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Living with love in today's world: philosophical reflections on some of its complexities

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Abstract In contrast to many philosophical accounts of love, which analyse it as a special kind of valuation of the beloved, or a special concern for her well-being, we elaborate on the minority observation characterising love as making a difference to one's whole life (endowing it with meaning). Our aim is not to suggest that this is an external, one-dimensional relationship. We consider not just the difference love makes to (our perception of) life, but inquire into how certain features of our life may make a difference for how we come to conceive of love. We first discuss the importance of the compartmentalisation of our lives and the interplay between our lives of love and those parts of our lives that are based elsewhere. Then we focus on such tonalities and modalities of love as the sense of responsibility and perseverance. These analyses relate to the phenomenon of environmental despair (first section) and high-functioning burnout (second section), relying equally on real-life and fictional examples. We indicate possible consequences that follow from these discussions for the *philosophy* of love. One of these is that philosophy's insights can be sharpened if it remains conscious of the relations between its own conceptual analyses and the approaches and findings of cultural critique and the social sciences.

Keywords: the language of love, environmental grief, burnout, the understanding of life, examples

1. Introduction

Our lives are not unitary enterprises, but typically unfold in several loosely rather than tightly interconnected domains. One of these segments of life can markedly outweigh the others, becoming thus what Fingarette (1988, 100) calls one's "central activity". Although the "list" of these domains vary across different cultures, some of the items exhibit a considerable transcultural constancy. One of such nearly ubiquitous items is the domain of personal (family) life. And at least in contemporary developed Western societies, the typical picture of life will combine this domain of the private with a few significant others – with those of professional occupation, leisure activities, civic or political engagements, or religion. This list is not supposed to be exhaustive, but to outline a picture in which most readers with this kind of cultural background can find themselves.

In this chapter we consider the interconnections between these domains in the light of the revival of interest in the phenomenon of love that Western philosophy saw around the middle of the 20th century.[1] Most of the central discussions in this revival stem from the analytical tradition, or, to put it more broadly, they reflect the register of concepts, arguments, and framings characteristic of the Anglophone philosophy (or philosophy of the kind most typically cultivated in English today). Though this philosophical upbringing necessarily mirrors a particular cultural spectre of examples and concerns, most thinkers engaged in the debate genuinely intend their observations and analyses to capture something about (the concept of) love "as such". This chapter shares this background, but with the intention of distinguishing itself in a certain direction. The key opening point of our reaction is that of discerning a divide between those philosophers who locate love only in one of the outlined life domains (by default, that of personal life) and those who see it as a more pervasive phenomenon.

Among the first, we find philosophers who analyse love mostly as a particular kind of emotion centring on the beloved person. Some authors suggest that love consists of the appreciation, or appraisal, of a particular value (Velleman, 1999); some prefer to see love as bestowing this value onto the other (Singer, 2009). The appreciation itself of the value then involves a special concern for the beloved's well-being, trumping preferentially any *impersonal* consequentialist-like or Kantian-like considerations (Williams, 1981a; Frankfurt, 1999). Other theorists stress the essence of love as the emergence and existence of a particular bond, or union (Nozick, 1991). Yet another philosophical tradition reads love as a particular kind of vision of the beloved (or a transformation thereof) (Jollimore, 2011; see also Murdoch, 1970, although her focus is not on erotic or partner love). Love sees the other as fully real and independent (Murdoch, 1997), as infinitely precious (Gaita, 2002), or involves one in the practical acknowledgment of the other's independence (Weil, 2009). The cognitivist turn in thinking about emotions (Solomon, 1973; Nussbaum 2004) also opened space for asking the question about the *reasons* for (or against) loving a person (Frankfurt, 2004).

Partly in criticism of the focus on the reasons for love of a particular person, some philosophers have observed that an exhaustive description of love (for a particular person) should not stop at those aspects of love that *directly thematise* the

[1] The motivation for this revival of interest in love as a subject for moral and philosophical psychology, largely derived from renewed readings of Plato or Aristotle, who devoted much attention to erotic love, friendship, or the citizen's love for their country. It also went along with a broader interest in philosophical theories of emotions that, in contrast to the study of passions, inquired into the cognitive and motivational structures and aspects of emotions.

beloved person. Harry Frankfurt (2004) suggested that rather than looking for reasons for love, it is instructive to consider love itself as "a source of reasons." Similarly, Robert Solomon (1990) suggested that love is no mere emotional attitude the lover takes to the beloved, but rather that love involves both lovers in a "loveworld" where the relationship sets the stage for a renewed sense of shared self. While he is rooted in the continental tradition, Agamben (2009, 25) offers a complementary observation that the beloved stands so "excessively close" to the lover that the lover cannot focus on *her* and incorporates her instead into the frame of *how* she sees everything that she sees.

Here, however, we will approach the question of how love pervades our conception of life from an alternative viewpoint, and consider the sense in which love shapes the meaning we see in life, through Rush Rhees's (1997, 42) remark that

> religion makes a difference to a man's life, and obviously being in love does too. (…) the person in love is different; life is different for him, or the whole world is different for him.

It is common to express sentiments of this kind in everyday language, also in negative terms, such as when it is claimed that love makes one "see everything through rose-coloured glasses". It is, however, important to Rhees that the difference that love makes cannot be reduced to a set of experiences causing us to see things differently. The difference centrally involves, and is internal to, the "language of love". As one of us (Kronqvist, 2017) put it in an elaboration of Rhees's sketchy remark, unravelling what sense can be made of love as "a passion for life," love (pure love, at least) involves a feeling that everything "falls into place" (36). This, however, is not a vague feeling, but rather a way of characterising the fact that love brings about an awareness of "the significance a life with another person has to us, in the sense we make of life" (37).

These observations contribute to a "phenomenology" of life in which love has a (central) place. One's own life, life as such, appears to oneself in a certain light. Of course, the lover cares about the well-being of the beloved, but she also gains a new *vision,* or *understanding*, of her whole life and its events. By "vision" we mean the complex of judgments, emotional responses, practical attitudes, etc., as characterised by Murdoch (1997b, 80). For example: as I am in love, I find something touchingly humane in my colleagues (who previously struck me as annoying, hardly bearable), Or, my love for my children helps me find meaning in my struggle of the political campaign against a local factory contaminating the air—I now (spontaneously) sense a point in this (otherwise, "objectively," exhausting and demoralising) endeavour. And so forth.

In these examples, as in Kronqvist's earlier account, the dialectic between how one conceives of one's life and one's love, is mainly explored through a consideration of the significance love has for the sense one makes of (sees in) one's life,

including those parts of it that do not feature love explicitly or overtly. Here, our aim is to work against the temptation to interpret the relation between love and life as an external, one-dimensional relationship. We supplement the view of this phenomenology with aspects of love, and life, which diversify the picture of what may be entailed in the experience that things fall into place. We consider not just the difference love makes to (our perception of) life, but also inquire into how features of our life make a difference for how we come to conceive of love.

In the first section, we discuss the interplay between our lives of love and those parts of our lives that are based elsewhere. The second section focuses on tonalities of love beyond passion (for one's life), in particular the sense of responsibility and perseverance that may become the characteristic feature of love. In the first section, we attend to a real-life example, whereas the second concerns a fictional one. Both these examples are taken from a rather particular cultural setting, and as such they allow us a glimpse into what living with love – living which is always necessarily somewhere – is like.

In the concluding section, we indicate possible implications of discussing these examples for the *philosophy* of love, namely, that it can sharpen its insights if it remains conscious of the relations between its conceptual analyses and the approaches and findings of cultural critique and the social sciences. One notable point: despite the heterogeneous conceptual landscape accessible only through joint forces of these disciplines, which any single example always reflects unevenly (being more "at home" somewhere than somewhere else), the language that the example speaks still makes what it has to say a talk of *love*. (There is an important difference between this talk and a talk of "what the people of the culture/society/community X think is love"; a difference in relied-upon notions and assumed elaborations.)

2. Love under a shadow

Insofar as love makes a difference to one's life *beyond* home (which it unmistakably does), it becomes important to make sense of the nature of this impingement. We have referred to a possible account of this impingement: proceeding in terms of the light in which we *see* and understand things that happen in our lives, now that love is present in them.

Our interests now lie with influences flowing in the, as it were, "opposite" direction: what difference the changed light in which we see and understand the events of our lives makes for how we can, or cannot anymore, understand our love. Here, we would like to consider a tragic event that took place in New York in 2018. David Buckel, a renowned lawyer, committed for many years to environmental and LGBT

issues and causes, immolated himself as a protest against a politics that is blind towards climate change. Though his friends and family later reported his increasing depression, nobody knew that its intensity was such that it would lead to suicide.

His memorandum sent to the media shows, however, that his feelings of guilt and helplessness may have been deep and overwhelming, but for what he considered good reasons rather than a pathology. He says:

> Pollution ravages our planet, oozing inhabitability via air, soil, water and weather. Most humans on the planet now breathe air made unhealthy by fossil fuels, and many die early deaths as a result—my early death by fossil fuel reflects what we are doing to ourselves[,]

adding that

> [m]any who drive their own lives to help others often realize that they do not change what causes the need for their help.

The opening of his note bears the mark of a man who has considered the consequemces of his actions:

> My name is David Buckel and I just killed myself by fire as a protest suicide. I apologize to you for the mess.

(About Buckel's life and farewell note, see Mays, 2018.)

Buckel's death can be read as a case of environmental grief or despair (as described e.g. by Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). The general "symptoms" of this "diagnosis" are such that facing the progressive, probably irreversible, deterioration of the environment, many people sink into depression, lose interest in their day-to-day lives, and exhibit suicidal tendencies. We speak of "symptoms" and "diagnosis" in scare quotes, for rather than being a mental-health issue, environmental grief seems to be one possible reaction of an attentive mind to the changed shape of our lives. It is changed to an extent that we suggest is "grammatically disruptive": it interferes with what we used to be able to meaningfully think and say.

The notion of environmental despair points us to cases in which any sense of balance in one's life is abolished. Unlike, say, clinical depression, which tends to directly disrupt the attitudes and relationships of love in various ways (Fiske & Peterson, 1991), environmental despair seems a more lucid condition. In an eerie way, it coexists with one's love. One does not become a different personality (no longer invested in the relationship), yet environmental despair overshadows the love that previously illuminated the whole of one's life. Severing the links of vision that pervaded the continuity of one's life, environmental despair does not need to eradicate love for loved ones. Nevertheless, love no longer makes a crucial difference to one's life as a whole. It may even be the *only* area of life that makes sense. David Buckel lived in a happy family, he and his partner had a daughter, and their relationship was by no means in a crisis or fading. And yet, it is not meaningless to think that though he really loved his family, his love could not cure his environmental despair.

Being the person he was, he could not help feeling that "the world has just gone off the rails," and that love could do nothing to diminish the burden of this realisation.

This case has some noteworthy implications:

1) There is an intriguing kind of cognitive dissonance here. That things are falling into place is not something one simply sees happening. Rather, one implicitly assumes that, when in love, everything *should* fall into place. Yet, sometimes it simply does not. The disaster of the climate crisis is of almost absurdly awful size: we cannot retreat to a domain that we can reasonably try to influence by our own powers. When we despair about our situation, or the whole world, a part of what makes it still bearable is the sense that we are not powerless in trying to prevent at least something we value from falling apart. But environmental despair creeps into the everyday components of the fabric of even the most personal and intimate domains of our lives. It brings about, among other things, a heightened awareness of the harrowing modes that concern the one I love—she is being poisoned by air and water, or is complicit in the destruction in subtle ways ("Privilege is derived from the suffering of others," reads Buckel's note), or both. Once these pathways of thinking about one's own life have been entered—again, we do not need to see them as delusional—it seems difficult to recover the viewpoint of "everything falling into place." Should one overlook climate change? Should one reinterpret it so that it does not matter to love? Would the one who loves then live with her eyes intentionally half-closed?
2) Love serves no real consolation; if anything, it rather exacerbates the situation. As horrid as the climate crisis is for one's own sake, it is even more so for the sake of one's *children*. Love for one's children, if suffused by a sense of responsibility and worry about them, only makes it worse. One does not worry about what might happen to one's nearest and dearest; one simply knows that it *will* happen. Again, one experiences a cognitive dissonance here: this is not something love *should* bring into our lives—the certainty that one is committing a sin against one's own children by being complicit in bequeathing an uninhabitable future to them.
3) The general sense that there is no future left, which accompanies environmental despair, plays a significant structural role in itself. Sentiments such as, "So long as we have each other, I know I don't have to be afraid of anything. We will endure" are characteristic of love. Now, love no longer offers a refuge from the world around us. We do not understand environmental degradation as a cyclical calamity (like war or economic crisis), but rather as an irreversible degradation of the once familiar richness and variety of our form of life. Face to face with this kind of understanding of the world, love may no longer offer the sense of reassurance that there is a private sphere in which, or through which, one can

resist or hide from the public sphere. Analogously, terminally ill adolescent patients often fail to see a real purpose in learning in school— what for should they? (Cf. Davis, 1989, 239.) In these extreme cases, appeals to instrumental rationality make little sense. And though it may be argued that the point of loving someone or educating oneself does not fall within the sphere of instrumental rationality, a *pinch* of it is still embedded in the motivational structures behind our understanding of why loving someone or educating oneself makes sense.

Against this background, environmental despair raises the demand for a concept of love purified of grammatical structures of worldly temporality. Statements to the effect that "When I grow up, I want to be alive"[2] – do of course have their literal meaning. But the environmental crisis is also, as we put it clumsily, grammatically disruptive: once we realise its urgency, it becomes drastically more difficult for us to *understand* our lives as having a future. This understanding necessarily goes hand in hand with what we do with our lives right now, and how we do it in relation to love.

The strong interconnection between the lost sense of balance in one's understanding of the world and of one's love—as, for example, in Buckel's story—cannot therefore mean that we are simply living in *too* hard times. As a philosophical observation, the statement that our relationships of love crumble and fail under the burden of life's adversities feels trivial.[3] Our concern is rather with showing the difference that our changed understanding of the world (its future) will make to the way we understand, experience and analyse our very concept of love.

It is hard to imagine how love could not involve a heightened attention to those aspects of the "here and now" that shape one's understanding of the beloved's person and of what one owes to her. This means to take into account the potentialities of the course of one's life. This life is *in* the world, and some of the life potentialities (of people one cares about) *will* be drastically curbed by aspects of a world in which

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[2] The title of a documentary film about the movement Fridays for Future, which is based on a direct quotation from one of the striking students.

[3] It seems preposterous to expect philosophy to outline a minimal set of life's (material) conditions that would guarantee a reasonably probable viability of love. Nevertheless, some philosophers engage in considerations of this kind (cf. Ben-Ze'ev 2019; see also his chapter in this book). A part of the temptation derive from a vaguely Aristotelian idea of the good life, one that has to do with the fulfilment of a "reasonable man's" expectations from his life. (Which is divorced from the "extremist" Platonic intuitions of the principal significance of the sense I make of my life whatever its conditions "materially" are; the significance of our moral aspirations and aspirations to understanding.)

everything does not fall into place. Loving one's children is not disconnected from the wish, however vague or implicit, for them to have a full life. Such a desire can be manifest in thinking, "When my little girl grows up, she can go study at a university, whatever subject, because she is super-smart." To someone who perceives the impact of the climate change crisis, however, a *natural* expression of love can rather be that it is "not fair," or "not right" that the future of one's children is being taken from them (consider an analogous case: if one's child is terminally ill). Similarly, the realisation that the climate change crisis is not a transitory or reversible hardship can be expressed in the decision to remain childless. A growing number of people have made such a decision, thinking that they have no future to offer to their children (Astor, 2018).

What we allude to here is that a historically and culturally conditioned shift may be looming in our conceptions of love. The idea of the full life that one can "reasonably" wish for one's children (such as the university wish above) is a reflection of a relatively stable life in stable, relatively rich societies with public social welfare systems. Such contents are slowly being elided from the lived notions of love even in these societies, and with that, there are changes in the ways we relate to our lives, and to what we can do with them in terms of love life or family life.

3. Love exhausted

In the first section, we discussed the impact of the changed stage for the way we experience the characteristic aspects of love, such as the emotions of care or joy, or the attitude of valuation, centring round the person of the loved one. Here, we discuss the aspects of love that, though not excluded are not usually given a central position in typical characterisations of love: the senses of responsibility and perseverance (see also the chapter of Barrett, Tudor, Quinn & Petrie in this book). To highlight them we make use of a fictional example

Michael Haneke's 2012 film *Amour* tells the story of an elderly couple trapped in the deadlock of exhausting care. When Anne suffers a paralysing stroke, her husband, Georges, starts taking care of her, with the partial help of hired nurses. This duty is exacting for him (being an elderly man in frail health), and as the story unfolds towards its inevitable ending, we can see his love for Anne manifested in the repeated daily tasks performed under increasing strain and exhaustion.

The progress and prospects of his relationship with his wife are not sources of perceived meaning in Georges's life. They do not charge him with energy or enthusiasm. Thus, his love for Anne cannot really be characterised as something that "keeps him going" in the sense of providing him with a support against other kinds

of hardship in life. This does not mean that his love for Anne is imperfect, but the tonality of their relationship changes significantly. Love still "keeps him going," for he knows he must stand by Anne as long as he can, but this "must" is not of the kind of "moral necessity" explored by Williams (1981b), with alternatives viscerally perceived as "unthinkable." Here we witness a phenomenon of a more Kantian sort.

As in the previous section, the phenomenology of this case has noteworthy implications:

1) Love may not (always) be exhaustively characterised by the experience (*Erlebnis*) that one "gets" from it, or simply as anything that one gets. It also requires one to give. This *giving* is often gratuitous, and in the best cases the thought about what one is giving may not occur for all that one receives in return. Yet, speaking about giving does not only have a "metaphorical" sense—giving one's love, giving of oneself. In the most concrete of ways, love often asks one to give something to the other that in another case could have been "spent" on oneself. And sometimes what one is asked to give is something that one lacks, be it money, time, energy, or attention. This doesn't mean that if a parent dedicates most of her free time to her children, thereby having no time left for her own long-standing, oft-postponed dreams (to finish the half-written detective novel, say), making this decision will make her unhappy. On the contrary. But what makes her happy is *not* that she has no time for her detective novel. She may never stop regretting that.

   The case of Georges and Anne is a version of this dedication, albeit an extreme one. Georges is not an adult in his prime, and Anne is not a beautifully growing, increasingly independent child. The "resources" (time, care, energy) that Georges needs to put into the relationship are scarcer than they used to be and not renewable. This huge giving out is not a matter of enjoyment in itself; rather, Georges acts out of the sense that he simply "owes" this to Anne. This is what their love means for him. This sense may not, in the moment of giving what he "owes" (natural as it is), feel elevating or joyful. If one's beloved is seriously or terminally ill, then the only available expression of love may be to stay, out of love, with the loved one until the end. Yet, this stage of life is often painful and draining, and the beloved's death can be perceived as a relief. Not only a final relief for the ill person, from the pain and suffering, but also a relief from the burden carried by his or her companion.

   In a situation like that of Georges, one may draw strength from various sources. One may go back, in one's thoughts, to what one experienced as good and beautiful and not simply as draining. Still being able to do this adds one more thing to be grateful for, apart from the shared time. Yet, these kinds of resources may also *not* be available (anymore) for the carer; she may only be supported by such

understanding that revolves round the ideas of duty, responsibility, or loyalty. Only death may allow her to think once more about what was good and beautiful. The carer may also be so afflicted by the situation that she no longer sees (or even cares about seeing, or tries to see) any answer to the question, "How did I end up here?" (or, as she may phrase it for herself, "Why do I have to be here?"). Empirical psychology may be interested in the causal factors leading a person into these various mind-sets; for a philosopher, these scenarios are interesting as varieties of understanding, as contributions to how one can make sense of one's life and one's love.

2) Related to the above phenomenon: caring for a seriously ill spouse, partner, or child sometimes leads to burnout similar to that which is an endemic threat in caring professions (nurses, physicians, etc.). Various studies have stressed that the onset of burnout should be studied not as an episodic phenomenon, but rather as developing over a long period during years that appear practically stable (Schaufeli et. al., 2011; Bakker & Costa, 2014). Reaching the acute burnout episode (a collapse) takes some time, and one can (or may have to) *live with one's burnout* for a long time, which gives it the nature of a *chronic* condition.

   If the loving carer is burning out, this is manifest in her slowly failing and faltering endeavour. There is a difference in phenomenological tonality between being driven (unstoppably) and persevering out of a sense of "must". Yet,. there is no sharp boundary between going on, with a sense of responsibility, and going on "somehow", with buzzing head, blunted senses, and ever-shrinking capacity for, and interest in, having any sense of why it is worthwhile to keep going—proceeding towards an episode of acute burnout. On a scale between a clear sense of responsibility and a breakdown, the various stages of a "high-functioning burnout" emerge.

   In her memorable story, Anne Helen Petersen (2019) describes millennials as the "burnout generation"—an entire generation for whom life has (irreparably assumed) the shape of a meaningless tangled web of plodding and toiling. Yet, they know no other life, and so they have to live this one, without much joy and with the undercurrent of fatigue in all their undertakings. This vision of life is related to the changed structure of the job market, social security systems, and so on. Again, it seems to be life under the burden of a cognitive dissonance: the notion that life should not be like this (perhaps when compared to what one's parents considered "realistic" life aspirations) and yet so often and overwhelmingly is. It is as if hard work, and the self-denial that hard work sometimes involves, has lost the capacity of being of genuine value, a source of healthy satisfaction for the worker. Only the toil is left.

   The gradually vanishing sense of value in the toil seems to be a characteristic shared by forms of chronic burnout, of both precarised millennials up to their

eyes in debt and the loving carer. The carer perseveres as long as it is possible—for the sake of the loved one—but the sense of her love as the source of the meaning and value inherent in the toil may shrink over time, while toil may gain centrality as the defining feature of how her life shows itself to her.

3) These shifts in our understanding of love respond to features (that change over time) of our lives in particular societies. Much as the story in *Amour* seems universal, what makes it sound familiar is its connection to characteristics of life in contemporary developed Western countries. Longevity and life expectancy is growing. Families tend towards a certain geographical, social, and economic atomisation into nuclear families that are, on average, better off than their ancestors a century ago, but that also more often need to face the twists of their lives "on their own." The availability, quality, and "offer" of social services and state-run social welfare systems is a major factor that simply is considered, in life situations of this kind, as a default, to an extent without parallel previously or elsewhere. (And how these services work also serves characteristics of the cultures of various countries not unrelated to, but not directly dependent on, their economic development; compare the Scandinavian countries with the U.S.)

The observation that love can be exhausting and exhausted would not be a great discovery, though its uncompromising artistic elaborations, like *Amour*, can strike us as revelatory. This observation tells us little if meant as a side-note to the contents of a universal and timeless concept ("'love' is … and apart from that, it can also be …"). There is no such universal and timeless concept; our familiarity with love is built from the ground up. Georges's story would not have looked like it did without its particular setting, and without appreciating these particulars it would be very difficult to understand his story as the story of love that it is.

On the other hand, though a particular cultural background might help one appreciate finer nuances of the narrative, this is by no means a requisite of understanding the story as a story of *love* (rather than a story about "what wealthy cultured French pensioners think is love"). Even a recipient from a distant culture can watch it and feel the emotional pressure. This *trans*cultural openness is not possible *despite* the story's not being *a*-cultural. If the story did not take place somewhere and did not take turns characteristic of this setting, there would be nothing to tell, and therefore nothing to translate and transfer either.

4. Lessons to be learned?

The focus issue of the first section was taken from real life. The same goes for the second section, but we borrowed our example from fiction. This may appear

unjustified if one thinks that philosophy should have the ambition to write about real lives and the real world. Yet, the "data" on which philosophy relies differ from the empirical data collected through the methods of the natural or social sciences. Philosophy's investigations are *conceptual*, and we learn about our concepts from various sources. By reading Austen's, Tolstoy's, or Coetzee's novels one is not "mining" empirical data about historical locations of human shallowness, poverty, war, or cruelty. Their works show what it *means* to live in poverty or war, or to be afflicted by cruelty, what form a life may take in such circumstances, what characterises the life of a shallow person. These examples, as well as our thinking through them, imagining ways of re-describing them (cf. Hertzberg, 2006; Moi, 2015), are philosophy's "data."[4]

The aim of the above explorations of the concept of love, as it appears in the light of these settings, was to show the complexity of the working of love—phenomenologically relevant and often neglected—that "keeps one going." In exploring its details, two points deserve special focus:

1) The image of love as that in which one can "enclose oneself from the world." While drawing thus on one's happy and harmonious personal life is psychologically natural, interpreting it as an integrative experience of the meaningfulness of life may falsify the phenomenon.. Relying on strong experiences of love as a safeguard against life's vicissitudes may prove foolhardy and wrongheaded. Such attitudes, however, should not be conflated with putting one's faith in love, or in one's beloved, finding occasions for wonder and gratitude in one's life despite the recognition that one's love won't change the world, in some of the most relevant senses. One's love will neither prevent climate change nor burnout. It may not even prevent one from losing faith in love when faced with dire circumstances. Faith in one's love (in its meaning) is *not* the same as a prediction of its own persistent continuity. This faith rather sheds the light in which one perceives one's here and now. (Compare Kronqvist's [2011] analysis of the important difference between an analogous pair of relationships towards love's future—prediction and promise.)

   These considerations bear interesting similarities to different reactions we may have to the fact that we are dying. Although the death in question is not specifically one's own, climate depression can be seen as a form of death anxiety. Rather than despairing, however, another possible reaction to the climate crisis is acting-out of the idea that the only thing one can do in the face of death is to persevere in one's love, as Georges does. This "love despite" may nurture no

[4] We owe this observation to Sophie-Grace Chappell's comments made during a lecture on the topic of love.

hope that it will be better, but express a kind of a disillusioned clear insight into why what one is doing is good, perhaps even the impossibility of living with oneself (with who one would become), if one chose to be somewhere else than by the loved one. Here the distinction between escapism and optimism becomes vital. David Buckel did not lose the capacity to "enclose himself from the world;" he was never (we suppose) a self-indulgent escapist, he rather lost his optimism. His self-immolation was pre-meditated, but it was not so as a "consequence drawn" from the prediction of imminent death (the lack of perspective of his love). He did not *choose to be elsewhere* because there was no perspective for him *here*; he lost faith. His expressed intention to *do something* about the attitude towards climate change through his death, however, can also be read as a hope of affecting the world so that faith in love and life, as he seemed to understand it, would be an intelligible option again.

2) The image of love as something that fills us (with various emotions). Of course, love does this, but it doesn't consist in this subjective experience, for we can learn much about it from cases and situations where it *empties* rather than fills us. A burnout carer gives a lot of her life away; what is at play are not her emotions, but rather her life. "This is my life to give away." "What happened to my life, where did it disappear?" To describe such words as a failure to "feel the same as before" (when everything was rosy) misses what the situation is about (unlike the inability to "go on like that," and being full of regret and guilt on that account). Whether love is blooming, or crumbling, it may be useful to resist the temptation to locate these happenings in one's *feelings*.

Wittgenstein (1981, § 504) points out:

> Love is not a feeling. Love is put to the test, pain not. One does not say: "That was not true pain, or it would not have gone off so quickly."

Love, in the sense of something that, if true, is unlikely to "go off quickly," is connected with what actions one perceives as thinkable and unthinkable. (Failing, for one reason or another, to do what one once perceived as unthinkable not to do does not amount to closing one's e yes to what one sees in the light of such a love.) Whatever Georges's love for Anne is like—it may have gone far from what he used to *feel* towards her decades ago—and however difficult it appears for him to carry on, wondering about which fleeting emotions come and go is to misunderstand in what sense *Amour* is a story of love. We may argue about how well he stands his test, but what is (metaphorically speaking) put to the test are not his feelings.

Love, in the sense of persevering, or doing what is good, may be the only way left to Georges to make sense of his life, perceived as a whole. This shows that love is not only accidentally exposed to life's hardships. The example helps us

see how all aspects of life, in some ways, involve us in love, more specifically, in *labours* of love.

A joint lesson from these two points would be: don't underestimate the complexity of the relationship between our lives and loves. Love pervades the whole of our lives, acting (powerfully) *in* and *upon* many areas or dimensions, though in ways responding also to the changing circumstances of our lives, as we understand them. Our circumstances may demand changes in our conception of love, yet how we come to conceive of our (transformed) circumstances may as well borrow much from previous conceptions of love. The despair with which environmental crisis may fill us—which, nevertheless, allows us to see its urgency more clearly—owes something to dreams we may once have cherished, such as those about the rosy future of our university-bound children.

This dialectic between the difference that love makes for us and the way in which we see the world—what we find in it, in response to what the world puts forward to us—deserves attention and exploration. Love is *not* our whole life (cf. Rorty's [2016, 347) observations about the *difficulties* of love). If it were, "moving on" would not be *one* of the *legitimate* ways of dealing with grief and bereavement.

We need to take the situated *variability* of this dialectic into account. Things develop in our lives, and we develop along with them. The array of responses that love for a child requires from a parent differs strongly when the child is one year old and when she is 16. There is something desecrating about the idea of being angry with a toddler, but it may be a natural form of respect paid to one's teenage child, because anger may be a sign that you see that person as your equal. (Depending, of course, on what it is you are angry about.) The array of what one is capable of "investing" in the relationship also changes with time (the time spent in the relationship as well as the time of one's life). There is the slow shift from the enthusiasm of youthful gestures (tearing up a train ticket in order to be able to spend a few more hours with the other) to the more sedate perseverance of the fifty-something sharing the household chores and remembering to buy the other's (unintelligibly) favourite brand of beer.

Our love changes as we change in it (cf. Rorty's, 1987) analysis of the historicity of love). But there are several patterns of the development of human life, and they do not exhibit a timeless, a-cultural character. The options of disposing of one's life in relation to those whom one loves have been changing strikingly. The two case studies discussed above show the shifts in our forms of life—shifts in what slowly becomes intelligible—that disrupt some ingrained "grammatical" structures of "the language of love." Other, new ways of talking about love may be taking root, though, allowing us to do differently the things that Rhees mentioned as capacities inherent to the familiarity with this particular language, such as recognising love in others, or feigning love.

Love, in this view, is not simply an adaptation to the changing world. The sense in which we can think of life as a continuous whole, rather shows that this world itself, as we inhabit it, offers profound motivations for considering love as something that mustn't cling to its realisation within this world. There is a risk of corruption inherent in becoming too attached to certain aspects of our life, and the darker turns of our lives serve as reminders of the necessity to emancipate ourselves from such attachments. The claims that love for one's children places on the parent may be considered absolute, unconditional, and timeless, yet a lot depends on how such ideas are unpacked in practice. There are important differences between wishing for a better future for our children, striving for it and expecting it, as well as being disappointed if it does not happen (for example, with whom is one disappointed?). How we deal with a future that is less splendid than what "reasonable" people feel assured to wish for, thus offers a kind of test to which a parent's love is put. The latter responses especially might highlight that certain understandings of what is involved in a better future (its material, secular sense—a university career, and so on) may have involved, from the very beginning, the potential to become rotten.

There is nothing rotten *per se* with a working-class single parent hoping for a better (perhaps university-related) future for her children and doing all she can to make it happen. One thing is notable, however: the hope of upward social mobility as an expression of one's love for one's children, including the ways in which it can rot, was not always an available and intelligible form of parental love. During the Early Middle Ages in Europe, these conceptions of love might have been considered accidental or unintelligible. Later societal and cultural shifts brought them to life, or at least to the forefront. When philosophers think about love (the concept of love), they thus cannot safely ignore bits and pieces of the history of ideas, which they can find pretty much everywhere, though, including in works of fiction. As Peter Winch (1990, 23) puts it,

> [a] man's social relations with his fellows are permeated with his ideas about reality. Indeed, "permeated" is hardly a strong enough word: social relations are expressions of ideas about reality.

And there is a note worth adding: we need to be aware of the incessant, if slow, movement of the complex of these ideas.

A number of observations can be made in this endeavour. One is that our lives have turned out to be, to an unprecedented extent, lives without a sustainable future. The mostly secularised notion of what one owes to one's children, in terms of their future, underscores the bitterness of this awareness.

Another observation: on the one hand, our lives unfold in response to massive rearrangements of a globalised society that suffers from inequality and exploitation and expects us to rely primarily on ourselves to organise our lives efficiently. On the other hand, there are ideas in the air about the injustice of these pressures.

Yet another observation: love has become the subject of massive attention from the expert and self-help genres. We have to accommodate in our lives, in one way or another, the expertise about the kinds of expressions of love that are most conducive to the well-being of our loved ones, such as the idea that the best kind of love for one's children manifests itself in spending time with them. What options does this imperative leave open for a single mother working 12-hour shifts in a supermarket to cover the commercial rent for her flat? For one thing, it provides a source for an intelligible concern of hers that she does not know them anymore, not having enough time to keep track of what is important for them at their respective ages.

We mentioned at the beginning that we would like to follow a "phenomenology" of love, as suggested by some minority voices of philosophy. We hope that it transpires clearly now that we do not have in mind anything like Husserl's (1970, 226) "invariant set of essential types" that "furnishes us in advance" with the "life-world itself." The idea of phenomenology employed here needs to take into account the variant, the contingent, and the particular. If you think of love's interaction with environmental grief, or with burnout, you are engaging with stories about what our lives are to us that could not have been told in the same way 100 or 200 years ago.. We would not want to call the contemporary historicity of the experiences that David Buckel, or Georges, must have gone through "essential" for love. (There seems to be no essence of love in the sense of the essence in which Husserl apparently was interested.) But we need to keep track of these changes, otherwise the language of love we are speaking will feel flat. We will also be unable to capture the full meaning of those stories of love that are set in the real world now.

Our present stories of love could not have been told in the past for various reasons. There is the material course of history—there was no point in coming to terms with environmental grief in the pre-industrial world in which Jane Austen's novels *about love* are set. There was poverty and exhaustion and misery back then, too. There was no burnout, though, because "burnout" is also an *idea* that developed to make sense of some forms of this exhaustion, and that helped, in turn, to shape the ways in which we think about and try to deal with these forms in our lives.

No historical and cultural shift, however, needs to make the older stories about love uninteresting or uninspiring. Just as it was *Pride and Prejudice* 200 years ago, today it is, *Amour* or, who knows, *Normal People* that teaches us about love—thanks as much to what remains the same (or similar) as to what has changed substantially. The philosophy of love that wants to do justice to this insight is not replaced by the history of ideas, or by cultural critique, or by social science, but it has good reasons to be interested in communicating with these disciplines.

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