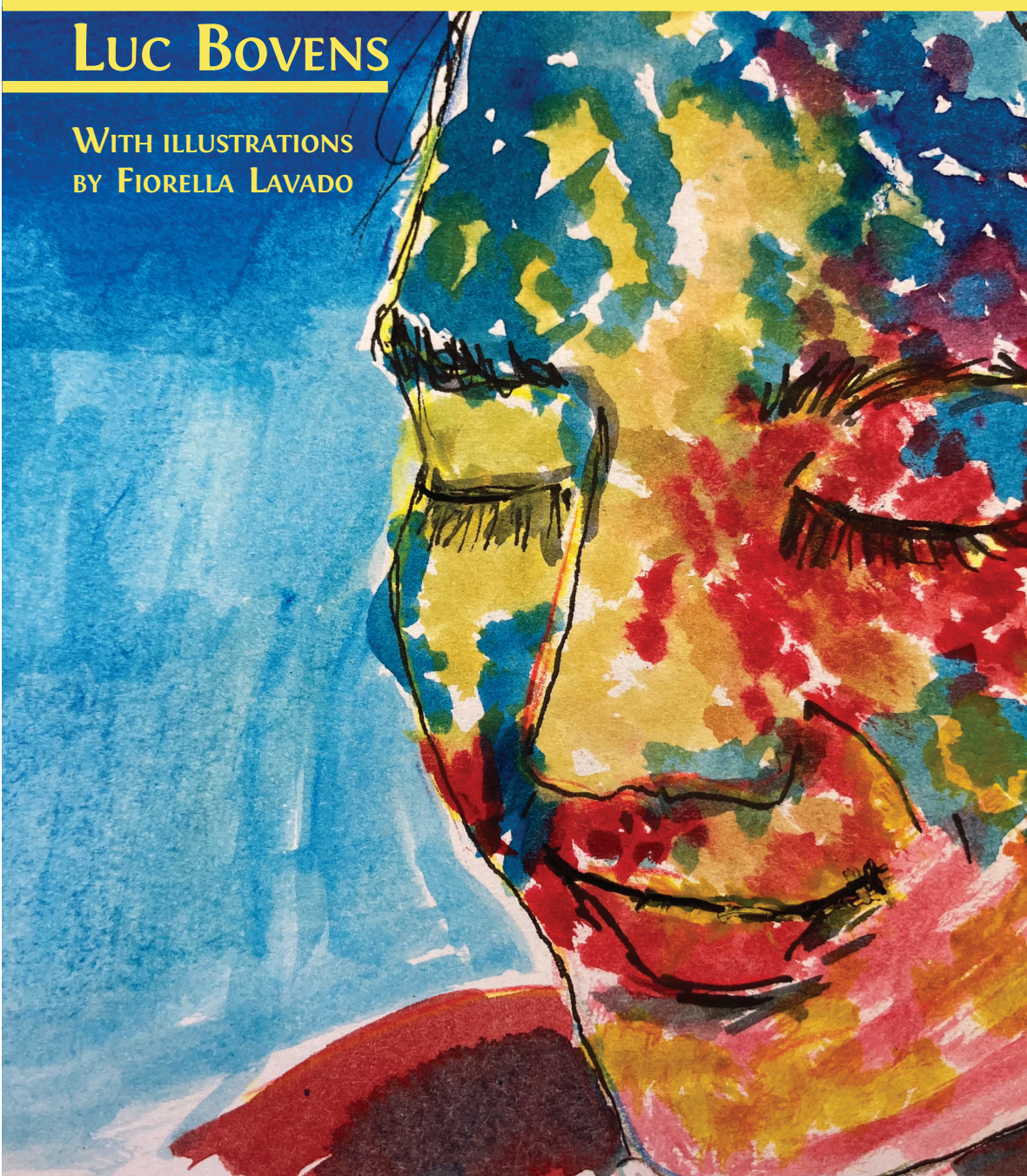
COPING

A PHILOSOPHICAL GUIDE

LUC BOVENS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY FIORELLA LAVADO



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3. Love

Constancy

We want all kinds of things in life—an interesting job, a cruise to exotic lands, a night on the town, a sports car… And then there is our love life. Again, there are all kinds of things that we want in the way of love. We want a happy love life, we want to be with our beloved, or, one might say, we want our beloved. But love-related wants are curiously different from more mundane wants.

Let's start with something that so many of us want—chocolate. Like love, most ordinary mortals don't just want chocolate; they crave it. Suppose that you grew up on Cadbury, but now you think that you have made the discovery of your life—you have tasted these nicely wrapped Ghirardelli squares from the Bay Area, and you swear that they are the best thing under the sun.

Being a choosy Belgian when it comes to chocolate, I ask what you like about it. You immediately start raving about the velvety texture, the robust bitterness, the aroma of hazelnuts, and so on. I understand your passion. But if that's what you like about chocolates, then I have news for you. Try these pralines from Daskalidès, manufactured in Ghent, Belgium—they score higher than Ghirardelli on all the factors you mention.

You are somewhat incredulous, but you are willing to give it a go. And indeed, you fall head over heels for Daskalidès on first bite. It is to die for! Ghirardelli pales in comparison. And so, you trade up. Ghirardelli is a thing of the past—the future with Daskalidès is bright.

And there are simpler ways to wean you off Ghirardelli. I might suggest you put on your reading glasses and read the ingredients of that Ghirardelli square. You notice the soy lecithin among the additives. For

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some reason or other, you have some misgivings about soy additives, and you turn your back on Ghirardelli.

Or Ghirardelli may decide to source its cocoa from a different supplier. It just doesn't taste the same anymore to your discerning palate, and, again, you say farewell to Ghirardelli.

In all these cases, we wouldn't bat an eyelid. You liked Ghirardelli yesterday. But you traded up for Daskalidès, you learned something new about Ghirardelli, or Ghirardelli changed. You don't like Ghirardelli today. But there is no reason to say that you didn't truly like Ghirardelli yesterday.

Compare this to love. Suppose that you tell me that you have found a new beloved. You are besotted and beguiled—you hear the angels singing. I ask you what is so great about them? You are more than happy to tell me all about how beautiful, handsome, witty, charming, and intelligent your new beloved is.

As with Ghirardelli, I am happy to dispense good advice. If that's what you find so attractive in your newfound Mr. or Ms. Right, I invite you to come along and meet Mr. or Ms. So-Much-More-Right—someone who has all those nice character traits to an even greater extent. We set up a date, you agree with my excellent judgment as a matchmaker, swiftly trade up, and live happily ever after.

Trading up from Ghirardelli to Daskalidès did not stand in the way of saying that you *truly* liked Ghirardelli yesterday. But trading up from Right to So-Much-More-Right makes one less confident about your love for Right yesterday. If you were so beguiled and besotted, why did you even take me up on arranging a date? And how is it that you were so easily convinced? You have to admit that, maybe, you did not *truly* love Right after all. To quote a well-worn line from Shakespeare's Sonnet 116: 'Love is not love/ Which alters when it alteration finds.'

Love should also be resilient to learning—at least more resilient than your fancy for Ghirardelli. As we become more acquainted with our beloved, we may learn things about them that would have stopped us from falling in love with them. But now that we are where we are, it shouldn't matter. If this new knowledge can undo our love, one may question how true it was.

This is a favorite ingredient in tragic love stories. In Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman*, Angel learns on his wedding

night that Tess had a child out of wedlock and leaves her. One questions whether Angel truly loved Tess. As a contrast, take the young love that blossoms between Jimmy and Dil in Neil Jordan's movie *The Crying Game*. Jimmy learns that Dil is transgender and anatomically male, and Dil learns that Jimmy was the cause of her former lover's death. Though they would never have fallen in love with each other had they known these things at the outset, they cannot let go of their love.

Wendy Cope has a two-line poem, entitled 'Two Cures for Love,' in her poetry book *Serious Concerns*: '1. Don't see him. Don't phone or write a letter. / 2. The easy way: get to know him better.' The poem is tongue-in-cheek. Indeed, it sounds fully reasonable that as we learn unwelcome information about our beloved—which is due to come—love will wither. But true love is less than fully reasonable and is meant to be resilient in the face of unwelcome information.

Love should also be resilient to change. There is no problem with turning our back on Ghirardelli when they change their cocoa supplier. Nothing stays the same—Ghirardelli is just not what it used to be. But no person stays the same either—lovers tend to change on us as well. But here, again, is where love differs from our passion for chocolates. We expect love to be able to weather change—at least to some extent. Of course, it's not all sunshine and rainbows—change brings new challenges and requires new coping strategies to keep the relationship afloat.

I was intrigued by some autobiographical comments of Janine di Giovanni, a prize-winning war journalist. She talks about her divorce after her husband turned away from alcoholism:

> It was the saddest birthday, the day of his last drink. Not because I grieved for the passing of his alcoholism, but because I knew, instinctively, that he would change and never again be the man I married. Because, in fact, part of that love was based on the passion, the drink, the fury, the rage, the anger, the drive, that made him so intense. Without it, there was a smaller person who looked sad and hardened by life. (The *Guardian*, 25 Jun 2011)

One wonders about a love that does not survive the process of recovery from alcoholism. Her husband had become a different man, and the spark was gone. Might this not say something about the love that came before? None of this is ours to judge, but di Giovanni's story strikes a

familiar chord. One may remember occasions when love was lost in one's own life over something that shouldn't have mattered, leaving one to conclude that the love was never genuinely there to begin with.

This is what is called the *constancy* of love. If alleged love is subject to trading up or is brittle in the face of learning unwelcome news or unexpected changes, then we conclude that the alleged love was not quite true love. It's a mark that something was absent. It is this constancy that sets love apart from other desires, longings, and passions—even from cravings for chocolate.

Granted, there are limits to the constancy of love. Relationships can become abusive over time, and it would be heartless to tell the party leaving that they never truly loved their partner. You may find out that, haplessly, the person you were dating was a perpetrator in the Rwandan genocide. Or as one of my students objected, tongue in cheek: 'I truly love my boyfriend, but what is there to do if Ryan Gosling were to show up on my doorstep?'

But even though there are limits to constancy, love is different in this respect from other things we want in life, be it a nice job, a cruise, a sports car, or what have you. Such longings, intense as they may be, typically do not display constancy. Admittedly, they do occasionally, but there is something pathological about that. For instance, I may not be able to let go of an old beater car, even though there is plenty of room to trade up, I am aware that it's a dreadful polluter, and repairs are endless. But that is a kind of misplaced constancy—one should not come to love a piece of metal with a love that ought to be reserved for persons.

Models

There are three grand and ancient models of romantic love. They go back to Socrates' and Aristophanes' speeches in the *Symposium* and to chapter thirteen of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. There is surprisingly little to be found in the original texts, but there is a kind of lore that has formed around a few lines of rather obscure musings.

Eros. Love is born in response to finding attractive features in a person. This can take many forms—beauty, riches, fame… In an interview, Diane Keaton says that there was chemistry between her and Woody Allen

'because it was Woody Allen and because he was funny.' Or one may find someone sensitive, charming, attentive, willing to listen to us, or what have you.

This is the model that we find in Socrates' speech in the *Symposium*. Socrates says that all he knows about love he learned from Diotima, the woman from Mantinea, 'a woman wise in this and in many other kinds of knowledge.' In keeping with the tradition, we will call this the *eros* model of love. There is a bit of mission creep in Socrates' speech. It starts with an appreciation of what is beautiful and good in one's beloved, but a minute later, we move onto the beauty and the good in the laws and institutions of the city, in the practice of philosophy, and finally, to what it means for something to be beautiful and good. Let Socrates and Diotima go down this metaphysical alleyway on their own, all we need is the idea that romantic love is comprised of an appreciation of the wonderful features of the beloved. The motto for this model might be—*to love is to find one's beloved great*.

Agape. This is the love that wants to take care of the other, to bring out the best in them. This love is not a response to great things in the other. Rather, it aims to bring about great things. It does not seek value, but rather it confers value.

Here is some Theology 101. When we say that God loves us, clearly the *eros* model would not be fitting: God is not gently looking down, impressed and beguiled by all the greatness to be seen in mortals roaming around on earth. Rather, God despairs at seeing all this sinfulness in motion. However, it is through loving us that God aims to lift us up and make us into better people, provided we are receptive to that love.

St. Paul sings the praises of this kind of love in 1 Corinthians 13:1–7. He uses the Greek word *agape*, which is translated in Latin as *caritas*. It is a self-forgetful love that sacrifices its own interests for the well-being of the beloved. It is a love of commitment, no matter what comes. Let the motto be—*to love is to make one's beloved great*.

One might object that St. Paul was interested here in the love that one should have for one's fellow human beings—the love of Christian fellowship—not the love of romantic engagement. What St. Paul had in mind I do not know. But clearly, people do find some romantic ideal

in St. Paul's words, considering how often they are the core reading in Christian wedding ceremonies. Conjugal love shares in this ideal of loving as bringing out the best in one's beloved.

Fusion. Before Socrates takes his turn in the *Symposium*, the playwright Aristophanes tells a myth about how humans in times long gone were like spheres and had two pairs of legs and arms, two heads and two genitals—some were double male, some were double female, and some were male-female. They revolted against Zeus, and as a punishment, Zeus split them in two. And that is the human form as we know it. But these humans have an irresistible longing to find their original other halves and to unite with them. Depending on our original form, this longing is for our gay, lesbian, or straight other halves.

The myth underscores that we have a need to find someone in life who complements us. Falling in love is like linking up two segments that perfectly match and thereby become one. Lovers create a shared self or a joint identity. They go through the world not as two separate people, but as one in body and soul. They think of themselves as such, and they want to be seen by the world as such. Let us call this the *fusion* model of love with the motto—*to love is to become one with one's beloved*.

These three models are not mutually exclusive. In Sonnet 43, Elizabeth Barrett Browning ponders how to 'count the ways' in which she loves her beloved. Relationships tend to display a bit more or less of an *eros* focus, an *agape* focus, or a *fusion* focus. Single-model relationships tend to be pathological. With too much *eros* comes infatuation. With too much *agape* comes a loss of self. And with too much *fusion* comes clinginess. One needs a mix for a healthy relationship.

All these models have, in their own way, a deep reverence for love. They portray love as the kind of thing that is worth pursuing in life. I call them 'reflectively endorsable' models because embracing the model in no way detracts from seeing love in its full glory. But, as we will see, each of these models also has a *cynical* counterpart. The Cartesian model maps onto *eros*, the love-for-love's-sake model maps onto *agape*, and the neurobiological model maps onto the *fusion* model. These cynical models may not be a good fit for Valentine's Day, yet they are edifying in their own way.

Let us look in more detail at each of these six models and see how they fare in the face of the constancy of love. And then there is the flipside—when constancy fails, there are heartaches. These models tell us different stories about the pangs of love lost and how one might cope with them.

Eros

Let us start with the *eros* model. Loving people for their features causes trouble for the constancy of love. Features may change. We may realize that we misjudged our beloved due to the infatuation of young love. Or someone may cross our path who displays the features that attracted us to a greater extent. If the *eros* model describes all there is to love, then what is there that could keep us from saying that we have reached the end of the line?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnet 14 in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* puts the worry very aptly:

> Do not say,
> "I love her for her smile—her look—her way
> Of speaking gently,—for a trick of thought
> That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
> A sense of pleasant ease on such a day"—
> For these things in themselves, Belovèd, may
> Be changed, or change for thee—and love, so wrought,
> May be unwrought so.

Browning exhorts her beloved not to love her on the *eros* model of love. All the features he may love her for may change in her. Or her beloved may come to see them differently. And that, she fears, would mean the end of love which she wishes to avoid at all costs.

But the *eros* model may have its own defense mechanisms against short horizons built into it. Maybe true love is rooted in the appreciation of valuable features—as the *eros* model stipulates—but certain features just cannot play this role. If we fall for someone because of their beauty, riches, or fame, one would be hard-pressed to call it true love.

This is fair enough, but then, what sort of features *can* play this role? What sort of features are such that their appreciation could be a ground for true love? There are many candidates, but none of them are unproblematic.

In 'He that Loves a Rosy Cheek,' the seventeenth-century English poet Thomas Carew warns that love should not be based on 'a rosy cheek [...] a coral lip [...] star-like eyes,' because these are bound to fade. Rather, it is 'a smooth and steadfast mind, gentle thoughts, and calm desires' that can 'kindle never-dying fires.' This matches Socrates' argument in the *Symposium*: First, the novice in the art of love finds beauty in the body of the beloved, and at a later stage, 'he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honorable than the beauty of the outward form.'

The suggestion is that one should love a person for their character traits. Character traits may be somewhat less ephemeral than looks, but they provide far less constancy than one would expect from love. Browning does not want to be loved for 'speaking gently' either, because she may not speak gently tomorrow, or her beloved may not think of her as speaking gently tomorrow.

People change, for better or for worse. Those who have nurtured a loved one through depression know all too well how little can be there of the person we fell in love with. If love is not to fade, character traits may be as fragile as beauty or money. But it may be wiser to focus on character traits because desirable character traits are typically a better predictor of long-term marital satisfaction. Similarly, it may be wiser to choose a place to live on grounds of its social scene or the opportunity for satisfying work, rather than on grounds of its natural beauty or the opportunity to make lots of money. But if natural beauty or riches really matter to *you*, then why not? And if the beauty of the outward form in a partner or the posh lifestyle that they promise really matters to *you*, then why not? You may come to realize that you were mistaken in your assessment of the relative importance of these features. But whether it's 'a rosy cheek' or 'a smooth and steadfast mind' that kindles your love does not make that love any more or less true.

But maybe we love people not for having certain features—bodily, monetary, character, or what have you—but for the *mode* in which they display those features. I adore my beloved not for, say, being a great skier, but for the way in which they ski. Nobody takes those turns quite the way they do. It's not how good a skier they are; it's the mode in which they are a great skier that stirs those butterflies inside.

This may guard against trading up. My beloved may not measure up to the Olympic skier I just met in the lounge, but the Olympic skier's

mode of skiing does not catch my fancy the way my beloved's mode of skiing does. But it is less clear that it will guard against change. After a few ligament ruptures, little may be left of their oh-so-special way of taking those turns. Maybe this mode of skiing may live on in the other things they do in life, and this is what guards against change. But if we go this route, it all becomes a bit mysterious—the ground for love becomes a kind of *je ne sais quoi*.

There is another clue in William Butler Yeats' 'For Anne Gregory.' The poem has Anne Gregory saying that she wants to be loved, not for her yellow hair, but for herself alone. But what is it to love a person for themselves alone? There is a mystical and not so mystical reading.

Let's start with the not so mystical. There are certain features of ourselves that we identify with, that we think of as defining us, and typically these are also the features that we are proud of. The real Anne Gregory, the granddaughter of the Irish playwright Lady Gregory, was a young child with flaxen hair when Yeats wrote his poem about her. But let's think of an imaginary Anne Gregory. She may not have cared much for her yellow hair. So, to be loved for it is not very satisfying. Maybe our imaginary Anne Gregory may have thought of herself as an intellectual or an artist. She would not mind being loved for being just that. When she says that she wants to be loved for herself, she means for something that she stands for, something that she takes herself to be about.

It is true that people like to be loved for what they take pride in. But it is one thing to be loved by the world and another thing to be loved romantically. It seems to me that there is, at least for most people, a separation of spheres. I want to be admired, appreciated, and loved for one set of features at work, for another set of features in my community, and yet another set of features by my beloved. Venus Williams may yearn to be loved by the world for her tennis prowess. Adele may be desperate to be adored by her fans for her vocal talent. But I doubt that they want to be so loved by romantic lovers.

Here is a more mystical reading of being loved for oneself alone, which needs a bit of a metaphysical warmup.

Think of the universe as a big bag. Grab something out of the bag. Put it back. Grab one more time. If both objects you grabbed have precisely the same features, then you grabbed the very same thing twice. This principle goes back to the seventeenth-century German philosopher Leibniz and is called the Identity of Indiscernibles.

The twentieth-century English American philosopher Max Black did not like the principle much. He asks us to suppose that there is a universe that is void except for two spheres of the same size and composition, circling around each other. Then both objects have precisely the same features, but they are not identical—they are clearly distinct objects. There seems to be something wrong with Leibniz's Identity of Indiscernibles.

To defend Leibniz, we step back a few centuries to the thirteenth-century Scottish philosopher Duns Scotus. Aside from all its run-of-the-mill features such as being blue, weighing twenty pounds, etc., each of Max Black's spheres also has the property of being this very sphere. One sphere has the property of being this very sphere, and the other sphere has the property of being that very sphere. Each sphere has its own 'primitive this-ness' or, following Duns Scotus, its own '*haecceity*.' (*Haec* is a Latin form for 'this.') It is in virtue of their respective *haecceities* that the spheres in Max Black's universe are discernible, and hence we can comfortably say, on Leibniz's principle, that they are distinct.

Let's return to Anne Gregory now. In matters of love, Anne Gregory does not want to be loved for her yellow hair, her smarts, her gentle demeanor, or whatever run-of-the-mill property you might want to add. She wants to be loved for being her, for being the unique person that she is. She wants to be loved for her *haecceity*, in Duns Scotus style.

This is a common theme in science fiction (such as in the episode 'Be Right Back' in the TV series *Black Mirror*). We may be able to create a replica of your beloved, who is just as good-looking, sensitive, smart, witty, with the same memories and dreams, but it wouldn't do: What they are lacking is being the very person whom you loved before.

The more sober-minded will think it stark raving mad to bring in such bizarre features as *haecceities* to account for the fact that people do not wish to be loved for any other feature than being the unique person that they are. It's also not clear what would be valuable about such a feature. But, when love is the prize, maybe a bit of metaphysical fairyland is just what we need.

In short, the quest for a special set of features that can ground true love and provide a basis for constancy is quite elusive. We tried character features, modes, identity-constituting features, and *haecceities*. They all have some attraction, but none of them are entirely convincing.

Agape

We now turn to St. Paul's *agape* model—a love of unconditional commitment that is self-forgetful and self-sacrificing. After Anne Gregory kicks up a fuss in Yeats' poem about wanting to be loved for herself alone, her interlocutor responds: '"I heard an old religious man/ But yesternight declare/ That he had found a text to prove/ That only God, my dear,/ Could love you for yourself alone/ And not your yellow hair."'

There are two ways to understand this. One reading understands 'for yourself' as indicating the *ground* of God's love: God loves us because we are the unique individuals that we are. But there is also another reading. Think of the expression: 'Buy something nice for yourself.' Here you are meant to be the beneficiary. So, if God loves us for ourselves, we are the beneficiaries—God loves us with the aim of lifting us up.

Is it true that *only* God can love in this manner*? Agape* is an ideal of love, and maybe only God can live up to it. Nonetheless, it is held up as an ideal to strive for in interpersonal relationships as well as in romantic love.

In *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) holds *agape* up as a model of romantic love in marriage:

> We love the person complete with all his or her virtues and faults, and up to a point independently of those virtues and in spite of those faults. The strength of such a love emerges most clearly when the beloved stumbles, when his or her weaknesses or even his sins come into the open. One who truly loves does not then withdraw his love, but loves all the more, loves in full consciousness of the other's shortcomings and faults.

This *agape* model of love also finds expression in popular culture. Think of the lyrics of Tammy Wynette's 'Stand by your Man,' in which she urges to forgive a lover who has gone astray. There is clearly constancy on this model, but what supports this constancy?

Agape is a love that is not drawn out by attractive features of the beloved. Hence there is no problem with features changing, with learning about the darker sides of one's beloved, or with any threat from someone crossing one's path who exemplifies the features you fancy to a greater degree. Features simply don't matter from the get-go.

Rather, it is a love that involves commitment. I once attended a wedding sermon in which the minister said: 'You fell in love, you were in love, and now you are saying to each other, I will love.' One takes on the commitment of taking care of one's beloved and living up to this commitment is a matter of the will. It is a love that is not contingent on the good fortune that passions won't fade.

And love is unconditional on this model. Love won't fade when one's beloved errs, shows weakness, or in whatever way does not live up to expectations. It is a love that aims to build up the beloved. Hence the lower the beloved falls, the greater the call. It is like an ardent sports fan who is not let down when the team goes through a losing streak. *Agape* is not fair-weather love.

But the constancy of *agape* comes at a cost. Here are some trouble spots for *agape*. A model of love that exhorts us to bear it all can become self-destructive. To protect our mental health, its proponents tend to throw in a qualifier that functions as an exit clause. Note how John Paul II throws in 'up to a point'—love persists in spite of the beloved's faults, *up to a point*. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, love 'bears it out even to the edge of doom'—but it doesn't follow the beloved beyond this edge. Nonetheless, *agape* may have its boundaries, but it can come dangerously close to the pitfalls of co-dependency and abusive relationships.

Here is another weakness. How can an agape-model lover respond to the simple question from their beloved: 'Why do you love me?' They might say: 'Because I want to take care of you.' 'But why,' the beloved may persist, 'do you want to take care of me, rather than of somebody else?' What might our agape-model lover respond? 'Because our paths crossed?' That just seems a bit too *whatever*. 'Because I saw that you needed me?' That seems a bit patronizing, or even worse, it sounds like a handyman who is keen to buy a fixer upper. What would bring a spark to the beloved's eye is if the lover would tell them what makes them so special. But if they are genuine about this, if it's more than some sweet nothing, then we are back with the *eros* model.

Fusion

Finally, there is the *fusion* model. Aristophanes' myth tells of how humans try to find their other halves to reunite with them and go through life

in the form they were before Zeus punished them. Unlike on the *agape* model, features do matter: People find their other halves by identifying complementary features, like the white and the black shape in a *yin-yang* symbol. But unlike on the *eros* model, what elicits our love is not how wonderful these features are. Rather, we recognize a complementarity between ourselves and the beloved, and it is this complementarity that grounds our love.

Philosophers talk about the *phenomenology* of love. What they mean by this is that there is something that it is like to be in love, that loves strikes us in particular ways, that love appears to us to be one way or another. The myth of Aristophanes ticks many boxes in this respect.

Love is about forming *an extended self* or *a shared identity* with the beloved. 'One is both and both are one in love' is a line in Christina Rossetti's poem 'I Loved You First.' Or think of Catherine's speech in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* in which she proclaims: 'I AM Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being.'

The extended self can take various forms. It can be a kind of merging—the individual selves are permeable, and they fuse as two cells become one. The old selves are no more. There is one new self that has absorbed the selves that once were. The singletons are gone; only the dyad remains. Aristophanes in the *Symposium* seems to favor this idea of merging. He imagines Hephaestus, the god of blacksmiths, proposing to weld the two lovers together. And the lovers wholeheartedly agree to this—they wish to 'be melted into one and remain one here and hereafter.' And this is what grounds love's constancy: Dissolving the union would be like a death—a death of the extended self.

If we wish to preserve the individual self, then we can envision love in one of two ways. Draw an outer circle representing the individual self and place a smaller circle of the shared self within it. Or draw an outer circle representing the shared self and place a smaller circle of the individual self within it. These pictures are suggestive. In 'Love's Bond,' (*The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*, 1989), the philosopher Robert Nozick writes that there is a gender difference, with men typically identifying with the former model and women with the latter model. That is, men typically make some space for the *we* within the *I*,

whereas women let the *I* be absorbed within the *we*. I leave it as an open question whether this is still a feature of love today.

Love strikes us as fated. Think of the 20s jazz tune 'It Had to Be You' by Isham Jones. It's not that we got to know one another, and we found out that we were a good match. Rather, as soon as we met, we knew right away that this was the match that was waiting for us all along. There is no room for maybe. There are 7.9 billion people on the globe, and the only right match is between you and your beloved—nothing else will do, it just had to be you. Lovers may even tell stories about how it seemed as if someone was pulling the strings, providing a little tug left and right to bring back the two halves that were once united.

This also squares with Aristophanes' explanation of sexual preference. We do not choose our sexual preference. They are simply given to us because they are contingent on whether we came from a unisex or mixed-sex original unit.

We feel that we have always known our beloved. 'I knew I loved you before I met you' is a line in the chorus of the late 90s hit 'I Knew I Loved You' by Savage Garden. Lovers sense that they were already present in each other's dreams before their paths crossed. They did not just find someone who matched their dreams—rather, they already knew this very person from their dreams.

Gabriel García Márquez plays on this theme in the short story 'Eyes of a Blue Dog.' It is a conversation between two lovers who repeatedly meet in their dreams. Since they hit it off so well, they agree to find each other in the real world, with the phrase 'Eyes of a Blue Dog' as a kind of code. But tragically, nothing comes of it because the man cannot remember his dreams, and the woman goes mad in her pursuit to find the lover of her dreams in real life.

This feeling of prescience or déjà vu is also present in Aristophanes' myth. We feel that we already knew each other before we met because our beloved is our long-lost love from the time before time began when we were still one.

This model also has some trouble spots. It combines two aspects. First, there is love as merging, and second, there is uniqueness, the notion that we are destined to love the one and only person that is *the* one for us.

As to merging, Kahlil Gibran warns against this loss of the individual self in 'On Marriage.' One should drink together, but not from the same cup. One should eat together, but not from the same loaf. And then he suggests various images in which greatness is reached by joint action that involves individuality—such as the pillars that make a temple or the strings of a lute that stand by themselves yet jointly create music. A respectful distance helps the cause of love—the cypress and the oak do not grow in each other's shadow.

We find a similar warning in Shel Silverstein's children's books *The Missing Piece* and *The Missing Piece meets the Big O*. A rock is trying to find its missing piece, and a missing piece is trying to find its rock so that the two of them can merge and roll, but the mission ultimately fails, and they find happiness without merging.

As to uniqueness, granted, there is something magical about love being fated and about prescience. At the same time, in a more sober hour, who could believe this to be the case? It is a fitting thing to say at moments of a distinctly romantic nature. But really, 7.9 billion people, and we each should find our very own Waldo in that multitude? We might as well give up from the start. This feature of the model also makes it into the cruelest model for the pangs of love lost—to which we will turn below.

Finally, there is a tension between merging and uniqueness. Merging suggests a slow process. The shared self is formed over time, and it draws on a shared history between the lovers. We have gone through so much together, they say. Uniqueness is based on your beloved being the one and only person whom you were once connected with. When you meet your other half, you will recognize it as such, as if meeting with an old friend, and you will wish to reconnect pronto. Hence uniqueness suggests that love should be love at first sight and that it should be head over heels. Now maybe love is a little bit of both and then the co-presence of merging and uniqueness is to the credit of the model.

Love Lost

So, what about when love is lost? What about when constancy fails? Each of these models has its own story to tell on why the pangs of love lost hurt so much.

On the *eros* model, loving one's beloved is like loving an awesome Lamborghini for a car lover. And losing one's beloved is like losing that Lamborghini—maybe different in magnitude, but not in kind. Something great—that is, something with the greatest features—just slipped through my fingers. Maybe the car was even tailor-made, a kind of *pièce unique*. And that is what is lost, never to return. I may find a new sports car, just as I may find a new love. But it may take a while. And there is the fear that I may never find one as wonderful as the one I had before.

On the *agape* model, the pangs of love lost are less about loss but rather about failure. It is not that someone drove off with my Lamborghini. Rather, it is as if I was trying single-mindedly to save the family firm, working night and day, but I finally had to admit defeat and declare bankruptcy. There is this nagging doubt that if I had just tried a bit harder, I could have succeeded, and maybe I just did not quite love enough. And now the whole endeavor was for naught, a kind of Sisyphus labor.

The *fusion* model is the cruelest of them all when it comes to the loss of love. The loss of love is like a death—it is the death of the shared self. It is Dickinson's 'all we need of hell.' And this death of the shared self affects the individual self in the deepest way, though how it affects us depends on whether we see the shared self as a merged self, as having a place within the individual self, or as encompassing the individual self.

On the model of merged selves, the individual selves are ripped apart and are left wounded. On the model of the shared self within the individual self, what is left is a hole, a gap, an emptiness. On the model of the individual self within the shared self, the individual self is left without a compass or a mooring place—it is adrift in a world that makes no sense because the shared self that gave it meaning is gone.

What adds to the trauma is the image that love is fated. If it had to be you, then it is not just *a* death—it is *the* death of the one and only shared self that there can ever be. It is the sense that there is only one missing piece that provided the right fit that makes the loss irreparable.

It is not a loss of something of great value, as in the *eros* model. The relationship may even have been arduous from the get-go. It is not a loss of a project as in the *agape* model—a doomed love may never even have

reached the stage of being a project to bring to fruition. Rather, it is the sense that there is something deeply amiss with the world, because, for whatever reason, what had to be so cannot be so—the world below does not live up to what is written in the stars.

'Love like you'll never be hurt' is a line in a quote that has many attributions on the web. The pangs of love lost have their distinct bitter tastes on the *eros*, the *agape*, and the *fusion* models. The prospect of being hurt may make us wary of entering amorous relationships. That is one way of coping. It may not be to everyone's taste. And even if we choose this route, Cupid may just relentlessly knock again—'comes love, nothing can be done,' as the jazz standard 'Comes Love' goes.

Another way of coping is to give into love but to conceive of it in some more cynical fashion or other, to shield oneself from the pangs of love lost. There are three variants of this, and they curiously map onto the *eros*, *agape,* and *fusion* models. This is what we will turn to next.

Cynical Models

After directing *The Piano*, Jane Campion volunteered some interesting reflections on love in an interview:

> I think the romantic impulse is in all of us and that sometimes we live it for a short time, but it's not part of a sensible way of living. It's a heroic path and it generally ends dangerously. I treasure it in the sense that I believe it's a path of great courage. It can also be the path of the foolhardy and the compulsive.

Note how Campion is both respectful and dismissive of romantic love.

The *eros*, *agape*, and *fusion* models are reflectively endorsable models of love: They are respectful of love, make love worth having, and its loss worth mourning. Coping with the loss of love requires different dynamics within each of these models. An altogether different way of coping with the loss of love is to be dismissive of love, to construe love as something rather foolish, something that is not worth shedding a tear over. Let us call these *cynical* models. If *that* is what love is all about, then it is not much worth having. And if it's not much worth having, then its loss is not much worth mourning. And so, a cynical model is itself a coping device. We tell ourselves that love is something strangely banal,

and we should not let something so banal get to us. The *Cartesian* model, the *love for love's sake* model, and the *neurobiological* model are three such cynical models.

The Cartesian model. In René Descartes' *Letter to Chanut* on the sixth of June 1647 (p. 201), he addresses the question of why we are attracted to people without having any ideas about their merits. He tells how he was fond of a young girl who had a slight strabismus (that is, a particular eye affliction) when he was a child. He finds himself at a later age attracted to women who have a strabismus. Once he becomes aware that his attraction is caused by what he calls a 'defect,' he manages to correct for it and withdraws his love.

Descartes backs up this observation with the science of the time. Impressions form creases in the brain. Once the creases are in, the brain is disposed to fold in the same way when an impression occurs that is similar in certain respects. I take it that the girl with the strabismus was lots of fun as a playmate and so elicited a love crease in Descartes' brain. And once the outline of the crease had formed, eyes with a strabismus by themselves sufficed to reproduce that very same love crease.

Descartes' insight is surprisingly modern. His observation anticipates the experiments on Pavlovian conditioning in the early twentieth century. Ivan Pavlov rang a bell each time his dog was about to be fed. After a while, the dog started salivating whenever the bell rang, no matter whether there was food or not. The unconditioned stimulus is the food, and the unconditioned response is salivation. The conditioned stimulus is the bell. After a while, the conditioned stimulus suffices to set off the conditioned response of salivation, as psychologists say.

Similarly, the *enfant* René is confronted with a playmate who is both fun and has a strabismus. For *Monsieur* Descartes, his love is triggered upon meeting a woman who has a strabismus, even if he knows nothing else about her. The unconditioned stimulus is the fun his playmate offers, and the unconditioned response is the affection. The conditioned stimulus, in Descartes' case, is the strabismus and the conditioned response is that very same affection.

Mixed with this Pavlovian conditioning is also a Freudian theme—that this conditioning happens at an early age. Reading Descartes' story today, one would think that many of the stimuli that condition

our affection are imprinted at an age that goes even further back than where our memory can reach. The neural creases of love are set in early infancy. Even though Descartes can identify the origin of this strange predilection, for most of us the secrets of the human heart are deeply hidden.

Why do we love the people we do? We fall head over heels in love knowing full well that trouble is around the corner—with 'eyes wide shut,' to quote the title of Stanley Kubrick's last film. And this explains why such dismal relationships are formed. Imagine shopping for a car in a used-car lot and what subconsciously compels your choices is attending to something that does not matter in the least—say, whether the door handles are nice and shiny or not. You would come home with one lemon after another—and no wonder.

If there is so little rhyme or reason to our heart's desires, then that does at least give us some reason to treat them with a bit less reverence, if not be outright distrustful of them. But love is resilient—we can't just turn off the dial of our affections. As Pascal writes in *Pensées*, 'the heart has its reasons, which reason does not know.' (§277) But if reason comes to realize that some of the heart's reasons have a dubious history, then it may at least be worth reminding oneself of this to soften the pangs of love lost.

The love for love's sake model. In the area of romantic love, some people see themselves in a line of great romantics—to surrender to love's vicissitudes is all that makes life worth living for them. They are the Tristans and Isoldes, the Abelards and Eloises, the Romeos and Juliets among us—either desperately looking for love, too much in love, or tragically falling out of love. For them life is worth living only on a rollercoaster of love gone mad. They render themselves vulnerable to these emotions or even encourage them since they are, after all, the most uncompromising romantics who ever roamed this earth.

This model has its champions. After Elizabeth Barrett Browning asks her beloved in Sonnet 14 not to love for any feature of hers that may perish, she asks him to love 'for love's sake' instead. What is it to love for love's sake? Think of making art for art's sake. People who make art for art's sake are uncompromising—all that matters is aesthetics. People who love for love's sake are equally uncompromising—all that matters

is romantic sentiment. Following Browning, let us call this the love-for-love's-sake model—or to give it some erudition, the *amor-amoris-gratia* model. We come to love because we want our lives to be guided by romantic sentiment.

If willing to live the life of a great romantic brings a bit of spice to life, there is little harm in it. But if we cherish romantic sentiments too much, they may come to drag us down, and they are known to take their champions well beyond the edge of doom. There is a feedback loop. In one direction, the sentiments that surge within us inform our sense of self—our sense of who we are and what we are like. In the other direction, our sense of self discourages some sentiments and encourages others. Cultivating a sense of self as a great romantic operates as a catalyst in this cycle—it encourages us to indulge in the sentiments of romantic love, for better or worse—and I am afraid, mostly for worse. In so far as it is for worse, coping with the pangs of love lost requires removing the catalyst or correcting a sense of self that is too much defined by tragic love. And this is especially so if it is a willed sense of self influenced by social fads.

There can be solace in admitting that one's love is merely the love of the great romantic. When we are in the throes of a heartache, we ask ourselves to what extent our agony might not be fed more by being in love with love and all its accouterments, rather than by having lost the love of the actual person. We acknowledge that being in love with love is a love that is not worth cherishing, we try to self-correct, and this self-correction will soften the heartache that is *de rigueur* on this model.

The neurobiological model. Biologists studying pair-bonding have found that among mammals, monogamy is relatively rare—we find it in only five percent of species. It is particularly interesting to compare closely related species that differ in this respect, with one being monogamous and the other not. What causes this kind of behavior in the animal world?

Prairie voles mate for life. They form attachments after short periods of exposure to each other. It helps if they can mate during this period, but even without mating, they can form a bond for life. Their bond even transcends death—if the female dies, the male does not search for a new partner. (I have not been able to ascertain whether the female is equally committed.) Their close cousin, the montane vole, is more of

a libertine—always in search of new sexual partners—or in biological parlance, it does not display any pair-bonding behavior.

Why does one species pair-bond while the other does not? The species have evolved under different environmental pressures. First, in low-density environments much time is lost finding another suitable mate, so it pays off to stick with the same partner. Second, with low dispersal opportunities across the terrain for the offspring, a species is better off creating low numbers of high-quality offspring, and this is helped by the presence of both parents. The prairie vole lives in lower-density and lower-dispersal-opportunity environments than the montane vole, which explains the difference.

Is there something in the neurobiology of the prairie vole that explains how they manage to pair-bond? During cohabitation and mating, hormones (oxytocin and vasopressin) are released. In prairie voles, the placement of the receptors for these hormones is in brain centers rich in dopamine, and dopamine is known to play a role in addiction. This physiology does not hold for montane voles.

When prairie voles are separated from their mates, they react with listlessness. They don't paddle when thrown in water, and they don't flail when they are suspended from their tails. And again, the neurobiology that underlies this listlessness is well-documented.

Does it transfer to the human animal? There are similarities in behavior and the underlying neurobiology. Yet less is known since we may be just a tad more complex than the prairie voles and getting permission to run experiments on human love lives is not so easy. But it is safe to assume that, with time, scientists will fill out the neurobiological stories of humans falling in love, being in love, and falling out of love.

How would knowledge of this neurobiological model of love affect our experience of the pangs of love lost? Knowledge of the physiology of what happens when you slam your knee into a coffee table does not help much when coping with physical pain. But when it comes to psychological pain, the case is slightly different. Knowledge of the physiology that underlies our emotions can help us cope, at least to some extent. Some people are sensitive to time-zone changes due to intercontinental travel or darkness during the winter and react with mood swings and depression. Knowing one's sensitivities allows one to brace oneself and exercise at least some control.

Think of yourself as a member of a species that has evolved with a qualified preference for life-long mating due to pressures from its environment. This preference rests on a neurophysiological mechanism that discourages break-ups. Separation deregulates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis in the human brain, causing stress and mood swings. The mechanism resembles the mechanism underlying addiction. There may even be a genetic basis for the effectiveness of this mechanism, in the same way that there may be a genetic basis for being an addictive personality.

This may not be the most romantic story to tell on your first Valentine's Day with a newfound love. It's better to stick to Aristophanes on such an occasion. But when love has gone sour, this objectifying stance may bring more consolation than what we can say on any reflectively endorsable model.

What the Cartesian model, the love-for-love's-sake model, and the neurobiological model have in common is that they bring some irreverence to our understanding of love. If love is just latching on to some features that we became fixated on in early childhood, if it is contingent on a faddish sense of self, if it is brought on by a neurophysiological mechanism that played a role in the evolution of our species, then is it worth losing much sleep over?

For Descartes, knowledge translated into control. He gave up on his attraction to women with strabismus. But of course, with knowledge does not come foolproof emotional control. We may continue having a thing for eyes affected by strabismus, cherish the drama in ill-fated loves as great romantics do, or shed tears while studying how much the regulation of the HPA-axis is sensitive to separation. Nonetheless, irreverence may have some healing power, when administered in the right dosages.

The reflectively endorsable models and the cynical models are curious mirror images. Within each pair, the reflectively endorsable model offers the brighter image, while the cynical model offers the darker image. The *eros* model and the Cartesian model are both focused on the beloved's features. The *agape* model and the love-for-love's-sake model are both placed in negative space—they define themselves as a love that is *not* based on features. And the bond of love is what draws together the *fusion* model and the neurobiological model.

Is there a right model? I don't think so. The revelers in Plato's Symposium all have something to add to the mixture. At different times in life, depending on where we come from, whom we are with, and where we want to go, it's good to hold up some models and downplay others. Neither is there a right model to deal with unrequited love or love lost. There is no telling what may work when, for whom, and with whom. Loving, after all, is an art, not a science. And so is coping with the pangs of love lost.