

Towards a Feminist Account of Romantic Love

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Abstract

This dissertation engages with contemporary analytic debate about love and reasons. I defend a view of romantic love as grounded in, and justified by, reasons arising from the beloved's properties (viz., 'Qualities Rationalism'). I argue this view is more plausible in light of feminist concerns about 'love' for abusers. For this reason it should be preferred to anti-rationalism about love, along with other rationalist accounts ('Personhood Rationalism' and 'Relationship Rationalism'), which lack the resources to adequately reflect these concerns.

Chapter 1 presents the explanatory and extensional limitations of anti-rationalism in reference to abuse cases (as defended by, e.g. Frankfurt, 2004; Yao, 2020; Zangwill, 2013). Chapter 2 compares Qualities Rationalism to other influential rationalist views expounded by Kolodny (2003) and Velleman (1999). Chapter 3 constructs an error theory to explain the apparent allergy to Qualities Rationalism by critiquing the romantic ideals – of love as strongly disinterested, unconditional, and non-fungible – that motivate objections to it. In this chapter, I draw primarily on work from Delaney (1996), Keller (2000), McKeever (2017, 2019) and Shpall (2020). Chapter 4 responds to objections about the potential implications of Qualities Rationalism's core commitment. These concern love's voluntariness, the distinction between romantic and platonic love, and the capacity of Qualities Rationalism to account for the value of passion in romantic love.

Impact statement

This dissertation examines the value of love in the contemporary western context, particularly in light of concerns about abusive relationships and intimate partner violence. I defend a philosophical account of love ('Qualities Rationalism') that takes feminist concerns about intimate partner abuse seriously while remaining optimistic that romantic love is worth pursuing as part of a flourishing life. This work bridges analytic philosophy and feminist theory, addressing both academic debates and pressing socio-political concerns about pathological romantic attachment.

According to Qualities Rationalism, love is a rational response to the beloved's qualities. My argument for the plausibility of this oft-dismissed view is driven by the claim that, in light of its particular explanatory resources, Qualities Rationalism is more sensitive to the ethical concerns raised by 'love' for abusers than other philosophical accounts. In particular, I charge opposing anti-rationalist perspectives with endorsing abusive attachments as paradigmatic and aspirational cases of love. I find explanatory limitations in fellow rationalist accounts ('Personhood Rationalism' and, to a lesser extent, 'Relationship Rationalism') that justify a preference for Qualities Rationalism.

Within academia, this thesis advances discussions in moral psychology, practical ethics and feminist theory, by critiquing traditional romantic ideals: love as unconditional, disinterested, and irreplaceable. It challenges both scholarly and popular narratives, encouraging future research to adopt a more critical and ethically rigorous approach to love and attachment. It also enriches curricula in moral psychology by integrating feminist insights into debate about the justification and appropriateness of attitudes. My feminist defence of Qualities Rationalism lays the groundwork for a fully-fledged feminist account of romantic love.

Beyond academia, Qualities Rationalism has important implications for public discourse and professional practice. By framing love as rational (viz., an attitude that should 'make sense' to the person experiencing it) my account offers a framework for us to recognize and critique our own pathological attachments and distinguish them from love. This conceptual clarity could also inform urgent counselling, social work, and mental health practices, as well as public health and policy efforts aimed at preventing intimate partner violence and supporting survivors. By challenging cultural myths that romanticise harmful relationships, we can foster healthier understandings of love.

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Introduction

Chapter 1 *A problem for anti-rationalism*

Chapter 2 *Extending the problem to other rationalist views*

Chapter 3 *Error theory*

Chapter 4 *Objections to Qualities Rationalism*

Conclusion

Introduction

This dissertation offers a new defence of ‘Qualities Rationalism’, a philosophical account which understands love as a rational response to the personal qualities of the beloved – her wit, intellect, or the shine of her hair, for example. My project is motivated by two key concerns. First, much of the analytic philosophy of love overlooks feminist critiques of love under patriarchy. Second, feminist theory, while rightly critical, often veers towards excessive scepticism about love’s potential value for flourishing. I argue that a sophisticated version of Qualities Rationalism can address both issues: it preserves the idea that romantic love is meaningful and worthwhile, while also offering conceptual resources to critically assess when it goes wrong – particularly in contexts of abuse.

I understand myself to be offering an urgent feminist intervention in the philosophical literature on love, as well as a loving intervention in the feminist tradition. So, before I sketch the shape of the contemporary analytic debate, I’ll set out an important idea in feminist theory and activism. Namely: there is something politically troubling about (cis-heterosexual) romantic love and relationships under patriarchy.

In this introduction and throughout, unless specified otherwise, by ‘love’ I mean ‘romantic love’ and by ‘relationship(s)’ I mean those of the romantic variety.

0.1 Feminism and romantic love

Feminists have long been concerned about love as a site of women’s oppression under patriarchy.¹ They have worried, for example, that love makes women socially and affectively dependent on men even if they are otherwise liberated (e.g. Beauvoir, 2011; Lynch, 2013). Even if a woman has attained equal access to work, capital, property, and democracy, the pursuit of love with a man blocks her from achieving independence and realising her autonomy (e.g. Frye, 1983). So long as a woman seeks love with a man, she is under pressure to conform to his desires and expectations. In the mid-twentieth century, feminist writers argued that the pressure to conform to such expectations – chiefly, ideals of domesticity – is *principally* responsible for disempowering women and destabilising their self-actualisation, by, for instance, disincentivising the pursuit of a career outside the home, or making the desire for their own pleasure shameful (Friedan, 1963; Greer, 1970).²

Feminists have also been concerned that love is fostered by, and reinforcing of, the kinds of relationships that make us vulnerable to our partners, opening us up to exploitation and abuse (e.g., Adams, 1994; hooks, 2000). Romantic relationships are

¹ Queer theorists have also been invested in challenging harmful ideas about love. Here and throughout (especially Chapter 4) I draw on philosophical work informed by their insights.

² See Faye’s (2025) *Love In Exile* for a recent trans perspective on Greer’s work.

typically private affairs that involve the cloistering of the lovers into an increasingly close union of interdependence. Therefore, lovers can become increasingly disconnected from friends and relatives who might offer alternative sources of love, care and support (McDonald, forthcoming). In our patriarchal society, gendered power dynamics are reproduced at the interpersonal level, so that women are, on a structural level, more vulnerable in loving relationships than men (e.g. Srinivasan, 2021: 13-41; Spelman, 1982).

Pursuing love, women are not only vulnerable to having their interests subtly set back or their options constrained; they risk material harms of the most severe order. Women are significantly more likely to experience intimate partner violence than men. According to the World Health Organisation (2024), approximately one in three women globally will experience intimate partner violence in her lifetime, with women of colour at increased risk (Women's Aid, 2024). The recent, sobering report, '2000 Women Report', by Femicide Census (2025), found that, of the two thousand women killed by men in the UK since 2009, 61% were killed by current or former intimate partners. Within that group, the majority of women were killed by men with whom they had an ongoing relationship, suggestive of romantic, not just sexual, involvement with the perpetrator (*ibid*).

In light of these concerns, several prominent feminist theorists have posited that the desire for heterosexual love is an *effect* of patriarchy, which also serves to uphold it. Rich (1980) notably coined the term 'compulsory heterosexuality' to denote a matrix of second-order desires and pressures that, she argued, mislead women into thinking their lives would be enriched by monogamous sex and love with men, even though they are repeatedly experienced as detrimental to their flourishing. The in-practice corollary of 'comphet' theory – namely, 'political lesbianism', which reached its peak in the 1970s – called on women to reject sexual and romantic feelings for men, and to instead invest exclusively in loving relationships with other women (Jeffreys, 2018: 96-112; Johnston, 1973; Rudy, 2001). However, criticism of the effectiveness, not to mention the feasibility, of political lesbianism as a revolutionary tactic has been frequent and scathing (e.g., Claudia, 1993: 135; Willis, 1984: 100-104).

More recently, a new movement of authors have proposed softened versions of Rich's critique. For example, Fraser (2018: 346) argues that women would be wise to remain critical of their desires for men, but she stops short of advocating straightforward flight from these desires, as this could be done only 'on pain of monstrous hypocrisy'. While Srinivasan (2021: 89-91) examines the relationship between 'fuckability' and agents' political status, holistically conceived, to recommend that we expand our desires beyond those positively-valenced by cis-heteronormative social scripts. Without demanding the wholesale abandonment of heterosexual romance, these philosophers encourage us to be critical of our intimate

desires and to understand these desires as importantly connected to oppressive hierarchies permeating the private and public spheres.

It's now widely accepted by feminist scholars that sexual and romantic preferences are at least partly constructed by differential power dynamics – including the privileging of men over women, straight people over queer, and white people over people of colour (Rupp and Thomson, 2016: 894-5). But debate about the details and normative significance of this fact remains heated.

Contemporary feminist thinking has also been strongly influenced by radical work from Dworkin (1987) and MacKinnon (1989), who identify (not uncontroversially) cis-heterosexual sex and, more specifically, penile-vaginal penetration, as central to women's oppression. There are two components to their critique. First, is the claim that 'intercourse' is overwhelmingly dangerous for women, while it is empowering for men. This can be bolstered by statistical evidence of the kind cited above. Second, is a more demanding claim. For Dworkin and MacKinnon, not only is intercourse a site of frequent and severe harm for women; it is *constitutive* of their oppression. It is through and by the ('violent') act of penile-vaginal penetration that the social kind 'woman' is constructed (Dworkin, 1987: 153; MacKinnon, 1989: 323-4). This is a claim about the metaphysics of gender, according to which, to be a woman *just is* to be the kind of person whose body is penetrated by a man's penis. A notable consequence of this account is that the identity of 'woman' is inherently negative, problematic and connotative of subjugation.

These critiques give rise to corresponding concerns about cis-heterosexual love. First, because this kind of love typically involves regular intercourse, it serves as a means of securing male access to women's bodies. This is materially dangerous for women. Second, to the extent that love facilitates male access to women's bodies, it creates the conditions for women's continued systemic oppression. Dworkin (1987: 155) writes: 'intercourse and women's inequality are like Siamese twins, always in the same place at the same time pissing in the same spot'. Where is this spot? Plausibly, for Dworkin and MacKinnon, it is the cis-heterosexual romantic relationship. Love is the affective basis of these relationships. So, love is the basis of a site of women's oppression.

Whether or not we find Dworkin and MacKinnon persuasive, their thinking has played a significant role in shaping contemporary feminist scholarship and establishing its loci of concern. Love is not a marginal issue for feminist philosophers. It has been thought *central* to the workings of patriarchy and indeed to the reification of the sex-gender system of social organisation.

So, scepticism (and indeed, pessimism) about the value of love is arguably at the heart of the feminist philosophical tradition. From this rich history, I inherit the following key insights. First, the empirical claim that our affective commitments –

more precisely, who we love and the kinds of relationships we pursue with them – are constrained by patriarchy. Call this ‘Patriarchal Impact’. Second, because of Patriarchal Impact, love and loving relationships are frequently detrimental to (women’s) flourishing. Call this claim ‘Harmful Love’.

It will be prudent to make two caveats about Patriarchal Impact and Harmful Love. First, these claims are not universally endorsed by feminists. Feminism is a heterogenous movement whose participants can be each other’s most fervent detractors. I expect Harmful Love will be more contentious than Patriarchal Impact. Many theorists worry about the risks of moralising about our affective lives by way of political critique. Such critique is not emancipatory for women when applied to the erotic realm, they argue, but unduly inhibiting, shame-inducing, or otherwise ineffective as a revolutionary tactic (e.g. Long Chu, 2018a; Rubin, 2012: 137-181; Willis, 2012: 3-14). These objections have been sustained even where the desires in question appear quite crudely reflective of patriarchal power dynamics – as in the case of women who fantasize about being ‘forced’ to have sex by men (Heck, 2025). Andrea Long Chu (2018b) even insists that a desire’s being ‘bad’ for her politically might be what gives it its particular value as a desire – namely, its ability to excite, thrill, and transform her. Anyone sympathetic to this line of argument is likely to be at least dubious about Harmful Love. (I hope the arguments I give throughout serve to make this line of argument less plausible; for reasons of scope, I cannot treat these objections head-on).

Second, in committing to Patriarchal Impact and Harmful Love, I don’t want to endorse misandry. It’s certainly possible to read arguments about the dangers of love for men as speaking against men themselves.³ On my view, individual men are not the problem in (or even, necessarily, the beneficiaries of) traditional models of cis-heterosexual love. If men *qua* men are cast in the role of abusers, victimisers, or dominators in love, then this is not conducive to their flourishing either. Instead, I understand Patriarchal Impact and Harmful Love as picking out features of patriarchal social organisation that set back the interests of people of all genders, including men, in the search for intimacy. The point of putting love on the stand is to interrogate the ways in which certain expectations and ideals encourage us to invest in people and relationships which are not conducive to our flourishing. The insights I draw from feminism illuminate how patriarchy structures our social lives in ways that are ultimately limiting for everyone.

In 0.2, I explain how I’ll apply these insights to make a feminist intervention in philosophical debate about love. Despite affirming Patriarchal Impact and Harmful Love, I offer an optimistic picture: it is by taking concerns about love seriously, that we can identify its proper value in the good case.

³ Solanas (1968) rehearses an argument of this kind.

Throughout this dissertation, I aim to address ideas prevalent in philosophical scholarship and popular thinking. Scepticism about love's value permeates feminist creative work and contemporary activism as well feminist scholarship. Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical fiction should be credited for providing an early exploration of how love (and marriage) make women vulnerable. Her short story, 'La Femme rompue' (1967), warns of the dangers of making romantic love one's primary end. Beauvoir's protagonist, Monique, loses her grasp on reality and her sense of self, when her marriage, which has become the sole nexus of her identity, is brutally unravelled with the discovery of her husband's extramarital affairs. Before Beauvoir, in Louisa May Alcott's classic novel *Little Women* (2009), there is the infamous plight of protagonist Jo March to resist being perceived only as a thing which loves and is loved. Her rousing speech was reproduced by Greta Gerwig in the 2019 film adaptation of the same name, where it still struck a chord with contemporary audiences: 'Women have minds and souls as well as just hearts [...] I'm so sick of people saying that love is all a woman is fit for. I'm so sick of it!' Even as early as the 18th century, English novelist Sarah Scott was writing about a feminist utopia in *Millenium Hall* (1762). There, a female separatist community thrive as they dedicate their time to arts and philanthropy, rather than to love with men or the reproduction of a nuclear family.

Narratives of this kind echo throughout feminist art, and they are reflected in mainstream activism, which often encourages women to assert their affective independence from men by disavowing the need for romantic relationships with them (Economist, 2024; HuffPost UK, 2025). To see the extent to which this critique has touched public consciousness, we need only look to the refrain in Miley Cyrus's 'Flowers', which was the best-selling global single of 2023: 'I can buy myself flowers, and I can hold my own hand. Yeah, I can love me better than you can'.⁴

0.2 Love and reasons

Having set out the feminist insights that motivate my argument (namely, Patriarchal Impact and Harmful Love), I now turn to the contemporary philosophical debate in which I plan to intervene. I argue certain philosophical accounts of love have not taken sufficient heed of these insights.

There has been philosophical interest in what we now call 'romantic' love since Plato (Vlastos, 1981: 6-7). From the earliest discussions, attempts to describe the nature of love have been guided by the motivation to explain its distinctive value. In the *Symposium*, Aristophanes famously describes the mythic origins of love as a uniquely human longing for reunion with our other ontic half (Plato, 1997). Here, the

⁴ According to the IFPI (2024).

value of love lies in its ability to offer a sense of completeness, which leads to profound contentment and satisfaction. In contemporary analytic discussion, authors agree that love is important for human flourishing. They disagree, however, about how it is that love contributes to our flourishing and, crucially for my purposes here, about whether love for a particular person should always strike us as *reasonable*. These disagreements are reflected in the debate about whether love is rational or anti-rational.

Anti-rationalists deny that love for a particular person can be justified or unjustified on the balance of reasons. On anti-rationalism, it is meaningless and confused to describe love for a particular person in these terms. Love is not the sort of thing that is responsive to, or evaluable by, reasons. Anti-rationalism is the view I find the least plausible in light of feminist concerns.

Rationalists hold that love for a particular person may be justified on the balance of reasons. (Not all rationalists commit to the related claim that love can be unjustified). Proponents of rationalism cite different kinds of reasons as relevant to love's justification. I focus on the three most prominent versions of the view. Personhood Rationalists hold that reasons arising from value of the beloved's bare personhood justify love (e.g., Setiya, 2014; Velleman, 1999). Relationship Rationalists hold that reasons arising from the value of the loving relationship with the beloved justify love (Kolodny, 2003). Qualities Rationalists hold that reasons arising from the beloved's personal qualities justify love (e.g., Keller, 2000; Lewis, n.d.).

I want to show that Qualities Rationalism is the most appealing account of love and its value. Qualities Rationalism captures the natural (though, not uncontroversial) thought that you're justified in loving someone because of how great you think they are. If you find someone witty, sharp, kind, and gorgeous to boot, then you have lots of reasons to love them. Conversely, if you have feelings for someone you think is dull, cruel, immature, and not even much of a looker... then something has gone wrong. Qualities Rationalism does not entail that these sorts of factors exhaust the considerations relevant to judgements about why we love other people. But it does say that the qualities of the beloved are central to those judgements. On my version of Qualities Rationalism, appreciation of the beloved's qualities justifies and grounds love for them (see 1.1). More so than any other account, I think, Qualities Rationalism allows us to take feminist concerns seriously, while maintaining – as is the wont of most contemporary analytic philosophers – a coherent account of love as valuable.

The most compelling and urgent evidence for Patriarchal Impact and Harmful Love is the prevalence of abusive relationships. So a hypothetical abuse case will be the starting point and the locus of my argument. I expound this case, along with a secondary case inspired by the disputed phenomenon of love at first sight, in 1.2.

Some accounts of love make it harder, perhaps impossible, to critique loving feelings for a particular person, including abusers, as inappropriate.⁵ This is especially true of anti-rationalist accounts, but also, I'll argue, Personhood Rationalism and, to a lesser extent, Relationship Rationalism. Often, theorists deliberately build this feature into their accounts. For example, Zangwill (2013) describes love as 'gloriously' a-rational and a-moral. Yao (2020), whose argument differs starkly in tone from Zangwill's, similarly holds that 'gracious' love for people we judge irredeemable is an especially valuable case, not one we should be concerned to critique. Frankfurt (2004: 38) also notices his account has this feature and (somewhat begrudgingly) accepts it – writing of love for 'utterly bad' people only that, 'such things happen.'

Qualities Rationalism has the resources to critique love for abusers. On Qualities Rationalism, loving feelings for an abuser are not justified. But the view is also consistent with optimism about the value of love *in the good case*, where the beloved's properties *do* justify the lover's feelings. Those of us troubled by Patriarchal Impact and Harmful Love can coherently endorse the pursuit of love on Qualities Rationalism. Moreover, justified love will be revealed as having features with the potential to counteract the effects of oppression: by building lovers' self-esteem, generating mutual understanding, and prompting positive personal transformation, for example.

Qualities Rationalism has already been defended by several scholars, a selection of whom I cite above. My reader might therefore wonder what is novel in my proposal. I believe my project contributes to the existing scholarship in two important ways. First, where support for Qualities Rationalism has been primarily defensive, my argument constitutes an attack on the plausibility of opposing views. Proponents of other accounts, including other rationalists, typically derive support for their accounts from the (supposed) untenability of Qualities Rationalism. Correspondingly, arguments for Qualities Rationalism have aimed at repairing the view. For example, Lewis (2023) recently argued the 'trading-up' objection (1.4) to Qualities Rationalism rests on an uncharitable construal of the view, without yet committing to Qualities Rationalism himself. Solomon (2002: 1-2) makes some very influential remarks in defence of Qualities Rationalism, but only aims at persuading readers the view should not be dismissed out of hand. Likewise, Jollimore (2011: 23; 4) contends that arguments against Qualities Rationalism rest on an uncharitable construal of the view. However, in the end, he offers a 'hybrid' account, on which love is attentive to the beloved's properties, but this attentiveness is moderated by anti-rational features (*ibid*).

⁵ Throughout, I treat appropriateness and justification as roughly equivalent. There is precedent for this in the existing literature (McKeever and Saunders, 2022: 256).

Second, I begin by assuming that the affective state of lovers in healthy relationships are paradigmatic of love. I define 'healthy' relationships loosely, in contrast to 'abusive'. The tendency in the philosophical literature on love has been to assume that paradigmatic cases of love are those which instantiate certain romantic ideals – of love as disinterested, unconditional, and non-fungible (see Chapter 3). Beginning from a position of agnosticism about these ideals, before going on to challenge them, represents an important methodological shift. The purpose of this shift is to explicitly decentre abusive cases from our understanding of love's value.

0.3 Housekeeping

It will be helpful to write a few lines on the scope of my project, its structure, and how I'm understanding key terms.

First, I am concerned only with *romantic* love, in the contemporary western sense of the term. I'm interested in other forms of love (familial, platonic, divine...) only insofar as they relate to romantic love, or where other authors infer from claims about these kinds of love to claims about romantic love. It is a subsidiary aim of my project to bolster the claim that romantic love is importantly distinct from ordinary conceptions of parental love, while, at the same time, romantic and platonic have more in common than is typically supposed (3.1 and 4.2).

Second, as I have found to be standard in recent philosophical discussions of love, I use 'reasons' in the ordinary language sense of pros and cons. I employ 'reasons' this way because it aligns with the norms in the existing literature and therefore allows me to clearly map my critique onto my interlocutor's accounts.

Third, it's worth clarifying from the outset that I don't understand myself as engaged in a conceptual engineering project. As I see it, there are multiple competing ideas about the nature of romantic love at play in ordinary language and popular thinking. My aim is to untangle these ideas to reveal that those consistent with Qualities Rationalism are more than *prima facie* plausible. But I won't deny there is a Haslangerian, 'ameliorative' flavour to my argument (Haslanger, 2012). I am motivated in part by the belief that Qualities Rationalism offers a helpful way to think about love. Since, as noted in 0.2, descriptive accounts of love typically aim to be at least consistent with a compelling account of its value, I submit that most of the accounts I discuss here have an analogously ameliorative flavour. This is important for the dialectic: I am meeting my interlocutors on their own turf and offering them an argument they are obliged to engage with, if they want to maintain their critique of Qualities Rationalism.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. In Chapter 1, I present my arguments against anti-rationalism. In Chapter 2, I distinguish Qualities Rationalism from opposing rationalist accounts, Personhood Rationalism and Relationship

Rationalism. In Chapter 3, I propose an error theory for opposition to Qualities Rationalism. In Chapter 4, I anticipate objections to potential implications of Qualities Rationalism – it is here that I draw most explicitly on feminist and queer theory. The Conclusion offers a survey of my argument, a review of my aims, and some remarks of a more speculative nature about the applications of my account.

Chapter 1

A problem for anti-rationalism

According to anti-rationalism about love, the question of who we love is not grounded in reason. More precisely, we might love someone who, on the balance of reasons, we don't think we are justified in loving; our love for them is not rational. Further, on anti-rationalism, love cannot be coherently critiqued in the language of reasons. It's never true of a person's love that it is justified or unjustified. Anti-rationalism is pervasive not only in the philosophical literature, but also in popular thinking, literature and art. Consider how we often talk about love as a kind of madness, or as involving a turn away from rational ideals towards (incompatible) romantic ones. Despite its ubiquity, I argue that anti-rationalism is mistaken.

This chapter develops my argument against anti-rationalism, focusing on the difficulty the view has critiquing cases of 'love' for abusive partners. Anti-rationalism, I argue, struggles to capture the distinction between bona fide love and problematic love-adjacent attitudes, including dependency and infatuation.⁶

After a bit more set-up in 1.1, I present two cases in 1.2 that indicate explanatory and extensional failings in anti-rationalism. I then consider a series of anti-rationalist objections to an alternative account of love, my preferred view, Qualities Rationalism. These objections are: the incompleteness and constancy objections (1.3), the trading-up objection (1.4), and apparent counterexamples (1.5). I conclude that anti-rationalism struggles to adequately critique cases of 'love' for abusive partners and this counts against the view compared to my Qualities Rationalism.

1.1 Setting the scene

Let's begin with some clarifications. My argument in this chapter involves the comparison of anti-rationalism with the view I defend throughout, Qualities Rationalism. I occasionally mention other rationalist views – namely, Personhood Rationalism and Relationship Rationalism. But the primary opponents in this chapter are anti-rationalism and Qualities Rationalism. Comparing rationalist views is the focus of Chapter 2.

For clarity and ease of reference, here is a slogan statement of both views. I use '*L*' for 'lover' and '*B*' for 'beloved'.

Qualities Rationalism: *L* loves *B* only if, on the balance of reasons arising from *B*'s qualities, *L* is justified in their loving feelings for *B*.

⁶ Drawing on psychoanalysis, hooks (2000: 5) employs a similar distinction between love and mere 'cathexis'.

Anti-rationalism: It is not the case that *L* loves *B* only if, on the balance of reasons, *L* is justified in their loving feelings for *B*.

As mentioned in the Introduction, my view is that reasons arising from the beloved's qualities *ground* love, not only that they justify it. That is, loving feelings which are not justified are not love. Instead, I call unjustified loving feelings 'problematic love-adjacent attitudes'. For rhetorical reasons, I sometimes talk about 'bona fide' love, this is purely emphatic, as is, I think, ordinary talk about 'true' love. Throughout, I use 'loving feelings' as a justification-neutral term: loving feelings may turn out to be of love, or mere a love-adjacent attitude. Likewise for 'lover' and 'beloved'.

You could, in theory, affirm that the beloved's qualities *justify* love without grounding it. This allows for cases where *L* feels bona fide love for *B*, but the love is unjustified. I take no strong issue with this view. If my reader is uncomfortable with my ruling that a given case does not involve love at all, while, at the same time, agreeing with me that there is something deeply inappropriate and unjustified about the loving feelings, then I encourage them to imagine this weaker claim is my view. The central point I'm working towards is that anti-rationalists struggle to make the distinction between the value of cases where loving feelings are justified and those where they are not. I believe this point can be made whether we rule a given case involves unjustified love or no love at all. I prefer the stronger grounding claim because it accommodates neater argumentation and because I think it reflects a genuine phenomenological distinction in our affective lives. I make the case for this latter claim in the Conclusion.

It's worth stressing that the disagreement between anti-rationalists and rationalists is primarily about *whom* – as opposed to how much, or in what way – we love. It's about whether it's ever true that *B* is an irrational object of *L*'s loving feelings. Suppose someone is very cruel, far too young, or largely unknown to *L*. Qualities Rationalism has the resources to describe these cases as irrational and *pro tanto* inappropriate. Anti-rationalists lack these resources. This chapter aims to show that this is a problem for their view.

I also stipulate that the reasons in question are those present to the lover from their first-personal perspective. The reasons justifying *L*'s love for *B* need only count as reasons *for L*. This should help disambiguate the minimum commitment of my Qualities Rationalism from the stronger claim that *L* loves *B* only if, on the balance of reasons *acceptable to others*, *L* is justified in loving *B*. Moreover, it allows that the relevant reasons may arise from properties which are only available to *L* as someone in an intimate relationship with *B*. On Qualities Rationalism, these reasons might include, for example, *B*'s empathic listening skills or gentleness of touch. Incidentally, this point is also relevant to my preference for the grounding claim, in that it bolsters the claim that justified loving feelings are experienced differently (viz., better) than

unjustified loving feelings. The internal tension, confusion and stress of believing that your loving feelings do not ‘make sense’ is part of what renders unjustified feelings defective (see also: Kolodny, 2003: 137; Philips, 2021: 173).

1.2 Contentious cases

Here I present two cases that we can use to test our intuitions about the rationality of love. Crucially, they seem to fall short of bona fide love precisely because *L* thinks, on the balance of reasons, they are not justified in loving *B*. One of these cases raises obvious ethical concerns, the other serves as a control case.⁷

ABUSE: Lorna and Boris are long-term partners who live alone together. Boris repeatedly subjects Lorna to abuse – frequently insulting her and becoming violent any time she displeases him. The couple have been together for years, sharing formative experiences and now a home. Lorna believes she loves Boris. However, Lorna also fears Boris, understanding him as generally cruel and a danger to her in particular.

FLING: Lady and Brady are perfect strangers who meet at a bar and spend one incredible night together. Waking up the next morning, Lady feels the belief that she loves Brady form in her mind. However, Lady understands that she barely knows Brady and Brady barely knows her. She is also aware of her tendency to get over-excited about people early on, especially if they know how to move on the dancefloor.

I invite the reader to share my intuition that Lorna does not really love Boris, nor does Lady love Brady. Rather, Lorna has become dependent on Boris, she has lost her grip on who she could be without him and, perhaps as a result, she has developed a misplaced care for him. She confuses this combination of dependency and care for love. Likewise, Lady is infatuated, she really fancies Brady, and she’s excited by the prospect of getting to know them better. She confuses this infatuation for love. Certainly, neither woman is experiencing a feeling that is paradigmatic of love or aspirational in that sense. In both cases, there is something inappropriate about *L*’s loving feelings for *B*.

Qualities Rationalism offers a clear and simple explanation of these intuitions. Love is a rational response to the beloved, justified by their qualities; dependency and infatuation are not. Lorna’s loving feelings for Boris are not justified because of the reasons she has which count against loving him. Lady lacks sufficient reasons to love Brady, because she barely knows them. This analysis of ABUSE and FLING is not

⁷ This is not to suggest that FLING is otherwise uncontroversial. In 2.3 I address debate about love at first sight. See also: Maurer (2014).

available on anti-rationalism. To explain what goes wrong in these cases, anti-rationalists must appeal to something other than reasons.

So here is my challenge to anti-rationalism. Without appeal to reasons, it's difficult to explain why cases like ABUSE and FLING might fall short of love. More precisely, what looks to be the simplest explanation – namely, that loving feelings are not a rational response in either case – is not available to anti-rationalists. Further, if we're only using the explanatory resources anti-rationalism supplies, it's a challenge to explain why *anything* goes awry with *L*'s feelings in these cases. Anti-rationalism therefore seems to falsely endorse ABUSE and FLING as cases of love like any others, with the same value.⁸

As we saw in the Introduction, feminists have a particular interest in critiquing cases like ABUSE. Under patriarchy, many women in heterosexual relationships feel a sense of attachment to men who abuse or otherwise mistreat them. Patriarchy normalises these relationships, in a way that harms individual women and contributes to their collective subordination. An important project for feminism is to challenge such relationships. Part of this challenge is critiquing the idea that what the women in such relationships feel towards their abusers is valuable enough to be worth pursuing and making sacrifices for. Insofar as anti-rationalism disables this critique, it is anti-feminist.

Now we understand the problem for anti-rationalists, let's construct a response on their behalf. Support for anti-rationalism often comes through arguments against Qualities Rationalism. Indeed, anti-rationalism has seemed to many a 'necessary' position, given the (supposed) untenability of my preferred view (Jollimore, 2011: 13). So my strategy will be to consider a selection of the most forceful objections to Qualities Rationalism and explain where the anti-rationalist critique goes wrong in each case.

1.3 Incompleteness and inconstancy

I'll begin with the 'incompleteness' objection to Qualities Rationalism, which goes as follows.

We expect that, if I love my partner, I can give some reasons why: she's funny, sharp, and has lovely hair. This seems a point in favour of Qualities Rationalism, according to which such features justify my love for her. However, there's a sense in which this list of reasons is felt by me and my audience to be 'incomplete'. Something over and above these properties must ground my love for my partner. Put

⁸ABUSE and FLING are not straightforward *counterexamples* to anti-rationalism. Whether these cases involve love remains open on anti-rationalism. My argument is that anti-rationalists struggle to adequately critique them.

differently: I don't just love my partner's humour, intelligence and hair; ultimately, I must love *her* (Nozick, 1991: 422).

Frankfurt captures this point with his distinction between grounds for love being *describable* (i.e., referring to *B*'s properties) versus *nameable* (i.e., picking out *B* as a unique individual) (Frankfurt, 1998: 170). Detached from my partner, her hair would strike me, at most, as superficially pleasing. But attached to my partner's head, it strikes me as glorious, sensuous, and bewitching. The list of her properties is incomplete without the nameable element. So, reasons alone cannot justify love.

The thought behind 'incompleteness' is also at the core of the 'inconstancy objection' to Qualities Rationalism, which is as follows.⁹ People's properties change all the time. If the integrity of *L*'s love were dependent on *B*'s having a particular set of properties, it could not last very long. But there are cases where love persists throughout a lifetime of changes. So there must be something other than *B*'s properties grounding *L*'s love for *B*. Importantly, we tend to think a love which endures is closer to the ideal than a love which is fleeting. We are even apt to discount feelings as 'love' if they fizzle at the slightest alteration in the beloved.

This all sounds very romantic. If we subscribe to the ideals motivating this romantic picture, I agree that it's at least *prima facie* odd to think qualities have an *exhaustive* role to play in grounding love. But I have an error theory about these ideals, which I expound in Chapter 3. Also, I think clarification of the kinds of qualities that are operative on Qualities Rationalism can dispel much of the *prima facie* oddness in this suggestion (see 1.4 and 2.5). For now, for the sake of argument, I'll grant that Qualities Rationalists face an explanatory challenge when it comes to the constancy of love.

I'm happy to grant this because, even as I grant it, I don't think these worries count against Qualities Rationalism compared to anti-rationalism. Notice that, on anti-rationalism, positive appraisal of the beloved is not a necessary feature of loving them. This means that I need not value my beloved's properties to love her; I may be indifferent to them, or even find them quite loathsome (e.g. Hamlyn, 1978: 13 Zangwill, 2013: 307). But this seems at least as odd as the claim that all it is to love someone is to appreciate their qualities (Dixon, 2007: 375-377). So it looks like anti-rationalists face an incompleteness problem of their own. Without reference to the appreciation of qualities, the anti-rationalism picture seems incomplete. To a lesser extent, it's a challenge to explain why people stick with their beloveds for a lifetime, if they don't find their properties remotely agreeable.

Frankfurt (2004: 67), for example, accepts these consequences. He specifies that if *L* values *B*'s properties at all, then this valuing comes *after* *L*'s loving *B* and is

⁹ See Jollimore (2011: 17-18) and Rorty (1986) for rehearsals of this objection.

incidental to it (ibid: 38). Appreciation of *B*'s properties is merely a way of expressing or rationalising love – a phenomenon which need not make sense to the lover, or to anyone else, for that matter (ibid: 42).

However, I press that these remarks are significantly less satisfying in light of ABUSE. What seems to go wrong in Lorna's case is that she doesn't value Boris for his properties; she thinks him irredeemable in light of them, and rightly so. Likewise, in FLING, Lady doesn't love Brady because she lacks sufficient knowledge of their properties to appraise them. Whatever love-adjacent feelings Lorna and Lady do hold for Boris and Brady seem to fall short of love precisely because they're not accompanied by (the right kind of) positive appraisal.

Another reason to think love must involve *some* enjoyment of the beloved's qualities is that it's unclear what a person *is* without them. Solomon (2002: 7) expresses this point vividly: 'What is "the person," apart from [their] properties? A naked soul?'. Frankfurt might reply that they are nameable. But that a person is nameable is such a thin explanation that it seems only to imply a shorthand for something else – viz., their properties, which are familiar to anyone who knows them by name (Jollimore, 2011: 19-21). Certainly, to be told your lover conceived of your identity in this way would feel 'as impersonal and alienating as [being told] "I would love anyone who had your name and social security number"' (ibid: 142).

Here I'll pause for a moment. This is a dissertation about love and its value. So I judge that it is beyond my scope to offer an aside on the metaphysics of personal identity. But I recognise that the above comments may strike my reader as insufficient to secure the point under contention. With that in mind, I'll offer the following remarks. In our everyday interactions, a person's properties are what we use to identify and compare them. Asked to describe someone, we are primed to reel off some salient properties: age, height, temperament... Asked why we are drawn to one person and not another, we do the same. And we easily distinguish people of the same name by citing an observable property they don't share: one is short, the other is tall; one is blonde, the other is brunette; one is funny, the other only *thinks* he is. This tactic is pervasive and, I submit, generally works well for us.¹⁰ If there is something more fundamental that distinguishes persons from one another, it's not clear that we're aware of it. As such, I argue that the burden of proof rests with the anti-rationalist to say more about what this identifying element not captured by property talk could be.

Let's take stock. Anti-rationalists think Qualities Rationalism offers incomplete explanations of why we love a particular person and, by the same token, fails to reflect the ideal of constancy in love. But I've argued anti-rationalism faces an

¹⁰ In *Really Good, Actually* (2023), Monica Heisey's narrator calls one of her friends 'Lauren' and the other, 'Emotional Lauren'. I take it that the fact this strikes readers as amusing indicates that it reflects a feature of interpersonal organisation that goes beyond the auto-fictional realm of Heisey's novel.

explanatory problem of similar weight – namely, how to make sense of the role that the beloved's properties *do* play in grounding love, especially in the good case.

1.4 Trading up

In this section I'll consider the 'trading up' objection to Qualities Rationalism – which has been thought very compelling against it (e.g. Lewis, 2023; Shpall, 2020: 426).

When we love someone, even if we think our love for them is partly constituted by an appreciation of their properties, we don't think this love is dependent on their demonstrating supremacy in these properties, even from our first-person perspective. In loving my partner, I may think she has a great sense of humour, a sharp intellect, and shiny hair; but I don't have to think she has the best sense of humour, the sharpest intellect, *and* the shiniest hair, for my feelings to count as love. Qualities Rationalism seems to require that I think my partner superlative, so that, on the balance of reasons, I am justified in loving *her*, not anyone else.¹¹

Already, we see a problem. But the worry goes deeper: even if I do think my partner superlative, I don't think my love will be undermined if I meet someone who has all the same traits as her, but is also a little bit funnier or smarter, with slightly shinier hair. In other words: my love is not contingent on there being no one better around for whom I could trade her.

However, it appears Qualities Rationalists are committed to the claim that my love *is* contingent in this way. Or, at least, Qualities Rationalist is committed to the claim that I would be *more* justified in loving this new and improved person. Qualities Rationalism seems to recommend that I would be justified in trading my beloved if someone slightly better came along.

This looks like a threatening objection. It's quite implausible that love responds to reasons in this manner: it just seems false that I would stop loving my partner just because I met someone with, say, very slightly better jokes. More importantly, it's an unappealing account of love. We don't want it to be the case that this is how love works. We desire a degree of commitment that means our lovers are not constantly on the lookout for someone better, or weighing us up against every new person they meet.

In response, I argue the trading-up objection is only persuasive on an overly simplistic account of how we come to know and love each other. Once we have a more nuanced picture, I argue that Qualities Rationalism has the resources to avoid

¹¹ As a matter of interest, Marušić (2022: 151) propounds a version of this objection before conceding, in a footnote, that he does think his spouse superlative in just this way.

this objection. (As in 1.3, I also have an error theory for the romantic ideal motivating the worry which drives my reply home. But it will remain off-stage for now (see 3.3)).

Following Lewis (2023), I think we should understand *B*'s love-worthy properties as fine-grained and tightly connected to other love-worthy properties of *B*'s. So, for example, I don't just love my partner because she is 'funny'; but because she displays a warm-spirited, yet socially critical, humour, with charming delivery. Perhaps it is extra enjoyable to me when she suddenly makes a cutting quip because of the juxtaposition with the sweetness of her usual demeanour. Then I value her humour not in isolation but as a signal of her other love-worthy traits, such as kindness, social intelligence, charisma, and her ability to surprise me. In order to appreciate my partner this way (that is, to find this reason for loving her) I must attend closely, probably over a prolonged period, to her properties (*ibid*: 12).

Two further considerations should demonstrate how this attentive view of love undermines the *prima facie* force of the trading-up objection. First, recall from 1.1 that *L*'s reasons for loving *B* need only count as reasons *for L*. So, it's not just a question of my partner's properties, but of how I judge our compatibility in light of those properties. I may reason that an appetite for adventure is *ceteris paribus* an attractive, love-worthy quality and nonetheless feel that someone with such a character would be ill-matched with a homebody like me.

Second, I agree with Keller (2000: 171) that becoming a romantic partner is itself a transformative experience, and '[w]hen romantic lovers change, they do not change alone'. Over the course of a healthy loving relationship, then, partners share transformative experiences that build mutual understanding, trust, and connection – making them increasingly compatible. In the good case, where we are well-matched from the beginning, pay mutual attention, spend time together, and generally behave so as to promote the success of our relationship, I will naturally have more reasons to love my partner than anyone else who might come along.

Please indulge me in briefly sharing a methodological gripe. I think the language of someone else 'just coming along', that tends to crop up in the presentation of trading up worries, reveals a somewhat uncharitable attitude towards Qualities Rationalism. If someone spontaneously appears in your life, it's unclear how you could know enough about them to judge that you had more reasons to love them than someone you've already fallen in love with.¹² The very fact that you have available to you more reasons to love this person than your partner suggests that they have not merely 'come along', but have been known to you for some time.

Here we can make a distinction between fickle trading-up and believing, with legitimate cause, that someone other than your partner is right for you. We can

¹² See Solomon (2002: 4-5) for an argument that falling in love takes time.

charge anti-rationalism with a corresponding objection, call it, the ‘not trading up’ objection. Again, ABUSE is illustrative here. Lorna would be right to embrace love for the kind and gentle Boris*, over her feelings for her current partner, Boris, who is actively abusing her. Qualities Rationalism captures this neatly: Lorna has more reasons to love Boris*, not to mention fewer reasons *against* loving him (see also, 2.3). On the balance of reasons, Lorna is justified in loving Boris*, but not Boris. Anti-rationalists have a hard time explaining this. What’s more, they risk conflating Lorna’s legitimate pursuit of a healthy connection with fickle trading up and critiquing it to that extent.

By clarifying the kinds of qualities at play, Qualities Rationalists can offer a satisfying reply to the trading up objection. I have also suggested that, as with the incompleteness and inconstancy worries, anti-rationalists need to say more to prevent the same objection being sustained against their view.

1.5 Counterexamples

It’s time for the most forceful argument in favour of anti-rationalism: apparent counterexamples.

Whether Qualities Rationalists like it or not, so anti-rationalists say, there just do exist cases where *L* seems to love *B* in the face of strong countervailing reasons. Further, such cases may be valuable precisely in virtue of this feature.

In his classic anti-rationalist account, Frankfurt (2004: 39-40) argues from cases of parental love, which he says persists even where parents think their children are ‘ferociously wicked’, to the claim that love in general is not reasons-responsive. He’s explicit that people are disposed to feel whole-hearted romantic love for someone ‘despite recognizing [their] inherent nature is actually and utterly bad’ (*ibid*: 38). Such a love might be ‘a misfortune’ or ‘regrettable’ from the lover’s perspective, but it does happen (*ibid*: 38; 39). Further, its being first-personally unfortunate does not preclude it from being valuable. Since he judges that love against reason is distinctly valuable in the parental case, Frankfurt supposes there is value in irrational *romantic* love too (*ibid*).

Approaching from a slightly different angle, Yao (2020) seeks to explain cases where love (apparently) develops against reason. She draws on a literary example in which a character, Glory, ‘loves’ her brother Jack, despite her appraisal of him as, ‘among other things, partly cowardly and partly predatory, arrogant, and belligerent’ – all traits for which he has ‘no excuse’ (*ibid*: 8-9). The puzzle for Yao is not *whether* love exists in cases like this one but *how* this can be (*ibid*: 1-2). She is clear from the

outset that gracious love is a virtuous phenomenon, like grace itself (ibid).¹³ It's this value that provides the impetus to explain how such experiences can be conceived of as 'love'.

If I simply deny these cases involve love because they are irrational – and instead insist they involve love-adjacent attitudes, like care – anti-rationalists will rightly accuse me of question-begging. In line with my previous replies, my next strategy is to point out that these counterexamples are less plausible in light of ABUSE. If we accept these counterexamples exist and are valuable precisely because of their irrationality, then Lorna's feelings seem to qualify as love too – and not just *bona fide* love, but as a valuable, even aspirational, case of love at that.

Some anti-rationalists have been content to bite the bullet on this point. Others, including Frankfurt, have shied away from addressing it head-on, through their choice of examples (see: Jollimore, 2011: 22).

Zangwill (2013: 307) bites the bullet with particular gusto. He acknowledges that a situation like Lorna's is ethically problematic.¹⁴ But he thinks the value of love is independent of our moral concerns. Therefore, to judge loving feelings by their moral value is, on his view, to moralise inappropriately about love – an 'emotion' which is 'gloriously a-moral' (ibid: 298).

To defend this provocative position, Zangwill (ibid: 307-308) presents the real-life case of Natasha Kampusch, 'who was kidnapped when aged 10 and held prisoner in a basement for 8 years.' After Kampusch escaped at 18, her captor killed himself. To public dismay, she announced she wanted to mourn him. Zangwill understands that, by this, Kampusch means she loved her captor (ibid). If we accept this reading, Kampusch is the real-life analogue of Lorna in ABUSE. Accordingly, my response to her case is to deny, in line with public opinion at the time, that her feelings were love (ibid). Here Zangwill presses that, to discount Kampusch's feelings as love is to moralise about her feelings *and* to disrespect her testimony about her own affective state. For Zangwill, romantic love may be *fitting* even where it's not rationally justified or morally appropriate (ibid). Indeed, on his view, this is key to its distinctive value.

I take issue with multiple claims in Zangwill's argument. Of course, I disagree with his verdict about the case. I also disagree that we necessarily disrespect Kampusch's testimony if we suggest that she's mistaken about her feelings.¹⁵ I don't

¹³ Yao doesn't say whether she thinks we can or should experience 'gracious love' in the romantic case. However, she says nothing to exclude this reading. So, as it stands, I think her account risks being invoked to bolster problematic, unintuitive conclusions about 'love' for abusers all the same.

¹⁴ Given his other commitments, I think he could do more to stress this point.

¹⁵ If my analysis of Kampusch's case did have this consequence, that would be a real problem. With Fricker (1999), I think it's a serious harm to be disrespected in one's capacity as a knower. Failure to grant someone credibility where it's due is paradigmatic of such disrespect.

have space to address the complexities of this claim here, but I will say the following. We can take what Kampusch says seriously and respect her choices (that is, allow her to mourn), while pointing to potential defeaters for her beliefs about her affective state – namely, that she's profoundly traumatised in the wake of decade-long isolation and abuse. Further, I suggest that *failure* to challenge Kampusch might be epistemically patronising or otherwise careless. The risks of simply going along with what Kampusch says seem greater than the risks of sensitively challenging her, in good faith. Consider our tendency to challenge friends when they make claims to love someone we don't think they are justified in loving. In FLING, Lady's friends might question whether she is just beguiled by Brady's undeniable feel for the rhythm, for example. This would not signal disrespect for Lady; quite the opposite. Gently challenging her testimony demonstrates that her friends think she's capable of understanding their concerns. It also speaks to their interest in her forming healthy relationships with others, who really deserve her love (see also, 2.3). So, we can legitimately question testimony about feelings. The issue, in Kampusch's case as in others, is really *how*, *by whom*, and *with what intentions*, the questioning is done – not whether it is done at all.

My strongest disagreement with Zangwill concerns his claims about the obligations generated by Kampusch's 'love'. He writes: 'given that she loved him, to some degree and in some way, she owed him [mourning], in spite of what he did. Or at least, the mourning was appropriate' (Zangwill, 2013: 307-308). Whether or not love strictly generates this kind of obligation is a topic for another paper. But certainly, we expect people to mourn the ones they love, and we think this is appropriate. We also expect love to inform other behaviours, like caregiving, commitment, and forgiveness. As such, I read these claims from Zangwill – which will strike most people as surprising, at the very least – as offering an unintentional *reductio ad absurdum* of his verdict about the case. It can't be that Kampusch's feelings for her captor amount to love, because then we would expect her to mourn him, and this expectation is absurd. We expect no such thing from her. Indeed, we find it shocking and inappropriate.¹⁶

My reply to Zangwill's charge of moralising is therefore to deny that moralising about love is bad or inappropriate. Love *is* a moral attitude. We can't help but moralise about it if we want to understand it as a force for good in our lives and the lives of those we love. Zangwill's view depicts love as a chaotic and tyrannical force, that possesses us and forces us to do its bidding, even when that goes against all our antecedent interests.

This reply may leave Zangwill unmoved. But I hope it could move anyone who has agreed with me up until now that the moral concerns raised by ABUSE are weighty. (If

¹⁶ This is true even if we judge that allowing Kampusch to mourn her captor is the best course of action and find her blameless in her desire to do so.

my reader has remaining hesitations, in 3.1 I trace and critique the romantic ideal that I think underwrites the intuition that (valuable) counterexamples to Qualities Rationalism exist).

To the extent that Frankfurt and Yao, among other anti-rationalists, imply that we can whole-heartedly love someone we think is abusive, they are vulnerable to the same objection as Zangwill. Namely: their accounts risk imposing expectations on survivors of abuse – expectations of care, commitment, forgiveness and mourning, that seem both absurd and inappropriate. Although she extolls the benefits of ‘gracious’ love for the irredeemable beloved throughout, Yao (2020: 10) does not seem aware that her account risks these negative consequences for the lover.¹⁷ Frankfurt (2004: 63), writes somewhat euphemistically when he concedes that, on his account, ‘loving is a particular danger to us’. He gives a corresponding warning that we should ‘be careful to whom and to what we give our love’ (*ibid*). But it’s harder to make sense of this warning without appeal to reasons and given Frankfurt’s view that we have no choice in who we love (*ibid*: 79-80) (see 4.1).

Before concluding the section and this chapter, I want to zoom out to make one final point that should drive my reply to the moralising charge home. As I’ve emphasised from the Introduction, anti-rationalists are invested in explaining, not just what love is, but also, its distinctive value (see 0.2, 0.3). By allowing that love might be dangerous in the sense that’s pertinent here, and yet, no less valuable for that, they create a challenge for themselves in giving an account of why love is still, on balance, worth pursuing. They also preclude themselves from appealing to many intuitive reasons to think love is valuable – because it makes us feel safe, happy, and builds our self-esteem, for example.

Where anti-rationalism risks treating cases like ABUSE as paradigmatic and aspirational of love, Qualities Rationalism supports the de-centring of such cases – either treating them as marginal and defective or excluding them from the category of ‘love’ altogether. To this extent, the latter looks better-placed to give an account of love’s value for flourishing.

Conclusion

This chapter presses an objection against anti-rationalist accounts of love. Namely: they struggle to explain what goes wrong in ‘love’ for abusers. Further, I have suggested that they risk treating loving feelings for abusers as paradigmatic of love and aspirational to that extent. Insofar as they have these implications, I argued, anti-rationalists struggle to give a satisfying account of romantic love’s distinctive

¹⁷ Lewis (n.d.) also stresses this point.

value. Insofar as proponents of the view aim to illuminate (or, at least, not contradict) a plausible account of love's value through its descriptive features, this is a problem of coherence as well as an ethical concern with their view.

Chapter 2

Extending the problem to other rationalist views

In this chapter, I distinguish Qualities Rationalism from other rationalist views. I focus on two competing rationalist accounts that have been very influential. First, Velleman's (1999) 'Personhood Rationalism', according to which love is justified by reasons arising from the beloved's rational nature. Second, Niko Kolodny's (2003) 'Relationship Rationalism', according to which love is justified by reasons arising from the lover's relationship with the beloved. Although the spirit of these accounts, especially Relationship Rationalism, is closer to that of Qualities Rationalism than anti-rationalism; I contend that both are ultimately less plausible in light of cases like ABUSE. Personhood Rationalism faces a similar problem to anti-rationalism – viz., it struggles to adequately distinguish bona fide love from problematic love-adjacent attitudes. Relationship Rationalism has the resources to capture this distinction. In fact, I'll argue the most plausible version of Relationship Rationalism is continuous with my own view. However, I think Qualities Rationalism should be preferred on the grounds its phraseology is more natural and illuminating.

In 2.1, I make some brief remarks about the shape of the debate. These are intended to help guide the reader through this chapter and the remainder of the dissertation. In 2.2, I expound Velleman's Personhood Rationalism. In 2.3, I test its resources for analysing my cases, ABUSE and FLING, and find them lacking. In 2.4, I expound Kolodny's Relationship Rationalism. In 2.5, I compare the plausibility of Relationship Rationalism and Qualities Rationalism, with a focus on why Kolodny has dismissed the latter as untenable. I conclude that Qualities Rationalism should be preferred over other rationalist views.

2.1 Shape of the debate

In Chapter 1, I contrasted Qualities Rationalism with anti-rationalism. In this chapter, I complicate the dialectic by introducing two more rationalist views. Here I'll sketch why it's helpful to group these views together with the 'rationalist' label, despite the important differences between them – especially since these differences are the focus of the discussion below. Also, in 2.5, I argue there are two versions of Qualities Rationalism at play in the contemporary debate: the first is obviously implausible, but the second is more sophisticated, and easily avoids the objections levelled against the more basic version. Naturally, I defend the latter. A subsidiary aim of this chapter is to show that these two versions have been elided by critics of Qualities Rationalism.

Rationalist views are united by their affirmation that love can be justified. For all rationalists, it is legitimate to talk about love's reasons, and it is a 'good-making' feature, so to speak, of a given case of loving feelings that they are justified by reasons of some kind. Despite their other differences, commitment to these claims unites them against anti-rationalists, who, as we saw in Chapter 1, deny that love is ever justified or unjustified. Velleman and Kolodny are concerned – at least in principle – to vindicate love as a *moral* phenomenon, whose reasons make loving harmonious with our broader ethical commitments (Kolodny, 2003: 143; Velleman, 1999: 338-340). This preoccupation is not characteristic of anti-rationalism in the same way (see especially: Hamlyn, 1978; Smuts, 2014; Zangwill, 2013). However, as I've stressed throughout, philosophers across the divide understand love as valuable *in some sense* (see 1.5).

2.2 Personhood Rationalism

I'll start by outlining Velleman's aims in constructing an account of love. Velleman wants to resist the notion that love and morality – especially morality according to a broadly Kantian ethics – are in opposition, due to their demands that we be partial and impartial in our treatment of others, respectively (Velleman, 1999: 338-9). He wants to vindicate love as a 'moral emotion', that does not force us to abandon our broader moral commitments, but is, rather, an expression of them. Chief among these commitments is the commitment to treating people's lives as equally valuable (ibid: 362). He therefore seeks to reconcile those features of love that seem to call for *partial* treatment of the beloved with the claim that any person may be the justified object of love.

Velleman's account is made up of three interlocking claims. First, love is a rational response. Second, love responds to the beloved's value. Third, following Kant, the beloved has this value in virtue of their 'rational nature', a marker of their 'bare personhood', which all persons qua persons share (ibid: 367).

Let's elaborate on these claims. Velleman thinks the experience of love is a kind of 'wonder or amazement or awe', which is felt when the lover is struck by the beloved's value (ibid: 360). On this view, as on Qualities Rationalism, positively evaluating the beloved is not merely a contingent feature of love, but a necessary, constitutive feature. Personhood Rationalism diverges from Qualities Rationalism in its insistence that the beloved's value, and corresponding justification for loving them, does not arise from their unique set of properties; but rather, from their bare personhood, which, by definition, they share with every other person (ibid: 367). An important consequence of grounding the beloved's value in their personhood is that any person may be the justified object of another's love – including their *romantic* love (ibid). Notice that this is also where the decreased partiality of love comes in. As the reader might imagine, this feature will be crucial for my cases (see 2.3).

Why does Velleman think it is the beloved's personhood, not their qualities, that grounds love? Velleman thinks our personhood is fit to capture the value of a person as distinct in kind from the value of all other things. Rather than a 'price', a person's rational nature confers to them a certain 'dignity' (ibid: 364). Being valued for one's dignity is being valued *non-instrumentally* and as *irreplaceable*, in the relevant respect. To love someone on Personhood Rationalism is to value them as a 'self-existent end', not for some feature of theirs that benefits you. Self-existent ends are the kinds of things for whose 'sake' we can act, disinterestedly, without any desire for personal gain (ibid: 356-7). Unlike objects with a price, a self-existent end 'doesn't serve as grounds for [comparison] with alternatives; it serves as grounds for revering or respecting the end as it already is' (ibid: 364). Whereas it seems true of any quality my beloved has (say, her shiny hair), that someone else might have it in greater abundance (say, super-duper-shiny hair); every person possesses the same personhood with the same value. On Personhood Rationalism, therefore, love is treated as an 'optional maximum' to the Kantian 'required minimum' of respect (ibid: 366). By grounding the beloved's love-worthiness in the same feature that grounds their right to respect, the account treats everyone as equally worthy of love.

For ease of reference, we can capture the gist of Velleman's view as follows.

Personhood rationalism: if L loves B , L 's love for B is justified by the value of B 's bare personhood, their rational nature, as a self-existent end.

Before giving my own critique, I want to dismiss three knee-jerk objections that will help to clarify Velleman's account. First, by understanding personhood in terms of 'rational nature' and making that the source of love's reasons, we might worry that Velleman inappropriately *intellectualises* love. Velleman is quick to clarify that 'rational nature is not the intellect': it is 'a capacity of appreciation or valuation [a person's] core of reflective concern' (ibid: 366). Thus, appreciating my beloved for her rational nature doesn't entail appreciating her intellect or appreciating her by some intellectual means.

Second, it could be pressed that the 'core of reflective concern' is not a concrete or easily accessible feature of my beloved. In practice, it's not clear what we are to understand by the beloved's 'capacity of appreciation' or her 'core of reflective concern'. Certainly, in explaining why I love my partner I am much *more* apt to cite her observable qualities – her humour, intelligence, or lovely hair. Unlike her 'rational nature', these properties are directly evident to me.

Velleman replies that we appreciate personhood *via* 'observable features – the way he wears his hat and sips his tea' (ibid: 371). Thus, my instinct to cite my partner's observable properties is not completely mistaken. On Personhood Rationalism, her qualities do act as 'an expression or symbol or reminder of [her] value as a person' (ibid). But I *am* mistaken if I understand her qualities as reasons in themselves. What

justifies love for my beloved is only her rational nature, her personhood, as revealed to me by her properties.

A third worry should now be clear. If love is justified by personhood, which every person possesses in equal measure, then it seems I am justified not only in loving my partner, but in loving anyone who might cross my path. Worse: it seems I am *equally* justified in loving my partner as I am in loving, say, someone who does not excite me, with whom I have nothing in common and in whose properties I find no charm whatsoever. If this is Personhood Rationalism, it seems blatantly wrong.

This is not what Velleman intends. He does understand love as less partial than is commonly assumed. But love still retains *some* partiality on his account. We only come to appreciate the beloved's personhood through their observable properties and Velleman thinks it intuitive that 'we can see into only some of our observable fellow creatures' (ibid: 372). So, I am not justified in loving the person I find charmless because, the very fact I don't find them charming is evidence that their observable properties have not revealed the value of their personhood to me. Only when someone's observable properties '[arrest] our tendencies toward emotional self-protection [...] tendencies to draw ourselves in and close ourselves off from being affected by [them]' do we experience love for them (ibid: 361). Further, since this arresting movement effected by love 'disarms our emotional defenses [...] makes us vulnerable to the other', once we are engaged in loving someone, 'our resulting vulnerability exhausts the attention that we might have devoted to finding and appreciating the value in others' (ibid: 361; 372). Not just anyone can make us see their value. If someone *is* special enough to capture our heart, we won't have the energy or inclination to go falling in love with someone else.

On Personhood Rationalism, wishing for love is desiring that 'one's own rendition of humanity, however distinctive, should succeed in communicating a value that is perfectly universal' (ibid: 371-2). We don't hope to be found more valuable than others, but only to have our equal worth noticed by someone with the right sensitivities to appreciate it.

2.3 Evaluating Personhood Rationalism

What does Velleman say about ABUSE and FLING? On the above interpretation of Personhood Rationalism, I don't think Velleman is obviously committed to a particular verdict. It's ambiguous whether these cases involve bona fide love or mere love-adjacent attitudes on his view. Velleman affirms that the beloved's observable properties must reveal the value of their personhood to the lover. But he doesn't have any commitments about which properties (viz., kindness as opposed to cruelty) or which conditions (viz., how much time or exposure) are apt for this kind of revelation *in general*. What matters is whether the lover in question is sufficiently

arrested by the beloved's particular properties. This is probably under-determined on my description of the cases. So, let's consider how Velleman might defend both verdicts about the cases, in turn. This discussion will also reveal whether his account faces the same or a similar problem to anti-rationalism.

Suppose that Velleman wants to argue Lorna and Lady are sufficiently arrested by Boris's and Brady's properties to count as loving them. I have already argued this verdict is unintuitive and ethically risky for the anti-rationalist. I think the same for the Personhood Rationalism. Except there is the added worry that, on Velleman's account, where *L* loves *B*, *L* is also *ipso facto justified* in loving *B*. On Personhood Rationalism, if a given case involves love, then that love is necessarily justified. Therefore, if he rules that Lorna loves Boris, Velleman is committed to the further claim that she is justified in feeling this way about him. (Likewise, for Lady and Brady). Like the anti-rationalist, the Personhood Rationalist who gives this ruling cannot appeal to reasons to distinguish love from problematic love-adjacent attitudes. Worse: the Personhood Rationalist endorses love as a rational response to Boris.

Why is this worse? It may not be immediately clear. Anti-rationalists and Personhood Rationalists alike commit to the claim that Lorna has *no more reason* to invest in her feelings for the kind and gentle counterpart, Boris*, compared with her abusive violent partner, Boris. The further commitment that loving feelings for Boris are justified implies that these feelings are positively rational, not merely a-rational. Anti-rationalism ignores rational concerns when it comes to love, judging them misapplied in this domain. Personhood Rationalism thinks rational concerns are relevant and, on this ruling, they speak *in favour* of affective investment in the abuser (Boris), or the relative unknown (Brady). Anti-rationalism merely disables rational critique of the cases. If it recommends this reading, Personhood Rationalism seems to misapply it.

To reassure the reader of my commitment to charity, I'll consider some possible responses on Velleman's behalf. First, ruling that Lorna's and Lady's feelings are what they say they are, and are justified, means taking their testimony seriously. This looks to be, *ceteris paribus*, a good thing.

However, as I argued in 1.5 against Zangwill's parallel defence of his ruling about Kampusch's case, we can take these women seriously while ruling their feelings are unjustified. Failure to challenge them might actually be careless or patronising.

Second, Personhood Rationalists could note that this ruling doesn't preclude them from critiquing the cases in other ways. (This reply is also available to anti-rationalists). For instance, Velleman could say of ABUSE that the relationship is unhealthy, or that Lorna's attachment to Boris is, to borrow Frankfurt's (2004: 38) term, 'a misfortune'.

I find this unsatisfactory for two reasons. Foremost, I think it's difficult to really grasp what is 'unhealthy' or unfortunate about the relationships in ABUSE and FLING without reference to the lovers' feelings and their beloveds' qualities. What's troubling about these relationships is that Lorna remains attached to someone who repeatedly harms her, while Lady is too forthcoming (or perhaps, too vulnerable) with someone she hardly knows. But even if my reader is not persuaded by this reply, I remind them that my aim is to show only that it's a point against Personhood Rationalism (and anti-rationalism), compared with my Qualities Rationalism, that they can't critique the agents' feelings as unjustified. Qualities Rationalists can offer such a critique. But we can also point out pathologies in the relationship dynamic or bad luck in Lorna's circumstances, for example. So, even if successful, this strategy doesn't protect Personhood Rationalism from the specific critique I'm pursuing.

Third is the most *prima facie* promising defence. Velleman could argue that denying Lorna and Lady are justified in loving Boris and Brady commits us to the claim that there are some people who are not worthy of love. Recall from 2.2 that the value of personhood is what justifies love on Personhood Rationalism: if you are a person then you are worthy of love. Correspondingly, Personhood Rationalists could insist that this is all they mean when they rule that love for Boris and Brady is justified. Namely: Boris and Brady are just people who are worthy of love, like anyone else.

I grant the plausibility of the claim that everyone is worthy of love *in general*. However, I think it far less plausible, indeed quite contentious, that everyone is worthy of *romantic* love. A *fortiori*, it is less plausible that everyone is worthy of romantic love from a *particular* person. I agree with Keller (2000: 171) that we should deny this latter claim and instead assert the following: you can only be worthy of romantic love in relation to a particular person – namely, your romantic lover. If you are abusive towards (or relatively unknown to) that person, it may be true of you that you are not (yet) worthy of their romantic love.

Romantic love typically involves a high degree of vulnerability and intimacy between lovers, more than most other modes of love. To share in this with someone, I say, you must earn it, by, at the very least, being respectful. There is precedent for this in ordinary talk: a concerned friend might advise Lorna that, given how he's treating her, Boris is unworthy of her love; he doesn't deserve her. My stance is to agree.

Let's consider what Velleman can say in defence of the alternative verdict – namely, denying that these cases involve love. At first glance, this looks a lot more promising. Of course, my own view is that ABUSE and FLING do not involve *bona fide* love.

It's open to Personhood Rationalists to deny that Lorna and Lady are sufficiently 'arrest[ed]' by the observable properties of Boris and Brady to count as loving them

(ibid: 372). Indeed, this is a fairly natural reading of the cases on Velleman's view. He can argue that, since Lorna perceives Boris as a cruel and fearsome man, she is not experiencing the 'wonder' that should be involved in bona fide love for him (ibid: 360).¹⁸ The value of his personhood remains hidden from her. As for Lady, while it's not an existing feature of the account, Personhood Rationalism could easily accommodate the claim that the revelation of the value of someone's personhood requires meeting a minimum threshold of acquaintance with their properties. Having only known Brady one night, Lady doesn't meet this threshold. It looks like Personhood Rationalism distinguishes Lorna's and Lady's love-like feelings from bona fide love by way of reasons. If so, Personhood Rationalism avoids the problem facing anti-rationalists.

But this would be too fast. Even if Personhood Rationalists gets us the right *verdict*, they lack the resources to give the correct explanation *why*. That Lorna is not sufficiently arrested by Boris's properties is not the most salient problem in ABUSE. The problem in ABUSE is that Boris is abusive. (I return to FLING at the end of the section).

Personhood Rationalism still treats Boris's abusive traits as incidental to the justification of loving feelings for him. To see why I think this is so bothersome, I'll return to the question of love-worthiness. If Velleman secures the verdict that Lorna's feelings for Boris are unjustified, he cannot accommodate the intuitive thought that Boris's being abusive gives Lorna any *less* reason to love him; he cannot capture the thought that it makes him *less worthy* of her love.

I argue this intuitive thought is present in the practical considerations we make about the arrangement of our interpersonal lives. We think Lorna would be wise to divest affectively from Boris. By contrast, affective investment in his kind and gentle counterpart, Boris*, would be no cause for concern. We can also consider the scenario from Boris's perspective. Suppose he is self-aware and notices himself exhibiting the traits of a quite sordid soul. It seems legitimate that he should communicate to Lorna that he is unworthy of her love and withdraw from her on those grounds. More optimistically: it seems legitimate that he should strive to be better for the explicit reason that he wants to be worthy of her love.¹⁹ Personhood Rationalism lacks the resources to make sense of these considerations.

Setiya (2014: 258) defends an amended version of Personhood Rationalism. Crucially, for the point under contention, Setiya agrees with Velleman that, the reasons of love 'do not consist in a person's particular merits' (ibid). We can look to

¹⁸ I dismiss this verdict for independent reasons; but it's worth noting that, despite understanding love as a way of valuing the beloved, Velleman affirms you *can* love someone you 'cannot stand to be with' (ibid: 353).

¹⁹ See Lewis (n.d.) for an argument that, pace Yao (2020), thinking yourself unworthy of someone's love makes it very difficult for you to accept it.

him to construct a reply on Velleman's behalf. What cases like ABUSE show, thinks Setiya, is only that love can take 'misguided forms'; not that loving feelings can be critiqued as irrational (*ibid*: 260). The problem in ABUSE is not Lorna's feelings, but the way she expresses them – viz., 'self-destructively' (*ibid*). Therefore, it's wrong to recommend that Lorna should not love Boris. Rather, she: 'should not want to advance her [partner's] interests, as he conceives them; most likely, she should end the [relationship] [...] Her [partner] should not occupy her thoughts.' (*ibid*: 260-1). Motivating this line of argument is the admittedly natural thought that we should critique the relationship instead of the feelings. I see the appeal of this claim. We typically think we have more control over our relationships than our feelings, for instance (see 4.1).

Nevertheless, I am unconvinced by this reply. I am sceptical about whether, having successfully ended their relationship and shunned any concern for (or even thoughts of) Boris, Lorna would retain anything resembling *love* for him. Across the anti-rationalist-rationalist divide, concern for the beloved is one of the most frequently cited features of love (e.g. Frankfurt, 2004: 43; Lewis, n.d.; Nozick, 1991). Moreover, the desire to be with the beloved, the wish that they be well, and the habit of thinking about them, appear to me necessary features of love. In recommending Lorna give up *all* of these ways of relating to Boris, I think Setiya is really recommending that she stop loving him.

Setiya (2014: 261) acknowledges the view I share with Kolodny (2003: 141-3) that 'forgetting a relationship would tend to extinguish love'. He responds that this 'may be right, but the effect is not inevitable' (Setiya, 2014: 261). Perhaps we just have different intuitions about the phenomenology of love. I'm not interested in quibbling over potential counterexamples which aim to show that love can, against the odds, endure in this esoteric form. Instead, I hope to persuade my reader that my account of love is more appealing: if Setiya is right that love needn't involve these elements, then it's increasingly difficult to decipher its value. If we can have love without concern or even regard for the beloved, then many of the benefits we associate with it are accidental. For instance, it would be possible to be in love while lacking any interest in the beloved whatsoever. Likewise, it would be a mistake to assume your lover would take an interest in you. We want to be able to say something has gone wrong if our lover never even thinks of us; intuitively, it's a sign they have simply fallen out of love.

There is a more urgent worry with the Personhood Rationalist treatment of ABUSE that emerges from Setiya's reply. In critiquing Lorna's mode of loving as self-destructive, rather than critiquing Boris as unworthy, Setiya risks suggesting that it is a failing – perhaps a blameless failing, but a failing nonetheless – on Lorna's part if she loves Boris. Setiya has the resources to respond that Boris is, on his account, likewise responsible for loving Lorna incorrectly, say, for expressing his love 'possessively' and without patience (Setiya, 2014: 260). But this reply only gets him

to the claim that Lorna and Boris commit the same genre of mistake – viz., loving each other incorrectly. I press that, if Lorna is guilty of any failing, it's a failing of a different category and magnitude than Boris'.

With the ABUSE case, we have seen that Personhood Rationalism cannot explain *why* loving feelings are justified for some people and not others. Kolodny (2003: 175; 177), whose account I turn to next, deems this the 'main shortcoming' of the account. The reply from Setiya is unconvincing and raises new worries for Personhood Rationalists.

As promised, I'll close this section with some brief remarks on FLING. I deny that FLING involves love, and I think there are feminist reasons for doing so.²⁰ But I acknowledge that intuitions are likely to vary, and I'm not so invested, as I am with ABUSE, in securing readers' agreement about this case. If you think Lady loves Brady, then Personhood Rationalism does seem better placed to explain how this can be. If love at first sight is possible, it's more likely to be grounded in something like being spontaneously arrested by their value, than in the appreciation of their qualities. (I note Setiya's (2014: 261) view that love at first sight is possible). If you agree with me that Lady doesn't really love Brady, then the fact that Personhood Rationalism is compatible with love at first sight is another mark against it. If not, I think the impact on the overall plausibility of Qualities Rationalism is insignificant. What matters is that Personhood Rationalism has serious difficulty responding to cases like ABUSE and Qualities Rationalism should be preferred on that basis.

2.4 Relationship Rationalism

In offering his account of love, Kolodny wants to address what he thinks are the shortcomings of existing views – including anti-rationalism, Personhood Rationalism and (a version of) my preferred view, Qualities Rationalism (Kolodny, 2003: 135). Kolodny shares my perspective that loving feelings can strike us as inappropriate, and he thinks a philosophical account of love should be able to capture our intuitions about these cases (ibid: 143). It's primarily for these reasons that he rejects anti-rationalism and finds Personhood Rationalism wanting (ibid: 142-146; 175-180). What will be most interesting in comparing our views is not, therefore, how Relationship Rationalism handles my cases, ABUSE and FLING; but rather, why Kolodny thinks Qualities Rationalism is not well-suited to do the same.

²⁰ For example, declarations of intense loving feelings early in relationships (viz., 'love-bombing') are anecdotally associated with pathological attachment and manipulation. Also, romantic relationships are intimate and vulnerable. It seems sensible that we should be careful to engage ourselves fully only once we are suitably well-acquainted with our partner(s).

Let's begin with the fundamentals of Kolodny's account. The crux of Relationship Rationalism is that love is justified by reasons arising from the value of the loving relationship (ibid: 146). Moreover, love partly *consists* in the belief that the relationship renders it appropriate (ibid). Like Velleman, Kolodny does carve a role for the beloved's properties in love's justification. But, also like Velleman, he insists that these properties are not themselves reasons. On Relationship Rationalism: 'love involves seeing a relationship as a source of reasons to seek out and delight in the appealing features of one's beloved' (ibid: 154). The beloved's qualities become reasons for love only because of the loving relationship between lover and beloved. So, for Kolodny, my partner's shiny hair counts as one of the many charms that make me love *her*, not because it is the shiniest hair I have ever seen, but because our relationship justifies me in delighting at her hair more than at anyone else's.²¹

Now we can zoom in. What is a loving relationship of the relevant kind? It should be (i) *ongoing*; (ii) between *particular* people; and (iii) *historical* (ibid: 148). These conditions exclude purely incidental relations, like 'being twice the age of'; relations of a professional or instrumental kind, say, between me and my dentist, who could be swapped out for any other dentist without the nature of the relationship changing; as well as very fleeting or cursory relations, like 'sitting to the left of' (ibid). I'm happy to grant that this three-point characterisation captures the most basic features common to all the relationships we value qua loving.

But what, precisely, does it mean to value these relationships in a way that justifies love? Kolodny understands valuing the relationship as a necessary and constitutive feature of love (ibid: 150). This valuing is expressed in two movements: 'being *vulnerable* to certain emotions regarding [the beloved]' and 'believing that one has *reasons* both for this vulnerability to [the beloved] and for actions regarding [the beloved]' (ibid). It's significant that Kolodny brings *vulnerability* to the fore, as I'll emphasise in 2.5. Crucially, Kolodny is committed to a grounding claim, not just a justification claim. He thinks that the belief that your feelings are justified by this kind of value is what transforms them from 'mere urges' into bona fide love: (ibid: 145-146).

As with the other accounts, it will be helpful to state Kolodny's view in its T-shirt-motto form.

Relationship Rationalism: L loves B only if L's loving feelings are justified by the value of L's loving relationship r with B.

²¹ For this feature, Kolodny avoids traditional incompleteness and inconstancy objections from anti-rationalists (see 1.3).

Now we have the fundamentals of Relationship Rationalism, we can turn to Kolodny's analysis of my cases, ABUSE and FLING, before comparing the plausibility of his account to that of Qualities Rationalism.

2.5 Relationship Rationalism

Let's look at how Kolodny's account handles ABUSE and FLING. Relationship Rationalism is designed in part to reflect our intuitions about cases like these, where the presence of loving feelings seems inappropriate. So we shouldn't expect them to cause problems for the view.

Kolodny seems committed to the claim that Lorna and Lady do *not* experience bona fide love in ABUSE and FLING. You might think: 'Great, this is the same as the Qualities Rationalist ruling; we can stop our investigation there.' But we saw with Personhood Rationalism in 2.3 that the explanation the account gives for *why* is just as important as, perhaps even more important than, the verdict itself.

The most straightforward explanation Relationship Rationalism can offer for this verdict is that *L*'s feelings for *B* are not justified from *L*'s first-personal perspective. I stipulated this in my description of the cases in 1.2. Kolodny makes it a necessary condition of love that it appears justified, and thereby appropriate, to the lover themselves. Lorna's and Lady's feelings don't seem justified to them on my description, so their feelings don't count as love on Relationship Rationalism.

Kolodny can give a more modally robust explanation as well: in neither case does Lorna or Lady believe it's rational to make herself *vulnerable* to Boris or Brady. Taking yourself to have reasons for vulnerability to the beloved is a necessary condition for *valuing* the relationship with them, on Relationship Rationalism (*ibid*: 150). Therefore, Kolodny can rule that Lorna doesn't value her relationship with Boris in the relevant sense, because she sees that Boris is dangerous for her; seeing that he is dangerous makes being vulnerable with him irrational. Likewise, Kolodny can say that, recognising it has only lasted a very short time, Lady doesn't think she is justified in being vulnerable with Brady. In FLING, Kolodny might add that the 'relationship' between Lady and Brady is not sufficiently historical (viz., it violates (iii)) to count as a 'loving relationship' – never mind one that Lady values in the relevant respect. Their connection might be better thought an 'encounter', an extended flirtation.

Because they judge that their feelings have arisen in the absence of a loving relationship of the relevant kind, any qualities Lorna and Lady do find in their beloveds are justificatorily inert. So neither woman has any *reasons* for loving their beloveds. Positive appraisal of the beloved's qualities might sustain their loving feelings, but on their own, they can never *justify* them.

So, Kolodny gets the right verdict, and it looks like he identifies the salient explanation too: Boris is no good and Brady is too much a stranger. ABUSE and FLING

are no problem for his account. Let's therefore conclude that Relationship Rationalism can distinguish between bona fide love and problematic love-adjacent attitudes just as well as Qualities Rationalism.

The task becomes showing that Kolodny's account should not be preferred over Qualities Rationalism. In what follows, I set out an argument that Qualities Rationalism is preferable to Relationship Rationalism. However, I'll be content if my reader is persuaded that the views are equally plausible. Actually, I agree with Protasi (2014: 214) that, despite appearances, Qualities Rationalism and Relationship Rationalism can be construed as two extremes on the same spectrum. Pace Protasi, I think this construal brings out the *most plausible* version of each view. I say more below. Correspondingly, in the chapters that follow, I draw on many of Kolodny's insights in defence of my own view.

Why does Kolodny reject Qualities Rationalism? In fact, Kolodny initially expresses sympathy for Qualities Rationalism – writing that it is *prima facie* the most natural account of love (Kolodny, 2003: 135). We are inclined to think that we love our partners, as opposed to anyone else, because of those things which are particular to them, and observable to us. Qualities Rationalism efficiently captures this thought (ibid: 138).

But Kolodny's sympathy runs out when he tests Qualities Rationalism against a series of objections and finds them decisive against it. The most illuminating of these objections, for my purposes, are versions of the incompleteness, inconstancy, and trading up worries from Chapter 1.

I'll focus on his inconstancy* objection. Kolodny begins by conceding that Qualities Rationalists need not worry about traditional presentations of the inconstancy objection. Recall, this is the objection that Qualities Rationalism falsely says of love that it alters 'as soon as' the beloved's properties change (ibid: 140). Contradicting the romantic, constancy ideal on which this objection is premised, Kolodny thinks it is quite right that alterations in the beloved's properties should provoke a change in the lover's attitude towards them – even a change as drastic as the end of love. But he thinks it is only *relational* properties that should provoke this kind of change in attitude. These are properties like, being 'unfeeling towards me' or displaying 'cruelty' (ibid). So his (updated) inconstancy* objection to Qualities Rationalism is that the kinds of properties the view takes to ground love – 'looks, wit, and self-confidence', for example – are the kinds of properties that, if they do change, should not provoke the end of love (ibid).

So, Kolodny assumes Qualities Rationalists cannot appeal to relational qualities. It's for this same reason that he thinks Qualities Rationalism is defeated by incompleteness* and trading up* worries. Of course, since Relationship Rationalism appeals *only* to relational qualities, he thinks his own view avoids these objections and should be preferred to Qualities Rationalism on those grounds.

Why does he assume Qualities Rationalism cannot appeal to relational qualities? The answer is not clear. Shpall (2020: 428) notes that there is a trend among critics of Qualities Rationalism (rationalists and anti-rationalists alike) to make this same assumption. But it seems that no one has ever actually attempted to defend a non-relational Qualities Rationalist account (*ibid*).²² What matters for my purposes is that *my* version of Qualities Rationalism takes relational qualities to be some of the weightiest reasons for love (recall 1.4). In my discussion of ABUSE, I focused precisely on Boris's cruelty towards Lorna, for instance. So these updated objections do not demonstrate that Relationship Rationalism should be preferred to Qualities Rationalism as decisively as Kolodny thinks they do. Rather, they only defeat a basic, non-relational version of the view.

Having treated Kolodny's objections to my preferred view, I'll now present two objections to Relationship Rationalism. Kolodny anticipates and responds to both. My argument is that, if they don't undermine the coherence of his account, these worries still give us reason to prefer Qualities Rationalism.

First, is the focus objection. Namely: Relationship Rationalism makes the focus of love the relationship with the beloved, when it should be the beloved (*ibid*: 154). On this objection, something is lost if we make the relationship love's focus. This seems a natural thought. I submit most of us would not like to be told that our partners love us only because we're who they happen to be in a relationship with, for example. We would prefer to be told that it's something about *you, darling* which has non-accidentally brought us together (*ibid*: 156-7). But, if the relationship is the focus of love, not the beloved, then, so long as they are being honest with us, we can't expect our partners to give us such a spiel.

In reply, Kolodny bites the bullet somewhat. He insists that the relationship is the sole *ground* of love, without being the *sole* focus (*ibid*: 154). Love has two foci: the loving relationship and the beloved. On this dual-focus modal, he can account for our sense (and hope) that delighting in the beloved's specialness is central to the experience of loving – he allows that, from my perspective, my partner's shiny hair is no less delightful than if it were a justifying reason all on its own. But he insists that it's our relationship that ultimately transforms her qualities into *reasons* for love. Love partly consists in 'seeking out and appreciating whatever appealing qualities one's beloved has to offer', but it is only 'warranted by a relationship' (*ibid*: 155).²³

This brings us to the second, related objection, from circularity. Relationship Rationalism seems to make love a reason for itself. Kolodny's account says that love is justified by the presence of a loving relationship. A natural thought is that the

²² Meanwhile, relational Qualities Rationalists abound, e.g. Abramson & Leite (2018); Keller (2000); Lau (2021); Lewis, (n.d.).

²³ My emphasis.

loving relationship is itself justified by love. If this is right, then Kolodny is guilty of bootstrapping (ibid: 162). What's more, this apparent circularity seems to imply that, once you are in a loving relationship with someone, you are 'locked into it, normatively speaking, for life' (ibid: 163). That is, once you're in a loving relationship, you always have sufficient reason, in virtue of that relationship, to continue loving your partner. The problem with this commitment is clear if we consider the possibility of cases where loving feelings *arise* in the presence of a healthy relationship, but, with time, that relationship transforms into something unhealthy or abusive. Kolodny's view seems to suggest that a lover in such a case remains interminably justified in their loving feelings despite the abuse (see also, 3.2).

Kolodny begins by offering a 'concessive reply'. He does think 'romantic relationships are reasons for part of love, if not at all' (ibid: 162). My belief that I have a loving relationship – that is, a shared history, mutual loving feelings, *et cetera* – with my partner causally sustains my emotional vulnerability to her. So it might be part of my justification for love too (ibid).

But Kolodny need not commit to this claim. Relationship Rationalism says that the relationship transforms the beloved's qualities into reasons for love; not that the relationship justifies love (ibid). In this explanatory story, love is not a reason for itself. Rather, loving relationships create the conditions necessary for loving feelings to be justified.

As for the normative concern, Kolodny thinks he can accommodate the claim that we are sometimes justified in falling out of love. He gives a few different explanations of how this could be, but the following seems the most promising to me: 'there is the psychologically real, but metaphysically vexed, phenomenon of no longer identifying the person now before one with the person with whom one once had a relationship' (ibid: 164-168; 165). In such cases, the change in a person's properties is so radical that the person you fell in love with seems to have been a mere 'fiction' (ibid). The change is experienced as a quantitative, not merely a qualitative, difference. And '[i]f the man before you is no longer *that* man [you were once with], then you have no special reason to love him' (ibid: 166).

I'm happy to grant that neither of the focus or circularity objections undermines the coherence of Relationship Rationalism. However, I do think they highlight limitations with the phraseology of the account. It's because of these limitations that I recommend we prefer my Qualities Rationalism.

As I see it, the lesson from the focus and circularity worries is that the complexity and intricacy of Relationship make it *seem* like it is incoherent and unappealing. Relationship Rationalism can, with the dual focus model, account for the attention we pay to the beloved as well as to our relationship with them. But the language of the

account obscures this. Likewise, Relationship Rationalism is not circular, but it can easily appear that way.

Kolodny himself remarks that the Qualities Rationalist talk of properties justifying love is *prima facie* the most natural account of love. Having defeated his objections to the view, I hope he would be happy to concede that his first instincts about Qualities Rationalism were correct. Qualities Rationalism is evidently not circular: the beloved's qualities are reasons in and of themselves. And Qualities Rationalism clearly places makes the beloved the focus of love: after all, it is all and only her qualities which justify love for her.

Conclusion

This chapter has been dedicated to distinguishing Qualities Rationalism from other, prominent rationalist accounts. I argued that Velleman's Personhood Rationalism faces much the same problem as the anti-rationalists discussed in Chapter 1. Kolodny's Relationship Rationalism successfully avoids this problem. However, the phraseology of Kolodny's view is complex and intricate in a way that obscures its plausibility. Since Qualities Rationalism avoids this issue, we should prefer Qualities Rationalism to other rationalist accounts.

Chapter 3

Error theory

At this point in the dissertation, my reader might wonder why, if it is such a fabulous account, Qualities Rationalism has been dismissed by so many for so long. As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, opposition to Qualities Rationalism has been strident and forceful. Lots of people *really* don't think it works *at all*. Further, as I argued in 2.5, there has been a tendency to dismiss Qualities Rationalism without even considering the possibility of a more sophisticated, relational version of the view – even though the relational version of Qualities Rationalism easily avoids traditional objections.

My aim in this chapter is to explain this apparent allergy to Qualities Rationalism by tracing and critiquing three romantic ideals that motivate the most forceful objections to it: the ideals of love as disinterestedness, unconditional, and non-fungible. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that my replies to the anti-rationalist objections would be supplemented later by an error theory: here, I construct that error theory. By identifying and critiquing these ideals, I also clear the way for the development of fully-fledged positive proposal that expands on the core claim I've been defending so far. Expounding such a proposal is unfortunately beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, in Chapter 4, while responding to objections, I do suggest some features the account might have.

In each of 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3, I explain and critique the ideals in question. My argument is that these ideals are, in practice, unfeasible and undesirable. However, I only hope to persuade the reader that there are reasonable objections to each of them, so that they cannot be assumed without argument. Critics of Qualities Rationalism are obliged to engage with these objections if they want to coherently sustain their objections.

3.1 Disinterested

The first ideal says that love should be disinterested. Many thinkers have supposed that love is not only unselfish; it should be selfless. More precisely, they have held that love can and should be persist even when the beloved displays qualities that puts loving them in conflict with the lover's own interests.

Frankfurt (2004) is perhaps the most influential and explicit proponent of this ideal. As we saw in 1.5, he argues from parental love, which he takes to be the paradigmatic case, to claims about love in general (*ibid*: 39-40). Disinterestedness is, he thinks, a key good-making feature of parental love: parents love their children no matter their qualities (or lack thereof) and this seems central to the distinctive value

of parental love (ibid).²⁴ Other forms of love, including romantic, touch the ideal only insofar as they are disinterested.

Not incidentally, Frankfurt notices that romantic love tends to be less disinterested than other modes of love. It frequently involves: ‘a hope [...] to acquire certain other goods that are distinct from the well-being of the beloved – for instance, companionship, emotional and material security, sexual gratification, prestige, or the like’ (ibid: 83). But he rules out that this could be suggestive of its distinctive nature or value. Rather, for this reason, he rules it marginal, one of the least valuable forms of love (ibid).

Velleman (1999) and Yao (2020) also assume the disinterested love ideal. Velleman (1999: 355-358) thinks that the bona fide lover must ‘aim’ at nothing, understanding the beloved as the only end of their love. That is, the lover must act only and always for the beloved’s sake. His ideal lover is the Kantian moral agent. Recall that Yao’s (2020: 3) ‘gracious’ love is valuable precisely because the lover expects nothing from the beloved – not even, as on Personhood Rationalism, an expression of their bare personhood (see 2.2). Yao’s ideal lover is saintly in their bountiful dispensing of grace.

Zangwill (2013) likewise assumes the disinterested love ideal. He explains that love has its own ends: it is internally meaningful and valuable without reference to rational or moral value (ibid: 308). Therefore, on his view, whether or not it serves the lover’s antecedent interests, it may still be valuable to love – in short, because it is ‘romantic’ (ibid: 298).

If we assume the disinterested love ideal, then the claim that love can persist in the face of strong countervailing reasons follows. So, the disinterested love ideal is at work in motivating apparent counterexamples to Qualities Rationalism (see 1.5). Proponents of these counterexamples have supposed the disinterested love ideal to be quite uncontroversial. Certainly, they have assumed it is less controversial than the implications of Qualities Rationalism. But I contend that there is at least one strong reason to doubt the ideal.

First, it’s worth disambiguating the ideal that motivates counterexamples to Qualities Rationalism from a weaker ideal – namely, the ideal that love should not be motivated *only* by desire for personal gain. Such an ideal, call it ‘Weak-DI’ (Weak-Disinterestedness), does seem quite uncontroversial. According to Weak-DI, where my partner is only interested in me for, say, the ‘prestige’ our relationship affords her, she doesn’t really love me – or her feelings are defective to that extent.²⁵ This seems right. Hanging around me only for the clout looks to be incommensurate with bona fide love for me.

²⁴ See: Rose (2018) for a feminist critique of our expectations of motherly love.

²⁵ To borrow Frankfurt’s example.

As I've suggested, counterexamples to Qualities Rationalism require more than Weak-DI. In these cases, lovers' feelings persist not only un-selfishly, but selflessly; that's to say, in a self-sacrificing manner. Call the stronger ideal, 'Strong-DI'. On Strong-DI, it is illegitimate for my partner to be interested in me for any reason other than my own sake. Notably, this means that, where my partner is interested in me partly because she wants to be loved back, she doesn't really love me – or her feelings are defective to that extent. This is, at the very least, controversial. Investing in me only when there is (a reasonable promise of) reciprocation looks to be perfectly commensurate with *bona fide* love for me.

In fact, there's a case to be made that it's *desirable* for the lover's feelings to be predicated partly on the promise of reciprocation (e.g. Kolodny, 2003: 162; McKeever, 2019: 213). McKeever appeals to cases where loving feelings seem pathological partly because the lover's feelings endure insensitive to the beloved's lack of reciprocation. Plausibly, this is one of the stalker's mistakes: 'it does not seem like an instance of real love if your "love" for another makes you happy but them afraid' (McKeever, 2019: 215). Likewise, she writes of '[w]holeheartedly loving someone who continually abuses you', that it may count as love, 'but it is not admirable' (ibid: 223). From my discussion of ABUSE, it will be clear that I agree: Lorna's feelings in ABUSE are not to be celebrated, but questioned and critiqued. One important reason to think this is that her feelings persist insensitive to Boris's lack of loving treatment, affection or even respect for her – viz., his failure to love her back.

McKeever (2019: 215) goes on to suggest that mutuality contributes to the distinctive value of romantic love qua romantic. While parents are hopeful their children will love them back, romantic love seemingly *depends* on reciprocation in a way that parental love, like God's love, does not (ibid). If it endures in the absence of (reasonable hope for) reciprocation, it is not properly romantic love.

Kolodny is even more explicit. He argues from a critique of unrequited 'love' to the claim that reciprocation is a *necessary* feature of romantic love (Kolodny, 2003: 171). We do not idealise the unrequited lover, he thinks; we pity them (ibid). Good friends do not encourage their 'futile pining' (ibid). And he anticipates McKeever's view that we interpret such feelings as pathological: 'if [unrequited 'love'] persists, we are apt to find it quite unsettling' (ibid).

Pace Kolodny, Protasi (2014) makes a case for the value of unrequited love, and a fortiori its status as *bona fide* love. She thinks the very fact it endures unreciprocated 'makes a statement about the importance of [the beloved as] *that* person, about *her* lovability' (ibid: 218). However, I counter that the persistence of unrequited love doesn't rule out that the lover still *hopes* for reciprocity. Accordingly, it may actually reveal a misunderstanding of something important about beloved's particular identity and value – namely, whatever makes them incompatible.

What's more, that we would all, whether as lovers or beloveds, wish for reciprocal over unrequited love, strongly suggests the latter should not be thought closer to the

ideal. To use Protasi's own example, Luvell is 'is painfully aware' of his feelings for Belo and is even 'jealous of Belo's wife' (ibid). Meanwhile, Belo 'would be disgusted and horrified' if he knew about Luvell's 'love' (ibid). This complex interpersonal scenario hardly sounds aspirational to me. Indeed, echoing Kolodny's initial surmisal, I'd say it strays closer to the realm of the unsettling or the creepy.

In a slightly different vein, Lewis (n.d.) argues that we struggle to accept love from people if we don't think they're gaining anything in return – and *especially* if we think it goes against their interests. He thinks this makes the gracious love, which Yao (2020) theorises, at least fraught and perhaps impossible. McKeever (2019: 215) makes a similar point: 'We [...] want [our lovers'] love for us to be at least partly self-interested so that our aim of making them happy can be fulfilled.' The lover's desire for reciprocation might, therefore, be enjoyed by the beloved too.

It could be replied that, where the lover's desire for reciprocation serves the beloved's interests, it is not really self-interested.²⁶ This might be right: it looks more like taking on the beloved's interests than looking out for yourself. But even if it's not straightforwardly self-interested, it no longer meets Strong-DI, which underwrites the apparent counterexamples to Qualities Rationalism. This is because, to again quote McKeever, 'taking on the beloved's interests as [your] own could be construed as simply acquiring more interests' for yourself, 'and thus more opportunity to acquire benefits' (McKeever, 2019: 207). Strong-DI, on the other hand, requires openness to self-sacrifice.

Let me summarise the objection I have been constructing to the disinterested love ideal. I have argued that a lover's desire for reciprocation can be a desirable, and is perhaps a necessary, feature of romantic love. But the desire for reciprocation is self-interested. So the reciprocation ideal conflicts with Strong-DI – the version of the disinterested love ideal that motivates apparent counterexamples to my view. If critics of Qualities Rationalism want to maintain commitment to these objections, underwritten by Strong-DI, they will need to argue against the reciprocation ideal or explain how they can accommodate the intuitions that motivate it.

3.2 Unconditional

Closely related to the disinterested love ideal is the ideal of love as unconditional. According to this ideal, love can and should persist regardless of any changes to the beloved's qualities. A natural corollary is that loving feelings which are conditional on certain qualities are thereby fall short of love – or they are defective to that extent. This ideal is implicit in the anti-rationalist presentation of the incompleteness and inconstancy worries, as well as, to a lesser extent, in Velleman's (1999) Personhood Rationalism (see 2.2).

²⁶ For example, Nozick (1989) argues love is *disinterested* because it involves forming a romantic 'we', in which the beloved's interests become the lover's own.

As with the disinterested love ideal, we can distinguish a weaker version of the unconditional ideal that is more plausible, call it 'Weak-UC' (Weak-Unconditionality). According to Weak-UC, where my partner's feelings for me are conditional on all or most of my qualities remaining the same, they are not really love – or they are defective to that extent. Weak-UC captures the intuitive thought that love is a stable attitude which cannot be upset by the slightest alteration in the beloved – the likes of an unflattering haircut, a temporary period of grumpiness, or a broken toe, for example (e.g. Shpall, 2020: 431). We don't want our lovers to be fickle. Weak-UC captures this.

But inconstancy and incompleteness worries rely on something stronger than Weak-UC. These worries arise only if we assume that love can and should persist despite even *drastic* change to the beloved's qualities. They are objections to the claim that appreciation of the beloved's qualities can ground love for them – viz., my Qualities Rationalism. It's no challenge to this claim if love persists while even *most* of the beloved's qualities change. In these cases, it can be replied that the changed qualities are just not the ones grounding the lover's enduring feelings. Other qualities, unchanged, ground love.

Instead of Weak-UC, I think the incompleteness and inconstancy objections rely on Strong-UC. On Strong-UC, where my partner's loving feelings for me are conditional on *any* of my qualities, they are not really love – or they are defective to that extent.

My argument here mirrors my argument in 3.2. I don't aim to disprove Strong-UC, but only to show that there are reasons to deny it. If proponents of the incompleteness and inconstancy worries want to coherently sustain these objections, they are obliged to engage with arguments for doubting Strong-UC. Let's now look at those arguments.

First, I want to notice how stringent Strong-UC could be. A love that is literally unconditional would endure through the kinds of changes that make the beloved utterly unrecognisable to their lover. A popular internet meme illustrates the concern. Namely: the 'Would you still love me if I were a worm?' thought experiment.²⁷ According to Strong-UC, I should aspire to continue loving my partner even if she, previously a human woman with whom I could converse, laugh, share hobbies, ideas, and values... spontaneously transformed into a worm. That I should continue to love her (romantically) under these circumstances, especially if the changes were permanent, is absurd, not to mention, deeply unappealing. No one wants to be in love, interminably, with a worm.

My intention in invoking this worm hypothetical is not to be glib. Rather, I want to put a sharp point on the risks of endorsing Strong-UC without scrutiny. The wish for completely unconditional love is not always legitimate: if the beloved is no longer

²⁷ This meme first appeared in a tweet by user '@shutyourhell' in 2019, according to knowyourmeme.com.

recognisable – which doesn't entail a metamorphosis as drastic as that which occurs in the woman-to-worm case – it might be appropriate that our attitude tracks that change (e.g. Kolodny, 2003: 165; Protasi, 2014: 223-4). Notice also that the worm case, however outlandish, serves to bolster the claim that love is conditional on at least some qualities, viz., being an adult human of the appealing gender(s). However thin this claim appears, it starts to pave the way for Qualities Rationalism.

Of course, it can be replied that Strong-UC shouldn't be taken literally. A charitable reading will suppose the ideal is to be understood as a target that is unreachable in practice, but which is valuable insofar as striving towards it promotes the right kinds of attitudes and behaviours in love. The chances of my partner transforming into a worm are, touch wood, vanishingly slim. But she *might* be unfortunate enough to sustain severely disabling and disfiguring injuries in a freak accident. Such an event could make her unrecognisable to me – physically, and in terms of her character, her outlook on life, and the lifestyle she leads. Plausibly, I should *aspire* to be unshaken in my loving feelings for her, despite changes like these. Moreover, it looks like an empirical fact that love does, at least sometimes, endure in similar circumstances.

However, not all changes are created equal. Some changes to the beloved's qualities seem like they should provoke the end of love. For instance, suppose a version of ABUSE in which, at the beginning of their relationship (t_1), the abusive Boris was more like his kind and gentle counterpart, Boris*. With time, he gradually lost these qualities of kindness and gentleness, and so that he had become unmistakably abusive by t_2 . The intuition that loving feelings for Boris are unjustified at t_2 doesn't change because we learn that Lorna made a loving commitment to him at t_1 (see also: Shpall, 2020: 432).

Another salient point is that deep changes in the beloved's and the lover's character just do, very often, provoke the end of love – even where neither person has transformed into an abusive monster (Abramson and Leite, 2018: 7). We often talk about having 'grown apart' from exes. When we do, we don't mean to suggest that we never loved them, or even that the love we did share with them was defective for the time that it lasted. Rather, we mean that we both changed in different directions, so that we were no longer compatible. It seems quite right that both the relationship and the love should end if this happens (Shpall, 2020: 430).

Further, arguably, we *want* to experience love that is conditional in a certain sense. Delaney (1996: 347) presents the following pithy dilemma: '[W]hile you seem to want it to be true that, were you to become a schmuck, your lover would continue to love you, [...] you also want it to be the case that your lover would never love a schmuck.' Put positively: we want our lovers to give us grace, to continue to love us even when we're not at our sparkly best; but we also want to feel that their love arises in response to our particular sparkle. In hoping for romantic love, Delaney thinks, we want a reason to feel good about ourselves (*ibid*: 347). More precisely, we want a reason to feel good about those qualities we think are central to our self-conception

(ibid). Keller (2000: 163) is in broad-strokes agreement: 'Among the most valuable of rewards that I can gain from romantic love is the personal affirmation that [...] someone whom I love romantically has chosen me as a worthy recipient of her [...] love.'

This is, for Delaney and Keller, part of the distinctive value of romantic, as opposed to, say, parental or neighbourly love. Being selected as the object of someone's romantic love provides such a reason only if the selection is based on 'things that set me apart from others' (ibid). Otherwise, I feel my lover is undiscerning. An undiscerning lover, someone who would love just anyone, with any old properties, is not desirable; they are 'pathetic' (Delaney, 1996: 352).

The force of the objection survives if we soften it somewhat. Suppose it matters to me to be viewed by my loved ones as smart, driven, and kind, with an unmatched knowledge of Eurovision trivia. Now suppose my partner tells me she's noticed these things about me, and appreciates them, but would be completely unmoved were they all to change. I think I would be justified in feeling somewhat bereft. Certainly, if she asserted that a whole host of the qualities I think of as central to my identity could change without her feelings being affected, I might wonder why she loved *me* at all. Or worse: I might question if it really was *me* she loved (Dixon, 2007: 383).

To bring this section to a close, I'll return to the severe injury case. Cases like these seem like the most compelling evidence for something stronger than Weak-UC. So I want to be clear that Qualities Rationalism can account for such cases and their value.

If my love persists for my partner despite her sustaining such severe injuries, I venture that this is not a sign that I don't love her for her qualities, but rather, it's a sign that I appreciate a great many of her qualities. Even in the injury case, we assume that some (important) qualities of my beloved remain. Perhaps her memories of our relationship and shared love, her sense of humour, and her lively social intelligence. Qualities Rationalists can say that appreciation of these qualities continues to ground my love, even when lots of the qualities that previously bolstered it have disappeared.

Also, Qualities Rationalism need not insist that the qualities for which we love our partners must remain the same over time (e.g. Keller, 2000: 170). So I can also accommodate the natural thought that, watching my partner handle her injuries with composure, determination, and continued optimism, might deepen my love for her, by bringing even more of her qualities to light.

A follow-up objection might raise the spectre of a case where, included in my partner's injuries, are her loss of memory, change of personality, and diminished cognitive function: would it not be possible and valuable for my love to persist here?

I'm inclined to say, 'No'. My intuition is that it's part of the tragedy of such nightmare cases that our attitudes to our partners inevitably do change – even drastically. It seems to me that, under these circumstances, *romantic* love is no longer possible. Or, at least, the same love I used to feel cannot endure. This is not to say I wouldn't continue to feel deep care for my partner, or to love her in a different mode (say, platonic or familial); but I think it's unrealistic to suggest that my romantic feelings could endure in such a case.

Let's recap. Here I have argued that the wish for unconditional love is often unrealistic and may be premised on a misunderstanding of what actually being loved in such a way entails. Since the *prima facie* force of prominent objections to Qualities Rationalism, from incompleteness and inconstancy, rely on a very strong construal of the ideal (namely, 'Strong-UC'), proponents of these objections are obliged to engage with my challenges if they want to coherently sustain their critique.

3.3 Non-fungible

Last is the ideal that the beloved should be non-fungible to their lover. It is often supposed that lovers should understand their beloveds as *irreplaceable* and, by the same token, think that their love-worthiness is incomparable to that of others.

The non-fungibility ideal is most obviously operative in trading up worries. In 1.4, I discussed the traditional anti-rationalist presentation of this objection. In 2.2, I also mentioned Velleman's (1999) stipulation that lovers should value their beloveds for their 'dignity', not their 'price'. This is meant to exclude the possibility of the lover comparing the beloved's love-worthiness to that of others, and, *a fortiori*, of them 'trading up'. In 2.5, I mentioned that Kolodny also appeals to a version of this worry. However, he argues, pace the traditional objection, that the extension of love to someone new is legitimate where the right kind of relationship holds (Kolodny, 2003: 147). As such, I don't think he relies on the same non-fungibility ideal as other critics of Qualities Rationalism.

Again, it's helpful to distinguish a weak and a strong version of the ideal. On Weak-NF ('Weak Non-fungibility'), where I 'love' my partner as a mere token of a type, I do not really love her – or my love is defective to that extent. My partner is a token of a type for me if I would feel the same about anyone I deemed relevantly similar to her; anyone who was a token of the same type. The relevant similarities in question might be as thin and superficial as *being blonde* or *being athletic*. I assume that, on Weak-NF, the relevant similarities are coarse-grained and readily perceptible. This secures that I am fairly likely to come across other people who instantiate them. I submit that this tracks our ordinary language use of romance 'type'.²⁸

²⁸ If the set of properties considered 'relevant similarities' was sufficiently fine-grained and expansive, then I think it would be legitimate for love to transfer to anyone who instantiates them. Indeed, if the list can encompass relational qualities, then this claim follows from my Qualities Rationalism. Apart

People do talk about having romantic, or at least sexual, types in roughly this way. We need only look to our reality TV stars for examples.²⁹ But I think we should be sceptical of the legitimacy of such talk. O'Neill (1985: 260) writes: 'We are concerned not only to be treated as a person – any person – but to some extent as the particular persons we are [...] There is some point to the thought that being treated as a person needs a personal touch.' The same seems true mutatis mutandis for love. Valuing someone as a mere token of a type seems, by definition, incompatible with loving them for the particular person they are. It also raises worries about fetishisation, which feminist theorists are increasingly concerned about (e.g. Bettcher, 2013: 52; Zheng, 2016; Zheng, 2017).

If Weak-NF was all that proponents of the trading up worries relied upon, then that would seem pretty uncontroversial. But I argue these objections rely on something stronger and more contentious. Recall that trading up objections to Qualities Rationalism rest on the complaint that my view fails to exclude, or adequately critique the value of, love in cases like the following.

NEW IMPROVED PERSON: I come across someone with all the same qualities as my partner, plus at least one feature, say, *even shinier hair*, that is slightly more appealing to me. My love transfers or extends to this 'New Improved Person'.

There are also Doppelganger worries – in which someone with exactly the same qualities as my partner appears, and my love extends to this 'New Person' (e.g. Jollimore, 2011: 16; Kolodny, 2003: 147).

In both these cases, it is not some shallow or coarse-grained properties that the new people share with my current partner. Rather, they have *all* the same qualities as her. Therefore, it's not Weak-NF at issue. New Improved Person and New Person are more than just *my type*.

Setting aside their noisy science fiction elements, these cases represent the real-life possibility of there being someone just as wonderful as my partner who exists in my orbit. Proponents of these worries want to say that bona fide love for my partner should make simultaneous love for these people impossible – or at least illegitimate.³⁰ We can call the ideal at play, Strong-NF. On Strong-NF, where my partner is not the only one who could fill the role of 'my beloved', I do not really love her – or my love is defective to that extent. My partner is fungible to me in this

from anything else, a sufficiently long list will make finding another token of the same type a practical impossibility.

²⁹ *Love Island* (2017) contestant, Olivia Attwood, seems to have coined the now-iconic phrase, 'my type on paper,' to describe the qualities she usually looks for in a partner.

³⁰ Where the objection is that Qualities Rationalism entails my love would *transfer* to the New Improved Person, and *turn off* for my current partner, I clarify that I commit to a view on which love can be felt for more than one person at once. In what follows, I argue that proponents of trading up worries are the ones who assume that it cannot.

stronger sense if I simultaneously love someone else, or if I believe I could love someone else just as much as I love her.

Strong-NF is clearly more controversial than Weak-NF. Crucially, we can reject Strong-NF without rejecting Weak-NF. Weak-NF ensures that love is not impersonal and, to a lesser extent, that there is not a proliferation of potential beloveds. Strong-NF seems to commit us to an account of love as occurring only between soulmates. It suggests that, for each of us, there is only one person with whom we can experience bona fide love. Or, at least, we should *think* the person we love is our soulmate; that they are the only one we could love. What's more, proponents of trading up worries tend to assert the stronger interpretation of the ideal – namely, that failure to think of one's partner as non-fungible in this way implies you don't love them at all (e.g. Marušić, 2022: 151; Philips, 2021: 186).

As in 3.1 and 3.2, my ambition is not to establish, decisively, that proponents of Strong-NF have misunderstood what love is all about. Rather, I want to show there are reasons to reject Strong-NF independently of support for Qualities Rationalism. And if we reject Strong-NF, objections to Qualities Rationalism lose their force.

The most straightforward and forceful objection to Strong-NF is that it conflicts with the testimony of polyamorous people. Polyamorous people testify that they experience love for more than one person at the same time and, moreover, that this can intensify the love they feel for each partner (Shpall, 2020: 427).³¹ Strong reasons must be provided for dismissing this testimony. But also, I agree with Shpall that 'more germane is the fact that [the] impossibility [of polyamory] cannot be assumed' (*ibid*).

However, even in monogamous relationships, we can argue that it's both possible and legitimate to deny Strong-NF. If you share my view that most people are good people, with an abundance of qualities, and you experience other kinds of love (platonic, familial) for multiple people at once, then it doesn't seem so outrageous to suggest you might think you could love someone else romantically, were it not for your partner.

I contend, pace Strong-NF, that thinking your partner is weakly fungible is indicative of a healthy attitude towards yourself, your partner and the other people in your life. For one, it can signal high self-esteem.³² If love requires a degree of mutual appreciation, as I've been arguing it does, then believing that you could love more than one person involves believing that more than one person could love you (see 1.4, 3.1). Also, thinking that you couldn't love anyone else might lead you to accept treatment you're not happy with, or to stay with someone who just doesn't excite you very much – because, to your mind, if you left, you would never love again. Over

³¹ See also: Brunning (2018); McKeever and Brunning (2022).

³² Beyoncé's (2006) song 'Irreplaceable' is demonstrative. Perhaps we need not be quite so cutting as Bey: 'I could have another you in a minute'. But we can all aspire to be so self-assured.

time, this could be detrimental to your self-image and self-esteem (Lopez-Cantero & Archer, 2020).

For another, viewing your partner as one of multiple possible beloveds emphasises that you are choosing your partner as the best of other (possibly great) options. To add a bit of romantic flare: rather than the only flower in the shop, they are the bouquet whose colours and forms call to you the most. (In 4.1, I give a related argument for the benefits of viewing your love as chosen in a weakly voluntary sense).

As a last consideration, I suggest that denying Strong-NF might help us accommodate the impartiality worries that motivate the likes of Velleman (1999) (see 2.2).³³ Strong-NF implies a very high degree of partial concern for your partner. Moving through the world, thinking that you could never come to value anyone in the same way as you value your partner, plausibly discourages the impartial treatment of others that ethics recommends. Certainly, thinking there are other people in the world we *could* come to love, romantically or otherwise, encourages us to search for and discover the best in them.

What matters in monogamous relationships is, I contend, not that we don't think we *could* love anyone else, but that we don't want to.

Conclusion

This chapter constructs an error theory for opposition to Qualities Rationalism. I have argued that the most forceful objections to my view rely on romantic ideals which their proponents take to be uncontroversial. But these ideals are not uncontroversial; there are strong reasons to object to them. Further, I think the elision of these ideals with similar, weaker ideals has obscured some of their less plausible implications. Once we have identified the true nature of the ideals in question, it's clear they shouldn't be assumed without argument.

³³ See also: Jollimore (2011: 6).

Chapter 4

Objections to Qualities Rationalism

The focus of this dissertation has been showing that Qualities Rationalism is more plausible in light of feminist concerns. So far, I have only specified that Qualities Rationalism entails commitment to the claim that love is responsive to reasons in a particular sense – namely, love is grounded (and justified) by reasons arising from the beloved's qualities. Alone, this is a relatively thin commitment. In this final chapter, I anticipate objections to the potential implications of this core claim.

In 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, I expound and reply to the three objections I find the most pressing: from voluntariness, platonic love, and passion.

In responding to these objections, I hope to achieve three interconnected aims. First, I want to bolster the plausibility of Qualities Rationalism in practice, beyond the two cases which have been my focus so far. Second, to give a sense of how Qualities Rationalism might be expanded. (Defending a fully-fledged account is unfortunately beyond my scope). Third, to reassure my reader that Qualities Rationalism is not inconsistent with some important feminist commitments.

4.1 Voluntariness

Throughout this dissertation, the question of love's voluntariness has been lurking in the background. In this section, I'll address them head-on.

Objectors complain that Qualities Rationalism implies we can choose who we fall in love with. But our experience shows that love is not a matter of choice (e.g., Frankfurt, 2004: 79-80; Smuts, 2014: 96). And the notion that we *choose* our beloveds runs counter to our language: we talk about 'falling in' love; not 'deciding to' (e.g. Shand, 2011: 7; Philips, 2021: 173). That we can't choose our beloveds may be an unfortunate fact of life; but it is a *fact* nonetheless. Qualities Rationalism, whatever its other benefits, can't capture this central feature of love – namely, that it escapes our voluntary control.

Why do objectors think Qualities Rationalism has this implication? Please indulge me in drawing up a daydream case that will give voice to the objection. Suppose I am at a philosophy conference and I meet a girl I judge to be quite fantastic. I find her witty, sharp, and I'm enchanted by her shiny hair. Call her 'Conference Girl'. So the objection goes: Qualities Rationalism implies that, having recognised the rational case for loving Conference Girl, if I am a rational lover, then I can *just decide* to start loving her. But this is not how love works. No matter how many reasons I think I have

for loving Conference Girl, I cannot summon love for her on command. If Qualities Rationalism has this implication, that's a serious flaw.

Qualities Rationalism does not have this implication. The inference from love's being rational to love's being voluntary is fallacious. It's false that φ 's being reason-responsive entails φ 's being under our direct and spontaneous control. The analogous case of beliefs is illustrative here (e.g., Kolodny, 2003: 138; Shpall, 2020: 420). Beliefs are perhaps the paradigm case of a reason-responsive phenomenon: we think we come to believe things on the balance of reasons. But I can't just *choose* to believe any old p . Believing p is not under my direct and spontaneous control. For instance, I cannot make myself believe that I am the best philosopher in the world, even if I think that believing such a thing would make me very happy. So the same can be true of love. Love can be rational without being under my direct and spontaneous control. Say I do fall in love with Conference Girl, it can be true that this love is rational, even if I did not directly and spontaneously cause it.

Before I say anything more, I want to underline that Qualities Rationalists are not committed to the claim that love is voluntary in any sense, certainly not *just* because we say love is rational. As it happens, however, I think there is a plausible sense in which love is voluntary. Needless to say, I intend 'voluntary' in a weaker sense than that of being under our direct and spontaneous control. Qualities Rationalism can accommodate the claim that love is voluntary in this weaker sense, and they can do so in a way that speaks in favour of the account.

Let's return to the belief analogy. Notice that, while it's not strongly voluntary, we don't think belief formation is strictly involuntary either. For many p s, I can undertake actions that have a predictable, albeit chancily predictable, influence on whether I end up believing that p . So I can exercise my agency in ways that exhibit indirect influence over which p s I do and don't believe.³⁴ I can do this by, for example, actively reflecting on what evidence I have for my beliefs and testing that evidence via debate with others. While I can't control the results of these actions, I *can* choose to engage in them. In the good case, where my belief is true, or at least well-founded, choosing these actions will give me more reasons to believe that p .

Qualities Rationalism is consistent with the claim that love is weakly voluntary in an analogous sense. Spending quality time with Conference Girl, finding out more about her, and eventually, if all goes well, forming a romantic relationship with her, will, in the good case, reveal and even *produce* reasons to love her (see 1.4). While I can't control which reasons they ultimately do or don't give rise to, I can choose or refuse to take these steps. The relevant contrast for my loving someone is, therefore, something like my being born with blue eyes: there's *nothing* I can do to change the

³⁴ The extent to which we exert control over our beliefs is a matter of ongoing debate in contemporary epistemology. See McCormick (2011) for a presentation of the central puzzle and Osborne (2021) for a more recent solution.

fact that I was born with blue eyes; but there are steps I can take that make it more or less likely I fall in love.

Keller (2000) is a Qualities Rationalist who affirms that love is voluntary in this weak sense. It is quite natural, he thinks, to appeal to our ability to ‘embrace’ or ‘resist’ love by indirect means (*ibid*: 165). If I find myself in love with someone, I can decide whether it would be better to ‘send [her] flowers or move to another city’ (*ibid*). Likewise, McKeever (2019: 224) remarks – without explicitly seeking to lend support to Qualities Rationalism – that being in a romantic relationship requires ongoing voluntary commitment from all parties. Remaining in a relationship with someone is therefore a way of embracing love for them. Correspondingly, ending the relationship is akin to deciding to resist, and eventually *stop*, loving your partner (*ibid*; Shpall, 2020: 422). When we break up, we take certain steps, like moving out of a shared home or breaking communication, that (we hope) will indirectly, with time, alter our affective state. These are the kinds of actions we commit to when we really want to move on.³⁵

I hope this strikes my reader as quite plausible, perhaps even mundane. To assuage any remaining worries, I want to show that, even if they understand love as weakly voluntary, Qualities Rationalists don’t contradict two widely accepted claims about love’s relationship to the will.

The first of these claims is that we can’t be persuaded to love or stop loving by way of rational argument (e.g. Jollimore, 2011: 10; McKeever, 2019: 210-11). Put differently: reported reasons are insufficient to turn loving feelings on or off. Consider another version of the Conference Girl case, in which the love interest is a certain ‘Conference Boy’. Suppose that I feel nothing for him. And suppose you are a kindly friend trying to convince me we would be a great fit. Intuitively, if, after getting to know him and carefully reflecting, I’m still not feeling it, there’s no reasoning on your part that could change my mind. My reader might worry that Qualities Rationalism contradicts this intuition, especially on my grounding claim, which says that love *just is* valuing someone for reasons.

But the kinds of reasons at play on my account are first-personal. That is, they must be reasons *for me* (1.1). What *you* think are salient reasons to love Conference Boy – his ambition, confidence, and perfectly straight teeth – may leave me unmoved. Just as well, otherwise we’d all be after the same person!

Further, as I’ve emphasised throughout, relational properties are at the heart of justification for love on my Qualities Rationalism (see 1.4, 2.5). Supposing you’re a close friend, who knows me well, you may be in a position to make predictions about, for example, how well I’ll get on with Conference Boy, or whether he’ll make me giddy. But these are mere predictions. Only my own experience with Conference

³⁵ Dua Lipa’s (2017) pop hit ‘New Rules’ is informative: ‘One, don’t pick up the phone [...] Two, don’t let him in [...] Three, don’t be his friend [...] And if you’re under him, you ain’t getting’ over him...’

Boy can confirm these predictions and transform them into reasons. Relatedly, as in my treatment of the trading up objection, Qualities Rationalists can appeal to the claim that love develops over time and through shared, transformative experience. A list of reasons provided by someone else is no substitute for this.³⁶

The second widely-accepted claim is that there are no positive obligations to love someone romantically (e.g. Jollimore, 2011: 17; Shpall, 2020: 422). According to this claim, we are never in the wrong simply because we don't love a given person.

Again, one might worry that Qualities Rationalists cannot coherently affirm this claim since the view allows that there could be someone it would be rational for me to love and yet I do not love them. In the original the Conference Girl case, this looks to be true of me: I recognise it would be rational for me to love Conference Girl, but I do not. The worry is that Qualities Rationalism risks implying I am thereby guilty of some failure, perhaps even a *moral* failure, to appreciate her value.

My reply is simple: Qualities Rationalists are not committed to the claim that reasons which justify love for someone thereby generate (moral) obligations to love them. It's perfectly consistent to hold that loving Conference Girl would be rational for me, at the same time as affirming that it's permissible for me not to love her. If you share the view I've expressed (see 3.3) that most people are good people, with many qualities, then you'll agree that, for any given person, there are probably lots of people they *could* be justified in loving. Assuming *ought* implies *can*, there's no obligation to love everyone in this set. It follows there is no trespass involved in not loving any one member of the set.

Affirming the grounding claim makes me particularly well-placed to respond to this objection. The grounding claim fixes that if *L* is actually (not just *possibly*) justified in loving *B*, then *L* loves *B*. In the Conference Girl case, there may be lots of reasons in favour of my loving her, but not enough, on balance, for me to actually love her – say, because we don't know each other very well yet.

However, if we avoid the positive obligation claim, Qualities Rationalists probably *are* committed to the related, but importantly different, claim that there are negative obligations *not* to love certain people. It's a central feature of my account that there are cases where loving feelings are not, on the balance of reasons, justified. The most natural way to interpret the moral significance of this claim is in the following terms: there are cases where one ought not to have loving feelings for a particular person. Allow me to reassure my reader that this isn't as problematic as it appears. I'll do this first by example and second by clarifying the limited scope of the claim.

Here is the example: Lorna, in ABUSE, is a prime candidate for someone who ought not to have loving feelings towards her partner, Boris. If you have been following my

³⁶ Actually, I think it's plausible that the arguments of those we care about can make *some* difference to how we feel about a love interest, especially in the early stages. We are apt to ask loved ones what they think of our new partners, for example. I don't have space to defend this claim here, but my arguments would likely borrow from work on deferential reasons, e.g. Lewis (2025).

argument thus far, and find the thrust of it plausible, I trust you will agree with me about this. All it amounts to is that, given Boris's treatment of her, Lorna would be better not to have loving feelings for him. Likewise, I think Lady ought not to have loving feelings for Brady – certainly *not yet*.

Here is the limitation on scope, noted also by Kolodny (*ibid*: 138). To say that someone like Lorna ought not to feel this way about Boris is not to say that Lorna is *blameworthy* for her feelings. We can ascribe responsibility to Lorna without blaming her. This move is well-established in the responsibility for attitudes literature and in the contemporary feminist debate about the moral critique of sexual preferences (e.g., Adams, 1985; Smith, 2005; Srinivasan, 2021: 87-91). Crucially, in line with recent work on the responsibility for attitudes, we can hold that we are responsible for who we love without committing to the claim that our loving feelings are under our direct and spontaneous control (Adams, 1985: 11; Smith, 2005: 236).

Nevertheless, we might worry that to ascribe responsibility to Lorna in this way is to inflict a harm similar to that of victim-blaming (e.g. Sliwa, 2024). Namely: it is to deflect attention away from the wrongdoing by the abuser, Boris, onto the victim, Lorna (*ibid*). So it risks adding to the emotional burden of someone who is already suffering disproportionately (*ibid*). The objection goes: feminists should be focused on protecting and supporting people like Lorna, not critiquing them.

I argue, pace this worry, that ascribing responsibility to Lorna is an important feminist move.³⁷ It creates the conditions for her to make a change in her own life – even if all that means is that she adopts a critical perspective on her feelings, as recommended by the feminist authors, Fraser (2018) and Srinivasan (2021), I cited in the Introduction. There is a feminist tradition of understanding ascriptions of responsibility, and even *blame*, as an important revolutionary tactic (e.g., Fricker, 2016; Friedman, 2013; Houston, 1992). In particular, Simone de Beauvoir (1948: 38) famously argues that the first step to overcoming patriarchal oppression is for women to take responsibility for their own complicity in it. She implies *most* women are blameworthy for this complicity (see also: Melo Lopes, 2024) On this line of argument, the benefits of protecting a survivor of abuse from the possible burden of feeling responsible, are outweighed by the costs – which include not being taken seriously as a moral actor and having their agency denied (Beauvoir, 1948).

One final remark will complete my reply to these voluntariness worries. I think we should be more troubled by accounts that imply love is *strictly* involuntary, than any account that risks implying love is voluntary, especially as feminists. To suggest that love is strictly involuntary is to understand it as a kind of cage or disease.³⁸ If we're

³⁷ This is not inconsistent with Sliwa's (2024) arguments.

³⁸ Comparisons between disease and romantic love are common in philosophy as in art. My point is only that this picture is unappealing. Tim Minchin's (2025) esoteric love song 'You Grew On Me' finds the comedy in this metaphor: 'You grew on me, like a tumour. And you spread through me like malignant melanoma.'

lucky, the cage is gilded and the disease, chronic. By contrast, in approaching love as a choice to *embrace* our beloveds, we are more likely to strive for a connection that really makes us happy (McKeever, 2019: 224). Correspondingly, I contend, we are less likely to settle, or struggle on, in a situation that doesn't serve us. If the aim is building an account of love that captures its value, the latter looks to be the much better picture. At the end of the day, I ask what we would prefer: that our partners feel bound to us by an involuntary urge they just can't shake? Or that they believe they love us freely, understanding our particular value and embracing love for us because of it?

4.2 Platonic love

Let's consider a second objection. Here I'll tackle the worry that Qualities Rationalism collapses the distinction between romantic and platonic love. If it has this implication, this could compromise its capacity to capture the *distinctive* value of romantic love, as has been one of my aims.

My strategy in responding will be similar in structure to my reply in 4.1. I want to show that Qualities Rationalism has the resources to distinguish romantic and platonic love. But I also suggest that the compatibility of Qualities Rationalism with a softening of the romantic-platonic distinction is a benefit, not a detriment, of the account. I cite feminist arguments for the dissolution of the romance-friendship distinction.

I'll begin by setting out the contours of the worry. As I argued in Chapter 3, Qualities Rationalism appeals to a different set of romantic ideals than other prominent philosophical accounts of love. More precisely, it does not assume that love should be disinterested, unconditional, or non-fungible in the strong sense. In disavowing these traditional ideals, you might think Qualities Rationalism makes romantic love quite unromantic. The potential theft of the romantic from romantic love has been especially preoccupying for anti-rationalists. For example, Zangwill (2013: 307) protests: 'moral philosophers could stand to be more rather than less romantic about this subject, which is, after all, love! Would could be more appropriate than a romantic theory of love?'

This objection is more than mere question-begging. There's an argument to be made that the ideals I've outlined for romantic love are really ideals for *platonic* love. Consider that, while the notion that we can consider our romantic partners weakly fungible remains a matter of debate, this is taken as read in friendship. We are quite happy for our friends, including our best friends, to have other friends. It would be perceived as unusual, probably pathological, to suggest that they shouldn't have others in their life who simultaneously fulfil the role of 'my friend'. But this is mutatis mutandis the norm for romantic partners in contemporary western romance (McKeever, 2017: 353).

A similar case can be made, though perhaps less forcefully, concerning self-interestedness and conditionality. These ideals seem to fit less controversially with platonic love than with romantic. Critics of Qualities Rationalism have been invested in arguing that romantic love for someone you *loathe* is quite coherent (e.g. Hamlyn, 1978: 13 Zangwill, 2013: 307). The parallel claim seems uncontroversially false for platonic love: there is an obvious tension in the concept of a beloved friend you do not like or respect at all (Mason, 2013). Critics might therefore press that my account has been aiming at the wrong kind of love: it works for platonic, but not for romantic love. If I insist otherwise, I am simply conflating the two.

Of course, I hope the arguments I made in Chapter 3 already go some way to showing how the ideals of some self-interestedness, conditionality, and fungibility can work in the case of romantic love. Nevertheless, the worry merits a direct reply.

My response is two-pronged. Here's the first prong. Actually, I think it's right that the ideals of romantic and platonic love should be overlapping in this way. I don't think, in practice, there is a sharp romantic-platonic distinction, and I think this is a good thing. So, from my perspective, it's no problem for Qualities Rationalism if it softens the divide between romantic and platonic love somewhat.

However, I recognise this will not satisfy my objector, who starts with the view that romantic and platonic love deserve their own treatment. So, before I make the case for my own perspective, I want to show that my reader need not relinquish the romantic-platonic distinction to endorse Qualities Rationalism. This is the second prong: for those invested in maintaining the romantic-platonic distinction, I say Qualities Rationalism has the resources to accommodate it.

Here's how. For most people, plausibly, there will be some qualities they appreciate in the people close to them that signal whether their feelings are broadly romantic or platonic. Namely: qualities relating to sexual attraction, intimacy, and the erotic.³⁹ It's outside my scope to defend a list of precisely which qualities might belong exclusively to the romantic and platonic realms. (Indeed, the extent of the challenge posed by such a feat further inclines me to the view that the distinction cannot be sharply drawn). For now, it suffices to show that Qualities Rationalism can map the general trends operative in ordinary language at least as well as the next account. It can do this by holding that romantic love is grounded in the appreciation of those qualities that are understood by the lover to signal romantic love, while platonic love need not involve the appreciation of these qualities. To appeal to a vague, but nevertheless illuminating, term from ordinary language: this is tantamount to saying we need to 'fancy' someone to love them romantically, while there is no such requirement for platonic love.

³⁹ I am keen to avoid making qualities of a sexual nature necessary reasons for romantic love. To do so would discount the possibility of asexual romantic love without argument, which I don't think is right. See: Brunning & McKeever (2022); Eaton & Szustak (2022).

This suggestion is roughly analogous to the strategy Kolodny employs for distinguishing different modes of love. Kolodny (2003: 149) argues that different modes are distinguished by the sorts of activities the lover wants to engage in with this person. In the romantic case, this may involve ‘living together and expressing, in one way or another, sexual drives’ (*ibid*). Qualities Rationalism can capture this thought in the language of properties: *L* loves *B* romantically if *L* finds *B* sexually attractive, for example.

With that out of the way, allow me to offer some arguments for my own view that romantic and platonic love are importantly similar, both in nature and in value. These arguments suggest that a theory which emphasises their similarities is not the worse for it.

The first point in favour of softening the theoretical romantic-platonic distinction is mutually reinforcing with my arguments in 4.1. Feminists have long heralded the chosen-ness of friendships as a feature that contributes to their liberatory potential (e.g. hooks, 2001: 133; Friedman, 1989: 286). In contrast to other relationship types, romance and friendship are characterised by the fact we choose, to some degree, the people we have them with – the most salient contrast being with family members (McKeever, 2019: 222). Softening the romantic-platonic *love* distinction could help us emphasise the ways in which our romantic love life, just like our platonic one, is ours to design.

Second, softening the romantic-platonic distinction could allow individuals more freedom to define their relationships according to boundaries that suit them (Hanel and Jenkins, 2024). The norms of friendship are not as strict as those guiding (read: governing) contemporary western romance. We accept that friendships are organised in disparate ways: some friends see each other every day, depend on one another for material and emotional support, and are involved in each others’ families; others are in touch sporadically or interact only in one domain – at work, through a hobby, or, in the case of pen pals, only via letter...

Relatedly, blurring the divide could legitimise the exploration of intimacy and physical affection with people other than our (primary) romantic partner(s) (*ibid*: 18-20). This has benefits for the legitimisation of polyamory – an important task, which I discussed in 3.3 (*ibid*: 19). But it also serves to normalise a broad range of LGTBQ+ and queer relationship structures and identities. In turn, it could increase the agency we express in our sex lives (*ibid*).⁴⁰

I’ll end this section with a third and final argument. Namely: affirming the romantic-platonic love distinction serves to reinforce a hierarchy of value between them. This

⁴⁰ Unlike Hanel and Jenkins (2024) I don’t want to advocate the *total* dissolution of the romantic-platonic relationship distinction. I am more sceptical than them that ‘[m]ost people [...] can recognize a successful romantic relationship without sex, and a successful friendship with sex’ (*ibid*: 6). Also, I’m persuaded by McKeever (2017) that there can be important benefits to deliberately choosing sexual exclusivity with a romantic partner.

hierarchy involves the systematic devaluing of friendships – especially, because of pervasive heteronormativity, *same-gender* friendships (ibid: 18). This is bad insofar as it is a distortion of reality, because same-gender friendships are extremely valuable, and have been essential to the ongoing struggle against patriarchy (Friedman, 1989: 289). But arguably worse is the fact such a hierarchy discourages us from investing in our friendships and thereby *discovering* their value (e.g., Behrooz, 2023). To highlight a pertinent example, Hanel and Jenkins (2024: 18) argue that same-gender friendship help safeguard against the confusion and isolation that can encourage women to remain with abusive romantic partners.

If my reader is still hesitant to accept that friendships can be as valuable as romantic partnerships, I prompt them to consider the intensity of the best friend relation. The expectations we have of our closest friends are scarcely different from those we have for our long-term romantic partners. Indeed, McKeever (2014: 120) notes that very often we expect more from, and depend much more firmly on, our friends than whoever we happen to be dating. This is especially true for those of us lucky enough to have a best friend. The depth of the connection involved in these relationships has been well-documented. From Montaigne's (1993) classic essay, in which he writes of the devastating heartbreak he experienced at the death of his friend, Etienne de la Boétie; to Anahit Behrooz's (2023) recent monograph, *BFFs*, where she chronicles the intensity of the love she has experienced in friendships with women throughout her life.⁴¹⁴² What's striking in these discussions, is that a friendship appears (quite coherently) to be the *primary* relationship around which the author's life is structured, with romantic relationships taking a backseat. In the world of modern dating, I think most people will experience at least one romantic entanglement that is both fleeting and trivial, while we have at least one friendship that is enduring and profoundly meaningful (Hanel and Jenkins, 2024: 9).

4.3 Passion

The final objection I'll consider is characteristic of opposition to properties-based views. This is the worry that Qualities Rationalism ignores one of love's most valuable defining characteristics: passion. There are multiple facets to this objection, some of which are more easily defeated than others.

First, is the complaint that Qualities Rationalism turns love into a mere quest for knowledge, stripping it of its embodied nature.⁴³ It's true that a natural model for understanding love and attraction on Qualities Rationalism is one of knowledge and

⁴¹ It would be remiss of me not to mention the speculation among queer theorists and historians that Boétie and Montaigne were in fact more than friends, e.g. Schachter (2001).

⁴² Not to mention Aristotle's (1997) discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁴³ See, e.g.: Nussbaum's essay collection *Love's Knowledge* (1991) for a series of arguments that love involves (among other things) embodied experience, not just propositional knowledge of the beloved. Keller (2000: 165) also expounds a version of this objection.

curiosity. Throughout the dissertation I have connected insufficient knowledge (of the beloved's qualities) to love's absence – viz., in FLING. In 2.3, I also argued, pace Setiya (2014: 261), that a lack of curiosity about the beloved signals a lack of love for them. Just as I appreciate that some people won't share my intuitions about the impossibility of love at first sight, I anticipate that a model which excludes these cases could be surprising and pro tanto objectionable. If you think it's possible and *valuable* to be gripped completely by someone's love-worthiness in an instant, knowing very little about them, you likely think a knowledge-curiosity model fails too. You're also likely to endorse a model that leans heavily on features of emotional embodiment – including physical attraction, for example. So an account which seems to de-emphasise these features looks to be missing something very important indeed.

My reply is to accept that Qualities Rationalism probably does require a knowledge-curiosity model of love. It certainly implies this model strongly. But I want to argue that such a model is compatible with an understanding of love as passionate and even embodied. To suggest how, I'll draw on recent work by Daniela Dover, which seeks to explain love in knowing and curious terms.

Dover (2024) argues that 'erotic curiosity' – a particularly intense desire to learn and know – about the beloved, may be central to our loving relationships. This kind of curiosity is best understood in contrast to what I will call 'question curiosity' – roughly, the desire to discover the answer to a specific question.⁴⁴ Instead of a question, erotic curiosity fixes on a 'living object', of which the paradigmatic case is a human love interest – though it may be any sufficiently complex object, including an artwork, or an animal (Dover, 2023: 817). Unlike someone in the grips of question curiosity, the erotically curious person does not hope their curiosity will be satisfied and thereby extinguished (*ibid*: 826). They enjoy the state of being curious for itself. This is just as well, because the living object is such that it precludes any definitive answers about its nature. So the act of inquiring involves interacting with the living object in a way that transforms it, along with the inquirer.⁴⁵

I hope my reader will agree this model chimes with the ideas from Keller (2000: 170) that partly inspired my reply to the trading up worry (see 1.4). Lovers 'change together [...] take on new values and goals [...] through gaining self-knowledge through the eyes of the other, through *learning* together to maintain a romantic relationship' (*ibid*).⁴⁶ Comparison with Keller's analysis should emphasise the *intimacy* of knowing and being known in this way.

The model Dover proposes is not of the dispassionate scientist who (lab coat, gloves, and goggles applied) observes the beloved through thick plexiglass. Rather, she imagines an Aristophanic lover, who seeks 'communion', a profound intertwining

⁴⁴ Dover calls 'question curiosity' the 'QDK' model in Dover (2023: 814).

⁴⁵ On this point, see: Dover (2022).

⁴⁶ My emphasis.

with the beloved (Dover, 2023: 824). Crucially for the objection at hand, the desire for communion is driven by the *pleasure* taken in contemplating the beloved, as well as sensuous, embodied impulses to ‘meld’, not just metaphorically, with them (ibid: 826; 824).

My ambition in rehearsing Dover’s arguments is not to establish, definitively, that love is identified with erotic curiosity in the way she suggests. Or even that the knowledge-curiosity model of love and desire is the one we should endorse. I hope only to show that the knowledge-curiosity model is not incompatible with an account of love as passionate in the sense at hand. If Qualities Rationalism commits us to the knowledge-curiosity model, it does not yet insist that love is free from passion.

Let’s turn to a second facet of the passion objection. It may be objected that passion consists in a certain ‘*je ne sais quoi*’ that cannot be captured in the language of qualities. Smuts (2014: 96) calls this unknown number ‘chemistry’: ‘No matter how good we think that someone is, we may or may not love them. Love, at least to some degree, just does seem to be a matter of chemistry. And chemistry is not responsive to reasons.’ For the same reason, he thinks love is involuntary: ‘We can work at trying to love someone, but it seems to just happen or not’ (ibid).

If Qualities Rationalism failed to capture the specialness, not to mention the sheer *thrill*, of experiencing romantic chemistry with someone, then that would be a major oversight. My disagreement with Smuts is not that romantic love requires no chemistry, but that chemistry can be captured in terms of qualities and reasons.

Smuts’ worry can be soothed by re-clarifying my account. Qualities Rationalism holds that bona fide lovers take themselves to be justified on the *balance* of reasons. My view does not require that each and every one of the reasons counting towards *L*’s love for *B* is accessible to *L* – and certainly not that each reason is expressible in language.⁴⁷ Further, the version of Qualities Rationalism I defend understands that many of the weightiest reasons for love are complex, interconnected, and relational, so that these may be the trickiest of all to put into words.⁴⁸ My view also allows that the relevant reasons may only be available to the lover (see 1.1). Consider qualities like *smells delightful*, *makes me feel giddy* or *senses what I’m feeling without a word*. These are legitimate reasons for love on Qualities Rationalism.

My reply to Smuts, and those of his persuasion, should be clear. I think ‘chemistry’, and the ‘*je ne sais quoi*,’ we may appeal to when explaining our love, is but a shorthand for a messy complex of reasons. It is a way we can make our reasons for love understandable to others, without having to spell out the details – something we

⁴⁷ There is precedent for this in the existing literature, e.g., Jollimore (2011: 19). The position is also bolstered by arguments for epistemic externalism, a view that has been defended by feminist epistemologists, e.g. Srinivasan (2020).

⁴⁸ On inarticulable reasons, see: Ebels-Duggan (2017).

may not always want or be in a position to do; perhaps because it's arduous, inappropriately intimate, or time-consuming.

I'll examine one more construal of the passion objection before concluding. This worry arises from the perceived connection between the passionate and the irrational. For example, McKeever and Saunders (2022) argue, pace both rationalists and anti-rationalists, that embracing a degree of irrationality in love provides access to valuable 'passion' and excitement.⁴⁹ They suppose that when we are in love, we sometimes know that what we feel is not rational: we know our beloved is not the most beautiful person in the world, but we allow ourselves to feel and behave like they are – by committing to them and eschewing all others (ibid: 265). Here, irrationality doesn't seem bad; it seems to facilitate a greater sense of passion.

Importantly, McKeever and Saunders (2022: 268) acknowledge the risks of embracing irrationality in an abusive context: 'We accept this and certainly do not want to endorse or glorify abusive [...] relationships' (ibid). They don't claim that irrationality is always good; only that an account of love which can say nothing of its contribution is the worse for it.

My own view is that, in the good case, we really *do* believe our beloved is great enough to be worth eschewing everyone else.⁵⁰ So we can commit to them, passionately, without being irrational. As I've already argued (1.4), this need not involve thinking that they are supreme in every, or even any *one*, of their properties. It entails only that we think, together, now, on the balance of reasons, they are a better match for us than anyone else. Notice I am not making the stronger claim that no one else *could* be a better match – with time spent cultivating a loving relationship, mutual knowledge, trust, in-jokes et cetera... But it seems right that if you have a healthy love that makes you happy, you probably are justified in continuing to invest exclusively in your affection for that person. On this picture, we only need to embrace irrationality to sustain passionate commitment when something is not right.

A more concessionary reply is that, even if embracing irrationality furnishes some additional passion, since it has the potential to put us in grave danger, maybe it is not worth the risk. One reason to think it is not worth the risk is if you believe, as I do, that the pleasures and value of rational love, even in the absence of passion, are profound. On this concessionary picture, we would be wise to keep ourselves from getting carried away in our appraisals of our beloveds. We could think: 'I love her because she's beautiful' and ask ourselves honestly if that is enough to sustain our commitment. If it is no longer, then we should be ready to renegotiate the boundaries of our loving relationship or to walk away.

⁴⁹ The authors don't employ 'passion' themselves. But they endorse Solomon's (1998: 96) use.

⁵⁰ Assuming we are monogamous.

With Keller (2000: 165), I believe that 'romantic love, to some extent, deserves to be intellectualized'. One of my aims in this dissertation has been to take seriously the risks of *underthinking* the question of who we love, in the name of passion or otherwise. As such, I suggest we should be more worried about thoughtlessly committing to the wrong person than we should about overthinking our investment in the right one.

Conclusion

This chapter responds to three objections against Qualities Rationalism, with the additional aim of sketching how the account might be expanded and applied. I argued Qualities Rationalists need not commit to a view on which love is voluntary (4.1), continuous with platonic love (4.2), and passionless (4.3). But I also suggested that there could be some benefits of conceiving of love as weakly voluntary, importantly similar to platonic love, and as demanding, on occasion, careful, dispassionate reflection from us.

Conclusion

This dissertation defends a version of Qualities Rationalism about romantic love. On my view, love is a rational response to the beloved, justified by reasons arising from their personal qualities, both inherent and relational. To love someone *just is* think yourself justified in loving them. Love is rejoicing in another person's qualities.

My argument has been that Qualities Rationalism is more plausible in light of important insights from feminist theory. These insights are that patriarchal power structures have an impact on our affective commitments (Patriarchal Impact) and love and loving relationships are frequently detrimental to our flourishing (Harmful Love). Judging that the most urgent evidence for these insights is the ongoing prevalence of abusive relationships, which disproportionately afflict women, I structured my argument around the hypothetical case, ABUSE.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I argued that, in neglecting such cases, many philosophers have underplayed the limitations for their own accounts at the same time as undervaluing or ignoring the merits of Qualities Rationalism. In particular, anti-rationalists and Personhood Rationalists struggle to accommodate intuitive explanations of what goes wrong in ABUSE. In fact, I pressed, they often struggle to capture the intuitive thought that anything at all goes wrong in these cases.

At the very least, this is an ethical problem for these views. That is, it's an important consideration that counts against them for anyone who takes it seriously. But I've argued that it's also a coherence problem, which cannot be so easily ignored (see especially 1.5, 3.1 and 3.2). In constructing a descriptive account of love, theorists also aim to illuminate its value. If their accounts allow that loving feelings for abusers may be just as valuable as loving feelings for those in healthy loving relationships, then they obscure the value of love to that extent.

In accommodating Patriarchal Impact and Harmful Love, Qualities Rationalism is able to give a coherent account of love that clarifies its value. It has the resources to disambiguate love from problematic love-adjacent attitudes, like dependence and infatuation. As such, my preferred view accommodates optimism about romantic love, even for those who acknowledge Patriarchal Impact and Harmful Love.

Throughout, I have also sought to identify various ways the existing scholarship has obscured the plausibility of Qualities Rationalism. Critics have assumed that Qualities Rationalism can only appeal to coarse-grained, non-relational qualities (see 1.4, 2.5). More fundamentally, they have assumed that commitment to traditional romantic ideals should be preferred to Qualities Rationalism, often without subjecting

these ideals to proper scrutiny (see Chapter 3). On a fine-grained, relational version of Qualities Rationalism, we can avoid traditional objections to the view. By interrogating the romantic ideals which motivate these objections, we can explain why so many theorists have dismissed the account for so long.

My task here has been to bolster the plausibility of the core claim of Qualities Rationalism. More must be done to expand this claim into a fully-fledged, feminist account of romantic love. I began laying the groundwork for this larger project in Chapter 4.

Having recapitulated, I would like to sketch some considerations that are not essential for my argument, but which I hope will leave my reader with the sense that the Qualities Rationalist picture I've been painting really is a plausible and appealing one.

First, I want to emphasise that Qualities Rationalism is an account of love's necessary, not its sufficient conditions. In arguing that love is predicated on, and justified by, the beloved's properties, I am not insisting that love involves nothing else. A fortiori, I am not committing to the claim that the act of loving *calls* for nothing else from us in our relationships. I find it very plausible that there's a place for care and also for grace in our treatment of our romantic partners. For example, Lewis (n.d.) defends a Qualities Rationalist account on which love has two movements: the rational approval of the beloved, on the one hand, and a non-rational care for them, on the other. This model allows us to capture the thought that, if we love someone, we are apt to develop a legitimate concern for their wellbeing that is not dependent on their having certain qualities. If we stop loving them, say, because we grow and change in different directions, this concern may remain.

The second consideration pertains to my methodology. It arises in response to a potential objection. There is a tendency in the literature to aim at offering a unified account of love – applying a single theory to all forms, from parental to romantic (e.g., Frankfurt, 2004; Kolodny, 2003; Velleman, 1999). Given we capture these modes of love with the same word, it seems *ceteris paribus* a desirable feature of an account if it can identify what's common to them all. Correspondingly, my reader might think it a detriment that I have only argued for the plausibility of Qualities Rationalism about *romantic* love. It remains to be seen whether Qualities Rationalism could be adapted for love in general.⁵¹

⁵¹ For example, Kolodny (2003: 140) worries about this, despite conceding Qualities Rationalism is a *prima facie* plausible account of romantic and platonic love.

My reply is that, if this is a detriment in my method, it has countervailing merits. Just as theorising only about romantic love risks obscuring the importance of features common to all forms of love, theorising towards a unified account risks obscuring important differences between them. In 3.1, I suggested that treating parental and divine love as paradigmatic of love in general obfuscates objections to the disinterested love ideal in the romantic case. In 2.3, I argued that appealing to ‘love in general’ masks the implausibility of the claim that everyone is equally worthy of *romantic* love. If we treat romantic love as worthy of independent investigation, we are more likely to discover its distinctive value.

A third consideration concerns love's place in moral psychology. If anti-rationalists are right that love isn't evaluable by reasons, then it is an outlier among other attitudes, like anger, jealousy, or fear, which we routinely assess as justified or unjustified (Shpall, 2020: 415-6; Solomon, 2002: 1).⁵² Anti-rationalists can argue that there is a principled distinction between love and other attitudes that justifies its differential treatment (e.g. Zangwill, 2013: 309, 311). But rationalists don't face the same pressure to explain how and why love is different from other attitudes.

According to the grounding claim that I defend, love cannot be unjustified: to love someone just is to be justified in your loving feelings. So you might worry that the above point only counts in favour of other rationalist accounts, while counting against my Qualities Rationalism. In reply, I reiterate that I am not concerned to defend this grounding claim if it jeopardises my defence of the weaker, justification claim: that love is justified by the beloved's qualities (see 1.1). Also, the grounding claim still allows us to talk about loving *feelings* as being unjustified, in a way that, I think, does much the same work as would allowing that love can be unjustified.

As promised in 1.1, I'll now sketch my case for the stronger, grounding claim, despite the apparent inconveniences of affirming it over and above the justification claim. Before I set out the case, let me underline that nothing in my argument rests on the following remarks. If the reader finds them implausible, I invite them to imagine I have only ever been arguing for the justification claim.

I affirm the grounding claim because I think that there is a real, if not a *sharp*, phenomenological distinction between justified and unjustified loving feelings. I'm not alone among contemporary authors in thinking that love should ‘feel right’ or appear fitting to the lover (e.g. Kolodny, 2003: 137; Philips, 2021: 173).

But I'll draw on a perhaps surprising source to defend my claim, which is a little stronger, now. Namely: 17th-century philosopher Nicolas Malebranche, who

⁵² There is ongoing debate about whether attitudes in general are ever (in)appropriate, e.g. D'Arms and Jacobson (2000), Srinivasan (2017). As mentioned in 0.2, I use ‘justified’ and ‘appropriate’ quite interchangeably here. But, in future research, more work could be done to defend this use.

opposed the Quietists, particularly his former follower, François Lamy (Lennon, 2013).⁵³ The Quietists held that love for God must be completely disinterested. In the impossible case that God condemns you to eternal damnation, precisely for loving Him, the Quietists think you should still love Him (Walsh and Lennon, 2012: 72). (I hope my reader finds the resemblance of 1600s Quietism between contemporary anti-rationalism as intriguing as I do).

Malebranche disagreed. For him, love should involve pleasure, and pleasure itself could be either *clarified* or *confused* (Malebranche, 1892, XIV: 9). All pleasure qua pleasure feels good, but only clarified pleasure is free from the confusion and tension of believing its source is leading you astray (*ibid*). Clarified pleasure signals that something is good and worth embracing (*ibid*). Confused pleasure, signals that pursuing its source is not fully aligned with divine will and is bad for us to that extent (*ibid*: 9-10).

I suggest that the more justified our loving feelings seem to us, the more they involve something resembling Malebranche's clarified pleasure: peaceful, stable, and free from the tension of believing we are being led into danger. (Of course, there's no role for the divine will on my account). By contrast, the experience of unjustified love involves something more like confused pleasure. Love-adjacent attitudes, like dependency and infatuation, may feel powerful and intoxicating in a way that seems to bind us to the beloved, but they are always tainted by uncertainty or distress.⁵⁴

If the first-personal experiences of justified and unjustified loving feelings do differ in this manner, then I contend we would be discerning to reserve 'love' for the former. Committing to this distinction emphasises the greatest strength of Qualities Rationalism as I see it. Qualities Rationalism captures the intuitive, lovely thought that there shouldn't be genuine danger in embracing love. Love should feel good because it does us good; that is its value and that is why we spend so much of our time and energy pursuing and sustaining it.

I would like to end by reviewing the aims I set out in the Introduction. First, to offer a feminist intervention in the philosophical literature. I have done this by testing the resources existing philosophical accounts have for explaining what goes wrong in 'love' for abusive partners. I found opposing accounts wanting (Chapter 1 and 2) and offered an explanation as to why (Chapter 3). I also defended my own account, which makes these resources its priority, in Chapter 4.

⁵³ I thank Colin Chamberlain for his infectious enthusiasm for Malebranche.

⁵⁴ hooks (2000: 5) makes similar remarks about the experience of 'cathexis' compared with bona fide love.

Second, I sought to offer a loving intervention in the feminist literature. My intention here was to vindicate love as worth pursuing, even from a feminist perspective which tells us that *what* love consists in, as well as *who* we love, has been partly corrupted and mobilised by patriarchy. I haven't yet been explicit about how I have addressed this second aim. My closing remarks will gesture towards an explanation.

According to my Qualities Rationalism, love is not an attitude bound up with oppression – it doesn't disempower us, cause low self-esteem, or deepen alienation; rather, love has the potential to counteract its effects. On this view, love discloses the beloved's strengths and beauty to the lover. Love celebrates these qualities whole-heartedly. To be loved, in turn, is an affirming experience: it gifts us with reasons to feel good about ourselves. Love, so understood, does not disorient or confuse; it clarifies our own value and the value of those we love. It is not a blind, a-rational urge that overwhelms us or binds us arbitrarily to one another. Love is a forward movement towards mutual understanding and appreciation, which may always be embraced with joy.

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