

CHAPTER 3 – THE OPERATIVE GROUNDS OF LOVE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Two I began an account of human love: love for humans, by humans. In that chapter I argued that love partially consists of a twofold orientation or tendency of the will. However, the presence of this attitude is, itself, not sufficient for love. For example, if one believed that it was one's duty to seek union with a person and his good (where possible and appropriate), one might gain the two tendencies on that basis. Nevertheless, these tendencies would not amount to love because of their source in, or dependence upon, a sense of duty. This example suggests that the two tendencies of love must have a particular source or dependence if they are to count as love. In this chapter I will complete my account of love by explaining and defending the view that the two tendencies of love—if they are to partially constitute love—must depend upon the lover's apprehension of the beloved as good in a particular sense—i.e., as apt or fitting for the lover, given the lover's values and sensibility.

This view that the attitudes of love depend upon a kind of apprehended value in the beloved puts me at odds with those who claim, on the contrary, that the value of the beloved

depends upon the attitude of love, and that love in fact generates or *bestows* value on the beloved.¹⁵⁷ Thus, in this chapter I will reject such “bestowal” views, arguing that the intuitions that such views are meant to explain are in fact better explained by my view that love depends upon apprehended value. In the penultimate section of the chapter (Section 3.6) I will briefly discuss the nature of love’s dependence upon apprehended value, i.e., whether it is rational or merely causal. Although I will not defend a specific view of this dependence, inspired by Aquinas I will speculate that the dependence may be merely causal in some cases and rational in others.

3.2 LOVE’S OPERATIVE GROUNDS: OBJECTS APPREHENDED AS GOOD

As explained in Chapter Two (Section 2.5), Aquinas claims that the cause of love—i.e., that in response to which love arises or is sustained—is an object apprehended by the lover as good *in a particular sense*. I suggested that, on Aquinas’s account, the particular goodness recognized by the lover amounts to a capacity for union with the beloved, either because he has some good feature that the lover also has, or because he has some good feature that the lover would like to have.

While Aquinas’s account seems correct as far as it goes, it may need to be supplemented by the possibility that love could be sustained by a feature that the lover simply finds pleasing in some way, and not necessarily a feature that she has or would like to have. So, for example, someone’s love for a person might, in part, be a response to her intellectual ability or athletic talent. However, it might also be the case that the lover himself does not share such abilities or talents and does not necessarily desire them either. Nevertheless, he appreciates them in the beloved, and so he loves her. Aquinas might reply that the lover must either possess or want such

¹⁵⁷ Irving Singer and especially Harry Frankfurt hold such a view. See Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 38–39. and Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love, Vol. 1: Plato to Luther*, Irving Singer Library (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 3–22.

qualities in some degree if he is to be able to appreciate them in the way necessary for love. And Aquinas might be correct about this. However, I would like to leave open the possibility that a lover might appreciate certain qualities in a person that she neither possesses nor would like to possess, and that her love might be sustained in response to such qualities. Even here, though, Aquinas seems right that there must be a certain fit—a certain “oneness” or “aptness”—between what the lover personally appreciates and the features of the beloved if love is to be sustained.

Given this particular sense in which the lover must apprehend the beloved as good if she is to love him, it is possible to apprehend someone as good in a *different* sense without loving him. For example, if I have little regard for morality, I may apprehend that someone is morally virtuous, and thus good in a moral sense, without loving him. On the view I am suggesting here, my failure to love him would be due to the fact that I do not personally appreciate the respect in which he is good, perhaps because I neither have that quality nor wish to have it. Thus I would not view him as *one* with me, or *apt* for me, in the relevant sense. In the same way one might acknowledge that someone is very attractive in certain respects, and yet one might not actually be attracted to him or stirred to love him since he is not really one’s “type.” Thus, a lover’s love depends upon, or is sustained by, her apprehension of a person as both good and apt with respect to the particular qualities, values, and sensibility of the lover. If the tendencies of love depend on something else—e.g., a sense of duty—then they will not amount to love.

Importantly, this sort of dependence of love on a lover’s apprehension of the beloved as good in the relevant sense does not demand that love *arise* in response to the apprehension of the beloved as good. Indeed, the dependence I have described could, conceptually speaking, come about as a result of drinking a potion or taking a pill. So, for example, on my view it is quite possible that Ron might eat some chocolates laced with a powerful love potion and thereby genuinely come to love Romilda.¹⁵⁸ As long as the potion produced in him an apprehension of

¹⁵⁸ I am a shameless Harry Potter fan.

Romilda as good in the relevant sense (e.g., a belief or perception that she is so), a tendency of will toward her good, a tendency of will toward union with her, and the right sort of dependence of these tendencies upon the apprehension, I would affirm that he loved her. Nevertheless, despite the conceptual possibility of love potions and pills, I take it that the tendencies of love typically arise in response to the apprehension of someone as good in the relevant sense.

It will be helpful to have a term by which to refer to that upon which the two tendencies of love depend, as described above. One option would be to follow Aquinas (or his translators) in using the term ‘cause’ to refer to it. However, this term seems to bias our view in favor of a mechanistic dependence something like the dependence of one pool ball on another for its motion. As I will suggest in Section 3.6, while there might be some cases of love that exhibit a relatively mechanistic dependence upon a cause in this way, there also seem to be others in which the dependence looks more rational—i.e., more like dependence upon a reason.¹⁵⁹ Given these two possibilities (and possible confusions stemming from the polyvalent term ‘reason’), it seems that referring to that upon which the two tendencies of love depend as a “reason” is not a good option either. Thus, I will use the more neutral term ‘operative ground’ to capture that upon which the two tendencies of love actually depend. If we set aside the possibility of potions and pills, we can refer to the operative ground of love as that in response to which love arises or is sustained. According to my account so far, then, the operative ground of love must be a lover’s apprehension of the beloved as good and apt in the sense described above. I will sharpen this idea of an operative ground of love when I contrast it with the idea of a “proper ground” of love in Chapter Four.

The occasion of love’s arising in response to an operative ground is another point at which a lover might experience emotion. In particular, for some kinds of love (e.g., romantic

¹⁵⁹ Of course, dependence upon a reason might also be causal. However, we should not assume such a view from the outset.

love) it is quite common to feel a certain delight or euphoria in association with the coming about of love. However, it seems obvious that such emotion is not a feature of all kinds of love, or even of all cases of romantic love. There are many cases in which love can arise with little or no emotional fanfare—indeed, without the lover even recognizing that love has come about. For example, we often become friends with people that we are simply thrown together with by the circumstances of life. In my experience, the love I have for such friends typically comes about without my feeling much at all, or even my knowledge that it has come about. To be sure, as the friendship progresses I feel things—joy at my friend’s success, worry at my friend’s sickness, sadness at my friend’s moving away, etc.—but these emotions are not associated with the genesis of love. Rather, as described in Chapter Two (Section 2.10), they are associated more closely with whether the two targets of love’s tendencies are actualized, after love is already established. Given that delight or euphoria is not consistently associated with the genesis of love, it seems clear that such emotion is not partially constitutive of love. Rather, as for the emotions associated with whether the targets of love’s tendencies are actualized, the emotions associated with the genesis of love are best characterized as contingent effects of love that arise under certain circumstances—circumstances that are perhaps typical (though maybe not universal) in cases of romantic love.

3.3 LOVE AND COMMITMENT

With the notion of an operative ground of love now in hand, I am in a position to clarify the relationship between love and commitment that I alluded to in my account of union in Chapter Two (Section 2.4). My view is that the notions of love and commitment partially overlap.¹⁶⁰ In cases of new love—say, in a budding friendship or romantic relationship—love and

¹⁶⁰ I take some of my inspiration for this claim from Beverley Fehr. See Beverley Fehr, “Prototype Analysis of the Concepts of Love and Commitment,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55, no. 4 (1988): 557–79.

commitment seem distinct. I might well love someone without being committed to her. I am stirred toward the good of the new friend or romantic partner and toward union with her, but something could happen and I could fairly easily let go of my tendencies toward these two targets. Perhaps I move to a different city. Perhaps she does something distasteful. Perhaps I become too busy to pursue a relationship. Perhaps I meet a different romantic partner that I prefer. In these cases, although I loved the person with a new, immature sort of love, the attitude fades in the face of inhospitable circumstances: I no longer seek her good or union with her in the ways indicative of friendship or romantic relationships. From such cases, it seems clear that I may love the person without being committed to her.

However, if circumstances are more hospitable and the relationship develops, then the tendencies of love seem more difficult to drop. If I move to a different city, then I still keep in touch with her. If she does something distasteful, then I might forgive her and continue loving. If I become too busy for the relationship then I might put it on hold for a season, but I would return to it when the business subsided. If I met another person that was romantically attractive to me, then I might purpose *not* to spend time with that person, lest it tempt me away from my current partner. In these cases, I would exhibit a commitment to the person I love.

The main difference between the committed and uncommitted cases, it seems to me, is that the attitudes constituting love in the committed cases are more fixed than those in the uncommitted cases. In these cases, commitment to a person still involves a tendency toward a person's good and toward union with her, but one that is more fixed or firm than those constituting new, immature love. In the committed cases, then, there would be no distinction between a commitment to a person and love for her: the commitment *would just be* a particularly fixed or firm kind of love for her. Insofar as love has its operative ground in something that the lover finds good about the beloved, in the committed cases the lover's commitment would have

the same operative ground insofar as commitment just is a fixed, firm kind of love. I will call this kind of commitment—a commitment consisting of firm tendencies toward the good of the other and union with her that is operatively grounded on an apprehension of the other as good—a *loving commitment*. As indicated in the discussion of union in Chapter Two (Section 2.4), I view mutual loving commitment as part of the union targeted by mature forms of love.

It seems possible that, over time, a loving commitment to a friend or romantic partner can take on an additional operative ground—namely, one’s sense of duty to the person. I take it as obvious that as a friendship or romantic relationship develops, the two parties incur special obligations or duties to the other, according to the kind of relationship it is. In particular, it seems that they incur duties to further the good of the other in special ways that go beyond what we owe to just anyone on the street. For example, you may have a duty to let your friend sleep on your couch for a few weeks if he gets evicted. But, it seems this is not something that you necessarily owe to a stranger. Friends and romantic partners may also incur duties to seek union with the other, depending on the kind and maturity of the relationship. In any case, my point is that a person’s apprehension of these duties may become a second operative ground for her tendencies toward the good of, and union with, the beloved person.

When a commitment becomes operatively grounded in this second way—i.e., grounded on a sense of one’s duty to the other—it is further possible for love to fade while commitment to the person remains, operatively grounded on a sense of duty. In such cases, a person no longer views the other as good in the sense that might operatively ground friendship or romantic love, and so love is undermined.¹⁶¹ However, the person remains committed to the good of the other

¹⁶¹ This issue is at least part of why Aristotle views character friendships (i.e., mutual love arising in response to the virtuous character of the other) as superior to friendships of use or pleasure (i.e., mutual love arising in response to the useful or pleasing characteristics of the other). If we find someone merely useful or pleasing and love him in response to those traits, he or we may well change and no longer find the other good in that way, in which case the mutual love and friendship disappears. But, if someone loves another for the sake of her character, Aristotle thinks the arrangement is more stable, since he thinks character is stable and fixed. Of course, the character friend also finds the good character of her friend pleasing and useful, but that is not the (or the only) ground of the friendship. See *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.3.

(and perhaps also to union with him) from a sense of duty or obligation owing to their history of relationship. I will refer to commitments like this—commitments consisting of firm tendencies toward the good of the other (and perhaps union with him) that are operatively grounded on an apprehension of one’s duty to the other—as *dutiful commitments*.¹⁶²

Friendships rarely end up with mere dutiful commitments since they typically dissolve if love for the other fades. However, marriages and family relationships sometimes do run on dutiful commitment. In family relationships, our sense of duty to the other family member is often operatively grounded on the “mere” familial relationship—i.e., the relationship constituted by mere blood or adoptive relation.¹⁶³ For example, a parent’s sense of duty to his newborn child (assuming he has it) is typically operatively grounded only on the fact that he is her parent. Of course, our sense of duty to a family member can grow and strengthen as a familial relationship matures, just as it does for friendships and romantic relationships. Nevertheless, there is often at least a kernel of duty that remains operatively grounded on the mere familial relationship, regardless of how the familial friendship develops. This is especially evident in cases where family members no longer love each other, but feel bound to each other out of a sense of duty owing to their mere familial tie. As noted above, marriages sometimes exhibit similar commitment despite a lack of mutual love. Loveless marriages may end up in such a situation, rather than simply dissolving, to the extent that the two partners view their marriage vows as constitutive of something like a familial tie.

Whether the tendencies toward the good of the beloved and union with him that I characterized in Chapter Two amount to love, commitment, or both depends, then, both on how fixed or firm they are and on the kind of operative ground they have. The two tendencies may

¹⁶² In the case where one’s commitment has both kinds of operative grounds, it may be that one has both a loving and dutiful commitment to the other, or just one or the other with two operative grounds. Either way of putting it is fine for my purposes.

¹⁶³ I will give a more developed account of familial relationships in Chapter Six, section 6.4.

amount to love despite being rather superficial and transient; new, immature cases of love for a friend or romantic partner are like that. In such cases, the tendencies do not amount to a commitment to the beloved. Once, however, the two tendencies become more entrenched they begin to constitute a loving commitment to the person. In these cases, love and commitment are identical. At some point, the lover might begin to have a sense of duty or obligation to the friend or romantic partner, in which case the two firm tendencies would take on this sense of duty as an additional operative ground. At that point the two tendencies would still constitute both love and commitment and they would exhibit two operative grounds. Lastly, as noted it is possible for the two firm tendencies to outlast love (or, more generally, to occur in the absence of love) insofar as they become operatively grounded on a sense of duty alone. Certain loveless yet dutiful family relationships and marriages are examples of that phenomenon. In that case, the two firm tendencies would constitute a dutiful commitment to the other and would be distinct from love.

3.4 OBJECTION: LOVE AS BESTOWAL

According to the account I have endorsed in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, love is a response to an evaluation or an appraisal of a particular sort—i.e., an apprehension of a person’s goodness, in the sense described above. However, some philosophers have thought that love is not so much a response to a positive appraisal of some aspect of the beloved’s value as it is a *bestowal* of value upon the beloved.¹⁶⁴ On a strict bestowal view, love is not produced and sustained in response to encountered value; rather, love *gives* value to the beloved object. Thus, according to such a view, Aquinas’s account of love gets the relationship between love and value backward. Harry Frankfurt endorses a bestowal view in the following passage:

It is true that the beloved invariably *is*, indeed, valuable to the lover. However, perceiving that value is not at all an indispensable *formative* or *grounding* condition of the love. It

¹⁶⁴ I take the language of “appraisal” and “bestowal” from Irving Singer’s canonical statement of the distinction between them. See Singer, *The Nature of Love, Vol. 1: Plato to Luther*, 3–22.

need not be a perception of value in what he loves that moves the lover to love it. The truly essential relationship between love and the value of the beloved goes in the opposite direction. It is not necessarily as a *result* of recognizing their value and of being captivated by it that we love things. Rather, what we love necessarily *acquires* value for us *because* we love it. The lover does invariably and necessarily perceive the beloved as valuable, but the value he sees it to possess is a value that derives from and that depends upon his love.¹⁶⁵

Frankfurt seems willing to grant that love *sometimes* arises in response to the lover's apprehension of the inherent value of the beloved.¹⁶⁶ However, his central point in the passage above is that love *need* not arise or be sustained in this way. Rather, what is essential to love, thinks Frankfurt, is that some perceived value of the beloved *derives from* the lover's love for him.

How, according to Frankfurt, does love ever arise in those cases where it does not do so in response to the lover's apprehension of the beloved's value?¹⁶⁷ His basic answer seems to be that in such cases love is brought about by natural causes.¹⁶⁸ He takes parental love for children to be such a case:

I can declare with unequivocal confidence that I do not love my children because I am aware of some value that inheres in them independent of my love for them. The fact is that I loved them even before they were born—before I had any especially relevant

¹⁶⁵ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 38–39. I take Frankfurt as my primary opponent instead of Irving Singer since Singer holds a kind of bestowal view that is not clearly in conflict with my view. While Singer surely holds that love bestows value on the beloved, and thus that some of the beloved's perceived value is dependent on the lover's love, he also holds that love requires a kind of appraisal. For example, he writes, "In the history of philosophy bestowal and appraisal have often been confused with one another, perhaps because they are both types of valuation. Love is related to both; they interweave in it. Unless we appraised we could not bestow a value that goes beyond appraisal; and without bestowal there would be no love...The objective beauty and goodness of his beloved will delight the lover, just as her deficiencies will distress him. In her, as in every other human being, these are important properties. How is the lover to know what they are without a system of appraisals?...none of this would be possible without objective appraisals." Singer, *The Nature of Love, Vol. 1: Plato to Luther*, 9, with apologies for Singer's sexist use of pronouns. Elsewhere Singer puts it even more bluntly: "In bestowal there will always be a concomitant appraisal...Apart from appraisal, no love would exist—we wouldn't even notice what the other is like." Irving Singer, *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing Up* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 52. Thus, it seems Singer would not necessarily contest Aquinas's idea that love is a response to apprehended value, i.e., a response to a kind of appraisal. It is just that Singer would want to add the idea of bestowal to Aquinas's account. Frankfurt, on the other hand, seems to me a genuine opponent of Aquinas's view.

¹⁶⁶ See Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 38.

¹⁶⁷ I set potions and pills aside for the moment.

¹⁶⁸ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 38.

information about their personal characteristics or their particular merits and virtue...It is not because I have noticed their value, then, that I love my children as I do...It is really the other way around...As for why it is that human beings do tend generally to love their children, the explanation presumably lies in the evolutionary pressures of natural selection.¹⁶⁹

Frankfurt's idea, here, is that his love for his children could not have arisen in response to his apprehension of a value inherent in them and independent of his love since he loved them before they were born, when he had no information about the particular characteristics or virtues that might make them valuable. Rather, he holds that certain natural, causal pressures—perhaps related to natural selection—produced in him his love for his children, and this love then brought him to see special value in his children. I take it that Frankfurt views the case of parental love for children as a counter-example to the Thomist “appraisal” view of love’s operative grounds that I endorse.

Of course, it seems correct that Frankfurt’s love for his children did not arise in response to his prior apprehension of their special beauty, wit, charm, or virtues of character. Thus, he seems right to deny that love for one’s own children arises in response to a prior apprehension of the value of such qualities. However, this does not rule out the idea that his love for his children arose in response to a prior apprehension of their special and love-independent value to him. Indeed, it strikes me that my recognition of the importance of my children being *my* children was instrumental in the formation of my love for them. But, this recognition is simply the apprehension of the value of my parental relationship to them. Thus, we might say that the parental relationship—a relational property of my children—is a feature that I apprehended the value of, and in response to which I came to love my children. Of course, I never would have articulated my coming to love them in this way, since I never thought these thoughts. Nevertheless, it seems clear to me that my love was an implicit response to my apprehension of

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 39–40.

the fact that they are *my* children, i.e., to the fact of the parent-child relation between us, and to the importance of this fact.

But, what of Frankfurt's claim that my love for my children arose out of mere natural causes—perhaps a certain brain chemistry brought about via evolutionary pressures? While some brain chemistry is surely involved in any case of love, if we set aside potions and pills¹⁷⁰ it seems cases of parental love must also involve a prior apprehension of *something* about the child; if not, it seems doubtful that love would arise. After all, if, unbeknownst to me, my sexual partner became pregnant and had a child, it seems highly unlikely that I would love that child. Mere biology or chemistry is not enough here: at a minimum love requires that I know of the child. Moreover, it seems that my apprehension of the parental relationship I have to the child is necessary in producing parental love.¹⁷¹ This apprehension is what accounts for the fact that I love *that* child with parental love and not any number of other children in the nursery. Finally, it seems equally clear that I must find the parental relationship I have to her to be *important* or *valuable* in some sense, if love is to arise. If I knew that the child was mine but thought that fact made no difference in the way I was to relate to her, or in the attitudes I was to have toward her, then, again, it seems unlikely I would have parental love for her. Of course, for most of us, the importance of a parental relationship is obvious and something we take for granted, and thus it is not something we even give thought to.¹⁷² However, sadly, this attitude is not universal. Thus, it seems some apprehension of the value or importance of my parental relationship to my child—however implicit or non-self-aware it might be—is necessary if I am to love her with parental love. For this reason, I take Frankfurt's easy reference to “natural causes” and “evolutionary

¹⁷⁰ Which seems legitimate here, since Frankfurt wants to talk about real cases.

¹⁷¹ I assume this parental relationship could come about in any number of ways, including ordinary biological means (i.e., sexual reproduction) and adoption.

¹⁷² Here might be the *real* influence of evolutionary biology on parental love: most of us seem wired to value our own children in response to our apprehended (valuable) parental relationship to them.

pressures” to paper over important aspects of the typical psychology of parental love for children. Indeed, I take this psychology to vindicate my view that love is sustained in response to an apprehension of some aspect of the value of the beloved.

3.5 OBJECTION: BESTOWAL EXPLAINS INFLATED APPRAISALS

It is sometimes claimed that bestowal views of love are better able to account for the fact that we often see far more value in the people we love than they actually objectively possess. For example, Irving Singer writes, “...loving a friend means more than...enjoying his noble character; it also means...treating him in a way that is incommensurate with his actual goodness, assuming a virtue though he have it not.”¹⁷³ The tendency to view a romantic partner as “perfect,” or a newborn grandchild as “the most beautiful baby in the world,” are further examples of this phenomenon. Singer’s point is that these cases are best accounted for by the idea that love is a bestowal of value on the beloved: in loving the person we bestow more value on him than he actually possesses, and thus he seems more perfect, beautiful, or noble than he objectively is. Bestowal also seems to explain well the fact that the value to us of a beloved person seems to increase over time. On the bestowal view, this fact is the result of our ongoing bestowal of value over time.

However, I think Singer’s explanation of such cases is too simplistic. In truth, these phenomena likely have a range of different explanations. In some such cases—perhaps especially cases of early-stage romantic love—something like Freudian overvaluation and transference are likely in play: the lover attributes to the beloved a host of excellences that he does not, in fact, possess—excellences that may be idealized versions of qualities possessed by important figures from the lover’s past (e.g., parents).¹⁷⁴ But, we need not view such attribution of excellences as

¹⁷³ Singer, *The Nature of Love, Vol. 1: Plato to Luther*, 90.

¹⁷⁴ I am inspired here by Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 350.

the bestowal of value. Why not think love is, in such cases, a response to a mistaken apprehension of value in the beloved? On this sort of reading, the case fits perfectly with my view: love still depends on the apprehension of the beloved's value; it is just that the apprehension is mistaken in this case. Moreover, even if such overvaluation and transference are best characterized as a kind of bestowal of value, it seems incorrect to suggest that love consists in such phenomena. For one thing, in most cases the fog of overvaluation and transference eventually clears and the lover takes on a more accurate assessment of the beloved and his qualities. However, the clearing of the fog does not entail that love also comes to an end. Rather, love may simply enter a more mature phase. Furthermore, not all cases of love seem accompanied by overvaluation and transference. Thus, at least on the basis of phenomena like overvaluation and transference, it seems a mistake to identify love with the kind of bestowal of value that Singer has in mind.

In other cases, our seeming tendency to attribute more value to a person we love than he actually possesses seems explained by the fact that, in an important sense, the person actually *becomes* more objectively valuable to us once we have a healthy relationship with him.¹⁷⁵ It seems patently obvious that healthy instances of friendships, familial relationships, and romantic relationships are incredibly valuable for human beings. Not only are they one of the most significant final ends or goods at which a typical person aims in her life, but they also typically bring with them a whole host of further goods, and so they have substantial instrumental value too. Such benefits include help in times of need, many kinds of pleasure, valuable self-knowledge, and a reduction in the stresses, anxieties, and burdens of life. I take it that closer instances of such healthy relationships typically have greater value for the participants. Relative to a healthy but distant friendship, a healthy close friendship is one in which we can typically

¹⁷⁵ I will elaborate on the claims I make in this paragraph about the value of relationships in Chapter Six.

expect more help if we need it, greater social pleasures, and greater reductions in the stress and strain of life.

Moreover, the value of healthy relationships is objective. By this I mean that a given instance of such a relationship would bear the same value for any two similarly situated people, and that the value of the relationship is something about which people might make a mistake. So, a healthy parent-child relationship has substantial value for its participants regardless of who those participants are. And I might well underestimate or overestimate the value of such a relationship in my practical life. Of course, there is room in this account for different “valuing” responses to a relationship of a given value. But, this need not suggest that the value of a relationship is a subjective bestowal of the participants. Thus, in some cases where it seems we attribute more value to a person we love than he actually possesses, our heightened sense of the beloved’s value need not indicate that we have bestowed value on him. Rather, it is that the genuine, objective value of the relationship we have to him—partly in virtue of which we find *him* valuable—now comes into play in our assessment of him, however implicitly.

In some cases, it might be that we mistakenly attribute the objective value of this relationship to certain of the beloved’s qualities, contributing to our tendency to view the beloved’s qualities with an inflated sense of value. Hence the grandparent’s claim that his granddaughter is “the most beautiful baby in the world.” Or, as Niko Kolodny has remarked, it might be that the value of the relationship gives us special reason to appreciate the excellences of the beloved.¹⁷⁶ On this story, it would not be that one bestows incommensurate value on the beloved’s qualities; rather, it would be that one’s special relationship to the beloved brings one to appreciate the genuine value of his qualities “to a greater degree than one would appreciate comparable qualities in a stranger.”¹⁷⁷ The objective value of a relationship between lover and

¹⁷⁶ Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship,” 154–155.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

beloved could also explain the tendency to view someone we love as increasingly valuable over time. As noted above, typically the closer someone is to us, the more objectively important and valuable that person and the relationship are to us. Thus, in cases like this, our increasing sense of the value of a beloved person might be grounded in the fact that the person *is* becoming objectively more valuable to us over time, in virtue of the increasing value of our relationship to him.

Thus, I think there are several plausible ways to explain the increased value we perceive in our loved ones, each of which are consistent with the sort of “appraisal” view of love I advocate. Therefore, I see no reason to advert to a Singer- or Frankfurt-style bestowal view of love to account for that phenomenon.

3.6 LOVE’S DEPENDENCE ON APPREHENDED GOODNESS

In this chapter I have been defending the view that it is partially constitutive of love that love’s two tendencies be sustained by, or depend upon, the lover’s apprehension of a person as good in a certain way. However, we might still wonder about the exact nature of this dependence. In this section I will speculate briefly on this question, though I will not settle it.

For some cases, it is tempting to think the dependence of love’s tendencies upon the apprehension of a person as good is merely causal. On this story, one might apprehend an attractive feature of the beloved and this apprehension (e.g., a perception or a belief) would then be the mere efficient cause of love’s two tendencies. This causal story seems to fit cases in which we “fall in love” with someone, i.e., certain visceral cases of romantic love. In these cases we typically experience a certain lack of control in our feelings and motivations to act. Indeed, even the language of “falling in love” suggests something that is happening to us causally, rather than something we are doing. Niko Kolodny seems to think the affective and motivational attitudes of

love are always causally dependent on a certain kind of belief in this way. For example, he claims, “Love...partly *consists* in the belief that some relationship renders it appropriate, and the emotions and motivations of love are *causally sustained* by this belief...”¹⁷⁸ On Kolodny’s story, the belief that a person has a certain valuable feature—namely, a kind of relationship to the lover—is the efficient cause of love’s dispositions to feel and act.

This causal story has a certain resemblance to Aquinas’s account of sensory love.¹⁷⁹ Recall from Chapter Two (Section 2.2) that the sensory appetite is the appetite that responds to objects apprehended as attractive to our senses. When we apprehend such an object—e.g., a piece of chocolate cake—the sensory appetite orients toward it in a kind of “sensory love.”¹⁸⁰ Certain of our sexual inclinations also seem to fit the category Aquinas has in mind here. When we apprehend (with our senses) an attractive potential sexual partner, the kind of inclinations toward the person we are liable to experience often seem causally, or at least instinctively, generated. Such inclinations may account for a portion of our experience of “falling in love.”

However, recall also that Aquinas claims that humans have a further appetite—the will—that responds not to the mere sensory apprehension of an object, but rather to the rational apprehension of an object with the intellect. As noted, the orientation of the will toward an object understood as good (in the relevant sense) amounts to “rational love.” On Aquinas’s view, then, rational love for a person seems to be a kind of response to practical reasons: we understand that the person is good, and on that basis our will becomes oriented toward him in the way

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 146. Emphasis original.

¹⁷⁹ Strictly speaking, Aquinas would likely reject my suggestion that inclinations of the sensitive appetite could be merely causally (i.e., mechanistically) generated, since, as Paul Hoffman puts it, “for Aquinas all causation presupposes a final cause, hence he would deny that there are any purely mechanistic causes...” See Hoffman, “Reasons, Causes, and Inclinations,” 165. Thus, Aquinas should be understood as “inspiring” the sort of view I am suggesting here and not as actually holding it.

¹⁸⁰ In this case, a love of concupiscence for the cake, and a love of friendship for oneself, as Aquinas would put it.

constitutive of love.¹⁸¹ Thus, it seems Aquinas thinks that in certain cases the dependence of love's tendencies upon the apprehension of the beloved as good is a *rational* sort of dependence, i.e., that the tendencies depend upon a reason. In such cases, we might say that Aquinas thinks we reason our way to love, in some sense.

Is Aquinas's story about rational love plausible? Do we sometimes reason our way to love? One worry about such an account might be that reasoning seems too intellectual and deliberate for love. In the practical realm, reasoning often evokes a picture of explicit deliberation in which we weigh various considerations, determine which ones are decisive, and then decide on a course of action. This picture is obviously foreign to love: we do not decide to love someone via explicit deliberation. Indeed, it is typically thought that love is something that just hits us without our trying. Or, at the very least, in most cases one day we just find ourselves loving someone, without any sense of having guided or controlled a deliberative process of acquiring the attitude.¹⁸² However, notice also that not all instances of practical reasoning involve explicit deliberation. Indeed, I suspect that the vast majority of practical reasoning does not.¹⁸³ Many of us go through our days operating mostly out of routines and habit, determining what to do at any given moment in a way that we are not necessarily conscious of. Nevertheless, if you asked me why I was brushing my teeth or getting on the bus, I might well give you a reason for my activity. If so, then some sort of implicit practical reasoning might lie behind my activity.

¹⁸¹ In some cases, the process of coming to understand the person as attractive could be informed by our sensory love and the sensory apprehension that produced it. If this is correct then it seems that something like a view expressed in Plato's *Symposium* could be correct, whereby we "ascend" from sensory love to rational love. See *Symposium* 210a-211d.

¹⁸² Samuel Scheffler makes a similar point about valuing, which seems apt in this context since love is frequently taken as a species of valuing. He writes, "Often, the process of coming to value something happens quite gradually, without any conscious awareness on our part, and we simply find at some point that we do in fact value the thing... Sometimes, far from deciding to value things, we find it difficult even to recognize or acknowledge that we value them." Samuel Scheffler, "Valuing," in *Equality and Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 39.

¹⁸³ While I hope that this claim is not terribly controversial, I realize that it depends upon an account of practical reasoning that I have not and will not give here.

But, if practical reasoning can be implicit in this way, it is at least not obvious that it is too intellectual or deliberate as a route to love.

Summing up, in this section I have gestured at two possible ways in which the tendencies of love might depend upon the apprehension of a person as good. First, the apprehension might serve as a merely efficient cause of love. Second, the content of the apprehension might serve as a practical reason that brings one to adopt love's two tendencies—albeit typically in an implicit way. Importantly, while I find the suggestion quite plausible that there are two possible ways in which love's tendencies depend upon the apprehension of a person as good—causally (or instinctively) and rationally—my account of love does not rely upon this suggestion. As long as some one of the modes of dependence remains plausible, my view will be viable. However, if it is correct that love's tendencies admit of two modes of dependence, then we have a further way of distinguishing kinds of love: according to the relevant mode of dependence, or the faculty by which love arises (sensory or rational).

3.7 CONCLUSION

In Chapter Three I completed my account of human love by offering a view of love's operative grounds, i.e., those features upon which love's two tendencies must depend if they are to constitute love. I have argued that love's operative grounds must be features apprehended by the lover as good in a particular sense. Specifically, the lover must recognize in the beloved a capacity for union with the lover, either because he has some good feature that the lover also has, because he has some good feature that the lover would like to have, or because the lover simply finds the beloved pleasing in some respect. Typically, the operative ground of love will be that in response to which love arises or is sustained.

In light of this account of love's operative ground I clarified the notion of "commitment" that I employed in Chapter Two when explaining my account of "union". I claimed, here, that there are two kinds of commitment. The first—what I called a "loving commitment"—is simply a kind of love in which love's two tendencies of will are particularly firm or fixed. The second—what I called a "dutiful commitment"—exhibits the two tendencies characteristic of love, but the operative ground of these tendencies is an apprehension of one's duty to pursue the good of and union with the other, and *not* an apprehension of the beloved as good in the relevant sense. For this reason, a dutiful commitment is not a kind of love.

In defense of my view of love's operative ground, I replied to two objections mounted by those who hold a bestowal view of love. According to the bestowal view, love does not depend on the prior apprehension of value in the beloved; rather, the apprehension of value depends on love insofar as love *bestows* value on the beloved that he did not previously have. The first objection held that my appraisal view cannot be correct since it fails in the case of parental love for children: such love seems not to depend on any features of personality or character that might make one find the child antecedently valuable. In reply I argued that, in fact, parental love *is* typically a response to antecedent value, namely the value of the parent-child relationship in virtue of which the child is objectively valuable to the parent. The second objection held that the bestowal view best explains the lover's commonly inflated appraisals of the beloved's traits: the lover bestows value on the beloved and thereby gives him a value that is greater than his traits objectively reflect. In reply, I argued that my appraisal view is capable of a less simplistic and thus more plausible explanation of the relevant phenomena.

Finally, in the penultimate section of the chapter I speculated on the nature of the dependence of love's two tendencies on the apprehension of the beloved as good. Inspired by Thomas Aquinas, I considered two possible kinds of such dependence: merely causal

dependence and rational dependence. I suggested that certain cases of what Aquinas might call “sensory love”—e.g., sexual love—might be examples in which the dependence is merely causal. However, I also suggested that there might be cases in which the lover’s apprehension of the beloved as good serves as a kind of practical reason, on the basis of which the lover adopts love’s two tendencies of will. Aquinas would call such cases, “rational love.”

In the next chapter—Chapter Four—I will continue to lay the philosophical groundwork necessary for addressing the two aims of my dissertation by offering an account of love’s *proper* grounds—those valuable features that love *properly* depends upon, or is *properly* sustained by. The proper grounds of love may be understood as those operative grounds of love that it would be proper for a lover to have.