

A Temporal Relationship Theory for the Justification of Love

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Abstract: We believe that love happens for a variety of reasons, yet the alteration of these reasons need not alter love. Philosophers call the former the selectivity of love and the latter the constancy of love. In this paper, I critically review quality theory and person theory and argue that neither can explain both phenomena. In light of Kolodny (2003) and Bagley (2015), I propose a temporal relationship theory (TRT) and argue that love between two people is justified if they are in a relationship for which a similar interpretation of the history, understanding of the present, and anticipation of the future of some identify-shaping ends of the relationship is shared. TRT can explain both the constancy and selectivity of love and the role of the beloved's qualities and identity in the justification of love.


Keywords: Love; temporality; qualities; identities; justification.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I review quality theory and person theory in terms of their justification of love and argue that neither can explain both the constancy

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and selectivity of love. In light of Kolodny (2003) and Bagley (2015), I propose a temporal relationship theory (TRT) and argue that the love between two people is justified by a relationship that shares a similar temporality about some identity-shaping ends of their relationship. TRT explains both the constancy and selectivity of love and the role of the beloved's qualities and identity in the justification of love.

2. Justification for Love

First, let me clarify the kind of justification to which I am referring. This is not a physical or biological explanation of what exactly causes one loving another but rather a normative justification explaining why one's love towards another is appropriate. Such appropriateness is not dictated by reasons like a moral or inferential requirement, of which one is wrong not to behave in certain way or hold a certain belief given the corresponding moral or logical reason. Instead, such appropriateness is more like an aesthetic reason which provides grounds for holding certain beliefs or experiencing certain feelings free of the potential charge of being unreasonable if one fails to believe or feel so. Abramson and Leite (2010) refer to such justification as 'warranting but not requiring reasons'. Kolodny (2003) refers to it as 'non-insistent reason'. Such a weak sense of reason is commonly used in the justification of emotion. For instance, cognitive/appraisal theories have suggested that an emotional response is justified when its object constitutes the emotion's core relational theme (See Lazarus & Smith 1993). Anger is about "a demeaning offence against me and mine." So, your anger responses towards X are appropriate when X insults you or unfairly violates your rights. Despite what X did, you are not being irrational not to get angry because you may hold certain non-emotional beliefs suggesting that you should not do so. Understanding justification in this way, this paper aims to explain the proper grounds of love without implying that these grounds are necessary or sufficient conditions of love.

Among the common forms of love towards human and non-human beings, and towards living things and non-living things, it is doubtful that all of them share the same kind of justification. This paper targets the kind of love that typically develops between family members, lovers and friends.

Thus, the justification I give does not deny that other kinds of love are not love. I choose this specific kind of love to be my *explanandum* because of three of its profound yet puzzling features. First, such love is non-egocentric, i.e., a concern about the well-being of another for their own sake. Its justification is particularly interesting because most emotions are egocentric and can be justified for their function of enhancing our well-being, e.g., a fear of snakes is justified because it helps us avoid a threat to our life. However, we actively care about the growth and prosperity of our loved ones not because their well-being affects our well-being, but because their well-being matters to us just like ours do (even if it does not matter to them.) Badhwar (1987) refers to this as ‘end friendship’, which is differentiated from loving someone instrumentally. For instance, even though parting ways with her child can make a mother sad, she still wants them to become independent because that is what they want, she believes, and what is good for them. We care about our beloved so much that we basically share their emotions. Kolodny (2003) describes this particular characteristic of love as emotional vulnerability:

To say that A is emotionally vulnerable to B (or r) is to say, in part, that A is disposed to have a range of favorable emotions in response to A’s beliefs that B (or r) has fared or will fare well, and a range of unfavorable emotion is in response to As beliefs that B (or r) has fared or will fare poorly (Kolodny 2003, 152).¹

Thus, we feel happy when our lovers fare well, sad about their losses, angry when they are wronged and fearful of the threats they face because although our well-being is not affected theirs is. Helm (2017) calls such a non-egocentric feature the robust concern of love (see also LaFollette 1996; Frankfurt 1999).

Non-egocentric love, however, is not unconditional like *agape* or the love of a neighbour, according to Luther’s interpretation of the Bible. Instead, non-egocentric love is highly selective, i.e., there are always reasons why we start, continue and stop loving a specific person (but not another) non-egocentrically. Helm refers to this feature as the discernment of love and asks, ‘What, if anything, justifies my coming to love this particular person

¹ In p.151, Kolodny defines “r” as the reasons for A’s emotional vulnerability to B.

rather than someone else given limited time, energy, and other resources?’ (Helm 2010, 20) Not only do we need a reason to love, we also want our lover to love us for the right reason. In Delaney’s words, we have ‘a desire to be loved for such properties where these properties are appreciated in a way not too different from the way that you appreciate them’ (Delancy 1996, 345). For instance, if X, even though she looks gorgeous, identifies herself as a poet, she would want her partner to love her for her writing talent rather than for her beautiful face. I call this feature the selectivity of love.²

The third feature of non-egocentric love is its constancy. As Shakespeare famously said, ‘Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds’. The constancy of love can be interpreted as its power to survive change or sustain the loss of the lover’s qualities that initially justified the love, and to prevent a replacement of a lover even when someone better appears. Such constancy is sometimes referred as the non-fungibility of love (see Helm 2017). Unlike a ten-dollar note that can be replaced by two five-dollar notes without losing any value, our lover cannot be replaced by a qualitatively indistinguishable duplicate suggested by Parfit’s thought experiment (1984). Even if we fall in love with the duplicate, our love towards her is fundamentally different from our original love. A puzzle about such constancy is that it is seemingly incompatible with the selectivity of love. Taking our intelligence as the reason of love, Delancy (1996) suggests that we hope that love remains constant enough to prevail over any change in our intelligence, yet not so blind that it regards a diminished level of intelligence as something negligible. Badhwar characterises such tension between constancy and selectivity of love in a different way:

² One of the reviewers questioned whether parental love is a kind of unconditional love which is not selective by nature. I agree that parental love is very close to unconditional love for there is rarely any change of quality of one’s son or daughter which will terminate our love to them. Yet, parental love is still selective if we understand the qualities of one’s child in a relational or historical sense. For instance, we will have a stronger reason to love our child if we have established a long-term intimate relationship with them than if we are only biologically related to them but do not spend much time with each other. Further elaboration of such qualities can be found in section 5.

On the one hand, my love for you, who are my friend, is not love if it alters *whenever* it alteration finds...But neither is my love for you, the unique person, love for *you* if it remains unaltered through *all* alterations of your qualities (as if ‘you’ = ‘bare particular’) – as it is in unconditional love (Badhwar 1987, p. 6).

With these three features of love in mind, my question is this: What are the proper grounds for starting and continuing a non-egocentric love that selectively directs towards a specific person, yet remains constant when this person changes, like the kind of love that typically instantiates among lovers, friends and family members?³

3. Quality Theory

One answer to the question above is provided by quality theory⁴, which claims that X’s love towards Y is justified if Y possesses qualities that X regards as valuable. Plato, who was arguably the earliest proponent of such an approach, suggested that it is the eternal beauty of our beloved that justifies our love towards them. It is more justified to love someone with a beautiful soul than a beautiful body because only the former can be pregnant with immortal beautiful offspring, e.g. great ideas, that offer perpetual glory to oneself. Such an instrumental account of love, despite its strength in explaining the selectivity of love, is incompatible with the non-egocentric love we aim to explain (See Badhwar). Aristotle suggested three qualities as reasons for friendship, namely, profit, pleasure and character, and

³ Frankfurt (1999) may object that such a question is ill-formed as it assumes that there is a reason for love. He proposes a no-reason view, which suggests that ‘loving is circumscribed by a necessity of that kind: what we love and what we fail to love is not up to us’. (p. 46). As we cannot choose who to love, it is redundant to ask whether our choice is appropriate or not. I am not sure whether love is involuntary as suggested by Frankfurt. It seems counterintuitive to suggest that we never choose who to love, or can never judge whether someone’s love is reasonable or not. Not denying the validity of Frankfurt’s argument, I propose that a more rational way is to review the strengths and weaknesses of different proposed reasons of love before we draw the conclusion that there is no reason for love at all.

⁴ Named by Kolodny (2003).

acknowledged only the last one as a reason for real friendship. For Aristotle, the love between friends must be non-instrumental. He says, ‘Let “loving” [*to philein*] be wishing for someone the things that he deems good, for the sake of that person and not oneself, and the accomplishment of these things to the best of one’s ability’. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1380b36-81a1) To appreciate the character of one’s friend for the sake of its contribution to her but not one’s happiness therefore serves as a *prima facie* valid reason for non-egocentric love.⁵

Regarding beauty or character as justification, however, faces the problem of replaceability. As these qualities can be instantiated in someone else, they serve as proper grounds for us to replace our lovers with someone with the same qualities, or to trade our lovers with someone with better qualities, thus violating the constancy of love. Modern proponents of quality theories have tried to explain such constancy of love by elaborating the effect of valuing the qualities of our beloved as a reason for love.⁶ Jollimore suggests that ‘Loving someone is, in large part, a kind of positive, appreciative response to her in virtue of her attractive, desirable, or otherwise valuable properties’ (Jollimore 2011, 25), yet these qualities are immune from comparison with others’ because of love’s ‘blinding’ effect:

⁵ Irwin (1988) provided an alternative interpretation of Aristotle’s theory of friendship. He thought that Aristotle’s account is instrumental in the sense that A is willing to care about B’s character for her own sake only because A regards B as a propagation of himself, and therefore the good character of B is simultaneously contributing to the happiness of B and A. Whiting (1991) criticised such an interpretation for its assumption of ‘the colonizing ego’ (See Whiting 2013 for a more elaborate criticism).

⁶ One influential quality theory that gives strong explanation of the constancy of love is given by Velleman (1999). Velleman proposes that the quality that justifies love is the dignity of the beloved. As the nature of human beings (in a Kantian sense), it will never change. A similar account is given by Setiya (2014), who argues that the quality that justifies love is the humanity of the beloved. Such accounts, however, cannot explain the selectivity of love because the quality of dignity is shared by all human beings. Velleman responds that one loves a particular person because of the ‘contingent fit’ between them and us. As Helm (2017) points out, such a ‘contingent fit’ only explain why one falls in love with a particular person, but not why one’s love is justified.

The beloved's attractive properties 'fill the mind' of the lover, leaving no room for her to appreciate similar properties possessed by others. An infatuated person becomes blind to the attractions of everyone but his beloved (Jollimore 2011, p. 42).

Not only is a lover blind to the good qualities in people other than his beloved, he is also blind to the adverse qualities of the beloved that he usually finds intolerable in others, and sees his beloved 'in the best possible light (Jollimore 2011, 48).' By such double-blindness, Jollimore's account claims to explicate the constancy of love by eliminating the chance of replacing beloveds through a comparison of their qualities. Nevertheless, other than the limited experimental results cited by Jollimore, our being psychologically wired to overlook qualities other than our lover's does not prove that it is reasonable to overlook similar qualities in others or unreasonable to pay attention to them. Besides, if our attention is so predominantly focused on the good qualities of our beloved that the bad ones become invisible, it is hard to imagine that we are to remain ignorant or indifferent if these qualities, as the foundation of our love, are gone. If so, would not such heightened sensitivity to the good qualities of a beloved weaken rather than strengthen the constancy of love?

Rorty (1986) suggests that constancy of love is ensured by the power of love to change the lover such that they learn to value the new qualities of the beloved when the old qualities disappear. Characterising love as 'dynamic permeable', she states the following:

It is permeable in that the lover is changed by loving and changed by truthful perception of the friend. Permeability rejects being obtuse to change as an easy way of assuring constancy. It is dynamic in that every change generates new changes, both in the lover and in interactions with the friend. Having been transformed by loving, the lover perceives the friend in a new way and loves in a new way (Rorty 1986, 402).

In her example, Louis loved Ella for her 'crisp way of playing Scarlatti'. Through their continuous interaction, Louis was changed by his love towards Ella in that he learned to appreciate some other traits of hers that previously had not seemed admirable, such as 'the sequence of her moods, the particular way she had of sitting still, head bent when she listened to

music'. Louis thus realised that he would not transfer his love even if someone played Scarlatti more brilliantly than Ella. In this way, the constancy of Louis' love is not guaranteed by Ella's unchanging qualities but rather by the correspondence between Ella's changing qualities and his appreciation of them. Rorty argued that such dynamic constancy is superior to the person theory that suggests that one's love never changes, no matter how the character of our beloved changes, for 'he'd be lunatic to love her at 60 in just exactly the same way as he had at 20; and he'd be cruel to love her way of playing Scarlatti if her hands had been mangled in an accident' (Rorty 1986, 403).

I find Rorty's account problematic in two ways. First, it is uncertain whether the dynamic interaction between lovers contributes more to the constancy or inconstancy of love. It is a beautiful coincidence that a lover happens to develop a new appreciation of the qualities that exist in his beloved. However, as such changes are not directed by either party, there is no reason why consonant changes are more likely to happen than inconsonant ones. Worse still, compared with typical quality theories, a termination of love can be justified in Rorty's account even when the beloved's qualities do not change if the lover develops new interests and no longer appreciates those old qualities. Secondly, assuming that consonant changes sometimes happen coincidentally, the problem of replaceability persists. In Rorty's example, even if Louis does not replace Ella with someone who plays Scarlatti better, because he starts appreciating the sequence moods of Ella, it is not clear why Louis does not replace Ella with someone who better expresses this new quality. The problem is not eased even if Ella is likely to produce changes that are consonant with Louis's changes because such capacity is a second-order quality that is by itself replicable in others. Despite these problems, Rorty offers valuable insight with the idea that the justification of love should be considered in a *temporal* manner because both the reasons for love and the appreciation of those reasons are continuously changing through the interaction of lovers.

Some proponents of quality theory have tried to explain the constancy of love by elaborating on how we value the qualities of the beloved. Badhwar (1987) suggests that such valuing is mediated through the idiosyncratic expression of the beloved's qualities. The qualities of our beloved

are not comparable with those of others because qualities are expressed in a style that is unique to everyone. Style, however, although arguably more unique than qualities, is not immune from comparison with others either. In fact, Badhwar admits that the distinction between style and qualities is just a matter of degree: ‘the style in which one expresses certain qualities can itself be described as a set of qualities, and the qualities expressed can be described as a style of facing life’ (Badhwar 1987, 20). If so, individualising qualities with style seems to be a futile move in protecting the constancy of love.

Abramson and Leite provide a more plausible explanation concerning the expression of the beloved’s qualities: ‘the laudable qualities of character are displayed in ways directed towards the lover that makes those qualities the proper grounds for the lover’s response’ (Abramson — Leite 2011, 681). For instance, John being a considerate person is not enough to justify Mary’s love towards him; such character must be expressed in terms of the behaviours or attitude directed towards Mary for it to become proper grounds for her love. Such relational context, although not a reason for love by itself, is what makes the beloved’s quality incomparable to other’s qualities. In response to Kolodny’s (2012) thought experiment of an imagined intrinsic duplicate of Jane, Abramson and Leite argue that one has no grounds for replacing one’s beloved with such a person because the relevant relational context is missing. I find their interpretation of an appropriate relational context as the direct contact between lover and beloved questionable in two ways. First, it is not clear why John’s good character, being expressed directly towards Mary, is a necessary condition of such character being a reason of love. Let us say that Mary is a wealthy woman who needs no help from her friend John. Mary finds out about John’s generous acts of regularly helping the poor. Even if she knows that such goodwill is not to be expressed towards her, she may still appreciate such character, which gives her more reason to love him (as a friend). Secondly, it is not clear why John’s quality, as expressed towards Mary, cannot be compared with, say, Jones’ similar quality as expressed towards Mary, given that both qualities are expressed towards the same person. The claim that such comparison is impossible because the relational context that helps justify Mary’s love towards John must involve John, sounds no different from saying that Mary

has no reason to love Jones because Jones is not John no matter what qualities Jones possesses. Despite these problems, Abramson and Leite's insight that the relationship between lovers plays an essential role in the justification of love should not be overlooked.

4. Person Theory

While quality theory in general struggles to explain the constancy of love, person theory provides a much simpler answer. If the reason of love is the personhood of one's beloveds, a change in their qualities, or a stronger instantiation of such qualities in others, does not justify a shift of love because the personhood of the beloved is unaffected by these changes and comparisons. Arguably, the earliest version of person theory was provided by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, which told a myth about how human beings had been split into halves by Zeus and then spent the rest of their lives longing to find their lost half. We love and continue to love this one half of us, i.e., our soulmate, not because they carry any qualities we appreciate but because they are who they are, the lost half of ourselves as determined by fate. Putting aside this preposterous transcendental assumption, modern philosophers agree that what justifies our love is the beloved's personhood rather than their qualities. Nozick says, 'An adult may come to love another because of the other's characteristics; but it is the other person, and not the characteristics, that is loved' (Nozick 1947, 167). One notorious problem of person theory is its weakness in explaining the selectivity of love. To say that one loves A but not B because A is A but B is not A is clearly no explanation at all. Logically, everyone is themselves. This does not give one a reason to love everyone. Besides, as our beloved always remains who they are, the justification for our love is never invalidated, which suggests that we should never terminate our love. Even if we accept a more liberal view of identity, e.g., Parfit's idea of psychological continuity, the situation is not much better. Only if there is a significant change in our lover's mental states, including their beliefs, desires and emotions, can they be regarded as a different person, which then justifies terminating our love. Such occasions, e.g., suffering from permanent vegetative state (PVS) or Alzheimer's

Disease, are quite rare. Our beloved losing some of our favourite characteristics, e.g., loyalty, faithfulness or kindness, need not become a reason for terminating our love if those changes are not drastically enough to change who they are (rather than what we want them to be).

Inspired by Kripke's theory of rigid designation, Kraut proposes a historical person theory of love by drawing an analogy as follows: 'a proper name is committed to its bearer, in much the way that a lover is historically committed to the object of his love' (Kraut 1986, 424). Just as a proper name rigidly designates an object by a casual history with it but not a definite description of its properties, one's love towards the beloved is justified by the causal history with that particular person but not by their characteristics. This explains why it is the person, rather than their qualities, that justifies love, and why changes of the beloved's qualities do not justify a change of love. Also, the problem of replaceability does not emerge because the historical relationship between two lovers is unique and non-replicable. Kraut's historical account is superior to the metaphysical account in explaining the selectivity of love. Even if both John and Jones possess the same kindness that Mary appreciates, Mary is justified to love John but not Jones only if John's kindness (but not Jones') is expressed in a historical connection between him and Mary that defines who he is. In other words, Mary loves John not because John is John, but because John is the person to whom she is historically related. Kraut emphasizes that such historical relation does not prohibit a justified termination of love: 'Historicity does not entail permanence; analogously, proper names are not eternally bound up with their referents. Every proper name can lose its use. Every love has its limits' (Kraut 1986, 425). However, it is not clear under what conditions the personhood defined in terms of historicity stops being a justification of love given that history is physically unchangeable. Grau (2010) suggests that Kraut may stick to his analogy by following Kripke's way to explain how a proper name loses its use when it acquires a new use through a new causal history, e.g., 'Santa Claus' being switched from a historical saint to a fictional entity. Thus, Mary is justified to stop loving John if she establishes a historical relation with Jones that justifies her love towards him. Here, an obvious question is this: Given that both John and Jones are historically connected to Mary, why might the history between

Jones and Mary override the history between John and Mary? How is a comparison between historical relationships possible?

A deeper question behind the larger historical approach is this: Why does history matter? As Helm (2017) states: ‘The mere fact that I have loved her in the past does not seem to justify my continuing to love her in the future’. Badwhar (1987) suggests that a historical relationship with the beloved has two values. First, it reveals their lovable characteristics and provides us with a better knowledge about each other. Secondly, it creates new appreciable characteristics of us that strengthen love when history is shared emotionally and cognitively. Admitting these epistemological and creative values of shared history as justification of love, however, violates the basic insight of the person theory, i.e., we love our beloved as the person who has a history with us but not for the value that such history provides because these replaceable values cannot be the factors defining who our lover is. Grau raises a similar concern by stating that ‘this approach grants the past a type of instrumental value, one which derives solely from the importance of its future predictive benefits’ (Grau 2011, 17). In response to the question of why history matters in love, Grau suggests that the importance of history is so fundamental that it ‘can be defended as in an important sense ungrounded, natural, and best construed as neither rational nor irrational, but a fundamental non-rational (or arational) feature of our lives that need not be revised away out of fear of irrationality’ (Grau 2011, 19). I believe that there is a reason why history matters, and the solution lies in how we understand the notion of history, which is the bedrock of the account I propose in section 5.

Nozick’s person theory offers another solution to the problem of selectivity. He interprets love as follows:

Love, romantic love, is wanting to form a *we* with that particular person, feeling, or perhaps wanting, that particular person to be the right one for you to form a *we* with, and also wanting the other to feel the same way about you. (Nozick 1989, 78)

Given that the purpose of love is to form such *we*, one’s love is justified if the beloved is the right person to form a *we* with. Constituted by the well-being and autonomy of each party, whether someone is the right person to form such *we* is determined by how their corresponding senses of well-being and autonomy fit together. Thus, what determines the selectivity of love is

not the identity of the beloved per se, but the part of their identity that contributes to the formation of a joint *we*. Similarly, one is justified to stop loving the beloved if the latter becomes unsuitable to be part of the *we*. As Nozick says: 'though no longer dependent upon the particular characteristics that set it (love) off, it can be overcome over time by new and sufficiently negative other characteristics' (Nozick 1989, 76). One problem of Nozick's account is that the requirement of being the right person in a *we* seems highly demanding. As Nozick explains: 'People who form a *we* pool not only their well-being but also their autonomy. They limit or curtail their own decision-making power and rights; some decisions can no longer be made alone' (Nozick 1989, 71). So, to be the right person not only requires that one to surrender (part of) autonomy; the autonomy surrendered must also be combined nicely with the other's autonomy to serve the purpose of promoting the joint well-being of the *we*. If selectivity of love is justified only by such miraculous formation of joint autonomy, then it may lead to the unwelcome consequence that justified love is rare and most everyday love choices are unjustified.

Friedman argues for a less demanding bond of the lover, namely, an interpersonal federation, which 'does not erase the existence of the two lovers as separable and separate agents with continuing possibilities for the exercise of their own respective agency' (Friedman 1998, 165). Lovers may merge partially in their subjectivity, agency or objecthood and yet remain independent in other aspects. These merged aspects may change overtime without affecting the legitimacy of the federation. The only requirement is that the merged aspects must pertain to the identity of the lovers. By cutting loose the commitment of such federation, Friedman claims that it can actually promote our autonomy 'by promoting our self-understanding, self-esteem, and capacities to act effectively in concert with others' (Friedman 1998, 170). Contrary to Nozick's highly demanding account of *we*, Friedman's account of federation seems so liberal that it is not clear how the selectivity of love can be explained. Given that no merging identity-shaping aspect is more important than others, and that no specific amount of autonomy from each party contributing to the federation is required, we have no idea why someone is a better candidate to form a federation than another, or whether we are justified to shift love to someone who can merge

with us in aspects other than those of our beloved, or whether we are justified to terminate love when our beloved stops merging with us in specific aspects. In short, while I find the idea of justifying the constancy and selectivity of love by a specific union of lovers that defines who they are to be insightful, the solution seems to lie between Nozick's narrow account and Friedman's liberal account.

5. Relationship Theory

Let us see what we can learn from the last two sections. Generally, the qualities of a loved one are specific and alterable, which make them good candidates to explain the selectivity but not constancy of love. Depending on the perception and expression of qualities, however, the constancy of love can be explained to a certain extent. Of particular interest is Rorty's idea that love may continuously change the lover's perception of the beloved's qualities, along with Abramson and Leite's idea that qualities expressed in a relational context are more stable than non-relational qualities. However, the personhood of a lover is relatively general and unalterable, which make it a good candidate to explain the constancy but not the selectivity of love. Depending on what constitutes the identity of a person, the selectivity of love can be somehow explained. Of particular interest is Kraut's idea that what makes a person a justified object of love is her history with oneself, and Nozick and Friedman's idea that some kinds of union constituted by the personhood of lovers justify love. Drawing from such a review, it seems that we need something more stable than qualities and less rigid than personal identity to explain both the selectivity and constancy of love. Such a thing is jointly constituted by both lovers as a person (including their shared history), which may affect how they interpret other qualities and how these qualities are expressed. Some philosophers have proposed that a relationship is that thing.

Kolodny's (2003) relationship theory argues that what justifies our love towards another is our relationship: 'My reason for loving Jane, I suggest, is my relationship to her: that she is my daughter, or my mother, or my sister, or my friend, or the woman with whom I have made my life' (Kolodny 2003, 146). According to Kolodny, a relationship that justifies love

must consist of an ongoing and historical pattern of mutual concern arising between particular people. The beauty of such a theory is that it simultaneously captures the strength of the quality theory and the person theory.

Concerning the constancy of love, as what justifies love is not the qualities of one's beloved but the less alterable qualities of the relationship, namely an ongoing and historical pattern of mutual concern, changes in the beloved's qualities or someone who appears to possess better qualities; these need not justify termination or a shift of love. Let us say that Mary is in a romantic relationship with John in which John cares about Mary because he is a caring person. John stops being a caring person because of some trauma. This does not mean that Mary is therefore justified in ceasing to love John. John may acquire other reasons to care for Mary, e.g., his belief that Mary needs him. As long as the quality of mutual concern in their relationship does not change, the justification for their love remains unchanged even if John's qualities change. Even if someone else cares about Mary more than John does, as long as Mary's care for John is not based on John being the person who cares about her most, Mary's care for John need not decrease. Thus, their mutual concern, as the corresponding justification for love, need not change accordingly. Concerning the selectivity of love, a termination of love can be justified by a change of the less rigid beloved's identity *in a relationship* but not her personal identity per se. Kolodny discusses such a possibility with a story of a reputable historian who comes to devote himself to denying the Holocaust. He still expresses a deep concern for his wife, as does she to him. His mental states do not undergo the drastic change that may lead people to see him as a different person. However, Kolodny argues that his wife is justified in not loving him anymore because he is no longer the same man *in their relationship*. Being forced to withdraw her respect for him, she can no longer see him as someone with equal standing, without which his identity in the relationship cannot be maintained.

Appealing as relationship theory in general may be, I find Kolodny's definition of relationship in terms of mutual concern problematic in two ways. First, it may lead to the counterintuitive conclusion that love is always unjustified at the beginning. Given that love is a non-egocentric concern of the beloved, if X is justified to love Y only if they are in a relationship in which Y loves X, it is puzzling how their love can start without

either party loving another unjustifiably at the beginning. Under Kolodny's account, it seems that love is justified only after an unjustified love exists first, which leads to mutual concern in a relationship that in turn justifies love. Kolodny is well aware of this problem. He states that critics might argue that 'relationship cannot be reasons for falling in love because they do not exist until one has fallen in love' (Kolodny 2003, 169). In response to this criticism, he suggests that before the establishment of a relationship, a shared history of friendly interaction 'gradually give(s) rise to noninstrumental concern' for one's potential lover, on the assumption that she is 'disposed to reciprocate one's emerging concern'. Here, Kolodny lowers the requirement for the justification of love from a relationship of mutual concern to a friendly interaction of mutual disposition to reciprocate other's concern. The problem is, firstly, that friendly interaction seems not to be enough to justify love because it can occur among people who are clearly not in love with each other, e.g., between colleagues, or between salespeople and customers. Secondly, if what is needed to justify our love is not the actual concern of our beloved *to us*, but their general character, e.g., 'she isn't antecedently hostile...or divisively competitive, or self-absorbed, or sociopathic' (Kolodny 2003, 169), that dispose them to reciprocate *anyone's love*, the uniqueness of one's lover is lost and the problem of replaceability emerges again given that these non-relational characteristics or qualities are non-idiosyncratic and can be instantiated in many people.

Secondly, Kolodny's definition of relationship as mutual concern is both too wide and too narrow. It is too wide in the sense that an ongoing and historical pattern of mutual concern can exist among people who are not justified to love each other. Bagley suggests that the pedagogical relationship between teachers and students may include a concern of other's interest 'in pedagogically appropriate ways and for pedagogically appropriate forms of emotional vulnerability' (Bagley 2015, 11). The teacher may have concern for all of her students but is not justified to fall in love with any of them because what she really values is the pedagogical relationship as such, not any particular pedagogical relationship with any particular student. These mutual concern relationships that cannot justify love may also exist among athletes on the same team, colleagues working for the same goal, or even soldiers in the same army. However, Kolodny's definition of relationship

is too narrow in the sense that a justified love can occur among people *not* in a relationship with mutual concern. Price questions whether Kolodny's account 'leaves sufficient scope for unrequited love' (Price 2012, 224). In his example, even if Edith does not believe that she shares any relationship with Laurie as she does not return her feelings to his love, we may still believe that Edith has better grounds to love Laurie if she is kind and charming rather than mean and tiresome. Denying any justifying role of the non-relational qualities of the beloved, Kolodny's definition of relationship renders unrequited love always unjustified. Another counterexample is the love among family members. Parents are not always the concern of their children as much as children are the concern of the parents, but it does not render parents' love towards their children unjustified or serve as a reason not to love them. Kolodny responds by defining family relationship as an attitude-independent relationship that may justify love without mutual concern (See Kolodny 2003, 149). However, it is not clear what still constitutes the power to justify love in a family relationship when we take away mutual concerns from the latter. Is it because family members are tied by blood, by social institutions, or by moral norms? None of these seems strong enough if we have never related personally to our family members. It seems preposterous to argue that one must love one's father if one has never met him once in one's life.

Kolodny's relationship theory is thick in the sense that a relationship must meet a specific condition to qualify as a justification of love, namely, mutual concern. Bagley (2015) provides a thin relationship theory that may avoid Kolodny's problems. Drawing from the analogy of musical improvisation, Bagley argues that what justifies love is an improvisational partnership, which is defined as 'a type of ongoing relationship grounded in the partners' mutual recognition of one another as sharing an end with respect to a given activity' (Bagley 2015, 25), for which 'the ends lovers share constitute fundamental values with which they identify' (Bagley 2015, 26). That is, a relationship that justifies love must involve some shared ends between lovers whose values they identify with. However, there is no specific requirement for what these ends must be. Each relationship may pursue its own ends, just as each band may strive for a different style of music. Besides, these ends need not have been previously agreed upon by both parties

but are always in the process of being determined through their interactions. In such relationship, one should recognise another as an authority in judgement with respect to the value of the shared ends and the ways to achieve such ends, in the sense that one assumes that their actions are always working towards those shared ends, even though one has never witnessed such actions, just as one may acknowledge the decision of one's bandmates to play a riff that expresses a shared musical idea and play along. Bagley's account not only allows different relationships to have different ends, but lovers in a relationship do not even need to be able to specifically spell out their shared ends. Such a thin relationship theory provides us with the necessary flexibility to explain a great variety of love, including love without mutual concern.

Moreover, Bagley's account offers a deep explanation of the constancy of love. Mary cannot trade John for a better partner not because her beloved John possesses unique qualities, but because the standard to judge whether John deserves Mary's love, i.e., the value of their relationship, can only be provided by the interaction between Mary and John in the process of improvisation. As Bagley says, 'If you had a different partner, you'd have different standards: there's no common basis of comparison' (Bagley 2015, 28). Nor can Mary terminate her love when John appears not to be sharing the same goal or value with her anymore, for she has to assume John is still working towards the same goal or achieving the same value in a legitimate yet alternative way in an improvised relationship. The specific ends and functioning in such a relationship may rule out those counterexamples faced by Kolodny's theory, e.g., relationships between teacher and students, and among teammates or comrades. These relationships do not justify love because even though the parties involved may share the same end within a specific period, they may not be ready to acknowledge the other's authority or judgement when working towards the same undetermined end.

Despite these advantages over Kolodny's account, I find Bagley's historical explanation of the selectivity of love to be inadequate. Just as there are hardly any objective qualities for determining who is a good partner for musical improvisation, there seems to be no objective standard for determining who may be a good partner in a deep improvised relationship. Bagley suggests that we may appeal to the lover's joint history of particular

interactions as a ‘common evaluative currency’ (Bagley 2015, 29) to determine the qualification of a deep improviser. This is a reasonable answer. Just as a musician may have a rough idea of how far their band can go after a few performances, two lovers may see how far their relationship can go after several interactions involving the clash and harmony of their fundamental values. Nonetheless, it is not clear in what way such joint history informs and determines the justification level of love in a relationship. It is not uncommon that people with a history of conflict may turn out to be life-long partners, or that people with a harmonious history turn out to be each other’s most hateful enemies. Besides, such joint history may not explain why we choose someone as our lover at the beginning when no history is yet available. Neither does it explain why people may be justified to love someone who completely forgets the history of the relationship, e.g., a patient of Alzheimer’s disease, nor someone who is not even capable of constructing or understanding any history, e.g. a new-born baby. The historical dimension of a love relationship seems more complicated than the function of ‘learning-from-history’ as suggested by Bagley’s account.

6. A Temporal Relationship Theory

In light of the reviews above, I propose a temporal relationship theory to explain the justification of love and argue that it offers a better explanation of the constancy and selectivity of love. Such a theory can be regarded as a complement to Bagley’s account with major modifications of his conception of the ‘history’ of a relationship.

The importance of the joint history of a relationship for the justification of love has been widely acknowledged by quality theories, person theories and relationship theories. In response to the problems faced by Bagley’s account (and by the traditional historical account discussed in section 3 and 4), I propose that history of a relationship should not be understood as independent of its present and future; instead, it is an interpretation that is affected by the anticipation of the future, just as the latter is an interpretation determined by the recalling of a joint history. Defining the relation between the past and future of a relationship, we can say that the recalling of history and the anticipation of the future both determine the

present identity of a relationship. For instance, if a couple interprets their past as a history of material satisfaction, they are less likely to expect a poor yet mind-fulfilling life in their future. Thus, they may regard themselves as profit-maximising partners in the present relationship. If a couple expects to share a rich moral life with each other in the long run, they may interpret their sexually fulfilling history as a waste of time, and may regard themselves as sinners and moral practitioners in their present relationship. I call such an interactive relation between the interpretation of the past, the understanding of the present, and the anticipation of the future of a relationship the temporality of a relationship.⁷

In light of the revised idea of history above, I propose that love between two people is justified if they are in a relationship in which both parties are sharing a similar temporality of some identity-shaping goals or ends of the relationship. By sharing, I take the broad sense proposed by Bagley, which suggests that lovers who recognise each other as an authority in the judgement of an indeterminate end, either factually or counterfactually, can be regarded as sharing an end even if they cannot specify what the end is. By identity-shaping ends, I refer to ends of a relationship that at least partially determine the identities of the lovers. Only then can we explain the intuition of person theory that what justifies our love is the beloved's personhood rather than their qualities. I call this temporal relationship theory (TRT). TRT suggests that the level of justification of love is determined by the similarity between lovers' interpretation of the history, understanding of the present, and anticipation of the future of some specific identity-shaping ends of their relationship. Not only can TRT explain both the constancy and selectivity of love, it can also explain the roles played by the beloved's qualities and identity in the justification of love.

⁷ The idea of the interlock between past, present, and future is enlightened by Heidegger's description of the authentic temporality of *Dasein*. He says, "The future is not later than having been, and having-been is not earlier than the Present. Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in a process of having been." (*Being and Time* 68: 401) My use of the term 'temporality', however, does not presuppose any metaphysical or phenomenological assumption of Heidegger's account. All it means is that the anticipation of the future, understanding of the present, and the interpretation of the past may affect each other.

Concerning the selectivity of love, one has a better reason to love someone who shares a more similar temporality of the relationship with oneself than to love those who do not. Before a relationship starts, there is no history of the relationship to which to appeal.⁸ Thus, lovers can only focus on the similarity of their anticipation of the future of the relationship. If Mary foresees herself as a future parent, she has a stronger reason to love John, who also foresees himself as a parent, than Mark, who foresees himself without children in his life, because it is more likely for Mary and John to both identify their relationship as a family-establishing relationship than for Mary and Mark. The qualities of John that attract Mary's attention, e.g., piety and kindness towards young children, plays the role of reason of love by serving as an indicator reflecting how much John shares the ends Mary regards as essential to their relationship. Thus, some qualities, e.g., characters and virtues, are usually regarded as better reasons for love than others, e.g., appearance and social status, not because they are deeper or more sophisticated but because they are better indicators of whether someone is and will continue to share an important end of a relationship.

Another example to which no history can be appealed is the love of parents towards their infant. Even though a history between them exists, the infant is cognitively incapable of recalling any of it. Nor is the infant capable of anticipating any shared ends in the future. I argue that parents are justified to love them by appealing to a counterfactual similarity of temporality of their relationship. That is, parents are not unreasonable to believe that if their baby is cognitively mature enough, they will agree to the ends their parents plan to share with them. Such counterfactual shared anticipation of the future may then provide grounds for the parents to believe that they were currently sharing the same end and the time they spend together were a history of the shared end if the baby was cognitively mature, which in turn constitutes grounds as a justification of their love towards their baby. Thus, if a couple anticipate a similar future with their adopted baby or foster child, their love's towards them is no less justified than their baby related by blood. Along with the development of the

⁸ They certainly have a shared history of acquaintance or friendship relation, and such relationship may affect how they anticipate the future of the current romantic relationship.

infant's cognitive capacity of interpreting history and anticipating future, such justification will normally become less and less counterfactual.

For those friends and lovers whose relationship has started, their everyday co-experience begins to accumulate as shared history and develop into a joint future. The interaction between the writing of history and the planning of the future leads to a dynamic interaction between the rewriting of history and the anticipation of the future, which, in turn, lead to a continuous modification of the understanding of the relationship's present identity. While harmony in the interpretation of one end of the timeline may strengthen the harmony at the other end, which may confirm the harmony of the present relationship, a discrepancy at either end may weaken the harmony of the other end, which may bring doubt or even crisis to the relationship. During such interaction, the qualities of the beloved that used to be good indicators of their shared ends may lose their function. New qualities (or new interpretations of the old qualities) are needed to match the new future or the new interpretation of the past, without which a termination of love could be justified. Let us say that John continuously demonstrates his caring and sweetness to Mary, e.g., when Mary is sick and when they have a disagreement. Mary may start to see their relationship as heading towards marriage in the foreseeable future. If John does not see their future in the same way, he may interpret their history as a pleasurable *carpe diem* rather than as preparation for marriage. Such discrepancy in the temporal understanding of their relationship may justify a termination of love. Even if John shares the same anticipation of the future with Mary, this expectation may affect how Mary interprets their past in a way different from John. She used to feel content about John's caring and kind character when she saw their relationship as romantic, but now she wants John to further demonstrate his sense of responsibility and commitment as she foresees them as potential wife and husband. If John fails to demonstrate these new qualities, their love may run into a crisis. Due to the dynamic interaction of the interpretation of history and the anticipation of future in a relationship, the reasons for love require continuous revision, renewal and reconfirmation.

Concerning the constancy of love, TRT suggests that one is not justified to stop loving someone even if their character or qualities change as long as

they share a similar temporality of the relationship. Changes in qualities only matter when they affect how the beloved interprets the past or/and anticipates the future. Even in such cases, a stabilising force can be found within a relationship. Specifically, even if they anticipate a different future, their shared history may provide resources, e.g., shared values, ways of communication, valuable memory, to help adapt to, accommodate or fix such discrepancies. For instance, if Mary wants three children and John declares that he only wants one after witnessing the chaos in his friend's triplet home, they may reach the conclusion that having one child rather than three may best fit what they both want, based on their shared experience of spending quality time alone with each other and on their consensus that social life, in addition to family life, is important. However, even if they interpret the past differently, their shared future plan may provide motivations for them to adapt to, accommodate or fix such discrepancies. For instance, let us say that Mary regards their past as a bitter adaptation to each other's personality and John learns to see it as a sweet interaction with someone different from himself after a few classes of meditation. If they both anticipate their relationship as running towards a marriage, such shared anticipation of the future may make both of them reinterpret their past as a collective bittersweet effort to become harmonious with each other. In this way, the constancy of love is preserved over change in qualities.

The personal identity of the beloved may contribute to the constancy of love if we understand it as the temporality of the beloved which is, by itself, a partial constitutive component and a cause of the temporality of the relationship. If John firmly regards himself as a father-figure, he is likely to turn his relationship with Mary into a family-establishing relationship, e.g., show her his sense of commitment and responsibility. Once their relationship acquires such a nature, John not only identifies himself as a father but also as a father to the children with Mary. In this way, his identity is constituted by the identity of the relationship. Such casual-cum-constitutive relation⁹ between the identity of the beloved and the identity of the relationship may prevent a comparison of qualities between the beloved and others that threatens the constancy of love. For instance, Mary is not justified in replacing John with a qualitatively identical person, Jones, because

⁹ I borrow the idea of a causal-cum-constitutive relation from Whiting (2013).

Jones' identity is different from John's in the sense that the former is not constituted by a relationship with Mary as was John. Without any shared history as a resource to overcome changes in qualities or discrepancy in anticipation of future, it is highly unlikely that Jones and Mary share a similar temporality of their relationship as much as John and Mary. Even if the qualities of our beloved have been changed so drastically that it renders impossible the recalling of a joint history or the anticipation of a joint future, as long as the shared history or future is sufficiently rich, one may still be justified to continue loving them. Even if John suffers from Alzheimer's disease that causes amnesia or is in a permanent vegetative state (PVS), thus preventing him from making any future plans, Mary's love towards him may still be justified if their shared future (in the case of Alzheimer's disease) or shared history (in the case of PVS) is rich enough to let Mary continue to believe that John is still who he is and that their relationship is still what it is.

Defining the role of the beloved's identity in this way, we can also explain why love can be justifiably terminated even if the beloved's identity does not change. The relationship is just part of the beloved's identity. Other parts may interfere and create discrepancies in the temporality of their relationship. Back to our example, being the father of Mary's child is only part of John's identity. He may also identify himself as a soldier who fights for his country. If John was being promoted and required to spend time in overseas training and missions, he may adjust his role of fatherhood and anticipate only one child with Mary. If Mary expects more than one child in their relationship, such a discrepancy may serve as a reason for the termination of her love. In this case, we can say that such termination of love is justified even though John's identity does not change. In this sense, the constancy of love ensured by TRT is less rigid than by the person theories.

7. Conclusion

Despite the theoretical advantages of TRT in explaining the selectivity and constancy of love, one may still ask, why does temporality matter to love? Other than giving a logical reason or a scientific explanation of the

importance of temporality, I can only outline what it means to take the temporality of a relationship seriously by comparing it with other theories. For quality theory, our beloved possesses qualities that satisfy our desire. Thus, love is a matter of desire satisfaction. For person theory, our beloved is the person who deserves our unselfish concern. Thus, love is a matter of giving and devotion. For relationship theory, our beloved is our partner to achieve a specific end. Thus, love is a matter of collective effort to achieve an end. For the temporal relationship theory, our beloved is our partner to work for some ends from the beginning till the end. Thus, what matters is not the achievement of the end, but the accompaniment along the way towards the development, achievement, or even abandonment of such end. It is about satisfying desires *with someone*. It is about devoting one's care and concern *with someone*. It is all about accompaniment. If every justification must stop somewhere, that's where TRT grounds.

I must also admit that the temporal relationship theory I propose is not a parsimonious theory. The dynamic interaction between interpretation of past, the understanding of the present and the anticipation of future, concerning various important identity-shaping ends of a relationship, can be so complex that it almost renders it impossible to judge whether love is justified or not at any given moment. Taking the complexity of love into consideration, the corresponding complexity of a theory that justifies different kinds of love should not be surprising.

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