One variety of love is familiar in everyday life and qualifies in every reasonable sense as a reactive attitude. ‘Reactive love’ is paradigmatically (a) an affectionate attachment to another person, (b) appropriately felt as a non-self-interested response to particular kinds of morally laudable features of character expressed by the loved one in interaction with the lover, and (c) paradigmatically manifested in certain kinds of acts of goodwill and characteristic affective, desiderative and other motivational responses (including other-regarding concern and a desire to be with the beloved). ‘Virtues of intimacy’ as expressed in interaction with the lover are agent-relative reasons for reactive love, and like other reactive attitudes, reactive love generates reasons in its own right. Within a broad conception of the virtues, reactive love sheds light on the reactive attitudes more generally.

Mrs Jennings ... with a kindness of heart which made Elinor really love her, declared her resolution of not stirring from Cleveland as long as Marianne remained ill, and of endeavouring, by her own attentive care, to supply to her the place of the mother she had taken her from.

Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility

One variety of love, P.F. Strawson repeatedly says, clearly qualifies as a reactive attitude.¹ Yet despite the importance of Strawson’s seminal essay, neither philosophers interested in the reactive attitudes nor those interested in friendship or love have taken this remark particularly seriously. We think this a significant mistake.

The reactive attitudes are, in the first instance, forms of interpersonally directed emotional response to what Strawson calls ‘good will’ and ‘ill will’. These terms mark a broad, pre-theoretical conception of the moral which includes not only rights, obligations and constraints, but also an expansive conception of the virtues and related interpersonally significant laudable qualities, the realm of Hume’s moral theory and Bernard Williams’ ‘sphere of the ethical’.² Central strands of ordinary thought suggest that Strawson

¹ P.F. Strawson, ‘Freedom and Resentment’, Proceedings of the British Academy, 48 (1962), pp. 1–25, also now available as open source text at http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ball0888/oxfordopen/resentment.htm. Strawson says that he has specifically in mind ‘the sort of love that two adults can sometimes be said to feel, reciprocally, for each other’ (p. 7).

was right to place love in this realm. People do in fact proceed as if love is an appropriate response to particular sorts of morally significant character traits such as generosity and interpersonal warmth, forthrightness and sincerity, compassion, considerateness, steadfastness and loyalty. Nothing could be more familiar, for instance, than the ways in which starry-eyed lovers extol their beloved’s good qualities. Likewise, a familiar refrain at the demise of a relationship is that the former beloved was not worth it, did not deserve the love, because the ex was a jerk, or a creep, or a selfish, self-involved, inconsiderate good-for-nothing. Highlighting such failings can register as an appropriate way to help a friend to get through a certain stage of heartbreak. Why would that be so, if love were not centrally a reaction to perceived morally significant traits of the love-object? Moreover, in these instances a person’s morally significant traits figure as reasons for loving or for ceasing to love, and in this second similarity to the reactive attitudes, too, it seems that there is something to Strawson’s thought.

The suggestion that love is a reactive attitude shares a certain similarity with what has been termed the ‘quality view’, the idea that love is properly grounded in non-relational features of the beloved. Niko Kolodny has objected that were love grounded in features of the beloved’s good conduct or character, this would imply ‘absurdly, that in so far as one’s love for (say) Jane is responsive to reasons, it will accept any relevantly similar person as a replacement’. But as we shall argue, once love is treated as a reactive attitude, this objection does not get off the ground. An account of love as a reactive attitude would also avoid some of the more startling features of prominent contemporary proposals by Frankfurt, Velleman and Kolodny. It would not require seeing love as a source of reasons without being a response to reasons (Frankfurt), treating it as a moral emotion grounded in the other’s mere Kantian moral personhood as such (Velleman), or regarding the relationship itself as the reason for love, or what is primarily valued in love (Kolodny).

First, though, a ground-clearing point. People love their pets, their friends, their spouses, themselves, their newborn children, their teenage children, and (often) the adults they become; as adults, people love their parents (or not), and certain Christian and other religious ideals involve the aspiration to love everyone. Why insist that there must be some single set of principles or conditions in the light of which all these attitudes qualify as love? The possibility we intend to explore is that one variety of love is

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reactive in Strawson’s sense, a variety best approached not through necessary and sufficient conditions, but as a family of central cases with deviations from them. (It is a separate question, which we shall address only glancingly, how this variety of love relates to others.) The relation between the central cases and the deviations reveal reactive love as one utterly familiar variety of love.

I. WHAT KIND OF LOVE?

Here is one such central case, from Jane Austen’s Sense and Sensibility. Early in the novel (ch. 4), Elinor, the voice of ‘sense’, of cautious, seasoned maturity, speaks to her sister Marianne thus of her beloved Edward:

Of his sense and his goodness ... no one can, I think, be in doubt, who has seen him often enough to engage him in unreserved conversation. The excellence of his understanding and his principles can be concealed only by that shyness which too often keeps him silent. You know enough of him to do justice to his solid worth. But of his minuter propensities, as you call them, you have ... been kept more ignorant than myself.... His abilities in every respect improve as much upon acquaintance as his manners and person. At first sight, his address is certainly not striking; and his person can hardly be called handsome, till the expression of his eyes, which are uncommonly good, and the general sweetness of his countenance, is perceived. At present, I know him so well, that I think him really handsome; or, at least, almost so.

At the forefront of this passage are two features of Elinor’s love for Edward: (1) Elinor sees her love for Edward as a response to his good qualities, the grand as well as the ‘minuter’ ones; (2) again, as far as Elinor herself is concerned, her loving appreciation of Edward’s good qualities arises out of her interactions with Edward.

At least at first glance, the most prominent contemporary accounts of love have difficulty in making sense of Elinor’s remarks. On Harry Frankfurt’s account, love is not itself a justified or unjustified response to anything, so Elinor’s love could be a response to Edward’s good qualities only in a purely aetiological sense. But that misses a central theme in her remarks. She opens by saying that she knows enough to ‘do justice’ to Edward’s ‘solid worth’, and her commentary elucidates and extends this remark. She thus treats her warm affectionate response as justified, as ‘doing justice’ to Edward’s character, given what she knows of him.

On David Velleman’s account, love can be a justified response to the goodness of the beloved. But Velleman has something very specific in mind: on his view the appropriate ground of love is just an agent’s capacity for pure practical reason. This capacity can be expressed in good and bad
conduct, virtue and vice. So on Velleman’s view, what justifies Elinor’s love for Edward is something that Edward shares with every other person as such. This is *prima facie* odd, and it is not how Elinor herself presents the matter: what she offers as reasons justifying her love are particular features of Edward’s character (including the ‘minuter’ ones), as opposed to features he shares with every other person.

Niko Kolodny proposes, alternatively, that a person’s *relationship* with another is the appropriate ground for love. But that seems to get things backwards: it is not that Elinor’s reason for loving Edward is that she has a relationship with him (or even a relationship of a certain kind); the relationship is rather the context in which, as Elinor herself says, she has come to ‘know him so well’ as to appreciate how his abilities, manner and person all ‘improve upon acquaintance’.

So what is Elinor trying to convey when she tells her sister that she has ‘come to know Edward so well’ that she now ‘thinks him really handsome’? It is tempting to see only an epistemological lesson here, to the effect that certain qualities, traits of character, are best revealed over the long haul in fairly intimate relations, and that when thus revealed, their moral worth can shine through to one’s perception even of the beloved’s countenance. There is something right in this suggestion: the experience of having one’s perception of another’s beauty (or lack thereof) influenced by perception of their moral qualities is familiar enough. When Elinor speaks of the ‘expression in his eyes’ as a mark of Edward’s handsomeness, her very phrasing makes it clear that some such fusion of aesthetic and moral perspectives is at stake there. The expression in someone’s eyes is not mere metaphor, it is a communicative gesture; to speak of it *is* to speak of how that person interacts with others, and this is a moral matter, one that reveals something about the character of the person behind the eyes.

However, to suggest that Elinor and Edward’s relationship is of mere epistemological relevance, a background condition for adequate insight into his good character, would be wildly distorting. In a variety of interactions with Elinor and her family, Edward displays a touching and admirable combination of attentiveness, consideration, concern for and empathetic understanding of those around him. Suppose, then, the story went like this. Elinor responds to Edward’s good qualities with simple esteem, and out of admiration tells a friend (who has never met him) of the episodes in which his good traits were revealed. In response and still without having met him, Elinor’s friend announces that she has fallen in love with Edward. How easily one can imagine responding ‘You cannot really *love* him, you have never even met him!’. At the least, if anything more than metaphor or exaggeration, it would be immature – a fantasy – for the friend to declare love of Edward
under these circumstances. If this is right, then the significance of the relational context for love cannot merely be that it provides an appropriate evidentiary context for judgements of character.

So what alternative conception of love might make better sense of the familiar experience Jane Austen describes? Here is the possibility we intend to explore.

There is a variety of love that is, in paradigm or central cases, an affectionate attachment to another person, (a) appropriately felt as a non-self-interested response to particular kinds of morally laudable features of character expressed by the loved one in interaction with the lover (and others the lover loves), and (b) paradigmatically manifested in certain kinds of acts of goodwill and characteristic affective, desiderative and other motivational responses (including other-regarding concern and a desire to be with the beloved).

We shall call this variety of love ‘reactive love’. We believe that it is central in loving friendships and romantic contexts, and is distinct from the love parents bear for their young children. Its being moralized, in the manner of all reactive attitudes, is compatible with the familiar ways in which love can be a pleasure and delight.

In the remainder of this section we elaborate and defend each clause of the above characterization of reactive love. §II answers what we take to be the most pressing objections, and §III sets the account within a wider theoretical context regarding the reactive attitudes and the virtues. We work throughout with an inclusive conception of the virtues (and we use this term to cover morally laudable character traits more generally); while our account requires no particular vision of the virtues (say, neo-Aristotelian), §III proposes one possible non-Aristotelian framework and relates it to the reactive attitudes. We close by addressing the standard objection to the ‘quality view’.

It is commonplace that a particular reactive attitude is an appropriate response only to certain morally significant features. Anger, for instance, is typically thought to be an appropriate response to certain kinds of wrongdoing, wrongdoings which have specifically to do with what persons can reasonably demand of one another. Gratitude is canonically taken to be an appropriate response only to those acts which exceed the actor’s obligations to the beneficiary. Shame is traditionally thought an appropriate response not in the first instance to wrongdoing, but to bad traits of character such as perhaps those involving failures to control one’s self-presentation.5

In the case of reactive love, the grounds are certain positive traits of character, as can be seen by comparing the following declarations of love:

(a) I love him for his stalwart kindness and loyalty, courageous thoughtfulness, the captivating way he tells a story, and the expression in his eyes
(b) I love him for repairing my car, bringing me flowers and taking the kids to their grandparents last weekend so that I could rest
(c) I love him for giving me this great big diamond necklace
(d) I love him for his shiny hair and flawless complexion
(e) I love him because he has size 10 feet.

It is difficult to understand (e) in a way that makes it intelligible as a basis for love; ‘size 10 feet’ is not even an aesthetic remark, as ‘flawless complexion’ is. People do, of course, say this sort of thing in jest, but that is precisely the point: it is a joke. Even if (e) is made intelligible, it seems, like (c) and (d), properly the subject of criticism as a basis for love: it is misplaced, inappropriate, superficial, immature, disturbed or perverse. Loving someone for their shiny hair and flawless complexion is both a recognizable form of immaturity and shallow. Loving someone for expensive gift-giving is (at least) superficial. Actually loving someone for size 10 feet is perverse, in the colloquial if not the Augustinian sense.

Why should criticism of love take these forms? The most straightforward answer is that there is a variety of love that is itself a moralized response, and if people present themselves as having this attitude but as responding to something other than another’s good character, their attitude seems shallow, superficial, etc. This is confirmed not only by the fact that (a) above seems entirely appropriate, but also by the ways in which degenerate cases like (c)–(e) commonly pay homage to cases such as (a). So, for instance, there is a well known diamond company which pitches its goods on something like the basis of (c). But even as the ad portrays a woman falling in love because some fellow has just given her a shiny bauble, the voice-over in the background says ‘She’ll know how much you care’. If the voice-over is the point of the matter, the shiny bauble is not the justificatory basis for the love; rather it is the ‘care’ which is purportedly evinced. The idea that ‘care’ should be especially evinced in that way is its own form of moral absurdity, but it is not the same kind of absurdity as is at issue in (c). The second declaration (b) is not obviously too shallow or superficial a basis for reactive love. But suppose the acts mentioned are out of character. One friend says to the other ‘Look, he always puts himself first – I don’t see why you love him so’, to which the other responds ‘I love him because he repaired my car, and brought me flowers, and ...’. The more such acts look out of character, the more they seem insufficient, or the wrong sort of basis.
It is true that it is possible to love someone for interpersonally significant traits which are morally neutral when characterized in the abstract, such as a finely tuned ability to 'get on the wavelength' of others. Here, however, it is important to look at the disposition in its relational context. The ability to get on the same wavelength as others can be used for good, or as a tool for manipulation. When regularly used in the latter way, it is neither laudable nor an appropriate ground for love on the part of those so affected. When it is used in ways that help to facilitate healthy aspects of the relationship, in contrast, it is both laudable and an appropriate ground for love (cf. 'I love him because he is so empathetic' vs 'I love him because he is so manipulative'). The fine moral texture of the deployment of the trait in relation to the lover is thus of central importance.

It might be objected all the same that character traits are not at the right depth to be appropriate grounds for love: people aspire, it might be said, to be loved for something more essential to their individual persons than that. Velleman ('Love as a Moral Emotion', p. 363), for instance, objects:

Matters only get worse if adults start to detail the personal qualities for which we are loved, since these qualities ... feel like accidents rather than our essence. We are like the girl who wants to be loved but not for her yellow hair – and not, we should add, for her mind or her sense of humour either – because she wants to be loved, as she puts it, 'for myself alone'.

But the girl who (sensibly enough) does not want to be loved for her yellow hair might well (again sensibly enough) wish to be loved by her friends for her loyalty and kindness. The latter may be, in some sense, 'accidental' features of what the girl is like, but unspecified talk of 'accidents' is misleading in this context. The aspiration to be a good friend and the character traits of which it is a part are attributable to the yellow-haired girl in the sense that they are appropriate objects of her moral responsibility: she can be appropriately praised or blamed for them. This gives a familiar sense in which the girl who is loved for her character is loved for herself alone.

Reactive love, then, is paradigmatically grounded in features of the beloved's character, rather than in particular actions or anything even less connected with 'who the person is'. Indeed, the proper grounds of reactive love are a subset of praiseworthy traits – those laudable traits that are especially salient in the context of fairly intimate relationships. For instance, in Sense and Sensibility, Colonel Brandon's good character is shown (in part) through his attentiveness to both Marianne and her sister Elinor while Marianne suffers through a long and potentially deadly illness. This is precisely the sort of character trait that would be relevant to anyone in an intimate (familial, friendly, marital) relationship with the Colonel. Austen does not, in contrast, describe the Colonel in ways that illustrate, say, a passion for
Instead of a chapter devoted to the Colonel's care and thoughtfulness during Marianne's illness, suppose Austen had offered his raising great funds in public benefits to serve the poor. Noble indeed, but not the sort of thing to suggest that Marianne's loving regard ought to shift towards him rather than Willoughby.

This feature of love is illustrated by degenerate cases as well, precisely in so far as they are recognized as degenerate cases. In the musical *Hair*, for instance, a woman falls in love and has a child with a peace activist. The fellow entirely neglects them both, leaving them desperate for housing and food. When confronted, he raises his hand dismissively, and the mother sings in response 'How can people be so heartless? ... especially people, who care about strangers, who care about evil and social injustice? Do you only care about the bleeding ground? How about a needing friend?'. Here is someone who has made the mistake of founding her love on a laudable aspect of character that as a matter of fact has no connection with good conduct as partner or father. Her lament pays tribute to the misdirected nature of her love, for the heartbroken complaint only makes sense if she thinks her beloved’s passion for social justice should yield good conduct as lover and parent.

While certain features of character are thus the paradigm grounds for reactive love, it is the persons themselves who are objects of the attitude. Reactive attitudes vary enormously on this score. Some, like love and shame, are canonically person-focused. Others are, or can be, trait-focused. One can be contemptuous, for instance, of some aspect of people’s characters – say, their ill treatment of students, or their philandering ways – while at the same time appreciating other aspects of their characters. Still others, such as guilt, are canonically action-focused. Just as reactive attitudes vary in their objects, so too they vary in whether their appropriate objects are the same as their grounds. The fact that on our account these two come apart in the case of love does not make love unique. The same is true, for instance, of anger and gratitude. You may be angry about something a person has done; the action is the ground for anger. But you are angry at the person; the person is the object of the attitude.

As with many other reactive attitudes, reactive love also requires the right relational context. It is crucial to the plot of *Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, that during her illness Colonel Brandon cares for Marianne herself and Marianne’s loved ones (most notably Elinor). Brandon might have been shown to have the same set of intimate virtues through interactions with characters not intimately connected with Marianne, but were Marianne
then apprised of his good conduct by a third party (and were there no other appropriate relational context), you would expect her to respond with admiration, not love. That Brandon’s laudable qualities are exhibited in ways directed towards Marianne and those she loves is key to making sense of her growing love for him. In Strawson’s terms, then, love is in the first instance a participant attitude.

The relationship here is neither the ground nor the object of reactive love. Rather, it establishes the context within which the beloved’s laudable character can become an appropriate ground for love. First, just as it would be inappropriate for a complete stranger, not in appropriate interaction with or appropriately related to any of the parties, to feel gratified by someone’s success, so too it would be inappropriate for a complete stranger to love (rather than merely admire) Edward for his goodness. There must be an appropriate relational context in order for love to be an appropriate response at all. Secondly, in the central case it is the fact that the beloved’s laudable qualities of character are displayed in ways directed towards the lover that makes those qualities the proper grounds for the lover’s response. This is not to say that the appropriate ground for love is the relational fact that the beloved’s virtuous traits have been expressed in a way directed towards the lover. What matters here are character traits, not discrete acts. The relational context in which the traits are expressed, and their expression in that context, thus provide the background against which the good traits become an agent-relative reason for love. It is these features of love that lie behind Elinor’s invocation of her relationship with Edward in the context of her description of his good traits. Her relationship to and interactions with him make love an appropriate response to the goodness he has displayed, where otherwise only admiration, not love, would fully make sense.

This structure is shared by other attitudes which take dispositions or traits as their grounds. Suppose I am gratified by Amy’s willingness to laugh uninhibitedly at my jokes. Without an appropriate relational context, this reaction would be thoroughly inappropriate; it would be bizarre for a total stranger to feel gratified on this account, since not just anyone is appropriately placed to feel gratified by Amy’s willingness to laugh at my jokes. Moreover, being gratified would be inappropriate unless this willingness were somehow expressed or manifested in an appropriate relational context. Suppose I tell some jokes. Amy does not laugh. A mutual friend who knows her well says ‘Oh, don’t feel disappointed. She’s completely willing to laugh with delight at your jokes, I have no doubt about that. She likes you and thinks you’re funny! She just didn’t hear you – the bar is too noisy.’ If I believe this, I may well feel mollified. But gratified? Certainly not, even if I am now fully convinced that she would be willing to laugh with delight at
my jokes if she heard them. But if she does laugh, in contrast, then I am
gratified by her willingness to laugh at my jokes; the willingness is the reason
for my feeling gratified, but it is so only given that it is relationally expressed.
(I may also be gratified by her laughing, but that is a separate matter.) This
example, like reactive love, is a member of a broader family of cases. Suppose you know Avery is a sexist pig. You are outraged. Then Avery
begins acting in sexist ways towards you. Now you are appropriately out-
raged by Avery’s sexism – not just Avery’s acts – in an entirely different way.
The relationally directed expression of the disposition makes different atti-
tudes towards Avery appropriate on account of the disposition. In the
structure of its grounds, then, reactive love displays a pattern that shows up
elsewhere as well. The disposition is a good reason for the attitude only in so
far as it has been relationally expressed (to the relevant person).

Another familiar structural pattern appears in reactive love’s affective and
motivational upshots. No particular reactive attitude can be understood in
isolation from its links to characteristic desires, aims, motivations and
affective responses. One of the most familiar indices of the depth of one’s
love is one’s other-regarding concern for the beloved. Mere well-wishing will
not do here; love gives reason to wish loved ones well at one’s own expense.
This is shown, for instance, in the ways in which people are criticized when
they claim to love but appear unwilling to sacrifice anything for their loved
ones: they are called selfish, shallow or juvenile, and it may be said that they
do not ‘really’ love. Indeed, in the worst case, a person who has none of the
relevant desires, motivations or affective responses may be said not to love at
all. Suppose George says that he loves his wife but feels no desire whatsoever
to help her when she is in need. When queried about how this squares with
his avowals of love, he explains that he is ‘just not that kind of person’. This
is not intelligible as an instance of love: all other things being equal, he will
not be believed. To render the case intelligible, an explanation is needed of
why, despite George’s love, he feels no such motivations – an explanation
pitched in terms of the details of the relationship, its history, the wife’s
recent behaviour and the like. If too much goes missing without the right
sort of explanation of its absence, one simply cannot make sense of the case
as love. This is not to say that any of the particular individual motivations in
question are necessary conditions of reactive love; what love requires varies
enormously from case to case, and the requirements themselves are
defeasible in ways varying with the details of the case.

What comes into view here is a complex constellation of (1) conduct in
which the person who loves has prima facie reason to engage, (2) motives,
desires and the like, expressive of love, (3) motivations, desires and affective
responses the absence of which constitutes prima facie grounds for criticism,
and (4) ceteris paribus, defeasible necessary conditions of love. For mature adults, this constellation can be made sense of in terms of the human constitution and the fact that love gives people reasons. There is an utterly familiar sense, for instance, in which loving people gives me reason to weep when they die: that I loved someone does not merely explain my weeping at their loss, it justifies my tears. Given how people are constituted and the fact that my love gives me reason to feel sorrow at the loss, those tears are a perfectly appropriate expression of my love. If someone does not cry at the loss of a loved one, you wonder why not, and if there really does not seem to be anything that would account for the absence of tears, you become dubious and critical of the claim to have loved. It is consequently unsurprising that in such circumstances, weeping is a defeasible requirement of love. The shift here from normative expectations and standards for criticism to conditions for possession of the attitude is familiar. If a kind is demarcated by standards of evaluation, something can be of that kind while failing to meet the standards, but if it is too far off then it is no longer counted as an instance of the kind at all.

Similar points apply to the desire to be with the beloved. In any given case the appropriate shape of this desire varies along multiple dimensions. Most obviously, it varies with the relationship at issue: spouses appropriately desire to be with each other in ways that would be inappropriate for, say, an aunt and nephew. But the inflection of this desire can also appropriately vary without variation in role or relationship type: friends, for instance, commonly desire to be together in ways that are somewhat peculiar to their particular friendship. A desire to be with someone may appropriately fade into the background at some points, or may be overridden by conflict, distraction, or concerns originating elsewhere in one’s life. For all this variation, however, there are key markers of the relevant kind of desire: taking joy in the beloved’s company, being glad to hear from the beloved, feeling a loss at the beloved’s absence, taking time and effort to be with the beloved, having a sense that it is important that the beloved is a part of one’s life, etc. Here too there is a constellation of reasons, characteristic forms of expression, defeasible necessary conditions, and grounds for criticism. If you were told that Jane loves her aunt but takes no joy in her company, is not happy to see her, has no intention now or in the future of visiting her, etc., you would appropriately wonder why, in spite of loving her, all this is so. In the absence of some such explanation (and without some other compensating indications), you would appropriately doubt the correctness or depth of her avowal of love.

There is likewise a normative expectation that reactive love will be disinterested, in the standard eighteenth-century sense. One expects people
who avow love to wish loved ones well for their own sake, not for the sake of the benefits that will or might accrue. Moreover, one expects the lover to desire to be with the loved one in a fashion not reducible to the expectation of any benefits to be gained thereby. This feature of love lies behind the kind of criticism which is involved in pointed references to a ‘trophy wife’ or a ‘boy-toy’. The lover is expected to value the beloved not on account of benefits that might accrue from the beloved’s good traits, but on account of the good traits themselves as revealed in the beloved’s interactions with the lover. (This is perfectly compatible with feeling fortunate and grateful for the ways in which one is treated well.) The dividing line between a love which is disinterested in this respect and one which is not depends upon differences in the ways in which avowed lovers treat the significance of the fact that they are the beneficiaries of the beloved’s good traits. These differences are a theme in Natalie Merchant’s song ‘Jealousy’:

Is she fine, so well bred
The perfect girl, a social deb?
And is she the sort, you’ve always thought,
Could make you what you’re not?

The character criticized here values his beloved on account of what she can do for him – indeed, on what she can make him. An obvious contrast here is Elinor’s expression of love for Edward, quoted above. Elinor values Edward’s good qualities as expressed in interaction with her and her family, but her affection is not a form of excited anticipation of benefitting by being with him. Of course, it is none the less a pleasure and a joy.

II. REASONS FOR LOVE

As a reactive attitude, love is an appropriate reaction to reasons, to certain virtuous traits of character manifested in interaction with the lover, and also a source of reasons to desire, act and feel in ways expressive of love. This combination may give rise to several important objections.

Harry Frankfurt (p. 37) agrees that ‘love is itself, for the lover, a source of reasons. It creates the reasons by which his acts of loving concern and devotion are inspired.’ But Frankfurt also holds (p. 38) that love is paradigmatically not a response to reasons. His view might lead one to wonder how a view like ours could possibly be right. How could love be an independent source of reasons – a source of reasons you would not have but for the fact that you love – if we are right that love is also grounded in reasons: would not the reasons sufficient for love ipso facto be sufficient reasons for whatever love gives reason for?
No. A parallel situation is one in which some form of blame is warranted, though no particular form is required. Someone who reacts with anger thereby has reason to do things which someone who reacts with contempt does not have. Similarly, there can be conditions that warrant love without requiring it (in the usual case, even exceptionally kind behaviour does not require love in particular as a response), and if one does love in those circumstances, one’s love gives one reasons that go beyond the reasons provided by the conditions that warranted the love. The fact that Mike consistently treats me kindly may give me some reason to take a measure of regard for his welfare. But this reason does not support anything remotely as deep and abiding as the commitment to another’s welfare which is given to me by love. More vividly still, Mike’s kindness does not by itself give me much of a reason to want to be with him, save that it would benefit me to do so. But if I come to love him, it is part and parcel of my love that (barring some defeating reason) I want to be with him quite aside from any benefit I might thereby gain. My dear ones’ relationally expressed good character warrants my love for them, but their good character does not by itself give me any disinterested reason to be with them or care for their welfare – that reason is given by the fact that I love them. So to this extent we agree with Frankfurt: love is an independent source of reasons, and it is not paradigmatically a response to reasons that require it. But this does not mean that love cannot be grounded in reasons. (In this way, our view is perfectly compatible with what truth there is in the bromide ‘Love is a gift’.)

Reflection on this point might give rise to a second important objection to our view. As love is gradually born, lovers generally respond not just to relationally expressed good character, but also to features that do not appear to be morally significant: aesthetic features, sexual attractiveness, shared interests, cultural commonalities, and the like. These features help to render the loving response intelligible. Why are these then not also reasons for love – with the result that our account is over-moralistic?

First, in some of these cases the relevant traits do constitute laudable moral qualities in situ. There is, for instance, a kind of sensitivity to others and their interests which sometimes justifies saying ‘He really understands me’. In the context of a developing intimate relationship, this trait can constitute a virtue. (If the sensitivity is consistently deployed in objectionable ways, moreover, it is not a virtue and ceases to be recognizable as an appropriate ground for love.) A more striking case is sexual attractiveness. An alluring walk or flirtatious speech can be a manifestation of good character when appropriately deployed in the context of a developing romantic relationship, where of course an appropriate expression of love is sexual activity. The relationship between sexual attractiveness/attraction
and moral features is more nuanced than is often supposed. Even Elinor’s
comment that Edward has come to look to her ‘really handsome, or ...’
almost so’ explicitly presents his attractiveness to her as an outgrowth of his
moral qualities.

It can be tempting to think that morally neutral traits can likewise provide
good reasons for love. For instance, one partner in a long-time friendship
might say he loves his friend because of ‘the way he plays music with me’.
But what is being gestured at here? Suppose two session musicians play
together on strictly professional terms day in and day out for many years.
They may take pleasure in the music they have made together. But love
may be a thoroughly inappropriate response in the context of their
relationship. In contrast, the friend who calls attention to ‘the way they play
music together’ is calling attention to such things as the responsiveness of the
other to subtleties of tone and mood, his considerateness in sharing space for
soloing, the playfulness and delight with which musical jokes are shared, re-
membered and recast over time, the kind of interactions in which the music-
making is enmeshed, and the like. In calling attention to such features, the
friend is calling attention to the fine texture of their interactions and to
the dispositions that give those interactions their special satisfaction. On the
ordinary, broad conception of the moral with which we are working here,
those are morally significant traits.6

Once such morally significant elements are factored out, what is left over
are not good reasons for love, as is readily recognized in ordinary moral
thinking. It is, for instance, a familiar form of confused immaturity to take as
a reason for love a physical allure that is independent of the person’s values
and laudable ways of interacting with others. As for other such factors,
suppose a teenager explains her love thus: ‘He has so much in common with
me, we like Twilight, we both worship Lady Gaga, he knows so much, he is
captain of the swimming team ...’. She does love. But taken at face value,
those are not good reasons to love. It would be similarly off-key for a session
musician to cite excellent musicianship by itself as a ground for loving a
fellow guitarist.

Nevertheless, these sorts of factors do play an important role both psycho-
logically and normatively. Psychologically, they ease the development of
successful love relationships. Normatively, their complete absence can be a
defeating condition for the appropriate establishment of a love relation. For
instance, given the central role of sexuality in the appropriate expression of
romantic love, if one finds Georgie completely sexually unappealing, and
one does not see how things could be otherwise, then one should not enter

6 We are grateful to Dick Moran for raising the issue addressed in this paragraph.
into a romantic love relationship with Georgie, regardless of what reasons there might otherwise be for love.

Even so, it might be wondered whether one is doing something objectionable – responding to the wrong things – if one loves John but not Jane, when accidents of, e.g., John’s history, grammar, education and taste make it psychologically easier to love him than to love her. No. As we have argued, the reasons to love are generally warranting reasons, not requiring reasons. Consequently one cannot be ipso facto doing something morally objectionable (or exhibiting a moral defect) when something that is not a reason to love prompts one to respond to those reasons in some cases but not in others.

Still, failure to love can reflect a defect in moral character in so far as it is a sign that one is characteristically unresponsive to some or all of the considerations which warrant love. This is displayed by the contrast between two familiar kinds of failures to love. Jane is caring for her dying mother, who is consequently the centre of her emotional attention in such a way as (psychologically) to leave no room at the time for romantic love. Jack enters the picture. He is kind to Jane, generous and forthright. He provides entertaining distractions from the drudgery of caring, and helps her without being overbearing or interfering. That Jane does not come to love him at the time is not something for which she should be faulted. The depth of her love for her parent seems appropriate, and that it and the caring which is the expression of that love should under these circumstances foreclose the possibility of her loving Jack is neither surprising nor blameworthy.

Fill out the story in another way, however, and matters begin to look very different. Suppose Jane’s primary relationship has always been with her mother, and her commitments to her mother preclude her forming loving attachments to other adults. The failing in this sort of case is not merely psychological: it is also moral, a matter of character. (Like a ‘mama’s boy’, she is attached to her mother in a way that harms her relations with others.) No particular person is in a position to address a complaint to her: nobody has been wronged. But this is just because that is not the nature of the defect at issue. Someone who is characteristically unresponsive to the reasons for love thereby displays a character defect, and in this way failures to love can be subject to moral evaluation.

We turn now to a last objection. The poet writes that ‘Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds’ (Shakespeare, Sonnet 116). On our view, this is too strong: one can of course have decisive reason to cease loving one’s abuser. But does not our view none the less have the troubling consequence that love should immediately cease if the love-object’s relationally-relevant character changes for the worse?
No, Reactive love has a kind of tenacity built into it: it provides reasons to continue loving. These reasons are heterogeneous, and some of them give way more easily than others. Moreover, how strong they are, and whether they would amount to warrants, requirements, or marks of excellence of character, vary in complicated ways with features of the relationship, the situation, the other person, and the lover’s own needs and desires. Here is one particularly striking reason of this sort. Reactive love paradigmatically gives people reason to be motivated in ways that further their beloveds’ well-being for their own sake. All else equal, it is not good for someone to lose another person’s affectionate attachment and the whole bundle of disinterested concern and other affectionate responses characteristic of love. Indeed, such loss is often a considerable harm (e.g., a broken heart). For this reason, if Peter loves Doug, Peter thereby (all other things being equal) has reason to continue to have the motivations and affective responses involved in loving Doug, a reason arising from Peter’s love-based regard for Doug’s welfare. Sensitivity to this reason is a recognizable morally praiseworthy trait, and its absence can be the source of familiar forms of fickleness. It is also true, however, that this reason can be used to cover up refusal to acknowledge the painful fact that other features of the situation override any disinterested reason one has to continue loving.

Suppose Morgan, Jamie’s beloved, has, under the vicissitudes of an ordinary but admittedly difficult adult life, gradually come to be manipulative, selfish, insulting and occasionally cruel. Jamie’s situation may well then be this. Jamie has a standing attitude of affectionate attachment and reason to look out for Morgan’s well-being for Morgan’s own sake. In so far as Jamie is motivated by concern for Morgan’s well-being, Jamie has reason to be concerned (for Morgan’s sake) that Morgan does not lose Jamie’s affectionate attachment. So Jamie has at least this (defeasible) reason to continue to love. But if things do not change, Jamie then likewise has a defeasible love-based reason to do what can be done (within the bounds of moral appropriateness) to help Morgan not to reach the point at which the withdrawal of love becomes imperative, including encouraging character improvement. Strikingly, this is a disinterested reason: Jamie has reason to encourage Morgan to improve, for Morgan’s own sake. (Of course Jamie has other reasons for encouraging behavioural improvement as well.)

People can appropriately continue to love without going through any such reasoning. But there are contexts in which people do seem to articulate the reasons we have identified. Suppose a couple, now recovering from difficult times, are speaking to each other in a therapist’s office. Having

\[7\] One of us has a vague sense of having read an argument along some such lines at some point over the years, but we have not found a possible source.
come to understand the seriousness of her misbehaviour and the sacrifices incurred in her partner’s continued love, she asks him ‘Why did you stay with me through all that?’ One perfectly natural answer to this question, one which accords entirely with the reason we have highlighted, is ‘I couldn’t leave you then; I knew what it would do to you, and I couldn’t do that’. Admittedly, it might be unacceptably patronizing or manipulative, as well as a claim to a kind of epistemic position which one can rarely occupy, to offer such a reason to another during difficult times. But this fact highlights the care and sensitivity that must be brought to such situations. Care likewise needs to be taken in an actual relational context to avoid being unacceptably patronizing or manipulative when declaring the reasons one may have to encourage one’s beloved’s improvement. Perhaps one might say something like ‘I can’t continue with things as they are. I love you, and I don’t want to hurt you. But I need things to change for this to work.’

We are hardly arguing here for some ‘stand by your man’ principle which excludes the possibility of justifiably bringing love to an end. Matters of character can be appropriate reasons to cease loving. One pleads with one’s friends, for instance, in exactly this way: ‘Why on earth do you still love her after everything she’s done to you? She’s completely selfish.’ Continued love thus is not appropriate or laudable in every case. What makes the difference? Again an enormous variety of factors might be relevant, including the precise nature of the bad behaviour and the extent to which it swamps other positive aspects of the person’s character. But in the face of ongoing significant hurtful behaviour (as in the example above), continued love can be appropriate only so long as there is a realistic hope of relevant improvement. Otherwise, one is left with decisive reason to cease loving, psychologically difficult as this may be. This is not to say that these lines are always clear; ordinary thinking recognizes the extreme moral and psychological difficulty of finding one’s way through these situations, especially given the depth of the attachments involved in love.

Ending an affectionate attachment can be painful for the lover too, even when the relationship is destructive. This fact can provide a defeasible prudential reason for maintaining attachment. However, it is difficult to see how this fact can function as a good reason to continue to love in the sorts of cases we have been describing. Relationships based in this way on both parties’ self-regarding desire to avoid the pain of losing attachment are utterly familiar but sad – a recognizably defective sort of case. Nevertheless, given the depth of the attachment involved in love, to have decisive reason to cease loving is (barring special explanation) to have decisive reason to mourn.

A certain ideal has it that love, once granted, should be unconditional in all cases: nothing could then warrant the withdrawal of love. We do not
endorse this view when applied to love relationships between adults. It is worth noting, however, that one could accommodate this view as an extension of the basic structure of a reactive attitude, if one wished to do so. One would just need to posit that there is an inalienable core of goodness or potential for goodness in every person sufficient to warrant continuing love as a reactive response in all cases despite ongoing bad behaviour—and to hold that nothing but the absence of that core could warrant the withdrawal of love.

Even parental love shares some similarities in its attitudinal structure, though it cannot be a species of reactive love, if for no other reason than that children do not have characters, or are only beginning to form them. But whatever the source of the duty to love one’s children, the reasons arising from love which we have stressed here can help explain why it is generally required for a parent or indeed any other involved adult to continue to love a child once love has been bestowed: the withdrawal of affectionate attachment is generally so damaging for a child that someone who loves a child generally has overwhelming reason to continue to do so, regardless of what the child does, until adulthood is reached.

III. THE BIGGER PICTURE: REACTIVE ATTITUDES, CHARACTER AND VIRTUE

Our account of reactive love presumes (1) that some reactive attitudes are responses to features of character (as opposed, for instance, to discrete actions in accordance with or in violation of obligations), and (2) that some qualities of character have special significance in the context of intimate relations such as friendships. We shall say something about both issues.

Some theorists have argued against Strawson that what qualifies as a reactive attitude ought to be limited to attitudes felt in response to the violation of an obligation or a demand properly made of another. Anger, indignation, guilt, and resentment would all then qualify as reactive attitudes; shame, gratitude, ‘hurt feelings’ and love would not. We disagree.

We begin with Strawson’s distinction between the ‘objective stance’ which a social scientist, or sometimes a therapist, can take, and which puts the reactive attitudes off-stage, and the interpersonal stance which necessarily brings with it the reactive attitudes. There are evaluative attitudes which I can appropriately have towards both persons and non-persons. I can aesthetically approve of a garden and can admire a person’s

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countenance in the same way; I can be frustrated that my car will not start, and equally well frustrated that someone is not understanding what I am trying to convey. If, on the other hand, I am angry at my car, form a resentment towards the weeds in my garden, or am grateful to the rain clouds, my attitude is inappropriate (as anything more than cathartic anthropomorphism): these are evaluative attitudes properly borne only towards persons, the hallmark of the interpersonal stance. Attitudes properly borne only towards persons cannot but be interpersonally significant moves, though this set of attitudes is not reducible to the reactive attitudes.

Focusing now on the reactive attitudes themselves, one might say that on a first approximation, these are emotional responses which are (1) directed towards their objects, and not merely about them (as feeling grateful to someone differs from feeling pleased about their conduct), (2) appropriately felt towards their objects only on account of morally praiseworthy or blameworthy traits, conduct, speech or feelings (traits, conduct, speech or feelings directed towards oneself, in the case of the participant reactive attitudes), (3) a source of defeasible reasons for particular forms of speech and action directed towards their objects, and (4) consequently appropriately manifested or expressed in a way directed at their objects, barring some special explanation or reason for not doing so. They thereby structure the subject’s relation to those objects in morally significant ways. (Again by ‘moral’ here and elsewhere we mean to include not just rights and obligations, but also considerations about the virtues, morally laudable traits that fall short of excellences, the expression of good or ill will, the interpersonal appropriateness and significance of our attitudes and their manner of expression, and the like.) ‘Persons’, then, is a way of gesturing towards the category of things towards which emotional responses with features (1)–(4) can be appropriately directed. It would be a further question why, or on account of what, such emotional responses are properly directed towards some things but not others.

In saying that the participant reactive emotions structure their subjects’ relation to their objects in morally significant ways, we mean to be calling attention to such facts as these: by being directed at a person, resentment (e.g.) modifies the relationship between the relevant people, for instance by giving one or both parties reasons to do things, reasons which they would not have previously had; these modifications of the relationship structure the relationship by shaping what it can be requisite, appropriate or praiseworthy for the parties to do and feel going forwards; this structuring of the relationship is morally significant in so far as, for instance, there is a dimension in which how it would be appropriate, praiseworthy or problematic to respond to someone’s resentful anger is itself a moral matter. On this approach,
there is nothing that should limit the reactive attitudes to violations of demands/obligations and thereby exclude the possibility of reactive love. One could carve out a more limited category, and perhaps doing so would be useful for certain theoretical purposes. But this limited category would be carved out of a larger group that includes the participant reactive emotions but not, e.g., aesthetic responses and other purely ‘spectator’ reactions.

Underlying the notion of the reactive attitudes, as introduced by Strawson, is the thought that these attitudes are ways of holding one another responsible. The notion of ‘holding responsible’ at issue here can be slippery, and it is tempting to try to elucidate it as follows: ‘When, for instance, we are angry with people, we do not merely attribute responsibility to them, nor is it even quite right to say we make claims to the effect that they are substantively responsible; rather, it would be more accurate to say that we make claims on them’. In Darwall’s terms, the relation is thus taken to be one of accountability. At this point, it could quite correctly be objected, there is no analogy in the case of love. Is this a good ground for not treating love as a reactive attitude? No. Other canonical reactive emotions also do not involve issuing demands. For instance, to feel gratitude is to acknowledge the other’s responsibility for a benefit; gratitude is an appropriate response only in so far as the benefit is not, e.g., inadvertent. Yet gratitude itself makes no demands of another; that would be ungrateful. So the ways in which the reactive attitudes involve holding persons responsible do not always involve demands of the sort involved in relations of accountability.

The core notion which needs to be preserved here is that the reactive attitudes interpersonally implicate matters of moral responsibility in a distinctive way, which we shall call ‘treating as substantively responsible’. Treating as responsible in this sense is a matter of taking to be appropriate only certain sorts of morally significant responses directed towards the person, and accordingly structuring the relationship in certain morally significant ways rather than others. The sorts of responses which are thus taken to be inappropriate are those belonging in the same broad category as excuse, that is, relationally directed, morally significant attitudes which structure relationships in morally significant ways, but without ipso facto involving moral approval or disapproval of the person who is their object. The paradigm negative reactive attitudes are ways of treating people as substantively responsible for their conduct in precisely this sense. Anger, for instance,

10 Darwall does not himself offer any such argument. On the contrary, he grants that there may be a form of love which is a reactive attitude, though he does not explore this possibility.
holds another accountable for the violation of an obligation. That anger paradigmatically demands apology is a way in which anger reconfigures the relationship between the parties in morally significant ways – and not in the way involved in excuse. Likewise, gratitude canonically responds, again not in the ways involved in excuse, to other parties’ having exceeded demands properly made of them. Reactive love configures the relationship in morally significant ways (not of the sort involved in excuse) in response to how other parties tends to conduct themselves in certain interpersonal contexts. In being thus a way of treating as responsible, love is as different as either anger or gratitude is from mere aesthetic appreciation and other purely ‘spectator’ responses. Like the paradigm reactive attitudes, loving and withdrawing love are interpersonally directed moves of moral approval and disapproval whose normative force is to reconfigure the moral context.11

Once the way is clear to the possibility of reactive attitudes which are in the first instance responses to praiseworthy features of character, the remaining crucial background assumption of our account is that some character traits have special salience and moral significance in the context of fairly intimate relationships. To get just that much, any number of theories about the virtues (many, in fact) will do. Indeed, the distinction between, for instance, social charity and generosity of friends is recognizable without any theory at all. Similarly, while fairness is important both with strangers and at home, it has a different and special sort of salience in the latter context. The same is true of loyalty, kindness, fidelity, patience and forthrightness. Other morally laudable traits especially implicated in intimacy, like finely tuned empathetic capacities, may have a very different place in, say, the political sphere.

Here is one way of accommodating these distinctions. Instead of following the neo-Aristotelian in understanding virtues as character traits that enable an agent to flourish, suppose we instead understand them as character traits that make an agent particularly well suited for some particular sphere or spheres of interpersonal interactions.12 By ‘spheres of interpersonal interaction’, we mean such things as parent–child relationships, friendship, neighbours, casual acquaintances, and interactions between

11 In putting the point in this way, we intentionally remain neutral on whether there is an independently characterizable metaphysical condition, being responsible, which is a necessary condition for appropriately responding to a person by treating as responsible. We are sceptical that there is.

strangers on the street, all of which ineliminably involve interpersonal expectations, including standards of excellence. Spheres of interpersonal interaction, and the expectations they involve, vary of course over time and place, between cultures and subcultures, in large and small ways. They may or may not be co-extensive with any ‘role’ (in the sense at stake in ‘role obligation’) that a person might occupy in a particular time and place. But they generate the possibility of traits that make one well suited for a given sphere of interaction. It would thus come as no surprise that some traits have a special place as virtues when it comes to intimate relations, and that some indeed are only virtues when considered in their role in intimate relations. The kind of honesty that makes a person well suited for maintaining a happy marriage over the course of a lifetime also makes that person well suited for close friendships. But this particular kind of honesty may be out of place in one’s work as an international diplomat.

Thinking of the virtues as traits that make one especially well suited for some sphere or spheres of interpersonal interaction, and of reactive love, in turn, as a response to the directed manifestation of virtues of spheres of intimacy, can be an especially illuminating way of looking at reactive love. Here are three respects in which this strikes us as true.

First, this way of conceiving of matters can explain why it may seem appropriate in certain intimate contexts to regard as virtues traits which one might not otherwise see as subject to moral evaluation (or at least to regard them as morally praiseworthy traits, where they fall short of excellences). Wit, for instance, makes it to Hume’s list of the virtues (EPM VIII i), but is treated by no philosopher as a cardinal virtue. Structurally speaking, wit seems to have all the elements of a canonical virtue: it is evaluatively laden, affective and motivational, involves certain ways of seeing the world, and is susceptible to reform by self-government. It might seem unclear what wit has to do with ethical relations between people. But suppose in a couple one spouse is particularly witty, and consistently, deliberately and sensitively deploys his wit to successfully dissipate tensions, cheer up his spouse on gloomy days, introduce levity into difficult times, and so on. Here wit begins to look like any other genuine virtue, and the proposed account can say why: the fellow’s wit makes him, in these respects, particularly well suited for the sphere of interactions involved in married life. It also makes sense in that regard for his spouse to respond with love as a reactive attitude.

Secondly, in everyday life, one expects there to be a fit between the mode of one’s expression of love and the relationship between lover and beloved. Kolodny, for instance (p. 139), notes in complaint about what he calls the ‘quality’ view:
Heather’s mother and Heather’s teenage friend may both love her, but they love her, or at least they ought to love her, in different ways. [One] might suggest that Heather’s mother and friend are acquainted with different qualities, and those different qualities are reasons for different kinds of love. [But] reasons of the kind at issue are not relative to an agent’s epistemic state.

On our account, this feature of love is easily explained. If virtues are traits that make one particularly well suited for particular spheres of interpersonal interaction, then love should take a form appropriate to the sphere of interpersonal interaction within which the trait is expressed and constitutes a virtue. Heather’s friend and her mother may well be acquainted with the same qualities of Heather. However, different qualities may count as virtues, or the same qualities may count as virtues in different ways, in relation to the two different relational contexts, and what counts as an appropriate reactive love response to those qualities also depends upon the different relational contexts. Heather’s mother should not love Heather as a friend, even if some of the traits to which she is responding are also traits which in other contexts make Heather a good teenage friend. For the mother to do otherwise would reflect confusion about the sphere of interpersonal interaction in which Heather’s good traits are being manifested in ways directed towards her.

Thirdly, in everyday life, spheres of interpersonal interaction involve normative expectations not only at the level of what is expected in the conduct of the parties to the interaction, but also at the level of their affective relations. Being well suited for a sphere of interpersonal interactions, in this light, means having one’s affections well tuned in the ways appropriate to that sphere of interpersonal interaction; loving well, in turn, means responding in ways and in modes which accord with those affective expectations. For instance, spouses are expected not only to interact with their partners in certain ways, but to bear affection for their partners in the course of doing so. Loving well as such a spouse’s partner, in turn, means having and showing affection not only for the good conduct of one’s spouse, but for the affection that one is shown.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE QUALITY VIEW REVISITED

We began by noting a certain worry which can plague any view which treats moral features of the beloved as grounds for love. According to what Niko Kolodny terms ‘the quality view’, the reasons for love are non-relational personal attributes of the beloved, of which moral features are one instance. Kolodny argues that all such views are doomed to failure.
On our account, reactive love is an appropriate response to certain traits that have been expressed in a way directed towards the lover in an appropriate relational context. The lover appropriately loves on account of the traits, but only given the relational setting. We could summarize this by saying that character traits are agent-relative reasons for love, dependent upon the interpersonal context.

Whether this is an instance of the ‘quality view’ is of little interest; it depends on how you want to draw the lines and for what purpose. The question is whether our proposal is vulnerable to the relevant objections. Kolodny (p. 135) writes

Whatever non-relational feature one selects as the reason for love will be one that another person could, or actually does, possess. The claim that non-relational features are reasons for love implies, absurdly, that in so far as one’s love for (say) Jane is responsive to reasons, it will accept any relevantly similar person as a replacement.

But on our view one would not have any reason to love the imagined intrinsic duplicate of Jane, any more than one would have reason to feel gratitude towards a mere intrinsic duplicate of someone who has done you a favour. The relevant relational context is missing. If one were in an appropriate relationship with an intrinsic duplicate of Jane, one would indeed have reason to love her too, but not as a replacement. Last, in a world in which it is only Jane’s duplicate with whom one has been interacting, one would have reason to love only her. All this fits with ordinary thinking. Non-relational features are reasons for love, but only in an appropriate relational setting. This is enough to secure our view from the standard objection to the ‘quality view’. Any further demand for ‘irreplaceability’ is an infantile fantasy of specialness.

Conceiving of love as a reactive attitude thus provides a fully satisfying conception of what it is to love people on account of their traits. It shows that the relational context can be essential to love without making the relationship into the ground of love, and it reveals how love could be both a response to reasons and a source of reasons. It reveals how love could be a moralized response while retaining a normative tie between love and particular relationally salient and morally significant behavioural, motivational and affective responses on the part of the lover. Since love is not specifically a response to failures or successes regarding obligations, and does not inherently issue demands to the beloved, conceiving of love as a reactive attitude may help to show the way beyond a simplistically framed conception of the participant reactive emotions more generally.13

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13 We would like to thank Gary Ebbs, Harry Frankfurt, Rachana Kamtekar, Kirk Ludwig, Dick Moran, Angela Smith, David Sussman, Ásta Sveinsdóttir and participants in the Bay Area Feminist Philosophy Colloquium and the conference Reasons for Love (Leuven, 2011).
Appendix: contra Velleman

David Velleman has recently proposed an account of love as a moral emotion. But he suggests (‘Love as Valuing a Relationship’, p. 371) that love is a response to the value of the capacity for practical reason. On his view (pp. 360–1), love is an awareness of the value of its object which ‘arrests our tendencies toward emotional self-protection from another person, tendencies to draw ourselves in and close ourselves off from being affected by him’. This awareness need not have any particular affective upshot; there is only a psychological link between it and feelings of attachment (p. 353). Nor need it have any particular motivational upshot (p. 361). In fact, Velleman denies that love has any essential tie (even defeasibly) to wishing the beloved’s well-being. ‘All that is essential to love ... is that it disarms our emotional defences towards an object in response to its incomparable value as a self-existent end’ (p. 365).

Of course emotional vulnerability is important to love. But it is hardly a necessary condition, let alone the one essential condition. I can love other people even if I emotionally retreat on occasion and close myself off from being affected by them. Moreover, the emotional openness and vulnerability involved in love are of a piece with aspects of love on which we have focused. For instance, if I want Bob to fare well, I am negatively affected by his suffering. Likewise, desiring to be with someone makes me vulnerable in all kinds of ways. These two sets of desires can also conflict with one another in ways that make me additionally vulnerable. Velleman’s view elevates just one vulnerability characteristically involved in love and isolates it from its affective context.

His account likewise runs into difficulties regarding the grounds of love. He proposes that individuals differentially respond to some people with love and not others because they happen to respond differently to various ‘expressions or symbols or reminders’ of people’s capacity for practical reason (p. 371); you might respond with love to the way someone walks (p. 371), while this trait leaves me cold. This view completely neglects the relational context. (On Velleman’s view, I could properly love someone as a response to his walk without our ever meeting.) Even more problematically, just about anything could qualify as an ‘expression or symbol or reminder’ of a person’s capacity for rational agency (as Velleman allows), including someone’s malicious, sadistic tendencies. Indeed, this would be an especially plausible reminder, since only rational agents can be sadistic. What is peculiar here is not the thought that one might love a sadist. What is peculiar is the thought that you could perfectly appropriately love someone in response to that person’s abiding sadism. This is a radically revisionary understanding of love.

The same is true of Velleman’s claim that the response in which love consists is no more than an ‘arresting awareness’ which disarms emotional defences. You might find that your awareness of another’s value as a rational agent disarms your emotional defences by opening yourself up to dissatisfaction and pain in the other’s success, and satisfaction and pleasure in the other’s difficulties and pain (a possibility which Velleman tacitly recognizes with regard to his own view – see, e.g., p. 361).
Schadenfreude and sadism are recognizable moral perversities. But Velleman lacks the resources to explain why feeling pain at the success of others and pleasure at their pain is deficient or perverse qua love — that is, why despite being an instance of emotional openness arising from awareness of the value of others, this is not thereby a central case of love.

In fact, Velleman’s view suffers more generally from his insistence that love at best has contingent psychological connections with particular motivational or affective upshots even in paradigm cases. As we argued earlier, an adequate account of love must include the way love motivates, or it will not be recognizable as an account of love. Indeed, the ways in which love motivates give rise to some of the most agonizing conflicts involved in loving, as when one desperately wants to aid one’s beloved but recognizes that it is in his best interest not to do so, or when one yearns to be with her despite recognizing that she will fare best in one’s absence. The possibility of such conflicts is internal to love: if one did not understand their possibility, one would not understand what love is. But on Velleman’s view, such conflicts cannot be anything beyond psychological accident.

Velleman objects that tying love to characteristic desires and motivations inevitably promotes a psychologically unhealthy portrait of love:

In most contexts, a love that is inseparable from the urge to benefit is an unhealthy love, bristling with uncalled-for impingements. Love becomes equally unhealthy if too closely allied with some... other desires.... Of course, there are occasions for pleasing and impressing the people one loves, just as there are occasions for caring and sharing. But someone whose love was a bundle of these urges, to care and share and please and impress — such a lover would be an interfering ingratiating nightmare (p. 353).

This objection misses its target. A defeasible motivation to be with and further the well-being of one’s beloved need not amount to anything like officiousness, boorishness or boorishness. Just as certain characteristic manifestations of anger can be morally inappropriate in context, so too there are moral limitations on the appropriate behavioural, affective and motivational expression of love in context. To consider love as a reactive attitude is thus to recognize that a person’s characteristic love responses are themselves proper objects of moral evaluation. A tendency towards love ‘bristling with uncalled-for impingements’ is morally problematic as well as psychologically unhealthy.

Velleman claims that a fundamental mistake lies behind all accounts which, like ours, understand love as involving characteristic desires or aims:

The error in all these theories, I think, is not their choice of an aim for love but their shared assumption that love can be analysed in terms of an aim. This assumption implies that love is essentially a pro-attitude toward a result, to which the beloved is instrumental or in which he is involved. I venture to suggest that love is essentially an attitude toward the beloved himself but not toward any result at all (p. 354).

However, the contrast underlying this criticism looks misguided if one keeps the structure of a reactive attitude clearly in mind. Anger is an attitude towards a person. But you cannot understand what anger is if you do not have in view its
defeasible links to characteristic desires, aims and motivations; if nothing of this sort is on the table, then you do not have anger in your sights. Granting this point does not make the person with whom one is angry merely instrumental in the attainment of the aims through which one’s anger is appropriately manifested. So too with love.

In the end, Velleman’s proposal cannot make sense of the total phenomenon. He regards love as an awareness of value in the other, but he cannot make sense of (1) the way in which that awareness is an appropriate response only to specific kinds of features of the other, (2) the limitations on its appropriate forms, or (3) its normative connection with characteristic motivations and affective responses. Viewing love as a reactive attitude responding to certain virtuous traits of character enables comprehension of the total package.