

## Les ateliers de l'éthique The Ethics Forum

Les ateliers de l'éthique  
The Ethics Forum

# The Psychology of Exclusivity

Troy Jollimore

Volume 3, numéro 1, printemps 2008

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1044604ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1044604ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Centre de recherche en éthique de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

1718-9977 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Jollimore, T. (2008). The Psychology of Exclusivity. *Les ateliers de l'éthique / The Ethics Forum*, 3(1), 52–60. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1044604ar>

### Résumé de l'article

L'amitié et l'amour romantique sont, de par leur nature, des relations exclusives. Cet article suggère que l'on peut mieux comprendre la nature de l'exclusivité dont il est question en comprenant l'erreur au cœur de la vision du raisonnement pratique que je nomme « le point de vue englobant ». Selon le PVE, pour que le raisonnement pratique soit rationnel, il doit s'agir d'un processus ayant pour but de choisir la meilleure alternative possible à partir d'une perspective qui est aussi détachée et objective que possible. Quoique cette vision cherche à être neutre à l'égard des porteurs de valeurs, elle incorpore en fait un biais contre les porteurs de valeurs qui ne peuvent être appréciés qu'à partir d'une perspective qui n'est pas détachée - qui ne peuvent être appréciés, par exemple, que par les agents qui sont engagés à long terme envers les valeurs en question. Dans le contexte des relations personnelles, de tels engagements tendent à donner naissance à la sorte d'exclusivité qui caractérise l'amitié et l'amour romantique ; ils empêchent l'agent d'être impartial entre les besoins, les intérêts, etc. de la personne qui lui est chère, d'une part, et ceux des autres, d'autre part. Je suggère que dans de tels contextes les besoins et les revendications des autres personnes peuvent être réduites au silence, de la même manière que, comme le suggère John McDowell, les tentations de l'immoralité sont, pour l'agent vertueux, réduites au silence.

Tous droits réservés © Centre de recherche en éthique de l'Université de Montréal, 2008



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EXCLUSIVITY

TROY JOLLIMORE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO

### RESUMÉ

L'amitié et l'amour romantique sont, de par leur nature, des relations exclusives. Cet article suggère que l'on peut mieux comprendre la nature de l'exclusivité dont il est question en comprenant l'erreur au cœur de la vision du raisonnement pratique que je nomme « le point de vue englobant ». Selon le PVE, pour que le raisonnement pratique soit rationnel, il doit s'agir d'un processus ayant pour but de choisir la meilleure alternative possible à partir d'une perspective qui est aussi détachée et objective que possible. Quoique cette vision cherche à être neutre à l'égard des porteurs de valeurs, elle incorpore en fait un biais contre les porteurs de valeurs qui ne peuvent être appréciés qu'à partir d'une perspective qui n'est pas détachée - qui ne peuvent être appréciés, par exemple, que par les agents qui sont engagés à long terme envers les valeurs en question. Dans le contexte des relations personnelles, de tels engagements tendent à donner naissance à la sorte d'exclusivité qui caractérise l'amitié et l'amour romantique ; ils empêchent l'agent d'être impartial entre les besoins, les intérêts, etc. de la personne qui lui est chère, d'une part, et ceux des autres, d'autre part. Je suggère que dans de tels contextes les besoins et les revendications des autres personnes peuvent être réduites au silence, de la même manière que, comme le suggère John McDowell, les tentations de l'immoralité sont, pour l'agent vertueux, réduites au silence.

### ABSTRACT

Friendship and romantic love are, by their very nature, exclusive relationships. This paper suggests that we can better understand the nature of the exclusivity in question by understanding what is wrong with the view of practical reasoning I call the Comprehensive Surveyor View. The CSV claims that practical reasoning, in order to be rational, must be a process of choosing the best available alternative from a perspective that is as detached and objective as possible. But this view, while it means to be neutral between various value-bearers, in fact incorporates a bias against those value-bearers that can only be appreciated from a perspective that is not detached—that can only be appreciated, for instance, by agents who bear long-term commitments to the values in question. In the realm of personal relationships, such commitments tend to give rise to the sort of exclusivity that characterizes friendship and romantic love; they prevent the agent from being impartial between her beloved's needs, interests, etc., and those of other persons. In such contexts, I suggest, needs and claims of other persons may be silenced in much the way that, as John McDowell has suggested, the temptations of immorality are silenced for the virtuous agent.

Une mère, une femme passionnée, ont nécessairement le cœur sec, car il est détourné du monde.

Albert Camus<sup>1</sup>

## 1

Friendship and romantic love are *exclusive* relationships: there is a limit on the number of persons toward whom one can bear the relationship in question. As C.S. Lewis pithily if somewhat brutally wrote, “To say ‘these are my friends’ implies ‘Those are not.’”<sup>2</sup> Of course, views differ regarding the *degree* of exclusivity required by either of these relationships. The most extreme form of exclusivity would demand a restriction to *one* individual. Our tradition has tended to connect this extreme form of exclusivity with romantic love, but not so much with friendship. Thus one is permitted, even encouraged, to have multiple friends, but the common view is that one ought ideally to have only one romantic lover (at least, at any given time). But this view, while common, is not universal. Many people in our tradition have maintained that romantic love may or even should be extended to more than one partner. And at least some have denied the accumulative nature of friendship, maintaining that friendship, properly understood, involves a genuine and complete unification of the two parties to the friendship, and thus must be as exclusive a relation as many people take romantic love to be. It seems likely that Kant held such a view, and the position is openly endorsed by Montaigne, who claimed that “L’unique et principale amitié descoust toutes autres obligations.”<sup>3</sup>

My starting point in this paper is not the issue of the specific degree of exclusivity required by either form of relation, but rather the apparent tension that exists between the existence of *any* degree of exclusivity, and certain common thoughts about the nature of morality and reasons: in particular, that morality is fundamentally impartial, and that reasons must be universalizable.

In my view, these tensions are real, but frequently overstated. That reasons must be universalizable may seem to suggest that friendship, insofar as it is a response to the valuable or attractive proper-

ties of one’s friend, cannot be exclusive (since any valuable or attractive property will certainly be shared by many others). But this inference, I will suggest, depends on an over-simplistic conception of the sort of standpoint an agent ought to occupy when making judgments of value. Similarly, we cannot infer from the fact that friendship and other types of love pull against and away from *impartial* morality that love is not, in itself, a type of moral response. Indeed, I want to suggest that love is not only *consistent* with morality, but that it expresses a kind of moral attitude that is particularly appropriate to human beings.

## 2

Impartialistic ethical theories tend to presuppose a certain sort of picture of the (real or ideal) moral agent.<sup>4</sup> The moral agent is pictured as an objective and detached surveyor and chooser of value-bearing options whose task is that of taking as broad and comprehensive a survey as possible, from as detached a perspective as can be attained, before choosing, as if from a menu of options, the option that instantiates the greatest amount of good. For convenience, I will henceforth refer to such views as Comprehensive Surveyor views.

Such theorists, for obvious reasons, tend to be puzzled by love’s tendency to attach itself to particular individuals in a way that shows commitment to those particular individuals—commitment that is expected to endure even in the face of the discovery that there exist other individuals who also make moral claims on us, or who possess the same attractive or otherwise valuable qualities to an even greater degree. The idea that love should be *exclusive*—with its core being that idea that love should *exclude*—runs directly counter to the thought, implicit in standard views of impartialistic ethics, that rationality should take as wide and comprehensive a survey of the available field of values as possible, and address itself to those values in as even-handed and fair-minded a manner as can be achieved.

The Comprehensive Surveyor picture means to be neutral between various candidate values. But the view that this is so depends on the assumption that the occupation of such a perspective will not privilege certain values, while making others less accessible, in a way that might actually impede the best possible operation of the faculty of practical reason. It depends, that is, on the assumption that all goods *can* be fairly evaluated, and fully appreciated, from a detached perspective and by an agent whose psychology is governed by the

dictate to maximize. If, in fact, there exist some goods of which this is not true, then the Comprehensive Surveyor perspective *itself* incorporates, beneath its apparently impartial and fair-minded surface, a certain substantive view about value that involves the privileging of certain goods (those appreciable from such a vantage point) over others.

Indeed, putting aside for the moment issues directly connected with romantic love and friendship (I shall return to these below), it is worth observing that there exist a number of other phenomena that show our practical lives to be more complex than is allowed for by the simple Comprehensive Surveyor model. Let us begin with the deeply ahistorical nature of the model. Part of the detachment thought to be involved is precisely that of being able to step away from one's own history, and in particular the values and commitments to value that may apply to one as a result not only of one's past decisions, but aspects of one's situation over which one had little if any control. While this element of the view is appealing to those who maintain a picture of rationality as, ideally, pure and unsullied by the distorting influences of historical contingency, it strains against the reality of human life. For it is of course a deep fact about human life that by the time any human being is in a position to think about her values in anything like a reflective manner, she has already been brought up within a tradition, or the intersection of a set of traditions, that carry their own value commitments and have in a deep way shaped her sensibility. This is not to say that she will be incapable of rejecting or transcending such traditions, at least to a significant degree; but that the decision-making faculty which results in the intention to do so is itself a product of these very traditions is a fact whose significance must not be ignored.

The importance of the fact that we are situated when reflection begins is that it undermines the detachment implicit in the 'comprehensive survey' picture. Suppose that we allowed ourselves, for a moment, to imagine what is surely an impossibility: that an utterly detached and as yet unencumbered observer might come to the plurality of potential ways of life in order to consider and compare them. The practical deliberations of such an unlikely evaluator would still fall short of the 'detached surveyor' picture. For she will have to try out different ways of life in a temporal sequence, i.e. some before others; and unless we are to imagine her entirely unchanged by each experience (in which case, how can it be possible for her to *compare*

them?), we must acknowledge that the order in which she tries them out will matter: changes wrought on her character and preferences by earlier experiences may make her more or less disposed to respond favorably to later ones.

Part of what is absurd about the Comprehensive Surveyor view is, of course, the idea that it is possible to dip in and out of different ways of life as one might sample different courses at a buffet. This goes beyond the points about history—that it matters in what order a person undergoes the various experiences that make up her life, and that it matters that, since human life is finite, it is not possible to sample them all—to the further point that there exist values that can only be appreciated or enjoyed as a result of a long-term and dedicated commitment to a certain sort of practice or even a certain mode of life. (An implication of this with which many of us are no doubt familiar is the difficulty of explaining the value of education to the uneducated.) These values do not disclose themselves immediately to agents, or make themselves available to be immediately experienced by anyone, regardless of preparation; rather, they demand a degree of commitment over time, where 'commitment' involves *not* being absolutely open to whatever *other* values might come along, no matter how legitimate in themselves such values might be (and how enthusiastically we might have responded to them had they come along first).

The value of being a Buddhist monk cannot straightforwardly be compared to the value of being a classical pianist or a professional chef, even if certain elements within each may be compared; for there will be certain other elements, including some quite foundational ones, which cannot. On the other hand, there are some who have, at different stages of their lives, enjoyed very different modes of existence; those who have, for instance, experienced both the ecstasy of faith and the liberty of skepticism. What must be rejected, though, is the thought that such a person could (or should be able to) retreat to a neutral standpoint from which to experience both, via memory, imagination, or what have you. Any choice between the two must be made from somewhere; it may be a standpoint that is informed by the individual's having experienced both modes of life, but it cannot be one that is entirely detached from both.

Let me illustrate the idea with an example from a different sphere—that of aesthetics, and in particular poetics—and one which does not involve the necessity of a lifelong or even long-term com-

mitment, but which nonetheless relies on the impossibility of appreciating, at one and the same time, two rival aesthetics. The following passage is from an essay on poetry by Louise Gluck:

It is valuable, though nearly impossible, to try to read [George] Oppen and [John] Berryman side by side. Nothing in Oppen feels involuntary. And yet nothing feels rigid. *One impression genius fosters is that there is, beside it, no comparable mastery: no other way to sound, to think, to be.* I admire both Berryman and Oppen to this degree; I regret not knowing what these two thought of each other. Berryman's meticulous need to offend everyone, to be certain that in no mind was he even briefly associated with anything even slightly conservative, mannerly, acceptable, his poignant but extremely wily egotism sometimes seems childish and limited beside Oppen. And sometimes, next to Berryman's feverish wildness, Oppen seems too lofty, too hermetic, too secure. Temperamentally, they seem to cancel one another out.<sup>5</sup>

As Gluck points out, when we are in the grip of a creative genius we find ourselves unable to imagine any other way of going about things (much as, in the grip of depression, we find ourselves unable to imagine that we will ever feel substantially better). And yet we are able to feel precisely this way about the creations of multiple artists—we just can't feel it about more than one of them at the same time. From the perspective that appreciates Berryman, Oppen seems deficient; from the perspective that appreciates Oppen, Berryman seems flawed. Moreover I take it that genius, on Gluck's account, silences opposing viewpoints: there is "no other way to sound, to think, to be."

This instability of perspectives signals the presence of a type of what philosophers refer to as *incommensurability*—the presence, that is, of multiple value-bearing entities whose values cannot be directly compared, or placed relative to each other on a comprehensive value ranking. Philosophical discussions of the issue too often downplay the role of human subjectivity in this context, by assuming that incommensurability must be a feature of values themselves: if two values are incommensurable, and so cannot be directly compared, it must be because they are deeply metaphysically distinct, or belong to two entirely different ontological orders, etc. One of the things I am trying to suggest—though there is insufficient room to fully develop the point here—is that incommensurability is instead

often a feature of human subjectivity: indeed two values which are in nature very similar to one another may nonetheless turn out to be incommensurable in this sense, simply because there is no humanly achievable standpoint from which both may be simultaneously experienced and thus directly compared with one another. Our experience of them, rather, is ineluctably temporal: we can experience one and then the other, with the result that we can at best achieve an indirect value comparison.

Finally, we must now consider a yet deeper way in which the view of the Comprehensive Surveyor theorist may fail adequately to capture our responses to values. Up to now I have concentrated mostly on a general point about the possibility of comparing goods in terms of value. But we must now consider the possibility that some goods are such that they themselves forbid being regarded from a neutral standpoint. By this I do not simply mean the largely practical (though somewhat more than *merely* practical) difficulty I have already noted—that some values disclose themselves only to agents who are willing to commit significant time and effort to their pursuit or promotion. Rather, I mean the word 'forbid' in a fairly literal and indeed moral sense. The idea I am getting at is that some goods *demand* to be appreciated from a standpoint that is anything but detached and neutral.

Consider, for instance, an object to which the proper response is some form of awe, veneration or reverence: the Notre Dame Cathedral, perhaps. The proper response to such an object, it would seem, has nothing whatsoever to do with promotion or maximization. What would it even *mean* to maximize the value of the Notre Dame Cathedral? To build duplicates in other locations? To add on to it so as to make it larger? Either of these, or any other such response, would in fact be *incompatible* with appreciating its value in the proper way (they would cheapen the cathedral, or even destroy its beauty). Whatever the proper response is, it is a response that is not directly linked to action—not in any straightforward and obvious manner, at any rate. Nor is it a response that seems to be thought from a detached and impartial standpoint. Indeed, the person who stands before Notre Dame thinking explicitly comparative thoughts like "How much more impressive is it, exactly, than the Salisbury Cathedral?" is failing to appreciate it as it ought to be appreciated: there is something deficient in the response that insists on its being compared with something else.



The class of objects in question, then, seems to call for a response that fundamentally involves, not action, but rather appreciation, and appreciation of a form that does not involve overt comparison. Moreover, where action *is* called for, the inappropriateness of explicit comparisons can land us in a deep kind of practical dilemma. Consider, for instance, Jacques Derrida's claim that "la vie ne vaut absolument qu'à valoir plus que la vie"<sup>6</sup> Showing proper reverence for life, that is, can only be done by refusing to treat individual lives as if their value were *calculable* and *fungible*—as if a certain number of lives on one side of the balance would be enough to make the sacrifice of a smaller number of lives a rationally justifiable action that any practical agent faced with the choice between the two ought to wholeheartedly embrace.

Indeed, the individual human person is, I think, the paradigm case of an object whose moral status cannot be fully recognized or appreciated by a Comprehensive Surveyor occupying a detached, impartial point of view. But this is just to say that the full recognition of the moral status of a human person is incompatible with the full recognition of every human person (or even, perhaps, the full recognition of many human persons). There simply is no vantage point one might occupy from which such a recognition would be possible. For to view the claims, needs and interests of any one person as *merely* the demands arising from the life of a being that is one among very many such beings would be to fail to accord to this life the deep moral significance which it *intrinsically* possesses. This, I think, is the moral basis of exclusivity in personal relationships. For it is only in the context of relationships of love and friendship that we are able to regard individuals with the degree of attention and care that their moral nature calls for.

I am relying heavily on visual metaphors here, speaking of 'regarding' persons, viewing them, and so forth. So I should come clean on this point, and acknowledge that I follow such contemporary Aristotelians as John McDowell and David Wiggins in thinking that motivation is fundamentally a matter of how one conceptualizes or, to use the dominant visual metaphor, *sees* a situation: to be motivated by a given consideration, that is, is to see it as possessing overriding importance.<sup>7</sup> We must keep in mind that 'seeing' always takes place from a certain particular location. A full characterization of what an agent sees would constitute not only a list of the things in her field of vision, but a description of their relation to one ano-

ther—which would make it clear, for instance, which objects occupy the center of her field of vision, which lie at the periphery, and which stand so as to block our view of others. This feature of vision carries over into the moral domain: to specify how a virtuous agent sees the world,<sup>8</sup> we need to mention not only *what* she sees, but what she sees *as central*; more generally, we need to specify the manner or (to borrow McDowell's term) the 'light' in which she sees things; or, to borrow a term from psychology, her *construal* of what she sees.

The characterization of an agent's moral field of vision makes clear not only what she sees, but what she does not. For example, a courageous agent, in a situation that calls for her to step in and protect the more vulnerable, should either not *notice* the danger to herself or at any rate should not see that danger as being of overriding significance (as compared to the potential harm to others if she does not act). Similarly, to use an example McDowell has discussed, a temperate agent may be aware that a certain non-virtuous course of action would be beneficial to himself, but will not regard that as a reason for so acting. Thus, while he may possess a true and clear grasp of the facts of the case, such an agent (as opposed to the merely continent agent, who must struggle against the temptation) will not regard the prospect of self-interested gain, in these circumstances, as tempting.<sup>9</sup> He will simply not hear its siren call; as McDowell writes, the motivating force of the unjust course of action will be "silenced" for such an agent.

### 3

It is commonly asserted that love is blind. I would like to suggest a connection between this blindness and the deafness of which McDowell speaks. Indeed I want to suggest more than a connection: I think they are essentially the same phenomena, appearing in two distinct contexts (and expressed via two distinct but obviously related sensory metaphors).

To be in love is to be blind with respect to two sorts of consideration. First, one must be at least partially blind with respect to one's beloved's shortcomings. This, I take it, is the meaning most centrally attached to the dictum that "love is blind," when that phrase is casually deployed. "A friendly eye," as Shakespeare wrote, "is slow to see small faults." Several recent philosophers have wondered whether our ordinary epistemological standards apply when we are evaluating, not strangers, but our lovers and friends.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the idea

receives support not only from literature, philosophy, and common sense, but from science as well: recent neurological research suggests that brain functions connected with passing negative judgments on others are literally deactivated with respect to those individuals whom we love.<sup>11</sup>

But there is a second type of blindness that is equally important. In addition to being blind to the faults of her beloved, a lover must also show a certain blindness to the attractions of others. She need not deny, of course, that other people have certain attractive qualities. But she may not respond to those qualities with the full appreciative attention with which she quite properly responds to similar qualities in the individual she loves. In light of the lover's appreciation of them, the beloved's valuable qualities not only justify his lover's loving him, they also justify her *not* loving others in the same way—despite the fact that they possess equally valuable personal qualities which justify *their* lovers in loving them. Albert Camus' claim that "a passionate wife necessarily has a closed heart, for it is turned away from the world" thus expresses an important truth.

To be a friend is to see a person in a certain light. It involves a tendency to interpret her character and her actions in positive terms, and an accompanying tendency to see considerations having to do with her happiness and flourishing as possessing overriding practical importance. Competing considerations—those which count against one's positive evaluations, and those which support actions that conflict with one's friend's interests—are often not merely *overridden* or *outweighed*: they are *silenced*. This is to say, in part, that friendship requires not only that the friend's interests typically *win* contests between themselves and the interests of others, but that the contest must typically not be felt as such: her being torn between her friend's interests and those arising from some other source will in at least some cases constitute evidence against the depth and genuineness of the friendship. Thus it is not enough, from the standpoint of friendship and love, that the friend's interests win the contest; what is required, rather, is that it be *no contest*. Consider, in this connection, Bernard Williams' famous example, in which (it is claimed) the man who stops to consult his understanding of the demands of impartial morality before plunging into the surf to save his drowning wife is guilty of having "one thought too many."<sup>12</sup>

To love is to occupy a perspective that is *not* the perspective

of the comprehensive surveying agent. It is to stand in awe and reverence before one's friend, as one stands before the Notre Dame Cathedral, and so to reject forms of reasoning that would call for cool, fair-minded, objective appraisal. So described, it is easy to discern a profound incompatibility between the standpoint occupied by the friend or lover, and that occupied by the impartialistic Comprehensive Surveyor.

To put it this way may sound as if love calls us to reject the demands of both reason and morality. I hope that by now the reader will be inclined to find the first claim, which is that love, by requiring us to abandon the rationalistic impartial perspective from which a comprehensive survey may be taken, thereby requires us to abandon reason itself, less persuasive than she might have previously. For much of the burden of this paper has been to dispute the common thought that occupation of the impartial perspective can always be equated with thinking in a reasonable manner. If the value of human beings is such that what individual human beings call for is not objective appraisal, but rather reverence and awe, then in refusing to be excessively rationalistic in our responses to them, then we are acting in a reasonable and justifiable manner. Perhaps this is one of the things Pascal had in mind when he famously wrote that "le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point."

We must keep in mind, moreover, that to be blind in the way necessary to love, we need not be *utterly* in the dark. As McDowell reminds us, it is perfectly alright for the virtuous person to be aware, on an intellectual level, that the rewards of unjust action would be pleasant; he must simply be blind to the *attractiveness* of such pleasure, in the sense that he must not *experience it as* attractive. Similarly, it would be absurd to require the friend, no matter how committed, to forget the existence and moral standing of others, or to literally believe that only her friend is attractive or worthy of love. It is sufficient that she *see him*—but not, of course, others—in the special light that is shed by love.<sup>13</sup>

Robert M. Adams' commentary on a passage from Buber's *I and Thou* is interesting in this connection. Buber writes:

Every actual relationship to another being in the world is exclusive. Its Thou is freed and steps forth to confront us in its uniqueness. It fills the firmament—not as if there were nothing else, but everything else lives in *its* light.<sup>14</sup>

And here is Adams' commentary:

The "exclusiveness" here is more a matter of focus than of literal (and therefore total) exclusion. Other objects are in view, but only insofar as they illuminate the nature or the meaning of the Thou or the object of love. To ask seriously whether the beloved is more (or less) excellent than some other object is to shift the focus of attention, demoting the beloved from being *the* focus to being at best one of two or more coordinate foci. Such a question is therefore no part of the fullness of appreciation.<sup>15</sup>

What love and friendship ask is that we reject one species of moral vision, which focuses on the impersonal, the impartial, and the abstract, in favor of another. The ethical case in favor of exclusive love takes off from W.S. Gilbert's wry observation, in *The Gondoliers*, that "When everybody's somebody, then no one's anybody." Of course, everybody *is* somebody, and this fundamental equality is significant and should be recognized in certain spheres—that of politics, for instance. But there is something deeply unattractive about the idea of extending the full recognition of everybody's somebodiness to everybody in *every* sphere. For how is the specialness of the individual human being to be given its full due, if there is no realm in which the individual human being is treated as special? And how *can* we treat an individual as special, if we are forced to treat them *all* as special? Indeed, what could it possibly *mean* to treat everyone as special?

#### 4

There is more than one way in which a certain fact or consideration might ground or contribute to an agent's having a reason. On the one hand, some facts are what we might call *transparent*: that is, fully accessible to the agent's consciousness in the processes of deliberation and action. The most transparent considerations are those which the agents themselves take to be their reasons for acting. But not all reasons are transparent in this way. Julia Driver, for instance, has pointed out that some virtues are, as she puts it, "virtues of ignorance": a talented but modest person, for example, cannot be fully aware of the facts regarding her merits relative to those of others, for such full awareness is simply incompatible with her being genuinely modest.<sup>16</sup>

According to Williams, the good husband will take 'It's my wife' as his reason for jumping into the water to save her, and will

*not* take 'Saving one's wife in such cases is permissible from the standpoint of impartial morality' as such a reason. But what, on Williams' view, justifies such an agent in not stopping to consider impartial morality (or, in regarding it as irrelevant to the extent that he *does* consider it)? This is a form of the question, much discussed of late, of the nature of love's reasons.

One possible answer is that the husband's love for his wife justifies his blindness to impartial requirements. This is the view of Harry Frankfurt, among others.<sup>17</sup> But the risk involved in making justifications contingent on psychological states may dissuade us from this. After all, it is psychologically possible for people to love bad or trivial things. If the man's wife and his favorite baseball card were both in danger, and he loved the baseball card more, would he then be justified in saving it rather than her?

One might say instead: his wife's value as a human individual, to which his love is a response. But one might then complain, as David Velleman does, that the wife's "Invoking her individual value in the eyes of his love would merely remind him that she was no more worthy of survival than the other potential victims, each of whom can ask: "What about me?"<sup>18</sup>

Velleman concludes from this that the reasons the husband should save his wife "have nothing essentially to do with love" and suggests that they are instead based in "the mutual commitments and dependencies of a loving relationship."<sup>19</sup> But this goes too far. After all, to specify that the relationship must be a *loving* one is already to take back the claim that the reasons have *nothing* to do with love. If, on the other hand, we rejected the requirement that the relationship must involve love, we would then be faced with a problem Frankfurt raises:

Suppose that for quite good reasons the man detests and fears his wife. Suppose that she detests him too, and that she has recently engaged in several viciously determined attempts to murder him. Or suppose that it was nothing but a cold-bloodedly arranged marriage of convenience anyhow [...] Surely to specify nothing more than a bare legal relationship between the man and the drowning woman misses the point.<sup>20</sup>

So: is it the love, the loving relationship, or the value of the loved individual that justifies Williams' loving husband in regarding the demands of impartial morality as irrelevant? Rather than choose



between them, I think we must acknowledge that *all* of these suggested elements will be present in a comprehensive and adequate account of love's reasons. From the lover's standpoint, it is the value of the particular human being whom he loves that is central, and that moves him—indeed, that so moves him that he will not pause to question her value, or the way in which her value gives rise to reasons for him to act, or the justifiability of so acting against a background in which other vulnerable persons also make potentially competing claims on his attention. At the same time, it is his relationship with her—which is essentially a *loving* relationship—that determines that *her* particular value, as opposed to the equally significant value of some other person or persons, plays this role in his practical deliberations, and which prevents him from occupying the impartial standpoint of the Comprehensive Surveyor from which the values of other persons would be seen and felt to be equally significant.

I am not convinced that the existence of the love relationship is necessary to *justify* the husband's saving his wife. After all, a stranger on the beach who was moved by her plight to jump in and try to save her would not, I assume, be unjustified in doing so. On the other hand, the *requirement* that he try to save her *is*, perhaps, justified by or grounded in the relationship. More particularly, it is grounded in the fact that, given that he has until now conducted his thinking and behavior in a way that is oriented toward the recognition of *her* special and particular value, a sudden or capricious transfer of commitments would constitute an abandonment and indeed a betrayal. But more fundamentally than this, what justifies this entire way of looking at things is precisely the special sort of value possessed by the human individual. For it is only in the light of this sort of value that we can make sense of loving commitments, and of the legitimacy of a standpoint that releases us from the demands of the comprehensive, impartial view.

Love blinds us to many things, among them the less than attractive qualities of our friends and lovers, and the very attractive qualities of those who would compete with our friends and lovers. It also blinds us, I think, to the way in which the special value of the human individual obliges us to engage in certain forms of partiality. For dwelling too much on *this* would have almost as significant an undermining effect as would dwelling on the demands of impartial

morality themselves. At any rate, none of this is on the true friend's mind as she performs acts of friendship. For part of what love blinds us to is precisely the fact that it blinds us at all.<sup>21</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Camus, Albert, "Le Mythe de Sisyphe", in *Essais*, Paris, NRF Gallimard, 1965, p. 155.
- 2 Lewis, C.S., "Friendship-The Least Necessary Love," in Badwhar, Neera Kapur, ed., *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 41.
- 3 Montaigne, Michel de, "Essais", in *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, NRF Gallimard, 1962, p.190. For Kant's view, see "Kant on the Metaphysics of Morals: Vigilantius's Lecture Notes," trans. P. Heath, in Kant, Immanuel, *Lectures on Ethics*, Heath, Peter, and Schneewind, J.B., eds, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 683: "[i]n friendship [...] the unity of the persons, or the reciprocal possession of one another by two persons, whereby they feel and think in common, is still more perfectly present, and with more equality, than in marriage."
- 4 I say "tend to" to leave room for theories, such as Peter Railton's 'sophisticated' consequentialism, which depart from the Comprehensive Surveyor model in allowing, for instance, that an agent may be motivated directly by her concern for a loved one without pausing to consider the effects of her actions on all affected persons, or its justifiability in broader impartialistic terms. It should be noted, however, that such theories still incorporate the model at the deeper level, to the extent that the patterns of behavior developed and exhibited by a sophisticated consequentialist agent must be justifiable to an impartial observer occupying something very much like the Comprehensive Survey position. For this reason, such theories, while they may on the surface appear somewhat amenable to the phenomenon of exclusivistic concern toward friends or loved ones, will nonetheless inevitably reject the sort of ethical stance described in this paper.
- 5 Gluck, Louise, *Proofs and Theories*, New York, Ecco Press, 1994, pp. 78-79; emphasis added.
- 6 Derrida, Jacques, *Foi et Savoir*, Paris, Seuil, 1996, p. 78.
- 7 There are obvious problems with this simple statement of the view, arising from the possibility of akrasia, etc.; these have received detailed consideration by John McDowell, David Wiggins, and others, but for the purpose of this paper I will simply set these issues aside.
- 8 That is, virtuous-in-a-particular-way, though I will leave this qualification as implicit in much of what follows.
- 9 See McDowell, John, "Virtue and Reason," reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998.
- 10 See especially Stroud, Sarah, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship" *Ethics*, vol. 116, 2006, pp. 498-524, and Keller, Simon, "Friendship and Belief," *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 33, 2004, pp. 329-51.
- 11 Bartels, A., and Zeki, S., "The neural correlates of maternal and romantic love," *Neuroimage*, vol. 21, 2004, pp. 1155-1166.
- 12 Williams, Bernard, "Persons, Character, and Morality," reprinted in *Moral Luck*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 18.
- 13 Cf. Velleman, David, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics*, vol. 109, 1999, p. 372, and Jeske, Diane, "Friendship, Virtue, and Impartiality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 57, 1997, pp. 51-72.
- 14 Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, New York, Scribner, 1970, p. 126; cited in Adams, R.M., *Finite and Infinite Goods*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 169.
- 15 Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 170.
- 16 Driver, Julia, "The Virtues of Ignorance," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 86, 1989, pp. 373-84.
- 17 See especially Frankfurt, Harry, *The Reasons of Love*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2004.
- 18 Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," p. 373.
- 19 Ibid., p. 373. For other examples of relationship-based accounts see Jeske, "Friendship, Virtue, and Impartiality," and Kolodny, Niko "Love as Valuing a Relationship," *Philosophical Review*, vol. 112, pp. 135-89.
- 20 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 37.
- 21 This paper was written at the Stanford Humanities Center while on sabbatical leave from California State University, Chico; I would like to thank both institutions for their generous support. I have benefited greatly from conversations with a number of colleagues and friends, particularly Sarah Buss, Harry Frankfurt, Wai-hung Wong, and Linda Zerilli.