

Love, Value and Supervenience*

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There is increasing interest these days in a pattern of value analysis that understands value in terms of fitting attitudes. However, not all attitudes lend themselves easily to this sort of analysis. Love, for instance, that presents itself immediately when the value of, say, a beloved is to be analysed, is in fact problematic for different reasons. In what follows I will draw attention to some of these problems, and in doing so I will set out from a view of what are certain core features of love. I will not argue for this view here.¹ Needless to say, it is only one suggestion of many recent attempts to bring clarity to our notion of love.

1.

Love, then, as I understand it, is an attitude that typically is directed at some person.² In what follows I will suggest that we take this claim

* Happy Birthday Wlodek! To philosophize with you, which has been my great pleasure for many years now, is never to have a dull moment. I am truly a fortunate beneficiary of your great generosity and capacious knowledge.

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¹ I do so in “Love and Value” (circulating Ms).

² Whether this happens in a more direct or indirect way is something that I will not discuss here. However, this much could be said: many of our attitudes require for

literally. We love *persons*, and not, say, the properties of the persons (or some states of affairs involving the beloved). It is not uncommon to find it argued that what we love is in fact the properties of the person. But this is, I think, a quite confused idea (which can be traced back to Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*) that I will not discuss any further here. When I love someone I do so, naturally, in virtue of what his or her properties are. But it is a clear fallacy to conclude from this alone that what we love is his or her properties. The object of love is a certain person. And we should not confuse what causes us to have an attitude with that which is the intentional object of the attitude. They might be the same, but they need not be.

Suppose therefore that the *identity* of the beloved somehow is an essential feature of the intentional content of the love attitude. This brings some rather interesting, but also some quite counterintuitive, features to the surface. I will here only concentrate on a couple of features.

2.

The first issue then concerns the following: how should we harmonize the idea that the identity of the beloved is a part of the attitude in question, with the idea that attitudes are in general discerning? By the latter I have in mind the idea that our attitudes are directed to objects on account of some particular property or properties of the objects. That is, at least some of the properties of the object are manifested in the intentional content of the attitude. To be more precise, what makes an attitude more or less discerning is that the intentional content of the attitude contains these

their explanation the mention of the fact that we love someone. This suggests that there is some support for the “indirect” idea that love plays a “master-like” role among our attitudes.

(discerned) properties to a higher or lower degree. Moreover, in the present “value context” (i.e., in the case where attitudes are called for, according to a certain format of value analysis, e.g., the so-called fitting attitude account of value), the aforementioned properties will also be what makes the object valuable, i.e., these properties make up the supervenience base of the object (they are subjacent properties). Thus, in the case of, say, a unique painting, uniqueness will be what (in part) makes the artwork valuable or at least more valuable, but (facts about) this property also provide a reason for favouring the object (for instance caring for it); i.e., we should favour the object on account of it.

Is then love a non-discerning attitude? That is, are the properties of the beloved absent in the intentional content of this kind of love? The old refrain that love is blind might suggest something to this effect. But although we cannot just rule out this possibility, I find the idea of a non-discerning attitude somewhat puzzling. Attitudes are discerning to a certain degree. But it is hard to imagine a completely non-discerning attitude towards an object *x*, if we by this mean that it is an attitude the intentional content of which is such that it does not contain any of *x*'s properties. However, there is in fact another approach to be considered, which looks more viable.

3.

Now, even if we suppose that the intentional content of love does in fact contain at least some of the properties of the beloved, there is the possibility that certain properties figure there differently to how properties appear in other attitudes. Properties would have different functions or play

different roles in the attitude.³ Of course, this needs to be further elaborated. To do so, let me begin by considering a more standard sort of discerning attitude, namely admiration.

We admire a person *a* for his or her, say, wit, or courage. Properties like these are what make *a* admirable; they form the supervenience base of admirability. Now, it is likely that these (subjacent) properties will play some sort of value-making or attitude-justificatory role in the intentional content. Actually I do not see why we should not consider both possibilities as likely. Thus, sometimes when we admire a person, *a*, for his and her wit and courage, the content of the attitude is such that these properties of *a* appear there as value makers, as what makes *a* admirable. However, other times we are not quite sure what it is about a certain object that makes us favour or admire it, we just do. When this happens we are often ready to argue our case, or to take measures to find out what it is about the object that we admire. In such cases the role of the properties is likely to appear in the content as that which justifies the attitude rather than as makers of value.⁴

Let us next consider love. Here things are different; what causes us to love the person will to some degree appear in the intentional content, but not obviously as what *makes a* valuable or what makes our love justified.⁵

³ The idea that properties may play different roles in attitudes goes back to the “dual-role” view of right reasons discussed in Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen “The Strike of the Demon: On fitting pro-attitudes and Value” 2004, *Ethics* vol. 114, No.3, pp. 414.

⁴ I imagine that there will also be attitudes that combine both kinds of contents. For simplicity’s sake I will not discuss this possibility here.

⁵ Of course, sometimes we might think that our love is justified. I am just not assuming that to love one is to regard one’s love as justified. I think there is ample

We might try to express the difference as follows: In the former case, we admire for instance person *a*, *who is made admirable by his courage, wit, etc.* In the second case, we love *a*, *which has such-and-such properties*. In the admirability case the properties which figure in the intentional content are what make *a* carry a value in the first place (or *ceteris paribus*, what justifies us in admiring *a*); in the latter case, the properties are rather identifiers of *a*; *they do not play any value-making or attitude-justifying role*.⁶

It might be objected that the distinction is entirely made up; there is no substantive argument for ascribing different functions to properties. But this may in fact be contested. For instance, it is backed up by the observation that we admit that certain of our attitudes cannot always be justified although they are directed at objects. However, a caveat is in place: the point is not that we are facing an epistemological problem – that we are more or less unsure what the justification is. The point is rather that in some cases we acknowledge that an attitude of ours is such that we find ourselves merely having it; we have neither sided with nor against it. We have as it were been struck by the attitude.⁷ In fact, at times it is not merely

evidence that people love despite the fact that they do not think the beloved deserves their love.

⁶ Cf., Robert C Roberts' point in *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), that "love, in the dispositional sense of attachment/.../ is a construal that identifies the object of concern". Emotions, on the other hand, "are situational construals of the object of concern"(p. 288)

⁷ This observation is made by several authors. See for instance, Harry Frankfurt (1999), *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

the case that we experience the attitude as being planted in us, we also believe that there are good reasons (moral or prudential) for us not to have the attitude in question (These attitudes show some affinity with so-called recalcitrant emotions).⁸

That properties may play different roles in attitudes is therefore not a pure invention. In fact, there is a further observation, besides the purely phenomenological point (that we sometimes experience us as having an attitude that we recognize ourselves as just having), which *a fortiori* strengthens the idea that properties which figure in the intentional content of an attitude may do so playing different roles. Thus, when it comes to certain attitudes – and love would be *an* example – we are ready to accept that it is *logically legitimate* for a person not to provide a justification for having the attitude. The nature of the attitude is such that we recognize that we just have the attitude – we have been struck by the attitude. There are other such attitudes. Consider a person who wants his house painted red. He may have no other “justification” than the fact that he desires to have his house painted red. Compare this to someone, *a*, who admires a certain person. In the latter case *a* might not be able to provide the justification, but

⁸ An example would be a person who has a certain preference for, say, a special sexual activity, but who realizes that there are good reasons for him not to have and act on this attitude. Cf., D’Arms, Justin and Jacobson, Daniel (2003) “The Significance of Recalcitrant Emotions (or anti- quasi-judgementalism)” in (ed) Hatzimoysis, Anthony *Philosophy and the emotions*, Cambridge UP (2003): “We will say that an emotion is *recalcitrant* when it exists despite the agent’s making a judgement that is in tension with it.” (p. 129.)

we would not accept for conceptual reasons that he denied that a justification was in fact called for.⁹

We do not so much love a person *for* his or her properties as we love him and her *regardless of* his and her properties. As a result, we cannot (nor do we recognize the need to) supply a justification for our love. This would in its turn explain why we sometime feel that we are not in a sense responsible for having the attitude. But given this view on love, we are stranded with a problem. That is, supposing attitudes are never completely non-discerning, we need to understand what role properties do play in the attitude. I suggest that the distinction between identifiers and justifiers accounts for this.

That we love a person in the sense I have in mind here is, of course, quite compatible with the fact that we may have a number of other attitudes towards the beloved. For instance, I think my wife Elly has a number of qualities; she is clever, unselfish and considerate. Her having these properties makes her into a good person; her qualities are such that I have a reason to favour her in various ways. These and many other features she has make her desirable, someone that I find worth caring for, and so on. If they somehow were lost, it would mean I would stop desiring her for the sake of those properties. But it would not necessarily mean I would stop loving her.

⁹ Whether the “desire” case should be handled in the same way as I propose for love is doubtful but I will not pursue this issue here. Another tricky issue that I will not go into here is to what extent we can genuinely admire something that we acknowledge is not admirable. However, notice that whether or not we admit this possibility it is still the case that for logical reasons if you admired something it is always logically legitimate to ask for a justification in terms of the admired object’s properties.

There are yet two more aspects that would need to be further examined, one of which I do not presently have a firm grip on. First, there is the question whether properties that figure in the intentional content may be evaluative. In the case of admirability, the supervenient properties do appear to be what is best described as admirable features, i.e., admirability often at least seems to supervene on evaluative properties. I am prone to think that the intentional content of love too will sometimes contain evaluative properties. However, this does not change the general idea that properties play different roles in love than in admiration. So I am not ruling out the possibility that the intentional content of love may contain evaluative properties. It needs to be stressed that being evaluative does not prevent the property from playing the role of identifier rather than maker of the beloved's lovability. This apart, the presence of evaluative properties in love raises another issue.

Consider again, a feature like courage. Although it is likely to be part of what makes a person admirable, it must not be forgotten that there are other properties that are "courage makers," say, being firmly disposed to risking one's life for others, or something like that.¹⁰ Now, in the case when love contains evaluative properties, what makes them "amiable" is in part that they are the beloved's properties. You would not want to say this *mutatis mutandis* about admirable features; the admired is not to be found in the supervenience base of the admired features. But if we turn to love, it does not strike me as implausible that certain features of a person have value for the lover just because they are the beloved's features. Our love towards *a* makes her have lovable features, whereas our admiration for *a*, does not

¹⁰ I hold it open that it is not the evaluative properties but rather the corresponding subjacent properties that figure in admiration.

make *a* have admirable features. Or put slightly differently, it is through love that people (in part) have love-worthy features.¹¹

4.

It might seem that the view of love outlined here in fact faces a *reductio ad absurdum*. If what we love is an irreplaceable person, and not his or her properties, it seems inexplicable how people would fall out of love unless we ascribe to them some sort of at least partial amnesia concerning the beloved's identity. But people do stop loving each other, and they do so without having any doubts whatsoever about the identity of the person whom they once loved. They are quite positive that the person they do not love is the very same person they used to love. So there must be something wrong after all with how love is described here.

But this objection can be dealt with quite easily. There are at least two plausible explanations. First, it is paramount not to blur the distinction I mentioned at the outset between what figures in the intentional content of an attitude and what caused us to have the attitude. What causes us to have an attitude need not appear in the content of the attitude. If we believe this, it should come as no surprise that what causes an attitude to disappear does

¹¹ The beloved may be valuable for its own sake – i.e., carry a final value. But we may have a thicker value notion in mind. That is, we might describe a person as *loveable* (A caveat: Lovability might also be a final value. But a person might be valuable for his or her own sake without exemplifying lovability). Both kinds of value may very well require love in their *analysans*. However, it seems likely, that a format of value analysis that is suitable for lovability is not equally fitting for the former kind of (more) thin final value. The difference might then be this: Whereas love appears to play more of a constitutive role when it comes to lovability, this does not seem at least as obvious in the other case.

not have to be part of the intentional content of this attitude. But notice that this does not have to mean that the lover is at a loss as to why he or she has stopped being in love. This may, of course, also happen. Just as we in some cases are struck by an attitude, we can be struck by its absence. But it need of course not always be like this. The person who no longer loves might well have strong beliefs about what causes are involved here. This brings us to the second explanation.

Characterizing love in terms of its intentional content helps to explain that what we love is persons rather than properties or states of affairs or some other metaphysical entity. Of course, this is but one feature of love. To give a more full account that among other things would illuminate the role this attitude plays in our lives, we need to do justice to many more observations and intuitions. For instance, characterizing love in the way done here does not shed light on another issue, viz., how love may last over a long time, or just what its relation is to other attitudes. Still, as mentioned earlier (see n.2) I am quite confident that many of our attitudes and acts do require for their explanation the mention of the fact that we are in love. And if this is true it would support the idea that love plays a dominant role among our attitudes. That it should be the sole dominant attitude is less likely. There might be other attitudes that perform this kind of master-like role. And if this is also true, I do not see any reason why love cannot, as it were, be defeated by other attitudes. That we acquire new attitudes and drop old ones is a well-known phenomenon, and there is nothing in the view of love presented here that upsets this picture.¹²

¹² Just how this acquiring or losing of attitudes happens is something that would require a much more detailed account than what I can offer here. I doubt, however, that being more specific would enable me to reach a satisfying account. But this is nothing particular for love. The few models we have for explaining “dominance”

5.

Above I have characterized love such that it is faithful to a couple of, I believe, quite firm intuitions, namely that the proper object of our love is persons, and these are not replaceable by exact copies (The latter follows if it is the case that the beloved's identity is an essential ingredient in the attitude). Let us next turn to what are some other problems.

One classic objection to understanding value in terms of love may be stated in a few words: If two objects differ in value, they must differ as to some universal feature (where a universal feature is one the description of which does not necessitate the mentioning of an individual). The idea is, then, often backed up by the claim that value judgments are universalizable judgments: if we say that an object *a* is valuable, then we are committed to saying that for every other object *x*, that is exactly similar to *a* as regards its universal features, *x* too will be valuable.

If universalizability is a requirement on all judgments of value, as Richard Hare so painstakingly argued over the years, then an analysis of value in terms of love has the implication that if my beloved has value, any exact copy as regarding universal features must also have value. However, this will not sit well with a person who endorses this sort of "love analysis". Such a person maintains that what he loves, and what accordingly has value, is a particular person. The value accrues to his or her beloved. Any copy, however similar it is to the beloved, is not the beloved, and need therefore not be of value.

or strength of attitudes are not very impressive (e.g., behaviorist and dispositional ones, "felt strength" views, or what sometimes is referred to as "the winner-takes-it-all view").

But there may in fact be a way around this conclusion, such that if “our” love and value analyst is ready to make a less encompassing claim, he may have his cake and eat it too. Instead of talking about *value period*, it might seem more plausible to ascribe agent-relative *value-for* to the beloved. I suspect that many who would be hesitant to say that their beloved carried a final value period, would at least be ready to promptly say that the beloved is *good for* or has *value for* them (People are probably not ready to say to the same extent that their beloved has some final value period that nobody else has). Suppose, then, that we should turn our attention to value-for rather than to value period when we analyze the beloved’s value. This brings in its train the following interesting feature: Since value-for is a *relative* notion the comparison base will have to include, albeit in universalizable terms, not only the valuable object, but also the person for whom it is a value-for. Thus, suppose I ascribe value-for to my beloved. I am now committed, it seems, to ascribing value-for to any other situation that is exactly similar in universal features to the one my beloved and I are in. And this does seem to be something that we might agree to. If *x* and *y* stand in the same relation, and are identical in universal terms with me and my beloved, then it would not make sense, it seems, to deny that *x* has value for *y*.

However, not everyone accepts notions such as “value-for” or “good-for”.¹³ As to value period, that love and universalizability do not go

¹³ G.E Moore is perhaps the most prominent example of someone who argued that we should not expand our value typology with “good for”. In “Analysing Personal Value” (*Journal of Ethics* forthcoming 2007), I argue that his argument is in fact not very convincing. But I also suggest a novel interpretation of good-for that ought to make this notion embraceable to those who share Moore’s scepticism regarding agent-relative goodness.

together is perhaps not (*pace* R.M. Hare) entirely devastating; after all; universalizability is a very strong requirement, and it might be argued that it is simply too strong; value analysis may make do with something less demanding, namely that value has to be a supervenient, i.e., a consequential feature.

A possible move would then be to require that values need only be supervenient features. Moreover, if we in addition combine this with the idea that the final value of the beloved is extrinsic (i.e., the beloved is valuable for its own sake in virtue of internal as well as external features), the analysis seemingly stands a good chance of succeeding.

Suppose therefore that the beloved does carry a value that is consequential on other features of the value bearer. In such a case we must acknowledge that any other person who has the subjacent features of the beloved is also valuable, i.e., ought also to be an object of our love attitude. Now, even a firm believer in non-fungibility love, if you will pardon the ugly description, ought to agree with this. The reason is that supervenience, in contrast to universalizability, is compatible with unicity, i.e. there being only one object fulfilling a given set of properties. What supervenience requires is that we ascribe value to any object that has the relevant properties, and these may well pick out one unique individual, such as, for instance, the being who shared the past with me, gave birth to my children, etc. The beloved is uniquely determined by these external relational properties.

The many hardships of a love analyst's life are still far from over. Even if it may look as if supervenience can be combined with love, a much tougher objection waits ahead.

6.

The claim that value is a supervenient feature expresses most likely not one but several different intuitions about the relationship between value and the

value bearer. Central to these intuitions is the idea that a question like ‘what makes object x valuable?’ cannot be answered in just any way. Some answers would be unintelligible. To reply, for instance, ‘Oh, it just is valuable! There is nothing that makes the object valuable’ would be regarded, if taken seriously, as mysterious, as claims that defy comprehension. The value of an object has to have something to do with the kind of object it is. It must result from the object and not only “land on” it. If not, value would be a sort of free-floating entity that had nothing to do with the object to which it accrues. This sort of dependence-intuition (as I have referred to it elsewhere)¹⁴ is fundamentally a *logical* intuition. It might be expressive of something in addition (some ontological assumptions), but there is no need to go into this here. But the fact that we do think it is always perfectly legitimate to ask questions like “What is so valuable about the value bearer?” or “What makes it valuable?” strongly indicates that supervenience is at least a logical thesis.

Traditionally supervenience is described as a ‘because of’ relation that has a value property and some (set of) other (natural) properties as relata. Obviously this tradition then creates a problem for a “love analysis” of value. The properties that are present in the intentional content of love are not value makers but identity makers. Hence, the question “what makes the beloved valuable?” cannot be answered by invoking these identity makers. The beloved is valuable because of who he or she is, and not what qualities he or she has.

¹⁴ See here my “Dislodging Butterflies from the Supervenient” in (ed.) Stephen Voss *Philosophical Anthropology*, vol. 9, Proceedings of the 2003 Istanbul World Congress.

There are basically two ways of dealing with this problem. First, one can revolt against the tradition and question that supervenience has to have properties as relata. Second, one can always try to adjust one's view of the role which the supervenience-base plays in the attitude. It is not obvious why what makes an object valuable has to be present in the intentional content of the attitude (in terms of which we understand the value). In fact, theories that let attitudes have a value-constitutive role may quite easily make room for such a view. For instance, in loving a person *a* he or she gets to be valuable; the object of my love is the person. However, maintaining this is quite consistent with the idea that value is a supervenient feature. The salient feature of such value theories is the idea that it is the pro-et-contra attitudes of the subject that constitute value to the object towards which they are directed. But claiming that value requires constitution by a subject is quite consistent with the idea that we are submitted to the logical restrictions set by the supervenience thesis. What these constitutive theories maintain is that by constituting *a*'s value, *a*'s properties (or at least some of them) are turned into value-making properties. That these properties may be absent from the attitude, and consequently, that the evaluator may be ignorant about what is the precise supervenience base, might strike one as counter-intuitive. Of course, constitutive value theories raise a number of difficult questions.¹⁵ However, that the agent may be unaware of precisely what it is that makes him love a person (and hence what makes him or her valuable according to the lover), seems to fit well with how many have reported what it means to love

¹⁵ I discuss such problems in "Subjectivism and Objectivism; An Outline" in eds., W. Rabinowicz and T. Rønnow-Rasmussen, *Patterns of Value; Essays on Formal Axiology and Value Analysis*, Lund Philosophy Reports., 2003.

someone. The point is then that, on certain views (subjectivist theories of value), determining the supervenience base may in some cases not happen automatically; it is rather a post-constitution activity that may require different sorts of skills from the agent.

To become a subjectivist of the sort outlined above may nonetheless be too high a price to pay for many. Let us therefore consider the more radical alternative, and ask ourselves whether supervenience really has to be a property relation.¹⁶ Why cannot some other metaphysical entities constitute the relata?¹⁷ If our metaphysics admits of there being individuals that are not reducible to their properties, could then value supervene on such entities? For instance, could a person be what value supervenes on?

I see no immediate objection to this idea. Perhaps this merely reflects my conviction that *value* supervenience is fundamentally a logical thesis (Someone who primarily regards the relation from a metaphysical perspective might find it hard to receive this suggestion with a consenting mind). But so far as the dependence intuition goes, answering the question

¹⁶ Perhaps a more correct way of putting it would be to say that supervenience is a relation between *instantiated* properties, and not merely properties. See here e.g., Jonas Olson (2003), “A Question about supervenience and value-making properties”, in (eds.) W. Rabinowicz and T. Rønnow-Rasmussen, *Patterns of Value; Essays on Formal Axiology and Value Analysis*, vol. 1, (Lund: Lund philosophy Reports), p.132.

¹⁷ As a curiosity, it may be pointed out that R. M. Hare, who often is said to have introduced the term to the philosophical community, did in fact describe the supervenience relation in a way that permitted it to have relata belonging to different ontological entities. See here R. M Hare (1984), ‘Supervenience’, *Aristotelian Society*. Supp. 58. Reprinted in Hare (1989) *Essays in Ethical Theory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

“what makes *a* valuable?” with “this ___ makes *a* valuable” where the blank may be filled with our favoured metaphysical entity, will be fine. To say, for instance, “*a* makes himself valuable” is at least not offensive for logical reasons. What the dependence intuition requires is that there is a *because of* relation; it does not take a stand regarding the nature of the relata.

Still, all this might be hard to swallow. So why not simply accept that certain values, namely those requiring love for their analysis, are unique in that they are not supervenient? The reason, of course, is that supervenience is—even to a higher degree than the universalizability thesis—expressive of our linguistic intuitions, which govern what we can and cannot say about value. Such intuitions do not easily lend themselves to exceptions. Thus, if the supervenience thesis expresses, among other things, our intuition that it is always logically legitimate to ask, “In virtue of what (properties) is this object valuable?” we cannot easily allow that there is one object of which this question is suddenly not legitimate.