

MODULE 3: THE MORALITY AND EPISTEMOLOGY OF ROMANTIC LOVE

Love and Rationality





DOES LOVE OBEY TO REASONS?



J. DAVID VELLEMAN

- We love people on the basis of their personhood
- Their intrinsic value as human beings
- Not on the basis of some inessential qualities

- Everyone is equally worthy of love

- If everyone is equally worthy of love, then **love is always rational**



BERIT BROGAARD

- Love is sometimes rational, sometimes irrational
- Love can be real, regardless of whether it is rational or irrational
- **Love is rational when two conditions are met:**
- a) Love fits the perceived object
 - (i.e., the object is lovable)
- b) There is no misperception of the emotion-sustaining qualities of the object



LAURENCE THOMAS

- Love is neither rational nor irrational
- "Love is blind"
- **Argument:** You can cease loving a wonderful person. That is not irrational.



PROBLEMS WITH THE VIEW THAT LOVE IS RESPONSIVE TO REASONS

Problem 1:

- If love is responsive to reasons, then love is mandatory!

Argument:

1. If love is responsive to reasons, then, in absence of good reasons not to love X, you ought to love X.
2. There are not good reasons not to love your neighbor next door.
3. Therefore, you ought to love your neighbor next door!



A RESPONSE FOR PROBLEM 1 (BY BERIT BROGAARD)

- Reasons for loving **do not make love mandatory**
- When love is rational, love is **permissible**
- However, when love is irrational, love is **impermissible**:
you ought to stop loving that person!



PROBLEMS WITH THE VIEW THAT LOVE IS RESPONSIVE TO REASONS

Problem 2 (Solomon's problem):

- If you have a reason for loving a person, then you do not love the whole person.
- You only love some of his/her qualities



A RESPONSE FOR PROBLEM 2 (BROGAARD AGAIN)

- Qualities of an object **motivate** you to love **the object**.
- You do not love the abs or the hair!
- You love the person that has the abs or the hair.





**CAN YOU THINK OF TWO GOOD
REASONS FOR LOVING A PERSON?**

THE IRRATIONALITY OF ROMANTIC LOVE

Some common beliefs:

- Romantic love, just like lust, is irrational
- True love is rational

- H. L. Menken: "Perceptual anesthesia"

- R. L. Johnson: Not true love, but "a complex of attitudes about love"

- Captain Corelli's Mandolin: "Temporary madness"



BUT, IS ROMANTIC LOVE REALLY, AND ALWAYS, IRRATIONAL?

- False affirmative properties attribution? - Not always
- Overlooking of flaws? - Not always
- Misattribution and idealization: Due to the **halo effect**
 - (Attribution of positive traits to likeable people)
- It's not romantic love's exclusive fault!



EVEN WHEN IT'S IRRATIONAL, IT'S REAL!

The skeptic claim:

- Romantic love is not "true" love, but it is an emotion

Brogaard's response:

- Emotions are subjects of rational assessment
- Thus, emotions can be either rational or irrational
- Besides, the so called "true" love can also be irrational!



THE IRRATIONALITY OF COMPASSIONATE LOVE

- Parental love: Lorraine Allard
- The life of her unborn child is given more intrinsic value than her own

- Altruism ("other-love"): Homer T. Roberts Jr., Wesley Autrey
- Sacrificed or endangered their own lives, in order to save a stranger's life

- Even more radical altruism: Abraham Zelmanowitz
- Sacrificed his own life, knowing that he wouldn't save his friend's

- **Supererogatory acts**
 - Acts beyond the call of duty





**ARE THESE ACTS/FEELINGS
RATIONAL?**



**CAN YOU HAVE TRUE LOVE WITHOUT
A DEGREE OF ALTRUISM?**



DOES LOVE INVOLVE ALTRUISM?

- Harry Frankfurt: YES
- Love is disinterested concern for the beloved's well-being and flourishing

- Velleman/Brogaard: NO
- Love does not involve an aim
- Love does not involve an urge to give



THE TRANSCENDENT VIEW OF LOVE: J. DAVID VELLEMAN AGAIN

- Love is awareness of the unique value of the other
- Everyone is equally lovable
- BUT: We do not love everyone! (and not equally!)
- **Persona** (*mask*):
 - Personality traits
 - Physical attributes



SOME CONSEQUENCES OF THE TRANSCENDENT VIEW

- Love becomes a matter of luck
- The bodily aspect of love is neglected
- It contradicts the intuition that sometimes love is not justified (some people just seem unworthy of love!)
- Entails that your significant other can be replaced by any other person





DO YOU AGREE WITH THE
TRANSCENDENT VIEW OF LOVE?



WHY, OR WHY NOT?



THE HISTORY VIEW OF LOVE: NIKO KOLODNY

- Our beloved ones are irreplaceable
- Justified love requires a **pre-existing history of shared experiences**
- The history must be a "good history"
- When there is such a history, love is **rational**
- When not, it is irrational



BUT, SOMETIMES A GOOD HISTORY IS NOT SUFFICIENT...

- You can have a good (romantic) history with someone that is not worthy of love.
- You can have a good (friendship) history with someone that does not love you back.
- You can have a good (friendship/classmates) history, but that history does not justify your romantic love.



THEN, DOES A SHARED HISTORY JUSTIFY LOVE?

- According to Brogaard:
- A shared history might be **necessary** for discovering whether love is appropriate or not
- But a shared history **does not by itself** make love appropriate or inappropriate



LOVE AND IRREPLACEABILITY

- "My beloved ones are irreplaceable... aren't they...?"
- **Robert Kraut:** That depends:
- What makes a person continue being the same person?
- What in our beloved ones is irreplaceable?



**COULD YOU LOVE AN IDEAL
SUBSTITUTE OF YOUR SIGNIFICANT
OTHER?**

**(A PERSON THAT WAS EXACTLY LIKE
HIM/HER, EXCEPT FOR HIS/HER
FLAWS)**

WHY, OR WHY NOT?

IRREPLACEABILITY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

The value of the original person is assessed in two ways:

- For its own sake
- In virtue of its relation to something external to it

I love you because...

- **... of your own qualities:** you are funny, thoughtful and caring
- **... of your relation to me:** you have been with me throughout my whole college life



THE QUESTION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

What does a person's identity consist in?

There are two popular answers:

a) **A biological criterion:** Persistence of certain biological structures (the brainstem)

b) **A psychological criterion:** Attitudes, personality traits, memories, beliefs, desires, plans...



SOME REASONS TO PREFER THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITERION

- We don't care about a brain structure; we care about a person.
- Split-brain syndrome (**Gazzaniga and Sperry**): Two personalities, one brain stem.
- Gender identity: Your identity is located in your mind. Not in your body.



A PROBLEM FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITERION

- **Derek Parfit:** Brain fission thought experiment.
- Suppose you love Robert.
- A mad surgeon splits Robert's brain in two halves, and transplants each half into a separate body.
- So now you have two people, Rob and Bert.
- Who is the person that you love?



**DID ROBERT SURVIVE THE
SURGERY, OR DID HE DISAPPEAR?**

**CAN EITHER ROB OR BERT BE A
BETTER SUITED CONTINUANT OF
ROBERT?**

WHY, OR WHY NOT?

SOME CONCEPTUAL POINTS ABOUT IDENTITY*

1. Identity is a one-to-one relation:

- Robert = Rob <--- this is ok
- Robert = Bert <--- this is ok
- Robert = Rob and Bert <--- not ok!

2. Identity is transitive

- If $A = B$, and $A = C$, then $B = C$
- If Robert = Rob, and Robert = Bert, then Rob = Bert!



A POSSIBLE RESPONSE TO THE BRAIN FISSION PROBLEM*

- Brogaard: "People can remain the same over time, even when strict identity does not obtain."(p. 99)
- The identity of persons is different from the identity of things.
- The identity of persons is not strict identity. It is quasi-identity, or mere continuity, or a relation of this ilk.
- Thus, it behaves differently than strict identity. It does not have to be one-one or transitive.



A FURTHER IMPLICATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITERION

1. If there is no psychological continuity, there is no personal identity.
 2. Brain damage, Alzheimer disease, etc., cause significant psychological changes.
 3. Therefore, after brain damage, Alzheimer disease, etc., a person becomes a different person.
- Does this mean that we are loving a new person?
 - If so, why is it ok to love this new person, and not an impostor?



A FURTHER IMPLICATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITERION FOR THE HISTORY VIEW

1. According to the History view, love is only rational when there is a shared story.
2. There is no shared story with the new person our beloved has become.
3. Therefore, it is irrational to love the new person! (and we ought to stop!)



UPSHOT

- Kolodny's History View has the advantage that it explains why our beloved ones are irreplaceable.
- However, it is not clear what we mean when we say that they are irreplaceable.
- There is no infallible criterion of personal identity.
- The History View thereby loses one of its main advantages.




LOVE FOR A REASON (BROGAARD'S VIEW): TWO KINDS OF REASONS

- **Explanatory-causal reasons:** Explain what brought actions about.
 - "I kicked the duck because I was angry"
 - "I love you because you play guitar beautifully!"
- **Justifying reasons:** Make actions appropriate.
 - "I kicked the duck because it was going to attack me!"
- A justifying reason for love depends on a **good fit: beloved's qualities-your loving response:**
 - "I love you because you are caring and compassionate"



LOVE FOR A REASON: SENSITIVITY TO EVIDENCE

- **Belief is sensitive to evidence**
 - I believe that it rained because I see water in the street.
 - I stop believing it rained when I see a broken pipe.
 - **Love is not (clearly) sensitive to evidence**
 - I love you because you are honest and faithful to me
 - Do I stop loving you when I see you kissing someone else...?
 - **However, both love and belief are in**
- 

IS ROMANTIC LOVE UNCONDITIONAL?

Conditional love:

- Love is conditioned to specific circumstances or traits.

Unconditional love:

- Love is not conditioned to specific circumstances/traits.
- But under certain circumstances, love can stop.

Love no matter what:

- Love is not conditioned to any circumstance, and will continue under any circumstance.

