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PROBLEMS IN PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE

This paper is a deep dive into two problems in the philosophy of love which I contend, when taken together, form quite the puzzle for contemporary value theory generally. We will see that the *prima facie* solution to one problem seems to be the antagonist of the other and vice versa. The problems I refer to are raised by Srinivasan ("Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex?") and Illouz (*Why Love Hurts*) independently.

In her paper Srinivasan suggests reviving an old feminist project: the critique of our desires (3-10). She convincingly argues that injustices will be left unresolved if we do not pursue such a critique. Which injustices? Most explicitly, the arbitrary and harmful discrimination in our choice of sexual partners: people of certain races, ethnicities, body types, abilities and other categorizations are not deemed or represented as desirable by society, leading to a lack in their sexual lives but more significantly, a lack in an appreciation for them and respect for their dignity (2, 6, 10). The matter is delicate however: Srinivasan is well aware that permitting any critique of our desires can open the door to authoritarian policy (7, 10), or over-bearing feminism (3, 4, 7) or simply fuel "morally ugly and confused" senses of entitlement (7). However we are to reform our desires then, it must be done with tact[1].

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[1] Srinivasan does have some helpful policy suggestions (8) but those will not be enough to solve the puzzle of this paper, so I pass over them.

In *Why Love Hurts* (Chapter 3) Illouz uncovers two modern behavior patterns (especially in men) in the realm of choosing a romantic partner: hedonic and aboulic commitment phobia.

- Hedonic commitment phobia: "in which commitment is deferred by engaging in a pleasurable accumulation of relationships," a behavior characterized by "an inability to fixate one partner" due to an "overflowing of desire" (78).

- Aboulic commitment phobia: "in which it is the capacity to want to commit that is at stake," a behavior characterized by a "deficient desire" (78) resulting in an inability to engage one's emotions in the service of committing to a relationship, despite a higher-order volition to commit (89).

Illouz convincingly argues that these phobias are brought on by, broadly speaking, a greater abundance of choice in romantic partners combined with a new mechanisms of choice that heavily rely on the choosing individual's rational deliberation, including attempts to maximize well-being (91).

Hopefully the puzzle is starting to take shape. If we successfully "transfigure" our desires to be open to a wider range of people, as Srinivasan hopes we will (10), we will in effect be amplifying the (perceived) abundance of choice (or equivalently, we will be putting more strain on the chooser's *rational* attempt to create a preference ranking of potential mates). Meanwhile the simplest (and most simplistic) solutions to Illouz's problem – reinstating some form of endogamy (e.g. class or racial) or just telling people to 'follow their gut' in order to, respectively, reduce abundance or alleviate pressure from a chooser's rational deliberation – would be, respectively, authoritarian or leave our biased

desires utterly untouched (if anything they would only become more entrenched along the lines of our internalized biases).

Before I develop this puzzle further though I need to situate this paper to avoid confusion. This is neither sociological investigation nor feminist critique. Though at heart concerned with the very real issues Illouz and Srinivasan raise, this paper approaches the issues with a decidedly philosophical and abstract bent (in accordance with the only intellectual training I have) hoping to bring the issues to bear on value theory generally. The overt project of the paper is not to solve a puzzle but rather elaborate a puzzle for philosophical value theory[2], a challenging test case for our theory. As I suggested in my opening, I think the puzzle will prove quite a challenge – indeed I think it will point to a serious myopia in much of contemporary value theory. In particular, I think no matter whether one has Kantian, utilitarian or virtue ethicist leanings, this will pose a difficulty[3]. A solution won't be given, but a general heading will be suggested.

For the purposes of this paper I must of course limit myself to one moral framework (a utilitarian one), but at the end of the paper I will suggest how the same puzzle (for all intents and purposes) arises for other moral frameworks (broadly Kantian or virtue ethicist frameworks). I choose a broadly utilitarian framework since it allows me to draw connections with analogous difficulties that have arisen in aesthetics (where a broadly hedonistic approach has dominated the field for a considerable period of time until

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[2] I use "value theory" in its broadest sense, to denote social and political philosophy, aesthetics, moral theory, and theory of value (understood as just the inquiry into value and goodness). See Schroeder (para.1, 2) for more.

[3] The principle difference I see in these leanings – analyzing things in terms of states of affairs versus actions versus character respectively – will yield nothing but terminological differences in this matter: the puzzle will remain nonetheless.

recently) (Van Der Berg [manuscript]). By making such connections, I hope to get to the deeper questions, since much of the conceptual work has already been done. By "framework" I mean some sort of combination of a political theory, theory of moral value, theory of aesthetic value and moral theory. So for example one could conceivably weave together something like a Rawlsian theory of justice, a Millian theory of value (complete with higher and lower pleasures), a Humean theory of aesthetic value (according to a hedonistic reading of Hume) and a Benthamite consequentialist moral theory. Of course I don't have time to consider every possible combination of said categories of theories and so must speak broadly of a generic "utilitarian framework". I think though, this will do for my purposes. My goal, one could say, is that *any combination of said types of theories will leave a hole in our overall value theory.* There is, I contend, a need for a theory of the good life, the fulfilled life, the well-realized life or something of this sort.

My first task in elaborating this puzzle is in making some of its terms sharper and assuaging some initial skepticism.

To start, we might ask, what notion of "commitment" are we operating on? And how are these commitment phobias *ills* and not just features of modern society? I'm not in a position to give a full account of commitment (and Illouz doesn't offer one), but I'll describe some of its features for my purposes. Someone is not committed to a relationship if that person consumes and discards the relationship in the same way we consume TV episodes or cans of soup. This indicates that commitment involves an important degree of attention, emotional investment and time investment. And finally, as I will understand it,

commitment does not mean unique exclusivity: one could be committed in polyamorous relationships. It seems a verbal injustice to call all polyamorous relationships non-committed, but more importantly for my purposes, in using the term thus I can put aside a problem which I am not concerned with and bring to focus what's really at issue here. There is a sense in which commitment phobia is only a serious *ailment* for modern society if one first buys into the cultural ideal of a long-lasting (typically adulthood-long) monogamous relationship (89). While it's certainly true that knocking this ideal off its pedestal could very much alleviate our concerns about the commitment phobias, I still maintain that commitment phobia is a problem: relationships that are relatively long-term and, if not totally exclusive, at least partially exclusive still seem to be an important ingredient of a good life for many. In other words, the giving and receiving of commitment in one's romantic relationship(s) seems important, and worth safe-guarding. Take this as a postulate on my part[4]. Finally, with regards specifically to the aboulic phobia, to the extent that it causes people to suffer in their inability to reconcile their emotions with their higher order volitions, it seems to be an ailment no matter what.

One might wonder whether both Illouz and Srinivasan's observations, of commitment phobia on one hand and discriminatory desires on the other, could both be correct simultaneously. After all, Illouz claims there is a greater abundance in potential mates due to "the collapse of religious, ethnic, racial, and class rules of endogamy" (Illouz 91): wouldn't our unjust biases have fallen away with said rules? This is far from being

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[4] Is it ordinary to come across a truly healthy and enriching romantic relationship if there isn't a level of mutual commitment in it? We might consider paramours counterexamples to this claim (assuming there is little or less commitment between paramours and that there are healthy and enriching relationships between paramours). But even if we concede this, surely a life with only a string of paramours is not a life that will suit everyone or even a majority of people.

obvious: implicit biases (Greenwald and Krieger) and popular images of beauty are not suddenly transfigured because said explicit rules have mostly fallen away. In fact Illouz argues that the abundance of choice induces a "pickiness" which will no doubt be in accordance with such biases (96): in that way the issue Illouz has observed can exacerbate the issue Srinivasan has raised. And indeed, as mentioned earlier, one could potentially "solve" both issues at once by reinstating reformed rules of, for example, racial endogamy (without their being motivated by repugnant rankings of races, but instead, say, a wish to preserve an enriching racial diversity). But this is precisely the paradigm example of an authoritarian policy we are reluctant to endorse.

Speaking of rejected recommendations for solving the puzzle, one might well wonder, has feminism never offered a more subtle answer? The answer is, yes it has: one could take old MacKinnonite feminism which asked women to critique their desires and drive out the mark of oppression, the 'inauthentic,' in said desires (Willis 5, 6 and Srinivasan 3, 4), and combine it with the old traditionalist wing of feminism which thought women do "really want marriage and monogamy" (Willis 5) and considered the real trouble was keeping men committed to a permanent and faithful relationship (6). As Willis notes, both factions "meet on the common ground of sexual conservatism:" both factions recommend some sort of curtailing of women's sexual desire, either out of a "self-righteous fury that propels the indictment of men as lustful beasts ravaging their chaste victims" or "in [the women's] interest to make [men] shape up" and respect their duties (6). Following such recommendations, women could (hypothetically) purge their desires of unjust biases and also learn to "[create] distance [between them and their man] in order to acquire scarcity and therefore value," bating men to fixate on the woman and thus commit (Illouz

86). Obviously there are problems with this. First, it's not clear a consistent solution even exists here given we are drawing from strains of feminism that are seriously opposed in many ways (see Willis 5-7). Second, this solution does nothing to address men's biased desires or the commitment phobias felt by some women. But third and most importantly, these solutions "induce women to accept a spurious moral superiority as a substitute for sexual pleasure, and curbs on men's sexual freedom as a substitute for real power" (Willis 6, 7) something Srinivasan agrees is dangerously condescending and assuming (who are we to say what is an authentic desire?) (Srinivasan 4) and Illouz agrees is "silly and demeaning" (how does treating oneself as bait and refusing men's advances constitute real power?) (Illouz 86).

Let me change gears now and assume the *prima facie* puzzle has been established. How might we start resolving it? We might inquire into what grounds the issues raised by Srinivasan and Illouz. If we're utilitarian, this will be formulated in terms of maximizing utility[5]. So for example, having biased desires will be said to be bad because having such desires is not conducive to maximizing utility for oneself or for the community in general. Presumably being someone without said biases is more conducive to the maximization of general utility. Call such a person an ideal admirer. A natural inference presents itself: we should want to become ideal admirers for the sake of maximizing utility. Indeed Srinivasan claims "[d]esire can take us by surprise, leading us somewhere we hadn't imagined we would ever go, or towards someone we never thought we would lust after, or love" (10)

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[5] Or hedon. I use these terms almost interchangeably since the nature of this utility or hedon does not matter for my purposes.

perhaps suggesting that only by freeing our desires from the yoke of "what politics has chosen for us" can we be led to someone whom we find greater happiness with.

Such an ideal admirer is part of a family of ideal appreciators. Ideal appreciators are, as I will understand them, people who correctly appreciate the real objective value/beauty in things of a certain sort or has the appropriate response to things of a certain sort (on the assumption that there is real objective value in things, or there is a fitting attitude to have with regards to certain things[6]). With regards to the romantic realm, this is the ideal admirer. In aesthetic[7] matters, this is the Humean ideal critic or "true judge" (on a certain reading of Hume – see Levinson "Hume's Standard of Taste"). Indeed the parallels run further. Levinson, an aesthetic hedonist[8], claims we will not be able to maximize our hedonic uptake without becoming an ideal critic (Levinson, "Artistic Worth" 226, 227): one would miss out on hedon if one's tastes were otherwise, since one would not go in for the most valuable artworks. Levinson would surely claim that one will miss out if one does not appreciate the beauty of great artworks from all mediums, genres and cultures, as the ideal critic does. We have similarly appealed to maximizing personal (as well as general) utility in motivating ourselves to become ideal admirers. Indeed, it is likewise open to Srinivasan to claim that we will "miss out" in some sense if we do not appreciate the beauty in people of all body types, races, abilities, ethnicities, genders etc.[9] as the ideal admirer does.

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[6] This assumption will be questioned later on, but I hold it here since it seems Srinivasan must hold it (8, 10).

[7] For the purposes of this paper I will construe the aesthetic realm narrowly as the realm of aesthetic experience just in relation to works of art.

[8] Someone who believes a artwork's value lies in its ability to produce finally valuable experiences when apprehended properly ("Hume's Standard of Taste" fn. 20). The greater the ability, the greater the value.

[9] I append "etc." not out of laziness but out of humility: I am no doubt ignorant of other categorizations whose perception we need to reevaluate.

We have seen how a utilitarian would ground our transformation into an ideal admirer, and we have seen how they would attempt to motivate such a transformation. But will this do? In short, no. The grounds for transformation are not objectionable but the motivation will not do: one who harbors a wish to maximize utility in romantic matters (whether personal or general) in the context of an abundance of potential mates is precisely someone most prone to both types of phobias. Illouz convincingly musters evidence to this effect: the hedon maximizing attitude is a direct cause of the hedonic phobia and an indirect cause of the aboulic phobia (a maximizing attitude is known to dull one's ability to emotionally attach to what one goes in for) (Illouz 95, 96).

Thus we arrive at the first obstacle for value theory: a textbook case of self-effacement for our ethical theory. What justifies our transformation cannot be the motivation for undertaking such a transformation *by the lights of the very theory which proffers the justification*. We might get smart and suggest that our ethical theory isn't the problem: we simply jumped too quickly to a conclusion. If a utility *satisficing* attitude is the attitude that is most conducive to utility maximization (as Illouz suggests, 95) then that is simply the attitude we should have. While this seems likely to be true, it does little to resolve our puzzle. Adopting a satisficing attitude is not enough to motivate us to become ideal admirers. If anything, such as suggestion might look like an excuse for being complacent about our biases. Rephrased in terms of the artistic, legitimizing a satisficing attitude looks like an excuse to only mimic the ideal critics to a certain extent, as if everything is fine so long as we get enough value-judgments right. So long as we know how to correctly appreciate a few genres and mediums, we've done enough. Or once again in terms of the political: so long as we can correctly appreciate a few body types and races,

we've done enough. Without saying something more[10], this is clearly not acceptable. And what of Illouz? As mentioned, she suggests that such an internal attitude would help alleviate hedonic commitment phobia and avoid aboulic commitment phobia altogether (95). The trouble is, if personal deliberation is the primary mechanism in the architecture of choice for mates (as Illouz argues it has increasingly become the case, ch. 2, 27-29, 40-42) and this mechanism works best when guided by an attitude of satisficing then we are in effect condemning many people to less than ideal romantic coupling (matches that are just ok). This cannot be right: we would be giving a poor recommendation. After all, romantic coupling seems to be rather important: there is a sense in which it *shouldn't* be met with a satisficing attitude in some sense. It's not something to be taken lightly. Again, without saying more[11] this is not a satisfactory solution.

Let us put aside the question of how to motivate ourselves to become ideal appreciators, we the middling appreciators. Let us consider the situation in which we have already become ideal appreciators. Would these ideal-appreciator versions of ourselves be free of our present ills?

Let us start with Srinivasan's worry. It should be uncontroversial to assume (as Srinivasan seems to) that beauty is to be found equally distributed across all ethnicities,

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[10] Something about the distribution of appreciators for each body type and race perhaps. But this is exactly the issue: how do we secure a relatively even distribution? By state action? Srinivasan suggests regulating the advertising industry (8) which is no doubt a step in the right direction. But as Srinivasan herself notes, "to think that such measures would be enough to alter our sexual desires, to free them entirely from the grooves of discrimination, is naïve." But is there much more the state can do without becoming authoritarian?

[11] Something about guaranteeing good matches. But how do we achieve such a guarantee? Again, state action seems of limited help, barring the authoritarian.

races, body types, genders etc., just as we will surely find beauty equally distributed across all artistic mediums and cultures (though maybe not all genres if we consider teenage poetry as genres of their own). So it seems a society of ideal appreciators would distribute desire evenly across racial, ethnic, body type, ability and gender lines; it seems Srinivasan's worry would be dealt with.

The catch comes again with Illouz's observations. The preferences of an ideal admirer will be likely wider than any of our own: by hypothesis, they will not quickly dismiss swathes of the population based on body type, race etc. This broader appreciation leads to a feeling of greater options. But greater options is precisely one of the key causes of the commitment phobia (this is the abundance in the "ecology of choice," 95, 96). In fact abundance typically leads to an attitude of utility maximization (95), which we have seen is not good, making abundance an even more important root cause of the phobias. Thus, Illouz's problems will be exacerbated for ideal admirers[12]. This must be recognized: we cannot recommend that we harbor a satisficing attitude with regards romantic coupling yet also recommend we have the tastes of an ideal admirer in these matters. The two recommendations are incompatible.

This is an explicit rendering of how the *prima facie* solution to Srinivasan's worry antagonizes Illouz's worry, something I gestured at much earlier. But matters are about to get much more conflicted, revealing what I take to be a much deeper problem.

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[12] A realistic ideal admirer. Obviously an admirer with superhuman abilities in distinguishing the smallest difference in beauty and value will be able to instantly come up with a preference ranking. But such a retort misses the point. We are looking for a solution for humans, not gods.

Assume we are somehow spared from the paradox of choice, the psychological phenomenon Illouz references (Illouz 95 and Schwartz) to explain the hazardous nature of abundance in choice. Will we have *really* solved Srinivasan's worries for social justice? Recall the ideal appreciators are those who correctly appreciate the real objective value of *all* things of a certain sort or who have the fitting response to *all* objects of appreciation of a certain sort. As Levinson himself notes, this would mean all comprehensive ideal appreciators (those who are ideal appreciators in all domains) would be indiscernible with regards to their taste ("Artistic Worth" 229). In effect ideal critics (or admirers) would have no aesthetic (or sexual) *personality*, which is to say they could not express their individuality through their aesthetic (or sexual) preferences since all their aesthetic (or sexual) preferences would be identical. If *everyone* were a comprehensive ideal appreciator, aesthetic and sexual personality would be effectively non-existent. So, for example, everyone would be pansexual, assuming finally valuable experiences are distributed roughly evenly across all sexual orientations. This should and does "give us pause" ("Artistic Worth" 229). It would seem something has gone wrong[13] – upon first encountering such a society we would suspect the members of this society were shaped by authoritarian policy.

At any rate, the thought is scary enough to Levinson that he wrote an entire paper devoted to rescuing aesthetic personality despite his recommendation that we all become his ideal critics ("Artistic Worth"). For reasons I will have to give elsewhere I think the only

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[13] And indeed there are those who place a premium on individuality. For example, Nehamas considers moral (i.e. justice) concerns to be on par with concerns for one's individuality (such as concerns of aesthetic personality and no doubt sexual personality as well). Nehamas calls these last concerns of style[13] (*Only a Promise* 137). Theorists such as Nehamas would no doubt consider this society of ideal appreciators a dystopia.

real solution[14] for Levinson would be, ironically, for us to adopt a satisficing attitude with regards to our becoming ideal critics[15], (and so to some degree, a satisficing attitude toward our accruing of finally valuable experiences, since the latter partly depends on the former). In so doing, we would become only somewhat ideal critics (or admirers) and could thus preserve some aesthetic (or sexual) personality. But this is an awkward solution: on the assumption that there is real objective value/beauty in[16] an artwork or a person (as Levinson and Srinivasan seem to assume) this solution implies that our aesthetic (or sexual) personality *depends on our making mistakes in judgment* since our preferences will only be different from one another insofar as we fail to properly assess or respond to the artwork (or person). These *mistakes* are all that distinguish us from the ideal appreciators and so what preserve our aesthetic and sexual personalities. But this sounds wrong-headed.

What seems to be missing from the story is this: there isn't *one* ideal aesthetic or sexual palette. Many different tastes are good. To use the time worn example: there doesn't seem to be anything better or worse about preferring chocolate over vanilla or vanilla over chocolate. These are both perfectly good preferences to have: they are simply different.

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[14] Even what looked to be his most successful rescue attempt will not do. He claims that even if we were all ideal critics, our actual aesthetic choices in a given particular context (e.g. what movie to watch on a given Saturday night with a given program of movies to choose from) would still be different, due to our *unique histories* that led us to that choice moment. But this is not satisfactory. Though our choices would plausibly be different and dependent on our history, by hypothesis we wouldn't be making different choices on the basis of *different perceptions of aesthetic value*: we would all agree in our assessment of an object's aesthetic value. So this difference in choice could not be expressive of any *aesthetic personality*. The differences in our decisions are only expressive of our contingent histories. Thanks to Dominic Lopes for pointing this out.

[15] A suggestion he himself makes, though doesn't think he needs to heavily rely on ("Artistic Worth" 229, col. 2).

[16] Or only one most fitting way to respond to the artwork or person. Fitting attitude theorists need not say this though.

Am I suggesting that Levinson and Srinivasan made a mistake in assuming value is objective, that what they should have claimed was that value is subjective or agent-relative in some manner? I'm not fond of such a dichotomy and don't wish to fixate on this, but I will answer with this counter-claim: if good taste is to an extent "subjective" it surely isn't purely so. A taste for paint infused ice cream looks like a pretty clear case of an objectively bad taste. The same could be said of a taste for deafening music or rape-glorifying movies. Furthermore, if one agrees with Srinivasan that there is a problem in our desires, one cannot be a complete relativist about sexual preferences. Srinivasan herself notes, "as a matter of good politics, we treat the preferences of others as sacred," "but personal preferences – NO DICKS, NO FEMS, NO FATS, NO BLACKS, NO ARABS, NO RICE NO SPICE, MASC-FOR-MASC – are never just personal" (10, 8 respectively).

In brief, we need to become *some sort* of ideal appreciator (e.g. an ideal appreciator of Classical or Rock but not necessarily both). But we also must organize ourselves such that there are roughly sufficient appreciators for or every race, body type, etc. Where are we to turn for guidance? A natural answer: we should look to our essential self and our history to uncover our "authentic" desires and hope that such desires cut against the norms of beauty that funnel the bulk of our appreciation into just a select few genres (or a select few races, body types etc.). And I'm sympathetic to this answer: it seems that something like this will be correct. Consider this notion of "authentic desire" a dummy notion, nearly devoid of content but serving us well as a target[17]: whatever the nature of an "authentic

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[17] Just as "the dormitive virtue" can serve as a target for our research when we want to know why some things make us sleep.

desire" is, that is what we're after. Now the question arises: who will tell us what counts as "authentic" or "unauthentic" desires? Certainly not the state. As Srinivasan puts it:

> That way, we know, authoritarianism lies. This is true, most of all, in sex, where invocations of real or ideal desires have long been used as a cover for the rape of women and gay men. (10)

Society at large also isn't suited: as Illouz notes, social norms used to play a much larger role in indicating who we should desire, but these norms were largely rules of class, racial, religious and ethnic endogamy (19, 40, 51). And even well meaning feminists make serious mistakes about said authentic desires, as evidenced by the suggestions of earlier feminists we considered. It seems we have good reason (stemming from concerns for justice or maximizing utility) not to give an external arbiter the power to make determinations about someone's authentic desires.

In any case, today the *de facto* determiner of one's authentic desires is oneself (Illouz 49-53). More than ever we concern ourselves with questions about whether a potential mate will fit well, in some way, with our inner, essential self (Illouz 91, 92). So we would hope our tastes (usually the first filter in mate selection) are in tune with our essence. And this seems to be progress: this new criterion for coupling seems to be an improvement over old criteria that served merely to maintain class and other endogamy, or criteria that effectively objectified women (criteria that treated women as goods to be traded in an economic transaction) (34, 40). The trouble is, it seems we are poorly equipped to evaluate our authentic desires or even whether we will be particularly happy with a certain potential mate (92-94). But more importantly, conducting such an

introspection and intense rationalization of our choices creates further ambivalence in our choices and dampens our ability to feel a positive emotional attachment to the object chosen (94, 95). In short, this introspection is yet another cause of both types of commitment phobia. As Illouz puts it: "[m]odern romantic choice is plagued by the problem of having to navigate between the cognitive monitoring of voluntary choice and the involuntary dynamic of spontaneous sentiment" (91).

If we put these two latest conclusions together, we can see that our concerns for justice (which will reduce to concerns for maximizing utility under the utilitarian framework) have again forsaken the individual. Again, there is a sense in which we *should* desire only according to our authentic desires, and we are the only ones who can determine what those are, but if we attempt follow such a maxim in real life (in which said authentic desires are not immediately obvious to us) we are left not only to endure the ills of modern romantic choice, *but will fail to fully engage our affect and thus could fail to desire at all.* It's as if our attempt to follow the maxim is defeated before we even had a chance to follow it.

Let me now reflect the on the puzzle I have erected. There are two parts to it: the issue of motivating ourselves to transform ourselves and the issue of choosing what to transform ourselves into. Both are to do with attempts to change ourselves under our own will. Both, it is argued, present hazards: we can easily fall into thinking "one thought to many." Harboring the desire to maximize utility can not only taint our genuine care for someone (as when we visit a sick friend and explain that we did so just to maximize general

utility[18]) but also prevent us from forming a strong emotional attachment to someone in a relationship we initiated on this premise of maximizing utility. Likewise for the intensely rational process of introspecting our authentic desires. I have noted similar hazards in our attempts to transform ourselves in matters of moral character (i.e. when we try to so mold ourselves that we become more virtuous) (Trout [manuscript]). And finally, I contend that these hazards are not special to the utilitarian framework we have been operating under[19].

The puzzle raised puts us in a pinch since we see no other path for transformation besides through the "operation of our own wills" (Srinivasan 10): where the state and society at large is of limited aid in helping us transform (we are rightly wary of giving it too much power over us) we jump to the conclusion that the task falls upon our own shoulders. This is reflected in our theorizing: on one hand we have theories about what the state should be, what it should do and what it should value, and on the other hand we have theories about what one should be, what one should do and what one should value. And that's it: that accounts for nearly all of mainstream Western value theory (or so it seems to me). I doubt this is a coincidence either: it accords nicely with our cultural fixation on the

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[18] This example is due to Stocker.

[19] I haven't the space to run through the paper two more times but I'll try to provide an illustration of how we might erect the puzzle for a deontologist or virtue ethicist. Consider the second part of the puzzle, the difficulty of knowing *how* we should transform ourselves. Just as desiring only what one authentically desires would seem to maximize utility, so too does it appear to follow a universalizable maxim and be in accordance with what the virtuous agent would do. The trouble is, to put that recommendation into action, a real human would have to go through the heavy introspection we noted was hazardous and defeated the purpose of pursuing the introspection: it crippled our ability to desire fully and authentically what we really should desire. Thus the maxim would *not* be universalizable (for real humans) and would *not* be in accordance with what a virtuous (real human) agent would do. As I will soon suggest, what we, the real humans in these situations, *should* do is trust our friends and other intimates to help us find the right match – which looks to be a universalizable maxim and in accordance with the virtuous agent's actions. Finally, with regards to the problem of self-effacement (or "moral schizophrenia"), it has elsewhere been argued that this is a problem for deontological (Stocker) as well as virtue ethicist theories (Keller).

individual (e.g. in our focus on individual rational choice in value theory and individualism generally) as contrasted with the impersonal state.

But an obvious solution to our woes presents itself. And no, it's not technology. On dating websites and apps one is *encouraged* to think of people via metrics and data, increasing the "information overload" (93) and intense rationalization of our choices, while the abundance of options is all the harder to ignore as one scrolls through myriad profiles. Any aid in filtering the options is offset by the fact that the *user* is still the one who must determine what their preferences are in the first place. No, the solution I am thinking of is so simple it might sound naïve: we need good friends. It is friends, family and other intimates who know us well that have such potential for good in shaping our lives. If finding a match through dating apps is like shopping around in online stores through pages of products with only shallow documentation and a search engine created by opaque algorithms to help us, then being introduced to one's match (or matches) through a friend or family member is like receiving a gift: the decision was made for you. And if the gift was a poor fit, we can confront the one who proposed the gift and tell them to try harder. But most of all, if the gift was well thought-out (matching the history and essence of the individuals receiving the gift) and virtuously chosen (circumventing "what politics has chosen" for someone (Srinivasan 10)), suddenly Srinivasan and Illouz's concerns are put to rest.

More would need to be said to make this solution precise[20] but I hope I've at least made it sound plausible. But how is this an attack on value theory generally? One could certainly shoehorn this solution into existing value theory: one could construe me as saying "being a good friend-gift-giver is conducive to maximizing utility and thus we should be good friend-gift-givers." While I certainly wouldn't deny such a claim, this misses the larger point I am trying to make. We should ask ourselves why this natural solution didn't arise earlier. The reason, I contend, is that such solutions *are not on our theoretical radar*. Again, we theorize about states and individuals, how they should be, act, and what they should value. However, to my knowledge, *contemporary philosophy does precious little holistic theorizing about what constitutes a good life[21]*. If we had started with *this* in mind, we would have immediately availed ourselves of the good friends that will no doubt figure in a good life. To put things another way, I claim that an individual that adheres to our moral theories, aesthetic theories and theories of value ascription, and who lives in an impersonal state that adheres to our most finely crafted theory of justice will still not necessarily lead a good life: such an individual risks leading *a simply free and rational life*. But more goes into a good life than its being directed by a chain of one's own free and rational choices. Some things cannot be met by a lone but free and rationally deliberating individual, without that individual's life being stunted to some extent.

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[20] For example, is *no* self-moulding to take place, or only little? I consider the second answer correct. Faking it until you make it is a thing, and so is experimentation with regards to one's authentic desires. This last point is actually what I consider a more fruitful takeaway of Srinivasan's reminder that "[d]esire can take us by surprise, leading us somewhere we hadn't imagined we would ever go, or towards someone we never thought we would lust after, or love" (10). But still other questions remain for my solution: how close does one need to be before one can give certain kinds of gifts? Where is the boundary between helpful advice and over-bearing paternalism? Are we to bring back arranged marriages or something more tame? These are questions I do not know the answer to. But they do not seem inherently problematic.

[21] An ironic exception to this is Nehamas' *Art of Living*: he claims that the principle mark of a good life is that it is self-styled. While I don't deny that we do shape ourselves "sometimes under the operation of our own wills" (Srinivasan 10) I hope to have impressed upon the reader the *danger* of over-emphasizing such a recommendation and forgetting to consider the other ingredients that can make up a good life.

To be clear, I am not claiming all of value theory needs to be torn down. Rather, I am suggesting a new (or perhaps renewed) focus on a more holistic theorizing: we need theories that illuminate the Good Life and maybe even theories that aren't theories, but simply stories and pictures to inspire. Though it probably wouldn't hurt if *somebody* understood the theory and science behind all this.

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