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Loving a Narrator

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Abstract

We love people because of who they are, but can the idea of "who they are" be explained through a property that everyone has, such as agency? David Velleman believes this to be the case, and argues that love is an appraisal of a person's incomparable value, which disarms the lover's emotional defences. Modelling love on Kantian respect, Velleman claims that love is a response to a person's rational nature, indirectly perceived though her empirical persona—her observable traits and behaviours, which are imperfect representations of the value of rational nature. An important problem for Velleman's account is that it seems incompatible with two widely shared assumptions about love: that love is personal (so it cannot be analogous to impersonal respect) and that love is selective (so it cannot be based on a property shared by all individuals). Here, I propose a re-formulation of Velleman's view that avoids those objections while preserving the idea that love is an evaluation of the loved person's agency. Specifically, love is an evaluation of a person's inner narrator, which is also a person's capacity to act for reasons—to make actions intelligible to herself. The inner narrator is perceived through that person's observable narrative: her actions and interpretations in interaction, which are a product, and not an imperfect representation, of the inner narrator. In the re-formulated view, love is both personal and selective, but still an agential process that involves both the lover's and the loved person's capacities to make sense of the world.

Keywords: love, relationships, narrative, agency, moral emotions

In "Love as a Moral Emotion" (1999), David Velleman offers a view on love for persons that is both unique and controversial. For Velleman, love is a valuing response that disarms the lover's emotional defences, and, because it is directed at a person's rational nature, love is not at odds with morality. The view is unique because, unlike other cognitivists, Velleman focuses on the phenomenology and the morality of love—two aspects that at the time had been neglected by philosophers who described love as an evaluation and who focused mostly on rationality. The view is controversial because Velleman argues that love is an evaluation of the loved person's true self. The self is understood within a Kantian framework as that person's rational nature, and so love is directed at the same object as respect. This view is, then, a radical departure from mainstream cognitivist views, which see love as an evaluation of the loved person's observable qualities.

One particularly damning line of objection is that, under Velleman's account, love losses its personal and selective character. The objection is twofold. First, if both love and respect are modes of appreciation of the same object, it is unclear how we can differentiate between personal love and impersonal respect. Second, if love is an appreciation of rational nature rather than the observable qualities of the loved person, it is unclear why we love some people and not others, given that everyone has rational nature—people seem therefore to be interchangeable as objects of love.

Velleman pre-empts this objection and tries to accommodate the personal and selective character of love by distinguishing between the final object of love's evaluation—the loved person's rational nature—and the immediate object of love's evaluation: the loved person's observable qualities, which Velleman calls her "empirical persona." As I show, this answer does not succeed. But that does not make the view unsalvageable; in fact, I argue that it is possible to avoid the objection, drawing from Velleman's own writings. I propose a re-formulation of Velleman's view that substitutes the Kantian framework with Velleman's views on narrative agency and narrative explanation.

The argument goes as follows. In Section 1, I situate and summarise Velleman's view on love and briefly motivate my aim. In Section 2, I present the objections based on the indistinguishability of love and respect and the incompatibility of the view with selective love, as developed by Edward Harcourt (2009) and Benjamin Bagley (2015). I argue that Velleman's available responses are incompatible with each other, but I present the potential alternative of re-interpreting the view while maintaining its structure. In Section 3, I draw from Velleman's work on narrative theory to argue for a replacement of rational nature with inner narrator, and empirical persona with observable narrative. This proposal, I argue, avoids both objections. In Section 4, I assess the re-formulated view against objections based on the commitment to narrative theory and the role of love in moral life.

1. Situating Velleman's View

To illustrate the significance of Velleman's account, let us start with a brief look into contemporary philosophy of love. For most part of the 20th century, many philosophers of love could be placed on one side of what Bennett Helm (2010, 10) has called the cognitive–conative divide. On the one side, cognitive views see love as a way of appreciating the person who is loved; a mode of valuing that person. On the other side, conative views do not see love as a mode of valuing, but as a type of concern that causes or entails the lover's bestowal of value upon the loved person.

Often, philosophers on either side have disagreed on what has become known as the matter of the reasons of love. It is a rather murky debate, and it is not always clear exactly which question is being asked. At first glance, it seems that the question being asked is: "What is love? (a mode of valuing or a mode of concern?)" But this question has quickly turned into another one: "Do we love for reasons?" This version of the question has in turn been understood in two seemingly similar but distinct ways. Some authors are concerned with the question "Is love the sort of attitude that can be justified in terms of reasons?" Cognitivists answer this question in the affirmative (Naar 2017), whereas those favouring conative views answer the question in the negative (Frankfurt 2004; Zangwill 2013). Other authors ask a different question under the guise of the one above: "What are, if any, *good* reasons for love?" which is often taken to be equivalent to the slightly different question: "What reasons, if any, justify love *for this person and not another*?" This latter question has come to be known as the question of selectivity, often posed by cognitivists as a question about the normative force of selective reasons: "Why *should* you love this person and not another?" That is, if we select some people and not others in our loving evaluation, what is the (rational and/or moral) justification for that selection, given that all people are in principle equally lovable? The relationship-based answer to this version of the question is that the source of justifying reasons for love is shared history (Kolodny 2003), while quality-based views point at the loved person's traits or observable qualities—such as her personality, her virtues, or her hair colour (Keller 2000; Abramson and Leite 2011).

The progression described above shows how philosophy of love moved from a descriptive question—"What *is* love?"—to a normative question—"Why *should* you love this person and not another?"—often within the same argument. Along the way, philosophy of love became paradoxically bereft of emotion. The focus on normativity and justification left little to no space for discussing how joyful, fearsome, and soul-destroying loving another person can be. In that way, the phenomenological component of love remained largely ignored by analytic philosophers from both sides of the divide, often embroiled in a discussion about rationality and direction of fit.

Velleman's account is to be situated at the height of that dialectic, when the stark division between cognitivist and conative views and the focus on justification was seldom questioned. It is against this background that "Love as a Moral Emotion" emerges as a notable exception, insofar as Velleman presents a cognitivist view that answers the descriptive question ("What is love?") while putting the phenomenological element of love at the centre of his answer to that question. For Velleman, love is an appreciation of the incomparable value of the loved person, which motivates the lover to arrest her emotional defences or "suspend [her] emotional protection" (1999, 362). Velleman does not concern himself with the rationality of love, or the normative force of reasons for love. Instead, he sets out to offer a description of what love is—an evaluation—with a distinct double aim: to argue that love is an essential component of moral life, and to show that a moralistic view of love can offer a satisfactory answer to the question of selectivity.

Let us start with the latter aim. According to Velleman, most answers to the question of selectivity wrongly focus on observable qualities of the loved person, such as beauty or intelligence. However, we do not want to be loved for qualities that may wear off with time, or that a number of other people may have: we want to be loved because we are special, unique, and irreplaceable (363). "We are like the girl who wants to be loved not for her yellow hair—and not, we should add, for her mind or her sense of humour, either—because she wants to be loved, as she puts it, 'for myself alone'" (363), he says in a reference to Yeats's poem.[1] We want to be loved for our true selves, which arguably do not change when our hair goes grey, when we start losing our memory due to Alzheimer's, or when our jokes are not funny anymore. Up until this point, his account seems to correspond with some plausible folk intuitions on our desires about love.

This correspondence with folk intuitions ends with Velleman's view of true selves, which are the object of evaluation in love, as the loved person's rational nature, understood in the Kantian sense of "a capacity to be actuated by reasons" (365).[2] According to Velleman's interpretation of Kant, instances of rational nature or 'self-existent ends' (that is, persons) require a specific evaluative response from others: respect. Not responding to rational nature with respect is both a rational and moral failure. To appreciate oneself as a self-existent end, one needs to respect other self-existent ends: an instance of rational nature "cannot first take itself seriously if it treats instances of itself as nothing more than mere means to an end" (366). However, respect is not the only way of appreciating the value of persons: we can also appreciate the value of persons by loving them.

1 "But I can get a hair-dye/ And set such colour there,/ Brown, or black, or carrot,/ That young men in despair/ May love me for myself alone/ And not my yellow hair." ("For Anne Gregory"; Yeats 1956).

2 Velleman (365) makes this equivalence explicit in the following passage: "Recall the following tenets of Kantian theory: that the rational nature whose value commands respect is the capacity to be actuated by reasons; that the capacity to be actuated by reasons is also the capacity to have a good will; and that the capacity for a rational and consequently good will is that better side of a person which constitutes his true self."

Velleman says that love and respect are different "modes of valuation" (366) or ways of appreciating the same object: a person's rational nature. Love and respect are distinct in two ways. Firstly, respect is a required response to the value of a person's rational nature, while love is a possible, but not required, response to the value of a person's rational nature. In turn, rational nature is itself both a capacity for respect (as seen above) and a capacity to love (365). Secondly, love and respect motivate different reactions: while respect arrests our tendency to treat other people as means, love arrests our tendency to be emotionally defensive towards others (362).

Velleman acknowledges that, at face value, his proposal does not meet the condition of selectivity. After all, he argues that love does not discriminate between people. He is also aware of the counterintuitiveness of the claim that rational natures are what we love about people, since we do not directly perceive rational natures. What we do perceive are the observable qualities of the loved person that other cognitivists identify as reasons for love: the loved person's personality, her mannerisms, even "the way he wears his hat and sips his tea … or the way he walks and the way he talks" (371). Velleman calls these observable qualities of the loved person her "empirical persona": "the manifest person, embodied in flesh and blood and accessible to the senses" (371). Thus, Velleman's complete answer to the descriptive question of what love is, including his answer to the question of selectivity, goes as follows: love is an awareness of the incomparable value of the loved person's rational nature, as represented by her observable empirical persona, and which results in the lowering of the lover's emotional defences.

Now let us turn to the aim of showing that love is a moral emotion, which is in fact Velleman's primary aim. Besides the debate described above among philosophers of love, Velleman's view is situated in another long-standing discussion among moral philosophers about the apparent incompatibility between love and moral choice: given that moral choice should not discriminate between people, and love *is* a discrimination between people, it seems that love is incomparable with morality.[3] Velleman's answer to the challenge is to argue that it is based on a false assumption. In his view, love does *not* involve a discrimination between people, since loving a person is to value them as having dignity, which itself precludes comparison: "[B]eing treasured as special doesn't entail being compared favorably with others; it rather entails being seen to have a value that forbids comparison" (370). Since love does not discriminate, and it is a mode of valuing people, love is not at odds with morality: in fact, love is an essential component of moral life.

Velleman's account has generated a great deal of disagreement. Here I focus on a specific objection raised by Harcourt (2009) and Bagley (2015) on the apparent incompatibility of the account with the personal and selective features of love—the fact that we love some people and not others based on something specific about those people. Before proceeding, three brief clarifications are needed. The first is that my re-formulation of Velleman's view is posited as a solution to the objection based on the personal and selective character of love only. I take as a starting assumption that love for persons is selective and not impersonal, and so I focus on answering the objection to that starting assumption, if Velleman's view is to be considered at all.[4]

3 Sophie Grace Chappell (2014, 80–84) offers a useful summary of the challenge and the different responses to it—like Velleman, she disputes the formulation of the challenge itself.

4 I leave aside objections formulated by Kennett (2008), Abramson and Leite (2011), Setya (2014), or Foster (2018); I also leave out an objection from Harcourt (2009) on the relation between dignity and value, and a myriad of rejections of Velleman's view in discussions about reasons for love. Also, in this paper I am not questioning Velleman's wider interpretation of Kant, which has been qualified as "revisionist" (Harcourt 2009, 349). These objections may or may not affect the re-formulated view, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

The second clarification is that, in re-formulating Velleman's view, I am not necessarily endorsing the view myself, for two reasons. The first is that I am not convinced that the claim that love is a mode of evaluation is correct, or if instead the correct claim is that love requires or merely involves evaluation, or—my preferred option—that love depends on or is grounded in evaluation. The second is that Velleman's views on agency and practical reason are not always clear or consistent, so I acknowledge that it is possible to disagree with my interpretation of Velleman. I will offer my reasoning for understanding Velleman in the way that I do, but I will not attempt to prove that my interpretation of Velleman is the correct one. For these reasons, my claim here is conditional and qualified: *if* love is a mode of valuing, the view that what is valued is the loved person's agency is a *plausible* view, and such a view can be obtained from *a reasonable interpretation* of Velleman's views on agency and practical reason.

My argumentative stance leads to the third clarificatory question: if I am not endorsing Velleman's view, why engage with it at all? In recent years, there have been several proposals that overcome the obstacles of the cognitive–conative divide and the exaggerated focus on rationality.[5] Why not simply abandon cognitivism and move on? One reason to preserve Velleman's view is the historical and current significance of the account, which is cited almost without exception in any review of contemporary philosophy of love, and which is widely regarded as a major contribution to the debate. Philosophical relevance is a good enough reason to continue engaging with Velleman's view on love, but there is a better, more concrete reason to do so.

The re-formulated version of Velleman's account can be a useful addition to the discussion on the role of agency in love. According to agency-based views, love is something that we *do* and thus is an expression of our agency, and not merely an experience that we undergo passively (Kühler 2014; Schaubroeck 2014; Ebels-Duggan 2008; Candiotto and De Jaegher 2021; Spreeuwenberg 2021). These views are mostly focused on the agency of lovers and the interactions between them; the people in the equation that *do* the loving, which in virtue of the focus on activity, are all the people involved. To put it coarsely, there is no more "lover" and "loved person" in these discussions. To put it more precisely, since these accounts are focused on action and interaction, there is less focus on the loved person as an object of evaluation, which makes sense given that "being an object of evaluation" seems to be a passive feature of persons, and thus in direct opposition to their roles as agents. However, the fact that these authors focus on loving instead of being loved does not mean that they refuse to engage with the latter issue—explicit calls to integrate the "passive" element of love can be found in Michael Kühler's (2014) and Kyla Ebels-Duggan's (2019) proposals, for example. Re-formulating Velleman's view so that there is a plausible view of agency of the loved person as the object of love is a valuable addition to the discussion of love and agency in that sense. As I will later argue, the re-formulated view also accounts for the role of the agency of the lover in love's evaluation. However, these two aims—showing that agency can be the object of love and that the agency of the lover is involved in love's evaluation—are unachievable without resolving the objections about the personal and selective character of love first.

5 For example, by proposing a double direction of fit that acknowledges both the cognitive and the conative aspects of love (Helm 2010; Bagley 2015; Han 2021); by arguing that both rational and irrational love can exist (Kroeker 2019; Saunders and McKeever 2022); or by differentiating subjective reasons for love from objective normative reasons (Jollimore 2011; Schaubroeck 2014; Jeske 2017; Naar 2017).

2. Personal and Selective Love

As seen above, in Velleman's account love has a final object of evaluation—rational nature—and an immediate object of evaluation—an empirical persona. Introducing the empirical persona as the immediate object of evaluation is not an argumentative manoeuvre on Velleman's part to get out of the acknowledged counterintuitiveness of his view. Recall that respect is a required response to others in order to appreciate oneself as a self-existent end. Although love is an optional response to others, it is nevertheless necessary in order to lower one's emotional defences. Only by loving can we do this. And we can only love by engaging with an empirical persona:

> The manifest person is the one against whom we have emotional defenses, and he must disarm them, if he can, with his manifest qualities. … [U]nless we actually *see* a person in the human being confronting us, we won't be moved to love; and we can see the person only by seeing him in or through his empirical persona. (1999, 371)

The selective character of love—that we love some people and not others—is a result of practical limitations imposed by the cognitive demandingness of love. According to Velleman (372) we are "constitutionally limited" in our capacity to love, given that loving some people takes up all of the capacity for attention we have. More importantly, we are not well equipped to perceive a person's value through her empirical persona, or to represent our own value through our empirical personae:

> The human body and human behavior are imperfect expressions of personhood, and we are imperfect interpreters. Hence the value that makes someone eligible to be loved does not necessarily make him lovable in our eyes. Whether someone is lovable depends on how well his value as a person is expressed or symbolized by us by his empirical persona. Someone's persona may not speak very clearly of his value as a person, or may not speak in ways that are clear to us. (372)

Velleman's solution for selectivity is unsuccessful, as illustrated by objections put forward by Harcourt (2009) and Bagley (2015) on the basis of two distinct but related aspects of love: the fact that love is personal and the fact that the loved person should not be interchangeable with another.

The first objection is that Velleman's account seems to do away with personal love. Personal love is not just a generic love for persons, understood as agapeic or universal love for humanity in general, but love for particular individuals. Harcourt (2009, 3) argues that, "[i]f we love only a subset of the people we respect because we miss their eligibility to be loved, the fact that we do not love more people is our mistake. But if it is a mistake, we must be able to conceive of correcting it." Similarly, Bagley (2015, 485) says that, on Velleman's account, love is "a genuine rational imperfection, one we have reason to work to overcome." Both Harcourt (2009, 3) and Bagley (2015, 485) conclude that, given that love is a suboptimal response on Velleman's account, then his view can only possibly explain impersonal love.

The second objection is that pointing at rational natures as the final objects of love's evaluation seems to establish a requirement for loving every person, since everyone has rational nature. This entails that people are interchangeable as objects of love: "If love is elicited by a property that all rational beings share, it seems to follow that it cannot matter which rational being one loves" (Harcourt 2009, 350). Bagley (2015, 485) says that Velleman misses the phenomenological significance that selectivity has for the lover, who needs to experience her love for a particular individual as "more than merely optional." This significance is not captured in

Velleman's selectivity, understood in terms of psychological limitations, which according to Bagley is a trivial or superficial kind of selectivity. Instead, in Velleman's view, the fact that we love one person and not another is "a strictly causal matter, just an incidental quirk of [our] psychology" (484).

Velleman anticipates the first objection and explicitly rejects it: "In merely respecting rather than loving [someone], we do not assess them as lower in value" (1999, 372). That is, he explicitly says that respect does not stand higher than love in a hierarchy of modes of valuing; there is no such hierarchy.[6] However, it is not possible for Velleman to endorse a non-hierarchical relation between love and respect while preserving his answer to the second objection on selectivity. This is because, as seen above, an empirical persona—the immediate object of love's evaluation—is an imperfect representation of a person's rational nature—the final object of evaluation. Harcourt and Bagley are correct: if empirical personae are imperfect representations, it does follow that, if we were able to offer perfect representations of our rational nature, then our observable qualities would be superfluous in love's evaluation. Hence, Velleman's answer to selectivity and to the personal character of love are incompatible with each other.

Due to this incompatibility, Velleman does not succeed in putting forward an account of love that is personal and selective. For Harcourt and Bagley, their objections mean that Velleman's claim that rational nature is the final object of evaluation is incorrect: this is the main flaw they see in the account. Harcourt (2009, 352) formulates this conclusion explicitly: "Love is not to be analysed as a response to the very same value as also elicits respect, namely, the value we have in virtue of exemplifying rational nature." However, they miss a second possibility available for Velleman which does not require giving up rational nature as the final object of evaluation. A non-hierarchical relation between love and respect could be preserved by re-defining the immediate object of evaluation. To avoid the hierarchical relation that leads to impersonal love, we need to re-interpret empirical personae so that they are not imperfect representations of rational natures. That would preserve Velleman's solution for selectivity while avoiding the incompatibility between Velleman's responses to the personal and selective characters of love.[7]

I will show next that this alternative becomes available by substituting the Kantian framework in the current formulation of the view with narrative theory—in fact, Velleman's own narrative theory. Specifically, I argue that if we replace 'rational nature' with 'inner narrator' as love's final object of evaluation, and 'empirical persona' with 'observable narrative' as love's immediate object of evaluation, the resulting re-formulated view can overcome the objections I have presented in this section.

6 At one point Velleman (1999, 366) hints at a hierarchy that goes in the opposite direction: "I regard respect and love as the required minimum and the optional maximum responses to one and the same value." This can also be understood to be implicit in his differentiation between "*merely* merely respecting rather than loving" (372; my emphasis). I do not think this claim is seriously supported in the paper, so I ignore it here.

7 A third possibility would be to bite the bullet for the second objection. Kieran Setiya (2014) adopts this strategy in order to put forward a view that mirrors Velleman's answer to the partiality challenge, but which abandons the Kantian framework. For Setiya, the final object of evaluation in love is the property of humanity, and the immediate object of evaluation is contingent—that is, he embraces Bagley's criticism of selectivity being random.

3. Velleman on Love: A Re-Formulation

In its current formulation, Velleman's answer to the descriptive question about love seems inseparable from (his interpretation of) Kantian moral theory, given that rational natures are the final object of evaluation. But it is possible to isolate the view from its Kantian element and frame it in a normatively neutral way. Velleman says that love is a mode of valuing another person that results in the arresting of the lover's emotional defences. The value of the loved person is apprehended through her observable qualities—ranging from personality to physical traits and mannerisms—and ultimately directed at that person's true self, which is represented in, and perceived through, the loved person's observable qualities. The self is not to be understood as a distinguishable entity: the true self *is* the capacity to act for reasons—rational nature (see footnote 2). Given that I am presenting Velleman's view minus the Kantian framework, let us substitute "rational nature" for a neutral term—agency—which is widely understood as the capacity to act for reasons. To sum up, love consists in an evaluation of the observable qualities of a person *qua* representations of that person's agency, which results in the lowering of the lover's emotional defences. Loving a person is, then, loving an agent.

Velleman's work on agency and practical rationality spans across four decades. Capturing it in its entirety would be a fruitless enterprise—and a rather unnecessary one. What matters for my purposes is that Velleman formulated the "capacity to act for reasons" or "the self" in terms that—as I will argue later—allow for an alternative route to understanding love as an evaluation of agency. Here I focus specifically on Velleman's explanation of how the different formulations of the self he has put forward across his different works interact and relate with each other. I focus on Velleman's reply to Catriona Mackenzie (2007), who was the first to highlight the interrelatedness between different aspects of the self in her review of *Self to Self* (Velleman 2006).[8]

Velleman discusses the self from three different perspectives: as an autonomous agent, as a diachronically unified entity, and an inner narrator. As Mackenzie (2007, 263–64) points out, these are not oppositional or distinct views of the self, but descriptions of "different dimensions or aspects of selfhood." These three dimensions of the self are all modes of self-reflection; they capture "interactions between the person and himself under various guises" (Velleman 2007, 284). I leave aside the dimension of diachronic unity, which is tangential to my re-formulation of Velleman's view on love.[9] With that in mind, I proceed on the understanding that the autonomous agent and the inner narrator are dimensions of the self that constitute two different modes of self-reflection.

Velleman's view of love rests on the first dimension of the self as an autonomous agent, understood in the Kantian sense as an instance of rational nature. Given that both the autonomous agent and the inner narrator are dimensions of a person's self, and that, for Velleman, love is an evaluation of a person's self, would it be possible to replace "rational nature" with "inner narrator"?

8 Velleman (2007, 284) agrees with Mackenzie that he had previously overlooked the relation between the different dimensions of the self. I am truly indebted to Mackenzie's discussion of Velleman's views, which, together with Velleman's responses to her, often offer much clearer insights than the original works.

9 This does not mean that diachronicity is irrelevant to love as a phenomenon (cf. Jones 2008, Schechtman 2021, or Jollimore 2022), or that Velleman's view on diachronic unity may not be useful in understanding important aspects of love. However, my purpose here is to overcome the objections set up in Section 2, which are not connected to diachronicity.

Velleman refers to a person's rational nature as her capacity to act for reasons, and he refers to the inner narrator in the same terms (2005, 69). The inner narrator is a person's capacity to interpret events in her life (her behaviours, interactions, thoughts, and occurrences around them) in the form of narratives, which in turn give her reasons to act in certain ways and not others. Narratives are not to be understood as fully-fledged stories, but as the structures that our behaviours and mental states take in following from one another, insofar as they are guided by our inner narrator. For example, if I decide I am going to have some avocado on toast for dinner, I have already set an aspect of how the story of me is going to develop today (it will involve, at some point, having avocado on toast for dinner, but also taking avocado out of the fridge, setting out the appropriate cutlery, or making sure the toaster's settings are not too high, for example). This is not because by deciding to have avocado I have somehow determined what my future actions will be. Instead, I have set out the conditions of intelligibility for my future actions in light of those plans. I am still free to choose to take the bacon out of the fridge instead of the avocado, but that action would be incoherent with my intention of dining on avocado on toast. According to Velleman, the reason why I choose the action that will cohere with my existent intentions and mental states is because the aim of action itself is intelligibility. This is because when we act for reasons we are aiming to make sense of ourselves: intelligibility is the constitutive aim of action.[10] Whether a person has a reason for taking an action "ultimately depends on whether it would make for a coherent continuation of his story" (69). The autonomous agent and the inner narrator have the same role (acting for reasons) and the same aim (intelligibility), and differ only insofar as they constitute different modes of engaging with oneself, as seen above. On that basis, a person's rational nature is plausibly interchangeable with her inner narrator as the final object of evaluation of love, since they are analogous aspects of agency. As I argue next, this exchange allows Velleman to overcome the objections set up in Section 2, with a re-formulated view of love that is both personal and selective.

I said at the end of Section 2 that the main flaw of Velleman's view—which opens it up to the objections seen above—is his understanding of the immediate object of evaluation as an imperfect representation of a person's true self, and not the fact that a person's rational nature is the final object of evaluation. Now I can make that claim more precise: the main flaw in Velleman's view on love is that rational nature is the wrong dimension of agency to focus on as the final object of evaluation, and that this mistake leads him to an incorrect understanding of the immediate object of evaluation as an imperfect representation of a person's true self. Let us see how focusing on the inner narrator as the final object of evaluation instead of rational nature helps Velleman overcome the objections from Section 2.

Again, the first objection is that the hierarchical relation between love and respect that Harcourt and Bagley identify in Velleman's view means that love collapses into respect, and thus Velleman does not account for the personal character of love. This criticism is inescapable insofar as Velleman says that the empirical persona—the observable qualities that are the immediate object of evaluation—is an imperfect representation of a person's agency. Replacing rational nature with inner narrator opens up a new way of understanding the empirical persona—not as an imperfect representation, but as a *product* of agency. I unpack this next.

If a person's inner narrator is her capacity to act for reasons, then *actions* are the product of the work of the inner narrator. These actions are themselves the result of intentions, desires, and beliefs that the inner narrator interprets as intelligible, that is, understands as belonging to itself: these *interpretations* are also the

10 Velleman makes different formulations of the constitutive aim of action. Here I am drawing from his "Précis of the Possibility of Practical Reason" (2004) where he explains how his view evolved from the Kantian view of practical reason that he had defended thus far (including in the eponymous paper included in that collection).

product of the work of the inner narrator. When we apprehend a person's traits, we are perceiving that person's actions and interpretations in interaction—which in turn are expressions of those traits. What that person does, and how that person understands the world (if they are impulsive, kind, or vengeful), are the direct product of her aiming at intelligibility through her inner narrator. Let us call this collection of a person's actions and interpretations her "observable narrative." An observable narrative is plausibly constituted by the same elements as the empirical persona, as initially formulated by Velleman: the manifest person, which is the collection of qualities of the loved person that are perceived by the lover, and the motivation for the arresting of the lover's emotional defences.

Because an observable narrative is a product of the inner narrator, and not a representation of the inner narrator, the obstacle to Velleman's aim of incorporating the personal character of love goes away.[11] Recall that Velleman states that love and respect are two different modes of evaluation which stand in a non-hierarchical relation with each other. Velleman's claim that an empirical persona is an imperfect representation of the final object of evaluation allowed Harcourt and Bagley to argue that love is a "poor" interpretation of the incomparable value of a person, or a "mistake" that should be corrected. But if the immediate evaluation is not a poor interpretation or a mistake, then we can accept Velleman's claim that love is not a lower kind of evaluation than respect. If the final object is the inner narrator, the immediate object—the observable narrative—is no longer a distorted reflection of the agent's value. It is actually the product of her agential powers. Hence, Velleman's account can be an account of personal love—of love for particular individuals—despite the final object of evaluation being something that everyone has—agency.

This re-formulated view does not yet avoid a hierarchical relationship between love and respect, as becomes evident when attempting to answer the question of selectivity. Recall that saying that love is selective means that love for a person is based on something that sets her apart from others, in such a way that that person is loved because of something in them that distinguishes them from others. For Velleman, we love some people and not others because we have different skills in performing our own value through our empirical personae and perceiving other people's value through their empirical personae. Again, if we isolate the view from its Kantian framework, this is not an implausible claim: when we say we want to be loved because we are special, what we actually mean is that we want to be loved because we are *seen* as special, or because we are special *for the lover*. In that sense, differences between people as objects of love are constituted not only by the characteristics of a specific individual as an object of love, but by the perception of those characteristics by the lover. The problem in Velleman's original proposal is that this difference in perception is formulated as a defect—we are imperfect performers and perceivers of value. As long as this is the case, it is not possible to overcome the first objection. So the answer to selectivity needs to account for differences in perception of value without this difference being defective in nature. Again, an alternative answer to the question of selectivity becomes available by applying Velleman's (2003) own insights on narrative explanation.

According to Velleman, when putting together events in narrative form we are not just giving a causal story of what has happened, is happening, or is going to happen. Instead, it is the emotional cadence or sense of anticipation for what comes next that turns a series of events into a narrative (6). That is, the sequence of events needs to prompt an emotional response in the audience. This emotional cadence is sustained throughout the duration of the narrative—although the actual individuated emotions an audience feels when engaging with a narrative may change during the plot, and the audience might go from fear to anticipation to relief, and so

11 This may be disputed by the claim that people may "see through" observable narratives or "buy into" inaccurate observable narratives. I respond to this objection to the re-formulated view in Section 4.

on. As Andrew Speight points out, "For Velleman, narrative helps us assimilate events not to a pattern of how things happen but to a pattern of how things feel or what they mean—an emotional cadence that, on his view, connects with the biological organism's desire for tension and release" (2014, 54). This emotional reaction and its power to give meaning to isolated events answer for the "distinctive force that narratives have on us" (53). Different people find different narratives meaningful, and this influences all types of choices that people make on the basis of, and as an expression of, the things that they care about. For example, someone may pick a career in medicine because a "saving lives" narrative is meaningful to them, while others may dedicate their time and effort to winning an Olympic medal or climbing the highest peaks in the world because of an "overcoming challenges" narrative.

However, narratives need not be explicit to elicit emotion. When the inner narrator aims to make the world intelligible to itself, it is often confronted with different possibilities and events that are more intelligible than others. To achieve intelligibility is not merely to form a propositional belief that something is intelligible. Things being intelligible *feels* like something: it feels like things make sense. In previous work (Lopez-Cantero 2023) I have drawn from Matthew Ratcliffe's (2016) view on existential feelings to describe the feeling of intelligibility as a shift in one's experience of the world, enabled by the opening of a new branch of possibilities that opens when one falls in love. It is this experience of intelligibility or meaningfulness, which for Velleman is an experience of value, that allows for the arresting of the lover's emotional defences. The existential feeling of intelligibility becomes a background orientation once one is in love: for as long as one is in love with a particular individual, loving that individual is one aspect that makes the lover's life meaningful. That does not mean that loving that particular individual always makes the lover's life happier, or more filled with meaning, understood as self-realisation: as Velleman (1999, 361) says, "love also lays us open to feeling hurt, anger, resentment, and even hate." It means that, without that particular individual, the lover's life would be less intelligible to themselves as theirs.

The answer to the question of selectivity, then, lies in the fact that different people find different narratives meaningful, which means that they will experience the existential feeling of intelligibility when confronted with different possibilities—that is, different people. We love some people and not others because some observable narratives make more sense to us than others—they feel more meaningful or more intelligible. That is the explanation for the selective character of love. My response to the question of selectivity has a double payoff. On one hand, it allows for a re-formulation of Velleman's view that wholly avoids the objections set out in Section 2, while preserving the phenomenological component of love. On the other, the re-formulation makes apparent that love engages the lover's agency as well as the loved person's agency, as I explain next.

It could be objected at this point that my proposal suffers from the same flaw as the original one: one may say that if we were able to perceive the meaningfulness of everyone's observable narratives, then we should rationally love everyone—that is, that love is a "mistake" on the side of the lover. However, such an objection would result from an oversight of the constitutive role of the lover's inner narrator in love's evaluation. The fact that a person finds some narratives more meaningful than others is not an inevitable consequence of our limited skills at perceiving meaning: it is, in fact, an expression of those skills. What we find salient in the first place has to do with our way of understanding the world, and insofar as have a specific way of understanding the world, our inner narrators are successful when they succeed in guiding actions and attitudes in a way that is intelligible to ourselves. This means that the inner narrator needs to discriminate between what is perceived and interpreted by default: it is the capacity to do precisely that. For example, a person who is an avid gym-goer may notice and appreciate people's level of physical fitness in a way that a bookworm academic may be

completely oblivious to. This difference in perceiving the world will also influence how each of those individuals understands a first encounter with other individuals in virtue of their levels of fitness. And that, in turn, will influence their relationships with that person, as well as the extent to which that person elicits the feeling of intelligibility. For those reasons, selectivity in love is then not a matter of poor performance of one's skills, as Velleman's initial formulation states. Instead, it is a natural result of the functioning of the lover's inner narrator.

From the above, we now have a fully-fledged new view of love as an evaluation of a person's agency which avoids the objections set out in Section 2. We meet a person with yellow hair we consider beautiful, a mind we consider brilliant, and a sense of humour that we find amusing. We do not consider those things separately, but we give them unity as part her observable narrative, which is the immediate object of loving evaluation through which we perceive the final object of loving evaluation, the inner narrator. Love is an evaluation of something that is unique to the beloved, and not of something that everyone has. What is more, it is not an imperfect representation of her value as an agent, but a direct product of her agency. In that way, the objections based on the personal and selective characters of love are overcome. Further, the re-formulated view gives prominence to the lover's agency as well. As agents, we aim at intelligibility through our inner narrators, and whether we experience meaningfulness when confronted with a person's observable narrative will depend on our own way of understanding the world.[12]

In this way, I have offered a way to re-formulate Velleman's agential view, drawing from his own claims about narrative, while at the same time addressing the objection that it is an impersonal account, and renouncing the Kantian framework that made the account counterintuitive to start with. The re-formulated view, however, may be exposed to new objections. I finish the paper by briefly addressing three of these objections.

4. Objections: Narrativity and Morality

It could be argued that, by giving up Velleman's Kantian framework, the re-formulated view runs into three new problems in terms of its commitment to narrative theory, and in terms of the compatibility of love with moral action.

It goes without saying that the re-formulated view would be unpalatable to narrative sceptics who reject the existence of an inner narrator wholesale. However, such levels of scepticism are rare. Reasonable anti-narrativism is often formulated in more tempered ways, in the sense that the inner narrator is not a universal capacity that everyone has, or in the sense that it is not a capacity that we should cultivate. Non-generalisation seems like a potential problem for the view of love I have put forward: if not everyone has the capacity for inner narration, can people without an inner narrator love at all? Galen Strawson, for example, has repeatedly proclaimed himself an "episodic," insofar as he claims to not have an inner narrator. In fact, Strawson (2007, 109) explicitly addresses how love may happen without the intervention of the inner narrator:

12 In a previous version of this manuscript, I used the expression *narrative fit* as part of my answer to the question of selectivity. This is the exact quote: "Given that the lover perceives other people's personal narratives in relation to her own personal narrative, some of these narratives will be more meaningful, or have a higher promise of meaning, than others. There will be what I call a narrative fit." Lotte Spreeuwenberg (2021) criticises this view as giving too passive a role to the loved person. I can see how the expression and the wording of the original manuscript could lead to this misunderstanding, and I have left the notion of a "narrative fit" aside, to be explored in further work as an explanation of mutuality instead of selectivity. I am thankful to the reviewer who made me realise the potential confusion between selectivity and mutuality that stems from the notion of narrative fit. Given my argument in this section about the role of both the loved person's and the lover's agency, I think my proposal avoids Spreeuwenberg's criticisms.

> Enduring love of a person is, at any moment, a matter of present disposition. Its manners and customs may be shaped by the past, but it does not require any tendency to engage in explicit recollection of the past, nor any trace of any Diachronic sense that one—or the one one loves—was there in the past. … A gift for friendship doesn't require any ability to recall past shared experiences in any detail, nor any tendency to value them. It is shown in how one is in the present.

Strawson's statement reflects a mistake frequently made by anti-narrativists, which is to conflate intelligibility with diachronic understanding. In the previous section, I explained that Velleman distinguishes three dimensions of the self: agent, inner narrator, and diachronically unified entity. Strawson's objection is directed at the third dimension of the self, which I said I would not discuss here, since the objections based on the personal and selective character of love are not directly related to diachronicity. The inner narrator aims at intelligibility and not diachronic unification. Strawson does not deny that agents aim at intelligibility; he merely denies that the capacity to make one's life intelligible is that of an inner narrator. But his dispute here is terminological: he believes that the capacity of intelligibility is only trivially narrative (2007 440). This paper is not, however, the place to solve the long-standing dispute between narrativists and anti-narrativists. I am happy to accept that anti-narrativists may not fully accept my view, but, as their view stands, it is not a rejection of the universal character of the capacity of intelligibility that is at the heart of the re-formulated view. I think this is enough to move on from this potential objection.

The potential dangers and limitations of the inner narrator, on the other hand, do seem like direct problems for my account. Because the inner narrator interprets the world from its own internal perspective, it is possible that these interpretations are unreliable. This is a reasonable worry for my account of love. We have all had a friend whose romantic partner is the most obnoxious human being we have ever encountered, and have sat though endless eulogies from our friend about how attentive, kind, and funny their partner is. In those cases, we may be the ones in the wrong if we fail to see something that is really there, but we could also have evidence that goes to show that our friend is the one has "bought into" their partner's observable narrative. Sometimes, the misinterpretation goes in the other direction: the famous trope of enemies to lovers illustrates how initial interpretations of the other may be inaccurate, and that the person who seemed unbearable to begin with reveals herself as an adorable grump. Further, sometimes we are unreliable as inner narrators of our own lives. We may present an observable narrative that portrays us as arrogant and nonchalant when in reality we are sensitive and insecure, and the people who love us are the best positioned to "see through" our observable narratives. These seem to be problems that arise directly from the incorporation of narrative theory, and which were not present in Velleman's initial proposal. Velleman already accounted for unreliability by arguing that we are poor performers and interpreters of value, but since I have rejected that the imperfect character of the immediate object of love's evaluation, this answer is not available in the re-formulated view.

Again, recall that the observable narrative is a product, and not a representation, of the inner narrator. The inner narrator is just a capacity, not a real self that needs to, or can be, uncovered through engagement with the observable narrative. The notion of unreliability should not be understood as lack of skill (intentional or not) at one's portrayal or apprehension of the final object of evaluation. Instead, it is better to understand the scenarios above as instances where the lover accesses alternative interpretations of the loved person's observable narrative through her own inner narrator. Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett (1998) argue, in fact, that interpreting the actions and attitudes of the people we love is a constitutive and necessary element of love; in turn, the loved person must be open and receptive to be shaped by the lover's interpretation. Of course, interpretation can be taken too far, as in the case of the friend with the obnoxious partner. Philosophers of love have often worried about this so-called problem of imagined qualities: all cognitivist views that give a role to

the characteristics of the loved person potentially suffer from this problem. In that sense, even if it is a potential objection to the view I have presented, it is an objection insofar as the view gives a role to the loved person's characteristics. The only alternative to avoid the objection would be, then, to say that the loved person's characteristics do not matter, which as we have seen results in the problem of the potential interchangeability of the loved person. But also, the problem of imagined qualities has been greatly exaggerated. Here I side with Troy Jollimore (2011, 7): even if the lover's apprehension of the loved person's qualities is not completely accurate, in most cases there will be sufficient accuracy, and cases where all characteristics are imagined and yet there is actual love are rather unusual. In that sense, the limitations of the inner narrator are not worrying enough to abandon the re-formulated view.

A second objection is that, by re-formulating the view in terms of narrative theory, it becomes apparent that the structure of love having an immediate and a final object of evaluation is not needed. Indeed, I have shown that the observable narrative is the product of the inner narrator, but I have merely assumed that the inner narrator is the final object of love's evaluation. Maybe it would be better, and more conceptually economical, to get rid of the final object altogether, and see the inner narrator simply as the cause or the driver for love, but not as the object of love's evaluation. I think that could be a plausible conclusion from my argument. Still, arguing that love is an evaluation of the loved person's observable narrative that arrests the lover's emotional defences, and that engages both the lover and the loved person's agency, seems like a worthwhile aim to me, so not all would be lost even if I bit that bullet. Whether the bullet needs to be bit or not depends on the answer to a third and final objection that I explain next.

At first glance, the re-formulated view seems to completely abandon Velleman's primary aim, which was to show that love is a moral emotion. It could even be argued that Velleman's descriptive aim (to define what love is) is subordinate to his normative aim (to show that love is not at odds with moral action). In that sense, it seems plausible that Velleman, or someone who endorses his original account, would reject the re-formulated view, which has been stripped of the Kantian element that allowed the compatibility between love and moral action. Recall that Velleman argues that love can be incorporated into moral consideration because love does not discriminate between people in terms of value, given that it is an appreciation of the loved person's rational nature.

On a second look, however, it becomes clear that the re-formulated view is wholly compatible not only with Velleman's interpretation of Kantian ethics, but also with other normative approaches. Starting with Velleman, the re-formulated view is still compatible with the claim that love does not discriminate between people in terms of value. Rather, it discriminates between people in terms of meaningfulness: the fact that some observable narratives elicit the feeling of intelligibility in us has no bearing on whether the people with those observable narratives are more or less valuable. Importantly, the fact that the re-formulated view is morally neutral but agency-based means that it is possible to fill in the details on the moral character of love with normative theories other than (Velleman's) Kantian theory. As I claimed in Section 1, the re-formulated view is a valuable contribution to the wider debate on love as an agential process. Unless we want to separate agency from moral action, the structure of the immediate and final object of evaluation has to be preserved: agency should be constitutive of love, and not merely its driver. Hence, the answer to the second objection—whether the final object of evaluation is superfluous—depends on whether we want the account to be compatible with a normative claim about love—that love is compatible with moral deliberation. If this compatibility is to be preserved, it is not possible to forego the structure of love's evaluation in the re-formulated view. Those who do not need to preserve this compatibility—because they do not deem it necessary for a descriptive view or

because they do not believe that love and morality are compatible—may be able to do away with agency as the final object of evaluation. I do not take a side here: the view is formulated so it can be adapted to a variety of normative projects, instead of being tied to a specific understanding of Kant, which plausibly was the root of the widespread resistance to Velleman's original proposal all along.

5. Conclusion

The re-formulation of Velleman's account I have offered here can open new avenues to discussing love as an agential process, where agency is not only in loving but in being loved. This is not to be understood in a highly intellectualised way, as if agents were only in the business of applying reasons to actions and deciding on the morally optimum choice. Instead, agents—people—aim to understand the world and themselves. In the re-formulated account, this capacity to make the world intelligible is put at the centre of loving and being loved. Love's final object of evaluation is the inner narrator, while the immediate object is the observable narrative, itself perceived—and shaped—by the lover, through the work of their own inner narrator. Velleman (1999, 365) says that, in love, "what our hearts respond is to another heart"; the re-formulated view preserves that claim, and it reveals that when loving a particular other we are making sense of the world with others—or at least trying to.

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