

## THE REUNION OF MARRIAGE\*

Philosophers have often taken some form of psychological or even metaphysical union to be crucial to the kind of love that characterizes long-term intimate relationships such as marriage. But is it possible to articulate a conception of union that is adequate to the reality of marriage (as opposed, for example, to the sentimental fantasies we may sometimes harbor of such relationships)? It may sound like a joke to say that it will have to be a conception of union that is compatible with a good deal of disagreement, but (as will become evident) I think that this is a deeply important part of the truth of the matter. A fuller answer to the question naturally depends on what we take marriage to be. The concept is something of a moving target, but we may at least restrict our attention to contexts in which marriage is understood as intended first and foremost to house relationships of mutual love and intimacy. The kind of union to which I've alluded would be beside the point, or of at best secondary importance, in marriages understood as primarily economic, political, or even reproductive arrangements. Yet it does not do justice to the target relationships to describe them simply as relationships of love—for this is too vague—nor even as relationships of romantic love. Marriages needn't *lack* romance, but they are characterized by a degree of familiarity and mundane dailiness that render the concept of romance inadequate on its own.

The relevant concept of marriage combines elements of romance and physical intimacy with something more like close friendship and ongoing companionship. For this reason, I think it is best to speak of marriage as a relationship of what I'll call 'companion love'.<sup>1</sup> As I use the term, relationships of companion love include a mutual desire to share experiences, projects, and plans over the course of an indefinite period (at the limit, over the course of a life). But no specific set of projects or plans provides the rationale for the relationship. Instead, the projects and plans undertaken by companion lovers are ways of realizing an overarching desire to be (and do) together. No one, perhaps, has expressed this thought more elo-

quently than Stanley Cavell in his reading of the Hollywood "remarriage" comedies of the 1930s and 40s: "What this pair does together is less important than the fact that they do whatever it is together, that they know how to spend time together, even that they would rather waste time together than do anything else—except that no time they are together could be wasted" (Cavell 1981, 88).

Cavell contends, in *Pursuits of Happiness*, that the meaning of marriage is deeply affected both by the legal and moral possibility of its dissolution in divorce and by the fact that its parties face one another as moral equals. I follow him in taking these background conditions (which have become more rather than less entrenched over time) as partly definitive of the relationship in question. Cavell treats the remarriage comedies of the 1930s and 40s as raising serious, indeed philosophical, questions about what legitimates marriage in such a context. What authenticates the bond of marriage—not to the state or to the church—but to the married partners themselves? When is "one's individual exclusiveness" well traded for "the exclusiveness of a union" (Cavell 1981, 53)? What *constitutes* union in a legitimate marriage? These questions are close cousins to the question with which I began, which itself might be rephrased as follows: What form of union (if any) characterizes "real" marriage, now conceived along Cavellian lines as including a sustained relationship of friendship between equals, alongside romantic and physical intimacy?

Leading models of loved-based union, espoused by Robert Nozick, Robert Solomon, and others, have difficulty doing justice to the reciprocity of companion love—and, as a result, to marriage. After reviewing the main features of these models, I will argue that they leave us without a principled way of distinguishing between healthy union and pathological variants that devolve into relations of domination and subordination. All the same, the idea of union should not be dismissed entirely. We do need a framework for understanding the evident "jointness" of the lives, interests, and ends of intimate partners. My aim in this paper is not to give a full definition of companion love or marriage but, rather, to develop an alternative conception of marital union that does not fall prey to the problems exhibited by other models.

The alternative conception of union is inspired, in part, by Cavell's treatment of the remarriage comedies, in that it emphasizes the dialogical or conversational dimension of companion love. I argue that companion

lovers are united in the ongoing process of forging a shared practical perspective—a perspective on what's to be done and why, on what is worth caring about, on what is valuable or important or choiceworthy and what is not—in short, a perspective on how to live (and, in particular, on how to live together). But because building a shared practical perspective is an ongoing process that requires the ongoing reconciliation of distinct practical perspectives, I'll argue that union in marriage is best understood as a kind of perpetual *reunion*. As such, it depends on the persistence of dialogue between distinct individuals, whose efforts to build a shared perspective are at the same time efforts to achieve and sustain the reciprocity of mutual recognition. The sound of marriage is, on this view, quite literally the sound of argument—not of acrimonious argument but, to borrow a phrase that Cavell, in turn, borrows from Milton, of “a meet and happy conversation” (cited in Cavell 1981, 87).

### 1. Ideas of Union

Man's original body having been thus cut in two, each half yearned for the half from which it had been severed. When they met they threw their arms round one another and embraced, in their longing to grow together again. . . .

—Plato's *Symposium*

Union views of love, which are often traced back to Aristophanes' vivid metaphor of re-unification, have a long history. Many union views pertain to romantic or erotic love in particular, though some pertain to friendship and others to love in general.<sup>3</sup> It is not always clear to what extent a given model of union is meant by its proponents to apply to marital love (which, as noted, combines several different elements), but most do, at least implicitly, treat such relationships as a central case. Robert Solomon, Robert Nozick, and Mark Fisher are among the strongest and most frequently discussed contemporary proponents of union, but we find elements of the idea in the views of many others, ranging from Elijah Millgram's Aristotle to Harry Frankfurt's recent work on the necessities of love.<sup>4</sup> While the models of union these philosophers espouse overlap in certain respects, they can be usefully divided into two broad categories: “fusion” views and “self-constitution” views. I will begin by providing a brief synopsis of each type.

Fusion views, as the label suggests, are truest in form to Aristophanes' metaphor of re-unification. The central idea is that there is some literal sense in which two previously separate individuals come to share one enlarged identity through their love. Nozick and Fisher both seem to hold versions of this sort of view. Nozick claims that love "is *wanting* to form a *we* with [a] particular person" (Nozick 1991, 418), and that where the desired relationship is in fact established, the resultant *we* constitutes a new entity in the world, produced by "two persons flowing together and intensely merging" (Nozick 1991, 420). Fisher goes so far as to say that lovers come to "perceive, feel and act as a single person, so that the perception, feeling or act does not exist unless both persons participate in it, and neither can say who originated it" (Fisher 1990, 28). For both, the boundary between two separate selves becomes blurred or even erased as they are joined in love.<sup>5</sup>

The blurring of boundaries, on these pictures, is at least in part a psychological matter. Indeed, Nozick explicitly claims that "Each [lover] becomes psychologically part of the other's identity" (1991, 419). But psychological fusion seems bound up (whether as cause or effect is not entirely clear) with what we might call "teleological fusion," or the joining together of lovers' ends and interests. As Nozick construes it, "the people you love are included inside your boundaries [in the sense that] *their well-being is your own*" (1991, 417, my emphasis). In a case of mutual love, where *each* party's well-being becomes the other's own, personal interests and ends are mingled together in a common pool that belongs, jointly, to both.<sup>6</sup> In coming to share a new enlarged identity in this way, lovers simultaneously come to have a similarly enlarged self-interest: each lover, in serving what we'd normally think of as the ends of the other, in fact serves ends that are as much his or her own, and *vice versa*. Considerations of this sort lead Nozick to conclude that willingness to change partners (or to "trade up") would be nothing less than a willingness to engage in *self-destructive* behavior: it would be "a willingness to destroy your self in the form of your own extended self" (1991, 424).

Self-constitution views share with fusion views the general idea that relations of love are to be spelled out in terms of shared identities. Solomon, for example, uses Aristophanes' metaphor of re-unification as a spring-board for his thesis that "the dominant conceptual ingredient in

romantic love . . . is just this urge for *shared identity*, a kind of *ontological dependency*" (Solomon 1991, 511). But the picture of union on offer is rather different and, perhaps, more metaphorical in nature. Solomon takes Catherine's oft-cited love of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* as a paradigm example: "I *am* Heathcliff—he's always, always in my mind, not as a pleasure, anymore than I am always a pleasure to myself—but as my own being" (Solomon 1991, 511). Catherine's love of Heathcliff makes him central to her identity *qua* individual, instead of incorporating him into a larger entity of which each is a part. Solomon takes this relationship to illustrate the kind of shared identity that is characteristic of love: it is "not a mystical union nor a frustrated physicality but a sense of presence, always 'in mind', defining one's sense of self to one's self" (1991, 511). On this picture we learn who we are (and *become* who we are) in relations of love, through a process Solomon describes as one of "mutual self-identification" (1991, 513).<sup>7</sup>

While Solomon's view of union is painted in rather broad strokes, there are various ways of specifying what it might be for a self to be constituted (or re-constituted) through love. Elijah Millgram (1987) reads Aristotle as arguing that one literally *makes* one's friends, and that one loves one's friends precisely because one is their procreator. In brief, the idea is that one is (at least partly) responsible for one's friends' status as virtuous, and that this is a way of being causally responsible for making one's friends who they are. Love for one's friends is an extension of self-love, because what one has made is a "part" or "actualization" of oneself (Millgram 1987). Aristotle did not himself regard spousal love as an instance of character friendship. But if marriage is a relationship of companion love, and companion love includes close friendship, then the "procreative" view may nonetheless be a candidate for fleshing out marital union.<sup>8</sup>

A second version of self-constitution is developed in Harry Frankfurt's recent work on love and volitional necessity. On Frankfurt's view, love is primarily "a configuration of the will" (Frankfurt 1999, 137). The lover cares selflessly about his beloved, where this means being "disinterestedly devoted to its interests and ends" (Frankfurt 1999, 135). The lover's devotion to his beloved subjects him to what Frankfurt calls "willing inabilities" to make (or not make) certain choices, in accordance with the demands of the beloved's interests and ends. Far from eroding the lover's sense of self, on Frankfurt's view, this disinterested devotion is self-defining. The constraints imposed by the beloved's interests and ends

are ones to which the lover willingly submits: "His readiness to serve the interests of his beloved is . . . an element of his established volitional nature, and hence of his identity as a person" (Frankfurt 1999, 137).<sup>9</sup>

Like the other union theorists canvassed so far, Frankfurt arrives at the conclusion that love confounds the distinction between self-interest and selflessness. To love oneself, on Frankfurt's view, is to be devoted disinterestedly to one's *own* interests and ends. But, on the view just spelled out, one's own interests and ends are determined by whatever it is that one cannot help caring about: "the love of a person for himself is essentially a devotion to whatever it is that he loves" (Frankfurt 2001a, 8).<sup>10</sup> Frankfurt thus argues that "[t]he apparent discrepancy or conflict between pursuing one's own interests and being selflessly devoted to the interests of another disappears, in the case of love, once it is understood that what serves the self-interest of the lover is, precisely, his selflessness" (Frankfurt 2001b, 13).

## 2. Union on Trial

HELMER: But to part!—to part from you! No, no, Nora; I can't understand that idea.

NORA: That makes it all the more certain that it must be done.

—Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*

One thing that the "fusion" and "self-constitution" views of union have in common is the idea that lovers share ends or interests by acquiring or coming to treat one another's ends or interests as their own—whether in virtue of the fact that the boundary between their identities is blurred or erased, or the fact that the beloved's identity is in part of one's own making, or the fact that the lover's identity is (at least in part) constituted by her devotion to the beloved. Proponents of each type of view are drawn toward the claim that in relations of love the difference between selflessness and self-interest disappears. Unfortunately, forms of union that collapse the distinction between selflessness and self-interest in these ways lend themselves to certain ethically problematic results. If the realization of a beloved's ends comes to be part and parcel of the realization of my own, then (absent some other reason for restraining myself) it would seem natural that I should be oriented towards the beloved's ends in just the same way that I am oriented towards any other ends of mine. It would seem natural, that is, both to devote myself actively to the achievement of the beloved's ends (insofar as I'm in a position to do so), and to

take an especially direct interest in *her* devotion to promoting the ends in question. The stance one takes towards another's ends on this picture is explicitly modeled on *intra-* rather than *inter-*personal relations, such that the other is treated as a part or extension of oneself.

Seen in this light, devotion to a beloved's ends has a distinctly sinister side. First of all, someone who regards another and her ends as part of him and his own ends might well appropriate her ends by doing things "for" her. But in absence of her request (or at least her consent), we'd normally regard this as a moral transgression and a form of disrespect. Secondly, someone who takes a loved one to be a part of himself may regard her as accountable to him, in a strangely direct way, for success in her pursuits. After all, this conception of end-sharing is one on which each party's successes and failures bear directly on the other's good or bad fortune. Where one party suffers a setback, the other may well regard her as having failed *him* in failing to achieve an end that he now regards as among his own.<sup>11</sup> But this, of course, sounds more like a feature of a pathological love relationship than of a healthy one.

A variation on this kind of pathology famously emerges in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. When things are going well, Torvald takes great pleasure in "showing off" his wife Nora. He regards her as so much an extension of himself that he can't imagine their being parted. Unfortunately, this also means that he cannot help but treat her "disgrace" as his own. Instead of offering sympathy or support of any kind, he reacts with horror and shame and announces a harsh series of punishments for her transgression. Moreover, in Torvald's view it is *he* who is saved when the crisis blows over—though he adds, as an afterthought, "You too, of course, we are both saved" (Ibsen 1992, 64). Equally illuminating is the way in which the post-crisis Torvald shifts so readily from placing blame on Nora to reclaiming the responsibility "to serve as will and conscience" for them both (Ibsen 1992, 65). He oscillates between holding her responsible *to* him, as agent to principal, and taking responsibility *for* her, as a mere extension of himself.

The attitudes just described exemplify ways in which union can degenerate into appropriation or felt "ownership" of another and her ends. As Millgram says of his own reading of Aristotle on friendship, on such a view "self-love is playing too great, and the wrong kind of, a role" (Millgram 1987). But where the distinction between selflessness and self-interest is collapsed, it is also possible for *other-*love to play the wrong kind of role:

instead of "colonizing" the beloved (to borrow Jennifer Whiting's wonderful term for egoistic love),<sup>12</sup> the lover may subordinate herself to the beloved to the extent that her identification with his ends degenerates into self-effacement and servility. In a much-cited passage of *The Second Sex*, for example, Simone de Beauvoir describes "the woman in love" as follows: "[She] tries to see with his eyes; she reads the books he reads, prefers the pictures and the music he prefers; she is interested only in . . . the ideas that come from him; she adopts his friendships, his enmities, his opinions; when she questions herself it is his reply she tries to hear . . ." (Beauvoir 1989, 653). Tellingly, she uses the same literary example as Solomon does, but to a much different end: "'I am Heathcliffe', says Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*; that is the cry of every woman in love; she is another incarnation of her loved one, his reflection, his double: she is *he*" (Beauvoir 1989, 653). On de Beauvoir's view, this kind of relationship does not succeed in bringing one into communion with another but instead results in "the most bitter solitude there is" (Beauvoir 1989, 668). The lover is reduced to "an anguished and powerless onlooker at her own fate," who fears the loss of her (self-constituting) relationship and is reduced to servility in her efforts to maintain it (Beauvoir 1989, 668). De Beauvoir draws out, as Nozick does not, the dark side of regarding the destruction of a relationship as (literally) the destruction of one's self: the lover's "salvation," as she puts it, depends on another "who has made her and can instantly destroy her" (Beauvoir 1989, 668).

In sum, fusion and self-constitution views of love open the door to a variety of ethically defective forms of devotion. In my view, these union-views are disqualified as models of marital union because they seem unable to give reciprocity (between distinct individuals with distinct ends) a suitably central place. We should want an account of such relationships, and of the sharing of ends therein, against which appropriation and self-effacement appear as pathological variants, not as paradigm forms.

### 3. Union Reclaimed

[I]n God's intention a meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and noblest end of marriage.

—John Milton, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*

One might be tempted to conclude, at this point, that any desire for (non-metaphorical) union is antithetical to healthy love between autonomous individuals, and that the parties to a healthy marriage simply do not form a *we* in anything but the most straightforward, grammatical sense. I do not think we are forced to accept this conclusion. Unionists are right to focus on the sharing of interests and ends, only wrong in how they think this sharing must take place. I will argue in this section that a rehabilitated concept of union does have an important place in our understanding of marriage, and that, properly understood, such union neither threatens the autonomy of the individual parties nor erodes the boundaries of their own identities.

Keeping in view the idea that marriage is a relationship of companion love, it should be clear that there is a familiar and unobjectionable sense in which married partners do set themselves up to behave as a unit: in choosing to wed, married partners understand themselves above all to be embarking on a *shared life*, which will necessarily involve ongoing engagement in shared decision-making and action. (There may, of course, be legal marriages that involve no shared decision-making or action, and thus no shared life, but these are the sorts of exception that strain the limits of the concept. Such marriages, I want to say, are marriages in name only.) Obviously, married (and other committed) partners are not the only people to engage in shared decision-making and action. But they are unique, or nearly unique, in doing so because they love one another and are committed to sharing a life.<sup>13</sup> On my view, union in marriage must be understood as the realization of this commitment. This means that we must understand union in marriage as a practical, rather than a primarily psychological or ontological, phenomenon.

Turning to a practical view of union brings the discussion of marital love into contact with the literature on shared agency, much of which has focused on the concept of shared intention (see, for example, Bratman 1999; Gilbert 1989; 1996; 2000; Roth 2004; Searle 1990; Tuomela and Miller 1988; Velleman 1997).<sup>14</sup> But intentions, it seems, can be quite asymmetrically shared. Both Gilbert and Bratman are explicit about the fact that an intention may even come to be shared as a result of coercion, so long as the coerced party's agency is not bypassed altogether, through, for example, brute force or psychologically debilitating fear (Bratman 1999, 133; Gilbert 1989, 410). If a practical view of union is to avoid the

pitfalls of the other union views, it must do justice to the idea that married partners face one another as moral equals, for whom a life counts as legitimately shared only insofar as neither party's interests or ends are swamped by the other's. The context of companion love, with its demand for reciprocal recognition, prompts us to shift our attention to the *input* side of shared intention—that is, to shared deliberation and reasons.

In sharing a life, companion lovers aim to establish what I call a shared practical perspective.<sup>15</sup> A shared practical perspective is constituted by a set of shared reasons (or “reasons-for-us”) to which each is prepared to appeal in accounting for what they jointly do, and which will serve as a defeasible, shared starting point in future deliberations. But a shared practical perspective does not just set the stage for *future* deliberation. It is itself the product of ongoing deliberation between the parties. In relationships of companion love, that is, a shared practical perspective is a product of a give-and-take between the partners who come to share it: it is a *joint* product of their *collective* deliberative agency.

So how does joint deliberation constitute a couple as the right sort of unit? It helps, here, to appeal to a normative feature of love itself. As other critics of union have insisted, loving another seems to require caring about that person for her own sake, not merely instrumentally or selfishly as an extension of oneself (Soble 1997; Whiting 1991). Properly understood, the idea of marital union is not defeated, but partly *defined* by this feature of love. In a relationship of companion love, each lover cares about the other for his or her own sake. This means that each has non-instrumental reason to care about the other's individual practical perspective, including the reasons each has to engage in any joint project or plan. At a minimum, this means caring that one's partner's acceptance of a shared reason is itself reasons-responsive, and not the result of frustration, exhaustion, psychological domination, or self-effacement. Each will want the other to have reasons that (from her own point of view) make sense of her acceptance of some consideration as a reason-for-us. But more than that, caring about another for her own sake also means caring about the *content* of her reasons for being willing to treat that consideration as jointly action-guiding. I do not want my loved one to agree to do something *just because* I want her to, nor do I want her to want to do it *just because* her so wanting will please me.<sup>16</sup> That I want something should matter to her, since this is

a relationship of mutual robust concern, but insofar as I love her it also matters to me that she not simply defer to my wants. I want her to treat her perspective as mattering on a par with mine.

Now, insofar as our love is mutual, and known to be mutual, I know that my beloved will have a perfectly parallel concern for *my* reasons: she will want me to take her point of view seriously, but not for me to simply defer to her. This renders our concerns mutually referring. I want my concerns to matter to my beloved, but not for her simply to defer to them; she wants her concerns to matter to me, but not for me simply to defer to them. Each of us wants the other to treat his or her own concerns as having normative weight for both of us, and it is common knowledge between us that each has this very concern. For companion lovers, joint deliberation requires each party to be open to guidance by the perspective of the other, which in turn requires each to be open to guidance by her *own* perspective, which in turn requires each to be open to guidance by the perspective of the other, and so on.

It is this complicated structure of concern that yields a conversational, even argumentative, conception of union in marriage. The project of sharing a practical perspective requires companion lovers to exhibit dialogical sensitivity to the interdependence between their individual practical perspectives. Joint deliberation is, between them, a process in which each deliberates about what *each* can reasonably agree to, and submits her provisional judgments to the review of the other, who is understood to be engaged in exactly the same process. Being either too rigid or too pliable about what one is willing to entertain as a reason-for-us is a clear sign that one has given up on the project of expressing moral parity through deliberation, either treating one's own perspective as paramount or resigning oneself to secondary status. One avoids inappropriate rigidity by holding oneself answerable to one's partner's point of view, and one avoids inappropriate pliability by holding one's partner answerable to one's own.<sup>17</sup> When have the partners found a perspective they can legitimately share? It may be disappointing, but should not be surprising, that there is no external standard of correctness here, nor is there necessarily even a stable answer to this question. Part of the point of ongoing reciprocal recognition is that any balance that is struck between the parties must be regarded as defeasible in the face of further reflection and experience, such that a shared practical perspective is always a work in progress.

A sustained relationship of mutual answerability is more important to the union of marriage than the precise content of the ends and interests a couple comes to share.

Cavell treats *A Doll's House* as setting the problem to which the re-marriage comedies offer an answer. One thing that is notably lacking in Nora and Torvald's marriage, by Nora's own account, is any real conversation, any real *argument*. And of course conversation and argument are the life-blood of the remarriage comedies (a *genre* of film that includes *The Awful Truth*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *Adam's Rib*, and several others) in which a pair of evenly matched sparring partners—by turns flirtatious, witty, competitive, and conciliatory—work out their differences and find ways of living together anew. The question of remarriage after a separation or divorce is central to the genre, but the idea of remarriage might be workable as a metaphor for marriage in general: on the view I've begun to articulate, the union of marriage is always, in a sense, union across difference or separation, a union—or *reunion*—which, paradoxically, thrives on a certain amount of antagonism. There is, of course, a difference between *friendly* antagonism and petty hostility. Cavell notes that the central (as-of-yet unmarried) pair in *It Happened One Night* disguise themselves as a married couple precisely by arranging to be seen bickering with one another. The humor of the moment relies in part on a truth that Cavell recognizes (namely, that being willing to be married is being willing to go in for a certain amount of bickering [Cavell 1981, 86]), but the couple's petty *mock* bickering also stands in contrast to the real conversation in which they engage over the course of the film. Their banter is sometimes heated, for real conversation is no more a stream of mutual affirmation than it is a barrage of mutual insult. But their differences are not petty: their obvious mutual care drives them to hold one another (and themselves) answerable for their individual perspectives on how to proceed together.<sup>18</sup>

It would be a stretch to suggest that these films contain a philosophical model of joint deliberation. But they do plant the seeds of such an idea, by giving such a vivid picture of what it is like for those who love and desire one another to be united in (happy) argument. At its best, it is a picture on which each party must both be argumentatively active and receptive to the other's activity.<sup>19</sup> Participating in the development of a shared deliberative perspective requires that one exercise one's own de-

liberative agency, but in a manner designed to be responsive to the other's similarly structured contributions. As such, joint deliberation involves a strong form of symmetry: co-deliberators treat one another as exercising ultimate authority over, and responsibility for, their respective shares in the activity. But in ceding a share of authority to the other, each simultaneously counts on the other actually to exercise that share and holds her answerable for doing so. One who refuses, or otherwise fails to exercise this sort of authority, frustrates the aims of joint deliberation as surely as one who refuses to cede any such authority to the other in the first place. In a particularly memorable scene of *The Philadelphia Story*, Tracy Lord (Katherine Hepburn) exclaims, "Oh Dext, I'm such an unholy mess of a girl," to which C. K. Dexter Haven (Cary Grant) replies, "That's no good. That's not even conversation." Lapsing into self-pity is bad conversation in a number of ways, including the one in which I'm most interested here: it is a way of stepping out of the deliberative perspective and rendering oneself passive—yielding one's share of deliberative authority to the other. (A good co-deliberator will not let his partner get away with it!)

A full account of joint deliberation would take me beyond the bounds of this paper.<sup>20</sup> But in the context of marriage and other similar relationships, it will have to emphasize co-deliberators' mutual answerability for their willingness to accept certain considerations as "reasons-for-us." I have argued elsewhere that holding oneself answerable for one's practical commitments is a crucial component of individual autonomy, and that individual autonomy thus has a distinctly dialogical component.<sup>21</sup> What emerges here is that relations of *mutual* answerability are crucial to the union of companion love and marriage, a form of union in which reciprocal recognition between moral equals is key. Readiness to answer for one's own willingness to accept a shared reason, and readiness to hold one's partner answerable for hers, lie at the very core of what it is to accord moral parity to one's own and the other's point of view. It is what precludes inappropriate relations of domination and self-effacement, and what gives the union (or perpetual reunion) of marriage its dialogical structure. In a sense, mutual answerability for our shared reasons is ultimately what holds us together as a pair or unit, differentiating us from otherwise well-coordinated deliberators who are not bound by any particular conception of their relationship to one another. But it is also what keeps us distinct as members of that pair.

Now, one might suggest that the fusion views discussed in Section 1 at least reach towards something resembling this conversational account. Nozick, after all, speaks of lovers as “pooling” their autonomy, in the sense that many decisions will be jointly rather than unilaterally made. On my view there is indeed a sense in which companion lovers “pool” their autonomy, and we need an account of genuinely shared or joint practical deliberation in order to make sense of this phenomenon. In this respect, my critique of Nozick’s view differs from Alan Soble’s (1997), which is that the very idea of such “pooling” is hopeless. Soble’s view seems to be that joint deliberation necessarily eats away at individual autonomy, and that the only way of preserving autonomy in a love relationship is by establishing an equitable division of decision-making labor that reflects the partners’ relative areas of skill and knowledge (Soble 1997, 76 n. 20). While this sort of division of labor obviously often occurs, I think Soble’s reliance on it as the central form of decision-making in love relationships misses a kernel of truth in the union views—namely, that there’s an important way in which individuals can and do deliberate *together* in relations of companion love. Fusion views do not help us understand this process—indeed, they obscure it by blurring the distinction between the would-be deliberators themselves. I have argued that joint deliberation between companion lovers *requires* the persistence of its participants as distinct centers of answerability, because their holding one another answerable for their deliberative contributions is a primary way in which their mutual concern is expressed.

Moreover, the conversational account also preserves a kernel of truth in the notions of mutual self-identification or self-constitution. Understood one way, self-constitution views seem driven by the idea that in relationships of love, the beloved’s ends exert a special sort of claim on the lover. We can now spell this idea out in a way that does not rely on the problematic notion of self-transformative devotion: the deliberative constraint of mutual concern (insofar as it requires that each party treat the other’s *individual* practical perspective as normatively on a par with her own) seems to imply that the ends that structure each individual’s practical perspective—the ends and interests which are sources of reasons for each, as singular agents—impose an open-endedly flexible constraint on the field of potentially shareable reasons. The flexibility of this constraint is, I think, an important part of the overall picture, since it is quite clear that

the interests and ends that come to be shared by close friends and lovers are not limited to those interests and ends that they have in common at the outset. Exactly how to construe the process of revising one's practical commitments in the context of companion love is a question that extends beyond the scope of this paper. But revisable as they are, the ends of each party nonetheless do exert a special claim on the other: these ends provide the evolving framework within which the process of establishing *shared* ends must unfold.<sup>22</sup>

I daresay the view even preserves something of the appeal of Aristophanes' myth, since marriage, on this view, turns out to be as much about *reunion* as about union. Of course, the act of marrying does not rejoin, once and for all, two halves of a former whole. But it does initiate an ongoing dance of union, separation, and reunion as partners engage one another dialogically in the shaping of a shared practical perspective.

### Conclusion

At the outset, I characterized companion love as a kind of love that includes an aim to share experiences, projects, and goals over an indefinite period of time, as a way of realizing an overarching desire to be and live together. Surely such sharing is an important component of our everyday understanding of the special intimacy of marriage. The practical, deliberative conception of union deepens this conception of sharing by applying it to the way in which lovers *arrive at* shared interests and ends. While more ethically demanding, the idea that shared interests and ends properly have a dialogical genesis, in relationships of love, is not really an unfamiliar one. Nancy Sherman (1989) reads Aristotle as arguing that friends "live together" in the sense of deliberating together, and it is central to my view that we should not draw a sharp line between friendship and love, or at least the form of love appropriate to marriage. Arguably, early liberal feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, who argued that marriage should be based on friendship between moral and intellectual equals, had something rather like the conversational model of love in mind.

Returning to the scene of *A Doll's House*, we may take our inspiration from Nora, who, as a way of illustrating just how alienating her union with Torvald has been, remarks on the fact that they've "never once sat down together and seriously tried to get to the bottom of anything" (Ibsen 1992). The sadly benighted Torvald has just done precisely the wrong

thing in offering to make all of Nora's decisions for her. What he regards as an expression of loving forgiveness now appears to her as so much evidence that they've never properly loved one another at all. I've argued, in effect, that Nora is on to something important here: if companion lovers are (non-pathologically) to form a *we*, they must do so in a way that leaves room for genuinely *interpersonal* agreement and disagreement, agreement and disagreement of the sort that is hammered out in *interpersonal* processes of practical deliberation. The *we* of other union theorists, by contrast, often looks suspiciously like the *royal* 'we', a plural pronoun in its surface grammar only. One way of putting what I've argued is that companion lovers who share ends in a more democratic way—that is, in a way that makes room for genuinely joint deliberation—may form a *we* without losing the kind of personal distinctness that goes problematically missing in other union views.

It seems to me that it is the possibility of a thoroughly interpersonal form of union to which Nora is awakened at the end of *A Doll's House*, when she decides she must separate from Torvald after eight years of seemingly happy marriage. In striking off on her own Nora is not rejecting the very project of sharing a life with another, but only a version of this project that she has now come to see as grievously flawed. Nora suggests that her life with Torvald had never constituted "real wedlock" at all (Ibsen 1992, 72). She shocks Torvald by referring to him as a mere stranger, despite (indeed, in a way, because of) the fact that they have regarded themselves as inseparable for years. De Beauvoir claims in *The Second Sex* that "Genuine love ought to be founded on the mutual recognition of two liberties," and that only in such conditions can lovers "together . . . manifest values and aims in the world" (Beauvoir 1989, 667). Cryptic as it is, something in this remark rings true. In this paper I hope to have made plausible the idea that marriage really can be a union, in more than the merely legal sense. We can avoid the pitfalls of other views by reconceptualizing union as perpetual *reunion* between distinct perspectives, in an ongoing, deliberative process of forging a shared practical perspective.

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## NOTES

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1. Despite the fact that much of the literature I discuss in this paper focuses (at least implicitly) on heterosexual relationships, and despite the fact that I draw on examples of the same, there is nothing about companion love that restricts it to heterosexual relationships. Relationships between same-sex partners may obviously also be relationships of companion love, whether or not they are legally sanctioned.

2. Cavell writes: "The overarching question of the comedies of remarriage is precisely the question of what constitutes a union, what makes these two into one, what binds, you may say what sanctifies, in marriage. When is marriage an honorable estate? In raising this question these films imply not only that the church has lost its power over this authentication but that society as a whole cannot be granted it" (Cavell 1981, 53).

3. Montaigne, for example, offers a union view of friendship in his essay "On Affectionate Relationships" (Montaigne 1991), as does Aristotle, at least on some readings, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (see Millgram 1987). Psychiatrist Willard Gaylin extends the idea of union even to non-personal love, writing that "The common ingredient of all love is the merging of the self with another person or ideal, creating a fused entity" (Gaylin 1986).

4. These are but a few examples; others abound. Jerome Neu claims that "the image of the search for one's missing half . . . continues to resonate in individual experience. Another person may be regarded as part of oneself. It is not at all unusual for individuals in a couple to think of themselves more as parts of a 'we' than as separate 'I's (Neu 2000, 75). Neil Delaney cites Nozick approvingly, and describes the desire to form a *we*, "to unite with a person in profound psychological and physical ways" as "perhaps the most important thing people associate with the ideal of romantic love" (Delaney 1996, 340). Roger Scruton takes love to involve an erosion of personal boundaries through the formation of a community of interests (Scruton 1986). For further examples, as well as critical discussion, see Alan Soble (1997) and Marilyn Friedman (1998).

5. Nozick offers a striking image of this phenomenon: "If we picture the individual self as a closed figure whose boundaries are continuous and solid, dividing what is inside from what is outside, then we might diagram the *we* as two figures with the boundary line between them erased where they come together" (1991, 420).

6. Roger Scruton, another fusion theorist, puts this idea particularly succinctly: "friendship . . . becomes love just so soon as reciprocity becomes community: that is, just so soon as all distinction between my interests and your interests is overcome" (Scruton 1986, 230).

7. One might wonder whether this view should count as a union view at all, since the bond between the parties is ultimately one of mutual influence (however deep that

influence may be). In part, I simply follow established usage in categorizing it as such. But established usage does seem reasonable, since Solomon regards himself as trying to cash out the same Aristophanic ideas about love as other union theorists.

8. Millgram notes that he does not personally endorse the view he attributes to Aristotle, since it seems to him that "self-love is playing too great, and the wrong kind of, a role" (Millgram 1987).

9. Joseph Raz makes a similar move in his comments on love in "Authority and Consent" (1981), where he offers a particularly striking gloss on what he calls "the spiritual aspect of the image of the lovers merging to become one": "Aspiring to such fusion includes the desire to have one will, not only through gradual adaptation, but also by the more immediate transformation of the will through love" (Raz 1981, 113). But instead of devoting oneself to the beloved's ends as an expression of one's disinterested devotion to the beloved's flourishing, the volitional transformation Raz has in mind is one in which the lover acquires the same desires as the loved one because it will please her. This version of self-constitution would, I think, be particularly prone to the defect of self-effacement discussed in Section 2 below.

10. More precisely, the love of self is constituted *either* by the love of whatever one loves, or, in the case of one who doesn't know what he loves, by his sincere attempts to find out (Frankfurt 2001a, 9).

11. One might point out that a clear differentiation between the parties involved re-emerges at least in the cases where blame is being laid. But this, to my mind, is just an indication of the instability of the attitudes involved in the sort of fusion described in union views: even if one treats the ends of another as one's own, one cannot help but treat her as having a separate will when one holds her responsible for achieving those ends.

12. See Whiting (1991).

13. I say "nearly unique" because very close friendships, and particularly close filial or sibling relationships could also fit the description. It is a good question what distinguishes marital and other similar relations from these other relationships. Though it is not my aim to answer this question here, I believe it has to do with the erotic potential of marital love and with its exclusivity. (These two features may also be related.)

14. I cannot discuss the details of these views here, but I consider the relationship between shared intention and other aspects of shared agency more fully in my "Joint Deliberation and the Sharing of Reasons" (unpublished manuscript).

15. I discuss the notion of a shared practical perspective in more detail in my "Joint Deliberation and the Sharing of Reasons" (unpublished manuscript).

16. This marks a clear difference between companion love and the phenomenon described as love by Raz (1981). See n. 9 for a description of that phenomenon.

17. The maximally rigid interlocutor displays a vice similar to Torvald's, in treating his own perspective as already counting for both him and Nora, while the maximally pliable interlocutor displays a vice similar to that of self-effacement.

18. I refer to the general "feel" of the film as much as to specific scenes. In one scene discussed by Cavell, however, the couple works out differences over matters of class, dignity, humility, pride, and acceptance through a deceptively mundane exchange over what food to eat on the road (Cavell 1981, 91-93).

19. Why only "at its best"? I would argue that the picture of marriage that these comedies offer falls short of being a *full* answer to the challenge of *A Doll's House*. On Cavell's own reading, a "moral cloud" hangs over the films' depiction of reciprocal recognition, since they are structured around a gendered model on which a woman stands in

need of education and, in a sense, re-creation, by a man (Cavell 1990, 214–15). Though in this *genre* the man must himself undergo a transformation in order to be the right person to provide the education, a more symmetrical model of union would not treat the roles of “educator” and “educated” as fixed or, of course, as gendered. Consider, by contrast, J. S. Mill’s words in *The Subjection of Women*: “What marriage may be in the case of two persons of cultivated faculties, . . . between whom there exists that best kind of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with reciprocal superiority in them—so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development—I will not attempt to describe” (Mill 1986, 101).

20. I attempt a fuller account in my “Joint Deliberation and the Sharing of Reasons” (unpublished manuscript).

21. See Westlund (2003).

22. Solomon does recognize that mutual self-identification often in fact involves compromise. Because lovers typically come to one another as more-or-less fully formed personalities (rather than as separated halves of a whole) Solomon claims that “[t]he development of love is . . . defined by a *dialectic* . . . in which each lover struggles for control over shared and reciprocal self-images, resists them, revises them, rejects them” (Solomon 1991). But framing the process as a struggle for control re-raises my earlier concerns about domination and submission. A conversational or deliberative view of union has the virtue of explaining how the “dialectic” may be spirited and even, at times, adversarial without its being a power struggle.

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