

## ROMANTIC LOVE AND LOVING COMMITMENT: ARTICULATING A MODERN IDEAL

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The relation of the one to the other must thus be a complete and continual exchange, a complete and continual affirmation of oneself in another, a perfect interaction and communion.  
—Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov, "The Meaning of Love"

Romantic love and loving commitment are topics that a lot of artists, philosophers, and theologians spend a lot of time talking and thinking about, and yet for all this the topics strike most of us as rather poorly understood.<sup>1</sup> In what follows I want to ask and try to answer some basic but important questions about these matters, sorting out some confusions and resolving some conundrums along the way.<sup>2</sup>

So as to avert possible misunderstandings of the project, I will first distinguish two questions that may or may not prove to be closely related to one another. One question concerns the *natures* of romantic love and loving commitment, and may demand by way of answer some set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the obtaining of the relation in question. Thus we may say a relationship is one of romantic love just in case various attitudes, dispositions, and feelings are in place. This question needs to be distinguished from the following: what sorts of attitudes, dispositions and feelings do modern Westerners regard as being preconditions for fulfilling romantic relations. The first question would appear to go directly to the substance of love, asking what it is, whereas the

latter looks to what a class of would-be lovers want, need, and seek. Alternatively, an answer to the first question calls for the examination of a phenomenon at the level of conceptual analysis, while an answer to the second tells us what people look for that phenomenon to deliver. Some may think it possible or even likely that there is a discrepancy between what romantic love really is and what people are looking for when they take themselves to be pursuing it. Whether or not the distinction is really so substantive as all that (and I am inclined to think it not), it is this latter question (or formulation) that will concern me in this essay. So to the extent to which this involves the articulation of an ideal, it is with respect to the anticipated deliveries of romantic love, not necessarily the relation itself.

Now a preliminary qualification. I will be concerned with questions about romantic love and loving commitment that look to presuppose unique denotation to these terms; while I am reluctant to suggest uniformity of either romantic sentiment or the conditions of romantic fulfillment across times, places, and cultures, I do think there is substantial agreement about what sorts of ingredients go into fulfilling romantic relations in contemporary Western culture,

and it is this culture that will be my sole focus of attention in this essay.<sup>3</sup> Little to none of the spirit or substance of my remarks may carry over to other cultures and periods, and any such applicability will be left for the discerning reader to determine.<sup>4</sup>

Having delimited and qualified my task, I now want to develop the network of needs and interests on which I take the pursuit of romantic love to concentrate. In doing this I am quite obviously making substantive claims about our common psychological makeup, specifically claims about the sorts of things most people must take to be more or less in place in order for them to find their romantic involvements psychologically satisfying. To this end I will be relying primarily upon an admixture of anecdotal evidence and reflective common sense, although I have looked into the relevant sociological literature.<sup>5</sup> The basic idea is the following: people want to form a distinctive sort of *we* with another person, to be *loved for properties* of certain kinds, and to have this love generate and sustain a *commitment* to them of a certain type. The first part of the idea is pretty generally accepted, and needs only to be spelled out and characterized in greater detail than is normally done. The second has been a source of controversy at least since the time of Plato. The third has been underarticulated and underappreciated, and its underappreciation gives rise to apparent inconsistencies in our wishes for lasting loving relationships.

#### WE

In an insightful essay titled "Love's Bond" Robert Nozick claims, rightly, that romantic love is characterized by "the desire to form and constitute a new entity in the world, what might be called a *we*."<sup>6</sup> Nozick is actually claiming that romantic love just *is* wanting to form a *we*, but I will ignore the constitutive claim and focus on the related idea that one of the things, perhaps the most important thing people associate with the ideal of romantic love, is this desire to unite with another person in profound psychological and physical ways.<sup>7</sup>

While there are a number of aspects to this desire, no doubt the most important one is that it includes wanting to identify with another, to take another's needs and interests to be your own and to wish that she will do the same.<sup>8</sup> While I take this last claim to be relatively uncontroversial, it goes only so far as our appreciation of its content permits, which a little reflection will show is not all that great.

First, just what does it mean to take another's needs and interests to be your own in this context? As a start, let's define a motivational set to be the network of interests, needs, and wants that guides a person's deliberations and actions. Supposing that two people have somewhat different motivational sets, say that *A* has interest *x* while *B* does not, the claim suggests that part of the romantic ideal is *A*'s wanting *B* to adopt *x* as an interest. But until we get a bit more information about what sort of interest *x* is *and* just how *B* comes to acquire it, the claim can look a bit weird. Let's let *x* be, say, the desire to do good work in philosophy. How is *B* supposed to incorporate *A*'s philosophical ambitions into her own motivational set? One thing that "taking *A*'s interests to be her own" shouldn't amount to is *B*'s coming to have similar philosophical ambitions. As it stands this seems at once too much to ask for and too little. Too much in that you don't usually insist (or even wish) that your lover should come to *have* your interests when they're of this sort. Too little in that her simply coming to have the same type of interests that you do doesn't adequately reflect your desire that she incorporate *your* interests into her motivational set. Another thing that "taking *A*'s interests to be her own" shouldn't come out to is *B*'s merely hoping that *A* realizes his philosophical ambitions for instrumental reasons, say because *B* knows a philosophically unsuccessful *A* is a miserable *A* to be around. This falls short of the sort of joint consolidation and identification with his ambitions that *A* desires. I think the difficulty in articulating this desire that your lover take on your concerns stems from a basic ten-

sion between the wish to form and constitute a profoundly intimate union with another, what I am calling a (romantic) *we*, and, with regard to some interests at least, a hope that the other will come to appreciate them without appropriating them.<sup>9</sup> More precisely, while you want your lover to substantially incorporate your interests into her motivational set, you don't want her to do this in a way that eviscerates the qualities that make these interests special to you, or to identify with the interests only to the extent that she takes her personal well-being to be associated with them.

This same tension reveals itself when trying to apply to romance the loosely Aristotelian idea that you want your friends to value your advancement of your interests for your own sake. On such a conception you want your lover to rightly regard your successes as intrinsically valuable and independent (at least in principle) of any effects they may have on her own well-being. This doesn't look quite right because it too falls short of the joint consolidation and identification adverted to above. That is to say, you commonly want the advancement of your interests and securing of your needs to both be and be perceived to be *directly connected* to the lover's well-being, in the sense that your advancement of an interest in itself constitutes a good for her.<sup>10</sup> While something like what I've called the Aristotelian idea looks at least plausible in connection with the related ideal of friendship, it seems wrong in the present context precisely because it fails to sit comfortably with the overarching desire to form and constitute the particular sort of union I've described. To the extent that you wish to form such a psychologically intimate *we*, it is inappropriate for your lover to be a mere spectator, albeit partisan, with regard to your various concerns.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, while you want your needs and interests to figure prominently and directly in your lover's rightly perceived well-being, you employ these very materials in engineering a self-conception, and given their importance in this regard you're often eager that your distinctively *personal* attachments to

them be neither compromised nor underappreciated. Both the fanatical tennis parent who lives vicariously through his child and the power-hungry Lady Macbeth serve as rough-and-ready examples of the sort of compromising and appropriation of personal interests that most of us would find unacceptable in our romantic relations.

Inattentiveness to these concerns mars Roger Scruton's otherwise trenchant investigation of romantic love in his *Sexual Desire*. There he aligns himself with Montaigne in stating that "the friendship of esteem becomes love just so soon as reciprocity becomes community: that is, just so soon as all distinction between my interests and your interests is overcome."<sup>12</sup> He then goes on to claim that the distinguishing features of love are "the desire to 'be with' the other, taking comfort from his bodily presence, and the 'community of interests' that erodes the distinction between *my* interests and *his*."<sup>13</sup> While I take Scruton to be more or less right in regarding the ideal of romantic love as an elaboration upon that of friendship rather than a wholly different beast, his emphasis upon the unqualified merging of interests and reasons in distinguishing romantic love from friendship is insensitive to the competing interests I have been striving to articulate.

Having said all this, it's important to keep in mind that I am not looking to highlight an intractable dilemma at the heart of the romantic ideal. It's not as if your wishes for consolidation and identification on the one hand, which are after all simply aspects of the profound psychological merging sought after in romance, and the desire to preserve the integrity of your personal boundaries on the other, are hopelessly irreconcilable aims. Rather, what I've been trying to show is that the romantic desire to form and constitute a *we* characterized by profound psychological and physical intimacy is a highly nuanced one, and one that ultimately looks in some respects quite like a wish amongst sovereign states to form a republican nation. Insofar as you

can rightly regard your lover as taking her well-being to be directly connected with yours, while at the same time appreciating the distinctively personal dimensions to your achievements, the relationship looks to be maximally fulfilling. It must be kept in mind, however, that needs and interests come in all shapes and sizes, and it would be ludicrous to suggest that the tension between intimacy and individuality that I've suggested applies to some personal concerns in fact applies to all of them, or that all lovers will be inclined to resolve similar cases in similar ways. Some interests will be fully collaborative and communal (the welfare of children), others wholly private (yoga), still others balanced in one way or another between these extremes (perhaps religious observances in mixed couples). Again, one person's inclination to be somewhat protective of his career will be met by another's complete openness to her partner's deepest affiliation with her pet projects. These various qualifications merely highlight the extent to which a characterization of the romantic ideal must be nuanced in accordance with the striking variety of personalities and motivational sets obtaining within contemporary Western culture.

All this attention to how you want your lover to regard your needs and interests should not distract us from the importance of how you want to see yourself as standing in relation to hers. An important part of the romantic ideal, one closely aligned with the desire to form a *we*, consists in taking yourself to be a significant contributor to the other's well-being. This is not to say you want to think of yourself as the other's *sine qua non*, but rather as playing an important supporting role in the other's advancement of at least some of her interests. For example, if your lover is down in the dumps, you would like to be the one who cheers her up, although barring this it's better that someone else (except maybe certain ex-someones) do the cheering up than no one. Free-riding in this sense, wherein your lover's role in your development far exceeds your perceived role in hers, is gener-

ally unsatisfying, all too easily giving rise to the sorts of unpleasant sensations Bernard Shaw is pointing to when he writes "Eliza never does like Higgins very much; he is altogether too god-like to be agreeable."

At this point it's interesting to ask why pursuit of the romantic ideal doesn't stop short of genuinely taking the other's needs and interests unto yourself. That is to say, why would most of us perceive it to be unsatisfying were we to find that while our lover identified with our needs and interests, we nonetheless failed to do so with his or hers, instead stopping short at some commiserative level? While I've indicated the value most of us attach to contributing to our lover's development and furthering his or her interests, this looks perfectly consistent with a relatively benign and somewhat detached form of concern for them, say of the sort dissertation directors customarily feel for their students' progress. Why is it so important to do the identifying rather than merely to be identified with? Wouldn't *this* kind of romantic free-riding be the best game in town?

That question does not have an easy answer. In an effort to point up a promising approach, I'll close this section by making explicit something I take to have been tacit throughout much of my discussion of the *we*, namely the value lovers customarily attach to a particular species of trust. It's not enough to say that lovers want to be able to trust one another; rather, as in the case of (better) friendship, each party strongly desires to be trusted as well. The mutual urgency of these desires both to trust your lover and be trusted by her distinguishes the sort of trust appropriate to the romantic ideal from, say, the sorts that figure in your relations with your doctor or lawyer or a small child's relations with his mother. Now, my suspicion is that the importance of identifying with your lover rather than merely being identified with by her is closely bound up with the importance of being trusted rather than merely being able to trust. That is to say, with regard to both identification and trust, merely to have one half without its complement is in-

compatible with the psychological intimacy after which romantic lovers customarily seek. Not much of an answer, but it's movement in the right direction.<sup>14</sup>

"FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS"

I'd now like to turn to another aspect of the romantic ideal, one concerning what we regard as appropriate bases for love. Let's begin by distinguishing persons from their properties, and then roughly divide these latter into those that a person takes to be central to his self-conception and those he regards as peripheral. Given that persons' self-conceptions tend to shift, settle, sometimes even quake over time, nevertheless on their good days most people can pick out some properties with which they most profoundly identify, which they take to more or less settle the questions "who am I?" and "what am I about?" for a reasonable stretch of time both past and future. With these distinctions in hand, we can say that a person *A* wants a romantic partner *B* to love him for properties that *A* takes to be central to his self-conception. Not necessarily all of these properties, perhaps not even just any plurality; but definitely some.<sup>15</sup>

Let me try to forestall a predictable worry by emphasizing that the ideal of romantic love involves a relation between *persons*, not between a person and a set of properties. By claiming that *A* wants to be loved for properties that *A* takes to be central to his self-conception, I am claiming that *A* wants such properties to be the ground of the attitude *B* has adopted, not the object. It should be absolutely clear that by claiming you want to be loved for properties that you take to be central to your self-conception I am maintaining that you want to stand in a relation that essentially relates persons partly in virtue of their instantiating various properties; an ideal of love that involves relating persons to properties directly is Platonic in spirit and peculiar in any case.

This is the most plausible construal of the commonplace expression, "I want my lover to love me for the right reasons."

Similarly, when someone issues a complaint like "he only loves me for my body," this is best interpreted as that person's observation that her lover's love is focused on properties that she herself regards as peripheral. I suggest that, while love for properties will commonly manifest itself in the citing of reasons for love that make reference to those very properties (say if a boy's mother asks him why he's so taken with a particular girl), serious talk of reasons as the basis for the attitude is probably best avoided. For my purposes, the claim that you want to be loved for the right reasons is equivalent to saying you want the love to focus on appropriate aspects of you, or that you want to be loved for the right sorts of properties. The important point is that people generally want those things about themselves that they take to be at the core of their identity to figure as grounds in the attitude their lover takes towards them.

Failure to distinguish love for properties from love of properties seems to be rather widespread in this line of work. Thus, for example, in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* Jean Buridan makes heavy weather of a proposed objection to the thesis that perfect friends value each other for their virtue, rather than simply noting that the objection involves confusing the object of an attitude with its ground.<sup>16</sup> Just as Aristotle is hardly committed to the view that perfect friends love each other's virtue rather than each other, so am I hardly committed to the view that romantic lovers love each other's desirable properties rather than each other.<sup>17</sup>

Already we see the importance of distinguishing questions about necessary conditions for the obtaining of the love relation from questions about what people are looking for. For if we attend to my claim to be describing what *A* wants, we'll see that worries about cases in which the properties *A* takes to be central to his self-conception differ drastically from those properties that in fact *are* central, are misdirected. Consider the following case: *A* is a good-hearted teenage rebel, who takes himself to be a nihilistic desperado when under-

neath it all he is a decent, gentle soul. It is an interesting question whether or not, if he is taken with an insightful girl who appreciates his goodness while at the same time humoring his silliness, we should call this a full-fledged instance of romantic love. But given that we're focused on the question of what people are looking for, my initial way of putting things is exactly right. A person wants to be loved for properties that he *takes* to be central to his self-conception. Most of the time people are sufficiently in touch with who they are so that any distinction between their supposed self-conception and their real one is negligible for these purposes; but if in fact there is a significant disparity, from the point of view of psychological fulfillment they want to think of their lover as valuing them for the same sorts of reasons that they themselves do. If the youthful desperado is as self-deceived as I take him to be, then what he wants is for the girl to love him for his apparent rebelliousness.<sup>18</sup>

These last remarks concerning cases of significant disparity between who you take yourself to be and who you really are provide occasion to bring together the desire for the sort of singularly intimate friendship that characterizes the ideal romantic *we* and the wish to be loved "for the right reasons." While most of us have a reasonably consistent grasp on the properties we most value about ourselves, almost all of us experience moments or even extended periods of self-doubt, where this is commonly attended by worries that perhaps we aren't the sorts of people we've generally taken ourselves to be. Thus a good father might worry that in fact he isn't one on having forgotten about his child's baseball game or having screamed at him for spilling coffee on his dissertation; or a clever philosopher might fear he's losing it after having been shown up in seminar by a freshman. One of the functions our closest relationships can serve is to stabilize and reinforce our ways of thinking about ourselves, to help us to maintain our belief that we have the properties we so highly value about ourselves. Oftentimes, as in the philosophical case, it's not even very important that

your lover be in a position to make a reliable evaluation; simply the fact that she has achieved a high degree of intimacy with you and continues to direct her romantic affections towards you in a customary manner enables you to weather momentary fears that you've been deceiving yourself and her.<sup>19</sup> Another example of how the desire to form a *we* comes together with the desire to be loved for the right properties involves the way in which the recognition that your lover loves you for properties you strongly identify with encourages you to strengthen and improve these attributes, to develop yourself into ever better versions of the person she so admires. In these ways the romantic *we* takes on some of the best features of an Aristotelian perfect friendship, namely the tendencies toward mutual encouragement and support in the joint projects of character-building and self-definition.<sup>20</sup>

In putting *A*'s desires in this way I am trying to capture a commonsensical idea that we have about fulfilling romantic relations: you don't want your partner to love you entirely, probably not even too significantly, for things about you that don't strike you as important to who you are or what you're about. Note that this is already a good bit more sophisticated than what's going on with an heiress who correctly perceives that her suitor is only after her money; in this case it looks like *B* doesn't love *A* at all, but rather merely wants the money and views relations with *A* as a means thereto. Such a scenario hardly constitutes romance, and is almost guaranteed to be unfulfilling from *A*'s point of view to the extent to which she perceives *B*'s motivations. Rather, I'm claiming that in a situation in which *B* really does direct loving affections towards *A* but does so only on the basis of what *A* would take to be peripheral properties, whatever relation is obtaining will fall short of the romantic ideal, at least but probably more than just to the extent to which *A* appreciates what's really going on.

One way to more clearly exhibit some intuitions driving the idea that a lover should love you for at least some proper-

ties with which you strongly identify is to imagine your likely reaction to the following scenario. Suppose that you and your lover attend a symposium on making romantic loving relationships flourish (a Catholic Pre-Cana workshop for engaged couples, perhaps), and you are each asked to draw up a list of properties, yours to include properties you highly value about yourself, hers properties she takes to be bases for her love for you. If you further suppose that having drawn up your respective lists you compare and find no overlap whatsoever, it's reasonable to expect that you would be somewhat distressed. Your inclination would be to ask whether this person really understands and appreciates you as a lover should, and to wonder just what sort of foundation for a lasting and complementary relationship this widely disparate set of perspectives forecasts. Given the wide range of human temperaments, responses would probably vary from bemusement to horror, the vast majority of persons would look unfavorably on such an outcome.<sup>21</sup>

Actually I'm inclined to go a ways further than just to insist that people want their romantic partners to love them for properties central to their self-conceptions. Consider the following case: *A* identifies profoundly with his career as a painter, taking painting to be an intrinsically valuable activity. His partner, while loving *A* in good part because he is a painter, takes the painting to provide a basis for loving *A* not because it is an intrinsically valuable activity, but rather because it assures entrance to lots of flashy cocktail parties. In this case it appears that, while *A* may properly take himself to be loved "for the right sort of reason," nevertheless this perceived basis for the love may leave him unsatisfied. If this is right, we need to more precisely articulate the desire to be loved for properties you take to be central to your self-conception. A better approximation would be to speak of a desire to be loved for such properties where these properties are appreciated in a way not too different from the way that you appreciate them.

What counts as too different will no doubt vary from case to case, but at least the sort of disparity present in this last example should be precluded.

This is as good a point as any at which to highlight the distinction between falling in love and romantically loving. I take the former to be the process that gives rise to the latter. I also take the process to vary across persons and circumstances to such great extent as to preclude saying much of substance about it here.<sup>22</sup> Important for my purposes is the claim that people generally aren't as concerned with the features of themselves that give rise to someone's falling in love with them as they are with the grounds for that person's sustained attachment to them. Some might find it rather amusing to learn that their partner fell in love with them "at first sight," or perhaps because they had saved them from the *Towering Inferno*; but the sorts of properties here involved would satisfy few if perceived to be the sole or primary grounds for the enduring attitude of romantic love. So with minor qualification I claim the bases for a partner's falling in love aren't of great concern to the person loved. What does tend to matter is the basis for the enduring relation.<sup>23</sup>

Even with the various clarifications and qualifications I've given, talk of being loved for one's properties continues to give some writers pause. Thus it might be objected that people don't want to be loved for *p*, rather they want to be loved "for their own sake" or "for themselves alone."<sup>24</sup> It's important when considering this objection to get clearer about what's being demanded over and above (or beside) what's already on offer in the account, because the most natural interpretations make the objector look either confused or silly. If he means something like, "We don't want to be loved *for* anything, we just want to be loved," he's setting up a bogus dichotomy. As I've already emphasized, love is a relation between persons, not persons and properties, so when one is truly loved for *p* one *is* simply being loved. What's probably behind

this type of objection is consideration of scenarios where a person isn't really being loved at all, but rather is being treated by another as a mere means to some desirable end. On the other hand, if the objector means something like, "We just want to be loved for being us, not for any of our attractive properties," he would seem to be claiming that people have a desire to be loved for their haecceities or some such things, which is altogether absurd.<sup>25</sup> I suspect that most of the time people object to talk of love for properties either because they wrongly take such talk as introducing strange relata into the love relation, or because it together with some other seemingly plausible romantic desiderata gives rise to a dilemma nicely posed by Russell Vannoy in his essay "Erotic Love: A Final Appraisal."<sup>26</sup> In essence, the dilemma is this: while you want to think of your lover as unselfish (since you don't want to be exploited), you also want to think that your lover's love for you is merited by your instantiating various attractive properties. But given that a lover is going to select only someone whose attractive features fit her own needs and interests, it would seem that wanting to be loved on merit requires wanting your lover to love you for selfish reasons.<sup>27</sup> How can we reconcile the desire to be loved for properties central to your self-conception with the wish that love be primarily altruistic? Vannoy takes this not so much to be an argument against love for properties as for the incoherence of the romantic ideal.<sup>28</sup> My inclination is both to accept love for properties and to countenance the implications regarding the selfishness of would-be lovers. Given my view that the romantic ideal is primarily characterized by a desire to achieve a profound consolidation of needs and interests through the formation of a *we*, I don't think a little selfishness of the sort described should pose a worry to either party. After all, isn't it gratifying to feel needed?

In emphasizing that a person wants to be loved for properties central to his self-conception I might look to be opening myself up to particularly nasty strain of criticism,

one which stems from the incontrovertible desire that your lover's affections be strongly individuative. Reflection on the following scenario will highlight the apparent nastiness. Suppose that you were replaced by a molecule-for-molecule duplicate, who would a fortiori instantiate precisely those properties that you had taken to be central to your self-conception and that had figured in your lover's romantic attachment to you.<sup>29</sup> Presumably you would want her discovery that such a replacement had occurred to be cause for distress, for feeling that something significant had been lost in the shuffle. But if the inclination is wholly grounded in properties, it may seem that no such feelings on the lover's part would be warranted.<sup>30</sup> This difficulty can be averted without looking beyond properties by noting that among the ones figuring into the lover's grounds will be historical-relational properties involving *you*, say the property of having been her dance partner at the USO social in '44, or having been the one who proposed to her on the Champs-Élysées. It is precisely the accumulation of these historical-relational properties that largely accounts for love's strongly individuative character, and to the extent that this character enters into the romantic ideal it enters by way of the desire to form a network of such bonds. Thus, in building up a shared history with another, people can come to secure the lasting significance to each other that they look for in their romantic relations.<sup>31</sup>

The importance of shared history in the growth and maintenance of fulfilling romantic relations should not be underappreciated. For many people these relational properties come to occupy a central place in their self-conceptions, right alongside and sometimes even to a greater extent than any intrinsic properties they might have. For such people, that relevant relational properties should constitute the grounds for their lover's attachment to them will seem entirely appropriate. As is usually the case in this territory, the extent to which individuals will want their lovers



to love them for relational as opposed to intrinsic properties, as well as persons' corresponding ideals of proper balance between property types, are ultimately matters of taste and discretion.<sup>32</sup>

#### SEXUAL LOVE AND THE DELIGHTS OF TOGETHERNESS

Central to any plausible contemporary romantic ideal are mutual longings for sexual intimacy together with a more sweeping delight in each other's physicality.<sup>33</sup> The presence of such feelings in both yourself and your beloved are far more than mere add-ons to romance; rather, that you enjoy distinctively pleasurable feelings on seeing or touching your beloved (feelings distinct in kind from, say, those induced by the sight or touch of a good friend), ones that come to transform more intimate acts into highly personalized modes of communication, is close to the very heart of romantic involvement. I choose to speak in terms of a reciprocated physical delight rather than a desire to love and be loved for physical properties not because I want to preclude the latter as a possible desideratum for some (or even most) people, but because I am taking physical delight to be something quite different from (although perfectly consistent with) love for physical properties. The sort of physical delight you're hoping to feel for your beloved (and have felt for you) is to spring not so much from a recognition of her physical fineness, but rather from the continual satisfaction of desires to achieve deep interpersonal closeness through movements, gestures, and expressions. The signature ways in which couples both react reflexively to each other's physicality and come to communicate with each other through seemingly insignificant visual, verbal, and tactile cues both express their appreciation of the romantic *we* they constitute and further articulate its contours. These last remarks help us to interpret a lot of common romantic behavior, be it knowing looks across crowded rooms or gentle finger tugs in crowded elevators. From these subtle gestures through to the most intimate con-

tacts we see and imagine the comings together of lovers in ways that express their manifest delight in each other's presence, whether this attitude issue forth in the form of arousal, friendship, comfort, or security. And most of us aspire to this delight and all the characteristic modes which reveal it in our own romantic endeavors.<sup>34</sup>

#### A PUZZLE ABOUT LOVE

Here's an apparent inconsistency among people's wants with regard to romantic love: while on the one hand you seem to want to be loved unconditionally, at the same time you want your lover to be discerning. This is to say that the value you attach to the love received in romantic relationships relies upon your taking your lover to have some taste, which is just to take your lover to be the sort of person who wouldn't love a schmuck. It would seem that your desire that your lover would continue to love you regardless of what you might become clashes with your desire that she be such as to love only the sort of person who exemplifies various properties you hold in some estimation, or at least such properties as you can make sense of (a? that?) person's esteeming. That you desire this discernment reflects both your interest in taking the lover's attitude towards you as reason or basis for loving yourself and your wish that that your most intimate companion have a structure of preferences broadly similar to yours. To the extent that you take your lover to be capable of romantic interest in a schmuck, both the lover and her love are devalued. Let me make the tension more explicit: while you seem to want it to be true that, were you to become a schmuck, your lover would continue to love you, as would be the case if the love really was unconditional, you also want it to be the case that your lover would never love a schmuck.

I fear my desire to be precise may obscure the basic point of the preceding discussion. Part of what people are looking for in romantic relations is reason to feel good about themselves. This is by no means

to say that it is only through romantic involvements that such reason is provided; indeed, ordinarily people think they have quite a few such reasons. To the extent that you take yourself to be the object of a love springing from a person of discernment, you are provided with just such reason. To the extent that the other is not perceived as discerning in the relevant ways, such attraction as they manifest, while it may be comforting, nonetheless fails to do the job. A hope that your romantic involvements will augment or at least reinforce your self-esteem is an important motivation for pursuing them.<sup>35</sup> In addition, that fulfilling romantic involvements tend to satisfy this desire is distinctive to them, say as opposed to either parental or divine love on standard Judaeo-Christian interpretations. I would suggest that it is in fact the very unconditionality of these latter sorts of love that makes them unsuitable bases for taking one's personal worth to be increased or affirmed.

So there's the problem. You have an apparent desire that your lover love you unconditionally or "no matter what," a desire that springs from a deep-rooted need for stable acceptance in the face of limited information as to who or what you might become. Yet at the same time you need to think of your lover's love for you as continuously conditioned by your being someone worthy of such attentions, this way of thinking being required for you to attach the necessary value and significance to the lover and her love.<sup>36</sup>

One way to alleviate this tension, supposing for now that customary romantic wants are in principle jointly realizable, would be to reject my characterization of the desire that a lover be discerning. Perhaps you really don't want this at all, or maybe you want her to be discerning only at the outset, but unconditionally "hooked" once she's fallen for you. Maybe this latter looks like a way to have it both ways, providing you with grounds for self-affirmation at the outset and the stability of unconditional love for the long haul. But I think that this sort of relationship falls far

short of the ideal precisely because it fails to reflect the *continuing* endorsement of you as a worthy object of another's affections that most people need to keep romance vital. It just isn't good enough to be "tenured" in this way; rather, the ideal of romantic love demands that the lovers be regularly prepared to opt for one another in the robust sense required for each to ground feelings of self-affirmation.

More can be said about this, but suffice it to say that my characterization of the desire to have your lover be discerning is not too far off base. What I do think needs to be examined more closely is the ostensible desire to be loved unconditionally or "no matter what." It is here that the introduction of the notion of a loving commitment will serve to clarify matters considerably. While people say or would say that they want to be loved by their romantic partners "no matter what," and this is commonly taken to be equivalent to wanting to be loved "for who I am," in fact they are usually mistaken in thinking they want the former and wrong in taking the former to amount to anything like the latter.

#### UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND LOVING COMMITMENT

As we have seen, the romantic ideal revolves around the desire to be loved for properties you take to be central to your self-conception; this or something very much like it amounts to the most reasonable interpretation of commonly-used expressions like "wanting to be loved for who I am" or "wanting to be loved for my own sake." I now will try to develop these ideas to take account of the characteristic dynamism and mutability of human personalities and attendant self-conceptions over time and through varying circumstances. First, you want your lover's grounds for love to "track" you through your evolution as a person, an evolution that may bring along marked changes in the sorts of properties with which you most profoundly identify. Take for example a former football player who subsequently goes on to minister to lepers in India. Further suppose

that this person who formerly took his athletic prowess to be the defining aspect of himself later comes to see this same prowess as altogether peripheral, now thinking of himself as first and foremost a minister to the sick. If we suppose that his lover's affection focused on his prowess on the gridiron throughout his athletic days, I suggest that he will most likely want her former structure of preferences to come into line with his current one, and thus for her to adopt an attitude towards his ministry more or less in keeping with his own. Were she merely to tolerate his new avocation, and continue to regard his former athletic glory as a predominant basis for loving him, this would pose a threat to the intimacy of the romantic *we*, since it stands poised to undermine the consolidation of needs and interests and the harmonization of their respective structures of preference. It would not be at all surprising for the minister to come to feel underappreciated insofar as those properties now central to his self-conception are marginal to his lover's appreciation of him, just as it seems likely that his lover would come to feel somewhat alienated from him insofar as many of his preferences have come to be ordered in ways she cannot comprehend. Along these same lines, it seems reasonable to posit a wish that the reasons for this sort of significant personal change should be understood and appreciated as well. To some extent this wish should be seen as partner to the desire that your lover appreciate properties central to your self-conception in ways not too different from your own (recall the example of the painter).<sup>37</sup> These considerations lead me to contend that the romantic ideal includes a desire that love be *plastic*, where this means that your lover's feelings towards you will be flexible and responsive in the ways described to (significant) modifications in your self-conception.<sup>38</sup>

Putting these last considerations in terms of plasticity looks to be on target so far as it goes, but it constitutes only half of the story at best. For while you surely want your lover to "track" significant changes in your self-conception, you just as surely do

not want significant changes in either party's values, preferences, or self-conception to obtain without appropriate regard for the other's continuing interests. Such unresponsiveness on the part of either party would seem to be at odds with the psychological intimacy that romantic lovers customarily seek to enjoy. This applies most conspicuously to those values, preferences, and aspects of each party's self-conception that come to bear more or less directly upon his or her perspective on the romance. While some cases of significant personal change might be unsettling only in so far as they raise questions about the intimacy of the relationship to that point (say one party only lately comes to appreciate some property that the other has exemplified and strongly identified with all along), others will involve a personal transformation the significance and/or independence of which threatens the very integrity of the *we*. The sorts of scenarios I have in mind range from the commonplace (divergences in sophistication, ambition, attitudes towards wealth and security) to the spectacular (Gauguin's transformation from his wife's point of view). I would suggest that the mutual desire for stable and enduring commitment that characterizes most romantic partnerships leads each lover to balance the wish for plasticity with an equally compelling demand for *reciprocity*, where by this phrase I mean that each is to be responsive to the values and preferences of the other insofar as he or she comes to adopt new or different ones of his or her own. So just as someone might reasonably hope that his lover would come to properly appreciate his earnest commitment to Alcoholics Anonymous, so he would wish that she not allow a summer in Paris to change her outlook so profoundly as to make her view him as tiresomely unsophisticated and perhaps unworthy of her previous attentions. Or, to revisit an earlier example, just as the minister may wish that his partner could bring her perspective on his more recent activities into line with his own, so his partner might reasonably ex-

pect that his values, preferences, and self-conception are to some extent guided by those she has shared with him over the course of their involvement. Every such case can be described either in terms of a desire for flexibility, a need for stability, or both, depending upon which partner's perspective we choose to emphasize, together with the particular circumstances. Nevertheless, most any description will make reference to both partners' hopes that the course of their romance and enduring commitment to one another will work so as to keep their inevitably dynamic sets of values and preferences in suitable alignment. The complementary demands for plasticity and reciprocity are thus to be seen as dual aspects of an effective shared history and ongoing romantic exchange, where these properly function to preserve the requisite psychological intimacy that characterizes a healthy romantic *we*.<sup>39</sup>

The importance of an appropriate plasticity and reciprocity in romantic attachments affords excellent entry into the larger discussion of unconditionality and the sort of commitment proper to loving relations. I've suggested that an urgent need for stability in your most intimate relations, a need that includes your wanting to be able to "count on" the other's continued acceptance in various ways, motivates something that at first glance looks to be a desire to be loved "unconditionally." But perceived "unconditional" love seems to run afoul of another urgent need, the need to see the other and her care for you in a light which reflects taste and discernment in persons and their attributes. There is, however, an alternative to unconditional love that more aptly characterizes this aspect of the romantic ideal, and what's more, can be consistently integrated into the network of romantic expectations. This is what I will call a loving commitment, and it can be crudely defined as an enduring interpersonal commitment that is both grounded in and sustained by the lover's romantic attachment to the beloved. It is this sustaining ground, together with the characteristic attitudes and emotions that it evokes, that

distinguishes a loving commitment in this sense from other sorts of interpersonal commitments, and makes it especially suited to play its role in the romantic ideal.

To get a firmer grasp of this notion of a loving commitment we should specify exactly what the commitment is a commitment to, identify the sorts of attitudes and emotions characteristic of it, and explain more precisely the manner in which it relates to the romantic love which produces and sustains it. Rather than addressing these matters separately, I'll try to address each in conjunction with the others. I've suggested that rather than wanting to be loved unconditionally, what you really want is for your lover to be strongly committed to you. This commitment should draw your lover to you even in circumstances wherein some, most, or even all of the properties that figure in her grounds for love are diminished or absent. Thus you may be physically debilitated, thrashed at the polls, or shown up philosophically, yet even if the relevant properties (physical prowess, gubernatorial savvy, analytical acumen, etc.) were both central to your self-conception and figured prominently in your lover's grounds for love, you would hope that she would willingly remain with you. Now, commitments of various sorts tend to prompt a characteristic range of attitudes and emotions. There are futures contracts, arrangements that oblige you to deliver heaps of commodities at a specified date and price. Again, there are common interpersonal commitments of the kind that yield obligations to invite a cretinous uncle to Passover or bail a ne'er-do-well ward out of jail. None of these sorts of commitments much resemble what I'm calling a loving commitment either in the attitudes and emotions they prompt or the origins from which they arise. Commodities trading is in most cases practically devoid of feeling and hardly personal, while the obligation you feel towards the cretinous uncle is grudging, and tends to be fulfilled resentfully or at best resignedly. The loving commitment, on the other hand, expresses itself in a sincere willingness to at-

tend to the other's interests and needs, and reflects a choice to sustain the relationship at its customary degree of intimacy, a choice that is always open to renewal and always freely renewed. It is a commitment to another that emerges from romantic love, and the obligations it creates are always viewed in this context.

Central to the notion of a loving commitment is the delicate conditionality associated with it. This conditionality properly articulated plays in counterpoint to the plasticity sought in enduring romantic relations. In characterizing the romantic ideal Scruton suggests that "love seeks, not a promise of affection, but a vow of loyalty," where this vow is taken to involve "the complete surrendering of one's future to a present project, a solemn declaration that what one now is, one will always be, in whatever unforeseeable circumstances."<sup>40</sup> This misrepresents the ideal in a number of important ways, all stemming from its static conception of enduring romantic involvement. To begin with, while *A* may certainly wish that *B* will always retain some of the properties that *A* dearly values, *A* also hopes that *B* will acquire new properties, augment existing ones, and come to lose others, with aspects of this ongoing transformation emerging from their interactions with one another. But even more importantly, Scruton's picture wrongly suggests that *A* wants *B*'s love for him to be thoroughly unresponsive to significant changes in *A*, which is tantamount to saying that it has *A* demanding unconditional love from *B*. As I've intimated through my introduction of the complementary notions of plasticity and reciprocity, such a demand is both absurd and in no way a part of the romantic ideal. What *is* an essential component of the ideal is something like the following: you want your lover to be freely disposed to remain in a relationship with you that is characterized by both the deep affection and intimate concern appropriate to your shared history as an evolving romantic *we*. More specifically, you want this free disposition to issue from both the various bases for love and the intricate entan-

glement of needs and interests that will have come about over the course of the relationship. My burden will now be to articulate the differences between this characterization of people's wants and that proposed by Scruton (as well as many others) which expresses these wants in terms of unconditional love.

A good way to bring out such differences is to focus on the attitudes that you might wish that a lover would exhibit were you to undergo various unfortunate changes. Suppose you imagine yourself as robbed of your faculties by advanced Alzheimer's Disease. A desire for unconditional love would obviously have you wanting your lover to love you despite your condition, one which, let's assume, for all intents and purposes renders you incapable of any meaningful interaction with her (say you don't remember who she is, who you are, etc.). I want to suggest that rather than wishing to be loved in such circumstances, you wish only to be the object of continuing care and concern, where this care and concern is bestowed freely and wholeheartedly. Both "freely" and "wholeheartedly" are being used here as phenomenological gestures rather than as metaphysical or practical notions. So, for instance, the care and concern are not to be bestowed grudgingly, where but for feeling the tug of something akin to contractual obligation your lover would sooner take off, nor are they to be bestowed half-heartedly in the sense that she really would rather you dropped dead and spared you both the bother.<sup>41</sup> Importantly, however, the care and concern are not in any way expressions or aspects of a contemporary attitude of romantic love. They are rather expressions of a largely (perhaps in some circumstances wholly) sentimental attachment to you as a person who was for a long time the object of romantic love and as such partner to an especially cherished union.

One naturally asks why in such unfortunate circumstances you should wish to be the object of such a sentimental attachment rather than of a continuing love. Wouldn't the latter be straightforwardly

better, at least from your point of view? Here I think a more nuanced version of the previously discussed desire for discernment in lovers is to the point. While you surely want such a future self of yours to be an object of your lover's care and deepest concern, you do not want her to be disposed to exhibit attitudes towards such a future self that so significantly differ in kind from the ones *you* are disposed to exhibit here and now (perhaps more accurately, under conditions of reasonable self-possession). To the extent that she should be still disposed to exhibit the attitudes, you take to be characteristic of the ideal of romantic love, she reveals a preference structure altogether alien to yours, for surely *you* can only look on such an imagined future self as (at best) a locus of sentimental value and historical significance.<sup>42</sup>

From these last remarks it should be clear that what I am calling the ideal of a loving commitment is straightforwardly inconsistent with that of an active romantic relationship. This is not by any means to suggest that the ideal of romantic love makes no room for commitment; rather, active romantic love is to carry its own species of commitment, one that obtains in virtue of the vitality of the romantic *we*. Not surprisingly, an important way in which such a distinct species of commitment should figure into active romantic love is precisely through the plasticity and reciprocity of the love. Returning the focus to the last example, one indication of the transition from the ideal of romantic love *for you* to that of loving commitment *to you* may be the overwhelming majority of historical-relational properties amongst your lover's grounds for love. Our ideal of romantic love requires some significant representation of currently instantiated intrinsic properties, or at least relational ones involving a substantially intact self, in the grounds of your lover's affections; in the absence of such representation what most people would hope for is something more like what I've called a loving commitment.

The picture that I've sketched of a commitment to care and concern that is grounded in, and is to this extent an expression of, romantic love bears a clearer resemblance to our relevant romantic wants than does Scruton's "vow of loyalty" or any other such demand for unconditional romantic love. But the picture needs a bit of filling in yet. So far it looks as if what you're looking for is an unconditional commitment; after all, in the Alzheimer's example you imagined yourself to be robbed of virtually all of your distinctively human qualities, not to mention your attractive ones or those with which you most closely identify. And indeed you expressed a hope that your lover would exhibit appropriately grounded attitudes of intimate care and deepest concern were you to befall such a fate. But the desired commitment is not an unconditional one tout court. Rather, the same sorts of considerations that led us to reject an ideal involving unconditional love should now lead us to reject one involving a commitment so vigorous as to endure, for example, a person's profound moral (or perhaps spiritual) deterioration. The deterioration I am imagining might be of the sort that often comes about through unchecked substance abuse, or a slippery descent into an ideologically outrageous organization. These sorts of personal devolutions are not the sorts that you should want to be "covered" by any loving commitment. Insofar as you want your lover's enduring commitment to the romantic *we* to reflect a taste and discernment that you can properly appreciate, you would hope that were you to profoundly devalue yourself in these sorts of ways she would take decisive steps to extricate herself from that relationship. Far from representing the ultimate romantic sacrifice, to the extent that you can justly conceive of your lover striving to maintain a commitment in these circumstances she becomes nearly so pathetic as the future self you are imagining. Just as illness and infirmity can render one an unsuitable candidate for continuing romantic love, so varieties of

grievous moral turpitude should render one an unsuitable candidate for continuing loving commitment. Loving commitment should thus be regarded as having a limited

unconditionality, where the (mutually understood) terms and limits will surely vary within recognizable boundaries from relationship to relationship.

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#### NOTES

1. Thanks to Gilbert Harman, Scott Soames, Robert George, Harry Frankfurt, Christine Korsgaard, Mark Johnston, George Kateb, John Cooper, David Solomon, Sarah Buss, John Barker, Shelly Branam, Jim Pryor and most especially Alasdair MacIntyre and David Lewis for helpful discussion of these issues and/or comments on various drafts. This essay was completed while I was an Andrew W. Mellon Graduate Prize Fellow at the Princeton University Center for Human Values.

2. Two of the best straightforwardly philosophical essays I've seen on these topics are Robert Nozick, "Love's Bond," in his *The Examined Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), and Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire* (New York: Free Press, 1986), especially ch.8. Their respective ways of framing matters motivate much of my discussion, although each strikes me as considerably oversimplifying the phenomena.

3. This said, it is ironic that I take my epigraph from the work of a nineteenth century Russian theologian.

4. Readers are specifically cautioned not to make too much of the origin of the expression "romantic love" or the historical significance of various phenomena so designated. For example, whether or not Bertrand Russell is right in suggesting romantic love was invented only with the expression is irrelevant to matters at hand. For Russell's treatment see *Marriage and Morals* (New York: Liveright Publishing Co., 1957), ch.6.

5. Particularly useful studies for my purposes include Robert N. Bellah et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), Joseph Verrof et. al., *The Inner American: A Self-Portrait from 1957-1976* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), and Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). With regard to this last reference I should note that the romantic ideal I will be articulating bears a closer resemblance to what Giddens terms "confluent love" than it does to "romantic love." This is as good a place as any to call attention to an issue that will no doubt be cause for some concern. I am all too aware of the important part gender and sexual orientation plays in accumulating and interpreting data of this sort. My masculinity and heterosexual orientation are thus likely relevant to the perspective manifested in this essay, probably to a greater extent than is customary in philosophical writing. The need to make use of intuitions and experiences that are significantly colored by one's severely limited outlook has been I think a forceful disincentive for many philosophers to try to do this sort of work. I hope that readers of different gender and sexual orientation will be able to use my thoughts as a basis for their own reflections on the subject.

6. *The Examined Life*, p. 70. The idea that erotic love can be identified with the desire to form and constitute a new entity in the world can be traced back at least to Plato's *Symposium*, 189A-193D, where Aristophanes relates a myth according to which individual humans are halves of the complete persons that they used to be before the Gods chose to divide them. Love according to this view just is the desire to become once again whole.

7. By suggesting that the desire for physical intimacy with another person is an aspect of the modern romantic ideal I am denying that the paradigm of courtly love fits this ideal, insofar as courtly love revolves around the indefinite deferment of physical intimacy and the ultimate sublimation of physical desire into an intellectual one. This is just one instance of my restriction of focus to contemporary Western mores. For more on courtly love and its associated ideals see Denis de Rougemont (trans. Montgomery Belgion), *Love in the Western World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), especially Bks. 1-2, Louis Mackey, "Eros into Logos: The Rhetoric of Courtly Love," in Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins eds., *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1991).

8. A minor stylistic point: throughout the essay I have chosen to make heavy use of the second person and the feminine singular. While experimentation has convinced me that this is the best of the available alternatives, it has some unfortunate side-effects, most significantly implications to the effect that heterosexuality and monogamy are substantially privileged with the respect to the ideal I am articulating. Such implications are unwanted. In particular, the ideal is meant to be neutral with respect to sexual orientation, and I am nearly ambivalent as to whether and to what extent the ideal may be realized with multiple partners.

9. The useful technical notion of a plural subject is introduced, developed and deployed by Margaret Gilbert in her book *On Social Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Briefly, she takes the term to pick out sets of individuals committed to joining forces on common projects, where such ready commitment is a matter of common knowledge and (presumably) common consent (see esp. pp. 199-200). To some extent the present remarks can be seen as a modification and application of her model to the particular case of romantic love. For her own admittedly brief remarks on relevant matters see *ibid.*, pp. 223-25.

10. In contrast, to say that your lover's well-being is indirectly connected to your advancement of an interest is just to say that the advancement simply provides a means to some good for her.

11. The model of the wildly partisan spectator seems particularly appropriate to an ideal of the relation between parents and their (grown) children.

12. *Sexual Desire*, p. 230. For Montaigne's own view see his "Of Friendship," in Donald M. Frame, trans., *Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), Bk. 1.

13. *Sexual Desire*, p. 231.

14. I thank Alasdair MacIntyre for stimulating my thoughts about trust.

15. In putting things this way I take myself to be broadly in agreement with Nozick (cf. *The Examined Life*, p. 75).

16. For Buridan's treatment see his *Quaestiones in dicem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum*, 8.4. A.W. Price gives essentially this diagnosis in his *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 108-109. Scruton makes the related point that reason-based or reason-involving attitudes need not be universal in the course of criticizing an argument of Pascal's to the effect that love of individuals is impossible. See *Sexual Desire*, p. 98. For a somewhat different interpretation of the relevant passage in Pascal see Alan Soble, *The Structure of Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 309-11.

17. Robert Solomon appears to fall prey to some such confusion regarding reasons for love when he states: "if love is for reasons, then it is not the whole person that one loves but certain aspects of the person—though the rest of the person comes along too, of course." I quote from his (admittedly popular) *About Love* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), pp.153-154. As I've emphasized, love is an attitude directed towards *persons*, not aspects of persons, properties, or any such things.

18. In fact I suspect that in cases of radical disparity between who you take yourself to be and who you are fulfilling romantic relations are effectively precluded. For relevant arguments to the effect that having a (more or less) veridical self-conception is a pre-condition for psychological visibility, and that this in turn is required for an ideally satisfying romance, see Nathaniel Branden, "Love and Psychological Visibility," in Neera Kapur Badhwar, ed., *Friendship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 65-72.

19. Someone might be inclined to object that these sorts of scenarios actually weigh against my suggestion that you want to be loved for properties central to your self-conception. Thus one might claim with regard to self-doubt that the thought that the properties you fear you lack are grounds for your lover's love for you, in addition to being the primary basis for your self-esteem, would make you doubly nervous. I would contend that the imagined scenario is rather outlandish. It's not normally the case that your self-doubt extends so as to cover all or even most of the properties you take to be central to your self-conception, nor that it ranges over what you perceive to be the entire basis of your lover's love. Rather, these sorts of crises tend to hit people piecemeal. In these more ordinary sorts of scenarios the relationship should be expected to function along the happy lines I've suggested. The Underground Man needs a psychiatrist, not a romance.



20. Scruton uses the apt phrase “mutual self-building” in characterizing “the course of love.” See *Sexual Desire*, pp. 241-44.
21. Of course this thought-experiment is grossly underdescribed and oversimplified. One needs, for instance, to build in an opportunity for sincere and thoughtful reflection on the lover’s list, so that we make room for cases in which the lover has picked out a property or properties that you might only subsequently recognize as being important to your self-conception (you might not have noticed that you were a patient listener. . .).
22. For an extensive and provocative examination of the phenomenon of falling in love see Francesco Alberoni (Lawrence Venuti, trans.), *Falling in Love* (New York: Random House, 1983).
23. William Newton-Smith makes a closely related point in “A Conceptual Investigation of Love,” in Alan Soble, ed., *Eros, Agape and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), p. 207.
24. I thank both Harry Frankfurt and Sarah Buss for goading me into confronting this possibility directly.
25. While this may be a bit uncharitable, I’m inclined to think that objectors of this sort tend to forget that haecceities *are* properties. Maybe what’s really afoot is an appeal to “the communion of souls,” but I can’t make much sense of this sort of approach in the present context.
26. Vannoy, “Erotic Love: A Final Appraisal,” in Jan Narveson, ed., *Moral Issues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 302.
27. It’s worth mentioning that Vannoy’s assumption that would-be lovers regularly opt for partners on the basis of perceived fitness is rather dubious if not outright simplistic. People quite often seem both to be drawn to one another and to embark on romances that run quite counter to their best (conscious?) all-things-considered judgments in this regard.
28. Having posed this interesting dilemma, Vannoy immediately goes on to offer yet another argument which hinges on the love for properties/love of properties confusion. See *ibid.*, pp. 302-303ff. For Vannoy’s full treatment of these issues see his *Sex Without Love: A Philosophical Exploration* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus, 1980).
29. So as to sidestep various controversies relating to the problem of personal identity, let the process whereby the duplicate comes into being be an accidental one rather than a reliable causal process. This should calm those theorists who may have been otherwise inclined to say that the duplicate is in fact *you*.
30. In framing what might be called “the problem of attachment” this way I mean to be making more precise a somewhat vague but persistent worry noted by a number of writers on love and friendship. As a nice example I quote from Paul Gilbert, *Human Relationships* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 74: “Love and friendship bind us closely to particular individuals and we set a special value on them precisely because of this. Yet it is hard to see how this could be justified if my reason for loving someone was their beauty or my reason for friendship with them their estimable qualities of character. For beauty and character seem to give me a reason to adopt the same attitude to anyone who has them. But such widespread affections will not be a suitable basis for the *personal* relationships which we especially value.”
31. The appeal to historical-relational properties forms the basis for a solution to a related problem concerning the reasonableness of love’s resistance to “trading up,” i.e., why lovers are characteristically reluctant to shift their attentions to persons who instantiate the attractive properties of their partners to a greater extent. For similar remarks see *The Examined Life*, pp. 76-82. It is instructive to compare the present discussion of shared history and its role in sustaining and enhancing the romantic *we* with Josiah Royce’s account of the time-process and its role as a condition of possibility for what he calls “communities of memory” and “communities of hope.” See his *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), esp. pp. 242-49. I was alerted to this aspect of Royce’s thought by John E. Smith’s illuminating discussion in his *America’s Philosophical Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), esp. pp. 130-37.
32. Alasdair MacIntyre usefully characterizes a class of what he calls “loyalty-exhibiting virtues,” in which he includes familial love, patriotism, and team spirit, as all involving “a regard founded upon a particular historical relationship between the person exhibiting the regard and the relevant person, institution or group.” See “Is Patriotism a Virtue?” (The Lindley Lecture) (Lawrence KS: University of Kansas Press, 1984), p. 4. The sort of regard MacIntyre describes strikes me as entirely appropriate to the romantic ideal.

33. Scruton suggests, rightly I think, that erotic love is to be distinguished from friendship in part by its “absolute focus on the physical nature of the other,” a feature “contributed by desire, and modified by the ‘course of love’—the project of self-building.” *Sexual Desire*, p. 249.

34. For an exhaustive and at times exhausting discussion of sexuality, erotic feeling and the alignment of these in relation to romantic love and its ideal see *Sexual Desire*. While I cannot begin to do justice to his discussion here, it’s worth noting one troubling feature of it, namely the inclination to liken the physical delight characteristic of romantic love to aesthetic appreciation, in that both are supposed to be reason-based and immediately linked to desire. Thus he says that “erotic love sees meaning in the appearance of the other, and seeks to ground its existence in the meaning that it sees.” (p. 250) While I grant that Scruton uses “erotic love” to pick out something in some ways distinct from what I’m calling “romantic love” for the purposes of constructing an ideal, I am inclined to take him as suggesting that reasons are fundamental to the physical delight I’m talking about, and as should be clear from my discussion I find such a suggestion dubious. This is not to deny the important place of reasons in the romantic ideal, only to claim that Scruton’s analysis of physical delight mislocates them.

35. In this spirit Vannoy writes: “. . . lovers do not want to be loved out of sheer charity anyway; their pride demands they be chosen because they have certain attractive qualities that appeal to others. They want to “win” the heart of their lover and not merely have love handed to them because they need it. Thus their being loved must be an achievement of which they can be proud.” See “Erotic Love: A Final Appraisal,” p. 302.

36. Here I just disagree with the following somewhat cryptic remarks of Nozick: “Being loved *for* characteristics seems to go with the notion of love being deserved, the characteristics being the basis of the desert. This notion of love’s being deserved is a strange one; no-one deserves non-love because they fall short of high standards.” (*The Examined Life*, p. 76) To some extent being loved for characteristics does go with the notion of love being *earned*, and to the extent that someone takes important aspects of his personal development to contribute to the other’s enduring love for him he obtains a valuable affirmation of his own worth.

37. I thank Gilbert Harman for urging me to make this point explicit.

38. My notion of plasticity roughly corresponds both in sense and relation to the romantic ideal to what Amelie Rorty calls “dynamic permeability.” See her “The Historicity of Psychological Attitudes: Love is Not Love Which Alters Not When it Alteration Finds,” in Badhwar ed., *Friendship*, pp. 73-88.

39. I thank Alasdair MacIntyre for encouraging me to develop the notion of reciprocity more fully. The term itself is in fact his (private correspondence).

40. *Sexual Desire*, p. 242.

41. Of course there will be cases in which one partner’s wish for the other’s peaceful passing on is an altogether appropriate expression of loving commitment.

42. I say “at best” to point up the quite wonderful tendencies of lovers to see their declining beloveds as loci of sentimental and historical value to a far greater extent than a beloved is customarily inclined to view such an imagined future self.