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Piss on Pity? A Qualified Defence of Pity and Compassion Towards Disabled People

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Abstract

Disability theorists and disability justice activists have long rejected pity as a response to disability, perceived as denigrating and as based in incorrect assumptions about disabled people. Even so, many people—even those who reject the idea that disability is inherently negative—have felt pity towards disabled individuals. In this article, we assess the moral permissibility and fittingness of pity as a response to disability, particularly when pity is felt by a non-disabled person. We start by presenting the argument according to which pity felt toward disabled people is both unfitting and morally impermissible, and consider whether compassion might be a more apt emotional response to disability. We then present alternative conceptions of pity and compassion informed by Buddhism and feminist care ethics. We conclude by arguing that pity can be fitting, but only when it responds to systemic disadvantages incurred by disabled people (and not when it responds to an alleged inherent badness of disability *per se*), and can be temporarily morally permissible, provided that it is soon replaced by a compassionate, sympathetic response that includes awareness of the pitfalls of implicit ableism and is imbued with a perception of our interconnectedness and vulnerability as human beings.

Keywords: philosophy of disability, pity, compassion, moral permissibility, fittingness, ethics of care, Buddhist ethics, disability justice

Many academics, disability rights activists, and people in general endorse the view that disability is not inherently bad, and that disabled people[1] live flourishing lives just as non-disabled people do, provided that the obstacles and discrimination typical of an ableist society are removed. Thanks to the progress made in conceptualising disability by the disability justice movement, by more nuanced and realistic portrayals

1. A note on language: most disability-positive or disability-neutral theorists and activists, ourselves included, use the same way of talking about disability that we do (that is, identity-first language). Identity-first language (language that describes a person as a "disabled person" as opposed to person-first language, which would have us say "person with a disability") is analogous to how we speak about many other minoritised identity traits, like gayness, Blackness, and gender identity, all of which are considered *value neutral*. Insofar as one also considers disability to be value neutral, akin to other minoritised identity traits, one should mirror the language style and allow for the reclaiming and celebration of disability as a key component of identity and human diversity. So, just as it would be weird to say "person with Blackness" or "person with lesbianism" or "person with transgenderism," we ought not say "person with disability." Rather, Black person, lesbian woman, trans person, and disabled person are appropriate, and capture the way race, sexuality, gender identity, and disability status are key components of individual identity, and are an important source of solidarity that spurs social justice movements. Identity-first language is often a way of reclaiming what has been incorrectly construed as a negative identity, and it celebrates the value of disabled lives. While it is always right to ask a person what they prefer to be called—similarly to pronoun use—the majority of folks involved in disability justice and theory support the use of identity-first language.

of disabled lives in the arts and on social media, and by a growing awareness of just how problematic older assumptions about disability have been, many of us no longer *think* or *believe* that disability is tragic or that disabled lives are pitiable. Those of us familiar with the rallying cry, "Piss on pity," or immersed in the disability justice literature, balk at the idea of a non-disabled person feeling pity for a disabled individual, and rightfully so. However, non-disabled people sometimes nonetheless feel pity towards disabled ones, whether that be in virtue of the disability itself or the disabled person's context, and whether that emotional reaction occurs pre-reflectively, or after much consideration and despite their knowing better.

Upon reflection, and having discussed this phenomenon with others, we have realised that certain emotional reactions of non-disabled people towards disabled lives give rise to a critical self-reflection in which the non-disabled person realises their potential error, its unfittingness, and the morally problematic nature of said emotional response. People we take to be thoughtful, considerate, and progressive still find themselves feeling pity, and recognise the dissonance between their beliefs and their reactions. As such, this paper was born out of the awareness of a gap between beliefs and emotional experiences, particularly with regard to the emotional reactions of some non-disabled people towards some disabled ones.

An easy explanation of this gap could stem from the familiar distinction between implicit and explicit attitudes: one could argue that our emotional responses are the direct and obvious consequences of not endorsing these beliefs *implicitly*, at the level of the fast, intuitive and partially instinctive system of reasoning that cognitive scientists call System 1 (Evans 2003; Kahneman 2003). And in fact, this might be the right explanation in many cases: it may well be that it accounts for the *psychological* phenomenon of feeling pity despite not explicitly believing that disabled lives are pitiable. However, we think this gap is nonetheless a worthwhile starting point for a *normative* investigation concerning the fittingness and moral permissibility of the pity and compassion sometimes felt by non-disabled persons for disabled individuals.

Here's an overview of our argument. In Section 1, we address some potential concerns about the aims and scope of our analysis, explain our background assumptions about disability, and discuss differences between disability and other historically marginalised identity traits. In Section 2, we present the case against pity as it has been traditionally made by disabled activists and scholars, according to which pity felt toward disabled people is both unfitting and morally impermissible, insofar as pity is necessarily hierarchising and condescending. We also discuss the possibility of distinguishing pity from compassion and arguing that compassion is morally permissible, and show how this move is rejected by some scholars. In Section 3, we re-examine both pity and compassion, and their distinction, through the lens of three different approaches: empirical, Buddhist, and feminist. We contend that a derogatory notion of pity is not entirely supported by empirical evidence and is influenced by a Western masculinist approach to ethics, but also concede that compassion is, in any case, morally superior to pity. Section 4 proposes that, when certain conditions are satisfied, both emotions can be fitting and morally permissible responses to disabled people (and their caregivers). To preview our conclusion, we suggest that pity can be fitting, but only when it responds to *localised* badness connected to disability or to systemic disadvantages incurred by disabled people (so, not when it responds to an alleged badness of disability *per se*). These cases are, probably, quite limited, and as such the contexts in which pity is fitting may be narrow in scope and require substantive consideration and reflection on behalf of the pitier. Additionally, pity can be temporarily morally permissible, provided that it's soon replaced by a compassionate, sympathetic response that is aware of the pitfalls of implicit ableism, committed to bringing about justice and equality for all, and imbued with a perception of our interconnectedness and of the suffering and vulnerability of all beings.

1. Disability Versus Other Historically Marginalised Identity Traits

Now, the nature of this inquiry may rightly raise eyebrows. We're all too aware of the concerns arising from non-disabled persons speculating on the lives and well-being of disabled ones. One could see this inquiry as objectifying, suggesting that disability is an inappropriate locus of voyeuristic consideration. Furthermore, by some perspectives on disability as value neutral, asking whether non-disabled people can *ever* justifiably feel pity or compassion for disabled individuals is a non-starter.

To address the voyeurism worry, some clarifications about the scope of our analysis are in order. We focus on pity felt by *non-disabled* people for several reasons. First, because we were moved to write this paper out of an awareness of deeply-felt emotional experiences, particularly those of non-disabled people who care about disability justice. The emotional responses, attitudes, and views of non-disabled people *matter pragmatically and politically*, insofar as they have a huge impact on the lives of disabled people. Whether or not that is itself just is another question, but it is the reality of the context in which we all currently exist. In other words, this is not a paper in ideal theory; we're interested in the lived emotional and sociopolitical realities of our current day and age. We considered analysing also the emotional responses of disabled people towards other disabled individuals, but realised we couldn't handle the additional layer of complexity in a single paper.

Moving on to a second worry, namely the question of how the goodness, badness, or neutrality of disability plays a role in the permissibility of our line of questioning. We agree with many core tenets of a value-neutral perspective on disability, particularly the insistence that in the vast majority of cases, disability only makes a person's life go better or worse in virtue of other things that it's combined with, and the idea that disability, like many other identity traits, is a valuable component of human diversity worth celebrating (as is argued in Barnes 2014 and 2016 and by the disability justice movement more broadly). For example, locomotive disabilities are only bad for a person if they cannot afford a wheelchair, if they are the target of prejudice and discriminatory attitudes, if they live in environments exclusively built for bipedal locomotion, and so on. This *mere-difference view of disability* is popular among disability theorists (e.g. Begon 2020; Barnes 2016; Campbell and Stramondo 2017; Peabody Smith 2022; Reynolds 2022). Barnes powerfully conceptualises the mere-difference view in *The Minority Body* (2016), where she argues that disability is analogous to other identity minoritised traits that are themselves value neutral. On this view, just as being racialised as Black is only bad for a person in racist contexts, physical disability is only bad for a person in ableist contexts.

However, despite our overarching agreement with the mere-difference view, we diverge from certain aspects of it in that we don't think disability is wholly analogous to traits such as race, sexuality, or gender identity. (Barnes (2020), too, recognises certain differences, as do others.) The appropriateness of asking our question is sensitive to salient contextual differences between disability and other forms of human diversity. So, while we largely agree with a mere-difference view of disability, we think that there are relevant aspects of disability that explain why we might have certain emotional responses to certain cases of disability that we do not have to, say, race.

To wit: disability is an internally heterogeneous category, a feature which is reflected in the notorious difficulty of defining disability and the suggestion that it may be better thought of as a cluster concept or family resemblance (Timpe 2022; Wasserman and Aas 2023). There's a sense in which disabilities vary from each other in different ways than things like race or gender identity differ from one another, and this disanalogy affects the question of potential local intrinsic badness of disability, as we explore later in the paper. Race, for example, does not have a genetic basis, whereas many disabilities do; while there are genetic cohorts that track

group-level differences across racial groups, these do not neatly map onto extant racial categories (see, for instance, Duello et al. 2021; Dupré 2012; Lala and Feldman 2024 and Peebles 2025).

Relatedly, there is a connection between disability, technology, and medicine that is unique to disability, compared to other identity categories, even within the context of a social-constructionist approach to disability (Lim 2018). Many disabilities require medical or technological support (even where that support is, correctly, not curative in nature). While aspects of these connections impact other identity categories, the specific relationships between disability, technology, and medicine are different than the ones between, say, sexuality, technology, and medicine; attempts to tidily analogise between these analyses would be like comparing apples to oranges.

Finally, some disabilities are congenital but many are acquired, often in traumatic and painful ways. Coming out as queer or undergoing gender transition can be traumatic and painful, but *being* gay or trans is not acquired in the way that some disabilities are. Likewise with race: a person is *born that way*.[2] The sense in which one can *become* disabled versus become some other identity feature is quite distinct. Disability is unique in having the feature of the potential acquisition (and transformative change) that can occur at any point in a person's life. Further, we can experience short-term disability in a way in which we rarely experience short-term racialisation or queerness. So, there are differences in transition costs for disability that are absent or distinct for other identity traits (and which may in part explain the pre-theoretical intuition that disability can be something bad for a person).

In sum, we agree with the central idea of a value-neutral view of disability, that disability itself is not inherently bad. But we do not think it's fully akin to other minority traits, for the reasons outlined above. We don't make any universal claims about the nature of disability. Our argument aligns with a number of views on disability, particularly those conscious of the socially constructed aspects of disabled experience, the neutrality of disability in-itself, and the possibility of social justice improving the lives of those with disabilities.

2. The Case Against Pity (and Compassion)

At an unreflective level, it may seem like feelings of pity reflect virtuous aspects of a person's character: in recognising an unfortunate circumstance or in witnessing an injustice, feeling pity toward another is a result of one's sensitivity, not one's indifference. Further, as mentioned, at a pre-theoretical level, disability may seem a wholly appropriate cause of pity, and those feeling pity towards disabled persons may take themselves to possess a virtuous emotional character.

But it's common to hear people reject pity with expressions like "I don't want your pity!" This would be surprising if pity were universally perceived as an altruistic response. That reaction is explained by the fact that we don't tend to pity people we perceive as our equals in circumstance. We pity those we perceive as lacking, as unfortunate, or as somehow lesser than ourselves. That is, pity is commonly understood as *hierarchical*,

2. More precisely, one is born with certain phenotypical characteristics that only partly determine, according to many social constructionist views of race, how one is racialised. So, it's possible for someone to move countries, for example, and be racialised in a different way. Some people from the Caribbeans or Latin America, for instance, where racial categories are nuanced and numerous, report "becoming Black" in the US, where Blackness is often assigned on the basis of the so-called "one drop rule." The difference with disability remains, but how strong it is depends on what view of race one subscribes to.

expressing the pitying person's perception (conscious or not) of some way in which they take themselves to be superior to, or better off than the pitied.

Furthermore, stereotypical understandings of certain social groups as pitiable play an important role in social hierarchies. According to the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al. 2007; Cuddy et al. 2009; Cikara and Fiske 2012; Cuddy et al. 2011), stereotypes toward outgroups are shaped by perceptions across two core dimensions: warmth and competence. For instance, some outgroups are the target of envy, insofar as they are seen as highly competent but unlikable (for instance, the ultra-wealthy). Some outgroups are both disliked and perceived as low in competence, such as drug addicts, or unhoused people. Disabled people (together with the elderly) are the target of stereotypes that are relatively high in warmth but low in competence, and the characteristic emotional output, according to Fiske and her collaborators, is pity.

It's not hard to see why this is the case, given that disability is often seen as the lack or damage of an intrinsic good, a curtailment of valuable opportunities, a negative departure from species norms, or a hindrance to core life functions that contribute to our survival and reproduction.[3] But this approach fails to capture the huge impact played by widespread ableism, the inaccessibility of most physical and social environments, the vast heterogeneity of disability, the role assistive technology can play, and a myriad of other factors that affect disabled people's quality of life, which has been shown to be comparable to the quality of life of those without disabilities. This is referred to as the "ableist conflation," capturing the mistaken view of non-disabled persons that disabled ones must suffer because of their disabilities (see e.g. Albrecht and Devlieger 1999; Campbell et al. 2021; Reynolds 2022). An additional factor that impacts the views of non-disabled people towards disabled ones is the widespread false belief that disability itself entails a lower quality of life. This view has been debunked by multiple empirical studies of disabled persons' self-reported quality of life, which matches that of non-disabled people. The so-called "disability paradox," an outdated term coined by Albrecht and Devlieger (1999), is a misnomer, as there is sufficient data at this point to indicate that disabled people enjoying a high quality of life shouldn't be paradoxical at all.

"Piss on pity" is thus a popular slogan and rallying cry in the disability activist community. It refuses in no uncertain terms the notion that disability is an inherently tragic condition. The slogan originated in the early 90s in the United Kingdom in response to the ITV Telethon, a fundraiser that intentionally provoked pity in viewers by portraying disabled lives as tragic to raise money for various charities. Protestors stood outside the television studios with the slogan emblazoned on posters and t-shirts, amping up visibility for disabled peoples' own voices, the view that their lives were not inherently tragic, and reframing the conversation about the value and reality of disabled lives. This is also around the time when the disability rights movement achieved political victories such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990). Joseph Shapiro (1994) recounts this history in a book called, *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement*.

3. This perspective is reflected in the *medical model* of disability, which positions disability as akin to disease, both of which are conditions to be avoided and, when possible, cured. This view remains widespread despite powerful counter-claims made by disability theorists and activists (Oliver 2004; Silvers 2003; Shapiro 1994; Williams 1996). Many disability theorists and activists favour a *social model* of disability (Oliver 1983; Silvers 1999; see also the activism of Ed Roberts and Judy Heumann in the 1970s). Against the medical model, social models of disability hold that much of the negativity of disability is in fact a contingent effect caused by systemic ableism. Impairments (physical or cognitive differences) are distinct from disability: it's society that disables persons with prevailing attitudes, including pity, and with environments built for the non-disabled majority. Note that there are philosophers who espouse the view that disability is socially-constructed while rejecting the social model of disability in its original manifestations (e.g. Barnes 2016).

It's not a coincidence that the first Disability Pride Parade was held the same year the ADA passed. Disability pride parades, much like gay pride parades, reject being shamed or pitied for one's identity, and vindicate not just the worth, but the beauty and the value of disabled lives and bodies. As Barnes vividly puts it: "Disability pride says that we may have *minority* bodies, but we don't have—we refuse to have—tragic bodies" (2016, 186). Garland-Thomson has argued for the conservation of disability, highlighting the value of its heterogeneity biologically, culturally, and politically, and emphasising its potential as a generative resource (2012). Other theorists, including Carlson (2009), Kittay (1999; 2019), Lindemann (2001; 2004), and Tremain (2005) have each advanced value-neutral or disability-positive perspectives on a range of disabilities.

Among philosophers of disability, Joseph Stramondo has directly addressed the topic of pity and argued that pity isn't merely an emotion but also a power relation, making pity directed towards disabled persons a *social harm* (2010, 122; see also Cureton 2020). In fact, Stramondo argues that unequal power relations are a *necessary precondition* to pity's existence (122). To analyse pity solely in terms of its emotional nature ignores the specific contexts in which pity is felt (that is, contexts in which a prevailing feature is attitudes of ableism and their resulting structures of power, both of which position disabled people beneath those without disabilities). Even if altruistic in intent, pity emerges from the perception of certain features as undesirable. That perceived undesirability is the product of social oppression and misguided evaluations of the lived experiences of certain types of persons—the source of whose negative lived experiences is, as a social model of disability illustrates, largely the result of negative attitudes like ableism. To add insult to injury, pity plays a role in veiling a system of domination between groups of persons using the guise of altruistic concern. The power differential between pity's subject and its object, coupled with the perceived altruism of the pitier, masks the systemic oppression faced by disabled people. Cureton refers to these impulses and the actions they spur as "offensive beneficence," capturing the added complication of undesired debts of gratitude pushed upon disabled persons who didn't want pity, or acts of beneficence, in the first place (2020).

A core feature of Stramondo's contribution to the pity and disability literature is the disambiguation of pity as a primarily emotional phenomenon, and the degree to which pity is necessarily socially and politically embedded. He emphasises how most contemporary philosophical treatments of pity continue to characterise pity as primarily emotional as opposed to contextually determined by social power relations, a point that we agree with, and with which we ultimately believe our argument to be concordant (2010, 123). We'll bracket this for now, and say more about why this is the case once we've more thoroughly investigated the questions of the fittingness and moral permissibility of pity felt by non-disabled people towards disabled ones.

Across this literature, then, pity is rejected as both *unfitting* (disabled lives aren't inherently tragic or unfortunate, so they don't merit pity) and as *morally impermissible* (pity reinforces unequal power relations and causes social harm). Therefore, anyone defending pity, even partially, would have to address two distinct problems:

1. A conceptual problem: pity involves condescension, hierarchy, and a downwards-cast gaze from the subject feeling pity towards the pitied object;

2. A practical problem: in necessarily involving condescension, pity reinforces unequal power relations.

But could there be an alternative to pity?

2.1 Ought We to Consider, Instead, Compassion?

The distinction between pity and compassion is a fairly recent one. Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* (2007, 1385b13–16) defines *eleos* as a distress at an apparent evil happening to someone who doesn't deserve it; he opposes this emotion to *nemesis* (pain at undeserved good fortune, usually translated as "indignation"). *Eleos* used to be translated as "pity," but commentators started using "compassion" to avoid the modern negative connotation of "pity."[4] When we find the terms "pity" and "compassion" in Adam Smith's *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1976), they're used synonymously. Robert Kimball argues that it isn't until the 19th century that we start seeing a differentiation between "benevolent pity" (which later becomes compassion, as used by, e.g., Kristjánsson 2018) and "contemptuous pity" (2004, 303). Nussbaum also remarks on the fact that "in modern English [pity] has acquired connotations of condescension and superiority that it did not have earlier" (2013, 416, n. 7) and distinguishes "egalitarian compassion" from "derogatory pity" (373). While some authors, such as Cartwright (1984), argue that a negative conception of pity can be already found in Spinoza, most scholars converge in identifying Nietzsche as the fiercest and most influential critic of pity. But we should not make too much of linguistic changes, since we find the gist of the distinction between these two emotional responses, even if the terms used differ, as Darwall argues with regard to the Humean treatment of these passions in the *Treatise*.[5] Sometimes "sympathy" or "empathy" are used to refer to the notion of compassion that we highlighted above.

In any case, the literature on sympathy, empathy, and related psychological mechanisms is enormous, and these terms are often used in different and incompatible ways.[6] Whatever the exact reconstruction of this historical devolution of the moral status of pity may be (which can be situated, at any rate, in the modern age), in contemporary literature compassion is standardly presented as void of the problematic features that pity seems to have (Caouette and Price 2018). Pity seemingly involves a scorning gaze shared with disgust and contempt (Fiske 2011), i.e., a condescending (Snow 1991), "hierarchising" (Darwall 2018), or depersonalising[7] attitude, such that the pitied is perceived as different, distant, and other (Carr 1999; Darwall 2018). Compassion, on the other hand, is alleged to involve a levelled gaze, according to which the other is seen as similar, close and same, a sympathetic "suffering with" (Boleyn-Fitzgerald 2003). From the detached and comparative nature of pity stems its potential passivity and inactivity: when we pity, the difference with the self is salient and we may be less inclined to relieve the pitied's suffering, whereas compassion may entail a push to make things better (Kimball 2004).

Regardless of what we term these emotional responses, the important takeaway is that one, namely pity, is seen as hierarchical in nature and may evoke feelings of disgust, superiority, fear, or other othering attitudes; the other, namely compassion, involves perceiving the other as equal in worth, though not in circumstance, may involve the desire to help the other, and may include an acknowledgement that the other's suffering could be one's own.

4. There's a large literature devoted to interpreting the Aristotelian notion of pity, and its relation to virtues and character traits. Among the many views, two influential ones are by Martha Nussbaum (1996, 2003, 2013), who defends a version of *eleos* (pity/compassion) as a central virtue (for a critique of her account, see Crisp 2008), and Kristján Kristjánsson (2014, 2018), who thinks of *eleos* (which he translates as "pity") as a precondition for the virtue proper of compassion.

5. See Darwall 2018 for a short review of some historical accounts of pity and compassion (195–99).

6. For a recent interdisciplinary account of empathy that reviews much of this literature, see Maibom 2022. Caouette and Price (2018), in their introduction to a volume on the moral psychology of compassion, review some of the different and opposing ways in which scholars have presented the difference between compassion, empathy, and sympathy.

7. What we mean by depersonalising is that when we pity someone, we may see only their condition, not the person: the wheelchair, not the individual sitting in it. We thank Fredrik Westerlund for this point.

Most of the aforementioned philosophical distinctions have not been justified by appeal to robust psychological evidence, which is, to be fair, scarce, as we discuss later in the paper (Section 3.1). Yet, they reflect widespread cultural assumptions and the way in which these words are used in the societal contexts relevant to the present discussion. No matter the exact genealogy of the contemporary notion of pity (which we could not possibly reconstruct in full here), it's undoubtable that it has assumed a strongly negative light, one that legitimises and supports the disability activist community's imperative to "piss on" it.

2.2. Reconsidering Pity

Having now clarified two distinct problems with pity, and a distinction between a hierarchical versus a levelled emotional response towards another person's (presumed) suffering, we can analyse the emotional responses of non-disabled people towards disabled people more carefully. We can also consider the role played by *expressions* of pity, such as acts of offensive beneficence or comments ("That must be so hard!" "You are so strong").

Let's start by addressing the fittingness of emotional reactions of pity. First, imagine a person (we'll call him A) who sees a wheelchair user approach a grocery store's automatic doors, which happen not to be working that day. They've been sealed off with caution tape and bear a sign asking customers to use the other entrance. A watches someone else walk up to the alternative entrance, which has stairs and a standard hinged doorway. A feels pity for the wheelchair user. A approaches the wheelchair user, commenting, "As if your life isn't already hard enough! Can I grab anything inside for you?"

Next, take a case where a non-disabled person (let's call her B) meets a woman who tells her about her significantly and multiply disabled child. B pities the woman, who (she imagines) has tremendous caretaking responsibilities, and worries that go above and beyond those of other parents regarding the safety, social acceptance, and longevity of her child. Nonetheless, being well-versed in disability theory and prevailing anti-pity attitudes, B suppresses her pity, instead inquiring more about the personality and interests of the child.

A's emotional reaction and his expression of pity can be analysed distinctly. Now, we don't know whether A feels pity for the wheelchair user because he uses a wheelchair, or because the wheelchair user is being inconvenienced by the store's temporary inaccessibility. Supposing A isn't aware of the disabled community's general rejection of pity, and that his pity is felt for being-a-wheelchair-user itself, A's reaction is unfitting, as A knows nothing about the wheelchair user's actual experiences or quality of life. A's expression of pity is also problematic: it is exactly this sort of "your life must be so hard" sentiment that rightfully offends its recipient.

B, on the other hand, represses her pity. The first reason B is right to repress her pity is that she doesn't know, yet, how her new friend perceives her situation; expressing pity towards someone who doesn't see their situation as unfortunate would be inappropriate. Consider our reaction when someone we don't know well tells us they got a divorce: caution is warranted, since we don't know whether that is good, bad, or mixed news. For some people, divorce is cause for celebration; for others, of mourning. For most people, it's… complicated.

Furthermore, a mother of a significantly disabled child in our ableist society is probably fatigued and burdened by others' expressions of pity. Even if she did agree that her situation is pitiable, she's probably not looking forward to being pitied over and over again.

Most importantly, B is aware of the rejection of pity in the disability-positive community, and aware of the social harms pity causes. Even if the caregiver of a disabled person feels her situation is pitiable, and even if she's not burdened by constant expressions of pity (a big "if"), it might still be impermissible to *express* or *act on* such pity, given that it risks reinforcing the oppression of disabled individuals. As Cureton (2016) suggests, absent significant empirical information relevant to offering help, and lacking moral or political knowledge about the specific ways in which our institutions have failed to accommodate or support a person, we don't have the same sort of good judgement that we do with, say, helping to carry a stroller up a set of stairs (86–87). Because social norms and awareness surrounding disability are already sub-par, we should be even more cautious in expressing or acting on pity than in other cases, because we cannot rely on our standard knowledge base.

However, we aren't sure that B's mere *feelings* of pity were wholly unfitting. Or, that A's mere feeling is unfitting, were his feeling a response to the lack of access as opposed to the disability itself. One could argue that B's pity was about the *circumstances* of the individuals involved, and not disability itself; pity felt towards the lack of support for the mother, or the limited access available for the child may have been fitting. Recognition of the fact that disability can be negative for a person when mixed with other factors is consistent with a mere-difference view of disability, thus making pity about those factors fitting. In other words, it matters whether the emotional reaction is towards the disability itself or the context of the disability.

So, it seems that, as a tentative conclusion, pity can be *fitting*, but only when it's felt for *extrinsic factors or circumstances*. Again, pity towards disability itself is not fitting; however, because disability can be bad depending on other factors, pity can be fitting when those extrinsic factors make it the case that the disability shapes individual experience in certain ways. In these limited occasions, it is a fact of the matter that the pitied person *is* experiencing something that creates a hierarchy between that individual and the observer, whether that be extreme vulnerability, a certain type of lacking, or an unavoidable suffering.

Let's then think more seriously about pity's moral permissibility. We'll set aside the worry that emotional arousal may not be wholly within a person's control, and thus that a person cannot be held responsible for their emotions. This is a vexed and complex question that we cannot deal with here.[8] Let's assume that people have *some* control over their emotional responses, by habituation and cultivation of alternative patterns of reaction to stimuli, and by actively engaging with members of communities where these alternative patterns are experienced and expressed. Assuming that, can *unexpressed* pity ever be morally permissible?

It seems even unexpressed pity (whether felt towards the disability itself, or its extrinsic and mitigating factors) could be taken to be morally impermissible because of the sense in which unreflective pity necessarily entails hierarchical and condescending evaluations of the other.

A plausible counterargument at this point is that the emotional response that *should be* felt (independently of whether *we* felt it) is a compassionate one. As Roger Crisp writes: "Shapiro's book on the civil rights of people with disabilities, *No Pity*, could not comprehensibly have been called No Compassion" (2008, 234). Compassion might be the response to cultivate when faced, for example, with the recognition of extreme vulnerability in certain cases of disability.

8. Holroyd et al. (2017) provide a review on implicit bias and moral responsibility; Sherman (1999) defends the view that we are responsible for our emotions.

Stramondo, however, preempts this move from pity to compassion, when he claims that "whether we call it pity, empathy or compassion" (2010, 123–24), pity is reflective not just of affect but of the power relations between the pitier and the pitied. He's responding here to Susan Stocker's (2002) defence of pity toward disabled people. Stocker encourages a translation from pity to what she calls empathy (and which others call sympathy, see e.g. Darwall 1998). Stramondo objects that Stocker seems unaware of the social sources of the suffering felt by disabled people (123). He writes, "Describing and analyzing pity only in terms of emotion does not seem to recognize that the suffering of disability, and any other form of existence that would be pitiable, is socially created" (124). We accept this point, and agree that pity is only fitting or morally permissible when it is felt both *in conjunction with* awareness of the socially constructed components of the suffering of disabled people, and *because of* those external features that cause that suffering. This claim seems responsive to Stramondo's insistence on the social context that undergirds pity. The same can be said of compassion: even with the levelled gaze compassion entails, it is only fitting or morally permissible when aware of the social context of disabled people.

Other authors support a broader sense of compassion as a fitting response to at least some disabilities. For instance, Lawrence Becker (2020) talks about "kind and compassionate ways" in which people with "serious agentic disabilities" (80) may be helped in care centres. More generally, compassion has been defended as a crucial emotion in relations of care and in medical settings (Boleyn-Fitzgerald 2003; Ekstrom 2012; see Sinclair et al. 2016 for a review of the vast empirical literature).

However, recall Stramondo's insistence that "pity, empathy or compassion" are equivalently problematic. Even though we have spent some time articulating the differences between pity and compassion, and the different fittingness conditions of each, we understand why: there is such a prevalent ableist bias in our society that even when an emotion may be fitting, it may still end up reinforcing ableist biases and misguided conceptions of disability, and it might still exacerbate extant relations of power. After all, if a disabled person perceives themselves to be on the receiving end of unexpressed compassion (and, even more so, pity), they might still rightly assume it stems from a wrongheaded conception of their lived experience.

So, it seems that we're still bound to reject both pity and compassion even when they may be, in limited circumstances, fitting, insofar as they both end up evoking, in our society, pity's hierarchical and downgrading attitude toward its *target* and not merely towards one's circumstances. Perhaps, then, we need a stronger move, one that requires us to introduce a more nuanced approach to how we think of these emotions.

3. Pity and Compassion Re-Examined

The philosophical perspectives on pity and compassion that we've presented so far, even when divergent, have in common that they mostly proceed from the armchair. Such a method of investigation is unavoidably affected by the biases and perceptions of a fairly localised subject base: scholars from the anglosphere, a restricted sample of perspectives which has been robustly criticised elsewhere (see, e.g., Knobe and Nichols 2017 for a review; Flanagan 2016, 2021; Van Norden 2017). As noted above, the derogatory characterisation of pity that seems so intuitive to anglophone philosophers today is arguably an invention of Western modern philosophy, to be especially credited to Spinoza, Kant, and, above all, Nietzsche (Cartwright 1984; Stocker 2002; Breen et al. 2025).

Both pity and compassion as discussed in the previous section are culturally constructed, rather than universals. In this section, we present alternative perspectives on pity and compassion, and suggest, first, that a wholly negative outlook on pity shouldn't be assumed or conceded too quickly, and, second and relatedly, that its relation to compassion may be more complex than it appears. We draw from the cognitive sciences, Buddhism, and feminism, so as to expand our reference values and incorporate different cultural and disciplinary perspectives. We chose these approaches for their heterogeneity of perspective and evidence, along with our own areas of awareness. Data in all three subsections suggest that a more sympathetic perception of pity is associated with feminine-coded approaches to morality. We concede that this section falls short of providing a truly cross-cultural examination of these emotions, which goes beyond the scope of the paper and isn't currently possible due to the paucity of empirical data on these emotions.

3.1 Empirical Approaches to Pity and Compassion

There's surprisingly little evidence on *pity alone*. Even more surprisingly, studies that are *widely* cited as providing evidence about pity (such as Dijker et al. 1996, which aims to study "pity" arousal processes) include, in their discussion and references, work on *any pro-social attitudes and motivations*, including empathy, sympathy, and altruism, and which therefore cannot provide any reliable evidence for our purposes.

However, four studies by Florian et al. (1999) attempt to analyse pity itself in a systematic way.[9] After highlighting the paucity of empirical work on pity, the authors stress how the recent literature is influenced by the negative view of the aforementioned modern European philosophers. They then draw from previous research to show that other people's suffering activates in an agent a cognitive process of causal attribution. If the suffering is perceived as uncontrollable, then the perceiver feels pity and *is* motivated to help the pitied (*contra* what is speculated, e.g., by Kimball 2004). If the suffering is perceived as caused by the sufferer, then the resulting emotional response is anger and withholding help. This hypothesis has been supported by subsequent studies.

Florian et al. apply a *multidimensional approach* to pity, and develop the Pity Experience Inventories, which identify *three patterns of pity*. (Following other multidimensional approaches to emotion types—e.g. Protasi 2021—we could call them *varieties of pity*.) These patterns "vary along the prosocial–egocentric and passive–active dimensions and consist of coherent clusters of feelings, cognitions, wishes, and behaviors" (1999, 19).

The first pattern is labelled "compassionate caring" and involves feelings of attachment and sympathy toward the sufferer, action-oriented thoughts, wishes, and behaviours that are directed at caring for and alleviating the suffering. It's a pro-social approach that correlates with confidence in being able to help others. The authors

9. It's important to note that cognitive sciences have been criticised as parochial and guilty of generalising from a "WEIRD" (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic) set of subjects (Henrich et al. 2010), and this set of studies does suffer from such limitations, having been conducted on Israeli people only, a limitation the authors themselves acknowledge. However, this concern is assuaged here by the fact that the very notions of pity and compassion we have been discussing so far also emerge from a Western tradition, so these studies still represent a valuable empirical counterpoint. Furthermore, they surely fare better compared to the aforementioned Dijker et al. 1996, which studied emotional responses *towards people with AIDS in the 90s*—not the most generalisable results.

note how this pattern may track what many philosophers have called compassion, sympathy, or empathy, even though this is associated with the word "pity" in the language of the study subjects (Hebrew).[10]

The second pattern is labelled "false superiority," and involves condescension, insecurity, and distancing, with associated feelings of arrogance, repulsion, and superiority, thoughts of asymmetry between the subject and the sufferer, a sense of personal insecurity, anxiety, discomfort, fear, and relief at one's own better position. The distancing position is expressed though wishes that one may forget and escape the pity-evoking situation. This pattern tracks the modern philosophical conception of pity and is positively associated with low level of personal control.

The third pattern is labelled "passive identification," and is somewhat intermediate between the first two. On the one hand, it resembles compassionate caring insofar as it involves genuine concern for the sufferer and is not egoistic; on the other, this altruistic concern doesn't materialise into actual concrete steps to alleviate suffering, and it instantiates a personal distress coupled with a sense of helplessness and despair, due to its association with low level of personal control. So, the person is flooded with a sort of inert discomfort. This pattern has, however, a unique value component: an emphasis on security and tradition.[11] This pattern has components that sometimes enter into the philosopher's condemnation of pity.

Florian et al. remark that a person's value system and beliefs about control partially determine which pattern is more prominent in their pity experiences, and that *gender and religiosity* are also contributors. In another study, women and religious people scored higher than men in both passive identification and compassionate caring, with the two factors being independent of each other (15).

These data can be interpreted in different ways. One option is to suggest reserving the term "pity" only for the false superiority pattern. However, if this analysis is correct, then a multifactor characterisation better explains the complex ways in which people experience pity. In another instance, a cross-cultural study by Cuddy and collaborators (2011) shows that in East-Asian collectivist cultures (such as Japan, Hong Kong, and South Korea), non-disabled subjects perceive a smaller gap between themselves and disabled people, and feel *less* pity (which the researchers conceptualise as a condescending emotion) than non-disabled subjects in individualistic cultures such as the United States. So it could be the case that a more empirically- and culturally-responsive option is for philosophers to rethink their conceptions of pity (as necessarily derogatory and hierarchising), while still emphasising that the compassionate caring pattern (or, for simplicity, compassion) is the morally preferable attitude.

10. The term used is "rachamim" a word that is usually translated in English as "pity," but the first study that constituted the basis of this research also used "hemla," which is usually translated as "compassion." This first study showed that the two words were used interchangeably by speakers, and so the authors chose to use in subsequent studies the more common word, namely "pity." One might cast doubt on the general validity of their results insofar as Hebrew does have significant semantic differences with English, and is just one language among many others. But so is English, and yet much evidence gathered from pools of English-speaking subjects (in WEIRD communities such as US universities) is often taken to be indicative of emotional experience that generalises to other Western contexts. More importantly, *the inventories developed by these researchers was shown to be significantly associated with other theoretically-relevant psychological constructs*, such as attachment styles and attitude toward prosocial behaviour, thus additionally validating the scales.

11. This may be the kind of pity that Sartre identifies in his critique of the pity felt towards Jews in WWII, which Stramondo refers to in his paper and which he instead interprets along the lines of "passive superiority," which seems to be more morally problematic insofar as it is more derogatory and selfish.

3.2 Buddhist Approaches to Pity and Compassion

Traditional Buddhism is, like most other ancient religions across the world, ableist in many ways. "Buddhist texts mention disability as one of several impediments to progressing on the path to liberation" (Harris 2016, 37). Disabilities are thought to be caused by negative karmic merit (*kamma*), i.e., by having committed bad actions in a present or past life (Naemiratch and Manderson 2009; Harris 2016; Kumari 2019).[12]

Compassion (*karuna*) is one of the four *brahmavihāras*, the central virtuous affective experiences in Buddhist ethics, together with love (*mettā*), sometimes translated as loving-kindness, sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekka*). The *brahmavihāra*s are also referred to as the four boundless or immeasurable qualities, because they can be extended to all sentient beings and felt in a "boundless," that is, increasingly deep and sincere, way (Eppert 2020; McRae 2018).

Compassion is the affective and cognitive response to suffering, and is importantly different from grief or sorrow, which is its "near-enemy" (*contra* Boleyn-Fitzgerald's (2003) claim that pity is compassion's near-enemy). The Four Boundless Qualities are mutually supportive. Importantly for our discussion, compassion cannot be achieved without equanimity, a neutral attitude towards all sentient beings, disconnected from pleasure or aversion towards them. McRae defines equanimity as freedom from vicious habits of the mind, a state positively characterised by feelings of tranquillity and spaciousness which allow one to engage in virtuous ways with oneself and others (2017). True compassion isn't biased, and thus is arguably free from a mistaken understanding of disability as inherently negative or tragic. True compassion, within this tradition, is neither patronising nor belittling, and it's compatible with fighting against injustice and discrimination.[13]

Pity, in its contemporary philosophical connotation, isn't discussed in ancient Buddhist texts. A study by Naemiratch and Manderson (2009) of a Thai rural community analyses the use of the word *songsarn*, which denotes feelings of sympathy towards someone who has experienced a misfortune or disadvantage, but in a detached way—not a "feeling with"—and is thus interpreted by the researchers as closer to Western pity. *Songsarn* played a central role in responses to disability. Importantly, *all* non-disabled people interviewed by the authors expressed feeling it toward disabled people, but it was received by disabled people in different ways, depending on their own experience of disability.

Those who were born with disabilities or acquired them early in life didn't think of themselves as being disabled (given the negative connotation of disability in that context), but accepted being the object of *songsarn* for pragmatic reasons: it motivated others to be inclusive and provide accommodations and opportunities in terms of education and employment.

Those who had lost physical function and mobility later in life, and felt "incomplete" because of it, had a more varied response to *songsarn*. Some accepted it as instantiations of loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuna*), while others felt looked down upon. Elderly people, who conceived of physical disability as an

12. The same belief is also held in Hinduism (Gupta 2011; Kumari 2019). Many monotheistic religions traditionally see physical disability as an expression of divine punishment (see Al-Aoufi et al. 2012 on Islam). For a historical review of representative Christian views on disability, see Timpe 2020, where he writes: "Even though it's not a central theme, many of the Christian Scriptures contain a close connection between disability, on the one hand, and sin, impurity, or disobedience on the other" (208). See also Reynolds 2022 on suffering as a form of divine punishment.

13. We don't have the space to do justice to even just Emily McRae's rich interpretive work on the boundless qualities (2013, 2017, 2018, 2019), let alone the Buddhist tradition as a whole. McRae also discusses the role of equanimity in remedying ignorance (2019) and defends a Buddhist-feminist approach to the elimination of bias (2013).

inevitable life stage, accepted *songsarn* as an apt emotional response young people should feel toward the elderly, motivating filial piety.

Finally, there was a third group, which was the most negatively affected by disability. These subjects were mostly men and had become severely physically disabled due to injuries. They all spoke angrily and were the most likely to cry, appear depressed, and even suicidal in some cases. They felt stripped of their dignity and personhood, and seemed not only influenced by shared Thai notions of incompleteness and bad *kamma* but also by *normative expectations of masculinity*. They felt like a burden to their relatives (some of them going as far as to voluntarily divorce their wives and go away from the home), ashamed they couldn't be family providers anymore.

While the distinction between *songsarn* and *karuna* may seem to mirror the one between pity and compassion, the similarity is only partial insofar as in Buddhism disability is perceived as part of the *suffering inherent to all life*, despite being understood to be a result of bad *kamma*. Furthermore, in this Thai rural context we find a striking similarity to the patterns found in the urban Israeli context examined by Florian et al.: men, more frequently than women, tend to interpret expressions of sympathy as necessarily patronising. (That said, *songsarn* is decidedly more morally problematic than *karuna*, insofar as it lacks equanimity and relies on the perception of disabled people as suffering *in virtue of their disability*, seen as bad-difference and thus feared.)

In general, the concern with *equality and autonomy* that characterises much post-Nietzschean modern philosophy is absent in Buddhist philosophy. To reiterate, Buddhism is infused with an awareness of shared suffering and the vulnerability of all beings. In Stephen Harris's words: "Disability studies can benefit from the careful analysis of impermanence, fragility and suffering developed in Buddhist texts, which suggests all humans lie somewhere in a spectrum of dependence and vulnerability that is often erroneously attributed to disabled persons alone" (2016, 45). Seen within this framework, neither compassion nor pity need be patronising, hierarchical, or incompatible with fighting against injustice or addressing avoidable suffering and discrimination.

3.3 Feminist Approaches to Pity and Compassion

Finally, let's return to contemporary Western philosophy, but with a different flavour. Again, we contend that the seeming consensus that pity *necessarily* involves condescension has been unduly influenced by the Nietzschean critique of Judeo-Christian morality as "slave morality" in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and the related condemnation of pity in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2014; 2019). But Nietzsche's condemnation may reflect more his own values than an essentially contemptuous or degrading nature of pity itself, and, as we're about to further argue, it may also reflect a gendered experience of pity and a *masculinist* approach to ethics and relationships. Within this approach, pity is perceived as emasculating, as feminising, and then, as a consequence, as downgrading and disrespectful. Care ethics, and in general feminist perspectives, suggest an alternative understanding.

Eamonn Callan (1988) acknowledges that pity in *typical* cases involves a perception of the pitied as helpless, as lacking control over their circumstances. However, he also suggests that our greatest misgivings stem from a particular variety of pity, namely *contemptuous* pity, involving disrespect for the other. Furthermore, he argues that respecting the personhood of others renders us "necessarily susceptible to feelings of pity when another is overwhelmed by misfortune, despite the fact that we would be disinclined to dwell on that emotion and ready to disguise its presence" (7). He draws from ethics of care to highlight that "the pitiless heart reveals a

pervasive and not just an isolated failure in the moral life. We obviously expect no pity from those who have pitiless hearts but we should also expect, with as much assurance, no mercy or justice or kindness because we know that they do not value us as persons" (10–11). In other words, while pity can often go wrong, it also expresses our care for people.

Among philosophers of disability, Eva Kittay has vindicated the importance of feminine-coded approaches to morality. She writes: "Love, empathetic concern, commitment, loyalty, compassion, and other attachments and emotions are important motivators to act on behalf of another" (2019, 174), and pushes back against Nietzsche-inspired critiques that care ethics is akin to slave morality (181–82). While she doesn't reevaluate pity, she rejects the idea that autonomy and equality are preconditions of legitimate moral relations and actions.

The prominent feminist scholar and activist bell hooks espoused a Buddhist (and Christian) approach to oppression (Medine 2022; Nittle 2023). She was much less sanguine than feminists who preceded her (such as Audre Lorde and Marilyn Frye) about the productiveness of anger, and instead championed *love* as a remedy to social problems (hooks 2000), and not just love towards oneself and members of one's communities as Lorde (1984) did.[14] As recounted by Nadra Nittle (2023), hooks was inspired by Buddhist scholar and activist Thích Nhâ´t Hanh to "compost" her anger and transform it into the useful energy of compassion.[15]

Darla Schumm (2010) takes inspiration from both the main tenets of Buddhism and from central notions in ethics of care to advocate for a "feminist disability ethics of compassion" (133) which aims to be political and transformative:

A feminist disability ethics of compassion also demands that we work to change the social and cultural structures and institutions that historically have subjugated persons with disabilities. A feminist disability ethics of compassion also insists on a rigorous refusal of a charity-based system of care, which reinscribes structures of domination and oppression and which does not work toward true social change and inclusion and justice for all. (136)

Schumm's approach may be the closest to ours. However, there are elements in Schumm's discussion that risk reinforcing the idea that disability necessarily involves suffering, such as when she writes of "an understanding that we are all interconnected and that the suffering and healing of your flesh is the suffering and healing of my flesh" (135). Locating the source of suffering in the "flesh" seemingly locates the harm of disability primarily in the body (or mind) of disabled people rather than in social oppression.[16] We therefore need to be very careful not only in how we define pity and compassion, but also with the ways in which we let ourselves feel them. To this implementation we turn now.

14. However, Rima Vesely-Flad (2022) identifies elements of Theravada Buddhism in Audre Lorde's writings. More generally, Vesely-Flad argues that Buddhism is a tool for liberation against racist oppression and highlights the continuity and crosspollination between Black Buddhism and the Black Radical tradition. While the fact that prominent Black philosophers, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and bell hooks, were influenced by Buddhism is well-known, Vesely-Flad argues that even the writings of authors who did not explicitly identify as Buddhist, such as Audre Lorde and James Baldwin, "illuminate core dharma teachings" (216). In particular, Lorde "demonstrates the synthesis between Buddhism and Black Feminism and her relevance for contemporary dharma teachers and practitioners" (216).

15. We thank Megan Smithling for supporting our research on this topic.

16. We thank Joseph Stramondo for highlighting this risk to us.

4. Limited Fittingness and Occasional Moral Permissibility of Pity and Compassion

Imagine the following scenarios:

> *The Unlucky Disabled Activist*
> Two disabled people with fluctuating impairments plan to attend a huge march on Washington for disability rights. On the morning of the march, one of them has a flare-up and cannot go. The other person gets to go, and is thus better off and feels quite relieved about that. They pity the person who can't go, even though there is no condescension or denigration involved. After all, the same could have happened to them.[17]
>
> *Pity Among Sisters*
> Jamila is an academic, while her sister Saba is a nurse. Jamila sometimes calls her sister to complain about the difficulties of writing a paper, explicitly asking: "Give me some pity!" She wants Saba to say: "Oh poor you!" even though Saba doesn't really understand or "feel with" Jamila, because Saba doesn't have any experience with paper writing. Jamila also reciprocates the favour when needed. The sisters "give each other pity" but their relationship is equal and respectful.[18]

In these scenarios, we disentangled two elements that are often conflated, namely the pitier's perception of being in an objectively more favourable situation than the pitied and the normative implication that the pitied is socially or morally inferior. In both cases, we can identify an emotion that isn't quite like compassion, in that the agent is aware of their better fortune in that moment and thus aren't "feeling with" but rather "feeling for" the other. In both cases, it's a matter of bad luck, not of injustice, that the other person is suffering. And, in both cases, there's no disrespect or belittlement.[19] This is pity among equals—equality not in fortune, but in dignity.[20]

Nonetheless, we have acknowledged that pity is frequently condescending and socially harmful, and that ableist pity is widespread. Furthermore, compassion can also be inappropriately directed at disabled people just in virtue of their disability due to ableist prejudice and ignorance. Therefore, without critical reflection on the distinction between circumstances and disability in-itself, deeming compassion to be a morally permissible and fitting response to some cases of disability still risks supporting the general notion that disability is inherently bad and tragic. This might in turn reinforce the notion that disabled people are inferior to non-disabled people in some ways. *A fortiori*, the same holds for pity.

Therefore, anyone who finds themselves feeling compassion or pity arise in response to disability or a disabled person shouldn't indulge in their feelings but should instead examine them attentively, starting with a critical look at one's possible implicit bias and then moving to evaluate the sources of *perceived* suffering in each situation: is the perception accurate? And, if there is suffering, where does it stem from?

17. We owe this example to Sara Goering and Erica Bigelow.
18. We owe this example to Kathryn Norlock.
19. One might argue that what we see here is "solidarity." But solidarity is better characterised as a pattern of feeling and action—it's not an emotion itself. We suggest that pity is an emotional component of the kind of solidarity we see expressed here. We thank a reviewer for prompting us to consider this objection.
20. Indirect evidence for the fact that pity doesn't necessarily involve the concept of moral superiority or condescension comes from the experience of self-pity: when I throw myself a "pity party" I do not feel inferior to myself in any moral sense.

Surely nobody denies that some disabilities can bring much suffering; that some disabled people have much lower quality of lives than other non-disabled people; and even that some caretakers of disabled people suffer greatly because of the condition of their loved ones (Hiller 2023). All of that seems to deserve compassion and, at times, even pity.

In the case of disabilities that are associated with a very short life span or with chronic and intense pain, the suffering may be intrinsic to the nature of the disability itself, and, if one is sufficiently informed about such conditions, one can reliably infer the existence of this type of suffering. Thus, compassion is likely to be fitting in the sort of case captured by what Reynolds (forthcoming) has termed the *hard problem of disability*: conditions that cause early mortality, severe chronic pain or depression, and other disabilities in that vein are difficult to reconcile with a mere-difference view of disability. Ableism isn't the problem here, and mitigating one's emotional response with an awareness of the effects of ableism will not render the circumstances of the person facing them any better. In these cases, not only is compassion appropriate, but, in fact, *not* feeling compassion may constitute a moral shortcoming. Even pity, here, might be fitting: the fact of the undesirability of, for example, a life cut tragically short by a genetic disability *does* create a stratification between the pitier and the pitied. It's a matter of fact, without entailing any lack of respect or downgrading gaze in the moral sense.

Extreme vulnerability may be another family of cases where compassion and pity may be fitting. Severely disabled children lacking the material or caregiving resources to meet their basic needs represent a case of this sort. Kindness, care, and support are warranted when faced with a case where the individual cannot, for whatever reasons, access the care they need due to a particular type of vulnerability, such as the vulnerability that arises in young children, or with those with certain, more significant, intellectual impairments that render them particularly dependent on others.

Even in these cases, however, the emotional response of the non-disabled person must be always mediated by self-reflection and by knowledge of whether this is, in fact, a case where the suffering is intrinsic to the disability, and not an effect that might be improved by (for example) better social supports for persons with that disability type, and their caregivers.

Furthermore, these emotional responses ought to be accompanied by the altruistic motive of improving the material and emotional circumstances of a person who cannot improve those things themselves—the kind of altruism Martin Luther King invites us to be moved by in his speech "On Being a Good Neighbor" (2017).

Within this approach, there's still a difference between pity and compassion. Even pity among equals risks *devolving* into its problematic forms, and, as Stramondo powerfully argued, this is more likely when pity occurs within the context of power relations such as those between a non-disabled person and a disabled person. Therefore, we suggest pity could play a special role, as a *transitory* and *transitional* emotion, one that prepares us to feel the right type of compassion (Kristjánsson 2014, 2018). For instance, when B started with feeling pity towards her new friend and her child, yet suppressed it and asked questions about the child's personality and interests, we can imagine that she became more acquainted with them, and more capable of seeing the similarities between their parenting situations, thus becoming able to *feel with* and not merely *feel for*.

Nevertheless, her pity may well have remained fitting due to the external features combined with the child's disability, for instance the immense practical difficulties faced by her new friend's family, and which she herself did not face and was unlikely to ever face (although of course not at all impossible, given that anyone can become disabled).

Thus, we conclude that pity can be fitting only when it responds to an actual systemic disadvantage incurred by some disabled people (but not when it responds to an alleged inherent badness of disability *per se*), and can be temporarily morally permissible, provided that it's soon replaced by a compassionate, sympathetic response that is aware of the pitfalls of implicit ableism, committed to bringing about justice and equality for all, and imbued with a perception of our interconnectedness and of the suffering and vulnerability of all beings.[21,22]

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21. One might be concerned that even transitional, unexpressed pity might still be perceived by the target of the emotion, and thus reinforce perceived power dynamics and be harmful. We concede this is a risk, but we contend that it can be mitigated by a partial revision of contemporary Western attitudes towards compassion and pity. This might sound like a lofty idea, but we are witnessing a surge of public-facing philosophy of emotion that seeks to re-evaluate and reconceptualise emotions. Martha Nussbaum has been engaged in this work for decades, but many more philosophers have joined her. Myisha Cherry's (2021) defence of the societal benefits of anger and rage, for instance, has reached large swaths of the public; Samir Chopra invites us to embrace anxiety in a deeply moving philosophical memoir (2024), while Krista Thomason defends all "negative" emotions in a book provocatively titled *Dancing With The Devil* (2024). Many other philosophers have popularised their revisionary approaches to emotions in essays available online or in podcasts (e.g. Elpidorou 2015; Protasi 2022; Chopra 2018; Thomason 2023). So, we are optimistic about the power of philosophy in reshaping cultural norms and the way everyday people speak and think about emotions, and we hope that this article may contribute to this project, by offering a more nuanced approach to pity and compassion.

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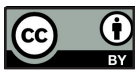
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Affect, Uptake and Existential Feeling

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Abstract

Recent literature on affording and denying uptake to people's emotions has so far centred discrete emotions like anger in contexts of social oppression. To give uptake, on the dominant view, involves tracing the emotion back to its object with which it is fitting, or apt. I argue that a fuller account of affective uptake needs to account for how other categories of affective experience, such as moods and transformations in existential feeling, can also be afforded and denied uptake. I propose what I call *existential humility* as a possible feature of uptake of these sorts of affective experiences.

Keywords: affect, uptake, affective injustice, mood, existential feeling

1. Introduction

I assume that all readers know what it feels like for one's emotional expressions to be badly-received. Perhaps you angrily rant to a colleague about another co-worker's prejudice towards you and are met with a suggestion that your anger is *really* about something else (perhaps they were on your promotion committee and you were not successful). Perhaps you share your grief over the death of a parent with a friend who, from a place of naiveté, tells you "I know exactly how you feel."

Philosophers of emotion have recently taken a turn towards understanding what it is for emotions to be well- or badly-received in terms of the *uptake* that the emotions are afforded or denied. So far, this literature has focused primarily on anger, specifically women's anger. Scholars have set out to illuminate. It is the task of this paper to shed light on the different requirements for uptake that may correspond to different *types* of affective experience. My goal is not to provide a taxonomy of *the* way to give uptake to specific affective experiences or their expressions (there are many reasons why one such taxonomy would fail); rather, it is my goal here to show that what constitutes uptake and uptake denial about your anger and your grief may differ, and that this can be at least partially explained by the difference in the type of affective experience at play. Extant accounts of affective uptake have centred one such dynamic—namely the recognition or lack thereof of an emotion's aptness in relation to its object—but I will show that other dynamics of uptake also need to be accommodated.

I proceed as follows. In Section 2, I introduce some current literature on affective uptake and uptake injustice. In Section 3, I show how the concepts can be fruitfully applied to the emotions in illness. This is an illuminating case which shows us what the concept of affective injustice is already equipped to do. Experiences of illness, I suggest, compellingly illustrate the relevance of certain categories of affective experience—namely moods

and existential feelings—which the current affective injustice framework is not yet well-equipped to capture. I then develop my central claim that a fuller account of affective uptake is required. Extant accounts define uptake as involving the recognition of emotion which is an apt response to its object, but I argue that this account eclipses important categories of affective experience which are not analysable in such terms. This is important, I suggest, because affective experiences like moods and existential feelings should still be taken seriously by those interested in affective injustice: they can still be afforded or denied uptake. In Section 4, I suggest how the notion of uptake might be developed to better accommodate mood and existential feeling. This is necessary since a focus on aptness will not apply to affect in illness as well as it may do in the paradigmatic affective injustice cases that focus on racialised and gendered experiences. In Section 5, I sketch out what I call *existential humility* is an important disposition which can protect against affective injustices in healthcare contexts.

2. Uptake

The notion of uptake has been put to different uses in a variety of philosophical contexts. Here, I am focusing on uptake in the context of its new and fruitful application to contemporary discussions in the philosophy of emotion, specifically discussions about *affective injustice*. Notably, Shiloh Whitney has done significant work on the concept of uptake in the last few years in relation to the anger of oppressed groups (2018a; 2018b; 2023). The notion of uptake at play here is not entirely severed from its more traditional philosophical roots: Whitney traces the relevant concept of uptake back to radical feminist Marilyn Frye (1983), whose understanding of uptake was inspired by J. L. Austin's work on the uptake of speech acts (1975).[1] Austin writes "the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of uptake," which happens when the hearer grasps the illocutionary force of the utterance (117). In developing her account of what it means for anger to have "gone well," Frye writes:

> Being angry at someone is somewhat like a speech act in that it has a conventional force whereby it sets people up in a certain sort of orientation to each other; and like a speech act, it cannot "come off" if it does not get uptake. . .. [It] is left as just a burst of expression of individual feeling. As a social act, an act of communication, it just doesn't happen. It is, as Austin would have said, "non-played." (1983)

Frye's focus is on the political and social injustices which mean that women's anger rarely "goes well," and instead often fails to position the speaker and the hearer in the right kind of orientation to each other.

Frye and Whitney are in good company amongst other feminist scholars in understanding anger as an attempt to communicate knowledge about the world to others, as a social act involving claims to knowledge (Lorde 1987; Ahmed 2013; Cherry 2021). On this understanding, it is clear how being denied affective uptake relates to epistemic injustices. In fact, Whitney argues that denying uptake constitutes a "uniquely affective hermeneutical injustice: one that concerns not only the conditions of epistemic intelligibility, but the conditions of affective influence" (2023). It is in this way that affective injustice is understood as the affective correlate of epistemic injustice: one is not (necessarily, or only) wronged in their capacity as a knower (Fricker 2007), but in their capacity as an affective being.

1. Rae Langton (1993) has also famously drawn on Austin's work to develop her account of silencing, in which she also engages with Frye's notion of uptake. For thorough engagements with related discussions of uptake in the philosophy of language and its various conceptualisations, see, for example, De Gaynesford 2017 and De Lara 2024.

It is worth noting that not everybody who works on affective injustice positions it alongside epistemic injustice in this way. I take their positioning alongside one another to be useful and theoretically well-motivated, but little hangs on it here. I take one benefit to be that it supports a more discerning approach to various types of harms and injustices. With the great success of the epistemic injustice research programme, the scope of distinctively *epistemic* injustice has found itself stretched. Some harms and injustices might be marginally epistemic, but primarily affective, or something else; being theoretically-equipped to conceptualise how they interact with one another can only be a good thing.

Whitney adopts a phenomenological approach to make sense of the "economies" of affective influence and to articulate the dynamics of affective uptake between people.[2] In so doing, her account centres the *intentionality* of emotion. She argues that it is constitutive of some dynamics of social oppression that certain people's emotions are not afforded intentionality in others' eyes, which leads to uniquely affective varieties of injustice (2018).[3] If your anger moves me, directs me towards your concerns—the object of your anger—then your anger has been given uptake by me. Conversely, if I deny your anger uptake, I treat it as though it has failed to have intentionality, failed to be truly *about* anything. Rather, I treat the anger as though it is "a reflection of psycho-physical events inside the angry person only, an outburst that reflects her as an emotional person, but bears on nothing in the world we share" (489). In the context of your anger towards your colleague, what makes the difference is whether your anger successfully communicates something to me about your colleague's prejudicial behaviour against you or not. The core notion at play here for Whitney is that anger which is denied uptake is perceived to be somehow inappropriate—dysregulated, excessive, improper—such that those witnessing it are not moved to (the right) action(s) by it.

Though not explicitly focusing on uptake, Srinivasan offers a similar formulation of affective injustice in the context of anger, and contends that the tension of affective injustice lies in a pressure to forego one's apt anger in favour of the response that is best "all things considered," precisely because the prejudices at play do not allow apt anger uptake. Aptness as a concept does a lot of work in her analysis of affective injustice, and she offers three criteria for apt anger (2018, 127–31). First, the anger must be in response to some genuine moral violation. This means that if I become angry because I misinterpreted somebody as laughing at me when they were not, that emotion is not apt. Second, the anger must be properly motivated by personal reason and third, it must be proportionate to that reason.

Before we proceed, it is worth a brief aside to say something constructive about the terms "aptness," "fittingness," and "appropriateness," which have so far been used fairly interchangeably without explanation. This is difficult, as the terms are employed inconsistently in the literature. Occasionally philosophers will have specific distinctions in mind, other times they won't. "Fittingness" and "aptness" are often but not always taken to be synonymous; sometimes "aptness" is broader than "fittingness" (see e.g. Song 20). Both are generally taken to capture accurate or rational evaluative attitudes, and therefore epistemic justification, but not necessarily normative considerations which might be associated more with "appropriateness" (see e.g. Paytas 2024). Some accounts of fittingness also incorporate personal values (see e.g. Tessman 2023), but other accounts incorporating personal values opt for "appropriateness" instead (see e.g. Ratcliffe et al. 2023). Szanto and Titejen (2024) distil this confusion very well, and Stephan (2017) suggests a move beyond the

2. See Ahmed 2004 on affective economies which inspires this "economic" framing.
3. Whitney claims that members of oppressed groups often have their emotional responses systematically denied uptake because of that group membership—in this sense there is a "double-oppression" If one counts epistemic injustices as well as social and affective ones, then arguably there are triple-oppressions at play in many of the cases she is interested in.

distinctions altogether. My own decision about how to manage this in what follows will be to employ "aptness" where possible, unless engaging with direct quotes where alternative terms are used. Where this might have important consequences for my argument, I will try to clarify it.

So far we've outlined the aptness criteria that are thought to constitute an affective injustice. What about the *harms* of affective injustice? Building on Srinivasan and Whitney, Archer and Mills (2019) have argued that affective injustice is particularly harmful because it calls for people to engage in emotion regulation in ways that cause them harm. Archer and Mills consider scenarios in which one might be pressured to regulate apt but counterproductive anger and show that these often call for the use of emotion regulation strategies which are both harmful *and* often counterproductive from the perspective of alleviating oppression.

For instance, where one is pressured to emotionally regulate one's anger, one may employ cognitive reappraisal. This involves manipulating how one appraises a situation to regulate one's emotional response to it. For example, if a senior male colleague is sexist towards me, I can consciously reappraise the situation to focus on their socio-cultural context and my relative good luck in encountering fairly few men like that, instead of focusing on how I have been slighted. This may successfully function to regulate my anger, and it may very well seem "all things considered" the best thing to do; perhaps it can stave off a nasty conflict in the moment, prevent me becoming a target of vindictive behaviour from them in future, and avoid feeding prejudices about the sensitivity of women. However, as Archer and Mills argue, this pressure to emotionally regulate is harmful to me and others like me. For one, my ability to down-regulate my anger means that the behaviour of the senior male colleague is likely to go unchallenged and hence is "enabled." Another consequence is that my anger loses its force; as such, I may be out of touch with the very real slight that I have been victim to.

There is additional emotional labour involved in this demand for regulation. This labour and its effects are captured nicely by Whitney's notion of *affective byproducts* (2018a; 2018b). The idea here is that continued denial of affective uptake has consequences: continued denial of uptake gives rise to anger which bulges and swells such that its connection to its original object is drowned out, hence losing its "sense and force" When this happens, once-appropriate anger then turns into rage, "rage at the injustice of being denied intelligibility" (2018b, 500). Since the angry person cannot expect their emotions to receive uptake, they are left with the excess emotions that require emotional labour in order to be processed or "metabolised" (2018a, 646). Whitney draws on the work of Maria Lugones to give weight to this point: the rage, unlike the originally appropriate anger, is now "non-communicative" (Lugones 2003). In ceasing to be communicative, it is even less likely that the anger or rage will move people to appropriate action, and more likely that it will present as affective behaviour which does not warrant uptake.

3. Affective Injustice and Affective Uptake in Illness

Most of the extant literature on affective injustice focuses on anger and its intersection with racialised and gendered experience.[4] Following the now rich and diverse literature on *epistemic* injustice and healthcare, there is now a wealth of research which articulates how being seriously ill, and finding oneself in the patient role, makes one vulnerable to a variety of epistemic injustices (Carel and Kidd 2014; 2017; Kidd and Carel 2017).

4. See Gallegos 2021 and Archer and Matheson 2022, 2023 for exceptions.

Different conditions have different historical, medical, and socio-political dynamics such that patients are vulnerable in different ways. Vulnerabilities may differ according to diagnosis, which can of course vary across time (e.g. how attitudes to certain diagnoses change over time, perhaps after a supposed "scientific breakthrough") and place (e.g. differences in cultural attitudes to certain diagnoses). Today, a variety of conditions remain poorly scientifically understood in ways that can adversely affect the epistemic reputation of their patients. These include conditions which might be classed as "unexplained" or as Functional Neurological Disorders (such as Long Covid, Fibromyalgia, Chronic Pain, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, Seizures, Irritable Bowel Syndrome), women's health conditions (such as Endometriosis, Pre-Menstrual Dysphoric Disorder, Menopause) and various psychiatric or neurodevelopmental conditions (such as Schizophrenia or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder). Many people with so-called "unexplained" conditions, including the timely condition of Long Covid, report distress over not being validated or taken seriously by others because of contention about the status of the condition amongst both lay-people and clinicians (Ireson et al 2022; Scholz et al. 2023). As a result, people suffering with such conditions can feel apprehensive about how they will be received by others when they need to disclose their experience.[5]

The epistemic predicaments of patients with conditions like these can often connect in complex ways with affective ones. Indeed, I suggest that the emotions of people with such conditions can be denied uptake in ways structurally alike the cases found in the extant literature on affective injustice. Gallegos (2021) has sketched some such categories of injustice that we might consider. Affect-related testimonial injustice, for instance, would be where a person or group is unfairly subject to credibility deficits, silencing, smothering etc., such that how others give uptake to their emotions and "affective assessments of things and where views about which emotional responses may be warranted" are undermined (10). Affect-related hermeneutic injustice, on the other hand, would take place when a person or group's ability to interpret or communicate their affective experiences is unjustly undermined because, for instance, historical exclusion from meaning-making practices has resulted in conceptual lacunae (10–11).

For the remainder of this section, I show the extent to which these affective injustices against ill people can be accommodated by the current affective injustice framework, before showing how the notion of uptake needs to be enriched to capture a fuller range of ways in which the affective experiences of ill people can be afforded and denied uptake.

3.1 Discrete Episodic Emotion

Suddenly becoming seriously and chronically ill can be life-shattering, involving profound losses across many dimensions of one's life—financial losses, interpersonal losses, career losses, identity losses (Byrne 2022b). Given the additional *epistemic* problem of certain conditions being poorly explained by biomedical investigation, some patients are particularly vulnerable to the loss of their credibility in the eyes of others who may doubt that they are *really* ill. Such patients often experience stigma, disbelief, dismissal and suspicion from others, whether that be in the clinical encounter or with previously-trusted close friends and relatives (Byrne 2022a; Re'em et al 2023; McNabb et al 2023). Unsurprisingly, this can cause significant emotional distress. On top of all of the losses of becoming ill, one also has to navigate a hostile interpersonal environment, unsure what prejudices are carried by your interlocutor.

5. Being a patient can intersect with other features of one's identity (e.g. age, sex) to further negatively affect one's credibility, constituting another obstacle to one's testimony being afforded sufficient weight. For example, some qualitative studies into Long Covid have shown that it is particularly difficult for children and adolescents to signal the severity of their illness given assumptions that were made about the mildness of Long Covid in young people (Wild et al. 2024; Torres et al. 2024). These predicaments are distinctively epistemic since patients are not being recognised as valuable knowers about their illness experience.

From the position of being heavily stigmatised, patients may consider it within their best interests to be sure to carefully regulate their affective life to stave off any character ascriptions that might further adversely affect their legitimacy. For instance, a young female patient may have good reason to think that if she loses her temper at somebody who appears to think that her symptoms are only the result of a neurotic personality and hypochondria, she may end up feeding their suspicions.[6] Hence, vigilant emotion regulation can be critical. This seems like a fairly clear case of an *unjust* demand for emotion regulation.

For instance, a young female Long Covid patient may regulate her emotions by managing what sort of situations she finds herself in. For instance, to avoid triggering negative emotional responses in herself, she may avoid doctors and social gatherings with friends and family. She may work from home more often in order to avoid the possibility of reacting to an ignorant comment by a colleague. She may be very selective about what media she consumes, avoiding articles and headlines about Long Covid, and adjusting her algorithmic preferences so that she does not see certain things. While this may prevent situations where she is acutely distressed, this may be bad for her health in the long run, further isolating her from others who could help her to regulate her emotions by offering a sense of togetherness and being understood.

Shouldering the weight of vigilantly regulating one's emotional expression, at a time of significant life upheaval, has affective consequences. In Whitney's terms, the patient might be expected to experience "affective by-products" from the emotional work of regulating (suppressing, re-appraising, etc.) her emotional responses to being denied recognition of her apt responses to difficult circumstances *and* the additional labour of vigilantly regulating her emotional expression. Whitney (2018) and Lugones (2003) articulate how the accumulation of this labour can turn once-appropriate anger into rage, which then ceases to be apt. In consequence, it becomes even less likely that the anger will move people to appropriate action; its roots in oppression will not be recognised.

For patients, repeated dynamics of suspicion and disbelief over time, and with no space to allow for the expression of apt and appropriate emotional responses to this, can easily lead to anger. Over time, when continually marginalised, this anger may become disjointed from its original intentional object (perhaps, say, no longer being perceived as level-headed and resilient by life-long friends). Patients might then exhibit anger (as well as other emotions, like grief or sadness) which are disproportionate, yet their roots in oppression are not recognised. The emotional expression of this "excess" may leave the person perceived as hysterical, their concerns disjointed from reality.

This sort of trajectory has been identified by researchers in the social sciences, albeit not in these terms. For instance, Blease and Geraghty (2018) have refuted accusations of militancy in certain patient communities (in this instance, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) by tracing anger and frustration back to chronic and widespread marginalisation and negative stereotyping. In so doing, they compare the treatment of people with such marginalised conditions to the treatment of people with other stigmatised chronic conditions, namely HIV/AIDS, and suggest that the patient groups organised themselves similarly in search of justice. This approach is compatible with Whitney's approach to affective injustice, whereby one of the paths to affective liberation is tracing perceived disproportionate affective outbursts back to their original intentional objects—that is, being able to point out the roots in oppression that the subsequent affect has. To

6. This is reminiscent of Dotson's concept of testimonial smothering, where testimony is truncated to avoid being taken up in ways that may be harmful (2012). However, this need not be at all verbal, nor to do with testimony. It also seems that the harms of this are not necessarily epistemic.

this extent, the affective uptake injustice framework seems like a good fit for capturing many of the affect-related injustices and predicaments that patients with such conditions can face.

3.2 Other Affective States

A fuller account of affective uptake ought to focus not only on episodic emotions like anger, but also more temporally and intentionally-dynamic affective states such as moods and existential feelings.[7] The focus on anger in the extant literature is a salient example of where emotions are social acts that attempt to communicate something about the shared world. "You wronged me," "That was funny," and "This is scary" all communicate something about at least one person's position in the shared world we all inhabit. Even if *you* are not wronged, amused, or scared, I still direct your attention to something out there in our world that can affect certain people in certain ways. Like the cases discussed in Section 3, these sorts of affective experiences have relatively clear intentional objects, where patients cannot communicate with their emotions and move people with their frustrations; these emotions are communicative and social in nature, yet blocked from their function by oppression.

Key aspects of affective experience in illness, however, are not like this. Chronic illness shapes one's experiential world profoundly, and can be affectively and existentially transformative. Drawing on the phenomenological tradition, some philosophers of emotion have acknowledged that while most if not all affective experience is intentional in structure, every emotional experience takes place against, and is shaped by, one's wider existential orientation within the world (James 1902; Ratcliffe 2005; 2019; 2020; Helm 2009). In his work on *existential feeling*, Ratcliffe (2005, 2020) emphasises that all intentional emotional experiences (say, for example, of a person threatening me) presuppose and take place against the wider experiential world, the "backdrop" against which I can approach entities, events and situations in certain ways. My existential orientation, my felt sense of relation to the world, restricts and facilitates the types of affective experiences I can have.

I and others have elsewhere argued that chronic illness can involve shifts in existential feeling, shaping which affective experiences are possible (Ratcliffe et al 2013; Byrne 2024).[8] Focusing more specifically on fatigue, I have argued that merely existing in a fatigued body can constrain one's experiential world and limit which affective responses are possible. I obtained qualitative data which illustrates this, with one chronically fatigued patient—let us call them J—writing that when their symptoms worsen, as well as struggling with information processing, their affective repertoire is also restricted: "When things go down I cannot process information and have *no access to the energy of charm and empathy—I become cranky even as I try to avoid acting it out*" (Byrne 2024; emphasis added).

It is more commonplace both within and outside of philosophy, perhaps, to think of the ways in which illness can affect one's mood. Of course, some psychiatric diagnoses are characterised by their effect on a person's mood (such as the "depressed mood" necessary for a diagnosis of depression). Existential feelings are not equivalent with mood, on Ratcliffe's account, though he develops the term with inspiration from Heidegger's account of mood (Ratcliffe 2009). For Ratcliffe, existential feelings can be short-lived, longer term, or even lifelong habitual temperaments, whereas mood seems only to pick out the second category. Moreover, it does not make much sense to talk of the "mood" of (un)familiarity, estrangement, homeliness and so on—we talk about these as feelings. Some existential feelings *may* be understood as moods or even emotions (such as

7. Gallegos (2021; 2023) acknowledges that a study of affective injustice may warrant scope over moods and feelings.
8. While there is much more work to be done here, some empirical work supports the claim that some "primary" features of conditions like Long Covid are affective in nature. See Byrne 2024 for an argument against the primary/secondary distinction.

the world-altering "emotion" of grief), but many may not. Conversely, some moods do not involve a shift in existential feeling: I can be in a bad mood about my cancelled train, for instance, without this involving a shift in my overall existential orientation. These technical considerations aside, we can pick out shifts in both mood and existential feeling in talking in more general terms about the constriction of a person's overall *affective repertoire* in illness.[9] *If* we take it to be true that at least some chronic illnesses can directly restrict one's affective repertoire, then about the role of intentionality and aptness in affective injustice. A central feature of affective injustice, at least based on the extant literature, is that apt emotional responses are not given uptake. While *some* of the affect-related difficulties that patients face can be accommodated by this framework, I suggest that this formulation eclipses other forms of affective uptake denial that patients are vulnerable to.

To begin, it is unclear whether moods and existential feelings permit aptness assessments or not. Let us recap what goes into an assessment of aptness. For Srinivasan, apt anger must arise in response to some genuine moral violation, be properly motivated by personal reason, and be proportionate to that reason. Not only on Srinivasan's definition, talk of the aptness of an emotion implies (at least) a two-place relation; an emotion is apt or not in relation to its *object*.[10] So, the first step is to identify the intentional object(s) which the emotions are directed towards. Being angry about being slighted or happy about the election are cases where the emotions at play have fairly clear intentional objects (i.e. the slight or the election). Generally, the aptness of emotions of this sort depends upon whether there is a match between the emotion and the object (such as the slight and the anger).

Other types of affective experience have more complicated intentional structures. For instance, focusing on grief as a process, Ratcliffe et al. (2023) have argued that the central object of grief is not just the person who has died, but a loss of life possibilities which can have more or less specific elements. Consider the famous passage from C.S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed*: "Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything" (1966). Moods and existential feelings have a similarly complex intentional structure. Gallegos (2023) sets out two key positions on the intentionality of moods, the latter of which is the dominant view in the philosophy of emotion: the view that moods do not have intentional objects (are not "about" anything), and the view that moods have maximal intentional objects (are "about" everything). This latter view, which Gallegos calls the "whole-world view," takes it that moods are directed towards the world as a whole, our total environment, the "existential background of our lives" (Lazarus 1994). This view captures something important about the pervasive phenomenology of shifts in mood and existential feelings, such that we can come to experience the whole world differently when we are in a particular mood, as though seeing the world through tinted glasses (Fish 2005). Gallegos considers Ratcliffe's account of existential feeling to belong in this category, despite Ratcliffe's emphasis on the *pre-intentional* nature of existential feeling (Ratcliffe 20). Existential feelings are pre-intentional in the sense that they shape and dictate which sorts of subsequent intentional states are possible; they alter the whole landscape of possibilities for our intentionally-directed emotional experiences.[11]

9. My concerns about aptness assessments have scope over both mood and existential feeling on various interpretations of their precise relation.

10. Where I talk about the object or intentional object of an emotion I am getting at what is often called the concrete object, understood as the thing towards which the emotion is directed. This has also been called the *particular* object (Teroni 2007). This may be distinguished from the formal object of an emotion, the evaluative properties attributed to the concrete object, and its focus which makes intelligible the relation between the concrete and formal object (Helm 2009). It is worth noting that these distinctions are also contentious.

11. Ratcliffe's view might well be compatible with Gallegos' proposal, in part depending on how the intentional structure of existential feelings is understood (see footnotes 10–11 in Gallegos 2023, and Ratcliffe 2019).

Gallegos advocates for a third position which he calls thepresent-situation view which he takes to better accommodate the variability in the scope of our moods. He defines the present-situation as the set of meaningful circumstances in which a person finds themselves, and moods as construals of the temporal, environmental and normative parameters of our situational context, occurring primarily at the pre-reflective level (2023 14). It is not necessary for the purposes of this paper to advocate for a given view of the intentionality of moods and existential feelings, nor to delineate precise boundaries between the two. It suffices to point out that the intentional structure of these sorts of affective states is sufficiently complex to make us rethink how we assess them for aptness.

Consider a patient whose severe symptoms narrow their capacity to feel motivated or hopeful. Whether we would come to understand the patient as in an illness-induced mood or experiencing illness-induced shifts in existential feeling, we are dealing with more than a straightforward episode of "I feel hopeless about X." The very conditions of possibility for him feeling motivated or hopeful about certain specific things are transformed; his world-experience is different overall. If we were only concerned with the intentional state "I feel hopeless about my recovery," the standard view of the aptness of emotion can be fairly straightforwardly applied. However, recognising the world-shaping pervasiveness of the patient's affective experience invites us to consider whether different tools are needed to assess such cases.

One *could* argue that certain moods and existential feelings are apt, or not: for instance, if I move through the world with a feeling of absolute safety, insensitive to dangers in my environment, one could reasonably maintain that my existential orientation is not properly sensitive to reality—I am under a deception. Similarly, if I am in an anxious mood and am convinced that all of my colleagues hate me, there seem to be fairly easy evaluative criteria by which we can judge whether that anxiety is apt or not. However, conversely, I may move through the world very accurately "alive" to real dangers in my environment: I may feel threatened by the viruses on surfaces that may infect me, the stranger in the street that may hurt me, and the cars driving recklessly that may hit me. Is this level of sensitivity apt? As insightfully captured by William James in his discussion of "sub-universes," matters are complicated: James takes the distinction between what is real and unreal to be grounded in two facts, "first, that we are liable to think differently of the same; and second that, when we have done so, we can choose which way of thinking to adhere to and which to disregard" (James 1890; Schütz 1962). Ratcliffe too appears sympathetic to this: "If we think of existential feelings as a changeable possibility space, it is often difficult to determine whether or why an existential feeling is situation-appropriate or otherwise, especially when it comes to the question of whether it is 'world-appropriate'" (2020, 8).[12][13]

Consider ill person J, quoted above, whose capacity for empathy is restricted when their symptoms are severe. If one is committed to making an aptness assessment in this case, one may argue that particular intentional emotional experiences (say, getting cranky at a particular person), fail to be apt. But what can be said of the aptness of existential orientation that underlies those subsequent intentional states? We do not need to settle

12. I take Gallegos to be broadly in agreement with James and Ratcliffe on this. He writes: "Because any given set of circumstances can be interpreted in various ways, our sense of our current situational context will always be more or less incongruent with at least some of our circumstances" (2023).

13. The intended distinction between aptness and appropriateness might matter here. If you are sympathetic to Tessman's (2023) view that aptness can be assessed on both subjective and intersubjective levels, assessments of world-appropriateness may differ accordingly. Tessman writes: "Evaluative attitudes and emotions are fitting when they reflect the way in which their object really matters, but because it is in subjective experience that something matters, fittingness is fundamentally subjective . . . Justice does require that we determine what is and is not 'intersubjectively fitting,' and so we must rely on the figurative notion of 'intersubjective fittingness.' Nevertheless, because the subjective experience of those we love and care for must matter to us in a way that exceeds the requirements of justice, we might fail those whom we love by applying only 'intersubjective fittingness conditions'" (18990).

matters for current purposes. Rather, the important point to impress here is that it would seem a mistake to conclude that if certain moods, existential feelings and their subsequent intentional emotional states are not apt then they cannot be unjustly denied uptake. If we take that to be an unattractive consequence of the affective injustice framework, we need to supplement our account of affective uptake.

4. Uptake Beyond Recognising Aptness

What about cases where uptake need not involve the recognition of an emotion which is apt to its object?[14] While ideas about the recognition of intentionality and aptness of emotion are foregrounded in the extant literature on affective injustice, one can find some qualifications in corners of Whitney's work suggesting that she is prepared to endorse broader necessary and sufficient conditions for uptake. In a footnote she writes: "Intentionality recognition is not sufficient for uptake . . . It also may not be necessary: I want to allow for the possibility that some non-intentional emotions may require uptake in order to be successful" (2023, 1260). She is also brief but clear about her position that uptake is not reducible to agreement, recognition, listening, understanding, approval or validation of an emotion's aptness (1275).[15] I hope to have motivated in Section 3 that it is persuasive that other types of affective experience warrant uptake, despite not having a straightforward intentional structure or being uncontroversially amenable to being judged as apt. The task is then to articulate *how* the uptake of these other categories of affect can be denied and afforded.

Whitney contends that "to give uptake is to cooperate with your bid for a share of meaning-making jurisdiction in our situation" (1272–73). While this phrasing is somewhat gestural, Whitney is clear that this does not amount to straightforward empathy or emotional contagion: giving uptake to a black woman's anger at racial injustice is not solely a matter of becoming angry at the things that she is angry at. Instead, in giving uptake, one's own position in the shared world is made richer, and is put into context situated alongside theirs: their anger illuminates one's own situation (1277). A key feature of the gender and race cases is that giving uptake seems to require hermeneutical enlightenment about the oppressed person's situation, becoming "sensitised to the world according to the other" (2023). Giving uptake to some of the emotions of chronically ill people might work similarly. Perhaps a fuller appreciation of the social and epistemic injustices people with chronic illnesses and disabilities have historically faced may be imperative to give proper uptake to, for example, the anger and distress of certain chronically ill people.[16] This allows me to trace back how the ill person, situated where they are in terms of epistemic and social power, can come to find themselves in that affective situation. This tracing back may, for instance, involve a developed understanding of the phenomenology of loss in chronic illness, or the effects of chronic self-censoring on the capacity to feel understood and listened to. Hence, a sort of education or hermeneutical enlightenment about the implicit biases, negative stereotypes, and dynamics of stigma against chronically ill people might be involved in—and may perhaps even be necessary for—uptake.

But what about the other types of affective experience I discussed in Section like shifts in mood and existential feeling? Recall J whose severe fatigue constrains him affectively, rendering empathy out of reach. It is not obvious that hermeneutical enlightenment about his social oppression *qua* ill person maps onto the right

14. In the extant literature, uptake involves the recognition of either (i) the intentional object of the apt emotion or (ii) the affective by-products as by-products, which can be made sense of only in the context of recognising (i) that came prior.
15. I hesitate to endorse this fully here on the grounds that action which might be captured by vague concepts like "feeling understood" may be sufficient in some cases.
16. We might turn to work on concepts such as pathophobia (Kidd and Carel 2024) and ableism (Toombs 1995) to do so.

features of their affective position for this to afford their affect uptake. In fact, it may even be a form of affective injustice to assume that this is *the* appropriate way to give J uptake.

Recall Whitney's claim that anger denied uptake is treated as a reflection of "psycho-physical events inside the angry person only, an outburst that reflects her as an emotional person, but bears on nothing in the world we share" (2018, 489). This claim, applied to shifts in existential feeling, reveals a challenge for her account of uptake. After all, shifts in existential feeling, shifts in one's own experiential world, might be conceptualised in such a way. Can Whitney's position that uptake requires becoming sensitised to the world according to another be maintained? One important point of clarification is the notion of "world" that is at stake here. One can distinguish between the socio-political world and the experiential world in the phenomenological sense: it seems that perhaps Whitney is more interested in the former. If she is referring to the latter notion of "world," her position becomes trickier to salvage. In fact, taking for granted features of one's experiential world can, in some circumstances, constitute an empathy failure.

Inspired by Edith Stein, Ratcliffe (2012) developed the notion of *radical empathy* which he characterises as a way of engaging with the experiences of others through suspending or "bracketing" assumptions that you and others around you inhabit the same "modal space" (414–16). This amounts to an appreciation of the fact that there are structurally different ways of finding oneself in the world, which is often overlooked in "mundane" forms of empathy where much is taken for granted as shared (245–47). Ratcliffe offers this account primarily as a therapeutic and philosophical methodological tool for understanding (and then perhaps also describing) experiences of psychiatric illness, since they are widely acknowledged to involve significant shifts in world-experience which are notoriously difficult to articulate (van den Berg 1972; Sass 2003; Ratcliffe 2014). As I highlighted in Section 3, I think that this can also be true of many chronic "somatic" and functional conditions, despite this being overlooked in the literature in the wider phenomenology of medicine.

Assuming that the only way to give uptake to affective experiences is to validate the aptness of an emotion to its object can, I suggest, approximate exactly this sort of counterproductive mundane empathy. This is because too much is taken for granted as shared about the experiential worlds that the patient shares with others. Arguably, this is the inverse of what goes wrong in the gender and race cases of affective injustice, where *not enough* of a shared world is assumed. Suppose a woman is frustrated with her male partner for not doing his share of domestic duties, and when she expresses this he replies that he simply isn't "tuned in" to mess in the meticulous way that she is. This puts distance between the worlds of the man and the woman in a way that robs her of the resources to influence him to do something in the shared world that matters to her. He has "opted out" of being sensitised to the world according to her.

However, suppose that you are in an anxious and irritable mood (perhaps you are in a fatigue "crash," pre-menstrual, or suffering from severe "brain fog") to the extent that your general perception of the world and the people in it is "tinted" to make threats appear where they otherwise wouldn't. You might propositionally recognise this on some level, but are gripped by the affective malaise nonetheless. Suppose you lash out at somebody who you feel insulted by, and your friend validates that your anger is apt. This validation eclipses the pervasive, world-shaping influence of the anxiety that you are experiencing. At times, this might be precisely what we want and need. At other times, such solidarity might not be instrumentally good for us; perhaps your friend's loyalty to you might be sustaining your sense that a well-meaning person is threatening, thus encouraging your social alienation. At other times, the lack of uptake given to the pervasiveness of your mood might be alienating and hurtful. It may then be, I suggest, a failure of uptake to assume that *the* right

way to give uptake is to recognise the intentional object of an affective state and validate its aptness. Uptake may require acknowledging that the intentionality of the person's affective state is much more complex.

So what is required to give uptake to shifts in mood and existential feeling? I am doubtful that something as strong as radical empathy is necessary. I instead suggest that something more subtle, which I will call *existential humility*, may be a fundamental feature in giving such dimensions of affective life uptake. In the final section of this paper, I offer my characterisation of existential humility as a felt appreciation of the contingency of one's own existential position, and outline some possible ways of displaying existential humility.

5. Existential Humility

To possess existential humility, I suggest, is to acknowledge that there are nearby counterfactual situations whereby one's own existential orientation is more or less significantly transformed. This involves recognising the contingency of one's own position, and one's vulnerability to the fates to which we are all subject, in our appraisal of the affective and existential position of others. Developing L.A. Paul's now-famous account of transformative experience (2014), Carel and Kidd (20) propose that we should appreciate that transformative experiences can also be unchosen, occurring simply because of our subjection to the "facts of life": contingency, vulnerability and subjection. As human beings, we are all inherently vulnerable to certain unchosen experiences—such as trauma, grief or illness—and their profound phenomenological and existential effects (Ratcliffe et al. 2014; Byrne 2022b; Irarrázaval 2022; Køster 2022; Markovic 202). Irarrázaval writes, for instance, that "human vulnerability, or the possibility of being hurt, is a shared condition of human life, which includes psychical and existential dimensions" (2022, 384). In the context of grief, Køster remarks that grief involves "a confrontation with the groundlessness of existence and how our lives rest on an abysmal nothingness that resolutely can take a person we love from us" (2022).

How does one go about appreciating these facts *in our relation to the suffering others*? One might ask in what a felt appreciation differs from a propositional recognition that my world, and my affective repertoire that presupposes it, could be other than it is. I do not think this is a clear distinction, and uptake needn't be considered an absolute concept, an all-or-nothing affair. I think it is most plausible to maintain that uptake permits of degrees, and that one can give uptake to a greater or lesser degree (see also Bell 2023, 245). As such, perhaps radical empathy is a particularly sophisticated way in which one can give uptake to categories of affective experience—like shifts in existential feeling—via attempting to understand them. There might be a variety of subtler or more minimal ways of giving uptake to shifts in existential feeling which do not require understanding, such as various forms of listening (Spencer and Broome 2023). As such, perhaps one promising way to conceptualise existential humility is as a virtue to be cultivated alongside others like intellectual humility (Tanesini 2018) or curiosity (Bortolotti and Murphy-Hollies 2023).

In some cases, forms of uptake that seem subtle or minimal might be the "fullest" available. For instance, in some cases of severely depressed mood, the best way to give uptake might not be with understanding, validation or challenge, but with silence (Degerman 2024). Jae Ryeong Sul has recently developed the notion of *undemanding silence* as a means of consolation for depressed people. Sul takes a sort of humility to be built into

such silences: in the space of an undemanding silence, "one does not hastily attempt to understand other's predicament and expresses humility to the alterity of the depressed individual's despair" (2025).[17]

Conversely, perhaps the most vehement uptake denial for such affect involves a sort of existential *arrogance*: a failure to appreciate the contingency of your existential position and its susceptibility to being undermined by stress and illness. Plausibly, this might pick out some of the more aggressive forms of affective injustice against patients, where people exhibit a conviction that they are physically, mentally—and also existentially—immune to such suffering from their current position, but also crucially do not conceive of their existential position as vulnerable to being undermined to the extent that this immunity could be compromised.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of ways to give uptake to certain shifts in existential feeling found in chronic psychiatric and somatic illness, nor is it an exhaustive list of the ways to display existential humility. However, what each of the suggestions have in common is that they work towards uptake without necessarily validating the aptness of a particular emotional state in relation to its object. The concept of existential humility also, I hope, motivates the view that its opposite (existential arrogance) will consistently be a barrier to uptake in such cases.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the concept of affective uptake and uptake injustice can and should be broadened as to accommodate other types of affective experience which are also vulnerable to unjust uptake refusal. I argued that the denial of affective uptake is not limited to cases of discrete, episodic emotions like anger, nor to cases of affective suffering as a result of social oppression. I offered a supplement to extant work on uptake as the recognition of apt emotion by showing that other categories of affective experience, like shifts in mood and existential feeling, can also be afforded and denied uptake. I have suggested that it is not obvious that shifts in existential feeling are amenable to assessment as apt or otherwise, and so an alternative conception of uptake is required. I closed by suggesting that a feature of affective uptake of affective experiences of this kind is existential humility, which I characterise as a felt appreciation of the contingency of one's own existential position.

While Ratcliffe primarily frames radical empathy as a methodological tool that can be a way of doing phenomenology, existential humility need not be conceived this way. There is much left to explore here, and it is my intention here only to motivate the potential theoretical use of the concept. Much remains to be said about how exactly to characterise existential humility, and how it can be employed. I hope to have motivated here that continued research into ways of giving and refusing uptake of a variety of categories of emotional experience has significant ameliorative potential in many contexts.[18]

17. I'm doubtful that *existential* humility of the sort I describe is necessary for all "successful" undemanding silences which might nonetheless involve uptake. I do, however, think it's plausible that existential humility is necessary for proper acts of consolation understood in the philosophical sense as that which makes the unbearableness of human contingency bearable (Blumenberg 2006; Pavesich 2015). I also take existential arrogance to be wholly inconsistent with consolation understood in this way.

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Précis of *Love, Subjectivity, and Truth: Existential Themes in Proust*

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How does love—personal, particularised, preferential love—figure into our moral lives? Much of contemporary ethics still takes its lead from Kant, who encourages a distrust of love and other emotions; and even those who find their inspiration rather in Nietzsche, for instance, must come to terms with such late remarks as "Love is the state in which man sees things most widely different from what they are. The force of illusion reaches its zenith here" (2000, §23). We celebrate love and sing its praises, we build our lives around it, and yet we sometimes distrust its influence on us—especially on our way of seeing and feeling about others. This is true of human existence in general, and it also shows up in our philosophical explanations.

A different line of thought has been introduced by Martha C. Nussbaum, who contends, polemically—most notably in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (1990)—that it would be a good thing for contemporary philosophers to write in a way that eschews excessive or needless abstraction, and to learn a lesson from literary authors. In other words, they ought to learn how to do justice to the complexities of particular situations—and this, as she points out, will involve taking love and other emotions seriously.[1] (I say "love and other emotions" since I view love as an emotional feeling in its own right which also gives rise to other feelings: jealousy, for instance, would be unintelligible without a basis in love or care; but love could not arise from jealousy. Love is the more fundamental emotion.) So a nuanced literary narrative might provide us with more insight than an abstract, *impersonal* argument.

It is very much in the spirit of Nussbaum's polemic that I have written *Love, Subjectivity, and Truth*, and taken the remarkable fiction of Marcel Proust as my focus. The question I ask of his vast text, *In Search of Lost Time*,[2] is whether love is a distorted way of seeing the world, or if it might actually enable us to see clearly, leading to trustworthy emotions.[3] Relentlessly, and in many forms, this question continues to perplex Proust's philosophically-inclined narrator. So it is not an imposition on this text to view it in light of what it may show about love's knowledge; how we interpret this novel will have significant implications for the philosophy of emotions.

"*La vérité subjective*,"[4] a phrase used in Proust's novel, is rich with philosophical connotations. Insofar as it includes the conveyance and analysis of experience, the novel is capable not only of exploring existential issues but also of doing something like phenomenology. Kundera (2000), who points out that "all the great

1. See, especially, pages 40–42.
2. *À la recherche du temps perdu* has also been translated as *Remembrance of Things Past*, a less accurate title but one that has Shakespearean resonance (see Sonnet 30).
3. That "love's vision" can provide us with insight is a major thesis, eloquently and convincingly defended, of Troy Jollimore's book *Love's Vision* (2011).
4. I have consulted Proust 1987 (*À la recherche du temps perdu*, edited by Jean-Yves Tadié et al.) throughout this précis.

existential themes" examined for instance by Heidegger are "unveiled, displayed, illuminated" in literary fiction (5), remarks as well that we find "superb 'phenomenological descriptions' in Proust" (32). His multi-volume novel is especially interested in the intermittencies of the heart, in what we come to know about others through love—and in our affective experience generally, from emotions such as jealousy to emotional dispositions such as anxious expectancy. "The search for lost time," as Ricoeur (1985, 139–40) has written, deals in particular with love, and coincides "with the search for truth," most notably the truth about love and subjectivity. That is why Proust's narrative dwells so much on *impressions*, and according to Kristeva (1993) also "blurs the boundaries of the felt and the thought," in addition to blurring the boundary between reporting about, and reflecting upon, experience (80–82).[5]

For this reason, *In Search of Lost Time* is often considered to be *the* novel of ideas *par excellence*.[6] That name is well merited for its detailed evocations of things that are concretely perceived, no less than for its theoretical speculations about the human condition. My approach is guided by the belief that what Proust's narrator tries to understand philosophically arises from his life,[7] and is inseparably bound up with it. To recount that life story, he meanders through first-person memories of what he has experienced and contemplates the meaning of it all. I will claim that Proust's work has something to teach us about the topics of love, subjectivity, and truth, if we as readers are willing to immerse ourselves completely in the texture of his incomparable prose narrative. And my intent is for *this* book to be not merely compatible, but continuous, with my (other) written work about emotion, literature, and existential thought.

What we know is shaped by our way of knowing, just as the properties of visible, coloured objects are determined by the wavelengths of light our eyes can see. Nowhere does the subjective basis of our awareness appear so evident as it does when we view things through loving eyes. In what he portrays as a Buddhist moment, Nietzsche goes so far as to assert that "love is the state in which man [*sic*] sees things most widely different from what they are. The force of illusion reaches its zenith here" (2000, §23).[8] In Proust's novel we find similar declarations made time and time again. However, we also observe counter-currents repeatedly arising, in which love and related emotions are both shown and said to provide a unique type of insight. At these times, love seems to be a prerequisite of veridical apprehension.

So which is it? What I hope to offer is an investigation of this question as it is played out in its various permutations throughout *In Search of Lost Time*. After the first two chapters introduce our major themes and ease us into the contours of the Proustian universe, my third and longest chapter delves into the reasons given by Proust's narrator for being sceptical about what love is capable of revealing, alongside the opposed reasons for overcoming this scepticism. After arguing for how the latter could be viewed as carrying greater weight, I conclude by considering why it is that even a flawed subjectivity can have a large role in acquainting us with particular truths about human existence; then, I clarify the concept of love-based personal identity that Proust's novel ultimately endorses, an ideal of "real life" and "felt truth" that we can affirm through the courage of our emotions. The affective constitution of the world may, therefore, legitimately be viewed through something other than a sceptical eye.

5. As we shall see, the tension between reports and reflections is frequently significant.
6. See, e.g., Weitz 1963, 78, 87; Large 1993, 613–14. See also Landy 2022.
7. The narrator's life, that is, which is not identical with that of Proust. On how we can be moved by the lives of fictional characters, see Cohen 2008, 36–37.
8. In the same section, he praises Buddhism for being "a hundred times colder, more truthful, more objective" than the religion of love, Christianity. Yet this is not Nietzsche's final word.

This reading of Proust must reckon with the numerous motivations for scepticism about love that are rehearsed throughout *In Search of Lost Time*. As I categorise and evaluate these motives, I am attentive at once to the inference that, "if there is but one true world, there can be but one vision of truth", implying that a finite standpoint is untrustworthy (Rawlinson 1982, 1),[9] and to the narrator's habit of denying the antecedent and embracing a plurality of truthful perspectives. From this side, what qualifies as objectively real for us is related to our affective vantage point,[10] delimited by our interests, passions, and concerns.

Readers who care about love and the meaning of life are invited to enter the pages that follow. Those who are not—yet—admirers of Proust are every bit as welcome as those who already are. This book is aimed first and foremost at a literary and philosophical audience, most of all at everyone who is in some way invested in both philosophy and literature. Furthermore, I hope this book will reach researchers into the psychology of emotions, in particular those readers who can appreciate why it is that "a person's interpretations of feelings and events are as fundamental to psychology as genes are to biology" (Kagan 2012, 248).[11] and how one author's writing can clarify human existence for others. Into their hands I commend the spirit of this inquiry.

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9. On Proust's status as a philosopher, see Robert 2021, 21–28.

10. See, e.g., Poellner 2001, especially 98–99.

11. On the same page, he observes that "the neuroscientist's concept of fear . . . does not capture the meaning" of, for example, a person's "fear that he had wasted his life." Regarding the pertinence of literature to psychology as a human science, see also Oatley 1992, 122–26.

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Where is Reciprocity?

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Let me get one thing out of the way: Rick Furtak has written a magnificent book: subtle, profound, exploring both epistemological issues and issues of loving perception with a rare depth. He has written it as a study of Proust, but it is really very original, using materials from Proust but correcting what I believe to be the deficiencies of that remarkable author out of his own (I believe) far healthier ethical sensibility. I will now focus on something that Proust and even Furtak leave out (as indeed I did in *Upheavals of Thought* (2001)), but this in no way detracts from his achievement.

Two accounts of love stand at the start of the ancient Greek philosophical tradition. One belongs to Plato, the other to Aristotle. I shall spend little time on Plato, because Proust follows Plato, and it is this account of love as a perception of value and specialness that Furtak investigates so well. Plato's account focuses on erotic love, but love can have many objects, as the ascent of love makes clear, including laws and institutions, and eventually the ideal form of Good itself. Love is unidirectional, and is fully compatible with non-reciprocation, or even the absence, death, or inertness (laws are not alive) of the object.[1]

Aristotle's account is very different. He uses a different word to begin with: not *erôs*, but *philia*, which is not a word for a perceptual attitude, but for a relationship. But he is not just changing the topic. As recent scholars (particularly Anthony Price (1989)) have ably insisted, erotic and romantic love may also be *philia*, if the right conditions are met. *Philia* does see a special type of value in the object, and acquires knowledge of that value, but Aristotle insists from the beginning that reciprocation is also essential. You may be a wine-lover, *oinophilos*, he says, but that isn't really *philia*, because the wine can't love you back. In addition to reciprocation he insists on mutual awareness of the loving attitudes, and, what is all-important, actions reciprocally promoting the good of the two parties as ends in themselves. This requirement, in turn, has demanding preconditions. The *philoi* must trust one another, and that takes time; so *philia* can't spring up in an instant. And beyond this, the *philoi*, in order to express their love and to choose activities that mutually promote their good, must spend a lot of time together sharing pursuits, whether they be political or athletic, or whatever.

Aristotle is plainly aware of Plato's account; indeed elsewhere he refers directly to the *Symposium*, and his little joke about wine-lovers is probably best taken as a jibe in Plato's direction. What he says to Plato, in effect, is this: loving attitudes and perceptions are important, but they are just necessary for love and not sufficient. We must look to see what the lovers actually *do*, how they do or do not promote one another's good. This sharing of cherished activities and this reciprocal good-promoting are absolutely essential.

1. The *Phaedrus* takes a different, more Aristotelian view, in which reciprocally benefiting action is essential: see my *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (1986, ch. 7).

To see what Aristotelian love looks like in a work of art I now present two pairs of Aristotelian lovers in Mozart's operas (on which I am currently writing a book[2]). One is a case of friendly love, one of romantic love, but Aristotelian love includes both—and so does Furtak's conception of love. For the first, let me turn to a scene from the *Marriage of Figaro* in which Susanna and the Countess write a letter together (as part of a scheme to restore both of their marriages). As the Countess dictates the letter and Susanna writes it down, the women take inspiration from one another's musical phrases, exchanging ideas with a sinuous capacity for response and a heightened awareness of the other's pitch, rhythm, and even timbre. They begin by exchanging phrases, as in a conversation. As the duet continues, however, their reciprocity becomes more intimate and more complex, as they wind around one another, ultimately achieving closely-knit harmony. Their musical partnership expresses a kind of friendly attunement that is, we might say, an image of mutual respect, but also a reciprocal affection that is deeper than respect.[3] Neither runs roughshod over the utterance of the other, and yet each contributes something distinctive of her own, which in turn is recognised by the other, and carried forward. They have a shared purpose, in the service of which they show respect, ingenuity, playfulness, and a nuanced sense of one another's particularity. Clearly they have a vision of the world, but they have, and especially they do, a lot more.

My second case is one of romantic love—a case of love overcoming the barrier imposed by national difference. In *Idomeneo*, The Trojan princess Ilia loves the Greek prince Idamante, and eventually they see their way clear to a life together, resolving to take considerable risks for this end. It takes her two acts to learn to trust him, and this is movingly shown, bit by bit. All along she sees him as having a special radiance, but the final step into reciprocity has to await the advent of trust. In the duet "S'io non moro a questi accenti" ("If I do not die at these words"), the two voices, in close-knit harmony, express the joy of trusting reciprocity looking forward to happiness: "Ah, our happiness overcomes the cruel anguish we have suffered. Our passion conquers all." At first they exchange separate phrases like Susanna and the Countess, then, in an ecstatic dancelike 3/8 rhythm, they celebrate their freedom from fear and superstition. The radiant music expresses a joyous, playful vision of happiness, and of one another's particularity, but it also expresses a freedom of action in which each is prepared to face death itself for the other's sake. In the end each does face death for the other's sake, although, because this is a Freemasonic opera, Reason triumphs and nobody dies. Indeed, the decree of an unnamed Voice, who displaces the old gods, is that this loving couple should rule the city, turning it from a realm based on superstition and grovelling to a realm ruled by love.

This is Aristotelian love: plenty of radiance, lots of vision, but also trust, shared pursuits, and reciprocal actions benefiting one another out in the world.

I think Proust is an unregenerate Platonist, taking love to consist in a pattern of vision and concluding that one might love without doing anything good for the object of love, or engaging in the nuanced back-and-forth of Aristotelian shared activities. It appears that Marcel does not treat Albertine very well—abusively, indeed; but we have little to go on, because Proust is not very interested in showing patterns of action between the two, and he also has independent reasons for thinking trust impossible. Indeed, for reasons given in the final volume, he concludes that one loves best when one retreats from active life altogether, pursuing a life

2. *The Republic of Love: Opera, Breath, and Freedom* (forthcoming).

3. The music of this scene has become famous in popular culture through its role in the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, where Tim Robbins plays it on the prison PA system, and the prisoners are deeply moved by it without knowing what it is about. As Morgan Freeman's character remembers the moment later: "I have no idea what those two Italian ladies were singing about. Truth is, I don't want to know. Some things are better left unsaid. I'd like to think they were singing about something so beautiful, it can't be expressed in words, and it makes your heart ache because of it … and for the briefest of moments, every last man in Shawshank felt free."

of contemplative literary art. But before I can confront this issue in Furtak's book, I must first address a key methodological issue: what to do about an unreliable narrator.

Whenever Marcel's ethical deficiencies as a lover become glaringly evident, Furtak is inclined to blame Marcel. He even says more than once that Marcel is lying about himself to himself. But this stratagem, which allows Furtak to insert his own sane judgments whenever we run across Marcel's particular obsessiveness, his jealous indifference to the well-being and agency of Albertine, raises a problem: how do we distinguish the narrator from the point of view of the author when that narrator is the only voice we hear for three thousand pages?

Many authors create unreliable narrators whose skewed visions of the world their readers are invited to unmask. Henry James, for example, is especially adept at this. So how do we figure out that Stransom in *The Altar of the Dead* (1895) (for example) is unreliable, and that we must try our best to distinguish his view of things from that of James the author? First of all, Stransom's view of the world strikes us as obsessive and weird. But that surely is not enough, for many artists have had obsessive, weird views of life, and I believe that Proust is one of them. Second, the view comes in for criticism from other characters in the work, and those characters' words (which, being quoted, appear to have at least some independent authority) supply a distinct and critical perspective on Stransom. Third, at times the narrator criticises himself and regrets his earlier views, though with Stransom we really can't tell which phase of Stransom is weirder and more obsessive. Above all, however, we figure things out because we read widely in James's works, becoming aware of a characteristic "take" on the world that is quite different from that of Stransom. This "take" shows up in his choices of characters and plots, but also in the way his prose presents them.

With Proust we are unable to do this, because he has chosen to create a single monumental artwork and to express all his insights through the mind of its narrator. We get occasional opportunities to do the second and third, but it seems to me dubious whether those elements, particularly Marcel's shift to a life of contemplative creativity, remedy the defect that concerns me: a lack of interest in the reciprocal interactions of lovers as a necessary element of genuine love. Although my paradigms of reciprocity were characters in a musical work, literary works are perfectly capable of showing reciprocal interaction and assessing it from an ethical viewpoint. Theatre perhaps is best placed to do this, but novels have many ways of performing the same task. George Eliot shows us clearly, in *Middlemarch* (1993), that both Casaubon and Dorothea are defective lovers, capable of certain (different) types of idealising perception, but utterly lacking in other elements without which love cannot exist: in Casaubon's case a regard for Dorothea's freedom, in Dorothea's a self-respect that will in due time curb her immature style of self-dramatising selflessness. Tolstoy too is a master of portraying both incomplete love and its growth into something far more complete, as both Levin and Kitty, in *Anna Karenina* (1995), begin with an immature vision and perfect it through the trials and errors of actually living together and having daily choices of actions to make. Meanwhile, both Anna and Vronsky have rich erotic visions of the world without having, either of them, the slightest capacity to love in a full Aristotelian sense. Their choices are self-serving and childish, and it is no surprise that these non-lovers end up destroying one another. I believe Tolstoy thought that intense erotic love is always incompatible with mature loving, but I need not argue that here, as it is irrelevant to my point. The point is, novels can show us lovers whose love has a rich vision-aspect, but because that love is so lacking in the domain of Aristotelian action (shared pursuits, reciprocal benefiting), the conclusion to be drawn is that they *actually don't love the other party at all*, they just have a self-serving fantasy that masquerades as love.

In these two cases I am confident that the novelists want us to see the relationships as cases of failed non-love and the vision of each as splendid but emptily self-serving. I draw this conclusion because *Middlemarch* shows Dorothea evolving into a woman really capable of love and because *Anna Karenina* contains other contrasting characters who show what real love (for Tolstoy) consists in. Tolstoy might have written a novel entirely about Anna, in which she would figure as someone who really loved and then tragically lost. Some readers and film producers think he did so. However, he did not.

I am strongly inclined to think that Marcel is like these defective lovers, seeing the world in a way tinged by erotic radiance, but not actually managing to love at all, so deficient is he in the reciprocal-benefiting and shared-activity department. His relationship with his grandmother looks like it promises to become a real loving relationship, but that is an exception. The "general form" of his loves begins with his relationship to his mother, which is entirely selfish and controlling, a form of infantile need that does not deserve the (full) name of love according to Aristotle. It looks as if the relationship with Albertine is hardly better: just as he tries to keep his mother in his room against her will, so he jealously imprisons Albertine. But in this case we are faced with a virtually insoluble question: does Proust mean to represent Marcel the way Tolstoy represents Anna, namely as so destructive and selfish that we should not count her as loving, or does he want us to see Marcel's vision of the world as a case of genuine love?

Before we get to the main issue, reciprocity, let me concede to Furtak that Marcel does attain a type of sensory knowledge of Albertine: as he says (117), relying on Anne Carson, we get at least fifty-nine bits of knowledge of Albertine in the text. These do not greatly move me, because some of them are dubious (her bisexuality may be a creation of his jealous fantasy, for example), and the rest are mainly observed physical attributes that do not add up to a character portrait of the type we get from Tolstoy or George Eliot. Still, I can agree with Furtak that she is not a mere fantasy: after all, if she were, he would not be agonised by his inability to control her. Thus I agree with Furtak in finding Marcel's sceptical claim in the final volume a bit extreme: the people we love, Marcel concludes (in a passage discussed by Furtak), are the ones we see least clearly of all: they are merely "a vast, vague arena in which to exteriorise our thoughts…And it was perhaps my fault that I did not make a greater effort to know Albertine in herself." Even here, however, he doesn't say that he knows nothing; he says that he did not make a sufficiently great effort.

Why not? The answer is that jealousy is a central part of his love, and jealousy directs his mind away from the woman who is with him toward anxious fantasies of what she could be doing when she is not, and related plans to control her more successfully. Albertine can escape from his jealousy only when she is unconscious and has ceased, for the time, to be a separate human being:

> When I returned she would be asleep and I saw before me the other woman that she became whenever one saw her full face…I could take her head, lift it up, press her face to my lips, put her arms round my neck, and she would continue to sleep, like a watch that never stops, like a climbing plant, a convolvulus which continues to thrust out its tendrils whatever support you give it. Only her breathing was altered by each touch of my fingers, as though she were an instrument on which I was playing and from which I extracted modulations by drawing different notes from one after another of its strings. My jealousy subsided, for I felt that Albertine had become a creature that breathes [*un être qui respire*] and is nothing else besides. (Proust 1981, 109)

> In this way, her sleep realised to a certain extent the possibility of love… By shutting her eyes, by losing consciousness, Albertine had stripped off, one after another, the different human personalities with which she had deceived me ever since the day when I had first made her acquaintance. She was animated now only by the unconscious life of plants, of trees, a life more different from my own, more alien, and yet one that belonged more to me. Her personality was not constantly escaping, as when we talked, by the outlets of her unacknowledged thoughts and of her eyes. (*ibid.*, 64)

Thus is it only when a human being becomes a plant that she can be loved without anxious self-preoccupation and studied with real care.[4] I feel that this material is a clear concession that Marcel does not know all that much about Albertine—because of his jealousy; but it seems to me that Proust unequivocally asserts that jealousy is integral to all erotic love.

However: even if he had been able to know her without this huge impediment, that would still be insufficient for Aristotelian love. So let me return now to the reciprocity question. The problem is that Proust the author seems to lack interest in reciprocity-in-action, and does not spend much time on it. If he thought, like Aristotle, that Marcel's deficiency in this regard disqualifies him from real love, we'd expect him to devote more attention to this question. So I am strongly inclined to think that he believes Marcel's love for Albertine to be a genuine case of love, and is not bothered by the glaring absence of (what I take to be) a central necessary condition of love. Certainly the wonderful material about knowledge of love on which Furtak writes so well treats the Marcel–Albertine relationship as a central case of love, rather than as (what I would call) a case of failure to love. So too does the material about the pattern of one's loves in the final volume—where again I would be inclined to say that we uncover a pattern of egoistic fantasy that doesn't come close to love. I suspect that Furtak already uses criticism of Marcel more than he is entitled to without further argument, given the novel's monophonic form. But surely he seems committed to saying that Marcel's relationship with Albertine (warts and all) is seen by Proust as a real case of love and of knowledge of love.

There is material late in the novel that complicates the story I have just told, suggesting that, after all, Proust the author (and Marcel in his later life) does recognise the deficiencies endemic to all human loving (because the desire to control the loved one is, he thinks, ineliminable), and, in consequence, does indeed treat ordinary love as not genuine love.[5]

In an important passage in which Marcel describes his thoughts on the death of Bergotte, the novelist, he turns to Plato's theory of recollection, announcing that the novelist bears into this world trace memories of moral obligations contracted in another world—and, realising that he cannot fulfil these obligations in ordinary human relations, he realises them through his art.

> All that we can say is that everything is arranged in this life as though we entered it carrying a burden of obligations contracted in a former life; there is no reason inherent in the conditions of life on this earth that can make us consider ourselves obliged to do good, to be kind and thoughtful, even to be polite…All these obligations, which have no sanction in our present life, seem to belong to a different world, a world based on kindness, scrupulousness, self-sacrifice, a world entirely different from this

4. Since Furtak refers often to Iris Murdoch, it is worth noting that this passage is the basis for John Bayley's account, in *Elegy for Iris* (1999), of his own attitude to (his wife) Iris, as she sank deeper into Alzheimer's dementia: he finds himself liberated from anxious fantasies about her many lovers and able to love her as she is—an animal body.

5. The following three paragraphs (ending at "reciprocal rather than solipsistic") are quoted from chapter 10 of my *Upheavals of Thought* (2001).

> one and which we leave in order to be born on this earth, before perhaps returning there to live once again beneath the sway of those unknown laws which we obeyed because we bore their precepts in our hearts… (Proust 1981, 186)

Proust is making more than one claim here. One claim is that the artist's dedication to art is the only example of pure dedication we have in this world. But he also says that this dedication is an example of "kindness" and "self-sacrifice"—because he thinks of the novel as a gift to readers. Only in this act do we see selfless giving to others—every face-to-face human relationship being marred by jealousy and possessive desire. The relationship between author and reader is free from excessive crippling dependency, free from ambivalence, even free, in a necessary way, from partiality—for the work addresses itself to all alike. It does not know where it is placed in the lives it addresses.

Nor is this the end of the artist's gift: for the gift also creates for the reader a possibility of unselfish and undemanding love, and therefore of knowledge of another's mind. All our attempts to know the mind of another real person are doomed by our jealous projects: we are always seeing some aspect of our own needs and wishes. Before the work of art, by contrast, these obstacles fall away and true knowledge can take place. An artist's style:

> Is the revelation, which by direct and conscious methods would be impossible, of the qualitative difference, the uniqueness of the fashion in which the world appears to each one of us, a difference which, if there were no art, would remain for ever the secret of every individual. Through art alone are we able to emerge from ourselves, to know what another person sees of a universe which is not the same as our own and of which, without art, the landscapes would remain as unknown to us as those that may exist on the moon. (Proust 1981, 931–32)

And this means that art offers us the only possibility of genuine human contact, and therefore the only possibility of a love that is reciprocal rather than solipsistic.

This material shows that Proust is aware of another quite different type of love, in the light of which he seems to judge daily human love inferior. He never quite says that his conclusion is that the artist–reader relationship is the only real love, and all the rest is non-love, but he surely moves in that direction.

The artist–reader relationship, however, would surely not satisfy Aristotle, nor should it. There are no shared activities, no mutual knowledge of particularity, no trust, no clear intention to benefit. After all, why should we believe the author wrote the novel we are reading to benefit us for our own sake, rather than to acquire fame or to make money? And does this matter to our experience as readers? On the reader side, the author, if sensible, ought to recognise that readers come in many types, and that some have no interest in a loving bond with the author. They may be reading the book because it is a course assignment. Or they might want to investigate a world-view that they actively dislike, as is my case with Wagner—and, indeed, Proust. So I think Furtak is well advised not to grab on to this part of the text as evidence that Proust actually had a sane view of love. This one is crazy in a different way.

In the end, then, my questions for Furtak are: where are the shared activities? Where is reciprocal benefiting? And in the absence of these, can we really say that Proust's novel shows us genuine love?

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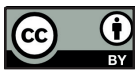
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Love, Skepticism, and Aesthetic Judgment

Comment on Rick Furtak, Love, Subjectivity, and Truth

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"What we know is shaped by our way of knowing," Rick Furtak writes in the preface to his perceptive and invigorating book on Proust. Thus, there is a "subjective basis [to] our awareness" (2023, xi). One might see one strand of Proust's novel as a prolonged attempt to work out the nature of this subjective basis. Do our "knowledge" and "awareness" amount to some sort of grasp of objective truth? Or does the subjective nature of the foundation undermine any pretension to objectivity, leaving us unable to know anything, perhaps, other than our own interior feelings and experiences? I want to offer a few reflections on these questions, and to draw connections with a couple of modern philosophers I take to matter here. Be warned, I will not be offering a full account of these issues, not only because that would vastly exceed the space I have available here, but because I am still, myself, groping my way toward such an account.

I share Furtak's sense that Proust's readers have all too often concluded, from the fact that Marcel often seems to take the second possibility seriously, that his final position—and, by extension, Proust's—must be essentially sceptical in nature. As he correctly writes, "we also observe countercurrents repeatedly arising, in which love and related emotions are both shown and said to provide a unique type of insight. At times, love seems to be a prerequisite of *veridical* apprehension" (xi–xii; my emphasis).

Still, Marcel *does* often take seriously the sceptical possibility that aspects of our experiences that seem external are actually internal. This is, of course, a Humean thought, and at times Marcel sounds strikingly like Hume:

> Our love is too big a thing for us to be able altogether to contain it within ourselves. It radiates towards the loved one, finds there a surface which arrests it, forcing it to return to its starting-point, and it is this repercussion of our own feeling which we call the other's feelings and which charms us more than on its outward journey because we do not recognize it as having originated in ourselves. (Proust 1981, 655)

This is clearly reminiscent of Hume's observation about the human mind's "great propensity to spread itself on external objects" ([2007], 1.3.14.25). That particular remark, as it happens, appears in Book One of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, as part of a discussion of the nature of causation and necessary connection. In Book Three, Hume makes it clear that he holds a similar view regarding moral qualities:

> Take any action allowed to be vicious; Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions, and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises

> in you, towards this action. … It lies in yourself, not in the object. … Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat, and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind[.] (3.1.1.26)

Hume's metaphysics commits him to the existence, in various domains, of a certain sort of deceptive experience: an experience that presents itself to us as something *external* to ourselves—something we notice, take in, or perceive, as if it were an aspect of external reality—which in fact originates within. A number of philosophers have used the term *Projectivism* to refer to such Humean views; I will, here, refer to *Projection* views of love, and take these to be opposed to *Response* views. Response views deny that love is (typically, or necessarily) a matter of projection, insisting that in such cases we really are noticing aspects of external reality—aspects to which our emotions then respond in (hopefully) the appropriate manner. Take something like beauty. On a Response view, I might notice that somebody possesses the (real, perceiver-independent) quality of being beautiful, and fall in love with her in response. A Projection view will say that no one is beautiful in and of themselves; beauty, rather, is a sentiment I make up, project onto some person or other, and then act as if (and, in all likelihood, believe that) I have found it "out there."

On this way of understanding the distinction, then, the issue between Response views and Projection views is largely a question of how love is connected with reasons. A genuinely responsive attitude is one for which there are reasons: take fear or anger, which can be justified or unjustified, appropriate or inappropriate, depending on whether or not one has good reasons. A feeling like thirst, on the other hand, is not in this sense a response, and so is not supported by reasons. While there are, of course, causal reasons that explain why one is thirsty, causation is distinct from justification; if you are thirsty then you are simply thirsty, and there is no sense in asking whether it is reasonable to feel that way.

Proust is undoubtedly concerned with issues raised by the possibility of projection in love. It is worth noting, though, that there are at least two kinds of issues that can come up here. One, the one that Furtak emphasises (and the one I have focused on to this point), concerns the metaphysical question: a sceptical position, here, would hold that love is *never* a genuine response, but always projected onto the objects of our love. This either logically entails, or at the very least strongly supports, various other subjectivist and/or sceptical theses: that love is never appropriate or inappropriate, that there can be no reasons for loving someone, and—nearest to Furtak's concerns—that love has little if anything to do with the possibility of knowledge or accurate perception. Marcel clearly is, at times, bothered by sceptical worries of this sort. At other times, though, I think his worry has a different nature, one that has less to do with the metaphysics of love and its reasons, and more to do with a cluster of issues concerning human psychology, authenticity, and the nature of aesthetic judgment.

It will help to be able to focus on specific examples. On page 12 of his book, Furtak quotes three remarks, which come from two distinct passages in *Swann's Way*. Furtak, I think, takes these remarks to support a generalized scepticism regarding the idea that love might be affirmatively linked with knowledge. Elements of that sort of scepticism may well be present, but on my reading they are at the very least intermingled with other concerns, as I will try to make clearer below.

> Furthermore, from early on in the novel Marcel shows the concern that a love, such as Swann's for Odette or his own for Gilberte, may "not correspond to anything outside itself, verifiable by others," our need "to find reasons for [our] passion" leading us to identify after the fact qualities that are

> "worthy of love," when we do not initially *begin* to love the person for these reasons. This provides Proust's truth-obsessed narrator with yet another reason to doubt his infra-red vision. (2023, 12)

"Infra-red" is Marcel's metaphor for the "indefinable quality" inherent in "everything that surrounded Gilberte"—a quality invisible to ordinary observers, but apparent to him precisely on account of his love for her. That Marcel chooses a *colour* to play this role ties the passage nicely to the end of the above quoted passage from Hume, while reminding us that Hume assumes, there, a perhaps too-simple analysis of the metaphysics of colour: many philosophers, while perhaps acknowledging colours to be subjective in *some* significant respect, would deny the flat claim that they are therefore not real qualities of objects.

Here is the first Proust passage from which the remarks quoted above are drawn (the "he" refers to Swann):

> He was well aware that his love was something that did not correspond to anything outside itself, verifiable by others besides him; he realized that Odette's qualities were not such as to justify his setting so high a value on the hours he spent in her company. And often, when the cold government of reason stood unchallenged in his mind, he would readily have ceased to sacrifice so many of his intellectual and social interests to this imaginary pleasure. (1981, 258)

And here is the second:

> Everyone needs to find reasons for his passion, to the extent of being glad to recognize in the loved one qualities which (he has learned from literature or conversation) are worthy of love, to the extent of assimilating them by imitation and making them additional reasons for his love, even though these qualities are diametrically opposed to those his love would have sought after as long as it was spontaneous—as Swann, before my day, had sought to establish the aesthetic basis of Odette's beauty. (444)[1]

In the second passage it is taken to be a common human trait that when in love, we feel a need to find reasons for our love. Some might take this to suggest that "reasons for love" are never anything more than *post hoc* rationalisations—the generalized scepticism I mentioned above. But Marcel does not seem to be suggesting that this is true of *all* putative reasons for love. Indeed, he seems to point to a particular class of reasons—"those his love would have sought after as long as it was spontaneous"—as an exception to this complaint. The qualities that really are just *post hoc* rationalisations are clearly distinct from the spontaneously appreciated qualities: the former are both "additional" to and "diametrically opposed" to the latter.

The clearest object of Marcel's concern in this passage, then, is not (directly) related to the issues that separate Projection from Response views; it is not a general concern about the epistemic nature of the emotions, nor one concerning the metaphysics of the relevant sentiment or the reasons for it. Instead, the focal concern seems close to authenticity, as is signalled by the mention of other people whose endorsement or approval the lover desires. The lover already *has* reasons for loving his beloved; the question is why he should feel the need to go in search of additional ones. And this is especially so given that those additional ones will not be *his* reasons—i.e., the reasons he already feels and takes to be compelling—but reasons that he predicts *others* will judge to be acceptable, reasons that are "verifiable by others besides him." Rather than relying on his own judgment,

1. I have isolated the embedded claim from its surrounding context, in which Marcel contemplates and draws conclusions about his own behaviour.

rather than being moved by what he can very well see are attractive qualities, he goes in search of qualities that other people have told him are loveworthy, demanding that his beloved match standards set by others.

This seems, of course, a rather bad way of going about things. Suppose Swann cannot find any sort of theory or aesthetic standard to vindicate his belief that Odette is beautiful. Would he then be required to abandon that belief? Suppose that a search of the relevant literature fails to turn up any evidence that your beloved is worthy of love; she doesn't seem to match any of the qualities of character specifically identified as loveworthy in those books. Still, *you* find her worthy of love. (Or at least, that's how you found her before you started paging desperately through novels.) Why is your personal judgement that she is lovable worth less than the judgement of some novelist or professor of aesthetics? Again, note that we can acknowledge this concern about (in)authenticity without in any way rejecting Response views. What it seems to call for is that we find the *right kinds* of reasons, not that we reject reasons altogether.

This might be resisted. After all, it might be claimed, the whole *point* of reasons is that they are universal: a reason, by its nature, compels and is authoritative for *everyone*, not just you. So to care about reasons for love *at all* is *ipso facto* to care about one's ability to justify love to a broad audience; in principle, to everyone. It seems to me, for reasons I will get to shortly, that this argument—call it the Universality argument—falls short of its mark. For now, let's just note that the very phenomenology of love suggests that *something* is wrong with it. Wondering whether other people will approve of your romantic choices is one thing; wondering why you love the person whom you love is quite something else. It seems entirely possible not to care about the former at all and to still give a great deal of thought to the latter. And at any rate, the very experience of finding someone beautiful, or loveable, seems to include the feeling of *getting it right*: you are seeing them as they really are, you are seeing something about them others cannot see—if you really love them, in fact, you *know* you are right to do so, and you simply don't care what others may think or feel. (Of course, Hume admits that projective experiences *feel* as if we are discovering something that comes from outside, and in that sense getting things right: that's part of the point of the Projectivist analysis. The question is whether to accept that analysis.)

Feelings that attach to beauty, which seem so central in such cases (and are so important to Marcel, and to Proust), are in a way paradigmatic of the philosophical perplexities here. For the experience of beauty seems to involve both subjective and objective elements, and it is not obvious how the two are to be reconciled. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is largely animated by this tension. Kant admits that the search for external validation seems out of place when it comes to what he calls judgements of taste, and is well aware of the potentially distorting effects of the desire for the approval of others:

> It is required of every judgment that is supposed to prove the taste of the subject that the subject judge for himself, without having to grope about by means of experience among the judgments of others and first inform himself about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the same object. … Hence a young poet does not let himself be dissuaded from his conviction that his poem is beautiful by the judgment of the public nor that of his friends. … To make the judgments of others into the determining ground of one's own would be heteronomy. (2001, 163)

Kant is clear, moreover, that inappropriate attempts at legitimation would include not only citations of such empirical facts as the fact that others share your judgment, but also philosophical arguments based in conceptual claims about beauty—the kind of thing, presumably, Swann was looking for in seeking "the aesthetic basis of Odette's beauty":

> If someone does not find a building, a view, or a poem beautiful, then, first**,** he does not allow approval to be internally imposed upon himself by a hundred voices who all praise it highly. He may of course behave as if it pleased him as well, in order not to be regarded as lacking in taste. … But what he does see clearly is this: that the approval of others provides no valid proof for the judging of beauty. … Second, an *a priori* proof in accordance with determinate rules can determine the judgment on beauty even less. If someone reads me his poem or takes me to a play that in the end fails to please my taste, then he can adduce Batteux or Lessing, or even older and more famous critics of taste, and adduce all the rules they established as proofs that his poem is beautiful; certain passages, which are the very ones that displease me, may even agree with rules of beauty (as they have been given there and have been universally recognized): I will stop my ears, listen to no reasons and arguments, and would rather believe that those rules of the critics are false or at least that this is not a case for their application than allow that my judgment should be determined by means of *a priori* grounds of proof, since it is supposed to be a judgment of taste and not of the understanding or of reason. (164–65)

Thus, neither the experience-based judgments of others, nor any theory or proof, can convince me that something is beautiful when it does not seem that way to me—or vice versa. You can find out whether something is beautiful only by directly experiencing it. It would be easy to conclude from this that judgments of taste are entirely subjective. What Kant says, though, is a bit different: "The judgment of taste is not determinable by grounds of proof at all, *just as if* it were merely subjective" (164; my emphasis). The "just as if" is essential, for part of Kant's claim about judgments of taste is that such a judgment makes a universal claim, which distinguishes it from a mere preference. "This is delicious!" expresses a merely, and purely, subjective response, but "This is beautiful" makes a claim with which others are expected to agree. And in his statement of this idea, we find a corresponding "as if" clause: "The judgment of taste determines its object with regard to satisfaction (as beauty) to the assent of everyone, as if it were objective" (162). Kant is searching for an account of aesthetic judgment that somehow reconciles objective and subjective elements—just the sort of account that Proust often seems to be seeking with respect to love.

Kant's attempt, though, is hindered by his assumption that reasons, by their very nature, must be universal, a fact that brings us back to the Universality argument. In combination with the diversity and apparent relativity of our aesthetic responses, the alleged universality of reasons seems to suggest that such responses are not the sorts of thing for which we can give reasons. But why think that reasons are necessarily universal, at least in any straightforward sense?[2] At the very least, it is far from true that all valid reasons appear to *require* everyone to respond in the same way. Some reasons seem to be such that they render certain actions or feelings eligible for performance without rendering them rationally required: thus, an action or feeling might be *justified* by reasons (suggesting that if I were to do it, I would have acted intelligibly or reasonably) without its being the case that I *had* to do it, or feel it, on pain of irrationality.[3] (Or, in the case of supererogatory actions, on pain of immorality.) This is one way, though not the only way, in which reasons based in beauty stop short of being "fully" universal. Part of the explanation, in my view, is that values like beauty are genuinely pluralistic: because many things must be in place in order to experience something's beauty, there is more beauty in the world than any single perceiver will ever be able to appreciate. This is true both over the course of a life and at any particular moment. Thus, different people will find different things beautiful, and this need not imply

2. See Jollimore 2024, on which the following discussions draws.
3. Jonathan Dancy (2004) refers to these as "enticing reasons." Margaret Little (2013) refers to them as "non-deontic reasons" and/or "non-requiring reasons" (see also Little and Macnamara 2020).

either that any of them are making a mistake (which is not to say that mistakes are impossible in this area), nor that a response to beauty is nothing more than a projection of a subjective sentiment.

The idea that beauty possesses normative force—that it is able to make claims on us—in no way depends on the idea that those claims are universal in scope. Any particular manifestation of beauty may be accessible only to some, but to those people it will be genuinely normative, standing apart from them, and their ordinary goals and concerns, as something to which they are called to respond appropriately, authentically, and indeed passionately. As Richard Moran writes, in a paper that traces relations between the aesthetic views of Kant and Proust:

> To begin with, not every sense of requirement is universal in form, and the obligations we feel to certain people, places, or other objects of love, are often such that we can find it impossible even to explain them to another person, let alone justify to them in such a way that they could come to find themselves under the same obligation themselves. … Something we are prepared to call beautiful is not measured purely by its ability to satisfy our given desires, but is rather something to which our pleasure or desires themselves may be answerable, may need to conform themselves to, or be instructed by. (2017, 78)

I very much like Moran's suggestion that what renders the demands of beauty genuine *demands* (and perhaps, by extension, what does this for the demands of love) has to do with direction of fit: beautiful things call for our desires to fit *them*, rather than bending to fit our desires. Beauty is an engine for our aspirations, something we feel we must live up to. (That is, when we perceive it. Unperceived beauty simply leaves us cold, flying underneath our radar.) This strikes me as very much the right direction to move in. A full account would, of course, require us to go considerably further. My own suspicion is that such an account would resonate much more harmoniously with Response views than with Projection views; that the relevant direction of fit is mind-to-world at least suggests as much. But I also suspect that we are not going to be able to settle the issue between Response and Projection theories *until* we reach a better understanding of our judgments regarding beauty (and other qualities we see as potential justifiers for love), and of the interactions between the subjective and the objective in these particular contexts.

Even after all the metaphysical matters are settled, many difficult questions will remain standing. Simply establishing that there are in fact reasons for love hardly settles questions like: which reasons count as good reasons? How, precisely, do they call on us to respond to them? What do we do when these conflict with other putative reasons? And, perhaps, most pertinently here: when, precisely, *should* you be worried about the fact that nobody but you seems to find this particular person loveable? (Or about the fact that they don't fit what you thought were *your own* standards and values? What do you do if you find yourself, like Swann, in love with someone who isn't even your type?) When might the desire for others' approval represent well-grounded caution rather than lack of self-confidence? Getting the metaphysics straight might help us here, but these are also questions about character, and authenticity, and how to live. Though these, too, are philosophical questions, they are posed in a different register. Answering them might be viewed as a joint project between philosophers and novelists, and we should be grateful for the work of philosophers like Rick Furtak, who are adept at building brilliant bridges between these domains.

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On Reading Love, With Resistance

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Love, Subjectivity, and Truth is an erudite, intricate, and moving book. It takes on important philosophical questions—most crucially, what is the relationship between love and knowledge, and between love and self-knowledge? Although these could easily stand alone, Rick Anthony Furtak chooses to address them in a reading of *In Search of Lost Time*. In fact, Marcel, "Proust's narrator," who "tries to understand philosophically" what "arises from his life," (2023, xi) becomes to a large extent the protagonist of Furtak's book. Like an existential philosopher, Marcel (as distinguished from Proust) is occupied with the question of what it means to understand oneself "in the midst of existence" (x). Marcel "meanders" on a continuous search for "the meaning of it all" (xi), accompanied, as it were, by Furtak. The philosopher does not give up on Marcel, even when the latter is "mistaken" (119), when he "gets *himself* wrong" (118), or is "in denial" (8), or is "in a state of bad faith" (120), or, finally, when he stubbornly holds on to a "positivistic, skeptical or meaningless interpretation" of love (69), an interpretation that is radically different from the one proposed by Furtak in this book and in his other work.

Furtak is patient with Marcel, reading him through "loving eyes" (xi), and argues that the protagonist and narrator of *In Search of Lost Time* eventually comes to his own philosophical conclusion about the nature of love—as that which brings the truth of the subject to light (a conclusion which Furtak, too, affirms). True to his vision of philosophy as a form of thinking that "need not strive to transcend the personal 'style and idiosyncrasy' of the individual person but can rather emphasize the particularities of temperament and personality" (126), Furtak argues that, despite not being always consistent, and despite not always being aware of it himself, Marcel's "singular identity" (127) is constituted by love. If "our distinct individuality," he holds, is to be known, this can be "only by virtue of our romantic encounter with the world of others" (130–31). This view is put into practice in his philosophical account, which stages his readerly encounter with Marcel.[1] *Love, Subjectivity, and Truth* becomes, consequently, a book both of and about love. What Furtak takes to be Marcel's main discovery, namely "that the cohesion of his life depends on a series of loves" (140), is exemplified by his loving reading of Proust, who is thus able to hold a "magnifying glass up to our own experience" (138). In Furtak's reading, Proust shines light on the fact, central to the weaving of "love," "subjectivity," and "truth," that in life, just as in literature, romantic love discloses to the loving person "the highest truth that is attainable for an existing person" (143), just as it endows the person with "the courage … to trust in the veracity of what love has disclosed" (141).

1. Furtak's project is a kind of labour of love. For him, love reveals for the lover "the truth about—not only *his* world, but *the* world … the content of subjective truth … the highest truth … attainable" (143). In reading, I often felt that *In Search of Lost Time* is such a love object, one which discloses and affirms to Furtak his subjective truth, allowing him to articulate what is so meaningful to him about love. Indeed, we learn in the preface that *Love, Subjectivity, and Truth* is part of Furtak's *project*; it is a book "not merely compatible, but continuous with my (other) written work about emotion, literature, and existential thought" (xi).

Perhaps because I read *Love, Subjectivity, and Truth* in a year marked by a genocidal war, surrounded by stories of violence, death, and displacement, I found myself resisting the idea that love has a privileged position in human life, that it is unique among human emotions in its ability to create meaning, disclose the truth of both self and other, and consolidate and reveal one's project.[2] I was, perhaps, like one of the characters in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* described so aptly by Furtak; my "sedimented history" outlines my affective and cognitive possibilities (25). I want very much to believe in love as a central, creative force in human life, but looking around, beyond intimate and personal encounters, I sadly do not see much love. And even personal, intimate encounters are more often than not structured and governed by sentiments other than love—possession, jealousy, hatred, frustration. Proust, I think, provides powerful descriptions of such sentiments consuming people. In fact, often the very thing Furtak takes as evidence in Proust for the transformative and revelatory nature of love, I understood as a desire for possession and objectification which I find hard to reconcile with love (although Furtak thinks of these as potential aspects of love, calling Marcel, for example, a "jealously possessive lover" (11)).[3] In what follows, I want to elaborate on these points, first by examining the more general assumption about the centrality of love in human life, and then by questioning the role that Furtak assigns to love more specifically with respect to *In Search of Lost Time*.

Love, says Furtak, partakes in "the emotional a priori" (3), his term for the affective ground that is fundamental to human experience. The notion of the emotional *a priori* belongs to a phenomenological tradition that holds that humans are in principle receptive and attuned to the world, and that they exist in such a way precisely by virtue of having moods.[4] The world, in which we are emotionally and pragmatically involved (never being detached spectators), is always a matter of care or concern; it always matters to humans in one way or another. Furtak puts it well: "Without … love, care, concern, or interest … nothing in the world around us would be more salient than anything else" (3). I find the idea that the world is always revealed by some mood or another very compelling, and am in complete agreement with Furtak that moods, affections, or emotions should not be seen as secondary, subjective responses to an objective reality, a reality independent of humans. What he calls "dispositional affects" (3) are a condition for the world, for the appearance of a meaningful environment in which we are grounded (such that we are able to respond to it, act in it in appropriate ways, and so on). I am just not certain that any of this entails that love has a privileged position and that we can conclude with Furtak that "our life in the world is experienced as meaningful *because* we are fundamentally loving beings" (1) or that "love and care … constitute the emotional a priori" (2).

In suggesting that love is *constitutive* of the emotional *a priori*, or that it is essential to our experience of the world as meaningful (claims that give love significant weight, over and above other emotions), Furtak views it not as one mood among others, a particular mode that discloses the world, but rather a value, the standard

2. Of course, *In Search of Lost Time* is also marked by a horrible war, which finds its way into the novel. Some of the epistemic issues provoked by the war in the novel (among them a form of scepticism, but also, on the opposite spectrum, a question about how the real is to be represented—and with it the unexpected, surprising intrusion of the reality of war into life) are discussed in Mahuzier 2005.

3. Furtak's main objective is to reject the idea that love is "merely" subjective, in the sense of a fictional or illusionary projection of the lover, one which discloses nothing about the "truth" of the beloved. Focusing on the idea that love can disclose truth while at the same time being perspectival, anchored in one's subjective manner of approaching the world ("subjective" in the broad sense of the subject's meaning-giving activity), he emphasises that love is always an orientation towards a person as "what she is or may be *to me*." (10) Love, in that sense, is always interested, always disclosing the specific location of the loving subject. Whereas some may not turn these interests into an "overly demanding" relation towards the beloved, others may be demanding, "jealously possessive," but still loving and manifesting care towards the beloved. While I agree that love is rarely disinterested, I am uncomfortable with the idea that possessive jealousy is a kind of love (and I think that this possessiveness is often clearly demarcated along gendered lines, the women becoming the object to possess, to "conquer." It is certainly that way in Proust).

4. I am thinking, at this point, of Heidegger's claim that moods make up our "Befindlichkeit," our ability to find ourselves in the world in one way or another (translated at times as "disposedness" or "attunement"; both terms are central to Furtak's discussion of the emotional *a priori* (see §29 and §30 in *Being and Time*)).

of a meaningful life. Love is assigned the greatest importance in the life of the individual, positioned as an ideal form of relationship to others and to oneself (because it is "a prerequisite of veridical apprehension" (xii)). This, I think, puts an unnecessary strain on love. Others matter to us first and foremost as objects of love, Furtak argues. Love just *is* the recognition and confirmation of the other as "worthy of existence" (11). In a similar manner, we mourn those whom we have lost, because we loved them (7), and the more profound our love, the more profound our grief over their loss. But we don't feel such love for most of the people with whom we come in contact. Do we have to affirm that they are somehow less worthy of existence or, more accurately, that we feel that they are so? Or should we alternatively "stretch" love so that it will also cover relations of care towards others which are neither romantic, close, or intimate?[5] Can we not envision a non-loving encounter with the other in which their singularity shines through, and is also affirmed and highly valued (perhaps through fascination, curiosity, or respect, emotive attitudes that are not tantamount to love)? Similarly, do we not mourn those whom we do not love (either romantically or in any other way), those whom we have perhaps not even met?[6] If love is a condition for the ability to care about others, to genuinely feel that they are worthy of existence and that their non-existence is a genuine loss, then we either demand too much of love, or too little of our non-loving dispositions towards others.

Addressing the question of whom and how we love, a question that touches upon the relationship between ethics and love, which is central to the point I made above, Furtak declares that he is focused "more on the personal aspect of existence than on the socio-political" (110), so that his account of love is based on, and relevant for, the intimate, amorous encounters between self and other. In such settings we encounter the "existing individual" (114), for whom love is a way of affirming the truth of existence. It is true, says Furtak, that love draws on public, shared meanings and ways of being, that it is structured by and responds to social conventions (how and whom is it normal to love and in what ways). Yet love always reflects, even within such contexts, a choice that individuals make. "Some cultures practice tattooing and others do not," says Furtak, pointing to how the broader social and political contexts in which we find ourselves lay out what can be deemed meaningful and laudable activities and choices. "Well and good. But our existential imperative is to choose whether to be tattooed or not" (114). Like the person choosing whether to be tattooed or not in a society in which tattooing is meaningful (or even a norm), the loving person chooses a way of life, chooses to affirm what may have by now consolidated into habits and routines, chooses to value the beloved, and thus the loving person gains purchase on life and commits to the "truth" of his or her existence. Well and good. But love, although described as emerging amidst the particularities of place and time, remains a completely abstract and universal "disposition" in this account. Might it not be the case that love as an individuating, "authenticating" activity ("truthfulness" consists "in … authenticity" (132)), as Furtak understands it, is itself born from certain shared matrices of meaning? It seems, first and foremost, to depend on a conception of the self born in a specific historical moment. Only individuals who have "true" cores, whose experience is or can be unified, can be discovered and affirmed by love, as Furtak understands it. Indeed, the book in its entirety takes for granted the existence of subjects whose experiences lend themselves to such ways of loving. Since both self and other are understood as entities that can affirm "life in its unique particularity" (125), they can love and discover each other's truth through love.

5. And what about those we despise? Hate too makes some things "more salient" then others, to borrow Furtak's term (3). Furthermore, couldn't we say that, at times, hate is, just like love, "an attunement, an emotional orientation, towards the possibilities" (26) that the other, or the world, hold? Why prioritise love over many of the other ways in which we relate to others?

6. Furtak does not strictly equate "love" with "romantic love," mentioning Marcel's love for his grandmother along with his love for Gilberte and Albertine. But it seems that all love, for him, is modelled on romantic love and involves intimacy and passion (even if not sexual in nature).

My final comment is related to the issue raised above, but bears more directly on Furtak's reading of Proust, and the question of how subjectivity and truth relate to each other in the novel. According to Furtak, Marcel is mistaken in thinking that since love is subjective, it cannot be the basis for the discovery of the truth of the individual. However, he continues, Marcel comes to amend his mistaken conception and "eventually learns" (119) that, despite the fact that love is always embedded in a specific vantage point (the loving individual's), it is nonetheless not illusory, but in fact discloses the meaning of his life ("the joy of rediscovering what is real," as Furtak quotes Marcel (131)). But is love the medium in which "the real" is rediscovered? For if there is no such unity of the self that can be affirmed and brought out by love, then love is deprived of one of its cardinal roles. Marcel's "scepticism," which touches upon the question of the unity of the self, is eventually overcome not by love, but by literature, which transforms lived life. Thus, in the final tome of the novel, *Le Temps retrouvé*, Marcel affirms that "real life, life as it is laid bare and illuminated—the only life in consequence which can be said to be really lived—is literature" (1993, 298).[7] Later in this passage, as well as in other instances, Marcel refers to the retrospective nature of such illumination. The appearance of the real involves a purposeful disengagement from the activity of living as well as of loving. Furthermore, there is a dimension of retrospectivity in many of our experiences, which materialise as they are only with the passing of time:

> What we take, in the presence of the beloved object, is merely a negative that we develop later, when we are back at home, and have once again found at our disposal that inner darkroom, the entrance to which is barred to us so long as we are with other people. (2015, 490)[8]

I don't see it as a sceptical argument, just as the expression of the idea that memory, and later literature, are crucial for the materialisation of meaning and truth (which is not necessarily related to love). Furtak himself argues at one point that literary art is the key to a meaningful life, for the emergence of a true self. But this is not because literature retraces routes already taken in concrete experiences of love ("A tribute to them," as he describes Marcel's conception of his literary art (132)), but rather because literature gives love, indeed life as a whole, its meaning.[9]

The relationship between life, philosophy, and literature is a frequent theme in Furtak's work, and this book is itself a testament to the power of literature, its "valuable contribution to cognitive awareness" (131). Since I am in the habit of thinking of the relationship between philosophy and art with the aid of Jean-Paul Sartre, I could not at this point refrain from thinking of another "sceptic," whose life, devoid of love, emptied of meaning, called him to reflect on the relationship between writing and living. I am referring to Roquentin, the protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*, who while no doubt different from Proust's Marcel, nonetheless reaches a similar decision towards the end of the novel. Roquentin, too, decides that the only redemption from the meaninglessness of existence (and the specific suffering that it brings) lies in the transmutation of life into art; *Nausea* ends with Roquentin's decision to write "[a] book. A novel" ([1938] 2007). Roquentin no doubt presents a much grimmer account of human life, but his commitment to the redemptive power of art is similar to Marcel's. Thus, he says, for example, that "nothing happens while you live. … But everything changes when you tell about life," and he expresses the hope that the moments making up his life, devoid of love, devoid of meaning, would "follow and order themselves like those of a life remembered" (39–40). I cannot pursue the relationship between Marcel and Roquentin beyond this initial similarity, but I hope that in drawing on

7. "La vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par consequent pleinement vécue, c'est la littérature" (IV, 474).
8. "Ce qu'on prend en présence de l'être aimé n'est qu'un cliché négatif, on le développe plus tard, une foi chez soi, quand on a retrouvé à sa disposition cette chambre noir intérieure dont l'entrée est condamnée tant qu'on voit du monde" (II, 227).
9. A recent account of the relationship between literature, love, and truth, which emphasises the role of the transmutation of life into art, and nonetheless remains in line with Furtak's interpretation of the individualising role of love, is developed in Buijs 2022.

it I am able to gesture towards the need to think about literature's relationship to "love," "subjectivity," and "truth," in the context of Proust's novel, to supplement the rich account created by Rick Anthony Furtak, whose work shows how natural and fruitful it is to think together about existential themes in Proust and in life more broadly.[10]

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Perspective, Affectivity, and Existential Meaning: On the Cognitive Value of Love and the Novel

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In *Love, Subjectivity, and Truth* (2023), Rick Anthony Furtak draws on his previous work on emotions, literature, and existential thought to offer a particular reading of Proust. For Furtak, *In Search of Lost Time* not only conveys and analyses experiences that enable the reader to explore existential issues, but also does "something like phenomenology" (x). In his view, Proust explores the search for truth about love and subjectivity using phenomenological descriptions. Furtak is particularly interested in how Proust's narrator, Marcel, is concerned with the kind of knowledge provided by love, but also questions the legitimacy of this knowledge (7). As he puts it: "A major conundrum that faces Proust's narrator throughout the novel is whether love puts us in touch with the world or encloses us in a fantasy realm that is of our own making" (39). In his view, there is in the novel a scepticism about what love is capable of revealing and yet, at the same time, this scepticism is overcome through the idea that love provides a particular kind of insight and is a condition for a "veridical apprehension" of the other (xii). One central question the book addresses regards whether love leads us to detect something actual which would not be visible in its absence, or whether it makes us apprehend false properties in the other. Inspired by existential philosophy (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche) and phenomenology (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Ortega y Gasset, Scheler, von Hildebrand), Furtak argues that even a flawed subjectivity might play an important function in acquainting us with particular truths about human existence.

In this review, I will focus on what I regard as an important contribution of Furtak's book: the development of a rich and nuanced concept of perspective that underscores its affective nature, which at the same time acknowledges that it is precisely by virtue of being shaped by the subject's affectivity that perspectives are able to provide knowledge about reality and others. My aim is twofold. First, I will show how this notion of perspective enables Furtak to defend two closely interrelated claims in his book: *the cognitive value of love*, according to which our affectively shaped perspectives are able to provide knowledge; and *the cognitive value of the novel*, which describes the way in which we learn about the cognitive value of love by engaging with Proust's novel. My second aim is to show how this concept of perspective can be further developed by drawing on the phenomenological tradition and, in particular, on the works of Max Scheler.

To develop his arguments, Furtak draws on the thesis of the "emotional *a priori*" that he introduced in *Knowing Emotions* (2018). The "emotional *a priori*" explains why reality does not appear as neutral but as something that matters from our perspective. For him, love establishes multifarious interests in the world and determines what has reality and value, which is why we experience it as meaningful. Love makes possible a particular kind of vision that enables us to apprehend aspects of the world which would otherwise be unseen. For Furtak, there is a kind of truth that is only accessible via love: only love introduces us to the particularity of a person's life. In love, we see possibilities that have not even manifested themselves. Love is fallible but not blind. As he puts it:

"Love can in this way make a person not blind, but perceptive – even perspicuous" (2023, 18). In Proust's novel, love provides Marcel with an infra-red vision that makes him able to apprehend possibilities in the loved one.

Furtak notes that Proust's narrator is fascinated by the knowledge that his loves were shaped by contingent factors and could have been different (27). Importantly, these possibilities seem to be richer than the real world. How can we then know that we apprehend the other objectively rather than projecting our love onto this other? Put otherwise, can the emotional *a priori* provide a foundation for the apprehension of reality and value? For Furtak, the narrator is tempted by a particular line of thought: "Skeptical once more of his infra-red vision, he reflects that perhaps at the time he loved her she had simply been illuminated by a glow that emanated from inside *him*" (33). The narrator wonders if one's own moods lead to a false colouring of the world and others. Here, however, Furtak reminds us that our perception is "a way of seeing from somewhere—and in some way" (36). We cannot speculate how things would be without our interpretation and subjectivity. More radically, "if we were to aspire toward the idea of the universe's own impersonal perspective, 'from which all is seen but nothing is cared for,' we would be dead to the meaning of things, lacking the focus and orientation that are required for the conduct of life and the pursuit of knowledge" (36). Thus, as he puts it, the reason why it is a shame to be stuck in a depressive mood, in irascibility, in nostalgia, etc., is that this is not the only way the world is. In his view, what is needed is to inhabit different moods, affective standpoints, and perspectives. Our infra-red vision functions from a particular angle of interpretation of the world. "Each person's attunement is both outwardly and inwardly truth-revealing, because it brings to light aspects of the environment (what we love) while also showing who we are at heart (our way of loving)" (37).

That reality is always apprehended from an affective standpoint leads to scepticism about the knowledge achieved through it. To address this issue, Furtak presents an inventory of Marcel's sceptical opinions, organised around a classical set of ten Pyrrhonian modes of suspending judgment. These sceptical judgments address questions that explain differences among beings by virtue of differences in the impressions that the same objects produce on different subjects, our individual peculiarities, the limitations of our senses, our affective standpoints, the positions from which we regard the world, the fact that we perceive things along with other things, the fact that nothing impinges on our senses alone, the correction of our impressions, the influence of belief on our perception, our tendency to undervalue what we are accustomed to, and the fact that our experience is shaped by habit. Scepticism shows us that a plurality of points of view produces multifaceted truths for us (115).

Yet, Furtak suggests, "how a beloved person appears to us may have something to do with our attention, which allows us to grasp and apprehend the iridescent features of the one we love—and that, in this respect, those without a loving disposition are condemned to remain in the dark" (115). Thus, subjective standpoints which are shaped by our love are cognitively valuable when it comes to knowing the other. Importantly, Furtak argues not only that we can know others through love, but also that this love might enable us to know ourselves insofar as the self arises from engaging with the intersubjective world. As he writes:

> Our feelings both designate the properties of people and things *and*, in addition, "manifest, express, and reveal" the first person, "the inwardness of an I," at the same time. Our loves, as well as the love of others for us, lend us a space in which to become what we are—that is, what we will have been. (140–41)

Therefore, the cognitive value of our perspectives in love consists not only in providing knowledge, but also in giving meaning to our existence and in leading us to become who we are.

In my view, this complex and rich concept of perspective enables him to defend what I called above the *cognitive value of love*. As with authors of the phenomenological tradition, according to Furtak, objectivity cannot be equated with neutrality. For him, perspectives can provide knowledge of the world, others, and ourselves. In fact, the kind of knowledge provided by perspectives is inaccessible from a "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986, 7, 25, 140). Perspectives are shaped by the subject's affective states. It is precisely by virtue of being affective in nature that perspectives are able to provide meaning and value. In fact, affectivity is what makes each of our perspectives unique and the knowledge achieved from them irreplaceable. As a result, in love, we can objectively apprehend the other and grasp possibilities inherent to her being. The kind of "infra-red vision" provided by love is not possible from a neutral standpoint. In my view, Furtak's emphasis on the affectively shaped nature of perspectives makes an important contribution to current research insofar as this issue has not been sufficiently acknowledged. While there has been a focus in epistemology on the cognitive achievements provided by perspectives, less has been said on the affective nature of perspectives themselves. For Furtak, each of us is endowed with an infra-red vision regarding the other's possibilities. Each perspective is unique and enables us to apprehend the other as she is, although this does not mean that she is seen by everyone in the same manner.

In addition, insofar as the novel provides the reader with relevant insights about the cognitive value of love and makes us think about the limits of this knowledge and how to overcome them, Furtak is defending what I called above *the cognitive value of the novel*. In particular, he defends a form of aesthetic cognitivism, according to which engaging with the novel allows us to discover the cognitive value of the subjectivity of a loving person. Put otherwise, literature teaches us how the subjective perspectives of the loving person play an important role in the acquisition of knowledge about others, and indeed the kind of knowledge acquired.

One aspect which I want to explore in more detail here is how Furtak develops this concept of perspective by employing his thesis of the "emotional *a priori*," which, as he states in several parts of the book, is inspired by Max Scheler's concept of an "*ordo amoris*," i.e., an order of the heart. For Scheler, there is an order of the heart which is more basic than cognition and will. As he puts it: "Man, before he is an *ens cogitans* or an *ens volens*, is an *ens amans*" (1973a, 110–11). This order of love shapes what becomes visible in our horizon and the degree of relevance with which things or the world are given to us. Love, as an attitude of openness to the world and others, enables us to apprehend the evaluative dimension of life. For Scheler, it is the order of our heart that pre-selects what can be apprehended and the order of preference in which it will be given to us (1973b, 116). Each individual (and collective) has its own order of the heart, so there are differences between what matters and what is preferred.

The use of Scheler's concept of "*ordo amoris*," which animates the thesis of "the emotional *a priori*" in order to develop the notion of perspective, demonstrates Furtak's awareness of the potential of phenomenology to study the cognitive value of affectivity and literature (see also Vendrell Ferran 2023). However, in my view, there are other aspects of Scheler's philosophy which could be employed to shed light on key aspects of the concept of perspective and, in so doing, develop Furtak's project further. As a Scheler scholar and a philosopher strongly inspired by phenomenology, I focus, in what follows, on three lines of research that can be developed by drawing on Scheler's concept of the order of the heart.

To begin, Furtak emphasises the role of love in enabling us to apprehend features of the other. This is in line with Scheler, who attributes to love its own order and logic. However, there is a crucial difference between Furtak and Scheler on this point. For Scheler, love is not an emotion but what he calls an "act" in which the

spiritual person is involved and which, as such, makes us open to the other and her possibilities. Unlike love, emotions such as jealousy or fear do not have any cognitive function for Scheler: they simply respond to values previously grasped by means of our capacity to feel (1973a and 1973b). In contrast to Scheler's position, Furtak conceives of his emotional *a priori* not only in terms of love, but also as encompassing other affective states. This suggests that, unlike Scheler, for Furtak emotions can be regarded as reliable sources of insight. This is not just a terminological or taxonomical difference between the two authors, since it also has consequences for their respective understandings of affectivity more generally. The thesis that emotions might provide knowledge of features of the target—which is implicit in Furtak's book—is, from Scheler's standpoint, problematic. Rather than revealing objective features of the other, emotions only reveal the relation between object and subject. If I fear the dog, this fear reveals that I am in a particular relation with the dog that makes it appear to be dangerous, but this does not imply that the dog is *really* dangerous (see also Mulligan 2009). In my view, Furtak's book should underscore the differences between love and the emotions. It should be clear that love, by virtue of being an affective phenomenon of a particular kind, has a cognitive value that cannot be found in emotional responses such as fear or disgust.

Second, Furtak's work would benefit from distinguishing between the different meanings of the concept of "*ordo amoris*" that can be found in Scheler's work. In fact, the concept as used by Scheler has three distinct meanings: there is an objective, a descriptive, and a normative *ordo amoris*. The objective *ordo amoris* describes the objective realm of values that can be grasped by our feelings. The descriptive *ordo amoris* refers to the subject's affective structure, developed over the course of her life. This order differs from individual to individual and defines one's character. Finally, there is a normative *ordo amoris*, which refers to a selection of objective values that can be realised over the course of a life: this is not an imperative to become a specific person, but rather describes a potential self that may be realised over the course of a life. The order of the heart is not constituted by an individual history, but is given at birth.

In my view, Furtak is focused on the descriptive rather than the objective and normative meanings of the concept. In particular, his idea that the subject's perspective is shaped affectively fits well with the thought that the descriptive *ordo amoris* is developed over the course of one's life. For Furtak, our affective perspectives are shaped by our emotions, and this accords with Scheler's notion of a descriptive order of the heart. From a Schelerian point of view, all kinds of affective states contribute to shaping our particular subjective perspectives. In my view, it is understandable that he does not use the idea of an objective *ordo amoris* to elaborate the affective nature of perspectives, insofar as he does not have to commit to value realism for his view. Yet, Scheler's normative *ordo amoris* would be relevant for Furtak's project, specifically in the final part of the book where he explores who we become due to our loves. In my view, Furtak could develop this issue in more detail by employing the notion of normative *ordo amoris* to explain how the knowledge about the other acquired from the perspective of the loving person, and the kind of existential meaning that this provides, allows the subject to become the person she is. In other words, loving a particular person enables the subject not only to apprehend possibilities intrinsic to the other, but also to develop possibilities intrinsic to herself that would perhaps not come to be realised if she did not love this particular other.

Finally, this latter point could help to develop Furtak's version of aesthetic cognitivism. The idea that literature can provide knowledge by virtue of letting us engage with the perspectives depicted has been defended by recent proponents of cognitivism (Huemer 2022; Vidmar Jovanovic 2023). With his book, Furtak is advocating the view that it is by engaging with the subjective perspectives depicted in the novel that we acquire what Burri (2007) has called "maximal subjective standpoints," which enable us to discover aspects of reality which

otherwise would remain unseen. More precisely, for Furtak, the cognitive value of engaging with literary perspectives consists in providing us with viewpoints that enable us to discover the cognitive value of love. This means that when we engage with these perspectives, we not only come to know the other, but become the person we could become, and so the cognitive value of literature goes beyond providing propositional, practical, or phenomenal knowledge; it precipitates an existential transformation of the reader's self. In other words, engaging with literary perspectives could lead us to realise what Scheler calls the normative *ordo amoris*. In this respect, and given the cognitive value of love, the cognitive value of literature should be interpreted as leading the reader to an existential transformation: the reader learns not only that love discloses the particularity of the other and her possibilities, but also that it enables her to develop existential possibilities. In this reading, Furtak could defend the view that learning from the novel is not just about acquiring propositional truths but also has to do with prompting a transformation of the reader's existence.

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Response to Martha C. Nussbaum, Troy Jollimore, Lior Levy, and Íngrid Vendrell Ferran

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In *Love, Subjectivity, and Truth*, I examine the kind of insight that may be provided to us by the affective disposition of love. This is done through a close engagement with the incessant theorising, and interpretation of personal experience, provided by Proust's narrator in his novel of ideas *In Search of Lost Time*. This rich and intricate text contributes to philosophy of emotion by repeatedly weighing sceptical objections to taking seriously what love reveals, but illustrating that love nonetheless enables the apprehension of meaning and value in the world. If even an admittedly selfish and possessive lover such as Proust's narrator, "Marcel," learns that a loving subjectivity can indeed orient us toward significant truth, then our emotional experience need not be viewed with sceptical distrust, but rather as an important mode of apprehension and a source of moral guidance.

1. On Love and Reciprocity

Martha Nussbaum suggests that Marcel's attachment to Albertine is not an example of the love Aristotle speaks about in Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which I will call *philia*. Yet, I think this sells short the elements of *philia* that are part of Marcel's love from the early instant of its awakening, when he first sees Albertine. One reason why we cannot have *philia* for wine, apart from the question of reciprocity, is that wine does not have a life of its own in which we could take an interest: we can *use* it, but we cannot take an interest in its well-being. The scene in which Proust's narrator initially glimpses, and is captivated by, Albertine and her friends shows that he regards her as a person with a unique personality and sensibility. He wonders what plans she has made or that others have made for her, for instance, and what home she will return to at the end of the day; and he wants to know the nature of her inscrutable will. If he only regarded her as an instance of superficial beauty, he would not care about any of these things. Nor does the Aristotelian character of his dawning love require that she love him back. An example of *philia* that Aristotle uses is the love of a parent for a child who does not know of the parent's existence or identity. Such a parent could be concerned about what plans the child has made or that others have made for them, by virtue of the parent's interest in the child's life and well-being. Is it farfetched to view Marcel's orientation to Albertine as involving an interest in her life and how it is going? I don't think so. He is intrigued by her and her companions, and he wishes to befriend them if possible.

With time, he will indeed meet the young women, playing games with them and finding himself drawn to Albertine above all. They will go driving in the countryside together, talk about art and literature, take picnics together with cheese and lettuce sandwiches, and enjoy music in the form of Albertine playing the piano while

Marcel listens. Arguments notwithstanding, they will be involved in the everyday habits of domestic life at Marcel's home in Paris. All of these, as simple as some of them may be, ought to qualify as shared activities.

What do we make of the times when Proust's narrator takes comfort in Albertine's sleep, when she has ceased to be a conscious human being and has a life akin to that of a plant? This shows, I think, that the same otherness toward which he is drawn and that he seeks to know is, simultaneously, a threat to him. While she is napping, Albertine no longer torments him with worry about what she is thinking or feeling, or what she might be planning to do. Albertine, as a person with a distinct point of view and way of life, is partially knowable—but not entirely. It is true that his love for her is inseparable from a wish to control her. But he does to a significant extent get to know her in spite of himself. The beloved other is a compelling reality, who cannot be reduced to whatever we might want from them or who we want them to be. She loves to ride her bicycle, even in the rain, and that she enjoys doing this marks one of the many ways in which Albertine is irreducibly different, as Marcel is forced to acknowledge. Her difference may prompt him to feel painful emotions, but at the same time it is part of his attraction. He realises this, remarking at one point that he chose Albertine over her (and his) friend Andrée because the latter resembles *him* too much, and is therefore not sufficiently mysterious.

Marcel's jealousy toward Albertine's (actual or imagined) other lovers, female ones in particular, would be unintelligible if he did not have some form of love for her. That is the sense in which love is foundational to our entire affective experience. Love defines what in the world concerns us and relates to our own life and well-being. We do not have emotions pertaining to what we do not care about. This is illustrated by numerous forms of love, too, such as Marcel's love for his grandmother and hers for him. We do sometimes resent this vulnerability.

The lesbian side of Albertine's bisexuality, for which we have solid evidence by virtue of Aimé's research and Andrée's confession, causes Proust's narrator to suffer painfully—not only because it limits his control over her and his possession of her. Rather, it surpasses the limits of what he can imagine, and Marcel wishes to understand Albertine's experience, to grasp what it is like to be her. Yet his very gender and sexual orientation place a barrier upon him, preventing him from knowing this aspect of what she feels.

When Marcel claims that life "laid bare and illuminated" is essentially a literary matter, this must be construed in terms of the vital connection between consciousness and writing that pervades Proust's text. This suggests that a clarification of what one has experienced in life is a crucial point of reference for the novelist's literary art. Marcel's relationship with Albertine puts a constraint on what can qualify as a legitimate interpretation of their life together. Because he did not appreciate her until she had disappeared, he must take account of this fact, and there is therefore a reality to which he must be answerable in explaining what happened between the two of them. By no means does his love float free in a fantasy realm which he himself controls. As Nussbaum points out, he eventually chastises himself for not having made a greater effort to know Albertine as she is in herself. Not every failure in loving, however, is a failure *to* love at all. Through literary art, we may get a glimpse of the uniqueness of the manner in which the world appears to each person. We can even get an inkling of what Albertine's emotional world is like, indirect and incomplete though this might be. We as readers know, for example, that she would not have separated from Marcel if he had not suggested this separation himself.

Additionally, we have reason to think that Albertine's very existence matters to Marcel, above and beyond her presence in his life. By taking an interest in her, he opens himself up to an experience of profound grief that becomes overwhelming when he learns that she has died. The fact that he has loved and lost Albertine is a defining feature of his life, an emotional truth that he learns through his feelings of upheaval, as Martha

Nussbaum argues in the title essay to her fine collection *Love's Knowledge* (1990). There is no room for scepticism here. Our way of seeing shapes what we see, and for Proust's narrator the world and its meaning are viewed in the light of his attachment to Albertine. This is compatible with its being true that a narrator who wasn't quite so preoccupied with the quest to control and possess his beloved would likely have gotten to know her better than Marcel got to know Albertine, which I am happy to concede.

2. On Love and Qualities

Troy Jollimore perceptively identifies the moments when Proust's narrator voices a kind of scepticism as essentially Humean in spirit, and grasps that a main issue in my book is whether qualities are projected onto the world or whether our attunement may enable us to respond to properties that really are there to be appreciated. In the latter case, it makes sense to speak of reasons for loving, just as in aesthetic judgement we have certain reasons for finding something beautiful. Although the qualities that justify our response are in principle available to others, it might be that in order to perceive them we must be sufficiently receptive and pay a heightened attention to the object—something that I refer to as a loving gaze.

Jollimore also notes that, when we seek confirmation from others that our love is not misplaced but well-justified, we may be guilty of a kind of inauthenticity, distrusting ourselves and our emotions. It is significant that Marcel affirms the possibility that interpreting one's life truthfully requires having the courage of one's emotions. It requires taking a stand on how the world seems from one's idiosyncratic vantage point. And Jollimore draws upon Kant in order to tease out how we should understand the interplay of subjectivity and objectivity here. Charles Swann finds Odette beautiful without having universal grounds, and yet her beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder because it is actually "out there" to be beheld. Jollimore suggests that we need to embrace a pluralism about the values that make our emotions well-grounded, since there is "more beauty in the world" than any one of us is able to perceive.

This harmonises well with the observation that, once we have begun to love a person or a work of art, we seek to find more aspects of that person or work that are beautiful or lovable. My love for Proust's novel makes me want to keep re-reading it, to know more about it, from its social context to the philosophical issues it raises. I want to spend more time with it, to discover new things about it that I can appreciate. It is the same way with my love for a close friend. I desire to keep learning more about how they see the world, as it were to look through their eyes—to apprehend their sensibility, their concerns, and their feelings. As *In Search of Lost Time* tells us, this would be the sole voyage of discovery that was ultimately worth making:

> The only true voyage of discovery, the only really rejuvenating experience, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them sees, that each of them is. (1987, III.260)

In his book *Love's Vision* (2011), Troy Jollimore accords a special priority to our loves for other human beings, because of the complexity and responsiveness of distinctive creatures for each of whom "a world exists." That *everyone* else appreciate our unique sense of the world is not necessary, as long as *someone* does. I am mostly in agreement with this; however, I wouldn't want to sell short our loves for animals, for places, and even for abstract ideals such as fairness. Any of these have the potential to illuminate a world of meaning. Yet this point ought not to be stretched too far. William James writes somewhere about a child who befriended a cucumber,

treating it like a pet. A cucumber, no matter how treasured, can only do so much for you. This is another way of saying that there is something to be said for objectivity, and that not just any sort of object can perform the role in our lives that a beloved person can.

The delicate interaction of subjective and objective aspects in a loving person's feelings about the world is captured by a passage from the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, when the narrator is in love with Gilberte:

> My imagination had isolated and hallowed in social Paris a certain family, just as it had set apart in structural Paris a certain house, whose entrance it had sculpted and its windows bejewelled. But these ornaments I alone had eyes to see. . . . For in order to distinguish in everything that surrounded Gilberte an indefinable quality analogous in the world of the emotions to what in the world of colors is called infra-red, my parents would have needed that supplementary sense with which love had temporarily endowed me. (I.450)

It is the radiant existence of Gilberte, bathed in love's glow, that makes her house appear to be hallowed and bejewelled. Infra-red vision, after all, does not spawn a fabricated world out of itself; rather, it brings to light something "out there" which is real yet invisible to most subjects. No logic determines what in the world ought to stand out and command our attention, and without the dispositional affects of love, care, concern, or interest—the emotional *a priori*, in my terminology—nothing in the world around us would be more salient than anything else. Indeed, in this case we would be faced with a flat, disorganised mass of information, without the sense that any of it *matters* to us. For a comprehensively unloving human being, the world would seem empty and absurd. When we love, we apprehend meaningful facts that would be otherwise lost upon us. Just as a family's dinner table used for daily meals is not merely a piece of wood, likewise the entrance to Gilberte's home isn't exhausted in its significance by the materials of which it is made. This would suggest that Marcel, in loving, is *not* out of touch with reality, but better attuned to it in certain respects, by virtue of his affective orientation. Giving epistemic priority to a disenchanted mode of vision would be not only sceptical but nihilistic. As Jollimore has elsewhere observed (2011), sometimes a charitable perspective is needed in order for us to see and appreciate what is right before our eyes.

3. On Love and Meaning

Roquentin, the narrator of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (2013), is radically unlike Proust's Marcel because he views the natural world as alienating and absurd. I regard this difference as having to do with a refusal or a willingness to be enraptured by one's surroundings. When Marcel, on first visiting Balbec, rhapsodises for many pages about the sunlight dancing on the undulating waves of the sea that are visible from his hotel room, he is exhibiting a receptivity to falling in love with the world. But his embrace of a loving point of view, one that is willing to finds things beautiful, does not imply that everything is rosy. Even if love makes the world go around, it does not by any means guarantee us happiness: indeed, it is precisely by virtue of his greatest loves that our narrator experiences the worst of sufferings after the deaths of his grandmother and then of Albertine. The relevant distinction here is not between happiness and sadness, but between meaning and meaninglessness. My jealous rival, or the terrorist who regards me as a threat, is not accurately described as radically different in motivation from a loving person: it is just that what they love and care about conflicts with what I represent or embody in their eyes. While I may do my best to avoid being harmed by them, I cannot refuse to comprehend why they dislike me.

Lior Levy agrees with me that our existence is always attuned, but suggests that this is not necessarily due to our capacity to love or care. One reason for characterising the themes of the book as "existential" is that I am concerned with what distinguishes meaningful experience from the sense that all is vanity. When Marcel first encounters Albertine and her friends on the Balbec coast, he feels that life is positively enchanted, rich with possibilities, and this is due to an incipient love for all of them, before they have been particularised. Yet being drawn to them all makes him want to know *each* of them in particular, and it is significant that Albertine's eyes are the first to meet his gaze. Proust's narrator tells us that love enables us to single out each individual in her specificity, even in her tone of voice. Our emotional perspective is enhanced *and* made more complicated by each of these loves, because we are susceptible to being upset for better or worse by contingencies that pertain to what we love and care about. The well-attuned lover is therefore oriented toward the beloved, a non-fabricated being, in such a way that his picture of her (or hers of him) is not falsified by distortions or fantastic impositions. He envisions her as precisely what she is, a person for whom a world exists, with an utterly singular perspective through which a unique truth can be disclosed.

Another variety of truth which is at issue in Proust's novel is the truth of the self, the one who loves and who is thereby individualised and located. Levy is right to highlight this. Marcel does not take flight from life into literature as into a fantasy; rather, by writing he articulates and clarifies what he has experienced most intensely, from the hawthorns in bloom to the death of his grandmother. This project is constrained by his own shortcomings and mistakes, such as his belief that Albertine would not leave him without warning, and all of his jealousy and boredom during the time that he was deceiving himself about how much she meant to him, as he would learn only later. His words pay tribute to his life in its actual particularity, doing justice to what he has become due to what he has found emotionally overwhelming. We learn who we are via "the truth of our feelings, the truth of our destiny" (1987, III.517), not by taking a view from nowhere.

In a formula for affirming one's own life in its singular identity, Marcel says: "Our true life is reality as we have felt it to be" (III.915). To avoid being untrue to that reality, his narrative will need to be every bit as messy, complex, and ambiguous as the story of what he has loved: "Only from such an impression," from the most cogent emotions, is it possible to "extract some truth from life" (II.787). What the writer transcribes, this book that has been dictated by reality, is to be used by each reader as a lens for self-interpretation: "Every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader to enable him to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have perceived" (III.949). Each of us experiences a unique and qualitatively different world, which a vivid example of anyone else's concrete narrative can aid us in bringing to light. Far from being "a purposeful disengagement from the activity of living as well as of loving," literary imagination is intrinsically bound up with the examined life.

4. On Love, Value, and Perspective

Íngrid Vendrell Ferran rightly emphasises the importance of phenomenological thought, especially that of Max Scheler, for my overall project. She notes that my book is distinguished by its attention to the ways in which love plays an indispensable role in constituting one's entire realm of affective experience, as well as how a literary narrative such as Proust's invites us as readers to reflect on the nature of such experience. I wholeheartedly agree with a thought of Scheler's (which she quotes) that our identity as loving beings is fundamental to our particular vantage point on reality, founding what Scheler calls our many-sided interest in the things of this world, above all the beloved others whose existence and well-being are important for us (1973).

It is remarkable that a flawed and sometimes unreliable narrator can serve to illuminate the very nature of human emotions—but this is precisely what we find in *À la recherche*. For Proust's own voice includes, but is not limited to, that of his narrator. When the latter professes his indifference while also mentioning his somatic agitation (that his heart rate has increased, that he is breaking out in sweat) when considering that Albertine might leave him, the novel as a whole gives us more information about "Marcel" than is transparently available to *him*. This shows us ways in which any of us might be susceptible to self-deception, and how through an increased attentiveness we might take notice of this deception. It also invites us to question views that his reflective mind puts forward as evident truths, such as that his joy when kissing Albertine was mainly a pleasure within himself and not a world-disclosing phenomenon. The narrator's formula of "our true life," that is, "reality as we have felt it to be" (III.915), is fulfilled by the novel as a whole more accurately than it takes shape in his own consciousness. That we as readers are invited to perceive the truth about matters that Proust's narrator incessantly and ultimately fails to grasp testifies to the scope of the novelist's literary and philosophical vision.

Once again, "every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer's [narrative] is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader to enable him to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps have never perceived in himself" (III.949). Never perhaps has a fallible narrator provided his reader with so valuable a lens onto affective experience in general, including the peculiar and idiosyncratic shape that it will invariably take for each of us. This fact has implications for the philosophy of emotion, which most of the time floats free of any engagement with concrete narratives. I would welcome a phenomenological psychology that more frequently made contact with the philosophy of literature.

The book that Proust's narrator plans to write, which may be the very text that we know and love, ends up being a tribute to his *ordo amoris* in Scheler's sense. Just as Swann's life story is defined by his tragic love for Odette, Marcel realises that although "[he] was no more capable by an effort of memory of being still in love with Albertine than [he] was of continuing to mourn [his] grandmother's death," he nonetheless "asked [himself] whether a work of art of which they would not be conscious could really for them, for the destiny of these two poor dead creatures, be a fulfillment" (III.939). Vendrell Ferran distinguishes among "the objective realm of values that can be grasped by our feelings," the "descriptive *ordo amoris* [which] refers to the subject's affective structure, developed over the course of her life," varying "from individual to individual and defin[ing] one's character," and "a normative *ordo amoris*, which refers to a selection of objective values realisable over the course of a life." I feel that each of these three is relevant to my interpretation of Proust, but I do not agree that the last "is given at birth," as she claims, not in Proust's (or his narrator's) universe at least. The novel is filled with remarkable coincidences, and the historical contingencies that led Marcel to Balbec are crucial to the role that Albertine ends up playing in his life. William Blake's line in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1994) that "eternity is in love with the productions of time" is an apt epithet for the Proustian apotheosis of chance.

After concisely summarising the ten sceptical modes that I employ in my longest, middle chapter, Vendrell Ferran attends to another main theme of the book that attains its culmination in the final chapter. This is the *perspectival* nature of any singular person's emotional "take" on the world, of "reality as we have felt it to be." It involves the way in which love enables each of us to become our distinctive selves. Proust's novel gestures toward the possibility of a broader enlightenment that would not only reveal our own personality but also offer a glimpse of those other affective worlds that others must perceive. In each case, the emotional self registers one irreplaceable and apparently inevitable point of view. Our sense of meaningful reality is based upon "that ineffable something which differentiates . . . what each of us has felt," and we could wish for no

greater miracle than "to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them sees, that each of them is" (1987, III: 257ff.). Particular emotions arise within our overall affective orientation. It may or may not require a few thousand pages to articulate this, but *In Search of Lost Time* accomplishes it masterfully in its chronicle of the heart.

Allow me to end by thanking all four commentators—Martha, Troy, Lior, and Íngrid—for the time and care they have devoted to bringing my book to light. Their illuminating responses to *Love, Subjectivity, and Truth* have effectively conveyed this book's major themes to my most esteemed group of emotion researchers. My heartfelt thanks are also given to *Passion*'s editors for making this possible.

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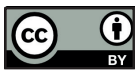
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