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LOVE IN VAIN

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Kant famously argued in the *Groundwork* that our fundamental moral obligation is simply to respect the humanity in persons. However, his fuller view, found in the *Metaphysic of Morals*, is that the humanity in persons not only demands our respect, but also our love. Neither of these demands, of course, requires that we *feel* anything for others, and Kant is much more specific here about what constitutes respect between persons. But in elaborating this position he also claims that these demands are somehow opposed, as though love were a sort of moral gravity and respect a sort of moral centrifugal force, which together create a cohesive moral/social bond, but alone would allow “nothingness (immorality)... [to] drink up the whole kingdom of (moral) beings” (MdS 6:449). Marcia Baron, in her illuminating paper, argues that this and related remarks are surely an exaggeration. After all, respect sometimes requires that we come closer and love sometimes imposes limits. And not only does Kant ground all duties in respect, but this is the same philosopher who, early on in the *Groundwork*, claimed that the Christian command to “love our neighbor” must be understood as commanding, not a feeling, but “beneficence from duty” (G 4:399). Since acting from duty is acting out of respect, “practical” love itself *requires* respect. So why does he think that they are opposing forces?

Baron’s paper raises serious questions, not merely about Kant’s views, but also about how philosophers in general have represented the relationship between love and morality, especially when they oppose the two. In what follows, however, I want to play the apologist for Kant, though in a back-handed way. It seems to me that Kant does not exaggerate the differences between love and respect. But this is not because I have some deeper exegesis of these passages that reveals a

rich and subtle position on love. Rather, unlike Baron, I do not think that these passages are about love at all. What Kant *calls* love here is itself just a form of respect. Of course, even if it is, one might think that this does not help to explain the puzzling opposition analogy. But I think that once we see that he is not talking about love, it will seem less puzzling. So as I see it, Kant should not be faulted for exaggerating the differences in the roles love and respect play in morality, but he may escape fault only by (perhaps mistakenly) giving love little or no role at all.

One of Baron's arguments is that while there can be genuine respect without love, there cannot be genuine love without respect, and so the two cannot be opposed. If respect fails, then love fails as well, and that in turn implies that there is no independent and opposing force of love whose failure would leave the force of respect intact and thus able to produce the ominous moral "nothingness" that awaits. Now it *is* obvious that, as we ordinarily understand these things, respect does not require love. And since it is the subject of so many popular songs and dime store novels, it must be equally obvious that love does not require respect, again, at least as we ordinarily think of love and respect. There may be limits to their independence: Utter contempt may be psychologically incompatible with love, utter hatred psychologically incompatible with respect. However, apart from these psychological extremes, love and respect often operate quite independently, and though we want both in our relationships, we can and often do have one without the other (if we are lucky enough to have either). But, by the same token, neither is it at all plausible that respect and love *in any sense* are "opposed forces" woven into the fabric of *our* social lives, keeping immorality at bay. Were it true! *Our* social lives lack either force in sufficient amount to have any such effect. And, indeed, it is only when "considering ourselves in a moral (intelligible) world", as members of a realm of ends, that for Kant respect and love create a stable moral bond, each keeping the other in check.

Baron's worry, however, is that some sort of *Kantian* love requires Kantian respect. Hence, Kant exaggerates the opposition of Kantian love to Kantian respect. But I think that this already assumes too much, that there *is* such a thing as "Kantian love". Kantian love would have to be an attitude that included or required respect, yet did not just collapse back into respect. Now Kant certainly *calls* certain duties "duties of love", but these are derived from the basic principle of respect for humanity, and we have a duty to perform them *out of* respect for humanity. This alone should warn us that the term "love" here signifies nothing more than respect as it applies to helping others and the like. But, more importantly, when Kant refers to "practical" love, he often all but comes out and says that he isn't really talking about love at all. In such passages, he refers to real love as simply a "feeling", and even as a mere modulation of self-love. (e.g., see KPV 5: 73) In contrast to his rich and moving account of what it means to respect others and treat them with dignity, such descriptions of love seem pale, if not utterly derogatory. But what clinches the point, I think, are passages in which he claims, for instance, that "unselfish benevolence toward human beings is often (*though very inappropriately*) also called *love*" and, although that benevolence is a duty, "what is done from constraint ... is not done from love". (MdS 6:402, my emphasis; see 6:449) So even if the "unselfish benevolence" called for by duties of love require respect, that is not a case of *love* requiring respect, but a *duty to others* in virtue of their humanity requiring respect. Thus, I am unconvinced that there is an independent kind of Kantian love that includes respect, and so for that reason that he exaggerates anything in his claims that there is an opposition between these great moral forces. What Kant *calls* the "great moral force" of love is really just the "great moral force" of respect as it is directed toward one aspect of our humanity, or so I think. But more on that below.

There are also important differences to keep in view between the claims that (i) *love* or *beneficence* requires respect, (ii) *good love* or *good beneficence* requires respect, and (iii) a *good person* loves or is beneficent only if also respectful. I'm not entirely sure which of these Baron holds. The latter two are normative claims, and I think only the last is plausible (better to have been loved and been disrespected than never to have been loved at all). But (i), that beneficence isn't genuine unless it is respectful, unless it is just a disguised version of the normative claims, seems to me to be false. It just doesn't seem plausible that you aren't genuinely beneficent unless you respect the object of your beneficence (except in the weird case where the help that a person needs is for someone to respect her). It is especially implausible when we're not discussing Kant. But I think it also is implausible when we are: Why can't one fulfill one's duties of love even if one entirely ignores one's duties of respect, and even if one fails to fulfill them out of respect? If one fails at the latter, one does fail in performing a duty of virtue, but that duty is a duty toward *oneself*-- the duty of self-perfection. (MdS 6:392-3, 6:446-7) One need not have thereby failed at a duty of love toward *others*, since one can still, so far as I can see, be beneficent, grateful and sympathetic.

One's duties of respect toward others require that, whatever one's true feelings, one refrain from such things as mockery, arrogance and ridicule. But one can *in general* be beneficent, grateful and sympathetic even if one fails to avoid these disrespectful behaviors. Perhaps there is an indirect connection between the duties in one of these cases (see MdS 6:457): one sure way to fail to cultivate one's sympathetic feelings is to stroll around an emergency room mocking the wailing and moaning. But aside from this, the virtues do not come bundled, and a person who is genuinely committed to helping others and actively sharing in their fates may conceivably fail to show them respect, even to the point of mockery, arrogance and ridicule (indeed, some

missionaries may have unfortunately given actual examples of this). That these latter failures show up in a person who is disposed to act beneficently doesn't *have* to call into question her commitment to their well-being and so on, or at least it doesn't seem so to me. Of course, one still might insist that *good* love must include respect. But, for one thing, for Kant "good love" means "love from duty" or "practical love" -- not anything we might recognize as love. For another, from the fact that good love includes respect, it would not follow that love includes respect -- good love would include respect because it is good, not because it is love. But this in turn seems better stated as the view that a *good person's* love comes with respect, and this again will be not because she is loving but because she is good.

However, suppose it is true that a person who is beneficent, grateful and sympathetic, will not, for instance, mock or ridicule others. It does not follow that maxims of beneficence or love require respect. For her avoidance of these things need have nothing at all to do with respect. She will avoid them, not because they are *disrespectful*, but because they are *harmful*. So even if performing one's duties of love required avoiding actions that happen to be inconsistent with duties of respect, that would not show that it required respect. For acts that are mocking or ridiculing are often very harmful, and a person bent on being a beneficent and sympathetic person will avoid them under that description.

Now one must admit, as I have, that Kant often does not paint a very sophisticated or flattering picture of love; in that sense, there may be an exaggerated relationship portrayed between love and respect. But it is not real love that he is concerned with in the opposition of forces analogy, or so I think. With what, then, is he concerned? In fact, I think that any exaggeration on Kant's part regarding the differences between love and respect is unrelated to this issue. For things can be different without being opposed and opposed without being different.

Opposed things can, in fact, be almost identical, as with magnets, twins or equally matched football teams. And the differences that exist between opposed things may have little to do with their opposition: Of twins opposed over who gets to take Ed on a date, one may love and the other hate opera, but *that* difference does not create the opposition. Indeed, sometimes similarities play a crucial role in generating opposition, as with two magnets or the twins' similar positive attitude toward Ed. And I think that what Kant *calls* love and respect are opposed in his view because of what they share, not because they differ.

To see my point, consider two parents who are opposed because of their shared concern for their daughter Jane. It is because of mother's concern that she wants Jane to go away to a big city college, while it is because of father's concern that he wants her not to. Both, as it were, share a positive attitude toward the "daughterhood" in Jane and this puts them in opposition. Here we have an opposition between two "forces" that is grounded in a shared attitude and that pulls in opposite directions. But here the same positive attitude focusses *on different aspects* of the daughterhood in Jane, generating an opposition out of the same attitude: Jane is dependent, and this is what father's concern focusses on; Jane is bright and full of promise and this is what mother's concern focusses on. Because of the different objects of their concern, one attitude becomes a push forward, the other, resistance. One might gather both attitudes under the rubric "parental love", and try to construe them as not opposed but at bottom "wanting the same thing" for Jane, namely, happiness. But that just hides, rather than brings out, the fact that a single positive parental concern can manifest itself, as it does in the father's case, as something like love, while in the mother's case, as something like respect, and so be the source of an opposition.

I have purposefully made this opposition more like Kant's than it really is. The opposition is over whether Jane is drawn close or is pushed away in the example, but the directions might

reverse in another case. Nevertheless it makes my main point, that the differences between forces may not be as relevant to their opposition as their similarities. And I think that this is much like the case of “love” and respect for Kant. Respect for persons requires that one recognize and value the dignity inherent in their humanity. (Not in the sense that it requires the intuition of some unique "Moorean" intrinsic value of persons, but in the sense that respecting others requires more than merely internally and externally *refraining* from this or that.) Since humanity is a combination of sensuous needs and a practical reason, this single attitude can diverge into opposed demands, much as it does in the case of parental concern: When directed upon another’s rationality, respect demands that one restrict one’s behavior and attitudes in various ways. When directed upon her human needs, it demands that one take notice of those needs. Hence, I am inclined to conclude that when Kant talks of the opposition of the forces of love and respect, he is referring to two kinds of demands he thinks are laid upon us by the same attitude of respect for another’s humanity. And although he may well have mistakenly thought that love -- real love, not duty’s doppelgänger -- and respect are more different than they are, the analogy actually only concerns two modes of respect for persons.

It is clear enough that the opposition analogy involves the idea that keeping the ends of others in view checks our respect for their capacity to determine rationally the shape of their lives, and keeping that capacity in view checks our concern for their finitude and neediness. I am inclined to think that this is best construed in terms of positive and negative duties. Baron objects to this, however, because respect requires recognizing another’s inherent dignity, and this is more than merely refraining from certain behavior and attitudes and the like. But that, I think, simply follows from the fact that *duties* of respect are derived from the basic principle of respect for humanity, something they share with all duties, and so with ethical duties of love. And, as I have

been arguing, things can be opposed in virtue of what they share. From the very general requirement that we value the humanity in persons one can derive further demands that oppose one another, some of which are internal and external *omissions* (ethical duties of respect) others of which are internal and external *commissions* (ethical duties of love).

What is the point of the analogy, then? Although it may seem to be that there can be too much of a good thing in both cases, I think the real problem is that there can be not enough of either. A general “principle of mutual love” admonishes rational beings “to come closer to one another” (where “closer” means *social* closeness.) Our first question should be “Closer than what?” How far apart does he think we are or have to be before that principle “kicks in”? Notice that he does *not* say that the principle counsels us to come closer and closer *and closer*, on and on, however far apart we are, until we are squashed together in a huge, perpetual slumber party. I think that Baron might assume that it does in her worry that love is not love if it is, for instance, nose-y. And, as I have said, I do not think that there are limits “built into” this principle by the inclusion of respect, as does Baron. In fact, the principle *has no specification* of what “come closer” means, since any limits must come from outside the principle. Likewise, the principle of respect counsels rational beings to “keep themselves at a distance from one another” (again, *socially*), but it doesn’t counsel us to scatter. The principle doesn’t specify a distance. How close together does he think we are, or have to be, when *that* principle kicks in? Both principles are simply open-ended. And this should suggest why if one of them fails, moral nothingness awaits. For each principle imposes a limit on the other, though none on itself. We are counselled to come closer subject to the constraint that we keep our distance, and to keep our distance subject to the requirement that we come closer. This, of course, is not a great deal of help. But it is only meant as a template for understanding how the two sets of duties fit together into one coherent conception of (perhaps ideal) social relations. The main idea here is thus not that we can have too much respect without (practical) “love” nor too much (practical) “love” without respect, but that we would not have any of either unless we had both.