

# OF SOULMATES AND OLD SPOUSES: HOW TO BE A ROMANTIC KANTIAN ABOUT THE ETHICS OF LOVE

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This paper introduces and defends the foundations of a comprehensive Kantian view of the ethics of love, and shows how this relates to the ethics of respect. The view is Kantian insofar as it maintains that everyone shares a feature that makes them lovable. But it maintains that, due to the metaphysics of this feature, particular qualities of people provide reasons for love. This allows us to account for both the stability of lovability whilst also making the justification of love romantic. In the second half of the paper, I argue that the view, when properly supplemented, can account for patterns of partiality that have come to dominate the discussion of the ethics of love.

What makes a life divine isn't its perfection  
or its power, but its estrangement  
From the world and the reflection of itself in  
all it sees. I wish I understood  
What people mean by an eternal life. I only  
know that mine is singular,  
Complete and coextensive with the  
transitory universe that it contains—  
As though it were like God's and  
comprehended everything, but small.

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John Koethe, 'The Divinity Within'

Sometimes, I wonder if I would know a  
beautiful thing  
if I saw it.

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Megan Fernandes, 'Love Poem'

## Introduction

Normative ethics in the analytic tradition focuses more on aggregating mild headaches than on the bonds between spouses, more on shoving unfortunately

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placed men than on the importance of one's children, and more on tropical island tragedies than on the duties between friends. While the former topics are of theoretical interest, this asymmetry in focus is out of alignment with the ethical lives of those who don't have much in common with the shallow characters of philosophical thought experiments—i.e., everybody.

One thing becomes clear when we turn our focus to the ethical lives of actual people: Love is central. For most people, loving relationships center their social lives. Who one loves deeply shapes where one lives, what one spends one's money on, what one craves, and where one's thoughts turn during sleepless nights. Given this, we should expect love to be central to ethics. Those who think it is not owe us an explanation.

I think love is central to ethics. This paper will sketch a theory about the role that it plays. The main thesis of the paper is that lovability—the feature that something has when it is fitting to love that thing—is an absolutely central ethical feature. We can understand not only the nuances of loving relationships by understanding the nature of lovability, we can also understand the ethics of respect. Understanding these two things goes a long way towards understanding what we owe to each other.

As we'll see, the debate about love and its demands has largely revolved around two big issues. The first has to do with whether love is the sort of thing that can be justified and, if it is, what justifies it. This debate is about the fittingness conditions of love. It is, unsurprisingly, connected to what love is; this is unsurprising since it is difficult to investigate the fittingness condition of an attitude if you don't have an idea of what that attitude is like. The second big issue is about the *shape* and *reach* of justified love. The main issue here is whether fitting love justifies *partiality* and, if it does, how much. Common sense suggests that it does justify partiality and that this partiality has a particular reach and shape. Much of the literature is about how to account for common sense.

This paper is about the best version of a Kantian approach to the ethics of love. I will investigate this by investigating both of these core issues. The first two main sections will be about fitting love. In the first, I will motivate and explain a new Kantian view about what makes love fitting. Kantian views traditionally see love and respect as connected. So in the second section I will connect my account of love to respect. This will come in two parts. The first is about what makes those states fitting; the second is about what it takes to hold those attitudes *fittingly*. The last two sections of the paper are about partiality and its patterns. I will supplement my view with some other resources to show how it, unlike other Kantian views, can vindicate common sense.

## 1. Soulmates and Old Spouses

### 1.1. *Love, The Very Idea*

We must start with something about the nature of the attitude of love. This is mostly because it will be hard to fully evaluate proposals about its ethics without having some idea of what it's like. It is also because disputes over this play a large role in Kantian discussions, most particularly between David Velleman and Kieran Setiya. As will be common in this paper, I will use their views to anchor the discussion.<sup>1</sup>

Velleman's (1999) main goal is to show that love is a "moral emotion." The biggest obstacle to this thesis, to him, is the idea that love is essentially partial and morality is essentially impartial. He wants an account of love compatible with impartiality. He thus goes in for an awareness account of love—to use his memorable phrase, "love is an arresting awareness of value in a person" (362). As I understand it, this makes love compatible with impartiality because it is merely a certain type of recognition of value. It does not have any connection to partiality, either practically or in thought.<sup>2</sup> He does not deny that partiality is sometimes justified; it is just not justified by the reasons of love (see the last section of Velleman 1999).

Setiya (2014) has a radically different view. For him, what is essential to love is a disposition to be partial towards the beloved. What he means is that this disposition is justified by the reasons of love whether or not you have any other attitudes related to love. The justification for this disposition by the reasons of love is therefore "categorical."

My understanding of love the attitude is a mixture of these two views. I agree with Velleman that the foundational loving response is a sort of appreciative awareness of the beloved's value. Being in this state at some point is essential for love, and the reasons for it are categorical in Setiya's sense—the reasons for love always make appreciative awareness fitting. But the reasons for being in this state are very often sufficient reasons for a whole constellation of attitudes—from desires to help the beloved and be with them, to intentions to form relationships, to dispositions to be emotionally vulnerable to their weal and woe. To give this constellation a name, this

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1. Of course, we talk about many things when we talk about love. While I think the attitude I'm about to sketch does have some hope of being exhaustive, I am not defending that here. My focus is on the attitude that plays an ethical role and is paradigmatically held by people towards people. Several other notes will flag nuances and complications.

2. Although both Kolodny (2003) and Setiya (2014) rightfully question this neutrality given Velleman's understanding of how love arrests us.

is what it is to *care* about the beloved. I agree with Velleman that none of these further attitudes are essential to love the way that appreciative awareness is, and the reasons to care are not categorical in Setiya's sense. Very often the reasons of love provide reasons to care, sometimes they don't. Nevertheless, particular instances of caring very often constitute token instances of love.<sup>3</sup>

It is crucial to understand the relationship between appreciative awareness and caring. As I think everyone knows, one can love at particular times without being in the appreciative perceptual state. Such states are *essentially* occurrent and conscious. They have a distinctive phenomenology. Love cannot always be like this. After all, most loving attitudes of any particular person are not occurrent or conscious at any given time. I love my father-in-law and have since roughly 2005. But I haven't been consciously appreciatively aware of his value for 19 straight years. For most of that time, my love has been non-occurrent and unconscious. It has been a standing attitude of mine.

To see how to reconcile the claim that love is perceptual with the claim that most love is a standing attitude, we should consider the relationship between visual perception and visual perceptual beliefs. I believe that my kitchen table is black. This is a visual perceptual belief. But often it is merely a standing attitude of mine. I usually am not perceiving my table despite the fact that I do have the visual perceptual belief that it is black across time. The belief is a standing belief because neither its nature nor its continued existence depends on a current perception. But it is a perceptual belief because it is sourced in perception—that's where it came from, both causally and rationally.

Appreciative awareness and caring are related in a similar way, I think. Caring can sometimes *constitute* one's love for someone, even though the nature and continued existence of one's caring does not depend on a current perceptual state. But whenever one's caring constitutes one's loving, that caring is sourced in a loving perceptual state. This differentiates the person who lovingly cares from someone who cares for some other reason—e.g., because they will prudentially benefit if things go well for someone.

This picture of love won't be crucial for many things I say, but it will be at some points along the way. It will also give the reader a better idea of what I take my view's predictions to be.

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3. It is popular to try to analyze love in terms of caring in some way. See, e.g., (Helm 2010) and (Jaworska & Wonderly 2020). Although I agree that the two are deeply connected, I don't think we should make caring a necessary requirement for loving. The fundamental loving attitude is merely appreciative. This will be important later.

## 1.2. *Romance and Constancy*

Now let me motivate and explicate my view about what makes love fitting. The motivation comes from a tension between our judgments about two different kinds of case. Here is the first case.<sup>4</sup>

*Soulmates.* Italo and Ifrah are in love. In fact, they are good candidates for being soulmates. They share a deep, long-term, stable affection. They each find the other completely compelling. They are committed to each other for the long haul, and they mutually enrich each other's lives. Their lives have become intertwined, which is something they both want deeply.<sup>5</sup>

Italo and Ifrah's relationship, we can suppose, exemplifies an ideal romantic-sexual partnership. It is, at the very least, an approximation of Montaigne's mythical relationship with Étienne de la Boétie, a relationship that Montaigne described like this (de Montaigne 1958: 99):<sup>6</sup>

Our souls travelled so unitedly together, they felt so strong an affection for one another, and with this same affection saw into the very depths of each other's hearts, that not only did I know his as well as my own, but I should certainly have trusted myself more freely to him than to myself.

The first plank of our puzzle is provided by considerations about what justifies Italo and Ifrah's love in this case. We can start by thinking about an extreme view that rejects the idea that love is the sort of thing that can be justified. This view, *anti-rationalism*, maintains that Ifrah and Italo are neither justified nor unjustified. Love, for the anti-rationalist, is beyond the scope of the justified.<sup>7</sup>

While this view has a pleasant egalitarian air—someone can love you without reproach no matter how bad you are!—it does not fare well upon scrutiny. One path to seeing why is to note that to say that love is beyond the scope of justification is tantamount to saying that no one is *lovable*. To be lovable is to be the *fitting* object of love. But for you to be the fitting object of love is for you to be, at least possibly, the beloved of a *justified* lover. So, rather than saving a pleasant egalitarianism,

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4. "Soulmates" is just a bit of rhetorical flourish. I'm not suggesting that there is only one person that is "meant" for each person.

5. The features mentioned are mentioned in order to capture a wide range of views about what is central to romantic love.

6. Perhaps Montaigne and de la Boétie's relationship was not sexual. It was, it seems, deeply romantic nonetheless.

7. Frankfurt (2004) is often said to be the paradigmatic anti-rationalist, although Shpall (2020) shows us we should show restraint. Clearer cases are Han (2021), Smuts (ms), and Zangwill (2013). See Shpall (2020) for a trenchant critique.

anti-rationalism actually predicts a terrible sort of egalitarianism—you aren't the fitting object of love no matter how good you are!

This problem plays out with Italo and Ifrah. Ifrah (or Italo) would rightly be miffed to learn that not only does she fail to have some feature that makes her lovable for Italo, it is actually *impossible* for her to have such a feature. Italo might be psychologically compelled to love her by certain features of hers—her physical beauty, sharp wit, love of whisky and Rilke—but these go absolutely no distance towards justifying his love. His love is not even the right kind of thing for that.

Ifrah, like Montaigne, is likely to have none of this. She is a *fitting* object of love. Thus, some sort of *rationalist* view must be true for their love—some view that says that love does admit of justification and thus that at least some are lovable. There is a large range of rationalist views. Some of them provide more natural explanations of Ifrah and Italo's justifications than others.

One view that is particularly well suited to explaining the sort of romantic love shared by Ifrah and Italo is the *Neo-Platonic* view. This view maintains that the proper object of love is *beauty*.<sup>8</sup> According to this view, Italo's love is justified by Ifrah's beauty.<sup>9</sup> This explanation is likely more agreeable to Ifrah than the anti-rationalist one.<sup>10</sup> There is a certain romance to it; were Italo to outline Ifrah's particular beauty by way of explaining his love for her, she would naturally find it *romantic*.<sup>11</sup>

I myself am attracted to the neo-Platonic view or something near enough. Unfortunately, the view has a difficult time with our second sort of case. This kind of case threatens, at the very least, to show that a romantic view cannot provide a unified account of love's justification.<sup>12</sup>

*Old Spouses.* Italo and Ifrah have grown old. Ifrah has remained very similar to the way she was when she was younger. Italo, on the other hand, has changed significantly. He has become more secretive, irritable,

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8. For perhaps the most thorough contemporary explication of this view, see Nehamas (2007).

9. Of course, we need to understand beauty broadly (as Plato did and modern conceptions tend not to). On this broad view of beauty, one can be beautiful without being physically attractive. One's beauty might be grounded in the quality of one's character, or wit, or learnedness. See Lord (FCa; FCb); Nehamas (2007) for more.

10. The neo-Platonic view is a member of broader class of views—what we can call *value views*—that maintain that the proper object of love is some value. All value views that hold that the value in question is not universal will have the sort of problem I sketch below.

11. A note on terminology. Shpall (2020) calls anti-rationalist views romantic, and then shows that they are poorly supported by the evidence. He is thus an ally of mine. His name is perfectly apt, given common cultural tropes about romance. I also think my name is apt, given other tropes about romance.

12. This sort of case raises the so-called constancy objection. See Rorty (1986), and Jollimore (2011).

and reckless. This is partly out of boredom and partly because of a slow decline in some of his capacities.

Ifrah is in a difficult but familiar situation. While it might be permissible for her love for Italo to wane, it also seems monstrous to think that she is forbidden from continuing to love him. Yet, romantic views seem to predict the monstrous. If Ifrah's love was justified by Italo's particularities, then it looks like her justification disappeared when those particularities disappeared. If that is so, then it is no longer fitting to love Italo and Ifrah is thus forbidden from doing so.

This prediction motivates a second type of rationalist view.<sup>13</sup> This view, the *Kantian view*, maintains that *everyone shares* a common feature that makes them lovable.<sup>14</sup> Kantians are universalists about lovability. They thus capture the sort of egalitarianism that anti-rationalists were striving for. According to the Kantian view, all love is made fitting by this common feature.<sup>15</sup>

This view predicts that Ifrah can permissibly continue to love Italo.<sup>16</sup> For it predicts that just so long as Italo is a person, there is adequate justification to love him.

So the Kantian view does a good job explaining why Italo continues to be lovable, despite massive change. But it does less well explaining the justification of their love when they were younger. Sure, it does better than the anti-rationalist view, but Ifrah would still be reasonably miffed if she found out that what justifies Italo's love for her is just the fact that she is a person! If she gets worried about just why it is *her* that Italo loves rather than her great romantic rival, the Kantian view will leave her with cold comfort. Not only is she lovable on the same grounds as her romantic rival, she is lovable on the same grounds as every other person, no matter what they are like.

This tension between a romantic justification of Italo and Ifrah's young love and a sufficiently egalitarian justification of Ifrah's future love lays bare problems

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13. It motivates some other rationalist views as well, most obviously the relationships view. The relationships view maintains that lovability is relational—*B* is lovable for *A* in virtue of *A* and *B* standing in some relationship with each other. As we'll see below, while I do think that facts about relationships are normatively relevant, I think it is implausible that lovability itself is relational in this way. See also Jollimore (2011); Keller (2013); Lord (2016; 2022); Setiya (2014).

14. See Setiya (2014); Velleman (1999).

15. Shpall (2020) calls this view half anti-rationalist because it "insulates love from a set of evaluations that many of us find legitimate." What he has in mind first and foremost are cases where love is forbidden. Kantian universalists do deny this. See the end of the next section for my thoughts about this objection.

16. Of course, it matters what feature makes people lovable. Some might doubt that Velleman's view actually does make this prediction. I think it does. For Velleman, someone is lovable if they have an intelligible will in Kant's sense. I think that Italo still does, even though his empirical will (his embodied will) is compromised in various ways.

for both the neo-Platonic view and the Kantian view—or, more broadly, between romantic and egalitarian views. To dissolve this tension, a view needs to be able to explain both the Romantic Constraint and the Stability Constraint:

**Romantic Constraint:** Romantic love is justified by the particularities of the beloved

**Stability Constraint:** The fittingness condition of love is stable enough to sustain lovability across radical change

I will ultimately side more with the neo-Platonic reaction than with the pure Kantian reaction, but I think that we can do more to explain the appeal of this reaction by considering the metaphysical structure of the object of love. This will both let us give a unified explanation of Ifrah and Italo's love in each case.

### 1.3. *Romantic Kantianism about Lovability*

The central *formal* commitment of the Kantian view is that all persons share some feature that makes each of them lovable. To give this feature a name, let's call it *dignity*.<sup>17</sup> This is a formal commitment because it is not a view about what dignity consists in; it is merely the view that there is some feature shared by all that makes them lovable. This formal commitment on its own allows the Kantian to capture the Stability Constraint. Italo remains lovable just so long as he remains a person.

Kant's *substantive* view about dignity maintains that dignity consists in bare rational nature. Others views have been defended—e.g., Setiya (2014) maintains that being human is sufficient for having dignity. Romantic Kantianism, at this point, is neutral about what dignity is.

No matter what it is, we can ask questions about the *type of feature* that it is. We can resolve our tension, I claim, by adopting the right sort of view about

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17. I will often speak of dignity as a value. This follows a long line of Kantians, including sometimes Kant himself. But there is tremendous controversy about just how to understand dignity. For one, it is tempting to think that dignity is actually a feature of other values. This is because it is tempting to think what it is to have dignity is to not be comparable to other values; otherwise the value in question has a price. This is how Velleman (1999) treats dignity. A second controversy has to do with the explanatory role of dignity *qua* value. Kantians like Korsgaard (1996b) and Wood (1999) often claim that the value of dignity explains the ethics of respect. This is a surprising claim to make for a Kantian given the supposed priority of the right over the good! For this reason, some (e.g., Bader 2023; Sensen 2011) maintain that it is not the value of dignity that explains the ethics of respect, but rather dignity is best construed as a deontic notion. More discussion of this follows in §2.

this. On my view, dignity is a *determinable* property that is made determinate by particular features of individual persons. Both the determinable feature—having dignity—and the determinate ways in which individuals have this feature are normatively relevant. The particular features of individuals that make their dignity determinate provide reasons to love them. This is how Ifrah’s particularities get into the justification. Her particular manifestation of dignity justifies Italo’s love. This is what allows Romantic Kantianism to explain the Romantic Constraint. Italo’s love is justified by Ifrah’s particularities. For it is in her particularities that her dignity is manifested.

That’s the view. It will help to explain the view’s crucial notion: The manifestation of dignity.

The paradigmatic determinable properties are colors. So <RED><sup>18</sup> is a determinable property. Whenever it is instantiated, it is instantiated by a *determinate* shade of red. All of the things that are red have something in common—they all instantiate <RED>—but they all are red by manifesting determinate shades of red. The point becomes very clear if you imagine a world and time where, for each shade of red, that shade is instantiated by exactly one object. All of the red objects would have something in common—instantiating <RED>—even though none of the red objects would share a determinate shade.

The appeal of this view about dignity is more easily appreciated by thinking about aesthetic values. For in the case of aesthetic values it is obvious that the particularities make all the difference.<sup>19</sup> Many paintings are graceful. Grace is a determinable property. Gracefulness in painting does not have a common look. There is not a look that all the graceful paintings share, just as there is not a color look that all the red objects share. The grace of a particular painting is utterly determinate. This goes a long way towards explaining why loving one graceful painting does not commit you to having to love all of them. The grace of a Holbein portrait might be radically different from the grace of a Renoir garden scene. What one loves about the Holbein is its determinate grace, not the fact that it is graceful. Loving the determinate grace of the Holbein thus doesn’t demand loving the determinate grace of the Renoir.

The same goes, I claim, with people and their dignity. For any particular person, what makes them lovable is their determinate dignity. These are constituted by very particular aspects of people. Romantic Kantianism is romantic insofar as it maintains that these particular aspects constitute what makes individuals lovable; it is Kantian insofar as it maintains that everyone has some particular aspects that are the determinates of the determinable property of dignity. So everyone

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18. I’ll use that bit of notation to pick out properties: <RED> = being red.

19. There are many, many places to look for discussion of this. An incomplete list: Mothersill (1984), Sibley (1974), Walton (1970), Johnston (2001), and Lord (2018a; 2025).

is lovable in virtue of having dignity. But the determinate features that make individuals lovable are diverse.

The view, officially stated, is Romantic Kantianism about Lovability.

### **Romantic Kantianism about Lovability**

*The Kantian Claim:* Every person is lovable in virtue of having dignity.

*The Romantic Claim:* Every person has dignity in virtue of manifesting an utterly determinate dignity.

The view that dignity is what makes one lovable is not new. Indeed, this is a canonical statement of the Kantian view. *But:* For the most part, it seems, philosophers have not thought of dignity as a determinable property. Instead, they have thought of it as the sort of property that has the same nature across individuals. This is, indeed, the source of many forceful objections to Kantian views about the nature of dignity. Here is Dillon (1992) talking about respecting dignity:<sup>20</sup>

The problem with the Kantian conception is that it does not have the resources to enable us in respecting[/loving] persons (as opposed to dealing with them in other moral modes) to transcend the abstractness of person as such in order to focus on and respect the individual human being as herself (118).

This problem falls away if we think of <DIGNITY> as a determinable. As we saw, all we need when it comes to Ifrah's continued love of Italo is some sort of universalism. It is plausible that intellectually compromised humans have dignity; this is what explains why they have a moral status. But that is all that is required. Whether <DIGNITY> is a determinable or not makes no difference to the explanation of Ifrah's constancy.

This does make a difference when it comes to our explanation of Italo's justification for loving younger Ifrah. If <DIGNITY> is a determinable, then it is always instantiated by a determinate manifestation. Ifrah has her own way of having dignity. This way might be the sort of thing that can be duplicated—but it might be that there can be multiple instances of it—but it is nevertheless highly particular. It is at least part of what makes Ifrah *Ifrah*. So if it is Ifrah's determinate

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20. For related complaints, see Williams (1981), Johnson (1982), and Badhwar (1987). The care based view of respect that Dillon defends is similar in many ways to the view of love I develop; I think it is much better suited as a view of love than respect.

way of being dignified that justifies Italo's love, Ifrah's particularities are essential to Italo's justification.<sup>21</sup>

The same cannot be said for Kantian views that maintain that <DIGNITY> is not a determinable. If Kant or Velleman (1999) are right, then Italo is justified because Ifrah has certain bare rational capacities. But Italo also has this very same justification for loving Ifrah's romantic rival, or for loving Donald Trump, or Charles Manson, or his repulsive colleague. It might be true that all of those people have dignity, but their *way* of being dignified might be out of Italo's reach or it simply might not be appealing absent some sort of transformative experience.

This reasoning shows, I think, that it is independently plausible that <DIGNITY> is a determinable property. One appealing aspect of Kant's moral philosophy is its egalitarianism. It explains what it is that makes us morally equal. It is our dignity. But this also threatens to wipe out our individuality. It threatens to reduce us to some shared feature that, while important, does not do justice to the diversity of agency. But if <DIGNITY> is a determinable, we can hold on to both the egalitarianism and do justice to diversity. What is important is *both* that we have dignity *and* that we all dignified in highly particular determinate ways.

Readers of Setiya (2014) will know that Setiya argues against views that appeal to particularities when explaining the fittingness conditions of love.<sup>22</sup> Setiya's basic idea is that particularities cannot be the *non-redundant* fount of lovability. This is because if, for example, young Ifrah's sharp wit and integrity are the non-redundant sources of her lovability and it is possible for her to not have those features, then it's possible for her not to be lovable. But *Old Spouses* shows that that is objectionable. Setiya's reaction to this is that we cannot appeal to particularities in order to explain lovability. Instead, we have to appeal to some property that is universally shared—he (tentatively) opts for the property of being human.

The devil is in the details of redundancy. If Kantianism of any form is true, then all persons are guaranteed to have a feature that makes them lovable. So any particularity is *modally redundant* in the sense that whether one has that particular feature is not necessary to explaining their lovability across modal space. Setiya is presumably thinking that this shows that particularities are explanatorily otiose. All we need to do is appeal to dignity in order to explain lovability.

But this assumes that there isn't an explanatory connection between dignity and more particular features. Romantic Kantianism about Lovability *ineliminably*

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21. To be clear, Italo doesn't need to think about these features *under the description* of dignity. These features will, at least usually, be normal things that attract people to others (although, as most of us unfortunately know, some people are good at faking it).

22. This is not quite right. He focuses on *merit* views of lovability, which maintain that people are lovable in virtue of their particular merits. Am I committed to the merit view? No. See the end of the section for a teaser about this.

ties dignity to particularities. People have dignity *in virtue of* having particular determinate features. This will be so in all worlds where they have dignity. Now, of course, it won't be true that in all worlds where they have dignity, they have dignity in virtue of the particular determinate features that ground their dignity in the actual world. So, in one way, any individual's particular way of having dignity is superfluous to a perfectly legitimate explanation of their lovability. They are lovable because they have dignity!

But that does not mean that the *full* (constitutive) explanation of their lovability lacks appeal to the particularities.<sup>23</sup> Setiya thinks that particularities are superfluous *tout court*. He thinks that people are lovable because they are human, full stop. Not so according to Romantic Kantianism about Lovability. You cannot explain an individual's dignity without appeal to their particularities. So a complete explanation of Ifrah's dignity in the actual world must appeal to her sharp wit and integrity. In worlds where she lacks those features, a complete explanation of her dignity in that world needs to appeal to other particularities. This is just another way of seeing that Romantic Kantianism about Lovability finds the particular in the general. This allows for a satisfying explanation of love's constancy. It allows the view to give the official Kantian line about lovability across change but it also allows for an ineliminable appeal to particularities.

The preceding is about the structure of the *ethical* explanation of lovability. It is also worth considering Romantic Kantianism's implications for the psychological explanation of particular loves. A sizable corner of the debate about love's justification has to do with the resources various views have for explaining love's *motivations*. Theorists like Keller (2013) and Jollimore (2011) complain that some views don't leave room for particularities being the motivation for love, as they seem to obviously be.<sup>24</sup> Romantic Kantianism, unlike its main Kantian competitors, does allow particularities to be the proper motivation for love. That is because particularities provide reasons for love in virtue of being the determinates of dignity.

Or so it seems. One might worry that particular instances of unconditional love can't be motivated by particularities, if Romantic Kantianism is right.<sup>25</sup> Imagine that, when they are young, Ifrah loves Italo for his youthful vigor and delight.

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23. The parenthetical is necessary because, of course, the full explanation of why people are lovable will include all sorts of things—e.g., the full explanation of Ifrah's lovability will appeal to the fact that she is alive. But the property of being alive is not part of the constitutive explanation of her lovability. The particularities are part of the constitutive explanation of Ifrah's lovability, according to Romantic Kantianism about Lovability.

24. This complaint is lodged mostly against relationships views, although versions also face Kantian views.

25. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this worry.

Over time Italo loses these qualities, up to the point where he is in *Old Spouses*. We can imagine that Ifrah's love is unconditional in the sense that she will love him across these changes. Given this, is it true that she once loved him for his youthful vigor and joy? Or did she love him for a feature he had across time—perhaps, the fact that he has dignity?

There are two things to say in reply. First, I think that it's possible that Ifrah's love is unconditional in this way, and that this in fact would be justified. The fact that Italo has dignity is a sufficient reason to love him. What is important about Romantic Kantianism is that it also makes room for the particularities. Most loves—and certainly most instances of caring—are not unconditional, and for good reason. Romantic Kantianism does a much better job explaining how this works than rival views.

The second—less conciliatory—thing to say is that it is possible for Ifrah to love Italo for his particularities even if her love is unconditional. The basis for her love might change as Italo changes. Compare this with her belief that she exists. She likely has this belief just so long as she is a conscious agent; the existence of the belief is not conditioned on (non-lethal) changes to Ifrah. But the grounds for it might be changing quite a bit across time. She might believe she exists on Tuesday because she is thinking on Tuesday, believe she exists on Wednesday because she is thinking on Wednesday etc. So resilience to change does not entail (perfect) stability in motivational grounds. Ifrah's love might be like this (although presumably not changing on a daily basis!).<sup>26</sup> This, it seems to me, is a better way for Ifrah's love to be unconditional because it is sensitive to how Italo actually is in particular, rather than focusing on such a generic property.

Readers of Velleman (1999) will know that he addresses objections like Dillon's in defense of Kant's view. In so doing, he comes quite close to accepting that dignity is a determinable. Velleman parts with Kant insofar as he maintains that love—unlike respect—“is not felt in contemplation of a mere concept or idea” (371). Instead, “the immediate object of love . . . is the manifest person, embodied in flesh and blood and accessible to the senses.” Further contrasting respect and love, Velleman concludes

grasping someone's personhood intellectually may be enough to make us respect him, but unless we actually *see* a person in the human being confronting us, we won't be moved to love; and we can see the person only by seeing him in or through his empirical persona (371).

As we'll see later, I think that there is something deeply important here. However, Velleman is not endorsing the Romantic Claim. Rather, he thinks that acquaintance

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<sup>26</sup> I talk about these issues more in (Lord 2018b: ch. 5).

with “the manifest person” is merely what gives us access to the abstract property of dignity. This is clearest when he says that “loving a person for the way he walks is not a response to the value of his gait; it’s rather a response to his gait as an expression or symbol or reminder of his value as a person” (371). The gait merely provides us with a symbol, reminder, or expression of something else—viz., his bare rational capacities.

This forces him to admit that, at bottom, the particularity of individuals is irrelevant to the explanation of their lovability. In response to the objection that this washes out individuality, Velleman maintains that people can be loved for themselves because items with dignity are *incomparable*—this is just what it is to have dignity rather than a *price*. This is an axiological feature of things with dignity. The proper response to this axiological fact is to treat the beloved as irreplaceable. So treating is the way in which people can be loved for themselves, according to Velleman.

I don’t want to officially deny Velleman’s axiological claim, although its deontic upshots—that people are irreplaceable in virtue of not having a price—seem more plausible when it comes to respect rather than love. Instead, I want to point out that it’s not clear why we need to bite Velleman’s bullets once Romantic Kantianism is made explicit. Romantic Kantianism, in contrast to Kant and Velleman’s view, maintains that the person’s gait might itself partly constitute the person’s dignity. In other words, if one is to ask *where* the person’s dignity might be found, one place we can point to is in his gait. Romantic Kantianism thus builds the particularities in much deeper than Velleman’s view. Velleman sticks with Kant in thinking that dignity solely consists in an abstract feature that everyone shares. He recognizes that acquaintance with particular people makes a difference when it comes to love, but not a big enough difference to fully capture the Romantic Constraint.

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The main point of this section is formal in the sense that you can accept Romantic Kantianism about Lovability without being committed to any particular view about what dignity consists in as a substantive matter. The important commitment is merely about the type of property dignity is. But, obviously enough, the ultimate plausibility of the view can’t be assessed without a substantive view about dignity. Here’s a sketch of a view that can be accurately called Kantian: The particular determinates of one’s dignity are related to one’s agential perspective on the world. What is special about those with moral status is that they have agential capacities that allow them to have a perspective on the world. Different types of morally relevant creatures have different types of capacities. Humans have a particularly robust set of intelligent capacities that allow our perspectives to be

particularly capacious; we have perspectives on ourselves, numbers, philosophical questions, the microphysical, and on and on.<sup>27</sup>

The types of features that play the determinate role are variegated. One's gait can play this role; it can be a distinctive part of your perspective—after all, it can be part of your *style*, which is centrally connected to your perspective. This perspective is, further, an organic unity. The value of the whole can be greater than the summing of the value of its parts. For at least some people, the parts of their perspective might not be particularly valuable, but the whole that they ground is. Indeed, for some people, some of the parts might be disvaluable. So, the features needn't all be values, nor virtues, nor morally good.<sup>28,29</sup>

This view is Kantian insofar as it ties what is of fundamental ethical significance to our agential capacities. It does this in a way that appeals to particularities.<sup>30</sup> It also makes manifest a problem for any such view, a problem one can see as motivating generic Kantian views. The problem is that not all individual perspectives seem apt to inspire love. A truly vicious person uses their agential capacities to have a perspective on the world. But this doesn't seem to be the right sort of thing to make love fitting. This motivates the idea that if universalism is true, love must be fitting in virtue of some generic universal property—e.g., the fact that one has intelligent capacities *per se*.<sup>31</sup>

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27. Does this mean that non-agents can't have dignity and thus can't be lovable? I don't think that they are the fundamental bearers of dignity, but one route towards something like dignity is being related to agential perspectives in the right kind of way. In Lord (ms), I argue that art and people can both have a type of value that makes love fitting. This type of value is grounded in something being the subject to a certain sort of understanding via interpretation. This itself is grounded in having or being the expression of agential capacities. Depending on the details, I might alter some of my more specific commitments of my view about dignity.

28. Thus, I don't think that all of the features that determine one's dignity need to be merits. See Yao (2020) for sympathy towards this view.

29. This could be supplemented more with Saunders and Stern's (2023) Hegelian notion of a *concrete universal*. Concrete universals, as opposed to abstract universals, are universal properties that are "exemplified by their instances in different ways." Tokens of the abstract universal of weighing 20 kg are exemplified in the same way by all instances. Whereas tokens of the concrete universal of being a funny person are exemplified in different ways by their instances. It is plausible that dignity is a concrete universal that applies to agents that manifest intelligent perspectives.

30. Do all of one's agential expressions ground one's dignity? Probably not! Do they all have to somehow be expressions of *rational* capacities, leaving out more bodily capacities or inherited features, like physical looks or athleticism? No! The notion of style is helpful here. One's style can be manifested in many different ways by many different things. That doesn't mean everything manifests one's style nor does it mean that everything one identifies with or values is part of their style. It's a datum about style that one's style explains and rationalizes things about one, and that it at least seeks to bring a sort of coherence and meaning to oneself and one's life. Dignity doesn't have to be quite like this, I don't think, but it is similar. See Riggle (2015) for some finer points about style and see Nehamas (1998), especially the introduction, for some very big picture things.

31. It also motivates the idea that universalism is false, as in Shpall (2020)!

The sting of this problem depends on how perspectively pervasive vice can be. I submit that for the vast majority of vicious people, there are particularities grounded in their perspectives that make potential (rational) love at least intelligible. This is why there are usually people who intelligibly love them. Call this the Mother Test: Are there features that make a mother's love intelligible? If there are, then I think that that person really does have a determinate dignity.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps it is possible for vice to be more deeply rooted, to permeate every corner of one's perspective. This, I submit, would be a big problem for the Kantian (universalist) claim. I don't think it spoils the spirit of the view, though. My reaction would be to admit that not every possible intelligent creature is lovable. If vice has completely infiltrated your perspective to the point where it would not be intelligible for your mother to love you for part of who you are, you are outside of the lovable. The vast, vast majority of people who are not like this are lovable in virtue of their manifested perspectives.<sup>33</sup>

These replies are directed largely to my Kantian brethren, who take these cases to motivate a generic fittingness condition. Others will take these cases to militate against universalism directly. To those I'll add this: Remember that my universalism only says that appreciative awareness is always fitting. It doesn't say *caring* is always permitted. In many cases, the loving mothers of the vicious should insulate their caring attitudes and, most importantly perhaps, their caring *actions*. Appreciative awareness is fitting, but only from afar, the tragedy of which will be keenly felt.

## 2. Towards an Ethics of Love: Lovability, Respect, and Fittingly Loving

Hypothesis: Analytic ethicists have thought that love cannot play a foundational ethical role because love is essentially partial, and the foundations of ethics are

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32. This forces me to think that the fittingness involved with love is on/off and not weighted. I can't think that the lovability of the vicious person is held hostage to how their virtues and vices weigh up; by stipulation the characters involved here are very, very vicious. Nor can we think that having determinate features that ground dignity is a matter of virtue outweighing vice. Not all fittingness conditions seem to be weighed in these ways. Belief is a paradigm—truth is not determined by the weight of competing considerations in the way that, say, admirability is. See Maguire (2018) for related discussion.

33. This would complicate the picture of dignity defended below. If the Romantic Kantian is forced to give up universalism about lovability, I think they should probably adopt the generic view about what makes respect fitting—i.e., the view that having agential capacities *per se* grounds the demand for respect. This would make the view more disjunctive but the justification for love and respect would still be deeply related—the former would consist in facts about certain expressions of agential capacities, while the latter would consist in the fact that one has those capacities.

essentially impartial.<sup>34</sup> Love might have a role to play when we're accounting for the ethics of our nearest and dearest, but this is not a central or foundational role due to its partiality.

The main goal of this section is to argue that lovability is foundational in virtue of explaining the ethics of *respect*. Romantic Kantianism includes a view about the grounds for respect—it is lovability—which allows it to be a comprehensive non-consequentialist view. Along the way, I will contrast it with similar projects carried out by Velleman (1999) and Setiya (2014).

### 2.1. *Love and Respect: Part I*

So far the anchoring focus has been on the relationship between dignity and love. Whilst this relationship is important to Kant's—and Kantian—ethics, it is of course not right at the center of Kant's ethics. Rather, the relationship between dignity and *respect* is right at the center.<sup>35</sup> The core deontological aspects of Kantian ethics flow from the nature of respect for dignity. Respecting dignity demands that we treat people as non-fungible and that we are not paternalistic, at the very least.<sup>36</sup> If we are required to respect dignity, then there are serious constraints on what we can do to promote our interests and the good. This is the heart of Kantian ethics.

Both love and respect are responses to the same value—viz., dignity. In other words, dignity is the fittingness condition for both love and respect. Given this, we should expect there to be a tight relationship between the two. Indeed, Kantians generally do posit a tight relationship. Here is (Velleman 1999: 366) again:

I regard respect and love as the required minimum and optional maximum responses to one and the same value.

While there is something intuitive about this view, it is not clear if Velleman has a particularly good explanation of why it is true.

Further, there is an important ambiguity between a subjective and objective reading of these deontic claims. When something has an objective deontic status, the balance of *all* of the reasons supports that status. Thus, if  $\phi$ -ing is objectively

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34. This hypothesis is partly confirmed by the fact that Velleman (1999) takes the supposed partiality of love as the biggest stumbling block to thinking that love is a moral emotion.

35. At least on one interpretation. Infamously, there are different strands of central interpretation deriving from the different formulations of the categorical imperative. Traditionally respect has been seen central by those who are most attracted to the formula of humanity version of the categorical imperative. Fortunately, that version is the most intuitive and also the one that gets most to the core of deontology based on the special status of dignity.

36. See White (2025) for a nice summary of core Kantian deontological commitments.

permitted, then, given all the facts, the reasons in favor of  $\phi$ -ing are at least as weighty as the reasons against  $\phi$ -ing. There is a second important type of deontic property, though. I will call them subjective deontic properties. The reasons that are relevant to the subjective weighings of reasons are the reasons that are *possessed*.<sup>37</sup> The reasons that are possessed for an agent *A* are the reasons in *A*'s ken. The fact that Anne is smiling is a reason to believe that she's happy, but if I am completely in the dark about whether she's smiling, I do not possess that reason as a reason to believe she is happy. If I see her smiling, on the other hand, then I do possess that reason and it thus makes a difference to the subjective weighing. In the next sub-section the subjective weighing will reveal its importance.

What Velleman means, I think, is that respect and love are *objectively* required and permitted. We already have an explanation of the claim that love is objectively permitted. This follows from the claims that dignity is the fittingness condition for love and the claim that there is always objectively sufficient reason to have an attitude that is fitting.

This leads, though, to a bit of a puzzle about respect. Dignity is also the fittingness condition of respect. Usually, fittingness is tied to permissibility. One is objectively *permitted* to believe truths; one is objectively permitted to fear the dangerous; one is objectively permitted to desire the good. Etc.<sup>38</sup> The Kantian view of respect seems to make an exception of respect. It maintains that respect is objectively required towards those with dignity. Why think that respect is an exception?

Here are two Kantian answers. The first is that dignity itself is a particularly special value.<sup>39</sup> It is a value that is inherently demanding. This is partly because of the contrast between having dignity and having a price. To have dignity is to not have a price. But this on its own has deontic consequences because only things with prices can be traded against each other. So if those with dignity have no price, you simply can't trade them against each other. Failing to respect things with dignity is to treat them like they have a price. Thus, failing to respect is forbidden and respect is required.

A second answer, defended by Bader (2023), maintains that having dignity is fundamentally a deontic status. On Bader's view, we can't explain dignity's

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37. See Lord (2018b) for much more.

38. This isn't beyond doubt. There is certainly some plausibility to the claim that there are some truths we are objectively required to believe—perhaps certain necessary truths or otherwise obvious truths. Nor am I saying that there can never be requirements to believe. But I do think that such requirements are plausibly always subjective, not objective (in the sense that will be elucidated in the next section). The objective reasons for belief, on my picture, apply to everyone equally (or, at least everyone who meet certain conceptual requirements). In order to get requirements, you need to introduce more subjectivity. If this turns out to be false, that's actually better for the view defended here.

39. See Guyer (2000), Korsgaard (1996a), and Wood (1999).

pride of place by appealing to its value. That would be surprising if we are textbook Kantians who think the right is not derived from the good! Instead, Bader thinks that having dignity is best understood as a deontic category. The later parts of the story are similar to the above. Having a price has a certain deontic role to play—things with prices compete against each other in a certain way. Having dignity is a different story. To have dignity just is to demand a certain response.

This helps some by showing that dignity has a special deontic role. But it doesn't get us fully there. That is because it doesn't fully explain the sorts of cases that motivate thinking that fittingness is merely connected with permission. The main reason why we're not objectively required to believe all of the truths is that this would be too demanding. For one, for any particular person, that person hasn't even considered the vast majority of truths. Further, they simply couldn't. This is strong reason to think that they aren't required to believe every truth. But, of course, we can say similar things about those with dignity. For any particular person, they have never even considered billions of people. Indeed, for any particular person, there are billions of people that person simply cannot have attitudes about! One needs to have some sort of contact with a person in order to have so-called singular thoughts about them.

I think that two things should be said about this. First, the obvious point: When it comes to any particular people *A* and *B*, *A* is objectively required to respect *B* if *A* has the ability to have singular thoughts about *B*. This avoids the problem above. Inspired by White (2025), I will call this sort of respect *particular* respect. It is particular because it takes particular people as its object. The point is that everyone is objectively required to particularly respect all of the people that they conceptually can have that attitude towards—i.e., all of the people they can have singular thoughts about.

The second point also draws on White (2025). In addition to particular respect, there is also *general* respect. The object of this attitude is all things with dignity. On one understanding of respect for all things with dignity, it is just respect for each individual thing with dignity. White argues that there is another way to understand it, though. This can be shown with a more restricted case. Suppose Jack respects all of the Millers. This could just mean that, for every Miller, Jack respects that Miller. But it needn't. We can see this by noticing that Jack's love might extend to Millers he is not acquainted with. So, for example, when a new Miller is born, Jack's respect might immediately extend to that Miller even though Jack is not in a position to have the new Miller as the object of particular respect. This is good evidence that the object of Jack's respect for the Millers is a "general object." It is the Millers, full stop.

With this we can say something further. Namely, given the nature of dignity, everyone is objectively required to respect those with dignity, where the object of

this respect is the general object of those with dignity. This, again, flows from the distinctive deontic consequences of dignity.

While this is not a full explanation, it is as much as can be given here. If it is right, then we have Fitting Respect Exceptions 1 and 2:

***Fittingness Respect Exception 1:*** When *A* has the ability to have singular thoughts about *B*, it is fitting for *A* to have particular respect for *B* just in case there are objectively decisive reasons to respect *B*.

***Fittingness Respect Exception 2:*** It is fitting to have general respect for those with dignity just in case there are objectively decisive reasons to have general respect for those with dignity.

These are exceptions because generally all that is true that it is objectively permitted to have fitting attitudes. The Fittingness Respect Exceptions tie fitting respect to requirements.

Now we have something of an explanation of Velleman's claims. Respect is the required minimum because of the nature of dignity. It is inherently demanding, unlike other fittingness conditions. Love is the permitted maximum because fitting love, like other fitting attitudes, is tied to objectively sufficient reasons. It is fitting to love *A* just in case there are objectively sufficient reasons to love *A*.

## ***2.2. Love and Respect: Part II***

The last subsection was about the objective deontic facts. This subsection is about the subjective deontic facts. Let's start with the very general distinction between  $\phi$ -ing being fitting and someone fittingly  $\phi$ -ing. This distinction is well illustrated by comparing mere true belief and knowledgeable belief. Belief is fitting just in case its object is true. However, more is needed in order to fittingly believe. If one guesses the right answer, they have a belief that is fitting but they don't fittingly believe. Plausibly, one fittingly believes just in case one knows. In order to fittingly believe, one needs to be in contact with the truth, whereas one can have a fitting belief even if one guesses.

All attitudes that can be fitting admit of this distinction. Given this, we can inquire into what it takes for a particular attitude to be fitting without saying what it takes to fittingly have that attitude. But if we're interested in what it takes for token instances of an attitude to be held fittingly, we need to say something about what it takes for someone to be in contact with the fittingness conditions in the right way to have that attitude fittingly.

What goes for belief goes for love. Above I argued that love is fitting when its object has dignity. One's dignity will always be grounded in one's particularities. Given this, one's particularities will provide reasons to love. The Kantian Claim guarantees that everyone has dignity and thus everyone has some particularities that provide reasons to love. These reasons are always objectively sufficient, which is to say, for every person *B*, if you weigh up all of the reasons to love *B* against all of the reasons not to love *B*, the reasons to love will always be at least as weighty as the reasons not to love.

These are just claims about fitting love. They are not yet claims about fittingly loving. For any truth *p*, there are objectively sufficient reasons to believe *p*. This follows from the claim that truth is what makes belief fitting. But, of course, it is not the case that for any truth *p* and any agent *A*, *A* is in a position to fittingly believe *p*. That would amount to the claim that everyone is in a position to know every truth! Given this, it would be very surprising to find out that every agent is in a position to fittingly love everyone. This manifestly does not follow from the claim that everyone is lovable. As we'll see, this has profound consequences for the ethics of love, and is an aid to common sense.

What does it take to fittingly  $\phi$ ? One important part of the puzzle is that whenever one fittingly  $\phi$ s, one  $\phi$ s *on the basis of sufficient possessed reasons* to  $\phi$ . The possessed reasons to  $\phi$  are subjectively sufficient when they are at least as weighty as the possessed reasons against  $\phi$ -ing. This on its own explains why most people aren't in a position to know most truths. It is because they do not possess subjectively sufficient reasons to believe most truths. Most of the reasons to believe most of the truths are outside of any particular person's ken.<sup>40</sup>

This gives us a more tractable question. What does it take to possess reasons to love? To start towards an answer, recall the second half of a Velleman quote from above:

unless we actually *see* a person in the human being confronting us, we won't be moved to love; and we can see the person only by seeing him in or through his empirical persona (Velleman 1999: 371)

Velleman is crucially ambiguous between a purely descriptive reading and a normative reading. On the descriptive reading, it is a mere psychological fact that we won't be "moved to love" unless we see a person. On the normative reading, it is in some sense impermissible to love without seeing the person. I think that the normative reading is correct. It is correct because in order to possess the reasons of love, we need to be *acquainted* with the dignity of the beloved. And

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40. Again, for much more, see Lord (2018b).

without possessing the reasons of love, we can't fittingly love. So when we fail to be acquainted, we can't fittingly love.

This is explained by the fact that love is an *appreciative* reaction to *utterly determinate* values. Again the paradigm here are aesthetic properties.<sup>41</sup> The gracefulness of the Holbein is utterly determinate. Because of this, in order to fully appreciate it, one needs to be acquainted with it. Dignity, on my view, is like grace in this way. Each instance of dignity is utterly determinate and, because of this, in order to fully appreciate it—in order to fittingly love it—one needs to be acquainted with it.

This gets us The Acquaintance Condition:

***The Acquaintance Condition:*** *A* possesses reasons to love *B* only if *A* is acquainted with *B*'s determinate dignity.

This is enough to explain why not everyone is in a position to fittingly love everyone else despite everyone being lovable. It is because we are acquainted with the determinate dignity of a relatively small number of people. We thus fail to possess reasons to love most people and are thus not in a position to fittingly love most people.

What about the deontic significance of the possessed reasons to love? The default for the subjective weighing of the reasons is the same as the default for the objective weighing of the reasons. This gets us Subjectively Sufficient Love:

***Subjectively Sufficient Love:*** If *A* becomes acquainted with the dignity of *B*, then *A* possesses subjectively sufficient reasons to love *B*.

In other words, *A* is permitted to love *B* whenever *A* is acquainted with *B*'s dignity. *A* is thus in a position to fittingly love *B* whenever *A* is acquainted with *B*'s dignity. Now, of course, even if one has sufficient reasons to love, it doesn't follow that one is required to love. (Below I will argue that sometimes we are required to love, and explain how this is determined.<sup>42</sup>)

That's fittingly loving. What about respect? Now consider the first part of the Velleman (371) quote:

Grasping someone's personhood intellectually may be enough to make us respect him

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41. Cf. Johnston (2001); Lord (2018a; 2026).

42. What about general love, which is love that is analogous to general respect spelled out above. White (2025) argues that general love is the best candidate for *agape*. As he makes clear, though, every agent with the sorts of limitations of humans will have decisive reason not to have general love for everyone.

Although this is hedged, it seems clear that Velleman agrees with Kant that one merely knowing someone is a person is enough to get one to respect them. As before, this is ambiguous between a descriptive and normative reading. I think a normative reading is true. Namely, I think the fact that someone is a person is a reason to respect them, and that one can possess this reason merely by knowing that someone is a person. Thus, there is, as Velleman says, an important difference between love and respect. Merely knowing someone is a person is enough to possess a reason to respect them, whereas this is not enough for love. For love, one needs to be acquainted with the determinate dignity of the person.

Now we are in a position to state one of the core subjective ethical claims of Romantic Kantianism. I'll call it Subjectively Decisive Respect:

***Subjectively Decisive Respect:*** If *A* knows that *B* is a person, then *A* possesses a subjectively decisive reason to respect *B*

It follows from this claim that if *A* knows that *B* is a person, then *A* is in a position to fittingly respect *B*. The most surprising aspect of this claim, though, is that it states that knowing someone is a person is a *sufficient condition* for possessing subjectively decisive reason to respect that person. This makes the reason to respect very special; it makes it undefeatable. Once you possess this reason, you cannot come to possess some reason that defeats it.<sup>43</sup>

This is, in effect, the reason-theoretic codification of the central deontological nature of Kantian ethics. It is also the subjective analog of Fittingness Respect Exception 1. These two claims together are Romantic Kantianism's version of the core Kantian requirement to respect persons.

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Romantic Kantianism's package of ethical claims explains a central pair of Velleman's Kantian commitments. First, it explains why respect is the required minimum and love is the permitted maximum reaction to dignity. The former claim is true because respect is both objectively and subjectively demanded by the fact that someone has dignity. It is objectively demanded just so long as one has the ability to have singular thoughts about the object of respect. It is subjectively demanded just so long as one knows that the object has dignity or is a person. The latter claim is true because love is both objectively and subjectively permitted

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43. This isn't quite right. This is because of *dispossessing defeat* (to use Gonzalez de Prado Salas 2020's term). Dispossessing defeaters are facts that, when learned, make it the case that you cease to possess some reason *r*. One could learn things that make it the case that they fail to know that *B* is a person. These things would be dispossessing defeaters of one's subjectively decisive reasons to respect *B*.

by the fact that someone has dignity. It is objectively permitted because dignity is the fittingness condition of love. It is subjectively permitted whenever one is acquainted with the dignity of the beloved.

The second claim of Velleman's that Romantic Kantianism explains is the fact that there is a crucial asymmetry between love and respect. On the one hand, respect is demanded just so long as one knows that someone is a person. On the other hand, fittingly loving requires one to be acquainted with the beloved. Romantic Kantianism explains this because it maintains that the conditions under which one possesses a reason to respect are different than the conditions under which one possesses a reason to love. Acquaintance is required for possessing the reasons to love, whereas mere knowledge is enough when it comes to reasons to respect.

### 3. Universality, Promiscuity, Trading Up

The previous two sections were mostly about the fundamental question for rationalist views of love and respect: What makes love/respect fitting? The view defended maintains that what makes people lovable are particular features of the beloved. This makes it a member of a certain family of views known as *property* views, so called because they make the fundamental reasons of love a function of non-relational properties of the beloved. These views have been heavily criticized.<sup>44</sup> Many think that they have fatal problems, and thus many think that the Romantic Constraint is false. The common core of these problems is the idea that property views do not capture the right *patterns of partiality*.<sup>45</sup>

In the next two sections I will further defend Romantic Kantianism by arguing that, with supplementation, it can capture the patterns. This not only makes it a plausible contender tout court, it also gives it a special advantage over other Kantian views that eschew common sense when it comes to the patterns.

Given the prominence so far of the distinction between objective and subjective deontic facts, I need to be clear at the beginning that I take the *primary* problems about patterns of partiality to be about the *objective* deontic facts. The primary problems are about what is required or permitted, *given all the facts*. The

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44. Indeed, Shpall (2020) claims that no one has ever actually defended these views, although he doesn't explain how this squares with Velleman and Setiya. Perhaps what he means, though, is that no one has thought that the *only* reasons are non-relational. I agree that some relational facts can be reasons, and that relational facts more broadly are important.

45. There has been a huge amount of literature on these problems. An incomplete list: Abramson and Leite (2011); Ebels-Duggan (2008); Jollimore (2011); Keller (2013); Kolodny (2003); Lewis (2023); Naar (2019); Nozick (1989); Protasi (2016); Setiya (2014); Shpall (2020); Stump (2006); Zangwill (2013).

considerations that drive the problems have bearing on questions concerning the subjective deontic facts, but solving the problems for the objective problems paves the way for solving the subjective problems.

### 3.1. *The Three Problems*

Focus on young Ifrah and Italo. Ifrah has a highly particular determinate way of manifesting dignity. Her way of being dignified provides particular reasons to love her. For example, her sharp wit and integrity provide particular reasons to love her. This is in virtue of those features being part of her manifestation of dignity. Italo's actual love is justified by these reasons (amongst others associated with Ifrah's particular dignity).

#### 3.1.1. *The Problem of Universality*

If Italo's particular love is justified by Ifrah's sharp wit and integrity, is love for Ifrah justified *for everyone* by Ifrah's sharp wit and integrity? Is love for Ifrah *demanding* for everyone by these features? Is love for Ifrah from Italo demanded by these features?

It's easy to end up with uncomfortable combinations of answers to these questions. It is not hard to set up the situation in a way where Italo's love seems demanded. Suppose, for example, that Ifrah is 6 months pregnant and their lives are otherwise completely enmeshed. To simply stop loving her now seems outrageous. But if Italo's love is demanded, then it is demanded *by* the reasons that justify him. So if Romantic Kantianism about Lovability is correct, Italo's love is demanded by her sharp wit and integrity.

This quickly leads to obvious trouble. It's not at all clear that the Romantic Kantian can explain the difference between Italo and everyone else. We don't want to say that everyone is required to love Ifrah. That is, at the very least, too demanding, if not downright creepy. But it's hard to see how to separate Italo from everyone else if all we have to go on is Ifrah's (non-relational) dignity.

This version of the problem is harder to deal with than the problem most often discussed under the heading of universality. We can see this by noting that the most popular solution offered doesn't work for our problem. The most common solution—defended most forcefully by Jollimore (2011) (see also Setiya 2014)—maintains that love's reasons are *non-insistent*. This means that they are the sorts of reasons that can justify a reaction without being the sorts of reasons that can require it (those are so-called insistent reasons). This explains, if right, why strangers aren't required to love Ifrah. It even explains why Italo, at the

beginning, wasn't required to love Ifrah even after knowing about her sharp wit and integrity.

But it does this at the expense of saying that no one is *ever* required to love. Non-insistent reasons are *essentially incapable* of requiring. This seems wrong. At the point of the story we are considering, Italo is required to love Ifrah. Indeed, Italo will also be required to love his child, at least once it is born. So it looks like some reasons of love are insistent reasons. The problem for Romantic Kantianism—and property views in general—is explaining both this and the fact that not everyone is required to love Ifrah and her child.

### 3.1.2. *The Problem of Promiscuity*

If Ifrah's sharp wit and integrity demand Italo's love, is Italo required to love anyone with a sharp wit and integrity? Above I claimed that Italo is required to love Ifrah; if Romantic Kantianism about Lovability is true, this is so because of her sharp wit and integrity. If those two claims are true, then it is very tempting to conclude that Italo is required to love everyone with a sharp wit and integrity. But that is silly. This problem is, in a way, the flip of the previous one. The previous problem considered the attitude everyone has to take towards Italo's beloved. This problem considers the attitude Italo must take towards everyone else who shares the relevant features with his beloved.

Again, many have resisted this sort of problem by claiming that love's reasons are non-insistent. If Italo isn't even required to love Ifrah because of her sharp wit and integrity, then surely he's not required to love everyone with a sharp wit and integrity. But this starts off in the wrong place. Italo is required to love Ifrah, at this point in the story. So the view that his reasons are non-insistent seems like a non-starter.

In one important way Romantic Kantianism does help directly with this problem. This is because of its insistence on the utterly particular. Ifrah manifests a sharp wit and integrity in a fully determinate way. Of course, she has something in common with all the other people with a sharp wit and integrity. They all share the determinable properties. But Ifrah manifests these qualities in a highly particular way. This particularity is crucial to a full understanding of the reasons to love her. We might only be able to refer to these determinate features by using words like 'sharp wit' and 'integrity,' but the Romantic Kantian maintains that what is of ultimate importance is the utterly determinate ways in which she has these features. Because of this, it will be a lot harder to share the relevant features with Ifrah than the objector assumes. This seems obvious with integrity. Some manifestations of integrity are not parts of the manifestation of dignity. Serial killers can have integrity.

The comparison with aesthetic features like grace is helpful. The Holbein's grace is a lot different than the Renoir's grace. Love in response to the Holbein's grace is thus quite a different response than love in response to the Renoir's. Loving the determinate grace of the Holbein doesn't demand loving the determinate grace of the Renoir. Or, in other words, loving a determinate grace doesn't demand loving everything that has the determinable property of grace because of the wide diversity of graceful determinates.<sup>46</sup> (Loving one shade of red doesn't demand loving every other shade of red.)<sup>47</sup>

Because of this, the Romantic Kantian isn't committed to what we can call determinable promiscuity. There is a good motivation for thinking that loving one determinate of a determinable doesn't demand loving all of them. But determinate promiscuity is at least possible. It is possible for another person to manifest a sharp wit in the same way that Ifrah does. Does this mean that Italo is required to love that person?

### 3.1.3. *The Problem of Trading Up*

While Ifrah has a sharp wit and integrity, she doesn't have the sharpest wit or the maximal amount of integrity. Others have a sharper wit or more integrity. If Ifrah's sharp wit and integrity demands Italo's love and its extreme partiality, is Italo required to stop loving Ifrah in order to love those with a sharper wit and more integrity? After all, the way that Italo loves Ifrah is very demanding. His resources are deeply tied up with her and her interests. If such an extreme level of partiality is justified—demanded, even—by her sharp wit and integrity, then it seems reasonable for him to trade up to someone with a sharper wit and more integrity, if he can. But that seems wrong. Again, it does seem that Italo is required to love Ifrah. Dropping that love just because a sharper wit comes along is not okay.

Once again, this version of the problem cannot be solved by appealing to non-insistent reasons. Indeed, I think that makes the problem worse. What we want is an explanation of why Italo is required to love Ifrah in virtue of her

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46. Again, see Sibley (1974).

47. Similar points are made by Lewis (2023) in connection to the trading up objection discussed below. Rather than focus on the determinable-determinate distinction, Lewis focuses on what he calls coarse-grained and fine-grained properties. One issue with Lewis' analysis is that he doesn't ever tell us what this distinction comes to, nor does he show how this distinction is in good working order. I obviously think he is onto something, but without more about the central distinction, it's hard to evaluate the proposal. Fortunately, we know a lot more about the determinable-determinate relation and can be confident it is in good working order (or, if it is not, that there is some other relation doing the work I need). See, for example, Wilson (2023). See the next note for more about Lewis on trading up.

sharp wit and integrity but is not required to love everyone with a sharp wit and integrity. The non-insistent reasons view only explains why he's not required to love the new person with a sharper wit; and it does this by giving up any resources for explaining why Italo is required to love Ifrah. On this view, Italo is not required to love Ifrah for the very same reason he's not required to love the new person—because love's reasons are non-insistent. This throws the baby out with the bath water.

Romantic Kantianism about Lovability also helps to directly allay part of this worry. The Renoir might be more graceful than the Holbein. But that on its own doesn't seem to demand that one love the Renoir more. Indeed, it might be that, all things considered, the amount of grace the Renoir has is actually a turn off for a particular person. It might border on the overly sentimental. We can draw the distinction between determinable trading up and determinate trading up. The former is easy to appreciate. There is some independent motivation for thinking that something having more of a generally positive determinable property doesn't necessarily make that thing more lovable. Determinate trading up is a bit harder to state. It's not entirely clear what it would take for Ifrah's romantic rival to have Ifrah's determinate wit to a greater degree. Perhaps Ifrah's rival is witty in the same sort of way as Ifrah, but she manifests this wit more because she is less socially self-conscious than Ifrah. Again, this sort of contrast seems possible. If it is Ifrah's determinate wit that justifies Italo's love, is he required to trade up for her less socially conscious rival?<sup>48</sup>

Given that many insist that the reasons of love are non-insistent, it is worth pausing to reconsider my claim that Italo is required to love Ifrah. Does Jollimore or others provide compelling arguments that love is never required? In short: Not really. In fact, the only motivation Jollimore has for accepting this view is that it allows him to avoid the problems of universality, promiscuity, and trading up (see especially Jollimore 2017). So Jollimore's motivation is undercut by alternative explanations, which is exactly what I aim to provide.

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48. Back to Lewis (2023): His basic idea about trading up is that "the absurd results [do not] follow" because "the relevant qualities. . . [are] so detailed and fine-grained that one can only know about them through being in a relationship with their bearer" (1681). As we saw in the previous section, I think there is something right about this. One cannot possess the reasons to love Ifrah without being acquainted with Ifrah's particular dignity. Thus, Lewis' claim is very plausible when it comes to *subjective* deontic properties. But the Trading Up problem is, in the first instance, a problem about the *objective* deontic properties. We want to know, given all the facts, what Italo is permitted to do. As far as I can tell, Lewis' view doesn't speak to this at all. How hard it is to know about the reasons is not relevant to the objective question. So his paper does not offer a solution to the problem of trading up that focuses on the objective deontic facts; I think this is the main objection the literature has focused on (although there is some eliding and unclarity). Arguably Lau (2021) makes a similar mistake, although we could read him as only speaking to the subjective deontic facts.

Putting Jollimore to the side, there is an interesting independent argument for why love is never required. This argument is anchored in the thought that love is *not the right kind of attitude* to be required. This gets purchase on me since, as I said at the top, I think that love is in some sense a *perceptual* reaction: It *presents* the beloved in some way.<sup>49</sup> Perceptual reactions, it is plausible to think, are not the sorts of things that can be required. They are things that merely happen to you. If this is right, then love can't be required.

Now, perceptualists about love might follow up on Italo's case to point out that even though love is not required, some other reactions plausibly are. Italo is required to *care* about Ifrah. He's required to be concerned with her well-being, required to assist her in various ways, required to desire her happiness, required to be pleased when things go well for her and displeased when they don't, etc. These are all attitudes that can be required and plausibly are of Italo. Perceptualists might contend that all that I can plausibly show is that Italo is required to care about Ifrah, not that he is required to love her.

This objection can be avoided as long as we remember that caring can constitute love when it is sourced in appreciative awareness. It is right that such awareness cannot be required and that caring can be. But in many cases our love for things is constituted by our caring, even though we are not currently consciously aware of the beloved's dignity.

This allows us a clearer picture of what I mean when I say Italo is required to love Ifrah. I don't mean that he is required to perceive her in a certain way. That cannot be required. But, given that he has perceived her in that way plus some other facts about their situation, he is required to care about her. And his caring about her constitutes loving her, given all the facts. Thus, he is required to love her.

### 3.2. Solving the Problems

#### 3.2.1. The Common Core of the Three Problems

The three problems are all about the *weight* of various reasons for loving. The problem of universality is about whether the weight of *Italo's reasons* for loving Ifrah is the same as the weight of everyone else's reasons to love Ifrah. The problem of promiscuity is about whether the weight of Italo's reasons for loving people who share Ifrah's merits is the same as the weight of Italo's reasons to love Ifrah.

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49. This doesn't demand that love is visual or auditory. It just requires that love *presents* the world in some way. Many views of love have this feature, including views that say that love is an emotion or a form of appreciation.

And the trading up problem is about whether the weight of Italo's reasons to love is proportional to the degree of people's merits. Given this common core, we will need a theory of the weight of love's reasons in order to solve these problems. Romantic Kantianism about Lovability will not give us all that we need. So to fully solve these problems, we need supplementation.<sup>50</sup>

We've already considered one account of weight that has been proposed. This is the idea that love's reasons are non-insistent. This is an account of weight in its way. This is because it tells us that love's reasons *can't* weigh up in a certain way. They can't combine in order to *require* love. This does offer an explanation to some of our data, because some of our data has to do with not being required to love. It is not the case that everyone else is required to love Ifrah, it is not the case that Italo is required to love everyone else with Ifrah's merits, and it is not the case that Italo is required to trade up. If love's reasons are non-insistent, then we have an explanation of these facts.

The problem with this is that if love's reasons are non-insistent, then love is *never* required. And that conflicts with some of our data (or so I claim). Italo *is* required to love Ifrah. The problem is reconciling Italo's requirement with all of the non-requirements above.

Some think this is decisive reason to give up on property views in favor of *relationship views*.<sup>51</sup> Relationship views maintain that facts about relationships provide love's reasons. These views can reconcile the data simply because the only relationship in view is the one between Italo and Ifrah. Italo is required to love Ifrah, according to this view, because the fact that she is his partner provides decisive reason to love her. Other people fail to stand in this relationship with her and thus, Italo's reasons don't transfer to other people. Italo doesn't stand in that relationship to other people with a sharp wit and integrity, so the reason for Italo to love Ifrah doesn't transmit to other sharp witted folks with integrity. And Italo fails to stand in a relationship with the people that have sharper wits and more integrity, and so lacks the reasons he has to love Ifrah to love those people.

As we'll see, I think that the relationship view gets something right. I do think that an appeal to relationships—or at least relational facts—is needed in order to solve these problems. However, the relationship view seems committed to deeply implausible view about *lovability*.<sup>52</sup> According to the relationship view, people

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50. For a lot more about various aspects of this supplementation, see Lord (2016; 2022).

51. See especially Kolodny (2003). Hurka (1997; 2011; 2016) suggests replacing relationships with a shared history. This broadening helps with some standard objections. Hurka's view is sometimes stated in a way that is ambiguous between views like Kolodny's that maintain that historical facts provide reasons that justify love and my view, which maintains that historical facts modify the weight of already existing reasons.

52. Cf. Protasi (2016) and Setiya (2014).

are lovable only insofar as they stand in certain relationships to other people. After all, someone is lovable only insofar as there is sufficient reason for someone or other to love them. The relationship view says that facts about relationships provide reasons to love. So the relationship view predicts that someone is lovable only if they are in certain relationships. This seems badly mistaken.

At the extreme, this view condemns the orphaned hermit to unlovability no matter their merits. Less extremely, this view has a very difficult time accounting for love preceding relationships. This includes love at first sight, but also the beginnings of more usual romantic and filial relationships. Italo might rationally love Ifrah before they are in a romantic relationship.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, everything is always related in some way to everything else. So there will always be some sort of relationship to appeal to, but this often looks ad hoc. Further, it just doesn't mesh well with experience. When Italo and Ifrah first meet each other at a party and Italo is taken with her, perhaps to the point of it very quickly being reasonable for him to devote a lot to her, this is made reasonable not by some gerrymandered relationship they now stand in (Aristotle's famous bumped-into-at-a-party). Rather, it is made reasonable by the way Ifrah is.<sup>54</sup>

Still, there is no doubt that the relationships view provides the best explanation so far of the patterns of justification that drive the other three problems. To do better, we need to look harder at the mechanics of the weight of reasons. We can start at the foundation—the relationship between lovability and reasons. Fittingness in general has a tight connection with *objectively sufficient reasons*. To wit:

***Fittingness Reason Connection:*** Some reaction  $\phi$  is fitting just in case there are objectively sufficient reasons to  $\phi$ .

Objective reasons are the reasons provided by the facts. We can weigh all of the objective reasons to see what they support. Fittingness Reason Connection maintains that when we do that, the fitting reactions will always be supported by sufficiently strong reasons. When a reaction is supported by sufficient reasons, that reaction is permissible. Thus, it follows from Fittingness Reason Connection that fitting reactions are always objectively permissible—i.e., permissible given all the facts.

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53. As Hurka (2016) shows, some of these problems can be solved by appealing to historical facts, but not all of them.

54. To be clear, I don't think these objections show that relational facts can *never* be reasons. They just can't be the *fundamental* reasons for love. We need non-relational reasons to explain the right patterns of lovability.

This gets our first important result about the weight of reasons:

**Objective Permissibility:** There are objectively sufficient reasons to love everyone.

Objective Permissibility follows from Romantic Kantianism about Lovability, the claim that one is lovable just in case it is fitting to love them, and Fittingness Reason Connection. Objective Permissibility is an expression of the view that there are sufficient reasons to love every person. So it is a precisification of the Kantian view. It is, in fact, the foundational claim of my Kantian view.

This is not enough to secure the patterns, hence the problems. But the foundations aren't everything there is. There can be non-foundational factors that are deontically important. My proposal is that while facts about relationships usually don't provide *reasons* to love, they can and often do *modify the weight* of the reasons to love.<sup>55</sup> Modifiers are facts that intensify or attenuate the weight of reasons. For example, the fact that it is the exhibition's last day intensifies the reasons to go to the exhibition. It doesn't on its own provide a reason to go; if the exhibition is wholly bad, the fact that it's the last day doesn't count in favor of going. Rather, the fact that it's the last day makes the other reasons to go weightier. Similarly, the fact that the study has a design flaw attenuates the weight of the reasons to believe its conclusion. That the study has a design flaw doesn't necessarily speak in favor of the negation of the conclusion. Rather, it just lowers the weight of the reasons to believe the conclusion provided by the study.<sup>56</sup>

This supplement allows us to capture the patterns. Let's take Italo and Ifrah in chronological order. They meet at a party. Italo quickly becomes acquainted with Ifrah's particular way of having dignity and is taken by it. This all on its own justifies his quick love. Once he has that, rather extreme levels of partiality are justified. This leads them to build a relationship, which eventually leads to them becoming romantic partners. The fact that they are in this relationship intensifies the weight of Italo's reasons to love Ifrah. Eventually it intensifies the weight to the point where Italo has decisive reasons to love Ifrah, which means that he's required to love her. To be clear, Italo's (fundamental) reasons for loving Ifrah are provided by her particularities. But the weight of those reasons for Italo is intensified by the fact that Ifrah is his partner. So Italo has reasons for loving Ifrah that everyone has (objectively), but the weight of those reasons for Italo is

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55. For more, see Lord (2016; 2022).

56. Keller (2013) appeals to another part of the mechanics to try to solve the problems. According to him, standing in a relationship is an *enabling condition* for non-relational facts about the beloved to provide reasons to love. While this view makes similar predictions to my view about what is permissible, it suffers from the problem with the relationships view; it makes lovability relational. On Keller's view, Italo has decisive reason to love Ifrah because he has *no reason at all* to love strangers.

different given the fact that Ifrah is Italo's partner.<sup>57</sup> This is Romantic Kantianism's explanation of why, eventually, Italo is required to love her.

With this machinery in hand, we can now state the solutions to the three problems.

### 3.2.2. *Solving the Problem of Trading Up*

Let's call Ifrah's romantic rival—the one with the sharper wit and more integrity—Becca. Italo is not required to trade up and love Becca first and foremost because he doesn't stand in any relationship with Becca that provides an intensifier for his reasons to love Becca. This differentiates Ifrah and Becca in the way needed to solve the trading up problem. It does this in nearly the same way the relationships view does.

One difference between the relationships view and Romantic Kantianism is that the former view maintains that Italo doesn't even have sufficient reason to love Becca. This does seem to give Becca short shrift, but can be spun in the relationship view's favor in this sort of case. After all, if Italo is *required* to love Ifrah, then, one might think, he must be required *not to love Becca*. And if that is true, then it looks like Objective Permissibility is false. Italo and Becca is a counterexample.

Care is needed—pun intended. Recall the view of love sketched at the very beginning. The reasons for appreciative awareness are categorical. Italo is still permitted to love Becca by being appreciatively aware of Becca's value. The question of whether Italo is permitted to *care* about Becca in some particular way is separate and not categorical. Given the relationship types dominate our social world and the expectations they establish, it is plausible that Italo's relationship with Ifrah constrains how he can care for Becca. He is not permitted to devote his life to Becca the way he devotes his life to Ifrah. Indeed, there are many forbidden forms such love might take. It might be forbidden for him to have a sexual relationship with Becca or make long term plans with Becca or support Becca financially. But appreciative awareness remains fitting.<sup>58</sup>

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57. This is not to deny that Italo might also have some reasons to love or care for Ifrah that are relational—e.g., the fact that Ifrah took care of him when he was hospitalized. Some relational facts provide reasons (indeed, some facts about relationships might sometimes provide reasons). The crucial point is that these relational facts don't provide the fundamental reasons. This is what leads to the many problems of the relationships view.

I'm also not claiming that once the intensification happens, the reasons to love can't be defeated. If Ifrah starts to abuse Italo, for example, she will provide him reasons to stop loving her (or at least caring for her). Those reasons might become strong enough that the reasons to love her—even intensified—are not decisive.

58. Some no doubt will think that this actually shows that appreciative awareness can't be love because it is too impartial (perhaps this is why Velleman adds his "arresting awareness" condition,

This is just a version of the old point that different types of relationships have their own normative structure. The particular demands of friendship are different from the demands of sexual-romantic relationships or parental relationships. The normative structure of relationships makes a difference to which reactions the reasons of love support. The fact that Italo has decisive reasons to romantically love Ifrah does entail that he lacks sufficient reasons to romantically love Becca.<sup>59</sup> But that doesn't mean that he lacks sufficient reasons to be appreciatively aware of Becca's value.

This shows that Romantic Kantianism not only has to maintain that relational facts modify the weight of reasons, it also has to maintain that relational facts affect the direction of one's reasons. That is, relational facts affect which reactions love's reasons support. This is not surprising nor, I think, ad hoc. But it is necessary.

### 3.2.3. *Solving the Problem of Promiscuity*

Italo is not required to love everyone with Ifrah's merits because he doesn't stand in the right relationships with anyone with Ifrah's merits besides Ifrah. He is permitted to love in some way anyone with Ifrah's merits (assuming that they are what ground determinate dignities). What makes the difference in weight between the reasons to love Ifrah and the reasons to love everyone else with Ifrah's merits is the fact that Ifrah is Italo's soulmate.

### 3.2.4. *Solving the Problem of Universality*

Italo is required to love Ifrah. It does not follow that everyone is required to love her. This is because only Italo stands in the right relationship with Ifrah. Now it is true that everyone is permitted to be appreciatively aware of Ifrah's value in light of her particularities. This is not objectionable. Indeed, as we've seen, it has a lot of virtues. We get an objection only if Italo's requirement transfers to everyone else. It doesn't because only Italo is in the right relationship with Ifrah.

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to his peril). Part of the issue is whether we want to call appreciative awareness 'love.' I think all should agree that it is *loving*. I'm not sure it matters all that much at the end of the day whether we call it love or just loving. I certainly agree that divorcing love and care so completely is revisionary and thus needs to be theoretically justified. I think that it can be given how well it can explain the dynamics of cases precisely like this.

59. To be clear, I don't think this is a *necessary* fact. Different forms of romantic relationships are possible, and people at least sometimes have discretion over what the norms are. But I take it the objector was thinking of monogamous romantic norms. For more on the impact of relationship types, see Brake (2012); Jenkins (2015; 2017); Jeske (2008); Shpall (2020).

(Of course, this is very likely false. There are likely many people who are required to love Ifrah—parents, siblings, friends etc. Those people’s requirements will be explained partly by the fact that they stand in the relevant relationships with Ifrah. Further, the nature of those relationships will normatively structure the permitted and required reactions. Plausibly no one else has decisive—or sufficient—romantic reasons even though they have decisive parental, philial, or filial reasons.)

#### 4. Tropical Island Tragedies, With Reluctance

At least since Williams (1981)’s discussion of the husband who has “one thought too many” while saving his wife from drowning at the expense of a stranger, it has been a requirement for a certain sort of theory to be tested against rescue cases. This is true for prominent Kantian theories about love. Velleman (1999) takes the claim that love justifies partiality towards loved ones in such cases as the biggest threat to his thesis that love is a moral emotion. He subsequently denies that love has anything to do with the explanation of why the husband is justified in saving the wife (although he does think he is so justified). This is because love is merely an “arresting awareness” of the dignity of the beloved. It plays no role justifying partiality.

Setiya (2014) has a very different view. He takes the constitutive core of love to be a disposition to be partially concerned with the beloved. Applied to rescue cases, the idea is that what constitutes love is the disposition to save the beloved. He combines this idea with his Kantian universalism about lovability to derive the result that there is sufficient reason for all of us to be partially concerned with the interests of everyone. Thus, not only does the husband have sufficient reasons of love to save his wife, but also has the very same reason to save the stranger.

Kantian accounts of love, then, have an antagonistic relationship with common sense in rescue cases. Velleman maintains that it is irrelevant, whereas Setiya maintains that there is no asymmetry between one’s wife and the stranger. To end, I will argue that Romantic Kantianism is much closer to common sense than these views. I will do this by comparing it to Setiya’s view (apt since, strictly speaking, Velleman’s view of love is silent on these cases).

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Let’s start with my view about rescue cases, in a nutshell. My wife is on island A and three strangers are on island B. I can go to one island but not both. Am I permitted or required to save my wife? As we know now, there are two kinds of

deontic properties—the objective and subjective. There is an asymmetry between my wife and the strangers when it comes to each kind. When it comes to the objective, there are non-relational reasons to love all of them. However, the non-relational reasons of love to save my wife are intensified by the fact that she is my wife. Plausibly, this intensification is powerful enough to make it the case that I ought to save my wife.<sup>60</sup>

When it comes to the subjective, there is a second asymmetry (although you also get intensification). I possess reasons of love to save my wife because I am acquainted with her determinate dignity. I don't possess those reasons to save the strangers. That doesn't mean that I don't possess some reasons to save the strangers. The fact that they are in great need is itself a strong reason to save them. But given my lack of acquaintance with their determinate dignities, I do not possess the reasons of love to save them. So I am not in a position to fittingly save them for those reasons. This makes the gap between the weight of my subjective reasons to save my wife and the reasons to save the stranger larger for the subjective deontic facts. But for each kind, it is plausible that I ought to save her (or, at least, that I am permitted).<sup>61</sup>

Setiya, being a Kantian, maintains that everyone is lovable in virtue of their humanity. He explicitly leaves it open that facts about relationships might provide additional reasons to love. Depending on his views about modifiers, he could be amenable to my alternative way of building in facts about relationships. His fundamental Kantian commitment is that the fact that one is human is always a sufficient reason to love.

He also agrees in broad strokes with me (and Velleman) that acquaintance matters to which people one is in a position to love. Although he doesn't use this terminology, I will put it in terms of fittingly loving.<sup>62</sup> He has a much more expansive view about when one is in a position to fittingly love another. Although he doesn't give an analysis—indeed, Setiya (2023) is largely dedicated to defending skepticism about an analysis—his test is that as long as *A* can have singular

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60. This doesn't mean that I lack sufficient reasons to be appreciatively aware of the strangers' value—again, the reasons for that are categorically sufficient. But it does affect the reasons of love to save my wife.

61. What if they are acquaintances or even friends? That is, what if I am acquainted with their dignity and have some relationship with them (or we can vary it; we can imagine cases where there is acquaintance but no relationship)? I don't know the answers to these questions; we need a substantive theory about how the weighing works in order to know. But I am confident that my view has the resources to explain what's going on. If you think that I'm required to save my wife when it's three friends, then the intensification of my reasons to save my wife will be stronger than the intensification to save the strangers. If you think it washes out or you think I ought to save my friends, then that won't be the case.

62. He talks about rationally loving. I think in the cases under consideration this will come to the same thing as fittingly loving.

thoughts about *B*, *A* can fittingly love *B*. Thus, all that it takes is for one to be able to think directly about the beloved. While most people still lack this ability when it comes to the vast majority of humanity, the average person has this ability when it comes to a relatively large amount of people. I can have singular thoughts about Julius Ceaser, Michael Jordan, my fourth grade teacher, and the receptionist at the dentist. Thus, on Setiya's view, I am in a position to fittingly love them on the grounds of their humanity.

This part of his view leads to puzzling results. Setiya and I agree that love justifies rather extreme levels of partiality so we agree that if one has the choice to save one's beloved on island A or several strangers on island B, one is justified in saving one's beloved. Love makes the difference.

But Setiya's view pushes the limits of partiality. After all, on his view, *A* can fittingly love *B* just so long as *A* can have singular thoughts about *B*. That means that the differences between my wife and the receptionist at the dentist don't make a difference in tropical island tragedies. I'd be just as justified saving the receptionist at the expense of many strangers as I would be saving my wife. In Setiya (2014), he claims this is a vindication of the notorious numbers skepticism defended by Taurek (1977). Setiya writes of his conclusion:

As I would put it [numbers skepticism], such claims [i.e., claims the potential victims can make to be saved] are incomparable. It is not that there is a reason to favor those you know and like over those you have never met. It is rather that, in the absence of special conditions, there is sufficient reason to give priority to the needs of any human being. This is what you do for David [Taurek's dentist's receptionist, as it were], not irrationally, and what you might do for anyone else (277).

As he acknowledges in Setiya (2023), this isn't quite his view. It is not the case, on his view, that "there is sufficient reason to give priority to the needs of any human being." On his view, there is a massive gulf between the human beings you can have singular thoughts about and the ones that you can't. The ones for which you cannot are out of luck. Add this to the list of the advantages of extroversion!

This leads to the first objection to a natural interpretation of Setiya's view. Ironically, it seems to fall prey to a version of my main objection to relationship views. This is because, at the end of the day, it looks like it makes lovability relational. *B*'s lovability is not absolute but is always related to others. And what makes the difference is that others can have singular thoughts about *B*. Again, at the extreme, this makes the total hermit unlovable. This is a very anti-Kantian result.

It is crucial to keep track of the objective and subjective deontic facts. Even though there are objectively sufficient reasons for *A* to love *B*, it does not follow that for every *A* and *B*, *A* is in a position to fittingly love *B* (just like for any *A*, *A* is not in a position to know all of the truths).

Setiya can help himself to this distinction in order to avoid my initial objection. He can agree with me that the fundamental reasons of love are wholly non-relational but that fittingly loving is relational. This would allow for a convergence when it comes to the objective deontic facts (depending on how he comes down on the role of relationships).

We would still disagree about the subjective deontic facts. Our disagreement would be about what it takes to possess the reasons of love. On his view, we just need the ability to have singular thoughts about the beloved. On my view, one needs to be acquainted with the determinate dignity of the beloved. For the vast majority of people, there are fewer people that meet my condition than Setiya's. On this interpretation, our disagreement isn't as severe as it might have initially appeared. Initially Setiya was claiming that the reasons (of love) there are for me to save a complete stranger are just as weighty as the reasons there are for me to save my wife. Now it's just that I possess equally good reasons (of love) to save my wife as I do to save my dentist's receptionist.

My wife would still be perturbed, and I think she would be right to be. Once my view is brought into focus, though, it is unclear to me why we'd go with Setiya's. Setiya's initial argument got purchase, I hypothesize, precisely because he was eliding the fitting v. fittingly distinction. He started with plausible Kantian claims about fitting love and then implicitly slid into puzzling claims about fittingly loving. While he is more sensitive to this in Setiya (2023), his skepticism about more restrictive views about the relevant relation seems to me unfounded.

So, to end, let's consider his skeptical arguments. His guiding thought is that the relevant relation needs to explain love at first sight. He considers a view like mine. According to the view he considers, what matters is that one is perceptually acquainted with the other person. This view differs from mine in two key respects. First, while I think that perception is the paradigmatic way we become acquainted, I do not think it is necessary. Second, I think that one needs to be acquainted with a particular feature of the beloved—viz., their determinate dignity. Setiya, following Levinas, is baffled about why this sort of acquaintance would make the ethical difference that I claim that it does. Setiya rightfully asks for an explanation of this; he comes up empty.

I think there is a good explanation. It has two parts. First, the distinction between  $\phi$  being fitting and fittingly  $\phi$ -ing is completely general and in good working order. Fittingly  $\phi$ -ing is essentially relational in the relevant way because in order to fittingly  $\phi$ , *A* needs to have contact with the conditions that make  $\phi$ -ing fitting. Further, fittingly  $\phi$ -ing is very plausibly married to the conditions under

which we ought to  $\phi$ . When  $A$  is not in a position to fittingly  $\phi$ , any  $\phi$ -ing done by  $A$  will just be a wild stab in the dark.<sup>63</sup>

This part of the explanation can be accepted by Setiya since he also seems to recognize the importance of the distinction between  $\phi$  being fitting and fittingly  $\phi$ -ing. Again, the real source of disagreement is that I think acquaintance with determinate dignity is necessary to be in a position to fittingly love, whereas he thinks the condition is weaker. Why does acquaintance with determinate dignity make such a big ethical difference?

This gets us to the second part of the explanation. Acquaintance with determinate dignity is necessary because of the *kind of value* dignity is. It is, to use Johnston's (2001) phrase, a *sensuous value*. Again the aesthetic provides the paradigm. The grace of the Holbein is an utterly determinate version of the determinable of grace. Certain reactions to the Holbein are warranted and intelligible only when one is acquainted with its utterly determinate grace. Finding out indirectly that it is graceful does not put one in a position to fittingly be subtly moved by its composition. That kind of reaction is only fittingly had when one is acquainted with its utterly determinate grace.<sup>64</sup>

Romantic Kantianism maintains that dignity is a sensuous value and that love is the sort of reaction that is fittingly had only when one is acquainted with utterly determinate instances. This is because love, at its core, is an appreciative reaction to the value of dignity. It is like being subtly moved by the Holbein's grace (or indeed, loving the Holbein in virtue of its grace). This is Romantic Kantianism's response to Setiya's skepticism. To close the circle, keep in mind that this can explain love at first sight. This is because one can become acquainted with another's determinate dignity at first sight. Unlike the value of paintings, this is quite rare. But it is possible. This allows me to explain Setiya's guiding thought.

As I see it, then, maintaining that dignity is a determinable also allows us to sidestep Setiya's most puzzling conclusion. This is because it provides a rationale for thinking that acquaintance with the particulars makes the relevant ethical difference.

## 5. Conclusion

The main goal of this paper has been to introduce and defend the foundations of a comprehensive Kantian view of the ethics of love, and to show how this relates to the ethics of respect. The view is Kantian insofar as it maintains that everyone shares a feature that makes them lovable. But it maintains that, due to

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63. This is, in essence, the argument of Lord (2015).

64. Again, see Lord (2018a; 2026).

the metaphysics of this feature, particular qualities of people provide reasons for love. This allows us to account for both the stability of lovability whilst also making the justification of love romantic. In the second half of the paper, I argued that the view, when properly supplemented, can account for patterns of partiality that have come to dominate the discussion of the ethics of love.

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