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DRAFT

Love and Admiration (Wonder): Fundaments of the Self-Other Relations

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Contemporary theory of emotions is largely dominated by the idea that love is directed at what is good and valuable. This notion is intuitive, and it neatly fits our common sense conception of human affairs but also coheres with many findings in empirical psychosciences and bio-sciences. We tend to love things and persons that we consider good and beautiful (or superb, terrific, cool, etc.), and we tend to value and appreciate the things and the persons that we happen to love.

I call this idea the value-theoretical conception of love. It informs our views of many, if not all, forms of love, from erotic and carnal love (*eros*, *ludus*) to affective ties between family members and partners (*pragma*), to friendship (*philia*), to self-love (*philautia*), and finally to the brotherly and sisterly charity that unites us **all** as human beings (*agape*).¹

However, for philosophical purposes it is crucial to notice that the assimilation of the object of love with the good is not unproblematic. We know many cases in which love is not directed at what is considered good or beautiful: we are able to love things and persons that are bad or even evil, and we would not always insist that the people that we

love are good. Moreover this seems to hold irrespectively of the scope of the objects' unworthiness: bad for us personally, bad in general and bad intrinsically.

Fictional literature presents diverse variations of such cases. Jay Gatsby, the main character of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, loves Daisy Buchanan even though she hardly is worth his dedication, or any dedication for that matter. In Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, Rhett Butler falls in love with Scarlett O'Hara, a silly, superficial girl, from the very moment he sees her, but in the course of events this attraction turns out to be much more than a fling: he cares for her devotedly and wholeheartedly, and much earlier than she knows who she is and what she can become. Fiction also depicts many female lovers who sacrifice their social position and status, their personal secureness and serenity, and even the happiness of their children for their passion for a unworthy lover. Anna Karenina's deep affection for Vronsky is one of the most tragic examples of such unfortunate affairs; but the paradigmatic case or archetype of wretched love is probably the relationship between Catherine Earnshaw and Heatcliff in Emily Brönte's *Wuthering Heights*. The point here is not to argue that we should base our philosophies of love on romantic fiction and on tragedies. Rather the claim is that we are able to understand such fictional characters since their relations reflect situations that have an important place in our own lives.

Another misunderstanding also needs to be removed. My point is not merely that there are countless cases in both fiction and in real life in which the object of love is unattractive or unpleasing to look at, or even ugly, both objectively for us all and subjectively for the lover. This is not my point here, since in such cases one can easily argue for inner beauty and the goodness of character and thus retain the idea that love

necessarily entails the goodness of its object.² Rather, the point is that there are several cases in which the beloved is bad both externally and internally, worthless both in terms of his or her outer manifestations and in terms of her character. Such cases are not rare or exceptional; they constitute one specific type of erotic and romantic love, and their possibility is also indicated in the Christian teaching according to which we must love the weak and choose the foolish, the insignificant and the despised (I Cor. 1: 26–27; Luke 14: 12–14). If such choices of the heart are possible, then the idea of the goodness of the beloved is not self-evident. If such cases are central in or crucial to our lives, then they must not be ignored as lesser forms of affection on the basis of the mere assumption about the essential goodness of the beloved. Loving the bad may be risky and even destructive, and eventually we may have to conclude by saying that the persons, the ideas and the things in question are not worthy of the love, but such normative verdicts do not substantiate the view that the object of love is always or necessarily good as such.

The notion that love is directed at the good has its philosophical origin in Plato's *Symposium*. The idea is put forward and entertained in diverse forms by many speakers at the banquet (cf., e.g., *Symp.* 201a–c,) but it also receives a precise formulation and a definition in Socrates' speech. Having first removed several misunderstandings and specified the question in a number of ways, Socrates introduces the idea of love as a mediator (*daimon*) and then concludes that love is *desire for the perpetual possession of the good* (*Symp.* 206a). This is the teaching of the Mantinean woman Diotima who, Socrates tells us, was his teacher in the affairs of love and whom he then cites at length while developing his own theory of love and its role in the pursuit of human wisdom and the other virtues (*Symp.* 201d).³

The doctrine about the essential goodness of the beloved is complicated in the dialogue by several considerations, most importantly, by the idea of the uniqueness and incomparability of the beloved, by the notion that we aspire to continue our loving forever, and by reflections on the mortal character of human life. However, modern commentators usually focus merely on the doctrine of the good and draw from it exclusively, perhaps for the reason that the other aspects of the dialogue—its reflections on the uniqueness of the beloved one and the eternity of loving—seem outdated or else alien to our contemporary concerns.

The value-theoretical notion dominates both realistic and idealistic approaches in the analysis of love. Thus we find it articulated, in different ways, both by value-realists, such as Max Scheler, and by idealists, such as Jean-Paul Sartre. The former argue that emotional intentionality (feeling, value-(ap)perception) is our way of apprehending values as independent objects, or attributes of objects. Our acts of practical intentionality, willing and desiring, then relate us to the bearers of the values, which exist independently of all such practical intending. Thus the emotion of love would be a special kind of intending of what is good as such, independently of our dispositions, affections, feelings, and interests. We grasp the good in our emotion, but it exists irrespectively of our feeling. Thus understood love, as all emotions, is our way of relating to the value or what is valuable.⁴ In Scheler's "Ordo Amoris," we read:

All that is worthy of love, from the viewpoint of God's comprehensive love, might have been stamped and created by this act of love; man's love does not so stamp or create its objects. Man's love is restricted to recognizing the objective demand these objects make and to submitting to the gradation of rank in what is worthy of

love. This gradation exists in itself, but in itself it exists “for” man, ordered to his particular essence (Scheler [1916] 1957 356/111).⁵

Idealist approaches contend, in contrast, that the emotion of love is the source of the value of the beloved one. We do not love or desire things and persons because they are good or beautiful inherently but, instead, we conceive and experience them as good and beautiful because we love and desire them. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Simone de Beauvoir articulates the idealist position of modern existentialism as follows: “It is desire which creates the desirable, and the project that sets up the end. It is human existence which makes values spring up in the world on the basis of which it will be able to judge the enterprise in which it will be engaged” (Beauvoir 1947, 22/15).

The main idea here is not specific to French existentialism. In the case of love, it can be found defended in contributions with very diverse philosophical orientations. Harry Frankfurt, for example, argues in his *The Reasons of Love* as follows: “The lover does invariably and necessarily perceive the beloved as valuable, but the value he sees it to possess is a value that derives from and that depends upon his love” (2004, 38). Frankfurt contends that the beloved person invariably is valuable to the lover, and valuable as such (not for some further end), but he argues that the *source and ground* of the value in the case of love is not in the object itself but is in the loving subject. More precisely, the beloved is valuable as such, but her value depends on the emotive attitude that the lover has or takes toward her: “As I am construing it, love is not necessarily a response grounded in awareness of the inherent value of its object. It may sometimes arise like that, but it need not do so” (2004, 39). This means that Frankfurt’s account of the value of the beloved one is subjectivist or idealist but is not instrumentalist.

In this paper, I want to offer an alternative perspective to love as an emotive relation between persons. I argue that revisiting Descartes' theory of emotions allows us to clarify our intuitions about the power and the function of love in the human makeup of emotions. More specifically, I would like to propose that an excursion into this early modern source, devised between Ancient discussions and post-Kantian reflections, helps us understand better why we tend to think that love of persons is not just one emotion among other emotions but has a specific role in our emotive lives. In order to see this, we need to study Descartes' general analysis of emotions and focus there, not on his definition and discussion of love, but on his characterizations of admiration or wonder (*admiration*).⁶

I base this contention on my indebtedness to the late existential and hermeneutical developments in the Cartesian tradition, most importantly the contributions of Emmanuel Levinas (*Time and Other, Totality and Infinity*) and Luce Irigaray (*An Ethics of Sexual Difference*). In this vein, I would like to argue that Descartes' analysis of the emotion of admiration helps us understand and conceptualize the transformative power of love. More specifically, I would like to suggest that if we ground our analysis of personal love, not on the idea of love as an affirmative relation to a positive value merely, but on the idea of an admiring relation to what is radically alien to us – alien in being and alien in value – then we can better understand why it is personal love (and not shame or guilt⁷) that can transform us comprehensively and change our relation to ourselves, to others and to the world. Let me specify my idea by a short excursion into Descartes' account of admiration or wonder.

Corporeal admiration and its place in Descartes' system of emotions

Admiration or wonder (*admiration*) is, according to Descartes, the first of all emotive passions (AT XI §53, 373/350).⁸ It is the basis of all other emotions, love and hatred, veneration and scorn, for example. The primacy of admiration is here meant in two related senses: admiration is claimed to be involved in all other emotions, as a necessary ingredient of them all, but Descartes also argues that admiration can appear alone, as pure, and thus that it is independent of all the other emotion-passions.⁹

In the systematic exposition of *Passions of the Soul* (*Les passions de l'âme* 1649), Descartes distinguishes between six basic emotion-passions: admiration (or wonder), love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. According to him, all other emotions are “either composed from some of these six or they are species of them” (AT XI §69, 380/335). In order to understand the special role of Descartes' concept of admiration in his general account of emotions, and the philosophical potential of this concept, it is necessary to study in detail Descartes' descriptions of the relations between the six basic emotions.

Descartes explains the primacy of admiration first by pointing out that we admire things “*before* we know whether [they are] beneficial to us or not” (AT XI §53, 373/350, italics added). The emphasis here is on the term “before” (not on the term “know”), and this “before” should be read as a statement about the independence of admiration of the evaluative character of the other emotions. The main point is not that admiration is a kind of knowledge or cognitive state for Descartes (or that it targets an object or a thingly being), but that it is a nonevaluative state, i.e. an emotion that does not involve considerations of or interests in the thing's suitability or benefit to us.

Further, Descartes also points out that admiration has no opposite, unlike the other emotion-passions. Love, for example, is a positive emotion involving an awareness of the goodness of the thing considered, and its opposite hatred is a negative emotion involving an awareness of the harm or badness of the thing. In *Passions of the Soul* we read, for example:

When we think of something as good with regard to us, i.e. as beneficial to us, this makes us have love for it; and when we think of it as bad or harmful, this arouses hatred in us. (AT XI §56, 374/350)¹⁰

And further, by adding temporal qualifications, we get to desire, hope, anxiety, jealousy, confidence and despair:

To make us desire to acquire some good or avoid some evil, all that's needed is for us to think of the desired outcome as *possible*. But a more detailed thought about *how likely* the outcome is leads to more specific kinds of passion: the belief that there is a good chance of something that we desire gives us hope; the belief that the chances are poor creates anxiety (of which jealousy is one variety) in us. When hope is extreme, it changes its nature and is called confidence and extreme anxiety becomes despair. (AT XI §58, 428/375)

Thus in the Cartesian framework, considerations of the values of things and persons—their goodness or badness—are crucial to the basic passions of love, hatred, desire, joy, and sadness, and all their specifications. This is a value-theoretical aspect in Descartes' discourse of emotions. It is important to emphasize, however, that for Descartes the common standard by which human passions estimate or measure the values of surrounding objects is our own mind-body union, its sustenance and well-being. The

objects that promote or advance the coherence and stability of the mind-body union are good, and objects that harm this unity are bad. Thus, our five basic emotion-passions are subjective in the sense that they evaluate things on the basis of the interest of maintaining and promoting our psychophysical being.

But the emotion of admiration has an exceptional role in this framework.¹¹ It diverges from the other basic passions in operating independently and prior to the oppositions between good and bad, benefit and harm. Descartes explains:

When our first encounter with some object surprises us and we find it novel—i.e., very different from what we formerly knew or from what we supposed it should be—this brings it about that we admire or wonder and are astonished at it. All this can happen before we know whether the object is beneficial to us, so I regard admiration or wonder as the first of all the passions. It has no opposite, because if the object before us has nothing surprising about it, it doesn't stir us in any way and we consider it without passion. (AT XI §53, 373/350)

Both Levinas and Irigaray put much emphasis on the nonevaluative and non-oppositional character of admiration but the key to their interpretation of admiration as a transformative emotion is in Descartes's description of the functions of passions.

The common function of emotion-passions, Descartes tells us, is to “dispose the soul to want the things which nature deems useful for us, and to persist in this volition” (AT XI §52, 372/349). The soul needs the passions in order to direct and fix its thoughts to beneficial tasks, such as developing practical skills and acquiring knowledge. Thus corporeal emotions “move the soul to consent and contribute to actions which may serve to preserve the body or render it in some way more perfect” (AT XI §137, 430/376). So

the general function of emotion passions is to contribute to the maintenance and well-being of the mind-body union.

But taken strictly, this applies only to the five basic passions of the soul: desire, love, hatred, joy, and sadness. The function of admiration is different. It precedes all evaluation of the thing or person at question, of its suitability (*convenance*), usefulness or harmfulness to the maintenance and well-being of the mind-body union. This is why it does not have any opposite, and this is why Descartes considers it as the first of all passions.

Admiration is the state in which we pay attention to a thing or a person before we apply our standards of good and bad, pleasurable and painful, useful and harmful to it. It is indispensable for us because it allows us to notice, perceive and learn things of which we were previously ignorant or which are different from the ones that we already know and are familiar with. Thus understood, admiration is the passion that allows us to encounter, to perceive, what is un-usual and extra-ordinary, new to our previous experience and knowledge. Descartes writes: “The other passions may serve to make us take note of things which appear good or evil, but we feel only admiration at things which merely appear unusual” (AT XI §75, 384/355).

Jean-Marie Beyssade characterizes Cartesian admiration by saying that it resides in “the alertness of the first glance” (Beyssade [1968] 1983, 113): when we look at something and see something for the first time, we attend to it in a specific way. Admiration is like a precursory movement of observance that does not yet proceed toward its object – thing or person – (or away from it) but prepares ground for such movements of the soul-body. Beyssade further emphasizes that admiration is a state

between two extremes, between stupidity that is stagnated by the first impression and the rigid attitude that sticks to already formed habits (cf. AT XI §72, 382/353). The one who admires is able to focus on the appearing object without adjusting it to her natural needs or habituated inclinations; she does not adapt the object to her expectations, but instead lets the object change the habitual motions of her mind-body.

So, in summary, we can say that Cartesian admiration is a preparative state that allows us to relate cognitively and emotionally to what is new to us and what is not (yet) evaluated. It precedes all evaluation of the attended thing or person by the standards of survival and well-being of the mind-body union. It is the state in which we have not yet “measured” the thing or person as good or bad for us. Thus understood, admiration is a specific way of attending to things and persons, before considering their suitability, appropriateness and fit to ourselves, or independently of such considerations. The emotion is specific in being attentive but nonevaluative: we are looking at and listening to the given thing (or person) as it (she or he) appears before any evaluation based on our life, personal and generally human.¹²

Intellectual love and admiration of God

There is another important section in Descartes’ work that concerns admiration. At the end of his third Meditation, Descartes describes how the idea of God invites him to pause his deductions and gaze with admiration and adoration at God’s immense light (AT VII, 71/49). This is the section to which Levinas draws our attention in *Totality and Infinity*:

The last paragraph of the Third Meditation brings us to a relation with infinitude in thought which overflows thought and becomes a personal relation.

Contemplation turns into admiration, adoration, and joy. It is a question no longer of an “infinite object” still known and thematized, but of a majesty. (Levinas [1961] 1971, 186–187/211–212)

While discussing the so-called intellectual emotions, Descartes does not refer to the passions of the soul, i.e. to corporeal or bodily emotions, but to its actions, that is, the mind’s active relation to God and His infinity. When admiration is directed toward God and His immense perfections, it is not caused by the body but by the soul, the soul’s own ideas. So the emotion in question is very different from the corporeal passions discussed in *The Passions of the Soul*. I will argue, however, that there are important structural and functional similarities between these two emotions in Descartes’ exposition.¹³

In *Meditations*, Descartes does not go into the nature of his intellectual admiration of God, or discuss its difference from admiration as a passion. But in his correspondence with Pierre Chanut, he comments on the difference between two kinds of love, intellectual and corporeal, and we can elaborate on these comments to arrive at an understanding of the similarity between intellectual and corporeal admiration.

In his letter on February 1, 1647, Descartes answers Chanut’s question on the nature of love by distinguishing between love as an intellectual state, a rational thought, and love as a passion of the soul (more precisely a passion of the soul-body union). Intellectual love “consists simply in the fact that when our soul perceives some present or absent good, which it judges to be fitting for itself, it joins itself to it willingly” (AT IV, 601/306). Depending on the presence or absence of the good, we get intellectual joy, sadness, and desire. In Descartes’ exposition, these all could exist in a soul without a body, i.e., in an angel, and they all are clear and distinct thoughts (AT IV, 602/306).

When the soul is joined to a body, as it is in the case of human beings, rational love is usually accompanied by corporeal or “sensuous” love. This latter emotion, Descartes points out to Chanut, is nothing but a confused thought, caused by the movements of animal spirits (discussed in *The Passions of the Soul*). Although these two forms of love are very different kinds of thoughts, they commonly occur together in our lives (AT IV, 603/306). Descartes explains the co-occurrence by referring to the soul’s natural capacity for union with a body: the soul disposes the body to certain motions and, conversely, bodily movements make the soul imagine lovable qualities.¹⁴

If we assume that *intellectual admiration* relates to *intellectual love* in the same way as *sensuous admiration* relates to *sensuous love*, then we can use our understanding of the passions of the soul and their mutual relations in our attempt to understand Descartes’ notion of intellectual admiration or wonder at God, mentioned in the third Meditation.

We have seen above that in the Cartesian framework sensuous admiration differs from sensuous love in that it precedes all considerations of the appropriateness or goodness of the object for us as bodily beings. In other words, corporeal admiration does not include an evaluation of the appearing object’s aptness to the soul-body union. In addition to this, Descartes argues that intellectual love consists of a non-sensible perception of God and an evaluation of His suitability to the soul (independently of the body). Thus, it seems that intellectual admiration of God is a mere awareness of His presence as such without any evaluation of His appropriateness or suitability to our soul, independently of the body. The emotion is not totally neutral; as the French word “admiration” indicates, the soul both attends to God and adores or reveres His splendor.¹⁵ But here the positive inclination of the soul is not based on its own standards; rather, all

positivity and value emanates from the appearing object itself. In post-Kantian terms, we could say that the object in this case has “intrinsic value,” not merely in the negative sense that it does not serve any further ends but also in the positive sense that it is the source of its own value.

So intellectual admiration is an active state of the mind, but its activity is different from that of intellectual love. It is a deferring or postponing activity, one could perhaps say, since it holds back the evaluative activities that characterize the other emotions. It involves a specific kind of awareness, a specific attentiveness of the mind, which precedes the consciousness of God’s suitability and aptness to the soul. Thus understood, intellectual admiration is a pure awareness of God’s presence and His intrinsic majesty and magnificence that do not accommodate or adjust to the limits and structures of the human mind.¹⁶

In summary we can then say that Cartesian admiration or wonder – both in its corporeal and non-corporeal intellectual mode – is a (temporary) state of attentiveness before evaluation. Corporeal admiration precedes all estimation of the value of the thing or person for the survival and well-being of the mind-body union. It is the state in which we have not yet reacted to things and persons as good or bad for us. We have not yet “measured” them by our standards of survival and well-being. Intellectual admiration, on the other hand, precedes consciousness of God’s suitability to our soul. Descartes’ derivation of truths, his movement of thought, is arrested by his admiring contemplation of God. The activity arrested is not just the progress from one idea to another, but also the directedness that is its prerequisite: the “movement” of the mind toward an immense transcendence conceived as suitable to our soul in the emotions of love and joy.

In both cases of admiration, there is a specific attitude, corporeal or spiritual, of attending to something or someone (the intentional object in the technical sense of the word) before evaluating its suitability, aptness, appropriateness or fit to oneself. This attitude is specific in combining passivity and activity in a way that differs from all the other emotions: I am actively attending to the other, looking at and listening to the other, as she appears independently of all evaluative activities that are based on my own standards of goodness and beauty.

Admiration of human persons

As we have seen, Descartes' analysis entails the idea that admiration necessarily participates or is involved in the other basic emotions, and this holds both in the case of corporeal emotions and intellectual emotions. This can be conceptualized by saying that admiration or wonder is a preparatory phase and a necessary component in all other emotions and its function is to guarantee that we are able to relate to what is unfamiliar and unexpected or even unprecedented to us. Understood in this way, admiration awakens us to the presence of an emotive object and prepares ground for its specific effects on us.¹⁷ To put it differently, we could say that admiration allows us to attend to the object in its being, independently of our standards of goodness and badness and our habits of reaction and action, but that this preparatory phase must then be replaced by an evaluative act for the emotion to be completed. Phenomenologically, this idea can be developed in several different ways: one can either propose that the possibility of a nonevaluative pure perception is implicated by all emotive experiences or alternatively argue that pure perception is merely a dependent moment of concrete experiences,

distinguished by abstractive thinking and not experientiable as such (e.g. Drummond 2013a).

In Descartes' account, only God is able to evoke a nonevaluative positive attentiveness in us. All emotive relations between human beings, and thus also all our mutual relations of love, are pervaded by self-care. We evaluate one another always by the standards of our own personal life and/or by the general standards of human life.¹⁸ However, all such emotions also involve the nonevaluative state of admiration as a necessary component and precondition, and this allows them to transcend considerations of personal well-being and self-care. Without admiration, we would remain attached to the good things that we already possess and the gentle persons whom we already know and could not relate to anything unfamiliar or unknown. We would not be able to notice anything that differs from our expectations and preconceptions but would constantly navigate in the world on the basis of our natural and habitual emotions, positive and negative.

Levinas's (1947, 1961) and Irigaray's (1984) appropriation of the Cartesian concept of admiration is based on the idea that we can cultivate the nonevaluative state of admiration that is involved in our emotions. In the case of the passion of love, this means that we can reflectively focus on this nonevaluative element in our loving and put emphasis on it when relating to the beloved object.¹⁹ Admiration allows us to suspend our movements towards the lovable object and thus it makes possible a retrieval of the first impression in which the beloved object can show itself in its own right, independently of the value that it has for us. For Descartes, such interruptions of evaluation have primarily an epistemic importance: they allow us to gain new knowledge of the objects that we love

or hate. But Levinas's and Irigaray's discourses make clear that admiration is also needed in any attempt to learn to love human persons in a more adequate way. When the object shows itself in its own right, independently of its suitability and beneficence to us, we are able to study, not just the object, but also our approach to it and the relation between our loving and the beloved other.

Here I want to add one consideration to the view that Levinas and Irigaray develop on admiration. This concerns the role of esteem and contempt in Descartes' system of passions. Whereas the other passions involve admiration or wonder as a necessary component, the passions of esteem and contempt also function as specifications or modifications of pure admiration. Esteem is the emotion that we feel when something surprises us by its magnitude, and contempt is the contrary emotion that we feel in face of something small or meagre: "Wonder is joined to either esteem or contempt, depending on whether we wonder at how big the object is or how small" (AT XI §54, 373–374/350).²⁰ This implies that, in addition to pure admiration, personal love can also involve the emotion of esteem or that of contempt, depending on how its object is conceived: as magnificent and imperial or alternatively as void and poor. Since human persons are compounds of mind and body—not pure spirits or mechanical machines—they can be esteemed both for the magnitude of their bodily properties (exceptional strength or boundless beauty, for example) and for the greatness of their mental capacities and powers (sharpness of intelligence or inexhaustibility of humour). Admiration and its two modifications, esteem and contempt, thus introduce an object-orientated comparative space within emotions, independent of considerations of our own sustenance and well-being.²¹ We can wonder at and esteem the magnitude of another person even in cases in

which she does not advance our life in any way, and conversely we can feel contempt for a person even if we would feel that her presence is necessary for our well-being.

Descartes develops this idea systematically, distinguishing between three different types of love: simple affection, friendship and devoted love. We read:

If [a person] has less esteem for that object than for himself, he has only a simple affection for it; if he esteems it with himself, it is called “friendship”; and when he has more esteem for it than for himself, his passion for it may be called “devotion” ... [W]e can also have devotion for our sovereign, our country, our town, and even for a particular person whom we esteem much more highly than we esteem ourselves. (AT XI §83, 390/357)

There is, however, another important aspect in Levinas’s and Irigaray’s appropriation of Descartes. Both refer in their discussions of love, not just to Descartes’s theory of the passions, but also to his account of intellectual love and admiration. More precisely, both Levinas and Irigaray draw from Descartes’s analysis of intellectual love, as an emotive relation to God’s infinite perfections, when theorizing erotic relations between human beings. But rather than conceiving human love as an overflow or surplus of God’s infinite love, as many phenomenologists have done (e.g. Scheler [1913] 1960, [1916] 1957, [1923] 1973, Marion [1986] 1999, Poellner 2012, Steinbock 2016),²² both argue that each human being carries an analogous infinity in herself and that love between human beings must therefore be understood as a relation between two infinities, or, better, two finite beings that both harbor infinite depths in their core selves.²³

What these Cartesian reflections help us articulate, I think, is the intuition that personal love is not just one emotion among other emotions, not just one type of love

among other loves but is also, due to the admiration-component involved in it, potentially a transformative condition that allows us to relate in a new way, not just to this or that object, but to the world as a whole. In the case of personal love, we are related, not just to an object—a value-object—but also to another thinking, perceiving, feeling, and willing subject. In the light of Descartes's discourse, this involves two dimensions: (i) the person as another subject of evaluative and volitional acts, analogous to us and thus operating on the basis of her own standards of well-being and sustenance which may differ from ours, and (ii) the person as an imperial source of values, analogous to God and thus infinitely transcending all our standards of evaluation.

If we model love on Cartesian admiration, then this emotion is not merely a relation to a value, but is also and more crucially a relation to an infinite source of alien values which, when encountered, interrupt our affective and emotive dealings, restrain our evaluations, and delimit or relativize ourselves as evaluative subjects. The other person is admired, not merely because she is good, but also because she appears to us as an alien source of values, analogous to ourselves but irrecoverably separate from us, and infinitely so. In other words, admiration is the one emotion that allows us to relate to what is alien to us, not just here and now, but endlessly so, and thus allows us to put limits, in reflection, to our own valuations. So what is specific to admiration in the Cartesian setting is this transformative character: the admired other challenges our emotive lives comprehensively and thus changes our relations to ourselves, to the world and to human beings.

Both Levinas and Irigaray argue that traditionally the emotion of admiration has been devoted to God and designated for religious and theological purposes, and that we must

learn to make space for this emotion also in our mutual relations with one another as mundane persons. Irigaray adds to this the command of “returning” the emotion of admiration to the carnal relation between man and woman, that is, between human persons of different sexes. The core of her argument is the idea that the Cartesian concept of admiration is necessary for the critique of the concepts of opposition, assimilation and fusion that dominate and burden our discourses of erotic love and especially our conception of love between man and woman. She opens her discourse on human emotions in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* with the following statement:

The feeling of surprise, astonishment, and admiration or wonder in the face of the unknowable ought to be returned to its locus: that of the sexual difference. The passions have either been repressed, stifled, or reduced, or reserved for God. Sometimes a space for admiration or wonder is left to works of art. But it is never found to reside in this locus: between man and woman. Into this space came attraction, greed, possession, consummation, disgust, and so on. But not that admiration or wonder which beholds what it sees always as if for the first time, never taking hold of the other as its object. It does not try to seize, possess, or reduce this object, but leaves it subjective, still free. (Irigaray 1984, 20/13)

Irigaray argues that for the realization of this possibility we need to return again to the origins of our philosophical discourses on love, that is, to Plato’s *Symposium*, and to reconsider its teaching about love and the role of beauty in erotic relationships in the light of Descartes’ teaching on admiration.

I try to follow this advice and end my exposition by a reflection of erotic love as generation in order to make space for a reconsideration of sexual difference in

contemporary philosophy of emotions.

As we saw at the beginning of the essay, Socrates defines love as “desire for the perpetual possession of the good,” but as was also brought out at the beginning, this definition is complicated by further considerations. One complication stems from our earthly existence. Following Diotima’s teaching, Socrates argues that as mortal beings we can possess the good perpetually only by constantly generating and regenerating it (*Symp.* 206b). This insight motivates a new definition of love. Love should not be assimilated with desire for the possession of the good but must also be understood as “generation *in the beauty*” or “giving birth *in beauty (tokos en kalô)*” (206b7–208e5, my emphasis).

However, there is a crucial linguistic matter here that needs attention since it has wide-ranging implications to our conception of personal love and the role of beauty in loving. In other words, one must be careful with the interpretation of the text and pay attention to Plato’s exact choice of words. The original characterization provided in the *Symposium* for the generative activity essential to love is not univocal but is twofold: Plato uses two different verbs, “γενναω” (*génnao*, masculine) and “τικτω” (*tikto*, feminine), the former meaning begetting or conceiving and the latter meaning bearing and birthing. He starts his exposition with the masculine term “γενναω” but then switches to the feminine term “τικτω” and ends the speech of Socrates with the latter (210d5–6, 212a5–6) (cf. Leitaó 2012, 188).

Standard English translations erase this duality, rendering both original verbs “γενναω” and “τικτω” by neutral English translations, by the terms “giving birth” (Helm 2013), “reproducing” (e.g. Scheffield 2006, 75) and “generating.” Some commentators use *The Republic* as an interpretative guide for deciphering the discourses of the

Symposium. This choice suggests that the masculine term “γενναω,” used consistently in *The Republic* (Rep. 490b5–7), would also capture the core idea of generation in the *Symposium*. Consequently the dual activity discussed by Socrates and his friends at the banquet is assimilated with the single activity of begetting or conceiving (and even ejaculating; see Pender 1992).

Thus, we move from a heterogeneous model of generation to a homogenous one: whereas the original Greek text thematizes a duality of *two different activities* – inseminating and begetting, on the one hand, and bearing and giving birth, on the other hand – our contemporary commentaries either describe the process in neutral terms or else use masculine terms that refer only to the generative activities and functions of men. What is lost in such translations and interpretation is the idea that the two lovers are capable of endless generation only by combining their diverse powers, that is, their creative activities and functions that differ in kind and origin.

And further we also lose grasp of the role of beauty in the process. As long as the two partners are conceived as originally or essentially different in their generative capacities and activities, beauty can be understood as having the role of mediator (cf. Irigaray 1984). The two are different, originally and essentially so, but both are capable of performing their own particular activities in a beautiful manner, so *beautifully* and *harmoniously*. Thus the two are united by the modality or mode of acting, not by any shared activity. But when the two verbs “γενναω” and “τικτω” are translated by one and the same verb, “to generate,” “to reproduce” or “to give birth,” we switch from the model of two activities (and two types of agents) to the model of one activity (and one type of agent, neutral or masculine), and lose the possibility of understanding beauty as mediator

between the two lovers. Beauty cannot any more have the necessary role as a specific mode of relating but becomes substantialized and is confused with the intentional object of love (the beloved one) or else with the end results of loving (child, poetry, law, virtue, speech).

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¹ Cf. Nicolas Hartmann's distinction between brotherly love (*agape*), love of the remote ideal (*eros*), love of the radiant virtue of an exemplary individual, and personal love in depth, developed in his *Ethik* (1926). For the medieval and early modern background of contemporary classifications of types of love, see Frigo 2016.

² Literature, mythology and fairy tales offer numerous examples of such cases. The best known are probably the Beast loved by Beauty, Cyrano de Bergerac neglected by Roxane for his outlook (but loved for his eloquence), and Jane Eyre's beloved Mr. Rochester, pictured as having "square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, grim mouth..." (Brontë 1864, 125).

³ Socrates' teacher Diotima is called "priestess" in standard English translations of *The Symposium* but in the original Greek text she is merely characterized as "a woman," "a wife" or "a lady" (*guné*) (201d2), and as "a stranger or a strange female person (*xenê*) (Plato *Symp.* 201e). Cf. Hobbs 2006, 252–271; Tuominen 2015, 3.

⁴ This view can be called "the appraisal view" of love (cf. Frankfurt 2004; Helm 2013).

⁵ The pagination given first refers to the original source, and the pagination that follows this, after the slash, refers to the English translation. Both sources are given in one and the same entry in the list of references below.

⁶ The French term "admiration" that Descartes uses in his *Passions* is usually translated into "wonder" in English. However, I will use the English term "admiration" throughout this paper since it serves my explicative and argumentative aims better than the alternative.

⁷ Much of contemporary phenomenology of intersubjectivity is focused on the so-called social emotions, i.e. emotions that we experience in front of others. These include the

emotions of shame, guilt, and pride. See, e.g., Landweer 1999; Rinofner-Kreidl 2009; Steinbock 2014; Zahavi 2015; Dolezal 2015; Salice and Sánchez 2016. It seems to me that this focus is partly due to systematic concerns but partly due to the central role that Scheler's (1913, 1916) and Sartre's (1943) analyses of emotions have in our discussions of intersubjectivity and sociality.

⁸ I will refer to the annotated edition of Descartes's works, *Œuvres de Descartes I–XII*, by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. The standard procedure is to give the reference by marking first the initials of the names of the editors "AT," then the number of the volume and finally paragraph and/or page numbers(s). For example, since *The Passions of the Soul* has appeared as the XI volume of this edition, its reference is AT XI.

⁹ For Descartes, emotive passions in general are one species of the so-called passions of the soul (*passions de l'âme*), a larger category that also includes other types of passions. The other two classes of passions are sensations and sense perceptions. Admiration, love, pride and shame, for example, are emotion-passions; pain and pleasure are sensations; and seeing and hearing are perceptions. In all these states, the body affects the soul or mind and sets it in motion by the mediating movements of the so-called animal spirits. Thus, passions in general are both actions of the body and passions of the mind, these two characterizations being conceptually distinct but concerning one and the same relation. (AT XI §27, 349–350/338–339, AT VIIA §46, 22/208, AT VIIIA §66, 32/216.)

¹⁰ In paragraph §79 we read: "Love is a commotion of the soul caused by a movement of the spirits, a commotion that impels the soul to join itself [*de volonté*] to objects that appear to be agreeable to it. And hatred is a spirit-caused commotion impelling the soul

to want to be separated from objects that appear to be harmful” (AT XI §79, 387/356, cf. §80–81, 387–388/356–357).

¹¹ Laurence Renault emphasizes the central role of admiration in Descartes’ reform of the theory of human passions in his “Nature humaine et passions selon Thomas d’Aquin et Descartes” (Renault 2003).

¹² In addition to the functional and phenomenal characterizations of admiration, explicated above, Descartes also gives us a physiological explanation of the causal origin of this passion. Physiologically, admiration is unique, according to him, because it lacks the cardiovascular modification that is the central component of the physiology of the other passions. In Descartes’s words, admiration is not accompanied by the “changes in heart and blood” which characterize all other passions (AT XI §71 381/353, cf. AT XI §28 350/339).

Still, admiration is an emotion-passion, according to Descartes’ definition: it is a state attributed to the soul and caused by movements of the animal spirits. Its energy or “power economy,” so to say, differs, however, from that of the other emotions. In admiration, the initial impression of the external thing on the sense organs is so strong that it does not need the maintenance or strengthening of the heart in order to affect the brain. Descartes expresses the idea by saying that admiration has “no relation with the heart and blood, on which depends the whole well-being of our body” (AT XI §71 381/353).

Thus, Descartes’s physiological explanation of admiration accords with his description of its function: admiration has no essential relation to those organs that secure the sustenance and well-being of the mind-body union. This does not mean that the heart

and blood are totally irrelevant to the physiology of admiration; they are needed, but only as mediators through which the animal spirits enter the brain. So admiration gets all its force from the external thing (or person), its first (true) cause. Jean-Marie Beyssade characterizes the physiology of this passion by saying that in it “the original flow [of the animal spirits] is also the essential flow to the motor reaction” (Beyssade [1968] 1983, 125).

¹³ In addition to the emotions directed at God, Descartes also discusses second-order emotions as intellectual emotions, i.e. those emotive states that have beneficial emotion-passions as their objects. Examples of these include the cathartic emotions that we may live through in theatre or when reading a book of fiction and the reflective emotions that may accompany our deepest feelings, for example, when we experience joy in being deeply sad when mourning the death of a beloved person (AT XI §147, 441/381). For more detailed discussions of such cases see, for example, James 1997; Gombay 2007; Alanen 2009.

¹⁴ On the problems of this account, see Heinämaa and Kaitaro 2017.

¹⁵ For a clarifying discussion of the ambiguity of the term, see Kaposi 2011.

¹⁶ It is crucial to notice that in Descartes’s account human will is infinite and thus the difference between human consciousness and divine consciousness cannot be explicated by the opposite concepts of finitude and infinitude. Rather, the difference between human and divine is articulated by the concepts of activity and passivity.

¹⁷ This Cartesian idea is similar to the Brentanian-Husserlian analysis of intentional feelings as founded on non-axiological acts. For this later development, see Drummond 2013b; 2015.

¹⁸ Cf. Frigo 2016, 1106–1109.

¹⁹ In the Schelerian framework, in contrast, all interest and all attention is founded on either love or on hate: “‘Taking an interest in,’ which is identical in the acts both of love and of hate, proved to be the fundamental condition for the occurrence of any sort of cognitive act, whether in the sphere images or in the that of thought. (...) While acts of desire and loathing, as well as genuine acts of will, proved to be founded on acts of cognition (...), the value-orientation of the latter was, in turn, dependent on acts of ‘taking interest’ and thus on acts of love and hate” (Scheler [1916] 1957, 127).

²⁰ Esteem and contempt also have self-related “derivates”: generosity or pride and humility or abjectness. These are not just concerned with the goodness (vs. badness) of the object, but also with its greatness or magnitude (vs. smallness).

²¹ For Descartes’s concept of the mind-body union or compound, see Heinämaa and Kaitaro 2017. For an illuminative discussion of the novelty of Descartes’ concepts of love and esteem and his typology of love, see Frigo 2016.

²² In Jean-Luc Marion’s account, this conception of God as the ultimate source of all love finds its first modern explication in Pascal’s critique of Descartes (Marion [1986] 1999).

²³ Levinas’s distinguishes Descartes’s early modern conception of infinitude from late modern post-Kantian conceptions. According to him the former conceptualizes infinity directly whereas the latter construes it on the basis of the finiteness of human life (as finitude of cognition, or as mortality): “For the Cartesian *cogito* is discovered, at the end of the Third Meditation, to be supported on the certitude of the divine existence qua infinite, by relation to which the finitude of the cogito ... is posited and conceivable. *This finitude could not be determined without the recourse to the infinite* [my emphasis], as is

the case in the moderns, for whom finitude is, for example, determined on the basis of the mortality of the subject. ... This certitude [of consciousness] is due to the clarity and distinctness of the *cogito*, but certitude itself is sought because of *the presence of infinity in this finite thought* [my emphasis], which without this presence would be ignorant of its own finitude” (Levinas [1961] 1971, 186/210).

The main philosophical background to my understanding here is in Kierkegaard’s view of the diverse ways in which we can live and “solve” our paradoxical condition of existing between finitude and infinitude, most importantly, the distinction that he makes between the attitude of *the knight of infinite resignation* and that of *the knight of faith*, as developed in *Fear and Trembling* ([1843] 1950). However, also early phenomenologists, most importantly Nicolai Hartmann (1926 chs. 58), but also Edmund Husserl (e.g. Husserl 1952, 273/286), offer important insights for the development of the idea of personal love as a relation between two creatures of infinite depths.