

**Chapter Title:** The Amorality of Romantic Love

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## **Abstract**

It has been argued that romantic love is an intrinsically moral phenomenon – a phenomenon that is directly connected to morality. The connection is elucidated in terms of reasons for love, and reasons of love. It is said that romantic love is a response to moral reasons – the moral qualities of the beloved. Additionally, the reasons that love produces are also moral in nature. Since romantic love is a response to moral qualities and a source of moral motivation, it is itself moral. This chapter aims to cast doubt on both these claims. By employing the model of emotional rationality it shows that a moralistic fallacy is committed when reasons for love are construed as moral. Reasons of love are also not essentially moral but rather of both moral and nonmoral kinds. Reasons of love are in part determined by cultural narratives and norms pertaining to love. Romantic love is not moral in nature. Morality is extrinsic to love.

**Keywords:** morality, romantic love, emotions, rationality, reasons

## **Introduction**

Philosophical discussions of romantic love<sup>1</sup> are often concerned with its moral dimensions. Indeed, some leading accounts characterize it as an intrinsically moral phenomenon. This means either or both of two things: (1) when in love, we respond to the moral qualities of our beloveds, and (2) love is the primary motivation for treating our beloveds morally. I dispute both of these claims. Using key concepts of the rationality of emotions, I argue that attempts to categorize romantic love as an intrinsically moral phenomenon relying on claim (1) commit a moralistic fallacy. They construct idealized accounts of love rather than providing a realistic picture of it. As regards (2), reasons of love are not reducible to moral reasons. Although they can be moral, they are not so

exclusively. Ultimately, they belong in their own category, which isn't determined by the kind of valuing love involves. Rather, reasons of love are grounded in the lover's internal love model, informed by the lover's attachment style and experience, and by social norms pertaining to romantic love. Since both are highly variable, they are unlikely to coincide with morality. Moral norms, therefore, are extrinsic to love. Romantic love is not an intrinsically moral phenomenon.

I begin by sketching a psychological profile of romantic love in Section I, differentiating between passionate and companionate love. Philosophers often complain that either one or the other should not be considered romantic love. For the purposes of this chapter either one or both of them together are what the discussion of the morality of love is about. In Section II, I prepare the ground for the discussion of reasons for love by distinguishing between prudent, moral, and aptness norms used to assess the rationality of emotions. The conflation of these norms can result in a moralistic fallacy. This happens when we infer from the claim that an emotional occurrence is immoral that it must also be irrational. Section III lays out preliminary distinctions required to clarify the possible connections between romantic love and morality. It demonstrates that when assessing an emotional state in moral terms, avoiding the moralistic fallacy requires that emotion's aptness or fittingness conditions be the same as the conditions for that emotion's moral assessment. Section IV examines two accounts that attempt to show that reasons for love are moral reasons by appealing to the moral features of the beloved. Both are found to commit a moralistic fallacy. Section V scrutinizes three attempts to reduce reasons of love to moral reasons. They are the Care View, the Duties of Trust View, and the Moral Deliberation View. Each view gets something right about morality and romantic love. Each one, however, ultimately fails to show that reasons of love are reducible to moral reasons. Reasons of love can be of both moral and nonmoral kinds. This is in part explained by the influence of the cultural narratives of love, a lover's history and attachment style, and other factors. I conclude that because neither reasons for nor reasons of love are intrinsically moral, morality is external to love. Romantic love is not a moral phenomenon.

## **Romantic Love: Definitions**

Although there is no consensus on how to best define romantic love, there are two common contenders. First, romantic love can be characterized as a passionate, obsessive state. It is illustrated by phrases such as being 'in love', falling 'head over heels', or feeling 'madly in love'. One finds this sort of love in the stories of Romeo and Juliet, Abelard and Heloise, Tristan and Isolde. Its psychological profile is described by Dorothy Tennov as having intrusive thoughts about the beloveds, violent feelings and desires directed at

them, and motivation to seek their company and intimacy (Tennov 1999/1979; Fisher 1992, 2004). It is also characterized by the idealization of the beloveds, to whom the lovers attribute special and unique value, not found in anyone else (Stendhal 1822/1967; Singer 2009a; Grau 2006; Grau and Pury 2014).

Some dismiss this definition of romantic love as referring to nothing more than infatuation or crush, not serious or 'real' love (cf. Frankfurt 2004; Velleman 1999). Spontaneous and whimsical, it is bound to end quickly. At best, it will pave the way for a deeper kind of love, the love that lasts: companionate love. Companionate love is characterized by a much calmer emotional state, an acquired intimacy, understanding, and trust between the lovers (Hatfield and Rapson 1996; Wang and Nguyen 1995; Kim and Hatfield 2004). Though less intense, companionate love "is a warm feeling of affection and tenderness that people feel for those with whom their lives are deeply connected" (Kim and Hatfield 2004, 175). It is closely associated with friendship, and involves shared values, strong and deep attachment, feelings of comfort, and a long-term commitment. It develops over a long period of time and can last for years, even a lifetime (Hatfield and Rapson 1996; Contreras, Hendrick, and Hendrick 1986; Hendrick, Hendrick, and Adler 1988; Kim and Hatfield 2004).

The dismissal of passionate love as not serious or real seems to rest on the presumed tradeoff between intense passion and deeper connection. One might wonder whether companionate love can justifiably bear the title 'romantic'. It can, no doubt, retain some or obtain new romantic elements; but it need not arise from passionate love in the first place. Passionate love, on the other hand, should not be dismissed as foolish and pointless. As is illustrated in many works of fiction and films, it can be very powerful and fulfilling, and also involve a deep mode of connection.

The distinction between passionate and companionate love can be useful, but for the purposes of this chapter it makes no difference. I take romantic love to be passionate love that can transform into companionate love, while maintaining some of the elements of passionate love. This conception is sufficient to discuss the morality of both reasons for and reasons of love.

## **Emotions and rationality**

I argue elsewhere that romantic love is not an emotion but rather a syndrome, comprising a variety of affective, cognitive, and behavioral dispositions (Pismenny and Prinz 2017; Pismenny 2018). Nevertheless, romantic love essentially involves vast if not unlimited emotional dispositions. I will, therefore, use the various rational norms applicable to emotions as a framework for thinking about the rationality of love. This will be useful for two reasons: first, it will help elucidate the relationship between love and reasons, and second, it will help zoom in on the different relationships between love and morality.

Emotions are intentional states (Deonna and Teroni 2012; Tappolet 2016). They represent certain features of the world and ourselves to us. While the question of intentionality of emotions is a complex one, there are at least two kinds of 'object' of emotions: the target, which is the primary object of the emotion, and the formal object (Kenny 1963). The target of an emotion is that at which the emotion is directed. The formal object represents the value that supervenes on the focal properties of the target (de Sousa 1987). For example, fear of a dog is directed at a dog, its target, while its formal object is dangerousness. To fear the dog is to attribute to it the property of being dangerous. Emotions, therefore, are evaluations of objects and situations relevant to those who are experiencing them, and each emotion type is individuated by the specific formal object that it attributes to its target.

Insofar as each emotion represents the value it is about, each emotion has its own standard of correctness. An emotion is assessed for correctly or incorrectly representing its target as having a particular value. This standard of correctness is the aptness or fittingness of emotions (de Sousa 1987). An emotion fails to be apt when the value it attributes to its target cannot be shown to be grounded in it. For instance, my anger at my friend for being late is inapt when in fact she is on time, and I have simply misremembered the hour we have agreed upon. Since showing up on time does not ground offensiveness, my anger is unfitting. Perhaps my anger is also inapt if she has left on time but was late because her subway train broke down, and she had no way of alerting me as she had no reception underground. On the other hand, if she simply managed her time poorly, or did not think it was important to meet me on time, my anger at her is fitting and justified, as her attitude and behavior are really insulting.

Even though aptness is the intrinsic norm of rational assessment for any emotion (as it stems directly from the emotion's meaning), it is not the only norm of rationality applicable to them. We often assess emotions from prudential and moral points of view. One might say that I ought not to be angry with my friend for being late, as my anger is just a waste of energy. My anger will not undo her lateness. My anger is unproductive and thus irrational. Or one might insist that patience is a virtue, and therefore, my anger reveals a character flaw. That amounts to regarding my anger as inappropriate in the sense of constituting a moral failure on my part. Furthermore, emotions are also subject to meta-attitudes such as those stemming from cultural norms of feeling and display. For instance, in the U.S. a woman's anger is more likely to be deemed inappropriate than a man's (Salerno and Peter-Hagene 2015). These meta-attitudes affect how women experience and express anger. They often feel unjustified in feeling it, and are afraid of revealing it lest they be labeled hysterical, etc.

Although it is common to assess emotions from prudential and moral standpoints, it is important to keep these assessments separate from that of aptness. Indeed, to run together aptness and prudential or moral assessments is to commit a prudential or a moralistic fallacy, respectively. As Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson put it, "[T]o

commit the moralistic fallacy is to infer, from the claim that it would be wrong or vicious to feel an emotion, that it is therefore unfitting” (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000). Aptness or fittingness is a distinct mode of correctness of emotions.

Romantic love too can be assessed in terms of these norms. From a meta-attitude perspective, in the West, romantic love is considered extremely important for a happy and meaningful life, as well as the most important reason to get married. In some Eastern cultures, by contrast, it is considered unstable and ephemeral, and a poor basis for matrimony (Beach and Tesser 1988; Branden 1980; Levine et al. 1995; Rothbaum and Tsang 1998, Triandis 1990; Dion and Dion 1996; Neto et al. 2000, Nelson and Yon 2019). A given case of love may be prudentially sound when it helps further one’s goals such as marriage and childrearing, or impractical as in the cases of unrequited love, or love not directed at one’s partner in a monogamous relationship. The fittingness conditions of love (if there are any) correlate with the formal object of love – lovability – the evaluative property in virtue of which the beloved is lovable. To elucidate this evaluative property, we would need to identify a set of properties that ground it as we have done in the cases of fear and anger. We can assess love from a moral standpoint by examining whether reasons for love are moral reasons, and whether reasons of love motivate us to act morally. In the following sections I discuss each question in turn.

### **Love and Morality: Preliminary Distinctions**

Evaluating reasons for love from a moral standpoint can take different forms. First, it might be thought that morality dictates that we love certain people—though it seems very unlikely that we *owe* romantic love to anyone.<sup>2</sup>

Second, we might evaluate reasons for love<sup>3</sup> as morally appropriate or inappropriate. Perhaps loving someone for their money is morally condemnable, while loving someone for their character is morally praiseworthy. On a view of this kind, the lovability of one’s beloved is grounded in their character traits, which may or may not be moral. If so, love may be apt when the beloved is loved for their humor, wit, attentiveness, and happy disposition (see Keller 2000). Here the aptness and moral assessments are clearly distinct. While an instance of such love may be fitting, it may at the same time be morally problematic if it takes the form of an adulterous affair, or manifests itself through abuse, or becomes a fetishism focusing exclusively on some of the beloved’s physical qualities. Similarly, love may be inapt but morally unproblematic, as in the case of the lover’s misattribution of qualities—if any such exist—that would ground lovability of the beloved. One may be deluded or tricked into thinking that the beloved is witty, funny, and charming but over time discover that it was all a fantasy or an act. While the beloved might have acted immorally, the lover’s love was not morally devious but simply grounded in false assumptions.

Third, it might be that reasons for love are moral reasons in so far as they pick out only moral qualities of the beloved. On such a view, the beloved is loved for their moral character (Abramson and Leite 2011). Construed this way, romantic love is an intrinsically moral phenomenon since its fittingness conditions are defined by the moral virtues of the beloved. It is apt only when someone is loved for their moral character and inapt when the moral character in the beloved is lacking, or the beloved is loved for some nonmoral features.

A worry arises with respect to this last consideration: aren't we committing a moralistic fallacy by conflating the fittingness norms of love with moral norms? It might seem so since the same moral qualities of the beloved are used to assess love for both of these norms. However, when the fittingness norm of love is defined by moral qualities, no fallacy need be committed. It might be that romantic love just is (or is like) a moral emotion, in requiring only moral features to ground the target's possession of the properties that define its formal object (D'Arms and Jacobson 2000; Gibbard 1990). Emotions like guilt, shame, contempt, indignation, and anger are often cited as examples of moral emotions because they deal with notions like personal moral failures, moral failures of others, justice, fairness, desert, and harm. When these emotions are directed at moral features of the situation, they are moral emotions.

It is likely, however, that not all cases of these emotions are purely moral cases (Prinz 2007). For I may be feeling angry that the car broke down, ashamed of my body, guilty of wasting time on Twitter, contemptuous of my friend's poor taste in music. Arguably, these are not examples of moral failures. Thus, if there are purely moral emotions (such as indignation), there are very few of them (Gibbard 1990; Prinz and Nichols 2010).

If love's fittingness conditions are determined by moral properties, then love is an intrinsically moral attitude. Nothing but the lovability of the beloved is relevant to love's fittingness. But we could still make a further moral assessment of a given instance of love. While an instance of love is grounded in the moral qualities of the beloved, it might still be morally problematic because it is adulterous or abusive. Fittingness and moral assessments can still be kept apart, so as to avoid the moralistic fallacy.

This last type of case does not preclude a very intimate connection between love and morality. Moral features, it could be held, are defining features of love. Without them love is unfitting: it gets things wrong either about the beloved or about what is worth loving. Lovability, in such cases, would be a moral property, and the function of love is to correctly identify those who are lovable.

## **Are Reasons For Love Moral Reasons?**

While it is conceivable that reasons for love are moral in nature, is it plausible that they are? What arguments can be offered in support of lovability being a moral property? Two accounts have attempted to show this. The first is that of David Velleman, who argues that lovability is grounded in the beloved's personhood – their rational will and capacity to value (Velleman 1999). The second, due to Kate Abramson and Adam Leite, argues that lovability is grounded in the beloved's moral qualities (Abramson and Leite 2011). I examine each in turn.

David Velleman models his view of love on the Kantian account of respect. He states that from the phenomenological perspective love feels like an arresting awareness of the person's value that is grounded in their personhood (Velleman 1999, 360). Persons have unconditional moral worth because they are rational and possess the capacity to value. Love is a response to and an appreciation of this worth (Velleman 1999, 365)<sup>4</sup>.

For Velleman, love is an intrinsically moral emotion since it is the moral value of persons that love is responding to. Love is apt when the beloved is loved for their personhood. Love is inapt when the beloved is loved for some other qualities such as their good looks and delicious cooking, or if the beloved is not a person.

Velleman holds that one advantage of his view is that the beloved is valued the way anyone would want to be valued – for who they truly are, and also as irreplaceable: for “[w]hat makes something truly irreplaceable is a value that commands appreciation for it as it is in itself, without comparison to anything else, and hence without substitutions” (Velleman 1999, 369).

In his attempt to ground lovability in personhood, Velleman's account shows too much and too little.<sup>5</sup> It shows too much since most cases of romantic love involve persons, and so love will rarely be inapt. Every person is equally lovable since all persons possess the same immeasurable value of dignity grounded in personhood. It shows too little, since few would recognize a universal abstract property of personhood or rational will as their reason for loving their beloveds. Rather it is the particularity of the beloved that love highlights and not a universal bare core that persons might have. Velleman acknowledges that we come to love our beloveds on the basis of the singular expression of their personhood, which seems designed to capture the particularity of the beloved (Velleman 1999, 371-2). However, since he insists that it is not the particular qualities that constitute the beloved's lovability, this point only explains rather than justifies a given instance of love.

In effect, Velleman's account commits a moralistic fallacy since his reasons for picking personhood as the quality that grounds lovability are moral ones. He wants to resolve the conflict between love and morality that arises, according to Kant, due to love's partiality<sup>6</sup>; he also thinks that if we love for some other qualities, our loves are superficial and are not loves that take our beloveds as ends in themselves. But while we might value our beloveds as moral beings, valuing them finally need not be reduced to the Kantian notion of ends in themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Kate Abramson and Adam Leite attempt to show that love is an intrinsically moral emotion by arguing that love is fitting when it is a response to moral qualities of the beloved (Abramson and Leite 2011). They point out that when asked why one loves their beloved, it is typical to list the beloved's moral character traits (Abramson and Leite 2011, 678). This kind of response feels more legitimate than appeals to convenience or the beloved's good looks. This may be so in part because we feel that moral traits best capture a person's essence: only thus can a person be loved for who they are. On this view, love is apt when the beloved is loved for their moral character traits. It is inapt if the beloved does not possess good moral character for which the lover takes themselves to be loving them, or if the beloved is loved for qualities other than moral.

Though it seems plausible to identify love's fittingness conditions by attending to answers commonly given to the question of why one loves, there are three main problems with this strategy. First, it is important to determine whether those answers are correct. If love's function is to track moral qualities then we should expect these qualities to serve as grounds for falling in love. Generally, there is a correlation between what makes emotions apt and their eliciting conditions. Whether the correlation exists is an empirical question. Abramson and Leite rely on characters from *Sense and Sensibility* to illustrate their view. But one need not look far for counter examples: Mr. Darcy, Rhett Butler, Eugene Onegin, Don Juan, Heathcliff, Dorian Gray, Carmen, Salome, Nana, Lulu, Hedda Gabler are some examples of romantic heroes and heroines with questionable or devious characters. A romantic hero is often a bad boy or an inconsiderate girl, someone with charisma and character rather than moral virtue. Indeed, exhibiting rudeness and standoffishness as a romantic strategy is more likely to catch attention, while being nice is likely to land one in the 'friend zone'<sup>8</sup> (for discussion see McDaniel 2005; Ahmetoglu and Swami 2012). If it is objected that such cases do not exemplify 'real love' because they fail to be grounded in moral qualities, that would be manifestly begging the question against the examples just provided.

Second, whether moral properties are the grounding properties of lovability is difficult to determine through self-report, since asking why one loves often arises when the lover's family or friends disapprove of their choice of love object. This puts the lover on the defensive, and they may try to appease the questioner by trying to rectify the beloved's flaws in the eyes of the accusers. Pointing to these qualities does not justify one's romantic love from the aptness point of view. Instead, attempting to show that the beloved is a good person evokes either prudential norms to reassure those concerned that the lover's wellbeing not be negatively affected by the beloved, or moral norms as an *ex-post-facto* rationalization to appease a critic.

Third, when faced with the demand to justify one's love, one is already in love. Indeed, love makes us idealize our beloveds, attaching positive values to their trivial traits, and underplaying or rationalizing their shortcomings. We inflate the goodness of our partners and of our relationships in comparison to others (Rusbult and Buunk 1993;

Martz et al. 1998; Murray, Holmes, and Griffin 1996a, 1996b; Showers and Kevlyn 1999). For this reason, referencing the practice of referring to the positive character traits of the beloved in justifying one's love is unhelpful, since this practice does not reveal the grounds for one's love but rather provides rationalizations for its existence. Or it might simply display the qualities that the lover lingers on when thinking about the beloved.

Abramson and Leite commit a moralistic fallacy in taking lovability to be grounded in moral character. Their project is not to identify lovability as an evaluative property to which we respond with love. Instead, they construct a moral ideal of love according to which the lover should love the beloved for their moral virtues.<sup>9</sup> However, since there is no actual correlation between love's eliciting conditions and the moral character of the beloveds, picking moral virtues as grounding features of lovability is arbitrary.

Of course Abramson and Leite could insist that love is essentially morally good by definition. Anything else simply cannot count as 'real love' even if it fits the psychological profile described in Section I. I have been trying to show that such a move begs the question. Romantic love is not an intrinsically moral emotion because lovability cannot be confined to moral qualities. It need not be grounded in either personhood or moral character traits. Moralizing reasons for love results in conflating aptness and moral norms, and in over-intellectualizing love.

Nonetheless, some might claim that love is intrinsically moral because the reasons that love *produces* are moral reasons. I explore this possibility in the next section.

### **Are Reasons of Love Moral Reasons?**

If lovability were a moral property, and love were a fitting response to it, it might have been reasonable to expect love to generate moral reasons for actions: for if love were essentially a recognition and appreciation of the beloved as a moral agent, it would give one a reason to treat them as such. But since lovability is not necessarily a moral property, valuing the beloved does not obviously generate moral reasons. Nevertheless, reasons of love might still be moral reasons. Indeed, quite independently of claims about reasons for love, some have argued that reasons of love are reducible to moral reasons. Others argue that reasons of love are *sui generis*. In this section I hope to show that a hybrid account of the reasons of love is most plausible: reasons of love can be of either kind.

To do so I consider three views according to which reasons of love are moral reasons. First, on what I call the Care View, reasons of love are moral reasons because they are concerned with promoting the beloved's wellbeing for its own sake. And this is what morality is inherently about – caring for people. Second, on what I call the Duties of Trust View, reasons of love are moral reasons because a romantic relationship is based on trust, and trust creates moral obligations. Third, on what I call the Moral Deliberation

View, reasons of love are moral reasons because moral reasoning is indispensable in practical deliberation generally, not excluding situations involving romantic love.

Before considering these three views, it is worth emphasizing that romantic love has a motivational component. As discussed in sections I and II, love is an affective state (like an emotion) or better, a syndrome that includes dispositions to experience affective states. Emotions such as anger and fear move us to aggress against the wrongdoer, or to freeze or flee. If love is like emotions in this regard, we should expect it to provide a set of motivations of its own. Indeed, recall that romantic love is characterized by the motivation to seek the beloved's company and intimacy. This motivation is enabled both in passionate and companionate types of love. Typically when in love, the lover seeks proximity to the beloved, longs for their company, desires reciprocity, etc. Over time the lover develops an attachment to the beloved, which motivates the lover to sustain the ongoing relationship, and when apart, to long for union (Fisher 1998). Romantic love moves the lover to achieve certain ends.

Several authors have argued that the motivational force of love can be harnessed by the will. Robert Solomon (1973) went as far as to claim that love and other emotions could be chosen. Without going quite so far, Harry Frankfurt is among those who characterize love as volitional. He says it is a "configuration of the will that consists in a practical concern for what is good for the beloved" (Frankfurt 2004, 43). He defines love as "a disinterested concern for the existence of what is loved, and for what is good for it" (Frankfurt 2004, 42). Thus, to love is to care for the beloved's wellbeing, and to promote it for its own sake (see also Taylor 1976; Newton-Smith 1989; LaFollette 1996; Soble 1997; White 2001; Helm 2010; Abramson and Leite 2011; Wallace 2012, Smuts 2014)<sup>10</sup>.

Frankfurt rejects the idea that reasons of love are moral reasons on several grounds. First, the kind of care and valuing that love generates is partial – it is directed towards a particular individual – the beloved – who acquires a special nonfungible value in virtue of being loved (Frankfurt 2004, 39-41). Whereas one might care for the sick or the poor as a generic object: any sick or poor will do, any one of them qualifies as a proper object of care (Frankfurt 2004, 44). Second, for Frankfurt love has its own reasons and duties that stem directly from the love attitude and the value love has for the lover as opposed to moral principles (Frankfurt 1998). He says, "I believe that it is possible to give a better explanation of the unquestionable truth that loving someone or something entails that there are certain things we must do – a more authentic and more illuminating explanation than one that resorts to the notion of moral obligation" (Frankfurt 1998, 6). He continues, "The imperatives of love are not grounded in the strictures of moral obligation but in the compelling facts that loving is of decisive importance to us and that it is rather hard to come by" (Frankfurt 1998, 7). Thus, reasons of love are not reducible to moral reasons because love as a species of caring generates reasons of its own. This brings us to the first of three views to be assessed.

According to what I call the Care View, reasons of love are moral reasons because love has a central role to play in morality. Care, as disinterested concern for the other, could take the form of treating the other as an end. In that regard care is like love, if not identical to love, and a capacity for love might need to be cultivated in order to value the well-being of others as much as one's own.<sup>11</sup> As Brook Sadler points out, "a commitment to being morally attentive to another, to treating her as an end-in-herself, is constitutive of a caring relationship with the other, thus blurring the line between an ethics that emphasizes duty and obligation and an ethics of care" (Sadler 2006, 252).<sup>12</sup>

Proponents of the Care View argue that acting from care is a paradigmatic example of moral action. For instance, Katrien Schaubroeck in her "Reasons of Love" points out that Susan Wolf's famous account of moral saints mischaracterizes morality as moralizing. Wolf's moral saint is concerned with the right, and one's duty to uphold it to the exclusion of all else. However, Schaubroeck argues, a truly good moral agent is likely to be concerned with the morally good actions themselves rather than mere commitment to moral principles (Schaubroeck 2019, 295-6). One wants to help those in need because they are in need, not because one has a duty to help. We want to help because we care about the well-being of others. Frankfurt is right that love singles out a particular individual while moral considerations may concern generic classes of people. However, since our moral actions are often directed at particular individuals even if we are not in love relationships with them, caring is arguably at the core of our moral concern for them.

Caring is central to some moral theories as well as many theories of love. Love is a paradigm of caring, an ideal towards which we might strive in our moral treatment of others: "[L]ove [is] an enabling condition of morality in the sense that it provides a firm experience with recognizing the individuality of another being" (Schaubroeck 2019, 297). But does it follow that reasons of love are moral reasons?

For four reasons we should resist the inference. Reasons of love are not moral reasons, nor are moral reasons reasons of love.

First, although care may be essential both to moral concerns and to love, neither is reducible to care. Nor are love and morality reducible to one another. While loving involves caring, not all caring involves loving. I might care for the well-being of my neighbors, without at the same time having the kind of emotional, cognitive, volitional engagement that loving consists in. Even if moral concerns stem from caring, it doesn't mean that they stem from love. Moreover, care is not a sufficient condition for morality, since we can care about anything, regardless of its moral status.

Second, moral reasons generalize: if they apply in one given case, they apply across all similar cases. This is not so in love. As Frankfurt points out, love is partial. It latches onto a particular individual, bestowing on them a unique non-fungible status. Reasons of love do not generalize because the kind of partial concern one has for the beloved does not extend to all. Additionally, the kind of commitment that love sometimes warrants flies in the face of moral considerations. A lover may be moved to commit

immoral acts on behalf of the beloved. If one were to insist that 'real love' would never motivate one to do anything immoral, one would again beg the question.

Third, while both love and morality involve disinterested concern for the other, the mode and the grounds of concern are different. The way we care for a stranger is not the way we care for our beloved. We might care for a stranger because we see them in need or in pain. We might be moved to help judging that the person needs help, not because it's our duty to help, or an obligation to help, or because helping is the right thing to do. However, even if the content of our moral motivation does not contain notions of 'duty', 'right', or 'ought', but rather only the specific factors of our situation, such as "this person needs my help!", the mode of concern does not represent the individual as non-fungible or special, and is not grounded in romantic love.

Fourth, the notion of care is simply too generic to adequately capture the kind of concern present in either love or moral considerations. In the current discussion, care is narrowly defined as disinterested concern for the other's wellbeing. But this is only one species of caring. One can care for something instrumentally. In its most general sense care only means valuing, or perhaps appreciating the value of something<sup>13</sup>. Caring *simpliciter* is too thin a concept to differentiate the many states in which it is involved, and too basic a concept to be explained in terms of any more complex one such as love or morality.

If appealing to care does not help in showing that reasons of love are necessarily moral reasons, another possible approach is the Duties of Trust approach. It is described by R. Jay Wallace in his "Duties of Love" (2012). According to Wallace, there are special duties<sup>14</sup> of trust, vulnerability, and reciprocity and gratitude that arise from our standing in close relationships with those we love. The duties of trust arise from the expectations the beloved is led to form, thereby obligating the lover to fulfill those expectations. Duties of vulnerability arise with respect to those who are particularly vulnerable to being harmed by the one they love. Duties of reciprocity and gratitude also arise from having benefited from a lover's altruistic actions (Wallace 2012, 177-8). These duties are not special to romantic relationships. They can arise in many different kinds of human interactions. However, they may be particularly salient in romantic relationships given their intimate nature, and the closeness and emotional interconnectedness they establish.

Given their salience, are these moral duties duties of love? Insofar as they arise in love contexts, yes. In so far as they are not unique to these contexts, no. Indeed, the fact that these duties are not unique to romantic love has been used to deny that there are *sui generis* reasons of love. According to what Wallace calls a reductionist account, whatever moral reasons guide any given interpersonal interaction are the same kinds of reasons that guide romantic interactions (Wallace 2012, 176-83). That is, there doesn't seem to be a special set of moral duties that arises between the lovers.

This seems too strong. We might acknowledge that these kinds of moral duties are present in romantic love relationships as well as other kinds of interpersonal

relationships but deny that these are the only kinds of reasons applicable to love. Indeed, since love does have a motivational component, it seems to be able to provide the lovers with reasons of its own. These reasons might either stem from the love attitude itself or from the romantic love relationship. Given the typical 'goals' of love, loving might motivate one to seek the company of the beloved, court them in hopes of facilitating reciprocation, and take actions that would enable love to continue. Once the relationship is formed, it too provides reasons for action by serving as a normative framework for interaction.

One might find this picture of reasons of love too generic. To imbue it with specificity it is important to recognize the role that social norms play with respect to love. Like all our experiences, our romantic love experiences are informed by our upbringing and cultural context. The social norms that we inherit and internalize inform our ideas of what kinds of reasons love can provide. For example, social norms elaborate on what sort of beloved is appropriate (not a child, a nonhuman animal, and, in not so distant past, not someone of the same sex), how love feelings should be experienced (deeply, intensely), expressed (romantic words and gestures, intimacy), and acted upon (attending to the beloved's needs, self-sacrifice). The social narratives of romantic love have changed over time, and differ across societies (Kim and Hatfield 2004; Mesquita and Frijda 1992; Singer 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). To the extent that they determine reasons of love, they are not exclusively moral reasons even though they might have the appearance of being moral because of their rigidity.

The apparent rigidity of the reasons of love as supplied by social norms brings us to the last approach to the question of whether reasons of love are moral reasons – The Moral Deliberation View. It is advanced by Brook Sadler, who argues we should reject the idea that social norms provide reasons of love for two reasons: (1) it commits one to an uncritical view of what a romantic relationship should be, endorsing an objectionable social conservatism, and (2) the social norms are not so clearly defined in a contemporary pluralist society (Sadler 2006, 248-9). Rigidly defined norms often promote injustice and limit personal freedom. Thus, it is necessary to engage in moral reasoning in order to critically assess these norms. Furthermore, since there is disagreement about what the norms of love are, in a modern society romantic norms are more like suggestions with which the individual lovers engage critically. When we do, we construct our roles as lovers (Sadler 2006, 250). This too can be aided by moral deliberation.

Sadler is right on both counts. The emergence of various forms of ethical non-monogamy is a case in point. It is particularly poignant because monogamy was and still often is taken to be a moral ideal, whereas ethical non-monogamy is viewed as morally deficient (for discussion see Brunning 2016; Brake 2017; Jenkins 2017; de Sousa 2017). Furthermore, moral deliberation is relevant when faced with a conflicting romantic narrative: 'you are mine' vs. 'I love your freedom'; 'all is fair in love and war' vs. 'love brings out the best in us'. However, Sadler's reasoning fails to show that reasons of love

are moral reasons. Instead, it demonstrates how moral reasons can figure in the assessment of the norms pertaining to romantic love, modifying them, and reconstructing the ideal of love. It is clear too that this kind of moral assessment is extrinsic to love. Thus, reasons of love cannot be said to be moral reasons in this way.

Sadler insists, “Moral considerations are formative of how we understand what is expected of us and what we are to do in relationships of love and friendship” (Sadler 2006, 251). However, this is only partially so. On the one hand, reasons of love can be critically assessed from the moral standpoint. On the other hand, some reasons of love can be moral reasons when they are a part of a romantic narrative. That is, it could well be that part of one’s romantic love model – a kind of personal conception of love – is that one ought to respect and promote the choices of the beloved, etc.

At the same time the phrase, ‘I did it because I love you’ can be meaningful whatever is substituted for ‘it’. Indeed, love can fail along prudential, moral, and other dimensions but it need not fail as love. First, it is clear that love can motivate us to lie, cheat, steal, and murder on our beloved’s behalf.<sup>15</sup> The ultimate sacrifice of one’s moral self for the sake of the beloved could be the categorical manifestation of one’s romantic commitment. Becoming a culprit, sharing the blame, or simply assisting the beloved’s ends are all plausible reasons of love. Second, love can move the lover to do the very same things to the beloved: lie, cheat, steal, and even murder them. These actions can be either construed as deeply mistaken acts of beneficence as when the lover lies to protect the beloved’s feelings or murders them to rid them of unhappiness and angst of existence, or as malevolent actions intended to harm: ‘I wish you were dead because I love you’ or ‘I wish you to suffer because I love you’ are perfectly intelligible utterances love might motivate. ‘If he doesn’t hit you, he doesn’t love you’ has been a common attitude among women across cultures (Ben-Ze’ev and Goussinsky 2008).

It is important to recognize that appealing to love in justifying one’s abhorrent actions has little merit.<sup>16</sup> Yet, it is also important to recognize that these can be reasons of love, nonetheless. This is evident from the contradictory narratives of love in our and other societies. Furthermore, an even greater specificity with respect to reasons of love can be achieved by looking at individual lovers, discerning their ideas of what love is, and how they practice them. An individual’s history, their attachment style<sup>17</sup>, their conceptions of love informed by family histories, personal experiences, and the cultural narratives they inherit, all contribute to the determination of what reasons of love are for them. Indeed, having different conceptions of love is often a cause of great tension between lovers. Given the multitude of factors that contribute to one’s reasons of love, their diversity is not surprising. Some of these reasons can be moral reasons if they are a part of one’s love model. Yet, it seems that any reason can be a reason of love. Therefore, reasons of love are not reducible to moral reasons.

After surveying the three views that attempts to show that reasons of love are moral reasons, it seems clear that reasons of love can be both moral and nonmoral. For

this reason I think the right view of the reasons of love is the hybrid view: reasons of love can be of both kinds. Even though morality and love have care in common, that shared element does not establish that reasons of love are exclusively moral. The Duties of Trust View demonstrates that some reasons of love can be moral in so far as they arise from moral duties one acquires when one enters an intimate relationship. However, these duties are not exclusive to love; neither are they exhaustive. Lastly, the Moral Deliberation View accurately shows that moral deliberation is relevant in a romantic love context: a moral assessment of reasons of love is often desirable. But that does not show that reasons of love are intrinsically moral. Furthermore, it remains an open question whether the narratives of love that are dominated by moral reasons provide for a better love experience.

## **Conclusion**

I have tried to show that romantic love is not an intrinsically moral phenomenon by arguing that neither reasons for love nor reasons of love are necessarily moral. Reasons for love are not as such moral because lovability is not necessarily a moral property. It can be grounded neither in the Kantian notion of personhood, nor in a collection of moral virtues. The Kantian notion is a nonstarter because personhood is a property possessed by most beloveds in a romantic context – most beloveds are persons. It is also too generic, which makes it incompatible with the particularity and partiality of love. It is not grounded in moral virtues because if love's function were to track the moral character of the beloved, virtuous people would be loved more than those of devious character. Yet, it seems, all kinds of people are loved, and an antihero is just as stereotypical a romantic protagonist as a virtuous person.

Reasons of love are not intrinsically moral reasons because love can provide both moral and nonmoral reasons. Some reasons of love conflict with morality not only because love might endorse immoral acts on behalf of the beloved but also towards the beloved. This is so because cultural scripts, family history, prior experience and many other factors contribute to one's model of love, and, therefore, to the range of reasons that love might be credited with providing. It is possible to critically assess a particular set of reasons of love from a moral as well as prudential standpoints. In the end, it is up to the lovers themselves to determine which reasons are reasons of love, and whether some are better than others.

## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> I will be using 'love' to mean 'romantic love' unless otherwise specified.

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<sup>2</sup> Although there may not be a duty to love someone romantically, perhaps other kinds of love such as a parent's love for a child can be said to be obligatory. See Liao 2015. But also Protasi 2019.

<sup>3</sup> I argue elsewhere that romantic love is not grounded in reasons of any kind (Pismenny and Prinz 2017; Pismenny 2018). I will not defend this view here but assume for the purposes of this paper that there can be reasons for love.

<sup>4</sup> Velleman explicitly denies that his account applies to passionate love. He says, "When I say that love is a moral emotion, what I have in mind is the love between close adult friends and relations—including spouses and other life-partners, insofar as their love has outgrown the effects of overvaluation and transference" (Velleman 1999, 351). Since his account applies to spouses and life-partners, however, he must have in mind companionate though not passionate love.

<sup>5</sup> There have been numerous articles criticizing Velleman's view. See, for instance, Millgram 2004 and Callcut 2005.

<sup>6</sup> See also the much discussed piece by Bernard Williams (Williams 1981).

<sup>7</sup> I thank Christopher Grau for this point.

<sup>8</sup> The scare quotes are intended to mark the numerous ways in which the pejorative connotation of the phrase is problematic.

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive criticism of the view that love should be directed at moral traits see Smuts 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Frankfurt explicitly rejects passionate love as 'real love' because it is rarely disinterested (Frankfurt 1999, 166; 2004, 43). Instead, he argues that paradigms of 'real love' include self-love and love for one's children.

<sup>11</sup> Frankfurt himself thinks that love is the source of final value: "Love is the originating source of terminal value. If we loved nothing, then nothing would possess for us any definitive and inherent worth. There would be nothing that we found ourselves in any way constrained to accept as a final end. By its very nature, loving entails both that we regard its objects as valuable in themselves and that we have no choice but to adopt those objects as our final ends. Insofar as love is the creator both of inherent or terminal value and of importance, then, it is the ultimate ground of practical rationality." (Frankfurt 2004, 55-6).

<sup>12</sup> For a developed account of care ethics and critique of deontology and consequentialism see Held 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Frankfurt himself develops an account of caring which he distinguishes from valuing (Frankfurt 1999). According to it, to care is to be committed to having a desire such that it is not discarded or neglected but continues to occupy an important place among one's preferences (Frankfurt 1999, 162). The person is unwilling to give it up. For example, if one truly cares about being a virtuous person, one would be unwilling to let go of that desire. Care is volitional, and love, a species of care, is also volitional. While to value would be to appreciate the value of a particular person, say, to care is to be committed to continue to desire the good of that person for its own sake.

<sup>14</sup> Wallace concentrates on defending the *sui generis* duties of love rather than simply reasons (see also Frankfurt 1998, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> See Cocking and Kennett 2000.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Peter Stearns' analysis of the defense in the so-called 'crimes of passion' (2010). Men (but not women) were often acquitted for killing their adulterous spouses.

<sup>17</sup> On attachment see Bowlby 1969; Ainsworth et al. 1978; Hazan and Shaver 1987; van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg 1988; Marazziti et al. 2010.

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