

Learning from Love: Reasoning, Respect, and the Value of a Person

Kyla Ebels-Duggan

We mourn the death of #TimothyCaughman, a fellow human being murdered for being Black.

—The King Center, public Facebook post

At a climactic moment in *The Sources of Normativity* Christine Korsgaard (1996b, 123) declares, “It follows from this argument that human beings are valuable. Enlightenment morality is true.” Here, she purports to accomplish what many take to be the defining aim of moral philosophy. If you think that what philosophers do is to try to construct non-question-begging, valid arguments for their positions, then it seems a moral philosopher would have to aim to reason to moral convictions. Korsgaard’s argument comes closer to accomplishing this ambitious aim than any other of which I am aware.

But I want to consider whether we can argue to moral convictions at all, whether anything would count as the sort of vindication of morality’s authority that this conception of moral philosophy seeks. I agree that human beings are valuable. In fact I think that each of us has the sort of value beyond price that Kant calls *dignity*. And I agree that what Korsgaard calls “enlightenment morality,” an overriding requirement to treat each person in accord with this value, is authoritative for us. We have sufficient reason for affirming these things and acting from these convictions and failing to do so would be wrong. But I don’t think that we can arrive at the attitudes constituting these commitments just through argument or reasoning. Moreover, the idea that we can, and the attendant thought that we have a rational obligation to try, carries certain moral dangers. I will argue that this way of thinking of the warrant for our moral commitments is itself in tension with these commitments.

On my view, then, we have sufficient reasons for, but cannot reason to, central moral commitments. But if we cannot reason to our moral commitments, cannot vindicate them with philosophical argument, what does it mean to have reasons for them, and what could make it the case that we do? I will argue that

we can make progress on these questions by thinking about love. Contemporary moral philosophers often treat interpersonal love as in presumptive conflict with a distinctively moral attitude or outlook. The tension arises insofar as morality demands impartial regard for everyone, while love requires partiality toward those whom we love. Considered this way the philosophical task becomes either protecting the moral demand against the encroachments of personal attachment or protecting the integrity of interpersonal relationships against the demands of an impersonal moral law.¹ But important ethical traditions have always placed love at the very center of the moral life. The biblical tradition, for example, presents love of God and of one's neighbor as the most fundamental moral demand, the summary of the law.² Here I join a small but growing group of contemporary moral philosophers who endorse a view in this spirit.³

I will argue that three sorts of experiences can reveal to us the value of other human beings, the value to which morality responds: love for particular individuals; singular respect, an experience structurally similar to love; and witness of the love of others. In Section 1, I argue that our experience of love gives us insight into the value of individuals. It discloses the content of the concept of *the value of humanity*, a concept that figures centrally in Kantian moral theory and more generally in any ethical view that recognizes the incommensurable value of each person.⁴ In Section 2, I argue that this value cannot be reduced to any set of properties, whether natural or nonnatural. In Sections 3–5, I argue that three experiences—love, singular respect, and the witness of the love of others—can provide grounds for attributing value to others, grounds that reasoning alone could not deliver. I conclude with some reflections on the implications of all of this for the practice of moral philosophy.

1. Learning from Love: The Value of Humanity

Korsgaard's argument concludes: *human beings are valuable*. Let's restate this as *each person has infinite and irreplaceable value* and call that claim *the moral conclusion*. The moral conclusion can also take the form of an intention—what Kant would call a maxim or principle of action—to treat everyone in accord with this value, or as this value demands. Affirmation of the moral conclusion in both of these forms is at least partially constitutive of a robust moral commitment.

But to comprehend what we affirm or commit to when we take up these attitudes, and so be in a position to draw the moral conclusion, we need an understanding of the value that human beings have. To put it in cognitive terms, we need to be in possession of the concept of what Kant calls *the value of humanity* or *dignity*, value beyond price (4:434–436).⁵ In this section, I argue that loving an individual provides a route to apprehending the value that we are here trying

to name. Love is not an attitude to which we can reason, yet it is a contentful attitude, not merely a passive state. Its content includes ascribing value to the beloved and taking this value to be both nonfungible and independent of one's own attitudes toward the beloved. Value of that kind is what the moral conclusion ascribes to all.

Judgments ascribing color concepts to objects provide a helpful analogy to the moral conclusion here. We can make, and can reason to, such judgments about objects that we do not see and have not seen. But we can understand these judgments only if we have prior perceptual experience that puts us in a position to use the color concepts that figure in them. In Frank Jackson's (1986) famous case, Mary, the color scientist who has lived only in a black and white room, needs to see red before she knows what red looks like or what redness is.⁶ No amount of descriptive information that could be available by mere report could put her in full possession of the color concept.⁷ My suggestion is that the concept of the value of humanity is like redness in this way, and that loving an individual can play a role analogous to seeing red things. We can *sincerely judge* of a person that she has dignity without loving her, and can sincerely judge that everyone has dignity without loving each of them, and we can act from these judgments. But we can grasp the content of these judgments, and so take up the distinctively moral attitude, only if we appreciate the value of some particular individuals. Interpersonal love is our normal route to this appreciation.

The analogy with seeing color holds insofar as loving someone constitutively involves experiencing him as valuable. When you love someone you regard him as having great and irreplaceable worth, a value that Kant rightly says cannot be reduced to price. Our ascription of this value to those we love is made searingly clear in experiences of loss, the grief of departure and especially of death (cf. Gaita 1991; Brewer 2018). Here we experience viscerally what we try to say about a person when we say that he has infinite and irreplaceable value. But it is not only these negative moments that reveal the value in question. If we pay attention—or in those moments of grace in which our attention is arrested—we can find ourselves overwhelmed by the value of the individual person in front of us.⁸ Anyone who has experienced love knows what this is like, and reflection on such experiences gives us a grasp on what we mean by talk of the infinite and irreplaceable worth of a person.

But loving a person is not just a matter of experiencing her *as if* she has this value. It involves something much more like an endorsement of this idea. Such endorsement need not be explicit, of course. Love doesn't require formulating the thought: *this person is of infinite and irreplaceable worth*. (Perhaps only a philosopher would think such a thought.) But regarding the experience of the beloved's value as misleading or illusory, or thinking that her worth could be expressed as a price or exchange value, would be in tension with loving her.⁹ That is to say,

there is a rational incompatibility between loving a person and denying that that person has nonfungible worth. We may sometimes have grounds for attributing to a person both love for another and a denial of his incomparable worth, just as we can have grounds to attribute a pair of contradictory beliefs to someone. But in both of these cases, holding this combination of attitudes amounts to a serious rational failing on the part of the agent, one that borders on unintelligibility: the agent should take each attitude in the pair to be a decisive consideration against the other.

Love cannot simply be assimilated to belief or to judgment. Unlike beliefs, love cannot be acquired through testimony or drawn as the conclusion of explicit reasoning (cf. Ebels-Duggan 2019).¹⁰ Yet the rational incompatibility between love and judgments about the value of the beloved shows that love is also not just a passive experience or a matter of things appearing to you in a certain way, but an attitude that involves a commitment to the idea that the beloved is incomparably valuable. In this way, love differs from seeing color and shares something with belief. You can—without any rational failing—see something as blue while simultaneously judging that the experience is illusory. You cannot rationally believe that it is blue while judging that your belief is wrong. Unlike perception, belief contains a built-in concern about the possibility of a difference between appearance and reality, and love is like belief in this way.¹¹

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So far I have claimed that to love someone involves experiencing him as having great and nonfungible value and is not compatible with regarding this experience as illusory. Next I argue that love is also incompatible with the idea that the value of the person you love depends on your attitudes toward him or the relationship in which you stand to him. In this way loving a person involves thinking of his value as objective and in important ways unconditional.

To bring this out, I'm going to follow Kant's strategy in *Groundwork I*, contrasting a variety of attitudes that I might express in treating you well. Kant is interested in isolating a distinctively moral attitude, but his approach can also help us identify the attitude that is distinctive of interpersonal love. It's no accident that a parallel strategy works in both of these cases if I am right in thinking that both attitudes are responses to, or apprehensions of, the value of humanity.

Kant begins with the case of the honest merchant, who treats another as he deserves only because doing so serves the merchant's self-interest, in particular business interests that are independent of any interests he might have in standing in a morally decent relationship with his customers. Kant says that, though the merchant's actions accord with duty, they lack moral worth. The actions are permissible, even required of him, but in so acting he expresses

no distinctively moral attitude toward his customers. Similarly, action motivated by narrow self-interest would also fail to express love. Regarding the reasons that you have to treat someone well as wholly conditioned on prior, independent interests of your own would be incompatible with valuing her as you must in order to love her.¹²

Suppose that, instead, I treat you well because it *pleases me* to do so. The reasons on which I act in this case are not conditioned on some independent interest of mine, but they are conditioned on my own preferences: I enjoy or take pleasure in interactions that contribute to your well-being or the advancement of your interests. I like playing the role of benefactor. Kant's Sympathetic Person, whom he describes as one who "without any other motive of vanity or self-interest [finds] an inner satisfaction in spreading joy and can take delight in the satisfaction of others so far as it is [his] own work," can be understood in this way (4:398–399).¹³ We may think that there is something more admirable here than in the first case, but taking your interests seriously because it's something that I enjoy doing still fails as an expression of a distinctively moral attitude. By the same token, I cannot love you well while at the same time thinking of the actions that I take with respect to you as worth doing only because I happen to enjoy them (cf. Lockhart 2017). The problem here is that your value or standing as a distinct individual with authority to make claims on my action is playing no role at all.

Suppose, then, that I treat you as you deserve to be treated just because I like *you*. My positive regard makes me willing to sacrifice for you and to treat you well even in instances in which I don't feel like or enjoy doing so. That sets this case apart from the second one. Moreover, there's plausibly a response to your own value here. But if my actions are to express love, I can't regard the reasons that I have to treat you well as merely a function of my own responses to you. If I combine my liking of you with the view that, were I not fond of you, you would have no claim on me, this would provide grounds for rejecting my claim that I love you. This is the thought that T. M. Scanlon (1998, 164–165) elicits when he points out that there would be something disconcerting about a friend who would steal a kidney for you. Such willingness indicates that your friend regards the kidneys of those who are not his friends as available for his use. And this, in turn, suggests that he would also be willing to steal your kidney were you not his friend. But regarding your standing to claim control over your own body as conditioned on his preferences in this way is incompatible with the regard one should have for a friend.

This point does need to be made with some care: loving someone is compatible with thinking that contingent preferences figure in why you love *that* person rather than some other person. Friendships or romantic partnerships might, perfectly appropriately, depend in part on brute preferences of that

kind. Other sorts of relationships may depend importantly on contingent facts. Love for one's own children seems to be like that. I can love my child while acknowledging that this one *just happens* to be mine, and that, had things happened differently, I would have some other child, whom I would love just as much. But the question I have in view concerns not the comparison between loving one person and loving some other one, but rather whether *love*, and the profound appreciation and valuing of a person that it involves, is an appropriate, justified, or rationally warranted response to the person in question.¹⁴ I am claiming that it is internal to love to ascribe to the beloved a value that makes it so. By contrast with, say, a taste for chocolate, love cannot be regarded from the inside as merely the expression of some preference of the lover. I can think that under different circumstances I would have loved another child just as much, but I cannot think that the justification or rational warrant of my love for this child depends only on what I happen to like or enjoy.

In contrast to all of these cases, then, acting *out of love for you* requires thinking of you as having a value to which I would have to respond regardless of whether I like you, enjoy doing things for you, or find it in my interest to do so. Such value is independent of the lover, and so one to which anyone must respond.¹⁵ Love commits us to the idea that the object of love is of value, and this value is more than agent-relative. This is not to say that loving you commits me to thinking that anyone must *love* you. But I cannot both love you and regard your value as depending solely on me. In loving you, I take your value to be objective, in the sense that it is not conditioned by my particular attitudes and response, and so provides reasons to which anyone must respond. We may think of love as the most preferential of interpersonal attitudes. Nevertheless, it involves responsiveness to a value that we must regard as independent of our preferences.

David Velleman (2006, 374) evocatively claims that *love is a moral education*. In this section I have tried to explain why this might be so. In order to take up the moral attitude, we need some way of marshaling the conceptual resources involved in attributing dignity to each person. My suggestion is that we can find these resources in love. To love someone is to experience that person as valuable and is not rationally compatible with denying his value. Moreover, the value that we cannot deny has at least these two features: it is nonfungible; it cannot be bought or sold for any price.¹⁶ And it is unconditioned by our own attitudes or reactions toward the person. I claim that it is this same value, the value of humanity or dignity—objective value beyond price—that the moral conclusion attributes and to which moral commitment responds.¹⁷

2. Understanding the Value of Humanity: Against the Property View

I have spoken of *the value of humanity*, used the phrase “great and irreplaceable worth,” and also suggested that the value in question is what Kant names *dignity* and contrasts with price. But I find all of this language inadequate to name or talk about the value that a person has. Philosophers have made other attempts as well. Talk of the *humanity*, *personhood*, *individuality*, *preciousness*, or *sacredness* of the person, of the *soul*, *the person herself*, or her *real self*, or—among Kantians—her *rational nature* or *noumenal self* can all be understood as attempts to refer to this value, but none seems quite up to the task.¹⁸ While it would be interesting to reflect on the distinctive shortcomings of each, I think it is no accident that all fail. The problem here is not merely that we haven’t yet hit upon the right term. Instead, the problem—at least one problem—is that any such term can sound as if it is trying to name some part or property of a person, the sort of thing that could be described, understood, and so considered apart from an experience such as love, and could provide the necessary and sufficient condition for something—someone—to be the intelligible object of love.¹⁹ But this way of understanding a person’s value is doomed to fail.

Humanity might suggest—at least to those not steeped in Kant’s writing—membership in a biological species. *Personhood*, *individuality*, or *rational nature* might be thought to pick out some set of capacities, for reasoning or for valuing or setting ends, and to invite further inquiry about what these capacities may be. It is less tempting to understand the *soul* or *noumenal self* in naturalistic terms, but if we are willing to admit such entities into our ontology, it is then tempting to think of them on a descriptive model, as naming some immaterial part that a being could have or fail to have, a sort of glowing ball inside her (cf. Korsgaard 2008, 132–135). Even the phrase “the value of the person” can sound as if refers to some such part or entity. But when we talk about a person’s value or dignity, it’s not some feature or property of her, but rather *her*, her self, the very one that can be loved, that we are trying to talk about.²⁰

If we try to think of value as a part or property of a person, we seem to have only two choices. On the one hand, we can think of it as naming some set of ordinary natural properties.²¹ But to think that a person has value beyond price is not the same as believing that she possesses any such set of properties. All such beliefs face the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the descriptive and the normative that Moore (1993, 66–69) identified in his famous open question argument. Someone might agree that a being has the relevant properties, yet refuse—explicitly or just in practice—to regard her as valuable. Such a person may be making a serious, morally significant error, but we cannot expose this

error merely by analyzing the concepts that she uses or bringing to light internal tensions in her commitments. She may be fully cognizant of what these natural properties amount to without this making her error manifest to her (cf. Korsgaard 2008; Scanlon 1998, 95–100; Brewer 2009, chap. 5; Buss 1999). Even so, her attitudes do not seem to contradict one another.²²

The alternative version of the property view would treat terms like *dignity* as attempts to name the value itself, a nonnatural thing or property of a sui generis metaphysical kind, the glowing ball to which I referred above. I am very doubtful that we can make sense of this idea. But even supposing we could, attributing such a property to others does not seem to capture what we are doing when we value them. Becoming convinced that no such property exists, or even that no such property could exist, would not lead a clear-thinking person to doubt or revise her values or ethical outlook.²³ And conversely, it's not clear that value conceived on this glowing ball model could play the relevant role in our ethical thought, even if we posit its existence. Insofar as we think of value itself as an object to which our terms could refer, or a property that figures in a complete description of the world, the problems that plague the attempt to reduce value to empirical descriptive facts rearise: if value were just part of the world, even a special, mysterious metaphysical part, we should want to know why it makes sense to be specially guided by this part.²⁴ This way of thinking of the value of a person opens a question that should not be open; it treats as intelligible a question that is not so.

The sort of question that we settle when we ascribe value to a thing is not a question about what objects there are or what properties these objects have. It is, instead, a broadly practical or ethical question about what should guide our actions, ethical thought, and attitudes: a question about what it makes sense to care about and orient ourselves toward, and so how we have reason to live our lives. We sometimes use the terms canvassed at the beginning of this section in a different way, one that is closer to the mark. We speak of a person's humanity, or invoke the fact that someone is "a fellow human being," as the chapter epigraph does. What is said here is not an attempt to clarify, as if it were in doubt, that Timothy Caughman is a member of a biological species or has some capacity or property that someone might have been thinking that he lacked. Nor is it the assertion of a metaphysical thesis. It is, rather, an attempt to make salient that this person is an individual, someone who shares with us and those we love the value in question. His characterization here as a "fellow human being" does not pick out or refer to a property that gives us independent purchase on that value or serve as even the beginning of an account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for having it.²⁵ Rather this phrase, in this context, depends for its sense on our prior grasp of this value, without which it cannot do the evocative, and so the ethical, work for which it was intended. In speaking about this

value we are urging the appropriateness of certain responses, here responses that register the enormity of the tragedy of a person's violent death, while also trying to elicit those responses. If you love or have loved someone, then you have in that experience a touchstone that allows you to apprehend what it means for someone to be a fellow human being in this sense.

So I take the felt inadequacy of the terms to count in favor of, rather than presenting a problem for, the view that I am advocating. It is a symptom of the fact that our grasp on the sort of value that human beings have, our understanding of what we mean when we talk about human dignity, *has to be* informed by experience of individuals who bear this value. Any attempt at ways of talking about the value of a person divorced from such experience will fall flat. Having tried to say something about why any terms may seem inadequate, I will continue to use both "dignity" and "the value of humanity" as interchangeable placeholders for that kind of value that human beings have.

3. Addressing Skeptical Challenges to Love

So far I have argued that loving a person involves ascribing to her the incomparable and unconditional value that Kant calls *dignity*, and that this ascription cannot be reduced to any set of beliefs about her properties, whether natural or nonnatural. But so far this is just a claim about what love *is*. I've not addressed the question of whether we are right to regard other people in this way, whether the ascription of value constitutive of love could be rationally grounded, warranted, or justified. In this section, I turn to justificatory questions and consider skeptical challenges to or doubts about the rational warrant of interpersonal love.²⁶

I argue that we have sufficient reasons *for* interpersonal love, though we cannot reason *to* it or fully articulate the reasons for it in the form of an argument. In fact, I will argue for the stronger claim that love is rationally incompatible with thinking that its warrant depends on being in possession of some argument for it. This makes interpersonal love an important counterexample to a powerful philosophical ideal of critical thought, an ideal on which we should seek arguments to vindicate all of our commitments. The best way to make sense of all of this is to think of love as direct appreciation of the beloved, and so of his value, in something like the way that many philosophers think perception is direct awareness of the empirical world. In the next two sections I will argue that two other sorts of experience, singular respect and witness of the love of others, can also disclose this value to us. We cannot arrive at a robust moral outlook absent some such experience.

I've already argued that love involves the endorsement of some content; it is not a mere taste, brute preference, or disposition to act. This is sufficient to

establish that love can intelligibly be subjected to justificatory questions and so is the sort of attitude for which we can have reasons. Asking about the justifying reasons for love is not the sort of category mistake that asking for justifying reasons for a headache would be. Here is another way to think of it: love is an activity, something that you can be *doing*. Indeed many people take loving other individuals to be among the most important things that they do. So—as with anything you do—it is possible to ask after not just a causal story about how it is that you came to be in the bodily state of doing it, but also the reasons *why* you do it, and whether these reasons are sufficient.²⁷

A skeptic doubts that this query can be satisfactorily answered. That is, he doubts that there are reasons sufficient to warrant interpersonal love. As above, I don't mean that he questions whether it makes sense to pursue some particular kind of *relationship* with a given person. That sort of question has a familiar home in, for instance, earnest conversations between friends who doubt the wisdom of one another's romantic pursuits. Rather, the skeptic questions the value that your love affirms: whether a person is rightly regarded as having value of the kind that we attribute to her when we love her, and so is a fitting object of love at all (again, cf. Helm 2021). Focusing on romantic cases can be misleading here. The content and the import of the question of interest is clearer if we imagine it addressed to a parent concerning her love for her child.²⁸ In contrast to the romantic case, it is easier to hear the justificatory challenge here as addressing the value of the child, whether she is worth loving, rather than targeting the wisdom of the relationship or offering the thought that a different individual might be a better candidate for a partner in it.

I've claimed that such skeptical challenges concerning the value of the beloved are not nonsense, in the sense that they lack intelligibility or that we have no idea what they could mean. We understand what it is to raise the justificatory question about love, and what it would be to conclude that this question has no satisfactory answer. But I now want to suggest that the skeptic's question is nevertheless meaningless in a different, but crucial, sense: *the question cannot be taken wholly seriously from within the perspective of the love that it seeks to challenge*. The idea that all of our commitments, and most especially our normative commitments, should be subjected to critical scrutiny, and the stronger idea that we should maintain only those that we are able to justify on reflection, is often presented as a guiding philosophical ideal, even as constitutive of doing philosophy. But I claim there is no stance or attitude that would count from the point of view of, for example, a parent as appropriate, yet genuine, critical consideration of the question whether her child is, in truth, valuable in a way that makes her worth loving.

The philosophical literature contains actual instances of skepticism about the value of certain human beings. We see it, for example, with respect to those

subject to a range of serious disabilities, especially cognitive disabilities.²⁹ If the parent of such a person takes it that a philosopher means to present for serious consideration the idea that her child lacks the value that makes love appropriate, what response should that parent have? Situated as they are in the philosophical discourse, these skeptical questions seem to demand answers in the form of an argument, a set of premises leading to the conclusion that the skeptic has called into doubt. Such an argument could be offered as an answer to the skeptic, and could also serve to settle, or resettle, one's own mind if one has been gripped by doubt or has otherwise entered into the skeptical standpoint. I am claiming that no appealing philosophical ideal could demand, or even recommend, that the parents who love these children seriously engage such questions and seek such arguments in defense of their love (cf. Hopwood 2016).

One problem with the suggestion that they should is that argument cannot possibly yield love, or any sort of grasp of the value that we appreciate in love. Seeking arguments is often a sensible, responsible approach when responding to justificatory challenges to your beliefs or intentions. If you call a belief or intention into question, and then reason your way back to it, you will have established it on a firm rational footing, a paradigm of philosophical success. But though a line of reasoning can conclude with a belief or intention, no line of reasoning could conclude with the attitude of love. No one could be moved to share your love by any deduction, nor could any such deduction reestablish love that has been subjected to genuine doubt. In a similar way, we cannot reason our way to aesthetic appreciation of works of art or literature: The attitude in question requires appreciative experience of its object, and so cannot be reached by inference. Just so, loving someone involves encountering, experiencing, and appreciating her value directly. If one were to treat this value as an object of intellectual curiosity, and begin to speculate about it, distancing oneself from a full affirmation of the value by inhabiting the skeptical question, no answer to that question—at least none that takes the form of an argument—would be capable of closing this gap.³⁰

A parent who did somehow manage to take up this speculative stance about the value of her child would, thereby, falter in her love for that child. The ideal of critical thought tells you to distance yourself from your commitments and attempt to articulate the reasons for them. But a loving parent cannot suspend or step back from this commitment and then see whether she can work her way back to it through objective consideration of the reasons. Whether their child has value is not a question on which parents should sincerely speculate and so not one that they could argue over in good faith. Love thus provides an important counterexample to this purported philosophical ideal that normative commitments should be subject to critical thought and reasoning.

I have claimed that, on the one hand, you cannot reason to love or present an argument for it that would move someone who was genuinely skeptical of its justification. But, on the other hand, love is an intelligible attitude, with content subject to justificatory query and normative standards. The best way to make sense of both of these claims together is to think that what justifies, warrants, or makes sense of love for an individual is that it amounts to direct appreciation of the value of the beloved. Again it may help to compare with knowledge gained through perception. On at least some views, perception involves direct awareness of the material world, and beliefs about the world can be warranted by this awareness rather than by any inference or argument. Argument or reasoning cannot substitute for such awareness as a ground for belief, at least not in a totally general way.³¹ On the view that I am defending, love for a person is also best conceived as a way of being in touch with reality, here the reality of that person's value, or, again, the reality of the person herself.³² That a person has such value is sufficient to justify loving him, and it follows that it can never be a mistake to love a fellow human being.³³

Both the sufficiency of a person's humanity to justify love for him and the impossibility of reasoning to the attitude of love are apparent in the case of parents seeking to adopt a child. Such parents stand ready to love their child, whoever that child is and without regard to any particular qualities that he has or appeal to any prior relationship that they have with him. Nor is this attitude any sort of error or mistake. The expectant parents would not do better to withhold commitment to their child until they see whether they got a sufficiently good one, one whose qualities or properties make him worthy of love. The fact that he is a child, a bearer of humanity or fellow human being, is enough. On the other hand, though these expectant parents know perfectly well in advance of meeting the child that this will be true of him, and so know that he will be worthy of love, they do not and cannot love *him* until they encounter and come to know him. They cannot use their knowledge that he will be a bearer of humanity as a premise in an argument that concludes with love for him, but can develop this love only through direct experience of him as an individual.

In this section I've argued that there is no skeptical or critical stance that one can take on love that is not itself in tension with love. Further, if one did successfully distance oneself from one's love in this way, there would be no route back to it through argument. And finally, the best sense that we can make of this is to think that what does provide warrant for love is the value of the person that we appreciate in loving her. This last suggestion, that the value that you appreciate in love also provides the justifying grounds for love, may have an air of circularity. It would be circular if it were meant as an argument in support of love that was supposed to answer the skeptic, or that might guide a lover who has taken the skeptic's question seriously, and suspended her love, back to her commitment.

But my point has been that no such argument can be given, none should be attempted, and none is intended here. We do not show that loves meets its justificatory standard via some inference from the fact that the beloved is valuable. Rather, love is warranted because it is a direct appreciation of the beloved herself.

4. Singular Respect

The singular attitude of love takes a particular individual as its object, ascribing value beyond price to *her*. What I have called the moral conclusion is the more general judgment that *all* have dignity, or the intention to treat *everyone* as such. Unlike love, a judgment or intention can stand as the conclusion of an argument or explicit line of reasoning. If you appreciate the value of your beloved, and you recognize that there is no relevant difference between her and others, then you can, in principle, use these two commitments to construct an argument for the moral conclusion:

P1: My beloved has nonfungible and unconditional value.

P2: There is no relevant difference between my beloved and all others.

C: Everyone has nonfungible and unconditional value.

Nevertheless, there remain many sorts of failures of moral commitment, failures to occupy a moral outlook, that reasoning cannot address. Straightaway we might notice that the first premise of this argument refers to the value of a person as disclosed in love. I have been arguing that no line of reasoning would be capable of bringing us to appreciate this value.

Moreover, reasoning alone cannot settle disagreements or doubts about the boundaries of the moral community, about who has dignity or is a bearer of the value of humanity. Disagreements about these boundaries could present as resistance to the second premise.³⁴ Or someone might accept the second premise, and reason sincerely to the moral conclusion, and yet limit its scope in unwarranted ways. Those who believe that all of the animals fall under the protection of the moral law attribute this sort of error to those who limit membership in the moral community to human beings. Some philosophers argue that certain positions in the philosophy of disability do the same. Arguably, many instances of racial, gender, and other sorts of bias manifest this error. Call this collection of issues *the boundary problem*.

Reasoning can address some limited versions of the boundary problem. In the simplest kind of case, failure to apply the moral principle appropriately arises from false beliefs about those who do not register as having dignity. If such beliefs are the sole obstacle, reasoning that convinces someone to change them

would thereby correct the moral failures. But, as I argued above, one might make no such descriptive errors, yet still fail to grasp or appreciate that the members of some group have, or that each one taken individually has, dignity.³⁵ One can even fail in this way while offering explicit endorsement of the claim that those in question have dignity. It is hard to sort out exactly what is going on with these attitudes, yet we human beings do seem to be tragically susceptible to this sort of failure, especially at the limits of social categories including nationality, gender, race, class, and physical or cognitive abilities.³⁶

A person cannot be argued out of, or reason herself out of, this sort of error. Since it does not rest on any mistaken belief, no reasoning to a better belief can correct it. A possible alternative is singular recognition of the value of the individual in question, or of a member of the disfavored group of people. Call this attitude toward another *singular respect*. In contrast to the generalized respect expressed by the moral conclusion, singular respect is an immediate response to a particular individual. It involves an experience of being *struck by* the value of someone's humanity.³⁷ One could reach for many examples here. Cora Diamond (1978, 477) invokes George Orwell's account of being unable to shoot an enemy soldier whom he saw trying to hold up his trousers while running. Orwell's appreciation of the man's humanity in that moment is singular respect. (Though the example suggests that it is not dignity, as we normally understand it, that calls forth the attitude in question. In fact, vulnerability—and our sense of this vulnerability as shared—is probably more effective.)

Such recognition of value—while not identical with love—shares much in common with it. Like love, singular respect has content but outstrips any belief about or intention concerning a person and cannot be the conclusion of an argument.³⁸ Just as we cannot reason to love, we cannot reason to this sort of recognition of another's humanity. No more can we reason to a moral outlook that constitutively includes such recognition.³⁹ But, like love, singular respect is an intelligible, contentful attitude. Affirmation of the great and irreplaceable value of another person, and the claims that this value makes on others, is part of this content.

Raimond Gaita claims that the ascription of value to others characteristic of moral regard is especially clear in the experience of remorse. We might think that, as the grief of loss stands to love, so remorse stands to singular respect: the first element of each pair is a negative experience of the appreciation of the value of the individual characteristic of the second. Gaita (1991, xiv) defines remorse as “[a] pained, bewildered realisation of what it means . . . to wrong someone.” Given the ineliminably first-personal character of remorse, I think that he ought rather to say that it is a realization that *I* have done wrong to a particular person, and of the significance of this. Gaita presents a scenario in which you are responsible for the death of a vagabond who was loved by no one. He is impressed with

the fact that it is not only possible, but fully intelligible, to experience remorse over such a death. We might go further still, and suggest that failure to respond with remorse in such a situation would be a moral failure. Since the victim leaves no survivors, remorse cannot be a reaction of concern for them and their suffering. It can only be a way of registering, of experiencing, the violated value of the dead man, who was, after all, a fellow human being.

Singular respect is a reaction to or experience of a particular individual, while the generalized respect embodied in the moral conclusion figures in a belief about or intention toward everyone. In distinguishing them, I don't mean to privilege the former. Though respect as a response to individuals is an important part of a full moral outlook, we cannot get by morally on our susceptibility to being struck by the humanity of our fellows one by one. The generalized judgment or commitment to a principle of respect is also necessary for a complete and robust moral commitment. The person who displays *only* the singular reaction is too much like Kant's Sympathetic Helper and shares his moral weaknesses. His moral commitment is not exactly conditional. He does not and would not think *I will help you only because your plight happens to move me*. But neither is his willingness to help exactly independent of his own responses. By hypothesis he also does not think *I will help you because you deserve help, whatever my feelings may be*. Moral philosophy should not abandon those sorts of thoughts.

Moreover, though I've been arguing that we cannot understand, and so cannot adopt, the moral conclusion without some singular experience of the value of an individual, acting from the moral conclusion is sufficient for full moral regard in some contexts. We do not always need the phenomena of the appreciation of the value of individuals before our minds to count as acting out of moral regard for them. For some purposes, a sincere and informed conviction that others are entitled to respect for their rights, and an effective intention to act accordingly, is all we need. This may be true when we act in legislative or administrative roles that require the making or enforcing of general rules. But there are also important examples in our navigation of our ordinary lives. We need not be in the grip of the experience of singular respect, overwhelmed with the full humanity of each of our fellow human beings, at each moment or in each encounter with them. Indeed, it is difficult to see how anyone could live that way, though perhaps it is a mark of a certain sort of saint.

I have been explaining why even sincere endorsement of the moral conclusion could yet fail to be enough to embody a full moral outlook or robust moral commitment.⁴⁰ Full moral commitment requires not merely judging that others have dignity, but *regarding them* that way, as fellow human beings, as "one of us." Perhaps to some ears *regarding* someone as having infinite value sounds *less* demanding than *actually believing* this about them. But my point is that one can affirm this belief sincerely—one isn't lying or mistaken about

one's convictions—yet fail to internalize it. To resist this failure, and so regard someone as valuable, is the more demanding standard.⁴¹ If we fail to have this response, then we have moral work to do, and this is work that no argument can accomplish.

So far we have that there is a morally significant attitude of singular respect that shares many of the features of love. It is a contentful attitude, an appreciation of the value of another, but not the sort that could be the conclusion of an argument; we cannot reason to it. I've suggested that singular respect can bridge a possible gap between our commitment to a general moral conclusion and its application to particular interactions with our fellow human beings.

5. Witnessing the Love of Others

I turn now to a third way in which sincere endorsement of the moral conclusion can fall short of a complete moral outlook due to failures in application that reasoning cannot address, and a third resource for bridging the gap. The kind of case I am interested in here contrasts with the category that I've just been discussing in that it involves clear-eyed denial that certain beings are persons, bearers of dignity or the value of humanity. It also differs from the first kind of case, in which failure to attribute dignity stems from a mistaken belief about the properties of individuals or groups of people. Here I am concerned with disagreement about moral status that outstrips disagreement about empirical facts. The controversy or doubt in these cases is not about what certain beings are like, but about whether we should take them to have dignity, given what they are like. This last category is thus especially significant in that it directly concerns skeptical questions about the justification for certain moral attitudes. These are intelligible questions that not only can, but actually do, figure in philosophical discourse.

Philosophers have made various attempts to draw the boundaries around who matters morally, citing, for example, sentience, susceptibility to pain, self-awareness, and certain cognitive and emotional capacities as purported bright lines between those who have dignity and those who do not. None of these commands universal assent, so we face a question about how to arbitrate these disagreements and settle our own views about them.

Love or singular respect can begin to address these questions, but only with respect to those individuals of whom we have direct experience of these kinds and those we regard as sufficiently like them. Where we lack such experience, it's tempting to switch gears and regard disagreements over controversial cases as ideally settled through consideration of the arguments for and against the various positions. But the claims of Section 2 raise doubts about the idea that this strategy could settle questions about who has dignity. Such procedures

of reasoning would either depend upon or reveal the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a bearer of the value of humanity. But I argued above that the value of humanity cannot be defined in terms of properties that we could understand independent of our experience of the value of individuals. Judgments about whether some quality or capacity matters morally are better regarded as expressions of particular moral convictions than as independent premises through which we could arrive at moral conviction or arbitrate disagreements among them.⁴²

In several discussions Gaita offers an alternative resource for arbitration. He urges that seeing someone as an intelligible object of *someone's* love rationally commits you to taking a moral attitude toward her. You must regard such a person as a fellow human being (cf. Setiya 2014, 263). There is a familiar phenomenon in the neighborhood here. We often set victims of violence or tragedy in the context of relationships with those who love them in an attempt to make their unspeakable value salient. We say, *she is someone's daughter; he is someone's son.*⁴³ Imagining another person as the object of someone's love in this way heightens awareness of the victim as having the sort of value that we find in those we love, a value—I have argued—to which no one could reasonably be indifferent. We cannot regard others' love as warranted while denying the dignity of the person in question.

Gaita describes at least two kinds of cases in which someone not antecedently viewed as having value that would give him full moral standing comes to appear as “one of us” when seen in the light of another's love for him. First, he relates his encounter with a nun whose treatment of patients suffering from profound mental disability manifests not merely consideration or respect but love for them, love such as we can have only for a fellow human being (Gaita 2000, 17ff.). In the second, he considers the love of an expectant mother for, as he sometimes puts it, “that which she carries in her pregnancy,” and the way in which witnessing such love might change a person's thinking about the significance of abortion (Gaita 1991, 161).⁴⁴ The claim is not that the love of the nun, or of the mother, *confers* value on those they love. It is, rather, that when we witness this love and see it as intelligible—if we do—we thereby see the object of that love as meriting moral regard, as a fellow human being or bearer of the value of humanity.

That the love appears intelligible is important. If the nun loved a rock or a gerbil with the profound love that Gaita describes, this would not lead us to think of the rock or gerbil as having the sort of value that makes it one of us, but rather to question the sanity of the nun. Witnessing her love for her patients could, in principle, have the same effect: one might find her response to them unintelligible. Gaita's testimony is that he did not find it so. Her love appeared apt to him, and in seeing that love as making sense, he came to understand the patients as having a value he had not previously attributed to them. That is why he says that the nun's love *revealed* their value to him.

So, the *intelligibility* in the seeing-as-intelligible matters. But so, too, the *seeing as* matters. Gaita's examples treat two instances sometimes characterized as "marginal cases" of moral status, cases implicated in philosophers' disagreements over which qualities matter morally. Philosophers standardly approach these disagreements by seeking arguments to settle the question of whether to attribute full humanity to those in question. Gaita's appeal to witness is not an attempt to provide such an argument, but rather a rejection of the idea that argument is the right tool for addressing that sort of question. He appeals to what we see, not how we reason. He suggests that it is possible to see not merely that someone loves, but that that love makes sense. Rather than *argue* that the love of the nun or the expectant mother is intelligible, he prompts us to reflect on the implications of seeing it that way, as he does and as we might. He suggests that, as we cannot seriously doubt the intelligibility of our own love in ordinary cases, he was not able seriously to doubt that the nun's love was warranted. Seeing her love revealed the value of the patients to him with "certainty."

Finding love of some individual intelligible in this way provides reason to reject a claim that she and those like her lack the value that I have been calling dignity. The rational grounds here are given in what you see, witness, or recognize, and we should expect them to outstrip any argumentative formulation that would be communicable to someone who did not see it that way. Depending, as it does, on morally significant experience, this approach may still be powerless to convince those with whom you disagree. But it can help you settle for yourself what to think about such disagreements or to parry their potential skeptical effects on your own thinking. My suggestion is that, though distinct from reasoning, Gaita's approach provides a perfectly rational way to do so.

6. On the Task of Moral Philosophy

I have argued that, while we can reason to the moral conclusion if we have the right conceptual materials, there are certain obstacles to adopting and occupying a moral outlook that reasoning cannot overcome and likewise certain skeptical challenges that it cannot address. In this sense, we cannot reason to moral commitment, just as we cannot reason to love. So, just as we cannot fully vindicate love in argument, neither can we fully vindicate moral commitment this way.

My argument has important implications for the way that we should regard moral skepticism, and so for the practice of moral philosophy. It demonstrates that it can be inappropriate to *speculate* about the justification of moral commitment in something like the same way that it would be inappropriate for a parent to speculate about the justification of his love for his child. A certain way of taking skeptical challenges seriously, distancing oneself from one's own

recognition of others' dignity in a way that allows one genuinely to doubt it, and then seeking arguments back to an affirmation of this value, is itself incompatible with moral respect, just as a similar disinterested inquiry would be incompatible with interpersonal love. Both speculative undertakings are affronts to the value affirmed in the attitudes that they seek to justify.

At the beginning I said that this sort of speculative inquiry about moral value and the authority of moral requirements is often regarded as the central or even characteristic task of moral philosophy. But if what I've gone on to say is right, then there are certain questions of moral significance that it is possible for us to frame, but that we have moral reason not to engage. Bernard Williams (1973, 92–93) recognizes this in his defense of preserving a moral category of the *unthinkable* against the relentlessly calculative attitude of the utilitarian. The methodology that we see in a certain sort of case-driven moral philosophy, paradigmatically exemplified by Trolley Problems, errs insofar as it fails to allow the possibility of this category. It describes cases that, taken seriously, could only be regarded as overwhelming tragedies and presumes that we will, and that we should, set aside the reactions appropriate to tragedy and consider these cases in a dispassionate administrative mode.

Moral philosophers then face a choice about how to understand our undertaking. We can characterize moral philosophy by specifying its *tools or methods*, the methods of dispassionate inquiry, and the construction, consideration, and critique of arguments. Or we can characterize moral philosophy as inquiry into a particular set of questions. But if we try to specify both methods and questions, we must recognize the possibility of a mismatch between them. The methods of argument construction may not be well-suited to questions that have been regarded as fundamental to, even defining of, moral philosophy, questions like: Why should we be moral? Are there ways that it is impermissible to treat anyone? Are all human beings equally valuable? How valuable are they? Why are they valuable?

The danger here is similar to the danger of relying on the methods of argument to see if it makes sense to affirm the value of your child. The methods of philosophy force us into a speculative mode not suited to the address of these questions, one in which we doubt, or at least play at doubting, convictions that should not be subject to doubt. To speculate about these questions, to entertain doubt about the value of some human beings, and to proceed as if commitment to the idea that each one has infinite and irreplaceable worth requires argumentative backing before it can be responsibly affirmed, is already to take up an attitude toward at least some individuals that is incompatible with the attitude of moral respect owed to them.

I have claimed that we cannot argue to an outlook that comprises moral commitment, which entails that there is no such thing as an argument in response to

certain moral skeptics. Convincing the moral skeptic, and so also settling certain of our own moral doubts, is not really a task for moral philosophy. This is the paper's negative thesis. I have also described three positive relationships in which love stands to moral commitment. First, the nature of the value to which moral commitment responds is something that we can, and normally do, learn about in the experience of love. Second, moral commitment requires susceptibility to singular respect for individuals, an attitude that shares structural features with love. Third, both the experience and the witness of love can give us insight into the boundaries of the moral community. In sum, my positive claim is that love can provide resources for establishing warranted moral commitment that reasoning alone lacks.

I have not argued that reasoning about moral questions can do no ethical work. Indeed, I take this essay itself to be an exercise in moral philosophy that aims to do some such work. In arguing for the limits of the standard tools of philosophy, their impotence in the face of certain morally significant questions, I hope to have used these same tools to quiet another kind of moral anxiety. Once in the grip of certain skeptical doubts, it can seem that only an argument could rescue you. I have urged, argued really, that accepting this limit would be to place too much faith in argument, and that trusting instead in your morally significant experience can be entirely appropriate and rationally warranted. You can be rationally permitted to trust this experience even if you are unable to communicate its import to others who do not share it. Similarly, patience with and charity toward those who cannot articulate the full import of their own experience to us is a rational and moral demand.⁴⁵ That a certain overestimation of the power and importance of argument can obscure these permissions and demands is itself a morally significant conclusion of philosophical argument.⁴⁶

Notes

1. The latter has been the more popular position. See, e.g., Railton 1984; Williams 1981; Wolf 1982; Scheffler 1994; Frankfurt 1988. Certain Kantians might be read as engaged in the former. See, e.g., Herman 1993a, 1993b, 1993c; Baron 1995.
2. See, e.g., Leviticus 19, Matthew 5, Matthew 22, Galatians 5.
3. Iris Murdoch (1970b) is a central figure here. Her approach to moral philosophy is driven by the idea that *any adequate moral philosophy would put love at its center*: "Love is a central concept in morals" (2); "the central concept of morality is 'the individual' as knowable by love" (29); "Will not *act lovingly* translate *act perfectly*, whereas *act rationally* will not?" (90). Contemporary writers who endorse and attempt to work out a view of this kind include Velleman 2006; Setiya 2014; Gaita 1991, 2000. For a development of the case that Murdoch's loving attention is the same as Kantian motivation by duty, see Bagnoli 2003.

4. See Rawls (1971) on the separateness of persons and Ebels-Duggan forthcoming-b.
5. What I am really after here is what Rawls calls a conception: a thick, contentful notion of value, not a mere normative placeholder. See Rawls (1971) on the concept/conception distinction.
6. Jackson (1986) is most concerned with phenomenal properties that cannot be reduced to physical descriptive properties, and not with how we learn the content of the concepts.
7. In one sense Jackson's Mary can make or reason to judgments that make use of the concept of red even though she lacks this sort of full possession of the concept. She is a scientist with detailed knowledge of the science of color. She knows that, e.g., ripe sour cherries have the physical properties that make them appear red. So she can judge that *cherries will appear red to those who have normal color vision* or even *cherries are red*. She can reason that if this thing is a ripe cherry, then *this thing is red*. All this is to say that she can achieve reference with the color concept. But if phenomenal qualities, what red looks like or what it is like to see red, figure in the concept, then she does not herself understand—arguably does not herself know—to what this important concept in the judgment refers. And if that is right, then she does not really understand what it is that she is judging. So perhaps it is too strong to say, as I do above, that we could not be in a position to *make* the judgment, to form the attitude, that each person has dignity. It may be better to say that we cannot understand this judgment, and so cannot apply it in practice.
8. The language of attention is from Murdoch 1970a. The idea of arrested attention is from Velleman 2006.
9. Of course, just as one may regard a person as a means without regarding him as a *mere* means, one may think that there is some aspect of a person's worth that can be expressed as price without thinking that his value can be fully expressed or captured as price. Both regarding a person as a means, and setting a price on him—or at least on some use of his skills or stretch of his time—seem to be going on when you hire someone to do some task.
10. Sharing some things with belief and others with perception may be a feature love shares with a wider class of attitudes, such as emotions, though I doubt that it is satisfactory to classify love as an emotion. For discussion of the ways in which emotions have been construed as judgments, on the one hand, and perceptions, on the other, see Scarantino and de Sousa, 2018.
11. Thanks to Sarah Buss for suggesting this last formulation of the view.
12. Cf. Aristotle's discussion of friendships of utility in *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII. For commentary, see Cooper 1980.
13. For more detail, see Korsgaard's introduction to that volume and see Korsgaard's introduction to Kant 1998; Ebels-Duggan 2011.
14. Compare the distinction in Helm (2021) between two different justificatory queries about love, distinguished by the alternatives against which they ask for justification: What, if anything, justifies my loving rather than not loving this particular person? What, if anything, justifies my coming to love this particular person rather than someone else?

15. This is an argument that we may actually make to people we love who are prone to underestimate their own worth or are averse to asserting their rights. I might point out to such a person that *I* love him, and use this—along with an implicit suggestion that I am not wrong to love him—to attempt to make salient to him that *anyone* should respect him. I am trying to get him to see his own worth in the light of my love for him.

We see a similar thought in Gaita's (1991, 50) discussion of remorse in *Good and Evil*: "[T]he nature of what he suffers in remorse because he murdered his friend is such that it is conditioned by the fact that he should suffer it if he murdered an anonymous tramp. And that is to say, it is fundamental to his understanding of friendship that *it be bound by moral constraints which are what they are precisely because the evil of murdering a friend is the evil of murdering another human being.*" Here Gaita argues that a person's response to having profoundly wronged a person whom he loves internally involves a commitment to the idea that the value or standing of that person is independent of his love.

16. Compare what Setiya (2014) says about the "picture" of the value of a life that is involved in his conception of love, and the implications of this picture for the ways in which others create reasons for us (see esp. 275–276).
17. Here, I intend "objective" to contrast with "conditional," not immediately with "subjective," and don't mean to commit to a metaphysical view that posits absolute value as a sort of entity in the world. Subjective value is standardly taken to be a function of the attitudes or perspectives of particular agents, and so also conditional in the sense that matters to me here. But Korsgaard argues that unconditional or absolute value is best interpreted as intersubjective, that which can or should be valued from all points of view. She appeals to a version of Kant's argument for the Formula of Humanity to claim that all people, and later all nonhuman animals as well, have value of this kind (see Korsgaard 1996a; 2018, chaps. 2 and 8). Cf. Theunissen (2020), who argues that valuing agents are valuable because we are valuable to, or good for, ourselves. While I'm not entirely satisfied with either of these arguments, neither do I take anything that I say here to exclude them.
18. For example, Setiya (2014, 262) criticizes Velleman (2006) for relying on the term "rational nature" and explains why he prefers "humanity." Gaita (1991, 2000) both uses and criticizes the use of "preciousness." Elsewhere he uses "individuality," which I prefer, though it has problems of its own. He also tries "humanity," while seeking to distinguish it from the term that picks out the biological species. Gaita strongly resists the Kantian language of "dignity," claiming that it could only be taken as a parody. Diamond (1978) relies on "fellow human being," and more broadly "fellow creature," which she also regards as importantly distinct from biological concepts.
19. Many discussions of so-called marginal cases of moral status presume that there must be some such capacity or property and attempt to characterize it. See, e.g., Singer 1975; Regan 1983; Harman 1999. Resistance to this way of approaching ethical questions about nonhuman animals is one of Cora Diamond's central themes. See, especially, Diamond 1978, 1988, 1991. See also Korsgaard (2018, 79–93) for a discussion of the argument from marginal cases.

20. For this reason I think that it is an error to classify Velleman's (2006) view about the reasons for love as a quality theory, as Kolodny (2003) does. Cf. Gaita's (1991) reasons for distinguishing between appreciating someone's individuality and treating him as a representative of humanity.
21. Here, compare *the property view* about what grounds or gives reason for interpersonal love. For some representative examples, see Badhwar 1987; Delaney 1996. *The relationship view* (Kolodny 2003; Scheffler 1997) is usually presented as the leading alternative. The position that I am advocating rejects both of these.
22. Valuing a person and attributing to him some set of descriptive properties can come apart in either direction. We can fail to regard someone as having the value in question in a way that cannot be corrected simply by learning new facts about him. Such failure seems constitutive of many misogynist or racist attitudes. Conversely, the love of parents for profoundly disabled children embodies ascription of the value in question, and this love can occur absent some or all of the candidate descriptive properties. These two sorts of cases show that attributing value cannot be identified with the attribution of a set of empirical properties. I will return to each below.
23. Thus I find a Mackie-style (1977) error theory to be a nonstarter. It is possible that there is nothing worth valuing or caring about, but this couldn't be true simply because analysis of the idea of value shows that it requires us to posit an odd metaphysical entity that the world lacks.
24. Here, I follow Korsgaard 2008. Cf. Korsgaard 2018, chap. 2.
25. "Not to know what it is to look at another human being with such recognition or with its denial, not to know how that differs from what is possible with animals, is not to have as fully as one might and as one should the concept of a human being. . . . To have the concept of a human being is to know how thoughts and deeds and happenings, and how happenings are met, give shape to a human story. . . . What it is to grasp the biological concept is nothing like what it is to grasp the concept of a human being" (Diamond 1988, 265; cf. Diamond 1978, 1991).
26. The strategy here to some extent parallels Buss 1999.
27. Many philosophers are tempted by the idea that love could not be the sort of thing for which there are reasons. Harry Frankfurt is the most prominent contemporary defender of this view (see, e.g., Frankfurt 2004). I think that the attraction of this view can be explained by two things: (1) the plausibility of the idea that preferences, brute attraction, or taste can play an indispensable role in justifying particular relationships, and (2) the idea that we could not fully state the reasons for love in a way that would allow us to reason to it. But one can agree with both of these, while resisting the claim that love itself is not subject to a justificatory query.
28. In Ebels-Duggan (2008) I argue that it is distorting to treat the parent-child relationship as primary, and that loving relationships between equally situated adults provide a better paradigm. I still think that those *relationships* provide an important paradigm, an ideal case that ought to shape our thinking about the parent-child relationship, among others. Nevertheless, for reasons explained above, focus on the parent-child case is helpful for thinking about love as such.
29. I have in mind here, e.g., Singer 2011, 2016; McMahan 2002, esp. 230.

30. Diamond (2003, esp. 11–12), develops a similar thought, that neither skeptical questions nor any attempt to answer them in argument is the right way to approach a person. Here she is discussing Cavell 2002.
31. On perception, see Crane and French, 2017, esp. sec. 3.
32. Especially in light of the perceptual metaphor, one might worry that the idea that love is warranted because it puts us in touch with the “reality” of another’s value forces us to regard value as a part or property of the person in the way that I rejected in the previous section. But there is no need to restrict our notion of reality to the set of physical facts, or of these plus more mysterious metaphysical facts that are construed on the model of physical ones. Instead of beginning from some theoretical view about what can count as real and trying to shoehorn what we learn from love into it, we begin with the sort of experience we have in love, and use this to make sense of our talk of the value of a person. We can understand the important thing that we say when we say that Timothy Caughman is a fellow human being. There is nothing substandard about this reality.

Compare here Nagel’s (1970) idea that we are each one among others, *equally real*. The sort of argument that he makes in *The Possibility of Altruism* is more closely related to the attitude of singular respect that I describe below than to that of love. But both of these are responses to, ways of coming to understand, the value of a person. It is also worth comparing Rawls’s (1971) appeal to the separateness of persons. And compare Diamond (2003) on the unthinkability, splendor, and horror of our separateness from one another. Diamond is, in part, responding to Cavell 1979.

33. Cf. the argument of Setiya (2014), against Kolodny (2003), that you need not bear a special relationship to a person in order to reasonably care specially about him. Kolodny objects against any view that appeals to qualities or properties of the beloved as the reasons for loving her, on grounds that if these were the reasons, the lover should be happy with any substitute who has the same properties. He then argues that appeal to our rational nature or humanity as the reason grounding love is subject to a particularly acute version of this worry. For, on this view, the lover should be happy to substitute her beloved for *anyone*. The problem with this argument is that Kolodny treats the value of humanity as a fungible value, an instance of price. But the whole point of saying that persons have dignity rather than price is that their value is *not* exchange value. Each person has it, but it does not follow that we’d be happy to substitute one for another. To love a person, to appreciate the sort of value she has, is to be aware of it as *not* substitutable.
34. The burden of proof lies with those who would reject this premise: a skeptical challenger must state, and defend the moral relevance of, some particular difference. The argument of Section 1 bars appeal to the fact that some people, but not others, are loved by her. Any alternatives can be intelligibly doubted or challenged and face assessment on their merits. Many such claims are nonstarters. For example, the moral conclusion is far more plausible than the idea that moral worth varies by nationality. Even if one were to fail to persuade an adversary who holds the latter view, her resistance would put no rational pressure on one’s own moral commitments.

Korsgaard (1996b) relies on this burden-of-proof argument when she makes the generalizing move from *my own* value to that of anyone with humanity. She imagines the futility of an agent trying to resist generalization by saying “I am *me*, after all” (43). Yet elsewhere (e.g., 10ff.) she seemingly allows the skeptic to rely on the mere intelligibility of the challenge that he presses.

35. Compare Gaita (2000) on racism. Gaita contrasts the slaveholder’s profound moral error about the significance of a woman he enslaves with an error based on purported empirical differences. The slaveholder does not posit any such differences, nor even feel rational pressure to do so. He simply fails to see the woman in question as a human being. The slaveholder cannot demonstrate that he is correct in regarding her as other than “one of us,” yet neither could it be demonstrated to him that he is wrong about this. If it could be so demonstrated to him, then he would only be making a “mistake.”
36. One thing that might be lacking is an understanding of others as having a complex internal emotional life, not unlike our own. Cf. Gaita 2000, esp. 57--73. To have not merely practically efficacious judgment about how I must treat others but the visceral appreciation of the value that grounds or warrants this treatment seems to importantly involve this appreciation. Again, this may be part of what Nagel (1970) had in mind in referring to others as “equally real.”
37. Also relevant here is the role of both photography and narrative essay in journalism, and the way that these can make us think differently about tragedies by eliciting awareness of the value of singular individuals swept up in them.
38. Compare what Setiya calls “personal concern” in his essay in this volume.
39. Cf. Gaita’s (2000, 19) claim that no philosophical theory can capture or relate what the nun’s love reveals.
40. Gaita (1991, 144) holds that Kant cannot account for this because of the deep division he draws between *duty* and *inclination*: “[T]he Kantian division between inclination and duty excludes sorrow for [the victim’s] death as *internal* to the moral response to his murder. His death is internal only to the description of the deed as one which falls under the moral law.”

I develop a similar criticism of Kant in (Ebels-Duggan forthcoming-a), arguing that Kantian moral psychology threatens to treat a division between states to which we can reason, on the one hand, and mere sensibility or brute, arational inclination, on the other, as exhaustive. This taxonomy requires supplementation by a third category: responses that cannot be reasoned to and yet are intelligible. On this issue it is instructive to compare the attempt of Bagnoli (2003) to capture Murdoch’s case, mentioned above, in Kantian terms. Bagnoli rightly holds that in order to do so we would have to capture the mother-in-law’s change in view in terms of a change in her *maxims*. Bagnoli thinks this can be done, and sketches a strategy of execution. I’m not convinced that her account succeeds in capturing the change.

41. Pointing out and trying to correct for the failure of this sort of regard is, for example, one of the aims of the Black Lives Matter movement. Some of the resistance to this movement might be understood as arising from failure to distinguish between *believing* that the lives of Black people matter just as much as those of white people, and regarding individual Black persons in this way. Those who take themselves to

- have the relevant belief resist the idea that they could be legitimate targets of the criticism that they do not think that Black Lives Matter. But the movement demands something that goes beyond belief: understanding, recognition, and regard for humanity as well as the practical and political consequences that would follow on that.
42. Cf. Setiya's (2014, 258) point that mentioning certain properties is more like an expression than a justification of love.
 43. This sort of appeal is in order insofar as it aims to make salient the infinite and irreplaceable worth of these individuals by making us think of them as intelligible objects of love. It becomes problematic insofar as it suggests that their value depends on or is conditioned by their relationship to others. It seems not accidental that victims who are female or members of disempowered racial or cultural groups are more often talked about in this way, though that could be subject to either explanation. On the one hand, people are, in general, less likely to take the suffering of these people seriously as relevantly like their own or that of those they love, so there is work to be done in making their dignity salient. On the other hand, such appeals can suggest or presume a primarily male and/or white audience in a way that perpetuates rather than undermines the idea that these victims are individuals, bearers of humanity in their own right.
 44. The unwieldy formulation is Gaita's attempt, in my view as successful as any could be, to avoid begging questions in the description of the phenomenon, as calling that which the expectant mother loves either "her unborn child" or "the fetus" might be thought to do. The phrasing can be heard as a tender description of something rightly loved, or as achieving reference by a definite description that mentions no morally salient properties or status. But part of Gaita's point, as I elaborate below, is that we do not and cannot see the phenomenon in an ethically neutral way. We see the love as intelligible or as not.
 45. Both self-trust and the demand for interpretive charity seem to me especially important for politically and socially disempowered people and groups of people, whose experiences may be less widely shared or are underrepresented in widely available art, media, and culture.
 46. I worked on this paper over a long enough period of time, presented versions of it in enough places, and talked about the issues it addresses with enough people, to feel that it is hard to know where to begin, and where to leave off, in acknowledging the many debts that I have incurred. I am grateful for wonderful discussions at Northwestern University's Practical Workshop, the Other Minds/Other Wills Workshop at the University of Chicago, the Wheaton Political Theory Workshop, the UK Kant Society conference at St. Andrews University, the Society of Christian Philosophers meeting at Asbury University, the Arizona Workshop in Normative Ethics, the Boston University Workshop in Late Modern Philosophy, the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the Rice Workshop in Humanistic Ethics, the Conference on Kant and Confucianism at Sungkyungwan University, Brown University, and the North American Kant Society Meeting at the APA in January 2020. I am grateful for conversations with Lucy Allais, Mark Alznauer, Matthew Boyle, Sarah Buss, Brad Cokelet, Ryan Davis, Bennett Eckert, Heidi Giannini, Richard Kimberly Heck, P. J. Ivanhoe, Christine Korsgaard,

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