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Making Sense of the Divinely Beautiful: Essays on Friendship, Love, and Attraction

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MAKING SENSE OF THE DIVINELY BEAUTIFUL: ESSAYS ON FRIENDSHIP, LOVE, AND ATTRACTION

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

MAKING SENSE OF THE DIVINELY BEAUTIFUL: ESSAYS ON FRIENDSHIP, LOVE, AND ATTRACTION

Essay 1**:** As interpersonal communication has changed with the proliferation of technology-based forms of meeting and interacting with others, philosophers have begun considering ways in which these new types of communication have altered the landscape of our relationships. Although philosophers are split on whether online friendships can measure up to the Aristotelean standard of virtue friendship, none have questioned the importance of truth telling or accurate representation of oneself in the context of online sharing. The underlying assumption is that in a virtuous friendship, there is no role whatsoever for anything other than strict honestly. I disagree with this assumption because I think it fails to account for the beneficial, generative potential of being *approximately honest* with one another in the context of close friendship. In this essay, I examine the role honesty plays in online friendship and make a case for a kind of relationship I call *generative friendship*, which forgoes the standard of strict honesty in favor of a mutually created, idealized rendering of the self and one's friend that resembles artistic interpretation as applied to the context of friendship.

Essay 2**:** One of the most interesting discussions in recent scholarship on love involves a question concerning what we are attracted to when we love someone. In seeking to understand this, philosophers have offered answers ranging from the claim that lovers respond to specific qualities or properties possessed by the beloved, to more broad-ranging notions such as love can only be understood as an attraction to the entire person of the beloved. Although each attempt to identify the nature of love succeeds in addressing certain aspects of the phenomenon, frequently it is at the expense of some other, equally important feature. The result has been a series of analytical essays offering competing claims or ad hoc additions aimed at shoring up these inadequacies. In an attempt to reconcile competing views on the nature of love—seemingly at an impasse—this essay suggests *viewing love in narrative terms* as a way to bring these views together as complements to one another, while at the same time providing a framework for understanding love as a coherent whole.

Essay 3**:** In keeping with the characteristic emphasis on rationality and the will, Stoic thinkers such as Epictetus and Seneca conceptualize intimate relationships, including friendships, by focusing on critical thinking and choice. On this view, persons become friends through an analytical process of weighing pros and cons and then deciding either to pursue or refrain from friendship. In contrast, this essay describes friendship formation—in particular, the initial stage of *attraction* to a particular person—in terms of *recognition* communicated primarily through embodied experience at an unconscious level. Drawing on concepts from both ancient and contemporary philosophy, this essay sketches a phenomenological account of attraction as the recognition of values expressed bodily through such things as comportment, language and gestures.

KEYWORDS: Online Friendship, Honesty, Narrative, Love, Phenomenology of Attraction

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. TRUTH TELLING AND ONLINE FRIENDSHIPS: A CASE FOR "APPROXIMATE HONESTY"

1.1 Introduction

As interpersonal communication has changed with the proliferation of technology-based forms of meeting and interacting with others, philosophers have begun considering ways in which these new types of communication have altered the landscape of our relationships. Among those interested in this topic, focus has converged upon Aristotle's formulation of the three kinds of friendship, with particular attention given to virtue friendship, which Aristotle grants an esteemed status by characterizing it both as the highest form of friendship available to humans, and also as "complete." In calling virtue friendship complete, Aristotle points out that, in addition to the mutual cultivation of virtue, friendships of this sort partake in each of the other kinds of friendship as well; namely, they prove to be both pleasurable and useful. Recently, debate about whether friendships conducted mainly or exclusively through online interactions qualify as "real" and how they stack up against traditional face-to-face relationships has dominated the conversation. While most are willing to grant technology a role in maintaining an existing relationship, few have suggested that online friendships rise to the high expectations demanded of the Aristotelian virtue friendship. Thus, two camps have emerged: there are those who claim that technology has largely undermined and debased the institution of friendship—or at least threatens to—and those who maintain that technology can be used as a tool to enhance existing friendships, and as a vehicle to forge significant and meaningful new ones.

Generally, those we might call "technology skeptics" argue that while email, texting, and social media may offer convenient and useful avenues for certain kinds of

communication (often characterized as quick and/or shallow), reliance on or overuse of these tech-mediated methods is incompatible with close friendships. Reasons for reluctance to embrace this type of communication vary, but most critics share the conviction that virtual friendships inevitably lack some essential features present in person-to-person relationships and this, in turn, makes them inferior.

Dean Cocking and Steve Matthews were among the first philosophers to attempt to address this issue. In a 2000 article titled "Unreal Friends," Cocking and Matthews begin with the notion that "context affects content"—the circumstances under which we communicate with one another bear upon the information we are able to exchange (225). This point is used to argue that due to certain "structural features" of internet correspondence—such as how one's self-presentation is limited to "voluntary disclosures"—internet friends cannot meet the demands of the complete friendship Aristotle describes. Specifically, Cocking and Matthews warn that voluntary self-disclosures are vulnerable to distortion and thus they object to the way internet correspondence, as a non-embodied form of communication, "permits and disposes us to present a skewed picture to others of what we are like" (225).

In fact, according to Cocking and Matthews, more than one structural feature of internet correspondence contributes to the freedom and leverage wielded by individuals as they craft versions of themselves they wish to put forward to others. Time constrictions, pressure to react to bodily cues and facial expressions, fear of betraying oneself, physically, under personal scrutiny—outside of traditional face-to-face interactions, each of these fades to minimal relevancy. Instead, when communicating virtually, Cocking and Matthews point out that "I am able to present myself to others

with a high level of control and choice" (228). In exclusively online contexts, the person we make available to others turns out to be a

> carefully constructed self, one that is able, for example, to concoct much more careful and thought-out responses to questions than I am able to in the non-virtual case. In the virtual case I can construct a highly controlled and chosen self-presentation. I can play down, put a positive or light-hearted spin on, or completely screen out the various things I don't particularly like about myself. (228)

Without the built-in verification checks of person-to-person interactions, Cocking and Matthews claim that online friends are at a disadvantage with respect to the accuracy of their knowledge of one other.

Similar concerns are echoed by others. Several recent critiques of online relationships cite the possibility, likelihood, and even inevitability of online friendship as uniquely susceptible to the problem of edited selves. Michael McFall, for instance, argues that "character-friendships cannot be created and sustained entirely through technological mediation" because they rely on a type of communication he calls "multi-filtered" (221; 224). McFall makes a distinction between "single" and "multi" filtered communication, where single-filtered communication, because it is experienced directly by the observer without additional levels of interpretation, is considered superior in terms of accurate conveyance of information. As an example of the difference, McFall describes a person relaying the details of an incident which occurred at a lunch meeting among a group of co-workers. Unless one is present at the meeting to observe interactions first-hand (single-filtered), they must rely on the honesty and perceptiveness of the individual

providing the report. McFall imagines a scenario where a person recounts an altercation and then seeks moral advice from a friend who was not present. Because the details come to the friend already selected and interpreted by the storyteller (multi-filtered), McFall argues that the friend's ability to provide guidance has been compromised. With internet friendships, McFall suggests this kind of multi-filtered communication disadvantage would be the norm, and would thus have a negative impact on the development of character friendships.

Not all philosophers have agreed with these critical assessments. As a rejoinder to this type of objection, Alexis Elder and Adam Briggle argue for the legitimacy of friendships mediated through technology-based forms of communication. In "Excellent Online Friendships: An Aristotelian Defense of Social Media" Elder makes a broad-ranging case for online friendships as real and meaningful. Against opposing claims that online friendships are inherently less-than, Elder supports her view that friendships "conducted predominantly online may qualify as the best sort of friendship" by showing how the Aristotelian elements of "conversation and thought"—essential to complete friendship—are available to online relationships in much the same way as they are to non-virtual ones. Citing examples of how friends can share music, photos and video links with one another as a means to enhance their mutual appreciation for such things, she effectively demonstrates how "social media preserves the relevantly human and valuable portions of life, especially reasoning, play, and exchange of ideas" (289; 287).

So far, even among those who argue for the overall legitimacy of online friendships, philosophers seem content to play defense. They have defended virtual friendships against charges of non-existence (i.e. that virtual relations are "friends" only

in name) and also against shallowness, but so far anyone has yet to make a sustained positive case for a type of friendship that exists primarily in the non-physical realm, and *because of this fact,* benefits from this arrangement and may actually be stronger in some ways for having done so. Adam Briggle comes closest in his 2008 article, "Real Friends: How the Internet Can Foster Friendship." Here, Briggle takes issue with Cocking and Matthews' depiction of online relationships as necessarily falling short. In their argument, Cocking and Matthews' claim that "within a purely virtual context, the establishment of close friendship is simply psychologically impossible" (224). Briggle disagrees. Using a hypothetical example of a correspondence between a Civil War soldier stationed across the country and a schoolteacher living in Boston, Briggle describes how a friendship comprised exclusively of written correspondence might develop over time and contain features conductive to the formation of an intimate connection between these two men.

Because the case Cocking and Matthews make against virtual friendship hinges heavily on the necessity of "non-voluntary" disclosures communicated physically during face-to-face interactions, Briggle points out several ways persons might tend to obscure themselves—either purposefully or unconsciously—in physical interactions. Examples include such things as failing to bring up in conversation among fellow soldiers one's doubts about the legitimacy of their efforts and seeking to avoid showing evidence of one's fears and apprehensions in order to project confidence to one's peers. These and other "exquisite acts of mutual pretense" Briggle calls "face-to-face feigning," and they are an indisputable element of interpersonal interaction (74). Contrasted against these rather situational motivations to keep to oneself rather than engage in revealing personal

conversation, Briggle praises written correspondence as a medium through which "distance" and "deliberateness" offer remedies for face-to-face feigning and can actually open up avenues for intimacy (77).

I agree with Briggle here but wish to take his line of reasoning a step further. In describing the war correspondents' friendship, Briggle makes a couple of important qualifications and assumptions. First, he makes note of the fact that the two men who begin writing one another have not previously met. In many ways, for the sake of Briggle's argument, whether the two men knew each other prior to their correspondence is immaterial. Presumably, had they met briefly some years earlier, or been casual acquaintances drawn together by the war, neither condition would figure significantly into their ability to forge a connection in the way he describes. The salient features contributing to the richness of the correspondence are, in fact, the ones Briggle highlights—distance and deliberateness. Second, Briggle's account takes for granted that, in their writings to one another, each of the men is straightforwardly honest in how they report their actions, and forthright with respect to their thoughts and feelings. The underlying assumption here is that when the soldier describes his day—marching, setting up camp, awaiting orders, preparations for movement, action seen in skirmishes, his reactions to what he has witnessed—in relating all this, the soldier's account directly corresponds to reality.

1.2 Honest Representation: A Self Among Friends

A general concern for what I will call *strict honesty* in the representation of oneself and others within the context of friendship is something that seems fundamental.

By "strict" in this case, I mean truth-telling that corresponds to reality and attempts, as much as possible, to present specific details in an accurate way, without embellishment. In varying ways, all the articles discussed so far have either directly or indirectly addressed the issue of honesty. This includes enthusiastic tech advocates as well as the skeptics. Although they find themselves in the position of defending a medium notorious for the tendency of its users to engage in widespread misrepresentation, aggrandizement or flat-out deception regarding online personas, at no point do Elder or Briggle suggest they endorse such deception. Instead, their arguments seek either to minimize the impact such misrepresentations might have (demonstrating, for example how negative effects might be mitigated or avoided altogether[1]) or to highlight ways in which honest communication—even online—is still possible. In Elder's essay, the issue of honesty is given only brief treatment. Basically, she acknowledges general concern over the potential for deceptive self-representation via the internet, but dismisses it, noting that such deceptions are common in face-to-face interactions as well and should therefore pose no special consideration for online friendship. She concludes: "One ought to exercise good judgment and discrimination in both circumstances" (292).

Among the technology skeptics? Each of the objections Cocking and Matthews raise with respect to online relationships has to do with honesty. First, they express concern that individuals in online relationships are inclined toward misrepresentation of oneself to others; second, they explain the importance of non-voluntary disclosures available exclusively through face-to-face contact with friends. The ability to read the

[1] Alexis Elder argues that, due to its nature as written communication, online conversations "are, arguably, less susceptible to deception" due to the fact that they leave "digital 'paper trails'" that can then be investigated and cross-referenced for accuracy (292).

physical cues (i.e. body language) of others is viewed by Cocking and Matthews as an essential component to friendship precisely because it makes available a more complete and accurate revelation of details otherwise inaccessible in virtual cases. For Cocking and Matthews, the distinct value of non-virtual friendship lies in the fact that direct contact allows friends to make observations and deductions about each other's behaviors that are as faithful to reality as possible. In both cases, communicating information considered mismatched or incomplete when viewed against reality is assumed to be detrimental to close friendship. In fact, honesty is so necessary to the function and health of a relationship of any kind that it nearly passes without comment. One seems automatically to assume strict honesty is a requirement for a non-dysfunctional friendship—most certainly for character friendship. After all, honesty is a virtue.

Shannon Vallor, chair of the Ethics of Data and Artificial Intelligence department at the Edinburgh Futures Institute, has authored several works on the intersection of friendship and technology. In a recent essay, Vallor advocates for the use of virtue ethics as a normative framework through which one might view questions about how we can best use technology to foster healthy human relationships. Toward the end of the essay, Vallor issues an invitation for tech users to prioritize the virtue of honesty in crafting their internet selves. Like Cocking and Matthews, Vallor voices apprehension at the way many have created an online presence that is less than honest. "Construction of a profile," she notes, encourages members to construct a carefully edited version of themselves, a version perhaps aimed more at drawing in as many 'friends' as possible than at exposing one's authentic personality" (Social 166). Implicit in Vallor's criticism here is the underlying suggestion—shared by all—that any type of communication which falls short

of the standards of strict honesty is problematic, casting shades of doubt over personal trust and threatening to undermine the possibility of friendship in general, and virtue friendship in particular.

So, is this all there is to say on the matter? Is strict honesty a necessary requirement for close character friendships? In what follows I want to consider, for a moment, the merits of setting aside the rigorous standards of strict honesty in favor of what might be called *approximate honesty*. Contrasted against the preoccupation with presenting things exactly as they are—a practice associated with strict honesty—approximate honesty focuses instead on possibility, potential and perfection: opening up space for possibilities, maximizing potential and striving for perfection. For a certain kind of friendship, the advantages of approximate honesty may be significant. It allows for the prospect of friends (at times) to be *approximately honest* with one another as they present aspects of their lives in an idealized fashion, within a space opened by distance, which is designed to facilitate the mutual creation of something beautiful. The remainder of this essay will describe such a relationship—which I call *generative friendship*—and will discuss the conditions under which communication within the context of the friendship might not satisfy the standards of strict honesty, and yet still qualify as an intimate character friendship. This kind of friendship is one that has not been considered in the literature thus far.

I am interested in a specific kind of friendship where the "reading" or ascertaining of the details of one's life becomes irrelevant because the friendship is centered on something else entirely. In such cases, the particular details of one's life fade out of focus as the friends shift their attention to ideas. Under ideal circumstances, this kind of

relationship can play an important role in the creative, intellectual and moral development of an individual. Because creativity, reasoning, and moral accountability are elements of logos—the distinctive features of human flourishing—generative friendship meets Aristotle's high standard for complete friendship.

1.3 The Role of the Beautiful in Creative, Intellectual and Moral Development

In seeking to describe what he hoped to achieve in creating works of art, the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones said, "I mean, by a picture, a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be—in a light better than any light that ever shone—in a land no one can define, or remember, only desire—and the forms are divinely beautiful" (qtd in Smith). The kind of vision offered here is one where art is seen as an idealization; where the role of the artist is to *re-present*, through imaginative interpretation, an image of something not fashioned with strict allegiance to how things appear "in reality," but how things might be if they were to exist in a perfected state.

As an example of how Burne-Jones' philosophy of art might be applied to a particular work, consider *Ophelia*, a painting by fellow Pre-Raphaelite and Burne-Jones contemporary John Everett Millais. Millais' depiction of Ophelia floating face-up, her body strewn with flowers, having drowned in despair, is notable for the aesthetic beauty with which the tragic scene is rendered. On the one hand, Millais' attention to detail—including each flower petal and frond—achieves an impressive, nearly photographic level of accuracy. He spent many months on location painting en plein air along the Hogsmill River in Surrey, capturing details of actual flowers as they appeared along the banks

(Tate). In this sense at least, Millais' *Ophelia* can be considered naturalistic or *realistic.* His son John even claimed that when a botany professor was unable to take his students to the country for field observation, he opted instead to have them study the flowers painted in *Ophelia* as substitutes "instructive as nature itself" (Tate).

And yet, as closely and accurately as Millais strove to reproduce the natural features in crafting his landscape for *Ophelia*, elements of its composition are decidedly *idealistic*. Most obviously, the many varieties of flowers along the banks, floating in the water, and tangled in Ophelia's dress serve as a beautiful backdrop for the scene, but astute observers have pointed out that the kinds of flowers Millais depicts in the painting would never have appeared together naturally at any one time, as they have different bloom periods throughout the spring and summer months (Tate). The flowers the artist includes, then, are not intended to be a direct representation of what he was seeing; instead, they are deliberate choices selected to function as literary references and objects imbued with symbolic significance. While several the flowers are mentioned by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* (crow flowers, nettles and daisies, for example), others were added by Millais due to their symbolic associations (forget-me-nots, and meadowsweet, for instance[2]), as well as for general aesthetic purposes[3]. So, in calling the painting idealistic, we mean both in aesthetic terms and also with respect to communicating meaning. The completed image Millais ultimately presents to the viewer is not meant to function like a snapshot of a scene from Shakespeare to be taken in and scrutinized against "reality" (whatever that would mean, since the episode to which this painting

[2] From "Wear Your Rue with Indifference" secretgardening.wordpress.com
[3] According to secretgardening.wordpress.com, "Millais originally included some daffodils in the painting not observed in Ewell [. . .] as he felt the painting needed more yellow. But his friend, the poet Tennyson, suggested that they were not appropriate as they symbolized false hope."

refers is itself a fictitious event to begin with); rather, *Ophelia* is an aesthetically idealized image to contemplate and enjoy.

Here art achieves approximate representation. Each of the flowers in *Ophelia* appears in the painting because it contributes aesthetically or thematically to the work as a whole. But if the artist were bound to a strictly accurate or "true to life" representation of the landscape, the flowers could not be presented in the same way, and arguably, something (symbolism; aesthetic balance) would be lost. Because the depiction is not strictly accurate, there's a sense in which the artist engages in a kind of deception. But unlike some forms of deception which aim at diverting the audience away from truth, this approximation is honest in that it aims at truth. It is what might called a *beautiful lie,* and is analogous to what I mean in allowing for "approximate honesty" in generative friendship. Like Millais' *Ophelia*, approximate honesty in friendship will be starkly honest and straightforwardly accurate in some aspects, while presenting an idealized vision in others.

In art we encounter something (an image; a verbal description) familiar enough to be recognized, but which is presented to the viewer at enough of a distance so as to inspire and motivate us to continue journeying toward this ideal. What we appreciate when we appreciate art is just this representation of possibility. When Burne-Jones' says of the project he envisions for himself as an artist—to create an image that "never was, never will be"—he is appealing to just this kind of otherworldly sense of perfection. He recognizes that the image he strives to create can never exist in the tangible world of the body; it can only exist as an idea in the realm of the intellect. Nevertheless, it is still a goal to be pursued.

The role that such a beautiful, idealized version of reality plays in creative, intellectual and moral development is varied. For starters, an encounter with beauty arrests us out of our common, everyday experience. Absent such encounters, the tendency is toward an unreflective carrying out of tasks that are overwhelmingly centered around physical, bodily needs and concerns. Beauty, though, interrupts this pattern and offers a glimpse into the realm of reason and morality. Once it engages us, a thing of beauty captures and holds our attention; in some cases, beauty can trigger recognition of alternative possibilities, hitherto unconsidered. At its best, beauty calls attention to the distance between what is and what could be, creating a space for the actualization of something new, perhaps more beautiful and full of wonder than previously imagined. Additionally, experiencing beauty offers a respite from the gritty reality of our lives, thus paving the way for recharging motivation while simultaneously offering an impetus for us to maximize our potential. In the context of friendship, the mutual apprehension of beauty gives each something to long for, to strive for, to hope for, and to work toward; in Platonic terms: it connects them to the ideal world of the Forms.

1.4 Contra Commonplace

One distinguishing feature of the Aristotelian virtue friendship is the way in which the individuals involved in the relationship contribute to the moral and intellectual growth of the other. Over the course of their time knowing one another, each becomes a better person because they are friends. Speaking of the friendship of "the excellent person" in relation to another excellent person, Aristotle says, "He must, then, perceive his friend's being together [with his own], and he will do this when they live together and

share conversation and thought. For in the case of human beings, what seems to count as living together is the *sharing of conversation and thought*, not sharing the same pasture, as in the case of grazing animals" (*NE* IX.9, italics mine). Presumably, this happens through the regular, meaningful exchange of ideas. Although ideally Aristotle envisions this interchange in terms of face-to-face interactions,[4] as others have shown, it is still possible to cultivate excellent friendships, even at a distance. Physical distance, as well as separation from the personal lives of our friends, may even offer advantages when compared to traditional in-person friendships. Knowing someone almost exclusively through their ideas seems as close to the Socratic ideal of minimizing intrusion from bodily distractions as we can come within the context of friendship. Furthermore, diminishing the role of the personal in the relationship helps insulate it from lapsing into an exchange of commonalities.

It is precisely this desire —to remain in the realm of the extraordinary, of the ideally beautiful—that animates generative friendship. In calling the friendship *generative*, I mean that a fundamental quality of the relationship is the way in which the structure of the friendship conduces to the creation of something new—something that might not be obtainable through traditional face-to-face interactions. This particular kind of relationship is an intellectual partnership maintained predominately online or mediated through correspondence. Like the beautiful image an artist can create when afforded the liberty to represent things not strictly as they are but as they could be, a friendship focused on ideas and maintained over distance could also benefit from exercising a kind of "poetic license" in the relationship. In a sense, the generative aspect of the relationship

[4] "Living together seems to be most characteristic of friendship" (NE IX.10).

is a function of viewing it as if it were a work of art, a creative project, mutually undertaken by two individuals striving together to imagine and then create—as much as possible—perfectly excellent versions of themselves. Of course, actual achievement of the goal of perfection is not obtainable; nonetheless, the striving toward, the effort undertaken to approximate an ideal, is essentially Platonic.

According to Plato, we dwell in the realm of becoming, of appearances. Because of this, humans are relegated to producing approximations of ideals. Our ability to do this well is hampered by the fact that we are embodied creatures, and our bodies inundate us with a continuous series of demands. Food, drink, sleep, shelter—whatever is needed for survival, plus many additional desires aimed at comfort and pleasure—generally speaking, these physical concerns occupy an outsized portion of our thoughts. In the *Phaedo,* Socrates explains how the body acts as a hindrance to the contemplative life of the mind. Although the only way to completely rid ourselves of such distractions is to be separated from our bodies through death, Socrates describes how we might attempt to strive toward knowledge in the meantime:

> He will do this most perfectly who approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense perception with his reasoning, but who using pure thought alone, tries to track down each reality pure and by itself, freeing himself as far as possible from eyes and ears and, in a word, from the whole body, because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom when it is associated with it. (65-71)

Insofar as online friendships offer a way to bracket the physical distractions which preclude us from focusing on the more important rational elements, they seem to offer at least one potential advantage over face-to-face interactions.

Along similar lines, in his essay dedicated to the subject of friendship, Ralph Waldo Emerson describes the ubiquity of friendly interactions with others, which he says is marked by kindness and pleasant exchanges. Highest praise, however, is reserved for a rare kind of friendship involving kindred souls whose focus is on intellectual and spiritual concerns[5]. With respect to these special friendships of the soul, Emerson advocates for establishing and maintaining a certain level of distance from one's friend. Specifically, he thinks becoming familiar with the mundane, day-to-day details of each other's lives would do nothing to bring friends closer to one another. In fact, he seems to hold that accumulation of such banal personal information—what is eaten and worn and experienced; the scheduling, planning, and running of a household—would achieve the opposite effect. For Emerson, there's a sense in which having this sort of knowledge about someone can strip away the beauty and mystery surrounding that individual and potentially rob the relationship of that which makes it rare: "The hues of the opal, the light of the diamond, are not to be seen if the eye is too near," he reminds ("Friendship").

In lieu of seeking personal closeness with our friend, Emerson suggests we treat them with reverence. For him, this entails a willingness to forego common knowledge about a friend in favor of the extraordinary, the significant, the meaningful. "Friendship demands a religious treatment," he says, "Reverence is a great part of it. Treat your friend as a spectacle. Of course he has merits that are not yours, and that you cannot honor if

[5] For Emerson, these are essentially the same.

you must needs hold him close to your person. Stand aside; give those merits room; let them mount and expand. Are you the friend of your friend's buttons, or of his thought?" And elsewhere: "Why should we desecrate noble and beautiful souls by intruding on them?" he asks, "Why insist on rash personal relations with your friend? Why go to his house, or know his mother and brother and sisters? Why be visited by him at your own? Are these things material to our covenant? ("Friendship").

Becoming too familiar with someone is seen here as an obstacle to both the uniqueness of the bond and to the goal of intellectual and spiritual growth. Like Socrates, Emerson views everyday concerns such as household relations and the day-to-day management of one's affairs as inconsequential and argues that investment in obtaining this kind of trivial knowledge about your friend wastes precious energy on distractions. Instead, he seeks to elevate friendship to a higher plane: "Let him be to me a spirit" he offers in place of a common embodied relationship.

What type of activity, then, does Emerson think is conducive to this special kind of friendship? Due to our nature as rational souls, true intimacy, he argues, can only be established when friends exchange, examine, and hone ideas with one another. And how best would such exchanges take place? Unsurprisingly, rather than suggest friends sit down with one another and converse in person, Emerson favors mediated communication, particularly writing: "To my friend I write a letter and from him I receive a letter . . . it is a spiritual gift worthy of him to give and of me to receive." And again, "A message, a thought, a sincerity, a glance from him I want, but not news, nor pottage;" "I can get politics and chat and neighborly conveniences from cheaper

companions," he says, but "Should not the society of my friend be to me poetic, pure, universal and great as nature itself?" ("Friendship").

The distance Emerson aims at establishing between noble souls is intended as protection against the relationship getting sullied by non-rational concerns or reduced to the level of the commonplace. Although he does not speak of friendship in terms of creating a work of art, part of the allure of maintaining personal and physical distance between friends is the space it opens up for the imagination. Near the beginning of his reflection on the pleasures of friendship, Emerson recounts what it is like anticipating the arrival of an esteemed individual, known only by reputation. His account makes an unexpected pivot, however, when he remarks that once the stranger begins to speak, the elation dissipates. This is not so much because the speaker's words themselves disappoint, but because a mystery has been unveiled. One understands, then, Emerson's insistence on keeping his most valued friends at arm's length: "To a great heart [the friend] will still be a stranger in a thousand particulars, that he may come near in the holiest ground" ("Friendship"). There is something to be said, after all, for enshrining an ideal.

1.5 Approximate Honesty and the Ideal Self

Having first surveyed recent scholarship on the pros and cons of online friendships, noting that, for their many differences, an unexamined consensus on the role of honesty has emerged, I now want to examine that premise. Briefly stated, the assumption is this: In a virtuous friendship, there is no role whatsoever for anything other than strict honestly. I disagree with this assumption because I think it fails to account for

the beneficial, generative potential of being *approximately honest* with one another in the context of close friendship.

Approximate honesty. Almost honest? Nearly honest? Approaching honesty? If you are like most, the phrase itself probably triggers both an initial sense of moral approbation and also bemused academic smugness. Is she advocating for being dishonest with one another, or is this just a euphemism for lying? The answer, in a word: neither. Earlier in the essay we considered the role idealizations—particularly beautiful ones—play in the intellectual and moral life of an individual and looked at how a work of art (whether it be a painting or a poem) can engage viewers at the intersection of two worlds, known variously throughout the history of ideas as: appearance versus reality; becoming and being; matter and mind; realism and idealism, and so on. Because humans simultaneously occupy both worlds, I agree with those (like Plato) who have argued that we dwell in the realm of approximations and find ourselves in the position of having to strive toward ideals of perfection that we find continually elude us. Artistic interpretation, then, is a balancing act, standing as it were in the liminal space of our experience and re-presenting elements of that experience to viewers. As such, art is an apt metaphor for human relationships and offers a model for how we might approach our most valued friendships.

In the same way an artist observes the world and then portrays those observations after a fashion—interpretively, aesthetically, symbolically—close friends are also in possession of a certain kind of knowledge concerning their counterparts. How they interpret, represent and reflect back that information is itself an act of creation, mutually offered and exchanged. Partaking of this process, friends engage in nothing less than the

business of working out their ideal selves. In what remains, I want to make a case for treating an online intellectual partnership as a work of art which not only allows but encourages honest "approximations" as a way of projecting ideals to strive toward and suggesting new ways of being.

But first, a story: I have a friend who, during his tenure as a medical student, became interested in rock climbing. He was not a climber, although like many 20-somethings, he had attempted recreational climbing in a gym setting. But it was after reading *The Night Climbers of Cambridge*, a first-hand account of a group of Cambridge undergrads who, in the 1930's formed a clandestine club to free-climb campus buildings at night for the sheer thrill of it, that his curiosity was piqued in earnest. As he contemplated taking up climbing as a pastime, he visited an outdoor store where an idea occurred to him. He purchased a carabiner, attached it prominently to his backpack and waited for someone—an actual rock climber—to take notice and ask about it. The plan worked brilliantly. An experienced climber did see it, assume my friend was a fellow climber and engaged him in conversation. Although he did not overtly lie, owning a professional-grade carabiner and displaying it as if it were a piece of gear owned because it is used, could arguably be considered *posing* as a climber. While not much is at stake here, it is still the case that an essential feature of the story of how my friend *actually became* a rock climber is the fact that he at first falsely presented himself as if he already was one.

The method employed by my friend to find his climbing partner illustrates, in part, what I mean by approximate honesty. It is not far from true that this aspiring rock climber can claim climbing as a hobby; he is interested, he scouted out entry level test-

versions of the sport and has undertaken preliminary research into the skills and equipment required. Given this, I would say that insofar as climbing is an ideal he is striving toward, this individual was approximately honest in his presentation of himself as a "climber." In Aristotelian terms, one might say he was attempting to become a climber by practicing (as best he could, given his level of experience) the actions associated with climbing. My account of approximate honesty owes much to Aristotle's description of the way humans achieve arete. As Aristotle explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, virtues are good habits formed through accumulated action practiced over time. Since moral virtues are not present at birth but must be developed through effort, first we identify an ideal—a model person who embodies the virtue we wish to emulate—and then through deliberate and consistent acts of choice we attempt to imitate the virtuous action until it becomes for us a natural, habituated way of being. In the early stages of this process, it may seem as if you are engaging in a kind of deception. You may know, for instance, that your generous act of giving your time to help another student is a choice you made, despite not feeling particularly inclined toward generosity at the moment. Initially, your actions may seem forced or faked; in fact, the quip "fake it till you make it," is a phrase in common parlance that captures this sense that our earliest efforts may appear false.

Imagine someone who finds, through casual but repeated choices to have a cigarette with others, that they increasingly behave as if they are addicted to nicotine. For example, they notice cravings for a cigarette which occur outside the normal social context wherein this habit first emerged; instead of bumming a smoke off whomever happens to be around, they have begun to purchase and smoke their own; what was once

an occasional indulgence now feels more necessary and urgent. Now imagine this person is aware of these changes and views them with growing disapproval, yet so far, they have not made a motion to curb this new habit. Let's say that recently our new smoker has become friends with someone they admire and respect, and through conversations about healthy living, virtuous and vicious habits and choices, it becomes clear to our smoker that the new friend would certainly view habitual smoking as unhealthy, unpleasant, and probably vicious. One evening at a party, the two friends are standing together when someone offering a cigarette, asks "Do you smoke?" In the moment, under the influence of their own best judgement, aided now by the presence of the friend who has no reason to expect otherwise, our new smoker discovers they have finally found the motivation to begin to be better, to prioritize health, to be otherwise than they currently are. The response? "No. Thank you."

Now there is a sense in which the reply here is neither a true statement (given the specific question asked), nor is it an accurate reflection of our smoker's current status. One can imagine the surprise and confusion of an onlooker who happened to be a recent smoking buddy: "That's a lie. You do smoke!" I mention this hypothetical situation as an example of how, in the context of friendship, one might have made available to them new opportunities to be something different than they currently are. In such a case, at least in its burgeoning form, this statement is still a misrepresentation of facts (strictly construed), but it may yet prove to be a beautiful lie. If, moving forward, our smoker exercises the determination required to make actual the claim being advanced, then we might say instead that what was offered here was not a lie, but rather a bold new truth made possible through hope and a crucial element of active resolve. To the smoker, the "lie"

presents itself as a possibility. The internal dialogue of the moment may run thus: “Am I a smoker? Is that what I have become, what I will continue choosing to be? No.” Here the lie represents an active decision to change. Striving toward. Not yet, but on the way to becoming. Practicing. Walking the path.

The challenge, of course, is how best to apply the concept of approximate honesty to virtue friendships in such a way that the “approximations” enrich and benefit rather than detract from or weaken the relationship. We have already discussed some of the conditions that best accommodate a thriving generative friendship. The first has to do with distance. Emerson makes a compelling case for the reasoning behind maintaining a degree of separation from those with whom we wish to correspond on an intellectual and spiritual level. To know our friend’s aesthetic tastes and academic interests, to understand their values and aspirations is far more intimate than knowing where they dined for lunch on Thursday or their plans for next week. Part of what makes an online relationship an ideal candidate for an intellectual partnership is the built-in separation that makes focusing on ideas more natural.

Earlier, in discussing the benefits of online friendship, Adam Briggle considers a relationship that develops between a teacher and a soldier as they exchange letters over the course of several months. Due to the distance separating them, Briggle suggests each is more open and honest with the other, sharing information they may feel uncomfortable revealing to people in their daily lives. While Briggle demonstrates how distance can increase what I have called strict honesty, I would like to consider how approximate honesty might also play an important role in a such a friendship; specifically, I want to

look at how approximate honesty might assist in generating courage in one or both correspondents.

As the soldier relays thoughts and feelings he experiences as his company prepares to engage in conflict, and as he describes details of those events in letters, the schoolteacher reacts as one unaccustomed to life on the front lines of war. To the teacher, the sense of calm resolve communicated through the soldier's words seems remarkably courageous, and in his response back to the soldier, he says as much, praising the soldier for his courage. Knowing now that his friend holds him in such high esteem, the soldier finds he begins *thinking of himself as courageous;* at the same time, he also discovers new motivation to practice small acts of courage. Eventually, he may even choose to undertake more difficult tasks which would require even greater courage—volunteering, perhaps, for a reconnaissance mission.

But what if, in his portrayal of himself in the letters, the soldier put on a braver face than how he actually felt? What if his choice of words and the details he mentions were selected to represent the situation (his views, feelings or actions) in the best possible light? What if in the letters to his friend he depicts the response he would, ideally, hope for himself, the one to which he aspires? Such cases, I have argued, have a place within character friendships as, under the right conditions, they can generate a positive feedback loop that produces favorable conditions for growth—in this case for moral development. The opportunity for moral growth extends to the other friend as well. Not only is it the case that the soldier benefits from the idealized notion of himself (which was partially cultivated by his portrayal of himself, but was also taken up and enhanced by his friend),

the teacher, too, is engaged in the same mutually exchanged process of self-representation/self-cultivation and therefore enjoys similar opportunities for growth[6].

A second condition that helps create a healthy generative friendship has to do with motives. For generative friendships to thrive, intention is paramount. If I were to name the essence of what separates approximate honesty from vicious misrepresentation, it would be intent. In speaking of creative, intellectual and moral aspirations with your friend, one must be committed to the project of realizing the ideal with a sincere desire to eventually embody the character trait, rather than simply keeping up a ruse. The goal, after all is *esse quam videri*— to be rather than to seem.

1.6 Objections and Conclusion

Certainly there are limits to this approach. One should never attempt to pass oneself off as having special expertise—professional or otherwise—most critically in high-stakes situations. Had my friend taken his pose as a rock climber to the next level and pretended he had experience belaying, for instance, and had he and his newfound friend decided to tackle a climb at Red River Gorge, both would incur substantial risk. Similarly, a pilot, a surgeon, a mental health specialist—without knowledge and proven expertise in these fields one should never attempt to fake or exaggerate credentials. These are just a few examples, to which common sense will readily supply more.

[6] Briggle speculates that, in response to the soldier's correspondence, the teacher might come to reevaluate himself. He then "faces his daily chores with a greater resolve and begins to appreciate more the simple things of a life at peace" (74). Although Briggle's example assumes what I've called strict honesty, one could expect similar results with approximate honesty as well.

In addition to needing to respect limits on the kinds of claims that can serve as appropriate "approximations," some may object to projecting an idealized version of yourself to others because of the potential for creating pressure to be or become something you are not (yet). If the high standards set expectations that generate anxiety about being "found out" (imposter syndrome) or failing at whatever goal has been set as the target, rather than generating the motivation to reach those goals, then the potential good of setting the standards has been undermined.

Another obstacle might be the draw of wanting to "close the distance"—that is, to have a "real" (physical, embodied) relationship with your online friend. If Aristotle is correct that what friends desire most of all is being together, then the likelihood this would arise is substantial. The question then becomes: if online friends choose to spend time together in person, do they risk losing or perhaps spoiling the special nature of the relationship? Is Emerson correct in asserting that "the very flower and aroma of the flower of each of the beautiful natures disappears as they approach each other" ("Friendship")?

Lastly, and most importantly, some may complain that the *approximate honesty* described here amounts to little more than an admission that the relationship is ultimately "predicated upon a lie." I find this to be most serious objection, although it is not without qualification and a remedy which I think mitigates this concern. Michael T. McFall has expressed concern that long-distance friends who rely on mediated correspondence (text based; whether online or traditional written) for communication have "no idea whether their respective sharing is genuine" (228). "There could be," he worries, "a large

distance between what is written and what is true. People often lie, and they might even unknowingly convey falsehoods" (228).

Surely, even under the parameters I have suggested here, the virtue of honesty is not without relevance. As mentioned earlier, the objective in approximating truth through an idealized lens of how things might be is to expand the way we look at representations to include an option for aesthetic interpretation. Such interpretations do not disregard honesty, nor do they discount virtue. After all, I am suggesting making honest approximations that both respect boundaries and aspire toward truth. This is hardly the egregious deception some fear. We find a useful model in revisiting the way Aristotle fleshes out his discussion of anger and the associated virtue, mildness. "It is hard to define," he says, "how, against whom, about what and how long we should be angry" (*NE* IV.5). Likewise, the capacity to be truthful is a virtue subject to the particulars of a given situation, where proper consideration requires determining how one might be honest "'at the right times,' in the right way, to the right persons and in the right degree" (qtd in Vallor).

While the concern motivating Cocking and Matthews' objection to the highly curated presentation of virtual selves in online friendships is legitimate for many cases, in the context of generative friendship, some of the things they view as potential problems can be seen as opportunities instead. Rather than seeing the "high level of control and choice" available in how one presents themselves to a friend in a negative light, with generative friendship this aspect can be viewed as a strength. After all, generally speaking, being able to produce "much more careful and thought-out responses to questions" would be considered a good thing. Most writing benefits from the writer

taking time to develop ideas (one can gather thoughts, research relevant material, map out the best way to convey information); moreover, written expression often improves with effort and attention, (one is able to craft more beautiful phrases; use more expressive language; present ideas more precisely, more concretely). The same can be said of virtual communication.

It is important to keep in mind here that approximate honesty in the context of generative friendship does not involve lying in the sense of being duplicitous, or even conjuring a whole-scale misrepresentation of oneself. Instead, a generative friendship is an intellectual partnership where two people engage in creating and nurturing an elevated sense of themselves and one another that is presented "in a light better than any light that ever shone"—not in the sense of something whose value has been mistaken or overestimated, but in the way holding a high estimation of something has the potential to elevate it to the next level—to a form Edward Burne-Jones might recognize and call *divinely beautiful*.

CHAPTER 2. LOVE AS NARRATIVE

2.1 Introduction

One of the most interesting discussions in recent scholarship on love involves a question concerning what we are attracted to when we love someone. In seeking to understand this, philosophers have offered a variety of answers; some quite specific, others broad-ranging and inclusive. Of these, the properties view has proved influential due in part to its intuitive appeal. As Simon Keller explains, the properties view "says that the question, 'What justifies your choosing to make *her* the object of your romantic love?' is a sensible question to ask, and that . . . lovers can, in principle, answer it by appealing to a set of the beloved's properties" (164).

In what follows I will consider some of the pros and cons generally associated with the properties view, noting especially some recent attempts to reconcile it with common objections. Although each attempt to amend the view has yielded additional insights, so far none of these defenses succeeds in capturing the essence of love without also generating issues of its own. Part of the reason this is so is because the methodology philosophers have employed thus far overwhelmingly focuses on abstract analysis aimed at breaking a concept apart into its component elements. While analysis excels at identifying essential features and clarifying the particulars of concepts, it generally falls short when it comes to showing how these particulars fit together as a whole—which is

an equally important part of understanding. In an attempt to reconcile competing views on the nature of love—seemingly at an impasse—this essay suggests viewing love in narrative terms as a way to bring these views together.

2.2 Advantages of the Properties View

As philosophers, we value objectivity; we want our thinking to be guided by reasoning that is logically sound and defensible, and ideally, we expect our actions to respond to these reasons. It is no surprise then, that in considering love—this state that plays such a central role in our lives—we often apply the same standard. We look for reasons in love because we want the things we do because of love to be ordered and rational, to make sense—or at the very least not be *irrational*. Of course, there are notable exceptions to this generalization, even amongst those who defend some version of the properties view. Robert Solomon, for instance, rejects the ideals of "objectivity, impersonality, disinterestedness, universality, respect for evidence and arguments, and so on" as being operative in love, and yet still maintains that love has reasons and that those reasons are linked to the properties of the beloved (*Erotic Love* 502). Additionally, Laurence Thomas argues that love can be "explained" but not "justified" through reference to reasons, thus allowing love to be freed from some problematic implications of objectivity in the sphere of love, namely: avoiding the conclusion that there could be reasons for love which would *compel* us to either love or reject someone.

Besides the commitment to rationality as an intellectual ideal, we want love to have reasons in part because love is so risky; a lot is at stake, emotionally speaking, if you make a mistake in love. Motivated by such a concern, Derek Edyvane has argued

that love should be answerable to external critique; the reasons I give for loving my beloved must be concrete and open to an evaluation of their merits. Because of this requirement, reasons need to refer to specific features, rather than vague proclamations such as "I love him—entirely—just him." Edyvane makes his point within the context of a more detailed argument about unconditional love, concluding that romantic love, at least, is best viewed as a *conditional* commitment which "takes into consideration the reasons we might be able to offer to render our commitment intelligible to others" and also, I might add, to ourselves (59).

The first advantage, then, of the properties view is that it provides an account of love's reasons. What are the reasons for my loving someone? To address this question, I would turn to observation and evaluation of the beloved, noting qualities, traits, or features I value or find desirable, and which are also possessed by my beloved. These properties, in principle[7], provide me with reasons for loving. Now, let's take a moment to consider a basic version of the competing view, so that we can contrast the two. The alternate approach to the properties view claims that what I am attracted to and what I ultimately love[8] is you: the whole person, the total 'self' of my beloved. As appealing as this initially sounds, one might well ask, "What does it mean to love the entirety of another person?" and "What, exactly, is the 'self' to which we would be appealing by making such a claim?" Solomon, at least, finds such notions ridiculous: "The idea that the object of my love is another person suggests . . . that love is about a person *simpliciter*, the whole person, nothing but and nothing less than the whole person. This is simply

[7] I follow Keller here in qualifying this statement in order to acknowledge the possibility that one does not always know precisely which properties one is responding to.
[8] These two should probably be separated. More on this issue later.

untrue" (*Love* 133). He continues by suggesting a hypothetical list such as one might produce when asked about a particular object of love: "I love you," he says, "but that may be for any number of reasons—because I think you're beautiful, because you love me too, because I admire you in your career, because we cook fine meals together" (133). His main argument in this passage is that we neither love with our own 'entire self,' nor do we love another's 'entire self,' instead our loving only makes sense within the context of what he calls a *loveworld*—the mutually created realm wherein we, as lovers, enact a new shared identity.

Now the point I want to bring out here, that Solomon serves to illustrate, is simply that in practice, when asked to provide an account of our reasons for love, more often than not we cite the admirable properties of the beloved. Moreover, a lover who cannot (does not? will not?) name at least *some* features of his beloved as reasons for his attraction is at risk of seeming lazy, apathetic, or at best, evasive, for his failure to engage in this exercise. Indeed, citing anything other than specific properties attributable to the beloved, in some sense, would seem vacuous. To extend this same observation, there is also a sense in which we conceive of ourselves as describable most readily in terms of what we consider our own set of properties. For example, in responding to the request, "Tell me about yourself," we almost always appeal to concrete properties such as physical features (I'm 5'9") and personality traits (I'm a bit shy), as well as things we have done (I've hiked 350 miles of the Appalachian Trail). This offers fairly persuasive support to the intuition that we tend to think even of ourselves, at least broadly, in terms of properties. What's important here is that no one, in answering that question, would say

something like “I am an ineffable underlying essence, a total self.” At least it would certainly seem odd if they did.

This brings up another issue. Absent any meaningful explanation of what is meant by loving a whole self, it seems we *must* love the beloved as an instantiation of actual traits, qualities, and properties; otherwise, lacking any particular feature(s) that would enable us to distinguish the ones we love from others, we would end up having to admit that love is arbitrary. After all, if my beloved’s properties do not pick her out, then what does? What would be the basis for love, or would we have to say that love has no reasons?

We want there to be reasons. There’s definitely a sense in which we want to be loved for at least *some* of our properties, especially if we consider these properties to be essential to, or definitive of, our own sense of self. This is particularly true when we consider the traits in question to be personal achievements, things we have striven for—whether this is a non-moral good such as maintaining a healthy body through conscientious eating habits and exercise, or a moral good such as the virtue of generosity. In each case, the featured good is one we have made a conscious effort to cultivate, and it is not unreasonable to want the struggle involved in its achievement to be recognized and appreciated—to have the work we have invested time and energy into to be acknowledged—as *belonging* to us, as *our own*.

But not only this. Another situation where we might wish to have a certain feature picked out by our lovers and viewed as inhering in us is when we deem a property valuable—worthy of our esteem—and we want that property associated with us. Here it need not matter whether the trait in question is possessed “naturally” (according to

disposition), or a trait we have acquired because of good upbringing or education, or even a trait we possess by chance (by luck of the genetic draw, for example, a person may be athletic or a gifted metaphysician), as long as the trait selected is one we value**,** and as long as we can attach this trait to us as an applicable descriptor, then we are apt to be disappointed to find out that our beloved is indifferent toward (unresponsive to) this quality—that she would have loved us in the same way even if we had been otherwise is no consolation. In this case it seems what is at stake (in addition to the arbitrariness mentioned earlier) is the fact that we want our lovers to appreciate what we take to be our positive properties, largely because we hope they too will value what we value.

Simon Keller has argued that when someone loves us it gives us reason to feel good about ourselves (perhaps most especially, I might add, when we are loved for traits we value). His claim serves to reinforce much of what I have been describing above. Here is Keller:

> A large part of what we value about being the object of another's love is that we take it to imply an informed and positive (at least not negative), objective evaluation of our character, we think of love as being more than the arbitrary expression of a subjective whim. We want to know that there exist reasons that can render this person's love for us intelligible to others. Where a person's declaration of love appears to lack this element of implicit objective evaluation, where it strikes us as being in this sense indiscriminate, we feel that it means less. (72)

To sum up what seems right about the properties view, the following should be mentioned: we want love to have reasons and properties supply reasons; if we are not

loved for our properties, it is unclear what motivates love; as a result, love may seem arbitrary or indiscriminate; being loved for properties importantly locates value in us as bearers of valued properties.

2.3 Downsides of the Properties View

I will begin by explaining an objection to the properties view that has intuitive appeal, mainly because it carries so much emotional and psychological weight. Speaking directly to our personal insecurities, this objection asks, "If someone loves me because of certain properties I possess, then what happens to that love if/when I change?" This objection is particularly powerful because of the inevitability of the condition it addresses. The question is not so much *whether* I will change, but when and how, and to what extent will these changes impact my lover's regard for me? For this reason, the objection has the potential to be one that could plague with perpetual worry. Expressing this problem, Derek Edyvane says,

> It is somewhat offensive, objectionably contractual and dispassionate to suggest that one will love, but only so long as the beloved retains her youthful appearance, her sense of humor, his easy-going demeanour [sic] or his impeccable hygiene. Of course we hope that our beloved will retain the qualities we adore in him or her, but it seems rather unforgiving to suggest that we shall only love so long as he or she does. (59)

What makes us uncomfortable, it seems, is the fickleness of such love. Taken from a slightly different angle, however, the same basic issue (the question of love's changeability) can generate an entirely different set of concerns. It is often in response to

this fear of love altering with alteration[9] that unconditional love is extolled as an ideal. And yet, coming from a standpoint generally sympathetic to the properties account, both Edyvane and Keller argue *against* unconditional love. Better to have love be responsive to properties than settle for a love which would give us no reason to value ourselves. So the solution to the issue we found objectionable (i.e. fickleness is objectionable, unconditional love the solution) is the very thing we must reject to in order to preserve what's valuable in the properties view. The fact that this cuts both ways—or either way perhaps—seems like a problem.

To further complicate things, even though in theory we tend to hold up unconditional love as an ideal, in practice, it's fairly common for significant features of the beloved to change and for us, nonetheless, to continue to love. Now this may seem to be a good thing. After all, "constancy" (Niko Kolodny's term for this feature) in love saves us from the disparaging charge of fickleness. But can we think of cases where constancy might not be so grand? Consider instances where an individual loves someone and that person changes for the worse—say the beloved turns abusive or becomes indifferent to his partner. If still, even in the face of such radical and destructive changes in the beloved, the lover continues to love, then we would be tempted to call this love not just constant, but perhaps even "stubborn" or "foolhardy" (Edyvane 60).

Now on a standard reading of the properties view, it would seem that in cases like the one mentioned above, alteration in the properties of the beloved would cause alteration in the love as well (remember: properties are supposed to be reasons for love),

[9] This reference to Shakespeare's "Love is not love which alters when alteration finds" is a favorite among those writing on this topic, as are references to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet 43: "How do I love thee, let me count the ways." Hard to resist.

but as Kolodny rightly points out, in plenty of relationships, such alteration *in love* never occurs (sometimes for ostensibly good reasons, sometimes not so good). Either way, the puzzling issue here, as Kolodny notes, is that in cases like this, "The quality view seems to imply that love cannot be responsive to its own reasons" (140).

Another major objection to the properties view concerns the issue of replaceability. If love can be understood as an attraction to the properties of the beloved, presuming these properties are identifiable, then it seems to follow that if one could locate another person who has the same attractive features as the beloved, the lover could, without issue, substitute this new person in as a replacement. Further, I see nothing preventing the lover from taking on ever more objects of love, as she continues to encounter individuals who express the properties she finds desirable. Viewed another way, suppose I compose a list of the properties I find attractive (difficult not to think of the proliferation of online dating sites here); now armed with that list, it would seem anyone (even a computer) could go out into the world, find suitable matches for the properties I seek, and return to me with any number of candidates for my love. If properties truly provide reasons for love, as they purport, would it then be irrational of me to fail to love any one—or for that matter *all*—of these candidates? Not only are the implications here counter-intuitive, they fly in the face of our actual lived experiences.

Finally, one might complain that the properties view, with its emphasis on objectively identifying features in the loved one is just "too cerebral" to plausibly explain the phenomenon of love (Keller 165). Love, we believe, is mysterious, somewhat inexplicable, and probably not subject to the same sort of evaluation we might apply elsewhere—at least not entirely. Moreover, focusing on the properties of one's beloved,

even when picking out laudable features, can seem impersonal—dangerously close to loving the properties rather than the person.

2.4 Modifications

If the original question of the properties view asks, "Can love be understood as an attraction to the qualities of the beloved?" As a tentative answer, I will say "No, I do not think love can be *adequately* understood as an attraction to the properties of the beloved." At least some forms of love (most notably, familial love) do not in any way seem motivated by an attraction to properties. But even if we limit our scope to eros/romantic love, I find the weight of the objections leveled against this view is persuasive enough to be a hindrance to any straightforward acceptance of the account. Nonetheless, the fundamental appeal of the properties view remains: it is the strong intuition that when it comes to love, the beloved is not simply chosen at random, nor are we attracted willy-nilly to just anyone. In fact, if anything, the opposite is true. In actuality we are quite selective in our loving. Also, it seems disingenuous to deny being attracted to the properties of the beloved. Surely the features of the beloved play *some* role in our loving. The question, then, is: How can we preserve what is essentially true about the properties view without offending other powerfully held intuitions?

In defending against objections, several modifications to the property view have been considered. Taking each of the above-mentioned objections in turn, I will describe and evaluate some of these responses. We begin with the problem of changeability. Will my lover still love me even when I change? Edyvane and Keller, arguing in support of love as *conditionally* given, would both reply, "Well, it depends." One strength of the

properties view is that it allows individuals to respond to radical changes in the loved one's character, sometimes, by ceasing to love them. I am reminded of Aristotle's discussion of this topic as it applies to *philia* in Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "But if we accept a friend as a good person, and he becomes vicious, and seems so, should we still love him? Surely we cannot, if not everything, but only the good is lovable. The bad is not lovable, and must not be loved" (341). For Aristotle, that was the easy question, of course we cannot love vice. The only issues he saw left to work out involved whether you should reject the friend right away or attempt to redeem him; and then, how patient should you be in your efforts.

Now, none of these philosophers are advocating for a rejection of the beloved based on trivial or superficial changes, but it seems as if without some additional elements added to the account, if you can reject the beloved for becoming vicious, why not allow rejection for any sort of change? Here is where I think a distinction in types of love would be most useful.[10] For instance, in a case where the beloved has become hopelessly untrustworthy (an alcoholic perhaps?) the lover might find she no longer loves (*erai*) her partner, and yet still she maintains some level of affection (*storge*) because of the time they have spent together.

Making an appeal to the history of a love relationship is a strategy that has been employed in attempts to reconcile both the problem of changeability and the substitution (replaceability) problem. In terms of changeability, one might salvage the properties view by appealing to a more nuanced model. Rather than being attracted to and valuing the

[10] Aristotle achieves this through distinguishing three types of friendships. Turns out, you *can* end a friendship if your friend is no longer funny…as long as it was mutually understood that the relationship was a friendship based on pleasure.

personal attributes of the beloved, according to Kolodny's relationship theory, the lover values his *relationship* with the beloved. Because the love is defined by relational aspects, it can more easily accommodate changes in either the lover or the beloved: "one's reason for loving a person is one's relationship to her: the ongoing history that one shares with her" (136). The problem with this theory, I think, is that it fails to provide any explanatory account of the initial attraction to a person. Even if relationships provide reasons for loving (and I believe they do), we seem only able to avail ourselves of this account after the fact—that is after something resembling love has already taken root. Prior to this, no relationship existed, so we would still need something like properties to explain why the lover picked out this particular subject for his love.

Perhaps the solution to this lies in separating *attraction* from *loving*. By considering these two states as different phenomena, we may come closer to understanding how it can be the case that we respond both to the properties in a person and to the person himself. For it seems in some way each must be true. If attraction and loving are answerable to different sorts of motivations and reasons, then we might be able to avoid problems like changeability and substitutability. As an illustration, Kolodny's relationship theory might be strengthened if he could appeal to a phenomenology of attraction that in some way responds to features in the beloved. Of course, a well-developed account of attraction would need to consider both the initial encounter with the beloved and attraction as an on-going process as well. Features that initially capture attention are not always the ones that keep people together; each new experience with the beloved is an opportunity to discover new reasons for attraction that may serve to sustain it and as these reasons accumulate over time, we can eventually make sense of talk about

"relational loving" or "shared history" or perhaps even loving the beloved herself. In "Love's Bond," Robert Nozick nicely summarizes the idea behind what I have suggested here: "You can fall in love with someone because of certain characteristics and you can continue to delight in these, but eventually you must love the person himself, and not for the characteristics, not, at any rate, for any delimited list of them." (422)

The list. The replaceability problem begins here, with the notion that if love is based on properties, in principle, any person who manifests the desired features could stand in just as well as a substitute for the beloved. I said earlier that the "appeal to history" modification has been applied in response to both changeability and this objection as well. The idea here is that even if we could locate a perfect match for the features on my list of desired properties, this identical twin could never actually *be* identical to my beloved because of the "unique contribution [my beloved] has made to the narrative of my life" (Edyvane 63). I accept this as a legitimate point; certainly referring to a matrix of conversations, shared activities, a particular kind of influence the beloved has exerted over the lover's thoughts, all serves the intended function of distinguishing the beloved as unique (and therefore not perfectly replaceable with another). However, there may be a potential downside to this.

Imagine two people: my beloved and his identical-properties-twin. As an adherent of the properties view, faced with this choice, I am at a loss as to whom I should love (identical-properties-twin, after all, seems quite appealing. Should I replace my beloved with twin or perhaps love them both?). Thinking about these two excellent candidates, I suddenly remember that I *do* have a way to distinguish my beloved from his twin—I can make note of our shared history together. This exercise, however, turns up some

disappointing material: we fight a lot; perhaps we take boring vacations; there is that time he forgot our anniversary… Armed with the revelation afforded me by examining the unique contribution my beloved has made to the narrative of my life, I decide to give identical-properties-twin a try. I doubt this is how advocates of the shared history view planned for this to end. My point is merely to call attention to the underlying assumption that a shared history with someone provides a *positive* reason to love them. As the example above demonstrates, this is not necessarily the case.

Finally, the concern that the properties view ultimately suggests a love of *properties* rather than *persons* is worth addressing, even though I think we are already equipped with resources to handle the objection. Earlier I suggested that a more nuanced account of what might be called the trajectory of love seemed like a promising place to look for resolution to some common problems facing the properties view. I wondered whether considering *attraction* and *loving* as having different, but overlapping and integrated objects and aims, and if attempting to trace the development (and integration) of these two states over time would help clarify these problematic issues. At the beginning of this section I said that I did not think love could be adequately understood as an attraction to the properties of the beloved. I still believe that. Although the properties view describes an essential aspect of love, by itself, it is incomplete.

2.5 A Narrative Approach

In the simplest terms, a narrative is a story. More specifically, Robert Roberts defines narrative as "a verbal account (oral or written) of a temporally connected series of events, including mental events (for example, plans, assessments, emotions) and actions,

including speech acts." Regarding these events, Roberts elaborates; narrative "shows connections (continuities, changes, antecedents and consequences) between the past, the present, and the future. It depicts characters, in their continuities and changes, through depiction of their actions, interactions, and reactions (for example emotions), their thoughts, desires and intentions at different points in time." In general, narrative is a fundamental way humans make sense of information. By collecting observations and noting sequences, patterns and themes, the brain pieces together separate aspects of various phenomena and then weaves them into a structure that makes sense ("Narrative Ethics").

Among philosophers, the narrative approach has made considerable inroads in the field of applied ethics. This is especially the case in medical ethics, where philosophers are keen to apply narratives to help patients and caregivers make sense of issues surrounding illness and death. Judging from the number of journal articles written on this topic over the past five years, a new subset of *narrative ethics* seems to be emerging. Additionally, interest in narrative is crossing over into the realm of (theoretical) normative ethics as well. In her book *Love's Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum takes up the topic, arguing that a "coordination between philosophical and narrative presentations of the virtues and vices is needed."

In his 2012 article "Narrative Ethics," Robert Roberts explains how philosophical analysis and literary description each have strong suits—areas of expertise wherein they excel— and he suggests that by working in tandem, these two approaches can generate a more complete and insightful whole: "Some of the best literature displays moral (and immoral) character in richer ways than philosophy alone has resources to do, but

philosophy brings to its description a schematic precision that narrative alone cannot supply" ("Narrative Ethics"). Roberts' own article focuses on the intersection between the theoretical framework of virtue ethics and literary narratives. He considers several passages in works by Jane Austen, Henry James and George Eliot where characters are astutely described by the author in ways that illuminate important features of the moral life, including virtuous and vicious behaviors. Roberts believes that examination of insightfully composed descriptions such as these can serve to ground otherwise abstract ethical theories and provide an effective tool philosophers can use to convey ideas to readers, thus enabling them to better translate such knowledge into ethical practice.

In the same way narrative has been useful in revealing points of intersection among ideas that seem unrelated or even at odds with one another in the fields of medical ethics and virtue ethics, I think applying a narrative approach to the analysis of love offers several advantages. What happens if instead of trying to abstract and analyze various aspects of love in isolation—attempts to *define* love, for example, or to locate *precisely* the features we are attracted to when we love someone—we consider ways in which the phenomenon of love functions as a narrative whole? Will this help show how separate, seemingly unrelated pieces fit together?

The primary advantage of viewing love as a narrative is the unification of competing explanatory theories. While each of the ways of analyzing love have something legitimate to offer, as stand-alone theories they are inadequate. In what follows I want to show how various analytical approaches considered previously in the essay are not fundamentally in conflict with one another—one is not wrong while the other is right—instead, they have each accurately described different aspects of the

phenomenon of love. Viewing love in narrative terms pushes back against the reductivist tendencies of some analytical methods and provides a way to conceive of the some of the features of love in continuity with one another. Ideally, this approach has the added virtue of more accurately reflecting our lived experience.

2.6 Love as a Narrative

Even though there are innumerable ways to tell a story, generally speaking stories share common features, like structural patterns (exposition-rising action-climax-falling action-denouement), devices (narrator, conflict, symbolism), and components (character, setting, theme). In this section, we will consider several traditional narrative elements and how they might fit into and enhance existing theories of love, with special attention given to the properties view and modifications it has precipitated.

2.6.1 Plot

The plot—or temporal sequence of events that comprises the action of the story—provides the essential structure of a story and enables the audience to locate, trace and contextualize events as they are experienced by characters over time. Viewing a love relationship in terms of a narrative arc developed through a series of actions, thoughts, emotions, and motivations unfolding within the context of an overarching storyline offers insight into the history of the relationship—how it began, developed, weathered challenges, grew in intimacy or deteriorated and declined. Not all plots progress in a linear fashion (Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* opens with Charles Ryder narrating as a middle-aged man reflecting on the experiences of his youth in Oxford and

concludes with a return to the 'present day'); nonetheless, picking out certain chronological markers can provide a framework through which to conceptualize relationships.

For instance, identifying an important event that serves as the initial contact between two people, the pre-meeting reference to someone, or an overheard conversation which sets the stage for an eventual interchange—these 'first encounters' and the follow-up sequence it generates make up what might be called the *Beginning* of a relationship. In order to understand Charles' relationship with Julia Flyte—their troubled first go-round at love, an extramarital affair when they are reunited after a lengthy separation, their attempt to forge a committed long-term union—one must piece together an account of a middle-class young man who is intrigued by a school mate's flamboyant charisma and who is drawn into a decades-long entanglement with a wealthy Catholic family. This love story begins, oddly enough, when Julia's brother Sebastian vomits into a ground floor window of Charles' room.

The properties that first attract Charles to Sebastian (and vice versa), such as personality traits and dispositions, contribute to a meaningful account of the subsequent intimacy that develops between them. But so do their interactions with other characters, and details from the family history of each. As we come to understand these past experiences and add them to the growing number of situations we can observe, we move toward a more comprehensive account of how an erotically charged friendship develops into an eventual love affair with Sebastian's sister Julia. In a narrative framework, this is the *Middle* or developmental period of the love story that depicts the relationship growing and altering as a "shared history" takes form. This continues through cycles of crisis and

resolution as we near the climax or narrative *End*, which may materialize as a failed relationship, or death, or perhaps with the suggestion of perpetuation—a cycling back to the beginning, or hints that some aspect of the relationship continues on though offspring (in the form of children, or accomplishments, or a look at those impacted by the legacy of the union). Thus, viewing love as a complex relationship unfolding within a narrative plot sequence combines elements from both the properties view and also the relational/shared history view.

2.6.2 Character

In any story, characters play a central role; they are the figures around whom the events of the story unfold. Whether they are active agents, moving, gesturing, and performing deeds, or passive recipients who experience consequences initiated by others, without characters there would be no story to relate. In the case of a love narrative, thinking of the lover and the beloved (minimally) as characters who are themselves individuals with unique personal histories, intellectual and emotional backgrounds, learned and dispositional behavioral patterns, and skill sets—in addition to an extensive list of physical attributes—provides a starting place for understanding both the nature of attraction and the reasons that animate action as it unfolds throughout the course of a relationship. Already we can see how analytical attempts to define love as an *attraction to properties*, and then isolate it from the complex ways in which these individuals as characters can generate a *shared life together* can misfire. Recall that within the context of abstract analytical reasoning, the above options are presented as opposing views.

When two people meet and take an interest in one another, they have a natural desire to increase their knowledge of the other. Commonly this takes the form of

exchanging personal histories. In Sheldon Vanauken's book *A Severe Mercy*, the couple in the story take this notion to an extreme. So intent are Davy and Van—two young people who meet and fall in love—to know and understand one another that they make lists of all the books they have read and places they visited before they met. Lists in hand, they decide to go back and experience these things together, with the ultimate goal being to create, as much as possible, a sense of shared history which they hope will stand as a "shining barrier" between themselves (in the form of this new, unified entity) and the outside world. This autobiographical account of Vanauken's marriage to Jean Davis is a good example of the relational view of love Niko Kolodny advocates for.

But as mentioned earlier, the accumulated experiences that comprise who we are as persons, as *characters*—including childhood adventures and mishaps, stories told about you by family members and friends—when taken into consideration, these sub-narratives help account for various likes and dislikes, confidences and insecurities, and strengths and weaknesses. Such information, when disclosed (whether "read" off of us by others' observations, or deliberately revealed) plays a role in the phenomenon of attraction in a way that is different from the ongoing, developmental quality of a relationship.

To take this a step further: even though observing a person's actions does provide some information about qualities they possess, the actions themselves are manifestations of something deeper within. As such, observing a person's actions over time (what might be called the narrative advantage) leads to accumulated knowledge, and with it a much deeper understanding of that person *as a person*, rather than a series of isolated or

disconnected actions. A list of properties alone—however long—can never fully express a person's core being.

Julia Flyte is an interesting example of someone whose *character arc* presents a series of conflicted actions ultimately tied to the core struggle she experiences. Even though she loves Charles, he is a professed agnostic, and since she is expected to marry a Catholic, she makes a hurried match with Rex Mottram who has agreed to convert. Unsurprisingly, the union is fraught, and Julia eventually violates social and religious norms by engaging in an affair with Charles. At first, the affair seems to offer Julia an opportunity to finally be happy: she is reunited with a man she loves; she emancipates herself from a strained marriage, and at the same time has mapped out a way to escape an overbearing family dynamic. And yet, at the climax of the story, just as Julia seems poised to finally break free, she instead chooses to give up her relationship with Charles and remain at home in order to fulfill what she takes to be her duty to family and religion (which, in this case are inextricably linked).

An attempt to describe Julia in terms of the properties displayed through her actions might yield a list of antithetical traits such as *rebellious* and fiercely *independent*, alongside *conforming* and *constrained*. Thus, it seems the best way to understand Julia is to consider the whole—her actions, motivations, and core disposition—as it unfolds over time within the narrative context of her experiences. On this view, a sense of continuity is still possible even when changes occur over time (as they will). The various traits one might associate with Julia's actions alter—sometimes in surprising ways—as she navigates her relationship with Charles. Ultimately, viewing someone in terms of properties alone is undercut by the fact that a person is never exhausted by their actions.

Here, a narrative framework allows for a sense of openness and offers a more comprehensive account, because—as Julia's character arc demonstrates—even radical change is possible.

2.6.3 Narrator

Just as every story is told from a point of view—whether it be first person, second person, or a third person omniscient narrator—the story of a particular love will also be recounted within the context of a given perspective. Considering the fact that no two people would report details of a series of events in the exact same way, even the selection process itself is indicative of what the person telling the story finds important. Because of this, salient features will vary depending on the narrative perspective. Although the narrator might also be a character in the story, this need not be the case. The most comprehensive narrative of love would be a multi-perspective story told from at least two points of view: the lover and the beloved. It is not uncommon in the context of describing an event—an argument for instance—that the motivations, reasons for action, and interpretation given by one party to the conflict will differ substantially from the account as understood and provided by the other. In cases like this, understanding love in terms of reasons that are concrete and open to an evaluation allows space and distance to weigh those reasons. One of the factors cited by Derek Edyvane in defense of love being grounded in reasons (which are themselves based on qualities) is just this: it enables the account of love to be answerable to external critique.

For as much as Sheldon Vanauken and Jean Davis wished to cordon themselves off from the rest of the world and live in an exclusive community of their own creation, this is never entirely possible. Lovers are not the only two characters in the narratives that

are their lives. When love is viewed as an interconnected whole comprised of multiple, varying perspectives that sometimes diverge, sometimes converge, and frequently overlap and intersect one another, these additional narrative perspectives will add dimension, offer correctives, and (at least in principle) provide an objective outsider's view that may offer wisdom and insight otherwise unavailable to those experiencing events at close range.

2.6.4 Setting

Insofar as location and situational features provide a context under which a story unfolds, dramatic setting contributes something essential to the meaning of narratives. The fact that two people first encounter one another while walking alone in a park; that they continue to pass on subsequent days at around the same time; that they ultimately begin speaking because of intersecting activity at the park, means that this particular location plays a central role in the narrative the couple's shared life. While location itself is important, other factors associated with place—such as weather, cultural traditions and pressures, activities available for the couple to engage in, geographical and manmade features of the landscape, whether the community is urban or rural, crowded or isolated—help define and conscribe the conditions for meaning within the narrative.

As an example of the way the setting of an event gives rise to meaning within a particular context, in *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre imagines a man engaging in the action of tending a garden. If someone were to ask or attempt to explain what he is "doing," MacIntyre suggests that a wide variety of answers may be given, all of them true and plausible within differing contexts. It may be said, for instance, that he is: "'Digging,' 'Gardening,' 'Taking exercise,' 'Preparing for winter,' or 'Pleasing his wife'

(206). The kind of answer that would make sense in a given situation is dependent on the context—or setting—under which the behavior takes place. MacIntyre illustrates this point by contrasting two contexts: one where it is autumn and the man is checking off late-season garden chores, and another where his wife wishes he would get out and exercise more. In one case the man's action is "situated in an annual cycle of domestic activity," where in the other, it occurs within the "narrative history of a marriage" (206). Each setting carries with it a different set of expectations, motivations and intentions, and because of this, MacIntyre argues that human actions can only be understood as taking place within a context: "a setting has a history, a history within which the histories of individual agents not only are, but have to be, situated, just because without the setting and its changes through time the history of the individual agent and his changes through time will be unintelligible" (206-7).

If MacIntyre is correct and the meaning of actions, events, and conversations alters within the context of the setting, then love cannot be adequately understood apart from its locatedness within a particular narrative framework. Consider two people who have known each other since childhood, who may have grown up within close proximity of one another. Perhaps they rode bicycles on the same streets and romped in the woods behind the same neighborhood school—these two individuals share a sense of place, a common history that serves as a framework for later experiences together. Contrast this with a couple whose initial meeting takes place in a foreign country, far away from their respective lives. Although their encounter occurs at a time in each of their lives when they are away from home for the first time, just getting a taste of independence, we can imagine they might come from radically different family and educational backgrounds,

be from opposite ends of the country, and hold significantly differing political views, yet still find common ground upon which to build a relationship. Whatever the elements of a couple's story happen to be, it is certain they would have played out differently had they taken place elsewhere, in an altered context, and under different circumstantial stimuli.

2.6.5 Theme

In literature, themes are main, underlying ideas that get established through significant actions or events, which are often repeated in varying circumstances throughout the narrative. Within the context of love, themes might include cycles that get repeated; issues that reoccur with some regularity, behavior and emotional patterns that emerge within an array of events one might recount in creating a narrative arc: The idealist dreamer who conjures grand visions for the practically-minded accomplisher to hammer out and make possible; The couple who researches and deliberates, endlessly weighing pros and cons before making decisions, only to find their hesitation frequently results in missed opportunities; The restless lover who changes jobs and moves to a new location every couple of years, and the accommodating beloved who is content to follow. Each of the above vignettes describes a behavioral pattern that could develop over time, and to the extent that it meaningfully impacts the relationship as such, can be said to be a *theme* of that relationship.

In the same way that our actions manifest patterns, speech—including topics of conversation, use of particular words and phrases and the expression of important ideas—may as well. It is not unusual in the course of a long-term relationship for partners to feel a kind of deja vu—as if they have already had a conversation before. Sometimes this occurs in a positive light, as in recognition of some point of agreement: When a neighbor

observes that the Browns haven't been on vacation in two years— "Yes, precisely. We always say that having animals ties people down!" Or, the issue may instead be a recurring point of contention in the relationship, representing an unresolved issue that resurfaces whenever a particular stimulus is introduced: "The Browns have a new puppy; it's so much fun for the kids. Why can't we get one too? You always say that, but…" Here ideas (sometimes even exact phrases) from past conversations reemerge and are recognized as expressing themes that have become significant to the couple's shared experience.

While the conversations, actions and events from which themes arise are temporal episodes in an unfolding plot, the sequence of events is not the same as the themes which emerge out of it. Even so, one cannot get hold of these themes without simultaneously considering the narrative sequence within which they are situated. The two are inextricably linked. Moreover, actions (and conversations, for that matter) are connected to personal properties—strengths, weaknesses, talents, dispositions—in the same way. The dreaming of the idealistic planner and her speech describing the features of "the perfect outdoor concert" arise from her idealistic disposition; in the same way the hedging, foot-dragging and naysaying of the hesitant person grows out of an overly cautious personality. None of this happens in isolation, and the interconnectedness of personality, speech and action are most clearly comprehended through consideration of the narrative details tying all this together.

Similarly, viewing love as exemplifying themes in the context of an overarching narrative allows equal weight to be given to the *properties view* (the lover values the qualities of the beloved), *relationship theory* (the lover values his relationship with the

beloved), and the *entire person view* (the lover is attracted to the 'entire self' of the beloved) because it makes love intelligible as having grown out of a particular setting, having developed a set of themes that can be understood only in terms of a relationship that both comes from a history (the setting) and is evolving through shared activity, which was initiated, and continues in response to, traits possessed by both the lover and beloved.

2.7 Conclusion

When seeking to understand the nature of love—this most elusive human condition—philosophers' work in attempting to define it concretely and in examining specific aspects in order to identify essential features has done much to bring us closer to understanding. At the same time however, when applied to the case of love, these analytical methods have produced a theoretical stalemate. An adequate account of love would need to include an acknowledgment of the interconnectedness of the stages and development of love, the forms it takes, and what it is responding to. Because of this, I have suggested it may be useful to think of love in narrative terms, and to apply the conceptual framework—the structure and elements—of storytelling as a way of unifying diverging theoretical views.

Even so, this approach is subject to certain limitations. For one thing, by its very nature a holistic account like this is not going to be able to provide precise, analytical assessments such as formulating a definition of love, or picking out its essential features. Furthermore, we will not attempt to identify that which would separate narratives of love from other forms of liking, affinity, or care because the narrative approach propounded

here is not intended to apply exclusively to love (even in its many forms). Nearly all human experience can be framed in terms of narrative structure; this means that this method could be meaningfully applied toward enterprises as diverse as finding satisfaction in vocation or work, understanding the role of failure and loss, or tracing how we construct the notion of family. But the fact that narrative could be used to generate a more complete understanding of many aspects of human experience is a strength rather than a weakness of the approach. This suggests, I think, that despite the limitations mentioned above, there is still a place for narrative as a companion to philosophical analysis. While argument plays an indispensable role in the work of philosophy aimed at understanding the nature of love, the holistic view offered by narrative can be used to resolve some of the competing claims generated through analysis. Thus, rather than attempting to seek answers using analysis alone, philosophers would do well to acknowledge that these two approaches should be considered together, as complementary forms of understanding.

CHAPTER 3. ATTRACTION AS RECOGNITION: EROS, FRIENDSHIP, AND THE DUAL NATURE OF INTIMACY

3.1 Introduction

In a letter to his friend Lucilius, Seneca responds to Lucilius' hesitancy to confide in another man whom he refers to as his friend: "You have sent me a letter by the hand of a 'friend' of yours, as you call him. And then in the next sentence you warn me to avoid discussing your affairs freely with him, since you are not even in the habit of doing so yourself." Immediately following this, Seneca rightly points out to Lucilius that if he feels he cannot trust this man, it would appear that the man is not, in fact, a true friend. As the letter continues, Seneca offers Lucilius some advice concerning how one should approach the process of determining whether or not another person is a genuine friend: "Certainly you should discuss everything with a friend; but before you do so, *discuss in your mind the man himself*. After friendship is formed you must trust, but *before that you must judge.*" A few lines later, Seneca cautions, "*Think for a long time* whether or not you should admit a given person to your friendship" (34-35, italics mine).

Notable in the passages above is the emphasis Seneca places on the rational element involved in even the earliest stages of friendship formation. His advice to Lucilius stresses thinking, weighing merits, judgment and choosing, suggesting that interpersonal relationships are both initiated by and structured primarily as activities of the mind. Such a view operates under an unstated presupposition that friendship itself

originates in the intellect, and is unsurprising given the primacy allotted to cognitive action in Stoic tradition.

Perhaps an even more extreme case of this is expressed by Epictetus, whose *Encheiridion* suggests such impersonal and counterintuitive attitudes concerning how one should approach intimate relationships that some have questioned whether embracing Stoicism would even allow for the existence of love[11]. For example, several passages in *Encheiridion* offer advice about how one might manage the loss of something treasured. Epictetus begins with a sensible suggestion: "In the case of everything attractive or useful or that you are fond of, remember to say just what sort of thing it is, beginning with the least little things. If you are fond of a jug, say 'I am fond of a jug!' For then when it is broken you will not be upset" (#3). The idea here is that, from a rational standpoint, it makes sense to be mindful that material objects—by their very nature—are liable to break. Knowing this, we should expect eventual damage or loss as likely, and this rational awareness can help mitigate our sense of loss. Seems reasonable enough. But then Epictetus continues with this non sequitur: "If you kiss your child or your wife, say you are kissing a human being; for when it dies you will not be upset" (#3). Setting aside the weak analogy here (there are relevant dissimilarities between losing a material possession and the loss of life, especially death of a loved one), what stands out is the rationale informing Epictetus' position. What enables him to dismiss loss of life with the same aplomb as breaking a jug is his belief that human emotions are subject to rational control. That one can and should exercise such control is a recurring theme throughout

[11] See Stephens, William O. Can a Stoic Love?" *Sex, Love, and Friendship: Studies of the Society for the Philosophy of Sex and Love*. Vol. 232 (1993-2003) 79-88.

the *Encheiridion*. On the outset, "impulses, desires and aversions" are listed among things that, according to Epictetus, are "up to us" (#1). At best, they should be relegated to the status of being extraneous; at worst, they are menacing and should be stamped out. His advice, after all is to "eliminate desire completely" (#4). Elsewhere he explains, "what upsets people is not things themselves but their *judgements* about the things" (#5, italics mine). Common throughout is Epictetus' insistence on the primacy of reason over both embodied experience and the emotions.

Epictetus' version of Stoicism encourages what many consider to be a radical dissociation of the body from the mind and its emotional responses that seems incoherent at times. If the body falls under the category of "things not up to us," while emotions are listed among things we can control—presumably through deliberate exercise of the will—both are essentially rendered irrelevant with respect to the role commanded by the rational, deciding self. At the very least, his insistence that one's own body and certain types of emotions are separate from—or external to—the essential self cultivates a reductive approach to human experience. As with Seneca, Epictetus' view of interpersonal relationships is grounded in the assumption that relationships (like friendship) are comprised and maintained through a series of rational judgements and chosen actions which are determined and managed irrespective of bodies.

In what follows, I want to challenge this basic claim. To do so, first we will need to expose commonly held views concerning the role of the individual—more precisely, the deliberative individual—in friendship formation; here we will see that in large part, common opinion maintains that friendship is a relationship that takes a particular individual's acts of rational choosing to be its starting point. As we hold this view up for

scrutiny, we will attend to the phenomenon of attraction in order to determine the role it plays in bringing, and ultimately keeping, people together. Here I will suggest a descriptive account of attraction as a kind of mutual recognition that both captures people and engages them in a process of discovery. Drawing on basic insights from John Russon's work in the phenomenology of human experience, I show how intimacy is dynamically developed through recognition of one's own dually characterized position of groundedness and openness with respect to the other. Recent work by Linda Zagzebski, Nancy Sherman, and others offers corroborative views on the essential role the body plays in communicating information about ourselves and others. Finally, I describe how attraction can be characterized in terms of the recognition of shared values, including moral, intellectual and aesthetic values.

3.2 The Phenomenon of Attraction

When you walk along the bustling sidewalks of a large city, hundreds of people come into view, appear for a moment, and then stream past. Likewise, to whatever degree you are noticed, you are to them an unfamiliar face among the many bodies passing by. This experience of the flow of others with whom you will most likely never have contact, imparts a sense of breadth, of the vastness of the human community you partake in. In some social situations, though, the nature of the encounter with others is altered in such a way that allows for this steady current to calm and collect into pools; interaction then becomes more localized and thus potentially more navigable. While attending a conference you may find yourself at a reception with several dozen individuals, all of

whom, by virtue of their presence at this event, have indicated a degree of shared interests, and yet, despite this commonality, you may still experience the majority of your encounters with these new people as generally uniform in nature.

Most estimate the number of people an individual is likely to meet over the course of a lifetime in the tens of thousands, and yet sociologists who study the dynamics of social networking claim that one can expect to form relations of some sort—ranging in intimacy from casual acquaintances all the way up to close friends—with between 300 and 3,000 of these people at a given time (Marlow). When you amend the data to include only those with whom one is cognitively and practically capable of maintaining a relationship—in terms of remembering names and faces and keeping track of basic personal information and content related to the interconnectedness of the web—the number drops to 150. So special is this number, in fact, that it has its own name: Dunbar's number. And yet, when surveyed about the number of people with whom they believed they could share anything, the field narrows sharply, with the average American claiming only three close friends (Marsden, cited in Marlow). Given the large number of people we make contact with throughout our lives, especially when compared to the small number of those with whom we nurture meaningful relationships, questions arise: What is it about these particular people that attracted our attention in the first place, that caused them to stand out amid a sea of others? What about them (and us) accounts for the endurance of our most significant relationships?

One version of the story goes like this: generally speaking, we choose our friends. I meet someone, gather data about them through a kind of detached observation, and then receive or reject them as a friend. This narrative—of withholding oneself in rational

deliberation until prepared to fully engage someone—is the one advocated by Seneca. But it is also an account of friendship germination that is widely endorsed by contemporary opinion as well. We find evidence of this view in the fact that we often speak of individuals as either praiseworthy or culpable based on an evaluation of the "friends they choose." An ample collection of wisdom literature, parables and wise sayings on this topic can be found instructing people concerning the importance of reasoned consideration regarding the people with whom they hold company. Common to many of these cautionary tales is the emphasis on the exclusivity of the relationship—which is often couched in terms of personal responsibility—and on friendship as fundamentally driven by rational decision-making. Thus, failures in friendship are failures of deliberation.

While it is certainly true that we think about and ultimately make choices with regards to the people we associate with, the overwhelming tendency is to prejudice the rational element as if it were the only legitimate influence that draws people together. But does this Stoic 'discussion in the mind' adequately capture the phenomenon of attraction? What about people whose experiences of relationship initiations evince a conspicuous *absence* of rational deliberation? Certainly it is not altogether uncommon for individuals to report incidences of 'love at first sight,' or being inexplicably drawn to a new acquaintance, or feeling immediately at ease in the presence of a person who is largely unknown to them. On first consideration, such accounts might strike one as shallow, hasty assessments that cannot possibly rest upon a solid foundation. After all, we might think (and justifiably so) that profound, enduring love relationships such as intimate friendships, life-partnerships, and marriages take time to develop and are much more

invested in commitment, fidelity and the binding strength of cumulative, shared experiences than they are concerned with initial impressions. Moreover, given the current culture of appearance, with its attendant dysfunctional emphasis placed on projecting oneself as through a façade of cosmetics, fashion, surgical enhancements, and non-healthy dieting or appearance-driven exercise, we might be justly skeptical of this purportedly *instant* magnetism as tending to be contrived or inauthentic.

And yet, were we to examine more closely these testimonies, we may discover that rather than being evidence of ungrounded, superficial judgments about potential compatibility, such phenomena might instead suggest that there is quite a bit about ourselves that we unconsciously project through our bodies. Information about the history of our interpersonal contacts (situations that embarrass us, circumstances where we feel comfortable), accumulated years of evidence describing the lived-dynamic of our familial interactions ("I fear this, but am confident here")—all this we house physically, externally, in our bodies. To some extent this information about us does seem apparent: perhaps it is revealed in our posture, in gestures, or in facial expressions. If this is true, then details such as these may be *sensually* available to be read and understood, to be perceived by those who, because of their own past histories, are themselves keenly—though probably equally unconsciously—attuned to noticing and taking up such signs.

In Anne Carson's poetic novel, *Autobiography of Red*, the narrator recounts the story of the protagonist Geryon's first encounter with Herakles, the young man who later becomes his lover. Their chance meeting occurs at a busy bus depot where travelers are streaming on and off vehicles, depositing and gathering passengers before heading off again to the next stop. The unlikelihood of the encounter is trumped only by the awkward

circumstance of Geryon's rounding a corner and nearly colliding into Herakles as he steps off the bus:

> The world poured back and forth between their eyes once or twice. / Other people wishing to disembark the bus from New Mexico / were jamming up behind Herakles who had stopped on the bottom step with his suitcase in one hand / trying to tuck in his shirt with the other. *Do you have change for a dollar*? / Geryon heard Geryon say. / *No*. Herakles stared straight at Geryon. *But I'll give you a quarter for free.* (39)

Significantly, Carson describes the above experience as one of mutual identification and of epiphany. "They were two superior eels at the bottom of the tank," she writes, "and they recognized each other like italics." Of Geryon's own experience, the narrator proclaims, "It was one of those moments that is the opposite of blindness" (39). Both images invoked here to describe the momentous occasion of this starkly physical meeting depict the phenomenon in terms of **recognition**: first as a kind of revelatory seeing, then as an appearing—the way an object appears to one as standing out from an indistinct background. Each is an apt expression of the experience of erotic attraction.

In *Bearing Witness to Epiphany: Persons, Things and the Nature of Erotic Life*, John Russon defines erotic experience as "the fundamental bodily recognition of the presence of another person as a person" whose way of being in the world arrests our attention and draws us with a kind of "magnetism," as if we are being summoned. At the bodily level, erotic attraction is experienced as desire (for closeness, interaction,

engagement), including a desire for the other to reciprocate our desiring[12] (*Bearing Witness* 73-77). Three particulars are noteworthy here. First, that Russon's account of the erotic has its foundation in the body. While this may seem an obvious feature to mention, a point that follows from this might appear somewhat less evident—at least judging from the fact that it typically gets overlooked: namely, that all human experience is fundamentally embodied experience. This bears upon our study because instead of formulating the phenomenon of attraction as a kind of intellectual response to data evaluated within our minds, Russon reminds us that as embodied beings, human sexuality "permeates all our experience" (75). The meaningful implication here is that human relational responses of attraction and repulsion can never be adequately understood solely or even primarily in terms of rationality. Furthermore, given the centrality of bodily experience, even relationships that may have previously seemed abstractly distanced from physical considerations (so-called merely 'Platonic' friendships come to mind) are shown, on this view, to be as erotic in nature as those attractions we might traditionally refer to as sexual.

The second point to highlight about erotic experience is its characterization as a type of recognition. Interestingly, both Carson's portrayal of Geryon and Herakles' love affair and Russon's designation of erotic experience have in common the fact that each employs the verb 'recognize' in order to describe the phenomenon of attraction. In each case, the choice of recognition as a predicate is potentially rather complex due to the richly nuanced ways in which we frequently make use of the word. 'Recognition,' in a

[12] "My erotic interest in another is the desire that my attraction for this other be welcomed and reciprocated by this other, which is the desire that the other be desiring my desire." (*Bearing Witness* 76)

very basic sense, refers to an acknowledgement or acceptance (to recognize a person as a member of an organization; to recognize a point in an argument); but it can also mean to set apart (to be awarded recognition with an honor). Often, recognition involves a discovery or epiphany; recognition occurs when a thing reveals itself to us and we take notice (to finally recognize the value of hard work). In naming the "bodily recognition of the presence of another person" an erotic experience, Russon likely intends to summon each of these various connotations. With our bodies we acknowledge and accept the presence of another; through our bodies we experience another as revealed to us; our bodies are the sites which allow for the discovery of other bodies. According to Russon, interpersonal relationships involve a noticing posture that he calls "erotic perception," which facilitates (and perhaps even compels) a kind of revelatory seeing which "draws us to a focus on individual persons in their detachment from others" (75). Thus, to call my experience of a person 'erotic' suggests that my gaining awareness of that person as *just that particular individual* is to have them stand out to me, as when an italicized word or phrase in the text comes forward on the page, distinct and separate from the many other words also recorded there.

But to say that Geryon and Herakles "recognized each other like italics" is to insist on quite a bit more than what is afforded by the relatively simple notion that the other appears as separate and distinct. If we accept the premise that erotic experience is a particular kind of perception, then we should also take care to specify precisely what it is that erotic attraction notices. For Russon, the momentous realization that erotic experience brings about is the recognition that the other is actually present in oneself. Erotic attraction, he notes, is the "the stirring of the other in me, in my body" (73-4).

Taken together with the first two observations, this third insight gleaned from Russon's discussion of erotic experience, points out a dynamic tension inherent in interpersonal relationships. On the one hand, inasmuch as I experience a person as a person, I must recognize them as separate from both me and everyone else; yet on the other hand, to respond to a person with recognition is to view them in terms of identity, to see them as importantly *in me*.[13] Perhaps the most common usage for the word 'recognize' is as a form of identification: to recognize a face is to place it, to remember that one has encountered it before. Here re-cognition is a kind of re-thinking, where thinking refers to a process of locating a stimulus within the known framework of one's experience. It is a tapping into or gaining access to something familiar, something already known. Necessarily, such identification engages memory; and so to recognize is to come to know again, to identify as part of one's previous experience. This notion of recognition-as-identification is very much the sense to which Carson appeals in the quote above. Geryon and Herakles stand-out to one another, to be sure, but they do so by virtue of identity rather than separateness; each recognizes in the other a similar kind: "They were two superior eels at the bottom of the tank."

Having first suggested the inadequacy of a common Stoic view of friendship—namely, that it emerges out of a stance of detached observation and rational reflection on a person's merits—we moved next to consider an alternate view: that friendship originates in erotic attraction. We characterized this attraction as being fundamentally of the body, and as exhibiting two distinct forms of recognition: one which viewed the other

[13] "In me" both in the sense of a desire for nearness and touch that originates in my body as a physical urge, and also in the sense that the physical presence of the other communicates—or reflects back to me—familiar aspects of my own experience with which I can identity and which also serve to bind us together.

as essentially separate, and a second that acknowledged the extent to which self and other are essentially entwined. Because both forms of recognition figure as operative in interpersonal relationships, we will now attempt to examine in greater detail the role that erotic recognition plays in the formation and subsequent development of close friendship.

3.3 The Dual Nature of Intimacy: Recognizing the Other as Self and the Other as Other

When Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that a decent a man will be "related to his friend as he is to himself, since the friend is another himself," at least two ways of taking up the meaning of the phrase 'another himself' come to mind (*IX. 6*). First, another self might mean 'another who is very like oneself.' As indicated earlier, the notion of likeness is closely linked to the phenomenon of recognition and it is our task to demonstrate how recognition of the other as essentially *like oneself* plays an indispensable role in bringing people together. In contrast, a second way one could interpret Aristotle's phrase involves viewing 'another self' not as an expression of the similarity between a person and his friend, but instead as a reference to experiencing the other as markedly different, as a potentially quite *other* manifestation of oneself. This sense of the other *as other* will prove to be an equally essential element of friendship. In fact, both senses—of groundedness in the familiar and of openness through the unfamiliar—are vital to intimacy. In what follows we will consider each in turn.

Previously, we established the body as the central site of erotic attraction. In describing the body as it is situated in the world, Russon writes, "By its nature, then, the

body is double. It is itself, but it is itself only by being beyond itself" (*Bearing Witness,* 31). Developing this sense of the dual nature of bodies, he continues, "Our body is our always being already thrown beyond ourselves, and yet it is equally our root in reality" (31). As an inherent structural feature of embodied human experience, ambiguity figures prominently in Russon's work. Not only are bodies "inherently double," perception too is framed in terms of a fundamental ambiguity with respect to our position as observers: "Our perceptual life is our unavoidable thrownness into the word of things. We find ourselves simultaneously engaged and detached from things" (33). A few pages later Russon settles on the terms 'immersed' and 'detached' to characterize our way of relating to the things we encounter in the world. Sometimes this engagement is the familiar relation of habituation, and as such, we recognize our immersion in things; other times it is our ignoring of things, our detachment from them, that affords openness (37). Of most significance to this study, though, is the application of Russon's immersed/detached analysis to describe the ambiguous character of erotic attraction. Like the dual interpretation implied in Aristotle's friend as another self, Russon's model simultaneously accentuates both aspects (sameness/immersion and difference/detachment) of interpersonal experience.

Considered from the perspective of **immersion**, the friend is seen as exemplifying the familiar. When comparisons are drawn, what is noticed is the sense in which the two individuals are similar. For example, my friend may seem to be another like myself because we have similar personal histories. We may both be children of divorced parents; we might each have grown up in large cities where we experienced the feeling of anonymity; we might also discover that we both come from families where certain

religious beliefs were highly influential. Conversely, although we might discover that we have vastly different family histories, we may come to realize that the ways we have processed these histories and incorporated lessons from them into our lives, are in fact similar. For instance, I might come from a large, tightly knit family unit where every member's actions were closely monitored by the group. My friend, on the other hand, may have been an only child who experienced a great deal of freedom, but who often felt alone because her actions were generally unsupervised. As a result of our separate reflections upon these dissimilar situations, each of us in our adult lives may have come to prefer small, intimate gatherings. My response can be seen as a rejection of feeling continually pressured by the scrutiny of an oversized community, while my friend's is an expression of disdain for the isolation and disconnectedness she experienced throughout her youth.

The above examples illustrate circumstances where, ultimately, individuals come to view one another as familiar other-selves largely out of recognition of commonality. Similar strands in familial history, shared experiences, reactions that indicate like-minded approaches in value judgment—all this information contributes to the sense of a relationship as immersed within the familiar. And yet, as seen earlier, such concrete details need not emerge through actual accumulation of simultaneous shared experiences (i.e. going camping together in order to 'build memories'), neither does a sense of immersion require focused discussion and overt revelation of these areas of commonality. Because erotic attraction is initiated at the bodily level[14], often a great deal of evidence

[14] Generally speaking. Certainly one may experience erotic attraction toward someone they have never encountered bodily (in person)—in the context of an online relationship, for example. In such cases,

attesting either to the compatibility or incompatibility of two people's experiences is manifest even without concentrated mental effort.

While recognition of the familiar self within the other can occur instantaneously, as it did with the example of Geryon and Herakles, it may also take the form of a more gradual unfolding, as in situations where verbal contact with a person opens up further avenues of exploration. Language itself is an extremely rich outlet for erotic expression. In *Human Experience: Philosophy, Neurosis and the Elements of Everyday Life*, Russon names the "arena of communication" as the primary location through which we engage most meaningfully with other humans in order to "negotiate our self-identity in light of the experience of others" (112). As examples of the most intimate and formative kinds of communication, he cites language and sex. "Language," he goes on to say, "can be seen as the development of our sexuality [and] is the most profound sphere of self-presentation, of self-expression" (113). Certainly the linguistic realm never ceases to be revelatory, for each linguistic expression—whether written or vocalized—contains a history of one's experiences both with the language itself and with situations of the type at hand. Thus, having the right words to say or being at a loss for words, and indeed opting to speak or choosing to remain silent in a given situation, are linguistic gestures that are partially suggestive of a person's identity. Details such as speaking with either subtle or exaggerated vocal inflections, word choices, and even the pace of a speaker's discourse may be indicative (pauses of reluctance, steadiness of ordered precision and care, breathlessness of blithe excitement) and therefore informative as a means of

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Russon's discussion of language as a medium for self-expression—including erotic expression—is perhaps most applicable.

recognizing common strains of experience or opinion. Something as basic as the *sound* of a voice can even offer insights into the entire narrative arch of a person's life, beginning with the most basic of life stories (a person's level of education and the geographic region of their origin, for example) that may prove to be potential sites of engagement with that person.[15]

We have thus far considered a model for intimacy that characterizes attraction as a kind of mutual recognition involving coming to experience, through bodily means, another person as taken to be *like oneself*. But this only a partial account of the erotic attraction that is foundational to human intimacy. The other mode of recognition is the form of interaction Russon characterizes as **detached**. When we encounter a person as detached from our lived experience, they present themselves to us as unfamiliar. Some forms of the unfamiliar are foreign to our experience because we have come to routinely reject them. In this case we may either reject them out of habit, or based on principle. What is rejected on principle are those things about which we have undertaken rational deliberation, and generally speaking, such positions are altered slowly and only then through a modified, yet equally rational process of reflection. Our current study, with its focus on the primarily sub-conscious, embodied aspects of interpersonal relations, will elide such concerns and will concentrate instead on the pre- or non-rational instigators of our repulsion.

Much of what we reject is likely accomplished by mere force of habit; other things, we may find, are only implicitly rejected by us—simply through default—as we

[15] For a detailed account of Russon's treatment of language, see also *Human Experience*, 112-118.

do not yet contain within ourselves the means for their discovery. In each of these last two cases, the unfamiliarity of the person who *is* conversant in these areas, may appear to us as alien, perhaps even profoundly detached from our experience, and yet still not completely unavailable. If the experience of the other captures my interest and "calls" to me as Russon has described, if it "pulls" me toward discovery and "elicits my self-transcendence, elicits my learning"—then, to experience the other in this way, as otherwise-than-ourselves and simultaneously (at least potentially) available to our experience, is to recognize erotic attraction figured in its detached form (*Bearing Witness* 74-5). Here the other is truly other, and as such, offers not a vision of ourselves as comfortably situated in familiarity, but rather as challenged to experience freedom, opportunity, and openness. Russon develops this sense of detached experience in *Bearing Witness to Epiphany*, where he contrasts the ways in which we "comfortably take root in our rooms, our families, our streets, our garments, our friends" against the power of epiphany to "break us out of our comfortable attitude" (37-8). In a later discussion, Russon highlights the potentially transformative power of erotic attraction, commenting that "the erotic other calls me out of my static routines, calling me to be a unique, singular agent" (75).

While the benefits afforded by interaction with others seem clear (the differences of others open up a space for development, not available within the context of the familiar), we have not yet touched on the issue of describing *why* a detached other might appear to one as a possibility rather than simply an incomprehensible and consequently inaccessible other. Again, if all others represent potential ways for our being otherwise, why do only particular others summon us and we them? It is best at this point to make

explicit a point that has been operative throughout the previous discussion, and yet has remained unstated. What until now we have been referring to as individual experiences of recognition—either of groundedness in the familiar or openness to difference—is, in cases of attraction, actually a mutually experienced phenomenon. As Russon points out in both *Human Experience* and *Bearing Witness to Epiphany*, all of the interpersonal relations and interactions we have been talking about (erotic attraction, touch, friendship) exist only inasmuch as these feelings, urgings, and reaching-out are gestures that are accepted and also taken up by each person involved.[16] Under this assumption, when we speak of a person recognizing herself as situated in a relationship of immersed familiarity with respect to another, we must also assume that if in fact there is legitimate grounding for this recognition, then it is available to be recognized by the other as well. Such a process of mutual conditioning is certainly embedded in the structure of erotic attraction. For in order to come to recognize the presence of another in oneself (as Russon describes erotic experience), that other must necessarily be simultaneously recognizing and accepting you as another as well.

Similarly, in order for the differences noticed by erotic attraction to appear as potentialities and not merely obstacles, each person must represent for their respective others some combination of being-otherwise that is desirable to each. The fact that for any two people, differences will likely overwhelm similarities, also suggests that the foreign elements in each potential friend must align in such a way as to match up

[16] This may be a potential problem for Russon's argument, at least as it stands, as it seems we can think of cases where one might be erotically attracted to someone who does not respond with reciprocity. Unrequited love comes to mind, and also situations where someone may 'admire from afar' having escaped (or failed to capture) the attention of the other.

opportunities sought with willingness to share in a relationship. Ultimately what this seems to suggest is that the few intimate friendships we enjoy as humans can be better understood by considering the mutually reinforcing interaction among the various oppositions we've discussed: groundedness and openness, similarity and difference, self and other.

3.4 The Recognition of Values

Russon is not alone in acknowledging the significance of non-cognitive cues communicated through our bodies; nor is he the first to recognize the contribution that such information lends to human interactions. In developing her account of the importance of exemplars to an individual's moral development, Linda Zagzebski describes how observation of an exceptional person can capture one's attention and how this may result in the observer feeling motivated to imitate the exemplar's behavior. "There are people whose moral beauty attracts us," she says, "We are usually drawn to them initially because we admire something easily observable about them—typically, their acts, although it could also be something about their physical bearing or speech" (60). To illustrate her point, Zagzebski highlights several historical figures as role models and describes the qualities she thinks makes them paradigms of morality. Citing previous work from Amy Olberding, Zagzebski notes that contemporaries of Confucius frequently commented on the exceptional quality of the outward, physical aspects of his daily interchanges with others. His unwavering conscientiousness, his polite, courteous movements and respectful manner—these external features of Confucius' bodily

comportment attracted followers who found themselves drawn to him, at least initially, based on observation alone (86).

Without calling such attraction erotic, Zagzebski considers the role the body plays in this process, noting that "a person's physical bearing, movement, and manner of speaking are expressions of his moral character" (86). Like Russon, Zagzebski thinks that in our everyday interactions with others, we are acutely aware of a wide array of non-cognitive bodily cues; but because she is interested in describing how exemplars can impact the moral development of others, Zagzebski focuses on a particular kind of noticing that Ian Kidd has called *moral attraction.* In "Admiration, Attraction, and the Aesthetics of Exemplarity," Kidd discusses this notion of moral attraction, which he describes in the following terms: "The inner beauty of exemplars is primarily experienced as moral attraction: the aesthetically charged admiration for their virtues or excellences as expressed in forms of bodily comportment experienced as beautiful" (sec. 3, par. 13). Notable here is the sense in which physical cues such as gestures and speech acts serve as outward manifestations which convey essential information about the internal state of an individual. Although this information-gathering initially plays out at an unconscious level, Zagzebski believes we eventually "seek to identify the psychological source of those acts" (86). She goes on to refer to these sources as deep "structures" and suggests that they represent a kind of internalized distillation of character embedded within (61, 65, 86).

Russon, Zagzebski, and Kidd have each identified contexts where aspects of a person's physical presence convey essential information about themselves to another. Although Russon focuses on erotic perception while Zagzebski and Kidd turn their

attention toward what might be called moral perception, all are interested in the way our physical embodiment as humans seems to engage with, speak to, and reveal things about us to other persons' bodies, independent of—or at least prior to—our awareness of cognitive processes. What is lacking from each of these accounts, however, is identifying this experience as a kind of *recognition*, and then connecting this with the phenomenon of attraction by describing exactly what it is that we recognize when we are drawn to another. As mentioned earlier, I want to suggest that in our attraction to another person, the features we recognize in their physical movements, gestures, bodily comportment, and speech are expressions of the **values** held by that person. Some of these values are tied to personality traits we may already possess in common with our potential friend, while some values we learn from others; they are things we did not previously appreciate that we come to understand and subsequently value though our attraction to another. In describing attraction as the recognition of values, I would include three main types: moral, intellectual, and aesthetic. I will now discuss each in turn.

3.4.1 Moral Values

In his article titled "Friendship," Laurence Thomas gives an account of an intimate relationship he calls "companion friendship." Although he does not go as far as Russon in suggesting an overt sexual component to these companionate friendships, Thomas does point out that in some significant ways, they tend to resemble the erotic love shared by romantic lovers: "Now, people are often said to fall in love. I hold that a similar phenomenon can occur with friendship" (218). In particular, he argues that rather than being the product of conscious decision-making, "there is a sense in which friendships happen to us" (218). In fact, he explains that in companion friendship, the

"initial feelings of love are sometimes experienced as an *onslaught*" (218, italics mine). Elsewhere, he notes that in the same way strong emotions are often associated with romantic love, within the context of certain kinds of friendship, one may feel "besieged by feelings of love for so-and-so, as opposed to choosing to have those feelings" (218). The fact that we may be surprised by our feelings (or perhaps the intensity of those feelings) suggests that on a cognitive level, we are frequently unaware of much of what is happening at the level of the body. Similar to the deep psychological structures Zagzebski describes as unseen influences of outward behavior, we generally have no clearly formed notion of what draws us to a particular person until after we have already begun to develop a relationship. Only then does the rational mind seek reasons for our feelings 'after the fact,' so to speak.

My primary interest in Thomas' account, though, has to do with a claim he makes— rather in passing—that in the case of companion friends, the relationship "will be harmonious only if the parties involved are sufficiently attuned to the way in which each other views and interacts with the world." Later, he specifies that intimate friendship "requires a shared conception of the good" (220). Here, I think Thomas touches upon a broader point I would like to make with respect to the unconscious attraction we experience with certain others. Thomas does not explain what he means by 'sufficiently attuned,' nor does he provide details concerning how friends might come to know one another's views—whether this happens through conversation over time, or as we might infer from his wording, that friends come to understand one another through observing physical actions and mannerisms as each 'interacts with the world.' This is where I think an account of attraction as the recognition of values is useful because it helps explain the

element of surprise: some friends are unexpected because unbeknownst to our conscious minds, our bodies are conveying and receiving information about values and views, up to and including our notion of 'the good.'

At a reception, you are seated among strangers at a table where an obviously overwhelmed server solicits drink orders. Nearly everyone asks for white wine, except a woman who requests red. When the server returns with a bottle, you notice he inadvertently fills each glass with white wine, including the one belonging to the woman. For a moment it appears she might speak, but instead she smiles and allows the error to pass without comment. Although this small gesture (overlooking an inconsequential mistake) unfolds in an environment full of external stimuli, it captures your attention as a simple act of kindness. The woman's reaction—that flash of seeing-dismissing-smiling—reveals something about her priorities (this is not important), her flexibility (I can enjoy white wine), and her attunement to the fine points of a situation (observing the server's stress level). In turn, the extent to which you notice this interaction in the first place—coupled with the fact that it also strikes you as meaningful and important—reveals something about you. Namely, your noticing stance suggests that her gesture arrests you (your physical perception) on a subconscious level. Insomuch as your body is engaged with the situation—participating as an observer—we might say it is attuned to *recognize* the woman's reaction and to 'take it up' in some way. If her actions express qualities you appreciate and value—in this case the moral virtue of kindness—then they resonate within you in a positive way as *attraction*. If the situation were different and she responded rudely by making too much of the error, protesting loudly or with disdain,

such behavior would register as a violation of your moral values and would be experienced instead as *repulsion*.

3.4.2 Intellectual Values

Depending on your own intellectual habits and interests, various kinds of actions, gestures and body language will stand out to you. On a walk in a park someone pauses contemplatively to jot down an idea in a notebook and you wonder if they are a writer. A person you attend class with has flecks of paint on her hands each time you meet and so you assume she is an artist. Without thinking about it, you find yourself standing in the back row of an outdoor play. Someone else in your periphery—also in the outskirts—is half paying attention, half watching other people watch the play. In each of these situations, the details you tune into—that may ultimately lead to making eye contact, or prompt a nod, or draw you into speaking to or approaching them—may not at first be consciously available to you. That is: you may not know what, exactly, suggests to you that this particular person might be open to engagement. You may not know, for instance, that you had seen the paint for several consecutive weeks before you actually 'noticed' it, that your conception of this individual already involved the unexamined assumption of a shared interest in art, that all the information streaming in at the level of bodily perception contributed to your feeling drawn to this person.

We may of course get it wrong in our initial pre-cognitive estimation of someone. That potential artist-friend from class might be a house painter with no experience or interest in creative endeavors. It may likewise turn out that a person you encounter is behaving in a manner atypical to them, or reacting to circumstances which do not align

with your assumptions. The fellow people-watcher might not be an observant introvert looking for his next short story, but someone separated from companions who is scanning the crowd trying to locate members of his party. Nonetheless, neither of these cases nullifies the fact that physical cues provide essential first impressions through which subsequent information is filtered and interpreted. My first 'introduction' to someone might be a phrase picked out of the din of a crowded room where I overhear them talking about a film I found memorable. Similarly, my underlying enthusiasm for a literary genre or an obsession with a particular book is available for others to take up with interest if while speaking I quote or refer to characters or some plot detail that is recognized and mutually appreciated. Alternately, you may catch my attention as the person who winced slightly when someone else mentions how much fun they had at karaoke the other night; you may also glimpse the eyebrow grimace I attempted to hide at the same time. In each of the above scenarios, information about myself and others—situations I/we find undesirable and information about what I/they value from an intellectual standpoint—is communicated and perceived through bodily channels prior to being taken up for consideration by conscious reasoning.

Although film interests, reading preferences, and entertainment choices are to a certain extent matters of taste, one's taste is frequently informed by more deeply held intellectual and aesthetic values. Given this, some observations will be more informative than others. If I see you reading JAMA, for example, my immediate assumption will be that you have an interest in medicine (either professional or intellectual). Underlying this choice of reading material, however, is evidence of an intellectual value: a considered appreciation for (or intellectual confidence in) the merits of scientific research and study.

Similarly, an overheard conversation involving a topic from a recent radio program might convey information about both taste (he listens to NPR) and intellectual values (political beliefs).

3.4.3 Aesthetic Values

The things we consider beautiful are revealing. For example, if I find a particular style of architecture—say Shaker design—aesthetically appealing, deliberate examination into why this is so might uncover reasons behind my preferences. I may discover that I respond favorably to particular elements such as balance, symmetry, clean lines, order and simplicity. In addition to these aesthetic features, I may also be registering approval for other aspects of the Shaker philosophy of design out of which this architectural approach grew—the focus on utilitarian function for shared spaces, or the emphasis on quality materials and craftsmanship, for example. Given this, it appears that the things we find beautiful are ultimately indicative of the kinds of things we value. Although I can identify these values through a deliberative process like the one just described, this need not be the case.

Walking through an art museum with a tour group one might notice how small clusters of people break away in order to visit areas that reflect their various interests. Who goes where, how long they linger in front of which pieces, what works they merely glance at and which ones they study, whether they ask questions, read about, or take pictures of the pieces—all these actions provide information about both the aesthetic and intellectual values of the individuals. Whether these perceptual details 'register' and ultimately translate into friendship involves a complex interchange of perceptive

discovery (taking a noticing stance with respect to another person), mutual recognition of shared values, and compatibility. If, for example, I end up eating lunch with a small group who has more or less travelled the same path through the museum, my experiences over the course of the day—my accumulated perceptions—play a role in determining whom I sit beside, whether or not we talk, and what we talk about. This same phenomenon simultaneously plays out among the others as well. A person who speaks to me may have noticed my careful attention to certain pieces of art, my disinterest in others, my standing off to the side reading artists' statements. Such lingerings, pauses and puzzled stares (what, exactly, is going on with *this* piece?) may stand out because such perceptions resonate with their own. Likewise, the person I feel comfortable sitting beside (for no reason immediately apparent to me) might be the same one I almost bumped into as we waited to view a piece, or whose path crossed in front of, or beside my line of vision a few times as we navigated back and forth among rooms in the collection. Cases like these demonstrate how two people with similar aesthetic sensibilities might experience the beginning of a potential friendship as they recognize familiar elements in each other and experience this discovery as an invitation to further exploration—as attraction.

We have already mentioned friendships which highlight similarity. Here, the orientation is toward engagement with others with whom we share personality traits, dispositions, and interests. Attributing this kind of relationship to Aristotle's notion of the 'friend as another oneself,' Dean Cocking and Steve Matthews call this the "mirror view," noting that in this case the friend acts as a mirror, reflecting back an image of our own established way of viewing ourselves (226). This might involve friends who are

interested in the same subject matter, or who ask and seek answers to similar questions. In this context, friends may acknowledge their values and manifest them through ongoing acts of sharing (pieces of art, music or film that fall within the range of established categories of preference); they may discuss creative endeavors, or simply engage in the appreciation of art together, or on behalf of the other.

Our previous discussion also revealed that there is another, quite different way to conceive of friendship where instead of responding to familiar, established norms, friends make available to each other novel experiences and offer avenues of growth and opportunities for the expansion of values. Cocking calls this the "drawing view" after the sense in which one is drawn along by the friend into unfamiliar territory, toward new experiences (226). Suppose a friendship does develop between me and my fellow tourist at the art museum. While it may be true that recognition of similar aesthetic interests drew us together in the first place, over time I might come to learn that my friend also loves contemporary abstract art, and he discovers I have a peculiar fascination with Italian Renaissance frescos. Prior to our friendship, both of us had been dismissive of the aesthetic style evoked by these respective genres; each seemed unable to understand or appreciate what they had to offer. And yet, because my friend sees value in this kind of artistic expression, I am suddenly afforded new reasons and motivation to see things differently. It then becomes possible for me to "find myself influenced in a new direction which lies outside what I . . . thought properly expressive of my interests" and, as Cocking and Matthews observe, "I may thus grow and develop in ways that reflect the character of my friend" (227).

Now, I would argue in cases like this, that what draws people together in spite of the distinct separateness of their positions as alien to one another, is the direction of the opportunities they represent: namely, they are both still oriented in the direction of underlying shared values. In the example above, perhaps the friend is able to show how abstract art fits into an already existing (shared) interpretive framework, such as one borrowed from literary criticism, or some other realm familiar to each. Conversely, functioning in the capacity of an *other*, a friend might introduce a completely new value for consideration as well. In this instance, the friend epitomizes a radically different perspective that opens up new possibilities and makes space available for further development to unfold for their companion.

3.4.4 Do Opposites Attract?

At this point, one may wonder about cases where it seems like, rather than two people recognizing shared values, they are responding instead to *differences* embodied in the other—cases where one might say, 'opposites attract.' As an example of this, consider the interaction between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. For most of the novel these two characters are presented as clashing in opposition. Rather than being drawn to one another, each views the other with disdain; they are critical of one another (appearance, behavior, personality traits) and engage in heated verbal sparring. And yet the fact that they eventually find themselves attracted to one another and end up marrying (and are very much in love) seems to suggest that perhaps opposites do attract. But I do not think this is the case.

While it is certainly true that Elizabeth and Darcy hail from vastly differing social and economic circumstances, their happy union occurs despite this opposition, rather than in response to it. I would argue that minor differences aside (yes, Mr. Darcy, it can be pleasurable to dance with the right person), Elizabeth and Darcy are more alike than they are different; moreover, their seeming to be opposites is more a function of their mutual misreading of one another (a failure of first impressions[17]) than it is a reflection of deep-seated essence. Once these errors are corrected, the other becomes scrutable as they each recognize and appreciate core values from which the words and actions in question have arisen. For instance, it becomes clear that both pursued actions motivated by a desire to protect the interests of loved ones (Darcy his friend Bingley; Elizabeth, her sister Jane). They also have similar, and strikingly unconventional notions of marriage, which is especially poignant given the time period: namely, they share the view that marriage is more than a pragmatic social arrangement aimed at combining social and economic assets. Instead, both Elizabeth and Darcy believe an ideal marriage should also involve the convergence of compatible hearts and minds united in love.

Even their personalities are more similar than different: they are both strong-willed, outwardly confident, sharp-witted, prideful and quick to judge. In fact, it is because of these shared features that they each make the same mistakes in misreading the others' actions and motivations. Elizabeth attributes Darcy's aloofness to arrogance alone, rather than disdain for the schemings of the Mrs. Bennets of the world; simultaneously, he thinks Elizabeth is just another desperate young woman willing to abandon decorum in order to "be noticed" in hopes of securing a wealthy husband. It is

[17] Austen's working title for the novel was *First Impressions*.

only when each breaks through the errors of their initial (and ongoing) impressions that they actually 'see' one another, recognize shared values, and experience feeling drawn to those values as expressed (so persuasively, so attractively) in that particular individual: 'Elizabeth,' 'Mr. Darcy.'

Because of this, I think that for the deepest, most meaningful kind of attraction to occur, two individuals must have a particular *valence* with respect to one another—some already existing points of connection—of sameness. For without such common values and character traits, their separateness might threaten to render them merely *separate*, and the relationship may never have gotten off the ground in the first place.

3.5 Conclusion

We began this essay considering the implications of some advice Seneca offers concerning friendship; namely, that if you want to cultivate trust within friendship, you should exercise judgement and serious consideration before entering into a close relationship. On the face of it—and given the specific circumstances of the intended recipient (Lucilius' involvement with a 'friend' he did not trust)—this stands as fairly sound advice. Certainly Seneca is correct in pointing out the strangeness of Lucilius calling an untrustworthy man 'friend.' Additionally, I doubt anyone would suggest there is *no place* for rational deliberation and choice within friendship. My quarrel with Seneca, and with the broader context of Stoic tradition from which comments like the following originate—"*Think for a long time whether or not you should admit a given person to your friendship*"—is that such admonishment places unbalanced emphasis on the cognitive aspect of experience, shifts undue burden onto the deliberative process, and

assumes an exaggerated sense of control over things which are not the proper subjects of rational choosing. One factor motivating this essay was to offer a corrective to such excesses, to provide an alternate account of the earliest stages of friendship formation that more accurately reflects the essential role of embodied experience.

Perhaps one reason why body language plays such an important role in friendship formation is partly due to the sense in which (to borrow language from Epictetus) 'our bodies are not up to us.' Because some types of physical responses are not entirely within our control, when gestures, facial expressions, and mannerisms suggest information to others, they truly are representative of some deep element inside responding to and interacting with a deep element within another person.[18] If two people respond to such perceptions by noticing them in each other, if they respond with mutual interest, feeling summoned by the other, I have suggested this is indicative of shared values. Whether we are speaking of moral values such as kindness, intellectual values like creative expression through writing, or aesthetic values like simplicity, on a basic level, when we are attracted to someone, when physical cues available to our perception arrest our attention and draw us toward further interaction with a particular person, we are responding with recognition and endorsement of those values.

[18] In "Of Manners and Morals" Nancy Sherman examines the impact decorum has on behavior. Is there a connection, she wonders, between going through the motions of an action (i.e. forcing ourselves to act courteous when another is rude even though we would rather not) and actually manifesting the behavior implied by the action (i.e. becoming courteous)? Among the behavioral cues Sherman discusses, "emotional demeanour, bodily comportment, and tone of voice" are listed as the "material elements of decorum"(280). Interestingly, Sherman cites examples from another Stoic, Cicero, whose treatise *On Duties* notes that "a careful observer can read into our characters, 'from a glance of the eyes, from the relaxation or contraction of an eyebrow, from sadness, cheerfulness or laughter, from speech or from silence, from a raising or lower[ing] of the voice, and so on.'" (qtd in Sherman 281).

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