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The aesthetics of coming to know someone

Abstract: This paper is about the similarity between the appreciation of a piece of art, such as a cherished music album, and the loving appreciation of a person whom one knows well. In philosophical discussion about the rationality of love, the Qualities View (QV) says that love can be justified by reference to the qualities of the beloved. I argue that the oft-rehearsed trading-up objection fails to undermine the QV. The problems typically identified by the objection arise from the idea that love-worthy qualities could be *coarse-grained*, when in fact they must be *fine-grained*. The analogy with appreciation of aesthetic qualities helps to draw out this point. Once the fine-grained nature of love-worthy qualities is properly understood, it is clear that critics of the QV cannot rely on the trading-up objection to motivate its rejection. Moreover, the paper's core argument helps to illuminate the persistently aesthetic nature of interpersonal affections.

1. Introduction

To be in a position to declare that you like a particular piece of art, you must appreciate its qualities. Appreciating art involves experiencing it attentively, exploring its detail, and thereby coming to a vivid awareness of its normative significance, that is, its aesthetic value. Suppose you are especially enamoured with a given artwork – say, an album by a music group – for its vivacity, soulfulness, and skilled musicianship. You listen to it often – perhaps to the extent that you inadvertently memorise its lyrics and melodies – and through these repeated listenings you come to recognise subtleties in the album's composition which serve to heighten your sense of its aesthetic worth. But then you learn, from a reliable authority, that there is another album by a different band that possesses those same key aesthetic qualities of vivacity, soulfulness and musicianship to an even greater degree than the album with which you are enamoured. In principle, whilst such news might give you reason to seek out and listen to the recommended album, the news itself does not yet give you reason to value the original album any less than you already did. The news certainly does not mean that the new album should replace the old one in your heart so that all your feelings of affection and appreciation are transferred from the old to the new.

In this paper I will argue that in several relevant respects valuing a person in the way that we do when we love someone, may be more similar than is often acknowledged to valuing an artwork like the album in the example. Principally, I hold that love may be grounded in a kind of appreciation of a person's qualities that can only be achieved through a sustained relationship with them. If this is right then just as news of an artwork of greater aesthetic value does not diminish one's fondness of a cherished album, neither would news of a person with superlatively admirable, love-worthy qualities diminish one's love for one's friends and lovers. In the terms of the recent debates about the rationality of love, I hold that the Qualities View of love (the QV) is not undermined – as it is often taken to be – by the trading-up objection.

In section two I will explain the Qualities View, distinguishing it from rival views on the rationality of love, and animating its core attractions. In section three I will explain the objection, which is about the fungibility of love on the QV, and articulate the shortcoming that such an objection purports to find, namely, that the valuing of the beloved is problematically generic. In section four I will argue that the literature on the trading-up objection typically equivocates between love being generic, and it being a response to qualities that are coarse-grained. Once this equivocation is acknowledged it is possible to see that the problem evoked by the trading-up objection is not genericness but coarse-grainedness. In section five I argue that there is independent reason, on the QV, for thinking that the qualities that justify love are in fact intractably fine-grained. Here, again, the analogy with aesthetic appreciation helps to make the point. In the concluding section, I will suggest that on the picture that results from my argument, love is more than merely analogous to aesthetic appreciation.

2. The Qualities View

For the purposes of my discussion, I will define the QV as follows.

QV: For S's love of X to be justified, S must know that X is worthy of love; and being worthy of love requires (perhaps among other things) the possession of individual, non-relational, love-worthy qualities.[1]

[1] By referring to S's knowledge as a criterion of S being justified, I am restricting my focus here and throughout this essay to an internalist sense of justification. That is, I will be interested in whether S is justified in her actions and attitudes by her own lights, rather than from some objective standpoint. My motivation for focusing on internalist justification is that this is the sense of justification that will be at issue in the most forceful version

It is important to point out what the QV is not. It is not a view about the psychological question of whether love is an emotion or some other kind of mental state.[2] It is also not a view about the metaphysical question of whether the object of love is a person qua bundle of properties, or a person qua bearer of properties, or some other metaphysical entity.[3] Rather, it is a view about the normative question of what, if anything, renders love justified (or fitting, or appropriate).[4]

The QV, understood this way, represents something of an extreme affirmative position on the spectrum of answers to the question of whether love is a rational attitude. It is affirmative in that it holds that love is the kind of thing that can be rational, that is, an attitude that can be held for reasons, an attitude that can be either justified or unjustified. But the QV is *extremely* affirmative because it holds not only that love of other people in general can be justified, but that love of *this* person, rather than *that* person can also be justified or unjustified. This element of the view is secured by the reference in the definition to *individual* qualities. Moreover, by specifying that the justifying qualities be non-relational, the QV cements its extreme position. On this view, love involves an appraisal of the beloved's character from a disinterested perspective. It denies that S's love would be justified by the knowledge that X is worthy of S's love in particular, unless that also implied that X would be worthy of anyone's love, in sufficiently similar circumstances.

In being an extreme rationalist answer, the QV is perfectly placed to capture some widely held sentiments that love involves an evaluative appreciation of the beloved's character. The QV says that loving another person is a response to their charms and virtues. It is uniquely well-placed to account for the fact that people who are in love often invoke their beloveds' charms and virtues to explain that love (Abramson & Leite, 2011, p. 675; Jollimore, 2011, pp. 10-11). Likewise, the QV gives a straightforward explanation of the fact that, other things equal, being loved by someone gives one cause to feel good about oneself (Delaney, 1996, p. 343). Similarly, it naturally accounts for the intuitive thought that in wanting to be loved, we want

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of the trading-up objection to the QV. If one interprets the objection as being about externalist justification, it is difficult to see the purported absurdity of the example.

[2] For a summary of the debates about this topic, see (Helm 2021).

[3] For an overview of the possibilities here, and a sense of the debate, see (Jenkins 2015).

[4] A further related issue that also falls outside my purview here is a meta-ethical question about love-worthy qualities. The version of the QV that I discuss is neutral over whether love-worthy qualities are response-dependent or -independent, for instance.

recognition of the specific achievements of our character that we value in ourselves (Keller, 2000, p. 166). Another way of putting the central merit of the QV is that it gives a straightforward explanation of what is wrong with a lover who believed that her beloved's character, when considered dispassionately, is irredeemably vicious and disvaluable. The QV says that there is a rational tension between loving such a person and believing that they are irredeemably vicious. This seems to be a compelling conclusion.

Despite these attractive features, though, the QV has been rejected by several philosophers in favour of negative, or affirmative-but-less-extreme answers to the question of whether love is rational. Some, such as Frankfurt (2004), Zangwill (2013), and Han (2021) reject the QV and deny that love is rational at all, holding instead that it is a-rational. Others recognise the appeal of the QV and agree that love can be justified, but reject it in favour of the less extreme affirmative view that love is justified by some property that every person instantiates, such as their bare personhood (Velleman 1999), or their humanity (Setiya 2014). Sometimes the a-rational and the impersonal views of love are partly motivated by a dismissal of the QV – the view which is often taken as the starting position in this domain – where that dismissal itself relies on the fungibility objections. My considerations here will bear on those views only to the extent that their motivation rests on the efficacy of those objections, since I do not aim to establish that the QV is the correct account of love, but merely that its most widely rehearsed weakness is not in fact a weakness.

There is another view, or family of views, that will be of more central concern. This might be called the Relational View (RV). This view is moved by the attractions of the QV to recognise that love of one person, X, over another person, Y, can be justified. But proponents of the RV reject the QV because they hold that what justifies such preferential love are not disinterested, universally normative qualities such as charms and virtues, but agent-relative qualities. Those agent-relative qualities might be that X is party to a relationship with S which is itself valuable (Kolodny, 2003, p. 150); or that X's love-worthy qualities were manifested *to* S in a way that calls for S alone to respond with love, much as a good deed done to S might call for her alone to respond with gratitude (Abramson & Leite, 2011, p. 677); or simply that X's actions and character have, as a matter of psychological fact, become entrenched in S's life (Protasi, 2016, pp. 220-221; Rorty, 1987). A motivation for each of these variations on the RV is the sense that the QV fails to deal with the trading-up objection. If I am successful below in showing the fallaciousness of that objection, then proponents of the RV will need to provide fresh motivation for their view if it is to be preferred over the QV.

3. The trading-up objection

A variety of objections have been lodged against the QV as an account of the rationality of love (in addition to the objections against the QV's implications for the metaphysics of love which, as mentioned, are not my focus). The two most prominent of those are known as the constancy, and the trading-up objections.[5] The constancy objection says that the QV cannot explain how love persists – and seems often that it ought to persist – even when the qualities in the beloved to which it was a response change or fade (Kolodny, 2003, p. 140). I will not respond at length to the constancy objection here, primarily because it does not rely on the illustrative mistake about coarse-grained qualities which it is my task to highlight and address. It is nonetheless worth saying that to my mind the constancy objection is not a serious problem for the QV. The kind of valuing of a person that love is consists, partly, in bestowing loving attention upon the beloved (Velleman 1999; Hopwood 2018; Setiya 2014; Bagnoli 2003). Such attention will yield new awareness of the beloved's qualities as those qualities change: as some diminish, others grow, and the beloved's character as a whole undergoes development and renewal (Delaney, 1996, p. 348; Keller, 2000, pp. 168-170). This seems to me to be the beginnings of an adequate response to the constancy objection, on which the QV can explain precisely what happens when love persists through changes in the beloved's qualities. Indeed, it is not the QV but rather its rival views which face difficulty in giving satisfactory accounts of that appreciation of character-renewal which seems integral to the constancy of love.

The trading-up objection, however, poses a more serious challenge to the QV, at least on the face of it.[6] In my view, it is a problem to which existing defences of the QV have not responded adequately.[7] The objection mirrors the form of the example of the music album above. It runs as follows.

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[5] Besides these, another prominent objection is advanced by Kolodny (2003, p. 141), and called *amnesia*. Whilst I do not have space to discuss that putative counter example in this paper, I believe that my central argument below has ramifications for that objection.

[6] Abramson and Leite (2011, p. 969) refer to this as "the standard objection to the 'quality view'".

[7] Of those who explicitly set out to respond to the trading-up objection, several authors end up defending a view which by my lights is not the QV (Abramson and Leite 2011; Protasi 2016). In the remaining literature, three defences of the QV against the objection stand out: Jollimore, Keller, and Lau (2021). Jollimore's defence tacitly allows that the objection would be forceful if one held that love was a fully-rational valuing attitude in

Trading-up According to the QV, S's love for her partner, X, is justified by S's knowledge that X is worthy of love in virtue of X's possessing love-worthy qualities a, b, and c. But S can also know of other people, such as Y, with whom S is not in a loving relationship, that Y is worthy of love in virtue of possessing a, b, and c to an even greater degree than X does. Thus, on the QV, it seems that S would be more justified in loving the stranger, Y, than in loving her partner, X. This would be absurd.

When pressing the trading-up objection, several commentators go further than saying that on the QV S would be more justified in loving Y than in loving X. They go on to say that, on the QV, S has reason to stop loving X,[8] or to end her relationship with X in order to begin one with Y.[9] As I will argue in a moment, these further steps are not plausible commitments of the QV. But the point worth emphasising for now is that even without these further steps, the outcome of the trading-up objection is an unpalatably absurd consequence for the QV. Surely, we are never more justified in loving strangers than we are in loving our love-worthy friends. If the QV were really committed to denying this then there would be something seriously wrong with

which one's reasons for loving X were the same as one's reasons for believing X to be love-worthy. He then goes on to reject this account of love's rationality. Keller, similarly, allows that trade-ups would be rational, but sees the reason to trade-up as silenced or outweighed by the value of lovers' fidelity. Thus, neither of these defences of the QV try to deny, as I do, that the trading-up objection is successful on its own terms in showing that on the QV one can be more justified in loving a stranger than a love-worthy friend. Lau's response to the trading-up objection is the one that is most amenable to the present approach, but, like Jollimore, Lau relies on seeing love as being a special kind of valuing-attitude – one involving a certain kind of commitment. As such, this view too is unfaithful to the straightforward rationalism at the heart of the QV. See also (Kirwin, manuscript)

[8] As Hichen Naar (2017, p. 201) puts it: "On this account [the QV] the people we love are in some sense replaceable: if someone equally good or better comes along, then we no longer have any reason to continue loving the original person."

[9] As Bennett Helm (2021) puts it: "if Bob were to be at least as funny (charming, kind, etc.) as Amy, why shouldn't I dump her and spend all my time with him?"

the QV. It is worth getting clear on the sometimes-confusing matter of exactly what would be wrong with such a view: what is the root of this absurd consequence?

When it appears that S has more reason to love Y than X, it seems that S lacks commitment to X. One natural candidate for the underlying flaw in the QV that produces the absurdity of the trading-up objection is thus that the QV does not regard commitment to be essential to love. It is true that, contrary to views of love as bestowal (Singer, 2009, chpt. 1), S's commitment to loving X is not necessary for S's justification for loving X, on the QV. And so, it may be thought that the sense that on the QV one can be more justified in loving a virtuous stranger than one's dearest friend is a product of the fact that the QV does not give the proper status to the special commitment that we have to our close friends.

This first, natural candidate answer is misleading, however. The QV is a view about the normative grounds of love, not about what form loving relationships ought to take, or about the manner in which love calls for one to promote the value of one's beloved. It is perfectly consistent with the QV – and, indeed, independently plausible – that commitment to, and investment in, the beloved's welfare and her interests are paradigmatic of the forms that loving relationships ought to take. It is open to proponents of the QV to say that loving X calls for commitment to X. The proper role for loving commitment in a theory of love thus seems plausibly to be in a description of the form of loving relationships, or of the kind of actions and attitudes that love calls for. It is far from clear that commitment to one's beloveds ought to play a role in justifying love. So, the QV does not necessarily omit the role of commitment in love, and such omission is therefore not the root cause of the absurdity in the trading-up objection.

A second candidate is that the QV regards love as a kind of instrumental valuing, as some have thought.[10] Instrumental valuing is valuing something for the sake of some further end. If valuing something in virtue of its valuable qualities entailed that one valued it for the sake of some further value, then the QV would indeed regard love as a kind of instrumental valuing. This would indeed be objectionable since S would not value X for X's own sake, and this appears to match the way in which X would be more justified in loving the stranger, Y, as though S's love had little or no regard for X's interests.

But this second candidate explanation of the absurdity of the trading-up objection is also misleading. It is perfectly possible to value something as a final value – as an end in itself, for

[10] See the discussion of instrumentality in (Badhwar, 1987, p. 14), see also (Helm 2021).

its own sake – and still for that valuing to be based on the qualities of the thing. The QV ought to say that this is just the sort of valuing-attitude that love is. So, the QV is not committed to regarding love as an instrumental valuing-attitude: S loves X for X's own sake, in virtue of X's love-worthy properties.

In fact, the absurdity of the trading-up objection should not be thought to arise in any way from S's neglect of X. Rather, I suggest that the most forceful construal of the trading-up objection finds the fundamental problem of the QV to be the way that X is valued *generically*. This is a forceful construal of the objection because the QV is indeed committed to conceiving non-relational, love-worthy qualities – virtues and charms – as generic qualities, which can be instantiated by multiple people, and to varying degrees. Construing the objection as being about genericness is also somewhat forceful in that it does, on the face of it, seem to explain the absurd outcome that S would be more justified in loving a stranger with pronounced generic virtues, than her partner in whom the very same generic qualities are fainter. To reiterate the essence of the objection: when I love my friend for her intelligence, my belief that your friend – who I do not know – is even more intelligent does not give me more reason to love your friend than I have to love mine. The QV appears to say that it does – as a result of the genericness of the love-worthy quality 'intelligence' – and that is an apparent weakness of the view.

4. Coarse-grained qualities

The most charitable and forceful construal of the trading-up objection finds genericness to be the flaw in the QV that produces the absurd result of the example. But in fact there is a better explanation of the absurdity of the example, namely that the qualities that justify love are assumed in the example to be the kinds of simple, coarse-grained qualities that can be known and appreciated in strangers. If the relevant qualities are regarded as being, necessarily, so detailed and fine-grained that one can only know about them through being in relationship with their bearer, then the absurd results would not follow. If love-worthy qualities were necessarily fine-grained then one would never have more reason to love strangers than one's love-worthy friends. And, I will argue, if coarse-grainedness is the real problem in the trading-up objection, then it is not an objection to the QV after all, since the QV need not take love-worthy qualities to be coarse-grained. In the next section below, I will say more about exactly what it is for a quality to be coarse- or fine-grained. For now, I will rely on an intuitive sense of those notions in order to examine whether the trading-up objection might plausibly rely on the assumption that love-worthy qualities are coarse-grained.

There are several versions of the trading-up objection, and it will be worth exploring each in turn to show that they all rely on coarse-grained conceptions of love-worthy qualities. I will consider some critical issues with each version in particular, before raising a further general problem that applies to any version of the objection. On the first version, the subject, S, personally encounters some handsome, virtuous stranger, Y. A phrase that is used with curious frequency by advocates of this version of the objection to introduce the superlative stranger is that somebody else 'comes along' (Keller, 2000, p. 163; Naar, 2017, p. 201; Protasi, 2016, p. 219). In order to appreciate this version of the objection, we are to imagine, presumably, a contrast between S's extensive connections with their original beloved, in contrast with a fleeting, partial connection with the new party. In what sense does this version of the objection require Y's love-worthy qualities to be simple, or coarse-grained?

Well, for a start, it is noteworthy that when the trading-up objection is advanced, its advocates typically associate love-worthy qualities with traits that can be named by single terms: beauty, intelligence, wit, tenderness, and so on. The fact that the names for these qualities are single terms, though, does not entail that the qualities they refer to are simple. They could be highly complex systems of dispositions. This first, personal-encounter version of the objection clearly requires that the qualities must be such that they can be recognised in a short space of time. But even brief perceptual experiences can be rich, and a good judge of character can discern large quantities of information from scant empirical resources, so perhaps this first version of the objection is consistent with the relevant love-worthy qualities being deep, complex facts about a person's habits and sensibilities, their strength of will, their cognitive and emotional capacities and limitations. It is therefore possible – at something of a stretch – to imagine the personal-encounter version of the objection to involve the appreciation of fine-grained love-worthy qualities.

The stretch is that such appreciation is at odds with the simplicity with which love-worthy qualities are typically described when the example is introduced. Thus, for the time being, it will suffice to have established that in order for this first version of the objection to be understood as involving fine-grained qualities, the encounter between the subject and the new party, Y, must be imagined somewhat differently than it is typically described by its advocates. Whereas the encounter is typically envisaged as something flippant or trifling, in which Y simply 'comes along', if S is to recognise fine-grained love-worthy qualities in Y then S must perceive a great deal about Y's personality and temperament. Perhaps some of the absurdity of this version of the example derives from the vast contrast between S's detailed knowledge of

her partner, X, as opposed to her negligible knowledge of the stranger Y. But either the example relies on a construal of love-worthy properties as coarse-grained, or this animating contrast is dramatically diminished.

The second version of the trading-up objection does not involve a personal encounter between S and Y. Rather, S learns of Y's qualities by description and via the impression of an intermediary: perhaps, for instance, she is informed of Y's qualities by a reliable source. This second version of the objection, unlike the first, does not depend on anything that might be considered far-fetched (unlike, arguably, a brief encounter that transcends its brevity to yield rich and robust knowledge of a person's character). And yet, the knowledge that is passed on by description could, in principle, be based on highly fine-grained appreciation of the person's character. Consider an elaboration on this version of the objection.

Trading-up on trust S's friend, F, knows both S's partner, X, and the handsome newcomer Y. In fact, F knows both X and Y extremely well. S trusts F as an exemplary judge of character and an honest friend. F tells S that while X is indeed love-worthy in virtue of possessing qualities a, b, and c, Y is even more love-worthy in virtue of possessing the very same qualities to a significantly higher degree.

Again, the objection holds that, on the QV, S would be more justified in loving Y than X – which seems absurd. There are two potential responses to this version of the example that I want to consider on behalf of the QV. The first response is concessionary. Namely, in light of the objection, the proponent of the QV could choose to modify the theory so as to build first-person appreciation of the beloved's love-worthy qualities into the conditions necessary for love to be justified. There is some appeal to this response, since there does seem to be something perverse about the idea of loving Y on the basis of F's testimony, while nothing seems perverse about the idea of knowing of Y's qualities on that same basis.

However, if the QV says that S's first-personal appreciation of X's love-worthy qualities is necessary in order for S to be justified in loving X, then it owes some account of why this may be so. That is, a modified version of the QV that reserves a special role for appreciation should say what it is that is so special about appreciation. Here appreciation cannot be reduced to knowledge – no matter how detailed – since appreciation is necessarily first-personal whereas knowledge is not.

Perhaps such an account could be given, showing a conceptual connection between love and first-personal appreciation of qualities. But the central merit of the QV has always been the unmysterious simplicity of its explanation of the normative foundations of love. It says that at least some people have certain valuable qualities, call them love-worthy qualities, and all it takes to be justified in loving a person is to know, of them, that they possess such qualities to such an extent as to be love-worthy overall, when all things are considered. The proposed introduction of irreducibly first-personal appreciation to the theory somewhat spoils its explanatory simplicity.

Happily, though, it seems to me that there is a better reply that the QV can make to the trust-based version of the trading-up objection, a reply that does not modify the view's fundamental explanation of love's rationality. The alternative response is to cast doubt on a key assumption of this version of the objection: namely, that one can trust another person categorically on this question of whether another person is ultimately worthy of love, or indeed the more specific question of the extent to which another person's qualities call for love.

What is really absurd about trading-up on trust is not that the qualities appraised by F were generic qualities, but that anyone could defer to another person on a question so central to their own agency and their sense of self as who to find worthy of love. Forming and refining one's discernment for virtue and beauty, vice and tastelessness, in other people is a core project of developing one's character. To turn away from the task of deciding who is worthy of one's love – to take the matter on trust as S does in the putative objection – is to relinquish this core aspect of self-authorship. We can allow those we take to be good judges of character to guide us in directing our attention towards certain people, or to call our attitudes towards others into question. But we cannot simply like a person because somebody else told us they warranted liking – not without alienating our own autonomous investment in our interpersonal affections. I hope that the discussion of fine-grained qualities in the next section below will help to cast further light on this process of judging other's love-worthy qualities.

The third and final version of the trading-up objection to consider involves neither a cognitively rich yet brief personal encounter, nor an agency-abdicating trust in another person. Rather, S learns of Y's love-worthy qualities by description and without an intermediary.[11] Perhaps S has read letters or books by Y, or perhaps a friend who knows Y well has extolled Y's virtues at

[11] This version of the objection is briefly rehearsed in (Abramson & Leite, 2011, pp. 180-181).

length. Unlike the personal-encounter version, we can suppose in this variation that S gains her justification for loving Y patiently and over plenty of time. The descriptions of Y's qualities over which S pores could be meticulously detailed. Unlike the trusting version, S need not defer the judgement of which actions and attitudes of Y's represent which love-worthy qualities, and to which extent such qualities justify love. S makes those judgments for herself.

However, this version of the objection helps to bring into focus a general problem that faces all versions of the trading-up objection. The problem is this: the more the example in the objection includes S having detailed, reliable knowledge of Y's character, the less outrageous or absurd it seems to say that S would be justified in loving Y. At the extreme, if S's knowledge of Y is thorough, replete with complex appreciation of his virtues and charms and the extent of his defects, and if on the basis of such knowledge S finds Y more worthy of love than her partner, X, then it makes some sense to say she is more justified in loving Y than in loving X. What is more, as I will argue shortly, the QV can insist that in order to be justified in loving someone, one must have knowledge of fine-grained love-worthy qualities that justify such love. This problem defuses the trading-up objection.

Let me summarise the argument of this section. I have surveyed three variations of the trading-up objection and found that every variation fails to undermine the QV – supposing for the time being that the QV can make good on the hypothesis that love-worthy qualities must be fine-grained. The personal-encounter versions of the trading-up objection accuse the QV of giving implausible results when applied to the feelings that emerge from brief encounters with apparently love-worthy strangers. But that version of the view must rely on one of two suspicious assumptions: either that love-worthy qualities are so simple that they can be comprehended thoroughly in brief encounters, or that brief encounters can be so cognitively rich as to deliver deep knowledge of character. The trusting version of the trading-up objection had the capacity to incorporate fine-grained appraisal of character, albeit vicarious appraisal wherein the subject of the love defers to the judgement of another. I argued that it is not plausible that one should ever trust another person to make such a life-defining judgment on one's behalf. Love is a matter over which one must exercise one's own judgment. Finally, and irrespective of the outcomes of those first critical points, I argued that any version of the trading-up objection must assume that love-worthy properties can be coarse-grained if is to yield the apparently absurd result that we can be more justified in loving strangers than our love-worthy friends. As such, if it can be shown that the QV has independent reason to insist

that love-worthy qualities are never coarse-, but always fine-grained, then the trading-up objection will not have undermined the view.

5. Love and aesthetic appreciation

In the remainder of the paper, I want to consider more closely the nature of the valuable qualities to which love might be a response, according to the QV. Can such qualities, in principle, be simple – i.e. coarse-grained – summaries of the traits of a person's character? Or, alternatively, in order for knowledge of such qualities to justify love, must they be detailed – i.e. fine-grained – complexes of such valuable traits? My strategy is to return to comparison between loving attention and aesthetic appreciation. By doing so, and by offering a description of the commonality in the two cases, I aim to show that in both cases the valuing-attitudes are normatively well-founded only when they are sensitive to a myriad of subtleties in their objects. Valuable qualities, in both instances, are necessarily fine-grained. This does not mean, however, that they are not generic; they are. Contrary to the assumptions of those who push the trading-up objection, coarse-grainedness and genericness are importantly distinct.

In the example of a music album in the introduction, I offered three qualities as exemplars of the normative qualities that might justify liking the album: vivacity, soulfulness, and musicianship. While there is controversy among philosophers over whether one can judge an artwork to possess aesthetic value without first-personal aesthetic experience of the work (see, for example, Hopkins, 2011; Robson, 2015), what is uncontroversial is that without such experience one cannot be justified in aesthetically *liking* the object. In this example, without having heard an album, one can know that it is vivacious, soulful, and full of skilled musicianship, because you can know of such things on the testimony of a reliable authority. But such second-hand knowledge would not suffice to ground your liking the album. Why not?

A first reason is that aesthetic value has an essential connection to experience. On some prominent accounts, aesthetic value just is the quality of producing certain kinds of responses in experience, namely aesthetic pleasure (see, for example, Gorodeisky, 2019). Consequently, to like an artwork is not just to believe that it is worth liking, but to have such a belief on the basis of having experienced its worthiness, in some sense. In comparing love with aesthetic appreciation, one might wonder whether love may also be essentially connected with experience in a similar way – a possibility that was raised earlier. I noted above that such a view of love's rationality is less simple than the QV sets out to be. Nonetheless, it is a striking suggestion, and one may even find support for it in the idea that love is fundamentally a

response to beauty (Nehamas, 2007; cf. Gaut, 2010), and so this idea finds love itself to be a kind of aesthetic valuing. But while striking, and suggestive, the idea that love shares with aesthetic appreciation this first connection with first-personal experience is based on little more than a faint intuition. Such intuitions are difficult to evaluate, and the view is therefore unlikely to convince proponents of the trading-up objection that the objection is flawed. But anyway, while the essential connection between aesthetic value and experience would be a sufficient explanation of why aesthetic liking must be grounded in experience, it is not the only explanation – a further reason can be given.

Qualities like vivacity, soulfulness and musicianship are aesthetically good, other things equal. Perceiving them involves recognising their aesthetic goodness and thereby enjoying them. But that is not all that such perception calls for. It also calls for renewed attention into the non-normative qualities of the music – it's arrangements and rhythms, melodies, harmonies, timbres, tempi, and so on, as well as the interplay between these features. Liking the initial appearance of aesthetic value consists, among other things, in being called to reach a further understanding of that aesthetic value, through such attention. The initial appearance in experience of beauty – or otherwise aesthetic goodness – calls for the subject to delve further into that aspect of the experience to learn and understand more. Appreciation is thus the state of liking that is based on the resultant, developed understanding (see Goldman, 2006, pp. 339-340). In this way, aesthetic appreciation depends on experience not because of the brute essentiality of experience to aesthetics, but because only through experience can the subject engage in the cognitive exploration of the artwork in which appreciation partly consists. It is not just that appreciating is a kind of experiencing, but that appreciating calls for experiencing.

Returning to the example, when one listens to the album and one is struck by, say, the vivacity of the music, this impression – which is aesthetically pleasurable – calls for closer attention to the aspects of music that give it that vivacity. Upon paying that closer attention, there are two possibilities. On the one hand, one might find that the close texture of the composing and the playing is full of still further qualities that reward that renewed attention: elements of spontaneity and joyful playing in the rhythms and melodies and ensemble playing. If this is so, then the quality of vivacity turns out to be deeply fine-grained and to provide sound normative support for one's valuing attitude of aesthetically liking the music. On the other hand, it could be that when one really listens it transpires that what had initially seemed to be vivacity was in fact an affected, forced sense of liveliness that was merely performed, or perhaps it was

prompted by aspects of the music that on reflection seem derivative of other recordings and so lack the spirit of free originality that seemed intriguing initially.

In other words, aesthetic qualities must be fine-grained in order to be genuinely normative. This is due to the connection between aesthetic liking, and detailed understanding. Namely, that connection is one of aesthetic liking calling for detailed understanding, where the result is aesthetic appreciation. If aesthetic qualities like vivacity were simple and coarse-grained, there would be no detail to explore, and thus nothing to appreciate through attentive aesthetic experience.

I put aside the suggestion that love might just be a kind of experiencing, but what about the possibility that love calls for the exploration of the value of the beloved in the same sort of way as is involved in aesthetic appreciation? It seems to me that love does indeed call for exactly this kind of appreciative understanding of the love-worthy qualities in the beloved. Indeed, the idea that love calls for (or perhaps partly consists in) loving attention is one that is popular even among opponents of the QV (Velleman 1999; Setiya 2014).[12] Indeed, the notion of attention as pioneered by Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch has also been a key focus of recent philosophical discussion of love (Jollimore 2011; Hopwood 2018; Chappell 2018; Driver 2020; Merritt 2017; Caprioglio Panizza 2022). The simple argument in favour of thinking that love calls for attention derives from contemplation of what love would look like if the lover showed no interest at all in gaining a detailed appreciation of the love-worthy qualities they believed their beloved to possess. If I believed – perhaps on the basis of reliable testimony – that my beloved had a wonderful sense of humour, but I lacked any desire to appreciate that sense of humour and understand this aspect of their character, then it would seem that whatever we might want to call my attitude toward them that is responding to that quality, it is very far from being love.

So, love calls for attention, and, just as in the musical example, attention requires that the qualities under consideration are fine-grained: that they reward the renewed focus with further

[12] There is a potential confusion in the idea that love consists in attention. Namely, one might worry that the QV is committed to the view that in order to be justified in loving another, one must appreciate their fine-grained qualities, but to appreciate their fine-grained qualities one must bestow loving attention on them, and so one must already love them. If that were the view, then it would seem that one's initial love could not possibly be justified. There are two lines of response to this that are worth flagging. First, and most straightforwardly, it should be clarified that to attend lovingly to someone might be part of what it is to love them, but doing so does not entail that one loves them – love involves more than loving attention, it also involves, at least, appreciation of love-worthy qualities. However, second, the QV would be consistent with the view that love is never justified at the point of bestowal – that it is only ever justified later, and retroactively.

detail worthy of appreciation and love. As a final step in the argument, I think it is worth offering a description of this process of attending to and thereby appreciating fine-grained love-worthy qualities. It would strengthen the defence of the QV if such a process seems true to life. A good example here might be the quality of having a good sense of humour, which, so stated, could be a simple, brute, coarse-grained quality, or, alternatively, a place-holder label for a complex arrangement of further qualities that themselves ground the love-worthiness.

Consider the following series of elaborations of what it means to say that X has a good sense of humour:

i. X is funny.

ii. X has a dry sense of humour.

iii. X has a deadpan mode of delivery and a lively social intelligence.

iv. X is attentive to others' behaviour, aware of the extent of others' awareness of X's attentiveness; X can immanently evaluate their own and others' behaviour from a critical if not cynical perspective, with an eye for spotting irony, hypocrisy, pomposity, and hubris; and conveys such evaluation with witty precision… and so on.

v. X's humour has certain constraints: a) X is sensitive to power imbalances, and with their critical jibes, X 'punches up' but never down; b) their comic outlook is especially resourceful in otherwise difficult moments, but more subdued when it is better for X not to dominate others' attention; but c) X is not incessantly ironical, they are also capable of being earnest, in appropriate circumstances; and d) X's humour is not boringly repetitive, but is imaginative and often novel… and so on.

vi. The dispositions named in (i)-(v) are dynamic, and their development and refinement have a sense of trajectory.

When one hears simply that X has a good sense of humour or that X is funny (i), this is ambiguous between a great many ways of being funny or good-humoured: being brash, quick-witted, clown-like, and so on. So, in the first instance, attending to X to appreciate this quality is a matter of learning which of these ways is X's way (ii). Appreciating X's funniness involves experiencing X's deadpan delivery and their lively social intelligence (iii), and finding it funny, in being amused by X. Through the experience of humour, one comes to know X in a way that might well endear one to X. And the elaborations in (iv)-(vi) are offered as one rough sketch

of what exactly one might be coming to know, when one comes to know X by appreciating their funniness. What these descriptions show is that beneath the initial description of a quality that appears to be coarse-grained, and normative – being funny is clearly a likeable quality – there may plausibly lie a nexus of further qualities of the person's character that are themselves also normative. These qualities (those described in iv and v especially), ground the love-worthiness of X being funny. Without them, or other underlying qualities of a similar sort, X being funny might not be a reason to like X. That love-worthiness might be undermined by the insensitivity of X's humour, or its crudeness, or naivety.

One thing that should be obvious is that while X's love-worthiness as described here is not coarse-grained, it is nonetheless undeniably generic. The qualities described in (i)-(vi) could be instantiated by any number of people. And yet, there does not seem to be anything objectionably fungible about loving someone for qualities of this sort. The more detail of this nature that one appreciates in X's love-worthy qualities, the more one will be seeing something the recognition of which X themselves ought to feel good about – and perhaps, the more one will even be seeing that for which X wants to be loved, which is to say, seeing X as they really are.

6. Conclusion

Many critics of the QV reject it as a normative account of what justifies love because they find it to lead to the absurd conclusion articulated by the trading-up objection: that one can be more justified in loving a stranger than in loving one's love-worthy friends. This objection relies on the idea that the qualities at issue, that might be thought to ground one's love of a friend, are such that one can also know of their instantiation in the characters of strangers. The question I have raised in this paper is whether the trading-up objection thus assumes that the QV treats love-worthy qualities as coarse-grained.

A dilemma ensues. The first option is that it does not: that the objection grants that love-worthy qualities can (or even must) be fine-grained. But then the trading-up example collapses because if one has fine-grained, detailed appreciation of the love-worthy qualities of the stranger, then they don't seem to be a stranger after all. And if they are not a stranger, but they do have extremely love-worthy attributes with which one is acquainted, then there no longer seems to be anything outrageous in the suggestion that one would be justified in loving them, even to a higher degree than one is justified in loving someone else that one knows well.

On the other horn of the dilemma, the trading-up objection maintains that love-worthy qualities are coarse-grained on the QV. This option at least maintains the sense that there is something absurd in the example in the objection. But it does this at the expense that it no longer applies to the QV. For, as I have argued in section 5, the QV ought to hold that love-worthy qualities are necessarily fine-grained. There is, ultimately, a simple explanation for this. Love calls for, or perhaps consists in, paying loving attention to the detail of the beloved's character. As such, the qualities that inspire one's love must be the kinds of things that warrant and reward such detailed attention if they are to provide normative support to one's love, as the QV says they do. That is just to say that they must be fine-grained qualities.

I do not pretend to have argued that the QV is the correct theory of the rationality of love. I have only tried to undermine a prominent objection to that theory, one which is often taken to be a serious problem by the theory's detractors, and which is, to my mind, often dealt with inadequately by the theory's proponents. But through this discussion of qualities to which love is a response, it has become clear that love bears a deep, structural resemblance to aesthetic normativity. This is something that any theory of love's rationality ought to try to explain.[13]

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