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Love As If

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Abstract

The primary focus here is romantic love, but it may be applied to other cases of love such as those within a family. The first issue is whether love is a non-rational occurrence leading to a state of affairs to which the normative constrains of reason do not apply. If one assumes that reasons are relevant to determining love, then the second issue is the manner in which love is and should be reasonable and governed by the indications of reason. It is contended that our conception of love is inherently contradictory. Depending on circumstances, we want love to be both a non-rational occurrence beyond reason and something normative such that the indications of reasons are relevant to determining and assessing it. We alternate between the two treatments of love and in so doing love can function in our lives. The incoherence is accommodated by each treatment or view of love being one of as if. This allows us to live with love in a manner whereby we do not have to definitively commit to either alternative, so we have a dipolar as if concept of love. Sometimes we view love as if reasons were beside the point and at others we view love as if it were rightly subject to the indications of reason.

I.

This paper considers two issues that connect love and reason, namely, normativity and reasonableness. It draws out from this a theory about the concept of love.¹

In talking of love, I am primarily considering that which may exist between two people, in particular between what one may call ‘lovers’. But some of the ideas here are easily extendable to other cases, such as love between members of a family.²

Love is so central to people’s lives that the capacity to think honestly about it may be an issue. Love is important to us because it is one of the fundamentals ways that life acquires meaning. As one thinks about love, one will in all likelihood be considering something that impinges on one’s own life in all-too pointed a manner. It may be hard to be ‘theoretical’ about it. It should be acknowledged then that the degree of emotional

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honesty required in addressing the subject properly, even when the approach is philosophical, might be difficult to attain. Love is, in a sense, everyday, and yet often acute in its importance to us. Therein lies the need to compensate in our thinking for any personal biases we may think we might be carrying with respect to love when we try to give an account of it. In short, we should be particularly self-aware of our own prejudices, and things that may prevent us from thinking as clearly as we might normally suppose we can. It’s hard to keep the personal out of love. Love is not unique in this, but is high on the list of subjects where we might expect to reason with difficulty.

The initial concern is whether love is the kind of thing that is normative or is non-rational. The next topic is reasonableness and how much love should be determined by the indications of reason, given that it should be at all; this supposes that love is to some degree a normative matter. My suggestion is that we want it both ways in both instances, depending on circumstances. The justification of this is partly conceptual, and partly it is based on the phenomenology of love as we encounter it in our lives. Sometimes we like to view love as something normative, and sometimes we like to view it as a non-rational event. Further, we like sometimes to consider it as something reason should determine little, and sometimes we like to consider it as something that rightly should be open to being substantially brought into line by the indications of reason. Our concept of love is confused, even contradictory. But, as will be argued, we save ourselves from the consequences of this dissonance in our thought by in practice adopting a dipolar as if treatment of love that varies depending on circumstances, and may vary as it suits us.

The use of ‘as if’ here, alludes to, but should not be thought to closely adhere to that of, Hans Vaihinger. There is no general commitment, however, to Vaihinger’s anti-realist, instrumentalist, metaphysics in this paper. Nor is it implied that love does not really exist. However, his notion of ‘useful fictions’ in our treatment of love does bear upon the discussion here. The dipolar or dual treatment of love might be considered analogous to the way that entities in quantum mechanics may be treated as both participles and waves. The account of love in the paper is derived significantly from the phenomenology of love as encountered in our lives.

II.

The first issue is the extent to which love might be said to be normative. Is loving someone the kind of thing one may make a mistake about? Can love be normative? Can it be something like thinking that 4 or that 5 is the answer to 2+2=? ? Or is love akin to liking marmite? you either do or you don’t, but it is not something it makes sense to say you can make a mistake about, or indeed be correct about. In that case love would be what one might call a mere matter of taste. Being in love or liking marmite might be unwise or bad for you - you could make a mistake in that sense - but that you are in
love or like marmite is not something, as a matter of taste, that one may be incorrect about. It is something that happens to you, or it doesn’t. As such, love would then be impervious to the indications of rational argument. It would be incorrigible. Love would be an entirely non-rational matter. It would be a fact, state of affairs, or event, to which the normative provisions of should or should not do not apply. Love is something that happens or does not happen, like a tree falling over. Reason in respect of it would be beside the point. Arguments are only valid against arguments. It is an old adage, that there’s no point in arguing over matters of taste. It would be ridiculous to try to convince someone by an argument that really they do not like or like the taste of marmite. To present arguments to someone against her thinking that she loves someone may be just as inappropriate and misconceived. It is liable to elicit a response along the line of: but I know how I feel. Whereas by contrast, the obvious appropriateness of giving an argument against thinking 5 is the case, when presented with answering 2+2=? shows that holding 5 is a normative matter, that one can make a mistake about it, and that it can and may be corrected by an argument.

The second issue is the extent to which love might be said to be something that should be reasonable, something that should be subject to the indications of reason. This rather assumes that the answer to the question raised by the first issue is a positive one; love is something one may make a mistake about, something normative that rightly should be subject to the dictates of reason. In that case, how far should reason inform love, if it can and should do so? The question then is to what extent reason should play a part in determining love, and how. How does love fit with a notion of reasonableness given that love is in principle open and should be open to the indications of rational argument? The answer is: uncomfortably. For many there seems something wrong, amounting to a deep misunderstanding, in talking about ‘reasonable love’ or love tempered or guided by reason.

The curious thing is that bringing together love and reason looks perfectly acceptable in one way and yet also undesirable, perhaps impossible, when viewed another way. However, certainly in practice we seem to want it both ways. There are notions of complete abandonment and commitment that for some stand as a litmus test of true love that makes the notion of presenting arguments as to whether - perhaps on some kind of balance of argumentative weight - A should love B, anathema. This again is akin to liking, or even, one might aver, loving, the taste of marmite. Asked for a reason as to why one likes the taste of marmite, one will be inclined to say that one ‘just does’. The circle of explanation is almost as tight as it could be, although one might stray into generalities, and talk of a general liking for savoury and salty things. But in the end, one’s reason for saying that one likes the taste of marmite is just that one likes the taste of marmite.

It could be said that love is like this. Similarly, if one is asked why one loves someone so much, one may begin by listing her qualities, but in the end one will be inclined to
say also that one ‘just does’ love her. Nor, it may be significant to note, does the beloved really want to hear a list of reasons for loving them. The beloved does not want considered reasons - if they want to hear anything they want to hear appropriate platitudes. One is supposed to fall in love - something that has connotations of a non-rational event one is subject to and does not deliberately, let alone rationally, control. One is not supposed, on one view of love, to weigh up the pros and cons, as one might in deciding whether to open an account with a particular bank, and think that on balance a particular bank is the best choice. On a certain view of love, one is not even supposed to be able to do this. Indeed, starting to give or even consider reasons for loving someone, and certainly presenting them to the beloved, may be seen as proof that one does not love them, or the love is dying. Giving your beloved a list of reasons for loving them might, quite understandably, have the opposite effect than what is intended - they may conclude that because you are able to be so reasonable about it, and indeed reason about it at all, you do not really love them. What they really want to hear is simply that you do love totally, as a fact, and that you cannot really say why. Perhaps you might add that your love is ineffable - thus drawing a line under all possibility of rational discussion.

Sartre noticed something similar. It is a paradox involved in what many would regard as true love and connected to the matter of freewill. Freewill is in turn, albeit arguably, connected to, indeed is a requirement for, normativity, since normativity cannot exist where there is no free choice. There is no point in saying that one ought in a normative sense to stop falling after being pushed out of a plane, or that arguments show that the falling is a mistake - it is just something that is happening, and because no choice is involved, no notion of a mistake or normativity can arise. The same may not, in contrast, apply to one’s original decision to get on the plane if the circumstances of one’s doing so were of a certain sort. Indeed, it makes no sense to apply normative judgements to events where there is no possibility of its being such that an individual is capable of following a rule, as opposed to merely acting in accord with a rule. However this may be, Sartre’s point is that the beloved often wants two contradictory things: that love for them should be the free choice of the lover a choice that could be based in some sense on there being a justification that someone deserved the love or has earned it - for otherwise it has no value if it is a mere compulsion - and on the other hand that the love should be unconditional and absolute, a matter of complete and unshakable commitment such that the lover could not in fact choose to give up loving. Certainly, argument would be supposed to have no impact on the love or lack of it. In the same way, one could not make oneself hate marmite if one likes marmite, by way of an argument. One might of course train oneself out of liking it by some kind of aversion therapy - but that would be a non-rational mode of changing things. So, in other words, the love must be had by someone as an absolute ineluctable force, and yet possessed and granted as a free act. As Sartre beautifully puts it: ‘He wants to be loved by a freedom but demands that this freedom as freedom should no longer be free.’ The same line of thought may be expressed by our wanting to be loved in a manner that is
normative and subject to reason, while at the same time the love is not open to the kind of rational explanation and constraints that something that is normative and subject to reason can and should be.

To extend this line of thought to reasonableness, it could plausibly be said that no beloved wants to hear that they are loved merely reasonably well or in a reasonable way. How much do you love me? It would be a probably foolhardy and overly honest lover who answers: ‘only quite a lot’ (unless it were deliberate understatement or jokey irony). Who wants to be loved in a manner where someone has weighed up the argumentative pros and cons, and decided in a composed manner that they will go ahead and love one? Overall they consider it might be a good idea. Could that even be love? To handle this kind of distinction, people sometimes say - and it can be a hurtful use of weasel words - that they love someone, but are not in love with them. If you were hoping for the in-love sort of love, and this little distinction is presented to you, experience and wisdom may suggest that it is time to give up.

We seem, then, to want it both ways when it comes to love. At its most stark: it should be freely chosen yet not something someone who loves us could choose not to be possessed by. Another way of putting this might be to say that we want love to be normative and non-rational. What seems to happen often in practice is that people adopt the non-rational mode of thinking about love when things are going well, but then turn to the love being subject to reason when things go wrong. We may even do this for third-parties when we see that the relationship is going wrong. There may be other circumstances where we switch from one view of love to another. From thinking that love is something that is either there or it is not, something that overwhelms one and presents itself, rather than something one thinks oneself into by looking at the arguments as to whether it is a good idea or not, one may turn to presenting arguments as to why a lover should not stop loving you fully expecting them to make a difference, and thinking they should. Irrelevant reasons suddenly become relevant. This becomes particularly pointed if a third person is involved. A and B have been in a loving relationship; but one day B tells A that she no longer loves him, but rather loves C. If love were a non-rational matter, that should be the end of it - and when things were going well, that is just how A would want to think about the way that B loved him, perhaps even generalising it - people ‘just do or they don’t’, and when they do they cannot help themselves, and this applies to B. A has in his mind that one day B fell in love with him, not that she weighed up the arguments for being in love with him and decided to go ahead. Indeed that sounds simply wrong when describing true love. Love isn’t something that a reconsideration of the arguments might show to be right or wrong, justified or unjustified. If that applies to B’s love for A, and that’s how A once preferred to see it, then consistently, A should think the same of B stopping loving A and starting to love C. Analogously, B has lost her taste for marmite and now likes jam instead. It’s just the way things are; reason has nothing to do with it. If you are starting to think that whether there is love should be a matter of weighing and assessing the
matter rationally, then, it may be argued, the love has already died, or is at least on shaky ground. But now that B has declared that the love for A has ceased, A starts, perhaps unsurprisingly, to take a different view of love; now it is the kind of thing that A thinks can and should be influenced by argument, in particular arguments presented to B.

He may start to give reasons why he, A, is a more worthy object of love than C. This may have both a subjective or particular aspect (A is a better object of love for B because of the kind of person B is) and an objective or general aspect (A has the kind of qualities that make him on most counts a more likely object of love than C). He may say that C does not deserve B’s love. The strange thing is that B may agree with everything A says, but say that, nevertheless, it is just a fact that she has fallen in love with C - she cannot help it. She can see the weight of the arguments about C, but they make no difference even if she thinks that they should. Again, this suggests that we are back with love as a non-rational event. This leaves A looking like someone arguing with a tree that is crashing towards his head and saying that there are good reasons why it should not fall on him, rather than the alternative of getting out of the way. And in fact, that is what we surely tend to learn in life: when it comes to persuading someone to love you by giving reasons why they should, or why they should love you rather than someone else, one is wasting one’s breath. If it hasn’t happened, it probably isn’t going to; if it’s gone, it isn’t going to come back; or at least arguments are not going to make a difference either way. In fact, that one is presenting persuasive arguments at all, or thinking of doing so, is probably a sign that the game is up, and to save oneself more pain, one should simply walk away. Either the other person loves you or they do not - nothing you say in the way of pointing out why they should love you is going to make any difference. The mere fact that one has started on the game of reasons may be taken as proof by some that love has disappeared, certainly if the love is seen to hang on the force of those reasons.

Of course, this does not preclude entirely giving reasons as to why someone should love you. It’s just a matter of not being deluded, on one view of love, into thinking that whether they do love you or not depends on those reasons. The reasons are a kind of epiphenomena to love; perhaps, in certain circumstances, even a kind of joke; not to be taken too seriously. On one view, reasons as epiphenomena play little or not part in our coming to love someone; rather the reasons are generated as a consequence of our coming to love someone. People often give reasons as to why the lover should love them - but in the end, what they conclude is that whether they do or do not love them is not a result of what may or may not be indicated by those reasons. We tend to be a bit wary of getting started on giving reasons at all as to why another person should love us, perhaps because the mere fact of doing so may be taken as an indicator that something is wrong, and that in having to resort to reasons the love of the other is not what it should be and may be in terminal decline. Connecting love to reasons is a door many people open with caution, as once opened there is a tendency to think that whatever is
going on between the two people is no longer true love, and the love has gone wrong. Quite often the door will be opened out of frustration, with both parties knowing that that is not what really matters as far as the existence of love is concerned. Moreover, once the parties convince one another that perhaps reasons are relevant, reasons can, as they could not before, be presented as to why one should not love the other - the reason-giving works dangerously both ways for the one who wishes to present reasons as to why the other should love them. If reasons are still seen as beside the point, this danger cannot arise; the wall of love as a non-rational event blocks them.

III.

So, where do these reflections leave us with our two initial issues, that of the normativity of love and that of its reasonableness? They suggest that the conceptual content of love, in certain applications, is inherently paradoxical. The phenomenology of love in our lives, I think, reveals this. Many people, I would suggest, think in a contradictory way about love at least some of the time. There may be nothing wrong with this. However, part of the problem in admitting this, or getting people to admit it - apart from the fact that people resent being accused of thinking in a contradictory manner - is that much often hangs upon the presence or not of love in our lives. The very act of coming to terms with the idea that the way we are thinking about love is paradoxical to instances where the existence of love matters to us - as opposed to thinking about it in the abstract for the sake of, say, a philosophy article - risks destroying the love that we value by the mere act of applied analysis. We tend to shy away from applying the analysis when it gets personal. Look at it too closely, and thereby reveal the paradoxes involved in love, and love fails to work its magic. Many loving relationships, I suggest, involve a suspension of disbelief, useful fictions - do not think about it too hard, do not take it apart to see what is really going on, and one will find that it works. Starting to analyse in detail the rational justification of one’s love, and the love itself evaporates under one’s nose in the very act of analysis.

An analogy here might be the way we experience art. If you start to analyse art objects in a certain way, perhaps saying that a picture is just paint marks on a bit of canvas, or start to say that the music one hears is just vibrations in the air, or the play one is watching is just people pretending to be other than they are, the experience and value of the artwork evaporates. Love too involves a level of involvement and suspension of disbelief in order to exist for us, and is something we greatly value.

Or perhaps love is like a game (not using this in a pejoratively belittling sense), where once all the rules are made explicit, the game paradoxically falls apart and looks trivial and silly. Similarly it is only if the nature of true love is not delved into too analytically that love works. The game of love is ‘played’, but only works as game if the ‘rules’ are viewed, as most, obliquely. What we often take to be the reasons two people love one another are rather symptoms that they do love one another. For example, their seeming
to ‘get on’ under most circumstances, or finding it easy to talk to each other and make each other laugh. Often what people take as arguments that people should be in love - the way they get on - are signs that they are (or are not) in love, to which the arguments themselves have contributed nothing.

Love is also something that needs to be thought about as existing in the particular. General talk about the conditions under which love arises is often glaringly useless in determining where it will arise; love is quirky like that; we often find it arising just where it should not on general criteria, and not arising just where it should on the same criteria.

To relate this more closely to love itself, consider what we expect from love juxtaposed with a supposed truth that we could if we wished make ourselves question. This is the supposed uniqueness of the loved one. Not many relationships considered loving ones could sustain a searchlight being shone on the denial of this for a sustained length of time. The serious consideration in the presence of the beloved that one might have been just as happy with someone else and loved another with equal fervency, and that it is a mere accident that one happens to end up with the beloved, is at best uncomfortable, and at worse utterly destructive. As with other aspects of love we blinker, even blind, ourselves to the possibility in order to make love work - in order, in fact, for it to exist. We look obliquely at love; looked at directly love dissolves.

The paradox of love is that people like to think it is something that they have some choice over, while at the same time thinking that it is something that overcomes them and others. In order for love to exist and work, they tell themselves these two contradictory things, while ignoring the contradiction. To say to someone ‘I chose to love you’, sounds not only not right, but, in the philosophical sense, ungrammatical; it would also appear aloof and possibly insulting, and suggests in an unwelcome way that the choice could have been different and at any moment might be so. Whereas to say that ‘I couldn’t help myself loving you’ gives the love an appearance of valuelessness, as it looks like an attraction coupled to no cognitive content at all, content that could consider why one loves another; rather it puts it on the same level as a liking for, or one might say a love of, cheese.

The first issue of normativity in respect of love is that people do not like to think of love as something they can coolly argue themselves by rational steps into or out of, and yet lovers often find themselves presenting arguments to each other over why the other should or should not love them (or should or should not love a rival). On the second issue of reasonableness, we seem similarly conflicted. Few of us would ideally opt for someone loving us in a moderate non-intense and considered way, even if we suppose arguments to be applicable with love qualifying as a normative matter. Love seems, if anything, to be a chance to do something unreasonable; something that is, in its fullest and most powerful form, maybe against reason or an escape from the dry moderate
dictates of the reasonable. We talk of being ‘swept up by love’, of ‘falling head over heels’ in love, or in flowery terms of our ‘hearts being captured’, and not of love as something weighed and considered. Note how often love gets referred to the heart not to the brain - to something instinctive and visceral, not to the seat of cognition. This could be dismissed as fanciful romanticism; but an honest view of the phenomenology of our experience of love and how we conduct ourselves in respect of love, suggests otherwise. People may, it is sometimes said, be surprised by love. ‘It’s just something that I found happening to me, loving you’ it may be said, ‘not something I planned or considered, let alone rationally debated with myself or others’. And yet, when it suits us we all of a sudden think that reasons are relevant, and can be called upon to determine whether it is reasonable to love someone or be loved back; to determine whether the love should exist.

A conclusion one may draw from this is that there is a lack of authenticity - or, more blatantly put, a lack of honesty - in our approach to love. But if love is something we want in our lives - this in itself may be something we may take steps to choose or choose to avoid - then perhaps inauthenticity cannot be helped and may be considered a price worth paying. By this I mean that complete analytical honesty about love would destroy the things analysed, especially when that analysis is personal. So, we avert our eyes. We love, and metaphorically (perhaps sometimes literally) put fingers on our ears and go ‘la la’, so reasons cannot even arise for us. We want love to take us over, and we want the other to love us the same way. We want love to flow instinctively and easily either way as part of the give and take of a relationship, nourished by reciprocal sympathy and empathy, as well as intense mutual interest and care, which in turn gives rise to an acute anticipation of and attention to each other’s needs and wants. Of course we cannot admit too openly and earnestly that as an explicit meta-strategy we are averting our eyes from any analysis, for then the game would be up, and we would start to consider what it is we are averting our eyes from, which would itself start the destruction of love. Reason sullies love. We do all this because that is the way love works and love is something we want.

If we sit down and take apart the reasons why two people love one another, our explanation will inevitably be insufficient and inadequate to the task. If we do this in our own case, perhaps whether we voice our thoughts or not, the consequences can be worse, for we are likely to destroy our love. Regardless of what transpires from such an analysis, the mere fact that we are doing it at all may tend to undermine love or show that it is flawed.

IV.

Is love normative? Can one make a mistake in love? This second question is ambiguous. It conflates two matters that need to be carefully distinguished, otherwise we are likely to jump to the wrong conclusion. The two matters are: making a mistake
that one loves someone and its being a mistake to love someone. The first looks strongly like a non-rational non-normative matter on one view. The second however is certainly not; it makes perfect sense to say that the consequence of one’s loving someone is a mistake in that it, say, gives one an unhappy life. When people talk of love itself being normative, one suspects that they sometimes mean the latter and not the former kind of mistake here. Rather the same applies to sex. It is one thing to say that the sexual act itself is a moral matter - although many would say that it is an amoral matter - quite another to say that the consequences of sex may be seen as a moral matter, in the broad sense of the effect it may have on people’s lives - people may in the wrong circumstances find themselves psychologically confused, damaged, and unhappy because of having had sex. What often happens is that the latter reasonable claim that the consequences matter morally (and pragmatically) is illegitimately transferred onto the sexual act itself.

However, things might not be quite as simple as this in the case of love. Two things may suggest that love itself is normative. One is the relevance of false information about the object of one’s love, and the other is the importance of a lack of self-knowledge.14

It might be reasonable to say that one does not love A because A is not in fact as one thinks he is. What one loves is in fact an appearance. Not A, but A*. It is true that one loves the appearance of A, that is A*, but not true that one really loves A, because A is not as he appears. It is still true to say that one cannot be mistaken in loving how A appears to you; but it is false to say that one loves A, that is, A as he really is. However, that one loves the appearance of A, namely A*, still looks like something non-normative, and not something one can be mistaken about. Rather one is mistaken that A* is A.

The other matter is self-knowledge: may one be sure the feeling (used in a broad sense), one is experiencing, or the attitude one has towards A, is love? What suggests that one cannot be sure is that one may later on say that one understands now that what one once felt was not love, but some other feeling one did not know how to distinguish from love at the time. We misidentified what we were experiencing. It may after all be the first time one has had that kind of feeling or experience, and so one has nothing to compare it with and use to recognise it; only time and experience can lead us to get some grip on whether it is truly love that we feel in relation to another. We may say later that it may have felt like love, but it was not. Of course this thought is often a psychological device in the form of a story one tells oneself, in order to make a separation from the person one loves less painful; if one can convince oneself that one never really loved A, but rather it was a mere shallow infatuation or lust, then in separating from A one is giving up, or one might say, losing, far less - indeed perhaps getting rid of something that one is better off without.
This way of considering things, however, is to be setting about viewing love in others in the third-person. If we find ourselves analysing whether we are in love, or sitting down with another to look at the arguments as to whether she is in love with us, the chances are, unless it is an ironic game, that we are not in love. The mere fact of setting about the analysis indicates, one might say, that regardless of the results, the love has gone or is under threat of going.

V.

Perhaps the safest conclusion we may draw about love is as follows, and it is one that enables us to have a working concept of love in our lives and yet embraces the paradoxical conceptual content of love. What is proposed is a dipolar as if theory of love. In order for love to work - for it to exist and function between two people - love is treated as if it is not normative (is non-rational), and as if the constraints of reasonableness are inappropriate. Yet on other occasions, to third parties or when love goes wrong, normativity and reasonableness may both seem correct and appropriate. What we do is that we shift our view of love depending on circumstances, and the dipolar as if treatment allows us to do this. It allows us to remain uncommitted, as the consequences of an astute and earnest analysis would not, to specifying a singular true nature for love. The dipolar as if treatment of love allows us accommodate the apparent contradiction of love being both normative and non-rational; it allows us to deal in love - have love in our lives - even though it involved a practical contradiction. We can hold the two attitudes to love in our head, and manifest it in our actions, because each is treat as if it were so. When things are going well, we treat love as if it were a non-rational force that possesses us. When things go badly, we treat love as if it were, and should be, subject to the kind of case for and against that argument and evidence would present us with. Of course the interesting thing is, that once you start presenting such a case, this may itself be evidence that the love is under threat of disappearing. That love is both normative and appropriately subject to thoughts of reasonableness and is an ineluctable non-rational fact forming a relation with another, seems both accepted and impossible. It is the treatment as if that saves love from this ultimate paradox, indeed contradiction, of being thought of as both a normative matter, and one subject to the constraints of reasonableness, and also a relation that is fundamentally non-rational in its nature. As the occasion arises we treat love as if it were normative and rightly subject to thoughts of reasonableness or as if it were a non-rational event that simply happens or fails to happen. In this way love can function in our lives even when our conception of it is inherently contradictory.

References


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1 One matter needs to be clarified at the opening for fear it will become a red herring. When speaking of love it is almost impossible not to use a phrase such as ‘the feeling of love’, or ‘feeling love for’. Nothing hangs upon this for the purposes of this essay. It is not supposed from this usage that love is a sensation like a pain, although it may be accompanied by sensations. Love, whatever else it is, is not a mere sensation, although the acuity of having it leads us to draw upon sensation language in trying to give an account of the emotions it may produce in us. ‘When you stopped loving me it was like a dagger through the heart’, is designed to express the distress and confusion caused. This does not prevent love being thought of as having a visceral element. But it cannot be only that.

Wittgenstein both reveals the possibly misleading nature of seeming to talk about love as a feeling and highlights that love should not be identified with mere feeling. Indeed, he virtually contradicts himself, or
would do if he intended anything to hang upon use of love in the phrase ‘Could someone have a feeling of ardent love or hope for the space of a second - no matter what preceded or follow this second?’ (Philosophical Investigations §583). But it turns out that it is precisely his point in that passage to show that love is not a sensation, and is contrasted with sensation. For he says: ‘Love is not a feeling. Love is put to the test, pain is not.’ (Zettel, §504). His point here is that love is something whose genuine existence can only be known by certain events considered over time. This is compatible with both a normative and a non-rational view of love.

2 One difference is notable but also irrelevant to what constitutes love, namely that we are presented with our family member to love in way in which is not true in the case of lovers. Certain people simply fill the slots designated by their role as family members, whereas the role of lover is an open vacancy with an indefinite number of people who might or might not play that role. Indeed, it need never be played at all. But as has been suggested this difference does not require a fundamental variation in how we view the love involved or what we expect from it.

3 Literally this refers to a pair of electric charges or magnetic poles, of equal magnitude but of opposite sign or polarity, separated by a small distance. Non-literally it refers here to a sort of practical contradiction, whereby

4 Philosophy of As If (Philosophie des Als Ob) 1924. The full title is, The Philosophy of ‘As If’: A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind.

5 Non-British readers may know the similar spreads, Vegemite and Swiss Cenovis.

6 D. G. C. MacNabb, David Hume, p.6. The rest of the passage (Ibid, p.6) goes on: ‘Sceptical arguments therefore may be valid against arguments proposed to justify our trust in our senses, memory and the lessons of experience, but they are not valid against that trust itself, which is based on natural instincts indispensable to our survival. Instinct prevails against argument; “nature by an… uncontrollable necessity has determined us to judge as well as to breathe and feel”’.

7 There is an issue here, helpfully noted by a character in Martin Amis’ novel The Pregnant Widow p.197, who is commenting on Jane Austin’s Emma, as to whether love may be subconscious. Emma Woodhouse realised that she was in love with Mr Knightley only after an incident where he points out how cruel her treatment is of another character. In other words, she was in love, but she wasn’t aware of it. But this still supports the notion of love as a non-rational matter, for it is not a relevant argument about whether she loves Mr Knightley, or not, that brings it about the Emma becomes aware of her love for Mr Knightley, but a further incident that brings to her attention something that already existed; and that being subconscious was certainly not the consequence of an argument. Rather it’s like looking in a mirror one day and realising, given the ensemble of clothing I am wearing, that I seem to like green rather a lot, having given little thought to the colours I dress in prior to that.

8 It is not explicitly put this way by Sartre.

9 Falling is acting in accord with a rule or law - that of gravity. Stopping at a red traffic light is following a rule or law - that on one stops at traffic signals when showing that colour. Persons, I would argue, are identified as those who can follow a rule, and not merely act in accord with it. It is for this reason that we hold persons responsible for their actions, unlike say dogs, and can properly be said where necessary to punish them, as opposed to retraining or treating them. We say ‘Bad dog’, but we do not really mean it.

10 Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, pp 366-369.
Not for nothing is it said that ‘love is blind’ - this, it may be argued, points to its detachment from reason, and indeed reasonableness.

Again, see Hans Vaihinger, *Philosophy As If*.


There is a question as to whether love need be grounded in any perception of the value of an object at all. On this, Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p.67 holds that appreciating the value of an object is not essential to love; love grounds reasons, rather than the other way around. The view of Gabriele Taylor, ‘Love’, p. 169, does not contradict this, but rather merely claims that love always has an object, that is, love is intentional.

One might call this a kind of conceptual double-aspect theory of love; but I think ‘dipolar as if’ theory is to be preferred. The proposal is, in any case, it should be emphasised, conceptual - about the way the concept functions, not a double-aspect metaphysical claim.

This line may appear to make marriage puzzling. And in many ways, it is. Some kind of inauthenticity is lurking. Marriage seems to involve promising something that cannot be promised or honestly asserted: that one will never stop loving someone and that they are the only person one could love. Some of this may be explained by the religious origins of marriage, whereby it is ‘made in heaven’ and determined categorically by God. This can have the consequence that people attempt to maintain marriages even when it is obvious that in reality all love has disappeared; the effort of believing that one should persist in such a situation because it is ordained often results tremendous psychological strain on the participants as they think they have to make the marriage work regardless. While there is undoubtedly an element of hope triumphing over experience in taking the marriage vows, there is also the belief that the performative practice or act of taking the vows will itself solidify and affirm the love and be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The affirmation of marriage vows manifest precisely the *as if* nature of our attitude to love argued for here, I suggest. Obviously much more could be said about all this.