various uses, in the same way that I open up to other human beings and the different things they are, or may be, in coming to know them in love.

This is not meant to exclude the possibility that concepts change as our lives change, or that we can criticise certain practices, as it were, from within, or with reference to other practices in our life. We may, say, criticize certain descriptions of love for being overly idealizing, trivial or corrupt. We may criticize someone for only discussing love from an aesthetic or economic perspective and not recognizing aspects of our relationships that are moral in character. Neither does it mean that there are no limits to our thinking, or that nothing in life is settled. It is rather a point about the place philosophy holds in our life, reminding us that it does not impose limits on our thinking, but instead shows us where *we* draw limits in our life.

Here again, we can make a distinction between our personal limits and those conceptual ones that are brought to the fore in the philosophical investigation. When becoming clear about what meaning it may have to speak about love in different ways, I may, on the one hand, become aware of my personal limitations in thinking about a matter. My clouded thinking, my self-deception, or unwillingness to regard something as love may prevent me from thinking freely. On the other hand, reflecting on what it means to talk about love in various situations may help me grasp, as it were, the “limits” of the concept. I come to see, for instance, how in saying “I feel great tenderness for the one I love” the tenderness that I feel is *internally* related to my love, whereas in saying “I feel indifferent towards the one I love” my feelings of indifference are rather *externally* related to it.

This does not mean that it does not make sense to say the latter. However, someone who claimed that indifference is a constitutive feature of our language of love in the way that tenderness is would fail to grasp in what way my feelings of indifference are in tension with my claiming that I love. He or she fails to see that speaking of indifference is *not* an *expression of love*, but may rather have the role of

a *confession* about my *failure to love*. Here, speaking of limits may also be misleading. Grasping these internal relations between love and other concepts is not a limit to the freedom of our thoughts, but what *enables* thinking in the first place. All attempts at formulating sentences do not, as it were, express thoughts.

VII WHAT "WE"?

In what ways, then, do my discussions merely serve to elucidate the present conceptions of my own culture or even my own culturally influenced understanding? In other words, how can I fend off the suggestion that I am only giving voice to a limited group's understanding of love, and that I am not saying anything about love *per se*? First, if I were able to elucidate even my own understanding, or that of my "culture", it would already have been a noteworthy achievement. Second, since my emphasis in the work to follow will be on clarifying what it means for *us*, the criticism may in certain ways be said to miss the mark. Yet, I see why someone would react to the use of what may sometimes strike one as a "regal we", speaking about what we do, think or mean. This may give the impression that the "we" represents a certain delineated group of people and a conception of love that is restricted to a certain time and place. This objection deserves some comments.

As I have already said, my investigation is, first and foremost, a *conceptual* investigation and not an *empirical* one. Although I discuss examples of conversations about love and emotions taken from our ordinary life, literature and popular culture, my aim is not to describe an existing use of language. Rather I want to gain a deeper understanding of the conceptual framework of the things we might say by turning to the question about what is involved in speaking in certain ways. What does it mean, and what may it mean to speak "the language of love"?

This should not, again, be taken in the sense that I am interested in making *normative* claims about that language. Speaking about what *we* want to say about love is not normative in the sense that it prescribes a certain usage of the word "love". I want to call attention to the moral dimension in raising questions about meaning, but this should not be understood in the sense that morality is an activity of making normative statements. Rather the moral dimension of questions of meaning enter through demanding that we consider what we, as

individual speakers, including you as my reader, sincerely are able to say in a matter.

Furthermore, when I speak about the language of love, I do not suggest that we think of this "language", or "language" as a whole, as any clearly delineated system or object of study. By contrast, I will continually stress the open and indeterminate character of language; what one could call the creativity of us as speakers in both using and understanding it in new situations. This openness, or indeterminacy, does not mean that we can mean just anything with our words, or that we can say just anything. It is rather a reminder that what it makes sense to say in certain situations cannot be laid down in some rules or be regulated in a system.

Against this background we may question whether it even makes sense to speak about our "culture" as representing a certain understanding of love. "Can we", as Peter Winch (1997) asks, "understand ourselves" in the sense that one often assumes when raising questions about our possibilities of understanding other cultures. The problems of understanding that there may be between people do not, in that way, differ in kind from the problems of understanding there may be between people in our own "culture" or "cultures". (Cf. Motturi 2003.)

Nevertheless, the openness of language also opens for understanding. The presupposition for misunderstandings and differing understandings, as I said, is that we also share an understanding, an understanding that may deepen and change in our conversations with each other. Language, as it were, is constitutively social in character. In that way it will always involve some kind of community of speakers. These communities, however, are not clearly delineated. In the sense that language can be seen as constitutive of human life (or what we understand as human life) this community can, in its widest sense, be seen as humanity as a whole.¹²

When I speak of what "we" say, I am, therefore, not proposing that there is any particular "we" that speak in a particular way. *The "we" is rather an invitation to consider your own ways of speaking*; ways which are related to the life you share with other people, which is also the presupposition of language. It is up to you, as a reader, to see what

¹² One should also add that in asking whether I only represent my own culture's understanding of love and suggesting that the understanding of another culture may differ, one has already agreed that both give expression to an understanding of love and that it is therefore possible to communicate between them.

sense you can make of what I say independently of your particular background. Do these ways of speaking, this concept, have a role in your life? The reflection on meaning proposed in this work, as it were, is not dependent on any new empirical evidence but is available to anyone of us who is prepared and willing to consider our own uses of words. By entering such a reflection, however, we open for the possibility that our understanding of these words may deepen.

VIII REMARKS ON STYLE

Before closing the discussion about how we are personally involved in love and philosophy, I want to bring out one further aspect of it that is reflected in the ways we usually express our love, as well as in the way I have chosen to make use of certain examples in my text. That is the personal voice that finds expression in any declaration of love, the "I" that loves "you" in saying "I love you". In some of the first versions of these texts I often wrote about a general "we" loving "them", to avoid always talking about "me" loving "you", which somehow sounded "too personal". This, however, came to strike me as quite an awkward, indirect way of capturing the ways in which we talk about love. We do not love in a philosophical "we", rather the language of love centres on two "I:s" loving two "you:s". This does not exclude the fact that we may talk about "we" and "they" in relation to love in some situations. Parents may tell their child, "You know that we love you", and you may say of them, "They really love their children." However, this does not contradict the claim that we always meet each other as individuals in love, rather it strengthens it. Remember that a usual way of talking about "we" or "they" in love, is "We" or "They love each other".

Now, one might ask what role the choice of pronoun has for making a philosophical point. Is this not just a question of style? However, I want to bring out the grammatical difference in *who* is saying what, for here we could say that style and content intersect. It makes a difference for the kind of conversation I am involved in whether I say, "I love...", "You love...", "He or she loves", "We love" or "They love". Mats Furberg (1998), for instance, remarks that I cannot declare someone else's love in his or her place (232). I may say, "He loves you" or "He should just admit that he loves you", but this does not serve as a declaration of love, unless he has asked me to tell you in his absence. Only when he says, "I love you" himself, does his

feelings have the character of love. Or rather, calling something love, on my part, has a different sense depending on whether the one I claim loves you, would be prepared to say it too. This is true even if he has confided his love for you in me, but not in you. Therefore, the questions with which you and I are faced, when you ask me, "Does he love me?" or ask him, "Do you love me?", are not the same. What examples we use in philosophy may in that sense alter the meaning that saying something has.

Another choice could have been to follow the traditional philosophical way of talking about "lover" and "beloved" as he and she. This use is quite questionable from a gender perspective, for even though one has often tried to refrain from inducing any stereotypes about gender or giving this use any explicit gender connotations, it often gives rise to certain associations rather than to others. One may easily come to think of the "active male lover" and "the passive female beloved", which also raises the question whether it is necessary to regard the lovers as either subject or object. Apart from the objections one might raise about gender, however, I find this use problematic, since it only understands love from a third person perspective. It views the lovers from the outside, and not from within, emphasizing what it means to *describe* someone as loving and not what meaning it may have for me to *express* my love. Moreover, it neglects the second person perspective and what different roles it may have to direct myself to another as a "you" and not only speak about them as a "he" or "she".¹³

Pointing out these differences in the different perspectives from which we may talk about love, I should hasten to add that I do not want to give priority to any one perspective. Rather I hope that the different examples may make us sensitive to what these different uses of the word "love" from different persons' perspective may mean. Being able to shift between the different perspectives also contributes to a deepened understanding of what is at hand. Relying quite heavily on the use of "I" and "you", however, I am aware that it may sometimes be unclear which "I" is speaking in the text. Is it I (CK) as the philosopher writing the text and discussing certain questions, or the generalized "I" in the examples of what it may mean for me to

¹³ On the whole, the second person perspective has been neglected in philosophy, and I will not do much to amend it in this work. One exception to this rule is Martin Buber (2004).

love you? Nevertheless, I hope that the context in most cases makes this clear.

The primary example of love within my discussions is “erotic love” or “sexual love”, although I mostly speak of “love” without defining “what kind” of love I am discussing. To the extent that I bring in examples of other forms of love, such as friendship, the love between parents and children, familial love, the love of neighbour, they mostly, although not always, serve as contrasts aimed at bringing out certain distinctions between the different kinds of love. In many cases, however, I do not see any sense in overly emphasizing the sense in which we may speak about *different kinds* of love. Rather talking about “kinds” or “forms” of love may, where some uses of “love” are concerned, obscure the matter, implying, for instance, that they have clearly defined characteristics, involve different demands and so on. It makes sense, as it were, to speak of all of these different relationships as love because they share certain features, although there may not be one specific feature running through all our uses of the concept. This is an additional reason for using the word “love” quite freely rather than constantly stressing the “erotic” or “sexual”. Another is that it is not evident that we should reserve the term “erotic” to characterize only sexual love.

Choosing a term for the love that I am mostly discussing, in other words, the love that evolves around a special “you”, bearing relations to sexuality, marriage, child-rearing, in itself raises certain questions. Through history the emphasis on different aspects of these relationships has changed. We may trace remnants of uses, sayings, and understandings of *eros* that go back on the development of what has been called “courtly love”, “chivalrous love” and “romantic love”, the concept has come to involve aspects of the love of God (*agape*) and friendship (*philia*).¹⁴

Against this vast background one may question why I have chosen to speak only of “love”, “erotic love” or “sexual love”. The answer to this is simply that I have wanted to attend to the ways in which *we* speak about love in *our* daily life and dealings with other people, not as philosophers, not as theologians, not as philologists. Even if the distinctions between, say, *eros*, *agape* and *philia* correspond to some of the distinctions we may make between our different uses of “love”, I

¹⁴ For an exposition of how the concept of love has been understood under these different terms see e.g. Singer (1984a, 1984b, 1987), Osborne (1996a), Nygren (1953), de Rougemont (1983), Airaksinen (2001).

am first and foremost interested in the distinctions that we make. Add to this that our uses of the word are often quite “eclectic”, in other words, that they comprise features of what has been taken to be aspects of different forms of love, and you have the recognition that if we consider, say, the distinction between *eros* and *agape*, our ways of speaking about erotic love do not strictly keep within the boundaries of *eros* but include many aspects which have primarily been assigned to *agape*.

Therefore, I have chosen to speak of *sexual love* because it strikes me as one of the most straightforward ways in which one may bring out the sense in which this love differs from other kinds in being constitutively connected with our sexuality and sexual desire. More often I have spoken of *erotic love*, because that notion seems to capture the sensuous nature of this love better. It bears acknowledgement that an understanding of sexual desire cannot be reduced to a biological drive, but belongs to the context of our “embodied intentionality”.¹⁵ However, since this choice is mainly a matter of feeling, I admit that my decision on what term to use is slightly contingent. Nevertheless, I have consciously decided not to speak about “romantic love” although that is quite a commonly used term. I do not do this only because the term carries so much baggage from “romanticism”, candle-light dinners and moonlight serenades, but also because I suspect that many of its idealizing features involve a temptation in or a corruption of love.

As the observant reader may notice there is one other common name for erotic love that I consistently leave out of the discussion. That is the “love between man and woman”. My reason for doing it, and for hoping that it would also be left out of philosophical discussions of love completely, is that it does not have any apparent bearing on the philosophical points one is interested in making. The distinction, one may think, may be useful if one wishes to distinguish between the love between man and woman and that between man and man or woman and woman in order to point out the differences or similarities in how they have been portrayed in literature, art and history. In most philosophical discussions, however, the phrase “love between man and woman” does not serve to distinguish this love from other kinds of erotic love—if they are indeed different kinds,

¹⁵ See Scruton (1987), especially the introduction, and chapter 6 for one discussion of this aspect.

posing different questions, bearing different implications—but to distinguish erotic love from other forms of love such as friendship, love of family, and so on.¹⁶ In doing that, however, the philosophical discussion intentionally or unintentionally excludes relationships that do not fit under the heading of “man and woman” from the sphere of erotic love. Sexual love is assumed to be one with *heterosexual* love.

It is easy to shrug off this usage as a euphemism or a mere manner of speaking, but as such the notion is far from innocent. Considering the history of violence that has accompanied the exclusion of homosexuals from both love and society, finding them rather to be a proper object of hate, it strikes me that much of this violence is still contained in this formulation. Certainly most philosophers using it, such as İlham Dilman, Hannes Nykänen and Rush Rhees, whose thinking in other respects has been an inspiration in this work, did not or do not mean to be violent. But if we agree that there is nothing more to this term than a manner of speaking, there should not be any problem in leaving it out of our philosophical or moral vocabulary and replace it with other expressions.

IX OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

I have chosen to divide the chapters in this thesis into three different parts, each consisting of chapters which concern a central theme. In the first part I discuss the relation between love and *emotions*, in the second I ponder questions about *identity* and love and in the third part I ask how questions of *meaning* may enter into love.

The first part addresses questions pertaining to love’s status as an emotion. What understanding can emotions be said to constitute and how is this related to love? Chapter one and two take on two dominant views in the philosophy of emotion; (1) that emotions are passive experiences such as feelings or dispositions (chapter one), and (2) that emotions are rather characterized by their rational character (chapter two), in other words that they involve constitutive beliefs or

¹⁶ Roger Scruton (1987, 305-311) does draw more far-reaching conclusions than this. He thinks that only “the strangeness of the other gender” (Scruton 1987, 310) that is desired in heterosexual love makes it into a true meeting with *another* first person-perspective. The homosexual rather desires the other as a mirror of his or her own body. I regret that this is not the place to bring out at length just how strange his suggestion is.

judgements concerning their object; the thing, the person or the situation at which they are directed.

I acknowledge that these accounts bring out important aspects of the emotions in that they point towards the fact that emotions involve a bodily as well as a mental dimension. In this, they capture one of the main difficulties with talking about the emotions or trying to define them; emotions are neither purely physical, or bodily, nor purely mental. At times it is important to notice that emotions are something that we feel; we may think of expressions such as “boiling with anger” or “being overwhelmed with fear”. Yet in other situations, emotions appear to be closer to thoughts, and so how we feel is not what matters but what we think or may say about our situation.

Despite the insights these accounts may offer us, I argue that they both run the risk of generalizing the emotions in opting for one of the alternatives in trying to say what an emotion *is*. Returning to the thought that we do not primarily use emotion-words to report something, either an inner or outer state or process, I suggest that we shift focus to what it is we *say to each other* when we express or refuse to express emotions. In doing this, I particularly emphasize the different roles emotions and love can be said to have in the moral drama that is our life.

In the first two chapters I come to the conclusion that it involves a reduction of the language of love and the other emotions only to give a psychological, or epistemological, description of it. In chapter three I begin to spell out what it may mean to recognize the moral character of the command to love, by bringing together themes from the first two chapters in a discussion of the interrelation between our will and our responsibility in love. Beginning with the observation that loving someone is not just about feeling, but also about regarding certain aspects of our relationships to others as demands, I raise the question about what we may be said to be responsible for in love.

The second part turns to questions concerning identity, discussing the role that “I”, “you” and “we” may have in love. Beginning with the thought that love necessarily has to be seen in connection with a relationship, I ask what it may mean to come to *know* each other and oneself in the light of love. Here, again, I find it crucial to acknowledge that the question about what we are bound to in love is a moral question, and not merely an epistemological one. I return to Simone Weil’s thought that the human being cannot be reduced to his or her personality, and emphasize in what ways the questions “*Who am I?*” and “*Who are you?*” are moral questions. I develop this

thought in the light of the internal relations between the concepts of love, goodness, beauty and truth.

In chapter four I discuss what it may mean to talk about reasons in the context of love and other emotions. In what ways do questions of justification arise in love, and what does it mean to regard someone as an intelligible object of love? I show why it is problematic to understand the bond of love as a bond to specific qualities of the other and how such a view ignores the unconditional character of our turning to someone in love. The personal qualities of the other cannot be taken as explaining our relationship, since it is only against the background of our relationship that we can understand what is meant by speaking about your qualities.

Chapter five takes on the question about what kind of self-understanding can be gained through a reflection of love. I argue that notions such as “being oneself” or “being true to oneself” do not depend upon an unchanging core of the person which philosophers discussing personal identity have often assumed. Rather they raise a question about *unity* that is of moral concern, calling us to be true to the sense of our words and in our relationships with others. Furthermore, I argue, partly inspired by, but also critical of, Jean-Paul Sartre, that holding on to a settled picture of what one is like may form a kind of self-deception.

In chapter six I discuss how we are to understand the bond of love or whether it is meaningful to think of love as a bond in the first place. I criticize Robert C. Solomon’s account of love as a “shared identity”, for only giving a psychological description of what it means to share a life in love. This neglects that *what* we share in love, which I suggest is a certain conception of goodness, is as important for our being able to understand a life together as loving. It is of paramount importance for the goodness we find in love that it cannot be reduced to what is pleasant.

Chapter seven starts off with the observation that the lover often sees things in the loved one that may be hidden from others, and asks what this means for the truth of love’s vision. I argue that the frequent tendency in philosophy to think that the one I love is not as I say is based on several problematic assumptions about what it means for a statement to be true. One assumes, for instance, that the criterion for the truth of a statement is that it corresponds with something in reality. In response to this view I show in what ways love involves a different kind of confrontation with what is real, which rather raises a question of truthfulness and sincerity.

The third part turns to the understanding of the world and our life that can be said to be internally connected with love. The title of the part is "Meaning" pointing to what meaning our life can be said to have in love, and dwelling on the relationships between the "meanings" of our words and the sense in which our relationships with other human beings are meaningful to us. Chapter eight begins with the recognition that love may make our lives meaningful in many ways. Pondering whether we may also regard a love of someone as a love of life, that is, as a way of finding meaning in life, I ask whether love truly gives meaning to our life or only makes us forget how meaningless it is. What kind of world is it that the one in love inhabits?

In chapter nine I raise the question what it may mean to say, "That won't happen to us" in love. What different kinds of attitude to chance and circumstances does such a statement express, and what risks are connected with wanting to determine the kind of meaning something may have in a relationship? Is the belief that nothing will happen an expression of faith in the relationship or a way of taking you for granted? I point out that statements such as this one take the form of promises and not of predictions, and the differences between these two kinds of attitudes towards future events.

Finally, in chapter ten, I raise a slightly different question about meaning: What meaning may it have to say, "Love is the meaning of life" or "What is the meaning (or purpose) of love?" I discuss these questions in connection with Martha Nussbaum's discussion of the place the ancient Greeks gave to love in a good or flourishing life (Nussbaum, 1986). This question brings us to yet another discussion of reasons for love, now on a more general level: Is there on the whole a point in loving? Is love good for anything? I question whether this is a meaningful question and what kind of meaning it assigns to love. It is misleading to think that we, as philosophers, could give an external justification for love, which is not in itself motivated by love, or the place we, as human beings, want to give to love in our life.

The current division into three parts follows one thread of my discussions. However, it would be misleading to say that this is the only pattern that runs through this thesis. It would be more correct to say that the thesis consists of a web of intertwining thoughts, of which the current disposition serves to pick out one line. As a rule, I have tried to write the chapters so that the content of each chapter follows on the thoughts developed in the previous ones. It would, however,

be completely possible to discern a different line of thoughts by spotting the connections between different chapters in the three parts.

A reader interested in the question of reasons for love may, for instance, turn to the second, fourth and tenth chapter for an exposition of ideas connected with this theme. A discussion of why I think it is problematic to search for criteria for love takes place in chapters one, six and ten. A reader concerned with the possibilities of making promises in love may be interested in reading chapters three and nine. Someone interested in a continued discussion of the ways in which the world, or life, as Rhees said, is different for the one in love may find useful observations in chapters three and eight. Furthermore, chapters seven and eight can be said to deal with questions concerning idealizations and beauty in love, whereas chapters five, six and nine take on a discussion of the place of goodness in love. Chapters six and eight raise questions about the roles that sharing a life may have in erotic love, whereas chapters one, seven and nine and the epilogue to part three entitled "The End", involve comments on what it may mean to make mistakes in love.

PART ONE

EMOTION

PROLOGUE: EMOTION

“I WANT TO KNOW WHAT LOVE IS”¹⁷

There is a scene in the Swedish film *Fucking Åmål* (1998) (in English it was called *Show Me Love*): two girls are walking down a dark street in the small Swedish town of Åmål. One of them is Elin, one of the most popular girls in school. Reputedly, she has already fooled around with numerous boys. The other is Agnes, newly moved into town, and something of an outsider. Rumour has it that she is a lesbian, and previously the same night Elin had kissed her to win a bet. She did not know that Agnes was secretly in love with her. Later she regretted it and went back to apologize.

Now, they are talking about what they want out of life, about Åmål and how to get out of there. Elin is convinced that Agnes would probably have lots of girls if she were living in Stockholm. And talking about Stockholm, why not hitch-hike there? Agnes is reluctant, but Elin convinces her. If one of the next following five cars stops for them they should definitely do it. One, two, three, four, the fifth one does and they get in, telling the driver a story about having paid a visit to their grandmother and running out of money. But the engine does not start and the driver gets out. Agnes and Elin sit in the back seat wondering whether they are crazy or “damn cool”. The car radio plays Foreigner’s (1984) song “I Want to Know What Love Is”. They share a kiss. This time it is for real.

They do not get to Stockholm. The driver catches them kissing and throws them out of the car, and as in most films with a romantic theme, there are some twists and turns before they eventually end up together.

Perhaps it is due to the song by Foreigner or to the recollections of my own teens—growing up in the eighties, the two also intermingle—but the above mentioned scene captures me, as does the whole film.

¹⁷ Foreigner (1984).

Showing not only love and courage, it is a story of the troubles and marvels of leaving childhood, awakening feelings for the other or the same sex, the cruelties and excitement of our first attempts at love, the longing to find someone who thinks one is quite OK.¹⁸ As for most teenagers it raises questions about what to do with this, one may think—with reference to the song “What Is this Thing Called Love?” by Cole Porter—“funny thing called love”. “How do we know that what we feel is love? And how do we know what love is?”

I do not want to claim that philosophers are like teenagers in this respect. But they too seem keenly interested in knowing what precisely love is. In comparison with the characters of *Fucking Åmål*, their attempts are much less painful, and much less vivid, striving to provide, first and foremost, a definition of this admittedly strange phenomenon. Few have succeeded in this endeavour, and the question is, of course, whether it is possible to succeed in it. Among the suggested answers to this question, of which some are addressed in the present work, one finds formulations such as, “Love is an emotion”, “Love is a commitment”, “Love is a shared identity” (Solomon), “Love is recognizing certain things as demands”, “Love is the difficult realization that something other than yourself is real”, “Love is idealization”, “Love is an absolute perspective”, “Love is a bond between two people”, “Love is a way of feeling, thinking and acting”, “Love is the spirit in which you do something”, “Love is a game of hide and seek” (Dilman).

The list of definitions of emotions, the group to which most philosophers would agree that love more or less loosely belong, is as long; “Emotions are feelings” (James), “Emotions are dispositions” (Ryle), “Emotions are wants”, “Emotions are actions”, “Emotions are judgements” (Solomon, Nussbaum), “Emotions are construals” (Roberts), “Emotions are adaptations” (Griffiths), “Emotions are evaluations”, “Emotions are upheavals of thought” (Nussbaum).

¹⁸ The film is a treasure for finding examples of people saying such things to each other. To name a few examples: Agnes’s father’s clumsy attempts to comfort her: “You’re a wonderful human being” “No, I’m not” “Yes, you’re wonderful. Wonderful, Agnes. Do you hear what I am saying?” Elin before going through with her bet, “But... it is only that ... you are so ... cute.” Johan who is also in love with Elin: “Damn, you’re good-looking. You’re the best-looking girl I know.” Elin, “You’re drunk.” “No, but it’s true.” Elin revealing her feelings to Agnes at the end: “For I mean, now you probably think that I think you’re bad, but that’s not true. It’s precisely the other way around. I actually think that you ... you’re good.”

The following three chapters are an attempt to examine this question: "What is love?" The aim, however, is *not* to try to give yet another answer, but to *investigate the question*. What does it mean to ask or know what love is? What could count as an answer to this question? Is there, or could there be, one overarching answer? My suggestion, as I mentioned in the introduction, is that we, as philosophers, should not set out to give an answer either to what love is or what other emotions are. Rather we should remind ourselves of the different kind of roles such questions may have in our life, and what kind of answers we might give to them, if we can give any.

I do not want to credit Foreigner with too much depth—in more than one way their song falls prey to the same kind of banalities that create temptations in any love song, or at least the bad ones.¹⁹ However, they do not fall for the same temptations for which philosophers do. After singing, "I want to know what love is", they do not continue to sing, "So, let us find a definition". They sing, "I want you to show me". And further on, "I want to feel what love is, I know you can show me".

To this extent, there is a recognition that knowing what love is does not amount to mere intellectual knowledge. I may say, "Now I know what love is", or "Looking into your eyes, I cannot doubt what love is", but what it means to say "I know" here is not being able to explicate what it is I know, nor being able to answer any factual question such as "What is the capital of Canada?" or "How cold is it outside?". Even in such cases, it is clear that knowing that "Ottawa is the capital of Canada" or that "It is -2° C degrees outside", does not only amount to the mere possession of a piece of information. It is unclear what it would mean to know these things if I did not see how they could figure in other considerations, such as understanding why this is a probable reason for Canada's parliament being situated there, or how these facts could be relevant for other practical considerations,

¹⁹ To the one puzzled by my use of popular love songs in the discussion and in the headings of chapter, I should perhaps say that I find these an interesting source for ways in which we talk about love. Even the most banal love songs may articulate some of our deepest concerns and experiences in love. Either they catch on to ways in which we do speak about love or then they provide us with new ways of articulating our love. The fact that I often "misread" the song titles in my headings to bring out the different ways in which we may make sense of certain formulations, is another matter. At best, I hope it can serve to bring out the different concerns that are addressed by philosophy and by such popular accounts of love.

such as what clothes I should wear when I step outside not to catch a cold, or treading carefully not to slip on ice.

To take an example more closely related to feelings or emotions which I will discuss more in chapter one, knowing that you are in pain, in the sense that it makes sense to say of me that I know it, involves among other things that I respond to you in appropriate ways. In the light of what I know, certain responses can be seen as unintelligible or intelligible, and in the latter case be deemed as either caring, thoughtless or even cruel. They are unintelligible if I, for instance, ask what number your pain is, intelligible in that I tend to your wounds or do not ask you to run a mile with a broken knee. They are caring, if I comfort you, thoughtless, if I ask you to come dancing, or cruel, if I use your pain to humiliate you or in different ways rub salt in your wounds. In the same sense, my discussion in chapter one, will also bring out in what ways regarding a relationship as one of love expresses an attitude to it and the people in it. Seeing two people as a couple means for instance that a third person who enters the picture in certain ways will come between them, as well as recognizing the excruciating effects such a situation may have on the people involved.

There is, however, a deeper respect in which my knowledge of love can be said to involve me. In Foreigner's song, wanting to know what love is cannot be separated from the wish to love and be loved oneself. That is, speaking of *knowing* love here cannot be distinguished from *experiencing* it. This is something philosophers often ignore. As a rule, philosophers appear to be more interested in the statement "This is love" and the conditions for it being true, than the different roles it may have to say "I love you" in different situations, be it a declaration, a confession or an admission that has been held back for a long time. It is, however, with that saying, I think that we should start, for several reasons.

For one thing, my own feelings and experiences of love, as well as my ability to love, are presuppositions for knowing love. To make sense of the language of love, or mean what I say in speaking it, it is not enough that I master its "rules" in the sense that I know how it may be used. I need to find in my own responses something of that which I find in others who speak that language, and who respond to each other and me in such loving ways. This aspect is perhaps at its clearest in what it means to know that you love me. Knowing love in this sense cannot be separated from looking into your eyes and feeling unconditionally welcome, from resting assured that whatever

happens I can turn to you. In that respect, your love may show me both something about what love may mean in a life and what significance I may have in that same life. You reveal to me that I am someone who may not only love but who can also be loved. If we do want to speak about knowledge in love, then, we should stay aware of the sense in which knowing that I love you, or you love me, may keep me warm at night, comfort me, or even haunt me if I do not or cannot love you in return.

For Elin, the realization that Agnes is in love with her, hits her with the cruelty of her former actions towards her; kissing Agnes to win a bet, not phoning her as she promised to, ignoring her at school after their above-mentioned meeting, and so on. This is not to say that these actions were cruel only to the extent that Agnes was in love with Elin—they would have been cruel in any case—but that they gain a different meaning for Elin when she finds out that this is so. It is one of the things that lead up to her confessing her feelings for Agnes.

One may notice that this meaning is already given to the viewers. When Elin says, "I do not want to be like everybody else but sometimes I think I'm just like everybody else", the viewers see Agnes's quiet response, "But you're not", as a stumbling expression of her love. This aspect, it seems, is lost on Elin. Playing with the meaning of words in this way is a familiar move in the games, or rather plays, involved in falling in love. The words, "You're not like everybody else", may be an expression of love or admiration, but they may also be a friendly comment. This provides the hopeful lover to be with the possibility of saying things that she may want to say in a quite specific sense, but still draw back from what was being said with a "I didn't mean it like that" if the other does not catch onto this sense, or responds to it in a way that the lover did not desire.

In the following chapters I will often emphasize this indeterminacy in what we may say of another's words or actions, to mark a contrast against the idea that there could be general criteria for settling whether something is love, or whether someone loves. This, however, does not commit me to saying that it is always unclear what we mean by our words, or what we mean by talking about love in a particular case. It is not that our hopeful lover to be does not know what she means by her words, it is only that she fears what consequences it may have to say what she wants to say and mean it.

There are also other ways in which the teenagers' quest to know love offer illumination into the sense in which love is something I may be said to learn from and in relation to others—although the sense in

which we learn to love, of course, is very different from many other senses in which we learn to do things. Elin is clearly experiencing feelings that are connected with love, but many of her actions towards both Agnes, her sister and Johan, with whom she is having a short and unenthusiastic affair, are cruel, as I said, in that she is seemingly unaware of the meaning her actions have for them. She appears to be unaware of the fact that being rejected by the one one loves, as Johan and Agnes are, hurt.²⁰

This is one reason for rejecting an account of love merely in terms of “feelings”. Certainly, loving presupposes what we may think of as quite primitive reactions, an ability to love. This ability must in one sense be given to us: there is no philosophical explanation as to why we are such creatures as may love. (Cf. Dilman 1998b, 122-124, and p. 371.) However, what meaning we may come to see and find in such reactions, what new reactions may be born out of our relationships with others, is dependent on the kind of life we share with them and the different roles that the concept of love has there. Although learning to love *cannot* be compared to learning a practical ability, it is not a matter of doing certain things, my ability grows and is shaped by my gaining concepts, by my learning to verbally articulate my emotions and experiences, talking with others, and so on. In that respect, I will emphasize the ways in which our understanding of love can be said to constitute a moral understanding.

To borrow a point that Hannes Nykänen (2002) makes and develops quite extensively, the difficulties we may have in connection with love are very rarely knowing what love is, but actually loving. The difficulties I may experience in accepting the transgressions of my parents during my upbringing, in facing the pains of someone I love or standing by a friend whom others turn against, are not primarily to know what love demands of me. My problem is that I fail to do it. Here we may also note that what changes Elin’s understanding of her own actions is not simply more knowledge, but another reaction. When the realization of her cruelty towards Agnes hits her, it hits her in the form of remorse. She comes to see what meaning her actions have in the light of love. This again, is an important way in which my knowing love is a personal matter.

²⁰ It is another question whether we excuse her more for it or regard her actions in a different light because of her young age.

In the following three chapters I will address some questions one may raise about love by addressing a selection of philosophical discussions on the nature of emotion. Now, many objections may be raised against including love in the category of emotions as well as to lumping together different concepts such as joy, anger, fear, love, hatred, pity, compassion, loyalty, jealousy, depression, bitterness, and so on, under the heading of "emotion".²¹ One may think that one of the main problems in many philosophical discussions of emotion precisely lies in thinking that emotions constitute a distinct and delineated phenomenon in our life—say, irrational eruptions in an otherwise rational life, or a particular kind of judgements—which may be distinguished from other forms of thinking, desiring or believing.

Furthermore, one may ask whether we do indeed want to retain the category emotion if we recognize the integral role emotion concepts have in thinking or understanding on the whole. It can be argued that the consequences of recent attempts to show the rationality of emotions, which I will discuss in chapters two and three, are more far-reaching than simply urging us to refine or soften our concept of reason. They show that the concept of reason that philosophy has leaned upon is illusory, which throws an equally dubious light on the other pair of the reason-emotion divide. Is there any sense in emphasizing the specifically emotional character of certain reactions, if one agrees that the division between reason and emotion does not do the job one has wanted it to do?

Nevertheless, I want to relate my discussion of love to some questions pertaining to the emotions, addressing, for example, our responsibility for reacting in certain ways, to show in what ways it is fruitful to understand love as constituting an embodied understanding of ourselves, others and life. Relating the emotions and love to how we understand our lives with each other, my interest goes beyond showing the cognitive and embodied aspects of this understanding. I also want to show how our concept of love constitutes a moral perspective on ourselves, others and the world.

²¹ The differing attempts to produce lists of what emotions are the basic emotions or true emotions, Descartes (1985) lists "wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness" as the six "simple and primitive" passions (353); Spinoza (1992), desire, pleasure and pain as the primary emotions (110, IIIp11), only testify to the problems involved in creating such categories rather than they encourage one to search for more refined ways of categorizing.

“WHAT A FEELING”²²

What if love were “nothing more than feelings” (Morris 1975)? “Feelings of love” (Morris 1975) which were easy to forget? Or taking up another suggestion from the same song, what if love were nothing more than “teardrops rolling down on my face” (Morris 1975)? Gone as soon as the tears had dried? What would our life with love look like then?

I say *what if* love were nothing but a feeling or a pattern of behaviour because I am convinced that any attempt to suggest that love consists in having certain feelings or behaving in certain ways involves a reduction of love and a misunderstanding of the part, or the *different* parts, the concept of love plays in our life. Imagining a life in which saying “I love you” or “They love each other” would fundamentally consist in reporting some inner physical or chemical processes which take place within a person and also lead to changes in his or her outer demeanour is imagining a life that is very different from ours. Even suggesting that our talk about “feelings” and “behaviour” primarily seeks to denote such inner and outer bodily changes involves confusion about the roles these concepts may have in making sense of our life.

My saying this, however, is not to be seen as the usual dismissal of feelings or other aspects of our emotional life that is typical for Western philosophy and culture which in many respects have been plagued by rationalistic tendencies. Such a background gives sense to the derogatory remark “it’s only feelings” in the above quoted song, “Feelings”, but it poorly succeeds in masking the real desperation that is felt at losing someone loved. What makes “feelings of love” so difficult to forget, we could say, is not their connections with me, what *I* feel, but that they concern *you* and what you mean to me as

²² Cara (1983).

another human being who in cases of love, unrequited or otherwise lost, may be impossible to forget, however hard I try to.

In other words, I am not saying that feelings do not count. There is nothing strikingly wrong about talking about "the way you make me feel", to quote Michael Jackson (1987), or asking, "Can you feel the love tonight?", as does Elton John (1994). A whole range of feelings and emotions, including the behaviour that can be said to go with them, such as affection or desire, delight or tenderness, longing or enjoyment, pride, anger or jealousy, can be expected to figure in a philosophical account of love, although there are, of course, differences both in the way they appear, as expressions of love or as temptations in love, and to which degree they do play a part in love.²³ Neither would I hesitate to say that any portrayal of love that did not take account of the ways in which someone can enter and light up a room, change one's life and make one's heart race, not to say stop, would be deficient. It would be lacking if it did not capture the joy and exaltation I may feel by looking at you and finding you looking at me, in the meeting of our eyes.

On the other hand, I do not want to say that the important thing is that we always feel things. Clearly we are not overcome with feelings every time we see the ones we love. An account of love would be as lacking if it did not make room for the calm and serenity you may bring about in me, an experience that may sometimes be best described as a lack of feelings or bodily disturbances. C. S. Lewis (1960) well captures this image of friendship and erotic love, "as it were, curled up asleep" when "the mere ease and ordinariness of the relationship (free as solitude, yet neither is alone) wraps us round. No need to talk. No need to make love. No needs at all except perhaps to stir the fire" (35).

Now, few philosophers of today would agree with the claim that love is either a feeling or a pattern of behaviour. Many would also deny that emotions in general could be understood in this way. The position that emotions are primarily feelings has by tradition been associated with the philosophy of Descartes (1985, 335-338) and Hume (1978, 275-277), who in different ways regard passions as impressions of perceptions of the mind. More recently this view has been

²³ One may also note that the temptation to identify love with feelings is often stronger when one speaks of erotic love than of love in other relationships. The pull to think of feelings is not that strong in the first place, in, say, the love of friends or family.

proposed by the psychologists William James (1884) and Carl Lange (1885), and even later it has been reintroduced in a new shape by Jesse Prinz (2004). Paul Griffiths, who is one of the philosophers I will discuss in more detail in this chapter, also seems to follow such a “Neo-Jamesian” approach.²⁴ This form of Cartesianism finds its opposite in behaviourism, the advocates of which who are most known in psychology are J.B. Watson and B.F. Skinner. The behaviourists do not emphasize the experiential side of emotions, although “the inner” may enter their accounts to varying degrees, but seek to explain emotions by their outward manifestations. The closest proponent of this view who I will discuss here is Gilbert Ryle, who by some has been considered to advance a philosophical or hypothetical behaviourism.²⁵ My argument should also show why it is misleading to take Wittgenstein’s remarks on emotions to be suggestive of such a stance.

As I said, what troubles me in saying that love is either a feeling or a pattern of behaviour is not so much speaking about “feelings” and “behaviour”, although I will return to why certain ways of conceiving these are deeply problematic, as it is saying that love *is* any one thing. The two movements offer diametrically different answers to the question about what emotions are—Cartesianism seeing emotion words as referring to some inner state, whereas behaviourism regards them as referring to some outer behaviour—but they are both aimed at the same question. They try to work out what it is that our emotion words or mental concepts can be seen as referring to. The problem, then, is not that the two views do not sufficiently take into account the ways in which *both* feelings and behaviour play a part in emotions—we would not be better off with an account of how emotion words refer to both feelings and behaviour, but that both accept the question about what an emotion is as a legitimate question.

This is the referential view of the use of words that Wittgenstein most vehemently rejects, and in this chapter I will follow him up on this rejection. With him I will suggest that we rather examine the contexts in which we use emotion or mental concepts if we want to become clear about what meaning these concepts may have, as well as what room there may be for feelings and behaviour in an account of love. Therefore, the present chapter will be more directly concerned

²⁴ I borrow this expression from Phil Hutchinson (2008).

²⁵ It has also been argued that such a characterisation of Ryle is misleading (Lyons 1980b, 196-201). It extends the scope of this work to enter such a discussion here.

with some of Wittgenstein's remarks about emotions than are the following. The purpose of this is, first of all, to make plain some of the considerations that I find crucial for understanding both the philosophical methods I put to use in this work and the insights about human language and understanding that his philosophy has contributed to my thinking about these matters. The discussion should also serve to show why I think conceptual investigations are crucial for clarifying certain confusions about emotions. I discuss this question especially with concern to the recent criticism Griffiths (1997) has directed against conceptual analysis.

The first four parts of the chapter set out to show why it is misleading to primarily consider the words, "I love you" as reports of either inner or outer states, processes or occurrences. The remaining two parts try to sketch out what I think is a more fruitful understanding of these words, attempting to show in what ways they are internally related to the moral drama that is our life.

I "FEELING" IN COMMUNICATION

Emphasizing the need for "feeling" in a philosophical discussion of love has yet a different dimension than the ones I have mentioned above. We may distinguish between at least two senses of "feeling something"; (1) *feelings* (as a noun) in the sense of something that I have or that takes place in me, I feel a chill, a pang or a throb, (2) *feeling* (as a verb) in regard to my tactual (tactile) sense, feeling, say, the roughness or smoothness of an object with my hands or on my skin. Having a drop of water roll down my neck I may say, "I feel a shiver" in the sense, "The drop made me/caused me to shiver", but I may also speak of feeling the drop on my skin, "It's wet and cold", "It's at the top of my neck and now it moves down my spine".

When discussing the role of feeling in emotions philosophers have often tended to focus on the first sense of feelings as "inner experiences or occurrences" and their outward manifestations. Speaking about love, however, it is utterly misleading not to reflect on the second sense in which I can be said to feel you: I come in touch or in contact with you, I feel you move against me, I feel your touches, kisses and caresses, as you feel mine.²⁶ My longing and desire for you

²⁶ This neglect is much stronger in Anglo-American philosophy than it is in continental philosophy within the phenomenological, psycho-analytical and

is in many cases a longing to come in touch with you, to touch and be touched, to hold and be held. As the song goes, "I hunger for your touch" (The Righteous Brothers 1965). I may be said to feel your love in your tender look or in your warm smile, and it is important that this is something I quite literally *feel*. I do not only see the warmth of your smile, your smile really warms me. But, I also feel your love in your touch and in my touching you. I feel your warmth and tenderness in our embrace, as you feel mine.

It has become commonplace in philosophy to relate this neglect of our tactile sense to the sceptical stance philosophers have traditionally taken to the body, or rather to our life as embodied beings. Even if the body does figure in both Cartesian and behaviourist accounts it does so mainly as a seat for certain bodily changes or movements, either inner or outer, which are offered as criteria for judging what emotion is taking place. By doing this they testify to a belief that one could give a description of emotions in merely physical terms, understood in a narrow sense. This view will prove to be problematic in my following discussion. Neither account gives due notice to the ways in which our embodiment itself plays a part in our understanding of ourselves, other people and their emotions. I would also suggest that it is only in virtue of assigning to the body this peripheral role that certain questions that have haunted philosophy gain a grip on us when we are philosophizing.²⁷ The following discussion can be said to show some of the consequences of the philosophical tendency to take vision as the leading metaphor for understanding knowledge at the expense of the other senses.

Although both Cartesianism and behaviourism are concerned with our knowledge of emotions their focus differs. Cartesianism takes as its starting point my knowledge of my own emotions, whereas behaviourism is primarily concerned with our knowledge of other people's emotions. In their different emphases, they bring forth important aspects of the emotions, the sense in which emotions are something we feel and experience as well as something that shows in our behaviour. By doing this, they also draw attention to what can be seen as an important asymmetry between the first and the third

dialogical tradition. Cf. e.g. the philosophy of Luce Irigaray, Emmanuel Lévinas, Gabriel Marcel and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

²⁷ Many of Wittgenstein's remarks that dissolve the problem of Other Minds have the form of reminding us of different aspects of our embodied life.

person perspective when it comes to attributing an emotion to someone.

The Cartesian view emphasizes the *first person* perspective, in other words that emotions are something that *I* feel. It starts out from the fact that I am in a *privileged* position when it comes to saying what I feel. I do not have to look at my own behaviour to know that I am feeling something, whereas other people's behaviour in other ways may need to guide me to what they feel. This is not to say that I agree with Descartes in thinking that I am always immediately conscious of the mental states that can be attributed to me. Although I do not doubt *that* I feel something, it is not always clear to me *what* I feel. A reflection on whether I love someone may well take the form of thinking about my behaviour in certain situations.

The behaviourists for their part emphasize the *third person* perspective in that we are able to attribute emotions to other people on the basis of their behaviour. The knowledge we can be said to have about other people's mental life does not, in this sense, have to be considered second rate, as Descartes thought in only assigning certain knowledge to the first person in his quest for indubitable knowledge.

However, in each giving priority to only one of the perspectives, they build on too sharp a distinction between the first and the third person. As we will see shortly, they also completely fail to acknowledge the second person and the perspective that "you" can be said to constitute. This is seen, for one thing, in that they model the method of knowing emotions on observation, and not on, say, talking with others. Either I report some inner states in me or some outer ones in other people. In this they both exemplify a certain dualism between inner and outer, a distinction which also bears resemblance to the classical distinction between body and soul.

In this picture, your inner is something I may only reach through inferring from your behaviour. If we, however, reflect on what it means to feel someone's touch and meet in an embrace the distinction between inner and outer is blurred. The notion of an "inner" and "outer" no longer gains a grip. Being hugged by you is not observing some behaviour in you, nor is it simply feeling some bodily movements against me. This reveals one of the problems with the "physicalism" of Cartesianism and behaviourism, that is, the thought that one could make sense either of some feelings in the sense of bodily sensations, or of some patterns of behaviour in isolation from their surrounding context and identify our emotions with these. Understanding something as an embrace, a kiss or caress does not

consist in picking out some bodily movements. It is against the larger context of a life in which we express desire and affection for each other in such ways that these words have meaning. It is in the light of our love, or our affection and friendship, that our holding each other constitutes an embrace, and not, say, a move in the game of wrestling. It is in so far as I see your touch as expressive of you and your love that it warms me. It does not, for instance, strike me as possessiveness, and if someone else were to touch me in a similar way I might feel creepy, feeling chills run down my body. Rather than attempting to translate our embrace into a *causal* account, we could say that it is expressive of *intentionality*, giving testimony to the meaning and significance we have for each other.

Reflecting on the ways we come in contact with each other also offers an interesting example of how causality and intentionality may intertwine. The warmth of your body, in terms of its temperature, may physically warm me if I am, say, feeling cold, but the sense in which I may be warmed by your embrace does *not* figure only in a causal chain, such as in the case of feeling a shiver from a drop of water. The meaning of your embrace cannot be reduced to this physical response. I am warmed not only by the temperature of your body; my response is an embodied response to the desire and love that is expressed in your caress. I feel, as it were, your kiss both on my lips and in the pit of my stomach.

My response is a response to you, a living, feeling, human being, to borrow a famous paragraph of Wittgenstein my feelings are expressive of "an attitude towards a soul" (Wittgenstein 1997, 178e) expressive of the love and desire you awaken in me. Considering the kisses and caresses of making love, feeling each other outside, inside and within, it does not strike me as strange to suggest that erotic love is truly a meeting of body and soul, if we want to hold on to that distinction. Locked in an embrace I feel *you* feeling *me*, feeling you touch my skin and my soul, feeling your soul touching mine, touching you. The caress, one could say, is constituted by an infinite dialectic. The feeling of your touch allows me to sense your feelings. I feel your touch on me and the response it awakens in me. You feel my arousal in my touch which strengthens yours and so on. "The caress is an awakening to you, to me, to us" (Irigaray 2004, 20).

Against this background the question, "How do I know you?", or, "How do I know your feelings?" begins to sound absurd. "I *feel* them/you." I do *not* observe your touches and interpret them as expressive of love and desire, inducing some feeling behind your

behaviour. I feel your desire in your touch. What I feel, how I respond to you, constitutes my understanding of you. The question of what you feel rather arises when I do not feel *you* in your movements. Instead of meeting you in our touches, I sense your distraction.

Rather than focusing on the role of observation in our understanding of other people, this example points us towards *communication*. It is, for instance, revealing that neither Cartesianism nor behaviourism acknowledges that in the case I am in doubt as to what you feel, I may *ask* you. Our meeting speaks of desire, yearning and love as do our words. The main effort of this chapter will also be to show how instead of searching for something to which our emotion words can be said to refer, we should pay heed to *what we say to each other* in using these words.

Talking about love is, among other things, to talk about feelings and behaviour. I see your face break out in a smile, the load of grief that weighs down your step or the joy that lightens it. But more than that, talking about love is talking about the meetings of people and what we come to mean to each other in these. It is against the background of these meetings that our feelings and behaviour have different meanings. For instance, they call certain feelings and behaviour into question as in the case of thinking: "Should I not feel more for her? (and less for her)", or saying, "If you loved me you would not behave like that." Our feelings and behaviour may be said to be constitutive of our understanding of these meetings, but it is within these meetings we need to start if we want to find out what meaning they may have and of *what kind of understanding* they are expressive.

II

"'JOY' DESIGNATES NOTHING AT ALL"

In response to the thought that our emotion words designate certain objects, Wittgenstein replied, among other things: "'Joy' designates nothing at all. Neither any inward nor any outward thing" (Wittgenstein 1967, §487). Again, this is not a denial that feelings as well as behaviour play a part in emotions such as joy, grief and love. Before saying that joy designates nothing at all, Wittgenstein answers his imaginary interlocutor's "But I do have a real *feeling* of joy!" by saying, "Yes, when you are glad you really are glad." (Wittgenstein 1967, §487) We go wrong, however, when we think that joy *is* for instance "joyful behaviour" or "a feeling round the corners of the

mouth and the eyes”, or “an inward thing” (Wittgenstein 1967, §487). These are examples Wittgenstein gives of what joy is not. In this way he speaks to our temptation when philosophizing to think that the meaning of “joy” is somehow connected with some one object or representation that the word designates.

Releasing ourselves from this conviction does not imply that we have to regard joy as a nothing. As Wittgenstein says in connection with pain, “It is not a something and it is not a nothing either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said.” (Wittgenstein 1997, §304). It is not that talking about “joy” lacks meaning, but Wittgenstein urges us to see the meaning this way of speaking has somewhere else than in some “thing” that lies behind the word. He wants us to see what meaning “joy” has in our life, which in Wittgenstein’s later writing is internally related with recognizing the *use* we make of words such as “joy”, “sadness” or “love” in different situations.

As I already mentioned, a core assumption of the physicalism that both Cartesianism and behaviourism represent is the idea that one could single out an isolated episode, such as a sensation or a facial movement, and identify it with love, or with any other emotion. Wittgenstein questions the intelligibility of this idea by reminding us of the need for context for understanding emotional expressions. When we speak of joy, grief, hope and love, he says, it is not clear what sense it could have to identify a certain sensation with the said emotion in the first place. As a contrast to this he often uses the example of pain, in the case of which an idea of an isolated episode has more hold.

“Grief” describes a pattern which recurs, with different variations, in the weave of our life. If a man’s bodily expression of sorrow and of joy alternated, say with the ticking of a clock, here we should not have the characteristic formation of the pattern of sorrow or of the pattern of joy.” (Wittgenstein 1997, 174e)

“For a second he felt violent pain.” — Why does it sound queer to say: “For a second he felt deep grief”? Only because it so seldom happens?” (Wittgenstein 1997, 174e)

Could someone have a feeling of ardent love or hope for the space of one second—*no matter what* preceded or followed this second?—What is happening now has significance—in these surroundings. The surroundings give it its importance. And the

word 'hope' refers to a phenomenon of human life. (A smiling mouth smiles only in a human face.) (Wittgenstein 1997, §583)

The differences between pain on the one hand and grief and love on the other hand that Wittgenstein brings out are not primarily differences in the qualities of the experiences involved but differences in the *grammar* of "pain" and "love". Whereas it makes sense to say, "I just felt a throb of pain", it is unclear what sense we are to make of someone saying out of the blue, "I had a feeling of love right now, but it just went away." In other words, whereas we may isolate an episode of pain and locate it in certain body parts, there are *no* episodes of love either in my feelings or in my behaviour that we may isolate and identify as love. My loving smile does not sit in some specific movements of my face. I may go to the doctor and say, "I feel a stab of pain in my chest" or "I feel a tingling sensation in my left toe." The next morning I may tell you, "I still feel that stabbing pain" or "I do not feel it anymore". Telling you, "I love you", however, is not saying, "I have that feeling again". This is true even if I say "I *feel* love for you." Neither is asking, "Do you still love me", an encouragement to check how you are feeling right now, as you may try to feel how a sore spot feels today.²⁸

Undeniably there are feelings and behaviour that are expressive of love. Just think of the ways in which expressions such as, "I have butterflies in my stomach", "My heart missed a beat" "I reached out to touch your hand" "There was a twinkle in your eye", may enter our conversations about love. Consider, for example, how Grushenka confesses her love for Mitya in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. We meet them on the same night that he has followed her to the town where she went to meet the love of her youth, an officer who at this meeting turns out to be something quite other than she had expected.

"Mitya darling, stay, don't go away. I want to say one word to you," she whispered, and suddenly raised her face to him. "Listen, tell me who it is I love? I love one man here. Who is that man? That's what you must tell me."

A smile lighted up her face that was swollen with weeping, and her eyes shone in the half darkness.

²⁸ That we often ask "Do you love?" instead of "Do you feel love?" also gives us a clue that what someone feels is not, or not necessarily, our prime interest.

“A falcon flew in, and my heart sank within me. ‘Fool! That’s the man you love!’ That was what my heart whispered to me at once. You came in, and everything grew bright.” (Dostoevsky 1949, 339)

The ways in which Dostoevsky here speaks of her smile “lighting up her face”, “her eyes shining” and “her heart sinking within her” gives content to the idea that we are witnessing a confession of love. But could we isolate this scene and think that we had captured what feelings are essential to love? Can we not easily think of situations in which the same feelings and behaviour would play a part in quite different descriptions of what had happened; “Her eyes shone in the half darkness as she cunningly proceeded to explain how they would go on with their revenge.” “My heart sank within me, when I realized that I would never be able to change her mind.”

It is, as it were, against the background of our life that certain feelings and behaviour have the meaning that they have, or even have any meaning at all. In one context, saying, “I feel butterflies in my stomach” means “I am really nervous about talking in front of all these people”. In another context, thinking about you, whom I just met and who caught my attention, I think to myself, “All these butterflies in my stomach? I must be falling in love.” In a third case, my speaking about butterflies in my stomach is to you a clear symptom of indigestion.²⁹ This is also how I take it when Peter Winch, in commenting on “a description of an emotional, even spiritual, encounter ... couched largely in ‘physical terms’”, says that “the physical interaction between the two itself is what it is and is revealed as what it is only within such a web of human relationships” (Winch 1987b, 143). It is not that we give different significance to the same feelings and behaviour in different situations. Our understanding of what kind of feeling it is goes with our understanding of what the situation is.

Even when we speak of pain, it is clear that the reference to certain isolated sensations does not exhaust the meanings, or uses, of “pain”.

²⁹ As we will see, it takes quite special circumstances—perhaps going from a meeting with you to a job interview—for me to ask. “Oh, I’m having butterflies. Am I falling in love or do I just feel nervous about the interview?” I will return to this point later.

Only surrounded by certain normal manifestations of life, is there such a thing as an expression of pain. Only surrounded by an even more far-reaching particular manifestation of life, such a thing as the expression of sorrow or affection. And so on. (Wittgenstein 1967, §534).

An account of pain that would identify pain with certain sensations or contortions of the face would fail to acknowledge the background that is needed to understand what it is for someone to be in pain, coming to see someone's face as contorted by pain, and so on.

One way of approaching Wittgenstein's suggestion that it is "only surrounded by an even more far-reaching particular manifestation of life [that there is] such a thing as the expression of sorrow or affection", and, I would add, love, is through Wittgenstein's remark that pains by contrast with love and grief have "genuine duration" (Wittgenstein 1967, §472); they have a beginning, a course and an end. You can ask "When did you begin feeling pain?" or "How long have you felt this pain?", and in most cases I can give you an answer. When I started or stopped having certain feelings is not relevant to the question whether I love in the same way.

The contrast with love, of course, is not that love may not be said to have a beginning, a course and an end. Nor is it that it may be more difficult to point out the exact beginning or end of a love than it is of a pain. It is constitutive of erotic love that you and I may tell a story, or two different stories, about how we met, how we started having feelings for each other and how they developed, the first time I or you said, "I love you". Sometimes we are also able to recount how we stopped "having feelings" for each other and how we eventually parted. Where love and pain differ is rather in *how* the question of a beginning and an end enters into the two cases. Think only about the ways in which there may be a disagreement as to whether someone has stopped loving another in ways we would not disagree about someone being in pain.

Our understanding the instant Dostoevsky describes above as the moment that Grushenka began to love Mitya depends not only on what happens at that moment, her heart sinking, everything growing bright. It depends on the things that happen before and after this moment in a way that understanding someone as being in pain does not. We may speak of pains coming and going, affecting one's life for no longer than the duration of the pain, but if someone's erotic feelings are constantly fleeting, as Grushenka's seemed to be before this moment, we do not consider them a case of love. Instead we may

speak of them as an infatuation or as lust. It is in the light of Grushenka's will to stand by Mitya even when he is accused of murder, her faith in his innocence and her will to take on part of the blame, that it is meaningful to speak of this moment as the beginning of her love. If it were not for the impact this moment had on her and her relationship to him and the changes it brought about in her and in her attitudes towards him, it would be difficult to take her confession of love any more seriously than her previous greeting to Mitya that she had "loved him only an hour" (Dostoevsky 1949, 276).³⁰

The same could be said about Grushenka's reaction to her former lover and the ways in which her love for him comes to an end that night. Moments before Mitya enters she does not recognize him.

And this isn't he at all! Was he like this? It might be his father!
Where did you get your wig from? He was a falcon but this is a
gander. (Dostoevsky 1949, 333)

[H]e was so kind to me, so merry, he used to sing to me ... Or
so it seemed to a silly girl like me.

... And now, O Lord, it's not the same man. (Dostoevsky 1949,
338)

The man that Grushenka meets this evening is not the man of her hopes and dreams. Part of this can, of course, be seen in that the love of her youth has changed: he is indeed not the same man he was before. But I think we fail to capture something important in the situation if we reduce it to a change in him. Loving someone even in spite of a radical change is not foreign to love. Neither do we capture what happens if we think of it merely in terms of a change in Grushenka's feelings, although they also play a crucial part in the situation.

What changes at that moment, we could say, is not only who he is, or the way she feels for him, but *all* the ways in which she comes to

³⁰ Wittgenstein (1997) asked whether it is meaningful to suggest that someone has "a feeling of ardent love or hope for the space of one second" (§583). I say, an hour does not make things much better. It is not that it is meaningless for Grushenka to say that she loved Mitya for an hour, Dostoevsky (1949) himself says she loved him "genuinely and sincerely" for that hour (281). However, it remains unclear what it is that she means by these words. Declaring that she loved him for an hour is not the same as declaring that she loves him, nor is it the same as saying that she secretly loved him during a certain stage of their relationship. Perhaps one could view her feelings as an infatuation, such as the one she also has for the young boy Kalganov at the same night she confesses her love to Mitya, finding him sweet or adorable, feeling affection or tenderness for him. Anyhow, I leave this question open.

see and respond to him, how she reacts and behaves towards him and the things concerning him. What happens changes the way she understands their relationship; she comes to see *him* and *her* in a different light. The one who earlier struck her as a falcon now strikes her as a gander. We may talk about this "change of heart" as a change in her feelings, but then we should be aware that this change cannot be construed in terms of merely bodily, physical or chemical changes. Saying that her feelings have changed is a way of saying that everything—her whole life—has changed.

III CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS: DRAWING MAPS OR FINDING ONE'S WAY?

It is, I guess, considerations such as these that brought Wittgenstein (1997) to speak of grief and hope, I include love in this observation, as forming patterns in the weave of our life or as "modes of a complicated form of life" (174e). In another place he also suggests that one might call love and hate "emotional dispositions" (Wittgenstein 1980b, §148; 1967, §491). But, it is also formulations such as these that may lead one to read Wittgenstein as simply being "a behaviourist in disguise" (Wittgenstein 1997, §307).³¹ One may suspect that in drawing attention to our life, he was simply trying to move the meaning of our words from something inner to something outer, to patterns or propensities in our behaviour.

If one reads Wittgenstein's distinctions between mental concepts as making a classification (Wittgenstein 1967, §488-492; 1980b, §148) one puts him on a par with Gilbert Ryle and the kind of logical behaviourism that has been associated with him. Ryle (1955) argues "that the word emotion is used to designate at least three or four different kinds of things [... which he calls] 'inclinations' (or 'motives'), 'moods', 'agitations' (or commotions) and 'feelings'" (83). Ryle introduces this distinction to warn against understanding the first three of these as referring to a feeling or a succession of feelings, in the sense of "thrills, twinges, pangs, throbs, wrenches, itches, prickings, chills, glows, loads, qualms, hankerings, curdlings, sinkings, tensions, gnawings and shocks" (1955, 83). Rather he encourages us to think of them as dispositions to act, behave and, also, feel in certain ways.

³¹ Cf. the introduction, p. 371.

In a manner similar to Wittgenstein, he points out that feelings, in this narrow sense, have a certain duration and can often be located in certain body parts whereas the other three do not fit this scheme. Agitations and moods go on for a longer period of time than bodily feelings; they have duration but are not located in certain body parts as bodily feelings are. Inclinations, on the whole, appear to be more dispassionate. A reason for thinking that agitations and moods are feelings, Ryle suggests, may be that we use the word “feel” to describe them; we feel anxious, excited, upset (agitations), happy, angry and depressed (moods). However, if we assume that what is going on when we say that we “feel” this way is reporting the occurrence of a bodily feeling, or some inner private states, we are, in Ryle’s famous words, making a “category mistake”. The enjoyment of a golfer playing his game is not to be found within some additional feeling of pleasure or enjoyment that accompanies his actions. Rather it is to be seen in that he does not welcome an interruption, is “never inclined to turn his thoughts or conversation from the circumstances of the game to other matters” and concentrates on the game “without lecturing or adjuring himself to do so” (Ryle 1955, 108).

This classification of the emotions which Ryle makes clarifies the varieties of our emotional experience in ways that the emphasis on bodily feelings, or even sensations, fails to do. It also draws important distinctions between different mental concepts such as “feeling”, “will” or “mood”. I especially find Ryle’s description of moods illuminating when it comes to the place love may be said to have in our life, pointing to the ways in which they colour a person’s actions and reactions and matters for the ways in which someone describes their whole world. Compare the following quote with my remarks about the change in Grushenka’s love.

A person in a frivolous vein is in the mood [or the frame of mind] to make more jokes than usual, to be more tickled than usual by the jokes of others, to polish off important matters of business without anxious consideration, to put heart and soul into childish games, and so on indefinitely. (Ryle 1955, 99)

If he is jovial, he finds everything jollier than usual; and if he is sulky, not only his employer’s tone of voice and his own knotted shoe-lace seem unjust to him, but everything seems to be doing him injustices. (Ryle 1955, 100)

These remarks invite us to think of love, as well as of the other emotions, not as something that we have, as I may be said to have a feeling, but as a way of being in the world, or even as a mode of

being.³² Remember that even if we speak of having an emotion, we express particular emotions in terms of "being"; "I am afraid", "you are angry", "we are joyous", not to forget that we say that "we are *in love*". As Buber (2004) says, "Feelings dwell in man; but man dwells in his love" (19). This difference in how we express different emotions may also be taken as a reason not to compare love with the other emotions.

Even so, if we take this to imply that the aim of conceptual analysis is to classify and draw distinctions between our concepts, pointing out "category mistakes", there is something gone awry in our philosophical project. Read as grammatical remarks, I do not have much to argue against the distinctions that Ryle makes, as well as the ones Wittgenstein makes between different uses of our mental concepts. In other words, if their aim is to remind us of the differences in how we speak about "anger", "fear", "pain", "joy", "love" or "hate"—pointing out the ways in which we use these words, what questions we may raise about them and what answer we may intelligibly receive—I have no complaints. But it is too easy to read their remarks as attempts at categorizing psychological phenomena and take them as saying, "This is what the words refer to rather than that", only what we are left with is something more vague, such as a disposition, propensity or pattern, instead of something more tangible, such as a feeling or a sequence of behaviour. This temptation is undoubtedly much greater when reading Ryle than when reading Wittgenstein.³³ Although I will not enter more closely into a discussion about why I do *not* think it is correct to understand love, or emotions, as dispositions, so that we can deduce someone's emotion from his or her behaviour, I hope the preceding, as well as the succeeding discussion may help to clarify the problems involved in such an idea. The greatest problem, however, is again the attempt to tell us what love or other emotions are.

³² Cf. Heidegger's (1962) discussion of moods and the ways in which we are always attuned to the world (172-178). See also Mulhall (1997).

³³ Peter Hacker (2004) maps out the concept of emotion in much the same way as Ryle does, although he sees his investigation as being based on Wittgenstein's philosophy. I think there is good reason to think that Hacker's work in that paper in many ways misrepresents Wittgenstein's philosophical concerns. The criticism I would direct towards this understanding is much in line with the one Read and Hutchinson raise in "Toward a Perspicuous Presentation of 'Perspicuous Presentation'" (2008) and "Whose Wittgenstein?" (2005).

It is against such a reading of conceptual analysis as a way of mapping out a conceptual landscape that Paul E. Griffiths (1997) directs his ferocious attack towards it. To the extent that one conducts conceptual analyses in the way he suggests I also think there are discussions that appear to be proper targets of it. His main argument against conceptual analysis as a method of understanding “emotion” is that the philosophers who are doing conceptual analysis, he mainly discusses “propositional attitude theorists” (Griffiths 1997, 22-23), content themselves with studying how we use emotion words and not with the biological and evolutionary background of emotional responses. They are not open to what scientific investigation may show about “the referent of a concept” (Griffiths 1997, 7), but only reveal “a community’s current beliefs” and stereotypes about what emotion words refer to.³⁴ These beliefs may well be mistaken, as people were mistaken in thinking that whales were a kind of fish (Griffiths 1997, 5, 7).³⁵

In his study, Griffiths tries to remedy this failure to tell us “what emotions really are”—this is the modest title of his book—by investigating the results of different scientific studies of emotions. The result is that grouped under the term “emotion” there are three distinct phenomena; (1) *affect programs* which are described as “the coordinated set of changes that constitute the emotional response” (Griffiths 1997, 77) and as “sources of motivation not integrated into the system of beliefs” (Griffiths 1997, 243), (2) *higher cognitive emotions*, “irruptive motivational complexes in higher cognition” (Griffiths 1997, 245) which lead us to depart from our long-term rational goals, and (3) *disclaimed actions* or *socially constructed emotions*, which, on Griffiths’s account, are really pseudo-emotions aimed “to take advantage of the special status that emotions are accorded because of their passivity [...] they are manifestations of the central purpose of higher cognitive activity—the understanding and manipulation of social relations” (Griffiths 1997, 245).

³⁴ “Analysis can reveal the epistemic project in which a community is engaged with a concept, but the way that project develops will depend on what the community finds out through empirical investigation. If philosophers want to know about emotion, rather than about what is currently believed of emotion, analysis must proceed hand in hand with the relevant empirical sciences” (Griffiths 1997, 7).

³⁵ See Dupré (1981, 759) for a discussion of whether science in this case really can be said to have shown that our former attitudes were based on a false categorization.

Love, to Griffiths, is to be seen as a socially constructed emotion. It involves the adoption of social roles "that reflect society's conception of what is appropriate in that situation" (Griffiths 1997, 139). Under the pretext of being "carried away by love", that is passively suffering from one's emotions, it allows one to cast off social ties "without questioning the legitimacy of those ties" (Griffiths 1997, 142).

He concludes that affect programs constitute a clear category that should take the place of some of the phenomena we mistakenly sort in the vernacular category of emotion, and that there is reason enough for introducing a second category that takes account of the higher cognitive emotions which do not coincide with affect programs. More research, however, is needed to work out what this category involves exactly.

I will not discuss Griffiths's classification in more detail here³⁶, as I did not discuss the ones of Wittgenstein and Ryle. I primarily sketched it to show the differences between these systems of classification, the first trying to clarify concepts, the second attempting to categorize phenomena. I rather want to raise questions about the place categorization has in philosophical analysis on the whole. Now, Griffiths assumes that concepts primarily serve as categorizations of different natural kinds. Concepts work as explanatory theories about why different instances belong to the same category. These theories "underlie people's everyday inductive practices" (Griffiths 1997, 6). That is, we use the concept "emotion" because we assume that there is some underlying (causal) mechanism which unites all the instances we call by that name. What Griffiths takes himself, or rather science, to have shown, is that there is no one mechanism corresponding to the category "emotion". Instead there are at least two. Thus, we may eliminate the folk psychological concept of "emotion", since it does not do the work we thought it would do.

³⁶ Since the publication of *What Emotions Really Are* (1997), Griffiths has also made adjustments to his theory according to advancements in the scientific research. Here, I do not see the place to attend to these adjustments. What I am interested in is not the details of Griffiths's account but the particular ideas he is expressing about the relation between philosophy and science. For one thing, the idea that it is the factual content of one's investigations that really matter, and consequently the insistence that one should pay attention to the details of one's writing. On the whole it is worth emphasizing that my main interest in this work are the particular thoughts expressed by philosophers, and what sense we are to make of them, and not their thinking on particular issues as individual thinkers.

If this were really the best way of understanding concepts it would seem that Griffiths's critique of conceptual analysis is correct. Why would we insist on keeping our previous categorization if science has provided us with a more refined one? Simply appealing to the need for seeing certain emotional reactions in context will not do, since it is precisely behind the usual contexts of our life which may be based on stereotype that Griffiths wants to reach to become clear about the underlying structures of emotion. But this is only true assuming that Griffiths's presentation is a good way of understanding the different roles the concepts of emotion have in our life. Griffiths presupposes that concepts primarily serve as labels of categories and that speaking about fear, anger or love in different situations is expressive of a folk psychological theory of some underlying mechanisms that unites the situations. It is precisely this underlying assumption of his that is in need of being questioned.

The first move Wittgenstein makes in trying to clarify any concept, be it "games", "language", "colour", "pain", or "love", is to alert us to the variety of ways and the manifold situations in which we may use these words.³⁷ The temptation from which he is trying to release us, both himself and his readers, is the idea that there is a common denominator in all the instances in which we use the same word (except, of course, that we use the same words in them). This does not mean that it is unclear what our words mean in particular circumstances. It may be perfectly clear what I mean with the word "love" in two contexts although the situations and the meaning of my words differ. Against the view that conceptual analysis is primarily aimed at *drawing maps of our conceptual geography*, I would also emphasize the *therapeutic* aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Reminding ourselves about the ways in which words are ordinarily used is a way of helping us *find our way out of philosophical muddles or confusions*. Rather than trying to paint a *general* picture of our different usages of a concept, as if the idea that we might gain such an overview does not in itself express a misunderstanding,

³⁷ There is a paragraph in which Griffiths (1997) seems to realize that "in everyday life concepts are not used exclusively for explanation and induction" (7). He refers to Ian Hacking (1991 a, b, 1995) who has argued that they "are used to structure social systems, to further the interests of individuals or groups, or to promote programs of political action" (Griffiths 1997, 7). Still, he does not think this makes conceptual analysis any more fruitful. He fails to see that clarifying a concept is not the same as finding its referent.

Wittgenstein's philosophical methods are a way of directing our attention to quite specific problems and the dissolution of them.

Griffiths also makes the observation that our uses of concepts differ but draws a very different conclusion. If there is no common denominator, our concepts are found to be deficient. In the spirit of Griffiths, we could say that if we do not find some distinct phenomenon to identify the concept of love with, then "love" is clearly a misleading concept. It would, he seems to think, be better to form a concept that refers to the distinct phenomenon science has revealed to exist.

Now, I do not want to deny that "love" is not a good concept for the investigations of natural science. In fact, I think both the humanities and the natural sciences would be better off if one realized that investigating biological, neurological, chemical or physiological changes or processes is not investigating "love". At most, this could be called an investigation of the symptoms of love. Such a realization could hopefully relieve us of the constant press releases that different branches of science have discovered what love is, that "infatuation lasts for a year" or "works like a drug". Nevertheless, even if we find that "love" or "emotion" are inappropriate concepts for science, this does not mean that they lack meaning in our life. The meaning of the concepts is not dependent on their having a referent.³⁸

IV

"I LOVE YOU": A REPORT OF ONE'S FEELINGS?

This is where I find the true force of Wittgenstein's elucidations. In his introductory remarks on language in the *Philosophical Investigations*, as well as in his emphasis on the role of primitive reactions and responses to other people in our understanding of human beings, Wittgenstein reminds us that our words are tied to different practices and reactions towards each other and what happens to us. Against the

³⁸ The identification of "meaning" with "referent" also explains Griffiths's scepticism towards conceptual analysis, since he thinks the aim of conceptual analysis is to provide us with definitions. He renders this purported aim in this way: "Conceptual analysis can reveal to us the conditions for the application of various emotion terms. Understanding these application conditions will allow us to frame 'definitions' of these various emotions, and, by abstraction, a general definition of emotion." (Griffiths 1997, 3) It need not be false that there are philosophers who view conceptual analysis in this way. The kind of investigation I propose, however, is very different from that. I also think this is the kind of philosophical investigation Wittgenstein.

idea that there is one feature that explains our using one concept in different situations, such as a common referent, he emphasizes that we do not merely report or describe states of the world or of the mind in language. Rather he demonstrates the connections between language and action. In different circumstances our words constitute “orders”, “promises”, “jokes”, “hypotheses” and so on. Knowing what “pain” is in that way is not only to be able to correctly attribute a particular state to someone. Seeing that someone is in pain, or asking whether he or she is, also concerns the way we deal with the person in pain, us taking care of him or her, tending to his or her wounds, offering comfort and painkillers.

The following tentative attempt to capture the difference between first person avowals and third person attributions of emotion is also revelatory of the ways in which what we say with respect to emotions may be expressive of what we feel.

Psychological verbs characterized by the fact that the third person of the present is to be verified by observation, the first person not.

Sentences in the third person of the present: information. In the first person present: expression. ((Not quite right.))

The first person of the present akin to an expression.

(Wittgenstein 1967, §472)

Compare this with the remark that what the child learns in learning to say “I am in pain” is new pain-behaviour (Wittgenstein 1997, §422), and further with the notion that our emotional and mental vocabulary, as it were, grows out of primitive reactions, such as tending to other people’s wounds as to our own and also reacting to other people’s pain behaviour in ways we do not react to our own (Wittgenstein 1967, §540-541, cf. also §537-539, 542).

Arguing against the idea that we merely report or describe states of the world or of the mind when we speak of love J.F.M. Hunter remarks that asking

what love, conceived as a state, is [...] contains [...] the mistake of supposing that the word ‘love’ is used to record the existence of a characteristic state (or one of a set of such states), or that it is used to express the belief or the hunch that the state one is in will one day be found to have been love. (Hunter 1990, 7)

Emphasizing that declaring one’s love for someone is not the same as reporting either what one feels or how one is behaving, Hunter introduces us to John, who, when asked by Mary, “John, do you love me?” replies:

Well, I think of you day and night, I'm drunk with pleasure when I am with you and I yearn for you terribly when I'm not. I have lost interest in other women and it makes me frantic when I see other men flirting with you... (Hunter 1990, 38)

As typical as these expressions may be of someone in love, figuring perhaps in a declaration of love or in a reassurance of one's love, Hunter remarks that "the significant thing is that he should hang back from saying 'Yes I do.'" (1990, 38). What John says does not amount to saying "I love you." It does not answer the question. We may well think that Mary will be disappointed.

[W]hat a beloved wants to hear is an actual declaration of love. No matter how long one has gone on recording joy, enthusiasm, tenderness, jealousy and so on, a new plunge is taken in saying 'I am in love with you.' (Hunter 1990, 38)

Hunter alerts us to the special place saying "I love you" has in the relationship between lovers, especially at the *beginning* of it. But why should it matter what John says? If we agreed that saying that someone loves is pointing out a disposition to act and feel in different ways it would be unclear why we would want to distinguish the John who fits the above description but does not say he loves Mary from the one who does. Yet, this is a distinction that can be and is made.

The answer, of course, is *not* that by saying, "I love you", John magically brings love into being. Neither is it possible for John to stipulate that what he is feeling for Mary, in the widest sense of the word, is love. Mary may still say, "You don't know what you're talking about", or, "Wait 'til you truly find someone you love until you say that." Nevertheless, love is not anything that exists in John or in his behaviour independently of what he says.

Certainly, a friend of his, Bill, may say, "He's clearly in love with her. Just look at him!" Or, "He refuses to accept that he loves her". We may well imagine a case in which John's love for Mary is more obvious to others than it is to himself. However, Bill *cannot* go to Mary and declare John's love in his place. Of course, he may tell Mary, "John really loves you. Just wait until he comes around", but this is not a declaration of love in the sense in which John may declare *his* love. Bill may see his talking to Mary as a way of offering her comfort,

whereas John, when he finds out, may think Bill had broken his trust.³⁹

Hunter speaks of John as trying to determine whether he loves her “by reviewing the evidence” (1990, 38). This exactly appears to be his problem. He acts as if the question about whether he loves could be determined without him being involved in the answer that *he* gives. In other words, he acts as if the question about whether he loves Mary does not really concern *him*, his own willingness or unwillingness to give himself to her, which is ultimately what saying these words and meaning them amounts to. This brings out one way in which saying, “I love you”, can be seen as constitutive of love. If John is not willing to declare his love for Mary, it is not right to describe him as loving her or to speak of his feelings and behaviour as expressive of his love. As I already implied, we may say that he “avoids” telling her that he loves her. Nevertheless, for us to be able to describe him as loving her, he needs, for lack of a better word, to “identify” himself with his feelings. He needs to see his feelings as expressive of him and of his love for her, declaring that this is the way he understands his feelings and how he wants others to understand them as well.

This also shows one of the distinctions between the first and the third person perspective which viewing all talk about love as reports fails to acknowledge. Saying, “I love you” is not primarily a *description* of what I feel; it is an *expression* of my love. In one situation it is a declaration, shy or bold. In others it is a greeting, a confession, a promise, or a prayer. What distinguishes the first and the third person from each other, therefore, is not that I am the only one with direct access to my own mental life. This picture, as I have said, is illuminating only in some respects, and does not exclude that others may have a better grasp of what I am doing and feeling than I have myself. The difference we need to get hold of is the grammatical difference between what I say about myself and what I say about others. I am, as it were, in a different position than others when it comes to saying what I feel. When I am speaking about myself, I am for one thing not speaking *about* myself. What I say is expressive of *me*. In calling my feelings love I commit myself to this understanding of them. It is an *expression* and *articulation* of what I feel, and not primarily an observation.

³⁹ These ways of reacting are not meant to be conclusive about what may be said in such a case. They are only meant to show the direction in which such a discussion may go.

Clearly John is worrying about making a mistake in telling Mary that he loves her. And why not? Quite a lot may depend on this plunge; marriage, children, a house loan, not to mention his disappointing her. Many philosophers also appear to worry about making such mistakes. Griffiths's account suggests that we should consider, and perhaps reconsider, the categories we use to make sense of our life because they might be mistaken. Although he does not suggest that love is a concept of which we need to rid ourselves, there is a feeling running through his argument that there might be aspects of our life in which we have gravely mistaken ourselves as to what is at stake. This feeling also introduces itself in the worry science may take away the mystery of love, and perhaps reveal that we were wrong in thinking that we loved, by offering us an explanation of love.

Philosophers such as Griffiths and other philosophers interested in finding definite criteria for love would probably claim that there is a difference between the mistakes they are interested in avoiding and John's worry that he is making one. What they are interested in, they might say, is not whether they themselves love, but, say, the possibilities of mistake, or the conditions under which we may be mistaken. I am, however, not so certain. In John's case, we saw how the tendency to take our talk about love as emotional reports was part of a moral difficulty to commit himself to love. His attempt at resolving the question by going through his feelings in itself constituted a failure in his love. Something similar may be said of many philosophical accounts of love. Although I may worry that someone else could determine whether I really love, the thought of such a possibility may also intrigue me. "What if my questions and concerns about love really could be settled once and for all, without my having to take responsibility for the answer that I reach?"

When philosophizing about love I think we easily bring some part of this temptation with us. We are drawn to the question of what love is precisely by what having an answer to this question would entail: a final answer to a constantly elusive question, the end of suffering in figuring it out and an escape from our responsibility for taking a stand. And finally, what may strike one as the most paradoxical of all, it holds the dubitable promise of a way out of loving, having love out of one's hands, for that exactly seems to be the aim of this search for what love is. This tendency combines with the more general tendency in philosophy to think that it could solve our moral or existential problems.

V CRITERIA FOR LOVE

The above discussion presents us with one obvious problem with thinking that philosophy and science could provide us with definite criteria for determining whether something is love. Pointing out the role different feelings and behaviour have in love reminds us of the natural expressions that love (and the other emotions) can be said to take. There is, as it were, an internal relation between saying that someone is “bursting with joy” or “feeling light-headed” and saying that she is in love. A description of this kind may, as we have seen, feature in a novel to convey the awakening love of one character for another. Think only of how Grushenka’s smile lit up her face when Mitya walked in, or how he, before Grushenka’s declaration of love, was moving from jealousy to faith in her whenever he was separated from and reunited with her (Dostoevsky 1949, 293-295).

To conclude that our behaviour or feelings offer determinate evidence or criteria for judging what really takes place, however, is misleading, not to say wrong. It suggests that judging that someone loves is a conclusion drawn from certain facts, or that it is a hypothesis about how he or she will react in the future. Griffiths testifies to such a view in his emphasis on using concepts for “explanation and induction” and in his suggestion that we use emotion terms to “derive predictions about how people will act” (Griffiths 1997, 244). This suggestion is problematic in several respects.

To begin with, there are no rules for what could count as acts or feelings of love. There is no given pattern of behaviour or feelings in which love consists. What we may come to see as an expression of love depends on the particular contexts and our ability to respond to something as an expression of love in them. As Kierkegaard says:

There is no word in human language [and further on no deeds], not a single one, not the most sacred word, of which we could say: when a man uses this word, it is unconditionally proved thereby that there is love in him. Rather, it is true that a word from one person can convince us that there is love in him and the opposite word from another can convince us that there is love in him also. It is true that one and the same word can convince us that love dwells in the person who uttered it and not in another who nevertheless uttered the same word. (Kierkegaard 1962, 30)

It should, again, be emphasized that there not being any clearly defined words or acts of love does not imply that our speaking about love is rendered meaningless, or unstable as Griffiths want to suggest. The quote by Kierkegaard rather points out how strong the conviction may be that something is or is not love in a particular case. We should also not forget that even if you and I from time to time fail to love or act lovingly this is not proof that we do not love. You may be irritated at my constant indecisiveness at choosing a restaurant or a dress for a party or outraged at my selfishness without my having any doubts that you love me.

Furthermore, one should remember that our recognizing certain feelings and behaviour as expressive of love do not explain why, or how, it comes about that we take them as expressions of love. It is true that there are times at which I conclude that you are in love from some of your reactions, the smile on your face, the occasional jealous glance or disappointment when the one with whom you are in love leaves the room. If asked why I think you are in love, I may also appeal to these reactions as reasons for describing you in this way. In this particular case I may be said to offer criteria for seeing your behaviour as expressive of love (cf. Malcolm 1977, 140).

However, this does not explain how I come to see your glance as jealous or your look as disappointing in the first place. There is no additional feature I may point out that would guarantee that you saw this too. What this amounts to in the concrete case will of course vary with the case. I may try to express what I see and hope that you come to see it my way. In many cases your response may also agree with mine. You find my description appropriate to the situation. But your understanding my response may also involve your recognition that it makes sense for *me* to respond in this way, whereas you may still see it differently. Knowing that I have an eye for such things, you may also trust my judgement even if you would not spontaneously respond to it as I do.⁴⁰

This also brings out in what ways claiming that someone is in love cannot merely be seen as describing an observation. In making this claim about you, I am also giving expression to my own response to you. Already in what I see as relevant behaviour or as relevant feelings, I commit myself to a certain understanding of what has

⁴⁰ These ways of seeing emotion in another's face and actions may also be read in the light of Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect seeing and the ways in which we may be alive to different aspects of the world.

happened. The meaningfulness of attributing different emotions to you is in that way also partly dependent on my willingness and resoluteness to stand behind what I have said. This may also be one way of understanding the “Not quite right” in double brackets that Wittgenstein added to his distinction between “sentences in the third person present” as “information” and sentences “in the first person present” as “expression”. Just as we may note that sentences in the first person may also serve as information, if not primarily, sentences in the third person may be expressive of certain attitudes to different situations and people.

Just think of parents who do not accept the partners of their children, claiming that, “It is not love, it is only an infatuation.” There may, of course, be cases in which the parents are right. Even so, there are cases in which the parents’ insistence that it is not love rather involves a refusal to acknowledge their children’s love. They are unwilling to accept what is involved in recognizing their relationships as love, be it realizing that their children have grown up or that somebody else has gained an incredible importance in their children’s lives, and consequently also in theirs. Or consider the refusal to view homosexual love as love or as equal to heterosexual love in present debates about the right to marry, adopt children, and so on. Speaking of homosexual relationships in terms of inclinations, orientations or identities that one may suppress or tolerate to different degrees obscures that what is at stake is our willingness to recognize something as love, or our refusals to see it as such and take on what goes with that.⁴¹

This also shows how untenable the suggestion is that what is needed for someone to change their mind in these cases is simply more evidence. Denying that these relationships are built on love is rather characterized by the refusal to take any reactions that in other cases would be considered to be expressive of love as such. Particularly in the case of homosexuality, one refuses to see the desire or joy in the lovers’ eyes, finding it perhaps to be a perverse attraction.

⁴¹ On the other side of refusing to see something as love, we find the attempt to portray something as love that is not. Sara Ahmed (2004) discusses how racist organizations labelled “hate groups” have attempted to define themselves as “love groups”, claiming that “they act out of love for their own kind, and for the nation as an inheritance of kind (‘our White Racial Family’), rather than out of hatred for strangers or others” (122). This case is a good reminder that simply calling something love does not turn it into love.

One is disgusted by their hugging, kissing and dismiss their desire to spend their life together with another, marry, and so on. Quoting The Smiths' (1986) song "The Boy with the Thorn in His Side", we may ask,

*if they see the love in our eyes
and still they don't believe us
if they don't believe us now
how can they ever believe us?*

It would be better to say that coming to change one's minds in these matters rather constitutes a moral change.

Now, I will not be able to say much about what might be involved in such a change here. I also do not think that it is possible to spell out everything that may be involved in it. At least it may be said that this would involve the recognition that what one is inclined to say in response to the question whether something is love or not is not a description of certain states of the world—however complicated one's explanations may be as to why, for instance, homosexuality really does constitute an abnormality—but a personal *judgement* that is expressive of who one is. It is a judgement not only in the sense that we may judge certain things to be the case, but in the sense in which we may speak of someone as being judgemental. It raises the question about in what position I am to judge someone else's love. Did I not rather take it upon myself to answer a question that was not directed to me in the first place?

Furthermore, it would involve the recognition that my judgement is rather expressive of contempt, or even hatred, towards other people than, say, compassion and love. I am, as it were, not only responsible for what I call love but also for what I see as love, and for becoming clear about what different reactions, what blind spots in my own thinking, influence my judgement in thinking that something is or is not love in a particular relationship.

VI

MAKING MISTAKES AND HAVING DOUBTS ABOUT LOVE

When philosophers try to give an answer to what love is, or provide *general* criteria for determining whether something is love, they invite one to forget that it is only in certain situations that the need to search for criteria arises. This is a central flaw in their arguments. They assume that the question whether someone loves can be posed at any time, *without* considering how the situation in which the question

arises and the different concerns that govern it is crucial for understanding what kind of question it is, and what kind of answer can be given to it.

The following scene from the German film *Lola rennt* (1998) well reveals the problems with this kind of insistence. The main character Lola asks her boyfriend Manni whether he loves her. He tries to assure her but she continues to ask: How can he be certain? How does he know that she is the best woman?—If they had not met he would be telling this to somebody else. What is it for his feeling, his heart to tell him this? “Your heart says: Hello Manni! She is the one!” “What does it feel right now?” Manni grows frustrated with Lola not being content with any of his answers. He replies, “It feels that somebody is asking some very stupid questions.” He tries to kiss her, but she turns away. “No! You don’t take me seriously!” Manni becomes worried. “Say, Lola. What is wrong? ... Do you somehow want to ... get away from me?” (*my translation*).⁴²

It is easy to understand Manni’s concern. Lola’s continuing questioning expresses much more doubts about their relationship than it speaks of love or trust in him. She acts as if she wants proofs that he, despite what he says, does not really love her, and now tries to catch him in his difficulties to give an answer. Her repeated questioning, of course, adds to his irritation. In that way, it becomes clear that her question, although it may have started out that way, is not innocent. In this light, we may also ask why it is that Mary asks John whether he loves her. Does she have reason to suspect that his feelings are insincere, fearing perhaps that he has only been leading her on? Furthermore, John speaks as if he is trying to convince both himself and her that he loves. This in itself may lead one to doubt the sincerity of his love.

This is *not* to say that doubts always reveal a failure to love. Our doubts about love may be expressive of many things. One could even say that there is a kind of doubt that in itself is internal to love, as we may speak of doubt as an internal aspect of faith. Reflecting on whether one in different situations has acted out of love, and not, say, out of one’s own self-interest, routine, and so on, clearly belongs to love in a way thinking, “Now I’ve done enough!” does not.

⁴² In the original German it goes: “Dein Herz sagt: ,Guten Tag, Manni! Die da die ist es!?’” “Was fühlt es jetzt?” “Das fühlt, dass da jemand gerade ziemlich blöde Fragen stellt!” “Mann! Du nimmst mich überhaupt nicht ernst!” “Sag mal, Lola. Was ist denn los? ... Willst Du irgendwie ... weg von mir?”

Nevertheless, it is a reminder that there are many situations in which the question whether you or somebody else loves does not arise.

Only when there is disagreement about how to take someone's look or when I feel that you are hiding your true feelings do I start looking for reasons, or criteria, for taking certain expressions in a particular way. When there is agreement that a smile or a comment is expressive of love, we need no additional explanation for seeing it so.⁴³ As Wittgenstein (1997) reminds us that "[t]he fear is there, alive, in the features" (§ 537), your love is alive in your every gesture, in the tone of your voice, in your touch. To go back to where I started, we may say that the question *how* I know that you love gains no hold. I *feel* it. I do not infer from your behaviour that you have these feelings for me.

Asking me why you love me, or how I can know that you do, may even be a way of manipulating me. It introduces doubt by leading me to look for answers in the wrong places. Rather than resting assured in the certainty of our love, it invites me to look for proofs. It may even have an alienating effect. The familiarity of your embrace, the faith in your eyes and the trust in your hands is brought under inspection. How can I be sure that there is love in them? The search for a general answer, for evidence that cannot be questioned, ignores that your answer is constituted by its personal character. My question, in so far as it comes from me, arising out of my doubts, does not ask for fool-proof information. It asks for reassurance.

How, then, are we to take the doubts I may entertain about love, if they do not primarily consist in correctly identifying something as a specific feeling? Let me try to answer this question by wrapping up some themes of the previous discussion, and attempt to spell out why I think it constitutes a moral question.

First of all, I think it is clear that these doubts do *not* usually take this form:

- (1) In the film *Les Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001), we are told that Amélie's father did not show his daughter any other kind of (physical) attention than the one she received in her monthly medical exams by him. Since she was only close to

⁴³ Cf. Wittgenstein: "'We see emotion.' – As opposed to what? – We do not see facial contortions and make inferences from them (like a doctor framing a diagnosis) to joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features. – Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face" (Wittgenstein 1967, §225).

her father on these occasions, her heart took an extra beat. Her father, the doctor, concluded that she suffered from a heart condition.

- (2) In Jeanette Winterson's novel *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (2001a), the protagonist's mother tells her daughter a story about how as a young girl she mistook the fizzing, buzzing feeling she experienced as well as a certain giddiness for being in love. This led her to give herself to the Frenchman she had met. Only later did she find out she suffered from an ulcer (84-85).

By contrast to these oddly tragicomical examples Wittgenstein (1997) remarks, "It makes sense to ask: 'Do I really love her or am I only pretending to myself?' and the process of introspection is the calling up of memories; of imagined possible situations; and of the feelings that one would have if..." (§587). Again we may read the remark in relation to the differences in grammar between the concepts of "love" and that of "pain". In several places Wittgenstein (1997, §404; 1965a, 66-67) points out the strange character of sentences such as "I know I'm in pain". If it is not, for instance, a manner of emphasizing one's claim, it is unclear what role the word "know" has in this sentence. Unlike the role it has in "I know she is pain", the words "I am in pain" do not admit of mistakes as to who it is that is in pain. I may ask, "Is it John or Mary who is in pain?", and you may answer, "It is John." ("How do you know?" "I saw him clutching his forehead.") This connects with the sense in which saying "I am in pain" is expressive of my pain. We cannot, as it were, separate my pain from the fact that it pains me.

When we speak of love, however, there is room for speaking about mistakes in quite a different way. Not, as I said, in the sense that I may make a mistake about whether it is I who feel something, but in the sense that I may raise questions about *what* it is I feel. The pain that I feel over my chest when losing someone I love, as it were, is an *expression* of love, but the pain that is felt at having a heart attack is not an expression of my pain, it is my pain. I may deceive others by pretending that I am in pain, but in love I myself may be deceived. There is a question about what I truly feel which is not reducible to establishing the existence of certain facts. It rather focuses on whether I, in saying that I love, am being true *to* my words and *in* my words.

Consider again Grushenka who prior to her declaration of love to Mitya, expresses regret at realizing that what she had been holding on to for five years in her love for the officer was only a fantasy.

"Mitya, Mitya, I loved him, you know," she began in a whisper.
 "How I have loved him these five years, all that time! Did I love him or only my own anger? No, him, him! It's a lie that it was my own anger I loved and not him. (Dostoevsky 1949, 338)

What plagues her in this question is not the uncertainty of not knowing whether she had a certain feeling or whether she behaved in ways corresponding to love. To the extent that introspection may enter into the answer that she gives it is not to be taken as an attempt to peek inside and try to grasp what her feeling was. Such an attempt would almost by necessity be quite empty. How is she, for one thing, to distinguish one feeling from another? Of course, she may say something about her feelings in terms of how intense or agreeable they are, she may talk about a stabbing pain or a soothing calm. This way of speaking about feelings may also tempt us to think that these aspects are all there is to them. Yet, talking about feelings in this way leaves us quite short in understanding what Grushenka's doubts are about.

In this respect the quote by Wittgenstein opens for quite a different understanding of what is involved in introspection. Grushenka's concern with the question involves a reflection about her motives and intentions, her past and future concerning the officer. She asks whether her feelings for the officer were true, in a manner that is largely a question of sincerity. Was she sincere when she swore him her love, or was she just pretending it was love all along? Was it her love that was speaking when she told Mitya she was in love with the officer or was it just spite, another move in the game she played with him? The urgency of the question, the sense in which everything can be said to hang on the answer that she gives, cannot be separated from the implications it has for the question about *who* she is. Is she or does she want to be good or evil?

Compare this case to Lars Hertzberg's example of a widow who,

looking back on her married life, [is] asking herself whether her husband really loved her. On one side she thinks about his concern, his tenderness and patience with her, his joy in her company; on the other side she thinks of their quarrels, his sarcasm, the times when he was bored with her or seemed to forget she existed. (Hertzberg 1994, 137)

He points out that it belongs to the grammar of the kind of certainty that we may reach in these matters that the widow's question could not be settled by learning more about her husband's behaviour. "It is not that she is looking for more evidence; rather, she does not know what to make of what she has." (Hertzberg 1994, 137) The widow and Grushenka both strive to sort out what sense, or what meaning, they are to make of their lives. What *kind* of life was it that they lived? Was it a life of love or a life full of bitterness, anger and resentment?

As I have already said, this question cannot be determined independently of what their own relation is to it. It cannot be answered without considering them and the place they are willing or able to give to love in their life. Coming to see their life as involving love, we could say, is itself expressive of love. This aspect is obvious in Grushenka's question. The answer to the question whether she loved the officer is dependent on her now being able, if not to love him, to look back on her life with love. Neither is it difficult to see how the widow's doubts may also be expressive of a concern about whether she loved. Is she able to find love in her heart to see it reflected in their life? Does she have faith to believe in her husband's love despite their constant struggles or does she find the strength to reconcile with the thought that they failed to love without denying that love is still a possibility in her life?

The kind of love that is needed to see love as such a possibility is also expressed by Mitya's brother Alyosha for whom Grushenka, in a previous conversation, raised the same concern whether she loved the officer and should forgive him (Dostoevsky 1949, 274). Responding to her doubts and self-recrimination, he says, "But you have forgiven him already" (Dostoevsky 1949, 274).

Again, Alyosha is not telling her that the feelings she is and was experiencing are love. He is not in a better position to identify them in that fashion than she is. Rather his response allows her to view herself, and what she had been experiencing with the officer, her feelings as well as her actions and motives, in the light of love and forgiveness. It belongs to the gentleness and forgiving character of this brother that he comes to see her in this way. Furthermore, his being able to see *her* in this way plays a crucial part in how she comes to see herself, by allowing her to reconcile with herself, to regard her life in the light of love. He gives her the chance to forgive herself as well as the officer. This in itself is an act of love.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN LOVE?

Doctor Lydgate is angry. After a prosperous start as a doctor in the town of Middlemarch, the young doctor of George Eliot's novel has run into economic problems. As a solution to these problems he has proposed different sanctions to his wife Rosamond, but she is less than willing to agree with them. Without his knowledge, she has averted his plans to sell their house and has also written a letter to his uncle asking for money. We find them when Lydgate has just read his uncle's stinging reply.

While Lydgate's eyes glanced rapidly over the brief letter, she saw his face, usually of a pale brown, taking on a dry whiteness; with nostrils and lips quivering he tossed down the letter before her, and said violently -

"It will be impossible to endure life with you, if you will be always acting secretly - acting in opposition to me and hiding your actions."

He checked his speech and turned his back on her - then wheeled round and walked about, sat down and got up again restlessly, grasping hard objects deep down in his pockets. He was afraid of saying something irremediably cruel. [...]

When Rosamond had finished reading the letter she sat quite still, with her hands folded before her, restraining any show of her keen disappointment, and intrenching herself in quiet passivity under her husband's wrath. [...]

Lydgate pausing and looking at her again began to feel that half-maddening sense of helplessness which comes over passionate people when their passion is met by an innocent-looking silence whose meek victimised air seems to put them in the wrong, and at last infects even the justest indignation with a doubt of its justice. He needed to recover the full sense that he was in the right by moderating his words. [...]

"Will you only say that you have been mistaken, and that I may depend on your not acting secretly in future?" said Lydgate, urgently, but with something of request in his tone which Rosamond was quick to perceive. She spoke with coolness.

"I cannot possibly make admissions or promises in answer to such words as you have used towards me. I have not been accustomed to language of that kind. You have spoken of my 'secret meddling,' and my 'interfering ignorance,' and my 'false assent.' I have never expressed myself in that way to you, and I think that you ought to apologise. You spoke of its being impossible to live with me. Certainly you have not made my life pleasant to me of late. I think it was to be expected that I should try to avert some of the hardships which our marriage has brought on me." Another tear fell as Rosamond ceased speaking, and she pressed it away as quietly as the first.

Lydgate flung himself into a chair, feeling checkmated. What place was there in her mind for a remonstrance to lodge in? (Eliot 1994, 633-635)

In all its richness the example presents us with an array of expressions that our anger may take. We see Lydgate turning white, his nostrils and lips quivering, him tossing the letter, walking restlessly about. And we see Rosamond's "passive aggression"; speaking with coolness when she finds a weakness to attack, the tears she presses away, her innocent-looking silence and "weak victimized air" that awakens feelings of helplessness in her husband. Considering these instances of anger would be a good place to start if one was interested in explicating the kind of feelings and behaviour that are characteristic of it. They remind us of the embodied experiences of emotion that I discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, however, I will not inquire further into how emotions are related to feelings and behaviour. The perspective on emotions I want to investigate is rather one that has become a dominant theme in the philosophy of emotion in the last decades; the different kinds of cognitive theories about emotions.

The impact of cognitive theories on the philosophy of emotion in the analytical tradition has been overwhelming. They come in a variety of versions, and different attempts at formulations have been made as to whether emotions are best to be described as beliefs (Taylor 1975, 1979, Neu 2000), judgements (Solomon 1980, 1993, Nussbaum 1990, 1994), concern-based construals (Roberts, 2003), appraisals, upheavals of thoughts (Nussbaum 2000), evaluations (Lyons 1980a). Some of these accounts are more cognitivist, (Solomon, Nussbaum, Taylor, Neu) claiming that emotions are essentially judgements or beliefs (propositional attitudes), albeit rasher or hastier, more vehement or obsessive than other beliefs and judgements. Others (Roberts 2003, de Sousa 1980) lay more weight on the

perceptual side of emotion. They regard emotions as a *seeing-as* and emphasize that emotions are more complex states in which cognition plays a part.

What unites the different accounts, however, is the stress on the cognitive content of emotions. If emotions are not seen as thoughts, they are seen as something very similar to thoughts. Catching on to the idea that we only understand particular feelings in their surrounding context, they rely heavily on the distinction between *feelings* and *emotions*, where feelings are said not to exhaust the phenomenon of emotion. What distinguishes different emotions from each other, they say, is not the character or intensity of the feelings that are involved in them, their *feel*, but their cognitive content. What makes the feelings Lydgate experiences a case of anger, and not mere frustration, is, from this point of view, his thinking of Rosamond's actions as unjust. This also explains why we are entitled to view both Lydgate's and Rosamond's quite different reactions as cases of anger, since we can attribute to both of them the thought that the other has acted unjustly.

In the present chapter I will discuss what we are to make of this connection between emotion and thoughts, or of the notion that emotions are thoughts. Alluding to the intentional pun of the heading, I will ask in what ways thoughts, beliefs and judgements enter into our emotional lives. How do emotions relate to our understanding of a situation, as well as to our understanding of others and ourselves? By contrast to the previous chapter, I will not discuss directly in what ways a certain kind of understanding is involved in love. Rather I will begin by investigating the two main features of emotion that cognitive theories emphasize. The first one is the *intentionality* of emotions, that is, the ways in which emotions are *about* something or take *objects*. The other is the *rationality* of emotions and the central role one has given to *justification* in discussing this.

In the first part, I suggest that we regard the relation between our *expressions of emotions* and *descriptions of the situation* as an internal one. Building on this idea, I then in the following two parts argue that the significant question is not only whether an emotion is justified or not, but whether it is meaningful to attribute an emotion to another and what implications this has for the different ways in which we may learn from another's emotions. In this, I touch upon the subject of love in a more indirect way by asking what a loving way of understanding the differences of mind that may exist between people in cases of emotion may be. I argue that the difficulties Rosamond and Lydgate

have in understanding each other are not merely founded in a difference in belief, or judgement, but that they run deeper than that. Finally I ask what implications such a recognition may have for the significance that justifying emotions has been giving in many cognitive accounts.

I THE INTENTIONALITY OF EMOTION

The main starting point of cognitive theories of emotion is the fact that emotions take objects. This is not yet to say anything about the causes of the emotions. The object is not necessarily the cause of my emotion but that *someone* or *something* that the emotion is directed at, or *about*.⁴⁴ Take but one example: Some problems at work have made me irritated, I come home and notice that you have not done the dishes or any cleaning although the house is in desperate need of it. I become angry with you. Here my previous irritation may be said to function as a *cause* of my anger, whereas your not doing the dishes is rather the *object* of it. It is what my anger is about. A special instance of this is when my anger at *you* leads me to look for *something you have done*. Usually no distinction is made between the case in which "I am angry at *you*", that is, at *someone*, and "I am angry that *you haven't done the dishes*", that is, at *something*, but as will see, it is important to note that the former cannot always be reduced to the latter.

The insight that emotions take objects can also be expressed by saying that emotions have *intentionality*. Saying this, however, is not the same as saying that emotions are intentional.⁴⁵ It is rather a reminder that emotions are what they are against the larger background of our life. It is in this life that we make sense of what it is we are feeling, and against this background that we separate distinct emotions from each other.

Let me first give a brief presentation of the position of the cognitive theorist as it is described by one of its proponents. The article I will make use of is Gabriele Taylor's "Love" (1979), and I choose it, rather than others, since it specifically addresses the question of what impact such an understanding of emotions may have on our understanding

⁴⁴ There are, however, also discussions about how we are to understand objectless emotions such as objectless fear or depression, or a fear or depression whose only object is "nothing" or "everything".

⁴⁵ I return to this question in chapter 3.

of love.⁴⁶ The question in which Taylor is primarily interested is whether we can talk about love as being justified or not, as we are able to do when we talk about other emotions such as fear and anger.

Taylor sees it as characteristic of the emotions that have an object that they involve certain beliefs about the object. If someone is afraid of a bear, for example, he believes that the bear is dangerous, that it has this “determinable quality” (Taylor 1979, 166), as Taylor calls it. He can substantiate this belief by referring to other beliefs. He can point to some “determinate qualities” in the object that justify his fear, such as the sharp claws and the malicious temperament of the bear. These “determinate qualities” (Taylor 1979, 166) are in turn limited by the “determinable quality” of the object. Not all beliefs that he entertains about the bear can be seen as making it dangerous, and the sharp claws and the malicious temperament only do so to the extent that it is possible for the bear to attack him. If the bear is safely locked in a cage and has no possibility of reaching him, it does not matter whether its claws are sharp and its temperament is malicious. Connected with these beliefs, or as a consequence of them, the person will also have certain wants and tendencies to react in certain ways in relation to the object. He wants to run away from the bear because he believes it to be dangerous. Taylor regards these beliefs and wants as necessary conditions for feeling the emotion (1979, 166).

My concerns with talking about emotions in terms of certain beliefs mainly involve three aspects of this notion which strike me as problematic. These problems do not become much smaller if we instead discuss emotions in terms of judgements. (1) Looking at emotions in this fashion runs the risk of *intellectualizing* them. It does not capture the ways in which emotions are embodied responses and not only rational assessments of the situation. (2) Describing emotions as having a belief involves a *generalization* of the emotions. By focusing on beliefs, wants and judgements, which in itself adds a technical terminology to the discussion of emotions, cognitive accounts ignore the multitude of ways in which different feelings, behaviour, wants and desires, as well as thoughts, beliefs and judgements come into an emotion. (3) It remains unclear what *kind of relations* the proponents of this view think there are between feelings, beliefs, or judgements. In what follows I will focus on the third point, and only make some remarks about my first two objections.

⁴⁶ I return to these considerations in chapter 4.

The main merit of cognitive approaches to emotions is that they call attention to the close connection how I see or may describe a situation has with what I feel in it. It is not far-fetched to say that being afraid of something means that I find it dangerous and do not want to be in it, although I, of course, can also see that a situation is dangerous without being afraid of it. I may, for example, know how to handle the danger in the situation. I may even enjoy the thrill of fear, say, when riding a roller coaster, although I would not describe the situation as dangerous.

In this case, it is important to remark on one discrepancy between what I might feel (in a physical or psychological sense) in a situation and how I might think about it. This is the difference that at times can be made between, say, "*feeling fear*" and "*being afraid*". Even if I might describe my feeling as a thrill of fear, we may question in what way this is really a case of fear. In what sense can I be said to be afraid and enjoy it? We may think it more correct to say that the only way I can enjoy the thrills is in so far as I do not find the situation dangerous and am not afraid of it. If I was really afraid of the situation, I would also describe it as dangerous or terrifying, no matter how much anyone else would try to convince me of the safety of it all.

But even if it is true that these beliefs and wants figure in our emotions, there is an important question as to exactly how they are related to the emotions. Taylor's remarks about my beliefs about the object underlying both the wants I have in relation to the object and my feelings, so that I can see the appropriateness of the emotion by investigating the beliefs, may tempt one into thinking that there is a *causal* relation between the belief and the emotional reaction. Even though this may not be what Taylor intends to say, since she speaks of the belief as a necessary but not as a sufficient condition for the emotion, there is reason to question whether her account succeeds in clarifying the fact that in many situations the emotional reaction *is* the belief that such and such has happened. It is not possible to distinguish the two.

Cognitive theorists often speak of "*beliefs*", "*judgements*" and "*facts*" and their possible interrelations. This gives us the idea that what we are dealing with are some kinds of entities that connect with each other in different ways. What I would like to bring out as significant in their accounts is rather that they present us with two kinds of statements. The one is, "I am afraid", and the other, "It is dangerous". It is natural to think that these statements are different in kind. The first, we may assume, gives us information about *the subject*

of the emotion, that is, about *me*. I tell you something about my inner emotional life. The other, we may think, rather tells us something of the object of the emotion; it relates to certain aspects of the world. The question we are faced with, then, is what kind of connection obtains between these two. I want to suggest that we regard these statements as *internally* related. Even if the two statements take a different focus, they both tell us something about the meaning we see in a situation.

Let us return to the quarrel between Lydgate and Rosamond to see more closely what it may mean to attribute to someone the belief that they have been wrongly treated. Now, I intentionally chose to discuss an example of anger, and specifically a quarrel, rather than fear as in Taylor's case, since the *different* perspectives on the situation that is characteristic of the marital strife in which we find Rosamond and Lydgate are constitutive of our understanding of anger. By contrast to fear in which there is mostly more agreement as to what situations are dangerous, both spouses think that the other has done them a wrong. In its search for what is just or unjust, anger also raises interesting questions about the morality of different emotions and the role they have in the meetings between people in which we talk about as love.

Fear and anger at people stealing one's car (Solomon 1980, 252-253) are often given as prime examples of emotions. A reason for this, I presume, is that they are taken to be simple cases. Through them one hopes to discern general lines that also hold for the more complex cases. Another reason for preferring to speak about quite limited cases of fear and anger may be that they are often connected with instrumental acting. This is part of the generalizing tendency of these discussions. Searching for one feature of the emotions that could be said to be essential to them, cognitive accounts fail to make room for the important distinctions we may make between different emotions in different situations as well as the distinctions that may be made between different uses of particular emotion words such as "anger", "fear", "joy" and so on. In that light, we may question the legitimacy of Taylor's jump from fear to love, both in the respect that it provides quite a stereotypical account of fear and in that it assumes that there is a common core to all our talk about different emotions.

I think it is correct to say that both Lydgate and Rosamond believe that the other has wronged them, but what does this involve? As I mentioned, Taylor appears to view the beliefs as somehow underlying both the wants and feelings involved in the emotion. In some places she even seems to imply that they are causally related. Is it, however, best to describe the expressions of Lydgate's anger as they are so

vividly described, turning white, walking restlessly about, as effects of his belief that Rosamond did him a wrong?

If someone asks us why he is angry we may, of course, give reasons for it in a way that seems to imply some kind of causality. We say, "Realizing what she had done made him angry". Yet, realizing this does not seem to be separable from nor give rise to his anger. We might even say that what it means for him to realize that she has wronged him, does not have to consist in anything more than these ways of reacting, in what he says and might say, in his being "afraid of saying something irremediably cruel". This also brings out that attributing a belief, or an emotion, to someone is not merely about assigning an intellectual property to him or her. Rather it reminds us of the important place spontaneous, embodied reactions have in our emotional life.

This is not to say that these ways of acting are what his anger consists in. As in Rosamond's case, we may also describe someone as angry, or perhaps rather as disappointed or disgusted, without her showing any outer signs of it. The point is rather that we do not have to stipulate some underlying belief, understood as an assessment of the situation, to say that someone *sees* a situation in a certain way. This is one common objection against the cognitivist accounts of emotions. D.W. Hamlyn (1983), for instance, gives an example of a person who may be said to "have all the right beliefs about mice" (272). She believes that they are "too small and too harmless in any direct way to be frightening" but still she "cannot help seeing them as frightening little creatures" (Hamlyn 1983, 272). He rejects the idea that this could be seen simply as "a conflict of beliefs" (Hamlyn 1983, 272) since that would be misleading. He continues,

How one sees things may be a function of one's beliefs in a variety of ways; it may, however, be a function of other things, and it is certainly not true that whenever someone sees something as such and such one has *ipso facto* a belief to that effect. (Hamlyn 1983, 272).

The assumption that we, in every instance of the emotion in question, should be able to find a more or less explicit belief on which the emotion is based, then, is misleading. This is another aspect of the overly generalizing move of Taylor's account. In its heavy reliance on one term, the important distinctions we might make between what we think and feel, or see and believe in a situation, as earlier in the case of riding a roller coaster (see p. 84), or the person seeing mice as frightening, remain unexplored. It also reveals some of the ways in

which these accounts involve an over-intellectualisation of the emotions. Rather than being content with one term to describe our emotions should we not be open to the different ways in which we express and speak of them? In being angry, I may, for instance, not only say that I think or believe that someone has done me a wrong. I may also be “struck by” the wrong you did me or somebody else, I may “realize” that you did me a wrong or “reflect” on what you did and “wonder” whether it was right or wrong. There is nothing in these cases that *a priori* should lead us to think that it is possible to reduce all these cases to having some beliefs or wants.

What I have wanted to bring forward is that attributing to Lydgate the belief that Rosamond had wronged him is *not* a *hypothesis* about his inner state, which we may deduce from his angry behaviour. Seeing the situation in this way is expressive of anger in the sense that it is difficult to understand what it would mean for someone to say that he was angry but still refuse to say that he sees the situation in this way.⁴⁷ This aspect is even clearer if we consider what Lydgate might say from a first person perspective.

Imagine that Lydgate says, “She went behind my back”, to give a reason for his anger. Or, as in the example, he says, “She acted ‘secretly’ ‘in opposition to’ me.” These ways of talking about the situation are clearly not “mere” descriptions of the situation, independent of Lydgate’s feelings in it. They are attempts to *articulate* his anger. Saying “she went behind my back” is itself a way of accusing her of doing something wrong.⁴⁸ Giving these reasons, then, is not so much explaining or describing *why* he has these feelings of anger as it is expressing *what* it is that he feels. This is what his anger is about.

⁴⁷ Compare the difference between giving a cause and giving a reason: “He was really angry at me”, “Why, what had you done (wrong)?”, “Nothing, he was just having a fit of bad temper.”

⁴⁸ The point here is not that whenever I do something “secretly” or “in opposition” to somebody I am necessarily doing something wrong, nor that it is always wrong to intentionally hide what I am doing from someone. If I e.g. plan a surprise birthday party for you, I may be described as acting secretly and intentionally hiding things from you, but probably no one would blame me for this. It would, however, sound strange to say that in doing this I “went behind your back”, since that is an expression of blame, which is internally related to my deceiving you. Planning a surprise for you is not deceiving you even if I, in a sense, withhold the truth. My point is that there are certain ways of speaking which are expressive of a moral understanding, i.e. they are expressing praise and blame, seeing wrongs and rights. Saying that someone has gone behind one’s back is in that sense no neutral description.

How Lydgate views the situation and what he feels, thus, are two aspects of his anger. Saying, "I am angry" and saying, "This was wrong" tell us something both about the situation and about himself. His understanding of the situation is a way of making sense both of his feelings and of what has happened. Trying to separate what is being felt from what is being believed, and put them in an order is, therefore, problematic. This is what I mean by saying that there is an internal relation between how I express my emotion and how I understand my situation and not a causal one.

This also explains why we may not find a case of anger in which someone cannot be said to see the situation as in some way harmful. This is not because anger is always accompanied by such a belief, or is based on it, but because we would not attribute anger to someone who did not regard the situation in this way and because at the point he stops responding to it as such, we would no longer say that he is angry. The sense in which we may speak about anger in relation to him loses its foothold.

Nevertheless, we should not hurry past this point. Saying that there is an *internal* relation between what I feel and how I see the situation does not mean that my ways of speaking about the situation and my feelings in it always go hand in hand. In some cases, saying, "I am angry", may have the same role in conversation, or in a quarrel, as saying, "You (or she) did something wrong". My emotion is a response to the situation, and the way I understand it; the words I use to describe it, what I focus on as important, is an expression of my emotions in it. This does not mean that I have to react to every situation that I may describe as unfair with anger. What it means to speak about an internal relation is rather to be found in the fact that I think you have a reason to be angry if I think you have been unfairly treated. The question why you react in a certain way arises when you are *not* angry although you agree that you have been treated unfairly, and not when you react with anger to this unfair treatment.

Moreover, your talking about someone's actions as cruel or mice as terrifying allows me to understand your reaction as anger or fear, even in situations that I do not find unfair or dangerous, as do in such cases also your clenched fists and shaking voice. I would be at a loss for words to describe what it is you are saying if you were standing on a chair screaming at a mouse, saying that you are afraid of mice but adding, "Ah, they're lovely little creatures aren't they". Are you joking, being ironical, or do you not understand the meaning of the words "afraid" and "lovely"?

I said that in certain situations saying “I am angry” may have the same role as saying, “It was wrong”. For one thing, both imply that there is something that needs to be done about the situation. Nevertheless, we should note that the self-ascription in the first case in many situations changes what is being said. I draw attention to different things when I say “I” and “it”.⁴⁹ In certain situations thinking that I am only trying to become clear about what has happened in a situation may blind me to my own emotional involvement in it. I do not see in what ways my understanding of a situation is expressive of a certain attitude towards it. If I were to recognize this, “It is not they that are irritating, I am the one who is irritated”, my understanding of the situation would also change. Saying, “I am angry”, and not, “It was unjust”, here would rather be a way of questioning my own response. “Maybe it’s just me.”

Recall Rosamond’s reaction to Lydgate’s outburst. Trying to keep her disappointment at bay, she refrains from expressing any anger at all. Her “innocent-looking silence” and “meek victimised air” (Eliot 1994, 634) questions the justice of his reaction to her deeds. In giving voice to his anger, Lydgate had been speaking from a conviction of being right, but Rosamond’s response, or lack of response, leads him to question whether it was. Her response even has him thinking that he has acted unjustly as he has acted out of anger, and in that sense “unbecomingly” (Eliot 1994, 634) in her eyes, while she never did such a thing.⁵⁰ When she finally says something, she says it coolly, “I am not angry, but *you* have...” Nevertheless, her words are full of disgust.

By focusing on what appears to be aspects of the situation, Rosamond keeps herself out of it. She is even trying to make Lydgate see his response not as a meaningful reaction to what *she* had done, but as an expression of *his* inconceivable cruelty. “No matter what I feel, this was wrong!” “It is not that I’m angry or anything, but...” She attempts to persuade Lydgate to give up his perspective on the situation since it was coloured by his emotions, his anger and his unfathomable cruelty, and accept her view on what had happened,

⁴⁹ Mari Lindman pointed out one interesting aspect of the ways in which one considers someone to be personally involved in the situation in relation to the ways we may speak of men and women. In a similarly stressful situation, we often say of a woman, “*She* is not strong enough to handle it”, while we say of a man, “*The situation* in which he’s in is quite unbearable.”

⁵⁰ This marks a further failure of Rosamond in that she lets what is agreeable or not rule her view of what is wrong or right. I will return to this in chapter 7.

but she does not acknowledge that her perspective is as expressive of an “emotional” reaction as is his. By not acknowledging her disappointment and “disgust with her husband” (Eliot 1994, 634) or only doing it when Lydgate is already weakened in his position, Rosamond does not give him any opportunity to question whether her view of the situation is correct.

Not expressing, or even acknowledging, her feelings allows Rosamond not to take *responsibility* for what she feels. She can continue to feel unjustly treated even in a situation in which it may be rightly argued that this is not the case. She does not have to answer for her own disgust at her husband, nor for her failure to find in his response anything that could serve as a fair description of her. She is blind to the role she herself has in their situation.

Compare this to Lydgate who, by clearly expressing his anger by contrast to coolly describing how he views the situation, draws attention to the part he himself plays in his perspective on their situation. He attempts to make Rosamond see that she has done something unjust, but in committing himself to that idea in his angry response, he also becomes responsible for spelling out why he thinks this is so. Of course, this does not mean that his anger is proven unjust just because Rosamond opposes it. It is for that matter not proven just because the reader agrees it is so. However, his claim to justice is open to challenge and criticism in another way than Rosamond’s in that *he* has expressed his anger at her.

The above examples bring out how I through reflecting on my own involvement in a situation, what I say, think and feel in it, may *learn* something both about the situation and about *myself*. In particular, it is in my meetings with other people, and in confrontation with their different perspectives on what has happened, that the sense in which I embody a perspective on the world, and am not one with it, may become most clear to me. I, who do not see myself in what I see,⁵¹ see myself (mirrored) in your reactions.

By contrast to the situations in which saying “I am angry” *expresses* my emotions this also brings to the fore other uses of the words. At times, my seeing myself as being angry is the outcome of a reflection on my emotions. I, as it were, come to see myself as angry by reflecting on my reactions; “I must still be angry with him. Whenever

⁵¹ This, I take it, is one dimension of Wittgenstein’s (1993) remark that one does not see the eye in the visual field (§5.633-5.6331).

we meet I end up arguing about some useless detail with him." Other times, my speaking about my emotions may take the form of reporting a psychological tendency; "My mother-in-law always drives me up the wall." The words may also take the form of a confession, "I know I shouldn't be angry with him (he didn't intend any harm), but I still cannot help feeling it."

Here again we may distinguish between my *feeling* anger and *being* angry and take note of the moral dimension of this distinction. Whereas the former can be seen as a way of psychologically registering certain reactions, the latter may be a way of committing myself to and accepting responsibility for a certain perspective, my anger.

II THE RATIONALITY OF EMOTION

After having shown that certain beliefs are necessary conditions for experiencing emotions Taylor suggests the following: Since we can examine the accuracy of the beliefs a person holds about the object of her emotions we can also judge whether a certain emotion is in place in a certain situation. If her beliefs about the object are rational, if it is true that the bear she is afraid of has sharp claws and a malicious temperament, she is "justified in experiencing an emotional reaction based on them". If this is not the case, her fear is irrational and cannot be said to be justified. (Taylor 1979, 165-168)

This effort to prove the rationality of emotions is one of the driving forces of the cognitive accounts of emotion. Contrary to the negative view on emotions that many philosophers have held, regarding emotions as passive occurrences, or interruptions or disturbances in our rational thinking and deliberative actions, they intend to show that emotions also inform our reasoning, or constitute a form of reasoning themselves. Some work is also made to loosen up the classical distinction between reason and emotion, trying to show that emotions have a rationality of their own, speaking as does Nussbaum about "love's knowledge" (Nussbaum 1990). But, even here, a certain conception of rationality looms in the shadow of Descartes.

The gist of their argument is to show that some emotions are rational whereas others are not. I have reason to be afraid of bears that I meet in the forest but not of the ones in a zoo, and by no means should I be afraid of mice. That is, there are reasons for being afraid in dangerous situations, but not all situations in which someone is afraid

are actually dangerous. Nor are our reactions of fear always in line with the danger of the object. I should not fear snakes to the extent that I do not dare leave the house in the summer. If my fear takes over and paralyses me in a way that is not proportionate to the danger of the situation there is, thus, reason to try to control my fear.⁵²

In this depiction they hold on to quite a traditional picture of rationality. Rationality and thinking is mainly considered as the ability to make correct judgements, hold correct beliefs or form correct conclusions about an independent reality. This picture is based on a sharp distinction between emotion and reason, body and mind, and is closely connected with the classical distinctions between fact and value, objectivity and subjectivity, according to which emotions and values are considered to be subjective responses to objective facts. The value of emotions is here judged in accordance with their ability to guide us to these facts (in some cases even "objective" values) which we may also recognize otherwise, and with their ability to invoke a proper response to them. If they fail to do so they maintain their dubious status. Thus, it assumes that there are given facts of the situation that do not depend on the person who notices them or calls our attention to them. This description focuses on a limited range of our emotional responses; the ways in which we may neutrally observe that a situation is dangerous, or the ways in which I may make mistakes as to what has happened.

These accounts seldom question what this rational ideal really amounts to. In fact, they do not say much about how we are to understand rationality on the whole, or whether the popular conception of it in philosophy is indeed meaningful. They simply assume that we know what we are talking about when we talk about

⁵² This also shows the close connection between cognitive theories and therapy. Even the Stoics offered a version of cognitive therapy by pointing out the possibility of changing one's judgements about the situation as a means to changing one's feelings. By realizing that some of my emotions are not rational, my grounds for them disappears and so does the emotion. That is at least the idea. A closely related objection is of course found in the phobic fear of spiders, snakes and mice. It is rather the rule than an exception that the phobic understands that his reaction is out of proportion without this changing the strength of his reaction. But, one may retort, this may also be a reason for calling his fear "phobic". It has pathological streaks, and does not simply operate within the "general" framework of emotions. This seems right up to a point, but then one leaves aside the whole question of what a "general framework of emotions" could be.

beliefs, thoughts and judgements, as if this talk were not as much subject to confusions as is our talk about feelings and emotions.

Lars Hertzberg's article "The Importance of Being Thoughtful" (2007a) offers many helpful reminders to release oneself from this picture of rationality and thinking as an inner logical process.⁵³ Within this view rationality becomes a tool the main aim of which is to draw conclusions and gain knowledge about reality. Drawing on the sense that expressions such as "being thoughtful" or "acting thoughtlessly" may have in different situations, Hertzberg rather shows that "the importance of being thoughtful" does *not* reside in the significance of having gone through certain thought-processes.⁵⁴

What constitutes good thinking, or being thoughtful, does not show so much in the time or attention I have spent on thinking about a problem as it shows in my response towards different situations: "[a] person's thoughtfulness will show itself, among other things, in what she *takes* to be a problem, as well as in her *way* of thinking the problems through." (Hertzberg 2007, 66) The thoughtful person's actions might even be characterized by *not* needing to think things through, while the need to think about what to do in a situation and not immediately seeing what is demanded of one may show another's thoughtlessness. (Hertzberg 2007, 66) He also points to the moral dimension talking about "thinking" and "being reasonable" has in these contexts. The injunction to "be reasonable" is not a call to undergo certain rational processes, to draw proper conclusions, but to see things in a certain way, to recognize the need to take on certain actions, abstain from insisting on certain rights or interests, and so on.

The insight that emotions in some situations are very much like thoughts, then, points in two directions. It does not only throw light on the concept of emotion, but also asks for a serious revision of certain conceptions of rationality in philosophy, and in our understanding of thinking as a whole. Even if there are times at which I may think that I have (re)acted against my better judgement, we will see that this does not necessarily mean that the best judgement is always constituted by a rational response in the sense philosophers have pictured rationality. That picture will rather prove to be problematic in many ways.

⁵³ See also McMillan (1984, 40f).

⁵⁴ Compare the following sign at Swedish subway trains: "Think about the distance between the train and the platform when you step of the train." What we are asked to do here is not to undergo certain processes, but to tread carefully when stepping out.

Cognitive accounts primarily discuss conditions for rationally experiencing an emotion that could be called *conditions of appropriateness*. They attempt to show what objects could count as appropriate objects of different emotions. What should we be afraid of or angry about, and how afraid or angry should we be? Undeniably, this is one dimension of our talking about emotions and the criticisms we are directing at them at times. I may wonder why you are so angry at something I consider a mere nuisance, or even blame you for not being angry enough at something else, say, the inequality of men and women or the exploitation of third world countries. "How could you be so cool when people are being treated like that!?"

What I have tried to show, however, is that a different set of conditions is as important, if not more, when it comes to understanding the emotions. We could call these *conditions of sense*. The question is not only what it takes to consider a particular emotional response justified or not, but what it takes to understand something as a particular emotion in the first place. Questions of justification or rationality, as it were, are secondary to the question of the *meaningfulness* of an emotion.

This also sheds new light on the kind of discrepancies there may be between the emotional reactions of different people. In the backwater of cognitive theories we find the notion that there is only one appropriate emotional response to the facts of a situation, and what is more the conviction that there are given facts to a situation; the complexity of beliefs involved may only make them difficult to discern (Taylor 1978, 167-168). However, it is rather a characterizing feature of the emotions that it is possible to find several meaningful perspectives on a situation. These are differences that cognitive theories insufficiently succeed to describe. This is also true for the kind of difficulties with which two people, who respond differently to a situation, may be confronted.

Certainly there are situations in which what it is needed for me to change my mind about the meaning of a situation is simply more facts. I am angry at a colleague for not handing in her share of a plan at a settled date, thinking that this is just another aspect of her constant sloppiness and lack of taking things seriously. Later I find out that she was prevented to do the work because of some family problems. I am struck by remorse at my previous anger, finding it now to be too harsh and callous a response. Here, one might want to say that I was not justified in being angry at my colleague, or not justified in being angry to the extent that I was.

There are, however, other situations in which my problems with becoming clear about the meaning of a situation take a different form. There is a sense in which we can say that both of Rosamond and Lydgate are aware of certain facts in their situation. He wanted to sell the house. She did not. She had written a letter to his uncle. He did not know. Yet, there is an immense difference in the meaning they find in them. She might say, "He threatened my security. I tried to secure the standard of living that I thought marrying him had promised me." He might say, "She did not see the severity of the situation. I tried to rescue it." Their differences also come to show in how they portray their quarrel. She: "He was acting unbecomingly." He: "She went behind my back."

Suggesting that either of them is not getting the facts right does not help us understand the depth of their conflict. It does not capture the sense in which they can be said not only to have differing beliefs about the same world, but the sense in which they can be said to *inhabit different worlds*. "The world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man" (Wittgenstein 1993, 6.43).⁵⁵ It is not that they, in any simple sense, misunderstand or make mistakes about their situation. Neither is it that they merely value the situation in different ways; Lydgate finding that "going behind his back" is a terrible thing to do, while Rosamond thinks it is perfectly acceptable. Rather their whole quarrel revolves around *what* it is that each of them had done. They embody two meaningful perspectives on what their situation *is*.

My point is not that there is no room to criticize their reactions, or that we may never reach a point at which we may say, "Now we know what really happened". We may well find a description that brings us peace. The tragedy of speaking about them inhabiting

⁵⁵ This is also pointedly expressed in a dialogue that Peter Winch borrows from Solzhenitsyn's book *Cancer Ward*. The two men in it both believe they are dying. One of them, "Kostoglotov ('Bonechewer') has been reading Tolstoy's *What Men Live By* and is deeply impressed by it". He tells the other: "'Yefrem ... that's enough of your whining - here read this book.' 'Read why should I read, we'll all kick the bucket soon.' Bonechewer's bone twitched. That's the point. If you don't hurry, you'll have kicked the bucket before you've read it! Here you are. Quick!'" (Winch 1987c, 30) Winch says, "It is not that Yefrem and Kostoglotov notice different things about their situation. Rather their situations make an entirely different sort of sense (or in Yefrem's case, lack of sense) to each of them" (1987c, 30). Whereas Bonechewer sees a meaning in doing things *sā-ki* just because he will not live long, this makes life appear meaningless to Yefrem.

worlds that do not meet, in one sense of “world” of course, is that they, in another sense of the word, clearly live in the same world. What I want to show is rather the illusion in thinking that there could be *one neutral description* with reference to which we could once and for all judge whether their emotions are in place or not.

Even if I, as a reader, may feel that Rosamond was in the wrong—“she really did go behind his back”—this conviction is also expressive of my own feelings in the matter. As I read on, I am gripped by Lydgate’s growing desperation at her lack of understanding, I experience it myself. We could even say that my ability to understand Lydgate’s anger presupposes my own ability to react to his situation or similar situations with anger. Even before their confrontation when I learn what Rosamond is up to, my irritation grows, I anticipate Lydgate’s response as he finds out, for it is also my response.

This is *not* a means of pining down criteria for how we come to recognize something as a particular emotion,⁵⁶ nor a claim that there is any one way in which we may come to do this. It is rather a reminder that the attribution of emotional concepts, and their associated descriptions, has meaning in particular contexts in which we ourselves take part as embodied human beings. If I were not an emotional being myself it would be unclear what it would mean to understand another’s reaction as “anger”, “joy” or “love”, or words such as “fearful” “unjust” “good” or “threatening”. A whole vocabulary of words such as “just”, “unjust”, “beautiful”, “unfair”, and a variety of practices, such as “blaming”, “accusing” and “praising”, grows out of our emotional reactions. This does not mean that we need to give up describing Rosamond as going behind her husband’s back since it is too coloured by emotions. Indeed, this may be the best description of the situation we may be able to give. The problem rather lies in the assumption that this description is somehow fallible because it is expressive of emotion.

It is also difficult to see what could constitute an alternative to it. My remarks about the ways in which my descriptions of the situation may be revealing of my emotions in it, were meant to show that our emotional vocabulary does not only comprise concepts that are directly concerned with emotion-words such as “anger”, “joy”, “love”, “hate”, and so on, but also with expressions such as “going behind someone’s back”, “behaving unbecomingly” or “acting

⁵⁶ Cf. chapter 1.

secretly". Trying to find a description that was be free of such emotional connotations, would, in this respect, mean releasing ourselves from most of the ways in which our life makes sense to us. Thinking about what it may mean to replace speaking about, say, "frowning", "smiling", "shrugging", "wincing" with a report of bodily movements or physiognomy, we may also think that such an attempt would deprive our life of all that is of significance to us in it.⁵⁷

The cognitive accounts, then, fail to acknowledge that what the situation *is* cannot be determined independently of our emotions in it. This is an aspect of the primary role they assign to forming correct or justified beliefs or judgements *about* the world in describing our relationship to it. It is a characteristic feature of at least Taylor's account that she centres on how talking about the objects of emotions may function as a reason for holding certain beliefs about the world—rather than, say, as a reason for feeling certain ways, such as distraught at finding out about the death of a loved one, and furthermore as a reason for acting and reacting in certain ways, such as comforting you in your grief.⁵⁸ (Cf. Cockburn 1997, 41-49) This fails to bring out how emotions, themselves, are *aspects of* the world. They tell us something about the way we as human, and emotional, beings are *in* the world. It is not clear what the world would be without these ways of being in it.

Working within quite a different framework than most cognitive theorists, Jean-Paul Sartre (2004) spoke of emotions as "magical transformations" of the world. Even this formulation leaves too big a gap between what the world is and what we make of it. A better way of putting it could be that emotions provide us with one example of how we are constitutively *engaged in* the world,⁵⁹ that is, in what

⁵⁷ Just think of the feeling of dread and alienation that may strike you in situations of extreme stress in which the usual meaning you see in actions is missing. Instead of a friendly face, you see uncoordinated movements, instead of voices speaking to you, you discern nothing but noises. Rather than finding that this brings you closer to what "really" happens, you may think that it is more revealing of what it may mean to lose one's sense of reality.

⁵⁸ The account of emotions as judgements seems to capture this aspect of the emotions better than the account of them as beliefs. In emphasizing the ways in which emotions can be seen as actions Solomon (1980) e.g. brings out how they in a sense are something we do, we make a judgement.

⁵⁹ In his final work on emotions Solomon (2007) uses almost the exact wording when he speaks of emotions as "engagements with the world". His discussion there, also takes a much broader approach to the subject of emotion, focusing much more on the

happens to ourselves and to other people. In opposition to the thought that it is possible to lay bare all the facts of the world, independently of our own concerns, we should remember that what it means to refer to certain facts cannot be understood independently of the *importance* and *relevance* they have to us in our life and dealings with each other. I say, "It's raining outside (so you should take an umbrella with you!)", or "She's really upset (so don't just rant about your own problems when you go and see her)."

A situation, in other words, is not simply there for us to react upon. What *kind* of situation it is, in as far as it bears on our emotion, can only be seen through or in relation to our emotion, *how* we respond to it, *who* we are in it. A quite common example of this is the sense in which someone's angry reaction can reveal to me a situation as unfair that I did not regard in that light before, or in any light at all. Suddenly I see the selfishness and cruelty in someone's actions, and the uneasiness of those who do not know what to put up against it. I am drawn into a situation that I did not perceive before. This also shows the important sense in which I may *learn* something from *another's* reactions and not only from my own.

There is, as it were, an *indeterminacy* in a situation and the meaning, or meanings, we can see in it. This indeterminacy is in many ways constitutive of our life with emotions, or of our life on the whole. One might well wonder what our life would be if there were never any disagreements about what is going on in a situation. What if we never saw things differently; what if what you say or see never struck me as remarkable or ludicrous, profound or worth considering? What if I never had the sense of finding new meanings in something that I thought was completely clear to me by talking to a friend, listening to a piece of music, being moved by someone's fate?

Nonetheless, it is not difficult to see why the temptation to look for a neutral perspective may be great when discussing emotions. There are times at which we may feel the pull of expressions such as, "Your emotions are running away with you", or, "His emotional involvement in the situation distorted his judgement". The discrepancies there may be in different people's reactions as well as in my own reactions to what has happened over time, or even the different perspectives that may present themselves in my own

distinctions that can be made between different emotions and within individual emotions, than on their general character as judgements.

responses to a particular situation, raise the question about what the situation is in ways in which it often does not arise in “factual” matters. Looking back at my anger, I see things differently than I did then. These are cases in which I may think that my anger *causes* me to represent the situation in a way that gives me reason to be angry, rather than it presents me with any adequate reasons for being angry. I try to make the world conform to my emotional state, to bridge what others, and I, in retrospect, may regard as an apparent gap between my emotions and the world.

What I have wanted to argue, however, is that it is misleading to think that the only way of criticizing this kind of emotionally distorted understanding is from a disengaged position, free from emotions. Even if I may feel the need to distance myself from my anger in cases such as the one above, it is from the perspective of anger that I think that my anger was not called for. Someone unable to feel anger would not understand what the question was about. The question, then, is what kinds of emotions my perspective expresses, and behind what kind of understanding of the situation and consequently what emotions I want to stand. Is my world full of joy or anger, pride or disappointment, hope or bitterness, love or hate?

By contrast to the primarily epistemological point of view from which cognitive accounts approach these questions, I want to stress their *moral* character. What I take this to mean is *not* that different beliefs and judgements are founded on more complex moral beliefs which we need to discern and judge the appropriateness of if we want to determine whether a current belief is justified (cf. Taylor 1979, 167). Such an attempt to reduce all questions about emotions to a set of beliefs is seriously misleading. Our emotions, so to speak, do not fit into a picture of a transparent consciousness, but bring out the unconscious elements of our thinking (cf. Tanesini 1999). It is, in that sense, not always clear to me why I think a certain way. How I see, or come to see, a situation is not reducible to any beliefs I may hold about it, but is an aspect of who I am, of how I see or feel the world. There comes a point at which I may have to say, “This is what I think, this is what I feel. This is who I am.”

What I take to be the moral question, then, is how this question about who I am enters into my relationships with *other* people. What kinds of attitudes are predominant in my relationships with other people; am I responsive to you and your differing perspective on the world? Do I, or rather do I want to, see it as meaningful? Am I ready to accept the implications this may involve for me? Instead of denying

the sense in which I embody a perspective on the world, my moral task is to take full responsibility for this realization, and for what it may mean.

Rosamond and Lydgate's problems of reaching (out to) each other, we may say, do not lie in their failure to understand some particular thing. Their situation would not improve by them paying more attention to the details of their specific beliefs, even if an account of what they thought had happened is bound to figure in a reconciliation in some way. Their failure is that they do not understand *each other*. This remark should be read in the light of the contrast that I earlier made between being angry at *someone* and being angry at *something* (the other has done or said).⁶⁰

When I speak of the couple's difficulties in understanding each other here, it is not in the epistemological sense of, "I don't understand this" or "I don't understand that!" It is related to the moral desperation or outrage that may be expressed in cries such as, "I don't get you" or "You don't understand me!" Whereas the first sense points to the relation they have to some object, the second points to the kind of relation they have with each other. What is needed if their situation is to change, we could say, is not information, but forgiveness.

Their difficulty of coming to see the situation in the light of the other's understanding of it, and accepting what meaning regarding it in such a way could have for them, is the difficulty of listening to the other and taking seriously the suggestion that he or she could give a meaningful depiction of what had happened. It is the difficulty of admitting that they too had done something wrong, the difficulty of abstaining from self-righteousness. It is their failure to trust each other and open up to the other, to be there for each other and allow the thoughts and feelings of the other to matter to their own, to learn from them and be changed by them. Their difficulties of understanding each other, as I hope it should be clear from the above descriptions, are revealing of their difficulties and failures to love.

⁶⁰ Cf. Diamond (1991e, 65ff) on the difference that can be made between understanding someone's propositions and understanding someone as well as the distinction I later make between speaking about understanding and changing in a transitive and intransitive sense (cf. p. 172).

III THE QUEST FOR JUSTIFICATION

In an attempt to investigate in what ways gender structures permeate the relationships between ten young Swedish couples who regard themselves as equals, Carin Holmberg (1995) brings out the differing ways in which the man and the woman may describe their relationship and quarrels.⁶¹ The descriptions of these are reminiscent of the quarrel between Rosamond and Lydgate. When "she" gets angry, "he", for instance, tries to make it better by *joking* with her, which makes her even more angry since she thinks he is *teasing* her or *does not care* about her being angry (Holmberg 1995, 161). In some situations he is also thinking that she is merely *trying to provoke* him by being angry while she says she wants to *discuss their relationship*, which she views as important. At times she thinks the only way of getting him to talk about these things, or take them seriously is by being angry with him, since "He does not want to talk about things he does not experience as serious" and "He takes quarrels and conflicts as expressive of things being serious." (Holmberg 1995, 162-163) He also expresses the wish to determine whether she has the right to be angry and decide how long she can be angry before he discusses things with her. If she does not accept it "and calms down and stops arguing when he explicitly tells her he becomes really angry." (Holmberg 1995, 162).

The book is full of examples of the couple's failures, difficulties and unwillingness to understand each other. It also reveals how anger, and one's attitude towards another person's anger, may be expressive of the power-relations that may obtain between two people, not exclusively between the genders. To mention one thing, his insistence on the need for her to have the right to be angry about something before he speaks with her is expressive of his authority in deciding what is worth talking about or understanding. "[M]any times she talks about things that are unimportant and uninteresting" (Holmberg 1995, 147). "[I]t's just such silly things that she gets angry about" (Holmberg 1995, 163). His not speaking with her even forces her into an even weaker position since he does not listen to her and also makes

⁶¹ In her socio-psychological study Holmberg brings together the statements of the ten couples in a "he" or "she". I will continue discussing them as one. All translations from Holmberg's book are mine.

it clear to her, while she listens even more carefully to what he says because he does not say so much.

What I want to focus on here is the ways in which his wanting her anger to be justified before he discusses it marks one of his failures to be with her. I want to relate this to the philosophical demand for justification, and the suggestion, embraced by many philosophers, that this is a presupposition for understanding. What if this quest for justification in philosophy is not any different from his and is more revelatory of our difficulties to understand each other than it is of understanding?⁶²

In cognitive accounts justification enters the discussion with the emphasis on the rationality of emotions. My emotional response is justified in so far as my judgements or my beliefs about the situation are representative of the facts of the situation. That is, others are to take my emotions seriously in so far as they correspond to the factual situation. Applied to the context of a quarrel, however, this suggestion is strikingly odd. Certainly, it is important to become clear about what the facts are in a matter of dispute. Just as it is as important, as I have tried to show, to clarify what it may mean to speak about facts in the first place. But is not the "fact" that I should take seriously in a quarrel precisely the fact that you are angry? That is, I should take *you* seriously.

The point is not that I should lend equal weight to everything that you say. Accepting everything with a, "Yeah, you're right", would be a poor picture of what taking someone seriously could mean. Clearly, there are times at which the only way of taking *you* seriously is to refuse to seriously consider some of the things you say. "Why would you want to say that? You can't mean it!" But even if I may have reason to suspect that you are only trying to provoke me, there are other issues that may and should concern us here. These are questions such as, why do you, who say you love me, try to provoke me, instead of, say, trying to talk to me about your real concerns? Why do you think that the only way of reaching me is by starting a quarrel? And furthermore, why do I, who say that I love you, not care about your

⁶² That the stress on reasons is also connected with the wish to change people's minds on certain issues is brought forward in Roger Scruton's (1987) saying: "We can change a person's behaviour by persuading him to change his declarations of intention, and he will change these just so long as he is rational and our reasons are good. Hence we have a direct means of access, through reason, to that core of activity from which his behaviour springs" (52-53).

provocative words more than I would about the buzzing of a fly at my ear? Why do I not try to engage you in a conversation to try to show you why I could not think of what you are saying as more than a provocation? Why do I not lament the fact, and try to invoke the same response in you, that we have ended up in such a place where communication has come to be equated with provocation?

If we consider actual cases of the relationships that may obtain between lovers, the features portrayed in Holmberg's example may not strike us at very surprising. Nevertheless, I, at least, hope that I never become so jaded that I think that this is truly love and not just something called by that name.⁶³ The man's attitude towards his girlfriend appears to be characterized by a lack of understanding that at most times appears like a total lack of concern for her as someone who has something to say.⁶⁴

At times, the man's relation to his girlfriend could be seen as a *blindness* towards her. In seeing what he does as joking, the man does not see what he does as something wrong, as she does in seeing it as teasing. At times this blindness rather seems expressive of an *indifference* to her or even a *refusal* to pay any attention to her. By joking with her when she is angry, or by thinking that she is only trying to provoke him, he does not take her anger, and so *her*, seriously. He does not think that she has anything important to tell him.⁶⁵ What matters to him is rather that *he* does not want to talk about something. "[S]he should not talk about things with him which he finds uninteresting or difficult." (Holmberg 1995, 144)

It may, of course, turn out that her anger in these cases is what one may think of as unjustified. However, what makes him so certain that whatever he is thinking may not be? Should he not know what it is she *means* by saying something before he judges whether it is wrong or right? The demand for justification, as does the whole issue of determining rights and wrongs, reveals a blindness towards her, but

⁶³ That Holmberg also thinks that the answer to this question would be in the negative is revealed by the title of her book: *They call this love*, and not, *This is love*.

⁶⁴ I do not want to imply that the woman is much better. Both of them seem to be involved in an evil game. I will, however, largely focus on the problems from the perspective of the man here.

⁶⁵ On the whole he does not seem to pay much attention to the things that she finds important. Although he knows that she would like him to express his affection in other ways than he does, by e.g. saying that he loves her more often, he does not do it because he sees no point in it. "[S]ince she and he knows that they care about each other, it is not necessary to say it all the time." (Holmberg 1995, 153).

also a narrow understanding of what may be involved in conversation.

For one thing, the question about justification or appropriateness only appears to arise naturally with concern to some of the emotions, such as anger, fear, indignation, guilt or shame. One may be abhorred by the suggestion that someone's grief is not justified, and find the notion that we should only love or be happy to an appropriate degree a very cynical one. By the same token one may argue that emotions such as envy or hate are never justified.

For another thing, emphasizing the sense in which an emotional reaction is in order in a situation neglects the way in which one may think that the expression of emotion in itself may be significant. Think only of the ways in which I may seek to find someone with whom to share my joy when hearing some good news. Or consider how someone may be said to "speak out" of grief or agony, and the importance he or she might attach to the fact that someone else is there to *listen*, and in other ways just *be* there. The same could be said for the cases in which one confesses one's darker thoughts of jealousy or envy to another, in which the confession itself may be a way of coming to grips with one's emotions. Clearly, the other is not needed to tell one that the emotions are not justified. One is already too aware of that oneself. Nevertheless, the outspoken admission may be a necessary step to reconcile oneself *not* with having these emotions, but with the "fact" that one is someone who may also entertain such thoughts.

In this sense, it might be more illuminating to speak about the ways in which we are or become *witnesses to each other* rather than simply speaking about seeing or recognizing emotion in someone. We could say that some expressions of emotions bear *testimony* of the lives we have lived, and that the presence of another who is willing to listen may be crucial for us being able to formulate and articulate what kind of lives they have been. The many ways in which we learn to hide our feelings both from others and ourselves, as in Rosamond's case, only emphasizes the significance of the situations in which we dare to acknowledge them and take responsibility for what having them means. Our recognition of a certain situation, which may include another's emotion, can in such cases be said to make demands on me. We may even be blamed for not seeing something or someone in a certain way.

One aspect of these conversations about emotions and expressive of emotions which I have tried to bring out in the above remarks is the

different ways in which we may learn from emotions by reflecting on how they engage us with the world. What may strike one as the tragedy of the man's ignorance towards his girlfriend, as well as of *her* attempts to provoke him to take her seriously, is the sense in which they fail to recognize what they both may learn from and about each other through listening and paying attention to each other. Meeting each other in this way may also help each of them to better articulate their thoughts and find out where they stand on a matter. The other may help them to notice blind spots in their own thinking, revealing aspects of the situation and of their own actions and thinking of which they were not aware before.

I do not by any means want to claim that this is always, or even often, an easy matter. Facing each other means facing themselves, and both the man and the woman may wince at the possibility of having to revalue their views about both the situation, themselves as individuals and as a couple and about their relationship. It is a notable fact that we often feel more at ease expressing our negative feelings to others than to those who gave rise to them. When talking with others about what you have done, my view of the situation may easily dominate, but when turning to you I am no longer dealing with my own feelings and descriptions: I am dealing with *you*, another human being with thoughts and feelings of your own. I am faced with another perspective on what has happened, with someone who can throw new light on my descriptions and lead me to change my mind about the situation, the reasons and motives for my anger, the justice of it, and so on. My talking with you may lead me to accept that my view of you was unfair, or that what I said was rather an expression of my meanness and pettiness than of yours. We should also not forget that what we go on to say to each other is a continuation of what has happened. Talking to you means that the situation changes and how we go about doing it gives new meaning to what has happened and is happening between us. Do I prolong the fight by bringing in old quarrels or am I willing to ask for forgiveness?

What particular conclusions we reach in our conversations have to be settled in the concrete situation. At times I or you may come to see that either of us was unjust in being angry, or that the anger was not in proportion to what had happened. At other times, our conversation may end with the acknowledgement that we just look at the situation differently. This may either mark our coming to terms with the differences that exist between us, or it may reveal the distance between us. In other situations, we may come to share a perspective

on the situation. In this, both of us may come to see something wrong in what we have done and also learn from each other's perspective. I can come to regard something as an injustice that I did not see as such before, or recognize that you can be angry about something although I might not be.

I do not question that justification may play a role in such conversations, as it may do in our discussions of thinking and emotions. Nonetheless, I have wanted to point out that it only offers a limited perspective of what is involved in understanding. Rather than describing a central aspect of our thinking, asking whether someone is justified in seeing something in a specific way can be said to constitute a special case of understanding. It has a role in situations in which we can already be said to be in agreement on what it means to hold differing views.⁶⁶ In many situations, however, the questions facing us are rather what *meaning* it is possible for us to see in a situation, and, furthermore, behind what meaning *we* are able and want to responsibly stand behind.

These questions are not so much epistemological questions as they are moral ones. Our understanding of emotions concerns not only the relationship between certain assertions and the world but our relationships with each other. My reluctance to encompass your perspective can be a refusal to seriously consider the implications of your different perspective, and an expression of my unwillingness to give up my self-given right to determine what the situation is. From the other side, your capacity and willingness to take in my different perspective, to try to understand what I feel and how I see the situation, can be revealing of your love, care, compassion, and concern for me. It is in this light that the stress on justification in philosophy strikes me as revealing of a temptation in our thinking. It is no mere coincidence that the only true representation of the world that one assumes that there is, is usually taken to be one's own.

This emphasis on seeing the meaningfulness of the other's perspective is not to be taken as a matter of uncritically accepting whatever he says. Confirming or fortifying the meaningfulness of the other's or of one's own perspective may in some situations take the form of indulgence. The emphasis rather points us to the kind of reasoning that may take place in these kinds of conversation. Offering

⁶⁶ Compare this with Peter Winch's (1987b) discussion about the vast background that is needed for the notion of "true" and "false" to have sense (50-51).

reasons here can be seen as a way of bringing out different aspects of the situation, pointing out what it would mean to regard the situation in a different light, becoming aware of blind spots in one's thinking and trying to awaken a different kind of response in the other. Rather than thinking that there is one true representation of the world which we can reach by attending to given facts, reaching the truth of the matter cannot be separated from what it means to be true to others and oneself. Do I or you really mean what we say?

In response to the question of the title, we could, thus, say, yes, certainly we believe in love. There is a number of different thoughts that are involved in love, as there is a variety of feelings, actions and behaviour which may be expressive of them. They are, however, not as neatly organized as many philosophers have wanted to suggest. Love, as it were, constitutes an embodied understanding of myself, you, others, and the world. To a large part, it will be the aim of the following chapters to flesh out what kind of understanding this is.

Furthermore, there is a variety of beliefs about the nature of love that may flourish in our both personal and philosophical conversations about love. They may surface in the manner of opinions such as, "True love only happens once" or "You never forget your first love". Here I will content myself with saying that an investigation into the meaning of love in our life is not to be equated with citing such beliefs without entering more closely into what perspective on love saying such things may express.

However, what is more important to the question of the title is whether we believe in love in the sense in which we may be said to have faith in it. This way of putting it, of course, is more in line with the sense in which one would first understand the title, and cannot, as I see it, be detached from the sense in which we have faith and trust in other people. Speaking about the two couples failing to understand each other is not pointing out their failure to entertain certain justified beliefs but pointing out their lack in these respects. It is not a point about their rational capacities but a remark about their failure to trust that the other one *has something to say* and also to *listen* to it.

“I DO, I DO, I DO, I DO”⁶⁷

On the night before their wedding day, or on the path leading up to it, many a bride and groom have probably asked themselves what it is exactly that they are going to do. I am not thinking about the worry that one says “I do” at the wrong moment or stumbles on the words, or about the possible difficulties of keeping relatives from jumping at each other’s throats. I am rather thinking about what it means for us to stand in front of the one we love and publicly announce that this is the one we will “have and hold, love and cherish, in sickness and in health, til death do us part”. What is it actually that we take upon ourselves when we make this promise? Are we committing ourselves to performing certain actions, feeling certain feelings, thinking certain thoughts? And how in the world, may we commit ourselves to this, as we do, forever?

The question alerts us to aspects of love that are difficult to reconcile in a unified account. It appears to present us with a dilemma of this form: Are we to understand love in terms of *actions* or are we better to understand it as a *passion*? In other words, is love something akin to decisions or is it rather a feeling? Much of our problems with this question is also expressive of our trying to answer it in this general form. Although we may experience no trouble understanding what is being said when someone in a particular situation asserts, “Love is not a rose-garden, sometimes you just have to decide to stick with the one you love”, or “There has to be some pleasure to love too, it can’t be all pain”, our thinking is caught up in itself when we try to work out whether love “is *really* a decision or a feeling”.

What speaks in favour of understanding love as a passion, and even one of the foremost, is the fact that speaking about love at times is speaking about feelings and sensations. We may ask *how* something

⁶⁷ Abba (1975).

feels, or *where* I feel something, in particular pointing to the heart. We may speak of love in terms of strength, intensity and duration. We may emphasize the need to be passionate in our loving relationships. By tradition these aspects of love and the other emotions have often been regarded as involving some kind of passivity on our part. Our experiences or feelings have often been construed as something that simply happen to us, or overcome us. This aspect is also apparent in the language of love. I can say that I am "struck by love" or "cannot help falling in love". Love is something that I "suffer from" (as from a disease). Or it is something to which I need to "surrender".

Even if we do not agree with this picture, we could say that there is a *spontaneity* that is characteristic of our emotional responses. It is easy to think that we either feel, or feel like something, or then we do not. Love does not consist in performing certain actions, it is as important *how* we perform them; what is more, this has a crucial role for determining *what* actions they are in the first place. Even if I could be said to do all the things a lover should do, you may say that you never felt that I loved you. Even if my actions were "right" in some way, they were still missing, say, a sense of warmth or desire that is characteristic of love. I did not act "with feeling".

But even if we in these respects may speak of love as a way of *feeling* for someone, there are ways of speaking about love that cannot be reduced to talking about feelings and sensations. As Wittgenstein (1967) remarks, "Love is not a feeling. Love is put to the test, pain not. One does not say: 'That was not true pain, or it would not have gone off so quickly'" (§504). His remark does not set out to deny that feelings are in some ways concerned with love. If we were not so inclined to think of love as a feeling, there would also be no point in emphasizing that it is not one. The remark is rather a reminder of the ways in which the grammar, or language, of love differs from the grammar of feelings and emotions. This is especially true of the ways in which love can be said to *demand* something of us. Love is not anything that I just happen to feel, but something for which I can be held *responsible*. I can promise to love, even for the rest of my life, as in our wedding vows, and be commanded to do it, as in the Christian command to love my neighbour.

In that way, I need not doubt the strength or intensity of your feelings when you say, "I love you", but I may still be inclined to say that you do not know what love is. I may say that you do not see the consequences that loving someone should have in your life. Your love, as it were, should show in other aspects of your life than in your

feelings. We may question whether something truly is or was love, whether you or I still love or love well. By contrast to pain love can be said to be challenged and tested. There is no question about whether I am responsible for my pain, but you may raise questions about whether I *am in my actions*, whether I *am true to my words* or *live up to* them when I say that I love. These aspects alert us to the moral dimension of love, and the sense in which love raises questions about truth, purity and sincerity in ways in which pain does not.

The aim of this chapter is to address these two aspects of love.⁶⁸ How are we best to characterize, on the one hand, the roles spontaneous responses and, on the other hand, recognizing certain things as demands have in love? When does it matter what we feel, and when are our feelings less important? I want to argue that the spontaneity of love and our responsibility for it do not constitute conflicting aspects of love, but that they are rather supportive of each other in our understanding of others and our relationships with them. I especially want to focus on these questions in the light of what it is to *promise* to love someone. How can we actively take responsibility for loving if love by necessity involves an element of spontaneity or passivity?

The problem with these questions, I argue, is the presuppositions that make the situation appear paradoxical. When philosophizing about these matters one easily assumes that we are only responsible for the voluntary actions which we choose, while one imagines that love, or its spontaneity, is an episode-like feeling, which happens to us independently of our will. If it is true, one thinks, that we are only responsible for our actions, that is, for what we bring about and make happen, we cannot reasonably be responsible for what we feel, for that which merely happens to us. Or then one suggests that we have to represent love and the other emotions as being more like actions, so that it makes sense to speak of us as being responsible for them.

However, the connection between responsibility and free will is not as self-evident as one may think. Nor do we always need to think of emotions as either active or passive. A reflection on love may rather offer new insights into the different roles responsibility has in our life. Contemplating the ways in which I may feel guilty or bad about not falling in love with someone, not loving someone anymore or being in

⁶⁸ See the previous chapters for a discussion about the problems involved in thinking of love as a feeling or an emotion.

love with someone with whom I know I should not be in love, gives us a different picture of what responsibility might be. It illuminates the ways in which I can be said to be responsible for my love, and how I am actively involved in my emotions. It also offers insights into the relation between responsibility and will, and love and the will.

I will continue this discussion by first raising some questions about the will. I then turn to the senses in which we may speak about being responsible (1) for the *attention* we pay to people, and (2) for our *feelings* for other people. I sum up the discussion by commenting on the fact that the question of "what I or you want" only arise in particular situations and by considering what impact this has on understanding others as a limit to our will in one way or another.

I "SPONTANEITY" AND "WILL"

Before discussing these questions let me say something about what I mean with speaking about "spontaneity" with respect to emotions and love. Now, many of the problems in understanding how we may be responsible for spontaneous reactions, desires or feelings appear to be connected with thinking that the spontaneity of emotions consists in some kind of episodic happenings that are external to us.⁶⁹ But, just as it is problematic to think that love consists in certain feelings, it is problematic to think that spontaneity consists in having certain feelings. Here again we have reason to remember Gilbert Ryle's (1955) discussion of enjoyment and his comment that the enjoyment of a golfer playing a game, as it were "with feeling", does not consist in some additional feeling that accompanies the golfer during his game but shows in the way he goes about playing it (108).⁷⁰

Thus, when I speak about spontaneity I am not interested in saying anything about what it consists in. I am interested in its grammatical role in understanding each other and our actions. The word serves as a contrast to other ways of making decisions, intellectually deliberating or acting intentionally or out of duty. It is, however, important to distinguish between different senses in which one may

⁶⁹ Another way of misunderstanding what I mean with spontaneity here is to think that it is an injunction to "be spontaneous" or "act spontaneously", that is without hesitation, or doing unexpected things, in your relationship with the one you love. I hope it will become clear that this is not the aim of my discussion.

⁷⁰ Cf. chapter 1, p. 60.

emphasize the spontaneity of emotions and love. In my previous discussion at least two senses have figured and yet another one will be of importance in the following discussion.

The first is the *immediacy* that is characteristic of many, but not all, emotional responses. This is the sense in which I spontaneously understand my situation in a way that is internal to my emotion that I discussed in chapter two. Related to this, but not to be equated with it, is the sense in which certain *primitive* responses, such as crying out of pain, are pre-linguistic, in Wittgenstein's words (1967), that "a language game is based on it, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought" (§541).⁷¹ The need to distinguish between these two senses, the primitive and the "enculturated" spontaneous responses, is obvious if one considers the difference between my jumping out of fear at a loud bang, and the creeping fear that may fill me at the thought that my loved one may come to be plagued by and die from an incurable disease. Even if my feelings of fear in the second case can be said to build upon my primitive reactions to other people, their sense relies on a vast understanding of what it means for human beings to be mortal, diseases incurable and so on.⁷²

These two senses attend to the importance of considering spontaneous, or unreflected, reactions in *epistemology*, and the role they have for understanding other forms of more reflective thinking. As we saw earlier, the notion of a freely choosing rationality that is often presented as a contrast to the acclaimed passivity of emotions does not hold up for any closer scrutiny.⁷³ There is, as it were, something illusory both about the notion of completely passive states of emotions and about the notion of reasoning as completely active. In what ways are, to name but one thing, judgements something that we choose? Certainly there are responses to the environment that, as Peter Winch (1989) says, are "mediated by thought and reflection" (43), but with him we may also say,

⁷¹ Compare chapter 1 p. 8.

⁷² Furthermore, one could make a distinction between the "enculturated" responses that are expressive of an understanding, and the spontaneous responses that reveal one's familiarity with a surrounding or an object. Think only of the surprised reaction of not finding one's coat where it is usually hanging.

⁷³ See chapter 2, p. 92ff and Hertzberg (2007).

first that not all our responses are like that; second and more important, that not all responses could be like that, since the concepts necessary for thought and reflection require unmediated, unreflective responses for their formation. (Winch 1989, 43)

However, the sense in which I particularly want to pay heed to spontaneity in relation to love and emotions is the *moral* sense in which one may emphasize the need to "feel like" doing what one does, or the need to do it willingly. Here spontaneity is attached to the sense in which we regard someone's actions as sincere or genuine. Peter Winch (1972), in another article, gives the example of a father who finds it impossible to enjoy playing with his child, and only does it out of fatherly duty. He suggests that the father could conceive this lack of spontaneity as a moral failure (Winch 1972, 181). Speaking about spontaneity here is a reminder that from a moral perspective *what* we do is not the only thing that matters. *How* we do it may be as important for understanding what it is we are doing. Is our playing with our children an aspect of our rejoicing in them or a way of deafening our bad conscience or an attempt to impress others of our skills to handle children? How we do something, however, is not to be determined by some feeling that could be said to accompany our actions, but in the *spirit* in which I act.

Even if I will emphasize the role spontaneity has in love, my intention is not to propose a general picture about the form love takes, or should take. There are situations in which our doing something "with feeling" or spontaneously may serve as a way of distinguishing true emotions from feigned ones. However, in other cases our moral understanding is rather revealed in the need to question or suppress our spontaneous responses. These kinds of contrast will perhaps become clearer in the following considerations of the role the concept of will has in relation to "love".

Many of the questions that we may raise about the roles of spontaneity and demands in relation to emotions can be raised as a matter of what aspects of our relationships with others are within our will. Emphasizing the place spontaneity has in love finds support in the fact that our emotions and love are in no clear sense subject to our will. Wanting to love you is *not* the same as loving you. You might even question whether something is an act of love if my will to do it enters too much into it, or suspect that I only do something because I

think that it is expected of me. You do not, as it were, see *me* in the action.⁷⁴ But even if I cannot initiate love in this way, loving someone does not seem to be independent of my will. It is not independent of *me*. Loving someone, in most cases, is also wanting to love. I can also choose or refuse to look at something as love and we may speak of coming or ceasing to love someone as a decision.

The attempt to establish a link between having a will and being responsible has held a prominent position in philosophy. Furthermore, our will has been considered to constitute, or be constituted by, our freedom as individuals, and has, thus, been considered of crucial importance for the sense in which we are being selves or persons. However, the introduction of the concept of “will” and “want” is not as helpful as one might think at first glance. Rather than presenting us with a clear solution of what we can be said to be responsible for in love, in other words, that which is an aspect of our free will, many of the discrepancies between what can be seen as “active” and “passive” sides of our love recur in what we say about “wanting”. This is seen in the fact that the words “will” and “want” may be used to express at least two different attitudes towards something.

On the one hand, we may speak of wanting to do something to emphasize the spontaneity of my actions and desires. “I just feel like doing something.” Sometimes this spontaneity finds expression in my impulsive actions—“I act on the spur of the moment”. However, it need not have an impulsive character. Neither do I need to act on my desires, or even have any intention of doing it, just as I may do something deliberately but unwillingly. On the other hand, what I want can be seen in my attitude towards things. I deliberate on what I want to do or I try to make up my mind about something. I act with a certain resoluteness and do not allow myself to be guided by what I spontaneously feel like doing. My wanting something in this second sense may, thus, conflict with what I want in the first sense although there in many cases is no tension between these two ways of speaking about “wanting”.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ There is, however, quite a step to saying that this means that I do not really love.

⁷⁵ One way of illustrating this difference is to think of two people trying to decide what subject they want to study. The first may carefully study the guide, weigh one subject against the other, and consider the probability of securing an outcome by choosing one subject rather than the other. On the basis of this she makes her decision. The other may consider the alternatives, but still intuitively decide on a

Harry G. Frankfurt's distinction between "first-order desires" and "second-order desires" (or "higher order desires") can be seen as one attempt to bring order into these different aspects of our will. Frankfurt (1971) introduces this distinction in a discussion of the role having a "free will" has for our concept of a person in which he argues that "one essential difference between persons and other creatures is to be found in the structures of a person's will" (6). What distinguishes us human beings from members of other species is not our "having desires and motives, or [...] making choices" (Frankfurt 1971, 6) but our capacity for reflecting on our spontaneous, first-order desires and forming higher order desires regarding them. In other words, we are not determined by our spontaneous impulses but can act on them in accordance with our other deliberations and judgements about which desires are desirable. We may have desires about what we should desire.

Charles Taylor's discussion of strong and weak evaluations (1985) offers a modification of Frankfurt's description of higher order desires. Taylor discusses the different ways in which we may judge different desires to be desirable. An example of a weak evaluation could be deciding on travelling to the south rather than to the north because one thinks one would enjoy the warmth more than the exciting landscapes (cf. Taylor 1985, 17). An example of a strong evaluation could be jumping into a river to save a child from drowning despite the fact that this will leave one wet and cold, and also may involve other risks for oneself. What distinguishes the latter (strong) evaluations from the first, Taylor claims, is that they are connected with moral judgements about the quality of one's actions. Whereas the desirability of weak evaluations are determined by what "I feel like", the goodness of a strong evaluation is dependent on standards that go beyond what I momentarily feel. Not saving a child because I do not feel like it is cowardly.

subject that she finds appealing. In both these cases we may say that the person wants to study the subject. In the second case, we may, of course, ask whether she had good reasons for her decision—we distinguish between real wants and idle wishes. In the first case, we may similarly wonder whether the person also allowed her own preferences, what she spontaneously would enjoy doing, rule the decision, although that might, of course, also have played a part in the earlier deliberations. We do not, however, have to question whether their respective choices were genuine cases of wanting to do something.

I aspire to be a certain kind of person. This would be compromised by my giving in to this craven impulse. [...] It is not just a matter of circumstances which makes it impossible to give in to the impulse to flee and still cleave to a courageous, upright mode of life. Such a mode of life consists among other things in withstanding such craven impulses. (Taylor 1985, 19)

Strong evaluations are, thus, related to my understanding of what kind of person I morally want to be.

My intention here is not to argue about terminology. Important distinctions are drawn within both Frankfurt's and Taylor's accounts, but their terminology have a tendency of obscuring matters, precisely in virtue of being, or becoming, a terminology. This is especially true of the discussions following Frankfurt's distinction. What I want to take from these accounts, however, is the reminder that there are different ways in which we may ask a person what she really or truly wants. I also want to bring out that these questions are moral questions in important respects. They tell us something about who we are as persons. With Taylor (1985), we could say that the question about what we want has "depth" (23). It cannot, for one thing, be answered merely by appealing to an inner experience.

The question about "what one really wants" may arise in different situations. What we are asking for may consequently also be quite different things. Sometimes, it is a question about one's more long-range intentions, the consequences of acting out one's spontaneous desires. A husband, who has fallen in love with someone other than his wife, may ask himself: "Do you really want to break up your family?" At other times, it is a question about what one spontaneously or intuitively desires to do. "Do you really want to be living a lie, suppressing your true feelings? Don't you want both you and your family to be happy?" the same husband may ask himself after his attempts to keep his family together have proven painful for all parties involved. In one situation, then, it is the husband's *intention*, which is morally relevant, in another it is his *desires* which carry the moral weight.⁷⁶ It is important for my following discussion that neither of the two ways of speaking about wanting determine what we will accept as expressive of his genuine wishes in the particular case.

⁷⁶ I borrow this distinction between *desire* and *intention* for capturing two ways of speaking about wanting from a discussion by Lars Hertzberg (1995). He introduces the terms as an attempt to make sense of Frankfurt's distinction.

Neither Frankfurt nor Taylor wishes to dictate what we should understand as our true wants. In addition to this, Taylor's account reminds us of the different roles we may assign to spontaneous reactions in responding to the question of "what I really I want". In some situations (weak evaluations), the good thing to do is simply to do whatever it is that I spontaneously desire. In other situations (strong evaluations) we judge something to be good independently of my possible desires in the moment.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, I want to point out one problematic tendency in their thinking. Both Frankfurt and Taylor use an "evaluative vocabulary" (to borrow Taylor's wording) to make their distinctions. They speak of "higher-order desires" and "strong evaluations". This gives the impression that the question about what we really want can be answered *in a general way* by considering our capacity to make evaluations and judgements about the kind of persons we are and want to be. The question, as it were, appears to be aimed at what our larger schemes of life are. This assumption is unwarranted.

First, it ignores that what we are dealing with is not a general question. What will count as an answer in a particular case will, as was said, depend on the particular situation in which we raise the question. Second, it does not pay attention to the primary place spontaneity has in relation to what I can meaningfully be said to want. Even though I might clench my teeth to pursue what I want, you might question whether I really want something if I only do it while grinding my teeth together. One could say that my spontaneous responses constitute a limit for what I can sincerely be said to want.

Where we draw a limit for where a lack of spontaneity in my responses makes it impossible to speak about my wanting to do something, will vary with the particular case, of course. I may never, or only seldom, feel like working but I may nevertheless say that I want to do it to secure my livelihood. It is, however, difficult to see what it would mean for me to love you, if I never felt that way. This is also reflected in what we understand as moral actions. In speaking about morality, Taylor appears to lend most weight to our ability to deliberate on and evaluate what kind of persons we are and the kind of actions such persons would pursue. But, we may ask, where is the morality if I save a child from drowning because I want to live the

⁷⁷ We may, as it were, speak about what is "good" in a relative and in an absolute sense. I will return to this distinction in chapter 6.

kind of life in which I do not act like a coward and do the right thing? Would we not rather identify my response as moral if I jump into the water because, "The child was drowning!" There was, I say, "nothing else I could do", not even a question about what I wanted. Although Taylor, then, draws attention to the moral character of some of our evaluations as well as their connections with the question about who we are as persons, he leaves out that, morally speaking, our spontaneous reactions to a situation—what courses of action we think are open for evaluation and the cases in which we see no place for evaluation at all—is as revealing of who we are.

This brings me to the second theme I want to pick up from Frankfurt's and Taylor's discussion. This is the role identifying myself with my desires, actions and feelings, has for understanding our responsibility in love, and, thus, the sense in which my spontaneous desires and deliberate actions throw light on who I am. However, I will not offer a theory of the self that takes our capacity to freely will, decide or choose as a metaphysical ground for attributing responsibility to people. I will rather turn to the ways in which these concepts are *internally* related. Part of the reason why it is misleading to think that our talk about the will offers a ground for morality, is because raising a question about what someone wants itself introduces a perspective that is moral to begin with.

Lars Hertzberg (1997) writes that acknowledging what someone says as an expression of his will is an aspect of the respect we pay to other human beings; I take the other's will as an expression of *him*. This does not necessarily mean that I always try to give the other whatever he wants, but that his desires matter in my response to him; I try to give reasons for why it is better not to do what he wants, I point out undesirable consequences and so on. In that sense, recognizing something as an expression of someone's will is expressive of the realization that I am responsible for taking it into account in what I say and do myself. By the same token, the recognition that I am someone whose wants are something that matters to and claims the respect of others is expressive of the realization that I am responsible for what I (say I) want.

From this point of view, raising questions about the ways in which I am responsible in love could be articulated as a question about the ways in which I see different aspects of love as *expressive of me*. From this angle the relevant questions about responsibility do *not* start with my capacity to freely will. The questions it poses are rather: What can I honestly see as an expression of myself, and what does it, on the

other hand, mean to reject certain feelings as expressive of me? These questions are inherently moral questions. They concern the ways in which other people matter to me and how I come to conceive myself in relation to them, in my spontaneous desires and feelings as well as in my deliberate actions.

II "ATTENTION"

Highly critical of the attempt to ground moral philosophy on a philosophy of mind and action that takes its starting point in the concepts of "freedom", "will", "action", "choice" or "decision" (Murdoch 1997, 288-290), Iris Murdoch turned to Simone Weil's concept of "attention". This emphasis on perception, or rather on "vision" as it is usually spoken of in the company of Platonists such as Murdoch, is reminiscent of many of the later cognitive theorists of emotion. Murdoch's interest in what it means to be "looking" and "seeing", however, is *not* so much epistemological as it is ethical. Her concern is to show in what ways attention may be viewed as a moral concept, by considering what it may mean to direct "a just and loving gaze [...] upon an individual reality" (Murdoch 1997, 327).

One of Murdoch's examples concerns M, a mother who

feels hostility to her daughter in law [...] D. M finds D a quite good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque sometimes, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. (Murdoch 1997, 312)

These thoughts, however, Murdoch invites us to think, do *not* figure in M's behaviour: she "behaves beautifully towards the girl throughout" (1997, 312). We are even asked to imagine that her thoughts never have the chance to show in action, "the young couple have emigrated" or "D is now dead" (Murdoch 1997, 312). These feelings about her daughter-in-law might have led M to be caught up by "the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl" (Murdoch 1997, 312-313), but since she is

an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just *attention* to an object which confronts her [...] M tells herself, 'I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again. (Murdoch 1997, 313)

Paying D, or the memory of her, due consideration, reflecting about her and so on, “her vision of D [gradually] alters”. She discovers that D is “not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful” (Murdoch 1997, 313).

Murdoch’s discussion, and Weil’s even more so, alerts us to an important dimension of responsibility. She reminds us of our responsibility not only for what we do, but for how we see people. Furthermore, she reminds us of the fact that a certain way of looking at people may constitute a change in the way we feel about them. There are, as it were, different ways in which I may approach people. I may welcome people with an open heart and mind, but I may also ignore them and reject them from my life. Thus, Murdoch’s account alerts us to the place our *openness* or *responsiveness* to others has in love.⁷⁸ Even if love cannot be said to come about by an act of will, there are a number of ways in which in our day to day life we may fail to “be alive”⁷⁹ to (the realities of) other people and thereby fail to acknowledge the place they and love could have in our life.

At times this lack of responsiveness may serve as a refusal. I say, “I cannot love you anymore”, meaning not, “I do not feel anything for you any more” but “I no longer see any possibilities of sharing my life with you.” I may still find myself wanting to be with you or missing you. I continue having conversations and arguments with you in my head, but I no longer want to meet you and whenever we do it stirs up difficult memories. In time, this desire to be with you may also fade. Or, so I may hope. At other times, my lack of response takes the form of negligence. For whatever reason, being too caught up in my own thoughts to recognize what is happening to you or too tired to be aware of it, I am blind to you. Your presence does not reach me, or touch me fully. At other times again, I react callously or cynically to the needs of other people, recognizing them as needs but turning away from the demands they make on me. A momentary instance of

⁷⁸ The remarks on the need to consider different aspects of responsiveness (Scruton 1986, 26, 30) in sexual desire is one of the more insightful parts of Roger Scruton’s, in many places, truly odd book about the subject. My main points of disagreement with aspects of this work, some of which I will return to later, is that he, in his emphasis on reasoning and rationality, fails to account sufficiently for how constitutive our responsiveness to the world and to other people is for these (more reasoned) aspects of our life.

⁷⁹ This way of putting it was inspired by Phil Hutchinson’s (2008) discussion of what he calls “world taking cognitivism”.

this kind of disregard for other people is often an aspect of anger. A further interesting case which falls between the last two is constituted by the ways in which my responses to others may be numbed by horrific events and the wrongdoings of other people. I do not respond to something with the same outrage or sadness that I used to do.

These remarks call attention to the kind of indeterminacy that I have said is characteristic of our emotional life. They also pave the way for questions about how we should understand the differing moral reactions of different people. With regard to love, and the subject of this chapter, however, they point out the moral significance of my different responses, as well as my responsiveness, to other people and the moral demand to unconditionally enter into my relationships with other people.

The failure to do so, as well as the awakening recognition of this demand, is portrayed in Nick Hornby's *About a Boy*. The book (2000) and film (2002) follows the changes that Will, a superficial playboy, undergoes through his meeting and growing friendship with the twelve year old boy Marcus. Before meeting Marcus, it is fair to say that people did not really matter to Will. This failure to respond to people in a loving way cannot primarily be explained by a lack of feelings. We might well think that he feels some things for the women whom he meets and treats as commodities for his own enjoyment. Apparently he is attracted to them and he also finds pleasure in them for a while. His failure rather lies in not allowing them to enter his life as other human beings, in not responding to them as someone he could love, or who could matter to him in different ways. If he just took the time to look at and be with people in a certain way, we may think, he would also feel love for them.

This is also what happens in Will's meeting with Marcus. Just by being with the boy, by simply letting him into his house—to begin with literally when Marcus starts appearing at his door after school, and then also metaphorically in the sense of letting him into his life—it becomes difficult for Will to shut himself out of Marcus's life. It becomes difficult not to care, and in coming to care for Marcus it also becomes difficult not to care about the other people in Marcus's life, such as his mother who is suffering from depression. Here, the film makes heavy use of the notion that caring for one human being, makes you care for others. It might sound like a cliché, but it may be said that understanding what it means to care for one person logically involves caring for others as well, to begin with the people whom the one I care about cares about. If Will did not care about what happened

to Marcus's mother, say, we could criticize him for not really *caring* about Marcus.

The concept of "attention", thus, serves to articulate one of the demands we can recognize in regarding our relationships in the light of love. I can accept responsibility and for not giving people the place in my life in which I can come to respond to them and react in new and spontaneous ways. I can be blamed for not giving of myself to others but ignoring and neglecting them in my. I can, as Raimond Gaita says, be "required to love better" (Gaita 1999, 25).⁸⁰ The emphasis on attention, however, should not only be on attending to people in general but on the kind of "loving attention" to objects and people of which both Murdoch Weil and Mikhail Bakhtin (1988) speak. It is not only love that may be said to highlight our perception, and sometimes be accused of darkening our judgements. This is a characterizing feature of all of the emotions. Pulling our focus to distinct features of our situation the different emotions present it in a distinct light.

Just think of the way in which the searing light of hatred shows up every detail of the hated object as flawed. With merciless and meticulous attention every aspect of the hated other is exposed. The sight of him is a strain to the eye. The sound of his laughter grates upon your ear. Even his breath is a cause for irritation. Compare this to the way in which in love you may cherish and rejoice in every aspect of the one you love, finding comfort in her breathing at night, lovingly counting every eyelash and wrinkle. Rather than exposing the other in the cold and unforgiving light of hatred, one could say that love wraps the other in a warm and caring light.⁸¹

Murdoch's stress on loving attention also reminds us of the ways in which loving may involve a struggle. There are times at which I may take a spontaneous dislike to someone and at which a conscious effort on my side is needed to see something else in him than that which I

⁸⁰ The kinds of claims and requirements other people can be said to impose on me will, of course, depend on the kind of relationship I have with someone as well as on the individual relationship. What may be regarded as a failure in my erotic love for you, such as not thinking about you in certain situations, may not constitute a problem in a friendship.

⁸¹ These considerations, as we will see in the continuing discussions of idealizations of love (see chapter 7 and 8), may lead one to raise questions as to which perspective on people show them as they "truly" are. My aim at this point however, is not to give priority to either perspective. So far, I content myself with pointing out the differences between these two cases.

first saw. Nevertheless, I may think that I am responsible for trying to give him the best reading possible. I may try to put aside my hard feelings and listen to him with an open mind. This effort on my side may even be necessary for me to care for, be friends with, or even love him, or just to behave decently towards him. This kind of effort, the attempt to open up to other people, we could say, is an on-going challenge in love. As Murdoch (1997) says, "M is engaged in an endless task" (317). Clearly there is no end to the kind of understanding we may gain of someone through engaging with her in love.

Nevertheless, there are problems involved in the emphasis on effort and struggles if we take this to mean that there is a certain procedure we have to go through. When Murdoch speaks of M attempting to "look again", it sounds as if it is through the act of looking that she comes to react differently towards her daughter-in-law. This ignores the insight that the recognition that her way of viewing D may be unfair already involves a change in what she sees. She no longer sees her descriptions of D as responsive to D, but as expressive of her own negative feelings for her. There is in this way no particular "acts" involved in coming to see D lovingly. It is not that M realizes that she is prejudiced and jealous and then has to go through the procedure of looking at D to see her differently. The realization that her descriptions are prejudiced and jealous already involve an opening up to (seeing her in the light of) love. It may of course be that she still reacts to her with jealousy and prejudice, she fails to love, but this failure does not consist in any particular actions but is a continuation of her difficulty to look at her daughter-in-law with love.

We may compare these considerations to Wittgenstein's (1967) remark, "Seeing is not an action but a state. (A grammatical remark)" (§208). The remark is embedded in a discussion of what it means to *see something as something* and is directed at the notion that seeing (the figure \dagger as either an F or the mirror image of an F) involves an act of interpretation and therefore is an action. This idea also has repercussions for our understanding of the notion of emotions as a *seeing-as*.⁸² It is tempting to take the different descriptions expressive of emotions which people may give as offering examples of the ways in which emotions involve enchanted looks at an otherwise

⁸² See Hamlyn (1983), Roberts (2003), Calhoun (1984) for a discussion of this, as well as my discussion in chapter 2.

disenchanted world. This ignores the immediacy with which I perceive things of which Wittgenstein's remark is a reminder. It also ignores the sense in which our emotions can be said to lend shape to the world. Our seeing in emotion does not involve an interpretation or evaluation of some given facts but a spontaneous reaction towards certain aspects of the situation and to other people, which in itself is a constitutive feature of what these situations *are*, as well as what our meetings with other people *mean*.

III

"ONCE MORE WITH FEELING"

The above reflections may lead one to the following conclusion: Love is active, or within our control, in the sense that we may try to approach people in such a way that it is possible for feelings of love to awaken. Such an approach may involve both how I act and behave towards people and how I try to view them. I try to give them a good reading and so on. Nevertheless, it is passive in the sense that we cannot bring about these feelings by will. This could be seen as one of the ways in which our spontaneous feelings can be said to constitute a limit to our will. They have a constitutive role in what we can meaningfully be said to want. We may hope or wish that we could feel a certain way in a certain situation, but it is not up to us whether we do.

In this picture one may be inclined to say that what I accept responsibility for in promising to love you is to perform certain actions or take up certain attitudes that enable or sustain love. Compare this to Iddo Landau (2004) who claims that the promise of love is a promise to perform "love-sustaining acts" (477).⁸³ However, I am not "really" responsible for love, in the sense that I am not responsible for what I spontaneously feel or do not feel. In other words, if you and I were to "fall out of" love and feel guilty for not

⁸³ As examples of what these "in the modern West [may] typically include" he suggests, "among other things, supporting one's spouse emotionally; helping him or her to cope with physical difficulties; sharing with one's spouse a significant part of one's thoughts, feelings, and hopes (including those that one does not normally share with others); investing time and effort in enhancing the well-being of one's spouse; sharing recreational activities; showing one's spouse that he or she is considered special to one; refraining from extramarital sexual affairs; and refraining from revealing secrets or issues that one's spouse considers private" (Landau 2004, 476-477).

loving each other any longer, it would be reasonable for us to feel guilty for not having paid each other a certain kind of attention, for not creating room for the other in our life. It would not, however, be reasonable or even make sense for us to feel guilty for not feeling the way we did before, for not responding to each other in the sweet spontaneous ways that characterized our former being in love.

Nonetheless, it is far from unintelligible that we may feel guilty precisely for having "lost that lovin' feelin'" (The Righteous Brothers 1964). Certainly we may blame ourselves for not attending enough to each other, or for not attending to each other at all, but we may also blame ourselves for not attending to each other in the right way, *with feeling*. Perhaps we have even tried to create room for feeling in these ways but have not succeeded. At this point, someone committed to the idea that we are only responsible for our actions could say: "Well, even if you may *feel* responsible for it, *in fact* you are not." To a certain extent, this is also right. Nobody else could blame us for not loving anymore. Nobody else could hold us responsible for it in the way we are held responsible for our deliberate actions. We may also realize that there is nothing we can do about it ourselves.

However, there is no reason for taking this to mean that we are not *in fact* or *really* responsible. It is not senseless to feel responsible for love or to react to our lack of or failure to love with guilt or shame. The realization that we cannot do anything about our feelings may well fill us with, and be expressive of, bitterness and despair. This also marks an asymmetry between what it means to talk about responsibility from a third and a first person perspective. Whereas we may think that our practice of holding other people accountable and blaming them for their actions should not exceed a reasonable limit—"You're being too harsh on him. Can't you just forgive him?"—there is no given limit to how far my responsibility in front of *myself* might stretch. Of course, there may come a point at which I need to forgive myself or reconcile myself with not succeeding in doing everything I take on myself to do. However, as far as I see something as expressive of me, it makes sense to feel and think of myself as responsible for it. The guilt and remorse I feel *constitutes* my understanding of what I have done or failed to do. It expresses what it means to think of myself as a responsible being.

This is not to say that it is only myself that I may hold responsible for spontaneous reactions. David Cockburn points out that the idea that we are only responsible for our voluntary actions neglects that we in our life together "care not only about what others *do*, but also about

what they *think* and *feel*." (Cockburn 1995, 416). He offers the example of "a close friend, [who] on seeing me talking with a certain group of people, immediately assumes that I am involved in their plotting". He states that "[w]hat I am distressed about, and perhaps resent" may not be the fact that she "did not reflect more carefully before drawing that conclusion [...] but the fact that *that* was her spontaneous judgment." (Cockburn 1995, 417). And with respect to Murdoch's example of M's daughter-in-law D; are we really supposed to think that she would rejoice in knowing that her mother-in-law at first found her pretty unbearable but then managed to change her vision by making an effort? Is it not disconcerting in itself that M's love for her required an effort?

This is where we may find the truly puzzling part of the problem. How can we be held responsible for what we see or do not see? If we are to take seriously Wittgenstein's remark that seeing is a state that in some way involves passivity, how should we explain our responsibility for such states? This may also be a reason for thinking that it is awkward to consider emotions as a way of seeing. Even if emotions are not actions, they are definitely active. Growing angry, I cannot sit still; I feel my muscles tensing, the colour rising in my face, or the blood draining away from it. In this way, emotions, by contrast to seeing, constitute a more full-fledged response.⁸⁴

The important move in Cockburn's discussion is first and foremost to remind us that the fact that we do hold people responsible for what they think and feel is a significant feature of our moral lives. The following discussions should also reveal why it is important to pay heed to this aspect of our life.⁸⁵ There are, however, also philosophical accounts that attempt to provide a rational justification for why we are responsible for our emotions. I will look at two of them to see what light they may shed on the question at hand.

One of the philosophers who sets out to solve this task is Robert C. Solomon. His work on the cognitive aspects of emotions is in many respects dedicated to showing how we can be said to be responsible

⁸⁴ Cf. Wittgenstein (1967) on our "look": "We do not see the human eye as a receiver, it appears not to let anything in, but to send something out. The ear receives; the eye looks. (It casts glances, it flashes, radiates, gleams.) One can terrify with one's eyes, not with one's ear or nose. When you see the eye you see something going out from it. You see the look in the eye" (§222).

⁸⁵ See Hertzberg (2007) and Diamond (2002) for more helpful reminders about the moral significance of how I see or portray something.

for them. He introduces the notion of emotions as judgements to explain their inherent rationality and thereby our responsibility for them. Emotions, to him, are purposive actions "aimed at changing the world" (Solomon 1980, 262). They have reasons and are intentional, and, therefore, we can be said to be responsible for them, and even choose them. "If emotions are judgements and actions, we can be held responsible for them." (Solomon 1980, 270, see also Solomon 1993). By explaining our responsibility for our emotions with reference to their relation to actions and reasoning, Solomon does not detract from the idea that we are mainly responsible for our (rational) judgements and (intentional) actions, in other words, for what we do out of our free will. He only presents our emotions as yet another aspect of our life that we may choose or reason about. Passions are just to be considered as a different kind of actions.

A similar move is made by Roger Scruton in his discussion of sexual desire. Scruton goes to great lengths to explain how it is that we take the "involuntary" character of smiles, blushes, and arousal, as expressive of "the other 'as he really is'" (Scruton 1986, 64). His reply involves a range of remarks about how our "first person perspectives" (which he identifies with our "selves") are incarnated or revealed in our bodies, the exact status of which is left unclear. The need to go that far, however, is largely dependent on his set-up. Speaking of such "involuntary movements" or changes in our body (his wording not mine) as "founded" on "I-thoughts", or as the embodiment of the first-person perspective of the other (Scruton 1987, 66) is part of his attempt to show that our understanding of sexual desire is bound up with our being rational beings (Scruton 1987, 35). It is in virtue of their rational character, Scruton argues, that my smiles and blushes can be seen as expressive of me.

Scruton tries to steer away from the classical Cartesian dualism between body and soul. Hence, he always puts quotation marks around expressions such as "the perspective that 'peers' from [the face]" (Scruton 1987, 66) or the eye that enables the human person "to 'look out' of his body" (Scruton 1987, 67). However, the attempt to explain how rationality, or persons, are embodied, gives too much to the idea that we might make sense of people as something apart from the embodied human beings that we meet.

Needless to say, I find this emphasis on rationality problematic. Against Scruton, I would argue that it is solely by virtue of presuming that only voluntary actions can be expressive of rationality and thereby an object for responsibility, that one may come to think of

smiles and blushes, as “involuntary changes in another’s body” (Scruton 1987, 68), and not as smiles, blushes and so on. It is only from such a background that our spontaneous reactions to each other become a puzzle to solve, and not a fundamental feature of our understanding of each other.

Both Solomon and Scruton have something important to say about the intentionality of emotions. However, they seriously misrepresent it in their attempts to formulate what it means. In part their problem lies in the apparent assimilation of intentionality with rationality, which also comes to show in their failure to distinguish between the different ways in which we can be said to have reasons for actions, judgements and emotions.⁸⁶ Intentionality, to them, is primarily to be found in our capacity to offer reasons, utter intentions and make rational choices. This also leads them to quite unrecognizable descriptions of our emotional life which are not void of ontological claims. Solomon (1980) suggests that we regard emotions as choices only as “non-deliberate” ones (270) and also proposes that our judgements are somehow subject to our choice. Scruton (1987) offers us the *a priori* claim that: “The thought of the blusher is: ‘I, as a responsible being, am represented in your perspective.’” (65).

Here I will focus on how the tendency to model intentionality on having intentions and acting intentionally comes out in Solomon’s account. He claims that emotions are purposive in the sense that we “use” them to reach certain ends. As an example of this he presents us with a husband whose outrage at his wife at a tiny detail serves to further his wish to stay at home and watch TV instead of going to the party she suggested that they go to (Solomon 1980, 263). He acknowledges that the description, “He did it on purpose”, is not one the husband himself could give to describe his own actions. “If he does [“think to himself “I am being angry in order to...”], he ceases to be angry and continues, at most, only to act angry—to feign anger” (Solomon 1980, 266). Yet, he hangs on to the thought that the husband’s actions and emotions are intentional and purposive.

I find this move obscuring. It is one thing to say that our emotions have certain consequences and that the specific meaning we give and

⁸⁶ Although I have a reason for acting in a certain way, I can, say, choose not to act on it, whereas the reasons I have for feeling a certain way cannot be separated from *what* it is I am feeling. Furthermore, I cannot choose to feel that way just because I recognized a reason for it, and so on. On the whole, Solomon and Scruton offer problematic pictures of what “rationality” involves.

find in them at different times of our lives may be quite different. It is quite a different thing to say that they are something we do on purpose or that we use them to reach certain ends. If the wife points out to her husband that he always acts emotionally when she suggests something in which he is not interested, he may realize that his outbursts often play the part of silencing her. He had considered them to be a just reaction to her suggestion, but in this light justice of his own behaviour is pulled into question and he may be resolved to act differently in the future. Faced with a similar situation, his insight may take the form, "Now, I'm getting angry at her again, instead of just telling her I want to stay at home". However, his recognition that this is an appropriate description of his behaviour, and that this is something he is responsible for, does not require that we regard his anger as an intentional act for making sense.

The point, as I would put it, is rather this: Emotions are part of the larger context of our human life, and have meaning in the different situations and conversations we have about them at different points in our life. These discussions are constitutively indeterminate, in that it is not given from the outset what meaning our emotions have or may come to have to us or to others. The meaning they might have is certainly not exhausted by the purported "use" we may be said to make of them.

I would, therefore, not press the concept of "rationality" to the unrecognizable, but suggest that we regard the question about our responsibility for our emotions in the light of the concept of "meaning". The important move in showing that emotions are not only irrational interruptions in an otherwise rational life is *not* to prove that emotions are also rational, but to remind us of the different parts they play in our attempts to make sense of life. Emotions, as it were, are meaningful in so far as they form part of our life. It is indicative of the presuppositions of the discussion that one feels the need to point out that emotions are always embedded in the contexts of our life and do not strike us as unfathomable interruptions in an otherwise intelligible life. In line with my previous discussions, then, I do not want to search for necessary conditions under which we may be said to experience certain emotions. I want to ask what it means to attribute certain emotions to others and oneself.

Just think of the ways in which my spontaneous reactions may conflict with what I would otherwise say in a situation. Suppose you have enjoyed some success in your work and received very positive reviews on an article you have written. To my surprise I react with a

sting of envy. The realization that I feel envious may be directly followed by a feeling of remorse. "Shouldn't I be happy for you?" Or, I may give no further thought to my reaction but proceed by commenting on what has happened to you by making snide remarks. "Well, these first reactions are usually more positive than the work merits." It is only when you say, "I thought you would be happy for me", that I realize the evident envy of my response.

In the case I see "envy" as a fitting description of my behaviour, it involves the realization that it is something for which you may blame me. My spontaneous reaction casts a shadow on my relationship to you by presenting what I would otherwise say in a new light. If I feel like this, I can no longer truthfully say that I am whole-heartedly, or genuinely, happy for you. Of course, I may admit my envious reaction, and try to suppress such thoughts and feelings in favour of thoughts that are more in line with my overall understanding of our relationship. However, it would not be surprising if you were offended by my spontaneous response, and if we both would find it more revealing of me and my true emotions than any other of my thoughts and rational judgements in and about the situation. We might take them to show that I am, say, more envious or unable to share your joy than I would prefer to think.

Nothing is strikingly odd in this. This is simply what it means to be envious. What would be strange is rather if I claimed that just because my intention was not to feel this way these envious reactions had nothing to do with me. This would truly be something for you to worry about, whereas we need no further explication of why my recognition that I am envious faces me with a demand to change.

Always asking for my intentions or reasons for doing something thus fails to account for the fact that it is precisely the spontaneous character of, say, joy and desire that we value. Not in the sense that it is an immediate reaction but in the sense that it raises a question about the *sincerity* of my response. What is more it can be said to *constitute* the kind of experiences these are. If I have an intention to smile at you, perhaps to hide my dislike from you, and the smile is not expressive of my happiness to see you, it is not a genuine smile. This may also be a reason why we value spontaneous responses in love, since they, as it were, come "straight from the heart".⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Scruton does recognize the importance of these kinds of spontaneous reactions in sexual desire and love. I would not disagree with him there. Where I think he goes

However, even if our spontaneous responses may play this part in distinguishing true emotions from feigned ones, I am not suggesting that we take them as general criteria for settling disputes about what someone truly feels. As we already saw in connection with the husband who wondered whether he really wanted to continue his marriage both his intentions as well as his intuitive desires may have the role of determining the question for him. Pointing to the constitutive role of spontaneous feelings and responses in love is first and foremost a grammatical point about one of the different moves we may make when talking about love. It reminds us that *how* we do something is sometimes fundamental for *what* it is we do, and what this shows about how things are with us.

As I have repeatedly emphasized, however, *how* we do something is not to be determined by some feeling that could be said to accompany our actions. At times I do things for the one I love with joy. It may even be my greatest wish or desire to do it. At other times, my love is expressed by my just doing something, regardless of what I feel. In other situations, I do something because I think it is up to me. It is my responsibility. Yet, at other times there is no question as to whether I want to do something or not. My love rather shows itself in my seeing things or taking in the world in a certain way. I respond to the expression of your wishes as something that makes a demand on me. Nothing forces us to say that some of these cases are more pure "acts of love" than are others.

IV "WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

Part of the problem with invoking rationality and intentionality to explain our responsibility for emotions is that it assumes that everything for which we can be said to be responsible shares a common feature. Emotions are considered to be a sub-class of rational actions which in turn are considered to share a general structure, of which intentions, reasons, desires are a part. In this way, neither Scruton nor Solomon completely succeeds in releasing themselves from the picture that intentions or desires/wants—one may also discuss whether it is fair to lump these concepts together—are components of our actions that either (1) brings them about, (2) make

wrong is in the attempt to explain why it is that they are important. He does not stop at simply regarding this feature a fundamental feature of our life.

the actions intentional or voluntary (cf. Hertzberg 1995), or (3) serve as necessary conditions (or criteria) for judging something to be a case of “wanting” or “intending”. The latter suggestion is probably most in line with what Solomon and Scruton would take themselves to be doing.

This attempt to give a unitary account of what intentional actions consist in fails to attend to the situations in which the question of what I or you want may arise. They do not consider what it is that I or you are asking for in such situations, but simply assume that one could, *a priori*, give a general answer to what constitutes our wanting to do something. This leads at least Scruton to the narrow idea that we may in general distinguish between voluntary actions on the one hand, and involuntary bodily movements or events that take place independently of us on the other hand. Thus, he operates with the suggestion that we may raise the question what someone wants in any situation, and that we in all cases where such a question arises are asking for the same thing. This neglects the different attitudes we may take to something in bringing in “wanting” as a perspective on the action. It also fails to notice that asking whether I or you want to do something may sometimes be misleading.

What, for instance, can be said to be common to all of the following instances?

1. I plan a surprise dinner for you. The whole experience of picking up flowers and buying food is exhilarating. I look forward to the joy in your face, I think about how you will react, and so on. Here, it may well be possible to trace a line of intentions behind my actions. I make lists of what I will do, and so on.
2. You blame me for my lame reaction at hearing about some wrong you have suffered. Caught up in my own thoughts, I did not recognize the concerned look on your face or listen to what you were telling me. I say, “I’m sorry, I did not want to hurt you!” (“It was not my intention!”) Do we have to assume that there was some other intention behind my actions?
3. You want to discuss a certain aspect of our relationship which I do not feel up to doing. Nevertheless, I do it because you ask me to. At first I am reluctant but after a while my initial hesitation disappears and I find myself completely engulfed in the discussion. My spontaneous desire is stirred by what I first

considered as an obligation. Or, I gnarl throughout the discussion, but afterwards I agree that it was good that we talked about it.

4. We are locked in an embrace. My hands move across your body.⁸⁸ Do I have an intention that I try to mediate in my caresses? Am I acting intentionally?⁸⁹ Certainly, my movements are not arbitrary or involuntary like a spasm, but I would hesitate to talk about an intention behind my action. That sounds as if I had some plans with my caresses that I do not reveal to you. The desire to touch and feel you need not be seen in anything other than my touches and caresses, such as in a mental act that accompanies my caresses. All the same, it is clear what it is I am doing.
5. You are going on a trip. I ask, "When are you coming back? I'll pick you up at the airport." You tell me the time and I realize that I have another appointment then. I say, "It's ok. I'll just change my schedule." You ask, "Are you really sure that you want to do it. You're not just doing it because you think you have to?" I assure you that I really want to do it. If you had not asked me I might not have given it any extra thought. And notice that it may be important for you that I do something because *I* want to, and not because you want me to, or because I want to "be nice".
6. My sister is getting married. Will I be there? Yes. Do I take it into consideration in my plans? Yes. Making another appointment with someone else, I say, "The 10th of June, is impossible. It's my sister's wedding day." There is no question as to whether I am going to attend the wedding, but do I want to do it? It is *not* that I do it unwillingly or against my will. If forced I might concede that I, of course, want to go, but the question of whether I want to or not simply does not arise. "It

⁸⁸ Speaking about your "body" here is not meant to introduce a metaphysical distinction between "you" and your "body". I might as well have said that I am caressing you. "Body" here rather serves to point out what parts I am touching, chest, sides, back, not your face, etc.

⁸⁹ Cf. Scruton (1986): "A caress of affection is a gesture of reassurance, an attempt to place in the consciousness of the other an image of one's own tender concern for him. [...] the caress of desire [...] aims to fill the surface of the other's body with a consciousness of one's interest—interest not only in his body, but also in him as embodied, in his body as an integral part of his identity as a self" (23).

is my sister's wedding. Of course I will go." The whole question of what I want seems misplaced.

7. The past years of our life together have been filled with quarrels and suspicions. Feeling that I have had enough of the constant arguing I say, "I do not want to go on fighting like this anymore. I can't take it." What is it that has changed in my reaction? Is there something in my actions, such as a desire, that was there before but now is missing?

This is not intended as a complete list of cases in which we may or may not speak about wanting to do something in our relationships of love. Rather I introduced the examples with the hope that the recognition that there is a variety of ways in which we may speak about wanting would relieve us of the temptation to think that all cases share a common structure that turn them into cases of wanting. Recognizing this should also make us less willing to think that there has to be one common feature to all the different situations in which we may speak of being responsible for something, and to think that the relation between will and responsibility can always be described in the same way.

Furthermore, I wanted to show that speaking of wanting does not consist in picking out a component of an action that turns it into an act of willing or brings the action about by contrast to a mere happening. Even if we may speak about doing something "with feeling" or about having different intentions with our actions we do not have to think of these feelings and intentions as inner objects accompanying our actions. Rather I propose that we look at "wanting" as one of the perspectives we may take on our actions by contrast to other possible understandings of them. We do different things when we say that something was an intentional or unintentional action, just as we do when we distinguish something we do willingly from something we do unwillingly or against our will.

I have also wanted to point out that far from every meaningful action falls under one of these categories. The question of what I want to do or not to do does not have sense regardless of the situation in which it is uttered. Compare this with Stanley Cavell (1976) who remarks that "we do not accept a question like 'Did you do that voluntarily?' as appropriate about any and every action" (9). It is only against the background of our life and our relationships with other people that it becomes evident what it is we ask for when we ask what someone wants to do. The same is true for what we regard as options

for deciding what one wants or the meaningfulness of asking for what he or she wants in the first place. What I am suggesting in the place of the attempt to explain our responsibility in love by reference to our will, therefore, is a shift in our philosophical focus to how the question of what we want may enter as a meaningful perspective into our responsible and loving relationships with each other and the different roles it may have there.⁹⁰

Rush Rhees (1969) said that "the person in love is different; life is different for him, or the whole world is different for him" (124-125). This, I would suggest, is one way we may understand this comment: Love does not only involve the way I view and respond to you and our relationship, but, with the risk of over-dramatising, the way I view my entire world. It sets the stage with things that have an unconditional meaning and importance for me, by contrast to the conditional character of my desires. Time not spent with you can be seen as time away from you, and a crush on someone else that might have blossomed into love if it were not for my love for you, must remain an infatuation at most, or becomes a threat to our love. In this sense, saying "I love you" is a way of marking the perspective from which I want you and others to regard my actions, intentions and desires. It is the perspective against which I accept responsibility, criticism and even blame for what I do, and who I am. If we bear these aspects of love in mind it should come as no surprise that we promise to love somebody in our wedding vows. The words, "I love you" are in themselves a promise to give you an important place in my life. It is an acknowledgement of the claims this makes on me and an expression of my responsibility before you and my promise.

V "A LIMIT TO MY WILL"

These considerations also have consequences for another way in which questions of my will and freedom may enter into love. To anticipate the discussion in part two love is sometimes spoken of as a bond, implying that love is something that may also bind us. A

⁹⁰ This is not to suggest that we rather explain our desires and intentions with reference to love. Love is not e.g. to be seen as expressing a "higher-order desire" or a "strong evaluation" against which our "first-order desires" are judged. On the whole, I am not trying to explain anything, but rather want to remind us of the contexts that are needed for us to understand what is meant by speaking about "wanting" in different situations.

similar idea is found in the notion that other people are “limits to my will”. This is a formulation which Raimond Gaita (2004) often uses. Like Murdoch in respect to the concept of “attention”, he also takes this expression from Simone Weil. This picture of our moral experience is descriptive up to a certain point. This is the sense in which the tears welling up in your eyes at finding out what I have done to you may reveal to me the significance of what I have done. Another articulation of this experience of being limited by something which is independent of me is found in Emmanuel Lévinas’ (1985) picture of the face of the other as something that prevents me from wrongdoing (89).

However, the expression also opens for a way of understanding the relationship between what I can be said to want and my relationships with other people that is misleading. This happens when one takes the moral point Gaita and Weil are making out of context to constitute an epistemological remark about the human individual. Or, to formulate it slightly differently, it happens when one tries to present us with an epistemology of the human individual without recognizing the kind of morality of which this epistemology is expressive. From this perspective, other people primarily appear to me as obstacles preventing me from realizing my freedom by exercising my will.

This picture assumes, first, that my will can be construed as a given entity which it makes sense to speak about prior to my meetings with other people. My will takes the form of an almost invincible force within me which is either necessarily constrained or needs to be subdued in my relationships with others. Second, it presents my will as something that is always to be understood in contrast to the wills of others. Every meeting with another human being involves a compromise of my will, or at least the possibility of its being compromised. In that sense, love is seen as something that limits my freedom. This way of over-emphasizing the spontaneous character of our will invites us to give an almost metaphysical status to it.

This is not to deny that there are times at which it is meaningful to speak about the will in such ways. There are times at which I may feel that other people prevent me from doing what I want, and at which I would have continued with a different course of actions if it were not for their wishes. There are also situations in which I may think that my spontaneous wishes run counter to the demands of love. However, the suggestion that we could always understand the will as a general contrast to the demands of love, fails to acknowledge that saying that I want something may also be expressive of love. It also

assumes the view criticized above that we only speak about wanting something in one way.

By contrast to the idea that the demands my love for other people make on me serve as limits to my actions or my will, I want to claim that recognizing something as a demand, or acting out of a sense of responsibility, does not in itself constitute a problem for love. Seeing something as a demand in my relationships with other people is already an expression of love. It is only in the light of love that aspects of my relationships appear to me as demands. The recognition of something as a demand reveals my commitment to what happens to other people and my relationship with them and is an important aspect of my involvement with them.

As I said, I do not want to deny that one may relate to other people mainly as limits to one's freedom, nor that such a view may be expressive of a person's complete outlook on life. Even in love there are times when commitments feel like chains, and responsibility becomes a burden. The cry, "I don't want to go on like that", exemplifies one such situation. Seeing other people as intruders in my life, as unwanted limits to my freedom, however, implies a perspective that is quite distinct from love. It regards other people as imposing on my life, as opposed to love in which other people may rather be said to make up my life, by endowing it with meaning.

In this respect, we should not forget that love not only makes claims on me but also gives me the opportunity to act in ways I could not act but for love. It places me in a world in which people matter to me, in which they are precious and meaningful to me, and it allows me to matter, to mean something for them. Thus, I may rather respond to the claims that love makes on me with gratitude instead of resentment. Even talking about "claims" or "demands" may be too strong a word for the meanings with which love and other people endow my life.

EPILOGUE: EMOTION

THE PSYCHOLOGY AND MORALITY OF EMOTION

The study of emotions is made difficult by the fact that the word “emotion” is used in ways that are far from representing a unitary phenomenon. Our use of emotion-words range from speaking about sensations; the fuzzy feelings in one’s stomach, the surge of rage rising in one’s body, the welling up of tears, to behaviour; the clenching of fists, the heightened voice, the reddening face, the grief-laden step, to elaborate moral discourses regarding the implications of responsibility, shame, remorse and guilt. It is, I would argue, vain to search for one single feature that would keep all of these instances together, entitling them to the word “emotion”, or to the name of any of the individual emotions, fear, anger, joy, pity, remorse, guilt, anxiety, love, hate, and so on. Rather it may be said that our different uses of the *concept* of emotion—that is not only emotions as a phenomenon—are held together by an array of “family resemblances” (cf. Wittgenstein 1997, §66ff). Some uses of emotion-words overlap, creating patterns of responses to others and to what is happening to oneself which are connected with each other in different ways. However, it may not be possible to find one aspect of these uses that run through all of the different uses.

I would not, for instance, agree with Griffiths (1997) who gives passivity the significant role in determining what we understand as emotions. Or, I should rather say, what we *should* understand as emotions, since Griffiths sees an intolerable vagueness precisely in the fact that the word “emotion” has no clear referent. It is true that this is an aspect of many situations in which we express different emotions, and I will shortly return to why I think that what I have talked about as spontaneity constitutes one central aspect of emotions. But it is far from true that every occasion on which it is meaningful to speak about an emotion has this passive element, or even that we need to

emphasize the spontaneous character of emotions. Sometimes our commitment to certain emotions is more or less chosen. Responding to another in an emotional manner is considered the proper response. "Do I have to become angry for you to understand that I am serious?" Our committing ourselves to an emotional understanding of the situation may in such situations have more to do with our over-all understanding of a situation than with our present physiological reactions. This is, of course, also what leads Griffiths to discard certain emotions, the disclaimed actions, as pseudo-emotions (Griffiths 1997, 245).⁹¹

The preceding discussions have all involved an implicit, and sometimes, explicit criticism of the philosophical tendency to neglect the above mentioned *diversity* when philosophizing about emotions. The search for one defining feature is a characteristic of most contemporary accounts of emotion, whether one puts one's focus on some physiological changes, some feelings or perceptions, as in the Neo-Jamesian accounts (Griffiths, Prinz) or on some thoughts or beliefs or judgements as in the cognitive theories of emotion (Taylor, Solomon). All such accounts of emotions suffer from feeding on too limited a range of examples by allowing their pre-conceived notions about what emotions are direct their choice of examples. The first takes for its starting point the physiological processes of emotion, the second their mental, and also moral, character.

As one remedy to such a limited diet of examples Wittgenstein proposed, among other things, that we look at the situations in which we come to gain a grasp of the concepts in our life. Here are some; (1) A father reaches out to get hold of his son, "Wait, the stairs are dangerous! You might fall! Daddy will go first." The child may be more scared by the tone of the parent's voice than the actual stairs, but stops and waits. (2) A mother comforts her whimpering child, "Don't be sad! I wasn't angry with you. I was just worried that something might have happened to you. That was why I spoke so loudly." (3) A child instructs a toy animal. "Have you been disobedient once again? Now, I'm getting really angry with you!"

It should be clear from the start that what the children can be said to learn in these cases is not something that can be captured and served in a neat package. At times they can be said to learn something about their own responses. They find new ways of articulating their

⁹¹ Cf. chapter 1, p. 62.

own reactions. Instead of crying out, or in addition to it, they say "That hurt!", in the place of hitting their siblings, they tell their parents, "She stole my car!" At other times they can be said to learn new responses. They find that *saying* something, expressing wishes, thoughts, feelings and the like, may itself elicit a response in others. Or they find ways of verbally responding to other people that were not within their reach earlier. They may tell their siblings, "Don't do that or Mommy will be mad at you". They come in contact with and learn to master a more complex vocabulary consisting of concepts such as justice, rights, obligations, bravery, cowardice, and so on.

What I want to bring out, however, is that by learning to master their language within these meetings with other people, children come to grasp the internal relations between certain aspects of our life. The child learns that "falling" is connected with "getting hurt", that "getting hurt" is something one may be "afraid of", that a loud voice may be an expression of "fear", "anger" or "worry". An aspect that I hope will become increasingly clear throughout this work is how closely connected these aspects are with our understanding of our relations to other people.⁹² The child learns that their parents may be worried about them getting hurt, and that they will, hopefully, watch out for them in dangerous situations. It learns in what contexts it is meaningful to say certain things, what makes sense in a particular situation and what not. The parent is not, say, laughing and being happy at the prospect of the child falling or at hearing that a window broke, and so on.

It is important to consider such cases of learning (in our natural history) for at least two reasons which are internally related.

(1) Philosophers often take our understanding of ourselves (our thoughts, beliefs, and feelings) as given. Too much priority is often given to the first person perspective. It is assumed that it makes sense to discuss my feelings or beliefs as individual "objects" within individual "subjects". This often goes with only considering human beings as adults at given moments of time and not giving enough room to the reflection that we are beings who live through time and change and learn in and through that life.

⁹² By contrast to Wittgenstein's (1976) quote of Goethe's "Im Anfang war die Tat" (420) Buber suggested that "In the beginning is relation" (Buber 2004, 22). Both these formulations, of course, form a contrast to the biblical, "In the beginning was the Word".

(2) When discussing the meaning of different words philosophers, or we, when philosophizing, often tend to forget the contexts within which these words are used. We forget that they have meaning *in* our life and that the meanings of our words are not external to the use we make of them there.

What then do these considerations of the context of our expressions and attributions of emotions tell us with respect to love? First of all, we need to consider the question whether it is always fruitful to consider love as an emotion. I have chosen to begin my discussions by considering questions pertaining to the philosophy of emotions but I have also pointed out in which ways it is not helpful to search for an understanding of love in the context of emotions. Rather than understanding love as some kind of inner or outer object, I have suggested that we need to understand the concept against the background of what I have called the moral drama that is our life.

I do not think there is any one answer to the question whether love belongs to the emotions or not. Rather the answers we may give depend on what we are asking for in the different situations in which the question may arise. In some situations, a discussion of emotions may help to shed light on questions concerning love. In others, it may be helpful to discuss love as an example of emotion to show that our emotional understanding in some cases is more complex than we thought at first. Yet again, in other situations we may think it better not to bring emotions into our discussion at all.

My main reason for introducing emotions into the discussion is that the understanding which love can be said to constitute is in many ways an emotional, and thereby in important respects an embodied, understanding. First of all, the understanding that love, among the other emotions, constitutes is often characterized by a certain indeterminacy. In attending to the ways in which we speak about emotions and love, therefore, we need to pay heed to the ways in which there are sometimes differences in how we take in or are engaged in the world. Furthermore, I have discussed the different ways in which spontaneity can be seen as a central aspect of love as well as of the other emotions. I have taken this spontaneous feature to remind us of (1) the unreflected, embodied, character of not only many of our emotional reactions but of understanding as a whole, the sense in which we immediately respond to the situation as being in a certain way, as well as, (2) the role spontaneity may have for questions about the sincerity of our words and actions. Here I have found it particularly illuminating to consider how we are responsible

for other emotions to see how questions of responsibility also enter into love.

Nevertheless, there are situations in which a discussion of emotions appears too narrow for understanding love. This may lead us to assign to love a much more fundamental role in our relationships with each other than any of the other emotions.⁹³ A consideration of the ways talk about love ties in with talk about other emotions may help us gain a deeper understanding of love, by reminding us of the ways in which love is related to our being sentient and embodied beings who respond to each other and the world emotionally. They remind us of our longing to touch and feel the one we love. However, focusing solely on these aspects of love may incline one to believe that it is possible to provide a psychological description of love, with which I mean a description which takes the human mind or individual as consisting in a system of beliefs, judgements, emotions and desires. Confining our discussions of love to such an understanding, I have argued, involves a reduction not the least of the moral character of much of our conversations about love.

For one thing, the significance that you have to me in love cannot meaningfully be reduced to the feelings you give rise to. Here we also see the importance of the cognitive stress that emotions are directed at something or someone. They are constitutive of an understanding of something other than *ourselves*. What matters to me is not the way *I* feel but *you*. For another thing, I have tried to show the ways in which love can be said to constitute a moral demand. Against this background one could also suggest that our emotions rather express different ways of reacting to the demands of love. As I showed in my discussion of the marriage between Rosamond and Lydgate in the second chapter, their different emotional reactions to each other tell us something about their love and their failures to love. Much of our understanding of the psychological aspects of love will thus come from understanding them in contrast to, and as distinctive from these rather moral aspects of love.

Furthermore, I have wanted to bring our attention to the fact that we do different things when we speak about love. If we only approach the concept of love from a psychological perspective there is

⁹³ Cf. Brentano's (1973) suggestion that love and hate are the two basic emotions which the rest of the emotions build on. See also Hamlyn's (1983) discussion of the "Phenomena of Love and Hate", as well as Freud's distinction between *eros* and *tanatos* as the two leading drives of the human being (cf. Lear 1998).

a great temptation to model our conversations about love on the reporting of isolated states or processes within the individual. This temptation will be the same even for those who regard emotions and love as socially constructed in interaction with other people. Now, there is no denying that we sometimes do report on our emotions and our love in this way. However, we should not forget that this is only one very specialized form of a wide variety of uses of these concepts. When we speak out of love, or about it, we are confessing, appealing, blaming, accusing, gushing, and so on.

Rather than focusing on the phenomena, I have, therefore, wanted to examine our uses of the words. What is involved in expressing one's own emotions, or choosing to hide them? I have commented on the fact that in many situations these expressions are expressive of a moral understanding of the situation. They grow out of our reactions to what happens to ourselves and to other people. They constitute responses to other people and to what our life with them means for us.

PART TWO

IDENTITY

PROLOGUE: IDENTITY

“IN THE NAME OF LOVE”⁹⁴

One of Tove Jansson’s (1995) short stories about the Moomin Valley is about the encounter between the philosophically inclined vagabond Snufkin on his way back to the valley after a winter of traveling and a small Creep. “Two shy eyes under a mop of hair. Just the look people have who are never noticed” (Jansson 1995, 7). The Creep is overwhelmed at meeting Snufkin, whose reputation has preceded him, and keen to find out about his travels, listen to his songs and possibly be given a name by Snufkin, since so far he has none. Rather than telling stories, even bragging about his adventures, however, Snufkin is reluctant to say anything. He is afraid that if he talks about his walks, the only thing that will be left of his experience is his story. He also feels annoyed at being bothered in his loneliness. The song he was about to write has disappeared and the atmosphere he was enjoying has gone with it. The Creep feels his irritation, and starts to be on its way, but before it goes, Snufkin gives it the name of Teety-woo.

After Teety-woo has gone, Snufkin regrets his reactions. It is only when he turns around to find Teety-woo and talk to him again that his songs return. When he finds Teety-woo, however, the positions have changed. Wrapped up in being his own person, in existing for real now that he has a name, Teety-woo is too busy to speak with Snufkin. The story ends with Snufkin being alone again and thinking about his melody.

The aspects of the story that I want to focus on here is, first, Snufkin’s reluctance to talk about his journeys and, second, the meaning having a name acquires for Teety-woo. Now, Snufkin’s reluctance to talk about what he has been through strikes a familiar chord. At some point probably everyone has felt the difficulty of

⁹⁴ U2 (1984).

conveying an experience, or had the feeling that what one is left with after talking about something is only one's words. Here, we may feel that our words fail us, either in the sense that they do not succeed in conveying what we want to convey or in the sense that our words take us away from the experience. The same kind of difficulty may make itself known in our attempts to describe another person, or ourselves. I may find it impossible to communicate to others who you are or what you mean to me. I may feel that no description captures you, my feelings for you and our life, but that any description I give by necessity involves a reduction. You, as it were, are always something other than my description of you.

I will wager to say that it is such kinds of experience that have led some continental thinkers with a psychoanalytic background (Kristeva 1977, Irigaray 1985) to speak of language as limiting or as separating us from certain experiences of life. In dividing our world into categories, in unifying different phenomena under *one* word, they say, we lose sight of ambiguity and differences that may be important. The underlying idea is that in language we give the particular a general form; we cast all experiences in the same mould. Thereby, we focus only on what unites different experiences and not on what separates them. In other words, when we speak, we lose the particular. This one may fear, entails losing that which really matters. (Cf. Hansen 2005, 368.)

A similar thought is expressed in the insistence of Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* (2008) that Abraham, on his walk to sacrifice his son, cannot be mediated.

Abraham [...] cannot talk. So soon as I talk I express the universal, and if I do not do so, no one can understand me. (Kierkegaard 2008, 43)

For if I when I speak am unable to make myself intelligible then I am not speaking—even though I were to talk uninterruptedly day and night. Such is the case with Abraham. [...] The relief of speech is that it translates me into the universal. (Kierkegaard 2008, 83).

In other words, for our words to be words, and not just babble, they need to be comprehensible, but that means that the incomprehensible, the mysterious, necessarily must remain outside the language that we speak. But what, then, are we to make of the situations in which we want to convey that which we do not comprehend?

These notions of language appeal to some of our experiences, but we should be careful to get this point right. Otherwise we may easily

end up doing metaphysics, which I believe is the case with both Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Their problem seems to be that they allow a variety of experiences to form an emotional background for a quite dubitable thesis about the nature of language. For Kierkegaard the notion that some things are unspeakable rather has a religious background. To slightly reformulate his position, I think it is right to say that Kristeva and Irigaray in many ways dress up a moral problem in epistemological clothes. Let me try to clarify this notion by showing how I think the story of Teety-woo may reflect on the following discussions of identity and personhood in the context of love.

Both the story and the doubts about the ability of language to convey certain experiences take hold of the double-edged character of our practices of giving names to people, as well as to things although I will concentrate on the first here. In fact, I will argue that many problems arise from the tendency to draw too close analogies between naming, or putting words on things, and giving names to people—and it should be clear from the beginning that the difference between knowing what a thing is and knowing a person is immense (cf. Hamlyn 1983, 215-217). Another source of confusion is the thought that words primarily function to give names to objects as well as the belief that all acts of giving names have the same form.

On the one hand, the sense of giving names to people is connected with the significance they have for us. The fact that we call people by name and not by numbers shows us something about what it is for someone to be an individual, or to be "someone" in the first place. (Cf. Gaita 1990, 129; Gaita 2004, 154; Diamond 1991b; Cockburn 1989, 80.) Quite contrary to the claim that naming serves to conceal the particular, giving you a proper name and calling you by is expressive of the recognition that you are a particular individual. Think, for instance, of the ways in which we may show love and affection by playfully giving each other nick-names, names that do not often leave our personal conversations.

On the other hand, and this is the aspect that continental philosophers more often catch hold of, "calling people names" is precisely a way of reducing their humanity as well as their individuality.⁹⁵ By thinking that either I, you, or somebody else, can be

⁹⁵ These philosophers often try to show in what ways naming relates to power, and control. In knowing your name I have control over you. This appears to be one aspect of the profundity Wittgenstein thought was expressed in the Grimm fairy-tale about

captured in a name (or better a description), they argue, that I turn myself, you, him or her into a thing. (Cf. Sartre's discussion of bad faith, Sartre 2003, and chapter 5 below.) In the following discussions, I will return to the different ways in which we may reduce human beings to some unchangeable facts or stereotypes and the different roles it may have in our conversations with each other.⁹⁶

Now, both these aspects of giving names to someone are apparent in the case of Snufkin and Teety-woo. Before Snufkin no one had asked for the small creature's name, and by asking for its name Snufkin was the first to show an interest in *him*. After Teety-woo's "baptism" his life is suddenly for real.

You see, before I had a name I just used to hop around, and perhaps feel this or that about this or that, and everything was simply happening around me, sometimes nice things and sometimes not nice, but nothing was real [...] Now I'm a person and everything that happens means something. Because it doesn't only happen, it happens to *me* (Jansson 1995, 15).

But, even though Teety-woo comes to be someone in a way he was not before, this coming into being also has more problematic features. His second meeting with Snufkin is free of the admiration that characterized his first—to quote Snufkin, "You can't ever be free if you admire somebody too much" (Jansson 1995, 9)—but although he has freed himself from that, he is now caught up in himself. He is too busy being someone to have time to be (someone) with Snufkin.

Hence, rather than assigning to "naming" the single function of generalizing the particular, we should stay aware of the quite different things we do when we give people first names, nicknames, name objects, sullen someone's name, and so on. Part of the metaphysical move in portraying language, *qua* language and not as particular words used in particular contexts, as limiting is also that one does not pay enough attention to the different ways in which we give people names or offer descriptions. This, together with the suggestion that this feature is an inescapable property of language, conceals the fact that the problems we are facing here are not

Rumpelstiltskin. In the fairy-tale, the dwarf's power resided in no one knowing his name (Pascal 1979, 30-31).

⁹⁶ Think e.g. of what it may mean to say, "You know I am forgetful." That is, "Do not blame me for not remembering." Or, "Do you always have to be so irritable", "You never change", "Black people are more musical than others."

problems that are inherent to "naming" or to language, but problems that concern our moral life with each other.

It is not language, as a linguistic system, which makes us call people names, give them labels or put them into categories. This is something that *we* do. Language, in the first place, does not do things: we do things in language. Neither would there be something such as "language" if it were not for its speakers. This is not to say that our life with language may not tempt us to portray our problems with each other as if they were linguistic problems or even imagine that they are so. Nevertheless, arguing for such a position is only a way of covering up problems that lie somewhere else.

Quite a recurring thought, when talking with people about love, is the idea that talking too much about love may in some ways destroy it. One should not say "I love you" too often, for then it loses its meaning. Or, one should not enter certain discussions too deeply, or on the whole, for then the magic is lost. This ties in with the sometimes offered suggestion that there is a danger involved in knowing each other too well in love. Such notions add another dimension to the idea that our words sometimes fail us, although there is something paradoxical in thinking both that our words necessarily fail to completely convey an experience, and that our actually expressing the experience in language serves to reduce it.

I do not want to claim that there are no things we may say that may jeopardize a relationship. Nevertheless, the suggestion that it is the talking as such that is dangerous, and not *what* we say or *how* we say it, reveals several confusions. Words can certainly lose meaning, but this is because *we* fail to give them meaning. We fail to be in our words, to be sincere. I say, "I love you", out of routine. You carelessly tell me "what you think", without considering whether this is really anything you want to stand behind. With the risk of sounding too dramatic, I would say that the only way in which we may say something, in the deepest sense of the word, is by meaning what we say.⁹⁷

A similar failure to appreciate the different roles of language is revealed in Irigaray (2004) writing, "Certainly, I will never understand you, I will never grasp who you are: you will always remain outside of me. But this not being *I*, not being *me*, or *mine*, makes speech

⁹⁷ Many philosophical problems, however, start off in that that as linguistic creatures we are sometimes tempted to believe that we are saying something when we are not.

possible between us" (15). Now, as I will try to show, there is a sense in which I can never completely and finally understand who you are, or rather *what* you are, to bring out a distinction that will be crucial for the following discussion. A description of what you are can never succeed in bringing out your individuality. Or, as Hannah Arendt writes,

The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a "character" in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us. (Arendt 1959, 161)

Nevertheless, this does not mean that it never makes sense to say, "I understand you". On the contrary, this may be a very meaningful thing to say. The crucial point, however, is recognizing that this utterance does not need to be understood in the sense that there is something *specific* that I understand and that I pick out in talking about "you". Neither do we have to think of it as something I may gain exhaustive knowledge of. Rather it is holding on to the idea that this is always what "understanding" means that leads Irigaray to the problematic suggestion that "I can never understand you". In that respect, she also ends up with a metaphysical notion of understanding as only consisting in having knowledge about someone or something. This does not pay attention to the distinctions that can be made between speaking about "understanding" in different cases.⁹⁸

As a contrast to this way of conceiving understanding, I will try to show the sense in which saying, "I understand you" can be a way of attending to, or being there for you, which cannot be reduced to being concerned with only your psychological characteristics.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Compare Hamlyn's (1983) criticism of Sartre for employing a Cartesian picture of what it is to know other minds. This picture presupposes a "radical division between consciousness and what is bodily" which makes it impossible to get to "another's consciousness though his body" (Hamlyn 1983, 211). "Certainly Sartre seems to adopt an overintellectual and restricted concept of knowledge; I do not myself see why an emotional awareness should not be spoken of as knowledge" (Hamlyn 1983, 203). And further, "Whatever the metaphysical basis of Sartre's view, the picture that results surely fails to fit the facts. If we fail to understand another person it is because the task is just too difficult, not because it was doomed to failure from the start through some kind of metaphysical necessity" (Hamlyn 1983, 211).

⁹⁹ This is neither to be equated with being identical with you, as Irigaray also points out.

Furthermore, I will discuss in what ways "understanding" or "knowing" you in this sense is related to having a personal relationship with you and, therefore, has a moral character. Even if it is illusory to think that we could give an epistemological description of *what* I, you or we are, I will suggest that it is still a worthwhile endeavour to reflect upon the kind of moral question it is to ask ourselves and others who we are.

4

“YOU ARE THE REASON”¹⁰⁰

*The things we won't do for love
I'd climb a mountain if I had to
And risk my life so I could have you
You, you, you...
Tracy Chapman (1988)*

*Infatuation is a state that precedes identity. Just as a person has no need of a name for his own sake (one 'knows' who one is), so too the beloved needs no name. A name would limit her without reason, because she's simply too uch for a single name.
P. F. Thomése (2005, 8)*

Asked to explain why he became friends with his friend, Étienne de La Boétie, Montaigne (1894) replied, “Because it was he, because it was my selfe” (85). This is one of the better replies to an utterly elusive question: “Why does x love y ?” To many philosophers, however, this query seems to make perfect sense. At least they are willing to elaborate on *general* questions of this kind and to try to formulate general answers to them.¹⁰¹ The assumption seems to be that every true assertion beginning with the word “why” is indeed a question that may be asked and also answered. If one takes their quest seriously, it must, as it were, always be possible to provide an explanation of why we do the things we do.

Most philosophers dealing with general questions and answers of this kind appear quite oblivious of the situations in which such questions do arise and play a part in our life. They do *not* discuss the disdain in saying “Why do you love him?” (i.e. such a useless creature) or “I can't see how anyone could fall in love with her.” They

¹⁰⁰ Dion (1997).

¹⁰¹ See Taylor (1979) for one quite common strand of thought in analytic philosophy, especially in the discussion of the emotions.

ignore the despair of "Why can't I stop loving you" (especially considering that I seem to have no reason to). They neglect the curiosity, the vanity or self-contempt in which I may urge you to respond, "Tell me, why do you love *me*?" Perhaps it is the "craving for generality" of which Wittgenstein (1965a, 17-18) accused philosophers which leads them to assume that the particular case in which these sentences are uttered does not matter for the sense we may make of them. Or, perhaps it is an idea that the situations in which these questions are asked and the emotions they are expressive of, only add a certain colour or flavour to a question which in principle is the same.

However, I want to argue that paying attention to the situations in which I or you may ask why we or somebody else loves is essential for understanding the different kinds of questions this may be. I say this especially since it is far from clear that talking about love in these ways is always best described as posing a question. Saying "Why do ...", may, as I mentioned, be done out of disdain, despair, curiosity or contempt. This should alert us to the fact that what concerns me or you in saying such things may not primarily be finding an explanation of someone's love, but voicing our own attitude towards it. This is at its most obvious in situations in which, "Why do you love him?", is a way of calling someone's love into question.

When assessing the different kinds of answers philosophers have given to their general question, we should therefore not lose sight of the different situations in which such questions may actually arise. Who is posing them and to whom? Are they expressive of interest, concern, or dislike? What may count as an answer, or a good answer, to these questions, if we are looking for answers in the first place? If we leave out the concrete contexts in which the words "why" and "love" are used, we run the risk of merely assuming that we know what the question is about. This will, of course, by necessity be reflected in the answers that we give.

The following discussion centers around two sets of issues. After some general comments about the place reasons have been given in discussions of love and in philosophy in general, I discuss the problems involved in thinking of love as directed at something specific. I make a distinction between liking and loving to show that love is better understood as a bond between human beings, than as a reaction to, or preference for, certain features of another person. I, then, point out that understanding love as having reasons makes love conditional, and question the aptness of such an understanding of love.

I
MADNESS WITHIN REASON

As we saw in the previous discussion of the role of thoughts and beliefs in love and the other emotions, the philosophical questions as to why we do or feel something are mainly raised in the context of reasons and justification. Behind the idea that our emotions are constituted by their cognitive content is an effort to show that emotions do *not* cloud our judgement as philosophers have often argued, but are in themselves judgements or beliefs, which may be justified. Thus, it is argued that emotions are not necessarily the opposite of reason but have a rationality of their own.

As we have seen, we may well agree that emotions (1) are not blind occurrences but intimately bound to the different situations in which they occur and (2) internally related to our understanding of the situation we are in. However, for that sake, we do not have to agree that this is necessarily a feature of rationality. On the contrary, I want to argue that philosophers who bring reasons into a discussion of love go awry precisely in their attempts to make love rational.

This failure can be seen in (1) the failure to acknowledge that the demand for rational justification or explanation of our actions and of our emotions does not always have a meaningful place in conversation, or has a very problematic one indeed, and (2) how misleading the philosophical notion of rationality is. It does not attend to the different roles it may have to speak about reasons with concern to actions, beliefs and emotions, as well as to the different kinds of reasoning that can be said to take place in relation to these.

Criticizing the ways in which reasons have been introduced in a discussion of love, does not amount to a defence of the irrationality of love. That there are no reasons for love does not mean that we necessarily act irrationally in love, that is, against better reasons. It is true that we may say that some people who are in love act irrationally, or behave unreasonably. We may, however, also say that they are perfectly reasonable, even if they do not act out of a particular reason. This reminds us of the fact that calling someone reasonable is often a moral assessment which does not primarily concern the grounds someone has for acting in certain ways. Rather it is expressive of the ways he goes about acting and what he sees as a possible course of action in the first place.¹⁰² In that sense, it is better to say that both the

¹⁰² Cf. the discussion of what it means to be thoughtful in chapter 2, p. 93.

concept of rationality and that of irrationality are quite inept when it comes to describing the concept of love. These considerations should also remind us to differentiate between “being reasonable”, “acting rationally”, and “having reasons for one’s actions”, as well as to be careful not to conflate our ways of speaking about “reason” with the philosophical notion of “rationality”.

Many philosophers, however, have emphasized the role of giving reasons to the extent that any value they appear willing to assign to the emotions and love in a philosophical discussion, or in a life as a whole, depends on the prospect of being able to categorize them under the heading of reason. Set against a certain conception of reason as rationality, which portrays rationality as an operational process, love also seems to be a prime example of irrationality. In relationships of love we are confronted with people going to extreme lengths “just” to be with the one they love. This is the case when talking about climbing a mountain or risking one’s life, as in the song by Tracy Chapman (1988), or moving around the world, giving up one’s careers and starting one’s life anew, as well as in the less extreme but still as life changing decisions to create a life together, raise a family and spend one’s time together. All these things people do without any rational justification for their actions. At least not if we refuse to take “I did it because of you”, or “because I love you” as reason enough, and it is a characteristic of philosophical discussions, if not of our regular life, that one is not content with that.

Here, it is worth noticing that in our non-philosophical conversations about love, love is usually given as the reason for my doing or not doing something, for moving around the world and so on, rather than being that which demands an additional reason. In this respect, Harry G. Frankfurt’s (2004) remark that “[l]ove is itself, for the lover, a source of reasons. It creates the reasons by which his acts of loving concern and devotion are inspired” (37) is much more to the point. From this perspective it also appears that every attempt to provide any other reason for spending one’s life together would compromise one’s love by reducing it to a matter of different preferences, interests or concerns.

Nevertheless, from a rational point of view, or in the light of a certain picture of what being rational and acting out of reasons means, love may well seem a form of madness. It does not fit the picture. If having rational grounds is what justifies our actions, it is difficult to see why one should have to accept that some of the most important decisions of our lives should be based on what may seem as very

loose grounds indeed against the standard of rationality. Bringing reasons into a discussion of love may thus be seen as one way of trying to make one undoubtedly important area of human life philosophically respectable.

The insistence that having rational grounds is a central aspect of all meaningful human interaction is often motivated by a fear that our life otherwise would be rendered contingent. This is seen, for one thing, in the belief that having reasons for love is a precondition for being able to criticize certain aspects of it. This idea is clearly articulated by Gabriele Taylor (1979), who is concerned with pointing out the ways in which questions of justification enter into love “in the form of questions of deficiency and propriety” (181). Robert C. Solomon (1990) expresses a similar concern in his insistence that we never love someone “no matter what” (133). The suggestion that rejecting the meaningfulness of speaking about love as something we may have reasons for necessarily means that “anything goes”, that we would be left with “psychotic obsession, blind blithering, helpless attachment, or mere frivolousness” (Solomon 2005), however, leaves out that there a number of ways in which we may pull aspects of loving relationships into question which do not have to be construed as questioning someone’s reasons for acting in certain ways or offering reasons to act differently. I may reject what you say as a meaningful remark about love, I may fail to see the significance of what you say or question your sincerity in saying something, and so on.¹⁰³

If one wants to maintain that these ways of talking with others are yet another form that reasoning may take, one has simply assigned to reasons a privileged position in human understanding that is not grounded in the ways in which we would in particular cases speak about having reasons for or against doing something. As I already mentioned, giving reasons this privileged position, one has also not paid any attention to what gives rise to the question as to why somebody does something, as well as to the situations in which we find such a question intelligible.

The demand that there be reasons for love, thus, reveals a failure to recognize the different character of the grammar of loving from that of giving reasons, as well as the different roles it may have to speak of reasons, not primarily *for* love, but *in* the context of love. Furthermore,

¹⁰³ I will continue this discussion in chapter 6.

it is a failure to recognize that there are points in our life and in the philosophical investigation at which, as Wittgenstein (1977) says, "justification comes to an end" (§192). The remark is a reminder that there are aspects of our life that we cannot explain by pointing to any other practices. Posing the question *why* we do something and expecting an answer is not always meaningful. There comes a point at which we may simply need to accept that "This is how we live, this is what we do".

Accepting the "groundlessness" of some of our practices in the sense that we cannot give rational grounds for them, however, does not, again, mean that we necessarily have to regard these practices as arbitrary. Wittgenstein's discussion in *On Certainty* (1977) is a further reminder that there are ways of being certain or resting assured in one's actions that do not rest upon rational grounds. Think only of the ways in which I may sometimes speak of love or about the one I love as "the ground beneath my feet", in a similar manner to saying that I feel rooted or at home in love. Not acknowledging this sense of certainty testifies to a philosophical prejudice which attempts to fit all practices into one unified system.

II WHAT OR WHO?

Discussing reasons for love is largely a matter of becoming clear about *what* we are committed to in love: What binds us together in love? In the previous discussion of the place of thoughts in emotions we saw that I am bound to view or accept certain descriptions of the object of my emotion for it to be intelligible to attribute that emotion to me. The question then arises whether there is some similar salient feature of the object of my love.

This question ties in with questions of personhood in significant respects so that the pertinent question turns into, "*What* is it that I love when I love you?" Or, "*what* is the person that I love when I say I love you?" One may, then, take it on oneself to explain to what it is that the word "person" refers. My following discussion should show just how much turns on formulating the question in this way, and not, as I will suggest, focusing on how the question about *who* we are may enter into love. I will argue that the latter question, to a great extent, is a moral question, and that in many cases it is primary to the question of what we are.

The answers that philosophers have given to the question of what we love differ. Here again I will let Taylor (1979) exemplify what can be seen as a standard reading of the (kinds of) qualities the beloved must be said to have for one's love to be rational. She distinguishes two kinds of beliefs that the lover can be said to hold about the beloved. First, if a person (x) loves somebody (y), "he does so in virtue of certain determinate qualities which he believes y to have" (Taylor 1979, 171). He will be able to point to certain characteristics in y that he finds attractive. Second, he will have certain wants concerning y that he believes that y can fulfil (Taylor 1979, 171). These wants can be described as a desire to benefit and cherish y and be benefited and cherished by y (Taylor 1979, 173-174).¹⁰⁴ This leaves us with a very simple picture of what it means for a love to be deficient. Prove that the beloved does not possess the believed properties and away go the reasons for that love and with it the love itself. Solomon also subscribes to this picture of reasons as he writes:

if I love you because you've told me that you're the illegitimate daughter of Jean-Paul Sartre and I find out that that's not true, that's the end of my love—not because you have lied to me, but because my reason for loving you has disappeared. (Solomon 1990, 177)

Solomon also gives a more intricate answer to the question of what it is we love which ties in with his account of love as a shared identity. In the light of this he defines the reasons for love as those that "are part of the person, defined in tandem with a lover who shares and mutually helps to define that identity" (Solomon 1990, 170). "[A] good reason for love is one that ties two people together in a mutually inspiring, supportive and enjoyable relationship". (Solomon 2005, 164) The reasons for love, therefore, are not simply some qualities that pre-exist within the persons outside of the relationship. They are also created within the relationship. Nevertheless, he still hangs on to the suggestion that the reasons we give for love, although they are personal reasons, may be offered as an explanation of our love, and even provide mild justification for it, although he sometimes only

¹⁰⁴ Cf. chapter 2 on the distinction Taylor makes between "determinate qualities", such as believing that a bear has sharp claws, and "determinable qualities", such as believing that it is dangerous. Love constitutes a problem for her discussion in that it is difficult to find a "determinable quality" in love that would have the place of "dangerous" in fear. That is also why Taylor proceeds to define the beliefs we have about the ones we love in terms of the wants we have in relation to them.

renders this in terms of making our love intelligible (Solomon 2005, 144).

Common to these answers is the idea that love is directed at something specific. There is “some thing” that I love, and this cannot simply be explained by a “you” or “the whole person”. Solomon (1990) even insists that we do not love “the whole person” (133). It is, he says, never true that we like all of a person or love them “no matter what” (133). There are always certain things that I like more than others. The picture with which we are presented, then, is one of a person or a human being who has certain wants, needs and interests to which the qualities of other people can be said to correspond. This is once again a way of reducing the human individual to a psychological description of her: the readiness with which such an account of the person lends itself to an account of reasons for love reveals yet another danger in only making sense of human beings in these terms.

In this picture love is easily construed as a relationship in which the qualities of the other are something that can either (1) be of *use* to us in that they further some of our interests or (2) bring us *pleasure*, since it is assumed that this is what people normally want or are interested in. Both these misunderstandings of love share the assumption that the relationships of love are primarily concerned with the exchange of goods and the satisfaction of needs. Here it does not matter whether the “goods” are considered to be material, such as financial security or dinner every evening, or immaterial ones, such as affirmation, self-realization or social status.

In this picture of the person, the tendency to take emotions, thoughts, beliefs or wants as referring to some kind of mental objects of the individual, whether they are thought to represent some material or immaterial states, dispositions to want, feel and think certain things or the capacity to form statements pertaining to these, repeats itself. Human beings are considered to have certain pretty settled and definable qualities, needs and wants that may be identified independently of the situations and conversations in which I express what I want or attribute certain character traits to you. To this is added the unspoken assumption that “psychological states can be assigned to and theorized about on an individualistic basis” (Scheman 1993, 37). In other words, one assumes that the objects of psychology may be investigated in isolation from other aspects of the person, as one imagines that we may identify the salient features of

the person (individually) in isolation from the relationships he or she has with other people.

One does not, for instance, question whether there are some distinct features that define the core of a person, one is only concerned with finding out what these defining features are. (The capacity to reason, to have a first person perspective, to feel pain, and so on.) Or, one assumes that love is an appraisal or an evaluation of personal qualities that may be assessed quite independently of what we feel for the particular person in question. Solomon's (2005) account of a shared identity is an attempt to question the sense of such an understanding of an isolated individual, by emphasizing that "[l]ove is a process, not a state" and that "our reasons for love are bound up with that process" (171). However, he only provides us with a more complex picture of how properties are created, or given weight to, in the relationships of love, which does not succeed in clarifying the meaning and significance of the other of to me in love.

Taken strictly as a grammatical point, there is nothing wrong in saying that persons have different qualities or personal characteristics. I am rather suggesting that we reconsider what it is we say when we claim that they do. If we teach someone the use of words such as "personal property" or "quality", it makes perfect sense to say that "kindness", "pride" or "courage" are "properties" which we attribute to persons, rather than, say, to trees and tables. To talk about persons, among other things, is to talk about properties, wants, thoughts and characteristics. When philosophers and scientists speak about such qualities, however, the purpose of their remarks is often more obscure. Apparently they do not try to teach us to use words such as "quality" or "property", "courage", "pride" or "kindness". Here, unproblematically speaking about someone having qualities in virtue of which we love him or her, or about how the properties of a person are created in interaction runs the risk of lending a reifying tendency to their discussions. What they try to provide us with, one may suspect, is a metaphysics or ontology of the person, delineating the general features which persons share.

This picture of the person or the human being as something specific, something that may be reduced to certain qualities and traits, is in many respects confused. One remarkable feature of these discussions of what constitutes or legitimizes our bonds to other people is that one assumes that what must be explained is how it comes about that we create such bonds. These bonds are consequently explained by our psychological characteristics, or by the things we get

out of love, the things that make it "worthwhile" to love. One does not, however, discuss how it is or how we are to explain that we may be bound to someone's psychological traits. This difficulty of fitting the human individual into a system of preference reveals a philosophical prejudice. One gives priority to one vocabulary of "interests", "qualities", "properties" and "goods" over another of "human being", "individual", "goodness" and "love", and assumes that the second can be explained completely by reference to the first. One does not see any problem in how someone might have an interest, use or find pleasure in single qualities, whereas the human being only seems to fit into the philosophical system in so far as she is reduced to some such qualities.

Furthermore, there is something awkward in the idea that we first have to clarify *what* the person is in order to explain how it comes about that she may form relationships with others, or be said to remain the same person over time. It is a characteristic feature of these discussions that the changes people undergo through life become a puzzle to be solved. The common conviction that "[l]ove is not love which alters when it alteration finds", as Shakespeare (1994) writes in sonnet 116 (1239), is considered to be in need of thorough examination by many philosophers. Even the thought that the person I am now and the person I was ten years ago are the same is a notion that has been very much put into doubt. There must be, so the story goes, something that justifies us in making such a claim. Especially if we agree that many of my personal qualities can be said to have changed.

In two insightful articles David Cockburn (1988 and 1989) criticizes the idea that we could even understand what a person is if we do not first consider the different kinds of relationships he may have to other people. In the first, Cockburn (1988) criticizes the notion that we could make sense of the idea of a person as he is in himself, that is, without reference to the circumstances that surround him, his past and future and relationships with other people. In the second, he argues that "there is a confusion in the idea that a persisting commitment to another is *dependent on* the thought of a persisting, unchanging core of that person" (Cockburn 1989, 88).

What we are committed to in love and friendship are not some characteristics that make up the person. Attributing personal characteristics to someone is better to be seen as an aspect of the relationship we have to him or her. It is in the light of my relationship with you that I come to see some of the things you do as endearing, typical or irritating, and it is in virtue of having a relationship with

you that the question of what you are like arises in the first place. To understand what a person or a human being is, as well as what personal properties, thoughts and emotions are, we have to be aware of the different contexts in which these concepts come to life.

Cockburn (1989) further remarks that “ascriptions of psychological characteristics to an individual [cannot] be made independently of any judgement as to *who* that individual is” (75). This allusion to *who* the individual is rather than to *what* he or she is, to which philosophers have often tended, is in Cockburn’s case a reminder of the ways in which we respond to another individual as being the same individual over time, although we may well agree that she does not possess the same qualities now as she did before. The point could also be made by saying that the identity we assign to a person living over time should be understood as *numerical identity*, by contrast to the *qualitative identity* we may assign to, say, two new cars from the same production line. In other words, the sense in which I am the same person as the child born some thirty years ago, is different from the sense in which the two cars can be said to be qualitatively identical. Cockburn’s remark also brings out the grammatical priority speaking about someone as being the same in the numerical sense, has to speaking about sameness in a qualitative sense. For the question whether *someone* has the same qualities as before to gain any foothold, we already have to take him or her to be the same person. We cannot, as it were, explain why we take someone to be the same by appealing to the fact that he has the same qualities as before.¹⁰⁵

We may, however, take the point one step further. To begin with, we could say, that whenever philosophers or scientists, attribute qualities to a person, or try to say something about what she is, they are in effect making a statement about who she is. They are expressing an attitude to her which reveals the character of their relation to her. This, I will argue, is an action that in many respects involves moral features. The question about who we are does not arise in isolation but finds its sense within the relationships we have with one another. Thus, it is here we need to start if we want to gain a deeper insight into what a “person” is, or rather what kind of concepts we are dealing with, when we are talking about persons and human beings.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Hamlyn (1983) on a similar problem with “the so-called argument from analogy [...] To use analogy between ourselves and others we have to presuppose that those others are fitting recipients of the analogy— and that is the whole point at issue” (209).

So far, I have used the concepts "person" and "human being" interchangeably, not dwelling on the different ways in which they have been discussed in the history of philosophy. Being sensitive to this difference, however, might prove fruitful for the discussion to follow as well as for understanding the accounts of the love of persons or human beings philosophers have given. Now, the concept of a "person", stemming from the Greek *persona*, the mask used by the characters in the theatre, is closely linked to the concept of "personality"; the different personal traits or characteristics that together with some distinctive capacities can be said to make up the person. In many ways, it is, thus, a psychological description of certain aspects of the individual. It also belongs within a legal context, determining to what instances we are to assign rights and duties. The concept of a human being, on the other hand, is closely connected with our status as embodied beings. John Locke (1975), for instance, made the classical distinction between the person and the human being, according to which "human being" was tied to our bodily being, whereas it was considered a theoretical possibility that the "person" could be able to move between bodies. "Human being" also has strong moral and normative overtones in a way that "person" has not. Think only of the differences between "What does it mean to be a person?" and "What does it mean to be a human being?" Whereas the first invites us to give an explanation, the second invites us to self-reflection.

In the introduction I quoted Simone Weil writing that one cannot say, "'You do not interest me' [...] to another without committing a cruelty and offending against justice", whereas, "Your person does not interest me", are words that "can be used in an affectionate conversation between close friends, without jarring upon even the tenderest nerve of their friendship" (Weil 1977, 313). Now, whereas there are situations in which we may think that the second phrase captures something important about the attitude of love, although it is far from being universal, the first one does not. Philosophers discussing love, however, are often specifically concerned with the love of persons. Thus, personal characteristics and qualities play an important part in their accounts, while they do not dwell as much on the concept of a human being.

III IS LOVE OF SOMETHING SPECIFIC?

The thought that my love for you is a bond to some of your qualities leads us to quite strange places, if we try to take it seriously. Consider first the ways in which I may be practically overflowing with great things to say about you in love. I take every chance to think or speak about you, and create opportunities to do so when they do not present themselves naturally. Such expressions appear to be what Taylor (1979) has in mind when she talks about the “determinate qualities” (171) of the object of love. I talk about your beautiful smile, your dazzling wit, your profound intelligence or your good sense of humour. I ponder the arch of your back or the way you walk. I cherish your concern for others and your sense for details. These are quite specific things that I may say about you, and it seems perfectly right to say that they matter to me in love. They are, as it were, the things I love *about* you.

But, to raise one quite common objection against taking these things as the reasons for my loving you; imagine that someone introduced me to another person who could also be described in this manner. He has a beautiful smile, a profound intelligence, a good sense of humour.¹⁰⁶ Would I happily accept this other person as a substitute for you, if for some reason I were prevented from being with you? Assuming that the listed qualities are the dominating features of my love, the possibility of such substitution does not seem far-fetched. Would not, however, a more intelligible reaction to such a situation be, “But it’s not you!”?

Even if you were to leave me, and I eventually would found someone “new”, it is not obvious, let alone pre-determined, that the things I would come to love about her would be the same as the ones I appreciated in you. There is nothing preventing me from paying attention to quite different things in this relationship, just as nothing hinders that the features I fell for in the beginning of our love story may be the very ones that drive me crazy at the end of it. Even if the same set of descriptions I used about you would be applicable to this other person, they would also not play the same role in my love for her. To this, one may add the observation that coming to see someone as constantly falling for the same “type” of person, would in most

¹⁰⁶ See Berenson (1991, 68-69) for a similar line of criticism and also Diamond (2005, 124-125) and Cockburn (1989, 78-80).

cases not be considered an expression of love but a psychological hang-up.

Taking another example: say that a good friend of yours has fallen in love with you, and you regret not being able to respond to him in the same way. You care for him deeply. You love him as a friend. There is no denying that you sincerely appreciate his fine qualities and think that he deserves all the happiness he might get. Nonetheless, you feel forced to say the dreaded, "The problem is not you, but me." In spite of all your good reasons, you do not love your friend in the way he wants you to. Or in the reverse case: you see all the reasons in the world not to love someone. You are already involved with someone else. You do not think that the two of you would match. There is constant irritation whenever the two of you meet. Yet, you ask yourself, "Why can't I stop loving her?"

In other words, whatever I may say about a person's specific qualities there is no one thing that forces me or you to the conclusion that I love. This does not mean that what I say about you may not in any way be indicative of my feelings. As we saw in relation to the discussion of beliefs and emotions, what I say and what I feel can be said to be internally related, in the sense that my descriptions of you are *expressive* of my love or lack of love for you. I only want to reject the idea that we could treat what I say about you as criteria of my feelings for you. It is quite possible that I give the exact same description of you, and in one situation say, "And I love you", and in another, "But I do not love you". This should alert us to the fact that saying "I love you" is not a conclusion drawn from certain facts.

At this point, you might be tempted to ask, "What is it that distinguishes these two situations from each other?" What is it that is missing when I do not love someone in that way? What would make me reply differently? These questions are in many ways misleading, urging one to think that there is something particular that constitutes *the* difference between loving and not loving. Here, I would say that there is not just one thing missing, such as physical attraction which seems quite a likely suggestion, but many different things that are different. I do not dream about you. I do not feel the urgent desire to meet you. I do not long for a life together, and so on.

Furthermore, the idea that we could make sense of a notion of qualities in isolation from you and from the different kinds of relationship I may have with you faces the same kind of difficulties

that we previously considered in relation to feelings and behaviour understood as physical movements.¹⁰⁷ Here, I will occupy myself with two problems in thinking that your personal characteristics are a kind of “inner objects” that I and other people alike may evaluate in a similar manner. First, I will argue that this does not allow for the ways in which “your” traits cannot be separated from you, or from who you are. Then, I will argue that it does not pay attention to the ways in which “your” traits, or who you are, cannot be separated from the relationship I have with you, what I bring about in you, and who we become together.

There is something tempting in the thought that one could abstract the qualities you possess from you. The step from listing what I love about you, such as your warmth, your smile, your intelligence, your kindness, and so on, to saying that it is the warmth, the smile, the intelligence, the kindness that I *really* love is quite easy to take. The temptation also becomes greater if we take into account that we often talk about intelligence, warmth, smiles and kindness in quite general terms, without mentioning whose intelligence, kindness, we are thinking of. Thus, it is easy to fall prey to a kind of idealism, picturing intelligence, and the like, as something that exists in a pure form and accordingly considering your intelligence as one instance of this general idea.

Here, again, there is reason to reflect on the need for context for understanding the meaning of certain sensations or facial movements that Wittgenstein (1997) draws attention to in saying, “A smiling mouth *smiles* only in a human face” (§583). Reflecting on the background that is needed in terms of personally knowing and being in contact with another person, for coming to recognize her smiles as caring, happy, welcoming or ironic, we should also ponder the personal character of such expressions. Compare D.W. Hamlyn, who writes,

A physiognomy is just one aspect, and perhaps a minor aspect of a person, and it may not loom very large in a personal relationship. Within a personal relationship there may be much less uncertainty about the other’s moods than the undoubted ambiguity of facial expressions may suggest. (Hamlyn 1983, 231)

One could say that your smile smiles only in your face, which is as true of your kindness, intelligence and warmth. You, as it were,

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 1.

embody your smile, intelligence or kindness. Coming to see you as intelligent or kind requires a context, and you constitute an integral part of that context. In coming to know you, I come to recognize some of your actions, your comments, your posture or demeanor as kind, I come to see your expressions, behaviour and actions against an ever increasing background of personal meetings.¹⁰⁸ However, these ways of acting may in another person rather strike me as mocking or misplaced.

This points to my second objection that we cannot understand the question about who you are, or what kind of person you are, independently of the relationships you have with other people, and the relationship, as well as the *kind* of relationship, that I, who describe you, have with you. To again quote Hamlyn

In order to know someone we must know what personal relations are, we must know from experience what it means to stand in personal relations, and we must stand in some kind of personal relationships to the person in question. (Hamlyn 1983, 227)

As David Cockburn points out philosophers have tended to favour accounts of things as they are in themselves. However, even when we speak of things many of the primary qualities we assign to objects, such as "solid", are not independent of us, and of the different relations we might have to them. Describing an object as "solid" is not a pure description of what the thing is *in itself*, it is saying something about how the object interacts with other objects, or with ourselves (Cockburn 1988, 14). Saying that something is "solid" means for instance that I can touch it with my hand. My hand does not run through it. In other words, it is far from obvious what it could mean to talk about a description of the thing as it is in itself.

This is even more apparent when we speak of people, and move on from speaking about them in terms that are also applicable to objects, such as speaking of them as solid or as having a certain weight, to describing personal properties or qualities. Describing you as being kind, intelligent or helpful, is to say something about the ways in which you relate to the people around you, *not* that you possess some

¹⁰⁸ "The growth in our understanding of a person may be viewed as an increase in our vision of him; we may see him from a wider point of view, from more aspects. It is easy enough to see that closer relations with a person may well present us with more aspects, even if a too great degree of closeness may sometimes be blinding" (Hamlyn 1983, 232).

quality of kindness, intelligence or helpfulness. It is not the kindness in you as an inner state that explains your kind acts. Rather it is against the background of your kind actions and reactions that it makes sense to attribute kindness to you.

Furthermore, what I say about you also tells us something of myself. Recalling Montaigne's words, "Because it was him, because it was *myselfe*" (*my emphasis*), we should be attentive to the ways we ourselves play a part in our understanding of others. What I say about you may not only be a telling remark about you (the one who is being judged), but is as often as revealing of me (the one who is judging). This may be said both in virtue of the ways in which I, myself, may bring about certain responses in you, and in virtue of the ways in which my own character, my emotions, dispositions and spontaneous responses, shape my judgement of you. It may, for instance, be my cheerfulness that brings out your wicked sense of humor which may be more downplayed in other relationships.

Compare C.S. Lewis,

Lamb says somewhere that if, of three friends (A, B, and C), A should die, then B loses not only A but "A's part of C," while C loses not only A but "A's part in B." In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. (Lewis 1960, 61)

My own eagerness to throw myself into new projects may also make me more inclined to see others as lazy than someone who lets things take their time.

In that sense, there is an indeterminacy in how we can come to see and understand another person that is dependent on what we bring to the relationship with the other, as well as an indeterminacy in the kind of responses we may come to have to the other. I may be struck by just how quick I am to regard you as lazy, and see this as an aspect of *me*, rather than of you. The realization may be expressive of my felt need to change. Coming to know who you are, then, cannot be separated from coming to know myself, coming to see both what is expressive of you, who *you* are, and what is expressive of *me*, my personal opinions and prejudices, as well as my deepest concerns.

This is not to say that it is impossible to offer more or less accurate accounts or descriptions of who someone is. The question is only what we take this to entail.¹⁰⁹ Neither, is it a denial of the importance of coming to see certain patterns or behaviour as characteristic of others and ourselves in the course of our lives. Quite the contrary, coming to see certain things as characteristic of you, that is, becoming aware of your manners, your quirks and hang-ups, “ces petites choses qu'on fait sans y penser” (Dion 2003, “the small things you do without thinking about them”, *my translation*), is often something that I cherish. It is expressive of the kind of closeness or intimacy that is implied in coming to know someone, the ways in which I see *you* in certain descriptions of what you do.

Moreover, it should be stressed that coming to know someone is indeed something I learn in the course of a life. It is not that I know who you are, and therefore fall in love with you. “Infatuation” as P.F. Thomése (2005) says, “is a state that precedes identity” (8). It is in the light of our love and our life together that I come to know who you are, as well as to know myself. In other words, even if it is true that many quite specific things relating to you and our shared life will be important to me and a significant aspect of our relationship, it is important to see that these things do not *explain* my bond with you. Rather, it is my bond with you that explains the importance I attach to certain things in our relationship. Although there is no particular reason for loving, my love, to paraphrase Frankfurt, fills my life with reasons.

IV LIKING AND LOVING

Love, then, distinguishes itself from the other emotions, by not being directed at some specific quality of the object. In fact, it is dubitable whether it is meaningful to characterize love as a relationship between a subject and an object in the first place, that is, as an emotion that one individual has towards another, or some features of the other.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ I return to the question about what it may mean to give a good description of another in chapter 7.

¹¹⁰ On this note Solomon agrees with me in his discussion of reasons. “By explicitly talking about the relationship [... he is] trying to break down [... the] misguided ontology that the object of love is the beloved and his or her properties while love is the attitude or emotion the lover has *toward* the beloved” (Solomon 2005, 169).

Further on,¹¹¹ I will also suggest that we think of the relationship between "I" and "you" as one between two "subjects", or rather as a way of *being* together. This feature also distinguishes love from what it is to like something. Recall Solomon saying that it is never true that we *like* the whole person. Now, although this may be true of liking, speaking about *love* is a different matter.¹¹² Loving you does not have to mean that I like everything about you, or even very much. I may like and dislike certain aspects of you, but when we speak about love it is not that I "love" some things about you more than others. I do not love certain facts: I love *you*.

The difference that Solomon fails to recognize is the one between emotional expressions that are directed towards some specific features of a person, and expressions that constitute a certain way of *turning to* a person. We could call this a difference between *transitive* and *intransitive* expressions: statements that have an object and ones that do not.¹¹³ Think, for instance, about the ways in which I may sometimes be able to articulate what it is in you that I miss. I miss your warmth, your arms, your smile, your comfort, your jokes, the way you pronounce certain words. At other times I cannot point to anything in particular that I miss. I miss *you*.

Furthermore, "liking" involves preferences in a way that is distinct from love.¹¹⁴ To say that I like something is a way of saying that I prefer one thing to another. If I can choose between chocolate ice cream and vanilla, I choose chocolate, because I like that more. Love, however, is not about being pleased with someone, nor a way of preferring one person to another, or some qualities to some others. Rather my love involves openly embracing you as another human being, promising to stand by you regardless of what happens and regardless of what you do. This is one way in which we may understand love as embodying an absolute perspective: it is not relative to certain features of you, but an attitude towards and a bond with you as an irreducibly other human being.

¹¹¹ See chapter six.

¹¹² The distinction between liking and loving I want to make use of here does not hang upon the specific words we use in different situations. I am also not setting down rules for how the words are to be used. "Love" may be used as a strong word for liking and "like" may also be used in the same sense as "love".

¹¹³ Lars Hertzberg first made this distinction between transitive and intransitive ways of speaking in a conversation about change.

¹¹⁴ I discuss this more in chapter 6.

The fact that we often fail to live up to the demands of love or pull away from it, and especially sexual love, when it no longer pleases us, does not make this less true. Not even if we attribute our failure to a failure in love by saying, "Well, no one could live up to those demands". Talk about reasons can be seen as a similar move. We bring in reasons, or talk about justification, to place love at the level of our normal interactions. We fail to see it as something that certainly makes claims on us, but also and through these claims invites us to see other people in a light that is anything but "normal". This is also one of the main tensions I find in Solomon's project as a whole. He wants to show that love is not anything out of the ordinary, that it is quite mundane, but still he does not want to remove its significance in our lives. He maintains that although it is not essential, it can still be the greatest thing that ever happens to us. (See e.g. the back cover of Solomon 1990.)

Solomon criticizes saying that we love the "whole human being", the soul, or the "total person" as a metaphysical move. "[I]t is an avoidance of being compared or evaluated in any way as if, in love, stupidity and lack of consideration, slovenliness and lazy self-indulgence all will be tolerated without question" (Solomon 1990, 165). Now, as for the ways in which Solomon thinks that comparisons and evaluations do belong to love, he is responsible for making a convincing argument for that case. The suggestion that what I called openly embracing another human being would be constituted by an avoidance of criticism and a tolerance of stupidity, however, does, for the present purposes, stand in need of response.

It is telling that Solomon as a proponent for reasons for love, should only be able to make sense of the unconditional demands of love as a blind tolerance, since it is precisely in such discussions that we are invited to think of love as a form of lukewarm tolerance and acceptance. Regarding the relationship of love as an exchange between two individuals with more or less definite wills and interests turns their relationship into something which is in constant need of mutual adjustment and compromise. The less likeable features of a person, which it is agreed that everybody has, although in different degrees, are considered to be something that we must come to overlook, tolerate or accept in love. Alternatively, love is conceived as being constituted by this way of overlooking, tolerating and accepting unpleasant qualities whereas it is said to cherish the ones that please. As one says, "the good sides in someone outweigh the bad ones",

suggesting that I have to tolerate or accept the qualities I do not like for the sake of those I like.

Such a characterization of love strikes me as off the mark in at least the following three respects. First, it assumes that in making such a list of things we like and dislike in people, what is “good” and “bad” operate on the same scale. This is a notion that Simone Weil has criticized by pointing out the asymmetries between goodness and evil (cf. e.g. Weil 1977, 382-383). That is, even if you would make a list of things you like in me and the things you do not it is not given that your love would only be justified in cases in which the list on the good side is longer.

Second, it does not distinguish between different ways in which we may speak of others’ failures and our own. The proposed “need” to tolerate or accept another’s dislikeable qualities mainly arises with concern to features of the other that in one’s daily dealings may prove to be irritating. It may be the other’s insecurity and shyness in meeting new people, her laziness in getting up in the morning, or her bad habit of leaving breadcrumbs on the table after eating. It should be pointed out that it is characteristic of such shortcomings that they are only shortcomings to the extent that others, or oneself, are irritated by them. But even if we may agree with the need to *reconcile* with how the other is in cases in which we do not succeed in finding any other common solution, or simply do not think it is something to be so worked up about, we may question whether reconciling with these aspects of our life together is best construed as a matter of tolerating each other’s shortcomings.

My third objection, therefore, goes against regarding love as a form of tolerance. Rather than raising myself to a position from which I may judge you as faulty but gracefully extend my tolerance towards your faults, the demand of love asks me to question and work on my own reactions towards you. Why should I assume that whenever I dislike something, you are the one in need of change? Here, the command to “love you as you are” is a recognition that human beings, including oneself, despite their best intentions, may go wrong and fail in what they do.¹¹⁵

In this respect, the ways in which I may come to see you in love are similar to the ways in which I may see myself, my shortcomings and

¹¹⁵ Compare this to Wittgenstein’s (1998) remark, “You can open yourself to others only out of a particular kind of love. Which acknowledges as it were that we are all wicked children” (52e).

imperfections as well as strengths. I may nag about everything, and point out every problematic detail, or I may excuse all faults and weaknesses. Nevertheless, I may also recognize that there are ways in which I am probably never going to drastically change although I may wish to do so—perhaps I will never be excellent at small talk or manage to keep my desk tidy—without for that sake beating myself up about it or giving up the desire to do better in the future.

The suggestion that love tells me to tolerate the other’s failures is even more misguided when we move from speaking about such “everyday” shortcomings to moral failures, such as being unreliable, deceiving or insincere, showing a lack of consideration and compassion for other people, and so on. The demand of love does not tell me to recognize that you do something wrong but accept it, nor to remain indifferent to your faults. It calls me to confront you with the wrongs you have committed and awaken in you the insight that you need to change.

Rather than picturing your person as a complex of psychological facts to which I simply need to find a way to react,¹¹⁶ we could say that the attitude of love is characterized by a *hope for change*. Think only of how, “You will never change!” can be uttered as words of disappointment, revealing my refusal to continue talking with you, and as such be expressive of my lack of or failures to love. Two facts about change appear to speak against this picture:

(1) People change in the course of a life. They grow out of their insecurities, train away bad habits and acquire new ones, they become bitter or humble through the difficulties they encounter, they change interests, work or hobbies. This goes on indefinitely. Some of these changes may be seen as for the better whereas others are for the worse, and many may for the most part not have any particular meaning attached to them.

(2) People do not only change but also grow, and love may be a crucial part of this growth. Love may offer us the strength to come out of destructive patterns, facing ourselves and what we have done. It

¹¹⁶ Here I also feel that there is a tension in Solomon’s own writing. On the one hand he wants to regard identity as open and created in interaction with others, but in other places, he seems to regard someone’s identity as more or less stable. This may be explained by the time gap between *Love: Emotion, Myth and Metaphor* (originally published in 1981) and *About Love: Reinventing Romance for Our Times* (1994), the theme of shared identity being explored in greater detail in the latter. Nevertheless, I think this tension can be seen also in that work.

may provide a surrounding and a light in which we dare to bring up painful memories and confront our past, and it may fill us with the peace of forgiveness and the hope for a future in which our choices may be different.

A misreading of this hope for change would be to understand it in terms of the woman who enters a relationship with a man others deem as hopeless, with the set intention that her love will change him. Such an attitude is a mere caricature in that the woman is not open to what it may truly mean to change in the light of love. Rather her attitude reveals a blindness both towards the man and to herself. She tries to press him into a certain picture of what she wants him to be, but she does not ask whether she too could be in need of change or what their relationship could bring about in her. Contrary to this attempt to force someone to change according to one's own interests, the command to "love you for who you are" is rather an injunction to release myself of any pre-given picture I may make of who you are. I should not judge you too quickly but stand by you on the road to change, yours as well as mine.

V

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

The challenge for a philosophical account of love is thus to conceptualize it in such a way that it does not stand in opposition to change and also captures the *absolute* significance you have for me in love. It needs to spell out what it means for love to be truly unconditional, that is, in what ways it is not relative to the different wants, needs or preferences I may have with concern to others, nor to the pleasures I may find in or the uses I may make of them. I say this well aware of the fact that many philosophers would only attribute the purity of unconditional love to motherly love or saintly love, if to any love in the first place. All other forms of love are mostly considered to be polluted by our less pure wants and interests a greater or lesser extent. Nonetheless, I maintain that it makes sense to bring this absolute or unconditional dimension as a demand into every human relationship in which love is a question.

Here, it may help to emphasize that when I speak of love in this context I am speaking about it as a demand, a light in which we may address our relationships, and not about the actual relationships of people who love each other. These may well be coloured by more or less noble aspirations, of which love is only one. Furthermore, I do *not*

regard our succeeding to *live up* to these demands as a condition for being able to attribute love to us. Rather the *recognition* that there are such demands is a central aspect of love.

One of the greatest problems with any account of reasons for love, then, is that it makes love conditional. The philosophers defending reasons for love argue that love, in a particular relationship, or on the whole, is something that is good for us, something that may satisfy our wants and needs. In that spirit, Gabriele Taylor (1979) describes love as a "give-and-take relationship" into which it is "worth while" to enter (171, 174).

Now, there are many ways in which love may be good for us. Presenting these as our reasons for loving, however, does not pay attention to an important asymmetry between giving and receiving, not to mention taking, in love. As Frances Berenson (1991) points out, the "give-and-take" Taylor describes can be an aspect of love, as well as of every human relationship, but it is based on "a serious misconception of giving as involving sacrifice as the reward of taking" (78). She continues:

Love, above all, is about joyous giving of oneself, of one's time, of one's very concerns in life, one's joys, and sorrows, one's understanding, humour, failures and successes, sadness and disappointments, one's deepest concern for the other and of spontaneous, sensitive responses, of life's tenderness. Receiving, rather than taking, will take care of itself, it is at its most poignant when what one receives is utterly unexpected. (Berenson 1991, 78)

Berenson's remark points out the primary place giving has in love in relation to taking, or receiving. This further points towards the grammatical priority "you" has over "I" in a loving relationship. What matters most in love is not what *I* get out of our relationship. What matters to me is *you*. As Catherine Osborne (1996b) remarks, "love is not an emotion by which we put *ourselves* into our lives—that was so already—but one whereby someone else finds a place in our own personal picture of the world" (318). What the discussions of reasons for love, fail to show is in that way that love concerns another individual, a human being of flesh and blood. By positing something other than the human being as the object and reason for my love, be it some qualities, or the anticipated satisfaction of some needs, they fail to show in what ways my love is really a love for "you".

In what then lies the force of this "you" that I have repeatedly appealed to as the "true object" of love? What makes this move

anything other than an empty gesture at something indescribable, verging suspiciously close on the sentimental? Now, some of the power of this articulation of love is that it attends to the moral character of saying "I love you". Philosophers, who try to work out what is the object our love catch on to an important question in love: What are we bound to in love? By construing the question as a question of knowledge, "what is it that I love when I love you" or "what is the you that I love", however, they fail to notice that the question they are dealing with is really a moral question, which cannot be answered by appealing to any qualities or interests.

Think, for instance, of the following case: stirred to think about the fortuities of life by the unfortunate fate of others, you ask me, "Would you still love me if I lost my job or became severely handicapped?" This question may lead us to think about love in the context of reasons, but even so I do not think we are best advised to re-describe your question as, "Would you still love me if your reasons for loving me disappeared?" Taking the question in such a way neglects the ways in which your question is expressive of doubt, pulling to the fore the sincerity of my love. It asks whether I am truly committed to you and not merely to some aspects of our relationship, some possible gains that I may have for myself.

This moral aspect of loving *you* may strike one more clearly in situations in which I say, "Even if you've lost your job, and your faith in yourself, I still love you, and will not leave your side." It does, however, play a part in all the situations in which we bring reasons into a discussion of love. Thus, rejecting the idea of reasons for love is not just a matter of some reasons being more respectable or admirable than others. It is not that "being a good husband" is a better reason for loving than doing it "because of the money" (Solomon 1990, 170). All talk of reasons introduces a perspective that is distinct from love.

What I suggest, therefore, is that we should not just take saying, "I love *you*" as a more complex version of saying I love, or like, certain qualities in you. We should recognize the grammatical and moral difference between the statements "I love you" and "I like this and that about you". Saying, "I love you", is not an attempt to sort out what or who it is that I love. The words do not serve to pick out an object, "you", in distinction to other objects. It is a way of directing myself to you as well as addressing my relation to you. It is a recognition of the absolute demands that my love make on me with concern to you. This is what I mean by saying that "you" in "I love

you” has an absolute character that is *not* relative to your personal traits or qualities and cannot be reduced to the sum of them.

Lingering on this point a bit longer, let us consider another example that is related to change. In a scene from the film “When Harry Met Sally” an old couple recounts how they met.

She: We fell in love in high school.

He: Yeah, we were high school sweethearts.

She: But, then after our junior year, his parents moved away.

He: But, I never forgot her.

She: He never forgot me.

He: No, her face was burned on my brain. And it was 34 years later that I was walking down Broadway and I saw her come out of [inaudible].

She: We both looked at each other and it was just as though not a single day had gone by.

He: She was just as beautiful as she was as 16.

She: He was just the same. He looked exactly the same.

The thought that someone would look exactly the same after 34 years may strike one as overly romantic and idealizing. Of course, people undergo changes in that amount of time, and some of them are bound to show. However, there is a sense in which expressions such as “You haven’t changed a bit since the last time I saw you!” ring very true. Speaking of change in what I previously called a *transitive* sense takes some specific features of the other as its object. I point out certain things that are now different, “You have changed in this and that way”. However, when I say, “You have changed”, in an *intransitive* sense, we misunderstand the sense of the remark if we think that it is necessary to explain what this change consist in. In other words, I may well recognize that you have changed in many ways in the transitive sense, but still say, “You haven’t changed”, in the intransitive sense. This point can be seen as a continuation of my earlier points about liking and loving, and sometimes being able to spell out what I miss or love about you while at other times saying that I miss or love you.

What separates the intransitive sense from the transitive sense is that the first is *not* a remark about the state of things. By saying “You’ve changed”, I am taking a stand on who you are, and on my relation to you. In that way, saying “You’re exactly the same” cannot be separated from saying that my attitude towards you, or my love for you, is exactly the same. I may say that you are the same, you have not, say, lost what I thought of as your defining features, “the sparkle in your eyes”, although in another sense I may well recognize that some things have changed. Saying that someone is the same may in

this case be seen as an expression of love. In others, seeing that someone has changed or even wishing that they would, may be as expressive of love. This is at least one feature of one of Bertold Brecht's tragicomical depictions of Mister K, "A man who had not seen Mister K in a long time, greeted him with the words, "You have not changed at all." "Oh", said Mister K and turned pale" (Brecht 1971, 26, *my translation*).

VI

"YOU DESERVE TO BE LOVED"

The introduction of love as a give-and-take relationship implies that there is something I or you could do to love or be loved. In other words, it suggests that love is something to be deserved. I take this notion to be deeply problematic, but it might need some elaborations for the implications of it to be fully visible. Now, saying that talk about deserving is distinct from love may strike us as obvious when we think of the cynical claim that no one or only some deserve love. How are we, however, to take remarks such as "You deserve better than that" or "You do not deserve that" offered as friendly advice to someone caught up in a bad relationship, or statements such as "Everyone deserves love"?

By saying, "Everyone deserves love", I am giving expression to a certain attitude to love, reminiscent, for one thing, of the Christian notion that God loves all people. However, significantly, Christianity does *not* say that all people deserve love, in the sense that God's love is something of which we have made ourselves worthy. In that respect, it is more correct to say that no one deserves God's love. There are no deeds we may do to assure ourselves of his love. It is always a grace. Compare this to Wittgenstein's remark (1998), "If you already *have* someone's love, no sacrifice is too high a price to pay for it but any sacrifice is too great to *buy* it"(48e). These notions of love introduce it as a gift that we receive independently of our deeds. Let us see where these contrasts can take us when reflecting on other cases in which the notion that someone deserves love is raised.

Consider, first, the following exchange between the main character Toula and her brother in the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002). For Toula to be able to marry her fiancé, he has to enter the Greek Orthodox religion. As he is being dipped in the water at his baptism her brother asks her, "It's not so bad, huh?" to which she responds, "Are you kidding? Any minute now he's gonna look at me and go

'Huh. Right. You're so not worth this!'" Her brother answers, "Yes, you are".

What I take these people *not* to be saying is something along the following lines.

The phrase "You can do better," offered in advising a friend about her love life or her job is at least sometimes in order. As the use of the comparative suggests, its point is not to insist that the man or the job at issue is utterly worthless or even falls below the minimal line—it is rather that as long as one has or is in a position to cultivate having more options, there is something to be said for aiming higher for a more interesting or virtuous or appealing partner, or a more challenging or responsible or socially useful job. (Wolf 2002, 232)

In other words, Toula is not asking, "Am I 'interesting or virtuous or appealing' enough for him not to start asking whether he is in 'a position to cultivate more options'". Her brother is not telling her that she is. When her brother says she deserves love he is not, as it were, marking a *contrast* between her and other people. He does *not* voice the belief that some people are more worthy or deserving of love, and that his sister is one of them. If he entertains such an idea, that itself is a very cynical one indeed. His words are rather an encouragement to her by showing his moral support and by giving expression to his own love for her. He is not speaking about whether people deserve love on a general level, but speaking to her as her brother.

Whereas "he deserves to be loved" or "you deserve to be loved" can be said in friendship, saying "he doesn't/you don't deserve love" would mostly be taken as a callous remark. When I speak about myself, however, I may recoil at the suggestion that I could deserve to be loved in the same sense that I deserve a raise in my salary if my tasks have grown. It sounds as a preposterous idea that I could appeal to my "rights" to be loved if you did not love me in return, or claim that you were under the "obligation" to love me. It does not, however, sound as preposterous to say, "I do not deserve (your) love". This marks an important asymmetry in how we may speak about deserving in love in relation to others and in relation to ourselves. In other words, it alerts us to a difference between the third, the second and the first person perspective, between love and self-love.

In one of his examples Solomon (1990) asks us to think of a man who "quite rightly sees himself as a person with no particularly lovable features" (169). He says this matter-of-factly, as if it would be clear what it is we are to imagine, as well as clear that we "quite

rightly" could regard some people as more lovable or more worthy of love than are others. He does not dwell upon whether this "insight" is expressive of fear, resignation or guilt, which I would suggest is crucial to understanding what kind of insight it is. It is not that the example presents us with a man with an exceptionally clear-sighted conception of himself. The man's conviction that he has no "lovable features" can be better described as an expression of self-contempt.

Contrast this with a case in which my saying, "I do not deserve your love", is a reaction to the smallness I feel in front of the grandness of your love. The words may be an acknowledgement of the fact that nothing I have done has led to your love and a way of marvelling at this same fact: Is it not amazing that you love me and that I may experience this kind of love? Now, this latter reaction appears to embody an important insight in love. It is a presupposition of love that I do not think that certain things I have done guarantee my being loved. Nevertheless, it is an equally important presupposition of love that I recognize that I am loved, and, therefore, am someone who can be loved. In that respect, self-love is always an aspect of love. If loving you does not in some way involve loving myself, I am forced to think of your love as an illusion. However, this is not to say that self-love is something we come by easily. Believing in love may be difficult, and loving oneself may be even harder. To receive the gift of love in that sense is always to wonder at this remarkable gift.

In this respect, we could say that the former case of "quite rightly" seeing myself "as a person with no particular lovable features" reveals a failure in the love I have to give. By thinking that "nobody could love me", my attention is not on you, but on myself and on the qualities I think I lack. Losing myself in self-sentimentality, I shut myself off from what you could see in me. I decide on my own what could count as a reason for love. Then again, perhaps this is precisely what I want? By convincing you of my own unworthiness, not admitting that I do not love you in return, I attempt to release myself of the responsibility such a realization demands of me.

By the look in your eye I can tell you're gonna cry.

Is it over me?

If it is, save your tears

for I'm not worth it, you see.

*For I'm the type of boy who is always on the roam,
wherever I lay my hat that's my home.*

(Young 1983)

My discussion has shown some roles speaking about deserving may have in the language of love. Saying, "Everyone deserves love", may be a way of saying, "There's no reason to exclude anyone from our community", "All people should be loved by someone" or "All human beings are possible objects of love." Saying, "Nobody deserves love", may in turn be a way of reminding us that there is nothing we can do to be loved and that love is always given to us. Taking these expressions as expressive of love, however, has also been a means of showing that the sense in which we speak about "deserving" here is different from other cases of talking about what we deserve. (These other ways of speaking, of course, need also not be unitary.) In these cases, love, as it were, transforms the meaning of what it is to deserve something.

Throughout the discussion I have criticized the attempt to reduce love to a psychological description for not attending to the unconditional importance another has to me in love. Attempting to conceptualize love in economical or contractual terms, which is the case if one thinks of love as something of which we can make ourselves "worthy" or as something involving "rights and obligations" strikes me as a similar failure to do justice to the language of love. Furthermore, there is no general viewpoint from which we could determine the worth of other people. From the fact that I (as a friend, a sister, brother or parent) may think that someone deserves love, it is not possible to draw the conclusion that someone is under the obligation to love them, at least not in the personal sense of erotic love. Or what could it possibly mean to say, "He deserves to be loved, so you should love him"?

VII ABSOLUTELY PERSONAL

Let me finally remark upon what I find to be one of the strongest objections to an account of love as unconditional. Saying, "I love you no matter what" may raise the concern that my love is not really a love for a specific person. Reading Simone Weil's remark that it is not your person that interests me but you, one may gain the feeling that the love she is thinking about is anonymous. If there is nothing you could do that could risk my love, if it does not matter to me who you are or may become, one may well ask in what ways my love is truly a love for you. Thus, one may think that an unconditional account of love fails to show in what ways love is personal.

I do believe that one of the greatest challenges of philosophy is to show in what ways love is a personal relationship but also embodies what I will call an absolute perspective. I will discuss this more extensively in the following chapters, trying to show in what way it is important to see that I do not only love the idea of you, but you, and that there does *not* have to be an inherent contradiction in regarding love both as an absolute perspective and a very personal relationship.

What I have wanted to argue here, however, is that giving an account of love as based on reasons gives us a very poor picture of what it means for love to be personal. It is important to show in what way love concerns another human being of flesh and blood, but the attempt to reduce the other to some personal qualities or traits, his or her personality, or to the use I might make of someone and the way in which she may be counted on to satisfy my needs, does not begin to tell us anything about what such a concern may amount to. Last but not least, it does not acknowledge the parts played by love in our lives as moral beings.

“I WANT TO BE IN LOVE”¹¹⁷

*When I call your name
I'm gonna scream out loud
I'll say...
"here I am standing in the crowd"
You'll say "come to me
With your open mind
you never know
What you still might find"
Annie Lennox (2003)*

In response to John Donne's "No man is an island", the character Will in the film version of Nick Hornby's book *About a Boy* (2002), states, "In my opinion all men are islands. [...] I'd like to think I am Ibiza."¹¹⁸ Will is a 36-year-old who in many ways tries to live up to the ideal of being an island. He is desperate not to depend on anyone. Living off the royalties of his father's only hit song, he has no job or meaningful relations to the people in his life, using the women he meets as means for his own pleasure. As the film progresses, he comes to realize, perhaps not that he is no island, but what it means to be a human being. Against his will, he becomes friends with the 12 year old Marcus, and thereby involved in the life he lives with his depressed mother. Not surprisingly, he also falls in love with a woman, Rachel, as for the first time. Suddenly he finds himself wanting to be someone for her, a wish that corresponds quite poorly with his feeling of being "nothing".

This wish to be someone is a characterizing feature of our expressions of love and may take more or less poetic forms. Our conversations about love are also filled with other sayings that in one

¹¹⁷ Etheridge (2001).

¹¹⁸ I first introduced this example in chapter 3.

way or another are connected with the self. I may say that I have *found myself* or am able to *be myself* in love. I may wish to *lose myself* in you or in love, or fear that I have *given up myself* in our relationship. I may encourage you to be *true to yourself* or advise you not to *sacrifice yourself* for the one you love.

The following discussion is an investigation into sayings such as these. What insights do these ways of thinking of oneself as “nothing” or as wanting to be “someone”, “finding oneself” and “losing oneself”, contribute to our understanding of the concept of the self as well as that of love? As in my previous discussions, my interest lies in showing the variety of ways in which we may speak about the self in love to see what roles it may have in different situations. My aim, however, is not merely to capture different ways of speaking, but to reflect on what different uses of the word “self” may have a place in love, and what uses are better taken as expressions of something else.

My main contentions are the following: There is a sense in which I need to lose myself in love. This “loss of self”, however, does not mean that love is a relationship in which I must sacrifice myself. Such a fear forms part of the feminist worry that romantic love creates a double bind for women, forcing them to forget themselves in the very relationship in which they are supposed to “find themselves” (See e.g. Morgan 1994). Rather, I want to argue that love may really give me the opportunity to be myself in what we may think of as the purest sense of the word. It may allow me to be someone in giving me the chance to reflect on my goals, aspirations and commitments, on what I really want to do or be.

Furthermore, I argue that the apparent paradox in talking about finding myself by losing myself revolves around different uses of “the self” to which philosophers have often not paid careful enough attention. Many philosophical discussions of the self neglect the essentially moral character of telling someone to be “true to herself” or encouraging someone to “just be yourself” in favour of metaphysical accounts of what the self is. Neglecting this moral feature of our different ways of talking about the self and the demands that they make on us, however, constitutes a failure within our personal relationships as well as within philosophy. The temptation to search for an ontological answer to the question of the self obscures the philosophical questions of the self in much the same way as the wish to be something particular, or the temptation to try to become someone, is a distortion of love.

In the first section of the chapter I continue to elaborate on the problems involved in the philosophical propensity to concentrate on questions of *what* a "self" or "person" is,¹¹⁹ and suggest, again, that we pay heed to the fact that our concern in our personal relations is rather with *who* someone is. I discuss Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist criticism of traditional ontological accounts of the human being, but state that he still fails to appreciate the moral dimensions of talking about *who*, and not merely *what*, we are. In the second part, I turn to the notions of losing and finding oneself in love, and try to spell out the implications of the first part for our understanding of "the self in love". I claim that the question of *who* we are in love is internally related to the question about *how* we are in our relations to other people.

I THE UNITY OF A PERSON'S LIFE

To return to my initial example: For the viewers it is clear that up to the point at which Will meets Marcus he is missing something in his "island-life". He is not a person (or a human being) in the deepest sense of the word. This failure to be something more than an island is largely constituted by his failure to commit and form relations to anything or anyone outside himself. His feeling of being "nothing" is, so to say, a reflection of the fact that, apart from Marcus, he has nobody or nothing in his life that matters to him and nobody who cares about him. He does not, as it were, latch on to anything in his life. Nobody wishes him to be something other than he is, cares for him remaining the same or encourages him to change.

If we turn to the answers philosophers have traditionally given to the question of what a self is, however, they seem to be quite content with viewing persons as islands. Most philosophers have favoured individualistic, non-relational accounts of the self. To find out what he was as a self or a person, Descartes (1931) locked himself in a room to reach an answer to his question by means of introspection without contact to the outer world or to other people. He found that he was "a substance the *whole* nature of which is to think" (101, *my emphasis*).

¹¹⁹ Although there are situations in which there is reason to discuss the concepts "person" and "self" as distinct from each other, I often use them interchangeably. In most cases where I discuss the meaning they have been given in philosophy, they stand in for "that which philosophers have taken to be the referent of the word 'I'".

Hume (1978) also attempted a similar look inside, but found “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions” (252). Thus, he concluded that the “[t]he identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one” (Hume 1978, 259). Their answers to what a self is are diverging, but their concern was the same. They tried to say *what* a self is in order to offer ontological underpinnings for our further discussions of persons or selves.

Their views on the self, and especially on the autonomous self, have been criticized by many philosophers.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the question of what a person or a self is has not lost its grip. A look at the contemporary discussions of person- and selfhood proves that many philosophers take the same route of trying to provide a metaphysical answer to the question of what a person is.¹²¹ This is also apparent in many of the discussions about persons in moral philosophy, aiming at grounding our moral practices in a theory of the person or the self. Often the discussions are weighed down by ontological considerations of what the person *is*, trying to resolve to what category of beings the term refers.¹²²

Philosophy is of course not void of criticisms against these kinds of ontological investigations about what the human being is, among which existentialist and phenomenologist critiques are perhaps most prominent.¹²³ One of the more famous criticisms of it is perhaps to be found in Sartre’s (2003) account of radical freedom. Sartre rejects any ontological attempt to capture the essence of a human being, claiming that the only thing that characterizes human beings is our ability to transcend and negate the given; we are characterized by the possibility *not* to be by contrast to inanimate objects which simply

¹²⁰ Many feminist critiques of the autonomous self e.g. point to the ways in which the self is situated and constituted by social relations. See e.g. Benhabib (1992), Friedman (2005), Grimshaw (2005). For a Wittgensteinian criticism of this idea of the self, see e.g. Cockburn (1988, 1989) and Cook (1969). I will not further argue that our selves are relational and situated but take it as a starting point for the discussion. Still, such accounts of “the self” do not exhaust what it means to be a human being, or the moral dimension of living in relations to other people.

¹²¹ This was one of the themes in a conference on personhood that took place in Jyväskylä in 2004, in which, among others, Eric Olson and Lynne Rudder Baker participated with papers that explicitly dealt with this question.

¹²² Cf. John Locke’s discussions of personhood and in modern times Peter Singer’s discussions of animal rights and bio-ethics.

¹²³ Apart from Sartre, one may mention Emmanuel Lévinas, K.E. Løgstrup, Luce Irigaray, Martin Buber and Søren Kierkegaard.

are.¹²⁴ Thus, the slogan "existence precedes essence". To him, any attempt to describe the human being is an attempt to bind her, that is, to reduce her to a number of facts. The common human reaction to this fact about our existence, however, Sartre claims, is fear and anguish. Consequently he introduces the term "bad faith" to describe the desire to escape one's freedom by acting as if one's identity were reducible to some specific features, as is the identity of inanimate objects. He exemplifies this attitude in his description of the waiter who in every gesture and movement tries to *be* a waiter. The attempt to be something, however, is doomed to fail, since *he* is never identical with that which he pretends to be. (Sartre 2003, 82-84)

Beset with many problems of its own, to which I will return throughout the discussion, Sartre's existential account of the mode of human existence has an advantage over the other ontological attempts to describe what the human self is in that it places the question of who we are in a moral and existential framework. It denies that there could be any such thing as a core to which the word "I" (or for that matter "you", "he", "she", and so on) corresponds,¹²⁵ and claims that any attempt to point to some such thing involves a failure to accept the freedom one has been given as a human being. In this, Sartre also offers an implicit critique of other philosophers. From the perspective of "bad faith" the philosophical attempt to give an ontological answer to what human beings are, and thus also to what they themselves are, is drawn into question. The attempt to gain control over the object of one's reflections, that is oneself, becomes an expression of bad faith itself, and in the end a rejection of one's humanity and the open-ended character of human life.

In this struggle for control, Sartre's account also captures a feature or our predicament that is all too human. We may sometimes become so caught up with how we present ourselves to others, with how they perceive us, or how well we perform a part, that we actually think that this is all there is to us. We may praise people for being individuals, but often enough we seem more contented with blending in with the crowd.¹²⁶ None of us wants to stick out, and the ones who

¹²⁴ Or to use Sartre's terminology, objects are characterized by "*être-en-soi*" whereas consciousness is characterized by "*être-pour-soi*" and can never be reduced to being "*en-soi*".

¹²⁵ I will mainly discuss Sartre's criticism in relation to the idea of a core self since it is primarily directed at the rationalist tradition beginning with Descartes.

¹²⁶ Cf. Heidegger's "das Man".

do can usually be assumed do so only in the manner that they, themselves, choose. At the other end, we make other people equally bland. I objectify you by treating you as constituted by certain facts. I brand you as ridiculous and refuse to see anything that is not ridiculous in your actions and words. Or, I idealize you, a recurrent error in love, and try to force you to live up to my picture of you.

In these situations, in which our description of someone is not so much a description as a way of diminishing someone by reducing her to our description, it is clear that our remarks about who someone *is*, can be seen as expressing the power-relations that exist between us. But although speaking of bad faith may have a role in these situations, it is far from being the case that our only way of understanding what wanting to become or be someone may mean necessarily has this feature.

Sartre shows us what happens when a certain metaphysics of the self, thinking of ourselves as objects, is put into practice. This is not to say that our practice of bad faith derives from bad philosophies of the self. Rather, it is a point about the moral implications of such an idea, as well as a reminder that aspects of our personal life have a tendency to creep into our philosophizing. But even if Sartre tries to free us of one metaphysics, he, nevertheless, provides us with a metaphysics of his own. He rejects one ontology, but introduces another one which takes our “nothingness” as its starting point. Now, there are many points to be made about the ways in which the sense human beings can be said to “be” differs from the sense in which different objects “are”. A better formulation is that there is a variety of distinctions, as well as similarities, between human beings and objects that it is intelligible to make in certain situations. The claim that human beings generally and essentially “are not”, however, is as problematic as any statement as to what they generally and essentially “are”. This becomes evident not least in Sartre’s depictions of human relationships.

In his favour, it may be said that he presupposes the existence of others. The manner in which “the Other” enters my life, however, is filled with *conflict* (Sartre 2003, 386). Sartre portrays human beings as antagonists, as limits and threats to each other’s freedom. He is, as most of you probably know, known to have said, “Hell is other people”. Other people tie me down, brand me and force me to be something that I am not (since I *am* “nothing”). This view is also apparent in his treatment of love. To him, love is not a bond in the sense of a commitment to each other. It is something that truly binds

us. I seek your freedom, as freedom, but I fear the thought that you give yourself to me of your free will, and may therefore also withhold your love, and want for you to be bound to me by other means. Not only do I seek to limit, or objectify you, according to Sartre, I also seek to be objectified myself, to give up my status as a subject to be the object of your look. Consequently love constitutes an impossibility for him, since I and you, in our freedom, cannot be bound without succumbing to bad faith. In being bound to something, then Sartre sees the danger of losing oneself and one's freedom (2003, 388-401).

However, it appears simply wrong to think that we can only conceptualize ways of being with each other that are based on power and dominance.¹²⁷ We do not necessarily need to think of every use of the word "I" as an attempt to exert control. Nor do we have to take Will's wish to be "someone" for Rachel as a sign of "bad faith", as a way of reducing himself to an object of her look. His wish may also serve as a reminder of the ways in which we may be or matter to each other in love. To Sartre, it is not only in situations in which someone pretends to be something other than he is that we may speak of deceptions; the whole idea of thinking about being something involves a pretence: every description becomes an attempt to capture our being or deprive us of our freedom. Such an assertion as to what "being" entails, leaves much to ask for in the different ways in which we usually go about speaking about who someone is.

There is a clearly destructive trait in Sartre's writings about human relations, which is worlds apart from what philosophers such as K. E. Løgstrup and Emmanuel Lévinas have had to say about the "ethical demand" in our relationships with others (Løgstrup 1997) and about the "nudity" and "wretchedness" with which the other's face confronts us (Lévinas 1986, 352). To use imagery invoked by Løgstrup's (1992) saying that when meeting people we always hold a piece of the other's life in our hands (48)¹²⁸, it appears that the only

¹²⁷ Martin Buber (2004), for instance, distinguishes between two different attitudes we may take to somebody, regarding someone as an *it* and as a *you*.

¹²⁸ Here I follow the Swedish translation and not the English. The Swedish speaks of holding another person in one's hand, "Den enskilde har aldrig med en annan människa att göra utan att han håller något av den andra människans liv [i] sin hand", whereas the English translation states that we always have "some degree of control over people. "A person never has something to do with another person without also having some degree of control over him or her" (Løgstrup 1997, 15-16). Here, I think it is clear that the Swedish translation conveys more of the tone of voice of the original.

way Sartre could make sense of such a picture is in terms of holding you in a grip and crushing you with my hands. Certainly, it is true that we may use this fact in order to take advantage of other people: we may use their vulnerability for our own means. This exercise of power may also have disastrous consequences for the people involved in a relationship, even in relationships that go by the name love. We may even think it forms a particular threat to these relationships, since they are not commonly thought to involve power. In this respect, the feminist worry that romantic love runs the risk of forming a trap for women, forcing them to become docile housewives or servants to their husbands' every whim, may well be justified.¹²⁹ But although there is no reason why we should *a priori* keep certain social relations from closer scrutiny in virtue of their alleged purity—we should also be careful not just to assume that our own personal relationships are free of power—are we not better advised to say that to the extent that love involves power at all, it is constituted by abstaining from the use of it? Or better yet, to describe a relationship as dominated by power and manipulation is to describe it as something quite distinct from love.

In that way Sartre is ignorant of the ways in which the quote by Løgstrup is a reminder of the moral demand to hold you tenderly, and also of the possibility to caress you, to reach out my arms and welcome you in an embrace. Or to make use of Sartre's (2003) discussion of the look (276ff): my look may be objectifying, distant, critical or judgemental, it may be a stare, as Sartre maintains, but it may also be loving, caring and concerned. To Sartre the look of the other is mostly connected with guilt, shame and embarrassment, but although I may experience this feeling of being caught by other people looking at me, perhaps primarily in situations where I am caught off guard—consider, for instance, the embarrassment that is often involved in stumbling and taking a fall, or in losing my face or temper in situations where I for some reason want to keep a straight face¹³⁰—

¹²⁹ As may the "masculinist" thought that it is indeed the woman who has the power in the household, and manipulates the man for her own needs.

¹³⁰ It is however important to remember that the fact that I am observed doing something (more or less appropriate) does not have to have any particular significance attached to it. What meaning it may acquire is dependent on the kind of situation it is. There are times where it may not matter to me that others saw me lose my temper, and I may also feel embarrassed for slipping on ice although no one was there to look. In that sense, Sartre's treatment of the look (2003, 276ff) is weighed down by its generalizing features, as well as by its neglect of the fact that often

this does not capture the wondrous moments that I can describe as truly being seen. I may long for your look and find comfort in the fact that you are there to witness my agony.

Being the "object" of such a loving attention cannot be separated from what it means to be recognized or understood by another. Remember that one can say "I see" as a way of saying "I understand". Nor can it be distinguished from what it is to trust someone and being loved in a wide sense of the word. This way of longing to be seen is not characterized by my managing to keep a straight face, that is, by having people see what I want them to see. On the contrary, it is characterized by my being able to let down my guard without fearing that your gaze will judge me. Indeed, the thought that you could catch me off guard does not arise. When I feel that I can open up and show you my weaknesses, or what in other situations would be seen as a weakness, without you using them to your advantage, when I feel that you will welcome me as "I am", there is no need to hide.

By contrast to thinking that your presence limits or binds me in these cases, we may say that this sense of being seen is *constitutive* of my self-understanding. I do not see myself, but just as your touch may allow me to sense the contours of my body, your seeing me may help me catch sight of myself. I, as it were, may borrow your eyes. As we will see shortly, it is also in this response to my meetings with others, in my responsibility for the other, that I am someone in a moral sense.

Let us again turn to Will. As a consequence of his feeling of being "nothing" and wanting to be "someone" for Rachel, he pretends to be the father of Marcus to make an impression on her. This may certainly strike one as a bout of "bad faith", and it is an undeniable deception towards her, and also to himself. However, if someone were to suggest that the only way in which Will could be true both to himself and to her would lie, as Sartre would have it, in the realization that he is "nothing", it would clearly be false. Even in situations where you feel like a nothing, I may well think that you are "everything". Such experiences of being nothing, "I'm not good for anything", "Nobody could love me", may also themselves be an expression of "bad faith" rather than a realization of our "radical freedom". This is if we stray from Sartre's understanding of "bad faith" and think of it in terms of self-sentimentality or self-indulgence, "feeling sorry for oneself".

enough it is the way we might be seen, and *who* might see us in this way, and not the fact that others actually see us, that matters.

What is lost in an account that sees Will's only possibility as a realization of his "nothingness" is this; even if Will lied about the kind of relationship he had to Marcus, claiming that he was his father and not his friend, this does not detract from the fact that his feelings for and commitment to the boy were true. Denying their relationship would be denying both Marcus and himself. In this respect, we could say that his relationship with Marcus actually made him into someone in a way that was not pretentious. He was Marcus's friend.¹³¹ And, then, are we not also as entitled to say that his desire to be "someone" for Rachel, may express a want to be in a similar unpretentious relationship with her as with Marcus (although there are of course differences between being a lover and a friend in this particular case); wanting to take responsibility for the first time in his life by admitting the lie and trying to figure out what mattered to him and what kind of person he wanted to be?

In a similar vein, İlham Dilman (1991) criticizes Sartre for thinking that "the only way in which we can be who we are, that is ourselves, is by refusing to take on any 'positive being'" (251). In line with Sartre, Dilman criticizes what he calls "the objectivist view of the self", the idea that the self is an entity with which I must coincide to be myself. He points out, however, that the questions I may raise about myself (note, not about my self) are not questions about the self in any philosophical or metaphysical sense but deeply personal questions concerning the way I relate myself to the actions and life that are purportedly mine; "when a person is said not to have been himself, or to be searching for himself, we are [not] indulging in metaphysics" (Dilman 1991, 247). The question of personal identity or unity that I am concerned with as an individual, in the sense in which someone might say that I have changed radically or remained the same, is quite different from the philosophical interest in determining the unity of a person's life. Rather than attempting to settle what it is in me that remains the same through the changes of life, it raises a moral question about what it may mean "to be one with oneself".

Dilman does not mention Kierkegaard, but the questions he mentions bear a close resemblance to Kierkegaard's writings in *Purity of Heart* (1956), where he remarks, "If it be possible for a man to will

¹³¹ This also distinguishes this lie from his previous attempt to gain attention from single mothers by pretending to be the father of a two-year old. Whereas the story of the two year old was completely made up, Marcus and the relationship Will had to him were not.

the good in truth, then he must be at one with himself in willing to renounce all double-mindedness" (68). These questions also point to the ways in which "self", "person" or "human being", as Jonathan Lear (2003) argues, are "subjective" concepts (37-38). The word "human being" can be said to concern both something that I am, that is a member of the species *homo sapiens*, and something that I am in the constant process of becoming, by trying, for instance, to live up to the demand of being more "human". Thus, "human being" functions both as a biological category and as a moral category, in which the latter is characterized by the indeterminacy of not beforehand being able to clearly state exactly what it is that I am to become (Lear 2003, 71).

Lover is a subjective concept in the sense that someone who loves is constantly in the process of shaping herself into a person who loves. She is constantly in the process of becoming a certain kind of a subject. This is an unending project. A person can dedicate her life to better understanding—and better living out—what it is to love others. There is no end to the ever-deepening complexity—or simplicity—of the project. Should one get to an end, all this can mean is that one gets stuck. Or, worse, one ceases to love. Furthermore, the lover essentially uses the concept of love in the never-ending project of becoming/being a lover. It is in continually asking the question, "What is it to love (this person, this idea)?" that the lover continues to shape herself as a lover. (Lear 2003, 38)

To use a contrast that Dilman brings up, what I am interested in when I pose the question "Who am I really?" is not to gain more factual knowledge about myself. I may not reach an answer to my question by being given an account of "what I am like". Nor, is my concern to find out who it was that did something. In his discussion of "the peculiar grammar of the word I" (Wittgenstein 1988, 66), Wittgenstein confronts the problem of the self by pointing out the differences in how we use the pronouns "I" or "he" or "she", in sentences such as "I am in pain" or "He is in pain".¹³² He reminds us that in these sentences we do *not* use "I" to point out the person who is in pain. This is, for instance, seen in it being unclear what it would mean to make a mistake about whether I am in pain. The words "I am in

¹³² For a treatment of his discussion see e.g. Anscombe (1975), Kenny (1978) and Malcolm (1978). Cf. also my discussion in chapter 1, p. 76.

pain", Wittgenstein suggests, are rather similar to a groan in the sense that it they do not depend on our being able to make an identification.

In a similar manner, the grammar for making a mistake about who I am myself differs from making a mistake as to who somebody else is. When I ask "Who am I?", I am not trying to make sure whom to pick out in a group of people, as when I ask "Who was it that brought the cakes" or "Who was his wife?" when being afraid that I have confused two people at a party. Rather I raise a question about the ways in which my actions and commitments can be said to truly be mine and not just a routine or elements of a part that I play. My question is a reaction to what Sartre called "bad faith", but as Dilman points out my only conclusion need not be that I am defined by "nothingness". I can also be said to be myself in that I identify with my actions or my profession, form convictions, and work out what I really think and feel in a matter. (Cf. Dilman 1991, 249, 259.) Thus, saying that I am a certain way may be a way of *evading* responsibility. It may, however, also be a way of *accepting* responsibility.

So, even though we may follow Sartre in rejecting the question of *what* we are as human selves, and also join Wittgenstein in thinking that the word "I" does not necessarily refer to anything, we do *not* need to reject the question of *who* we are. It is rather expressive of a certain kind of philosophical prejudice to assume that the words "I" or "self" must always be used to refer to something, even if this "something" is a "nothing", without paying attention to what use we may make of them in our life.

Focusing on the question of "what" we are also fails to acknowledge that the questions of who I am, or who you are, are not used as means of classifying or categorizing beings, but are primarily *moral* questions. I earlier spoke of Will finding out "what it means to be a human being" or "not being a person in the deepest sense of the word". I also mentioned expressions such as "being true to oneself" and "being one with oneself". Expressions such as these clearly belong to a moral or existential vocabulary. They are connected, among other things, with seeing certain claims and obligations in our relationships with each other. This also points to one of the problems in trying to construct a theory of the person to ground our moral practices. The notion of a "person" is often invoked to justify the extension of certain rights to different groups of beings. But is it not so that what justifies us in extending certain rights to her or treating him as a moral subject (or as an object for morality) is not the fact that

someone is a person? Rather responding to someone as a person or a human being is itself expressive of a moral outlook.

Sartre's account, then, fails to capture the ways in which we "become someone" in our relationships with others. The omission, however, is not surprising considering that Sartre's subject, although it tries to release itself from the burdens of the rationalist tradition, is still very much an autonomous, individualistic, subject. His philosophy carries a moral imperative in that it calls upon me to accept my freedom and "nothingness", and liberate myself from bad faith (ontological insecurity), but this is primarily a responsibility before myself.¹³³ When it comes to the moral relations I have to other people, however, the radical freedom that Sartre presents us with is in many ways a freedom from responsibility. The Sartrean subject has no obligations to others and if such demands arise, they seem to be something for the subject to evade.¹³⁴

Sartre spurned the relationships we have with each other as a road to independence and self-knowledge, holding on to the thought that the only way of finding oneself is by releasing oneself from one's bonds with others. I want to suggest, however, that it is only *in relation to* others that I can be said to be independent as well as to come to know myself. As Dilman (1991) points out, it is only against the background of a shared language that there is room for speaking about finding my own voice (260). Questions about being too dependent or not independent enough only arise and constitute a challenge or a corruption in particular relationships. It does not make sense to speak of being independent of people to whom I have no relation, for instance, people passing me by in the street. Only when you matter to me in one way or another is it intelligible to say that I am independent of you.

Therefore, for a notion of independence to have any meaning, it has to be true to the ways in which we use the concept within our relationships. We are inevitably connected to other people through a web of relations, and being independent cannot simply involve a rejection of these. Such a "freedom" only strikes me as a kind of

¹³³ Even that may be saying too much, as it may be argued that the responsibility I can be said to have before myself cannot be separated from and is secondary to the responsibility I have before others.

¹³⁴ On the whole, Sartre's conception of morality seems to have been dominated by a rejection of bourgeois morality, not recognizing that there could be more depth to the question than the aesthetics of middle-class society.

loneliness. It must be a matter of how we enter into our relationships, openly, responsibly, not hiding behind a mask but taking the question of who I am and become in relation to others seriously. Think, for instance, of a child growing up. Now, an essential aspect of becoming an adult means becoming independent of my parents in the way I depended on them as a child. However, this does not mean that I free myself from my parents, in the sense that I cut off my relations to them. Doing that often reveals a much greater dependence on the parents than we find in relationships in which the parents and the grown up child are on good terms. At least, the wounds from such a cut from the parents are seldom clean.¹³⁵ Rather my independence is constitutive of my being able to enter the relationship I was first born into as an adult.

Consider one example of taking responsibility for what one has done. A window at school is broken. The teacher asks the pupils, "Who did this?" I, the guilty pupil, step forward, "I am the one who did it", "I am responsible". If we consider this example in relation to Sartre there are some things that are worth pointing out. First, in raising my voice and taking the blame, I am not blending in with the crowd, which would be one of the motivations of bad faith. I am rather distinguishing myself from the others by quite literally or metaphorically stepping out of it. Second, rather than thinking that "I" refers to anything of a particular shape, I would suggest that saying, "I did it", and accepting responsibility for what I have done is one of the ways in which the "I" takes on a shape. In more than one sense I step out, I acquire an outline. In saying, "I did it", I embody responsibility. This is the moral dimension of the "self", and how it can be said to highlight the "I" without referring to anything specific, which Sartre fails to account for. There is a moral to his ontology, but it is still an ontology in that it posits a "nothing" in the place of a "something" as that to which "I" is assumed to refer.

Granting Sartre one point, it is true that although I take responsibility for my action, I cannot be reduced to it. The demand, discussed by Augustine, that we should "love the sinner, but not the sin" is a reminder that I am never merely "a window-breaker". The action does not and cannot define me, although others may thus try to confine me to my deeds. But whereas Sartre sees my freedom in the

¹³⁵ Cf. Coetzee (2003): "He is proving something: that each man is an island; that you don't need parents" (3).

realization that I am "nothing" and, therefore, not bound to anything, I would suggest that it is only by taking responsibility that I may be free. "The step forward" is not, as it may seem, a step away from people. For me to be taking responsibility, my words and actions need to be a *response* to the *address* of the other. Taking responsibility is also a precondition for re-entering the relationships from which I have cut myself off by my deed.

In other words, it is not morality, by which I mean the demands that I recognize in my relationships with other people in the light of love, which ties me down. Guilt, shame, unresolved issues, insecurity and fear may tie me down, as may a refusal to stand up for what I have done and hiding within the crowd. Taking responsibility, however, enables me to move freely. It is true that by accepting responsibility I am drawing attention to myself. I am attracting the looks of other people, making myself vulnerable to their criticism. However, since I admit what I have done, they do not have a hold on me in the same way in which they do in cases where my past deeds come back to haunt me and I live in constant fear of being exposed. If I admit my deed, there is nothing to expose.

Accepting responsibility also opens up for a life beyond my wrongdoing, accepting my punishment or asking for forgiveness. Far from being antithetical to freedom, responsibility, therefore, appears to be a constitutive feature of being free. Think only of how liberating it may be to speak your mind after being caught up in and entangled by your own lies, constantly holding your tongue. This involves responsibility in itself, striving to work out what you stand for and really want to say in a matter.¹³⁶

II BEING ONESELF IN LOVE

Talking about wanting to be someone, finding or losing oneself in love, may express the hopes, wishes and aspirations I have with regard to you; wanting to be there for you, wanting you to be proud of me, and so on. However, it may also be expressive of a specific kind of deception or self-deception. Fantasies of being everything for you, "the air you breathe" (Dion 2000), "the one who takes down the stars", of being a perfect husband, wife, man, woman or lover tread

¹³⁶ But, as I will emphasize later on, speaking one's mind is of course not merely to be equated with blurting out whatever runs through one's head.

dangerously close to the deep waters of bad faith and often make us blind to the real needs of the ones we say we love. These ways of expressing myself and my love, then, may both form a specific challenge or task for love and invite certain temptations and corruptions of it. The concern of the following discussion is to bring out the different uses to which these expressions may be put and clarify what they might mean.

I brought in Sartre's account of bad faith since it captures a conception of the self that I think is irreconcilable with love. This is the sense in which the "self" stands for the ways in which I present myself to others, the position or status I have in society, or my concern for how others perceive me. This conception of myself is problematic in love because it essentially involves a kind of self-indulgence. It is largely a matter of *appearance*, characterized by the self-consciousness of someone who is aware of the effects he may have on other people. It also expresses a wish to control oneself as well as the situation. I relate to myself as the object of people's evaluations, concentrating on giving such an impression of me that their judgements are the ones I desire.

To Sartre the suggestion that this should not be my concern in love would most probably seem bizarre, considering that to him, love is constituted by precisely such a wish to be something for the other. However, I would say that this kind of self-consciousness and wish to control is not primarily a problem arising *out of* love, but a problem *in* and *for* love. Contrary to what Sartre would think, love itself may also be said to free us from this kind of self-obsession, if not once and for all.

Consider quite a usual description people may give of falling in love, "When you fall in love, you sing moonlight serenades outside the other's window, without caring about the fact that others will listen. You do not recognize that you are making a fool of yourself." Now, to the self-conscious self, "making a fool of yourself" is something to avoid at any cost. This is not to say that the injunction not to make a fool of yourself may never have a place in love. There comes a point, especially in unrequited love, where many of us would think it sensible to suggest that the lover should not pursue her love any further. In happier cases, however, love rather questions the standards against which singing moonlight serenades is considered a foolish thing to do. Why should I abstain from expressing my love in

a manner I see fit, just because others might find my behaviour inappropriate?¹³⁷ Is it not more foolish not to do something I truly wish to do out of consideration for what others may have to say about my poor singing, or choice of venue? Could we not, in this respect of not caring about appearances or whether I am starting to look like a fool, rather congratulate love on being able to pull me out of myself, and my self-obsessed concerns?

A similar but slightly different formulation of the ways in which love pulls me out of myself is expressed by one of the characters in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*.

By belonging to Sophie, I began to feel as though I belonged to everyone else as well. My true place in the world, it turned out, was somewhere beyond myself, and if that place was inside me, it was also unlocatable. This was the tiny hole between self and not-self, and for the first time in my life I saw this nowhere as the exact centre of the world. (Auster 1988, 232)

The passage captures the experience of being ripped out of oneself into a new world that often characterizes falling in love. The interesting point from a moral perspective, however, is the shift in focal point that distinguishes love, the move from a perspective in which I am the central character of my life to one in which other people find their own place in it.

The thought that I may find myself, or find my center in something other than myself, may well fill us with puzzlement. How are we to make sense of such a claim? The thought may also scare us, even terrify us, in that it appears to imply not so much that I find myself, as that I give up myself. Does not such a shift of attention mean that I sacrifice my own independence, coming to rely on someone else than myself for my own sense of being?

Such a reading of love is to be found in Simone de Beauvoir (1991) who describes the woman in love (but not the man!) as "doomed to dependence" (234). "There is no other way out for her than to lose herself, body and soul, in him who is represented to her as the absolute, as the essential" (de Beauvoir 1991, 234). I have no intention of denying the reality of such descriptions and the fears that accompany them. Quite to the contrary there is much empirical evidence to support them. What strikes me as problematic in these

¹³⁷ Here the stress is on the appropriateness and the well behaved side of my actions, not on how good or evil they may be. Morality is in this sense not a matter of appearance.

struggles for independence is again the concept of independence that they put to use. Any suggestion that apparently invites me to relinquish some control over myself, others and the situation, is considered a threat to my independence. Such a view portrays our life together as characterized by a struggle for control, where my only options are either to exercise my will upon the situation and others, or to compromise myself by submitting to the wills of others.¹³⁸ Thus, it is not the significance of being independent that I want to question, but the way it is conceived. Becoming independent may indeed require that I free myself from some of the attachments I have to other people, but I may as well need to free myself from some aspects of and attachments to myself. This, however, is *not* the same as freeing myself from my commitments to other people. It is finding a different way of being committed to them.

The notion of finding myself by locating my center in something other than myself is not as far-fetched as it may seem at first. In fact, it is a characteristic of many situations in which I may describe myself as “being myself” that my center of attention is *not* myself. What I want to call attention to is the kind of unity I may experience in situations where I can be said to be “one with myself”. Consider, first, a situation in which you are so into, so engulfed in what you are doing that you forget time and space, you even forget yourself.¹³⁹ Perhaps you are writing a philosophical paper for a conference and you are in one of those stages where everything seems to work. The words are flowing out of you, you seem to have a grip on the question, you picture the structure. When you come out of it, you notice how late it is, you have barely eaten, your hair is on edge. You laugh to yourself that anyone who has seen you probably thought you looked like a lunatic. Then, compare this with a situation where you are experiencing writer’s block. You cannot seem to concentrate on the words on the screen, and there is no lack of trying. Your thoughts are drifting to what to eat or whether the room would need cleaning. Now, let us reflect upon these situations in the light of being aware, or being in control of what you are doing.

¹³⁸ This notion of the will as some pre-given element existing in me is in itself problematic, but the space does not allow me to comment further on it.

¹³⁹ Although this description of what happens is similar to the one I used to describe Sartre’s position, the sense in which you forget yourself, is, as you will see, quite different.

First, what separates these two instances from each other is not so much that your thoughts are occupied by something. The difference rather lies in what you are thinking about. The point of talking about forgetting yourself when being into something is not to say that you are not aware of what it is you are doing, or not aware of yourself in the sense of knowing that you are writing a paper. One could rather say that nothing separates you, or your thoughts, from the task at hand: you are what you are doing. In the other case, however, your thoughts are scattered. They may not be centered on yourself in any direct sense, but they are distinguished by a different kind of self-awareness than in the first case. You are aware of what you are doing as an activity apart from you, so aware of it that it even prevents you from doing what you want. You are, as it were, thinking about the wrong thing.

These examples point to a certain unity between our thoughts and actions that is important for understanding the different ways in which we may be aware of or pay attention to ourselves and what we are doing. There are of course many ways in which I may feel alienated from myself, divided or ambivalent as to what it is I want. That such ways of "not being in one's actions" or "not seeing someone in her actions" also have a moral importance, however, becomes evident if one considers what it may mean for someone to say one thing and do another, or the ways in which a moral action, such as being generous, loses its worth if one does it in order to be seen as generous. This is one form of the double-mindedness that Kierkegaard considered to be a failure to will the good. This kind of unity, or lack of double-mindedness, is also of paramount importance in love. Let us, therefore, consider a case which is more closely related to love, and the failures I may experience there. I am thinking of the inherent demand and often outspoken wish "to be there for you" in love.

Imagine the following case. You come home from work. Already by the look on your face and the way you say hello, I can sense something is wrong. I ask you what has happened, and you start telling me about your day, the strained atmosphere at your workplace, your feelings of inadequacy in finishing the tasks you have set yourself. As you are telling me this, I become more and more beset with thoughts. Some of your concerns tie in with my own worries, and I experience a growing helplessness in the face of them. More frantically, I urge myself to come up with some redeeming words, pondering what somebody else would say in the situation and

what you wish for me to say. Suddenly I notice that I have not really listened to the things you were saying. I have been so occupied with my own thoughts about how to best be there for you that I have failed to simply be there, to make time for you, look at you, and listen to what you have to say.

Here, a certain concern for myself comes to stand in the way of doing both what I want to do and what I think is demanded of me. My thoughts all involve how I am to be there for you but by focusing on myself and how *I* am best to do this, my attention is divided and I fail to focus on you. I am not wholeheartedly there for *you*. This failure to be there for you is not only evident in my thinking about something else, but also in my doubts about my own capacity to handle the situation. By thinking that being there myself is not going to be enough and imagining that there is some specific way I would need to be, some particular response you would want from me, I do not trust that the response you want is *my* response.

Such feelings of inadequacy and fears of not measuring up are certainly not uncommon in our loving relationships with others, but if we keep in mind that love does not only involve loving, but also being loved, it becomes clear that succumbing to or indulging in such fears distances me from love. I do not recognize myself as someone to love, or, more precisely someone you love, and whose thoughts and reflections are by that very fact of significance to you. My fear of not being enough or special enough becomes yet a form of self-indulgence.¹⁴⁰

What, then, is it precisely that I fail to do? Part of the answer has already been given. I fail to be there, to be one with my actions, to be myself. But what exactly does this consist in? This brings me to my second point, which is that being myself, or finding myself, does not consist in doing anything specific. To be somebody else, if I am an actor or imitator, I may try to behave in a particular way. I may try to pay attention to some facts about the person I am portraying to be able to be more like her. I do not, however, need to do anything

¹⁴⁰ Another way of describing the self-indulgence of these self-obsessed concerns is to say that they reveal a lack of self-love. I do not have the place to discuss in what ways the attitude I have in mind in speaking of self-love differs from self-indulgence here, but it strikes me as if the distinction between the two notions of “self” that I am discussing, could also be described in relation to these two attitudes to oneself. (See Frankfurt 2004, in particular chapter three, for one discussion of the differences between them.)

particular to be myself.¹⁴¹ If we think again of what it means to be there for you in the above case, it seems as if the only things I may take upon me to do are negative. I can shut off the telephone or TV, I can look you in the eyes. That is, I can refrain from doing other things. However, there is no positive action that I myself can take on to be attentive. Rather it seems that if I try too actively to be attentive, if I, for example, concentrate on it really hard, my attention wavers, and I fail to do what I want. (Cf. Weil 1977, 47-48).

In a similar manner I do not find myself by realizing some facts about myself. It is tempting to think that being myself implies that there is a certain way that I am and that I only need to be this way to be myself.¹⁴² One pictures a core with which I am to identify to be one with myself, a picture that is emphasized by philosophical musings about the notion of the self.¹⁴³ But, as I have tried to show there is confusion in thinking that expressions such as "being myself" are expressive of a certain metaphysics of the self. We do not have to think of them as *referring* to something particular, or as referring to anything at all.

Think of the saying, "I can really be myself with you". There is nothing preventing me from saying this in a range of relationships in which the particular way in which I am may vary significantly. Nevertheless, the statement may not be less true. Why? Because my claim is not about *what* I am in the relationships, but a declaration about *how* I am able to be in them. I may be telling you that I can relax and feel comfortable with you or that I am not afraid of showing my weaknesses or vulnerability to you. Hence, it is not a statement about being in a particular way, just as the statement, "I love you just the way you are", is not a way of urging you to be a certain way but a

¹⁴¹ One of the strengths of Catherine Osborne's (1996b) remark that "love is not an emotion by which we put *ourselves* into our lives—that was so already" (318) is also that it reminds us of the fact that I do not need to do anything additional to have a place in my life.

¹⁴² I can easily remember a sense of confusion around the encouragement to "just be myself" in my teens (and probably also later). What was I to make of such a suggestion if the problem to begin with was that I did not know what I was like?

¹⁴³ Sartre is also led to regard sincerity as a form of bad faith in that he pictures it as coinciding with itself. "Through introspection I intend to determine exactly what I am, and to be it plainly—even though it means consequently to set about searching for ways to change myself. But what does this mean if not that I am constituting myself as a thing?" (Sartre 2003, 86). Here, the problem rather seems to lie in Sartre's conceptualization of sincerity than in being sincere.

way of telling you not to think that you would have to be in any particular way to “deserve my love”.¹⁴⁴

This claim, that it is not a matter of what I am, but how I am, needs some elaboration. Speaking about relaxing, being comfortable and not having to do anything may make one think that there are no constraints on me and that I can do anything whatsoever. Nothing could be further from the truth! The conception of the self that I have wanted to do away with reflects a certain kind of self-awareness or self-control that often risks controlling me out of the situation. But even if we do not need to think of these situations in terms of either being in control or losing control, it does not mean that what I do is contingent, or that it does not matter what I do.

The command to “be there” or “be yourself” calls for me to be there, truly *be there* in the sense of being attentive and sensitive to you and the demands you make on me in the light of love. In this respect, the question “Who am I?” is of paramount importance. But, as I have argued, it enters first and foremost as a moral demand, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, to enter the situation and my relations to others with a “pure heart”, to be *present* not just physically but also mentally, body and soul.¹⁴⁵ It strikes me that we cannot completely grasp what is involved in releasing myself from double-mindedness so that I am able to be one with myself, and true to myself and will “the good in truth”¹⁴⁶ without bringing in the concept of love. For is not entering the situation and our relations *with love* precisely the kind of wholehearted engagement and presence in the situation that is demanded of me to be truly in it, as well as the act of opening up to someone and telling her, “Here I am”?¹⁴⁷

The notion of “self” that surfaces in these discussions of “being one with myself” is essentially different from the ones I have previously discussed. Far from referring to an inner core, or the way in which I may wish to present myself to you, the “I” that is called for is the “I” that takes shape in taking responsibility. I am myself, and find out who I am, by being one with my actions, by not hiding behind a

¹⁴⁴ Cf. chapter 4 p. 180ff and chapter 7.

¹⁴⁵ It seems to me that the question of being one with oneself also has important bearings on the traditional dualisms. One could describe a certain experience of alienation from the body as a failure to be one with oneself (cf. Young 2005).

¹⁴⁶ This is the only thing that I, according to Kierkegaard, may will without being double-minded.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Lear (2003): “Love then becomes the condition for the possibility of subjectivity (that is, a condition for the possibility of ever forming ourselves into subjects)” (173).

façade or thinking that I am something specific. The encouragement to "be myself" is an encouragement to enter into my relations with others without reservation, to scrutinize my wants and wishes, and not deceive myself about who I become through my actions. By doing this, I am independent in the deepest sense of the word, but not alone but together with other people.

The fear of losing control, and also myself, in finding myself and my happiness in your hands, does, of course, point to the kind of exposure that is inherent in opening up to someone. In that sense, not "being there" may well make me feel more "safe". But the emphasis on the dangers of exposure neglects that love is a relation of trust. The fact that I am in your hands may be exactly that which makes me feel no fear. Your love may give me the strength to open up and question what it is I really want, as well as the courage to face the possibly difficult answers. It may help me work through my insecurities and self-deceptions to become more true to myself and you, or just fill me with the joy of being there.

These remarks, however, are not only meant to be read as psychological points, even if love may be therapeutic in that sense.¹⁴⁸ Rather, love in itself involves the recognition of the moral demand to be true to others and oneself, to be one. Love, as it were, is the pursuit of "the good in truth".¹⁴⁹ As we may say that the "I" of "I did it" takes shape in accepting responsibility, so does the "I" of "I love you"¹⁵⁰ take shape in taking on the demands of love. This is also one of the reasons why I have focused on the "I" in love here, and not on the "you" or the "we", which deserve as much attention in a discussion of love. It is an essential characteristic of morality that only I can shoulder *my* responsibility for my deeds. Ilham Dilman remarks,

another person cannot take *my* decisions, face *my* difficulties, feel *my* distress, love or die in *my* place and vice versa [...] he can enter into my situation and help me arrive at a decision that will be mine; he can share my distress in his concern, himself feeling distress at my distress. But he cannot take it away from me, however much he may wish to do so. (Dilman 1998b, 2)

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Jonathan Lear's (1998) discussions of Freud's remark that psychoanalysis is a cure through love.

¹⁴⁹ I will pursue this grand claim in chapter 6.

¹⁵⁰ Consider also saying "I do" when giving one's wedding vows.

And further K.E. Løgstrup (1997), “[r]esponsibility for the other person never consists in our assuming the responsibility which is his or hers” (28).

This, however, is not to say that we always succeed in taking on the demands of love. Above I have given a sketch of some of the demands that we may see in our relationships to other people in the light of love. The power of my description, thus, lies within the willingness of you as my reader to recognize the place such demands have in your own life. However, it is *not* a description of what many relationships of love look like, or rather of what many romantic relationships look like, to save the word “love” for more proper occasions, nor a prescription for how we should regard them. It is a tragic feature of the “we” of love that it often forms into an “unholy alliance” which serves to feed the self-deceptions of both parties: I carefully watch out for anything you may want me to be or give you, and you watch out ever so carefully for me and my “needs”. We succumb to pretence and compliance rather than to love.¹⁵¹

As Løgstrup points out, this situation is not improved by my sacrificing myself for you. The raptures of falling in love may really tempt me to lose myself completely; not just to give up a certain kind of self-control, but to refuse to take responsibility, to live or breathe through you, as if I were you. Your willingly accepting my sacrifice, desiring to take on my responsibilities in a wish to do everything for me, does not make matters better.

What human beings commonly call love is usually an affectation which shuns like the plague truth between people. And this situation is not altered by the fact that the sacrifice is sometimes both demanded and given. Where there is no will to truth, even sacrifice turns to flattery. (Løgstrup 1997, 21)

That is, although I need to “lose myself” in the sense of ridding myself of any pre-conceived notion of what I am, I should not “lose myself” in the moral sense of renouncing my responsibility. This kind of

¹⁵¹ Cf. Løgstrup (1997): “If it were only a matter of fulfilling the other person’s expectations and granting his or her wishes, our association would mean nothing less than—irresponsibly—making oneself the tool of the other person. Our mutual relations would no longer present any challenge but would consist merely in reciprocal flattery. However, what we are speaking of is a demand for love, not for indulgence” (21).

altruism is no better than the kind of egoism that can be said to be expressed in self-indulgence.¹⁵²

Furthermore, whatever desires, wishes and wants I may entertain in, or about, love, they become problematic in so far they remain mere wishes and wants. I mentioned earlier that a reason for emphasizing the unity of one's moral actions is that we often question the sincerity of an action if it is too self-conscious. The generous act loses its generosity—or rather becomes an egoistic act—if I am generous in order to be "the generous kind of person". This consideration also had me wondering at first whether there could be any good uses of "wanting to be someone" in love. Nevertheless, it should be more correct to say that the problem is not that I want something. Indeed the Kierkegaardian command is not that I should not will at all, but that I will one thing. As we saw with regard to being into what I am doing, the point is not that I am acting without intentions or wants; it is only that all my intentions and wants revolve around what I am doing. Hence, the charge is not against my acting intentionally. It is rather a question about what my intentions are, and what is more, that I should not content myself with merely having a good intention.

This is also a problem with sentences such as "You make me want to be a better man!", which initially drew my attention to these questions with respect to love. Now, I may well recognize that love has made me a better person, but the above comment is probably best answered by a remark that Lars Hertzberg made to it, "So, why aren't you?" It appears as if the man has recognized the possibilities that love would transform him, but still he prefers not to be transformed, as if the feeling that he could be better suffices. Such an attitude, again, is expressive of bad faith.

The man resembles the young protagonist in Coetzee's *Youth* (2003), who, to give a caricature reading, does not look for what he might find out about himself in love, but looks for love to find him as the aspiring artist he wants to be.

What will cure him, if it were to arrive, will be love. He may not believe in God but he does believe in love and the powers of love. The beloved, the destined one, will see at once through the odd and even dull exterior he presents to the fire that burns

¹⁵² In fact, it seems as if both altruism and egoism are as bad options for understanding love and self-love, although egoism is often presented as a form of self-love and altruism taken as constitutive of love. Altruism, in this sense, rather seems like a lack of self-love which, therefore, fails to be love.

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within him. Meanwhile, being dull and odd-looking are part of a purgatory he must pass through in order to emerge, one day, into the light: the light of love, the light of art. For he will be an artist, that has long been settled. If for the time being he must be obscure and ridiculous, that is because it is the lot of the artist to suffer obscurity and ridicule until the day when he is revealed in his true powers and the scoffers and mockers fall silent. (Coetzee 2003, 3)

It is not surprising that his following encounters with women prove to be disappointing.

6

“WE TWO ARE ONE”¹⁵³

*I remember that time that you told me, you said
“Love is touching souls”
Surely you touched mine
‘Cause part of you pours out of me
In these lines from time to time
Joni Mitchell (1971)*

*One man by himself is nothing.
Two people who belong together make a world.
Hans Margolius*

In Plato’s *Symposium* Aristophanes recounts a famous myth about the origins of love. We are told that human beings were originally quite different from now. Equipped with four arms and legs, a head with two faces facing opposite ways, they had a round shape and enormous strength. Because of this they constituted a threat against the gods, and to counter their attack, Zeus conceived a plan to humble them and improve their manners: He cut them in halves to decrease their strength and asked Apollo to give them a new form. The result, however, was not what he expected. Separated from their other half, the human beings were inconsolable. They longed for re-union, they threw their arms around each other and almost died since they refused “to do anything apart” (Plato 1953c, 139, 191b). Taking mercy on them, Zeus came up with another plan. He turned their genitals around so that they could find pleasure in each other and also procreate. This is to explain how it comes about that each of us is always looking for our other half. Without it, if we believe Aristophanes, we are but a “tally of a man” (Plato 1953c, 141, 191d). We are always longing for the oneness and wholeness we once had,

¹⁵³ Eurhythmics (1989).

“the craving and pursuit of” which “is called love.” (Plato 1953c, 145, 193a).

The myth provides an explanation not only of procreation but also of how it came to be that some men love men and others love women, and why some women love women while others love men; there were originally three sexes, man-man, woman-woman and the androgynous woman-man, which after the split were drawn to each other. The point I want to focus on, however, is the longing for union which Aristophanes is appealing to here in connection with love. The account he offers may strike us as comical or exaggerated, and we may be less than inclined to take the details of it seriously. Yet, the myth draws attention to a significant aspect of love. His speech is reminiscent of, if not the reason for, our talk about “finding one’s other half”. The desire for union is also a common theme in erotic love, which is reflected in many forms of mysticism as well.¹⁵⁴

Focusing on the former here this chapter takes on how we are best to characterize our longing to be together in love. Certainly there is something fundamental in the desire for intimacy, the need to be ever closer, for understanding sexual love. Even more, it is a common thought that in love there is not only an “I” and a “you” (or two) but that born out of this constellation comes something more, a “we”. (Cf. Nozick 1991, 418ff.) However, I will argue that rather than taking this longing for each other primarily as a kind of merging or fusing with the other, as some philosophers have suggested, or as a meshing up of identities, desires, thoughts and emotions, it is better to formulate the question about union in love as a matter of *unity*. The former chapter was an attempt to show how the question about the unity of a person’s life could be said to raise a moral question for the individual. Following a similar line of thought, my present concern is to show how speaking about the lovers’ unity in love has a moral dimension. In particular, I want to focus on how our understanding of both “I”, “you” and “we” in love can be said to depend upon an understanding of what is good, by considering what it involves to strive for what is good for the other or what it may mean to regard what we love as good.

My discussion can be said to involve a dialectical movement. The first part examines Robert C. Solomon’s account of “shared identity”,

¹⁵⁴ This is a recurring theme in Irving Singer’s (1984a; 1984b; 1987) investigations of the nature of love.

which he introduces and develops in his two books on love, *Love: Emotion, Myth & Metaphor* and *About Love: Reinventing Romance for Our Times* (1990 and 2001). I criticize the idea that we could understand the personal character of love in what I take to be too narrowly psychological terms, which Solomon does in speaking about our selves as created in interaction with other people.

The second part rather sets out to show in what ways we may understand the unity of love in moral terms. Here I give the word to Plato, and the speech, referred to as the speech of Diotima, delivered by Socrates at a later point in the *Symposium*. I ask in what ways love can be said to constitute an absolute understanding of our relationship as good that cannot be described as relative to our personal desires, wishes and so on.

The third part attempts to show why such a move towards the moral dimension of our identity, or rather unity, in love does not threaten the fundamentally personal character of love. The recognition that love involves absolute demands, I claim, is not an attempt to transcend our personal relations by leaving out the person as an object of love. Rather I argue that it is only in particular situations, and within personal relationships that we, as particular individuals, can make sense of our lives in absolute terms.

I SOLOMON'S "SHARED IDENTITY"

Taking his point of departure in Aristophanes' myth, Robert C. Solomon launches a theory of love that finds its essence in a "shared identity" or in "shared selves".¹⁵⁵ The underlying idea is that our selves, who we are, are always dependent upon our different (kinds of) relations to other people. Picking up the existential idea that our selves are neither static nor stable, but that identities are always "created" in interaction with others, he claims that "love is not a mysterious 'union' of two otherwise separate and isolated selves but rather a special instance of the mutually defined creation of selves" (Solomon 2001, 24) Since this creation of ourselves is often at its most personal and intimate in love, he regards it as one of the most

¹⁵⁵ For an overview of the theory of a shared identity see e.g. "Introduction: Reinventing Love" (Solomon 2001) and "Self, Love and Self-love" (Solomon 1990), as well as Solomon (2005).

important relations in which we are able to recreate and redefine ourselves with and through another human being.

Even if we strive to unite with each other in love, Solomon emphasizes that this striving can only be understood against the background of our being two separate individuals. He regards love as a dialectical process, “as the movement of two dialectically opposed conceptions of ourselves—as individuals and as a fusion of two-into-one” (Solomon 2001, 26). As an example of the opportunity love gives us to “redefine” ourselves in the light of love, Solomon offers an account of a Romeo and a Juliet who instead of facing a tragic death as in Shakespeare’s tragedy, took an angry farewell of their families in order to settle down in a modest suburb in Wisconsin. He sees this as an example of using “love to break the bonds of socially acceptable and ‘rational’ behaviour and define themselves anew” (Solomon 2001, 192). They no longer identified themselves with their families, but “identified themselves and their obligations only with reference to one another” (Solomon 2001, 192).

As I have mentioned in a previous chapter,¹⁵⁶ Solomon’s account of a shared self is closely connected with his account of reasons for love. Regarding love as a process, and our reason for love as “bound up with that process” (Solomon 2005, 171), he thinks the best reasons for love, the “Aristophanic” ones, are the ones that are constituted by the shared identity. “[T]he most important and effective reasons for love are those which are actually shared in the relationship itself” (Solomon 2001, 159). Part of the problem of his account is also the role he gives to reasons in it, but since I have already discussed some problems involved in that I will not focus on this aspect here, but rather on the notion of “sharing” as it enters his account.

Through his discussion, Solomon throws light on several important aspects of who we are and become in love, and his over-all attempt to show how our identity is never fully formed is significant. The attempt to introduce a new term into the debate, however, may strike one as either courageous or foolhardy. Philosophically speaking, it is not even clear what it may mean to speak about the identity of a person and what place that concept may have in love. Introducing a theoretical concept such as a “shared identity” may be suspected of creating more problems than it actually solves. The role he tries to assign to it further nourishes this suspicion.

¹⁵⁶ See chapter 4.

It is, to begin with, utterly unclear what sense we are to make of Solomon’s claim that our identities are “created in interaction with others”. Is it a psychological notion or a metaphysical one? Is it a grammatical point about the use of the word “identity”, that is, a reminder of the different uses of the pronouns “I”, “you” and “we” in love? If it is the last one, and Solomon wishes to point out that it is only in a language which is essentially shared that it makes sense to speak of identities, this notion sounds correct. It is only as creatures with a shared language that we can raise questions and gain answers about who we are. However, Solomon apparently wants to take this suggestion further than that. It sounds as if he wants to say something about how we come to share wants, wishes, desires and so on in love, as well as why this sharing plays an important role for how we understand ourselves and love. And why not? Could we not say that love is exactly constituted by our sharing hopes, dreams and fears, our memories of a past and our plans for a future, in short sharing *a life* and often a home with each other?

Certainly these ways of being bound together by joint experiences, of sharing desires and aspirations is a central aspect of love. In its fundamental demand for reciprocity, our love for each other is characterized by our mutual reaching out for each other, our wanting to share each other’s thoughts and feelings. Even more, I would claim that it is of paramount importance that in building a relationship of love, through conversation, through learning about the other and about ourselves, we come to share an understanding of the world. This may, for instance, be seen in the dire need I may experience that the story that you tell others about us in significant respects is the same as the “story about us” that I tell them. Or to name but one other aspect, it may show in the ways in which we may come to share a reaction to something, by taking over and learning from the other’s reactions.

The significance of sharing a life in erotic relationships also distinguishes them from other relationships of love. Erotic love, as it were, involves the question whether we want to make a life time commitment, although this should not be taken to mean that we necessarily come to share our life in any particular way, such as living together. Our lives come together in the most intimate ways, whereas, say, the love between parent and child, in many cases should lead to living separate lives.

Solomon would probably admit that the notion of a shared life that is characteristic of love introduces a different sense of sharing than

does pointing out the constitutive role that sharing practices has for understanding different ways of talking about identity. Keeping in mind the ways in which language is not a private but a common affair is significant for dissolving the sceptical question of other minds as well certain individualist assumptions in philosophy. However, even if this realization about language may relieve one of a certain metaphysical solipsism, the kind of loneliness that gives rise to such questions is not necessarily lessened by it. I am thinking of thoughts such as, "Is there anyone who understands me?", or, "Am I alone with these thoughts and experiences?" Stanley Cavell (1976, 238-266) has offered some of the most insightful discussions about this existential aspect of solipsism.

Language, as it were, is not only that which brings us together; it is only against the background of language that it is meaningful to speak about being of different minds. In that sense, language is also the presupposition for certain conflicts. To be in conflict with each other we have to share an understanding of what our words mean, but this kind of shared understanding does not do much to solve the conflicts there are between us. In other words, to share the concept of "wanting" is not the same as wanting the same thing. Nevertheless, this is not to deny that there is also a continuity between the ways in which shared reactions, that is, wanting the same things, are significant for sharing a concept of "wanting", as well as sharing a language and talking together in the first place. Compare, for one thing, Wittgenstein's remarks on the importance of "agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments" for language "to be a means of communication" (Wittgenstein 1997, §242). We could not come to share a concept of wanting if we did not to a certain extent want the same things. However, my and your wanting different things does not necessarily show that any one of us has misunderstood the concept.

In the light of this distinction between different senses in which we may speak about sharing a life in response to the sceptic and in the context of erotic love, we could understand the longing for union in erotic love as the wish to bridge the kinds of gaps there may be between people wanting different things. It is a longing that love would answer to our loneliness, that in love I would be understood by another human being, who is precisely another and not me. C.S. Lewis (1960) gives voice to one way of picturing this longing when he describes friendship in the following way.

Friendship rises out of mere Comradeship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, “What? You too? I thought I was the only one.” (Lewis 1960, 65)¹⁵⁷

It is, of course, something to marvel at when you do meet someone and there is no gap between you. To an equal extent it is something to despair about if you never do, or if you for some reason are required to stay away from the one you love. Even more, it is a tragedy how much we, as a consequence of this longing, may endure in the belief that it is love. For as difficult as it may be to admit, not all of this longing, powerful as it may be, is necessarily a longing for love. It is, for one thing, not clear that the quote by Lewis really serves to articulate the desire for *another* person, and not just for another *me*.

In his emphasis on meeting someone with the same interests as oneself, Lewis also gives too much to the philosophical tendency to picture our psychology in individualist terms that I have criticized earlier in this work. In other words, he paves way for the idea that the words “emotions”, “thoughts” and “desires”, and so on, denote inner objects that it is possible to isolate within the individual. Here reflection on the ways in which we may speak of sharing emotions, thoughts, hopes and fears, and the characteristically shared character of activities such as having conversations, playing chess, agreeing or disagreeing,¹⁵⁸ may help to rid ourselves of the idea that it is always possible to break down the shared experience of doing something together into individual experiences which two or more people have in common.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Cf. also “we picture lovers face to face but Friends side by side; their eyes look ahead” (Lewis 1960, 66). This, however, is not to claim that love and friendship by necessity need to be based on some shared *interest*, as Lewis at some points falsely seems to claim. See Backström (2007, 47ff) for a critical discussion of this. It strikes me that Lewis is more to the point when he writes, quoting Emerson, “Emerson said, *Do you love me? means Do you see the same truth? —Or at least, “Do you care about the same truth”* (Lewis 1960, 66).

¹⁵⁸ In these latter cases of talking with each other and playing games doing what we are doing together with another person is crucial for our understanding of what the activity is. To the extent I may speak about e.g. speaking to myself, it is clear that this use is secondary to my speaking with others.

¹⁵⁹ See Baier (1997) for a rendition of this individualist bias in several philosophical discussions of “we-intentions”. This attitude is also apparent in many popular

Furthermore, the notion that we enter into a relationship with clearly defined wills, which will hopefully match, is not descriptive of entering a relationship of love. On the contrary, it is striking that my insisting on what I want in many situations only serves to bring out and strengthen a *conflict* of wills. In other words, the question about what I or you want arises precisely because we want different things, whereas in many other situations in which “we do what we want” there may not even be a question as to: (1) What individual or shared wills preceded our actions. Saying that we are doing what we want may simply be a way of saying that we enjoy doing what we are doing. (2) Who wanted to do it first. Either you were first struck by a thought or I was, or we just went on to do things with each other. (3) Who had to compromise or give up his or her will to reach a decision. There is no question about whether this is indeed what “I”, “you”, or “we” want to do, where my will ends or yours begins. We simply are together. It should also be clear that it is not always obvious to me what it is that I really want, or whether I want anything in particular.

In this respect, Solomon’s discussion goes some way in questioning what we may think of as an individualist prejudice in philosophical discussions of emotions, identity and the self. However, by not properly attending to the two senses of sharing mentioned above, what we may call the grammatical (the sharing of the concept) and the psychological (the sharing of wants)—he only speaks of love as a more personal or intimate form of the creation of identity—he still ends up with a mainly psychological picture of the two human beings in love. Love, to him, becomes the psychological process in which we come to share wants, thoughts and reasons with each other: the “shared self” the entity to which the “we” of love refers. In this way, he fails to attend to the different ways in which words such as “love”, “wanting” or “sharing” may be used in our relationships with one another.

accounts of the means of finding a “compatible” partner. The best matches in love are often thought to be the ones in which the wants and interests of the partners coincide. To make a perfect fit and lessen the strains of having to reach a common agreement on what one, as a couple, wants, it is suggested that the goals and aspirations of the individual lovers should be in need of minimal adjustment. But even here, it is mostly emphasized that the practicalities of love involve a constant compromise. Loving someone, it is said, means not always getting what you want, giving up your own wishes for the sake of the other’s or settling for some middle ground where you can at least get some of the things you want.

Rather than introducing a metaphysical notion of shared selves, and then attempting to add flesh to its bones, then, it would have been better if Solomon had begun by asking what is involved in the various ways in which questions about sharing may enter into our life. Reflecting on issues such as what is involved in sharing a household, paying the rent, going on walks or holidays together, deciding on who should do the shopping or cleaning, making common decisions about buying cars or washing machines, inviting people over to have a party, and so on, may strike one as utterly mundane. It does, however, help one to escape a metaphysical picture of what is involved in "your desires becoming mine", which may otherwise obstruct one's thinking. For why should I not, say, take your letters to the post office, if you are busy with other things to do, and we will not find time to be together otherwise? Or why should you not find it evident that you could pay the rent for me, if I am short of money?

Against the psychological picture of our life together in love offered by Solomon, one may articulate the way "sharing" enters into our conversations about thoughts, emotions, hopes, dreams, interests and experiences by saying that in these cases there is nothing in particular that we share. We do not share an interest in the same way that we may share a cake or a workload. It is not that each of us only has half an interest or half a thought. Neither does sharing a thought involve having identical thoughts with the other one, in the way we may have identical coats. Notice also that in the latter case we would not normally say that we share a coat, and that if we can be said to do just that, it is clear that sharing a thought or interest also does not consist in one of us carrying it at a time. To the extent that we may share a thought or an interest we should be as able to say that the interest is fully mine or yours.

In that sense, we may rather speak of sharing experiences in the context of going through certain things together, or as an expression of the ways in which we are able to *meet, be in contact or present to each other* in our thoughts, desires and interests. We may also see our thoughts, desires, hopes and dreams as expressive precisely of the ways we are able to meet each other: unabashedly telling each other about our personal quirks, not holding back even the most oddly sounding wish, and so on.

To illustrate this sense of unity in love, consider what it means to be engaged in a conversation. The choice of this example is no mere coincidence. Loving someone can be seen as having a long conversation with him or her and the ways in which we are able to

meet in conversation shares many features with the unity of love. The need to respond and attend to each other is as important in love as it is in a conversation. This emphasis on conversation might be thought to express a philosophical prejudice, but then we should keep in mind that the conversation about love that Plato offers us in the *Symposium* is also supposed to be an account of philosophy. In that our understanding of both love and philosophy may be helped by considering the importance of conversation.

To be able to describe us as having a conversation we need to take each other and the presuppositions (or demands) of a good conversation seriously. We need to listen to each other and pay attention to what the other has to say. We need to consider carefully what we want to say in return. For us to be (together) in the conversation, we need to *be one* in it. This does not mean that we should think of the same things, or advance the same ideas, but that our words should latch onto each other. If they do not we are only delivering monologues. "Being together" or "being one" in the conversation, then, calls to mind the significance of *how* we are together in what we are doing. This gives a first indication of the ways in which our unity in love, and in conversations, can be said to present us with a moral demand.

Solomon is sensitive to the ways in which shared trials and experiences may tie people together. However, by only paying attention to this aspect of love, and understanding it in terms of a psychological process or bond, it remains unclear what would distinguish our description of love from a description of how people may bound together in, say, anger, bitterness and hatred. Even within an erotic relationship, it may be difficult to discern what desires really keep the two together. The lovers may be drawn together by their respective desire to present themselves in a specific light, to conquer and possess, or be swallowed by love, as well as by a longing to rejoice in each other and learn more about the other and themselves.¹⁶⁰

Solomon does not appear to have any great problem in calling all of these relationships relationships of love. In discussing what can

¹⁶⁰ Choosing joy as an example in a discussion of love is a conscious decision since joy is central to the concept of love in many ways. To love someone is to rejoice in him or her, to find joy in being in their presence. Hannes Nykänen (2002) has a much more extensive discussion of joy, unity and love. I am indebted to many of the thoughts he expresses there in this chapter, or my take on them, although the references are not explicit.

qualify as reasons or conditions for love, he suggests that "[s]o long as those reasons are part of the person, defined in tandem with a lover who shares and mutually helps to define that identity, they are reasons for love." (Solomon 1990, 170). It is, as it were, the sharing that matters. The example he has in mind is one of a woman who "loves a man because-he-has-money". It is not the money she is interested in, but "it is the money that draws them together [...]—the money that provides the network of shared activities and identity that constitutes their love". He does, however, add that she at least finds him tolerable or even pleasant to be with. And since the man, again using Solomon's words, "quite rightly sees himself as a person with no particular lovable features", he "identifies with his having money. It is not just the way she sees him but the way he sees himself" (Solomon 1990, 169). In that way, both of them regard his having money as the reason for their love, and Solomon concludes by asking why this could not be seen as such, just as "being a good husband" can be seen as a reason for love (1990, 170).¹⁶¹

The question I want to raise is whether indeed it is meaningful to view everything which binds people together in this fashion and which defines their identity as love. One could say that I want to clarify the conditions of love, but *not* conditions in the sense of appropriateness, reasons or justification, as Solomon wants to do, but in the sense of intelligibility or meaningfulness. The conditions I am thinking about are *conditions of sense*. The questions are not whether we should love something or someone in particular, or what our conditions are for loving, but whether it is meaningful to speak of another's words as expressive of love in the first place.

Sometimes it seems that this is what Solomon wants to do with reasons. He argues that there are better and worse reasons for love, and sometimes speaks about my reasons for love as something that may explain my love or justify it in the minimal sense of rendering it intelligible (Solomon 2005, 144, 152). Among the more "dubious and downright perverse reasons" (Solomon 2005, 175) he lists "the need to be punished or martyred, the desire to take care of a truly pathetic

¹⁶¹ Cf. my discussion in chapter 4. With such an example in mind I would hesitate to agree with John Armstrong (2002) when he says: "For all happy lovers possess their own private ideology, their special way of looking at the world which they share and which they quietly regard as superior to others" (68). Joel Backström (2007) has criticized this idea of love as consisting in being loyal to each other as opposed to other people.

human being, the need to play God with someone" (Solomon 2005, 175), jealousy, "the fear of leaving or being left alone [...] breaking up [...] hurting the other's feelings" (Solomon 2005, 176-177), "love out of obligation" (Solomon 2005, 177-178),¹⁶² and so on.

In some of these cases he touches upon the question whether a relationship that is built on such reasons "deserves to be called *love*", but he does not dwell on it. He maintains that, "[t]he shared identity of love can in some cases turn out to be a hateful, destructive, demeaning identity, and in such cases one would be hard pressed to say that love is good at all." (Solomon 2005, 174-175) Nevertheless, he mainly takes this "fact" as an injunction not to "moralize" love. "It may make us uncomfortable to think that evil aspirations shared may provide a good reason for love, but I think it is important to refrain from 'moralizing' love, as Socrates does" (Solomon 2005, 169).

I too do not want to "moralize" love, but I still do not think that Solomon's descriptions provide us with a *meaningful* description of love. Solomon emphasizes the role of reasons to be able to criticize particular relationships of love, but he makes too little of the insight that we may not only criticize someone for not loving well: we may also ask whether something is love in the first place. Even if both persons in the above case of loving because-of-the-money may be pleased with this arrangement, we may still think that they do not love each other. Let me try to clarify this objection by considering what is involved in seriously suggesting that evil aspirations may be a ground for love. This should also bring out the ways in which raising questions about whether we can understand something as love is itself of moral concern.

In a discussion about the ways in which love endures change I was once asked, "Can we love someone who has turned (or is) evil?"¹⁶³ The question is problematic, not least because it may lead us to look in the wrong direction. Would not love and the trust that belongs to it most properly make me address such a question, if it were to arise in my own life, by saying, "Well, she would not turn evil"? I might even demand to know what makes the one raising the question consider this as an option. It could be said that "when I trust someone, she [...] embodies goodness [...] for me" (Hertzberg 1994, 123). Furthermore,

¹⁶² It strikes me that the fact that we may understand these as reasons for love reveals the problems in talking about reasons for love. The problem in these relationships, it seems, is precisely that they have another reason for loving each other than love itself.

¹⁶³ Sören Stenlund raised this question in a seminar on the role of beliefs in love.

we may ask whether it is indeed meaningful to consider someone to be all evil. Even so, this question seems to exert some power on us; the above mentioned discussion was not the only time people have uttered thoughts on what to make of mothers who love their criminal children.

The form of the question—“Can we love someone evil?”—may easily lead us to think in terms of abilities. The example of a mother or a saint who is able to find love and compassion for a person others consider utterly evil may well stir up a question as to how anyone can love in the face of the horrible deeds they have done. This reaction may also be expressive of our own experienced inability to see anything else but the crime in another human being. Our own failure to “love the sinner, but not the sin”, may even lead us to promptly assert, “No one could love such a person.” The strength of our conviction, however, does not turn it into a factual claim. Rather presenting it as a factual claim frequently serves to cover up our own failure. We point our finger at the one who has committed a crime to justify the fact that we ourselves fail to respond lovingly.

However, even if we may voice such attitudes in our personal life, there is something seriously awry in the thought that philosophy should have anything to say about what we are able or unable to do, saying, for instance, “some of us are able to love evil, some of us are not”. Work in philosophy may clarify in what ways a question such as the one above reveals a temptation to pull away from what these cases show us, namely that even against the background of a horrible deed, love may still show us another human being as someone to love. Furthermore, it may show how posing the question in terms of abilities may corrupt our thinking by allowing us to indulge in our *failures* to love rather than attend to the demands love makes on us. Philosophy, however, cannot be asked to legitimize our own shortcomings by offering a formula along the lines of “there are people who are not appropriate or intelligible objects of love” or “feeling unable to love is sometimes understandable”.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ In suggesting that “pessimistic conclusions [in relation to failing to live upto one’s ideals etc.] cannot be ruled out as a sign of moral seriousness” (Phillips 1982, 44) or that “[p]essimism about oneself is not incompatible with moral seriousness” (Phillips 1982, 45), it strikes me that D.Z. Phillips does not simply leave philosophy to clarify what morality means for us, but rather prescribes a certain view on morality. I do not see what it could mean for philosophy to say, e.g. in relation to a married couple who have “accepted the fact” that they are not going to realize certain ideals they recognize in other relationships, that “[t]hey conclude, *rightly*, that it would be foolish

The question I would like to pursue, therefore, is not “Can we love evil?” in the sense of “Are we able to do it”, but “Is evil (and not that particular person) an intelligible object of love”, or, “Does it have any meaning to love someone under the description of being evil?” The fact that there are people who love persons, whom others regard as evil, and whose evil they themselves recognize, is clear. If we were never confronted with such facts, we would probably not raise these questions. But are these cases best described by saying that they love the evil in them? Is it not rather the case that it is meaningful to describe their attitude as love precisely because they are able to see the other as a human being and not just as an evildoer? In other words, we see love in the recognition that human beings are never completely comprised by their deeds.

This way of posing the question should also help rid us from the temptation to think that what we are struggling with in questions such as, “Did Eva Braun *really* love Adolf Hitler”, is finding criteria for deciding whether whatever was between them really was *love*, and not, as I would say, finding a way of *describing* their relationship that is true to it and our response to it.

Asking whether it is meaningful to speak about love in a particular case may take different forms. (1) It may involve *linguistically* correcting someone who does not yet master a specific grammatical rule. “No, even if you may say, ‘I am singing in the rain’, you can’t say ‘I am loving in you’, if you want to say, ‘I love you’ or ‘I am in love with you’.” (2) It may be a way of pointing out that “I *really like* my boss” may be a better choice of words than “I love my boss”, if one does not want anyone to misunderstand one as being *in love* with one’s boss. (3) Pointing out a difference in *use*, we may also explain to

of them to try to emulate or seek after the kind of relationship they believe is deeper. They settle for less.” (Phillips 1982, 43, *my emphasis*). The suggestion that we simply assume that they are right to make this conclusion, and not say that they are self-deceived, and that it may be expressive of moral seriousness, ignores that the moral question revolves precisely around what it means to reach this kind of conclusion and whether we think it is correct to see it as a *moral* one.

With Rupert Read (2002), I would say that I do “not believe that philosophy can dictate to one one’s ethical commitments and political actions; but philosophy can help us gain a clear view of what we are already in one way or another committed to” (424). With regards to what it may tell us about our commitments in love, I would say that it may show us that in the light of love there is always a possibility to love and that in that light our practical inability to love always constitute a failure. Our failures to love, however, do not make us unlovable, but show the way in which we are all, in a sense, sinners.

children that they "are not in love with" their parents, but that they "love" them. The sense in speaking about something as a meaningful description of love that I want to focus on here, however, is the sense in which it raises a question about *sincerity*, both with concern to the ones who claim they love, and the ones who find difficulties in seeing them as loving.

Faced with a sentence such as, "Evil be thou my good", delivered by Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, or "The devil loves all evil", we may well conjure up different images of what this entails. We may think of the devil laughing at someone being pushed and taking a bad fall, smiling at spreading spite and malice amongst people. In this we may well find a sense in which he may find pleasure in evil, and, therefore, be said to love it. But we may also think that his "love of all evil things" means that he does not *really* love anything. He cannot be said to *truly* rejoice in anything, or enter a situation with the "purity of heart" that is characteristic of love. His reactions towards others may be thought to be better described as, say, "gloating".

One way of describing the puzzlement I may feel about what to say in a situation in which I do not find it meaningful to think of someone's responses as love is to say that I do not see what it would mean for me to speak of love in this particular context. This, however, should not be taken to mean that I may only understand something as love in situations in which I could imagine myself reacting to someone with love. The most normal case, of course, is that I recognize love as a meaningful description of a relationship from the descriptions of it made by the people involved, as well as from their more spontaneous expressive behaviour, even if I, myself, do not feel that way. What characterizes the case I am thinking of is rather my coming to doubt the sincerity of someone's expressions and words, the purity or depth of their attachments. It is not that the parties do not master the language of love, at least they do so on a superficial level, but that they fail to recognize the kinds of demands speaking it involves.

Solomon also seems to agree that we cannot call just anything love. At the beginning of *About Love* he remarks that by "reinventing love" he does not mean:

that there are no pre-given elements or emotions in love, or that love can be anything that one wants it to be, or that we can ever free ourselves from the historical, conceptual and emotional contexts in which we find ourselves and which we have not ourselves invented. (Solomon 2001, 25)

We do not, as he says, invent love, love is always a reinvention. We always need to work out what love *means* to us in a particular relationship with concern to the meaning love has been given in the life that surrounds us. This, I think, is one aspect of the narrator in Jeanette Winterson's novel *Written on the Body*, saying, "Why is it that the most unoriginal thing we can say to one another is still the thing we long to hear? 'I love you' is always a quotation. You did not say it first and neither did I" (Winterson 2001b, 9). Even if the words, "I love you" have been used by millions of people, we still need to speak them and mean them in our individual relationships.

Unfortunately Solomon's lumping together the historical, conceptual and emotional contexts in which he thinks we find ourselves and speaking of them as something from which we cannot free ourselves confuses more matters than it solves. Certainly, gaining a deeper understanding of what is involved in meaningfully calling something love may include freeing ourselves from certain historical contexts. We may come to see our thinking as being bound by certain cultural norms about what love should be or look like that prevent us from responding to each other in a loving way. These may be beliefs about the respective roles of the two genders in a marriage, or it may be convictions such as, "Children should not be born out of wedlock", or "Marriage is superior to co-habitation." We may come to react to such beliefs as prejudices and try to rid ourselves of them.

The kind of conflation of the grammar (or even the rules) of language with norms that is at work in Solomon's suggestion that we cannot free ourselves from our conceptual contexts, however, is hardly helpful, although not unusual.¹⁶⁵ There is something utterly confused in the thought that language in any way forces us to say anything or prescribes what it is we should say. Language, as it were, provides us with the tools for saying certain things, but we are the ones who need to say them.¹⁶⁶ In that way, rather than speaking of

¹⁶⁵ Many considerations of language as a social construction, e.g., suffer from bringing quite different aspects of our life under the heading of socially constructed norms. Rather than thinking that I, in any way, am bound to think that $2+2=4$; that triangles have three sides or that husband and wives are married, it seems more correct to say that it does not make sense to claim the contrary. You would be free to think that $2+2=5$ etc. if you were able to give the notions any sense.

¹⁶⁶ This is not to deny that there are features of the surface grammar of language that may prove problematic. Certain ways of putting a question, such as "Is love real or an ideal" or "How is the self created in love?" may lead us to look in the wrong direction and present the problem in a way that embodies metaphysical notions. It may also

conditions of sense, as I did earlier, it may be better to speak of *possibilities* of sense (cf. McEachrane 2006, 82), to avoid the thought that language conditions us to say anything in particular.¹⁶⁷

A better way of approaching the question of sense is to reflect on the distinction between principles and rules that Stanley Cavell (1976) makes.¹⁶⁸ "Rules tell you what you do when you do the thing at all; principles tell you how to do the thing well, with skill or understanding" (Cavell 1976, 28-29). In other words, it is possible to distinguish between situations in which we can see that someone is engaging in a particular activity but doing it poorly, and situations in which we would not say that they are engaging in the activity at all. There are, to take one example, many things you can do with the pieces of a chess-game, but everything you do does not constitute a move in the game of chess. "You CAN *push the little object called the Queen* in many ways, as you can *lift* it and *throw* it across the room; not all of these will be *moving the Queen*" (Cavell 1976, 28). Against this distinction, one could say that norms are more closely related to what it is to do something well or badly. The conditions or possibilities of sense of which I have spoken rather relate to what it is to be doing a certain thing at all.

Now, when we move from speaking about the rules and principles for chess to questions about morality and love, the line between failing to do something, such as failing in love, and not loving is not always clear. "When is not doing a thing well not really doing the thing?" (Cavell 1976, 29).¹⁶⁹ If we, again, consider having a

turn out that certain expressions used in the philosophical discussion are oppressive, such as talking about "the love between man and woman" or emphasizing the need for "rational justification". Nevertheless, we are free not to talk in certain ways, to leave out certain expressions, and also to find new ways of articulating our experiences. Language, in that way, is not a closed system.

¹⁶⁷ This is not to say that the meaning a word has in a particular situation is not dependent on its history of uses in previous situations. It is only to say that its uses there do not determine the meaning (that is its use) in new situations.

¹⁶⁸ The discussion on rules and whether we should understand language in terms of rule-following is vast and by far exceeds the scope of this work. For now, it can only be noted that I am slightly uncomfortable with the term, and think that it needs elaboration to get the important points of the discussion just right.

¹⁶⁹ Perhaps this is so, because in moral matters one may think that the only thing that matters is *how* we do something. That is, we should *do well* or *be good*, not do well or be good at any specific thing. This is one aspect of the distinction that Wittgenstein (1965b) makes between not minding playing tennis badly, and not minding being a good person (5). Whereas we may accept the first as revealing of an understanding of

conversation it is true that in many of our actual exchanges we often fail both the other and the conversation by not always listening, by being too concerned with getting our own points across, and so on. Here another person may say that we are having a bad conversation, but he or she may also criticize us by saying that we are not having a conversation at all.

Earlier I have criticized the notion that we could settle questions such as, "Are we having a bad conversation, or are we having a conversation at all", by appealing to criteria or rules for applying a word that are independent of the things we, spontaneously or on closer reflection, are willing to say on a particular matter. It is in conversation and dialogue that we decide what the best description is, or gain a deeper understanding of what the use of a specific word would involve. In that light, attempting to settle questions of meaning can often be seen as a way of trying out different ideas in relation to particular situations, reflecting on what would be an appropriate description and what one would want to say. What I want to suggest, however, is that these discussions of meaning have a moral dimension. I earlier said that for us to be having what is called a conversation, we have to respond to the demands of the conversation. In other words, we need to understand what we do in the light of what it means to be having a conversation. I need to respond to you as someone who is trying to tell me something, and who is also listening to me as someone who may equally have something to say. This, we could say, is not only an aspect of having a conversation but of speaking, and language, as a whole.

In the title of the chapter that I quoted earlier, Stanley Cavell poses the question, "must we mean what we say?" He argues in the affirmative, and I would agree with him. If I want to say anything, it is fundamental that my words latch on to the significance people and things have in my life as well as to the lives of those I am talking to. If my words were not rooted in my life, which at the same time is our life, if I did not stand behind what I say, and considered the implications of what I want to say, I would only be making noises. This is a condition for making sense, for saying anything in the first place. Recognizing what is at stake in deciding whether to call a relationship, say, loving or abusive, then, is recognizing the different

tennis, it is hard to see the second as expressive of a *moral* understanding, if not a corrupt one.

attitudes to another that will be expressed in my choosing one description over another. There is a great difference between what I might continue to say about someone who I think fails in her love but still loves, or someone who I do not see as loving in the first place.¹⁷⁰

As I said, language does not commit me to saying anything specific, it is not binding. In speaking, however, I am, myself, committing myself to a certain understanding of what is happening and what I am doing. I open myself to criticism as to whether I stand behind my perception of the situation or am really doing what I say I am doing. In other words, if I am bound in any way, one could say I am bound by a demand for sincerity. Our language is expressive of the different kinds of bonds or commitments we have to each other and to the life that we share. Speaking is a commitment to this shared life. I am responsible both for making sense in it and making sense of it.

Against the largely psychological picture of being bound together in love or by culture, history and language, that Solomon offered us, we may, therefore, say that a moral demand for unity, in the sense of sincerity, is fundamental both for language and love. Being one with oneself in one's words is a presupposition for being one with another, as it is a presupposition for communication. This demand for sincerity and unity, I further want to bring out, does not bind us to anything specific. It is characterized by an *openness* to the other person and the situation in his, her or its particularity. Rather than restricting our life, love and language could be said to *enable* us to live a certain kind of life.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Wittgenstein:

"We have the word "love" and now we give this title to the most important thing. (As we confer the title "Philosophy" on a particular intellectual activity.)" (1980a, §115).

"The greatest happiness for a human being is love. Suppose you say of the schizophrenic: he does not love, he cannot love, he refuses to love – where is the difference?

'He refuses to...' means: it is in his power. And *who* wants to say that!

Well, of what do we say "it is in his power"?- We say it in cases where we want to draw a distinction. I can lift *this* weight, but I will not lift it; *that* weight I cannot lift." (1998, 87e)

¹⁷¹ Language, to mention a few things, enables us to have conversations, to do other things that relate to language, joking, telling stories, making promises, finding meaning in things that would not be open to me but for language.

II DOES LOVE DESIRE WHAT IS GOOD?

In what seems to be a response to Aristophanes' account of love in the Symposium Diotima expresses the claim that love is of the good¹⁷² in the following way,

"And certainly there runs a story,' she continued, 'that all who go seeking their other half are in love; though by my account love is neither for half nor for whole, unless of course, my dear sir, this happens to be something good. For men are prepared to have their own feet and hands cut off if they feel these belongings to be harmful. The fact is, I suppose, that each person does not cherish his belongings except where a man calls the good his own property and the bad another's; since what men love is simply and solely the good. [...]"

"Briefly then,' said she, 'love loves the good to be one's own for ever."

"That is the very truth,' (Plato 1953c, 189, 205e, 206b)

Diotima goes on to tell us a story about how the lover of wisdom becomes educated in the mysteries of love by climbing the famous ladder. By first locating the good and the beautiful which love seeks in the loved one's body, the lover moves on to find it in his soul, in the ideas of goodness or beauty, and finally in the search for wisdom, since wisdom is the most beautiful of things. My intention here, however, is not to give a reading of the Socratic account of love, but to see what it may *mean* to make the kind of claim Diotima makes. Of course, finding some sense in the things Socrates says in the *Symposium* cannot be separated from saying something about what Plato might have meant, but the aim is not to offer a consistent reading of him, but to see how we are best to make sense of the problems with which he was struggling.

Presenting love both as the mediator between the Good and the Beautiful as ideal forms and us human beings as imperfect creatures and as a creative force bringing these about, the Diotimian account of love as a response to, a desire for or a pursuit of the true, the good and the beautiful, leaves us with quite a different idea of what it is that we are bound to in love than the accounts of love I have previously discussed. It presents the Good and the Beautiful as objects of love

¹⁷² I will discuss the ways in which we may see the beautiful as an object of love in the following chapter.

rather than locating its object in some specific qualities of the beloved, or of the relationship we build together.

The relation between love and the good is also addressed by Plato in the *Euthyphro*. In that work Socrates asks whether the gods love the good because it is good or whether it is good because the gods love it. "Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?" (Plato 1953a, 35, 10a) I will also attend to this question by asking whether the goodness of something is dependent or independent of us or of our love, if not of the gods. This is not to be seen as an inquiry into why the good is good, but as an attempt to bring out two senses of speaking about the "good" that may sometimes come into conflict. The first is the sense in which our concept of what is good is *relative* to our desires and preferences, whereas the second is the sense in which our concept of the "good" can be said to embody an *absolute* conception against which we are judged.

This way of formulating the matter should also help to shed light on what exactly I find problematic with Solomon's account of shared identity. The ways in which he construes "good" reasons for love in terms of reasons growing out of the "shared identity" give too much weight to the relative sense of speaking about something as "good", neglecting the absolute sense in which we may speak about it and the ways in which such a conception may have a role in our understanding of love. It reduces "goodness" to what may be described as our mutual desires and preferences. Raising questions about the sincerity of someone's love or the meaningfulness of calling something love, however, is internally related to raising a question about the goodness of that love. It is essential to the kind of question this is that it addresses both concepts in a moral, that is, absolute, sense. Then, whereas Solomon discusses love as involving a psychological transformation, I want to bring out how in love our concept of goodness is transformed to go beyond a mere psychological description of our preferences.

The distinction between these two senses of the good may become clearer through reflecting on the following literary example. In the novel *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson, the nameless (and genderless) narrator falls in love with Louise.¹⁷³ Louise is married but leaves her husband, Elgin, who is also a cancer researcher, for the

¹⁷³ See Hansen (2005) for another philosophical reading of the novel.

narrator. When Louise falls ill with cancer, however, her former husband convinces the narrator that he is the only one who can help and heal Louise, and in despair the narrator decides to leave Louise. The narrator's decision is clearly taken with the best of intentions, acting as he or she thinks out of love, sacrificing his or her own wants for the sake of Louise's life. And what, after all, could be more important than that Louise lives? After going away, the narrator also learns as much as possible about cancer and what it does to the body, in order to love every inch of Louise in her absence.

At the end of the novel, however, the narrator comes to realize that he or she had made a mistake. If he or she had truly loved Louise, the insight tells the narrator, he or she would not have abandoned her (Winterson 2001b, 187). The decision about what was best for Louise was not up to him or her to make.

Why didn't I hear you when you told me you wouldn't go back to Elgin? Why didn't I see your serious face? I did think I was doing the right thing and I thought it was for the right reasons. [...] What were my heroics and sacrifices really about? Your pig-headedness or my own? [...]

Louise, stars in your eyes my own constellation. I was following you faithfully but I looked down. You took me out beyond the house, over the roofs, way past commonsense and good behaviour. No compromise. I should have trusted you but I lost my nerve. (Winterson 2001b, 187)

In the light of this insight, the narrator's obsession with the bodily changes that occur in cancer also appears as a fetishism rather than as love.

Taking up the suggestion that "the best thing to do" is not to be reduced to doing what either of them would want to do, in the sense of being spontaneously inclined to do, it is clear that doing what was best for Louise was not necessarily doing whatever Louise had wanted the narrator to do. The narrator's concern for the best for Louise was also a worry that Louise would not have chosen what was best for her. Clearly there are also circumstances in which we may think that disregarding the other's wishes is a legitimate move. Nonetheless, this does not commit us to saying that the only way of making the right decision would have been by conferring with Louise, in other words, that whatever agreement they had reached together would have been the right decision for them. In Solomon's account, this would sound as a possible solution: Louise and the narrator are the ones who, as it were, define the "rules" for their own world.

The idea that the “goodness” of their decision is based on desires and preferences, whether individual or mutual ones, is tempting, not the least because doing what is good for someone in many cases goes hand in hand with doing what she wants. When it comes to questions such as what you want for your birthday or for dinner, where you want to go for the holiday or for the weekend, it would in many cases be absurd if I did not to consider your wishes. Indeed one could say that one significant aspect of sharing a life in love is that, whatever I do, I ask you what you think in the end. It is also an expression of love that I, in such cases, may respect your spontaneous desires as an expression of you.

There is also an array of cases in which we may determine that something is a good decision on the basis of its being an expression of *us*, of what we together think and feel on a matter. These concern questions such as, “Should we buy this house or that one?” or “Should we rather spend the money on going on a trip around the world?” These considerations do not carry any particular philosophical or moral weight, although the decisions we reach are immensely important for our individual relationship, giving it its form and meaning. In this respect, part of the failure of Winterson’s narrator can be seen to be taking it in his or her own hands to decide what was best for the both of them.

We might view these cases of “giving someone what she wants” in the light of what Charles Taylor (1985) called *weak evaluations*,¹⁷⁴ finding in the “good decision” the expression of our spontaneous desires. In these cases we also see in what ways the concept of “goodness” is linked to that of pleasure and the sense in which something “feels good” to us. If it were not for this sense in which likes and dislikes, feeling like something or feeling good were connected with our concepts of both “wanting” and “goodness”, we would not have the concepts we now have. The goodness of joy cannot be separated from the goodness we *feel* in being together, the goodness in sharing your joy, and rejoicing in it too, just as the badness of lying to someone and deceiving him or her cannot be separated from the fact that we *feel* bad about doing it. Think also of the sense in which I can say that it “feels good” to confess a wrong, ask for forgiveness and be forgiven, although this feeling of being “cleansed”, in the particular situation may well be mixed up with a

¹⁷⁴ See also chapter 3, p. 115.

variety of feelings, such as remorse, upset, reluctance to admit what I have done, fear of being rejected, and so on.

The problem with reducing talk of goodness to the fulfilment of various desires, however, comes out if we consider sayings such as, “What you want is not always what you need” or “Be careful what you wish for, you might get it.” Again bringing in what Taylor (1985) called *strong evaluations*, we may say that such expressions recognize the deeper sense in which asking for what we want is expressive of our moral understanding of a situation and raises questions about the sincerity of our expressions. I may ask myself and others whether I really want or need something, whether it is good, and come to realize that what I really want is something other than that to which I am spontaneously drawn. In making such a distinction between what *feels* good and what *is* good, I do not consider myself the judge of what is good. It is better to say that I am judged in the light of a certain conception of what is good.¹⁷⁵ Whereas “goodness” in the first case is described in psychological terms, relating to our spontaneous desires and pleasures, it enters the second case as a moral demand. In the first case my giving “It is good” as a reason for wanting or liking something is an *expression* of my wanting or liking it. In the second case something’s being good is offered as a reason for my wanting it, doing it or cherishing it.

These considerations give us one reading of Plato’s suggestion that our spontaneous desires for the beautiful and good need to be educated. His further suggestion that they can only be educated in and through love, also strikes a chord. It is, as it were, in love that our sense of goodness is transformed. It teaches us that my conception of goodness is not relative to my desires, but involves, to borrow Raimond Gaita’s (2004) words, an “absolute conception” which is internally related to the unconditional significance others have for us.

The insight of the narrator of *Written on the Body* that he or she had done something wrong, as it were, is not only revelatory of a certain absolute conception of goodness. It is also expressive of love. It is in the light of a certain conception of love, and of the goodness of that love, that her walking away shows itself to be not an act of heroism and sacrifice, but an expression of “pig-headedness”, a lack of trust

¹⁷⁵ Even if I have made use of Taylor’s distinction between different forms of evaluation I would hesitate to say that this latter case, in which we are judged by a certain conception of what is good, is best to be understood as an evaluation. We lose something of the absolute character of the concept if we regard it in those terms.

and a loss of nerve. Leaving Louise constituted a betrayal of the goodness of their love. I take it that such a betrayal of their love might as well have taken place if the two had reached the same decision together.

In *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* Raimond Gaita (2004) also draws our attention to the sense in which another's love may reveal to us what it means for another human being to be someone who can be loved. He movingly discusses one of the incidents from Auschwitz which Primo Levi recounts in *If This Is a Man* (Gaita 2004, xvi). In it, one man, Charles, tends to another man, Lakmaker, who is ill, after he has fallen out of bed and lies groaning in his own vomit.

Charles lit the lamp [...] and we were able to ascertain the gravity of the incident. The boy's bed and the floor were filthy. The smell in the small area was rapidly becoming insupportable. We had but a minimum supply of water and neither blankets nor straw mattresses to spare. And the poor wretch, suffering from typhus, formed a terrible source of infection, while he could certainly not be left all night to groan and shiver in the cold in the middle of the filth.

Charles climbed down from his bed and dressed in silence. While I held the lamp, he cut all the dirty patches from the straw mattress and the blankets with a knife. He lifted Lakmaker from the ground with the tenderness of a mother, cleaned him as best as possible with straw taken from the mattress and lifted him into the remade bed in the only position in which the unfortunate fellow could lie. He scraped the floor with a scrap of tin plate, diluted a little chloramine and finally spread disinfectant over everything, including himself. (Levi 2000, 200)

The point with which I want to proceed, that is, that a certain conception of goodness is internal to love is similar to Elizabeth Anscombe's (1979) discussion of conditions of desirability in her discussion of (intentions and) the will. There she develops the idea that there is an internal relation between what I desire and what I regard as desirable (Anscombe 1979, 76). The same thing can be said about the relation between desiring something and regarding it as good. To desire something, as in loving, is to view it in the light of goodness. This is not meant as a commitment to the further claims that we are obliged to react to goodness with love, nor that what we love is always good. The question is only what our other meaningful reactions to goodness can be said mean in the light of love.

Considering the fate of Socrates, Plato seemed to have been painfully aware of the fact that not all people react towards the good

in a loving way. This recognition, however, seemed to have puzzled him to a great degree. The failure to react to goodness with love is strikingly described in the portrayal of Alcibiades in the *Symposium*. Bursting in at the end of the “drinking party”, this scorned lover of Socrates¹⁷⁶ delivers his passionate view of the state of love, which in these settings is revealed to be the love of wisdom personified in the philosopher. He declares his intention to tell the truth about Socrates, a claim that Nussbaum (1986, chapter 6, 165-199) makes much of in a discussion of the *Symposium*. In Alcibiades’ speech she finds a commitment to the idea that images and literature have an important part to play in our knowledge of other people since they are able to convey the lover’s personal knowledge of a unique individual. According to Nussbaum this knowledge is by necessity sensuous and impossible to attain by other means. In particular it is not possible to attain it only through intellectual communication with the forms which is what she sees Socrates as suggesting.

The endeavour to show how love pays attention to the particular individual in ways which cannot fully be represented by intellectual means is praiseworthy. Nevertheless, Nussbaum’s account suffers from her reliance on Alcibiades for putting forth her own objections against the Socratic/Diotimian account. Undoubtedly, Alcibiades’ tumultuous account of his relationship with Socrates gives expression to the kind of burning desire that often characterizes erotic love, as well as to the chaotic experience of not knowing quite what to do with one’s own conflicting feelings. But, turning to Alcibiades for an example of personal love also leads her to downplay the ways in which his speech is not only a speech about love, but also breathes of revenge, obsession, possessiveness and defiance. The speech is a confession about the ways in which Socrates, in his peculiar kind of beauty and goodness, awakens shame in Alcibiades, by telling him things about himself that he recognizes are true, but which he in his vanity constantly fails to live up to. Socrates reveals to him something about what goodness is, but this is not something that Alcibiades is

¹⁷⁶ Nussbaum (1986) points out the confusion in sexual roles that takes place in that Alcibiades, entering the relationship with Socrates as a passive object of desire, the beloved boy, takes the role of the active lover, whereas Socrates seems to move from lover to beloved (188).

willing to accept. Celebrating his freedom, goodness to him is something limiting, a bond from which he wishes to release himself.¹⁷⁷

The way in which Nussbaum unproblematically takes the truth Alcibiades contends to tell as the truth about personal love, therefore, neglects that what he says cannot be understood independently of his explicit pledge to reveal or expose who Socrates is. His understanding of Socrates is an expression of the love he has to give, or better yet of his failure to love. His inability to see and accept the goodness of Socrates as good, reveals something about his own inability to love.

This is one way in which we may understand the personal character of love. That is, although the experience and emotions of falling in love may come to us all, what we make of them, what they bring out in us will depend on who we are ourselves. Our own ability or inability to open up to love, our insecurities and failures, affect what we come to see as characteristic of love and as possibilities in it. Where there is trust and faith in one relationship, possessiveness and jealousy rule in another. This of course, also makes it difficult to distinguish what is truly a philosophical remark about love from what is an expression of one’s own difficulties in love.

The example of Alcibiades also shows the manner in which love may reveal to us that something other than what we desire is good. In the light of Socrates and the kind of life he embodies, the aspirations of Alcibiades show themselves as vanity, as a hunger for power, and so on. Until his meeting with Socrates, he had succeeded in living his life under the pretext that these were noble intentions but the confrontation with the philosopher brings out their true meaning. Socrates confronts Alcibiades with the question about who he is and wants to be. This is by no means a less personal question than his previous considerations of what kind of person he was in the eyes of others. In fact it is more so, but the moral sense in which he is personally involved in it differs enormously from the first case. It demands of him to take himself seriously, not just following up on any whim but carefully attending to the question of what he truly wants, and in what sense that is good.

Alcibiades’ reluctance to accept the goodness of Socrates, then, cannot be distinguished from his unwillingness to accept what it says

¹⁷⁷ Compare the way in which Alcibiades speaks about being bound and limited in his love for Socrates with Solomon’s description of the shared identity in love as a psychological bond as well as of us being bound by or historical, emotional and conceptual contexts.

about his own lack of it. In that, his love for Socrates could also be described as hate. A kind of hate similar to the one Wittgenstein (1998) draws our attention to when he remarks, "It might also be said: hate between human beings comes from our cutting ourselves off from each other. Because we don't want anyone else to see inside us, since it's not a pretty sight in there" (52e).

Bringing in a theme from Plato's other dialogues, we could say, that the ways in which Alcibiades' is torn between motives reveals a division between the needs of the body on the one hand, and the needs of the soul on the other. This distinction between body and soul, İlham Dilman (1992) emphasizes in a discussion of the *Phaedo*, is not to be seen in analogue with the Cartesian dualism of mind and body. It is not a rejection of the fact that we are embodied beings nor expressive of the kind of scepticism that comprises Cartesianism. "For Socrates, from the start, human beings are flesh and blood beings interacting with one another in a public life. It is within such a life that the possibilities of good and evil are to be found" (Dilman 1992, 74). For Plato the body rather comes to represent our moral weaknesses:

the body is the seat of various forms of pleasure and pain and appetites, the focus of powerful fears, desires and attitudes. These contrast with many of our moral ideals and handicap us in our aspirations to live in their light. (Dilman 1992, 74)

Our desire for pleasure may well make us present the desired "object" as good or desirable, but Plato repeatedly emphasizes the need not to reduce the goodness of the soul to the pleasures of the body. We are, he says, continually misconceived by the looks of beauty and goodness, but if we only let our desires rule, true goodness may well pass us by. In the words of Kahlil Gibran's *Prophet*:

But if in your fear you would seek only love's peace and love's pleasure,
Then it is better for you that you cover
your nakedness and pass out of love's threshing-floor,
Into the seasonless world where you shall laugh, but not all of
your laughter, and weep,
but not all of your tears.
(Gibran 1998, 20-21)

One of the telling examples Socrates gives to free us from the temptation to reduce questions of the goodness of the soul to the pleasures of the body, is the comparison between rhetoric and cookery in the *Gorgias*. He asks which of the two, cookery and medicine, it is that attends to the true needs of the body? He opts for

the latter, claiming that the former is a form of flattery which "cares nothing for what is the best, but dangles what is most pleasant for the moment as a bait for folly, and deceives it into thinking that she is of the highest value (Plato 1953b, 317-319, 464d). The aim of the argument is to show that philosophy is more like medicine while rhetoric is more like cookery. The aim of philosophy is not to please its public but to become clear about the truth. Love, I will argue, carries a similar demand.

The point can be brought out by considering the distinctions we may make between on the one hand loving and on the other wishing to please or being pleased with someone.¹⁷⁸ This is a distinction that Solomon's description of love as a psychological bond fails to account for, and I will attempt to show how this is a failure to capture both something about love and something about the kind of sharing or unity of a life that is internal to it.

In the novel *What I Loved*, Siri Hustvedt (2003) paints one quite extreme picture of love turned into a wish to please. Her story centres around two couples whose lives and families become intertwined, the narrator Leo, an art critic, and his wife Erica, and the artist Bill and his "true love" Violet, for whom Bill leaves his first wife and young son, Mark. The second part of the book is to a great extent also a story about Mark, who, after the unexpected death of Leo and Erica's son and Mark's childhood friend (the 12-year-old) Matthew, also becomes something of a son to Leo after his and Erica's marriage falls apart as a consequence of Matthew's death.

Having been what struck everyone as a cheerful boy, Mark's teenage years are marked by conflicts. He becomes involved with drugs and the artist, Terry Giles, who proposes to do art by killing cats and cutting up models of human bodies. In short he does not lead the kind of life his parents would wish for him. He is repeatedly caught out with lies, but for every lie, he comes up with an explanation or an apology that sounds sincere. Time and again he is forgiven. Only to show that all his explanations and apologies were yet another lie. In the end, his parents, and finally Leo and Violet after Bill's death, give up their hopes for him. They come to question what, or who, it was that they truly loved. In one of the final scenes with Mark, he tells Leo that his whole life has been a pretence, that he does

¹⁷⁸ This goes together with my distinguishing love from liking something in chapter 4 and partially arguing for this by saying that loving does not simply amount to being pleased with something (which seems to be an essential aspect of liking something).

not tell the truth and makes up lies and faces because he does not think they would like listening to his own voice. "There's a voice inside my head. I hear it, but nobody else does. People wouldn't like it, so I use other voices for them." (Hustvedt 2003, 323) What one first took and hoped to be an expression of love for his parents shows itself as a pathological desire to please.

The example shows the difficulties in relating to someone who acts with the sole intention to please. We may well understand the concern Violet expresses, when she says, "the really terrible question is this: What was it that I loved?" (Hustvedt 2003, 352). Was it him or the perfect automaton that, as she now sees it, he had already become as a child? What is so terrible about this question, and so uncanny in reading about Mark, is that *he* is nowhere to be seen in his actions. He is never one with his words or actions but there is always some ulterior motive behind them. This makes it difficult to see what it would mean for him to love anyone, and also what it would mean for Violet to love *him*, since nothing he did was ever a true expression of him.

As I said, the example of Mark is quite extreme. It does not seem possible to capture his failure in merely moral terms, without discussing the pathology of it. Nonetheless, the same patterns are also discernible in normal cases of wishing to please. This should alert us to the problems involved in thinking that pleasing or being pleased with someone is a central feature of love. Consider the following case. I find your reaction to somebody unfair, thinking to myself that your descriptions of what has happened are exaggerated and overly self-righteous. I am convinced that speaking my mind is the right thing to do, perhaps I even think I have good reasons to be angry with you, but to keep the peace, I consider not saying anything about it to you. I may well be right in thinking that what I have to say is not anything that you want to hear. Facing one's wrongs is often difficult. Even so, this does not make not telling you right.

This is a case in which there is an obvious conflict between doing what is good and doing what is pleasing. Now, is it sensible to suggest that I could choose not to say anything to you although I am convinced that you are doing something wrong and still be said to act out of love? To become clear about this, we may, first, raise the question whether I am really entitled to decide what it is *you* want. It is true that what I say may be unpleasant to you, but this does not exclude that it is something you may also want to hear. Remember that someone might say, "I want you to tell me what you truly think,

even if you are afraid that it may be painful to me.” We should also keep in mind that saying or thinking, “I am only doing what is best for you” may well constitute a particularly nasty form of abuse, in which I try to push my will upon you.¹⁷⁹ Just as your good is not always connected with your desires or pleasures, it is also not solely dependent on mine. Even if I am convinced of the good I am doing, I may be as confused and deceived about what is good for you, as I think you are.

Furthermore, by concealing my thoughts from you, I can be described as not being true to you. By not sharing my thoughts with you, I threaten the unity of love. I do not want to suggest that the only alternative to hiding one’s thoughts from each other is sharing everything. There may well be thoughts and experiences that we never discuss. However, the fact that I intentionally conceal something from you that I hold important in any sense of the word, reveals a double-mindedness on my part. There is a split between what I say I am doing (or thinking, cf. lies) and what I am actually doing. This lack of unity in my actions, it should be evident, also constitutes a problem for the unity of love. How can I claim to be one with you, if I am not one with myself?¹⁸⁰

However, this does not mean that I should not care about the ways in which my words may hurt or offend you. To suggest that your well-being, even in the sense in which things are pleasant or unpleasant to you, should not concern me, would be an affront to love, and it is only to be expected that this concern will play a part both in how I tell you and what I tell you. In other words, it comes to show in that I do not *blame* or *condemn* you, but try to *open your eyes for what you are doing* and *support you in trying to do better*. Coming to see that my *desire to do what is good for you* does not amount to merely *attending to your pleasures* involves the recognition that only being concerned with the latter is not really *loving you*.

¹⁷⁹ bell hooks (2000) is very conscious of the problematic nature of such sayings in our relations to children.

¹⁸⁰ On the whole, it strikes me that many of our articulated or worked out intentions and reasons are connected with our doing something questionable. Normally we do not walk around with a clear intention of what we are doing even if in most cases we are able to spell out our intentions as well as our reasons for doing something if we are asked. When we do something that might be criticized, however, our explanations are often much closer at hand: we have a clear picture of what it is we doing, and how others should perceive it.

Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that it is exactly my care, consideration and love for you that may make it difficult for me to tell you what I think is wrong in what you do. My concern for you may even tempt me not to say anything. However, if I withdraw from difficult conversations and decisions, what I am doing may be better described as a form of (self) indulgence. My actions no longer constitute a concern for *you*, but a concern for myself. My wish to please becomes a way of blinding myself to the reality of you.

III

ABSOLUTE PERSPECTIVES AND INDIVIDUAL PERSONS

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that accounts of love that stress the unconditional aspects of it may be criticized for not being sufficiently able to encompass the personal character of love. Speaking about the absolute character of goodness and beauty, and about goodness and beauty as the true objects of love, does not lessen the weight of this criticism. The rest of this discussion, therefore, is an attempt to clarify why I do *not* think that an account of love as embodying an absolute, or unconditional, perspective on our relationships with other people, or an account of “goodness” as the object of love, excludes the ways in which love is deeply personal. I first say something about the criticism that has been directed at Plato and the ways in which I think this criticism is justified. I then turn to the ways in which I think my account avoids this kind of criticism.

The criticism against Plato’s view of love is largely that it does not take other persons as its object, and furthermore that it does not account for the fact that actual persons are never perfectly good. This is the criticism that Nussbaum wishes to bring forward by presenting us with Alcibiades’ imperfections and this is the criticism that Gregory Vlastos (1981) brings up against him.

As a theory of the love of persons, this is its crux: What we are to love in persons is the “image” of the Idea in them. We are to love the persons so far, and only insofar, as they are good and beautiful. Now since all too few human beings are masterworks of excellence, and not even the best of those we have the chance to love are wholly free of streaks of the ugly, the mean, the commonplace, the ridiculous, if our love for them is to be only for their virtue and beauty, the individual, in the uniqueness and integrity of his or her individuality will never be the object of our love. (Vlastos 1981, 31)

Regardless of the problems in Plato's account, it should be noted that Vlastos's comments in themselves give rise to questions. Speaking about what we are to love people *for*, he moves about in the problematic context of reasons for love, a context which remains in his suggestion that we should love persons who are "worthy of love for their own sake" (Vlastos 1981, 31). This appeal to "loving persons for their own sake" is common place in philosophical discussions of love, often drawing on Aristotle's discussion of friendship in which the kind of friendship in which we love our friends for what they are, rather than for their utility or the pleasure they give us is regarded as the highest form of friendship. It also seems to be the greatest length to which many philosophers want to go to assign an unconditional character to love.

But even if this formulation goes some length towards saying that loving people involves recognizing that they also have faults, it still carries much of the burden of conditional accounts of love. Saying that we should love someone for his or her own sake is modeled on an understanding of how love and friendship can be conditional. It suggests that we do understand what it is to love someone for fame, money or fortune, but that we should really love people *for* their own sake. Here I agree with Peter Winch (1972) that the problem with putting the emphasis on doing something "for its own sake" is that it makes one's actions and love "too like" what we do "for the sake of something else" (183). Furthermore, I have emphasized how different the kind of concern we may have for the pleasure and utility people may bring us is from the concern we have for others in love or friendship.

Roger Scruton (1987) suggests that the phrase "for its own sake" is "a device which serves to block the passage to purpose, and to focus all reasoning upon the thing itself" (81). I, on the other hand, have suggested that saying "I love you" is *not* to be considered as a form of reasoning, even if a whole world of understanding is embodied in those three words. My saying "I love you" is an address, a way of turning to you with my love. It is a way of opening up to what this may mean in different circumstances. The words take the form of an address. They long for a response, not for justification. The demand of love, as I understand it, is primarily a demand to love *people*, not *for* anything, and it is far from clear how we should understand such a demand. Clarifying that is the challenge of any philosophy of love.

We may, however, agree with Vlastos that when it comes to telling us what it means to love people, Plato does not offer much help. At

least not at first glance. The standard reading of the *Symposium* presents us with personal love as something which we need to transcend. The aim of love is *not* to be found within our personal relationships with each other but in the philosophical reflection of the forms. It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to give a coherent answer to whether this standard reading is indeed a good rendition of Plato's arguments, but at least I want to raise some questions about how true it is to what Plato is actually saying. First, there is the question whether we should really take Socrates' words in the *Symposium* as the mediator of Plato's ideas. What should we make of the fact that his speech is only one in a row of praises of love? Are we right to assume that just because Socrates is usually the conveyor of Plato's thoughts he is now?¹⁸¹

More importantly, there is a question about how one should understand Plato's conception of the forms. Vlastos claims that we cannot read the *Symposium* correctly without acknowledging in which ways it is a continuation of his teachings about the forms (Vlastos 1981, 19f). Since the forms of goodness and beauty clearly play a part in how Socrates wants us to understand love, we should ask how we are best to understand these forms and their relation to love. What importance should we give to the idea that we come to know the good through our personal relations to others?

It strikes me that the standard reading often assigns to Plato the metaphysics of a world of forms. The Diotimian ladder is taken as a temporal account of how we come to acquire knowledge of the form of goodness as an idea, or better yet as an ideal that exists in a world beyond our own. In my readings of Plato, however, I often see a struggle to come to terms with concepts and the relations that hold between them. Rather than taking the ladder as telling us something about the relation between the personal and the ideal world, it can be read as telling us something about how we come to be acquainted with the *concept* of the good in our own world.

There are certainly many metaphysical overtones in Plato and I do not think that he is able to convincingly counter all the charges that have been made against him. For one thing, I do not think that perfection, which is often attributed to the forms, is an intelligible quality of a concept. What would it be for a concept to be perfect?

¹⁸¹ See e.g. Osborne (1996a), especially chapter 4, and also Nussbaum (1986) for a discussion of this.

Such descriptions easily lead us to think of the ideas as separate entities, and this is clearly a metaphysical idea. But I can also understand how one could stop at "perfection" in a search for appropriate words to describe (what may strike one as) the absolute character of logic or grammar. Many of Plato's problems in articulating the role of goodness in love also stem from a too strong identification of the absolute character of morality with the "absolute" character of conceptual relations (as well as of mathematics).¹⁸²

Nevertheless, I *do* think that a reading of the *Symposium* which regards the connections he makes between goodness and love as *internal* relations may deepen our understanding of the two in fruitful ways. I also think there is some textual evidence for this. It does not say that the lover of wisdom should be alone in his contemplation of the good. Rather, the activity of philosophizing as it is presented in the Platonic dialogues is always done together with others. If we look at the Socratic dialogues we may, of course, question whether they indeed portray good conversations. We may feel that Socrates has a certain aim with his questions, that he is not really interested in learning something new from his adversaries but thinks that they are the ones who should learn from him. In that sense we may think that they are not truly dialogues but monologues. However, the settings Plato has chosen for presenting his ideas should *not* simply be put aside as an unnecessary ornament. Much of what we may learn about philosophy in Plato is precisely to be found in the form in which it is delivered to us.

It is also true that Plato uses imagery such as gazing at the forms of beauty and goodness, to portray the love of wisdom. This, we may easily picture as a solitary enterprise. Nevertheless, rather than taking this as saying something about the actual forms that philosophizing should take, we should consider what it means to read this as a moral remark, in other words, as an attempt to characterize the moral relation we should have to the good, and why not to the object of the philosophical investigation. That is, I should not try to control it or try to turn it into what I want.¹⁸³

The picture of gazing at the forms may also lead us to think of the knowledge of the good that Plato offers us in too rational terms, primarily portraying our understanding as an intellectual capacity.

¹⁸² Cf. chapter 10.

¹⁸³ Cf. Weil (1977): "Beauty is a fruit which we look at without trying to seize it" (379).

However, if one bears in mind that Plato speaks of philosophy as a *love* of wisdom, it is clear that the knowledge of the good that we may gain through this kind of contemplation in any case is quite different from any other kind of knowledge we may have, even if we speak of it as a kind of knowledge.¹⁸⁴

Thus, we may ask whether we should really understand the search for the good as a way of transcending our personal relations, or if we would be better off understanding it as a *transformation* of them in the light of the good? Rather than reading the Diotimian ladder as an ascent in a literal sense, we could understand it as telling us something about the deepening of our concept of the good, coming to see the good as not being connected either to any specific feature of a person or to one single person but as having a more fundamental role in our understanding of each other. Even so, I agree that this may be taking Plato too far.

Leaving Plato aside, let me turn to why I see no stark conflict between viewing love as deeply personal and thinking that it involves an absolute perspective. If we take this to mean, as Vlastos suggests, that I am to love the “‘image’ of the Idea” in you, we are clearly on the wrong track. Loving you is never loving any image or idea I make of you, however ethereal it may be.¹⁸⁵ Vlastos’s criticism, however, suffers from his attempt to transfer the points Plato makes about the forms (or the concepts as I take them to be) to persons, as if it were possible to make such a shift. If the object of love is supposed to be completely perfect and excellent then clearly no person could be such an object. I do not want to claim that Plato’s writing is not open to criticism on this point; we may ask, for instance, what it may mean for goodness to be perfect. But when I speak of goodness as an absolute concept I do not mean that in seeing goodness in you I am forced at the same time to concede that it is something perfect. Nor do I have to say that you are perfect in the sense of being a “masterwork of excellence”.

¹⁸⁴ Hannes Nykänen (2002) criticizes Greek morality for primarily being a morality of knowledge, and thereby mislocating the moral question in how we may *know* the good. Here, anyway it seems as if the knowledge (or rather wisdom) Plato has in mind is not simply rational knowledge, but is integrally connected with love. Cf. also Nussbaum’s discussions of love’s knowledge (Nussbaum 1990).

¹⁸⁵ This does not mean that idealizations do not form a constant temptation in love. I discuss this more in chapter 7.

Speaking about the absolute character of “goodness” or “love” is rather a reminder that there is a sense of speaking about goodness and love that is not relative to our desires and wishes. The absolute demands that I see in love are there independently of what I choose to think about them. I cannot neglect them, and release myself from responsibility or criticism by denying their absolute character. But even if love and goodness confront me with these absolute demands, I do not mean that I should only love you in so far as you succeed in living up to these demands. Nor, am I saying that the love I have to offer is as absolute as the demands we may see in it. Our lives and loves are full of failures and flaws in the light of these demands. Nevertheless, they are also lives of joy and happiness, and it belongs to the sense of these moments that they may feel eternal.

My point in speaking about the absolute sense of love, then, is that if I love I will see certain things as making absolute demands on me. There is no chance to budge. This is also where I see the crucial mix-up in Plato. He fails to distinguish between seeing perfection and excellence as a property of the ideas of goodness, beauty, and so on, and the absolute character of our reaction to what is good and beautiful, even if we may question whether Plato was aware of this moral aspect of the relation. In other words, the concept of “the absolute” is *not* to be equated with that of “perfection”. The absolute is rather a characteristic of the relation, the attitude we have to something, than a characteristic of that to which we stand in relation.

More importantly, the goodness that I see in you cannot be separated from seeing *you*. Wittgenstein warned us against locating the meaning of words in anything other than our use of language, and by the same token I would warn against thinking that goodness exists somewhere apart from our lives and the good and evil we do to each other within these. The goodness of your love is not anything apart from your smiles, your care and concerns, the look in your eyes. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, it is there alive in your features, in your actions, in your words (cf. Wittgenstein 1997, §537): being concerned about your goodness is precisely being concerned about *you*. In that sense, it could be said that the absolute demands exist only in particular situations.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ There is, so to speak, no general way of being together in particular instances. The only way we can determine whether something can count as being together or not, is by judging the particular occasions on which we do things together. Sometimes I or you may, of course, say, “It does not matter whether we do this or that as long as we

In other words, it is essential to the goodness that is revealed to me in love that it is revealed in the individual meetings between human beings. The goodness I see in you and our relationship cannot be separated from the remorse I may feel at realizing that I, by my words, have caused you pain, or the joy that is awakened in me by a loving glance, by you taking the time to listen or recognizing me in my affliction. The sense in which I may experience love as unconditional or as a grace cannot be separated from you welcoming me with open arms although I stand in front of you as a sinner, perhaps having done something “unforgivable”. The list could be extended with innumerable examples. Our understanding of goodness is dependent on our seeing it embodied in our life, to the extent that someone who has only been met with distrust and betrayal may be unable to see, say, the generosity and trust of another’s actions.

If I have succeeded in making myself clear, my reasons for hesitating to speak about you as the object of love, should gradually have become more evident. Certainly my love can be said to be *about* you in the sense that it involves an understanding of who you are. Yet, there is a sense in which it is not *about* you, in the same sense that fear is about danger, or anger about injustice. My love is rather *for* you, or to take up the suggestion of a shared life in love, I live in love *with* you. Speaking about love as a subject-object relation fails to recognize that love involves the meeting of two subjects, if one feels obliged to use either part of the subject-object distinction.

Therefore, if we do wish to speak about what love is *about*, we may also take goodness, and furthermore beauty and truth, which will be the subjects of the following chapter, as our examples. The concepts, as I have tried to show, are internally related. Loving someone is understanding him or her in the light of goodness, truth and love. It is not meaningful to speak about love in a case in which the lover does not regard the loved one as good in any way. Nevertheless, we may

are together”. Thus, what counts is not that a particular activity takes place, but that we both take part in it. But even if we may, in one sense, say that what we do or talk about is not significant, in another sense it still is. If we, again, think of what it is to have a conversation, our being one in the conversation comes to show precisely in our trying to find out what it is we are discussing. It is through focusing on what it is that we are doing that we are focusing on each other. By taking the conversation seriously we are also taking each other seriously.

also join Weil (1978) in criticizing Plato's love for truth (and goodness and beauty for that sake) by saying:

Instead of talking about love of truth, it would be better to talk about the spirit of truth in love. [...] Pure and genuine love always desires above all to dwell wholly in the truth whatever it may be, unconditionally. (Weil 1978, 242)

This, I take it, is similar to Kierkegaard's (1956) injunction to "will the good in truth." I have also wanted to show how questions of goodness in many situations enter into our conversations about love as a demand.

I have shown some ways in which we can be said to be bound by a certain conception of goodness in love. This, however, is not to say that we are also bound to each other, or that we should understand the bonds of love as a psychological bond. It is a reminder of the ways in which I commit myself to you through my words and actions, which at the same time involves a commitment to open up to you as a person who can change, who is not determined by past deeds, and so on. It is to know you in the sense of being in contact with you, to really be there with you, to meet you, with an open mind and heart.

Compare this to Dilman, who, speaking of a couple's failure to know each other, says,

the estrangement I mentioned earlier is not the result of the husband and wife not being able to know each other; it is the lack of knowledge or contact between them. The way they are unable to meet in their responses is what we have in mind when we say that they no longer know each other. They have not forgotten something each knew about the other, they have lost contact. (Dilman 1987, 126)

When speaking about unity in love, it is something of this sort I have had in mind.

“THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GIRL IN THE WORLD”¹⁸⁷

*Die Liebe, die ist die Perle von großem Wert, die man am Herzen hält, für die man nichts eintauschen will, die man als das Wertvollste schätzt. Sie zeigt einem überhaupt — wenn man sie hat — was großer Wert ist. Man lernt, was es heißt: den Wert erkennen. Man lernt, was es heißt: ein Edelmetall von allen andern aussondern. Die ungeheure Vorliebe dafür lehrt uns [die Idee \ den Begriff] des einzigartigen Wertes. Die ungeheure Vorliebe führt uns dazu zu sehen: es ist unsere Pflicht das zu verteidigen. Die Vorliebe führt uns zum Ernst. Die Leidenschaft, zum Ernst.
Ludwig Wittgenstein (2000, Item 133 Page 8v)*

*And so you see I have come to doubt
All that I once held as true
I stand alone without beliefs
The only truth I know is you
Simon and Garfunkel (1966)*

“Have you seen the most beautiful girl in the world?” Prince (1995) asks us in a song. “I love you just the way you are”, Billy Joel (1977) declares in another. The songs give voice to two familiar ways of expressing my love for you. On the one hand seeing you as beautiful or wonderful, on the other hand loving you for who you are. Put together, however, the two sentences present us with an apparent paradox. How can I say that I love you just the way you are, and in the same breath, say that you are the most beautiful and wonderful person in the world? Does not the first exclude the other, implying that I accept you just as you are, that is, with faults and imperfections and not as the most wonderful, beautiful human being that ever walked the face of this earth?

¹⁸⁷ Prince (1995).

If we consider the situations in which I may utter these words, the paradox seems to dissolve as of itself. The first, “You’re so beautiful”, may be a quite spontaneous and passionate expression of my love, uttered at a romantic dinner or in the midst of love-making, after not seeing you for a long time or during courtship, kissing and caressing, paying compliments. This should also remind us of the fact that seeing you as such is not a reason for my love, but an *expression* of it. The second, “I love you just the way you are”, may rather be a way of reassuring you of my love. I am telling you to trust me and that our love will face the test of time. Consider, for instance, these parts of the lyrics of Joel’s song, “Don’t go changing to try and please me, you never let me down before” or “I took the good times, I’ll take the bad times, I’ll take you just the way you are”. I assert that my love needs no reason. You do not have to deserve my love. Or, better yet, my assertion is a reminder that talk about deserving does not belong to the language of love.

Yet when we are confronted with the statement that someone is the most beautiful girl in the world, we might be tempted to ask what she is *really* like. Is she *really* that beautiful, or is it only her lover who sees her as such? This echoes a more general question about emotions and their relation to facts and values.¹⁸⁸ Are we to understand emotions as rational judgements of facts in a situation as the dominant trend in analytic philosophy maintains, or do the emotions themselves shape what we see as facts or as given in a situation? Or in relation to values: Are emotions merely guides to what might also otherwise be regarded as valuable,¹⁸⁹ or are they part and parcel of what values are? Do they find, create or even reveal value?

I touched upon this discussion in chapter 2, in which I tried to question any clearcut general distinction between facts and values. I argued that what I say in a situation is expressive of what I feel, and that my feelings are constitutive of what I think of as facts. My aim here is to show some ways in which a discussion of the concepts “beauty”, “reality” and “truth” in the context of love may deepen our

¹⁸⁸ In one recent discussion, Michael Stocker (2002) e.g. argues that rather than being “external to value: [which emotions may well seem to be] by ‘only pointing to’ them, or by being only useful for them, or by being only added flourishes to them [...] emotions are internal to value [...] emotions are expressions of, and may even be, evaluative knowledge” (65).

¹⁸⁹ Such a view of emotions may seem tempting if one considers only examples of “fear”. Fear may be said to alert us to danger we may also otherwise be aware of.

understanding of the question about who somebody is and what it is to know someone. Drawing on the aspect of the emotions that I underlined in the previous discussion, that is, their capacity to embody different meaningful perspectives on a person or a situation, I will continue to argue that knowing someone is not to be reduced to having information about some facts.

In particular, I want to scrutinize the claim that the perspective of love inevitably constitutes an idealization of the beloved, in other words, that it mainly serves to register a private, subjective, response which does not attend to how things actually are. I want to contrast this with the view, brought out by philosophers such as Lev Shestov, Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil, that love involves a confrontation with the reality of other people. I will argue that the philosophers who regard love on the whole as an idealization build on too narrow a conception of the concepts of “truth” and “reality”. “Reality” mainly figures as an epistemological concept in these accounts, which fails to attend to the rather moral character of the ways in which the words “reality” and “real” are used in the discussions of Murdoch and Weil, as well as in many of our conversations about what is “real” and what is an “ideal” in the context of loving relations. The outcome of my investigation is that the question of reality and truth is indeed of the utmost importance in conversations about love. It only takes forms that philosophers often fail to see.

I LOVE AS IDEALIZATION

A recurrent concern in the philosophy of love is the wish to explain the kind of extraordinary seeing that characterizes love. Taking one’s point of departure in Stendhal’s (1975) description of love as involving a process of *crystallization*—a psychological process, in which imagination adds perfections to the image of the loved one, in the same manner that a twig dipped into the water at a salt mine becomes encrusted with salt (45)—one asks, how it is that the lover can find beauty in a face that most people would consider quite bland? What truth-value can we assign to statements such as ‘You are the most beautiful girl in the world’ where there clearly is no general agreement as to who deserves that title?

Few commentators on love go as far as echoing the cynic’s claim that love is either blind to the people who truly deserve it, or that it is always based on an illusion in thinking that anyone deserves love.

Rather they discuss the beauty the lover sees in the context of fantasy, idealization or imagination. In that vein the philosophers I mainly focus on here claim that the lover either has an "over-active imagination" (Solomon 1990, 176), a "creative eye" (Armstrong 2002, 55), or that love is a gratuitous response to the beloved in which "people bestow value upon one another over and above their individual or objective value" (Singer 1984a, 6). *To the extent that* my way of seeing you is expressive of love or coloured by emotion, the suggestion is that it does not really pay attention to the way things are. We may be fooled into thinking of love as a guide to value but it would be more correct, Irving Singer says, to see it as a creator of such.

To explain why love creates, rather than searches or finds value, Singer (1984a) makes a distinction between appraisal and bestowal. By "appraisal" he means the "objective value" that a "community of human interest" assigns to something, say, a house. This value is connected with the significance that certain facts may have for prospective buyers. He also speaks of individual appraisals, which are rather connected with the individual's different interests and desires and how well an object can satisfy them. "Bestowal", by contrast, is *not* concerned with "objective value". It describes the subjective or emotional value something comes to have for me independently of its appraised value, say, in the sense the house I grew up may become dear to me (Singer 1984a, 3-4). Love, for Singer, is a case of bestowal.

In caring about someone, attending to her, affirming the importance of her being what she is, the lover resembles a man who has appraised an object and found it very valuable. Though he is bestowing value, the lover seems to be declaring the objective goodness of the beloved. It is as if he were predicting the outcome of all possible appraisals and insisting that they would always be favorable.

As a matter of fact, the lover is doing nothing of the sort. (Singer 1984a, 12)

Subjectively speaking, Singer, as well as the other philosophers mentioned above, would not say that I base my love on a mistake. Objectively speaking, however, it still seems as if I do. A lovely and endearing mistake, for sure, and "boy, would life be much poorer without it", but a mistake all the same, since love does not concern itself with the "objective" facts, but enthusiastically paints its own picture, adding emotion to the cold facts, bestowing value where there is none.

But is this truly the best way to portray the beauty that love sees? As a “subjective truth” that does not pay attention to the objective facts? Now, in introducing love as a kind of bestowal of value, Singer tries to separate it from other kinds of appraisals, which, although they do play some part in love do not exhaust the kind of value that the lover sees. Part of his motives for showing that love is a “gratuitous” response is to show in what ways love is not purposive or instrumental. The lover’s “superlatives are expressive and metaphorical. Far from being terms of literal praise, they betoken the magnitude of his attachment and little about the lady’s beauty or goodness.” (Singer 1984a, 12) The attempt to distinguish love from other purposive attitudes has some merits. Your importance to me in love cannot be reduced to the use I make of you, and so on. When Singer (1984a) continues by saying that “the loving attitude is speculative and always dangerous” (14) in that, “in creating value, bestowing it freely, [it] introduces an element of risk into the [purposive] economy” (14), however, one easily understands why some philosophers, such as Susan Wolf (2002) in responding to Harry G. Frankfurt’s discussion on caring, have insisted on the need for a discussion on “objective worth” in love. Surely Singer’s descriptions capture some of the things we may say in love, but they are not representative of everything we may say about our loved ones.

I do not think that an attempt to show in what ways love concerns itself with “objective worth” or “objective value” will prove itself much more fruitful than regarding it as a subjective response. In fact, I will argue that both objectivity and subjectivity, as they are normally understood,¹⁹⁰ are quite inadequate for capturing what we mean by speaking about truth in love and in relation to statements such as, “You’re the most beautiful girl in the world”. Furthermore, it is difficult to make sense of the notion of “objective value”, or for that matter “subjective truth”. To evaluate something, as it were, is to express the meaning it has for me. It is never a mere description of something independent of me, which is what the claim of objectivity

¹⁹⁰ A further question is of course whether there is a better way of conceptualizing objectivity and subjectivity than the one I have criticized. Jonathan Lear (2003) succeeds in giving an elucidating presentation of what they could mean in psychoanalysis.

apparently calls for.¹⁹¹ This also makes it difficult to see what it could mean to flip the coin and consider the beauty we see as similar to a subjective opinion. Consider, for one thing, this remark that Jonathan Lear (2003) makes about the terms “objective” and “subjective” in relation to their place in psychoanalysis.

Objective and *subjective* are a contrasting pair, but in different contexts they can be used to make various contrasts. If we don’t really understand what, in a given context, is meant by *objective*, then it is not going to be of help simply to flip over to the other member of the pair, *subjective*. Whatever unclarity there is about the first member of the pair will be preserved as we flip over to the second. (Lear 2003, 37)

I will, however, stress the importance of attending to the “objective” language in which we often speak about beauty. Think only of the ways in which I may be said to *discover* or *find* beauty in you— aspects of you, we might add, that I may insist I really find in *you*. I may even regard it as a failure on the part of other people that they are blind to this beauty. In other words, it is central to our experience that the beauty I see in you is not first and foremost an expression of *me*, of my tastes and preferences, but a reaction to *you*. In that sense beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder, but an aspect of something that is other than me. Thus, when we try to make sense of the claim “You’re the most beautiful girl in the world”, we need to hold on to the ways in which this is something I can say and *mean*, and not just as a figure of speech.

I do not by any means want to deny that seeing beauty in this fashion has a deeply personal character. It is central to these statements that *I* respond to *you* in this way. I do, however, want to suggest that the ways in which the beauty that I see is dependent on me is not to be seen as being “merely subjective” in the sense that it is impossible to speak about truth in this connection. Indeed, I will argue that it is only considering what *kind* of statement this is, that we can gain a clearer picture of what it means to speak about truth in this case. There is, as it were, no *general* viewpoint from which we can determine whether people, or particular persons, are beautiful or not, nor any *general* standard of truth against which we can decide whether such statements have truth-value.

¹⁹¹ Singer (1984a) also takes note of the fact that the value of a house “exists only in so far as there are people who want the house”, but still insists on calling the value objective in that “the estimate is open to public verification” (4).

The problems I experience with the notion that love is a form of idealization, then, is not primarily with the suggestion that loving relationships often may and do involve idealizations. Rather idealizing or embellishing either myself or you, or our relationship, is a continuous temptation in love. This is a particularly striking element of falling in love and the kind of admiration of the other that often goes with it.¹⁹² I am mesmerized by you and see only the good things about you. I project what I wish for you to be into you, and see only what I want to see. I try to be what I think you want me to be. This temptation to idealize is as alive in the different ways of romanticizing the relationships of love in different circumstances, as in the mystification of the relationship between the different sexes. Think only of self-help books claiming that men are from Mars or women from Venus (Gray 1992) or of religious zealots emphasizing the biblical “male and female He created them”, or of different conversations about what it is to be a “real man” or “woman”.

What troubles me is rather the suggestion that we could make sense of the notion that love *in its entirety* involves an idealization—and not just that this may be a characteristic of love. It is true that I may come to regard my love or my ways of viewing you as mistaken or illusory, thinking that I was living a fantasy. But this is not a mistake that is internal to loving *per se* but something that is better described as a *failure* in my love. Idealizations can be said to form not only a constant temptation to love but also a threat to it. Solomon (1990) seems to have some grasp of this when he says, “Love has its fantasies, and inevitably some of these may turn out to be illusions. But this is not to deny the difference between the two, much less to show that love itself is an illusion” (188). He retreats from this insight, however, when, a few sentences later on, he speaks of the “loveworld” as a fantasy in itself.

Does it really matter to anyone else if you *aren't* the most wonderful person in the world? In what sense does it even matter to me? To love is to share the loveworld together, and that is itself a fantasy, a fantasy in which it is, as far as we are concerned, ‘just the two of us.’ And that is why, ultimately, you are the most wonderful person in the world. Apart from me, you are the only other person in there. (Solomon 1990, 188)

¹⁹² A failure of many philosophical discussions of love is also that they often tend to discuss love as an extended infatuation.

In passing, it is, of course, wrong to conclude that just because you and I share this loveworld, it necessarily follows that you are the most wonderful one in it. Why could not I be?

The philosophers discussing love and idealization attend to an important question, that is, "what is truth or fiction in love?" By trying to give a general answer to what is "real" and what is an "ideal", however, they misconstrue the roles this distinction in itself has in our conversations about love, as well as the *different* kinds of contrasts we make with the words. Our talk about love, as it were, does not only concern the beauty or wonders in it. A great deal of it also emphasizes the ways in which we may come to know someone in love, such as the demand to "love you as you are". Contrast, for one thing, the former descriptions of love as an idealization with Simone Weil (1977) who writes, "Love needs reality. What is more terrible than the discovery that through a bodily appearance we have been loving an imaginary being" (359).

Hence, if we want to see what sense it may have to speak about idealizations in love, or decide whether love is by necessity an idealization, it is to such sayings and experiences we need to turn. Otherwise we risk misrepresenting the concerns that we give voice to when we speak about idealizations in love in our daily life. We also risk rendering obscure the philosophical concerns we may have in discussing questions about love, beauty and truth.

In the following, I want to question the idea that there is a privileged position from which we could judge whether love in its entirety is an idealization. I will argue that the philosophers taking this stance fail to describe love in that they try to judge it by standards that are not applicable to it. They take a distinction that has meaning within certain practices and use it to judge a practice as a whole. Their suggestion seems to be that certain linguistic practices are "more in contact with reality" than are others, and that they, therefore, enable us to draw a general distinction between what is "real" and what is not. They fail to notice that the different distinctions between what is real and what is not are ones we make *in* language.

The standard against which love is judged to be an idealization appears to be borrowed from the natural sciences. True statements are considered to be those which correctly describe certain facts of the world (since only facts may have truth-value), and the ideal is to find a neutral position from which to represent these facts in language. What is considered to be true in that sense is not dependent on the time or place of the utterance of a statement, nor on who utters it. The

truth of a statement solely depends on its correspondence with reality. Hence, the role of rationality, or the philosophical picture of rationality that I have discussed throughout this work, is also emphasized as it is considered to be our only guide to true facts about the world.

This notion of truth, however, is only intelligible in relation to a very limited range of cases. Even then we should be attentive to what role we give to words such as “fact”, “truth” and “reality” in our discussion so that we do not turn them into some kind of philosophical “super/meta concepts”.¹⁹³ Certainly “reality” and “truth” are concepts that have a fundamental role in our life and in philosophy, but there are many problems involved in assigning to “reality” the metaphysical role of, say, grounding our linguistic practices. Quoting Peter Winch (1970): “Reality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself *in* the sense that language has” (82).

I can hardly do justice to Winch’s remark here, but I want to bring out the following points: When Winch speaks about the relation between reality and language, he is making a grammatical point, not a metaphysical one. Contrary to idealists or realists he is not trying to say anything about what reality is or is not. For instance, he is not making an idealist claim that reality is constructed in language. Rather he is pointing out the internal relation between language and reality and the impossibility of separating the two. Against realism, he reminds us that language is not a reflection of reality, nor is reality something that determines the sense of language. Rather it is in language that we distinguish what is ‘real’ from what is not.

My argument, then, is that there are important differences in the roles talking about ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ may have in conversations about love and in scientific discourse. A tentative attempt to capture these differences could be to say that when speaking about your beauty in love, I am not so much trying to judge or describe reality, the way one does in science: I am expressing *what is real*. If we do not remain clear about these differences when philosophizing about love, we risk misrepresenting what it is we are doing when we speak about ‘truth’ in the different cases. To complicate matters, however, I want to add that the different uses to which “reality” and “truth” are put in

¹⁹³ Cf. Wittgenstein (1997), “if the words ‘language’, ‘experience’, ‘world’, have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words ‘table’, ‘lamp’, ‘door’” (§97).

our different practices are not completely separable. I criticize philosophers for using too narrow a conception of “reality” to capture what is at stake in different practices, but the only conclusion we may draw from this is not just to broaden our vocabulary to encompass different concepts of reality. A consideration of the role the concepts “real” and “truth” have in our life may also lead us to reconsider the ways they can come into play within the practice of science.¹⁹⁴ It raises the question about the ways in which it is the same concept we use in different situations.

This also shows in that it is not only science, philosophy or rationality that may propose to tell us what is real. The lover, as I already mentioned, may also make a claim to that effect. Here, one should also remember that words such as “reality”, “real”, “realistic” are in many situations what W.B. Gallie (1962) called “essentially contested concepts”.¹⁹⁵ In other words, even if we share a general agreement about the meaning of these concepts, there will inevitably be disagreements about their application in given situations. In certain situations we may dispute whether a certain description of a situation captures what is “real”, and, thus, should play a prominent part in our thinking and acting. Think, for instance, of the ways in which someone can put emphasis on being a “realist” in making political decisions, and also of the cynic’s conviction that he sees the world as it really is.

The philosophers regarding love as an idealization certainly give expression to quite general sentiments when they say, “mostly we don’t have all that many virtues or have them only to a limited extent; people in general are simply not terribly lovable” (Armstrong 2002, 46), or, “They are what they are. Why should they be loved for it?” (Singer 1984a, 14). Along with the extreme idealizations of romantic love, or as a natural consequence of it, there is an outspread cynicism concerning love. This may tempt us to think that the philosophers who regard love as an idealization are right, a temptation which may also grow with our own experience of awakening from love, finding a

¹⁹⁴ Think e.g. of the ways in which aesthetic reactions and a personal interest in questions may play a role in science (Cf. Wickman 2005).

¹⁹⁵ W. B. Gallie introduced the thought that some concepts “are essentially contested, concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users” (Gallie 1962, 123). Although there is a general agreement that e.g. goodness should be furthered, you may dispute my description of an action as good.

relationship which was once filled with dreams to be nothing but a nightmare.

Lending his voice to those philosophers who only put their faith in reason and not in spiritual inspiration, Lev Shestov in *Sola fide* (1995) articulates this concern in the following way:

Can one really believe people in love? They are themselves surprised about their madness once the passion has faded. Does not the one who is in love think that the object of his love is more beautiful and surpasses all the others in the world? And when the passion cools down, is he not convinced together with everyone else that she is a highly ordinary woman? (Sjestov 1995, 67, *my translation*)

This, argues Shestov, is what many philosophers say. He cites Schopenhauer as one example. This is also what many other people say. It is what Plato and Socrates taught us to think (Sjestov 1995, 68).

No one doubts that Ivan misjudged Marya and Marya Ivan when they saw each other in the supernatural light of Eros and that they judged each other correctly when they appeared in the ordinary plane light. (Sjestov 1995, 67, *my translation*)

But, he continues, what if this idea is the one which rests upon confusion? What if

another solution to the question is possible, that Ivan and Marya were right at the moment when they saw what no one else saw in them, that which they themselves had not seen either before or after that solemn moment, that Eros did not fool them but only revealed to them a new reality, inaccessible to reason, a reality that hid itself from them forever, as quickly as Eros turned off his light. (Sjestov 1995, 68, *my translation*)

In other words, why should we think that it is I who love who needs to wake up from my dreams and fantasies? Why not think that those in need of a wake-up call are the ones who call my life in love a dream? What are we even comparing it with when we call my life a dream or a fantasy? From my perspective, the perspective of love, such descriptions have no hold. Rather it is those who think I am living a "dream" or a "fantasy" who in their refusal to accept what I see turn their back on love. This is not to say that they too would have to see you as beautiful or wonderful in the way that I do (although I may also think that is their failure), but that they, in refusing to regard what I say as a significant remark, are not open to me and to what is important to me. Consequently their words serve as a rejection of the

place love may have in my life, and, one may suspect, a rejection of the place it may have in their own life.

Of course, all the descriptions I put to use here, on either side, are expressive of what I am myself prepared to say in this matter. Whether I speak about "imagination" or "dream", on the one side, or about "turning your back", or, "refusing to see what is important", on the other, depends upon my own outlook and expresses my perspective on the situation. Compare the parent of a new-born child, who walks the streets, feeling elevated, initiated into the great mysteries of life, wanting to embrace all the people that he meets. (Cf. Thomése 2005, 32-34.) What he sees in others, may strike him as small-mindedness, as a rejection of joy. Their every move and gesture may speak of oblivion to an important aspect of reality. He may, of course, step out of this perspective (or grow out of it), but there is nothing preventing us from thinking that that would be a failure.

This is also an important point in Shestov's remarks. He reminds us that what is usually taken as a factual statement is in itself expressive of a perspective on the world and on other people. There is a professed neutrality to statements such as "all too few human beings are masterworks of excellence" (Vlastos 1981, 31), but it is unclear what status they are meant to have in a *general* discussion about what people are. Indeed, one of the primary confusions in many philosophical discussions of idealizations in love is that they unproblematically assume that it is possible to make general, apparently neutral or objective, statements about what people are or are not, and that we could make sense of these statements without considering the contexts in which they are uttered. By contrast, I want us to pay attention to the particular contexts in which we speak about people as beautiful or not. Only then can we see what it means to speak about truth in relation to the claims we make.

There are of course situations in which remarks such as "all too few human beings are masterworks of excellence" (Vlastos 1981, 31) may have a place. They may be reminders that I myself fail to live up to the demands I see in relation to others, and that, therefore, I should not judge other people or demand of them that they live up to some standards that *I* set on them. In that sense it may rather be a corrective to my own understanding of myself than a lesson about other people. In the writings of these philosophers, however, the recognition that people are flawed, no masterworks or not very lovable, rather seems to express a kind of *disappointment* with people for not being able to live up to an ideal.

This disappointment is very similar to that of the lover who wrote, in a personal message published in a Swedish tabloid, "Jonas, I thought you were a diamond but you were only a piece of glass. Couldn't care less." It is also similar to the attitude of the cynic who, using the same language as that of the message, regards all people as pieces of glass, or accepts that there are some diamonds, but insists that they are difficult to find. Of course the cynic and the disappointed lover often coincide. But why should we read this as due to a human failure, and not to an erroneous ideal? Does not the problem with the idea that I could set standards for other people precisely lie in the suggestion that it is meaningful to compare people to masterworks in a discussion of love?

The tendency to look for what we ordinarily would say in a matter is related to the objectivist conception of truth which, as I already mentioned, is embraced by the natural sciences. Shestov (1995) describes this conception of truth in this way: "What is true is and must be something that everyone at all times can present and accept as the truth" (67, *my translation*). Against this conception the fact that people are often of different minds in these matters creates a problem for speaking about truth in relation to what we say about our loved one's beauty in love. I might not object to Prince saying that his girl is the most beautiful one in the world, but I might not see her so. This, Solomon and Singer seem to say, makes it impossible to speak about truth in the "common" sense of the word.

Nevertheless, it remains unclear why we should think that the opinions of others should matter to me in this case. When dealing with objects such as real diamonds, jems and stones, they may certainly matter. I might take an heirloom to the jeweller to find out whether the stone is real or a piece of glass. The jeweller, as an expert, may tell me some facts about the stone, whether it is a diamond or not, and inform me of its "objective value", that is the value it has on the market. His telling me this, of course, does not have to change the "subjective value" to me of the piece of jewellery. This, to use Singer's terminology, provides us with a clear case of appraisal and bestowal. However, when I say that you are beautiful and you ask me if it is true, what does it matter what other people think? Does it say more about my sincerity if the majority of my friends agree that you are a good catch, or prove me a liar or a fool if only I see you as such?

To justify why the distinction between appraisal and bestowal has a role also in the context of love, Singer says, "[h]owever subtly, we are always setting prices on other people, and on ourselves" (1984a,

6). Undoubtedly this is a pertinent description of what people often do, but it is not at all clear why we need to accept this as a more “objective” contrast to the “gratuitous” and “subjective” responses of love. Singer is certainly right in as far as the obsessive worrying about what other people may think about the one I love has very little to do with love. However, by the same token, we could say that the various ways of “setting prices on other people” are far from saying anything about their “objective value”, but reveal one of the dark sides of human life, our judgementalism, as well as our callousness, to each other.¹⁹⁶

What might attract philosophers to the notion of a general notion of “beauty” is that we sometimes speak of attractiveness as if it were a property we could decide on someone having. In chapter two I discussed in what ways my description of a situation or a person can be expressive of my emotions in it, and I said that there is an internal relation between the emotions someone may attribute to me and the descriptions I give of the situation at hand. In some situations saying, “She’s attractive” may have the same sense as saying, “I’m attracted to her”. Yet, I pointed out that in other cases this is not so. There may be a gap between what I say about someone and what I feel for him. I may say, “He’s attractive”, as a comment about his looks, and still say, “But I’m not attracted to him.” And I might say the opposite, “She may not be attractive in the ordinary sense, but I’m still attracted to her”. As in the song “Someone to Watch over Me” by George and Ira Gershwin; *“Although he may not be the man, Some girls think of as handsome, To my heart he carries the key”*

When we speak of attractiveness and beauty in concrete situations, our personal attraction to another may enter more or less obviously into what we say. We may also have different reasons for committing or not committing ourselves to making a personal statement in different situations. Think, for instance, of a case in which I talk with you, whom I love, about someone else and say, “He’s attractive”, and then hasten to add, “But, I’m not attracted to him”. This may be not so much a comment about my actual attraction to him as it is a statement about what I intend to do with it. In other words, I may well be

¹⁹⁶ This is not to deny that in many situations we judge the appropriateness of people for a specific job, their skills and competence, and that in such circumstances we may emphasize the need to be “objective”. What this calls for, however, is not a general viewpoint from which to judge if a person measures up to a standard, but a consideration of one’s judgements in the light of fairness and justice.

attracted to him, but I am telling you not to take this as a threat against you, I do not intend to act on this attraction. The situation may even become more problematic if I do not admit my attraction to him.

This shift in perspectives, however, becomes problematic, if, as many philosophers seem to, one takes this as granting that we may speak generally about attractiveness and beauty, without considering the kind of appreciation and love of which it may be expressive. Even more, it is problematic if one thinks that this “neutral” use is in some ways primary to the expression of appreciation and love. Even if we may speak of attractiveness and looks in an impersonal manner, commenting on beauty queens, our different ways of talking about beauty and attractiveness is internally related to our practices of appreciating, praising and loving, and in negative cases, envying, hating, being cynical or bitter.

This is particularly clear when considering the kind of meaning speaking about beauty may have in love. It is essential to what I say about your beauty that I say it in a personal sense. What you want to hear in love is not that “others would find you attractive”, but exactly that *I* do. Even if you are considered to be attractive in the general sense, it may be important to you that the sense in which I find you beautiful is different from these general considerations.

In that sense, the personal dimension is constitutive of what I can be said to say. Suppose that I am really asking a friend for advice in the matter. I am about to marry, and I am having “cold feet”. I say, “He’s really great, and all... I really do find him attractive”, but a “but” is still lingering in the air. Now, of course my friend may say something that helps me in this matter. “If I were in your shoes, I’d...” or “You know he really cares for you.” She may offer guidance in clarifying my thoughts: Am I, say, entertaining doubts as to whether I really *love* him, “Is it just friendship or infatuation?” or whether I really love *him*, “Do I just love the idea of being married?” However, whatever she says, she cannot step into my shoes and make my decision. If I tell my fiancé, “I was having some doubts, but my friend told me you were worth it”, he would probably not want to marry me.

Here one should also remember that my friend is not just a more “objective” observer of the beauty or greatness of my prospective husband, but that what she thinks and feels about him also plays a role in the advice she gives. Does she take this as an opportunity to talk me out of a marriage that she thinks is a lost cause, or is she even more positive to my marrying than I am, or that I have reason to be (in other words, I do not love him). Imagine, for instance, that I later find

out that my friend was not only advising me as a friend, but that she, too, was secretly in love with my fiancé. I do not want to say anything about what kind of meaning finding this out may have, or even less, what meaning it should have. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that my reaction to this revelation may be one of awkwardness, sadness (for my friend being unhappily in love), or of a felt betrayal. (Such a reaction would probably be more obvious if my friend was also encouraging me not to be with my lover, pointing out his faults.)

I have offered these examples as a reminder that what is meant by talking about someone’s beauty is dependent on the particular situation and the concerns that are being expressed by these words. Now, traditionally philosophy has not been very much concerned with the particular.¹⁹⁷ Rather particularity is often taken as a form of partiality, and the particular individual, as well as the particular case, are deemed irrelevant in the search for general principles. In the following section I try to show why this equation of particularity with partiality is unjustified, by considering how questions about truly knowing the other or oneself in love can be seen in contrast to idealizing the other, oneself or the relationship. I also attempt to show how beauty may not only reveal the other to us in love but may also be said to mislead us in such cases.

II OUR STRUGGLES WITH REALITY

The picture of the personal as something that distorts the truth of a matter has a place within the natural sciences. Here there is a clear sense in which my subjective responses (bias) may unintentionally distort the results I reach in my experiments and lead to a misrepresentation of what has happened. In this case, the need to be able to repeat an experiment and report results that anyone could agree upon is significant for *what kind* of practice the scientific investigation is. Our different practices of telling someone he or she is beautiful, however, are a different matter.

¹⁹⁷ In many fields there is an upsurge of noteworthy criticism against this tendency. See e.g. the volume *Commonality and Particularity in Ethics* (Alanen et al. 1997). Within the Wittgensteinian tradition one may mention the writings of Raimond Gaita, R.F. Holland, Peter Winch, and further the philosophy of Iris Murdoch, Simone Weil, Martin Buber and Emmanuel Lévinas.

First of all, the fact that there is no general agreement about who is beautiful does not give us occasion to think that the one who sees beauty where others do not necessarily is making a mistake. As we will see later in the discussion the sense in which we may be said to mistake ourselves about the true beauty of someone, is also of another kind than mistaking oneself about some facts. Furthermore, in the context of love, there is a question not only about whether one speaks the truth, in the sense that what one says conveys the true state of affairs, but whether one *is true to one's words*, and furthermore *true to each other*. The heart of the deception in a scene of seduction, as it were, does not lie in the seducer's failure to represent reality correctly. Many may agree that the one who is being seduced is attractive in a more general sense, this may even be the reason for the seducer to try to seduce her. The deception of the seducer rather lies in his not being in his words. His words are not the expressions of love and devotion they pretend to be but a means of seduction.

When Solomon, thus, says,

if I love you because you've told me that you're the illegitimate daughter of Jean-Paul Sartre, and I find out that that's not true, that's the end of my love-not because you have lied to me, but because my reason for loving you has disappeared. (Solomon 1990, 177)

may we not say that it is precisely the other way around? That is, what hurts and disappoints me in such cases is precisely the fact that you have lied to me. You were not true to your words. To portray the realization that someone "was not a diamond, but a piece of glass" as a simple matter of gaining a clearer view of the facts hides the fact that the real meaning of discovering who someone truly is in such a case, is something that has to do with lies and betrayal, trust and deceptions, growing close to other people, sharing a life with them. Saying, "You are a piece of glass" reveals my disappointment in you, the hopes and dreams I entertained in relation to you and how you let them and me down. The least we could say is that my relation to certain facts has changed. It is more telling to say that my *whole* way of looking at you and myself, even life, has changed. Injured by the experience I may become cynical and distrustful, refusing to let other people into my life again for fear of once more getting hurt.

In a comment on Plato speaking about the love of truth, Simone Weil draws attention to this aspect of talking about truth in the context of love. She writes,

Love of truth is not a correct form of expression. Truth is not an object of love. It is not an object at all. What one loves is something which exists, which one thinks on, and which may hence be an occasion for truth and error. A truth is always the truth with reference to something. Truth is the radiant manifestation of reality. Truth is not the object of love but reality. To desire truth is to desire direct contact with a piece of reality. To desire contact with a piece of reality is to love. We desire truth only in order to love in truth. We desire to know the truth about what we love. Instead of talking about love of truth, it would be better to talk about *the spirit of truth in love*.

Pure and genuine love always desires above all to dwell wholly in the truth whatever it may be, unconditionally. Every other sort of love desires before anything else means of satisfaction, and for this reason is a source of error and falsehood. Pure and genuine love is in itself spirit of truth. (Weil 1978, 242, *my emphasis*)¹⁹⁸

This sense in which we may talk about living in truth as opposed to living a lie in love, is quite distinct from saying that we should only say things that correctly represent reality.¹⁹⁹ “To desire contact with a piece of reality” in the way Weil identifies with love is not simply, or only, to want a scientific explanation of the constituents of the world. The way in which Weil speaks of reality clearly belongs to a moral context.

This is equally true of Iris Murdoch (1997), when she says, “Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality” (215). In this quote, Murdoch brings together notions that are not generally supposed to match. She speaks of arts, morals and love, and she speaks of reality. Even more, she claims that these have something to do with each other. Set against the background of a more scientific understanding of reality, this is undoubtedly a strange claim. Why would it be difficult to get hold of reality? And what does it have to do with love? To make sense of this claim it is important to recognize that in speaking about

¹⁹⁸ When Weil speaks of the relation between truth, reality and love, she is making grammatical points about the use of these words. They are not statements about how we live.

¹⁹⁹ It may further be said that this sense of being true to each other is a presupposition of language and, thus, constitutive of what it may mean to speak of something “corresponding with reality”, even if philosophers have often construed the relation the other way around.

“recognizing the reality of the other” one is making a moral point. The difficulties to come to grips with reality that Murdoch is describing are moral difficulties.

If one considers the question of who you are as a psychological question, it is easy to think that my difficulties of coming to know you are primarily constituted by the complexity of mapping out the myriad of thoughts, wants, wishes, and emotions which may be thought to constitute your psyche or personality. The quote by Murdoch, however, invites us to reconsider the question, suggesting that my difficulties of knowing both others and myself are of a different kind than the difficulties of spelling out the complexities of the mind. The quote also invites us to reconsider our notion of reality, by reminding us that ‘beauty’, ‘goodness’, ‘love’ are as much part of our conversations about ‘reality’ as are rocks, atoms, minerals and houses.

If anyone is puzzled by the suggestion that “reality” can be said to belong to a moral context, it may help to remember that someone may speak of the need to be “reminded of what is real” or consider certain aspects of her life as less “real” than others. Think for instance of the star who coming home to his children says: “This is what’s real. All that fame and fortune is just an illusion.” One may of course argue that this kind of talk is only metaphorical, but then one has already subscribed to a certain conception of “reality” that forces one to take certain actual uses of the words less seriously than others. If, however, we want to deepen our understanding of this concept, we need to take these kinds of statement about reality as seriously as we do scientific formulations. This is also an invitation to allow our thinking about these concepts to change depending on what we learn by doing so.

Simone Weil (1977), whose writing also inspired Murdoch comments: “Belief in the existence of other people as such is love” (359). Now, philosophical discussions about the existence of other people and the external world have often taken place against the background of the Cartesian meditations about certain knowledge and how far it may extend. Focusing largely on epistemological questions, they ask, “What can we know and how do we know it?” However, even if it is possible to counter the doubts of the Cartesian sceptic and the kind of philosophical solipsism he represents, by showing in what way his position is untenable, we have not yet countered a different kind of solipsism, or rather loneliness, that may

plague people.²⁰⁰ As we will see, there are ways of ‘living a dream’ or entertaining illusions about the world that do not concern the existence of other minds or of the world.

What it means to “face the truth” or “confront reality” in this sense, and this is the sense in which I think both Murdoch and Weil are speaking, is rather connected with our lives *with* other people. Here, the fact that other human beings inhabit my world, and that “my” world is a world I share with them, is a constitutive feature of the kinds of problems I may experience. What we are dealing with here is not so much a doubt about the reality of others as a *blindness* to them, and, what follows from this, a blindness towards myself, since it is in relation to others that I become aware of my own reality and the meaning of my actions.

Consider a wife who does not seem to fully acknowledge that her husband is untrue, despite the overwhelming evidence. She dismisses friendly attempts to bring up the subject. She cannot bring herself to utter or even think the words “cheating” or “infidelity”.²⁰¹ The full extent of what has happened has not, as one says, sunk in. Or think of the cheating husband who turns down any attempt to regard his affair as harmful to either his wife or his marriage, not noticing that this denial may be as harmful as his cheating. He says, “This is my own business. It doesn’t concern her”. Or, “Our marriage was dead anyway” — as if his having an affair was not yet another step to killing it.

In these cases it is clear that we cannot separate what it is to face reality from the moral difficulties the wife and husband may have in accepting to regard what has happened in the light of cheating. This involves owning up to what both of them may have done to create the problems in their marriage or how they have failed to solve them, as

²⁰⁰ Dilman (1987) speaks about our difficulties to care about other people as “affective solipsism” (109-111).

²⁰¹ Cf. Cockburn (2003): “While the fact is staring her in the face, Mary never says ‘My husband is having an affair’. Is she *prepared* to say it? Well, one question that needs to be asked about this is: prepared to say it when and to whom? (To the radical translator, with his tape recorder, visiting her country from a far off land?) That aside, there may be a quite straightforward, and fairly general, sense in which she is *not* prepared to say it. Indeed, she cannot even bring herself to *think* it: her thoughts veer away from the evidence and from any topic that has potential links with her husband’s affair. And yet we can see in her demeanour towards her husband, and, perhaps, in adjustments at other points in her life, a recognition of his infidelity. And we suspect that under certain kinds of pressure she would verbally acknowledge what is going on” (154).

well as asking for forgiveness and forgiving. What is more, what they continue to do, and how willing they are to come to terms with what has happened, constitutes what will be the reality of their marriage, and of what happened. Did his cheating mean the end of their marriage? Did they go on living together suppressing what had happened? Or did it provide an opportunity for them to rekindle their relationship and open up to each other and to forgiveness?

For Murdoch, my struggles with reality and coming to recognize another person mainly involve a form of “unselfing”. My problems with seeing other people is largely an outcome of my difficulties of overcoming myself and attending to them. Now, it is quite easy to think of situations in which I become so wrapped up in myself and what I am doing that I do not take notice of what happens to you. My self-concern prevents me from grasping the meaning of what has happened to you. I do not see you or listen to you although you are sitting right in front of me. What I want to focus on, however, is how idealizations may constitute a similar kind of self-absorption and blindness to the realities of other people. This should also help to spell out why it is misleading to regard love in its entirety as an idealization.

The example I have in mind is the unhappy marriage of Rosamond and Lydgate in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*. From the start this relationship is filled with idealizations, dreams, wishes and expectations, of each other and of what married life would be. It is fair to say that the disastrous consequences of that marriage to a great extent grew out of these. On Lydgate’s part this comes to show in the way he is taken in by Rosamond’s enchanting manner. He finds her to be “grace itself; she is perfectly lovely and accomplished. [...] Rosamond Vincy seemed to have the true melodic charm” (Eliot 1994, 93).

For Rosamond their beginning infatuation plays out the love story she had scripted long in advance:

a stranger was absolutely necessary to Rosamond’s social romance, which had always turned on a lover and bridegroom who was not a Middlemarcher, and who had no connections at all like her own: of late, indeed, the construction seemed to demand that he should somehow be related to a baronet. [...] And here was Mr. Lydgate suddenly corresponding to her ideal, being altogether foreign to Middlemarch, carrying a certain air of distinction congruous with good family, and possessing vistas of that middle-class heaven, rank; a man of talent, also, whom it would be especially delightful to enslave: in fact, a man

who had touched her nature quite newly, and brought a vivid interest into her life which was better than any fancied "might-be" such as she was in the habit of opposing to the actual. (Eliot 1994, 115-116)

Rosamond and Lydgate's idealizations run on many levels, reaching from their hopes and wishes of what the other should be to what married life should mean in their middle-class society to images of what were appropriate roles for women and men, husbands and wives. This final aspect is especially clear in many of Lydgate's musings about femininity and the functions of a wife, which to him was largely a question of adornment. "That is what a woman ought to be: she ought to produce the effect of exquisite music." (Eliot 1994, 93)

Their romanticized picture of marriage, however, comes to a bitter end as Lydgate's financial problems grow. Looking for support and understanding in his wife, and not just for a pleasant sight, he is repeatedly disappointed. The only understanding Rosamond has to offer him is the way she thinks he has failed her. She cannot forgive him for not being the one she thought she married, the man who was going to give her a life full of pleasantries.

There are hopes that Rosamond and Lydgate's two worlds might meet, and glimpses of this possibly happening, but the two never fully reach an understanding of each other. In the concluding remarks of the book, we are told that the two never got away from considering the other a burden. After Lydgate dies at fifty, and Rosamond remarries, she speaks of her happiness as "a reward" (Eliot 1994, 792).

she did not say for what, but probably she meant it as a reward for her patience with Tertius [Lydgate], whose temper never became faultless, and to the last occasionally let slip a bitter speech which was more memorable than the signs he made of his repentance. He once called her his basil plant; and when she asked for an explanation, said that basil was a plant which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man's brain. (Eliot 1994, 792)

A possible reason for why beauty has been so distrusted through philosophy is probably linked with the part the concept of beauty, or perhaps rather a picture of beauty, plays in the idealizations involved in relationships such as the one between Rosamond and Lydgate. Both of these lovers are captured by a picture of what the other person *should be* like, which is attached to a certain understanding of what beauty consists in: perfection, harmony, a pleasure to the eye.

I speak of a *picture* of beauty here to distinguish between two different senses in which “beauty” (as a concept) may enter our conversations about love. This distinction is related to the distinction that is often made between someone’s *inner* and *outer* beauty. Nonetheless, I think such a formulation is misleading, not the least because it implies that someone’s inner beauty is in some ways less accessible than what one may call a person’s outer beauty. It is not, as it were, that we can locate ‘outer beauty’ in some facial features, whereas the inner beauty is rather located in some inner qualities, such as a generous personality. On the contrary, one could say that the ‘inner’ beauty is as much there in the face of the other, in her smiles and eyes as in the case of outer beauty, if not even more. It is something I can be said to see or be struck by in her. Her features are something on which I want to dwell.

Perhaps we would be better advised to say that the distinction between “inner” and “outer” rather serves as a moral reminder, not to be too taken in by *appearance*, to be *dazzled by looks*, but to attend to other aspects of people than the *initial impression* they make on us. It is a reminder of the ways in which our understanding of “beauty” may deepen; we may raise questions as to whether something that at first glance appeared to be beautiful was truly beautiful and may also find beauty in someone who by general standards is considered not to be beautiful. Compare this to a point made by Cora Diamond, who writes:

[O]ne might, for example, meet George Eliot and find oneself, during the encounter, recognizing her to be beautiful, but not beautiful as one had understood what beauty was. She, that magnificently ugly woman, gives a totally transformed meaning to ‘beauty’. Beauty itself becomes something entirely new for one, as one comes to see (to one’s own amazement, perhaps) a powerful beauty residing in this woman. She has done something, something that one could not at all have predicted, to the concept of beauty. In such a case, she is not judged by a norm available through the concept of beauty; she shows the concept up, she moves one to use the words ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful’ almost as new words, or as renewed words. She gives one a new vocabulary, a new way of taking the world in in one’s words, and of speaking about it to others. (Diamond 2005, 125)²⁰²

²⁰² Diamond’s example is a free interpretation of how Henry James once described Eliot in a letter.

As I understand Diamond this transformation of the concept of "beauty" cannot simply be grasped by reference to the realization that George Eliot possessed a remarkable "inner beauty". Although expressions such as "Beauty comes from the inside" give some indication towards the way in which our conception of beauty may change, they still leave us with the idea that the sense in which Eliot is ugly according to ordinary standards remains intact and is only contrasted by an invisible kind of beauty, the one from inside. Diamond's example rather points to the ways in which I may come to question the relevance of such standards. I see beauty in what I previously judged as ugly.

In the case I let an emphasis on the exterior, appearance or perfection rule my understanding of "beauty" I use the concept as a standard against which I judge the people that I meet. In that way I distance myself from them as well as from what I may learn about beauty from them. In coming in contact with someone's beauty in the way described by Diamond however, my concept of beauty is transformed by what I learn from the other. I may, for one thing, come to see the beauty that I see as internally related to the goodness she embodies to me. Through this I may also come to question whether "good looks", understood in a general sense, could be said to reveal to us anything about what beauty truly is. In this, I let myself be transformed by what I learn through my meeting and being with other people.

In this deepening or transformation of the concept of beauty I move from the standards that may be given to me within my community towards the question of what meaning "beauty" may have for me. I move, as it were, from the "collective (norms)" to the personal. The deeper meaning of "beauty", then, is not to be found in what everybody thinks. Rather we lose the meaning that speaking of "beauty" may have in these cases if we attempt to reduce it to that. This is not to say that "beauty" gains a private meaning for me, which is hidden from everybody else, but that my understanding is dependent on and constituted by my particular response to a particular individual. Through this personal understanding I may also myself contribute to the meaning that "beauty" has in my community.

It should come as no surprise that whereas I think that the understanding of beauty that comes to show in the latter case is expressive of love, I do not think so of the first case. Rosamond's and Lydgate's failures in love find expression in their holding on to their images of what the other should be rather than responding to the

demands the other makes on them in the face of their new situation.²⁰³ Their idealizations are expressive of a preoccupation with themselves that blinds them to the meaning other people could have for them. (As, we might add, the preoccupation with what concepts should mean, blinds us to the variety of meanings they have in our life with other people.)

This kind of preoccupation with oneself is particularly clear in the case of Rosamond. Her idealizations of what life should be extend as much to herself as to her husband. Conflating exquisite manners with what is good and right, or assuming the two to be the same, Rosamond's life is all about appearance and being the pleasant woman she takes herself to be. The promise that her interest in Lydgate would take her out of the "fancied 'might-be' [...] she was in the habit of opposing to the actual", is not fulfilled. Convinced by her own virtue of always being in the right, nothing that Lydgate can say reaches beyond the image she presents of herself.

The novel only presents us with two incidents in which her façade breaks. Both of them concern another couple in the novel, Will Ladislaw and Dorothea Casaubon, and a situation in which Dorothea catches Will and Rosamond in what appears to be quite inappropriate circumstances. At this point in the novel, Will is someone about whom Rosamond has begun to entertain romantic fantasies as Lydgate has begun to bore her. Will, however, is completely devoted to Dorothea. At the moment she walks in on him and Rosamond, he is actually telling Rosamond that Dorothea is the only woman in his life, although they cannot be together—a clause in the will of Dorothea's

²⁰³ The relationship with Rosamond is not the first time Lydgate fails to release himself from the attractions of a beautiful appearance in his relationship with women. Before coming to Middlemarch, he experiences an impulsive infatuation with an actress whose beauty has him spellbound. Without knowing her, he is convinced he loves her and intent on marrying her. He is shocked to hear that the accident in which her fellow actor husband had died, and which had added yet some drama to his passion, was no accident, but murder. This leaves him determined never again to allow such follies to rule his relationships to women. "Henceforth he would take a strictly scientific view of woman, entertaining no expectations, but such as were justified beforehand" (Eliot 1994, 149). His meeting with Rosamond, however, changes his plans.

A similar pattern rules his first meeting with Dorothea Casaubon, a woman who is portrayed as beautiful in both senses of the word under discussion here. Despite her beauty Lydgate finds her wanting since "[s]he did not look at things from the proper feminine angle" (Eliot 1994, 93). Ironically, it is Dorothea who does understand him when his reputation is questioned and shows him the trust and compassion he then so much comes to long for from his wife.

first husband would leave her moneyless if she remarried. Dorothea, on the other side, had come to speak to Rosamond about Lydgate’s situation. She was convinced that she could encourage Rosamond to have the same kind of trust in him that she felt. Nevertheless, she misreads the situation and rushes out. Afraid that he has lost the only thing he had from the woman he loves, her good will in thinking of him, Will lashes out at Rosamond. “I had no hope before—not much—of anything better to come. But I had one certainty—that she believed in me. Whatever people had said or done about me, she believed in me. —That’s gone!” (Eliot 1994, 740).

Rosamond, while these poisoned weapons were being hurled at her, was almost losing the sense of her identity, and seemed to be waking into some new terrible existence. [...] What another nature felt in opposition to her own was being burnt and bitten into her consciousness [...] her little world was in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness. (Eliot 1994, 740-742)²⁰⁴

After Will has gone, she falls back fainting, and when Lydgate comes back to find her in this distraught state he believes it is the effect of Dorothea’s coming to speak with her.

The second encounter takes place when Dorothea realizes her initial intention of speaking with Rosamond about Lydgate. At first suspicious of her visit, Rosamond is astounded by the other woman’s wholehearted openness and mildness, the way she speaks “from out the heart of her own trial to Rosamond’s” (Eliot 1994, 756).

It was a newer crisis in Rosamond’s experience than even Dorothea could imagine: she was under the first great shock that had shattered her dream-world in which she had been easily confident of herself and critical of others; and this strange unexpected manifestation of feeling in a woman whom she had approached with a shrinking aversion and dread, as one who must necessarily have a jealous hatred towards her, made her soul totter all the more with a sense that she had been walking in an unknown world which had just broken in upon her. (Eliot 1994, 756-757)

“[U]rged by a mysterious necessity to free herself from something that oppressed her as if it were blood-guiltiness”, Rosamond then tells her about what happened between her and Will, confessing that Will had never had any love for her (Eliot 1994, 758-759).

²⁰⁴ Dilman (1987) discusses the same example in more detail (115).

Both events portray Rosamond in a situation that is new to her. For a moment, at least, she wakes up into a reality where other people are not only pawns in her games but human beings with lives and feelings of their own. Will's desperation at having lost Dorothea's faith in him reveals a quite different way in which other people may matter to one, than any of her own relations.²⁰⁵ His refusal to act upon her misery by comforting her (which Lydgate always did) imprints in her most clearly that she too had done something wrong.

In this scene, as in the following one with Dorothea, we clearly see how Rosamond's realization of the reality of other people is internally connected to recognizing her own reality. Suddenly struck by their independent being, it is impossible for her to hold on to the images she had made of them and of herself. No longer can she think of "other people's states of mind [...] as material cut into shape by her own wishes" (Eliot 1994, 739). No more can she consider herself an innocent victim of other people's malice. She is forced to act responsibly, to speak for herself and to recognize what light is reflected on her by their actions and her own.

The blindness towards other people that finds expression in Lydgate's and Rosamond's differing searches for beauty is twofold. Again taking our starting point in Weil's (1977) claim that, "Belief in the existence of other people as such is love" (359), we could say that they are blind both to the fact that other people are *other* than themselves and to the fact that they are *people*. There are numerous ways in which we may make ourselves images of other people, by idealizing them or romanticizing our life with them. This is apparent not least in the mystification of the difference between the sexes, and the weight one gives to upholding such a difference. Just think of the often feverishly held conviction that "men and women cannot ever understand each other", and the consequent fear of even trying to understand each other as that might rob the relationship of all the magic.

But, to stress a point that Emmanuel Lévinas has repeatedly made, there is no need to *turn* you into another. *You are always other than me*. Contrary to what the above-mentioned accounts would have us think, however, your otherness is *not* an insurmountable obstacle to our understanding each other. Quite the contrary, speaking about

²⁰⁵ Even if Raimond Gaita (2004) usually gives other kinds of examples when speaking of the way we sometimes "see that something is precious only in the light of someone's love for it" (xxiv), this could also be taken as an example of that.

understanding in the first place is expressive of the recognition that we are separate people. This obvious insight—you are never me—may be taken as pointing us to at least two different aspects of human life. First, and this is the more shallow point of the two, it is a reminder that however much information I may have about your past or your plans about your future, I cannot deduce your future thoughts and actions from these facts. The facts about you, as it were, accumulate through your life. The second more important point is rather a point about what it means to understand another human being. We could say that knowing and understanding another person cannot be reduced to merely having information about her.

According to such a picture of what it is to know a person, our knowledge about him may first and foremost increase by learning more facts. Now, it is true that in many situations I may be said to learn to know you better by learning new facts. But if we, by contrast, consider what it may mean for my understanding of you to deepen, this does not necessarily have to involve learning any new facts. What may change is rather the way in which I relate to the ‘facts’, the meaning I come to see in them or the different kind of emphasis I lay on them. Think, for instance, of the ways in which Dorothea’s first impression of Rosamond and Will’s meeting as a romantic rendezvous changed when she recognized that the romantic interest was solely on Rosamond’s side. Better yet, we could say that my understanding *manifests* itself in what I come to regard as the facts of the situation. Dorothea saw Lydgate’s financial problems as a *misfortune* whereas Rosamond considered them to be a *betrayal* of her.

This is also one reason for rejecting speaking about the ways in which we may understand and misunderstand each other in love solely with reference to different facts. Facts, to put it boldly, do not explain our understanding. Speaking of facts only has a place in conversations where we already share an understanding of what it may mean to understand certain things in the situation as facts. The difficulty Dorothea had of conveying her perspective on Lydgate’s situation to Rosamond was not merely a problem of conveying the right facts, but the struggle of awakening in Rosamond a similar response to his situation as the one she experienced; responding to it as a wretched situation and recognizing what it, and the lack of understanding Rosamond had shown him, had made of that man. It was the struggle of encouraging Rosamond to respond to her husband with love.

The last points anticipate the other form of blindness to people I mentioned: being blind to what it means for others to be people. Sartre insisted that we cannot reduce human beings to their “facticity”. In Martin Buber’s vocabulary, a similar point is expressed in the thought that even if it is possible to give a description of you as an “it”, this does not account for the significance it may have to meet you as a “*thou*”. There is a sense in which people go over and beyond any descriptions we may give of them. Thinking that we could reduce them to one description is a way of denying their reality, turning them into objects.

These insights led Luce Irigaray (2004) to suggest that a more appropriate expression than “I love you” would be “I love *to* you”, pointing at the direction my love takes rather than at its object (14).

Far from wanting to possess you in linking myself to you, I preserve a ‘to’, a safeguard of the in-direction between us – I Love to You, and not: I love you. This ‘to’ safeguards a place of transcendence between us, a place of respect which is both obligated and willed, a place of possible alliance. You do not, then, find yourself reduced to a factual thing or to an object of my love, and not even to an ensemble of qualities, which make you a whole perceptible by me. Instead I stop in front of you as in front of an other irreducible to me: in body and in intellect, in exteriority and in interiority. (Irigaray 2004, 14)²⁰⁶

In the light of this, we could say that the tragedy of Rosamond and Lydgate’s marriage lies in its never having been a true meeting between people, neither of hearts nor of minds. Quite contrary to the above mentioned fear that in love one may come to know each other too well, their misfortune was that they never really came to know each other in the first place. Certainly, they became well acquainted with each other’s weaknesses and conduct, but they did not come understand each other in the sense that is internally related to love.

Here again, it is possible to make a distinction between a transitive and intransitive sense in speaking about “knowing”. Speaking about knowing in the transitive sense encompasses the specific facts I might be said to know *about* someone. The intransitive sense rather points out the “nothing in particular” character of “I know him”. This is the

²⁰⁶ I am not completely at peace with Irigaray’s proposal. It works as a reminder not to be fooled by the surface-grammar of “I love you” into thinking that it depicts the same kind of relation as “I like ice-cream”. However, if we consider the important task of philosophy to remind us of the different uses we may make of “I love you”, it becomes more difficult to see what help we can have from it.

sense in which knowing someone cannot be separated from being *in contact* with someone, or *being there for* someone.²⁰⁷ Just remember how, “I know what you’re going through”, can be uttered as a way of showing compassion. This second sense of knowing someone, I would say, is internally related with love.

I cannot emphasize enough the sense in which being alive to the realities of other people involves a constant struggle. Directing the kind of loving attention to people that is involved here, as Murdoch (1997) says in one place, is “an endless task” (317). Recognizing what it means for you to be “your own person”, or to have an existence that is independent of mine, is not something I do once and for all. Time and again I have to beware of withdrawing into my own perspective, or of turning you into an object of my own desires, wishes and expectations. That I often fail in this does not lessen the demand. Rather it strengthens it.

III AN IMAGINATIVE UNDERSTANDING?

One final question: In what way is knowing another person dependent on an “imaginative” response? I raise this question since some philosophers have wanted to give imagination a different role in love than that which draws us to idealize. Murdoch, for instance, makes a distinction between fantasy and imagination, finding the latter to be utterly important for our ability to perceive justly and lovingly. Approaching the matter from a different angle, John Armstrong also writes,

Most people are not startlingly beautiful or magically attractive. But someone who seems just moderately nice can flower under the imaginative attention of a lover’s eye. Not, as Stendhal inclines us to think, because the lover is somehow gilding the other with fictitious charms; but because the kind of attention the lover brings allows less obvious qualities to be seen and appreciated. (Armstrong 2002, 96)

Armstrong connects imagination with our ability to see details as significant, but also with the ability to create wholes, to find meaning and patterns in someone’s behaviour, and relate different aspects to each other. Imagination then would be closely connected with the creative powers that are often attributed to love. Compare this to

²⁰⁷ Cf. Dilman (1987, chapter 8).

Vlastos, who writes, "Beauty stirs us so deeply, Plato is saying, because we have the power to create and only beauty we love can release that power" (Vlastos 1973, 21). This idea connects to the Diotimian picture of the lovers as "pregnant both in body and in soul" longing to give birth (Plato 1953c, 191, 206c). The bodily side of this striving comes to show in procreation (which is regarded as a lower form), whereas the spiritual side of our pregnancy gives rise to poetry, inventions, the creation of states, thoughts and ideas. All these, Diotima tells us, lead us towards immortality.

Bringing in imagination in these cases mainly serves as a contrast to what has normally been considered to be rational thinking. Murdoch (1997), for instance, wants to introduce "[a]ctive imagination as [...] an important faculty" in our evaluation of "what is really there" by contrast to "intentions, decisions, choices" on which Stuart Hampshire, whom she criticizes, focuses (199). This move serves as a reminder of the role that imagination, feeling and fantasy have in understanding both art and other people. It helps to release ourselves from the idea that understanding can be reduced to an ability to draw conclusions from facts or represent an independent reality.

What I have wanted to show, however, here and elsewhere, is that the notion that our reasoning could only be explained in terms of drawing conclusions or representing facts is in itself illusory. To say that we possess this kind of reasoning, and now also need to include our faculty of imagination is thus not enough. Before we begin speaking of different faculties of "reasoning" and "imagination", we need to work out how we should understand these concepts in the first place. If we take Armstrong's suggestion that imagination is concerned with our ability to discern meanings and forms, and it is an interesting suggestion, it seems as if our sense for beauty that comes to live in imagination, has a much greater role for our understanding of thinking as a whole, than as a complementary faculty to an imagined "rationality".

A second reason for being wary of linking our sense of beauty with imagination, is that it still leaves room for the idea that there is a more "real" way of perceiving the world. How do we introduce imagination in such a way that its associations with our usual ways of using the words—"You must be imagining"—are lost? Using imagery that is close to Stendhal's picture of "crystallization", Singer portrays the lover as an artist who paints the lover with stronger contours. This

leaves us with the picture that you have some given contours that are only emphasized by my love.²⁰⁸ My point would rather be that the *only* way it makes sense to speak of you as having contours is in the life that we share, a life where these "contours" may have different roles. This is not a commitment to any idealistic idea, or to a constructivist theory of how our character is created in our dealings with each other. You do not come into being by my talking about you. It is rather a reminder that we cannot abstract our ways of speaking about who someone is from the life that we share and the different meanings attributing emotions and character traits to people have there. There is no question about who you are outside our community.

IV THE BEAUTY LOVE SEES

In this chapter I have wanted to show the internal relation between the concepts of beauty and love, that is, the ways in which seeing someone as beautiful may be an expression of love. This, however, is not to be taken as an empirical point, that is, as saying something about how I actually may see you in the course of our life together. Nor is it a prescriptive remark about how I should see you.

The point, as it were, is not that to love you I have to see you as beautiful all of the time. Indeed, there are a variety of ways in which I may come to regard you in our relationship. Sometimes I am struck by your beauty, other times I have to search for it. Yet at other points, my regard may be said to enter an "aesthetic mode"²⁰⁹, casually registering a nose that may be considered too big or shoulders that might seem too narrow, the surface of your skin, the paths of your wrinkles. My gaze may neither be judging nor expressing desire, rather it is characterized by a kind of disinterest. In other situations, yet again, my eyes shoot daggers, you are an object of irritation and anger.

²⁰⁸ The same may be said about the beauty we may find in nature.

²⁰⁹ Cf. "Sally Gadow has argued that in addition to experiencing the body as a transparent mediator for our project or an objectified and alienated resistance or pain, we also at times experience or bodily being in an aesthetic mode. That is, we can become aware of ourselves as body and take an interest in its sensations and limitations for their own sake, experiencing them as a fullness rather than as a lack" (Young 2005, 51).

What I have hoped to show is rather how the ability to love and the ability to see beauty are interrelated. My failure to see you as beautiful, and it is important that I may regard this as a failure, is a failure to love. If I am never touched by your beauty, or lose sight of it, it becomes difficult to see what it would mean for me to love you.

I would suggest that our experiencing beauty in these ways is a central aspect of our life that cannot be reduced to any other understanding of the world. Like our ability to love, in some ways, it is given to us. If there is nothing in its upbringing that destroys it, we expect a child growing up to catch on to the meaning of these words and find a place to apply them in his or her own life. Given as it is, however, it is something we may lose. As a perspective of life it is often put to the test. Our experiences and disappointments may make it difficult to keep up our sense of beauty, and sometimes we may need to struggle to hold on to it, as we may need to struggle to hold on to love. The cynic gives us one example of what it may mean to lose this battle.

To speak of beauty in love, as I have, is not, I would claim, to paint an ideal. Rather, it enters into love as a demand: to open myself to the true beauty of another human being, ridding myself of idealizations, and not allowing my weakness for appearances to lead me astray.

EPILOGUE: IDENTITY

“KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU”²¹⁰

In one of his books Robert Solomon (2001) cites a poem by Alice Walker called “Warning”. He does not discuss it directly, and neither will I in any greater detail. However, it helps to bring some of the remarks I have made about love as embodying personal knowledge into sharper focus.

To love a man wholly
love him
feet first
 head down
 eyes cold
 closed
in depression

It is too easy to love
a surfer
white eyes
godliness &
 bronze
in the bright sun.
(Walker 1976, 65)

The very first line draws attention to one important distinction we can make: “To love a man wholly.” Where are we supposed to put the emphasis in that line? Are we to think about what may be entailed in loving the whole man? In other words, are we to take up on the suggestion that we are to love everything about him; the good sides along with the bad sides? Certainly this may be an important reminder not to forget that people make mistakes and fall short in many ways in spite of their aspirations. However, I have repeatedly tried to show that there is something puzzling in the suggestion that a person is constituted by a collection of facts, all of which the lover

²¹⁰ Abba (1976).

could be said to find endearing. This is not so much a refusal of the notion that we may come to think about our loved ones in such a manner, as it is a criticism of the idea that we may capture what it means to be or know a person in such terms.

That is also why I have rather argued for a different way of understanding what it means to *wholly* love a man. Talking in this way is not necessarily to say that you should love someone *as a whole*, but that your love should be *whole-hearted*. You should love somebody whole-heartedly and be there in your love, not only in times of joy but also in times of trouble. You should recognize the other not only in his or her moments of perfection but also in times of weakness and despair.

The warning Walker issues hits at the heart of the Platonic equation of goodness with perfection. It reveals a temptation to think that goodness is only revealed to us by others in the form of great examples of excellence. I would be prepared to say that this temptation runs deep in all of us. When trying to think of examples of goodness, one is often tempted to lean towards the extravagant. One searches for the grand gestures, the life-changing moments. Very seldom one thinks of the small things, the smiles, the attentive listener, and so on. Even so, it is often precisely in the small things that many of the greatest wonders of love lie, as well as in the small things that our greatest difficulties to love gain hold. It is easy to feel awe and amazement in front of astounding beauty or goodness when nothing is demanded of us, but much more difficult to respond to the demands love makes on us in the grittier cases.

I imagine that it was something of this sort that led Rush Rhees (1997, 387ff) to remark that it is often easier to be good to strangers than to be good to the persons who are closest to one. With strangers in need, there is often no struggle to see just what the need is, whereas in the muddiness of our relationships, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish your needs from my own. It is easier to be a hero for a day than to find the strength to see meaning in life, to reach above one's own pettiness and smallness on a day to day basis, or even to recognize this kind of everyday heroism. The difficulty here does not so much lie in your making it difficult to love you, as it does in my own difficulty to love, not only you but life, and in the challenge not to be caught up in my own small-mindedness but to be one with you.

Although I agree with Walker's and Rhees's remarks to a certain extent, I have some difficulty understanding precisely what it is that they say about love being easier in some situations than in others. Is it

not that these kinds of differences between different relations do *not* point to a difference in the difficulty to love, but that they tell us something about what my difficulties may be in different relations? We encounter quite different difficulties in our personal relations and in our attitudes to people we do not know and the temptations in these relationships are equally different.

A first point against their suggestion is that it is not possible to say beforehand where our difficulties in loving will lie in particular situations. It is perhaps tempting to think that the "godly surfer" provides us with a clear *reason* for love. This, however, does not exclude that I may think that your depression and exposure reveal to me the nature of love to the same extent as, or even more than, your kindness and joy. This is not to deny that your sadness and depression are difficult to face, nor to say that I would in any way want you to be depressed, or sad. But in these situations, I may feel that I see more clearly the *demands* love make on me, your need for *me*. I feel the reality of our relationship and my responsibility in front of you in a sense that may be lost on me in the ease of everyday life.

A second point, relating to my criticism of reasons for love, is that our willing acceptance of an "image of perfection" as a reason for love, or as something making it easy to love, in itself reveals a temptation in love. Our awe and admiration for perfection may be said to tell us more about our tendency to be taken in by beauty than it speaks about love. Similarly our tendency to wish to determine proper objects for love speaks about our desire to make ourselves judges over love, rather than to be judged by it. This again can be seen as a failure to love wholly. We wish to reduce our endless responsibility for others by determining the limits to which it extends.

This distinction between what it means to love the whole person and love someone wholly relates to the distinction between a *transitive* and an *intransitive* sense in which we may speak about knowing, changing, loving, or understanding something specific or another human being that I have brought out at several points in the previous discussion. I have emphasized that to *know someone* in the latter sense is not the same as to have *knowledge about someone*. This also marks a distinction between the knowledge of another individual that love can be said to constitute and scientific knowledge.

The difference between knowing another human being and having knowledge and information about her has by some philosophers within the Wittgensteinian tradition (see e.g. Dilman 1987, 119; Tilghman 1991, 117) as well as in other places been related to the

difference between scientific knowledge and the meaning we may see in an artwork (For more on this difference see e.g. McMillan 1984, 35f; Hertzberg 2004; Armstrong 2002, 95-97.) A further reason for bringing aesthetic reactions into a discussion of love is also that aesthetics is the study of beauty and part of my discussion has been aimed at showing how love is internally related to the perception of beauty.

I do not, however, think that a discussion of artworks suffices to bring out what is involved in our meeting and coming to know another human being. The way in which, for example, Iris Murdoch places our understanding of another human being at the same level as our understanding of works of art when she says that “love, and so art and morals is the discovery of reality”, may rather involve a way of aestheticizing our relations to others that corrupts what is at stake in them. Human beings, as it were, are not works of art.²¹¹ By reflecting on the differences between scientific or rational knowledge, aesthetic knowledge and the knowledge of love, we may therefore mark a distinction in two directions; first, against too narrow an understanding of knowledge as possessing information, and second, against too closely modeling our understanding of other people on our understanding of art.

One uniting feature of what we may say about artworks as well as about people is the *indeterminacy* in how we may understand something that I have previously argued is characteristic of our “emotional vocabulary”. Compare this to Wittgenstein’s remark,

It is hard to understand yourself properly since something that you *might* be doing out of generosity & goodness is the same as you may be doing out of cowardice or indifference. To be sure, one may act in such & such a way from true love, but also from deceitfulness & from a cold heart too. (Wittgenstein 1998, 54e)

Pointing out this aspect is not to say that what we say about art and people is by necessity vague. Some things may be, but others may well strike us as utterly precise. The indeterminacy is rather to be found in our sometimes perceived difficulty to find the right description. (Cf. Hertzberg 1994.) Does a painting capture a sense of serenity or melancholy? Does a person’s words and behaviour speak of discontentment or shyness? In this respect, experiencing someone’s remarks about a person or an artwork as vague may rather be seen in

²¹¹ In this respect I am also critical towards the philosophical emphasis on the power of art and literature to heighten our moral sensitivity.

his or her failure to commit to any one description. On the other side, a remark may strike us as to the point in its capacity to make sense of a situation that had puzzled us before, or rid us of the kind of bewilderment we had experienced in front of a piece of art or someone's action.

This indeterminacy also finds an expression in the types of disputes and disagreements we may have about who someone is or what an artwork expresses (cf. Hertzberg 2004). Although there are situations in which we may be in agreement as to how to take a person, how to read a novel or describe a painting, there are many situations in which we may "agree to disagree" to different extents. At times I may see what makes you describe someone or something differently than I do. I see why *you* would describe it as such, but still I would not agree with your description. At other times, I may passionately try to convince you to see the situation as I do. My refusal to describe the situation in other terms may also have a moral character. I may think that you compromise yourself by agreeing to use certain descriptions. Think, for instance, of the passionate avowals, "That isn't art!", or, "No one could be happy doing that!" Yet at other times again, I may feel I have nothing to say on a matter.

I want to take these considerations as pointing us towards two different things; (1) the illusion in thinking that the kinds of disagreements there may be between people in such cases may be settled with reference to a general or neutral standard, and in connection with this, (2) the need to enter into such discussions about what is a good or fair description oneself, as an individual. These two things come together in the insight that the questions we are dealing with here are questions about *meaning* and *truthfulness* and not merely about correctly representing certain facts: What does it mean to say what I say? What kinds of descriptions do I want to stand behind?

This is not to say that "facts" play no part in what I may meaningfully say about a person or a piece of art. Many times what we need will precisely be more facts to feel certain about what to say. There is also a sense in which what I am ultimately concerned with are the "facts". This, however, is not in the sense that I only need to accept certain facts to reach a conclusion or that in every case my problems could be solved by bringing in more facts. To the extent that facts will play a part in our agreements and disagreements, it is primarily in the *sense* we are able to make of them. Trying to persuade you to see things as I do is hoping that the facts would figure in your

understanding in the way they do in mine, that you would give the same weight to different aspects that I do.²¹²

The emphasis on meaning and truthfulness is first and foremost a reminder of the ways in which what I say in these matters is expressive of my own responses, and thereby reflect on who I am. Against the impersonal ideal of scientific knowledge our knowledge of art and other people alerts us to the need of standing in a personal relation to what or who is being discussed. Think, for instance, of how my judgement about an artwork may *deepen*. At the first reading a book leaves me cold. The second time around I find it full of insightful remarks. This change of mind may be the result of being convinced by some other person's description, your reaction to something leads me to reconsider my reaction. It may also be an effect of coming to see a meaning in something I did not give any weight to at first, or of a spontaneous change of heart. I come back to see something "with new eyes".

As this example shows, emphasizing the personal dimension of what I come to see and say in a matter against the notion of a general standard against which I could judge someone or something is not intended to exclude that the views of others may matter to me in significant ways. When we speak about beauty in connection with love, there needs to a certain extent to be an agreement about what it means to say that someone is beautiful, even if we do not necessarily need to say that the same person is beautiful. When we move to what it means to know someone, however, there is a deeper need for agreement in what we say about a particular person, and not only in that we agree about what it means to describe someone in that way. For one thing, an important aspect of coming to know you is seeing how you react in relation to others. How you treat others you do not love can be seen as telling me something about your love for me, and it may often be easier to keep alive a deluded picture of what you are like if I never see you with other people.

Contrary to the sometimes offered suggestion that we may make sense of Nazi officers who were committed family men apart from their gruesome job,²¹³ I would suggest that it is as intelligible that a child of such an officer comes to see a conflict between the ways in which his or her father acted towards the Jews in the concentration

²¹² Compare this to Wittgenstein's remarks about aspect seeing.

²¹³ Raimond Gaita (2004) discusses a similar question (8).

camps and his love for his family. The indifferent and callous actions he had proved capable of performing against them can be seen as revealing something about what other people, and his family, meant to him. In a similar manner, there is nothing surprising if a parent's love for his children moves him to be more concerned about the welfare of other children.

However, although others may tell me things that change my understanding of you, the truth of what they say is not solely dependent on their being more detached observers who are able to offer more general statements about who you are. Rather I may hope that my friends tell me difficult truths about you out of their concern for me and also offer me their support in facing them. This also reminds us that how I understand your words about somebody else may be expressive of how I know you. If I have previously been taken in with your pointed observations, I may be more inclined to listen to your differing opinion than in situations in which I, perhaps wrongly, find myself to be a better judge of character than you are.

Recognizing our personal involvement in the meaning we see in someone's actions and in an artwork leads us to our *responsibility* in answering such questions. To give a good or fair description of someone, I should not distance myself from my own responses to the other, but pay attention to them and the roles they have in what I say. The difficulty I may perceive in finding a good description, then, is the difficulty that may be involved in sincerely articulating my own experience.

The need for a personal relation if one is to be able to say anything significant about the person or artwork under discussion also brings out one of the crucial *differences* between aesthetic judgements and our descriptions of other people. Even if we may stress this need in relation to artworks, the kind of contact that is needed for us to be able to say that we know someone, and not only know much *about* him or her differs greatly in character.²¹⁴ İlham Dilman gives some indication of what is involved in this when he writes:

For to come to know people one has to be an individual oneself, with feelings and convictions [...] one can only know a person in meeting him as an individual oneself, and [...] one can only

²¹⁴ Dilman remarks that if I have not remained in contact with an old friend, "I may say that I have known him; but it does not follow that I still do. I may say: 'I can tell you a lot about him, but I no longer know him. We are not on speaking terms.'" (Dilman 1987, 121-122).

do so in the course of common work and joint activities, 'in the traffic of human life'. It is here that one finds oneself, that one becomes an individual. (Dilman 1987, 120-121)

Both Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil put great weight on paying loving attention to the other, on contemplation. In speaking of M, the mother-in-law who tries to view her daughter-in-law in a loving way (cf. p. 119), Murdoch speaks of making use of "a just and loving gaze". This emphasis on vision certainly has a place in describing my relation to pieces of art. Read as a reminder that one should allow the other to be other and not attempt to change her according to one's own preferences, Weil's insistence that beauty is something one contemplates without trying to touch it also captures something important (Weil 1977, 379). But the kind of distant regard that both of them emphasize becomes strikingly odd if we think of what we normally connect with knowing other people.

Undoubtedly seeing holds an important part in appreciating someone's beauty; to find you beautiful is to enjoy looking at you. Nevertheless, it is difficult to neglect the important part our other senses play in coming to know another person, without, of course, denying that seeing may be regarded as active and as involving most senses. I come to recognize your individuality not only through spending time observing you, but by touching you and feeling your touch and movements, the feel of your hands, the tone of your voice, your scent, and so on. This kind of contact is essential to my knowing you in love. It is no coincidence that Joni Mitchell (1971) sings of love as "*touching* souls". As Buber (2004) would say, it is in meeting you as a "thou", and not by describing you or observing you as an "it", that I come to know you. "[N]either detached observation nor imaginative voyeurism can bring knowledge of other people" (Dilman 1987, 123).

Buber's account of what it is to meet you in a shared life emphasizes the dialogical character of our relation. Coming to know you is not something I do on my own. It is essential that I may also ask you what you think, whether you recognize yourself in my descriptions of you, find them fair or illuminating, and that your subsequent answer will matter for what I may go on to say. In that way, it reminds us that what we may say *about* each other is not only descriptions *of* each other but something we may potentially *say to* each other, and which may have the power of changing each one of us. Think only about the discrepancy there may be between what we are prepared to say *to* someone and *about* her.

This also brings out one of the main problems about thinking that the disagreements there may be between people in talking about who someone is may be settled by appeal to a general standard. This picture assumes that our discussions about who someone is are always governed by the same concern, that is, the wish to lay bare all the facts about the person and say who the person is as a whole. In this manner the words denoting character traits are taken to report certain states, dispositions or propositional attitudes of the individual. This ignores the different concerns out of which utterances such as, "That was a callous thing to do!", "He wouldn't do that!", "Don't worry about telling her that. She won't be angry with you.", "Who are you really?", arises and to which they are responses. At times they are reminders or reprimands, "Do you always have to be so self-obsessed!" At other times they express our bewilderment or alienation in front of another human being, "Did I ever know him?" Without paying attention to these concerns and the contexts in which these questions arise, I have argued that we cannot determine what *kind of question* it is that we are raising, let alone provide an answer to it.

Recalling the widow who was wondering whether there had been love in her life in Hertzberg's example,²¹⁵ we would be faced with a different situation if she was able to ask her husband whether he loved her or not. This is not to say that whatever he had said would be an answer to her question. It is, of course, also possible that his answer would be insincere. He might have hidden his thoughts and shut himself off from her. The emphasis on the need for contact with another, therefore, cannot be reduced to being in their presence; he might still not have *been there* for her. Even if he were sincere, he might have also asked himself the same question, or have come to doubt his own reactions and intentions. We are, as it were, very seldom lucid even to ourselves.

What he would say in response to her question, however, would have the power of changing her question in different ways. The insistence that he did not love her even though he swore he did, or vice versa, would have a different ring than her question originally. For one thing, it would be an insistence. His response might also have made her wonder about her reasons for raising the question, or might have reaffirmed her sense of their love. Learning about him, thus, opens the possibility that she learns something about herself. This

²¹⁵ Discussed in chapter 1.

may be a reason for speaking about knowledge in love as a form of *wisdom*.

What makes our knowledge of others and ourselves so hard to come by is not only the indeterminacy of deciding what description particular actions fall under, but also that we so often deceive ourselves as to what it is we and others are doing. We much rather see ourselves as acting out of generosity and goodness than out of cowardice and indifference, to again use Wittgenstein's examples. In that sense, only emphasizing the need to personally enter such discussions about who a person is may mislead us into thinking that the facts we are dealing with are only more sublime than others, requiring sensitivity, imagination rather than mere rationality, and into neglecting the moral concerns that may be involved in raising these questions. Now, I have shown in what ways our knowledge of others in an intransitive sense is dependent on us being one with the other, and the kind of demands with which this confront us.

In this sense, loving someone can be seen as a two-fold matter, requiring at times that both of us change. At times I may need to rid myself of aspects of myself that stand in the way of seeing who you are and loving you. At other times, I may think that you are confused about who you are or tell that you are not being true to yourself. If this realization is not self-deceived, it is not necessarily an expression of my not accept you as you are, or wanting to change you to fit my own needs. Rather being critical of certain aspects of you, may carry the insight that everything you do is not expressive of who you are, and that in my love, I have the opportunity to help and support you in ridding yourself of aspects of you that may stand in the way of what is good for you.

PART THREE

MEANING

PROLOGUE: MEANING

TOMAS, TEREZA AND THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING

In the story of Tomas and Tereza in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* Milan Kundera portrays two different ways of relating to the contingencies of a beginning love. First, we see them through the eyes of Tomas who is shaken by the insight that it was a pure coincidence that Tereza fell in love with him and not with anybody else. "Apart from her consummated love for Tomas, there were, in the realm of possibility, an infinite number of unconsummated loves for other men" (Kundera 1984, 34).

His realization is preceded by his decision to follow her back to Prague from Switzerland, where they had wanted to begin a new life after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. When he makes the decision, Tomas is driven by a feeling of necessity and compassion, a feeling that Kundera captures well in a theme borrowed from Beethoven, "Es muss sein". When he reaches Prague, however, the feeling of necessity and compassion has worn off. All he feels is "the pressure in his stomach and the despair of having returned". Contemplating a remark she has made—if it were not for him she would have fallen in love with a friend of his—he comes "to the conclusion that the love story of his life exemplified not 'Es muss sein' (It must be so), but rather 'Es könnte auch anders sein' (It could just as well be otherwise.)" (Kundera 1984, 35).

Seven years earlier, a complex neurological case *happened* to have been discovered at the hospital in Tereza's town. They called in the chief surgeon of Tomas's hospital in Prague for consultation, but the chief surgeon of Tomas's hospital *happened* to be suffering from sciatica, and because he could not move he sent Tomas to the provincial hospital in his place. The town had several hotels, but Tomas *happened* to be given a room in the one where Tereza was employed. He *happened* to have had enough free time before his train left to stop at the hotel restaurant.

Tereza *happened* to be on duty, and *happened* to be serving Tomas's table. It had taken six chance happenings to push Tomas towards Tereza, as if he had little inclination to go on his own. (Kundera 1984, 35)

The thought that "his acquaintance with Tereza was the result of six improbable fortuities" makes Tomas feel uneasy. For him the chance happenings represent something light, something weightless, and this lightness becomes heavy for him to bear, whereas the weight and necessity of it all, the thought that their love was meant to be this way, was easy to carry, indeed no burden at all. For Tereza on the other hand, the coincidences leading up to their meeting lend weight to it.

It was the call of all those fortuities (the book [that he was reading which for her symbolized a secret brotherhood], Beethoven [that the radio was playing as she went to pour the cognac he had ordered and that represented a better life to her], the number six [the number of his hotel room which reminded her "that the house where they had lived in Prague before her parents were divorced was number six" (Kundera 1984, 50)], the yellow park bench [on which he was sitting, waiting for her to finish her shift and on which she had sat the "day before with a book in her lap" (Kundera 1984, 50)] which gave her the courage to leave home and change her fate. It may well be those few fortuities (quite modest, by the way, even drab, just what one would expect from so lackluster a town) which set her love in motion and provided her with a source of energy she had not yet exhausted at the end of her days. (Kundera 1984, 51)

It is, Kundera remarks, as if

[c]hance and chance alone has a message for us. Everything that occurs out of necessity, everything expected, repeated day in and day out, is mute. Only chance can speak to us. We read its message much as gypsies read the images made by coffee grounds at the bottom of a cup. (Kundera 1984, 48)

The example reminds us that our lives do not only depend on our choices, intentions and actions but are shaped by factors and circumstances external to us. It tells us about how one moment may change our lives and gain a special meaning in it. In Tomas's perspective it also raises the question about how different our life might have been if it had taken that turn rather than this. At times, probably all of us have asked ourselves the question of what would have happened if. Sometimes we are also allowed to catch a glimpse of what our lives could have been like if at one time we had happened to be in another place. This is maybe at its most obvious in near-

accidents, where our life in one way or another hung by a thread, "Give or take some metres, and I could have been dead!", but it may also take on more mundane forms as in, "If I had gone to that party as I planned and not fallen asleep, I could finally have been able to meet and talk with him".

I may think about what could have been different in my life with dread, curiosity, regret and wonder. My reflection may take the form of both wishing that the circumstances had been different and of wishing that I had acted upon them differently by making a different choice. But even when I think that what happened was in some way up to me, there may be the feeling of missing the moment. (Cf. "Did I miss my one chance of happiness?")

These considerations can be seen as pointing us towards two different ways of speaking about meaning in the context of love. First, there is the question about how different coincidences and circumstances take on meaning in the "story of our love". This is not only true of love. An accident, the loss of somebody close or, on a more positive note, the birth of a child or the beginning of a new career may all be events that in some ways change our life. Love may also help us find meaning in something that does not seem meaningful at first.

Second, we may reflect on the notion that there was some "deeper meaning" in our meeting, that in some way we were "meant to be". It is easy to shrug off such talk as mere superstition or to think that it is philosophically confused in other ways, since it implies a form of fatalism or belief in destiny that cannot be rationally justified. Here and in the following chapters, I will show how thinking that love is determined by forces external to us may also be expressive of a moral temptation not to take full responsibility for the other in love. This is comparable to the role an external explanation of love may be given in scientific or philosophical discourse.

However, even if we may easily summon up pictures from films and literature of what it means for matches to be "made in heaven" — we see two people, as it were, drifting towards each other through a chain of unlikely events—we do not have to think that by saying "our love had to be" one is necessarily committed to promoting a clear picture of destiny or fate of this kind. Many people saying such things are quite vague about what it means or reluctant to give it any distinct meaning. Often, saying this is also the end of a conversation rather than the beginning of it. Rather than looking at these reactions as expressive of a belief in some underlying meaning or structure of

life, I will, therefore, investigate what it may mean to see them as expressive of the meaning one may find *in* life in love.

The different perspectives that Tomas and Tereza take on the contingencies of their relationship is portrayed through their different reactions towards chance and necessity. Furthermore they relate to the lightness and heaviness of life that is the general theme of Kundera's book. Tomas finds meaning and weight only in what happens of necessity, in what must be: "The weighty resolution²¹⁶ is at one with the voice of Fate (*"Es muss sein"*); necessity, weight and value are three concepts inextricably bound: only necessity is heavy, and only what is heavy has value" (Kundera 1984, 32).

Tomas's view can thus be understood in the light of a certain conception of fate, which considers certain things to be determined. Things are meaningful, because in some way they were meant to be. They have to happen and would happen regardless of our own wishes or choices. On this conception, one looks at what happens almost like a natural law, although going into a discussion of what that could mean is bound to end up in confusion. It is our lot to take the strikes that fate deals us. We need to carry our burden. Thus, the meaning of life is determined by forces external to us.

From this point of view, what happens by chance may easily be construed as quite meaningless. From Tereza's perspective, however, necessity is rather regarded as "mute". It is not precisely meaningless, but it does not carry with it any particular meaning either. "[I]s not an event in fact more significant and noteworthy the greater the number of fortuities necessary to bring it about?" (Kundera 1984, 48). Something so unexpected, so unplanned, she thinks, could not happen and not have any meaning. At least she rushes to find some meaning in it. This idea, again, can be combined with a conception of fate. How could so many coincidences join together to create an event if there were no deeper plan behind it? The thought that something was just a coincidence might be heavy to bear, but then again it might not be.

I did not give the characters of Kundera's novel so much space to decide whether necessity or chance is better suited to define the

²¹⁶ According to Kundera (1984) "Beethoven introduced the movement [consisting of the already known motif *"Es muss sein"* in Allegro and the other motif put in the question *"Muss es sein?"* in Grave] with a phrase, *"Der schwer gefasste Entschluss"*, which is commonly translated as "the difficult resolution" (32) but could "also be construed as a "heavy" or "weighty resolution" (32).

character of fate. Rather these characters give us an opportunity to reflect on what it might mean to regard life and love in the light of these concepts. They also tell the story about the *kind of person* who would be inclined to look at life and love in this way. Asking and trying to answer the question of what it means to think of one's love in this light is not only an attempt to see the different ways in which people may react to coincidences or necessity. It is also an invitation to reflect on what it is to regard something as necessary or coincidental in the first place.

Tomas's and Tereza's thinking about necessity or chance reveals a temptation to think that there are aspects of the world which are independent of them and which in some way determine the meaning their love may have for them. Against this, I will argue that there is confusion in the idea that we could make sense of a concept of meaning that is not related to how we live our life. Consequently the terms in which Tomas and Tereza make sense of their lives express a difference in the meaning they are able to find in their life.

There is, as it were, nothing in the events leading up to their meeting that mark them as either necessary or coincidental as such. It is not as if all the events of the world either happen by chance or by necessity so that we simply can go out in the world to check whether they were indeed necessary or coincidental. Considering that people fall ill, and not only people in small villages but also chief surgeons, and that Tomas was the next in line for emergency operations, we do not, for one thing, have to think that it was especially *surprising* that he ended up in Tereza's village, not even in the hotel where she was working, since there were only a few other hotels in the village. Knowing that Tomas is portrayed as a womanizer, even makes it seem quite *ordinary*, or necessary, that he would meet some town girl, and have a fling with her during his tour in the Czech countryside.

We may also think that it was highly *probable* that Tereza would be at the hotel at the same time as Tomas was. It was her work-place after all, and even if they had not met at the time they did, they might have run into each other at some other point of his stay there. In that sense it might also have been considered a coincidence if they had not met. As for the radio playing Beethoven and Tomas living in room number six, something else that happened might as well have been endowed with meaning in relation to their meeting.

Saying this, I do not want to lessen the importance these coincidences had for Tomas and especially for Tereza, nor argue that they would be better understood in any other way. Rather I want to

point out that it is only because Tomas had this fling not with any town girl but with Tereza, that they and we come to look upon these events as coincidences and not under any other description. If they had not been part of their history together we would most probably not consider them in the first place.

As Kundera puts it:

Our day-to-day life is bombarded with fortuities or, to be more precise, with the accidental meetings of people we call coincidences. [...] We do not even notice the great majority of such coincidences. If the seat Tomas occupied had been occupied instead by the local butcher, Tereza never would have noticed that the radio was playing Beethoven (though the meeting of Beethoven and the butcher would also have been an interesting coincidence). But her nascent love inflamed her sense of beauty, and she would never forget that music. (Kundera 1984, 51)

It is only against the background of their love and what this love has come to mean for them that these happenings have meaning as coincidences or fortuities, laughable, magical or wondrous. This, again, is a reminder of the need for context for making sense of particular aspects of our life; seeing how they are related to us and other aspects of our life and not trying to provide an explanation of what they are in *themselves*. Rather than thinking that necessity or chance are *causally* connected with the meaning we see in life—perspectives on life that in some way force themselves on us—it is a reminder that seeing something as meaningful in any way is an aspect of *intentionality*. It is only in certain situations that the question whether something happened by coincidence or by necessity arises.

Calling something a coincidence may be a way of marking it as unexpected, unplanned or surprising. I do not run into strangers in the street by chance, but meeting an acquaintance in the street may be a coincidence; meeting him or her on a trip abroad may be an even greater coincidence still. However, it is not a coincidence that I meet a friend at the place and the time at which we had decided to meet earlier although certain coincidences, such as missing the bus, or running into an old acquaintance on the way, may lead up to one of us being late for our meeting. Thus, referring to coincidences is one way of saying that something was not up to me or my planning.²¹⁷

²¹⁷ We may, of course, also plan for the unexpected. I may, for instance, make sure that there is enough extra time for something unexpected to happen during a trip to still

Conversely saying that something was necessary often means that something could be expected to happen. There was, say, “no way of avoiding” an accident on the icy roads. This reference to forces external to us may be both an excuse and a way to lessen the guilt of the one who still thinks she or he could have done something else. In a different situation and a different sense, saying that something is necessary may be a way of emphasizing the importance of something: “It is necessary that you come to this meeting (otherwise...)”.

In some situations, then, saying that something was necessary is the opposite of saying that it was a coincidence. However, this does not mean that whenever we say that something did not happen by coincidence it happened by necessity. Although it was not a coincidence that my friend was at a meeting we had decided on, this does not mean that it was necessary that he or she was there. As we have seen, things might have come in between, there may be misunderstanding. However, this does not mean that I was wrong to be certain that my friend would be there.

This certainty, however, is not the certainty of causal necessity, in the sense of gravity pulling objects towards the earth, or water freezing at 0° C. Rather, it is the certainty of friendship, of trust, of a life in which people make appointments and in which it matters to us that people are where they say they will be. It is in the light of this life I share with others that I am able to say that “I have to be somewhere” or “It is necessary that I am there” to explain why I have to go somewhere, or with absolute certainty say, “He will come”.

The “necessity” we are concerned with in these cases, then, is rather a “moral necessity”. When we speak of people meeting, and not for instance of water freezing, there are other things than chance and necessity, such as intentions, plans, choices, decisions and promises, that come into our understanding of people’s actions and the meaning we see in them. Speaking of actions in itself implies intentionality, and this also raises a question of responsibility. We hold people

be able to make it home on time, or I may take into account that a drive will necessarily be longer than usual because of the icy roads. That I can control these circumstances to some extent of course also means that there may be disagreement about the extent to which this is possible. Someone might, for instance, not accept any reference to the weather, or missing a bus etc., as an excuse for being late, since we could have taken these things into account before we set off, while most of us would probably be less strict. What we take as an appropriate excuse will also vary with the occasion we are late for. It is one thing to be late for a lecture, another for one’s wedding.

accountable for their actions and promises, trusting that they mean what they say.

Thus, even though Tomas left Zurich with the feeling that he just had to follow Tereza, I would suggest that this feeling of not being able to act otherwise was not a response to the voice of necessity or destiny, but a response to the voice of love.²¹⁸ It was not some outer necessity of the world that determined his actions, but the inner necessity of love or compassion (which Kundera about) which set him moving. By inner rather than outer necessity I mean that even if he or we may say that he “had to” go, this is not intelligible independently of love but only makes sense in the light of it. In other words, the necessity he felt was internal to his love.

Tomas’s reluctance to regard his actions in the light of love, however, has to be seen in relation to other aspects of his life. Before meeting Tereza, he had, for one thing, excluded all love from his life in favour of a life with “erotic friendships” with several woman. These friendships were an invention created as a compromise between his fear of and desire for women (Kundera 1984, 12) and required a certain distance since anyone growing close would threaten his arrangement. This gave him the feeling of being the master of his own life and his relationships in a way that one can only be by not letting anyone into it.

Tereza, however, bridged the distance he had created between himself and other people and found her way into his life, evoking images in him of her being sent to him as “a child put in a bulrush basket and sent downstream. He couldn’t very well let a basket with a child in it float down a stormy river!” (Kundera 1984, 10). Like no one else she managed to awaken his compassion and love. Even so, he had problems reconciling with these feelings. Even when Tereza moved into his place and they married, he did not want to give up his erotic friendships claiming that they “did not in the least run counter to his love for her” (Kundera 1984, 16).

He did, however, consider “her fidelity an unconditional postulate of their relationship” (Kundera 1984, 17) which also showed itself in

²¹⁸ How could this “It must be” be the voice of love? How can love be something that has to be, something that could not be otherwise? I raise the question because it feels as if any conception of love that views it as something we can expect to receive, reckon with or presuppose, seems foreign to love. In that sense, regarding love as a gift, almost surprising, out of the ordinary, may be thought to be more appropriate than thinking that love in some way has to come about.

his jealousy in thinking about the fact that she could just as well have fallen in love with a friend of his. In that way, his attitudes towards other people, both to Tereza and to his erotic friends were characterized by a certain fear and blindness. He shut his eyes to the ways in which his infidelities came to torture Tereza during their whole relationship and found nothing deeper in his erotic relationships than a certain aesthetic interest, collecting sexual experiences as fine wines. By thinking that his fate was determined by some outer necessity he avoided confronting this blindness on his part.

In agreement with the old opposition of reason and emotion, one could say that Tomas used his "It must be" to rationalize his decision to leave Switzerland, although the true reason for leaving was his emotions (and of course Tereza!). He could not think that something as light and fickle as our emotions may appear to us to be could give any weight to a decision of that kind.

Yes, it was unbearable for him to stay in Zurich imagining Tereza living on her own in Prague.

But how long would he have been tortured by compassion? All his life? A year? Or a month? Or only a week?

How could he have known? How could he have gauged it? (Kundera 1984, 34)

Of course there is no way he could have known what would have happened had he decided to stay. He might have imagined different outcomes, but he would not have been able to predict all the possible consequences of his other option.

Any schoolboy can conduct experiments in the physics laboratory to test various scientific hypotheses. But man, because he has only one life to live, cannot conduct experiments to test whether to follow his passion (compassion) or not. (Kundera 1984, 34)

But even if we cannot calculate what consequences following our emotions will have—this is, of course, also true of following our reason—Tomas failed to see that our emotions still can (and do) carry weight for us and that they, precisely because of that, are expressive of our life with other people and not just irruptive experiences. They may have an unconditional meaning for us that is independent of any conception of necessity or chance.

This is a realization that Tomas comes to only later in the book. He comes to see that love is not dependent on what has to be; "[l]ove is our freedom. Love lies beyond '*Es muss sein*'" (Kundera 1984, 236).

One night he dreams of the perfect woman who radiated the “feminine calm” that “had eluded him all his life” (Kundera 1984, 238). He wakes up, with the desire to meet her, only to realize she was not real. He recalls the myth of Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium* of how the ancient human beings were split into two halves, which forever seek each other, and thinks that the woman in his dream could be his second part. Now suppose he did “not find the other part of himself”.

Instead, he is sent a Tereza in a bulrush basket. But what happens if he nevertheless later meets the one who was meant for him, the other part of himself? Whom is he to prefer? The woman from the bulrush basket or the woman from Plato’s myth?

He tried to picture himself living in an ideal world with the young woman from the dream. He sees Tereza walking past the open windows of their ideal house. She is alone and stops to look in at him with an infinitely sad expression in her eyes. He cannot withstand her glance. Again, he feels her pain in his own heart. Again, he falls prey to compassion and sinks deep into her soul. [...] And he knows that time and again he will abandon the house of his happiness, time and again abandon his paradise and the woman from his dream and betray the “*Es muss sein!*” of his love to go off with Tereza, the woman born of six laughable fortuities. (Kundera 1984, 239)²¹⁹

It is, as it were, the reality of Tereza (or of Tomas and Tereza) that keeps him with her, and which makes this life a necessity. His love for her creates a world of necessities and possibilities that would not exist if it were not for his love. He is confronted with situations, questions and choices, that would not be meaningful but for love.

²¹⁹ Kundera connects the meaning of our emotions with our “sense of beauty”. This sense, he says, made Beethoven’s music unforgettable to Tereza, so that “[w]henver she heard it, she would be touched”. It also made Tomas think that he would not survive Tereza’s death when she was lying ill the second time they met and think of her as a child set out in a bullrush basket. This sense of beauty, Kundera says, singles out events as meaningful and important and grants them a place in what he calls our *poetic memory*, “which records everything that charms or touches us, that makes our lives beautiful” (Kundera 1984, 208). According to him, the metaphors we make use of in this context are dangerous and “not to be trifled with”, since “[a] single metaphor can give birth to love.” (Kundera 1984, 11)

I will not be able to argue for it, but I do not think that picture captures what is involved in the meaning other human beings have for us in love. Working largely on an aesthetic level, it does not make a clear enough distinction between the character of the ways in which Tomas is collecting “erotic encounters”, and the unconditional significance the loved one has in true love.

From the outside of their relationship it might seem accidental or contingent that the radio playing Beethoven or Tomas living in number six became vital for Tereza's understanding of their love, or that Tomas thought of Tereza as a child in a bulrush basket. Looking at them from the inside of their relationship, however, they cannot be abstracted from their love; they even constitute that love. In that sense, it may be said that love not only finds or gives meaning to our life but is also dependent on life to have meaning. It was no coincidence that Tomas came to think of Beethoven's "Es muss sein" when thinking of following Tereza. In fact it was his first step back to her since "she was the one who had induced him to buy records of the Beethoven quartets and sonatas" to begin with (Kundera 1984, 32).

The way in which love may come to have an unconditional sense for us is also something that Tereza comes to recognize at the end of the book. Throughout their love she had nurtured a wish that Tomas would be old and weak, a wish that comes true when she one day sees him like this from afar (Kundera 1984, 309). "She could not tear her eyes from him: he looked like an old man. His hair had gone gray, and his lack of coordination was not that of a surgeon turned driver but of a man no longer young." Hiding behind a tree trunk so that he and the man he was talking with will not see her,

she suffers a bout of self-recrimination: It was her fault that he had come back to Prague from Zurich, her fault that he had left Prague, and even here she could not leave him in peace, torturing him with her secret suspicions while Karenin [their dog] lay dying.

She had always secretly reproached him for not loving her enough. Her own love she had considered above reproach, while his seemed mere condescension.

Now she saw that she had been unfair: If she had really loved Tomas with a great love, she would have stuck it out with him abroad! Tomas had been happy there; a new life had opened for him and she had left him! True, at the time she had convinced herself she was being magnanimous, giving him his freedom. But hadn't her magnanimity been merely an excuse? She knew all along that he would come home to her. [...]

She had summoned him to follow her as if wishing to test him again and again, to test his love for her; she had summoned him persistently, and here he was, tired and gray, with stiffened fingers that would never again be able to hold a scalpel. [...]

Good God, had they had to cover all that distance just to make her believe he loved her? (Kundera 1984, 309-310)

Besides the objection that there is nothing one can do to make someone believe that one loves him or her, and that the whole attempt of trying to force someone to prove his or her love for oneself goes against the grain of love, the aim of this paragraph is not to pass out judgements on Tomas and Tereza's love. It is not to decide which one of them loved more, or what they would have done had they really loved. I rather want to point out how the realizations that both Tomas and Tereza have at the end of the book change the meaning their love has for them, and how different this meaning is from the meaning they had found in talk about necessities, coincidences, and even choices and intentions in human life.

One of these realizations concerns the ways in which they are dependent on and responsible for each other. When Tereza left for Prague she did it with the wish that the circumstances, even coincidences, or Tomas's choice would determine whether he followed her or not. She wanted to free herself of responsibility with regard to his possible return, when the truth was that she left him no other choice but to follow her, and knew it.²²⁰ Although she or he could imagine other possible outcomes, she left no serious alternatives for him.

When talking about the ways in which we all presume that "our love is what must be" Kundera remarks that we all think "that without it our life would no longer be the same" (Kundera 1984, 35). He does not appear to take the suggestion seriously, but why should we not? In one sense, it would remain our life regardless of the shape it took, *we* would still be living it. But in another sense we might not be able to understand what it would mean for this to still be *our* life, if all the things and people that make it meaningful were missing. Think only of the way I may assert that "This is *my* life" to remind someone that in their suggestions or prescriptions of what to do they seem to be forgetting that not they but *I* am to live with these choices and how they will reflect on my life. Or think of the difficulties we may have in finding ourselves in our life after the loss of a loved one, or of how I may not be able to think of what my life and I would have been like if I had not met you.

Even speaking about Tomas as having a choice, or being able to act out of his free will may be misleading in relation to love. It is true that

²²⁰ The question is of course what it might mean to say that she knew it then in retrospect. Is it a way of saying, she knows now, or, she was deceiving herself?

he is not determined to “time and again [...] abandon the house of his happiness [...] to go off with Tereza” by some external force, but his going is also not his choice in any simple sense. Knowing Tereza, and knowing in the sense of loving, he has no other options. What it means for her to be Tereza, one could say, is that he will follow her, no matter what.

Their realizations are in that way also important realizations of who they and the other are. This is seen, for one thing, in their different ways of regarding weakness and strength. Through their relationship both of them had come to define Tereza as the weak one and Tomas as representing strength. By the end however they both come to question this picture, or what it might imply. Here from Tereza’s point of view:

She kept telling herself that she had set a lifetime of weaknesses against Tomas. We all have a tendency to consider strength the culprit and weakness the innocent victim. But now Tereza realized that in her case the opposite was true! Even her dreams, as if aware of the single weakness in a man otherwise strong, made a display of her suffering to him, thereby forcing him to retreat. Her weakness was aggressive and kept forcing him to capitulate until eventually he lost his strength and was transformed into the rabbit in her arms. (Kundera 1984, 310)

Their picturing each other in terms of weakness and strength and allowing those characteristics to determine how they made sense of their love, then, revealed yet another temptation in their love. It is true that there are times at which your weakness calls on me to offer you strength, as there are times at which I may need to trust that your strength will carry the both of us. There are also times when admitting weakness may be considered a strength and upholding a picture of strength may be regarded as a weakness. Nevertheless, thinking that our responsibility for each other in love can be determined by offering such a general characterization of one of us as strong and the other one as weak, ignores the fact that the demands love in the end defies all such categorizations of what we really are or should be. Our responsibility for each other in love is not portioned out on the basis of how strong or weak we tell ourselves that we are. On the whole, it is not something to be measured. Rather it urges us to scrutinize our ways of making sense of our life together, recognizing what these categorizations may tell ourselves about our love, as well as about our fears and failures in it.

“HOW WONDERFUL LIFE IS,
NOW YOU’RE IN THE WORLD”²²¹

*Kannst du nicht auch ohne seine Liebe fröhlich sein?
Musst du ohne diese Liebe in Gram versinken?
Kannst du ohne diese Stütze nicht leben?
Ludwig Wittgenstein (2000, Item 133 Page 9r)*

From my previous descriptions it may already have become clear that Nick Hornby’s book *About a Boy* (2000) is actually a story about two boys. It just happens that one of them, Will, is already 36 years old, while the other, Marcus seems much older although he is only twelve. One of the “coincidences” that leads to their coming together, becoming friends and eventually both learning about love and life from each other, is the attempted suicide by Marcus’s mother, which awaits them when they return to Marcus’s home after their first meeting. Truth to be told, the two of them were not supposed to meet that afternoon. Will actually wanted to meet Suzie, a friend of Marcus’s mother, and Marcus just tagged along.

In a scene after the suicide attempt, in the film version of the book (2002), Marcus’s mother asks him whether, when reading her suicide letter, he also read that she will always love him. To this Marcus replies, “It’s a bit hard for you to love me when you’re dead, isn’t it?” This reply echoes a doubt one may easily have about the sincerity of the love of someone who is depressed. It is as if one would like to ask, “How can you say your life is meaningless when I, whom you say you love, am in it?” There appears to be a conflict between love on the one hand and depression on the other, since loving someone involves regarding life as meaningful whereas depression is rather a state that robs life of all meaning.

²²¹ John (1970).

The apparent contradiction, or at least the grammatical tension between loving and being depressed, does not mean that it is in any way meaningless for Marcus’s mother to say both that she loves him and that she wants to die. There are many things we can say and do without the words losing any meaning, and to think that our ways of viewing the world must be free from contradiction to make sense is to take a naive view on both language and life. As we will see, it is a characteristic feature of our talk about finding meaning in life that different perspectives may exist side by side; we may vacillate between despairing about life’s meaning and finding it meaningful.

The point is rather that the two contrasting ways of viewing the world that love and depression represent make the doubt that Marcus expresses meaningful. There is at least a question as to how someone can say they love and not want life, not love waking up in the morning and looking forward to a new day.²²² There is the sense in which “love changes everything”, how it “makes you fly”, or brings things to life, which raises the question why it sometimes is not able to do it. But maybe this example just testifies to the sad fact that love, although it may give us strength and help us find meaning where we thought that there was none, may not be enough to fill a life?

We may also take it as saying more about depression than it does about love, the horrible force that is able to deprive even the most meaningful things in life of their meaning. In other words we may think of a person’s despairing about the meaning of life as an aspect of the depression, and in that way as something pathological, and not as an aspect of who the person is. If we take this attitude towards the depressed person, the tension between love and depression dissolves, since we see the perspective of love and not that of the depression as expressive of who the person truly is.

In what follows, I want to discuss what sense there may be in saying that loving someone is internally related to loving life. Furthermore I want to give more attention to the ways in which love can be said to bring meaning into our lives. What I am thinking of here is something similar to Mitya’s feeling of intoxication at hearing Grushenka’s declaration of love in the *Brothers Karamazov*. She expresses her love for him on a night when he literally thought his life was over. About to take his life, thinking that he had forever lost her

²²² This is not to say that most people who love and are not depressed have to describe their average Monday morning in this exhilarating manner. But maybe they would, or maybe we should?

and fearing that he had killed the servant who took care of him as a boy—later he is also accused of the murder of his father—finding out that she returns his love brings out a new hope in the shape of a wish to start a new life with her and wash away the blood he thought he had spilt (Dostoevsky 1949). You may also think of the line in Elton John’s “Your Song” that gave the title to this chapter; “How wonderful life is, now you’re in the world.”

Another question I have in mind is whether love can only be said to make us forget life’s meaninglessness or whether it really makes us find its meaning. The music critic Hans Keller reportedly said that Vivaldi made him forget that life lacked meaning whereas Schubert made him see that life has meaning. We may ask whether love is closer to the music of Schubert than to that of Vivaldi in this respect.

I LOVING YOU AND LOVING LIFE

How are we to understand the claim that loving someone means loving life or finding it meaningful? Are we to think of this as a causal relation, or rather as an internal one? Does love, by some stroke of magic, bring about meaning or are we rather to think of the connection as a grammatical point about the use of our language?

One quite obvious aspect of this is that loving someone easily fills one’s life. There is always something to do, to look forward to, to hope or wish for. Wanting to meet one’s friends and loved ones again, talk to them, be with them and so on. This aspect is also brought to the fore in *About a Boy* (Hornby 2000). In conversation with Rachel, the woman with whom he eventually falls in love, Will discusses how to deal with Marcus’s mother after the suicide attempt. She tells him that what kept her from taking her life at a time when she was feeling depressed was the fact that there was always something else to do.

Anyway, it was always, you know, not today. Maybe tomorrow, but not today. And after a few weeks of that I knew I was never going to do it, and the reason I was never going to do it was because I didn’t want to miss out. I don’t mean that life was great and I didn’t want not to participate. I just mean there were always one or two things that seemed unfinished, things I wanted to follow through. (Hornby 2000, 250)

This is not the only kind of description one may give of what it is to be depressed. It is not the best kind by far. In the book, Will also questions whether this is all there is to a depression. Some of the

things she mentions, such as seeing her work progress, are also not directly related to other people, such as friends, lovers or family, but more generally to different things one may care about, such as one’s work, poetry, paintings or TV- programmes. It does, however, seem as if other people in particular are able to give our life a meaning (or different meanings). Rachel also mentions her friends and her son in their discussion. There is a longing for another person in love that is crucial for our understanding of it. “[I]t is the feeling that is left when after endless hours of being together, talking, making love, and so on, you still feel the same desire for the other as you did before” (Nykänen 2002, 111).

We might also speak of this longing as a hunger for life, but we should tread carefully here. When we speak of needs, such as hunger or thirst, we often think of something that can be satisfied, a gap that needs to be filled. But Hannes Nykänen’s emphasis in speaking of the longing or desire we have for someone in love is precisely to question the idea that it is something that is satisfied (or fulfilled) by our being together. My wanting to be with you does not end when we are together. There is, as it were, “nothing *in particular* we want, rather we want just anything and everything, we want the person as such” (Nykänen 2002, 110).²²³ In that sense, love can be seen as a reaching out to another person, a reaching that also stretches forward into the future.

The final considerations should already have made us wary of simply regarding the relation between love and meaning as an external one. If we consider the things Rachel is talking about, we may be tempted to think that (1) love is only one of the things we might think of as meaningful, such as collecting stamps or following the national ice-hockey league. Just as these hobbies may keep us going in times of trouble, we may think that love does. Or, we may think that (2) love only provides access to things that are meaningful regardless

²²³ These considerations also lead Nykänen to question whether we are right to describe love as an inclination. Inclinations, however “determinate (‘I would want a glass of water’)” or “indeterminate (‘I am thirsty’)” (Nykänen 2002, 36) they are, seem to be directed at something that we want or prefer, something we might have. I might have an interest in or need for something, but as in the case of saying that what we want is not anything in particular, but the person as such, what I desire in love, is not something I can have. “Love cannot be ‘had’ - it is not a preference nor something that just pops up; it is not an inclination.” (Nykänen 2002, 36). Compare this to my previous criticisms against understanding love as a preference in chapter 4 and 6. This criticism was also partly inspired by Nykänen’s discussion.

of whether we love or not. It gives us the opportunity to travel to exotic destinations, or enjoy interesting dinners, or it provides the opportunity to realize one's "life projects" such as building and decorating a house, raising a family and so on. Here one may note that the latter formulations are only superficially different from the chauvinist suggestion that marriage is a way of securing one's sexual needs. Both ways of looking at a love are as problematic in that one's interest in the other in these cases is purely instrumental.

The claim I want to make, however, is that the connection between love and meaning is much closer than any of these formulations allow us to think. The following discussion should help to make clear that love is not just a component of a meaningful life, but that there is an internal relation between the meaning things may have for us and love. Before saying more about what I mean by this, it is worth noting that there is an ambiguity in talking about the meaning of something. This ambiguity rests on differences between two uses of "meaning". On the one hand, we may talk about what something means to us, thereby saying something about the significance or importance we attach to it. On the other hand, we may talk about what a word means, whether it makes sense or is used in a meaningful way in a certain context. These two uses are not completely distinct from each other. On the contrary, one may argue that language could not make sense if what we say (or how we say it) had no relation to what we regard as significant. One might also describe the idea of finding life meaningful as a way of thinking that life as a whole makes sense.

This ambiguity is also apparent in situations in which we talk about whether someone really means what he or she says, or about whether we are talking about the same thing. It alerts us to the difference between mastering the use of certain words, and meaning what we say. This is not to say that we always need to stand behind our words in the same sense, but that it is unclear what language would be if we could never be said to mean what we say. Compare Cockburn,

Will it follow from this [that I employ a racist term in conversation] that I *mean* by the word the same as those with whom I am speaking? Will it follow that I am *using* the word as they use it? My own answer to this is that it will not follow. I am only pretending to mean by the word what they do, and only pretending to use it as they do. To mean by it, and to use it, as they do would involve my using the term to give expression to my contempt of this race. If I feel no such contempt, whatever I do I will not be using it, or meaning by it, what they do. [...] We

might put the point this way: there is a distinction to be drawn between ‘knowing what, according to the linguistic conventions, it is appropriate to say’ and ‘having something to say’. I know how to use this term of abuse; but I have no use for it myself. (Cockburn 1997, 65-66).

Now, both these uses have a bearing on our understanding of the relation between love and meaning. Consequently I will try to highlight aspects of each of them. The emphasis, however, will be on the relation between loving and finding life meaningful, since that notion seems closely connected with the notion of loving life.

Certain aspects of this relation between love and meaning have already been raised in previous discussions. We may recall how Will’s friendship with Marcus opened him to other people and to the question about who he was; a question which I described as being intimately bound up with the place he wanted to give other people in his life.²²⁴ We may also think of the different meanings Tomas and Tereza in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* attached to the events that led up to their being together, and the beauty with which their love seemed to surround them.²²⁵ The point I want to examine more closely, however, is Rhees’s (1969) remark that “the person in love is different; life is different for him, or the whole world is different for him” (124-125). What kind of world, as it were, is it that the one in love inhabits? What are its characteristic features and how does it differ from other worlds, or other ways of taking in one’s life?

One way of misunderstanding both what it means for words to have meaning and for something to be meaningful for me is to think that the meaning is constituted by some inner occurrence; one thinks, say, that meaning consists in my associating certain words with certain mental images or feelings. In line with the attempt to show that the meaning of words can only be found by considering the different roles they have in the context of our life, I will rather show that the kind of meaning with which love endows our life can only be seen by considering the different ways in which we come to make sense of life in the context of our loving relationships. Failing to see this, for one thing, is failing to acknowledge the difference between truly seeing something or life as meaningful, and merely having an experience of meaning. I will return to this point later on in the discussion. Rather than focusing on some inner experience I will stress

²²⁴ See chapter 3, p. 121f.

²²⁵ See the prologue of the third part.

that coming to grasp the meaning someone sees in life and in a particular situation involves paying attention to what the person says and does not say, what descriptions he or she finds appropriate or fair in a particular situation, how he or she reacts to other people and to the ones he or she loves.

Here again it is possible to make a distinction between two ways in which love is related to the kind of meaning we see in life. On the one hand, love and depression constitute opposite reactions to the question whether life *in its entirety* has meaning. In this respect, they can also be seen as being connected with how we are alive to our situation. Just think of how we may describe someone as “full of life” in love, and another as “cut off from life” in depression. On the other hand, love, just like the other emotions, embodies a particular way of making sense of one’s particular situation. As a continuation of my previous discussions, I will try to show how this meaning is intimately bound up with our life being a life which we share with other people and the kind of beauty and goodness we may find in such a life. Here, I should perhaps point out that the examples I am discussing are primarily connected with the kind of sharing of a life that is an aspect of “happy loves”. In that sense, I leave aside many questions about what meaning, or lack of meaning, loving someone who does not return one’s love may involve.

In the *New York Trilogy* by Paul Auster one of the main characters expresses the beginning of his love with almost the exact same words as Rhees did in the above quote.

Everything had changed for me, and words that I had never understood before suddenly began to make sense. This came as a revelation, and when I finally had time to absorb it, I wondered how I had managed to live so long without learning this simple thing. I am not talking about desire so much as knowledge, the discovery that two people, through desire can create a thing more powerful than either of them can create alone. This knowledge changed me, I think, and actually made me feel more human. By belonging to Sophie, I began to feel as if I belonged to everyone else as well. (Auster 1988, 232)

This paragraph brings out several ways in which love can be seen as relating to the meaning things have for me. To begin with, there is the feeling that everything has changed, or that I myself have changed in crucial ways. Love, as it were, lends colour and shape to my world. I come to find meaning in things I did not consider (meaningful) before, attaching a great significance to things that from the outside may look

contingent, such as the way the light fell on you, the place we first met, the colour of the shirt you wore. A particular case of this is the relation I may now come to take towards speaking the language of love. My own experience of being in love may, as Auster writes, make me sensitive to the meaning of words that have previously struck me as quite banal. In the light of my love, the words gain a deeper meaning. They now strike me as true, and I may feel that, for the first time, I can speak them and really mean what I say.

I may also experience a similar reaction towards other things that concern you, feeling, as it were, as if meaning emanates from you. Things gain a meaning for me through you. They become meaningful because they have a relation to you, or a meaning for you. Your fascination for the swelling buds of spring makes me aware of the changes of seasons in a way I was not before. The smell of pine-trees warmed by the sun is forever associated with you and the place where you used to ride your bicycle as a child. Your apparent joy in watching a film that I never really appreciated makes me take a different interest in it, although I still cannot bring myself to like it. After your initial amazement at the light Nordic summer nights, I am the one who constantly says, "Oh, look how light it is" during summer evenings. In these ways, I come to carry you, as well as the other people I love with me in my experiences of life.²²⁶

These kinds of experiences, which I assume are familiar to everyone although they, of course, take very different forms, may seem quite superfluous in the big scheme of life. Nevertheless, I think they have a much more fundamental role in our life than one may be prone to assign to them at first. Our being born into a context of other people who in different ways matter to us, and to whom things matter, can be seen as playing a constitutive part in how things and words come to have meaning to me in the first place. The Dutch author P.F. Thomése (2005) writes about the ways in which his father showed him and taught him the names of different birds and how after the death of his father, looking at birds became one way of continuing his relationship with his father (52). The story is an important reminder of the ways in which children are brought up into our forms of life. Pointing out things of interest and concern, the parents help the child to orient itself in the world. By connecting

²²⁶ Remember the ways in which visiting someone in another country may open the country and their ways of life to me in ways that merely spending time in the country as a tourist do not.

certain ways of relating to a situation with another person, and what he or she finds important, it learns to what aspects it should direct its attention. In Bachtin's words it is important that this attention be a loving attention. Another aspect of this, of course, is to pick up on the things to which the child's immediate attention is drawn in different ways. We are, as it were, born into circumstances that are already saturated with meanings the importance of which cannot be separated from the importance other people have for us.²²⁷

The former notion of people bringing meaning into our life could be one way of expressing the thought that in love I have found a new center for my world. This may again be related to the experience of belonging to someone or to the world, or to everyone else as Auster writes. Thomése describes his feelings for his new-born daughter in a similar fashion.

Her birth came to us like an infatuation; everything became charged, enchanted by the miracle of her presence. The world, in which I had moved without direction for so long, suddenly had a radical centre. (Thomése 2005, 8)

I have already discussed how we are to understand the somewhat paradoxical statement that I find myself by locating the center of my life in someone else.²²⁸ Here we may only note that expressions such as these may be used to convey the feeling that there is a purpose in and with my life. Or, it may be said to illustrate that love puts things in the right perspective. It teaches²²⁹ me what really matters, solidifying the conviction that whatever problems may befall me, I may rest safe in love.²³⁰

At the same time these ways of finding direction and meaning in love alert us to the vulnerability of love. Placing my happiness in your hands, or finding it there, opens up the possibility that I may lose my center, the ground beneath my feet, in losing you. This aspect is at its

²²⁷ This reminds us of the significant role shared reactions and agreement in what we regard as important has for the formation of language. It gives us one way of understanding Wittgenstein's emphasis on the need for community for language making any sense. Cf. e.g. McDowell (2002) and Rhees (1954).

²²⁸ See chapter 5.

²²⁹ Two points can be made about what love can be said to teach me; (1) there are always new things to learn, (2) what I have learned is something that I have to learn time and again. There is no point at which I can say, "Now I know all there is to know about love." Or, "This (and only this) is what it means to love."

²³⁰ I discuss this idea of being safe in love in relation to the risks that seem to be involved in loving in more detail in the following chapter.

most obvious in the loss of meaning we may experience in sorrow and grief. In this respect also, Thomése's book, trying to grasp what to make of his and his wife's life after the death of his new-born daughter, is a powerful testimony of the ways in which the death of a loved one can deprive one's life of meaning. A similar kind of desperation is also found in one of Wittgenstein's (2000) more personal remarks, in which he asks himself, "Kannst du dich nicht auch ohne seine Liebe fröhlich sein? Musst du ohne diese Liebe in Gram versinken. Kannst du ohne diese Stütze nicht leben?" (Item 133 Page 43v). Compared to love and depression as reactions towards life as having meaning as a whole, grief also constitutes an interesting "in between". On the one hand, it is an affirmation of life having meaning, on the other, it is experienced as a loss of meaning, which, of course, it is. We lose someone we love. This again brings to the fore how another human being is always an other to me. Like few other things, death has the power of revealing to us what it means for another to be a unique individual. In the light of the loss we experience in grief, the attempts, discussed in this work, to explain what we love with reference to preferences or use, show just how shallow they are.

The above remarks have mainly concerned some ways in which different things in life may be or become meaningful for us in love. However, love also changes the way we understand and describe things. Think, for instance, of how someone may make a house feel like a home, and not only feel like a home, but actually be one. (In the background, Tanita Tikaram (1998) sings, *I open the door but it's not like a home without you* whereas Abba (1982) records the seemingly meaningless details of a life turned into a rut in *The Day Before You Came*.) Furthermore, draw to mind how doing something together actually changes the meaning of what it is we do, the different implications, questions and reasons that a specific activity can be said to entail. Sharing a meal is something different from enjoying one on my own, and not only in the way I may experience it, but in what it is I can be said to do. This again reminds us of the ways love mostly involves sharing a life together, and how the life that we share comes to change the way I think about my own life.²³¹ I may not be able to think about my life without thinking about your place in it.

²³¹ Cf. chapter 6. However, there is a distinction between the meaning loving someone can have for a person, and the meaning the happy lovers' relationship have for them. Although many of my points concentrate on the latter, it is possible that loving

Speaking about sharing also brings out the number of activities that are essentially shared such as having conversations, hugging, kissing, making love which made possible by love. Even in cases where we do something together that we might also do alone what is involved in doing it changes. Deciding what to do implies different things if I am the only one who is making the decision or if I am making it together with you. If I am the only one to make a decision, you may well advise me on what to do. If, however, I take what you say in our joint decision as a piece of advice, I am seriously mistaken about what it means to decide something together.

This aspect of being together is also relevant for clearing away one kind of mistake in how one understands the sense in which another person may become the center of my life. One may easily take this as simply saying something about the relationship two people have to one another. But the point of talking about you as the center of my life is not only a personal one. Ronald L. Hall (2000) comments that a happy "marriage requires not only that the two fall into love with each other, it also requires that the two together fall in love with the world" (239). He takes this as a point about the place marriage holds as an "institution" that "carries public responsibilities" and says that it is a "moral necessity" that marriage is "not simply a conversation exclusively between the two lovers [... but] a conversation that opens toward the world" (Hall 2000, 238). He calls this necessity a moral one in that it needs to allow for the possibility that the lovers have a life outside their relationship, not denying the conflicts and disagreements that may exist in that life with other people.

I agree with the gist of his argument but I would add that this necessity is not only a moral necessity but a grammatical one. The promise of love is not made in secret. Rather there appears to be a problem if someone does not want to reveal his or her love, or keep it a secret after the initial hesitation that normally characterizes a beginning relationship. It is crucial that I may not only want you to know that I love you, but that I (may) want the world to know it. As I mentioned earlier, my promise to love you does not only concern how I want you to regard my present and future actions, I am marking the perspective against which I understand and want you as well as

someone from afar may also give one's life meaning. Yet, being unable to be in a relationship with the loved one may make holding on to the meaning in one's life difficult.

others to understand me, my actions and my life. It is in the light of this promise that I accept responsibility for what I do.

To name but one example, it is a characteristic feature of love that in some situations I must take an active stand on it and us. Answering a harmless question such as "What did you do this weekend?" may become a lie if I simply offer a story about what *I*, and not what we did. The mere fact that I spent the weekend with you may make speaking about it in such terms an omission. There are of course situations in life where there is no question as to whether I share my life with someone, but at other times, it is unclear what it may mean to tell someone about *my* life without at the same time telling him about *our* life. Even saying that leaving you out of the story of what I have done and where I have been may be considered an omission or a deception says something about the different kind of meaning with which a life with you endows my life. Our love, thus, becomes the center of our life in that it provides the light in which our actions are to be understood. Marriage can be seen as a public acknowledgement of this inherent fact about love.

II

IMPURE ATTACHMENT OR IRRATIONAL ILLUSION?

Above I have tried to bring out some ways in which love can be said to be related to finding meaning in life and turning toward the world. I now want to turn to one objection to this idea. It is raised by Rush Rhees (2000) in an attempt to make sense of some of Simone Weil's remarks, such as "If you love anyone, then always think of him as though he were dead" (105, the formulation is Rhees's). In struggling with such phrases, Rhees formulates Weil's position like this,

If in your love for someone you are possessed by the thought of seeing him again—by thoughts of what the future may bring, and of the joy of his company—then the love is not pure. It is not purely a love of *him*; it is contaminated by imagination. Perhaps she would say that your love is then not concentrated on him; you have not disregarded yourself. Or she might say: Your love is not a love of him; it is a love of life. (Rhees 2000, 106)

The concluding sentence, of course, is in stark contrast with what I have said so far. If this is indeed what Weil wanted to say, and she is right about it, it appears that if we would be quite wrong to bring together loving someone with a love of life. Rather, it would seem that we should do our best to keep the two apart. Now, the remarks with

which Rhees struggled all concern a certain form of detachment which, for Weil, was of utmost importance for attaining purity in love. This concerns especially the love of God which she considered to be the purest form of love. But is there, Rhees asks, any room for personal love in such an account? Is not the kind of personal concern we may have for others excluded in remarks such as, "To endure the thought that those we love, on whom we think lovingly, are mortal, are perhaps dead at the very moment we are thinking of them—this is an anguish" (Weil 1956, 218), and, "Friendship is a miracle by which a person consents to view from a certain distance, and without coming any nearer, the very being who is necessary to him as food" (Weil 1977, 370).²³²

What Weil is criticizing here is a certain form of attachment to the world, which in one way or other may contaminate our love. In other places she also stresses the need to renounce the world in love. It is important to recognize that this talk about the "world", and in Rhees's case, "life", belongs to a spiritual and religious language. The "world" we need to renounce should be understood in accordance with the worldly life Christians are encouraged to give up, a life of pleasures, fame, wealth and power.²³³ Therefore, we should not confuse this "world" with the physical or metaphysical "world" of philosophy, but attend to what it is we want to say by speaking about "the world" in different circumstances. Furthermore, we do not have to assume that all aspects of life, or of the world in a broad sense, are necessarily excluded in Weil's account.

A similar line of thinking also holds a place in love, even when we are not talking about the love of God. There is a question about what we are attached to in love, and it may be necessary for me to give up certain attachments if my love is to be pure. For my love to be a love of you, it cannot, as Rhees says, take my own wishes, idealizations or expectations of what you should be as its object. Nor should I take you for granted in thinking that I, say, know everything there is to know about you, or try to mould you to fit my taste. If I do that, then I myself am at the center of my love, and what is specific about love, as I have already stated, is that somebody else comes to have this place in my thinking about the world. These questions about what we are bound to in love, or what lies at its center, just like the injunction to

²³² Dilman discusses the final one on several occasions. (See e.g. Dilman 1998, 91-92.)

²³³ Compare this to Dilman's remarks about Plato's use of "soul" and "body" in the *Phaedo* which I discuss in chapter 6 and 10.

detach ourselves from the world, have to be seen as moral questions, and not simply as questions to be dealt with in epistemic terms.

Nevertheless, this is not yet saying anything about what place attachment on the whole should hold in love, and this is the critical point in Weil’s discussion. The contrasts I have drawn are between different forms of attachment, where the crucial question is *what* we are attached to. It is in no way an encouragement always to stay detached. If we look at Weil, however, it sometimes—and, of course, it is important that it is not always—seems as if she slips into thinking that attachment on the whole is something to do away with. She speaks about our personal attachments as if they rendered our love of God less pure.²³⁴ But if we again look at the quote by Rhees, in what way does the “thought of seeing [the one we love] again [or the] thoughts of what the future may bring, and of the joy of his company” (Rhees 2000, 106) constitute a contrast to love?

If these thoughts take the form of an obsession, certainly we may be well advised to be rid of them. But what about the cases in which they belong to the ways in which we rejoice in someone, and entertain hopes for the future in love? Should we not rather say that these ways of rejoicing in someone lie at the core of love? It looks as if we are creating a distinction rather than marking one, if we distinguish this joy in someone from a joy in life, since one way of rejoicing in you is exactly rejoicing in (the possibility of) a life with you.

What leads Weil into a position from which all attachment may be seen as contaminating love is her tendency to connect all our desires with interests and inclinations. Nykänen’s remark that there is “nothing *in particular* we want, rather we want just anything and everything” (Nykänen 2002, 110), however, reminds us that the longing for each other that characterizes love constitutes a different *kind* of desire than that which is expressed in talking about interests and inclinations. Now, as I have already argued, I see this emphasis on not wanting anything *in particular*, or anything specific, as an important moral move in discussing love. There is a serious problem involved in trying to give a general description of what it is that we

²³⁴ This is one reason for Rhees to say that she does not make room for personal love. “Once again, the attempt to identify the love of men and the love of God. ‘All you can really (or unconditionally) love in men is their love of God.’ Then you hardly love them as men.” (Rhees 2000, 120) The criticism Rhees levels against Weil is similar to the one directed at Plato’s account of love in the *Symposium* as transcending personal relations, and indeed, Weil was inspired by him.

want in love. Nevertheless, I find the second part of the quote as important, the everything and anything that I come to care for in love. Our personal love, as it were, always latches on to our particular lives; it gains a specific meaning through our life together.²³⁵ In other words, I see no conflict between loving *you* and attending to your particular ways of being. Something similar can be said in relation to my attitude to life. There is no way of separating you from life, for you are always a part of what I come to understand as (my) life.

The criticism that Weil directs at love comes from within. It is directed at certain aspects of our personal love that, considered from a certain perspective of love, makes it less pure. She tries to show one way in which in personal love we may turn away from the true center of our world, that is, turn from the love of God towards the world. In a similar manner, Wittgenstein criticizes the purity of his own love, when in the remarks that follow the quote above, he writes: "Es ist nicht Liebe, was mich zu dieser Stütze zieht, sondern, daß ich auf meinen zwei Beinen allein nicht sicher stehen kann" (2000, Item 133 Page 43v 133). In other words, he identifies what pulls him to another not as love but as a form of weakness. This again expresses the recognition that although we may think of something as love, it may not really be. The question of conscience with which he struggles, "Is there anything else but weakness to my love?", also testifies to a kind of despair about the meaning we are to find in our relationships with others that is characteristic of the concept of love. There is a question about whether our love is pure, sincere, deep, which cannot be given an ultimate answer independently of what we are prepared to say in the matter.

This does not mean that we cannot give it any kind of answer, from time to time, but that the answers that we give do not exclude that the question can and will rise again. This indeterminacy also holds for what we may consider to be a good description of the role this kind of despair may have in someone's life. It is possible to see both Weil's and Wittgenstein's descriptions as expressive of a pure and unconditional love. It is, however, also possible to think that the tendency to regard all forms of exposure to and dependence on others as an impure attachment expresses a kind of self-contempt and ruthlessness both to oneself and to other people. We may vacillate

²³⁵ Cf. chapter 6.

between these two descriptions, finding that both capture something important in the attitudes of the two philosophers.

Weil and Wittgenstein offer us one idea of how some of our attachment to people in love (or all of it on one reading of Weil) may be seen as illusory. There is however also a different kind of criticism of love which I want to focus on for the remainder of this chapter. That is the idea that love in its entirety is illusory addressed already in the previous chapter. On this view, rather than showing us life’s meaning(fulness), love is accused of only creating an illusion of meaning that we would be best advised to see through.

Now, it is important to note that these declarations of love’s meaninglessness are seldom made without connection to the speaker’s own experiences, disappointments, shortcomings and failures in love. It sadly seems that the fact that we may survive love and come to see that what we once held to be utterly meaningful no longer holds the same meaning may easily make us cynical or sceptical about the existence of love.²³⁶ We may wonder whether we only fooled ourselves about the meaning love had, if it turns out that one day it does not have the meaning it once did. I point out this connection with our personal life to remind us that what we come to say in this matter is expressive of an existential stance. Such experiences, however, may also tempt one to bring these kinds of existential commitments into one’s philosophizing.

I cannot say how widespread this conception of love is among philosophers. Nevertheless, it appears to be a temptation for anyone who holds on to a strict division between facts and values. Making such a general distinction inclines one to ask, “If love colours the world (i.e. expresses different value judgements), does it then truly show it as it is (i.e. tell us anything about the facts)?” Now, it may be said that the fact-value distinction offers us two different readings of what is involved in language having meaning. (1) An “objectivist”

²³⁶ It is important to note that this is only one possible attitude we may take towards our personal failures in love. We may also imagine that someone, although being rejected by the one she or he loves, suffering from an unrequited love, still goes through the experience with a reaffirmed belief in (the possibilities of) love. Therefore, it is not that certain experiences always imply a certain attitude. Rather, the attitude with which we went into and out of the experience is internally related to the kind of experience it can be said to be. This is not to say that our attitude towards love and life may not also change through the experience, but that it is not clear in what direction such a change has to run. I may enter into a relationship with an attitude of disbelief and come out “believing” even though I suffered rejection.

reading which gives weight only to factual statements may suggest that language only has sense to the extent that it truly represents the world independently of us. The facts, as it were, determine the meaning of language.²³⁷ Value judgements are not meaningful in the same sense, but only in so far as they are expressive of certain feelings and experiences that we associate with the “facts”. (2) On a “subjectivist” reading the scale may tip in favour of value judgements, suggesting that all kinds of judgements are ultimately expressive of values. This may be taken to mean that in the end we are the ones who determine what meaning there is in the world.

Against this general background, one may conclude, on an objectivist note, either that the language of love involves an idealization of life (cf. Singer 1984a) or that the lovers live in a fantasy world that does not attend to how the world really is (cf. Solomon 1990, 188). These questions may also extend to the philosophy of love, asking whether a philosophy of love that tries to take the normative language of love seriously does not also idealize love.²³⁸ This seems to be the suggestion behind Solomon’s (2005) warning not to “moralize love” (169). Someone more prone to think of meaning in “subjectivist” terms is probably less inclined to think that love by necessity is an illusion. That view, however, faces different problems of its own. It retains a similarly problematic picture of meaning as the one of those who think that the experiences of love do not carry any true meaning. It is only that whereas the latter hold on to the “facts of the world” as “true bearers of meaning” the first leave them out altogether, assigning value only to our experience. In this respect, this view makes it difficult to see what it could mean to speak about certain aspects of love as illusory in any case. Whereas the “objectivist” view that love altogether is an illusion makes this judgement on what I have argued are illusory grounds in the first place, it appears that the “subjectivist” view does away with all grounds for speaking about illusions in connection with love, since everything turns into a matter of our experience.

It does not, for one thing, leave any room for distinguishing between experiencing something as meaningful and something truly having meaning. Cekhov, in the short story “The Duel”, for instance, portrays a character who could only stand people when he was in

²³⁷ Paul Griffiths’s scientism (1997) expresses this kind of understanding of meaning.

²³⁸ See chapter 10, p. 378 for a response to this question with concern to the present work.

love (Cekhov 2003). He needed the feeling of being in love in order to be able to bear having relationships with other people and find joy and meaning in them. This way of “being in love with love” and not with the other person is a recurrent temptation in our relationships.²³⁹ We might be drawn to the intoxicating experience of falling in love—in which the whole world may be said to take on a rosy colour—because it appears to give us an opportunity to escape the dullness of the world. However, the *experience of meaning* that this may bring us, is not a good indication of whether we truly find our lives meaningful.²⁴⁰ Rather it may be said that the experience of falling in love, in the case of Cekhov’s character, created the *illusion of meaning* and beauty in an otherwise monotonous life, just as Vivaldi made Hans Keller forget life’s meaninglessness. His failure to care for people and find meaning in life after the first raptures of falling in love had faded may, furthermore, be said to reveal his incapacity to love, other human beings as well as life. Conversely, his failure to find life meaningful reveals a lack of love for life.

From the perspective of the possible deceptions there may be in love, it also strikes me that the inclination to think that love does not attend to the true facts of the world is also expressive of a temptation in love, if not to say outward denial of life. For as Kierkegaard so strikingly writes in *Works of Love*:

If it were true—as conceited shrewdness, proud of not being deceived thinks—that one should believe nothing which he cannot see by means of his physical eyes, then first and foremost one ought to give up believing in love. If one did this and did it out of fear of being deceived would not one then be deceived? Indeed one can be deceived in many ways; one can be deceived in believing what is untrue, but on the other hand, one is also deceived in not believing what is true. (Kierkegaard 1964, 23)

Rather than being expressive of a clear-sighted realism, the suggestion that love is an illusion, or does not really exist, reveals a cynical

²³⁹ In this respect, one should also remember that the philosophical investigation on love that I seek to conduct in this work attempts to describe the grammar of love and not actual relationships.

²⁴⁰ This is not to deny that we may come to doubt the sincerity of someone’s expressions of meaning if they do not also experience their life as meaningful. Compare this to my remarks on the need for spontaneity for understanding something as a genuine expression of love in chapter 3.

tendency. Thinking that love is altogether an idealization, we could say, is expressive of the cynic's failure to believe in love.²⁴¹

In my discussion of the place idealizations can be said to have in connection with how I see you in love,²⁴² I tried to show some problems involved in thinking that there is a neutral viewpoint from which we could settle questions as to whether the world has or does not have any particular meaning in itself, or whether we are the ones who add meaning to it. It is true that it is only in relation to people that we may speak about something having or not having meaning. From that, however, it does not follow that things do not have any meaning in themselves; saying that they lack meaning in themselves, as it were, already introduces a perspective of meaning. If we do not bring into account what something means for people, there is no place for speaking about meaning in the first place. In the rest of this discussion, I will try to indicate why it is problematic to think that meaning is either determined by "the world" or by "us" by means of an example. The example also gives us a good portrayal of what may be seen as a moral temptation in thinking that the "meaning of life" is either independent of us or wholly dependent on us. It also serves as an elucidation of why the attempt to determine what "meaning" consists in, in itself can be seen as morally corrupt.

One of the characters in the film *Adaptation* (2002) presents us with a failure to find meaning in life that is similar to the one in Cechov's short story. In it, the journalist Susan Orlean is portrayed as a woman whose only passion in life is finding out about people who are passionate about something. The film revolves around the adaptation of her book "The Orchid Thief",²⁴³ in which she follows the life of John Laroche, a man whose main objective is to "steal" rare orchids. As an aside, there is reason to suspect that the theme of orchids is not completely coincidental. Although most orchids are not the parasites they are sometimes alleged to be,²⁴⁴ these beautiful and exquisite

²⁴¹ Furthermore, it may be said that regarding certain descriptions of love as ideals, is not saying that they are meaningless. Rather, it seems that the one who demotes the demands of love to an unattainable ideal, has recognized the meaning these demands of love could have in his or her life, but refuses to accept the difference they could make for him or her there.

²⁴² See chapter 7.

²⁴³ The Orchid Thief is really a book by Susan Orlean, and the film is about an attempted adaptation of it. My points here, however, center on the films and the persons as they are portrayed there.

²⁴⁴ In fact they are *epiphytes*.

flowers usually grow on trees and bushes. In the film, it also becomes clear that Susan's odd passion, if it does not exactly feed on, in many ways at least grows on the passions of others; she appears unable to conjure up any real passion for life herself.

This lack of passion culminates in a scene in which she follows the orchid thief into a swamp in a reserve to try to spot a particularly beautiful and exceptional orchid, the ghost orchid, in bloom. In her book the story ends without them finding the orchid, but in the film it turns out that they actually did. It is revealed, however, that the experience was not as breathtaking for Susan as everyone had said it would be. Faced with the flower, she states with disappointment, "But it's just a flower".²⁴⁵

Now, in the absence of the right attitude, one could say that nothing is "anything but a flower". Susan went in search for the beauty of the orchid as if she could have found it by just examining the plant. She looked for meaning as if it were simply there to grasp independently of her own attitude towards it. This is not to say that "beauty (and in this case meaning) is in the eye of the beholder." There is an important sense in which beauty, as well as meaning, love and goodness, are "out there". It belongs to the grammar of these words that they exist independently of us. This is the sense in which beauty, love and goodness, are rather something that we find than we create. They are not anything we make up, we cannot stipulate that something is beautiful, meaningful or good, nor are they our own projection of meaning on an otherwise meaningless world.

Nonetheless, it could be said that seeing something as beautiful or lovely, or finding something meaningful requires that we are responsive to its beauty or other meaning. Seeing beauty and love cannot be distinguished from being *touched* by it, and Susan's failure to see anything "but a flower" is a failure to be touched by it, or be touched by life, although she desperately wanted to be. It is a failure in her reactions towards what happens to her, a failure both to live and love. This shows why our *experience* of beauty or meaning has to be discussed precisely in relation to the grammar of "experiencing"

²⁴⁵ As the film continues it takes on even more odd twists and turns. For instance, it turns out that the ghost orchid was not primarily sought after for its beauty, but because of its hallucinogenic properties, on which both Susan and the orchid thief consequently get high. The point I want to make, however, does not turn on the subsequent events, and thus I will not extend my discussion to what happens after the finding of the flower.

and not, say, “deciding” or “stipulating”. There is no way of being touched by one’s own decision.

As I said, Susan’s failure to find meaning and passion is not due to a lack of will, in the sense of having her mind set on something. Rather her desperate determination to find a way of living a life with meaning actually comes to stand in her way of finding any.²⁴⁶ To again use Kierkegaard’s notion of double-mindedness, we could say that her determination to find meaning in a specific way of life prevents her from raising the question of what she truly wants from life:

willing one thing does not mean to commit the grave mistake of a brazen, unholy enthusiasm, namely, to will the big, no matter whether it be good or bad. Also, one who wills in this fashion no matter how desperately he does it, is indeed double-minded. Is not despair simply double-mindedness? For what is despair other than to have two wills. (Kierkegaard 1956, 61)

Her search for passion and meaning is a search for something specific, something that she could *do* in order for her life to make sense. There is not, however, anything in particular we need to do to love or experience meaning. On the contrary, finding meaning in many cases involves refraining from doing anything in particular, but rather being responsive to the different kinds of meaning there might be in a situation. Of course, it is tempting to think that a life with meaning and passion must take a specific form. A form of exotism often also comes into play in the belief that a life of passion should involve more or less exciting features, such as heading into a swamp looking for rare flowers. However, if one cannot find any meaning in one’s regular life it is fairly reasonable to think that one will not find it in a swamp either.

David Cockburn quotes a Zen master who writes, with regard to focusing on what one is doing:

If while washing the dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance [...] we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes [...] If we can’t wash the dishes, the chances are we won’t be able to drink our tea either. (Cockburn 1997, 193)

²⁴⁶ Here, one may also think of the distinction between the two uses of will: “feeling like” and “deciding”. Cf. chapter 3.

Cockburn brings in this quote in a discussion of what “living in the present”, or “for the moment” might mean, but it strikes me that there are important connections to be made between such a discussion and a discussion of the meaning we find in life. In a similar manner, the discussion may also benefit from considering the question with regard to concepts such as “contentment”, “hope”, “faith” or “purity”.

In striving to put the failure I see in Susan’s attitude towards life into words, I find myself coming up with descriptions such as, “She is not involved in her own life”, or, “Through it all she remains remarkably distant”, or, “She seems to have a need always to remain in control”. A theme that runs through these different descriptions is the refusal to be taken in by something, the wish to remain detached without the risk of losing oneself or losing one’s head. But leading a passionate life—and I now take it as evident that loving means living if not “passionately”, with all that might be connected with such descriptions, emotional roller coasters and so on, then at least with passion, whether this passion in individual cases is best described as a roaring fire or an inner glow—means opening up to risk and fortune, not knowing what to expect.

In Susan Orlean’s attitude towards life, there is a large element of control. She searches for passion but she is afraid of what it would mean to be truly passionate, to let herself ²⁴⁷ go, and open up to both fortune and failure. It might even be said that her fear of passion reveals her lack of it. When there is passion, there is no mention of the risks involved in being passionate. When it is lacking, however, the risks involved in letting oneself go stare one in the face. Trying to calculate with these perceived risks to find a way of having passion without the risks, again, runs counter to finding any real passion. What one looks for if one *attempts* to muster up a passion that may not involve loss, is not true passion but a substitute.

Susan is searching for a way to decide what meaning things might have for her. An important lesson of love, however, is that we are not the sole judges of what is important and what is not. We cannot decide the significance something will have for us in advance. If we open up to love, just anything and everything may have a meaning for us, but there is no way of *bringing about* this meaning by ourselves. This, however, does not exclude that there are times at which we may also need to *hold on* to the significance something has for us.

²⁴⁷ In the sense of her *self* as I discussed in chapter 5.

What I have wanted to show is not what life is really like, whether there is meaning in it or not, or whether life has a particular meaning. I have rather wanted to bring out two different kinds of attitudes that we might take towards life which in themselves are constitutive of *the kinds of things we say about it*, that is, the meaning we find in it. I have characterized the kind of attitude that Susan Orlean exemplifies as one of *control*, finding in it an attempt to determine what everything should be like. The attitude of love that I have wanted to present is rather one of *opening* up to life, and to other people, by not trying to, say, determine what something should be like, but living what is.²⁴⁸

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize in what ways these two attitudes are in conflict with each other. Looking at life in one way excludes looking at it in the other way. In a comment about miracles Wittgenstein (1965b) makes a similar remark when he says, "it is absurd to say 'science has proved that there are no miracles'. The truth is that the scientific way of looking at a fact is not the way to look at it as a miracle" (11).

[W]e all know what in ordinary life would be called a miracle. It obviously is simply an event the like of which we have never yet seen. Now suppose such an event happened. Take the case that one of you suddenly grew a lion's head and began to roar. Certainly that would be as extraordinary a thing as I can imagine. Now whenever we should have recovered from our surprise, what I would suggest would be to fetch a doctor and have the case scientifically investigated and if it were not for hurting him I would have him vivisected. *And where would the miracle have got to? For it is clear that when we look at it in this way everything miraculous has disappeared; unless what we mean by this term is merely that a fact has not yet been explained by science which again means that we have hitherto failed to group this fact with others in a scientific system. (Wittgenstein 1965b, 10-11, my emphasis)*

In other words, if we want to see what sense there may be in the suggestion that our life in love really is "a wonderful life", we should be clear about the perspective from which we are approaching the question. If we approach the question with a certain set of presuppositions, trying, for one thing, to fit the language of love into a certain system of language and meaning, or, for another thing, trying

²⁴⁸ There is, of course, still a question about what *is*, and what it might mean to say that life *is* in a certain way in the first place.

to fit love into our own system of preferences or desire, the meaning we might find may well elude us.

In *Tractatus* Wittgenstein writes, “Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is” (1993, §6.44). This gives voice to quite a different way of wondering at our world than any scientific attempt to determine its meaning. Rather than fixing the world to our pre-conceived notion of what could be beautiful in it, I would say he is encouraging us to discover the beauty of the world, by accepting, for one thing, the indeterminacy in the different forms it may take. This could be seen as one way of giving voice to the attitude of love.

“NOTHING’S GONNA STOP US NOW”²⁴⁹

*Just before our love got lost you said
I am as constant as a northern star
And I said, constant in the darkness
Where’s that at?
If you want me I’ll be in the bar
Joni Mitchell (1971)*

*[T]he real source of the anxiety and the sense of fragility is in the
consciousness of the uncertainty and the unpredictability of it all
Ronald L. Hall (2000, 176)*

A scene from a romantic sitcom.²⁵⁰ The young couple has just escaped the tumult of their wedding reception, at which the discontentment and bitterness their parents have experienced in their own marriages have found more and more extreme expressions during the evening. Breathing a sigh of relief in the refuge of the garden, they ponder the “fate” of their parents. “It’s scary. Thirty years ago my mother and father stood in front of the minister and said the exact same words we just did. And look at them”, he says. To which she replies “That won’t happen to us.” Exchanging vows of fidelity once more, this time only to each other, they promise they will not end up like them.

The fears the couple harbours may strike us as natural. Contrary to what we are told in the majority of romantic stories, the tests to which the lovers are put do not come to an end with the first kiss or with the decision to spend their life together. Other obstacles may be lurking on the way. Considering the failed relationships of other people, the growing divorce rates, there seems to be a grave risk that not even the strongest of loves will endure the tests of time and life. If the lovers

²⁴⁹ Starship (1987).

²⁵⁰ Dharma and Greg (1997-2002).

are not dragged down by the pressures and worries of everyday life – a life filled not only with love, but with work, children to raise, aging parents to care for and so on²⁵¹ – then how does it bear the blows that life or fortune deals it, such as forced absences or distances due to work, the loss of a child, infidelities? Hardships may well bring people closer to one another, but it is as true that they may also tear them apart. Reflecting on the break-ups of other people's relationships we might ask, what makes ours any different from theirs? What protects our relationship from harm or tells us that our love will last?

Posing such questions about what meaning certain events have had and might have for us can be seen as a reaction to what Martha Nussbaum (1986) has called the fragility of goodness and of human life. They arise against the background of the fact that our life together in many ways is characterized by contingent features. We may have the feeling that certain moments, incidents and occurrences played a crucial part in our relationship being what it is, and ask each other or ourselves whether we would still be together if the circumstances had been different. In this respect, these questions can be seen as expressive of the realization that, as Nussbaum claims, human beings are not only "agents", but also "plants".²⁵² In other words, we are dependent for our well-being on things that are "are outside us". We are open to "fortune, because we encounter hardships and can come to need something that only another can provide" (Nussbaum 1986, 1).

The questions are also reminiscent of the kinds of questions that have been raised under the heading of "moral luck".²⁵³ The starting point for these discussions is that a person's life is not only shaped by his or her reason and rational will, but is also affected by things and circumstances that are out of his or her hands. This fact has by some philosophers been considered to pose a serious threat to our practices

²⁵¹ The illusion, of course, lies in thinking that there could be such a thing as a life filled only with love, and to think that these other aspects of life constitute a contrast to it.

²⁵² She borrows this imagery from a poem by Pindar who portrays human excellence as growing "like a wine tree, fed by the green dew, raised up, among wise men and just, to the liquid sky" (Nussbaum 1986, 1), and states the position she departs from and which she regards as common thus: "That I am an agent and also a plant; that much that I did not make goes towards making me whatever I shall be praised or blamed for being" (Nussbaum 1986, 5).

²⁵³ See e.g. the discussions by Thomas Nagel (1979), Bernard Williams (1981) and D.Z. Phillips (1992).

of holding people responsible for what they do independently of a consideration of the circumstances leading up to an action and the consequences of it. These philosophers question whether it is reasonable to administer blame or praise to people for events that merely happen to them or are a result of their backgrounds which they did not choose, or for “things about them that do not appear to be under the control of reason or rational will: things like responsiveness, desire, passion, imagination” (Nussbaum 1986, 46).

If we consider these questions with respect to love, we may be struck by the oddity in criticizing the purity of someone’s love if the various difficulties that the particular lovers have overcome in order to be together do not play a part in our judgement. We may wonder whether we should say that two people truly love each other if their love has never been put to any serious tests or whether it is fair to claim that another couple failed to love each other just because they were not able to conquer the obstacles that were put in their way? We may ask whether the love of a couple whose love overcame the obstacles that came in their way necessarily stronger, or more pure, than the ones of the couples who did not?

These ways of putting the questions are at best unclear. At other times, they are simply misleading. They show how certain metaphors and pictures may prove to be problematic if we allow them to guide our thoughts too much. Speaking about love as a bond, or as a burning fire, may lead us to think that a love is strong if the bond does not break although the lovers are drawn apart or if water and wind does not quench it. This imagery, strengthened by discussions about love’s constancy or stability, leads us to think of love in quite naturalistic terms. In other words, we are led to consider love mainly as an experience or a process that has a certain feel, duration, and so on, and do not acknowledge the roles different moral demands may have in our talk about love, such as enduring unpleasant moments for the sake of the other, abstaining from self-righteousness or striving towards openness. It also reveals a tension in the different ways in which we may talk about “love” as being put to the test. When we say that someone’s love is strong, is this a characteristic we assign to a feeling, or is it rather to be seen as an aspect of the persons in a relationship, their marriage or promise to each other?

What troubles me most in speaking about the strength, intensity or depth of someone’s love is that it introduces a comparative language into our conversations of love. We are drawn to calculate how much our love could bear in relation to other loves, or to what length I or

you would be willing to go for it. Do you love me as much as I do? Is our love as deep as theirs? Needless to say, these speculations rarely have much to do with love. In one case they may speak of insecurity; in another of jealousy; in a third of self-gratulating smugness, “At least we’re better than them”. Neither is the temptation far away not only to recognize that we may speak of love as being put to the test but to go ahead and test my own love or yours. Nevertheless, we should remember that in order to test how strong our bond is, we also need to be prepared to break it. In that sense, it is crucial to consider in what situations these questions about the power of our love to survive certain tests arise and what attitudes they may express if we want to understand the kind of question with which we are faced.

Dressed in a philosophical guise, the questions face further problems. What in some situations may be a perfectly intelligible doubt about one’s own capacity to deal with life’s unpleasantness—this is not yet saying anything about what meaning this doubt may have or express in specific circumstances—becomes a philosophical monstrosity which is filled with prejudice about what constitutes a philosophical question. One assumes that the task of philosophy is always to provide justification for our practices of keeping people responsible, and so on, or to sort out what might pass as a valid judgement, presupposing that our main objective is always to make sound or rational judgements.²⁵⁴

One also deals with a very rough distinction for determining the goodness of an action. In asking how we are to account for goodness in a life in which things happen that are out of our control, that is, if “we are beings whose definitive mode of existence is *anxiety*” (Hall 2000, 176), or in which it is an internal aspect of some of our commitments that what we need is out of our hands and our needs, therefore render us vulnerable to fortune, Nussbaum primarily works within the concepts of “control” and “that which merely happens to us”. There is, however, good reason to question whether either of these two provides us with a good way of understanding moral action. Ronald L. Hall (2000) justly criticizes Nussbaum’s distinction and points out that moral action cannot simply be understood as a technique for controlling an otherwise contingent world. He comments, “Moral action secures in some sense, but it does so in the midst of contingency, not by attempting to eliminate it. Or better,

²⁵⁴ See chapter 3.

moral action secures us within, rather than from, contingency.” (Hall 2000, 182).

I will return to the question of how we are best to understand the character of moral action and the relationship between what we do and do not control. The questions, however, will not take the form of what we may be said to be responsible for. Rather I want to focus on the attitudes to which these ways of talking and thinking about the contingency and indeterminacy of human life may lend themselves. I will mark contrasts between ways of saying “That won’t happen to us” or “Nothing’s gonna stop us now” that are expressive of trust, faith, hope and love, on the one hand, and ones that introduce a way of speculating and comparing one’s love to others’ that rather appear to be a temptation in or failure to love.

Beginning with the question of what role we may assign to change in a life in which it is not predetermined what will happen, I continue by arguing that the promise of love is not to be understood in the form of a prediction that certain aspects of our life will remain constant. I then distinguish between attempts to control the indeterminacy of life and embracing it with faith in one another. I ask what it may mean to think of human life as fragile, and what it may mean to think that love expresses an absolute perspective, that is, as it were, forever.

To clear away one possible misunderstanding; when I speak about what attitudes may be expressed in speaking about love in one way or another, I am not trying to define the right attitude we should take to one another and our relationship in love, say, hopeful but not overweening, certain but not calculating, trusting but not taking each other for granted. Nor am I trying to describe the prevailing attitude in actual relationships of love. It rather appears that in the actual case, there are a variety of attitudes that may and do present themselves to us. Some of these are expressive of love, while others rather constitute corruptions, failures or temptations in love. My intention is rather to elucidate what *moral significance* these different ways of relating to each other and to life gain in the light of a certain understanding of love, that is, one that recognizes that we are confronted with certain unconditional demands in our relationships with others.

I
 "EVERYTHING MUST CHANGE"²⁵⁵

Before turning to the question about what different kinds of attitudes may be expressed in a statement such as "That won't happen to us" or "Nothing's gonna stop us now", I want to say something about two concepts that play a crucial part in this discussion. This (1) the one of "openness" or "indeterminacy" and (2) the one of "change". Now, these two concepts are closely connected. The question about how we are to deal with or react to the indeterminacy of life may also be formulated as a question about what place different kinds of changes may have in love. What does it mean to change in love? Are there some kinds of changes that love does not endure?

To Aristotle and Nussbaum it appears as if *every* kind of change, at least negative change, may threaten or challenge our love or friendship.²⁵⁶ This is as true of many philosophers' thinking about what is required for judging that something or someone is the same. *Any* kind of change a person may undergo is taken as a threat to remaining the same. This idea reveals a fallacy in many philosophers' (cf. Locke 1975, Hume 1978) thinking about identity, and about what talking about something as the same entails.²⁵⁷ They assume that something must have the same properties for us to call it the same, an idea which does not find much foothold in a life or world where from one perspective everything appears to be in constant flux; atoms, molecules and cells transform, we grow older, and often not that

²⁵⁵ Young (1987)

²⁵⁶ If we turn old and grouchy it is, e.g., clear to Aristotle that we are not as easy to love as before. Nussbaum passes over these aspects of his discussion in silence. This ignores that we often think that a love is less pure if it does not endure change.

²⁵⁷ For one thing, they conflate numerical identity with qualitative identity, that is, (1) the identity we may ascribe to something lasting over time, such as my car, which although its bits and pieces may have been replaced, still remains my car and (2) the identity we may ascribe to two objects having the same properties, such as two new cars of the same model. (The "real" philosophical puzzle here is of course what we are to say if all the pieces of my car are replaced. Is it still the same car? And what if someone had built another car out of the replaced pieces is not that car really my car? Cf. Theseus' ship. I guess it takes a philosopher not to be content with the answer, "Well, this is my car that has undergone repair, and that is the car some lunatic decided to put together from the discarded pieces.") Rather than explaining numerical identity as referring e.g. to continued identity through time, I would suggest that if we want to understand the idea of it being the same car, we should not only look to some properties of the car, but to my relation to it; it is as important, and perhaps more so, that it is *my* car than that it is that *car*.

much wiser, get wrinkles, become more arrogant or humble, and so on. Remarking on this quite trivial sense in which everything is constantly changing, however, does not mean that notions such as sameness, constancy or stability, and furthermore, promises and commitments, have no place in our life.

It is a philosophical prejudice to think that we could make sense of a notion of identity which does not take account of the changes that we undergo as a central feature of who we are. It might even be more to the point to say that even though we live through change, and our mode of existence is change, it is *only in certain contexts* that we speak about things as having changed in a relevant way. Furthermore, there is no contradiction in changing in several different ways, in the above senses, and still being the same, again in the relevant way. The question is only what we ask for when we want to know whether something or someone is the same or has changed, and what kind of answer we are looking for in the particular situation. There is, in that way, nothing peculiar in being able to answer a question as to whether someone has changed with a, "Well, if you look at it in that way, she has, but if you look at it from a different perspective then she hasn't." The question is only whether we are content with such an answer.

This, again, brings out the distinction I have marked between talking about change in a *transitive* and an *intransitive* sense. I may point to specific features that have changed and are different in a person in the first sense, but I may also tell someone "You have changed!" or "Everything has changed", in the second sense, in which the important thing is not that I am able to specify wherein the change lies. It is only that now things look different. When Aristotle, Nussbaum, and so on, talk about change they only seem to talk about it in the first sense. This ignores the fact that the concept of change is not merely a *descriptive*, but often a *normative* concept. The question is not only *how* we may react to changes in love, but *what* we may regard as a relevant change in love. Furthermore, there is a question about what kinds of changes are excluded from our perspective in love.

Let me bring out two ways of speaking about and relating to change to which the narrator of Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* gives voice when he or she responds to his or her girlfriend Jacqueline's question whether he or she was seeing another woman.

I mumbled something about yes as usual but things had changed. THINGS HAD CHANGED, what an arsehole comment, I had changed things. Things don't change, they're

not like the seasons moving on a diurnal round. People change things. There are victims of change but not victims of things. Why do I collude to this misuse of language? I can't make it easier for Jacqueline however I put it. I can make it a bit easier for me and I suppose that's what I'm doing. (Winterson 2001b, 56-57)

In other words, when we talk about the kind of changes love may or should endure, we may, on the one hand, think about the changes around me, in the situation. On the other hand, we may speak about changes in me. This distinction could be read in the light of Nussbaum's reading of Aristotle as presenting us with a human love that

desires the independent continued motion, rather than the immobility of its object. [...] It is the love of someone who is content to live in a world in which other beings move themselves –who desires to continue to be part of such a complex world, not controlling the whole but acting towards and being acted on by its separately moving pieces. (Nussbaum 1986, 356, my emphasis)

However, the above quote by Winterson does not only speak about finding a balance between the ways in which we may act upon the world and be acted on by it. It points out how simply regarding changes in oneself as brought about by aspects of the world may be revelatory of a moral failure. This is not to suggest that we are always "creators of our own fate" or "judges of our actions", and that the predominant feature of human beings is our ability to *act on* the world. I agree with Nussbaum in rejecting this philosophical picture. Nevertheless, it appears that operating simply with the distinction between acting and being acted on, leaves out the moral significance we attach to someone having changed.

Ronald L. Hall rightly criticizes Nussbaum's account for only giving an external description of the difficulties we might have with respect to the indeterminacy of life. She primarily speaks of external contingencies, about that which happens to us. Even when she turns to features of our life that can be said to be internal to our psychology, such as our emotions²⁵⁸ and "responsiveness", as well as our character, she treats them as external to us, in that they are not within our

²⁵⁸ Questioning the stability of the promise of love seems to be one outcome of regarding love as an emotion. "If it was our emotions that got us into love in the first place", one may be inclined to think, "why could they not take us out of it too?"

control. When she speaks of changes in me she primarily speaks of the way in which I am changed by a situation in ways that make it sound as if this was only a matter of a *psychological* change. In that way, she does not leave much room for what we might call moral difficulties, weakness, failures, doubts and temptations. These rather relate to the ways in which my perspective on a situation may change, which can be described as a *moral* change, reminding us, again, of my responsibility for how I regard a situation.

My worries about the future may, as it were, not only concern the unlucky events that may befall me. Even though I might reconcile myself with fate, and with the fact that I may lose you, I may still fear that I myself may do something that could lead me to losing you, that I could ruin what we have by betraying my promises. These kinds of failings are not just something that happens to me. Regarding them in that way, as a psychological phenomenon, misses the absolute significance keeping my promises and being true to you have for me. Therefore, it is important to note that morality, and love in being a moral relation, brings a different dimension into the discussion of what is open to us and what may count as a crucial change in love than the ones offered to us by Nussbaum's account. Love, as it were, transforms what we perceive *as* change. There are aspects of my life that have the meaning that they have in the light of my moral commitments.

II

PROMISES AND PREDICTIONS

One quite common charge against assertions that nothing will happen to a particular relationship is to ask how we can be *certain* that this will not be the case. There is, one says, no way of *knowing* what life will bring with it, whether we will end up bitter or resentful. This doubt may also be entertained about marriage as a whole, as one may wonder how we can promise to love when we do not know it is going to last?

This is the main concern for many of the contemporary philosophers discussing the marriage vow. Dan Moller (2003), for instance, (theoretically) argues against marriage by pointing out that marriages frequently fail. Considering the high percentage of marriages that end up loveless or in a divorce, he argues that the probability of succeeding in carrying out one's promise to love is quite low, and, therefore, that this may not be a worthwhile endeavour to

pursue. "If we marry, we cannot be what one might describe as *reasonably sure* that we will not find ourselves morally committed to a permanent relationship with someone we do not love" (Moller 2003, 81).

Iddo Landau (2004), criticizes Moller, but still pursues the same kind of argument by arguing that marriage may indeed be a worthwhile endeavour. John Wilson (1999) also emphasizes the place our ability to predict that our affection for someone will last holds in love. He is "reasonably confident that promising to love another is logically in order, and that it is *sometimes* empirically sensible" (Wilson 1999, 563). Thus, the aim of their arguments is to show that it is either highly unlikely that anyone could keep this promise, or that it is still likely that somebody could.

The first questions we may raise here is what it may mean to talk about knowledge or certainty in these cases. There are situations in which it may be accurate to say that we do not know that everything will turn out for the best. Saying this may be a reminder that we cannot take love for granted, which is a notion I will return to shortly. Nevertheless, there are other situations in which we do not need to question the certainty with which someone says, "that won't happen to us".

In the above mentioned example we might well imagine one of the lovers asking, "How do you know our love will not meet the same fate as theirs?" and the other replying, "I just do". As we have seen, pressing the point that the one who says "I just do" does not really know may reveal one's doubts about one's own or the other's love.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, I have argued that it is expressive of a different kind of misunderstanding, this time a philosophical one, to think that knowledge only consists in having information or proof that something is the case. This does not pay attention to the different senses in which we may speak about "knowing". In this case, then, it is important to note that the two persons express different attitudes to love by saying "I know". Whereas the first utterance expresses *fear* and *anxiety* about the relationship, the other is a *reassurance*, a way of *inspiring hope* for the future, expressing *faith* and *trust* in the relationship. This is something that the above objections fail to notice.

The kind of knowledge addressed by these discussions is modelled on what could be described as factual knowledge. Connecting

²⁵⁹ See chapter 1, p. 74f.

knowing something with making sound judgements and having evidence for thinking that something will be the case, they make the reasonableness of making promises dependent on our ability to offer predictions. But promising to love you, or saying that nothing will happen to my love, is *not* the same as predicting that I will do something. It is not a statement about the probability of my staying with you, drawn from my observations of myself reacting in certain ways and coming to the conclusion that considering these different aspects of my character, I will continue to act and respond in these ways in the future. Rather I am marking the perspective against which I judge, and want others to judge, my actions at present and in the future. I am expressing my *trust* in the relationship and my *willingness* that it continues. (Cf. Ashdown 1995, 166.)

This is not to argue that our ability to make predictions may play no part in the promises that we give and in judging other people's promises. It is a reminder that there are important distinctions to be made between the two, and that there are ways of talking about future actions and events that do not take the form of predicting. We may mark our attitude towards future happenings by speaking about wishing, wanting, hoping, intending or planning. Marking the distinctions between these attitudes may serve as useful elucidations for the present discussion.

Consider the following case. We are discussing who should be the leader of a project during a group meeting at work. You say, "John offered to do it." I say, "No, not John. He always takes on more than he can handle." Hereby I may imply that you should not take John at his word, since he usually promises more than he keeps. This may express a doubt about the sincerity of his promise. Nevertheless, I may also think he is sincere but still have difficulty accepting his words based on my previous experience of him in similar situations. I may also come to say something similar about myself, perhaps as a consequence of people repeatedly pointing out this tendency of mine to me. I may say, "I would like to promise you this, but I know I won't be able to keep it." In making a prediction of this kind, I can be described as pointing out some, historical or psychological, facts about me, just as my former judgement about John was a response to some facts about him. I have become aware that I tend to react in certain ways, and I am giving voice to this awareness. If I do not see why this tendency of mine may lead people not to take my words seriously, I can be said to be blind to what it is I am saying and doing,

either in the sense that I am misjudging my own capacity to do things, or in the sense that I am deceiving myself about it.

Similar considerations may also keep me from committing to someone in love. I may feel that that my heart is not in it or that certain possibilities are out of the question for me. This kind of self-awareness, however, does not exclude that I one day may come to react in ways that I could not imagine. What was once completely out of the question may appear as the most natural thing to me some day. Sharon Rider (1998) gives an example of a man who, while picking out the wedding dress for his prospective bride, is suddenly struck by the thought that he does not care about it or about her. As a consequence he walks out on her and the wedding. Some years later, however, he finds himself practically spell-bound by another woman (Rider 1998, 155-156). My not feeling able to give another promise of love at one time, therefore, does not rule out giving it to another person at another time. Of course, this may be a bitter realization for the one I could not marry. As Sally laments in a scene in *When Harry Met Sally* (1989): "All this time I've been saying that he didn't want to get married. But the truth is, he didn't want to marry me. He didn't love me."

When I am looking at my actions in a predictive mode I am taking a third person perspective on them. I view my actions from the outside, considering them to be events in the world. When I say, "I would never do that" or "That would never happen to us", however, I am not making a factual statement. I am not commenting on my ways of acting as facts in the world; I am taking a stand on them, as the author of these facts. I am expressing my perspective on the situation, giving voice to my view of the action, as it were, from within. This much said, I am of course not the only one to determine what my actions will be or mean. It is in the course of the life that we lead with each other that our actions have meaning. As we saw earlier, my authority in saying or promising certain things may also be undermined by certain facts about myself. The two perspectives are, therefore, not exclusive. In a concrete situation there is often a dialectic between, on the one hand, what I have learned to know about myself and how I might act in certain situations, and, on the other hand, what I spontaneously respond to as demands in the situation.

In the sense that my promise can be described as a way of committing myself to a certain perspective on my action, saying that nothing will happen or promising that it won't, is much more closely

connected with expressing an intention than with making a prediction. In both these cases, we cannot separate what I can be said to do from what I intended or promised to do. In that sense, the relation between my intention or promise and my subsequent action is an internal one, and not an external one, say, a causal relation. The intention or promise, as it were, is not an event that gives rise to the action. What I intend or promise to do is rather constitutive of the meaning my actions may have for us. It is against the background of my promise that it is meaningful to describe what I do as either keeping a promise or breaking it. Conversely, my determination that "I would never do something like that", such as being unfaithful or betraying your trust, expresses what I understand these ways of acting to be. It is not possible to separate the meaning "being unfaithful" or "betraying your trust" from my desire not to hurt you.

However, there are also important differences to be made between making a promise and expressing an intention. My intention can be described as a resoluteness to do certain things, but the promise to love is not a promise to do anything in particular. I may have an intention, as Landau said, to engage in "love sustaining activities", but if these activities are all there is to my love, there is a definite question whether I truly love. As we have seen on several occasions, love cannot be reduced to performing certain actions. The spirit in which I do certain things is crucial for understanding what it is I do in the light of love.

If we take account of these differences between making a promise and a prediction, it should be clear that the question whether we can or should make the kinds of promises we do in love and in our wedding vows is not dependent on our ability to predict future events. The philosophical question, I would claim, is furthermore not whether we can or should make these kinds of promises, but what meaning it may have to make them. A further question is what kinds of criticism we may meaningfully direct at the promises we make. There are many ways in which we can doubt a person's sincerity in making a promise or be hesitant to promise something, which do not involve our professed inability to predict what is going to happen. This brings out that the relevant question in love is not only whether something can count as a promise, or whether we are "justified" in promising certain things, but in what way I can be said to *be in* my promises and

be sincere in making them, as well as *have faith* in the promises you make to me.²⁶⁰

The point I have wanted to emphasize, however, is that the fact that we do not know whether something is going to be the case, does *not* threaten the sense of making promises. Rather this indeterminacy in our life is grammatically presupposed in our making promises. Making promises makes sense just because we cannot predict everything.

As a rule of thumb we may, of course, say, “one should not promise more than one can keep”. One should definitely not promise to do something that one *knows* one will not *be able* to do, not to speak of making promises one does not *intend* to keep. Nevertheless, this does *not* mean that I should only promise to do things I know I will do anyway. It is more to the point to say that it is constitutive of our talk about promises that I promise to do things in cases in which there is room for doubting whether something is going to be the case. I make my promises in response to the recognition that something is demanded of me. Promising to do something I and you know I am going to do anyway is an empty gesture.

Thus, the notion of promising and being faithful only makes sense in relation to the fact that things and people may and will change. It does not constitute a contrast to our being temporal, changing beings, but is a recognition of this fact. If our life were stable and possible to predict, the idea of *holding on* to something would not have any foothold. There would be no need to talk about being faithful, or having faith in love, if we had a guarantee that everything would continue as it is.

From this perspective our promises to love can be seen as expressing a readiness to make certain ways of relating to each other—lovingly, openly, forgivingly—the focus of our relationship by contrast to thinking that it gains stability from unchanging features in our personalities or the surrounding circumstances. The question with which each one of us is faced is what we want to bring into the changes, and the call to take responsibility for the changes we bring about in this way. In this respect, it is better to emphasize that our responsibility in love is always renewed; it is not a recognition of the

²⁶⁰ This also alerts us to the different kinds of questions that can be raised with respect to the place predictions may have from a first person and third person perspective, as well as to the kinds of doubts I may entertain about myself keeping a promise and about another’s doing it.

same demand in a different situation, but a recognition of the particular demands of varying situations.

III

HAVING FAITH IN LOVE AND TAKING IT FOR GRANTED

As we have seen, making promises does *not* rule out a certain indeterminacy in our life. Rather it grammatically presupposes it. In the following I want to give closer consideration to what this indeterminacy may amount to in love, and to the different attitudes we may take to various contingencies in our life. What may it mean to be or try to be the judges of our own actions in different situations? In particular I want to criticize the notion that the meaning something will have is within our control or an aspect of our decisions, as well as the thought that our only way of being involved in a situation is one of control.

For Nussbaum the primary attitudes we may take towards the indeterminacy of life is either (1) controlling the open aspects of it or (2) embracing them as an internal aspect of human life and goodness. Departing from the Greek distinction between *tuche* and *techne*, happenings that are uncontrolled and happenings that are controlled, she asks whether there are "important commitments and concerns that are not in the realm of natural contingency and cannot be affected by the 'accidents of step-motherly nature' [quoting from Kant]" (Nussbaum 1986, 299). She criticizes what she sees as the Platonic attempt to transcend human existence, and to become demigods. In the search for a life of contemplation she finds an attempt to control "life" by excluding parts of it that may involve risk. These mainly include the sufferings that seem to be an inevitable part of forming attachments in the human world. Rather, she suggests that we adopt an Aristotelian approach to these matters, and return to the human world and to what is valuable to us within that. In Aristotle's writings, she finds an attempt to bring out a kind of human excellence that is only excellent against the background of our vulnerability.

She describes his account as

a conception of human good living that makes it something relatively stable, but still vulnerable, in its search for richness of value, to many sorts of accidents. We pursue and value both stability and the richness that opens us to risk. In a certain sense we value risk itself, as partially constitutive of some kinds of value. In our deliberations we must balance these competing claims. (Nussbaum 1986, 372)

This, she says, involves accepting a certain amount of instability in life, since we have to rely on the good will of others to reach what we want. "Goodness depends on the good faith of others, who are not always faithful" (Nussbaum 1986, 397).

This is part of her attempt to "show the fragility of a part of (what is usually thought to be) moral goodness itself" (Nussbaum 1986, 30). "[T]he stabler values of the intellectual life are best nourished and promoted in a life that includes these riskier commitments [...] any life that devoted itself entirely to safe activities would be, for a human being, impoverished" (Nussbaum 1986, 420). She "suggests that there is wisdom in the embrace of the human. Such an embrace requires that we embrace our exposure to *tuche*, and that we embrace our fragility as our essential human condition" (Hall 2000, 178).

Nussbaum's criticisms of Plato are to the point in so far as any attempt to avoid harm and to control what happens in the future is an exclusion of love from life. There is no way of excluding the possibility that some of the things we say and do to each other may hurt the other, even if we did not intend to, and it is a sad fact that we often do. There are also ways of speaking about hurting or betraying a friend or lover that only has the sense it has in the context of our relationship. Saying, "I do not know him" about an acquaintance may be a simple case of mistaking one person for another, but saying the same thing about a friend is a *denial* of our friendship. It is also only against the background of our loving each other and a certain conception of faithfulness that it makes sense to describe certain things as infidelities. But this is not yet saying anything about what significance our vulnerability and exposure to each other should be given in a reflection of love. In particular, it is not a commitment to what role this exposure or vulnerability could be said to have in judging what part love plays in a good life.

As we saw in the discussion about what it means to be passionate in the previous chapter, it is only in the light of a lack of passion that being passionate presents us with numerable risks that we need to reckon with. When we are passionate, I said, we do not think of the risks involved. Better yet, we do not think of our passion in relation to the concept of "risk". A similar thing could be said about the recognition that certain aspects of our relationship may and will be painful to me. What hurts you has the power to hurt me too, and the thought that you may die, due to an accident or to old age, is a painful thought. However, if someone seriously took the possible pains involved in a relationship of love as a reason for considering whether

the relationship was a worthwhile endeavour, comparing the pains of the relationship to its possible pleasures, this kind of consideration would in itself reveal a failure in his or her love.

Here it is worth noting that although Nussbaum criticizes Plato for trying to control life, and thereby for not paying attention to the “good things in life”, she does not question that the idea of “control” has some part to play in love. In her attempt to devise a plan or cultivate a technique for living a (or the) good life she still works within a scheme of finding ways to control or balance the different things that may happen to us so as to ensure the best and most stable end result. She only does it in a more “moderate”, Aristotelian way.

Against the defender of solitary self-sufficiency Aristotle argues that these vulnerable relationships and their associated activities have both instrumental value as necessary means to, and intrinsic value as component parts of, the best human life. But, he argues, this does not put the best life intolerably at the mercy of fortune. For it is possible to realize each of these values, properly understood, within a life that is not intolerably unstable, one that possesses an appropriately human kind of self-sufficiency. (Nussbaum 1986, 345)

So we find an uneasy balance; and it is never entirely clear that risk does not threaten too much, or that some genuine value does not escape us. Then again, we want the good life to include, for fullness of value, some relational components that are particularly vulnerable to chance; but, not wanting to be unbearably at the mercy of luck; we opt for a conception of each of these that secures to them a relatively high degree of stability. (Nussbaum 1986, 372)

Even if Nussbaum brings in Aristotle to flesh out our notion of human rationality, adding emotion, sensitivity and experience to it to reform it into an Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom, she retains the idea of a general point of view from which it is possible to find a proper balance between different values. In this she holds on to the picture of rationality that I have argued is illusory. It is, for one thing, characteristic of Nussbaum’s discussion that she does not really question the idea of “self-sufficiency” nor of “control” as fitting descriptions of a good human life, but only seeks to refine them. This attitude is also found in her way of unproblematically speaking about what “values” and “risks” may be involved in a life of love and friendship, without noticing how such a concern with “stable values” and “riskier commitments” may lend itself to certain fears and failures in love.

A similar point could be made about the ways in which Nussbaum speaks about "stability" and "security" as important aspects of the good life. Against the background of these concepts it is clear that love is regarded as the ultimate exposure to injury. But this way of talking about life is part of a perspective that in itself is quite *distinct* from love. Again, it introduces love, and also goodness, in the realm of things we may predict and rely upon.²⁶¹ These expressions can be seen in relation to what it may mean to talk about somebody's love as constant, but as Joni Mitchell's song "A Case of You", quoted at the beginning of this chapter, pointedly marks, there is something deeply problematic about one way of understanding what "constancy" might mean in relation to love.

Just think of the mile-wide difference between my confident conviction that you won't leave me, and my having faith in your love. Whereas the first settles with the knowledge of a psychological disposition in you that I am certain will endure over time, again viewing love as a state or process, the second involves my trustingly turning to you with my love, but not grounding this trust in any specific facts. This is not to deny that there may be times where someone feels content with the fact that the other won't leave him or her, regardless of whether there is any love in the relationship or not. It is first and foremost a point about the difference in grammar between a psychological assessment and a moral commitment. Saying, "I will never leave you", as a comfort or a pessimistic conclusion, with resignation or despair, is something other than saying, "I will always love you".

Lars Hertzberg marks a similar distinction between two ways of understanding what it is to trust someone, which he captures in the words "trust" and "reliance". Relying on someone can be seen as knowing certain facts about another person. I have a certain picture about what you are like, according to which I predict your actions in certain situations. Thus, I may count on your acting in a specific way for a specific purpose. My trust in you, however, does not have anything to do with my ability to judge or predict your actions. I do

²⁶¹ Cf. "This willingness to embrace something that *is* in the world and subject to its risks is, in fact the virtue of the Euripidean child, whose love is directed at the world itself, including its dangers." (Nussbaum 1986, 420). Although it may be said that the only way I can experience goodness is in the world, I will later criticize the notion that goodness is *of* this world in that it renders love and goodness relative to certain interests and preferences.

not trust you for certain purposes, I trust *you* (Hertzberg 1994, 119-122).

Now, the moderately self-sufficient Aristotelian, who restlessly wonders whether the risks are too large or whether there is some genuine value that escapes him in love, is searching for some value he can rely upon. In this he also exemplifies a fear of love, rather than being the picture of goodness he is presented to be. By contrast, one could say that the *perspective of love* is characterized by my *not* thinking of my relationships in terms of risks, exposure and vulnerability, at least not of my own. It is true that we may at times fear losing love. It may also be difficult to see in what ways something could be precious, if we never were afraid of losing it. However, if I let my fear rule, I do not appreciate your love. In constantly worrying about what will happen, I do not see what is right in front of me.²⁶² In that way, the relationship of love is rather constituted by trust than by fear.

By bringing promises into the discussion, I have wanted to show what it may mean to think of love as embodying this kind of trust. This is also to distinguish promising from merely wishing for the best. I may say, "I wish it would always be like this." In the wish, I am aware that things might change, that is why I wish they would not. A view that would equate promising with wishing, however, ignores the fact that I am also a part of the situation. I deceive myself if I just leave everything as it is and try, as it were, to exclude myself from what might change in my relationships with others.

²⁶² There are of course different forms the fear can take. In a discussion of courage, Aristotle comments that the more a man "is possessed with virtue in its entirety and the happier he is, the more he will be pained by the thought of death; for life is best worth living for such a man, and he is knowingly losing the greatest of goods, and this is painful" (1954, 1117b9-13). Those "who have no other good [...] sell their life for trifling gains." (Aristotle 1954, 1117b19-20). But are we to take this to mean that it is the happy man who fears death the most, since he knows what he has to lose? Is it not rather that the one who constantly frets about what he might be losing, is the one that has the most to lose? He does not even know what it is he loses. Cf. Wittgenstein (1961, 74e): "A man who is happy must have no fear. Not even in face of death. Only a man who lives not in time but in the present is happy. For life in the present there is no death. [...] Fear in face of death is the best sign of a false i.e. a bad life." We might also react quite differently towards loss. I may curse the gods for taking someone away from me, or feel gratitude for the time we shared, amazement that I could have you in my life in the first place. We may contrast the fear of losing with the certainty that nothing can take away the things we had and the ways in which love mattered to me, the sense in which, with the risk of sounding too Aristotelian, "I'm a better person because of it".

In this sense the promise is more closely connected with hope. Of course, "hoping" and "promising" are not one and the same, which is seen in situations where someone says, "Now we can only hope for the best." Hope may come in when everything else is out of our hands in this respect. In saying, "That won't happen to us", however, I may also say, "I hope that everything will work out well." Perhaps one could say that love is always hopeful? Hoping is not all there is to promising, but promises are still connected with a hopeful perspective on life. They are expressive of a perspective characterized by faith, trust and love, and not just by obligations and demands.

Furthermore, by speaking about our promises in love, I have wanted to show an attitude towards life that does not fall into the two categories of either controlling life or embracing its fragility that Nussbaum discusses. The concept brings out a different understanding of what it means for us to be, using Nussbaum's contrast, not only plants or rational agents, but *moral* beings. Making promises is *not* about devising rational plans for making stable and valuable connections with people of "similar character and aspirations who also find each other physically, socially and morally attractive and who are able to live in the same place for an extended period of time" which Nussbaum describes as the most "fulfilling loves" to Aristotle (Nussbaum 1986, 359). Nor is it about simply accepting what life has to offer. Rather it introduces an *absolute* perspective on our life with other people which provides the background for what we come to think of in terms of goodness as well as in terms of possibilities in our life in the first place.

IV THE ABSOLUTE IN LOVE

To understand what I mean by speaking about the absolute character of our promises, it may help to consider a remark Wittgenstein makes about an experience he speaks of as that of being "absolutely safe" in his "Lecture on Ethics".

I will mention another experience straight away which I also know and which others of you might be acquainted with: it is, what one might call, the experience of feeling absolutely safe. I mean the state of mind in which one is inclined to say "I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens. (Wittgenstein 1965b, 8)

Wittgenstein mentions this experience to illuminate a contrast he wants to make between speaking about goodness in an absolute and a relative sense. He remarks that when we are talking about something being absolutely good, or safe, we are using the words in a different manner than when we normally talk about something being good or feeling safe. "We all know what it means in ordinary life to be safe. I am safe in my room, when I cannot be run over by an omnibus. I am safe if I have had whooping cough and cannot therefore get it again" (Wittgenstein 1965b, 9). In these cases, we are speaking of safety in a relative manner. Whether someone is safe or something is good, depends upon what I am safe *from* or what it is good *for*. "To be safe essentially means that it is physically impossible that certain things should happen to me and therefore it's nonsense to say that I am safe whatever happens" (Wittgenstein 1965b, 9).

The thought that it is nonsense to claim that one is safe whatever happens carries with it a Tractarian understanding of language and should be read in the light of the time in which "A Lecture on Ethics" was given, that is between the writing of the *Tractatus* and what came to be *Philosophical Investigations*. Therefore, the idea that our words only express facts about the natural world, whereas ethics is supernatural, and ethical propositions, as it were, "run against the boundaries of language" (Wittgenstein 1965b, 12) still lingers. Wittgenstein also says that a "certain characteristic misuse of our language runs through *all* ethical and religious expressions" (Wittgenstein 1965b, 9). This picture of ethical propositions trying to defy the borders of our language might be tempting as a description of the difficulty of trying to capture the ethical in words—"It's not good for anything, it's just good"—but it is still expressive of a view on language, sense and nonsense that is problematic in the light of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. It should be sufficient to say that our use of words such as "good" and "safe" in this absolute, moral sense, is different from the relative sense in which we may speak about "goodness" or "safety", in which I am safe *from* something, or do something that is good *for* something.²⁶³ We do not need to tie ourselves to claims such as that language is something that has limits, and that we only speak sense as long as we keep our words within these.

²⁶³ In his later philosophy Wittgenstein rather spoke of secondary sense. Cf. Diamond (1991d).

Wittgenstein connected the experience of absolute safety with religious experiences and a certain way of wondering at the world. However, it can also be taken as an adequate expression of love. There is a sense of belonging, of feeling at home with someone in loving that may lead me to say, for instance, "I am where I should be". As in the case of feeling absolutely safe, what I mean by saying this is *not* the same as when I normally speak of being in a particular place. It does not have anything to do with where I find myself geographically speaking, as if I attend a conference at a new place and wonder whether I have found the right lecture hall. "Am I where I should be?" I am expressing an attitude to my life as a whole and to my relationship with someone in particular. If asked to elaborate on this I may go on to say, "There is no other place where, or no other person with whom I'd rather be" or, "I am not constantly beset with worries whether what I'm doing with my life is right or whether I'm losing out on life's adventures", or, "If I died tomorrow, there is nothing I would regret." This sense of being at peace, feeling safe, secure and rooted in love, having faith in you and our love may also be said to be expressed in the idea that a love was "meant to be".

Not taking into account the different senses in which we may speak about "feeling safe" or "being certain" of my own love or yours reveals a philosophical confusion. One thinks perhaps that we may only speak about certainty and trust in one sense, that is in relation to certain facts and probabilities, what Hertzberg called "reliance", and does not recognize the different uses of the word. But thinking that we speak of certainty in the same sense in love as in factual cases may also be a corruption of our love in our personal life. To take the idea that a love was meant to be literally to mean that nothing could damage our relationship, or that there is no need to make any effort to keep our love alive, is again to take assertions such as "That won't happen to us" or "I will always love you" as predictions. It assumes that we could give evidence for thinking that nothing could endanger our relationship, by pointing out certain states or dispositions which are likely to endure through time. Rather than assuring you of our love in the spirit of faith, thinking that "we were meant to be, and thus nothing may happen (and if it does, then it wasn't meant to be)" is one way of *taking loving each other for granted*.

This is not to say that I or you may not easily slip into this attitude towards love within our relationship to each other. In some situations love may even be said to give me a false sense of security. I may not be able to imagine that things which cause problems in other

relationships could possibly come to stand between us, or that I or you would ever do anything that could threaten our love. Perhaps we have always found that the pillar of our love has been the ability to communicate and discuss even minor tensions in our relationship in ways that make the problems others experience in expressing themselves and their concerns to their lovers seem unintelligible. This may make the concern that minor irritations one day could take on huge proportions feel inconceivable. The strength I find in love may even make me feel invincible in ways that really convince me that “love conquers all”. But whereas this may be all right in so far as it is an expression of the trust, faith and even certainty I feel within our love, it becomes a problem, and may even be disastrous, if I take the safety and security I experience in love as proof that it is going to last, if I become overconfident in relying on our love or even toy with it because of my conviction that we cannot be harmed.

We may also think of the distinction between the absolute character of the promise to love and taking it for granted in relation to the concept of eternity. These two concepts, “the absolute” and “the eternal”, seem to be internally related, and it should be to the point to say that the promise of love is also eternal. It is forever. I can understand if people are wary of such descriptions, since they again seem to imply that we could know that a love will *last* on the basis of evidence. But this is a misunderstanding of the concept of eternity.

One often thinks of eternity as something that spans over a lot of time, but I would suggest that eternity, or any sense we could make out of a concept such as that, is better understood as the absence of time than as a great amount of it. Perhaps one could say that our closest contact with eternity is in the moments when we forget time, or lose our sense of it, when we simply *are*, like children, or are completely engulfed in what we do and become one with it.²⁶⁴ This also offers us a way of understanding Wittgenstein’s (1993), “If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present” (§6.4311).

At the same time, being in the present is also doing something in time, or for a certain amount of time. It is only in the particular, temporal, moments, that we may understand something of what eternity could be, in the same manner that I only meet you in particular situations although the significance you have to me cannot

²⁶⁴ Cf. chapter 5.

be reduced to any specific feature of these situations, such as your personality. I would also understand the eternity of love in this manner; as a contrast to other temporal things we do, and may also do in love. I do not just love you for two weeks or two years or as long as I feel like it. I love you *simpliciter*, and if I have to put a time limit on it, then forever it is.²⁶⁵

V THE FRAGILITY OF GOODNESS?

Let me finally return to Nussbaum's suggestion that we embrace our fragile humanity, which was one of the starting points for this discussion. If I give a caricature reading of Nussbaum, I would say that she criticizes Plato for being concerned with lofty concepts such as "ideas", "goodness" or "the absolute", although neither Plato nor Nussbaum uses just that word, while she "praises" Aristotle for being more down to earth, for talking about what is really of human concern. To Nussbaum, then, we would be better off *without* words such as "absolute" and "eternal" since we, as human beings, are not small gods and should not pretend to be. From her perspective, these infinite concepts do not make sense in our life, since we are finite beings; at least they do not do any relevant work there. I, on the other hand, would like to propose, as I have done with regard to promises, that these infinite concepts have a meaning in our life, just because we are finite beings. It is in the light of our being temporal beings that it makes sense to speak of eternity. It is in the light of our fragility and failures that we recognize absolute demands in our life, and in the light of change that we may take upon us not to alter, or make our perspective that which lasts in times of change.

What are we then to make of Nussbaum's notion of fragility in a moral discussion? How are we to take her claim that "[t]here is a beauty in the willingness to love someone in the face of love's instability that is absent from a completely trustworthy love" (Nussbaum 1986, 420). Now, the idea of a completely trustworthy love is itself odd and I will shortly return to some problems with this formulation. What I take Nussbaum to be saying, however, is that

²⁶⁵ Perhaps I should point out that I do not want to reduce these concepts to a manner of speaking. I am inclined to say that only someone who has not experienced such a thing would think that that is all there is to it. My aim is rather to salvage these concepts and the absolute importance they have in our life.

part of the value we find in love is related to the fact that it may be taken from us. Our love may die or even be destroyed. In other words, love is not within our control; we cannot make a decision to love, nor do we rule over its course. Up to a point, she is also right. We can express love's preciousness by speaking of it as a gift or as a matter of grace. In that way, we may consider the preciousness of love as connected to the fact that it is not within our control. We may also see this as a point about the importance of remembering our own mortality and that of others in love.

For Nussbaum this point also ties in with the thought that it lies within our nature as human beings to be fragile and that we should not lose touch with our humanity. But even if we do not need to contest the claim that human beings are often fragile, or perhaps rather weak—we often fail to do what we set out to do, and sometimes we do not even set out to do what we should—what does this say about the proposed fragility of goodness or love? Could one not say that it is in fact we human beings who are fragile, but not love nor goodness? We may fail to live up to the demands that love and goodness make on us, but this does *not* make the demands less absolute. Nor does the fact that I or you may die seem to make our love more fragile. I may still feel that nothing, not even death, can take away the importance you have for me.²⁶⁶

We see this more clearly if we turn to Nussbaum's notion of a "completely trustworthy love". This, on the one hand, sounds like an unintelligible description of love. If we talk about something being trustworthy in terms of being "reliable", in Hertzberg's sense, and Nussbaum is urging us to think of a love that we really could take for granted, she gravely misunderstands both what it is to love and to trust. Remember that I earlier said that it goes against the grain of love to think that we could rely upon having it and that we may often think that it is more fitting to think of love as a gift or grace.

On the other hand, if I have reason to suspect that you or your love is not completely trustworthy, it also appears that I am entertaining doubts about the sincerity of your love. In other words, it is an expression of love that we are able to trust each other without reservation, or if one wants, completely. This does not exclude the possibility that I or you may one day do something that betrays the

²⁶⁶ This discussion is related to the discussion of the Socratic suggestion that a good man cannot be harmed. See Plato (1953b), and further e.g. Winch (1966), Dilman (1992) and Ashdown (1995).

other’s trust. However, the fact that I may betray you does not necessarily imply that I was not worthy of your trust, or that my love was not sincere. To think that this must be taken to prove that I was not completely trustworthy is to take trustworthiness as a quality that it may turn out that I did or did not possess. But this is a failure to see that the question whether I was trustworthy or not is a question about whether I was sincere or serious in giving my word to you.

The conclusion that love and goodness are fragile also marks Nussbaum’s failure, following Aristotle, to distinguish between absolute and relative goods. To Aristotle *all* goods seem to be on the same scale. They are all relative to the place they hold in making our life a flourishing human life.²⁶⁷ Thus, he does not recognize the grammatical difference between enjoying “good” food and having “good” friends, since they both bring us pleasure. This can be contrasted with Plato who struggled to show how goodness is something different from, something over and above, what is pleasurable to us. But as we have seen earlier, the significance someone has for me in love cannot be reduced to what is pleasing or appealing. Aristotle does add that our friends are not good for the pleasure they bring but that they can be said to be pleasurable in themselves (Aristotle 1954, 1156b8-10), but this is not enough to mark the distinction between what is meant by goodness in the two cases.

This is an aspect of Nussbaum and Aristotle primarily speaking about goodness as a virtue, that is, as a character trait which is in some ways similar to a more or less persistent disposition and may be transformed by one’s circumstances and relationships. This largely psychological description of goodness also makes it evident why they think that goodness is something that may be said to be harmed. If goodness is seen as an aspect of our human condition, our needs, capacities and aspirations, it is clear that there is always the risk that some needs may be left unfulfilled in our ever-changing life.

To do justice to Nussbaum it is worth mentioning that neither she nor Aristotle settles for a naturalistic description of our condition. Both regard our life as social beings, encompassing higher aspirations as virtues such as nobility, honour, justice, courage, love and goodness, as being as much a part of our human condition as our

²⁶⁷ “[T]he notion of a Good abstracted from the nature and the conditions of a certain sort of being is an empty one” (Nussbaum 1986, 341).

more basic needs such as hunger, sleep, and so on.²⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the focus on our moral psychology still puts too much emphasis on our lives as individuals, which leaves out the unconditional significance that other people may have for me in the light of love. This, I take it, is a significance that reaches beyond the ways in which our relationships with others can be said to have a formative influence on our character, both corrupting and edifying.

By contrast to the suggestion that love confronts us with the vulnerability of our *own* human condition, it may better be said, as does Lévinas (1986) when he speaks of the nudity and need of the Other's face (1986, 350-352), that love, from a moral perspective, confronts us first and foremost with the vulnerability of *the other*. My own vulnerability rather comes in second place, and my pre-occupation with it may, as we will see, also constitute a form of self-sentimentality and selfishness. In other words, I am confronted with the reality of the other and the possibility that she may come to harm in ways that cannot be reduced to the harm that she may cause me. This meeting carries the insight of my endless responsibility for other people, which takes the form of a moral demand to respond to the other in his or her otherness. From this perspective, it is also evident that my responsibility for the other is not dependent on aspects of my own condition or my moral psychology. If I allow my own aspirations and preferences to override my responsibility for the other, I am no longer responding to him or her. This is one of my reasons for stressing the absolute character of the demands of love.

To bring out the character of this moral demand that love and goodness can be said to constitute, I have wanted to focus on the language in which we express our moral concerns, rather than considering our moral psychology. Instead of raising questions about the ways in which a good person may be corrupted by associating with someone with less noble aspirations (cf. Nussbaum 1986, 362-363; Aristotle 1954, 1172a8-1172a15), I would in this manner suggest that one looks at the situations in which one may say, "He's a good person!", or, "That was a good thing to do!", to see what role and significance these utterances may have there, as expressions of, say,

²⁶⁸ In this respect I think Nussbaum would agree with John McDowell (1998) that the virtues can be seen as an aspect of our "second nature". In chapter 10 I will argue that even with this addition the attempt to find guidelines for our moral life in our human nature or condition is a problematic endeavour. It neglects that any description we give of our life in itself is expressive of a moral outlook.

admiration and praise, joy, or love. The context that is needed for understanding what is meant by speaking about something as "good" in these situations extends far beyond denoting a character trait.

It is also by considering the contexts in which we make promises and commitments to each other that I have brought out the absolute character of our promises and talk about what is good as an aspect of our *use* of certain words in certain situations, and not, say, as a feature of a phenomenon to which our words may falsely be taken to refer. If we think of goodness as a character trait it makes sense to think of it as something that is vulnerable to harm, something that may be "polluted" (Nussbaum 1986, 337). If we want to question such a notion of goodness, however, this picture cannot be given any literal sense. Now, I do not want to question the power a metaphor such as "the fragility of goodness" may have in a particular conversation. I do, however, want to warn against a reifying tendency in such ways of speaking, in the same sense that I have tried to show the problems involved in thinking that expressions such as "love is a bond" could be given a literal sense.

By discussing morality without accounting for the absolute sense in which we speak about matters of moral concern, Nussbaum also becomes a proponent for a view of morality, or a moral attitude, that may itself be criticized from an absolute perspective on morality. In part, this is also what Nussbaum aims to do. Her introduction of "the fragility of goodness" is in many ways meant to be a point about moral philosophy and what should be counted as a part of it. She wants to change our perception of what is good and of what matters in our understanding of goodness. She challenges the Kantian claim that we could determine what actions are right or wrong independently of the context in which they appear, and she wants us to recognize that it is an internal aspect of morality that we judge actions differently depending on the person's background, and the different circumstances in which someone does something.

This reveals a difference not only in how differently we may judge what may be called the same action; feeling indignant about the company executive who swindles to make a profit but finding compassion for the parent stealing to feed his or her starving family, but in *what* we may come to regard as a certain kind of action in the first place. We may, for instance, question whether the second case really presents us with a case of stealing or rather with a desperate act. The role we may assign to circumstances in the way we understand an action may also take at least two different forms. On the one hand,

we may think that the circumstances excuse an action. "The love for their children made the parents lose their sense of justice". On the other hand, the circumstances may determine what kind of action we consider something to be. "They stole to save their children." In this case, we might not think there is anything to excuse.

But even though we may criticize Kant for trying to *universalize* morality and not attending to the particular case, this does not mean that the moral perspective does not have an absolute character. Bringing in the absolute character of our moral language does not mean that we are forced to accept the idea that there are general or universal rules for acting morally. The particularity of morality does not exclude its absolute character. In line with the thought that we may only experience eternity in the moment, we could rather say that it only makes sense to speak of what is absolute for us in a particular situation.

This point about seeing the role circumstances play for how we judge or come to understand an action also has a place in our moral discourse. We may reproach someone for being too harsh on other people or on themselves. If you regard the end of another couple's relationship as a personal failure without recognizing how they were consumed by their economical difficulties, I may regard this as a failure on your part to understand what had happened. In that sense, we may think that it is fair not to demand too much of others, or think that someone demands too much of him- or herself. We may also question in what circumstances we have a right to demand anything of others in the first place.

But, although this point about our vulnerability has a place from a third person perspective, in speaking about what we demand of others, it is not as clear what sense it may have from a first person perspective. Again, it may be a recognition that I need to reconcile myself with the fact that I do not always live up to the demands I make on myself. This may be a crucial insight, not least because a certain kind of self-recrimination is no longer responsive to what I have done to others and my responsibility for that, but expressive of a preoccupation with myself. However, saying that my failure was "only human" in the face of the demands I recognize in my relationships with others may rather reveal a kind of self-sentimentality, self-pity or even self-deception. If I excuse what I did by pointing to my humanity, I do not take responsibility for the fact that it was *I*, and not humanity, who failed to live up to the demands that love or goodness made on me. What is a virtue in relation to

others, that is not expecting others to live up to *my* demands, thus, becomes a vice when it turns into giving myself permission not to accept the demands that *love* makes on me. This is also true if I am only eager to excuse the failures of others in order to excuse myself for not doing what they failed to do.

THE MEANING OF LOVE

*Es ist Unsinn
sagt die Vernunft
Es ist was es ist
sagt die Liebe
Es ist Unglück
sagt die Berechnung
Es ist nichts als Schmerz
sagt die Angst
Es ist aussichtslos
sagt die Einsicht
Es ist was es ist
sagt die Liebe
Es ist lächerlich
sagt der Stolz
Es ist leichtsinnig
sagt die Vorsicht
Es ist unmöglich
sagt die Erfahrung
Es ist was es ist
sagt die Liebe
Erich Fried*

The questions I have been raising so far have all concerned the meaning we see in love or “when in love”. I now want to turn to a different question about love and meaning, although the aim of my argument will be to show that there are more connections with my previous discussions than one may first be inclined to think. The question I want to investigate resembles the classical philosophical question about the meaning of life, that is, what is the meaning of love? Or, to put it differently, how are we supposed to understand a claim such as “love is the meaning of life”?

The previous discussions should have taught us first to look for what kind of question is being raised here. What are we asking for

when we are asking for the meaning of love? Who is posing the question and in what circumstances? One quite common way of taking it is thinking that we in some way are asking for an explanation. We want to know why we, as human beings, love. What is the point of love or the purpose of it? Earlier I have argued that taking the question in this way is problematic in its personal form, in other words, when we ask why A loves B. This suggests that there may also be problems involved in posing it in this general form: Why do human beings love?

We should also be wary of assuming that the concerns philosophers have had with regards to these kinds of questions always reflect our usual concerns with similar questions. Our personal questions about the meaning of love may arise out of situations of desperation or despair. They may also constitute attempts to articulate the significance our different relationships with children, parents, lovers and friends have in our life. When philosophers and scientists raise questions about the meaning of love, however, they are usually concerned with trying to provide us with explanations of love, clarifying the background mechanisms of love, the purpose of loving, its aims, and so on. Their questions range from, "Why do we love?" which cannot be separated from the ontological "What is love?", to the rather moral questions, "Why should we love?" or "Is love good for us?". Whereas the first is often identified with discovering the causes of love scientifically, the second often find their place in giving reasons for love in philosophical circumstances.

In the following I will point out some ways in which philosophers and scientists misrepresent our common concerns by trying to explain the meaning of love either in terms of causes (scientists) or in terms of reasons (philosophers). They do not attend to the roles this question may have in our love, which at the same time means attending to the *kind* of question it is, but attempt to judge love from the outside, by describing it in terms which are not (or not always) internal to the language of love.

I begin by saying some words about the differing scientific attempts to explain love, spending only a bit more time on evolutionary explanations of love, since they form one of the primary seats in which explanations of love, as well as of almost everything, are formulated today. The major part of the chapter, however, is a response to the branch of moral philosophy that attempts to formulate the "rationality" of love in terms of reasons for loving, or reasons for including love in a happy, flourishing life. The primary object of my

discussion, then, is the kind of virtue ethics which is being done in the name of Aristotle and which has given new (philosophical) life to the age-old question "How should we live?"

There are, at least, two ways of understanding the question about the meaning of love. One is the attempt to look behind the "word", towards a mechanism, a function, a drive or a force, or in more teleological terms, a purpose of or an aim for love. This is what I think many scientists and philosophers take on themselves to do. This view has many similarities with the notion that language, first and foremost, is referential. The meaning of a word is that for which the word stands. The other, which I think is more closely related to the place questions of meaning may have in our own life, is to raise questions about the meaningfulness of certain activities and ask what meaning certain things have for us. This notion comes to show in exclamations such as, "I really do think that family and friends are the true meaning of life!"²⁶⁹

Focusing on the latter notion of "meaning" cannot be separated from raising questions about what it may mean to use the words "meaningful" and "meaningless" in different situations, or to speak of something as having meaning for me. Therefore, it cannot be distinguished from reflecting on the meaning of the concept of "meaning"; its different uses in our life. The following discussion will unfortunately not venture too far into that question. Nevertheless, such considerations form part of the background against which I will argue against the first way of responding to questions about meaning.

I

SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATIONS OF LOVE

Considering the diversity of science, and the great variety of different fields of inquiry, it is impossible to give a unitary account of what could be called a "scientific explanation" of love. It can only be said that there is a number of scientific explanations of different aspects of love that differ both in scope, method, ambition and objective. Here, I will content myself with pointing out some strands in the scientific investigations and comment on the questions they take on themselves to answer. Perhaps it need not be said that the descriptions I offer are in no way meant to be all-encompassing. Much of the research in one

²⁶⁹ Of course, this is not to exclude that we may also find meaning, say, in our work and hobbies, in doing sports or in experiences of the grandness of nature.

field also builds on results from neighbouring fields, so that different fields can be seen as supporting each other, as in the case of neuropsychology. What brings different approaches together is at times the field of study, at other times methodological considerations. Discourse analysis may, for instance, be used as a tool in different fields and one may also look for evolutionary explanations within different subjects.

Nevertheless, there are attempts to provide more full-fledged explanations of love, such as the one offered by Helen Fisher in *Why We Love* (2004). In that book, the anthropologist Fisher attempts to bring together psychological, neurological and evolutionary models of explanation into a unitary, albeit popular, account of love. She suggests that “romantic love is a primary motivation system in the brain—in short, a fundamental mating drive” (Fisher 2004, 74).

With the development of more advanced instruments for scanning the brain, there has been an upsurge of research trying to provide neurological or neuropsychological explanations of the phenomena of love. They take different kinds of physiological or chemical bodily states or changes, primarily in the brain, as their focus, making claims that are often both quite modest and quite ambitious. They set out to explain both very much and very little at the same time. Mostly they do not, for instance, propose to answer the question about why we love. Rather they put their emphasis on questions such as, “Why do we choose the partners that we do?”, or, “What do women and men find attractive?” The replies range from pointing to a female tendency to find sweaty T-shirts from men with a different immune system from theirs sexier than those from men whose smell reminded them of their own fathers or brothers (Wedekind et. al 1995), to men showing more “brain activity in regions associated with *visual* processing” when looking at their loved ones (Fisher 2004, 100), to both men and women being attracted to more symmetrical shapes (Gangestad and Thornhill 1997).²⁷⁰

In that way, one is mostly concerned with revealing the *background mechanisms* of love. What happens when we love? What causes us to feel the way we do? In that manner, Fisher advances the hypothesis that “*this fire in the mind is caused by elevated levels of either dopamine or*

²⁷⁰ Apparently highly symmetrical men “have more sex partners and more adulterous affairs” (Fisher 2004, 106, Gangestad and Thornhill, 1997) and women “achieve more orgasms with symmetrical men” (Fisher 2004, 106, Thornhill et al. 1995). Men also mostly prefer women with a 70 % ratio waist to hip (Singh 1993).

norepinephrine or both, as well as decreased levels of serotonin. These chemicals form the backbone of obsessive, passionate, romantic love" (2004, 56). Their brain scannings of "twenty men and women, who were deeply and happily in love" (Fisher 2004, 63) also proved changes in levels of dopamine while their objects of study looked at pictures of their beloved. Furthermore, she suggests that the brain circuit of romantic love joins with two other "mating drives, *lust*—the craving for sexual gratification; and *attachment*—the feelings of calm, security, and union with a long-term partner" (Fisher 2004, 78).²⁷¹ Each of these has a brain circuitry of their own and is linked with different neurochemicals; lust with the hormone testosterone and attachment with the hormones oxytocin and vasopressin (Fisher 2004, 78).

The implications of these kinds of investigations do not, as I said, have to be seen as very far-reaching. Neither do the researchers behind them always draw any great conclusions out of them. If we simply take the experiments involving sweaty T-shirts and pictures of more or less attractive men or women as indicative of what men and women might respond to as attractive in such situations, they serve as interesting curiosities. If one considers that symmetry can be understood as an aspect of beauty, and that beauty and attraction are internally related it should also not strike one as especially surprising that an investigation of that kind would gain such results. It is, however, not clear that these experiments are representative of people's actual choices of partners, nor how "attraction" plays a part in people's romantic relationships. Taking the example of smells, for instance, it is certainly clear that the scent of the one we love may matter in one way or another in different relationships. However, we do not need to assume that the relation between scents and attractions always work in one way. There is room for speaking about "learning to like", or "growing accustomed to someone's smell", as well as coming to "associate" a particular smell with a particular person.

Combined with evolutionary explanations as to why such functions came to develop, however—mostly understood in association with our or the species' "reproductive strategies"—these results present much more problems. It is quite easy to conjure up an

²⁷¹ In the words of *Psychology Today*: "the experience of love may best be viewed as a biological drive that comprises lust, romantic love and attachment. These three states are experientially different, but share the goal of successful reproduction." (Perina 2004, 38).

evolutionary story as to why being drawn to someone whose immune system differs from one's own but still is compatible with it "unconsciously" lead woman to partners "who could potentially help them produce genetically more varied young" (Fisher 2004, 104), why symmetry is a sign of health and "genetic ability" (Fisher 2004, 105) which enhances "one's choices in the mating game" (Fisher 2004, 106), or youth and beauty signal to men that these women have "good qualities for bearing and rearing babies" (Fisher 2004, 109). Nevertheless, such explanations, as I will return to shortly, are laden with difficulties, many of them internal to the kind of question it is.

Before I move on to these, however, let me linger at the scientific explanations of love that are presented in psychology and sociology. These are rather aimed at revealing the *functions* of love on an individual level or on a social level. In their attempts to explain why we choose the partners that we do, for instance, psychologists have emphasized the role of the relationship dynamics for forming the self or identity of the individual. Love functions to satisfy certain psychological needs. We choose partners similar to the parents with whom we have an unresolved conflict to hopefully resolve them in this relationship (Pines 1999). Or we choose partners who have experienced similar childhood traumas (Hendrix 1992, 2005), who are able to handle anxiety (Bowen 1978), or that mirror the type of attachment we made to our mother (Hazan and Phaver 1987; Bowlby 1960, 1969, 1973, 1980; Ainsworth et al. 1978). A sociological answer to the same question may involve pointing out how our motives for marrying are related to "the entire institutional structure within which an individual lives his life—class, career, economic ambition, aspirations of power and prestige (Berger 1968, 48).

A common trait in both psychological and sociological explanations of love is that they tend to search for a general and universal account of what love is. In this fashion, Fisher's colleague Art Aron characterized love as a "motivation system designed to enable suitors to build an intimate relationship with a preferred mating partner" (Fisher 2004, 75). Many sociological descriptions are also wedded to giving a systematic account of love's place in society (see e.g. Alberoni 1983; Giddens 1992; Luhmann 1998). A feature that is explicitly stated by sociologists is to look for a description of love (or society) that go beyond our own ways of understanding it. They attempt to find regularities behind our practices, discern unconscious patterns or structures. They try to describe life, as it were, from the outside, explaining events without referring to our own ways of

making sense of them, even if, which they often fail to acknowledge, they are still dependent on our descriptions for identifying the phenomena under description.²⁷²

This way of putting forward general or universal definitions of social phenomena often blind them to the many distinctions we may make between different aspects of our life. Thereby, they also fail to describe what they set out to do.²⁷³ Against this attempt to give a description of love from the outside, I will argue that the idea of a meaning behind our practices is illusory, and that, if we are interested in meaning, we need to pay attention to the distinctions we make in our life. We need to pay heed to the different ways in which we make sense of our life, if we want to see what meaning there might be in it.

The search for hidden or latent structures is also involved in the methods of the social sciences that are closest to mine. I am here thinking of the role the hermeneutic tradition and discourse analysis have had in philology, the history of ideas, art history, literature, cultural studies, gender studies and critical theory. They share with me the conviction that the focus of a scientific investigation of human life is not so much on *explanation* as it is on *understanding*. Since they usually do not set out to provide causes of love, I will also not say much about them, but only point out what I see as the main differences between their methods and mine.

The aim of many such studies is often to trace the uses of concepts through different times. In what contexts have they been used and what meaning have they had at different times? One such way of tracing the histories of a concept could be showing how the concept of love has gained different meanings from the different ways it has been understood in the context of mysticism, courtly love, chivalry love, romantic love, the love of God, or God's love of men, the concepts of *agape*, *eros*, *philia* (cf. Singer 1984a, 1984b, 1987; de Rougemont 1983). Or one may study how the word "love" is currently being used by people, and what understanding of the word is being expressed in people's conversations about it. (Cf. Holmberg 1995; Martinsson 1997.)

What separates such studies from mine are mainly that they are still empirical in character. Their focus is on revealing patterns of use,

²⁷² Compare these attempts to go beyond the language of love with the philosophical rejection of that language as necessary idealizing.

²⁷³ R.F. Holland (1980) offers an illuminating criticism of Durkheim's discussion of suicide on this account (143-147).

rather than asking for what it means to say different things. Furthermore, although discourse analysis has evolved as a critique against essentialism, their claims still have not completely succeeded in releasing themselves from universalist strands. Although one is quite aware of the historicity of concepts, the need for context for words to have meaning, their main theoretical tool for analyzing the different purposes for which we use our words is often the attempt to reveal discourse as primarily constituted by hierarchical structures and relations of power. This blocks out any understanding of the subject that would describe it in a different way. Nevertheless, I think, they are the ones who have most capacity to criticize evolutionary accounts of love among the present scientific methods.

Explanations of love within evolutionary psychology mainly serve to show its link to our unconscious reproductive strategies. Love is an outcome of the urge to reproduce and the need to care for one's offspring. Hence, Fisher suggests that each of the brain circuits she sees as fundamental to love

evolved to direct a different aspect of reproduction. Lust evolved to motivate individuals to seek sexual union with almost *any* semi-appropriate partner. Romantic love emerged to drive men and women to focus their mating attention on a preferred individual, thereby conserving invaluable courtship time and energy. And the brain circuitry for male-female attachment developed to enable our ancestors to live with this mate at least long enough to rear a single child through infancy together. (Fisher 2004, 78)

Evolutionary psychology shares the assumption with many of the above theories that the meaning of love is to be found in something other than the present practices of our life. It shares the assumption that the key to understanding our life now lies within the past with psychoanalysis. Only whereas psychoanalysis searches for answers in the history of the individual, evolutionary psychology turns its gaze towards the history of our species. On the whole, there are noteworthy similarities between psychoanalysis and evolutionary psychology, although they today differ greatly in their claims of presenting us with knowledge that is scientifically grounded.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ The similarities are surprising since it often feels that with the rise and development of cognitive psychology and neuropsychology psychoanalysis has come to play a much smaller part in popular discussions, whereas evolutionary psychology has gained a much larger role in the wake of these fields of research. This may,

Both psychoanalysis and evolutionary psychology carry important insights. They acknowledge that we are beings who live through time, and whose past, as well as whose future, influence our understanding of our present. Better yet, our understanding of the present always implies a certain understanding of the past and the future. However, the understanding that is expressed in the descriptions of evolutionary psychologists is often more expressive of our life than it is of that of our ancestors.²⁷⁵ Certainly, there are ways in which they question our understanding of our life, by suggesting, say, as Fisher does, in our “natural condition” we would not mate for life, but most probably for four years which is the approximate time it takes to raise a child out of infancy, and so on. On the whole, evolutionary psychology can be said to offer us a different way of understanding ourselves. Nevertheless, when it comes to the pictures of, for example, gender roles and family life that are put to use, it is often our present conventions and interests to defend a certain way of life that come into play.

Many evolutionary psychologists work as if it would be given what meaning our different practices have. They assume that it is clear what phenomenon it is that is in need of explanation. But, I would argue, the essential question in many situations, and precisely in cases in which one is prone to look for an explanation of something, is *what* meaning we are to see in it. Here, I also see the great benefits of discourse analysis and other hermeneutic approaches to display in what different ways we have made sense of these aspects of our life, as well as revealing in what ways certain claims are expressive of an ideology and do not provide us with a “neutral” description of life.

It has been argued that psychoanalysis does not so much offer causes for our behaviour but provides us with a new way of making

however, be a natural effect of their differing claims of being scientific. Whereas one has come to question psychoanalysis as a natural science, the speculations of evolutionary psychology still thrive on the assumption that it forms a legitimate branch of the natural sciences. My following discussion should show some flaws in the claim that it is a science.

²⁷⁵ Richard Hamilton (2005) sums it up nicely when he says, “the stress of decontextualised preferences explains little about actual behaviour. The tendency to treat context as nugatory is central to Buss’s analysis. In reality, however, what we get is not a decontextualised picture but one in which aspects of the researchers’ own culture are taken for granted and transposed onto a mythical Pleistocene” (171). To Hamilton’s mind, Buss is one of the evolutionary psychologists who “treat the North American singles bar as the norm of human sexual behaviour rather than as a culturally specific phenomenon.” (Hamilton 2005, 171)

sense of them (Bouvresse 1995, Scruton 1987, 195-199). Through the process of analysis I come to see a new meaning in my life, past as well as present. I would suggest that the same is true of evolutionary psychology. This is not to deny that much of our life now has probably been affected by our natural history as a species. I only want to raise the question whether it is indeed intelligible to think that we could succeed in tracing our past without always investing in it some of our understanding of our present.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1996) makes the perfectly sound grammatical point that the idea of a beginning and an end are inextricably intertwined. Similarly the idea of a development presupposes an understanding of a beginning and an end (Gadamer 1996, 18-19). That is, I take it in relation to this discussion, when we ask how something has evolved, we regard the present state as the end of a distinct process. But what may come to count as a beginning and as a process leading to it is already presupposed in our understanding of where this process "ended". Thus, we exclude the possibility of anything new and unexpected happening which to Gadamer is the mark of history.

Perhaps we could say that there are always certain things rather than others that we think are in need of an evolutionary explanation.²⁷⁶ We ask for explanations to aspects of our life that we regard as important, or in need of scientific explanation. Nevertheless, what says that these are the deciding ones from the perspective of evolution, which is, of course, a perspective that *we* lay on our life and history. In this respect evolutionary psychology faces a problem of validity. To be able to attract readers, they have to act as if they are providing explanations of what is of concern to us today, but their explanations still aspire to be something distinct from these concerns. At the same time, there is no method for testing the hypotheses they put forward, but the whole endeavour rests on our acceptance of certain descriptions as legitimate elucidations of our human history.

Furthermore, the whole attempt to give an explanation to why our life is the way it is rests on quite shaky ground. İlham Dilman (1998b) points out that although we may be able to give a historical or psychological explanation to why someone fails to love, there is no explanation as to why we love (123-124). Loving, as it were, is a

²⁷⁶ Is there, e.g. an evolutionary story about why we need an evolutionary story? Or to why we have evolved to find sunsets beautiful?

fundamental fact of our existence; we presuppose that a child who is met with love will also come to respond to others in a loving way. We may even say that the question put in this general form, “why do human beings love [...] comes from confusion” (Dilman 1998b, 122). Posing it in this form disregards the different meanings it may have to ask the question “why?” in different situations and ignores that this question is not always equally meaningful.

Rather than assigning to evolutionary psychology (and psychoanalysis) the role of explanation, I would, therefore, say they have more in common with stories and myths (cf. Scruton 1986, 197). Considering the lack of methods for testing their hypotheses, the field also opens for wild speculation. This is not to diminish the role myths and telling stories may have in our life. However, if we recognize that these theories serve to establish another way of finding meaning in our life, they should also be open to the same kind of scrutiny with which any other account aiming to articulate the meaning our life has to us is faced. We need to be able to question such stories, or point to temptations and difficulties in telling them. There is no reason to accept them just because they are offered by scientists. Science, as it were, does not provide the limits for how we may meaningfully understand our life.

The questions we need to raise, then, are, “Can we make sense of our life in this way?” Is it on the whole intelligible to speak of love as an “instinct”, “a biological drive” (Perina 2004) or a “mechanism” (Fisher 2004, 121), to compare it to a drug, and so on? What sense can we make of evolutionary psychologists assigning human characteristics to subpersonal or superpersonal mechanisms, such as genes, the species, and natural selection, speaking of “subconscious, physiological *decisions* of the body” (Baker and Bellis 1995, 185, *my emphasis*), or natural selection as not “*caring*” about our intentions (Baker Bellis 1995, 185, *my emphasis*).

We also need to ask, “Do we *want* to make sense of our life in this way?” What are we to make of a description that professes to be a description of our life, but that we do not recognize ourselves in? Simply appealing to unconscious processes does not help, if we cannot give a lucid description of what this way of speaking means. Consider, for instance, childrearing which gains an important role in evolutionary accounts. Is it really a meaningful suggestion that the significance of my children to me can be reduced to them being the carriers of my DNA and guarantors of the survival of the species? Certainly, there are many different ways in which the thought of a

bloodline may figure in a life, of which some may have a closer connection to the considerations of evolutionary psychology than others. However, to conclude that someone's saying, "My children give my life meaning" could be easily translated into the notion that "life's grandest prize [is] a mate who may pass their DNA toward eternity" (Fisher 2004, 72), is to misrepresent the significance having children may have to us. It is better to say that seeing reproduction as the meaning of life, and seeing one's children as the meaning of one's life are two quite distinct perspectives on life and what it is for life to continue after my death. Even if Helen Fisher talks about romantic love as being focused on another individual, it is difficult to discern from her account any feeling for what it is for other people to be important to us as anything else than as a "reproductive prize" (Fisher 2004, 124) or as "precious reproductive vessels" (Fisher 2004, 112).

In these respects evolutionary psychologists fall victim to certain prejudices about what constitutes a scientific understanding of life. It is as if certain ways of describing life, more dire, more selfish,²⁷⁷ those that pertain to "needs", "drives", "urges" or "instincts", our "struggle for survival", provides a more real understanding than does any other way in which we make sense of our life, such as "beauty", "joy", "goodness" or "love". Not seldom this move involves the projection of certain images of our proposed natural state on the life of our ancestors, which is often perceived as dark, violent and hobbesian.²⁷⁸ In this manner, one crowns certain descriptions with the epithet "scientific" and proposes that we just accept these as the "Truth".

Nevertheless, to use an example that D.W. Hamlyn (1983) discusses with reference to R.K. Elliott, instead of "trying to explain the way in which the child comes to behave to other human beings in terms of what it finds pleasurable and painful in the treatment that it receives", suggesting, for instance, that "satisfaction of hunger is pleasant to the child, the hunger being unpleasant and even painful" it may be better to say that "such satisfaction might be more like grace and salvation to it" (Hamlyn 1983, 234-235). Rather than reaching the grain of our life, I have tried to show, the descriptions offered by evolutionary psychologists give voice to a distinct understanding of life. We need to ask ourselves whether such an understanding is really

²⁷⁷ Richard Hamilton (2005) argues that evolutionary psychology can be understood as what Talcott Parsons called individualist utilitarianism (143).

²⁷⁸ From another point of view, Fisher's account can often be said to romanticize our pre-history.

attentive to *our* life. The following discussions should bring out that the ways in which we go about describing our life are not scientific in any simple sense, but have a strongly moral character.

II REASONS FOR LOVING

Whereas scientists try to explain love by searching for its causes, the road mostly traveled by philosophers is to ask for its reasons. Do we have reasons for love and are they well-grounded? Schematically, an investigation of this sort may take the following form: One begins by citing some "well-known facts" about love which appear to be problematic. Although love may be said to bring us many goods, one realizes, for instance, that loving also involves certain risks. We become vulnerable in love, since we may lose our love; our love may not be requited, the one we love may die and so on (Nussbaum 1986). Or, one finds that there is some kind of injustice in the fact that we do not extend the same kind of care or consideration that we show our friends, lovers and children to all people and thinks that this practice of preferring one person over another is in need of moral justification.²⁷⁹ Why should we find it morally justified that a husband saves his wife instead of another woman in a situation where he can only save one of two drowning people? (Williams 1981, 17-18). Or, one asks, why we are not as distraught by the fate of starving children on the other side of the planet as we are by our own children's admittedly less grave needs? Or, yet again, what virtue should we assign to love considering that even if it may motivate us to do much good it also brings with it many negative features into our lives with others, such as jealousy or possessiveness? Are we correct to consider love to be a virtue, despite its being an emotion? (Solomon 1991).

One, then, proposes a solution to these problems, by producing some arguments to show why these practices may still be justified or worthwhile. With Aristotle, Nussbaum argues, for instance, "that those vulnerable relationships and their associated activities have both instrumental value as necessary means to, and intrinsic value as component parts of the best human life" (Nussbaum 1986 345), and further that

²⁷⁹ See Backström (2007) for an in depth criticism of this idea.

this does not put the best life intolerably at the mercy of fortune. For it is possible to realize each of these values, properly understood, within a life that is not intolerably unstable, one that possesses an appropriate human kind of self-sufficiency. (Nussbaum 1986, 345)

Or, one argues that we need to separate those forms of love that are virtuous from those that are not, since indeed some love is connected with virtue whereas others are not (Airaksinen 2001, 59-60). Or, one concludes that, despite the charges that can be made against it, love can nevertheless be regarded a private virtue (Solomon 1991). Or, one claims that the question whether it is worthwhile to love is a personal question that cannot be given a general answer. It is neither irrational to live without love nor irrational to love (Hall 2000, 225).

Not seldom following in the footsteps of Aristotle, and the virtue ethics that has been done in his name in the last decades, these philosophers often take themselves to be readdressing the classical question of ancient Greek philosophy, "How should we live?" "What belongs to a good (human) life? Does love contribute to the happiness and flourishing of men, and if so how?" In some discussions, such as arguing against and for marriage or whether it is possible to promise to love,²⁸⁰ whether lovers can or cannot be friends (Conlon 1995), whether jealousy has a place in love or is excusable (Neu 2001), or whether there are unforgivable acts, their questions could also be put in the words "How should we love?"

Independently of this explicit aim, one may wonder about the nature of their remarks. To whom are they speaking and from what point of view? Do they speak out of their own doubts about love, trying to find an answer to their personal questions about love? Are their words offered as a means of consolation to the ones unlucky in love, feeling they have lost the love of their life, or are they an encouragement not yet to give up their hopes on love? If their arguments are aimed at the ones who have already lost their faith in love, finding in loving relationships nothing but dominance and the search for the satisfaction of some biological needs, there is good reason to suspect that the best way of either consoling, encouraging or convincing the cynic to be or the cynic *per se*, is not by means of argument.

I strongly doubt that a suggestion such as,

²⁸⁰ See chapter 9.

the stabler values of the intellectual life are best nourished and promoted in a life that includes these riskier commitments [...] any life that devoted itself entirely to safe activities would be, for a human being, impoverished (Nussbaum 1986, 420)

really has the power of making the ones despairing about love change their mind. Or, that the words, “we know that lasting love is clearly worth the trouble” (Solomon 2001, 196) could convince someone to stay in a marriage which he himself and others have deemed hopeless. Such words of advice may well play a part in friendly conversation. They come in a bundle in well meaning aphorisms, such as Tennyson’s, “It is better to have loved and lost/Than never to have loved at all.” But it is not clear what role they have in philosophy.

If these philosophers are not trying to convince anyone, nor speak out of their own misery, what are they doing? Do they attempt to justify their own actions by means of argument? If that is the case, is it not true that we would rather suspect a person who really wondered whether he should stop treating his own children and spouse differently than others, for instance, stop giving them good night kisses and hugs, because he does not hug or kiss his neighbour’s children and spouse, for not being sincere in his love for his spouse and children, or then utterly confused? Such an attitude does not become less suspicious if we learn that the one who doubted the rightness of these actions continued doing them, because he found them to be justified. Doing these things under that description takes away the meaning of these ways of showing affection—in other words, hugging and kissing someone as an expression of love and not as a consequence of rational consideration—or gives them a meaning that is the opposite of love.

The questions I have been raising, of course, go back on many general questions about what it is to do philosophy and in particular what may be involved in moral philosophy. Are moral philosophers, say, faced with the *normative* task of advancing arguments for different moral positions or convincing us of the goodness and righteousness of certain actions? They also raise questions about the relation between philosophy and the clarification of philosophical problems and our problems of life. Does philosophy make us better apt to solve our own personal problems as well as those of others? Does it turn us into some kind of experts where morality is concerned? I, for one, find it quite preposterous to think that philosophers have anything more to say about the problems of life

than the “regular man” (or woman). Especially if one considers much of what they have indeed been saying in these matters.

Undoubtedly, a certain kind of philosophizing may be of help in coming to grips with certain problems (cf. Dilman 1998a, 257-259, 262-263). Work in philosophy may make us better able to recognize what kind of problems we are having. What difficulties, for instance, are involved in making promises as opposed to what may be a difficulty in making predictions?²⁸¹ As I have tried to show throughout this work, many of our philosophical problems are also intimately connected with our problems of life. Nevertheless, an overly optimistic belief in the supremacy of philosophy to come to grips with our problems of life obscures the kind of difficulties we face in our moral lives. This is true whether we conceive philosophy as primarily being concerned with rational thinking—that is, the picture I have criticized—or in terms of elucidating different concepts by pointing out the use we make of them in our life—which is the view I have proposed. The emphasis on rational thinking also reaches its limits if one remembers that too much thinking may sometimes lead us away from acting morally rather than towards it. We rationalize our wrongdoing by arguing that our actions were still justified, that we had special reasons for not taking on the demands that love made on us.

The notion of moral expertise that is perhaps most pregnant in utilitarian thinking, may seem tempting if one pictures moral problems as being primarily rational problems, and rationality as a logical procedure through which any problems may be processed and answered by means of argument. From this point of view, rational thinking is quite independent of the one who is doing the thinking; there is something such as pure thought. In this case, however, I would rather join the moral philosophy that has been done in the footsteps of Wittgenstein in stressing the philosophical and moral insight that moral decisions are by logic personal problems. Nobody else can make my decisions.

Like Cora Diamond and Raimond Gaita I question the force of advancing arguments if one wishes to reform our moral practices in a certain matter, in Diamond’s (1991a, 1991b) case our relationships with animals, as well as the thought that we are obliged to follow the (rational) argument wherever it may take us (Gaita 1991). The

²⁸¹ Cf. chapter 9.

corrupting step in a moral discussion may not, as it were, lie in the different answers one gives to certain questions, but in what one sees as questions in the first place (Diamond 2002) and as appropriate methods for answering them.

With respect to the present discussion, the crucial step in these accounts of love can often be seen in how they present the problems. Previously I have showed that regarding love as risky, although a risk that is worth taking, reveals the bias of a sufficiently self-sufficient individual, lending one's voice to the language of fear and anxiety, rather than to that of love: "I love only if it does not hurt too much!"²⁸² In that way, we have reason to ask from what perspective we are speaking when we are asking for justification to love, since in introducing such a concept we have already agreed upon a certain understanding of love. The same goes for speaking about love as a preference, or as has been made in other places, for introducing the concepts of "deserving", and "reasons" into the philosophical discussion of love.

In line with many other Wittgensteinian philosophers, I would also claim that rather than being *prescriptive* the task of moral philosophy, as well as of philosophy, is to be *descriptive*. However, it remains to be shown what exactly this means with concern to morality and love. Describing the language of morality and love is describing a language that is clearly normative, and trying to describe that language in a way that does not capture these aspects of it, as we have seen, is to distort it. But, how else could we do it justice? Is there a way of speaking about love and goodness that is not normative?

Now, however successful or unsuccessful I have been in doing it, one of my aims with this thesis has been to speak about love without making normative claims. It has been an ongoing question throughout the work what this could mean in practice and I hope that the rest of this final chapter will also serve to throw some light on this discussion. Whether I have succeeded in this, or whether it is indeed desirable to succeed in it, will finally be up to the reader to decide. I am, however, aware that some readers will perhaps think that some, or even many, of my remarks are normative, not to say overly idealizing. It might be of help at least to try to respond to this claim.

One way of responding to it would be to say that love by necessity involves certain ideals, although I would preferably speak of demands

²⁸² See chapter 9.

for reasons I will offer later, and that I have been trying to articulate these demands as they appear from “the inside”. This formulation takes us some way, but it is not completely satisfying. There is an additional aspect as to what one may find appropriate and inappropriate to say about love. It may be said that the force of a philosophical remark always lies in its capacity to speak to its reader. A remark clarifies in as far as it speaks to something I recognize in my own life. In that sense, philosophy is always personal. This, of course, means that there is a certain indeterminacy in what one may understand as a good remark; some remarks speak to me, others leave me cold. Some open up to me when I return to them at a later occasion.

This is even more so when it comes to love. A philosophical remark about love, one could say, comes alive in that it enables love to speak to its reader. It has meaning in so far as it touches something that one may recognize in one’s own life. At best it may help one to articulate certain aspects of these experiences more clearly. If it does not touch one, or touches one in a place one does not want to be touched, one may well reject the remarks as normative or overly idealizing.

Now, as it is with any philosopher, my thinking may be subject to idealizations, generalizations or superficialities which may well be criticized. What I have wanted to show, however, is that any discussion about what is possibly an idealization of love has to be made within the language of love. Otherwise, we are no longer speaking about love. There is no sense in thinking that one could judge this language, in its entirety, as an idealization.²⁸³ There is no point from which we could understand love except from the point of view of our own life and the part that love plays in it. Any conversation we enter into about love is as potential lovers, or as potential speakers of that language.²⁸⁴ This is the question I want to turn to for the remainder of this chapter.

The wariness I expressed above against some of the ways of dealing with love and goodness within virtue ethics should not lead us to reject the question of what relation love has to a good or

²⁸³ Cf. chapter 8.

²⁸⁴ What we are prepared to say about love, or consider a good point to be made about love, is internal to our own understanding and capacity for loving. It tells us something about ourselves. Rejecting certain points about love is rejecting love. Any attempt to say what love is has to involve coming to grips with what it means for us, the meaning it has for me.

meaningful life. Rather I take them as an encouragement to attend more carefully to the kind of question this is. How are we best to understand the relation between love, happiness, goodness and meaning?

One way of investigating this relation is to take a strictly empirical approach to the question. This is the method suggested by Aristotle and taken up by his followers. Simply go out and look at the virtuous man! Does he love, does he have friends? If so, then clearly love and friendship have something to do with human flourishing. In this fashion, Nussbaum (1986, 354) repeatedly and approvingly cites him saying that *philia*²⁸⁵ “is not only necessary but also noble; for we praise those who love their friends, and it is thought to be a fine thing to have many friends; and again we think it is the same people that are good men and are friends” (Aristotle 1954, 1155a28-32). Not only does *philia* (or friendship) have something to do with the good life. It is one of its highest values. It is “intrinsically good and fine” (Nussbaum 1986, 354).

Despite the success Aristotelian virtue ethics has had in modern moral philosophy, this approach is problematic in many respects. For one, it takes a predominantly aesthetic approach to goodness, by which I mean that its emphasis is on what the good life *looks* like. This way of speaking about our moral life is faithful to Aristotle’s overarching attempt to give a description of the “appearances” (*phainomena*) of human life. His concern, as Nussbaum shows, is to show “‘what we believe’ or ‘what we say’” in our ordinary life (Nussbaum 1986, 241), by contrast to the Platonic preoccupation with ideal objects or forms. This insistence on being true to human life and sensitive to its details is indeed commendable. Most probably it is one reason for the popularity of Aristotelian virtue ethics; at least Nussbaum is convinced by the humanitarian strand of his thinking. Rather than proposing universal solutions to moral problems, it emphasizes the need for perception, imagination and sensitivity in moral actions. The virtuous man’s inclination to do what is right is explained by his character, experience and practical wisdom, rather than by his commitment to certain general obligations or the consequences of his actions, which is suggested by deontological or teleological ethics respectively.

²⁸⁵ See Nussbaum (1986) for a comment of why “*philia*” cannot simply be translated as “friendship” (328, 354).

But even if there are advantages to this way of describing our moral psychology, focusing on character rather than on universal rules, this commitment to appearances is strangely at odds with some of our other moral intuitions. Focusing on what is generally considered to be good does not make a clear enough distinction between the ways in which we may think that something is truly good or beautiful and think that it merely seems to be so. It is true that Aristotle also offers criteria for distinguishing genuine *philia* from other ways of liking someone or something. Friendship, to him, involves the mutual recognition that one wishes the other good for his own sake and not, say, the pleasure or utility he brings (Aristotle 1954, 1155b28ff). Even so, we may think that satisfying these outer criteria of mutual well-wishing does not capture the significance another human being has to me in love. There are relations that we could describe in this fashion without regarding them as friendships, and there are friendships in which we may question someone's love even if these conditions appear to be satisfied on the outside. The whole idea of giving general criteria for what it is to love or be friends with someone may be criticized for leaving out the inherently *particular* character of love and friendship.

Therefore, it may be argued that this version of ethics, rather than merely describing goodness or morality, presupposes and prescribes a certain view of it. This, again, is not anything Aristotle would deny. To be able to appreciate the virtues, Aristotle emphasizes that we need to possess some of our own. Although I would not put this realization in the exact same terms, it is indeed important. Whatever we say about morality, it will to some extent reveal what we are willing to accept as moral beings ourselves. It does, however, confront us with a question that concerns not only the correctness of his description of morality but addresses the kind of morality he is giving voice to. The question that is called to the fore is not whether his ethics is descriptive of our (moral) life, but in *what kind of life* it is appropriate to describe one's moral concerns in such a way. What kind of attitude towards life does this view of morality express?

The image of the virtuous person one is left with after reading Aristotle is of someone relatively accomplished and self-sufficient, having a certain position in society, being an object of praise and admiration. (In a similar manner, one may feel that Nussbaum's philosophy also speaks to a distinct class of people, well-read in the Classics with a distinguished taste for fine literature.) This imagery, as well as the emphasis on appearance, is not surprising considering that

the morality of ancient Greece to a great extent was a morality of honour. What may strike one as surprising is rather the amount of positive response this reading has met with in modern moral philosophy. This is especially surprising considering that it is done against the backdrop of a culture and tradition which has mainly been influenced by a religion which, despite the impact Greek thinking had on early Christian theology, advocates a morality of love.²⁸⁶

Whatever we conclude on this note, we are left with the question whether this understanding of morality is indeed illuminating when it comes to love. The general framework in which morality is discussed within the Aristotelian account is built around terms such as “excellence” and “admiration”, “risk” and “balance”. It is questionable how suitable this framework is for conceptualizing love. In its emphasis on self-sufficiency, the Aristotelian account takes the individual as its starting point. Even if Nussbaum emphasizes that Aristotle bases human excellence on the social nature of the human being, claiming that to him “all of excellence has an other-related aspect” and that “personal love and political association are not only important components of the good human life but also necessary for the continued flourishing of good character generally” (Nussbaum 1986, 418), the focus is still on the individual person. It asks what it takes for me to flourish, to be a virtuous person. The goodness of love and other people is considered to be relative to their ability to strengthen my character.

The focus of love, however, as I have tried to show throughout this work, is rather related to others. It involves the recognition that “something other than oneself is real” (Murdoch 1997), that others constitute a reality that is independent of me and that they may matter to me in ways that cannot be captured in terms of merely “wanting their good for their own sake”. It is only to be expected that an account of love which takes this other-relatedness as its starting-point will make use of quite different words and concepts than the one emphasizing virtues.

²⁸⁶ Hannes Nykänen (2002) has discussed these aspects of Christian and Greek morality more thoroughly. One reason for turning to the ancient Greek conception of morality in the attempt to build an ethical system can, of course, be seen in the wish to turn a way from a religious conception of morality to an ethics that is able to make more universal claims. At least Nussbaum, in her later writings, is officially committed to the attempt to formulate a humanist ethics which is valid in a plurality of cultures and against different backgrounds.

This is not to say that there are certain ways in which we can or should talk about love and others in which it is not possible. The question is rather what it may mean to talk about love in these different ways. What does love come to mean if we conceptualize it in terms of virtues? Is this the kind of meaning we see in love? The introductory poem by Erich Fried expresses with striking clarity the different meanings love may have for us depending on our point of departure and the attitudes we take to it. Depending on whether we approach the prospect of love from the perspective of reason and calculation, fear and pride, it may strike us as unreasonable, unfortunate, painful or laughable. Speaking from experience it may even sound impossible. Becoming clear about our starting point, the words we use to approach love, is therefore of immense importance, since it affects the outcome of our investigations.

The need for asking in what framework one begins one's discussions also concerns the more general framework in which philosophers discuss love. Iris Murdoch criticizes the notion that a philosophical analysis of the mind could provide us with a good understanding of morality. She cites Stuart Hampshire as saying "that 'it is the constructive task of a philosophy of mind to provide a set of terms in which ultimate judgements of value can be very clearly stated'." (Murdoch 1997, 300). She concludes:

In this understanding of it, philosophy of mind is the background to moral philosophy, the reasons for this are to be sought in current philosophy of mind and in the fascinating power of a certain picture of the soul. One suspects that philosophy of mind has not in fact been performing the task, which Professor Hampshire recommends, of sorting and classifying fundamental moral issues; it has rather been imposing upon us a particular value judgement in the guise of a theory of human nature. (Murdoch 1997, 300)

Further, she suggests that

an attempt to produce, if not a comprehensive analysis, at least a rival soul picture which covers a greater or a different territory should make new places for philosophical reflection. We would like to know what, as moral agents, we have got to do because of logic, what we have got to do because of human nature, and what we can choose to do. Such a programme is easy to state and perhaps impossible to carry out. But even to discover what, under these headings we *can* achieve certainly demands a much more complex and subtle conceptual system than any which we can find readily available. (Murdoch 1997, 300)

Lars Hertzberg has suggested that we read Murdoch as emphasizing the need for a give- and take relationship between morality and psychology, or between moral philosophy and the philosophy of mind. I have great sympathy with such a reading, considering that I in many places see my investigations as starting off at the intersection of these two branches of philosophy. By paying attention to how many questions, such as questions of identity, emotions, beliefs, desires and understanding, which have often been discussed under the heading of a philosophy of the mind, have a moral dimension, I have wanted to show how an understanding of these questions as moral questions may transform our understanding of these aspects of our life in the philosophy of mind. At the same time, many of my discussions about the role of moral philosophy with regards to questions about love have benefited from investigations that have primarily been conducted in the philosophy of mind.²⁸⁷

What I have wanted to show to be problematic, however, and I think this is also something at which Murdoch's argument is aimed, is the conviction that one could solve questions in moral philosophy by attending to questions in the philosophy of mind. It may seem that the philosophy of mind provides us with a more neutral starting point than moral philosophy when it comes to giving grounds for how we live. This picture, however, is illusory.²⁸⁸ It is not meaningful to understand the question concerning the relation between love and goodness as simply being a question about the part love has to play in the good life; whether it contributes to it or is an intrinsic part of it. We need to ask what kind of meaning speaking about goodness has in love, in the first place. Thus, the question I want to pursue is what it may mean to understand the relation between love and goodness, happiness or meaningfulness as an internal relation. In other words, in what ways is our concept of goodness and happiness dependent on our understanding of love?

One problem with the Aristotelian account is that it takes the meanings of these concepts for granted. Thinking that we may find

²⁸⁷ One of the most central themes here, of course, is the rejection of understanding emotions or thoughts as a matter of mental states, and the stress instead on the use of these words in our life.

²⁸⁸ G.E.M. Anscombe's paper "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1981) offers the explicit suggestion that we should abstain from doing moral philosophy before we have worked out a satisfactory philosophy of psychology. However, there is reason to inquire what conception of a philosophy of psychology is really entailed in her claim.

out what goodness and happiness are by simply considering what is commonly thought to be good, assumes that our understanding of these words is in order. This ignores the many ways in which our understanding of goodness and happiness may deepen through (a discussion of) love. I have quoted Raimond Gaita (1999) saying that “we sometimes learn that something is precious only by regarding it in the light of someone’s love” (24). His point is, to begin with, a reminder about the ways in which the love of another person may awaken me to the preciousness of what is loved. But, it also has more far reaching implications. We may say that we only learn what it is for something to be precious or good by responding to it and being able to regard it in the light of love. To again quote Wittgenstein, “Sie zeigt einem überhaupt — wenn man sie hat — was großer Wert ist” (2000, Item 133 Page 8v). Love, as it were, *transforms* our concepts of goodness and happiness by showing how these are dependent on the existence of other people and the joy we experience with them.

Here I also see a difference between the answers Aristotle and Socrates gave to the question “How should we live?” Socrates’ and through him Plato’s, concern for these questions is mainly of a conceptual kind. The questions they raise are what it means to lead a good life, and how our understanding of that life is connected with other aspects of our life, wisdom, beauty, truth and love. “In the Symposium what brings the soul in contact with absolute beauty, the form of the beautiful, is *love*.” (Dilman 1992, 25) Plato presents us with a critical examination of what the good life entails, an examination which ends with the endorsement of a life of the soul by contrast to a life of the senses, the appearances and pleasures of the body.

As Dilman points out in an interesting discussion of Plato’s *Phaedo*, Plato’s denunciation of appearances (which Aristotle took as his object of investigation) does not only have an epistemological character leading to, or stemming from, his metaphysics of the forms as a criticism of empiricism. It is first and foremost a moral rejection.

For Socrates the deceptiveness of the senses is the deceptiveness of a life with the senses, a life in which pleasure, gratification and self-aggrandisement are given pride of place. The deception here is moral and not perceptual deception. (Dilman 1992, 44)

Rather than finding our path towards a good life in the “appearances” of our life, Socrates, who of course is the opposite of an aesthetic,

emphasizes the contemplative search for truth and purity of heart.²⁸⁹ The aim of this purification of the soul is 'separation from the body', again in a moral sense,²⁹⁰ which is found in the detachment from destructive emotions, although not from all emotions (Dilman 1992, 89, 98), and in the detachment from one's self, in the sense of one's self-assertiveness. The question that is raised is what we want to form the center of our life.

We may well think that the contemplative ideal of reflecting on the forms of goodness and beauty that Socrates offers as an answer to what should form this center is too cold. One may be deterred by the fact that it is ideas and not other people that form the center of the lives of the Platonic lovers, and ask, as I have already done, whether there is place for personal relationships in Plato's account.²⁹¹ As Nussbaum does, one may wonder whether this is really what we want to fill our lives with. At this point, there is also no need to take a stand on the morality that Plato and Socrates recommend. Bringing up the Socratic account has rather been a way of showing a contrast to the Aristotelian account of morality. Furthermore, it helps to bring out how an investigation of our moral concepts cannot be seen as distinct from formulating a *moral vision*, although we may be of different minds as to what that vision allows us to see.

III IDEAL MEANING

My greatest disagreement with Plato is the extent to which he identifies clarifying the concept of goodness and its relations to other concepts with describing (or prescribing) an ideal. Finding the wisdom of the good life in the contemplative knowledge of the ideal, perfect, and eternal forms, to me, involves an obvious confusion. This is also a problem for Aristotle if yet in another form. Even if he builds his ideal of the virtuous person on our experiences of such men, he still presupposes that goodness (and love) has a certain form. In this, both Plato and Aristotle are testifying to the Greek morality of honour, paying attention to the form of goodness rather than the meaning it has for us.

²⁸⁹ Dilman states that there are important similarities between Kierkegaard and Socrates in this matter.

²⁹⁰ Cf. chapter 6, p. 238.

²⁹¹ See chapter 6.

The emphasis on ideals in relation to love is problematic in at least two respects: (1) linguistically and (2) morally. First, the idea that our concepts function as a kind of ideal type against which we test particular instances, provides a problematic picture of language. This idea takes different forms in philosophy.

(1) There is the notion that we somehow derive our concepts from our experiences. Learning a concept is regarded as acquiring a general image of the particular instances. One thinks that “the man who has learnt to understand a general term, say, the term ‘leaf’, has thereby come to possess a kind of general picture of a leaf, as opposed to pictures of particular leaves” (Wittgenstein 1965a, 18). This seems to be the picture of meaning Aristotle has in mind. It is also reproduced in the notion that concepts are representations.

(2) There is the idea that all instances that we call by the same name, share some common property by virtue of which we are justified in applying the same word to them. This is the picture Plato offers us, regarding the objects of our life as partaking in the absolute, perfect and eternal forms, and, thus, only being vague reflections of them.

(3) A more modern version of (2) is the notion that we have a more or less rigid list of criteria by reference to which we attribute concepts to different situations and that philosophy clarifies the criteria needed for correctly applying these.²⁹²

All these notions set out to explain how it is that our concepts have meaning. How is it that we can use the same word in very different situations, and in contexts in which we did not learn to use it? The assumption that this is something that can and needs to be explained leads philosophers down the road of metaphysics; one is convinced that we are in need of some general theory about how it is that language has meaning. These accounts also share the assumption that language is dependent on something behind what we say, a referent, a representation or an ideal, a structure, to have meaning. The “meaning” of the word is that to which it refers. As I have repeatedly tried to show, this notion obscures more matters than it clarifies, leading to an infinite regress. If we hope to explain why we take different instances as expressive of love by introducing the notion of a referent or a set of criteria, which gives the word “love” meaning in

²⁹² Cf. Griffiths’s (1997) suggestion that meaning consists in our forming theories of causal mechanisms to explain why different objects belong to the same group.

each instance (or rather *is* its meaning), we are still left to explain how it is that we come to recognize this referent as the “meaning” of love. To borrow Wittgenstein’s famous picture, it is as if we would be buying the same paper over and over again to make sure that it says what it says (Wittgenstein 1997, §265).

This leads us back to my conviction that the task of philosophy is not to offer criteria for what is love in particular situations. There is no given form or standard of love against which we may try out different instances to see if they measure up to being love. Rather we should be open, in our philosophizing, to see how what we in particular situations may be willing to call love may change our understanding of the concept as well as the “criteria” we may give in a particular situation to explain why we want to call something love.

Moreover, rather than looking for the meaning behind the word, it is a task for philosophy to clarify what it is we speak about when we speak about “meaning”. It is a glaring failure that philosophers discussing the meaning of words neglect to reflect upon our different usages of the word itself, not to mention how seldom we actually use it in the specialized sense philosophers are mostly considering. Such an investigation would be crucial to becoming clear about what it is that we are asking for at the moments we speak about “meaning”. One simply cannot assume that we ask for the same thing when we say; “What does this word mean?”, “What is the meaning of this poem?”, “What do you mean?”, “You can’t mean that!” or, “This means a lot to me”.

Whereas the first question may be answered by checking a dictionary, it is clear that the second cannot be answered by the same procedure. Neither do we capture what is involved in the attempt to articulate and clarify one’s thoughts that is requested in the third case in such a way. Furthermore, the failure to render one’s thoughts in an intelligible way that is addressed in asking what someone means is different from the kind of deprecation that is marked by saying, “You can’t mean that!” My disassociating myself from certain ideas in such cases, such as racist or homophobic statements, is not necessarily because they lack sense. On the contrary, by agreeing that they are “ideas”, I admit that they are intelligible. My utterance rather constitutes a rejection of the thought that anyone, least of all *you*, could entertain such ideas.

The matter of formulating an ideal is even more problematic in its moral dimension. Now, questioning the idea of ideals in morality may strike many as surprising. Could we not say that morality consists

precisely in striving to live up to certain ideals? Dilman criticizes the metaphysical pull in Plato's attempt to describe what he primarily sees as moral questions. He argues that Plato uses moral language to express the relation between the objects of sense and the ideal forms, saying that the former "'fall short' of [the latter] and only 'approximate' them [...] 'imitate' or 'copy' them." (Dilman 1992, 63). He takes the example of adding the series $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, and so on, and states:

One can say that 1 is the ideal limit to which the sum of the series $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{16} . . .$ approaches or approximates without ever reaching it. One may express this anthropomorphically by saying that this sum 'strives to become 1 but in vain'. [...]

This language, however [...] is more fitting in expressing the relation between human conduct and the moral values in terms of which it may be judged. (Dilman 1992, 67-68)

Dilman is perfectly right in criticizing Plato for bringing in an antropomorphic vocabulary in describing the relationship between geometrical forms and mathematical paradigms and the objects that surround us. However, we may ask whether this is a good picture even in the case of morality. Of course, the words "striving in vain" belong to the human sphere of morality and not to the mathematical sphere of proofs. But some of Dilman's remarks about "the relation between certain moral ideals and human conduct" (1992, 102) sound as if we could in some way actually formulate a moral ideal, in other words, have an idea of perfect justice or goodness against which we judge our often lacking actions. He remarks that "in this life perhaps only the saint can attain such an ideal [perfect justice and wisdom]" (Dilman 1992, 88). He speaks of human conduct as falling "short of these ideals, however much the author or agent of this conduct may strive to emulate the ideals in his life, or at least measure his conduct in terms of them." (Dilman 1992, 102).

I do not want to say that we should settle for anything less than "perfection" in morality. I do not suggest that we sell out on the demands of goodness, love or morality with the sigh, "Nobody's perfect". I do, however, want to question what place a conception of "perfection" or "ideals" holds in morality. The suggestion that we have an ideal picture of what love should be and that we in our life try to emulate this ideal is not particularly helpful. There are better ways of understanding the kind of demands that are involved in love than as some standards against which we measure our conduct.

The problem in such a picture is largely connected with the place an idea of a specific form gains in it. It suggests that we could somehow know what perfect justice or love looks like or that it is intelligible to think that we could have a conception of the perfect human being. It treats the concept of a human being in the same way as geometrical concepts, as if there were not many crucial distinctions between them. Whereas we have a conception of the necessary features of a perfect circle, there is no such equivalent when we speak of human beings, love or morality.

We may compare drawings of circles with each other and see which of them best matches our definition of a circle. "This circle is almost perfect", we say of the circle in which the length of the radius approximates equality at every point. With the help of this definition we distinguish circles from ellipses, and so on. What we mean by a perfect or an ideal circle is here related to how well an actual circle corresponds to our definition of a circle. Nevertheless, there is something odd and metaphysical in the idea that our definition of a circle presents us with something perfect. Seeing a circle as perfect, as it were, is first and foremost an aesthetical judgement, whereas it may be quite irrelevant how well an actual drawing of a circle corresponds to the definition of a circle in practice. Furthermore, what we take as a circle, or the degree of perfection we strive for in our drawings, depends on the circumstances and the purposes for which we make the drawing. Sketching the design of a poster I say, "I thought we would add some circles here". The circles that I draw may be rather egg-shaped than circular, but they still fulfil my purposes perfectly. You see what I want to do.

Turning to human beings and our moral lives, such definitions have no clear part to play. This is not only because it is more difficult to find a perfect human being, or because only a saint could attain the ideal of perfection, but because the notion of perfection in this context is confused. It is difficult to see what it is supposed to latch onto. Undoubtedly there are many things we set out to do but fail to do; you may wish you were more loving, caring or considerate to other people, and realize that you have acted quite contrary to your intentions, I may feel that I did not measure up to the demands of a situation. But the stress here is not on our failing to live up to an ideal, an image of what it is to be loving, caring or considerate, but on your and my failure to respond to another with love, care and consideration. It is not that we work with an image of what it is to be like this, and then test our actual doings against this picture,

recognizing to different extents that we did not live up to it. On the contrary, having such an image about how I or you should be to be good or loving involves a corruption of morality. By centering on an *image*, and not on the particular demands of the situation, our focus moves from others to ourselves, inviting us to think that we could escape our responsibility in every new situation by fulfilling some given conditions.

Dilman is not blind to this distinction between mathematics and geometry and morality. He states that the kind of hindrance our senses may be to attaining moral knowledge, according to Socrates, involves the ways in which we may be morally deceived. The sense in which our “body” can be said to lead us astray, here, as I have already stated, is moral in character (Dilman 1992, 102). Nevertheless, he gives too much to the Socratic stress on moral *knowledge*. He points out that the kind of knowledge which is involved in morality is distinct from epistemic knowledge, and rather presents it as a form of wisdom. “[T]he moral knowledge which he [Socrates] identifies with virtue is a form of love” (Dilman 1992, 88). He also emphasizes that our understanding of ideals cannot be separated from the part they play in our life. “The ideals themselves make certain demands on the person’s life and mode of existence, and they cannot be realized in his actions, in his conduct, until he takes those demands seriously” (Dilman 1992, 88).

Nevertheless, the emphasis on what is involved in knowing these ideals turns our attention away from the fact that our concern is often enough not to *know* what (perfect) justice, wisdom or love is but to *act* justly, wisely and lovingly as well as to *react* to others in such a way. Drawing on the Socratic presupposition that we would do what is right if we only knew it, that is, assuming that we are good but just in need of knowledge, the emphasis on knowing conceals the ways in which our moral difficulties may better be described as refraining to do what we are already, more or less, aware of being wrong.²⁹³ If we are searching for deeper insights into this aspect of our moral life St Paul is a much better instructor than Plato. “For the good that I would

²⁹³ There is a different reading one may give to this notion, which I have tried to unveil in my previous discussion. (See chapter 6 in particular.) There is, one could say, a tension in the suggestion that one *knowingly* does the wrong thing. We usually dress up our wrongdoing in finer clothes, although we, to some extent may be said to know that it is wrong. There is, as it were, an element of self-deception in most evil deeds.

I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (The Letter to the Romans, 7:19).

Moreover, the emphasis on knowing an ideal gives the impression that we could make sense of an ideal as existing outside of our practices. One is tempted to think that the notions of "perfect justice", "wisdom" or "love" refer to some ideal state to which our actions converge, but still never fully reach, a utopic place in which evil and wrongs are extinct. This also gives us a clue why one would think it impossible to find "perfect justice" or "perfect love" in an actual case, for is it not quite impossible to imagine a state in which perfect justice and love prevails. But, allow me to object, it is the idea of "justice", "love" or "wisdom" as some kinds of state that leads us to reject such notions, whereas it is precisely that idea, that is, that "love" or "justice" refers to certain states, which is in need of rejection.

It is true that we are accustomed to different pictures and discussions about paradise, but it is also true that such a notion mostly serves as a contrast to our life. It is a dreamed possibility that functions to articulate some of our deepest hopes and concerns but at the same time it can be said to exclude much of what makes our life a human life. This is not a way of arguing that human life is fragile in the sense that Nussbaum has pointed out, although I do think that her point has some bearing on this discussion. Rather I want to question the intelligibility of conceptualizing the concept of paradise in terms of an ideal state of the world as well as the sense in picturing this as telling us something about our human life.

First, it has been argued that this conception of an ideal state of the world presupposes a picture of life as static (Hertzberg 2005). The ones who set out to "change the world" according to any utopian model has to assume a certain permanence in the ways things would be without the change and also in the world after the change (Hertzberg 2005, 2). They do not allow for change in the sense that change, as we understand the concept, may be both for the better and for the worse. They want to change something, the world, "that is in itself essentially constituted by change" (Hertzberg 2005, 2). In that way, they reject the indeterminacy that is a characterizing feature of the whole hurly-burly of our life.

Secondly, and this attaches to the first point, it is difficult to see what meaning love, goodness or justice would have in a life in which evil and the temptation to do wrong and act unjustly would be excluded. Our life encompasses the possibility of doing both good and evil and much of the value and meaning we find in goodness and love

is related to our acknowledging the temptations that may be exercised on us by the alternatives. To borrow another Biblical example it can be said that the humanity of Christ is shown precisely in his being succumbed to the enticements of temptation. His goodness is "proven" by his ability to resist temptation rather than by his freedom from it. If he had not been touched by temptation in the first place the lessons we might learn from the New Testament would be very different.²⁹⁴

In this way I find it problematic to think that we might extract the meaning of words such as "justice", "love" or "human being" from the life and practices we live. There is no way of determining whether some action was just or loving apart from the particular cases of our life in which we laugh, cry, rejoice in or turn our backs at each other, share experiences, withdraw in our own perspective or break each others' heart. This includes also that we cannot determine what these concepts mean in particular situations without ourselves being involved in them. It is in our life that these words gain meaning and make sense, a life in which we share concerns and reactions (and also meaning) with others.

The sense in which I would, therefore, propose that we understand the meaning of "love", "a good life", "justice", that is, the different uses we make of these words in our lives, is not in terms of ideals but as *demands*, or less forcefully as *possibilities* in our life. The sense in which we may find it important to live in the light of truth, beauty or goodness, is a recurring demand to be good and speak truthfully in every particular situation, being *responsive* to, and *responsible* for the meaning with which each situation addresses us in the light of love. It is only in these situations that we may determine what it is for an action to be good or just. In our reactions to them it may be said that our own love is revealed.

These considerations may also release us from the misgivings we may have about speaking about the "perfection" or "purity" of

²⁹⁴ In this respect, one may also remark upon a striking difference between Socrates and Jesus, and what one may take as possible reactions to their quite similar fates. Whereas Jesus' cry at crucifixion rings true to what we may easily recognize as human despair, the ease with which Socrates accepts his death sentence adds to the oddness of his character. The sense in which both of their reactions can be seen as expressive of an attitude of love and to life (although quite distinct) testifies to the different meanings we may give to the concepts (and thereby a constitutive part of these phenomena) in our life. See Barabas (1986) for a reading of this aspect of Socrates.

someone's actions in concrete situations. If we do not think of "perfection" or "purity" as permanent states that we may or may not obtain in our lifetime, but pay heed to the absolute character of saying, "Now justice has been done" (in other words, in this case, not once and for all), or, "That was a truly beautiful thing to do", (notice in this case how beauty and goodness converge) we do not need to feel hesitation at any of these formulations. They give us occasion to marvel at the unconditional character of these aspects of our life.

This unconditional character in which we say "That's unjust!" or "That must be true love!" may also tempt us to speak about ideals or perfection in the sense of platonic forms. The moral necessities may strike one as necessary in much the same way as the laws of mathematics. This feeling easily leads us to metaphysics, we try to give universal grounds for our practices (in mathematics and in love), we imagine that there must be some kind of logical link between the states of the world and the concepts we use. This is an idea that I have showed is misconceived. What is more, it appears that this philosophical move diverts us from the real problems at hand, in other words, the moral problems we are faced with as individuals. Thinking that the object of philosophy is always giving grounds for our actions and life reveals the same moral temptation as thinking that one has done enough by reaching a certain standard. It invites one to think that it is possible to free oneself from the demands of love, and to, morally speaking, do enough. We, as philosophers, say, "In an ideal world this would not happen", as if we were not ourselves responsible for the kind of world it is. This is a real problem for Plato, and for his longing for forms that exist outside of our life, since it makes him ignorant of the ways in which moral demands only arise in particular situations.

IV "LIVE HAPPILY!"

Let me end by considering a remark by Wittgenstein to see of what help it may be in wrapping up my thoughts. In the Notebooks he writes: "It seems one can't say anything more than: Live happily!" (Wittgenstein 1961, 78e). The line follows some comments on how to regard the relations between goodness and evil, the will and the world, in which some formulations also appear about the way in which the world of the happy man is different from that of the unhappy man (cf. Wittgenstein 1993, §6.43). It is not particularly

surprising that the remark is not included in *Tractatus*, since it is not a philosophical remark in any strict sense. Nevertheless, it is worth considering to clarify the kind of work philosophy can be said to do when it comes to the questions about what kind of life we lead (with all the indeterminacy in speaking about a “we” in this case).

I have criticized the notion that we in any way could determine the meaning of love “from the outside” and have questioned the intelligibility of making sense of love’s meaning independently of who we are and what life we live, which is a move that is often made within both scientific and philosophical investigations. In particular I have criticized the attempts to draw conclusions about how we should live out of these distanced considerations. We misunderstand the questions at hand if we think that (science or) philosophy could provide justification for why certain aspects of our life should be perceived as good, if we think that it could offer grounds for our moral actions, or that it should dictate what aspects are essential to a happy life. Rather I have wanted to show that the question of meaning only makes sense in the context of our lives. It is internally related to the question about what meaning we see in our life, in the sense of what is *meaningful* to us. In what ways does love give my life meaning and with what meaning does it endow my life? Saying that love makes life meaningful, one could say, is not a judgement about the value of love. Rather it is an expression of the value or significance love has in my life.

This criticism of any attempt to locate meaning outside our life or present grounds for a certain kind of life is connected with Wittgenstein’s conviction that philosophy should not be prescriptive but only descriptive. Philosophy should only serve to elucidate the kinds of life we live. It should, as the *Tractatus* tells us, know when to keep quiet. This idea is also present in his above remark. Philosophy, so to say, should not tell us whether we should be happy or not, it should not offer grounds for why it is better to be happy than unhappy, and so on. It may only clarify what it may mean to speak about happiness and unhappiness in different circumstances.

In a philosophical discussion, one may, for instance, point out that happiness is not a distinct feature of our life, an inner object or feeling, a smile on your face. The sense in which our lives are happy or unhappy, one may further remark, shows in the ways we make sense of life. Happiness or unhappiness are aspects of the structure of our world, how we react towards failures and risks. One could perhaps, tongue in cheek, distinguish the happy man from the unhappy man

by pointing to the first's propensity to stand behind the attitude, "Every failure is an opportunity.", whereas the second's attitude to life is better expressed in the conviction, "Every opportunity is a possible failure."

Philosophy, if I try to spell out the consequences of such an understanding of it, may in this way clarify what may count as alternatives in a human life. It cannot, however, tell us which alternative to choose. The onus is still on us to be happy if we want that kind of life. At most, philosophers may utter the wish that people be "happy". But this is not anything they do as philosophers in particular, but something anyone of us may wish our fellow beings as human beings ourselves. This, I take it, is what Dilman wants to point out in the distinction he often makes between philosophical questions and questions of life. (See e.g. Dilman 1998a, 249-264.)

In part I agree with this description of the place of philosophy in moral life. But I think there is more to the matter than this. There is something wrong in thinking that we could sketch the conceptual contours of a happy life and then leave it to the reader to decide whether or not she wants to make this her life. It is as if it would be possible to scan the alternatives and place them side by side, as if such a project would not be faced with many internal difficulties. "You may choose to be happy, but you may also choose not to." This fails to capture the depth of Wittgenstein's insight that the happy and the unhappy man do not really live in the same world. It does not attend to the ways in which another person's world may feel like a mystery to me, or the sense in which we may feel that our worlds do not touch each other.

This is not to say that we cannot speak to each other and that our worlds form subjective wholes that disable communication. Rather it is an attempt to capture what one may think is an existential experience, the feeling that certain aspects of another person's life, or life as a whole, is not open to me. I may feel that I cannot understand you in the sense that I come to share your reaction. In that way, it is too weak to say that I choose to lead a particular kind of life. In many cases I see no real alternative. Of course, different things may happen that change my world or what I see as possibilities in it. My meetings with other people, tragedies that befall me, may have a life-altering effect on me. Just think of how the feeling of grief may be expressed by the thought that there was a sort of life I lived that is now not even a possibility:

[...]
 He was my North, my South, my East and West,
 My working week and my Sunday rest,
 My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
 I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
 Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,
 Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
 For nothing now can ever come to any good.
 (Auden 1999, "Funeral Blues")

Furthermore, presenting the division between these different ways of perceiving life as a matter of choice, leaves out how the philosophical investigation may serve to deepen my understanding of a concept, by showing it up in new clothes and provide ways of making sense of my experiences that were not previously within my reach. The attempt to show how our understanding of goodness and happiness, and about what life is as a whole, is deepened and transformed through love, has been a central aim of my discussion.

What is lacking from an account that sees the philosophical work of clarification as purely descriptive—in the sense that the description makes no normative claims on us—is the recognition that coming to see something as a meaningful description cannot be separated from recognizing the demands that the possibilities of understanding life in that manner makes on me. By coming to grasp the concept of "goodness", by encountering it in the form of an unconditional act of love, I come alive not only to other people acting in this way, but to the possibility of acting in a similar way myself in another situation.

I do not mean that responding to these demands necessarily implies acting in accordance with them. There are many ways in which my acknowledgement of these demands may take the form of a refusal to act on them. I realize that I could do something, but I refrain from doing it, for some special reason. "It wouldn't have changed much anyway." "Society should care for homeless people, not individual citizens." "I would have donated money but right now I needed it for myself."²⁹⁵

My point is rather that recognizing the demands of love gives my further actions a distinct meaning. Whatever I think or do about them,

²⁹⁵ In that respect I do not think that my account can be properly blamed for giving expression to a form of what D.Z. Phillips in discussions have called "moral optimism" (see Hertzberg 2002).

I am implicated by my recognizing this as a possibility in my life. I open myself to the criticism of acting selfishly and failing in my relationships to the people I love. To recognize love as a possibility in a human life, then, is to recognize the demands it may make on my own life. In the sense that I see love as a possibility it is not open to me choose what to do. I am confronted by the question of what such an understanding makes of me, who I am or become in the light of these demands. They may force me to recognize my own small-mindedness, fear and difficulty to love.

Thus, learning about the concept cannot be separated from learning about myself, about my life, my world. This may also be a reason why a conceptual investigation into love in many cases is much more difficult to take on than any other philosophical investigation. Even if we agree that “philosophy is always work on oneself”²⁹⁶ the kind of work that is required in an investigation of love, or moral philosophy on the whole, involves oneself in a different way than it may seem that investigations, in for instance, the philosophy of mind may seem to do at first glance.²⁹⁷

The point that my understanding of a concept reveals something about who I am, and my morality, can be taken in at least two ways. These come out by considering the kind of disagreements there may be between given different descriptions of a situation and of a concept. The first kind of disagreement concerns situations in which I recognize something as a meaningful description of a concept but do not accept it as an appropriate description of a certain situation. I agree that bullying is wrong, and that recognizing it as an aspect of two children’s dealings with each other would require an intervention. In this case, however, I do not see bullying in their actions but only rough playfulness.²⁹⁸ Now, if you were to start

²⁹⁶ Cf. p. 23.

²⁹⁷ It may be said that the work it requires is moral in a different sense than the philosophical work in other areas. The possibility of discussing “desires”, “beliefs” etc. on a rather general level, makes it easier to think that one could make sense of that language from a neutral perspective. But here as well, it is important to bring back the words to their use, that is, recognize that we *use* them and what this implies for our understanding of language. This is one sense in which we may regard philosophy as therapeutic, in the way that some philosophers have described the emphasis of Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

²⁹⁸ I borrow the example from the introduction to a Swedish collection of essays in moral philosophy by philosophers working in the tradition of Wittgenstein (Backström and Torrkulla 2001) The introduction serves as an important contribution in its own right, in its lucid presentation of the major ways in which this way of doing

discerning a pattern in my application of the words “bullying” and “playing roughly”, seeing, for instance, that I apply the first quite scarcely, but use the latter more freely, you may well think that this reveals a certain callousness or harshness in my attitude towards what is happening to other people. In a similar manner, but considering a different case, you may think that my eagerness to speak about “bullying” in certain situations expresses a greater sensitivity or even paranoia. In this work, I have tried to argue that philosophy has no obvious role in settling such disputes. What we may come to see as an appropriate description of a particular situation has to be settled in conversation, although it is also possible, not to say quite usual, that we leave the situation without reaching any agreement about what the proper understanding of it entails.

These are cases in which we may be said to share the same concept. The only disagreements we have is about its *application*. The second case, I have in mind, however, are situations in which it is not clear to begin with whether we *share an understanding of a concept*. This involves situations in which one would question the meaningfulness of a description of a concept.²⁹⁹ This would be the case if someone testified to not being able to make sense of what I have called the absolute sense in which we use the words “love” or “goodness”, or would argue that contrary to what I have tried to say, love is only a matter of power-relations, a way of serving one’s self-interest or involved with the satisfaction of certain biological needs. Just think of someone who would not be content with the answer, “I love her”, to explain why I would follow the one I love to another continent for the sake of her work: “But why would that be a reason?” Here we are faced with a different kind of difficulty than in the case of deciding whether the children are bullying.³⁰⁰ Our question concerns not only

moral philosophy differs from what the editors call the “standard picture of moral philosophy”.

²⁹⁹ A further question could be whether it is possible to recognize something as a meaningful description of someone else’s love, but not see it as making any difference in my life. How we answer that question, again, depends on what we want to say in particular cases. Sometimes, “You don’t understand”, “I understand that you would see it like that but I wouldn’t/couldn’t!” What is the difference between seeing something and not accepting it as a possible description (expression) of love?

³⁰⁰ Someone may be inclined to ask, “What kind of difficulty is this?” “Is it a difficulty of understanding the concept of ‘love’ or a difficulty of understanding love?” I think this case clearly shows that there is no simple way of separating the two.

what meaning we see in a specific situation, but what meaning the word “love” has for us.

It is fair to say that many of the philosophical difficulties of understanding what somebody wants to say about love and morality are of the latter kind. It is true, of course, that my description of different uses of “love” may be misleading, and misrepresentative of some cases. Here, another may help to point out uses that do not fall under the description I have given, and thereby deepen my understanding of it. Even if my understanding of a concept does not conflict with yours, I may learn something about it through listening to how you would describe it, and gain new insights about the concept from speaking with others. My understanding may deepen by my coming to see new aspects of the word or finding new uses for it in my life. These ways of reminding each other of different uses of our words is also an essential aspect of the philosophical practice. Philosophy could even be seen as a constant effort to understand the meanings of our concepts, by which I mean an attempt to understand and articulate the uses we make of our words in language.

The possibility of such a deepening of concepts also testifies to the ways in which language is shared and meaning can be said to be indeterminate. It is not clear from the start what certain things should mean or what meaning we should see in them. There is, as it were, room for the unhappy and happy man to meet. Even if some of our uses of concepts conflict, others may still be in agreement. This opens for conversation, for changing one’s mind. Nevertheless, there are other cases in which the disagreements about our concepts run deeper. This is particularly the case in questions that involve our moral understanding. I think we can only take it for a fact that there are situations in which our worlds, and our words, do not meet. Our understanding of concepts differs at times, in the same way that our lives differ.³⁰¹

³⁰¹ What do these kinds of disagreements amount to in our life? One aspect of rejecting a description of the concept of love as meaningless is that it involves a rejection of the person who gives expression to this kind of understanding. And it is clear that moral philosophy often involve these kinds of rejection. I reject a certain view as callous, selfish, overly idealizing etc. In many of the first cases, however, I may think that the account is not seriously put forth as an account of morality. I may suspect that it does not respond to the understanding of morality that comes to show in the person’s own life. I do not propose any solution to this. I simply want to point out one difficulty that is connected with doing moral philosophy.

This realization may, of course, still leave one searching for a universal understanding, perhaps even more desperately. I would rather see that it left us as a reminder of the need for sincerity. I have tried to show that we cannot separate the question about what love means, from the moral question about what I mean when I speak about love. What is more, I would argue that this question is intimately tied to the question whether I mean what I say. The insight that our understanding may differ, and also change, should urge us to ask what kind of understanding it is possible for us to stand behind. What can I say and mean?

The temptation I have tried to expose is thinking that we could solve questions of meaning without having to take a stand on it, or start with our own life. My point has not been that we are the ones who create meaning or that the meaning is somehow in us. It is not that I give meaning to my words by some kind of inner act. The meaning of my words does not lie in a specific emphasis, or a tone of voice. The question we need to ask ourselves is which concepts, and which uses of a word, have a place in our life. Which concepts serve to articulate our experiences and make sense of our life? To what uses do we want to put our words? The personal dimension of these questions is rather to be found in that they can only be addressed by directing ourselves, as individuals and as philosophers, to the different uses of our words in our relations to each other in our life.

When Wittgenstein leaves out the injunction to be happy in the final version of the *Tractatus*, I would suggest that he does not leave out happiness as a distinct feature of philosophy. The command to “live happily” is repeated in a different form when Wittgenstein in the final paragraph of the *Tractatus* tells us that we should only say what can be said and remain in silence about that of which we cannot speak (Wittgenstein 1961, §7).³⁰² It serves to remind us that there are ways of doing philosophy that are revelatory of our unhappiness. In the attempts, familiar to much philosophy, to control the investigation, to order language or construct systems in accordance with one’s own presuppositions of the object of study, Wittgenstein, saw the characteristics of the unhappy man, as well as the root of many of our philosophical problems. The unifying attempt to find one meaning

³⁰² I would also claim that this command lives on in his later philosophy. Part of the discontentment Wittgenstein expresses against some of the ideas of the *Tractatus* in *Philosophical Investigations*, can be seen as reflecting the sense in which the former, in its emphasis on a strict logic of a formal language, was still an “unhappy work”.

that is independent of ourselves involves a refusal of the indeterminacy and variety of life.

In this respect Wittgenstein's philosophy is also expressive of a love of life. It takes love, as it were, to appreciate the diversity of our life. Only then, one could say, do we see the world and language—for in this case they cannot be separated—as it is; bustling, complex, sometimes contradicting and paradoxical, sometimes immediately clear. It is in this recognition I also find the depth of Fried's introductory poem. There are many ways in which we may try to make our world conform to our understanding of it; "Love says, it is what it is."

This is not to deny the struggle of sometimes holding on to the meaning we see in life. If there is one drawback with the picture of the happy man and the unhappy man, it is that it easily gives us the feeling that these are two different types of men. It does not fully show the ways in which we are all more or less happy and unhappy, and how these different perspectives may compete in our life. At times we see the place for using certain words, we see what it would mean to make sense of our life in this way. At other times the meaning is lost on us.

EPILOGUE: MEANING

THE END

*Why did he write to her,
"I can't live with you?"
And why did she write to him,
"I can't live without you"?
For he went west, she went east,
And they both lived.
Carl Sandburg*

*We were meant to be, supposed to be, but we lost it
Avril Lavigne (2004)*

I will end these considerations about the different places questions of meaning may have in love by posing yet another question: If it is true that love constitutes an absolute, eternal perspective, is it intelligible to suggest that love could ever end? Or, from a slightly different point of view: what it is that can be said to end in love? These questions have time and again troubled me throughout my working with these issues. I also have full understanding for anyone who thinks that my considerations would prove to be wrong if the only answer to this question one could draw out of them was that it never makes sense to say that love comes to an end.

Considering that my aim, as I have repeatedly emphasized it, is not to legislate about language or to say what it does or does not make sense to say, it would be odd at this point to deny that we may speak of love coming to an end. Clearly we do often talk about people not loving each other anymore, or people "falling out" of love. Nevertheless, this leaves the question whether saying that love may end involves a misunderstanding or a corruption of love. I can only say that I do not see anything in the grammar of love that would *a priori* make saying that love ends a problematic claim.

In the following I will show how I would tackle the question about what *kind* of question asking whether love can come to an end is, by

drawing on some of the threads of my previous discussions in this part. I will try to show that our concern with the question is not only one that may arise in a specifically philosophical context. It is in many ways related to our personal experience of love, and I will discuss what kind of experiences can be said to give rise to it and of what kind of difficulties it may be expressive.

Although I have criticized Nussbaum's account of the fragility of goodness for neglecting significant aspects of goodness and morality,³⁰³ the "fact" still remains that our lives can be seen as vulnerable to fortune in many ways. Different circumstances play a role in what we come to understand both as love and as failures to love in different relationships. The following considerations will mainly relate to this theme. As Carl Sandburg brilliantly brings out in the introductory poem, there appears to be a conflict between the promises we make in love and the fact that one day we no longer want to be kept to these promises. Exclamations such as "I cannot live without you" or "I will always love you" sound less convincing after one has been left by somebody or has left them.

Thus, even if the promises we make do not serve as factual statements, certain facts may still have the power of drawing the meaning of these promises into question. The fact that I do not keep a promise may make you wonder whether I truly made you a promise. Did I make a *mistake* as to what it was that I was feeling? Or, was it rather that I *lied* to you when I told you that I loved you? Did my declarations of love in any way constitute a betrayal? Just think of the feeling of guilt a husband may experience at rejoicing at something after what appears to be too short a time after the death of his wife, or the guilt he may be plagued by for falling in love with someone else. Or think of the ways in which falling in love with someone other than one's spouse may make one question whether one truly loved one's spouse as deeply as one thought. In what way may these people, in the light of these facts, still maintain that it was love that they felt?

Such feelings may be expressive of ideas that we may easily think of as confused. For one thing, they seem to express a belief that the amount of love that we have to give is limited, that I can only love one person in a deep enough way or that my love for one person may lessen my love for another. We may feel that such concerns are easy to

³⁰³ See chapter 9.

wave off. In the love for children and friends, for instance, loving several people does not by necessity corrupt one's love.

What I want to take hold of in such examples, however, are the ways in which future events are able to change my view of earlier ones. In chapter 8, I remarked that the claim that love is illusory often seems to grow out of the realization that the significance something had for me at a certain point of life had changed. The experience may raise questions as to whether I was wrong to attach the significance to something that I did, whether I really did attach the significance to it that I thought I did, or that I think I should have attached to it.

In reflecting on the different kinds of meanings it may have to understand what has happened in one way or another, it may help to remember the distinctions I made between making a promise and making a prediction in chapter 9. Many times thinking that the facts of the matter resolve the question whether a promise was true conflates promises with predictions. When predicting something, if what I say will happen does not, it means that I made the wrong prediction. In this case, future events determine how we are to take the prediction. The truth or falsity of my prediction depends on how well it corresponds to certain states of affairs.

In this respect, we could say that the grammar of making predictions connects with the grammar of other concepts that relate to our senses, such as "knowing", "seeing" or "hearing". What makes it meaningful to attribute these concepts to other people, we could say, is internally related to the ways things are, or the ways we take them to be. If I assure you that, say, "She knows that the keys are in the top drawer. She'll find them alright," I am at the same time asserting that the keys are there. If they were not, we would not say that either I or she knew where they were. We only *believed* that they were in a certain place. Similarly with seeing and hearing: if I say, "I see a cat up there in the tree", or, "I heard a loud bang", I am at the same time saying, "There is a cat there", or, "There was a loud bang." If there was no cat or bang, my seeing or hearing would only be something that I imagined. Our ways of assessing whether she really knows, whether I saw or heard something, and so on, is in these ways internally related with becoming clear about certain states of affairs. What makes a statement expressive of knowledge rather than belief is not some inner act but the relation of these two statements to how things are.

However, when we turn to our promises of love, the reference to certain states of affairs does not resolve our difficulties in deciding

whether something was love or not, or whether it did indeed end. This is, for one thing, an aspect of the fact that declaring one's love for someone is not only a matter of reporting a current state of affairs, so that if we cannot show, say, that a certain disposition is in place it means that it is not love. When we speak of "true" love, or out of love, it is not mainly a matter of whether certain sentences are true or false. It is a question of *truthfulness*, in which it is the *spirit* in which we speak which matters and not what the words we utter refer to.

The kind of answer we give to the question whether there is an end to love, then, depends on what we understand as love. It seems that it is precisely with concern to love understood as a moral demand and the absolute character love has in virtue of that, that the question about what it is for love to end arises. Understanding what it would be for love as an emotion, or as a relationship, to end is not a problem in the same way. We know what it is for an emotion to begin and end. A flare of anger subsides as quickly as it ignites. My trembling after being scared by a racing car slowly fades away. My joy at getting a scholarship turns into disappointment when I learn that a friend was left without financing.

The same may be said of emotions that we rather understand as long-term dispositions. I realize that I no longer become as upset at someone's recurring indecisiveness as I used to become. You state that the loss of a lover has introduced a melancholic trait in your relationships with other people. Furthermore, we are all familiar with the waxing and waning of relationships, the ways in which we, perhaps, spend periods of time in close relationships with some people, perhaps only to exchange Christmas cards a few years later.

These aspects of love take a specific form and, thus, we may also speak of them as beginning and ending. The promise to love and the demands we see in love, however, are not directed at anything that we could specify, although they arise and have meaning in particular situations. In that sense, they present us with an endless task.

I said that when we speak of predictions what happens in the future determines whether the predictions were true or false. The fact that things do not go as I *promise*, however, does *not* necessarily show that my promise was not true; in other words that *I* was not being true or sincere in making my promise. My sincerity in making a prediction does not determine whether it was true or false, but in promising it is constitutive of what we understand as a promise. Certainly, it may be that someone did not even have the intention of keeping a promise; he was not truthful in giving it. It is, however, simply wrong to say that

when someone does not keep a promise it reveals that their intention to keep it was not sincere. People may be prevented from fulfilling their promises for a number of reasons. There are other obligations, accidents, and the like, which may steer one away from what one promised to do.

Similarly with love, we need not conclude that someone's ceasing to love proves that they were insincere in making their promise to love. It may feel odd to speak about someone being prevented from loving, in the way one may be prevented from keeping some other promise to do something, considering that promising to love is not a matter of promising to do certain things, as I commented on in chapter 9. However, we are probably all familiar with relationships in which distance, differing personalities and so on, created obstacles in the lovers' way. I could not live in the country you wanted. You could not bear the kind of lifestyle I chose. I wanted children, you did not. These are cases in which we may feel that the "could" in "I could not love you", or "I could not live with you, although I loved you" is mainly related to my personal abilities to be in a certain relationship. It is as if my psychology, or my personality, prevented me from being with you.

Yet, what does this mean for the absolute sense in which I recognize the demands of love? Recalling the ways in which we may talk about love being put to the test, or think that a love which endures these tests is a purer form of love, may we not ask how it is possible for a love to end, or fail to work? Could we not say that "whenever there is love, it will find a way" or that "love conquers everything"? In other words, does it reveal that it was not love to begin with if a relationship ends?

One of the main problems with thinking that "the end" of a relationship reveals that it was not based on love is that it suggests that there could be proof that something was love or not. It is as if the fact that a relationship did not work out provided conclusive evidence that the people involved did not love each other. Taking the question whether something is love in this way is treating it as an *empirical* question. What I have repeatedly tried to show, however, is that the kind of certainty we have in love is not based on evidence. In that way, I have rejected the meaningfulness of treating the question in the way we treat empirical ones. Instead, I have wanted to show that determining whether something is love is a matter of what we meaningfully may understand as love both in our own relationships and in those of other people.

Indeed, the question whether a relationship works is not irrelevant to love. The sense in speaking about a relationship working or not, however, is not independent on what we may understand as love. It is only in the light of love, we see what it means for a relationship to work or not. There are no fool-proof ways of determining the facts of the matter. There are, of course, the facts of separation, the breaking up, the moving out of furniture, the division of property, the signing of divorce papers. The seemingly obvious meaning of such facts may tempt us to assign to them a conclusive role in determining what is and is not love. "If they do all that then at least they cannot love each other." Nevertheless, if we take these as the evidence for a relationship not working out, we should remember that people stay together for a number of different reasons. They "stick together" for the sake of their economy, for convenience, for fear of breaking a habit, for the children. Their marriages may be lifeless or bitter. Even the fact that their dealings with each other run smoothly and there are no open conflicts may only go to show their indifference to each other. Their marriage may be a matter of routine, a well-running machinery. Are we prepared to say that such relationships deserve the name of love simply because they do not leave each other?

On the other hand, there are the "happy divorces", although some may think that this is a contradiction in terms. There is the parting as friends, the deep attachment that may live on despite the "marital" separation, the fond memories of times spent together, the joy at meeting not as partners but as friends. Would we be willing to deny that these relationships were cases of love, and even working such, despite the split? Moreover, what do we do with the array of loves and romantic involvements which did not really "work" in any sense of the word, but were still filled with passion, with aspirations, with the desire that it should work, and which were nevertheless were brought down by obstacles that became insurmountable for them; in one case, the physical distance between them; in another, their past history, say, in an abusive relationship; in a third, their differing ambitions; in a fourth, their commitments to other people. Are we prepared to say that they do *not* deserve the name of love?

What we say will, of course, depend on the particular case and on who we are as people. What worlds can we be said to inhabit? What do we regard as possible and impossible, as meaningful and meaningless? I want to suggest that there are cases in which it makes sense to say that something was love although the relationship did not work out. To some, this may sound like a realistic claim, to others it

may perhaps still be too idealistic. Others again may still think it is too pessimistic. At my best moments, I hope it bears the humble recognition that I am not the one to be the judge of your love.

What we say in the matter, however, will have a bearing on how we respond to the possibilities of tragedy in human life. Admitting that love might end comes with recognizing that there are tragedies in life; things do not always go the way we plan. Refusing to accept a relationship as love when it does not come to a happy end, however, excludes the possibility of thinking about the end of one's own or somebody else's love as tragic.

In other words, accepting that love may end is an acceptance of the fragility of human life of which Nussbaum speaks. The times at which we do want to speak of love ending or failing are times at which we reach our borders and recognize our finitude. We are confronted with our failures to love in the way we may think is demanded of us; how do I bear the fact that I could not be with you or love you in a way that we both wanted? It is also a testimony to understanding love not only as something that makes us strong but as something that involves failed expectations and broken hearts. The one who leans too much on expressions such as, "All you need is love" (Beatles 1967), "Love will not die, love will change the world" (Dion, 2000) or "Love lifts us up where we belong" (Cocker and Warnes 1982), may be brought down to earth by remembering also that "love hurts, love scars, love wounds" (Nazareth 1975). However, the need to recognize tragedy as a feature of human life and love is not an argument for complacency. There are times when we give up too easily, and when our professed inability to love are much more expressive of self-pity than of anything else.

The thought that certain facts could resolve the question whether something was love may both tempt and haunt us. What tempts us to think that there could be decisive evidence for love may precisely be the wish to gain a final resolution to our perhaps conflicting feelings. Nevertheless, the thought that it could somehow turn out that what I consider, or considered, to be love was not by some objective standard may terrify me to the same degree. What if it could turn out that I was wrong in placing the significance on something that I did?

I do not want to say that no future events may change the way I regard my feelings and my relationships right now. These things do happen. You look back on an infatuation, thinking that you mistook the intensity of your feelings, or the fervour of your loved one's declarations, for love. Nevertheless, there is nothing that could

happen or nothing anyone could say that would force me to give up thinking of it as love. (Of course, this presupposes that I master the use of the concept.) In thinking that one could become clearer about the meaning of love by considering its outcome, one makes the meaning, the value or significance of our relationships to other people dependent on "the probable success of the endeavour" (Landau 2004, 479). This, to name only one of the problems with this description, fails to capture in what ways the meaning of love (or of what was not love) is not to be determined independently of our own relation to the question.

Commenting on the notion that a good man cannot be harmed that is put forward in Plato's *Gorgias*, İlham Dilman remarks:³⁰⁴

To have achieved such immunity, such an independence from the vagaries of fate, is to have found immortality; a well-being that is safe from such vagaries, one which *only a separation from goodness can hurt*. (Dilman 1992, 121 *my emphasis*)

In many ways, I think such an understanding comes closer to what is involved in one's love, or often one's love affairs, coming to an end, than any other description I have encountered. It reminds us that ceasing to love does not imply the mere end of some process or state that takes place independently of me, but constitutes an active turning away from or turning our back on love. By the word "active" I do not mean to suggest that there are any specific actions or activities that we take on. It is an attempt to bring out our responsibility for not loving anymore. In chapter 9 I discussed the sense of trust in which we may feel that nothing can draw our love into question. Not even death, one may think, could destroy our love, even if it inevitably means that we are no longer able to share our life together.

In this sense, we may need to think no more of the husband, who after the death of his beloved wife falls in love again. In close affinity with Dilman we could say that the only way of threatening the perspective of love is by betraying our love and the meaning you have for me in it, by losing my faith in love, by distancing myself from its goodness, losing myself in me, or by neglecting you in the sense brought out in the following quote from Winterson's *Written on the Body* :

³⁰⁴ The remark appears in connection with Dilman's discussion about Plato's *Phaedo* that I discussed more extensively in chapter 10.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. What then kills love? Only this: Neglect. Not to see you stand before me. Not to think of you in the little things. Not to make the road wide for you, the table spread for you. To choose you out of habit not desire. To leave the dishes unwashed, the bed unmade, to ignore you in the mornings, make use of you at night. To crave another while pecking your cheek. To say your name without hearing it, to assume it is mine to call. (Winterson 2001b, 186-187)

In this sense, I find it difficult to see what it would mean for the demand to love to end. This does not mean that the demand of love takes any specific forms when it comes to the details of our life. It is not that loving you means that we, forever, must spend our life together, sharing a house and economy. It may even be love that leads us to the recognition that we might be better off if we were not together. The demands of love present us with a question about what it means to be true to this perspective in a new and changing situation in which both you and I may have altered. Love, as it were, cannot be that which prevents us from changing. What it asks of us, however, is what we take with us into these changing situations.

The question whether we have betrayed each other by not loving each other in the same way as before, then, is not merely a question about what we were feeling and saying then but an injunction to ask what this perspective means today. What do our promises to love mean now? What meaning do we see in our relationship today? How do we look back upon our shared life and past, and see it for what it is, for love, perhaps, without diminishing the importance the other had in my life? How do we hold on to each other in our future life, as it were, without each other?

What marks the true horror of many broken relationships is *not* the realization that one had been mistaken about the importance of one's love and of one's relationship to someone. It is the explicit denial of the meaning another person had for one: "You mean nothing to me!" One should never forget that the denial of love is first and foremost a denial of other people and the meaning they have and have had for me.

It sometimes seems that what disturbs us the most in these questions is their challenge to our sense of consistency. We strongly want things to have one specific meaning. If it was love then, it should be love now. If we feel the urgent sense that this love, our lover now, is the only one for us, that the love that we feel now is the one that will last forever, then it could not possibly have been love that we felt

before in another relationship. We do not, as it were, seem capable of dealing with the fact that something that once was of significance is not anymore. This attitude in itself is expressive of something other than love. The refusal to accept that things will change is in itself a denial of the perspective of love and the recognition of what it demands of us in every *new* situation.

Here it may help to remember that there are many different attitudes that we may take towards the fact that something that was of significance then is not of significance now. We may look back longingly, with nostalgia or with regret. Or we may think back with disdain. "How could anyone find that important?" We may feel that we have lost some of the sense of magic we experienced then or a childlike innocence that makes it impossible to cherish anything else today or we may treasure the memory of what we felt, the enthusiasm with which we entered something. We do not need to conclude that it did not, and does not, have any significance.

CONCLUSION

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT LOVE

In the middle of my work on this thesis I was struck by the realization that I would never be able to give a complete account of love. I am not saying that prior to that I had imagined that the end result of my research would be “the complete work on love”. Ever since I started working on the subject I had struggled with my felt limitation when it came to saying something about love that would be both true to my own experiences of love and responsive to those of others. I was also aware of the inevitably personal character of philosophical insights and of morality, the sense in which philosophy is always “work on oneself”, on one’s own ideas, and the sense in which philosophy nevertheless *cannot, and does not*, offer solutions to our personal, moral problems. Hence, the realization that struck me bore a strong resemblance to many of my previous thoughts on the matter.

However, it was only then that I realized the full force of these insights and their implications for the kind of work I was doing. I came to see that it is constitutive of the place love has in our life that the notion of giving a complete answer itself needs to be dissolved. This is not expressive of the kind of false modesty that coloured my initial doubts about this project: “Who am I to say something about something as great and mysterious as love?” I recognized that the limitation I experienced was not primarily a personal one. It is *not* that somebody else could have given a complete answer, only *I* could not. We misrepresent the kind of question it is if we think that *anyone* could give a complete answer to it.

This is not to say that in particular situations there are no better or worse answers to our questions, neither that our understanding of love may not deepen. However, we misidentify the concerns that are expressed in the desire to know what love is if we think that they could be settled by anyone simply telling us this. The point is *not* that it is impossible to give an answer nor that I could not say anything

about what I find important and essential in a discussion on love. Neither does such an answer constitute some secret knowledge about love that is only consecrated for a few. The question is rather what we think that such an answer could reveal to us.

I would, for instance, say that Kierkegaard (1956) alerts us to something important when he says, "Purity of heart is to will the good in truth". I would say the same about Murdoch when she claims that "[l]ove is the realization that something other than yourself is real" (1997, 215) and about Weil, who remarks, "[b]elief in the existence of other people as such is love" (1977, 359). Their remarks serve as reminders of the grammar of love, pointing to the fundamental roles concepts such as "unity", "reality" or "individuality" hold in love. The discussion of love that takes place in Plato's *Symposium* also reveals many important questions about love. Plato's struggles to resolve the conflicts between the spiritual and carnal aspects of love are repeated in much of the literature on love ever since. His work also involves an attempt to reconcile the absolute and infinite aspects of our life with the recognition of our own finitude. This I have come to identify as an increasingly significant subject when discussing love.

Part of the absurdity of imagining that one could give a complete answer to the question about what love is becomes apparent in the recognition of how far-reaching a background is needed for reading such remarks as revelatory of love. For these remarks to make sense, we need to see them in the light of a variety of different questions we may raise about love, the connections they have with concepts such as truth, goodness, reality and desire, and so on. There is a range of concrete situations in which the concept of love is used in different ways that we need to keep in mind if we are to see what sense there may be in such formulations. In this work I have tried to bring out one kind of background against which one may read them.

This is a reason why I suggest that you read these final remarks as the opening of a conversation rather than as the end of one. I have emphasized the dialogical character of love and this work is the outcome and continuation of many such dialogues, both philosophical and personal ones. My work has been an attempt to address certain questions about love, but more than that it is an attempt to address *you*, my reader, with these thoughts. It is an invitation to you to think through the questions I have raised and become clear about what you want to say to them. In that sense, it mirrors the triad of *address*, *response* and *responsibility* that I have brought out as constitutive

aspects of the meetings and conversations of love in different places; in other words, the ways in which love is constituted by me and you turning to each other, responding to each other as human beings and taking responsibility for what we say and do to each other.

Regarding this work in that fashion also draws the idea of a final destination into question. What would it mean to be done talking with each other, to end this conversation? Certainly we may make stops on the way. At times we may turn in one direction rather than another, leaving other roads behind left untravelled. But we may always pick up on our conversation at a later point, going back to where we once started, looking for another road that might lead us further, or entering paths that lead us to familiar places.

If nothing else, this work should have made you realize that we talk about quite a number of things “when we talk about love”. We express our longing, desire and gratitude to each other. We state our commitment, dependence and independence. We speak of grief, trust, faith and forgiveness, promises, beauty, truth and unity. We speak about “feeling at home” or “feeling at peace”, about “feeling lost” and about “finding ourselves”. We cry out of despair at deceptions, betrayals and needs left unfulfilled. We are shaken by turmoil, fury and rage. We experience vulnerability and nakedness, we idealize or embellish. We lose ourselves in cynicism and selfishness. We find new hope.

My aim has not been to legislate about the language of love, saying what is a sensible thing to say or deeming certain ways of speaking unintelligible or nonsensical. Rather I have wanted to open up to the diversity of ways in which we speak of love. Not all ways of speaking about love, however, are equally meaningful. We do not need to look far into what has been written about love, especially in popular songs and the like that has formed part of the background of my discussions, to see that not all metaphors are illuminating. Neither are all analogies fruitful. At the end of the day some ways of speaking about love succeed in articulating our experience of love while others fail.

In response to the philosophers I have examined more critically, I have, therefore, brought out the ways in which I find that their discussions fail to provide meaningful accounts of love. Many philosophers with their background in analytic philosophy tend to limit their talk about love to feelings, beliefs, judgements, reasons, properties, functions, worthwhile endeavors, and so on. This choice of

vocabulary, I have argued, often offers too narrow an account of what is involved in our conversations about love.

Their failure to account for the differing backgrounds of our conversations, I have argued, takes at least two different forms. First, when we speak about love, in our daily life and as philosophers, the question is not only what we say but *how* we say it and how our words go along with what we do. There is a question about what vocabulary we use, the tone of voice in which we speak, and so on. The problem with many philosophers writing about love is that often enough we do not know in or out of what context they speak. Their attempts to formulate a general theory or definition of love obscure the particular kinds of concerns to which they speak.

Second, speaking about love in the terms many of the philosophers I have criticized have used does not sufficiently attend to the moral character of love. This is one of the major criticisms of my work. The themes they bring out are primarily discussed with reference to the philosophy of mind. They commit themselves, more or less, to the belief that one could answer moral questions by describing the mind of men (or women). By finding out what kinds of beings we are, what capacities constitute the person, they hope to find or give a ground for morality. I have argued that we cannot make sense of the kinds of beings we are without recognizing the moral character of this question. The answers we give, give voice to different moral attitudes to our lives as human beings.

Hence, I have addressed the problems involved in attempting to reduce matters of love to questions of psychology, by which I mean, not so much the notions of any existing psychological theory, as a picture of the human being or the person as a self made up of various beliefs, intentions, wants, desires, interests, and needs. This picture of what it is to describe the human condition presupposes that one discusses the question from a third person perspective. It attends, as I have shown in the second part, to the question "What is a person?" rather than to the question "Who am I?" It asks, "What is it to be a human being?" rather than "What does it mean to be human?"

I have argued that we cannot make sense of the question *what* we are as human beings without attending to the question *who* we are. As my discussion in the third part has shown we cannot find out the meaning of the words we use in our life, without asking what meaning these aspects of our life have for us. Searching for the meaning of "human being", then, is not a matter of *describing* what the word refers to, but a means of *articulating* what we ourselves can

understand as significant in a human life. In turn, this question cannot easily be separated from what we may come to understand as a *humane* life. The question of what it means to be a human being, therefore, has a specific role in philosophy, in that it involves an element of *self-reflection*. It aims to articulate and understand our *self-understanding* of the kinds of beings we are, the demands we recognize in our lives as human beings. This self-understanding may deepen and change through philosophical reflection.

If we pay attention to our lives together and to the ways in which we use our words in it we should see that speaking about thinking, wanting, feeling, desiring, loving belongs to a moral context as well. This is also true for many words denoting personal characteristics and traits, serving to pick out objects of blame and praise, such as envy, selfishness, courage or generosity, being expressive of guilt, remorse, anger, joy or love. Our regarding something as a thought, desire or feeling, our describing an action as thoughtless or thoughtful, as lacking feeling, can be said to constitute moves in a moral game. What we come to consider as alternatives for thought and desire reveals something about our moral make-up.

Thus, we need to attend to our moral psychology if we are interested in putting forward a psychological description of the human being. Otherwise, we run the risk of leaving out important aspects of our uses of our “mental vocabulary”. In this respect, philosophy of mind and moral philosophy are internally related. I also think that the philosophy of language may prosper from considering the moral presuppositions or the starting points for our being linguistic creatures, but that is another issue.

These considerations also have an impact on how we should understand the practice of philosophy. By tradition, the primary focus of philosophy has been on our capacity for reasoning, or on Reason or rationality. As Alessandra Tanesini (1999) so aptly puts it, one has regarded philosophy as being concerned with “reason’s self-understanding. It involves a rational investigation of the limits of reason itself” (212). I am far from the only one who has directed criticism against this kind of self-understanding. The different attacks on reason or rationality that have been conducted by feminist philosophy, critical theory, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis, as well as by many of the movements that have often been categorized under the heading of postmodernism, have in many ways been devastating.

The aim of their criticisms has been showing how the concept of rationality has given priority to one way of understanding the world, which has led it to give voice mainly to a male perspective on life and human relationships (see e.g. the works by Genevieve Lloyd, Luce Irigaray, Michelle LeDoux), how rationality has been used to gain control over the environment and as a consequence has gained control over us turning us into its slaves (see e.g. the work of Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas and Georg Henrik von Wright), how the emphasis on rationality and our capacity for drawing logical conclusions has been brought to the fore at the expense of the body, and so forth. I am not well enough versed in these traditions to offer any substantial analysis of how these criticisms tie in with and diverge from mine. In the cases in which I have come into closer contact with them, however, they have often served as helpful sources of inspiration.

Attempts have also been made to salvage the concept of reasoning from these blistering attacks (cf. e.g. Lovibond 2002, especially part III) and to modify it to respond to some of the criticisms. The attempts to prove the rationality of emotions can be seen both as an attempt to alter our understanding of emotions as not merely irrational, and our understanding of rationality as being dependent on, say, sensitivity and imagination (cf. e.g. Nussbaum 1990).

I have argued, however, that what is needed is not only a more refined picture of rationality but a different approach to understanding the methods of philosophy. Picturing rationality as the undergoing of logical processes provides us with an illusory picture of what is involved in thinking, and the emphasis on giving and responding to reasons for different courses of action also gives too limited an account of what is involved in communication. In this respect, I have proposed that we take seriously the notion that philosophy is also a form of love. Philosophers' wish for unitary systems—single solutions to complex problems—for one thing, can be seen as a failure in our philosophizing in much the same way that a certain kind of fascination with beauty constitutes a failure in love by idealizing the other or the relationship. A commitment to the view that philosophy is a form of love is already expressed in the Platonic dialogues, most clearly in the *Symposium*, to which I have tried to give due attention. Yet, we may criticize Plato, with Shestov, for in the end opting for rationality as the primary guide to knowledge in the long run.

In Wittgenstein's philosophy, I have also found an understanding of philosophy which is expressive of a love of life, although this formulation is not one that he himself uses. To my mind, his emphasis on the need to open up to the manifold forms of life far exceeds many postmodernist vows to pluralism and multiplicity. His rooting of language in the practices of our life also steers away from the kind of relativism that often can be said to accompany the postmodern dissolution of "Reason".

The focus on reason and the mind centers on the individual person. Rationality can be said to represent the attitude of a generalized individual (as if that was not a contradiction in itself) towards the world. In this one views the relation between the individual and the world as primarily an *epistemological* relation. This presupposition seems to be retained in postmodernist accounts although one emphasizes the plurality and the different positions of different individuals.

In Wittgenstein, there is a hint of a suggestion, which is given more emphasis by many of his followers, that we rather regard the relation between ourselves and the world as a *moral* one. To Wittgenstein, language does not primarily have an epistemological character, words are not conceived of as representing states of the world. It is rather expressive of our moral relationships with other people. One of his most important contributions to philosophy is the reminder that we share our life with other people and that it is in this life that our words (as well as our worlds) have meaning. One of the insights I have taken from these discussions by him and the philosophers working within this tradition (David Cockburn, Cora Diamond, İlham Dilman, Raimond Gaita, D.W. Hamlyn, Lars Hertzberg, D.Z. Phillips, Rush Rhees, Peter Winch), is that we cannot ground morality in anything, but need to attend to the ways it is expressed in our reactions to other people.

The attempt to provide grounds for everything in our life is problematic not least because our practices of giving grounds or reasons itself presupposes an understanding of what may count as a good reason for doing, thinking or feeling something in a particular case. There is no additional ground we may offer for why we take these things as grounds. If we try doing that we are, leaning on Wittgenstein, taking the words "reasons" and "grounds" out of the circumstances in which they make sense without clarifying what sense they are supposed to have in these new circumstances. To use the somewhat problematic analogy of language games we have not

responded to the question of what kind of moves using these words are and what kind of game it is that we are playing.

I have continually emphasized the indeterminacy or openness of our life and language with emotions. I have pointed out that sometimes philosophy, or rather we as philosophers, need to settle for the realization that there may be differences in people's responses that cannot be reconciled in a unitary understanding but are due to their different responses as different people. A change in how they understand things is a change in who they are as people.

This emphasis on different responses and understandings, however, may be misleading if it leads one to neglect the importance of shared reactions for the possibility of understanding oneself, other people, and the world in the first place. Emphasizing this feature of our life is not a call for relativism or a commitment to the idea that we are never able to understand each other. Emotions sometimes have the power of pulling us apart but they are an important factor in bringing us together. They make possible an understanding of what it means to live our life together *with* other people.

Our life would not be a human life if we did not care or show concern for other people, if we did not react to other people's actions and reactions. Regarding the first as "actions" is itself expressive of a reaction to other people, distinguishing them from "rocks", "trees", "waves" or "machines". If we were not responsive to each other's smiles as "caring", "loving", "conceited", "secretive", "mocking", if we did not recognize frowns as "confounded", "disagreeing", "suspicious", "serious", if we were not sensitive to subtle changes of voice, the playfulness or wickedness in someone's eyes, we would not be open to the jokes, ironies, the chatter and banter of the conversations of our life, but locked into our own worlds.³⁰⁵ In saying that a life which lacked these features would not be a human life, I am saying both that such a life would not be a life that I would describe as human, in other words it is a moral statement, and that this is how I understand *our* use of the concept "human being". Without emotions we would be the kind of rationally choosing individuals that philosophy (and science) often presents us as being.

³⁰⁵ I am indebted to Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2004) for his depiction of the understanding of a boy with Asperger's syndrome. The book conveys a picture of the kind of atomism that often characterizes philosophy's subject.

Our emotional reactions to each other, thus, are of utmost importance for our overall understanding of other people. More than that I have wanted to bring out how, in the perspective of life that is love, other people are not merely people with whom I share a world. They are my world.

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