

UNDERSTANDING LOVE

PHILOSOPHY, FILM, AND FICTION

EDITED BY

SUSAN WOLF AND

CHRISTOPHER GRAU



UNDERSTANDING LOVE

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In memory of Hilde Wolf,
who taught me so much about love, novels, and the movies,
and who let me stay up late every time *The Philadelphia Story* was on
television

—SW

For Susan Watson,
whose love, friendship, and support cannot be adequately acknowledged
in a dedication

—CG

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UNDERSTANDING LOVE

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INTRODUCTION

SUSAN WOLF

It is a well-known saying, and a true one, that money can't buy love. But it can buy or at least provide a basis for stimulating thought and discussion *about* love. At least, so this volume suggests, as it has its origins in an extraordinarily generous grant I received from the Mellon Foundation, to be used to fund intellectual projects of my choosing.

I wanted to initiate some project or other that would bring philosophers together with other scholars in the humanities to encourage more engagement among them in a way that would make their ideas accessible and interesting to each other and to a wider nonacademic public. The idea of organizing the project around the exploration of connections and interactions among philosophy, fiction, and film occurred almost immediately, since first, literature and film are the principal subject matter of so much work in the humanities and, second, everyone, or at least a lot of people, like (or love) novels and movies. Many of us love talking about novels and movies, too. So I gathered a group of scholars together—professors of literature, philosophy, film studies, and others—to consider how best to give the project shape and unity. What emerged was the decision to hold a series of workshops for which we would each write papers that we would discuss and eventually put into a volume. We wanted a theme that would be substantial enough to make likely the prospect that the issues and essays would “speak to each other,” but that would be expansive enough to make it easy for all the participants to find something they could get excited about working on. We chose love.

Though the essays in this volume do not form an organized or systematic answer to any question, they provide evidence, examples, and stimuli for thought both about the relations of the humanities to film and fiction and about love. And, of course, apart from their relation to each other, they offer individual rewards. In this introduction, I will highlight a few of the essays’

overlapping and intersecting themes that may help guide the reader with particular interests in one or another of the collection's distinctive features.

MODELS OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Interdisciplinary scholarship has been officially praised and encouraged for as long as I can remember. Interdisciplinary centers and institutes, undergraduate majors and certificate programs abound; if you have a project for which you want funding, finding a way to cast it as "interdisciplinary" will help. There are plenty of good reasons for this kind of support. Academic disciplines, after all, are artificially constructed. Though they train us to think, study, and work carefully and well on projects and issues that demand expertise, they may also bias or blind us to aspects of the phenomena we are trying to explore or understand. Our world and experience are not compartmentalized into disciplinary parts. A full understanding of any piece of our experience is apt to be enhanced by looking at it from multiple perspectives, and pooling information gathered from different sources will ordinarily improve the accuracy and soundness of one's investigations. Thus, for example, it would be good if philosophers writing on psychological concepts such as motivation, emotion, and reasoning were familiar with psychological research on these subjects; at the same time, psychologists working on these topics might benefit from a greater appreciation of the conceptual distinctions and categories that philosophers have found it useful to make in this area. But the reasons and ideals of interdisciplinary research naturally vary with the combinations of disciplines and the details of the project. It is my impression that interdisciplinary efforts within the humanities have tended to be less successful than many that involve the natural or social sciences.

Philosophy, and especially analytic philosophy, has a particularly bad track record, and an even worse reputation, for working cooperatively and fruitfully with others in the humanities. Much analytic philosophy aims at understanding phenomena and concepts in a way that abstracts from historical origins and cultural variation. Related to this, much philosophy that is not explicitly about political institutions and ideologies is insensitive to the social and political assumptions reflected in the way its problems are conceived. At the same time as it aims for reaching conclusions that are as universal as possible, analytic philosophy places a high premium on precision and rigor. Thus, analytic philosophy is frequently criticized both for its failure to appreciate the historical and political nuances inherent in any intellectual enterprise and for being obsessed and pedantic about terminology and detail. Finally, many people in the humanities and in the general public object to (analytic) philosophical discourse as being too judgmental. Philosophers are trained to argue with each other, to search for holes in each other's arguments (and in their own) and for counterexamples to each other's (and their

own) conclusions. In many other disciplines, especially within the humanities, responding to another person's ideas in terms of "that's right/wrong," "that's true/false" seems arrogant and aggressive, if not intellectually out of place.

To many outside of philosophy, then, analytic philosophy appears naïve, arrogant, and pedantic. To some within philosophy such criticism seems indicative of an opposite set of vices—confused, vague, or mushy thinking and intellectual cowardice, perhaps. Though there may be truth in both these perspectives, the portrayal of analytic philosophy is a stereotype, and like most stereotypes, it presents an inaccurate picture of its target and relies on false dichotomies. Many philosophers are sensitive to the historical contexts and political implications of the texts they analyze and of the views they discuss, and even more philosophers would welcome learning from others what their writing unwittingly presumes. The search for truth is compatible with humility about one's ability to reach it. And the acknowledgment that some ideas and interpretations of a phenomenon or a text are better than others is compatible with the belief that there is no single truth for all times and cultures.

Still, models of interdisciplinary work involving philosophy and the social and natural sciences are easier to come by and better defined than interdisciplinary work within the humanities themselves. In the former case, work is regarded as interdisciplinary if the researcher in one discipline has read and absorbed work that has been conducted in another, and made use of that work in framing a question or answering it, structuring a problem or solving it. The latest findings in neuroscience may be relevant to philosophical research on moral responsibility; knowledge of contemporary physics is necessary for an adequate philosophical treatment of time. Conversely, a linguist or anthropologist or biologist might find that distinctions coming out of academic philosophy provide her with conceptual tools that improve her ability to analyze her data or to design a research program that will focus precisely on the hypothesis she aims to test. Within the humanities it is less clear what should count as interdisciplinary research and scholarship, since literature and film are not, after all, the exclusive domains of literature and film *departments*, and the exploration of questions about the meaning of life and about ideals of human flourishing is not restricted to debate among professional academic philosophers. Though philosophers sometimes use novels and films, not to mention historical incidents, as examples, to illustrate a position or make a philosophical problem more concrete, this is hardly interdisciplinary. Nor is it clear that it should count as interdisciplinary to give a literary treatment of a text in the philosophical canon (such as, for example, one of Plato's dialogues or Augustine's *Confessions*) or to mine it for historical information.

Do the individual essays in this volume have any greater claim to be characterized as interdisciplinary? This is open to dispute. They were all written *for* a

group whose members come from different disciplinary backgrounds, and with an even wider eventual audience in mind. But in many cases, if not all of them, it might be more accurate to describe the essays as *nondisciplinary*: exercises in thinking and writing that, while inevitably reflecting the author's training and temperament, engage with a text or explore an idea in a way unconstrained by disciplinary boundaries. Many of the essays in this volume are, first and foremost, close readings or interpretations of a particular film, play, or novel. (This includes the essays by Maria DiBattista, Frances Ferguson, Douglas MacLean, Toril Moi, Frederick Neuhouser, David Paletz, Gilberto Perez, C. D. C. Reeve, and George Wilson.) Reading these essays in conjunction with viewing or reading the works on which they focus can be revelatory, both about how much is in these works and about ways of reading films, novels, and plays more generally. Overlapping with these are essays that use individual texts or films as a springboard for introducing a more general idea or problem. (See, for example, the essays by Macalester Bell, Lawrence Blum, Christopher Grau, Rae Langton, Judith Smith, George Toles, and Susan Wolf.) One essay (Nick Halpern's) does not focus on specific works of fiction or film at all, but rather on a type of relationship—that of son to “the Embarrassing Father”—that can be seen both in fiction and in the lives of a striking number of authors and poets.

If the volume as a whole is illustrative of a particular model of interdisciplinarity among the humanities, it consists in this nondisciplinary approach. Underlying it is a commitment to the idea that wearing one's disciplinary training lightly and being as open as possible to the questions and ideas that humanists of all sorts are inclined to come up with will help one get the most out of a book or a movie or, for that matter, out of an exploration of a concept like love.

LOVE

The contributors to this volume were invited to write on any item they liked—a novel, a film, a play, a problem, or an idea—as long as it concerned or involved some aspect of love. It is hard to imagine that a group of this size could have found a greater variety of relationships to discuss. While many of the essays concern themselves with romantic and sexual love, some (e.g., Halpern, Moi, Perez) discuss varieties of familial love; Ferguson considers a type of relationship she terms “professional love”; Bell looks at love between humans and animals; and Toles considers the love an omniscient narrator might hold for a character! Moreover, although a few of the essays (for example, DiBattista, Wolf) consider ideal, healthy, and desirable forms of love, at least as many are occupied with love's darker sides and consequences (thus, there is discussion of obsessive love—Reeve; incestuous love—Perez; destructive love—MacLean, to name only a few).

Whether there is a useful concept of love that is broad enough to encompass what we might naturally call love not only between people but between people and animals, and even between people and objects (like movies) or activities (like philosophy), yet narrow enough to exclude other relationships that are perhaps merely cordial or, quite differently, merely passionate is an interesting question, although it is not taken up in this book. Even if there is such a unified concept, we use “love” differently in different contexts, sometimes, for example, in a way that implies a certain type of approval or admiration, and sometimes not. Readers may well think that the relationships central to some of these essays are not really love relationships at all. But that would not keep their examination from helping us *understand* love—reflecting on a relationship that falls short of love, as well as on the question of whether and why it falls short, may teach us as much about what love is as the study of paradigm cases (and such problematic relationships may well tend to make for more interesting novels and movies).

To a philosopher, a title like “Understanding Love” may seem to promise a theory of love, including an analysis of the concept of love in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, and an explanation of love’s value and importance. Although neither this volume nor any of the individual essays in it aims to give anything like a theory of love, someone in search of such a theory may find in these essays both positive suggestions and negative ones. Thus, some essays may be suggestive of features that are arguably essential to love or to good love, while others, which explore unconventional relationships, may warn against simplistic overgeneralization.

To many others, though, “understanding love” refers less to a theoretical aspiration than to a personal one. Understanding love, in this more personal sense, may not require the possession of a satisfying and articulable definition of love, so much as an attunement to the complexities of relationships and to their potential both for enriching and for damaging people’s lives. It is to be hoped that reading the essays in this volume, especially in conjunction with some of the texts and films they discuss, will contribute toward understanding in this sense as well.

Each of the essays stands on its own and may be read independently of all the others. Due to the remarkable variety of topics and treatments of love in this volume, as well as the range of interests with which a reader may come to the book, there is no special order in which these essays ought to be read for maximum benefit. (They are arranged by alphabetical order of the authors.) Still, one can find in these essays overlapping themes and recurring discussions of some of the same questions. For the reader interested in pursuing ideas about love in a somewhat more systematic way, I call attention to a number of these connections in the remainder of this introduction.

LOVE AND SOCIETY

A significant number of the essays in the book as well as the works on which they focus explore and illuminate the degree to which social forces shape our relationships, encouraging love in some cases, confining or prohibiting it in others. Thus, Lawrence Blum examines the way the film *Far From Heaven* portrays the effects of racism and heterosexism in 1950s America on interracial and homosexual relationships. In Douglas MacLean's discussion of *The Go-Between* we see class barriers destroying not only a loving relationship but at least one of the lovers themselves. Maria DiBattista's close reading of *Now, Voyager* is more hopeful: Though social conventions of marriage raise obstacles for the love of the central characters of that film, the determination, ingenuity, and commitment of the movie's heroine lead her to find a form in which the characters' love can express itself and flourish.

While the works and essays just mentioned explore the way social expectations and prejudices constrain our possibilities for love, other essays in the volume bring out ways that the material character of social life shapes the sorts of relationships we form and the pressures they face. Highlighting a group of films made outside of the Hollywood system that focus on working-class love and marriage, Judith Smith's essay calls our attention to the ways in which the tensions and challenges faced by lovers and married couples vary with the circumstances of class. George Wilson's essay on the Coen brothers' film *The Man Who Wasn't There* takes the fact that the social world depicted in it is pervaded by an "incessant barrage of bullshit" to be salient. He argues that, against this background even the attenuated and repressed relationship the film's protagonist has to his wife may count as a kind of love. Another unfamiliar extension of the possibilities of love is articulated in Frances Ferguson's essay, "Communicating Love: Personal Affection in the Information Age." In her close examination of Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday*, Ferguson focuses on the book's portrayal of an unconventional and surprising form in which a deep connection between people can be realized. While sharply contrasting with the loves a husband may have for his wife and a father may have for his children, Ferguson sees in the difficult and uncomfortable relationship that is central to the novel's narrative a kind of love grounded in professionalism that may be a peculiar product of contemporary life.

While the essays just mentioned and the works that are their focus highlight the ways concrete features of specific societies shape the relationships we are capable of forming and sustaining, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Julie* and Frederick Neuhausser's essay about it discuss more general questions about the place of personal relations in a larger society. Interpreting *Julie* against the background

of Rousseau's more familiar philosophical work, Neuhouser shows us how the novel allows Rousseau to explore the tensions between our passions for particular individuals and our duties to society at large, and to develop an ideal of love that will overcome and transcend them. As Neuhouser explains, however, Rousseau's novelistic presentation makes it possible for him to express ambivalence about the viability and appeal of this alleged ideal in an especially effective way.

LOVE AND EROS

Because the kind of love that Rousseau sees as particularly at odds with social duty is grounded in erotic passion, Neuhouser's essay on Rousseau also exemplifies one of the other themes frequently alluded to in this volume—namely, the complex relations between love and sexual attraction. Does intense erotic attraction itself constitute a form of love? To what extent does it contribute to love or otherwise enhance one's life? To what extent is it dangerous, or even destructive, a form of desire to be avoided or suppressed? The only clear answer (or beginning of an answer) that emerges from reading the relevant essays in this volume is "It's complicated."

Perhaps it is not surprising that most of the essays that focus on erotically charged relationships are occupied with ways in which the erotic passions or the relationships that involve them are problematic. In some cases, the relationships that are fueled or shaped by sexual passion are or become, well, weird. C. D. C. Reeve's fine-grained study of a relationship that begins voyeuristically in Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Love* is a case in point. The central relationship in *The Innocent*, the subject of Rae Langton's essay, is another. A less overt example is explored by Gilberto Perez in his discussion of Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*, where, according to Perez, the heroine's affection for her uncle expresses an erotic and incestuous attraction to evil. In other essays, the problems that come up in connection with erotic love are not so much problems in the loving relationships themselves as in the tension between them, on the one hand, and the demands of society or family on the other. The works discussed by Blum, DiBattista, and MacLean, each of which illustrate ways that social convention and prejudice interfere with the lives and loves of its characters, emphasize the erotic element to varying degrees. In Neuhouser's reading of *Julie*, the force of the erotic passion at the heart of Julie's relation to Saint-Preux is what leads to Julie's downfall. In *Little Eyolf*, the focus of Toril Moi's essay, erotic desire is the cause of a different sort of tragedy.

This is not to say that erotic desire is always taken in these essays to be a source of problems. As Ferguson notes, the difficult, and presumably totally nonsexual relationship that is at the center of McEwan's *Saturday* is presented

against the background of a family whose other relationships, including the sexual ones (the protagonist to his wife; the daughter to her husband) are healthy and strong, and the quest for true (romantic and sexual) love in *Sherman's March*, the prime object of David Paletz's study, is hopeful even if, at the end of the film, the results, as it were, are not yet in. But, as both Ferguson and Paletz comment, happy, successful romantic relationships are hard to make the basis of a good story.

Even in the cases of the erotic relationships explored in this volume that are ultimately unsuccessful, it would be rash to conclude that the relationships were, all things considered, bad. In some of the instances where erotic love conflicts with societal demands, the fault seems to lie in society and its issuance of unjust and unjustified constraints. And if the reader or viewer were to ask of any of the participants in the depictions of erotic love discussed in this volume whether it was better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all, it is not clear how they would answer.

THE IMPERFECT REALITIES OF LOVE

When philosophers write about love in abstraction, they typically characterize it in ways that bring out what is good, perhaps incomparably good, about it; they offer definitions and conjure ideals of love that are intended to explain and support the high value most people assign to love in their conceptions of happiness and fulfillment. But, as we have already seen, when novelists, playwrights, and filmmakers portray love, their depictions are rarely so rosy. Sometimes, to be sure, the difficulties are not internal to the relationships or their participants. Events and circumstances beyond the control of the characters of the loving partners subject the relationships to pressures and strains. (Consider, for example, the relationships in the essays by Blum, Smith, and DiBattista.) In other cases, the fault comes from within: our passions are misdirected or our cowardice or insensitivity or selfishness destroys love or its potential (see, e.g., the cases discussed by Reeve, MacLean, Langton, and Moi). Sometimes, we are just unlucky. The perfect mate is hard to find (see Paletz); or perhaps we find her, and she dies (Grau).

So far we have been primarily occupied with the range and limits of romantic or sexual love. But at least two of the essays in the volume remind us that other sorts of loving relationships can also be deeply flawed. Nick Halpern's essay on "The Embarrassing Father" vividly traces a personality type through the biographies of (the fathers of) Henry James, William Butler Yeats, and Edmund Gosse, whose smothering but narcissistic attention make filial love a challenge and a burden. Macalester Bell explores the possibilities and the limits

of love or friendship between humans and nonhuman animals. Through an examination of Timothy Treadwell's attempt to live in friendship with Alaskan grizzly bears and Werner Herzog's critical documentary about it, Bell asks whether sentimentality inevitably colors and mars our relationships to nonhumans, concluding that the dangers may be recognized and avoided.

LOVE, PROJECTION, AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE BELOVED

Of course, sentimentality can infect not only our relationships to nonhuman animals; it can also affect or afflict our relationships with each other. Furthermore, sentimentalization is but one of a number of ways in which understanding of a beloved can be distorted or inaccurate. The temptations and tendencies to project traits and thoughts onto a love object that aren't really there come up remarkably often in the essays in this volume. (The films discussed by Reeve and Perez are striking examples.) Can we ever see someone as she really is? If we can, does it enhance or impair our love of the person we see? To what extent are our loves a function of what we see in our beloveds? Do we really love concrete individuals at all, or do we love the qualities we find or imagine them to exemplify? These questions are discussed and debated across a number of these essays.

The last of these issues has been a concern in philosophical writings about love from Plato to contemporary philosopher Derek Parfit. As Christopher Grau's essay shows, Steven Soderbergh's science fiction film *Solaris* offers a particularly vivid opportunity to explore the issue on an emotional as well as an intellectual level. At the same time, the film invites us to ask how much it matters whether the ideas we have of the people we love are accurate, as opposed to projections we impose upon them expressing our own needs and wishes as much as the independent realities of the ones we supposedly love.

The role of projection—and especially of the projection of a lover onto his or her beloved—is the explicit topic of Rae Langton's essay. Taking up a theme of the philosopher David Hume, for whom projection is a ubiquitous feature of human life, Langton uses Ian McEwan's novel *The Innocent* and the film that is based on it to distinguish three different kinds of projection. While some kinds of projections are unhealthy or harmful to love, she argues that others are necessary or good for it. Bell's essay, which argues that sentimentality can play a crucial role in a loving relationship, supports a similar thesis.

Susan Wolf's contribution to the volume defends a contrasting view, according to which the best sort of love is a love that sees the other as she really is and that loves the other in full knowledge of her failings and imperfections. Using the concept of "loving attention" that figures prominently in Iris Murdoch's philosophical writings to develop her claim about the best kind of love, Wolf

finds an example of it in an unlikely place—the classic Hollywood comedy *The Philadelphia Story*, where indeed all the characters of the movie seem to be occupied with the arguably false tension between loving people and seeing their faults.

The idea that full knowledge of an individual is compatible with love receives support from an utterly different angle in George Toles's essay. Toles, focusing on Willa Cather's novel *Lucy Gayheart*, shows us how Cather uses the vehicle of the omniscient narrator to express her *authorial* love for the tragic character she has created. The selfless and knowing attention to the other that Murdoch takes to be fundamental to love and virtue finds its most radical illustration in Toles's interpretation of Cather's narrator, an "anti-self" whom Toles describes as having "exchanged all the advantages and anxieties of being 'for oneself' for a powerful identification with a disembodied state of endurance in the flow of time."

LOVE AND ATTENTION

While the essays in this volume take up and illustrate a range of positions on the relation between love and selflessness as well as on the relationship between love and objectivity, there seems to be no disagreement on the close relation between love and attention. In every relationship discussed in this book, love is marked and expressed by the attention the lover bestows on his or her beloved. (This includes even the smothering attention of the embarrassing fathers Halpern discusses and the belittling attention of the protagonist's mother in *Now, Voyager*. Note also how effectively inattention or negligence signals the absence of love, as for example, in *Little Eyolf*.) Indeed, although love is often identified with a desire for the good of the beloved, it is arguable that a disposition to *attend* to the beloved, to be interested in her, to find her fascinating, would be an even better indicator of love.

Interestingly, the connection between love and attentiveness seems to work in both directions: as love seems always to provoke attention, attention frequently leads to love. The more one knows someone, the more one is apt to love him; and a similar phenomenon seems to take place when attending to particular works of art. This makes the choice of love as the topic to be explored in this experiment in interdisciplinary engagement with fiction and film especially fortuitous. For if love is a dominant theme in the essays in this collection, attention—particularly, to individual literary, dramatic, and cinematic works—is an implicit but manifestly important and dominant virtue. At least some of the contributors chose the works on which they would focus on the basis of love. That is, it was because they loved a particular film or novel, or a particular author, playwright, or director that they elected to devote so much

attention to the work in question. Others may have chosen their subjects for different reasons—perhaps they were attracted to the challenge of trying to understand a particular work because it was especially opaque; perhaps they chose a topic or text that had bearing on an independent ongoing research project of theirs. But it would not be far fetched to imagine that in the course of attending to the works as carefully as they did, they also came to love them. Readers of these essays may experience something similar. Certainly in my case, the essays in this volume introduced me to a number of works I had known nothing of before. Reading or watching them in conjunction with the essays that discuss them heightened my attention to them (as well as explaining what would otherwise be obscure and guiding my thoughts about them in fruitful ways), leading me, if not to love them, at least to admire, appreciate, and enjoy them to a degree that would have been impossible otherwise.

Lessons in love are thus also lessons in attention, or, as C. D. C. Reeve puts it in the title of his essay, “lessons in looking,” and vice versa. As attention to fiction and film about love may contribute to our understanding of love, so too it can lead us to love the works of fiction and film themselves, or even to love the activity of interdisciplinary engagement with such works. From my perspective, this last result, stimulating the readers of this book to carry on the activity themselves, would be the most desirable of all.

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GRIZZLY MAN, SENTIMENTALITY, AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ANIMALS

MACALESTER BELL

Many people take themselves to enjoy important relationships of love and affection with nonhuman animals.¹ But some object that these relationships (and the love and affection that partially constitute these relationships) are irredeemably marred by sentimental fantasies and projections. Are critics right to object that these relationships are likely to be spoiled by sentimentality? What is it about these relationships that make them especially prone to this criticism? I will take up these questions by considering how relationships between humans and animals are portrayed in Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man*.²

Grizzly Man tells the unique and dramatic story of Timothy Treadwell's attempt to befriend wild Alaskan grizzly bears. Treadwell lived, unarmed, with the bears for thirteen summers. But in 2003 Treadwell's peaceful coexistence with the grizzlies came to a tragic end when he and his girlfriend, Amie Huguenard, were killed and devoured by a bear. Throughout *Grizzly Man*, Herzog engages in what he has described in interviews as an "ongoing argument" with Treadwell concerning what Herzog sees as Treadwell's sentimental attachment to the grizzlies.³ While *Grizzly Man* depicts one man's ill-fated attempt to

¹ According to a recent survey, 52 percent of American pet owners would choose their pet over any human companion if they found themselves stranded on a deserted island, and 93 percent said they were either "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to risk their own lives for their pet (2004 Pet Owner Survey American Animal Hospital Association, accessed February 1, 2007, <http://www.aahanet.org>). For ease of exposition, I will often use the term "animals" to refer to nonhuman animals. Also, I will ignore the important differences between the terms "persons," "people," and "humans" and will use these terms interchangeably in what follows.

² *Grizzly Man*, directed by Werner Herzog and produced by Discovery Docs and Lions Gate Entertainment (Santa Monica, CA: Lions Gate Films, 2005).

³ See, for example, Herzog's interview on National Public Radio's *Weekend Edition*, July 30, 2005, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4778191>.

befriend wild bears, the film also explores some common concerns about whether it is possible for humans and nonhuman animals to enjoy relationships of love and affection, and it raises fundamental questions about the value of, and dangers associated with, these relationships. Through an exploration of *Grizzly Man*, I hope to show that we have good reasons for sentimentalizing our relationships with nonhuman animals. While responding in a sentimental manner is blameworthy under some circumstances, a proneness to sentimentality may also be an important part of loving relationships.

THE VALUE OF HUMAN–ANIMAL FRIENDSHIP

Some people claim to enjoy relationships with nonhuman animals that are similar to friendships between human beings, that is, relationships of mutual love and affection that extend over time.⁴ There are, of course, many differences between humans and other animals (e.g., most animals are mute, the animals people keep as pets are often highly dependent upon the humans in their lives, animals are not usually considered moral agents, to name a few) and these differences mean that friendships between human beings will be fundamentally different from relationships that people may enjoy with nonhuman animals. But despite, or maybe because of, these differences, many people prize their relationships with other animals. These relationships are valued for all sorts of reasons: some people think that animals are especially loyal companions, others value the lack of pretense in these relationships, and some simply enjoy the tactile pleasures associated with caring for another living creature. But if we value our relationships with other animals solely for these sorts of reasons, it might be objected that these relationships are merely second-class substitutes for interpersonal relationships. Is there any reason to think that our relationships with animals are *distinctly* valuable and not simply poor substitutes for our relationships with other persons?

One reason for thinking that at least some relationships between persons and animals are uniquely valuable is that they seem capable of staying off the feelings of isolation associated with being a human in a universe of nonhumans. Let me explain what I have in mind.

In a different context, Rae Langton has described how friendships *between persons* can help protect against solipsism:

My world is solipsistic if I am alone, interacting with things, but treating them as people. My world is also solipsistic if I interact with people, treating

⁴ In what follows, I will use the term “relationship” to refer to relationships of love and affection that extend over time. There are obviously a wide variety of other kinds of relationships, but for the purposes of this paper, I am interested in relationships that are similar to friendship.

them as things. How one is to escape these worlds is a matter of philosophical debate. One pursues the path of virtue, perhaps. One finds a reply to the sceptic. In practice however, an effective remedy for (and proof against?) both worlds is to be found in love and friendship. One cannot believe of a friend that he does not exist, cannot be known, does not matter. If he is a friend, then evidently he does exist, he is known, and he does matter.⁵

Friendship, and perhaps love in general, can offer us protection against solipsism and the feelings of malaise or despair which sometimes accompanies it. This is because genuine friendship requires us to acknowledge the existence of other persons. So, too, our relationships with animals can protect us from what we might describe as a different *kind* of solipsism. Insofar as I am able to forge a relationship approaching friendship with an animal, I am sheltered from the thought that I am all alone *with them*, where “them” refers to the rest of humanity, or other persons. Of course, the solipsist, of either variety, is not necessarily filled with despair. One can derive a great deal of satisfaction from declaring that one is alone (as we will see, this is probably Herzog’s position vis-à-vis other animals). Nonetheless, many people find the solipsist’s world incredibly bleak and yearn for release. A relationship with an animal may offer a kind of escape from this particular type of solipsism; insofar as we are able to form a relationship with another animal, we must acknowledge that human beings are not the only creatures in the world. If one experiences a genuine relationship with an animal, then one cannot doubt the animal’s existence or wonder whether the animal really matters.

We can see a version of this thought in John Berger’s essay “Why Look at Animals?”:

With their parallel lives, animals offer man a companionship which is different from any offered by human exchange. Different because it is a companionship offered to the loneliness of man as a species. Such an unspeaking companionship was felt to be so equal that often one finds the conviction that it was man who lacked the capacity to speak with animals—hence the stories and legends of exceptional beings, like Orpheus, who could talk with animals in their own language.⁶

⁵ Rae Langton, “Love and Solipsism,” in *Love Analyzed*, ed. Roger E. Lamb (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 127. Langton goes on to say that “[t]here are limits on the extent to which the functions of a friend may be performed by beings that are not people—limits that are placed by nature” (127).

⁶ “Why Look at Animals?” in *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International Edition, 1991), 6.

Our relationships with animals can save us from what I have described as a kind of solipsism and what Berger describes as the “loneliness of man as a species.” There is obviously much more that could be said about the kind of solipsism I have described and the ways in which our relationships with other animals can offer us protection from these feelings of isolation, but a full exploration of this topic must be reserved for another occasion. Here, I simply wish to stress that *if* our relationships with animals can stave off the loneliness of man as a species, then it follows that our relationships with animals are not simply watered-down substitutes for our relationships with human beings. And if our relationships with animals are uniquely valuable in this way, then we should be especially troubled by the suggestion that these relationships are irredeemably marred by sentimentality.

Let’s turn now to *Grizzly Man* and Herzog’s critique of Treadwell’s sentimental affection for nonhuman animals.

GRIZZLY MAN: TREADWELL’S GREAT EXPERIMENT AND HERZOG’S CRITIQUE

Treadwell was, I think, meaning well, trying to do things to help the resource of the bears, but to me he was acting like a, like he was working with people wearing bear costumes out there instead of wild animals. Those bears are big and ferocious, and they come equipped to kill you and eat you. And that’s just what Treadwell was asking for. He got what he was asking for. He got what he deserved, in my opinion. The tragedy of it was taking the girl with him. . . . My opinion, I think Treadwell thought these bears were big, scary looking, harmless creatures that he could go up and pet and sing to, and they would bond as children of the universe or some odd. I think he had lost sight of what was really going on.

—Sam Egli, helicopter pilot, *Grizzly Man*

Treadwell lived for thirteen summers in Katmai National Park and Preserve. During that time he amassed over 100 hours of video footage of his interactions with the native bears. Treadwell’s footage makes up approximately one-half of *Grizzly Man* (the other half of the film is composed of Herzog’s interviews with Treadwell’s friends and family and others associated with the case).

The film opens with a long shot of two large grizzly bears. Treadwell walks into the frame, introduces the two bears behind him, and launches into a long monologue that reflects many of the film’s main themes:

I'm out in the prime cut of the big green. Behind me is Ed and Rowdy, members of an up-and-coming subadult gang. They're challenging everything, including me. Goes with the territory. If I show weakness, if I retreat, I may be hurt, I may be killed. . . . Occasionally I am challenged. And in that case, the kind warrior must, must, must become a samurai. Must become so, so formidable, so fearless of death, so strong that he will win, he will win. Even the bears will believe that you are more powerful. And in a sense you must be more powerful if you are to survive in this land with the bear. No one knew that. No one ever friggin' knew that there are times when my life is on the precipice of death and that these bears *can* bite, they *can* kill. And if I am weak, I go down. I love them with all my heart. I will protect them. I will die *for them*, but I will not die at their claws and paws. I will fight. I will be strong. I'll be one of them. I will be master. But still a kind warrior. Love you, Rowdy. Give it to me, baby. That's what I'm talkin' about. That's what I'm talkin' about. That's what I'm talkin' about. I can smell *death* all over my fingers.

In this monologue we see Treadwell's obvious passion for the bears and his commitment to these animals. But Herzog also forces us to immediately confront Treadwell's darker side: Treadwell appears egocentric, unstable, and more than a bit out of control. "Timothy Treadwell 1957–2003" appears as Treadwell begins to speak, but even without the prompt, or antecedent knowledge of Treadwell's untimely death, the opening scene portends doom. If we needed any further confirmation of the disquiet we immediately feel, Treadwell's last line provides it: "I can smell death all over my fingers."

It is clear that Treadwell takes himself to enjoy a kind of friendship or fellowship with the grizzlies. He regularly expresses his love for them, he does his best to promote their interests, he desires to spend his time with them, and he reports that the bears inspired him to become a better person. From Treadwell's perspective, his affection for the bears was reciprocated. In his autobiography he reports that female bears often left their cubs near him for protection while they searched for food.⁷ And one of the bears, "Mr. Chocolate," seemed to act as his protector in several altercations with other bears.

Yet Herzog makes it clear that he thinks Treadwell's interactions with the bears were irredeemably marred by sentimentality. He makes this criticism explicit through interviews with people who share his concerns about Treadwell. In addition, Herzog offers his own direct line of argument against Treadwell by showing us four clips of Treadwell in quick succession.

⁷ Timothy Treadwell and Jewel Palovak, *Among Grizzlies* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 67.

In the first scene, Treadwell is shown in the center of the frame looking directly into the camera. He tells us that he is in love with his animal friends. He also acknowledges that he is “very, very troubled.”

In the second scene we see Treadwell kneeling down next to a fox. He is quietly crying and gently stroking the fox: “Do you know you’re the star for all the children? They love you. And I love you so much, and thank you. Thank you for being my friend.”

In the next scene we see a close-up of a bumblebee, apparently dead, attached to a flower:

Isn’t this so sad? This is a bumblebee who expired as it was working at doing the pollen thing on this Alaskan fireweed. And it just is . . . Just has really touched me to no end. It was doing its duty, it was flying around. Working busy as a bee, and it died right there. It’s beautiful, it’s sad, it’s tragic. I love that bee. Well, the bee moved. Was it sleeping?

Finally, we see a close-up of bear excrement and see Treadwell’s hand come into the frame. He holds his hand over the bear dung and is thrilled to be so close to it. He acknowledges that his delight may seem rather strange, but he declares that everything about the bears is perfect.

The quick juxtaposition of these four scenes paints a decidedly unflattering portrait of Treadwell. To complete his argument, Herzog goes on to show several scenes that, according to Herzog, depict the true brutality of nature: in one shot we see Treadwell staring sadly at the severed paw of a bear cub while Herzog informs us in a voiceover that it is not uncommon for male bears to kill young cubs so that they can stop the female bears from lactating and thereby ready them for an early round of mating. Herzog cuts to a scene in which we see the skull of a bear cub that has been eaten by its hungry mother. In another shot we see Treadwell weeping over a fox cub that has been killed by a wolf in the night. In the voiceover Herzog intones: “He seemed to ignore the fact that in nature there are predators. I believe the common denominator of the universe is not harmony, but chaos, hostility, and murder.”

Herzog’s worries about Treadwell’s sentimentality derive from a more basic worry that is also a theme of the film. It is possible to read *Grizzly Man* as an extended meditation on our—or Herzog’s—anxieties concerning what we can and cannot know. Herzog’s objection to what he sees as Treadwell’s sentimentality is motivated, in part, I think, by Herzog’s skepticism about the possibility of *knowing* another animal.

Herzog never explicitly articulates this worry, but *Grizzly Man* is packed with references to what we can and cannot know. For example, in the opening

monologue Treadwell emphasizes what others do not know about his relationship with the bears: “And in a sense you must be more powerful if you are to survive in this land with the bear. No one knew that. No one ever friggin’ knew that there are times when my life is on the precipice of death and that these bears can bite, they can kill.”

And in Treadwell’s last monologue of the film—indeed, the last filmed monologue of his life—he again emphasizes a claim to knowledge, this time stressing what he knows about the bears:

I’ve tried hard. I bleed for them, I live for them, I die for them. I love them. I love this. It’s tough work. But it’s the only work I know. It’s the only work I’ll ever, I’ll ever want. Take care of these animals. Take care of this land. It’s the only thing I know. It’s the only thing I wanna know.

Beyond his use of Treadwell’s soliloquies, Herzog’s preoccupation with what we can and cannot know is evident in Herzog’s treatment of Huguenard, Treadwell’s girlfriend who died with him as she attempted to save his life. Although Huguenard accompanied Treadwell on several trips to Alaska, she is rarely seen in his footage. Herzog makes much of the fact that we have little footage of Huguenard and never see her face: “She remains a mystery, veiled by a mosquito net, obscured, unknown.”

Finally, I think we can understand one of the most powerful moments of the film in terms of the anxiety surrounding what we can and cannot know. I am referring to the scene in which we see Herzog listening to the recording of the bear attack that killed Treadwell and Huguenard. Huguenard turned on Treadwell’s video camera in the middle of the fatal attack. Since the lens cap was still on the camera, only an audio recording of the attack remains. Immediately before the scene with Herzog, we learn about the tape from the coroner, who gives us a detailed account of its contents. He tells us Treadwell can be heard moaning and screaming for Huguenard to run away. Huguenard can be heard screaming and beating on the bear with a frying pan. Then, in the very next scene, Herzog steps in front of the camera and, using headphones, is shown listening to the tape and reporting its contents to Jewel Palovak, Treadwell’s ex-girlfriend and business partner. After experiencing the recording, he warns her never to listen to the tape.

This is a rather peculiar scene. We have just been made aware of the existence of the tape and its contents, so what purpose does this scene, in which we watch Herzog listen to the tape, serve? Herzog seems to be playing with the audience’s desire to hear the tape. He implies that there are some things we simply should not know.

So what does Herzog's preoccupation with what we can and cannot know have to do with his arguments against Treadwell's sentimentality? Friendship, some people think, involves more than love or the desire to benefit and spend time with one's friends. Genuine friendship also involves *knowing* the other. In describing the ways in which friendship makes certain epistemic demands on us, Langton writes:

Friendship is a matter of doing, and feeling, and also knowing: it has aspects that are both practical and epistemic. Friends do things together, act in ways that bring joy to each other; but this is possible only if each (partly) knows the mind of the other. In friendship one must exercise an active power of sympathy, a capacity that is no sentimental susceptibility to joy or sadness, but a communion that is practical in its orientation, providing a way to "participate actively in the fate of others" ([Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*], 126). Friendship is a duty to know another person, and to allow oneself to be known.⁸

The fact that friendship demands or presupposes partial knowledge of the other is what allows friendship to serve as a buttress against certain skeptical doubts. On Langton's view, there is a tension between what we might call "loving attention" and "sentimental affection"; loving attention involves genuine knowledge of the other, while sentimental affection involves feelings of affection in the absence of genuine knowledge of the other.⁹

Herzog seems to think that the bears, qua wild animals, are unknowable in the sense presupposed by friendship, and, because of this, Treadwell's professed love for the bears will always be tainted by sentimentality; the kind of knowledge that Treadwell could have of the bears could never support his professed love for them. Herzog suggests that Treadwell's affective responses are merely sentimental and ought to be dismissed as unfitting and inappropriate.

Given Herzog's skepticism regarding the possibility of human–animal friendship and his obvious distaste for sentimentality, the film ends in a very puzzling manner. After showing us Treadwell's last monologue, Herzog remarks

⁸ Langton, 128.

⁹ What I am calling loving attention is discussed in Iris Murdoch's "The Idea of Perfection" in *The Sovereignty of Good* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). In her paper in this volume, "Loving Attention: Lessons in Love from *The Philadelphia Story*," Susan Wolf discusses loving attention at some length. While Wolf does not specifically contrast loving attention with what I have called sentimental affection, I think she would agree that there is a fundamental tension between these two stances. I part company with Wolf insofar as I think that sentimental affection has a role to play in loving relationships. I will say more about this in the last section.

that Treadwell's footage illuminates the human condition rather than giving us special insight into the bears he filmed. At this point, a highly sentimental song begins to play and the film ends with three brief scenes. In the first, we see Treadwell leaving camp with two foxes scampering behind him.

In the next scene, Treadwell's friend Willy Fulton is shown flying in his airplane over the Alaskan wilderness. He is singing along to the music, changing the lyrics slightly to include Treadwell in the list of those gone but not forgotten:

*Now the longhorns are gone
And the drovers are gone
The Comanches are gone
And the outlaws are gone
Geronimo's gone
And Sam Bass is gone
And the lion is gone
And the red wolf is gone
And Treadwell is gone*

Finally, the film ends with a truly remarkable, beautiful, and highly sentimental image. We see a river and Treadwell in the distance with two bears. Treadwell walks down the riverbank away from the camera and the two bears follow behind him like faithful servants. The scene is in soft focus and is without a trace of menace or danger—it really is as if Treadwell and the bears have bonded, in Sam Elgi's words, as children of the universe.

Given Herzog's condemnation of Treadwell's sentimentality, what are we to make of this highly sentimental ending of the film? There seems to be a deep tension in *Grizzly Man*: on the one hand, Herzog sternly insists that our responses toward other



animals should avoid sentimentality at all costs. Yet, on the other hand, Herzog ends his own film in a highly sentimental way.

As we have seen, *Grizzly Man* raises some important questions regarding the possibility of loving relationships between humans and other animals. Is Herzog right to dismiss Treadwell's feelings toward the animals as merely sentimental? If

so, do these considerations tell against all human–animal relationships? If genuine friendship presupposes knowledge of the other, is anything like friendship possible between humans and nonhumans?

OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ANIMALS AND THE THREAT OF SENTIMENTALITY

With the exception of the film’s puzzling ending, *Grizzly Man* paints a rather bleak picture of the possibility of human–animal friendship. In this section, I will consider the charge that our relationships with animals are always irredeemably sullied by sentimentality.¹⁰

The Nature of Sentimentality

What is sentimentality and why is it thought to be objectionable? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “sentimental” as follows: “Of persons, their dispositions, and actions: Characterized by sentiment. Originally in favorable sense: Characterized by or inhibiting refined and elevated feeling. In later use: Addicted to indulgence in superficial emotion, apt to be swayed by sentiment.” The dictionary goes on to give another sense of “sentimental”: “Of literary compositions (occas. of music or other art): Appealing to sentiment. Expressive of the tender emotions, esp. those of love.”¹¹ As this entry illustrates, our concept of the sentimental is multifaceted and has changed over time. To understand whether our relationships with animals are always marred by sentimentality, we will need to delve more deeply into what we mean when we criticize a person for being sentimental.

While a sentimental response often involves excessive sweet and tender emotions, there is not one distinct affective response associated with sentimentality. Instead, when attitudes and emotions are felt, experienced, or expressed in a particular way or in a particular context, or toward a particular range of targets, they are described as sentimental. But while it is true that sentimentality is a mode or way of experiencing emotion (and should not be identified with a particular emotion or set of emotions) it seems wrong for one commentator to claim that “*any* emotion can on occasion be sentimentally entertained.”¹² Some

¹⁰ Herzog does not explicitly argue that *all* our relationships with nonhuman animals are marred by sentimentality, but the overarching argument in *Grizzly Man* suggests this might be his view.

¹¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed February 12, 2007, <http://www.oed.com/>.

¹² Anthony Savile, “Sentimentality,” in *Arguing About Art*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (New York: Routledge, 2002), 318.

emotions do not seem amenable to sentimentalization. For example, we do not normally think that fear can be experienced in a sentimental way. I think this can be explained, but to do so, I will need to say a bit more about the nature of sentimentality.

When I respond sentimentally to something, my attitude is thought to misrepresent the world in some way. But not all inaccurate or unfitting emotional responses are properly called “sentimental.” A sentimental response is thought to be false to the world in a particular way.

Some have suggested that what is distinctive about our sentimental responses is that they encourage the sentimentalizer to sustain certain feelings about himself. That is, a sentimental response is always *reflexive* and often *self-sustained*. Milan Kundera nicely brings out the reflexive element of sentimentality in his discussion of kitsch (understood as a kind of sentimentality): “Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: how nice to see children running in the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.”¹³ As Kundera suggests, when we respond sentimentally, we are both responder and observer of our own response. To be sad about a dead bumblebee frozen on a flower may not be sentimental, but to be *moved* by one’s own sadness at the bumblebee’s fate suggests that one may be responding in a sentimental way. In addition, sentimental responses are usually sustained by the subject.¹⁴ Given the reflexivity of our sentimental responses, we often work to keep our sentimental responses alive. This adds to the sense in which these responses are false to the world; self-generated emotions are not so much responses to the world as they are responses to the subject of the emotion.

Sentimental responses are not simply reflexive and self-sustained; they are also self-congratulatory. As Kundera notes, when we respond sentimentally to children running through the grass, we are *pleased* by our own responsiveness. That is, we take our emotions to be a credit to us as persons. This helps to explain why sentimental fear is rare if not incoherent: It is difficult to imagine a case in which one experienced one’s fear in a reflexive and self-congratulatory manner.

¹³ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 251. Several philosophers writing on sentimentality appeal to Kundera’s discussion in the *Unbearable Lightness of Being*. See, for example, Robert Solomon, “On Kitsch and Sentimentality,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, no. 1 (1991): 1–14 and C. D. C. Reeve, *Love’s Confusions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Joel Feinberg remarks that the autogeneration of sentimental responses is part of what makes them disvaluable: “emotions that would normally weaken and vanish tend to turn rancid when kept alive artificially.” Joel Feinberg, “Sentiment and Sentimentality in Practical Ethics” in *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 107.

Just as some attitudes seem more open than others to being experienced in a sentimental way, some *targets* seem especially prone to being regarded with sentimental attitudes. Part of the reason why some targets are sentimentalized more frequently than others has to do with the fact that the sentimental is closely connected to the *symbolic*. To respond sentimentally to some target is usually to value the target as a symbol for something else, and we will be inclined to respond sentimentally to things that we already value symbolically. For example, children are often the targets of sentimental responses because children have become symbols for innocence or carefree happiness. In addition, children are less likely and less able than adults to challenge or push back against our tendency to value them symbolically; we are more likely to respond with sentimental attitudes if we can do so without encountering resistance. Finally, it is arguably more difficult to gain the kind of knowledge of young children that would preclude responding to them in a sentimental way since children are, in many ways, quite different from adults. It is challenging to succinctly describe the kind of knowledge that would block a sentimental response, but this includes knowledge of the target's specific traits and qualities. To the extent that children are still developing and may not yet have fully developed traits and qualities, it is especially difficult to gain this sort of knowledge of young children.

Given the connection between the sentimental and the symbolic, it is not surprising that we often respond to animals in a sentimental manner: animals have, throughout history and across cultures, been viewed as symbols for other values. Like children, animals generally lack the power to challenge our symbolic valuation of them. And, like children, it is difficult to gain the kind of knowledge of other animals that would preclude responding to them in a sentimental way.

Many are critical of sentimentality. As one commentator describes it, sentimentality is "a deceptive, dangerous vice."¹⁵ What is it about sentimentality that has attracted such ire?

Oscar Wilde tells us that sentimentality is "merely the bank-holiday of cynicism," for it involves wanting to enjoy "the luxury of an emotion without paying for it."¹⁶ To respond in a sentimental way is to indulge in cheap and false emotions. Thus, the sentimental person might wail at the plight of the poor without fully or appropriately feeling sorrow for the injustices that they suffer and without taking any steps to relieve their pain.¹⁷

¹⁵ Joseph Kupfer, "The Sentimental Self," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 20 (1996): 543–560, at 560.

¹⁶ Oscar Wilde, *Letters*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 501.

¹⁷ This view is also expressed in Mary Midgley's analysis. For her, being sentimental is "misrepresenting the world in order to indulge our feelings." Mary Midgley, "Brutality and Sentimentality," *Philosophy* 54, no. 209 (1979): 385.

It is sentimentality's tendency to distort the subject's perception of his target that seems especially troubling to Herzog. Treadwell weeping over the remains of the fox cub or lamenting the bears' cannibalism disturbs Herzog because these responses distort what Herzog regards as the basic facts about nature: nature is merciless, chaotic, and cruel.¹⁸ To weep over a dead bear cub is to fail to recognize these fundamental truths about the natural world.

But the problem with sentimentality cannot be explained merely by appealing to its tendency to distort the subject's perceptions of its target. All emotions present their targets in a certain light and thus can be said to distort their subject's perceptions to some extent. When I am angry with you for slighting me, my attention is drawn to you as wrongdoer and not to you as a caring teacher or to you as a gourmet chef. So, too, when a mother loves her child, her attention is drawn to the child's loveable qualities and away from the child's less loveable qualities. And, as the example of maternal love suggests, it is arguably a good thing that our emotions selectively focus our attention on their targets in this way. Part of what is valuable about maternal love is that, in its best instantiations, it focuses the mother's attention on the good qualities of her child. In fact, we might criticize a mother whose love is too attuned to the real faults of her child. Such a love might be said to lack the generosity characteristic of the best forms of maternal love.¹⁹ If we accept that maternal love is good, in part, because it focuses the mother's attention on the lovable qualities of her child and directs her attention away from her child's less loveable qualities, then we must acknowledge that not all emotions that distort our perceptions are disvaluable. Thus, simply pointing out that a sentimental response is one that distorts is not sufficient to show that there is something wrong with sentimentality, and if most or all emotions distort, this does not explain what is distinctively bad about our sentimental responses.

Another problem with sentimental emotions is that they are *self-indulgent*. While sentimental responses do have the potential to be self-indulgent, it is not clear that this sort of self-indulgence is always disvaluable. Consider, for example,

¹⁸ Space does not permit a discussion of this issue, but we might wonder about the ways in which Herzog's clear-eyed antisentimentalist stance distorts his own perception of the natural world.

¹⁹ Wolf argues that the best sort of love (at least from the point of view of *The Philadelphia Story*) is a love "that sees its object as it really is, and can love completely and unreservedly even in light of that knowledge" (p. 375). While this does seem to be the ideal of love implicit in *The Philadelphia Story*, I wonder whether this characterization of the ideal of love captures what we think is valuable about the best instances of maternal love. Ideally, does the mother love her child despite his flaws or does her love so strongly focus her attention on her child's good qualities that she does not notice his flaws at all? From the perspective of the beloved, it seems that we value more highly the second kind of love. That is, we would rather be loved as someone who is seen as spirited and independent than loved despite being seen as bossy and overbearing.