

Two Faces of Love

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In this paper, I introduce and characterize love as an objective attitude. I suggest that love is an emotion with two faces: a reactive face and an objective face. By looking at the differences between love's two faces, we can make sense of several issues in the literature on love and draw a broader lesson about the possibility of certain emotions being both reactive and objective attitudes, thus offering a new perspective on the Strawsonian landscape.

I begin with a simple observation: sometimes, we love those who are difficult to love. Some people are hard to love because of their blameworthy flaws. Other times, it can be hard to love someone through no fault of their own. In both cases, though, we often love people even when love is a challenge.

I'll draw on the following three examples throughout this paper.

In the surrealist TV show, *Twin Peaks*, Ed and Nadine Hurley have a less-than-ideal marriage. Nadine struggles with some sort of mental illness. She routinely engages in fruitless, absurd pursuits like trying to invent noiseless drape runners using cotton balls and scotch tape. When these impossible pursuits fail, she often lashes out at Ed and acts erratically. For instance, when her drape runners aren't picked up by a local company for mass production, she tries to end her life. Ed rushes her to a hospital, and it's clear to the audience that he deeply loves Nadine, even though she is mentally closer to his child than his wife. (It's clear that they have a sexless marriage.) Ed provides for her, tries his best to support her fruitless creations, and keeps his troubles to himself, not wanting to burden Nadine with things she can't understand. And even though Ed has an ongoing affair with another woman, the audience can see that the affair results from Ed's need for a genuinely *adult* romantic and sexual relationship, something Nadine just isn't capable of. Neither husband nor wife come off as a villain.

Throughout the course of another TV show, *Breaking Bad*, we watch the gradual demise of a young man, Jesse Pinkman. Jesse struggles to find meaning in his life and becomes a drug dealer and manufacturer. His parents are devastated by who their son has become. Jesse routinely uses his mother and father for various resources, and they often acquiesce; they love their son and want to help him. Eventually though, they reach a point where they cannot continue to be a part of Jesse's endless cycle of relapse. It's too painful to repeatedly give their son the help he claims he needs to get his life back together, only for him to fall back into drug usage and criminal activity. So, with great pain, they emotionally and physically close themselves off from their son. They ask him to leave their home and remain stoic in the wake of his backlash. While Jesse continues to overstep their boundaries, asking for yet another chance, they calmly reject these requests.

Finally, I'll offer a case from my own life. Like many readers, I have extended family that I love, but with whom I share nothing in common. My family and I are just radically different people in nearly every way. They are deeply conservative and fiercely religious, and they cannot see the value

of pursuing a PhD at all—let alone in philosophy of all subjects! As I’ve gotten older (and maybe less foolhardy), I’ve come to simply accept my family for who they are, and I’ve long ago given up on any ideas of changing their minds (on any topic, really). We’re just different people, and that’s okay. When I see many of these family members during holidays, I commit to keeping the peace. I don’t say too much about my graduate studies, I avoid directly responding to whether I’ve found a church in California yet, and I certainly don’t mention anything that might remind them I’m living with my partner before marriage. I likewise don’t react to the typical comments about society, religion, or politics that would ordinarily raise an eyebrow, if not much more. Despite all this, I do love my family, even though loving them is hard. In some sense, my relationship would be much easier—less complicated at least—if I did not love them. It is because I love them that I try to make them happy.

These relationships are marked by common deficiency; they clearly aren’t what they could be. But what exactly is missing in these cases? One might be tempted to claim these relationships are deficient, at least in part, because they lack love. Much of the philosophical work on love supports this conclusion. Love is widely understood to essentially involve a particular type of emotional vulnerability¹, a desire to be close with the beloved², sharing in the beloved’s ends³, valuing the relationship itself⁴, awe in light of the beloved’s distinctive rational agency⁵, taking the beloved’s interests as reasons to act accordingly⁶, and mutual esteem⁷. But the above relationships don’t embody these ideals. So if we understand love as essentially involving these features, it seems like we should say that relationships like the above preclude love.

I’m not convinced this conclusion is plausible. It’s just not right to say that Ed not only doesn’t, but *can’t* genuinely love Nadine, that Jesse’s parents can’t love him, or that it’s not possible for me to genuinely love my family. Simply put, I think it’s possible to love the cognitively impaired, those who cannot be a part of your life, and people with whom you cannot be yourself. Part of what makes human relations messy is that we *do* love under far less than ideal conditions.⁸

I think our understanding of love should be primarily shaped by the facts of human experience, rather than conformity with philosophical theories. This isn’t to wholly reject what other philosophers have said about the nature of love. I am not denying that when we consider certain loving relationships—happy marriages, best friends, or close families—the image of love as involving emotional vulnerability, mutual esteem, a desire to be close with the beloved, and to share in the

¹ Velleman (1999) and White (2025).

² Sidgwick (1981, 244) and Jeske (2008).

³ Ebels-Duggan (2008).

⁴ Kolodny (2003).

⁵ Velleman (1999).

⁶ White (2025) and Setiya (2014).

⁷ Langton (1992).

⁸ Reflecting *first* on our loving relations and only *secondly* on our philosophical theories supports this conclusion. While other aspects of Velleman’s view I think go astray, he gets this reality exactly right: “But, surely, it is easy enough to love someone whom one cannot stand to be with...This meddling aunt, cranky grandfather, smothering parent, or overcompetitive sibling is dearly loved, loved freely and with feeling: one just has no desire for his or her company” (1999, 353). White offers a similar observation: “For better and for worse, many of us have friends or family who drive us crazy, whose company we would avoid but that we suffer out of love. Following a divorce, a divorcée can still love her ex-spouse while never wanting to see him again; she can care about him, wish him well, and have a place for him in her heart all while never wanting him in her presence” (2025, 857).

beloved's ends paints an accurate picture. But these accounts fall flat as attempts to portray other relationships: poorly-functioning, but nonetheless loving.⁹

I suggest that a commonality in these cases can be found in the *nature* of the present love, not its quantity or existence.¹⁰ These relationships all contain love, but the love in question takes a different, deficient form (compared to what it could be).¹¹ Love aims to be something more than what it's able to be in these cases. In the cases above, Ed's perspective of Nadine, Jesse's parents' perspective of him, and my perspective of my family are distinctly marked by their thoroughgoing objectivity of attitude, though it's not at all clear that these relationships wholly lack love.¹²

In this paper, I aim to illuminate the way in which we can those who are difficult to love. I suggest that love is an emotion with *two faces*: a reactive face and an objective face. Love, like other emotions, can be experienced and expressed through either face.¹³ What is common to each of the above cases is how the maladies in each relationship force love to be felt as an objective attitude. This puts the lover in a difficult position, as love, I'll suggest, aims to be experienced as a reactive attitude, though it can settle for objectivity.

With these central cases on the table, I'll aim to achieve the following three goals: The first is to characterize love as an emotion with two faces: a reactive face and an objective face. This will involve first understanding the difference between a reactive and objective attitude, which will comprise the goal of section 1. Then, in section 2, I'll unpack how love can express itself reactively and objectively. My final goal will be undertaken in section 3, where I'll bring this distinction to bear on issues in the philosophical literature on love.

⁹ To be clear, I am *not* suggesting that all bad relationships are bad because they are dominated by an objective view. Part of what's so dysfunctional about some relationships is the fruitless exchange of reactivity—that one or both parties have an inability to step back and take an objective stance from time to time. Unhealthy reactive exchanges are a common feature of many unhealthy relationships. In this paper, I am examining relationships that are dominated by asymmetrical objectivity.

As an additional clarification, I should say that my goal is to differentiate two faces of love towards other humans. I am simply ignoring any questions of whether we can coherently love non-human animals (I think we can) or non-conscious objects (I am unsure). These questions run orthogonal to my current aim.

¹⁰ Likewise, I don't think it's plausible to suggest that these relationships simply contain *less* love than their well-functioning counterparts. Ed doesn't necessarily love Nadine less than he might love the woman he's been seeing on the side (indeed, part of what's so tragic about Ed's situation is that he *does* love both women, but in radically different ways). Jesse's parents clearly don't love him any less than they love his studious, kindhearted brother. It's not simply that I love certain family members *less* than those who are easier to be around.

¹¹ When I say the love is deficient, I simply mean compared to what it could be, not in the sense that the love in inappropriate or somehow unfitting.

¹² The first case highlights an adoption of objectivity because of mental illness, representing an exemption condition (See Watson 1987). The second illustrates objectivity as self-protection. My own case highlights an adoption of objectivity as psychological refuge and as a tool of interpersonal management.

¹³ Other philosophers have voiced thoughts which are friendly to this suggestion. Shpall observes that "love for human beings varies not just in intensity and surface features, but also in more fundamental psychological characteristics" (2017, 61). Kolodny remarks that "different modes of love are appropriate to different relationships" (2003, 147). Zangwill notes that "ascriptions of 'love' are often qualified by 'filial', 'maternal', 'brotherly', 'sexual', 'friendship', etc. We might call this phenomenon 'subscripted love'" (2013, 300). I think these observations are deeply right, but they need developed; it's not just the label on a relationship which determines how love shows up. Not all mother-daughter or husband-wife pairs relationships allow for the same expressions of love.

1. What Makes an Attitude Objective?

Before understanding love as an objective attitude, we need to understand what it means for an attitude or emotion to be objective in a Strawsonian sense. And before we can understand this concept, we should first understand what characterizes reactive attitudes generally (and reactive love specifically).

1.1 Reactive Attitudes (and Reactive Love in Particular)

Reactive attitudes are “essentially natural human reactions to the good or ill will or indifference of others towards us, as displayed in their attitudes and actions” (Strawson 1962, 25).¹⁴ These attitudes play a central role in the development and maintenance of our relationships with others. Resentment, indignation, guilt, forgiveness, and trust are paradigmatic reactive attitudes. A key feature of these attitudes is their intrinsic reciprocity; they contain—as Darwall puts it—an implicit RSVP (2024, 32). As part of their nature, reactive attitudes contain a call for response.¹⁵ This intrinsic reciprocity does not mean that reactive attitudes seek to engender exactly the same attitudes in another. Rather, when Darwall says that reactive attitudes come with an RSVP, he means that they call for their fitting counterparts to be felt by their recipients.¹⁶

For instance, resentment is a reactive attitude we feel *towards* rather than *about* other people; it’s an attitude that is naturally expressed using “the second-person pronoun: ‘You cannot treat me that way. You must take responsibility for what you’re done...and do something about it’” (Darwall 2024, 31-32). Darwall evocatively summarizes this reciprocal aspect of resentment (and reactive attitudes generally) as having an “eyes on eyes” feeling (2024, 32). When I express my resentment towards you, I’m looking for you to respond with your own reactive attitudes—guilt and remorse, for instance.¹⁷ In this way, reactive attitudes are constitutively about their recipient just as much as they are about their issuer. My resentment is not just about how I feel towards you, it’s also about your response to how I feel.

For much of the post-Strawson era in moral psychology, love has gone largely undiscussed as a reactive attitude. (Resentment and indignation are quite compelling after all.) More recently though, philosophers have turned their focus towards love as a reactive attitude: a variety of quintessentially interpersonal love which responds to who someone is and which arises from interactions with that

¹⁴ Korsgaard nicely phrases this ‘readiness potential’ of the reactive stance as being “*prepared* to exchange lawless individual activity for reciprocity in some or all of its forms. You are *prepared* to accept promises, offer confidences, exchange vows, cooperate on a project, enter a social contract, have a conversation, make love, be friends, or get married” (1992, 306, emphasis added).

¹⁵ Darwall suggests that only reactive attitudes of the heart express this call to respond through an *invitation*, while reactive attitudes of the will *demand* a response (2024, Ch 3).

¹⁶ McGeer refers to exchanges of reactive attitudes as ‘*co-reactive*’ in the sense that they are supposed to function in harmony between individuals (2012).

¹⁷ There’s a sense in which an exchange of reactive attitudes has operated correctly regardless of the response returned, as long as it remains reactive. Resentment seeks remorse and apology, but it’s a fitting response to reply with resentment in kind: “*I know you’re angry with me—I get it; but what I did was nothing compared to what you did to me first!*” There’s a distinct sense in which even this reply engages with resentment on its own terms. Compare this response to an ill-concealed sneer, laughter, and walking away. To engage reactively, even if unproductively, is to pay them a kind of respect, to take them seriously.

person (Abramson & Leite 2011, 675-679). Reactive love is essentially *relational* like other reactive attitudes; it is a natural reaction to who the beloved is as a person, as evidenced by how they treat other people (including but not limited to the lover).¹⁸

Even more recently, Darwall has discussed love as the heart's principle reactive attitude. Reactive love "seeks reciprocal emotional connection with its object; it seeks to be *with* its object" (Darwall 2024, 40). Being *with* another person means being emotionally vulnerable towards them in a particular way. By being reactive with someone, you give them a kind of power to affect your inner emotional life simply by the way they treat you—a proneness to emotionally react simply to how they treat you. This doesn't mean that strangers wholly lack an ability to emotionally affect you; it might be embarrassing and unpleasant to suspect that two members of an audience are snickering at your talk. But this ill will issued by someone you *love* has a vastly different effect.

Curiously, the word 'objective' appears only once in Abramson and Leite's article. It appears only twice in chapter three of Darwall's *The Heart and its Attitudes* (in which he introduces love as a reactive attitude), and it's completely absent from chapter five (in which he characterizes love as the principle reactive attitude of the heart). This isn't to criticize either work. But it is surprising that characterizations of love as a reactive attitude seem to ignore the possibility of love as an objective attitude.¹⁹ Is there such a thing? If so, what does objective love look like? And how does it differ from reactive love?²⁰

1.2 The Character of Objectivity

Strawson first introduced the objective attitude by contrasting it with the reactive attitudes. More precisely, he introduced "what might be called the objective attitude (or *range of attitudes*) to another human being" in contrast to "the attitude (or *range of attitudes*) of involvement or participation in a human relationship" (1962, 24, emphases added). Following this lead, I'll refer to objective attitudes as a range of attitudes that share features distinctive to what we might call an objective stance or view. This will allow us to speak of different objective attitudes and emotions, which are particular ways of inhabiting an objective perspective towards a person, just as particular reactive emotions are ways of responding reactivity towards someone.

This layout creates the following conceptual scheme: there are two broad perspectives we can take towards a person—the objective stance and reactive stance. Within these two stances are a multitude of various objective and reactive attitudes. But reactivity and objectivity themselves are not, as Strawson suggested, mutually exclusive of each other (though they are deeply opposed).²¹ So not

¹⁸ Abramson and Leite suggest that reactive attitudes respond to only the *moral* (2011, 677 & 685). They go on to paint aspects of a person's character like their humor and wit in moral terms; I think it's more straightforward to simply allow for reactive attitudes to engage with virtues that fall outside the moral domain, rather than attempting to recast these virtues in a moral light.

¹⁹ It's not fully clear whether Abramson, Leite, or Darwall see the possibility of love as an objective attitude. They discuss love as a reactive attitude, but this way of formulating their projects leaves open affirming or denying the possibility of love as an objective attitude as well.

²⁰ Another way to get at this question is to ask whether taking up an objective stance towards someone precludes loving them. I think the answer to this question is, in summary: *not entirely—but in a way, yes*.

²¹ Strawson (1962, 25).

only do we have a range of particular reactive and objective attitudes within their respective stances, but the reactive and objective stances themselves existing along a spectrum. We can think of adopting a wholly objective view on one end and a wholly reactive on the other. This implies that some emotions can operate across a wide range of the reactive-objective spectrum. (In the next section, I'll argue love is one such emotion.)

Taking an objective stance towards someone is a deeply familiar experience, but the concept has proved surprisingly difficult to pin down. Strawson himself used several methods of describing the phenomenon: he juxtaposed reactive and objective attitudes, relied on familiar examples, and laid out different motivations for adopting an objective stance. Below are several key quotes from Strawson's introduction of objectivity:

1. The objective attitude "cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships" (1962, 25).
2. "But what is above all interesting is the tension there is, in us, between the participant attitude and the objective attitude. One is tempted to say: between our humanity and our intelligence" (1962, 25).
3. "The holding of [reactive attitudes] does not, as the holding of objective attitudes does, involve as a part of itself viewing their object other than as a member of the moral community" (1962, 34).
4. "To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided" (1962, 25).

From **1** and **2**, we see that while the reactive and objective attitudes may not be truly incompatible, they cannot coexist without serious tension. **2** and **4** suggest that a fundamental aspect of our humanity is replaced by something colder when taking up an objective stance. From **3**, we see that holding an objective stance towards someone pushes him outside one's moral community: as Bennett says, outside the circle of equals we hold accountable through our reactive attitudes (1980, 58-59). And **4** suggests that taking up an objective stance involves a radical shift in how we see another.

Much of the post-Strawson literature offers little help illuminating the nature of objectivity. Many discussions raise the objective attitude only to talk about the rationale or consequences of its universal adoption. Other prominent accounts go wrong in rightly noticing common triggers, features, or results of objectivity, but mistakenly identify these close associations as its central nature. For instance, Sommers suggests that "taking the objective attitude commits us only to regarding human beings as creatures who cannot deserve praise or blame" (2007, 323). Mason similarly understands the objective attitude as "a stance of no longer regarding its target as properly subject to the normative expectations that determine necessary fittingness conditions of the reactive attitudes" (2014, 147). But these accounts forget both (i) that the reactive-objective divide is a spectrum and (ii) that we can adopt an objective stance for our own practical purposes having nothing to do with another's constitution

or abilities. The option to take up an objective stance “is always theoretically open...we can regard someone as ‘a case’ without believing or pretending that he is mentally ill etc.” (Bennett 1980, 54).

Return to Strawson’s language of objectivity as a *view* of someone; to *see* another in a certain light; that we may “look with an objective eye” on the behavior of others (1962, 25). I suspect this visual language is more than merely suggestive. I propose we understand objectivity as a type of mental perspective which shapes how one mentally views, sees, and looks upon the subject of objectivity. I suggest there are two defining characteristics of Strawson’s objective stance (and thus two characteristic features of the various objective attitudes which populate this stance):

- (i) an intentional lack of emotional vulnerability and
- (ii) a mental distance or separation from the other.

1.3 On Lack of Emotional Vulnerability

There are (at least) two senses of emotional vulnerability; it can refer to an emotionally-laden *concern* for another person or to a certain type of *access* to one’s own reactive emotional life. The objective stance does not preclude the former, while it inherently limits the latter type of vulnerability.

Concern is a basic emotional connection to an object of value. Think of this as being “emotionally invested” in how a person is treated and what happens to them (Anderson 1993 & Franklin 2013). White illustrates this idea with a compelling example: “Imagine reading a list of casualties of a terrible accident and seeing a long list of strangers’ names. However saddening that might be, there would be a world of difference if you found a name of one you loved—a family member, a friend” (2025, 857). Kolodny provides a more technical account of emotional vulnerability as *concern*: “To say that A is emotionally vulnerable to B...is to say, in part, that A is disposed to have a range of favorable emotions in response to A’s beliefs that B...has fared or will fare well, and a range of unfavorable emotions in response to A’s beliefs that B...has fared or will fare poorly” (2003, 152). This emotionally-bound concern for or caring about someone is *not* excluded by objectivity.

Access vulnerability is a more involved type of emotional vulnerability. It’s a way of turning towards the other, opening yourself to them. Making yourself emotionally accessible to another is to give them a kind of power to affect your inner mental life simply by how they treat you. They’ve been given a ‘key card’ to your heart and mind. Recall Darwall’s notion of an RSVP; when we give another access to our heart, we extend an implicit invitation for reactive exchanges (2024, 39). Emotional accessibility is a characteristic feature of reactive attitudes in general: being reactive towards someone is to open yourself to them in a way that invites them into your emotional life and requests (or demands) that they treat you with good will.²² By opening yourself to them, you make yourself prone to experiencing reactive emotions in response to their behavior (Strawson 1962, 23 & 34). Adopting an objective stance limits this specific vulnerability by removing the “basic demand” for good will.

²² On Darwall’s account, only attitudes of the heart involve this emotional vulnerability (2024, 40-42). Attitudes of the heart invite reciprocation while attitudes of the will demand it. I’m not so sure; it seems that even the making of a demand opens oneself to how the other replies, giving them this same type of access to one’s emotional life.

Because you no longer expect to be treated in certain ways, you no longer react when that demand is violated.

Concern is largely about how what happens to someone makes you feel. *Access*, on the other hand, is about how the way another treats you makes you feel. While taking up an objective attitude does not necessitate the elimination of concern, it does limit another's access to your emotional life. This restriction is best illustrated in the case of Jesse Pinkman. When his parents take an objective stance towards him, they close themselves off in the sense that they limit Jesse's access to their emotional life. They make themselves invulnerable to how he treats them (this is the first step his parents take before asking him to move out of their home). However, while his mother and father have removed Jesse's access to their reactive emotions, they of course still care about their son. They remain deeply concerned for his wellbeing.

Importantly, objectivity's limitation of emotional access is more involved than simply failing to experience reactive emotions towards another. I don't feel anything at all towards a stranger on the train who hasn't interacted with me in any way. But that doesn't mean I've taken an objective stance towards him. Adopting an objective view is to intentionally limit or eliminate one's proneness to feel reactive attitudes in response to the behavior of another.

1.4 On Mental and Emotional Distancing

The objective stance holds its subject at a distance or mental remove. Just as a disposition to draw near the other—to be *with* them—was a characteristic feature of reactive attitudes, a disposition to move or remain *away* characterizes objective attitudes. Recall Darwall's notion of being mentally and emotionally close to another; "to be with someone in the relevant sense is not necessarily to be spatiotemporally near to them. One can be right up against someone, in the subway, for example, but not really be *with* them... To be with someone, one must be *present* to them" (2024, 40).

Objective attitudes have an opposing aim; rather than aiming to draw closer to another, adopting an objective stance aims to create or sustain *distance* from its subject. Strawson several times speaks of objective attitudes having a "detached" view of their subject (1962, 21 & 36). I think this is exactly right; the way objective attitudes detach their adopters from their subjects is by creating a distance between the two. Different objective attitudes can aim to create this distance in distinct ways. Contempt, for instance, elevates its adopter (and potentially lowers the other as well). Fear aims to hide from the other, creating distance through lack of visibility. All objective attitudes, being particular ways of inhabiting an objective stance, create or maintain distance from their subject.

Strawson mirrors this image of objectivity as involving mental separation when suggesting that to adopt this stance towards someone removes him from one's "moral community" (1962, 30). Pushing another outside the walled garden of one's reactive community is a central feature of the objective stance. It's a way of not being with someone, even if that person remains in your physical presence. Recall the way in which I adopted an objective stance towards my extended family; I utilized this 'tool of interpersonal management' as a kind of 'psychological refuge,' to use two of Strawson's phrases. It was a way of not truly being *with* people while remaining in their company.

2. Two faces of Love

My hope is that better understanding the nature of objectivity can illuminate something about love. In part, my aim is to shed light on a fascinating and largely unexamined suggestion in Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment":

The objective attitude may be emotionally toned in many ways, but not in all ways: it may include repulsion or fear, it may include pity *or even love, though not all kinds of love*. But it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships; it cannot include resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, *or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be said to feel reciprocally, for each other* (Strawson 1962, 25, emphases added).

We now have the tools to understand this cryptic suggestion by Strawson. There's some form of love which shares important features with pity, repulsion, and fear. That's a strange statement on its face. And this love is importantly different from another expression of love: a love that two adults can sometimes feel reciprocally for each other and that shares common features with resentment and gratitude.

It should be clear at this point that Strawson is marking out reactive and objective love. The former has been cataloged by Darwall, Abramson, and Liete. But the latter has gone largely unnoticed. And because love as an objective attitude has been largely ignored, another insight has been ignored along with it. Some emotions, including love, can express themselves through two faces: a reactive face and an objective face.

2.1 Love as an Objective Attitude

We've witnessed love as a reactive attitude; it's a type of love which draws one closer to another, that aims at reciprocation, and that makes one emotionally accessible to another. This is the love which we find in our most intimate relationships: our best friends, close family members, and happy marriages. But these features of love were absent from the three cases I opened with. Yet, it simply seems inaccurate to say that relationships like these must preclude love.

I think that love as an objective attitude accurately depicts the love found in these deficient relationships. Objective love lacks key features of reactive attitudes: it lacks an aim to draw closer to another, it does not try for reciprocation, and it does not give the power access to one's inner emotional life. Objective love in fact actively aims against these features; it aims to move or remain away from the other, it does not expect reciprocation, and it actively restricts another's access to one's inner life.

We can see these constitutive features in our introductory cases. Ed, having recognized his wife's mental condition, has clearly given up any attempt to engage in reciprocal, reactive exchanges. He's adjusted to interacting with his wife at a mental remove; he's limited her power to engender reactive attitudes in him simply by how she behaves. He responds to and interacts with Nadine in a strategic manner; his aim is to keep her calm, try to support her projects, and get through each day with as little strife as is possible. His aim is, in large part, to *manage* her rather than to *be with* her. Thus,

Ed's inner emotional life is unresponsive to the way she behaves; he isn't prone to becoming angry when she unfairly blames him for the failure of her noiseless drape runners. But this mental distance also limits the depth of his love. It is a type of love which resembles other objective attitudes like repulsion or pity: Nadine is kept at arm's length, even when physically in Ed's arms.

Jesse's parents are forced to love him in a similar manner. Because of their son's behavior, normal, reactive interactions are unsustainable. Co-reactive attitudes fail to operate properly, and his parents simply cannot continue this cycle of pain. Thus, they remove his access to their inner emotional lives. They emotionally distance themselves from their son, even before they create physical distance. Of course, when Jesse responds with vitriol and bile, this pains his parents, but the wound is lessened by their mental separation. They are still hurt by his words, but they no longer feel resentment or anger, and they are not tempted to respond. Jesse has already been exiled from their moral community. He can hurl hate their way, but the sting of his words are lessened and muffled by the distance between them.

This raises two important questions: What then remains in cases where reactive love is absent? And why should we think what's left is still love?

We've seen what love as an objective attitude lacks. But what remains when reactivity has been forsworn? Once again, I think our philosophical account should be primarily informed by our experience. I think we have all had relationships that resemble these central cases in being dominated by a throughgoing objectivity. Yet it's simply wrong to say that these relationships wholly lack love. It's clear, for instance, that Jesse's parents still love their son. This is the tragedy of their situation: they love someone who they cannot keep in their life. So in what sense do they still love him? For one, they are still deeply emotionally vulnerable in the sense that they have *concern for* and *care about* their son's wellbeing. It breaks their heart to see him wasting his life, and they genuinely want the best for him. The same is true of Ed; he is concerned about Nadine even while he remains emotionally inaccessible to her. While Ed has intentionally limited Nadine's ability to create reactive emotions in him, it's not as though he doesn't care about her. When she attempts to end her life in response to the failure of her drape runners, Ed is clearly distraught. He blames himself for her suicide attempt, ending his ongoing affair with another woman, whom he clearly loves, to further dedicate his time and efforts to Nadine. And while I keep certain family members at a mental remove, this doesn't entail—or even imply—that I do not love them. I care about them and want the best for them. And again, part of the poignancy of this situation is that my wanting the best for them includes my desire for us to share in a deep relationship. But this is made impossible by our inability to see eye to eye on too many features of my life and worldview. My love *aims* to be more than it's able to be, as does Ed's and Jesse's parents'.

Here we can see that objective love still affords a deep, *personal* concern for someone. It is not an emotionally inert perspective, as some philosophers have implied.²³ The other's successes and failures still move one who loves objectively, even while deeper connection remains limited. This is part of the tragic nature of all three cases; in each, the objective lover wishes for more. Ed wishes he could be his 'full self' with Nadine, just as I wish I could be my full, reactive self with my extended family. Jesse's parents cannot keep him in their lives precisely because they cannot cohabitately reactively

²³ Darwall (2024, 38-40) implies that a person who lacks all attitudes of the heart (love being the heart's principle reactive attitude) would be emotionally inert in this way.

with him, but it's their desire to have this relationship with their son which provides one dimension of their pain when excising him from their lives. There's a sort of tragic double-bind in relationships like these; part of what's so painful is that the adopter of objectivity still cares about and wants the best for the other party. And part of wanting the best for them is wanting to have reactive relations—to be an enriching part of their lives and to share in it totally. But because they've been forced to withdraw into an objective stance, they cannot provide the very thing which they want for the other to have. To love objectively, even when warranted, imposes a sort of poignant toll on its adopter. Love remains even under an objective specter, but it does take on a "hollow ring."²⁴

2.2 Two Faces of Love (and of Other Emotions)

Love is an emotion which can express itself both reactively and objectively. This is the sense in which I've suggested love has two faces. Adopting an objective stance does not dispel love, though it does change its nature. I suggest that this applies to other emotions as well. While some emotions or attitudes have only one face—either reactive or objective—others are able to express themselves through both.

Resentment, for instance, has only a reactive face. That is, resentment constitutively involves a reactive-RSVP; it calls out to be made known to the other and for them to respond accordingly.²⁵ Resentment has Darwall's "eyes on eyes" feeling; it looks "towards" rather than "at" its subject (2024, 32 & 2006, 57). In this way, resentment gives its recipient access to one's emotional life, making the resentful party vulnerable in this specific way. Thus, resentment cannot be experienced from a wholly objective stance. To adopt a fully objective view of another is to dispel the possibility of resentment.

Pity and fear are two emotions that likewise have only one face. But these are purely objective emotions.²⁶ Pity looks only downwards "at" rather than "towards" another; it does not seek eye-to-eye contact. It does not seek reciprocation, and it thus does not make oneself emotionally vulnerable in the way resentment does. The same is true of fear; it seeks to hide from the other, distinctly *avoiding* any reciprocal response.

But other emotions and attitudes can express themselves through both faces. These feelings can exist both under a wholly reactive and wholly objective stance. I've suggested that love is one such emotion. But there are other two-faced emotions as well. Consider disappointment. We typically think of disappointment's reactive face in terms of being disappointed *in* or *with* someone, whereas being merely disappointed *that* an event occurred highlights its objective expression. Speaking from experience, being told that another is disappointed *with* you contains the same implicit call for reply that resentment carries. Because it calls for a response, disappointment's issuer makes herself vulnerable to how the other party chooses to reply. Disappointment *that* an event occurred, however, lacks these constitutive reactive features. When the event in question is another's action, being disappointed *that* the act occurred keeps a mental distance from its subject. It looks 'at' rather than 'towards' the other. The act was a frustration or inconvenience, but not something that wants to be

²⁴ Wolf (1981, 75).

²⁵ See Macnamara (2013).

²⁶ C.f. Pál-Wallin (2025) with respect to fear.

addressed. It doesn't involve being emotionally open to the other in the way that reactive love, resentment, and even anger involve.

Love is flexible enough to express itself reactively or objectively. But I suspect that all two-faced emotions have a more and less natural face. Some attitudes are more naturally reactive, while others feel more comfortable as objective attitudes. For instance, anger, contempt, disgust, and a type of moral sadness or grief all seem to be emotions with two faces. Anger seems to clearly be more comfortable as a reactive attitude. Consider Nussbaum's conception of what she calls *transition-anger*: anger "whose entire content is: 'How outrageous. Something should be done about that'" (2016, 6). This is clearly anger's objective face. And I think it's telling that while this expression of anger is certainly a real phenomenon, it's also clearly not our default way of feeling angry. When someone does something that angers us, the natural feeling is very much a call for 'eyes on eyes' interaction and for a reciprocal response.²⁷ Thinking simply about welfare-maximization in the wake of an affront isn't the natural face of anger. Contempt and disgust, however, seem to be more naturally objective.²⁸

Love, I think, clearly aims to be reactive, even though it can settle for objectivity. Love inherently wants to draw the beloved close—to be *with* another and to give them access to your heart. It seeks to look another in the eye, to hide nothing from them. Love does not want its subject to be held at arm's length, though it can still span that divide. I think this fact explains why so much of the philosophical focus centers on love as a reactive attitude; it's love's natural face. When we think about love, we default to thinking about positive, healthy relationships—ones marked by well-functioning exchanges of reactive attitudes. But I've suggested that love can exist in deficient relationships as well, where these exchanges are not possible.

3. We're Not *Always* Naked

I've suggested that a common issue plagues the literature on love: so many accounts of love appear insightful and illuminating on first pass, but when further considered, fail to depict love in less-than-sublime relationships. Recall several prominent accounts of love: Love is widely understood to essentially involve a particular type of emotional vulnerability²⁹, a desire to be close with the beloved³⁰, sharing in the beloved's ends³¹, valuing the relationship itself³², awe in light of the beloved's distinctive rational agency³³, taking the beloved's interests as reasons to act accordingly³⁴, and mutual esteem³⁵.

Consider a particularly beautiful description of love offered by Velleman: "I suggest that [love] arrests our tendencies toward emotional self-protection from another person, tendencies to draw ourselves in and close ourselves off from being affected by him. Love disarms our emotional defenses;

²⁷ Nussbaum describes transition-anger as "forward-looking" rather than 'other-looking' (2016, 6).

²⁸ Mason emphasizes the range of emotional tones an objective stance can take; for instance, we might feel non-reactive contempt, disgust, or sadness (2014, footnote 3 and 19, 148, 153-155).

²⁹ Velleman (1999) and White (2025).

³⁰ Sidgwick (1981, 244) and Jeske (2008).

³¹ Ebels-Duggan (2008).

³² Kolodny (2003).

³³ Velleman (1999).

³⁴ White (2025) and Setiya (2014).

³⁵ Langton (1992).

it makes us vulnerable to the other” (1999, 361). This *is indeed* what love feels like in a happy partnership or with a close friend.

When philosophers think about love, it’s understandable that we gravitate towards our happy marriages, best friends, and close family members. We bear our naked selves to those we deeply love (most of the time metaphorically, of course). But we’re not naked *all* the time—even in loving relationships. Even the best ones require some clothing some of the time. And certain relationships, like those I introduced this paper with, require a heavy coat and several layers underneath. But it’s simply not right to conclude that these relationships wholly lack love.

To equate love with these descriptions is simply wrong. But to reject these accounts on the same grounds would likewise be too hasty. I have aimed to avoid the dual errors of simple acceptance or rejection. These views capture something *right*, but only partially so. So rather than waging war over contesting accounts of love, I suggest we admit that these accounts wonderfully depict love as a reactive attitude, while keeping an eye on the reality that not all love is reactive. Because the intricacies of some relationships render reactive love unwelcome, it can sometimes be replaced by its lesser form (while still being genuine love).

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I’ve aimed to introduce love as an objective attitude. Objective love lacks emotional vulnerability and an intrinsic aim to be reciprocally *with* another, two features of its reactive counterpart. Objective love intentionally limits another’s access to one’s emotional life and aims to create or maintain distance from the other. While loving reactively makes the soul feel naked, objective love is guarded and closed off. Adopting a wholly objective view is not incompatible with love, though it does change its nature. The objective lover, while keeping her distance, still deeply cares about the other and genuinely wants the best for them. It’s just that *her* role in attaining these aims has been limited.

My central aim has been to shed light on the multiple faces of love. But my hope is that whatever insights I’ve offered can extend beyond love. My suggestion that love is an emotion with *two faces*—a reactive and objective face—raises questions for other emotions: just which attitudes can express themselves through both faces? And for these ‘two-faced’ emotions, which face is the more natural? I hope to encourage exploration into the more dimly lit side of the Strawsonian landscape. By recognizing that emotions like love can express themselves objectively, I hope to have illuminated the reality that the landscape of objectivity is as rich and complicated as the reactive.

Finally, I suggested that a common deficiency plagued the relationships in each of my three central cases. I should be careful to say more specifically what I mean by this: I am not suggesting that there’s something wrong or inappropriate with the stance Ed takes towards Nadine, Jesse’s parents take towards him, or that I take towards some extended family members. When I say that our objectively-toned love is deficient, I mean this in the sense that love itself aims to be *more* than an objective attitude, *not* that the present love is morally inappropriate. Ed’s love for Nadine is the right sort of emotion to feel, but as *love*, it is lacking. It’s Nadine’s capacities—through no fault of her own—that limit the depth of what Ed can bring to the table. I myself have a relative who has been diagnosed

with dementia, and his degradation has been difficult to watch. One difficulty has been that of adjusting to an increasingly objective stance towards him as his condition worsens. But remaining my fully natural, reactive self wouldn't be the right thing to do. He's just not capable of fully engaging in that way. So while my increasingly objective stance is the appropriate view to take, it's deficient in the sense that my feelings towards him—my *love* for him—wants to be more than its able to be. The fitting point of view comes with a loss of love's depth.

In my central cases, one party takes up a total and throughgoing objectivity. But most relationships are not dominated by a purely objective or reactive view. We slide around the reactive-objective spectrum with great agility, sometimes flickering into an objective moment of interpersonal management or refuge, even in our closest bonds. But I'm not sure we get to inhabit both perspectives for free. When we temporarily take up an objective view, we transform the nature of the relationship, even if only for a short duration. For that time, your husband, wife, friend, or family member is relocated outside your moral community of reactive equals. A relationship built or maintained on too much objectivity runs the risk of atrophy. Of course, thoroughgoing objectivity isn't inappropriate when reactivity is impossible, but in cases where greater depths can be plumbed, a wholly objective view puts limitations on love. Recall that love aims to be reactive, but—for better and for worse—it will settle for less.

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