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Love as Epistemic Emotion

Book V of Plato's *Republic* contends that, in the Kallipolis, "[wives and children] should be held in common" (449c) to inhibit differential treatment based on kinship relations (462c-465b). The risk of differential treatment reflects a popular conception of love as threatening the demands of morality. Morality seems to require treating individuals impartially, not making allowances for, or providing undeserved benefits to, someone simply because they are loved. On the other hand, love seems to demand that we treat those whom we love as special relative to others.

Notably, this popular conception does not merely place love at odds with the demands of morality; it also pits love against epistemic norms. The idiom-cum-reality-show-title "Love is Blind" is ambiguous between the sense that love can transcend physical attractiveness (the premise of Netflix's blockbuster) versus the sense that love can obscure for the lover the character flaws of the beloved. According to this later sense, love renders one liable to misjudge the beloved; love and knowledge seem incompatible.

At first blush, Mary Astell (1666-1731) seems to fall prey to the negative epistemic side-effects of this popular conception of love. In *Letters Concerning Love of God*, she writes of her friend, Lady Catherine Jones: "I love with the greatest Tenderness, for all must love her who have any Esteem for unfeigned Goodness," and "So good she is that even Envy it self as never a *But* to interfere with her Praises" (LG 66, 67). By Astell's account, Lady Catherine appears, somewhat improbably, without fault. Worse, such praise by Astell seems to fail her conception of the duties of a true friend.

In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), Astell holds what it is to love someone is to want what is truly good for them, namely, wisdom, virtue, happiness, and, ultimately, salvation. Being thus motivated, friends have a duty to inform each other of the shortcomings that inhibit them from attaining such goods. Importantly, to succeed in this duty, friends must accurately perceive those whom they love so as to communicate to them true judgments in supporting their friend to rectify their faults. Thus, rather than cause particular epistemic failures, Astell's conception of love is not only consistent with knowledge, but adhering to the demands of love requires that subjects adhere to epistemic norms; indeed, love is a source of motivation for adhering to such norms.

What's more, Astell's metaphysics of love offers the resources for explaining the peculiar epistemic liability of misjudging the beloved. In *Letters Concerning Love of God*, Astell endorses a distinction between love of benevolence, seeking some good for another, and love of desire, seeking a union with some good for oneself (LG 105; Broad, 112). Furthermore, Astell avers that God is the only fit object of love of desire. Being infinitely good, He is the only object capable of satisfying this desire (LG 76, 88,91). By contrast, Astell asks,

"How often will the Objects of our Love be wanting?" (LG 91). Human beings are liable to love others with a love of desire which cannot be satisfied by their fellow creatures. This indicates the source of the mistake: humans see others without fault in an effort to render them seemingly capable of satisfying a love of desire.

In his seminal article, "Love as a Moral Emotion" J. David Velleman argues that love, understood as an appreciation analogous with Kantian respect, is not at odds with demands of morality. However, as highlighted by Milgram, this account depends on a crystallization of the beloved as idealized rational will, an improbable account of what it is we (ought to) love when we love (344). With Astell, there is no, or at least less, crystallization. The beloved is not idealized but perceived accurately, "warts and all" as the saying goes. Yet, it is this very flawed condition that accounts for the need of true friendship. Indeed, friends are (permissibly) partial in helping their friend achieve what is good for them, not because others are seen as less deserving of this help, but rather because human nature is limited: "Friendship is nothing else but Charity contracted[...]which we are willing, but not able to exercise towards all" (SP 91-92). If ought implies can, but one cannot exercise charity towards all in the sense of helping them to achieve what is good, then it follows that one does not have a duty to so exercise charity. Plato's Kallipolis mistakes what is possible and thus miscalculates the threat of partiality. According to Astell, we cannot help but be partial, but this does not exile us from the realm of the moral. Rather, this partiality positions us to better promote the good through an intimate knowledge of the other.