

7 Intimate Relations

Friends and Lovers

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1 Introduction

Bob is in love with Amanda. Amanda, however, has a gambling problem. In order to pay her overdue mortgage and keep her house, she has just stolen the payroll from the safe of the small business in which she works. Amanda needs an alibi and Bob agrees to lie to the police to provide her with one. He thinks it would be morally wrong, but he thinks he must do it nonetheless. He thinks that lying for Amanda would be foolish and likely to land him in jail, yet he thinks that he must do it anyway. He thinks he shouldn't, but he also thinks that he must; he feels obligated by love.

Lovers have no difficulty in understanding Bob's situation, but it seems that many philosophers do. We, contrary to many philosophers, say Bob may well count as rational—his judgment is not overpowered nor is he suffering from weakness of will—and that when he decides to lie for Amanda he acts on a kind of reason that is *sui generis*—a reason of love.

In this paper, we look at two kinds of relations that give rise to reasons for action of a distinctive sort: friendship and erotic love. We argue that what is common to these different relations of affection is that the people in them exhibit dispositions toward mutual direction by one another and interpretation of one another (in a sense that we describe in detail below). This mutual responsiveness is, in part, a matter of responding to reasons that arise from the relation of love or friendship. These reasons are frequently distinct from—and may be opposed to—normative reasons arising from prudence or even morality. Yet reasons of love are normative: they too may obligate us. They may make demands on us that conflict with our present desires and require considerable sacrifice. Bob is not morally justified in lying for Amanda, nor prudentially justified. He is, however, erotically or romantically justified—though this justification is hardly likely to save him from criminal charges or moral opprobrium.

To understand the kind of normativity that attaches to reasons of love we need to tell a richer story about friendship, erotic love and the nature of the self. We assume it is uncontroversial that intimate relations are, for most people, fundamental to a valuable life and so that there are powerful

reasons to engage in them. But it is essential to these relations to give rise to reasons for action—they would not *be* the relations that we value if they did not. As we will show, direct responsiveness to reasons of love is a governing condition of erotic love and of friendship. So to enter into these relationships is to open oneself to having reasons of a certain sort. An agent who rules out in advance *any possibility whatsoever* that the reasons of friendship or love could trump moral or prudential reasons is thus incapable of really entering into these relations. But if friendship and love are both essentially reason-giving relationships, they are also essentially dangerous because the reasons that arise from them are different from, and can sometimes successfully compete with, reasons of prudence or morality.

Even if friendship and love are great goods, how then could it be rational for an agent to enter into a relation that essentially involves the possibility of having good reasons to be imprudent or immoral? This would be a puzzle if we ever came to love or friendship as fully formed selves for whom this question could be a live one. Our account, however, presupposes a relational view of the self: it assumes that we are constituted as the particular persons that we are in and through our relations with others.¹ We call this mutual constitution of the self through interaction ‘drawing,’ and we invite you to think of M. C. Escher’s famous ‘Drawing Hands.’² The ways in which the self may be drawn by others are many. But the ways in which we are drawn in relations of love and friendship are particularly central to who we are and who we take ourselves to be. In the example above, we can imagine a history of Bob and Amanda’s love in light of which his decision to lie or not to lie for Amanda is an existential choice: it is a choice to embrace or abandon a relationship that is central to being the person Bob takes himself to be. In this paper, we seek to explain the normativity of reasons of love by showing that relations of love play a central role in constituting us as the very agents that we are. We think this makes it rational for us to act as love demands.³

2 Friendship

Aristotle argues that friends are central to the good life and that friendship is a good that no one would choose to be without even if they had all the other goods. How is this good attained and constituted? A significant part of what we seek in friendship is the kind of intimacy that develops when we are loved, as Aristotle says, for who we are. But in order to love and be loved for the person that one is, close or companion friends need a deep mutual understanding of each other. We say that the development of this understanding and intimacy requires friends to be responsive directly to *each other*, rather than to the imperatives of, say, morality (whether broad-based or role driven) or prudence. Our argument is that, within close friendship, direction and interpretation are the key to the development and maintenance of mutual understanding between friends.⁴ Mutual direction

and interpretation importantly explain the particularity, intimacy, and non-replaceability of one's close friendships. They explain how, unlike pleasure- or use-friendships, one's close friendships are productive of non-derivative reasons for action.

My friend has a sudden whim to go ten-pin bowling, so I go. She comes to an art exhibition with me and recommends books she has read, or music she thinks I'll like. I might also be disposed, at her suggestion, to take up more long-term projects that I have previously had no interest in. I might, for example, try to acquire a taste for red wine or take up tai chi because she enjoys those things. My reasons for action where she is concerned do not depend on any contingent similarity of interests, and neither are they derivative on other personal or professional or moral commitments. Rather, our friendship gives rise to reasons for action directly. Even in the case where my close friend's interests diverge from mine, her interests continue to have action-guiding force for me, since in friendship it is her interests *as such* that are important. I go ten-pin bowling with her *because she is my friend*—full stop. Not only am I motivated to go, but I take myself to be justified in being so motivated. A person who purports to fail to understand the justificatory force of 'because she is my friend' is not being philosophically penetrating, but is rather merely obtuse. A person who routinely seeks endorsement from self-interest or morality before taking herself to have reason to do such things with or for a friend doesn't think or act as a friend *should*. In seeking such endorsement she has one thought too many.⁵ She fails to live up to the norms of friendship. Though we may not often think in such terms it is the case that when we act on reasons of friendship we act on normative reasons. Of course the reasons arising directly from friendship will not always override moral and prudential considerations but if they never do, we think the relationship could not be one of close friendship. We call this phenomenon in which my friend's interests *as such* provide me with reasons for action 'direction.'

Now consider the way in which friends contribute to each other's self-conception. Close friends often recognize and highlight aspects of one another's character; they often accept such interpretations from one another; and their self-conception is often changed and enriched by seeing themselves through their friend's eyes. Through your interpretations of me I may come to see myself as generous, clumsy, funny or cool, and my evaluation of these characteristics is also influenced by your responses. I may become more confident in making witty comments, or less embarrassed and more inclined to make a joke of my clumsiness than formerly. As a result of your influence and interpretation, I may adopt a new hairstyle or decide that my mother was wrong and I look good in red after all. Here too my reasons for revising my self-conception in light of your insights into me are non-derivative. I do this not because I think you are professionally qualified to help me see myself in the correct light, but because you are my friend. We call this phenomenon 'interpretation' in friendship.

Close friends, then, have a mutual atypical receptivity to each other's direction and interpretation and are provided, through the friendship, with reasons not shared by others. We can say, then, that these two mechanisms of direction and interpretation, taken together, generate mutual *drawing* between the friends. The drawing view of friendship involves a dynamic and ongoing process, which progressively shapes and defines the particular relationship between the two friends and indeed the friends themselves.⁶ This process is typically distinct in character across the different friendships we have and this variation nicely explains the fact that, very often, we think and behave differently when we are with our different friends. Through the drawing process a shared narrative of the friendship is developed providing the conditions for intimacy to flourish.

3 Erotic Love

We believe that erotic love shares with this notion of friendship the centrality of being open to direction and interpretation from one's lover. We want to focus on one difference and one similarity between friendship and love.

Cocking and Kennett distinguish between the *initiating* conditions of a friendship and *governing* conditions. It may be that having been held hostage by the same group of militants for three months was what initiated our friendship—had it not been for that, we would not have become friends. Yet this is not a governing condition of our friendship, for we may remain friends even when we are no longer held hostage. The governing conditions of a relationship are not merely descriptive; they lay out the norms of the relationship. Take the teacher-student relationship. It is not merely that the relationship in fact fails if the teacher does not prepare or mark work, turn up to class, or otherwise engage in any pedagogical relationship with the student as the governing acceptance conditions might specify. Having accepted the relationship she *ought* to engage in these activities. She has a normative reason to do so.

The Cocking and Kennett account makes the willingness to be drawn and interpreted by one's friend a governing acceptance condition of friendship. This is a governing condition that is shared with other sorts of relationships as well. So it might be essential to the therapeutic relationship that one be similarly open to the direction and interpretation offered by one's psychotherapist. But this relation is not friendship for (at least) two reasons. First, the direction and interpretation is not *mutual*. Second, it is not *open-ended*. One enters into the therapeutic relationship with a *particular goal* in mind: getting better. So the therapeutic relationship has as a terminating condition the relief from mental distress. Once cured, you cease to see your therapist. By contrast, the direction and interpretation that one opens oneself to in friendship has no such preconceived end. Direction and interpretation in friendship is essentially 'open-ended.'⁷

We claim that erotic love is *similar* to friendship in *essentially involving a disposition to be directed and interpreted by one's lover*. It also exhibits a similar open-endedness. I am open to being led in my interests by my lover for no deeper reason than that I love her and want to be with her. Too much purposiveness in our relations of friendship can undermine them. If Amelia comes to believe that Barbara has cultivated her friendship for the purpose of gaining entry to a better social set, Amelia may come to feel that she is being used—even if she otherwise enjoys Barbara's companionship and Barbara responds to her as a friend should. She may feel that there is just something a bit too calculated about it. We say that what this feeling conveys is a suspicion that Barbara will always subordinate the reasons that arise from friendship to prudential considerations. Similarly, the woman in her late thirties who goes looking for the 'future father of her two children'—one boy, one girl: names, private schools and career plans envisioned in full detail in advance—is unlikely to find love. Such a person exhibits a rigidity of character that is incompatible with a mutual disposition to be led and interpreted in the ways in which friends and lovers necessarily are. Hence, there is an intimate connection between the open-endedness of love or friendship and the disposition to be moved by reasons arising from the other that lies at the heart of these relations. It is this that explains why such relations are potentially risky and why we experience them as we do. Both relations can be experienced as a kind of intoxication, especially in their early stages. To be genuinely open to being someone's friend or lover is precisely to admit to oneself that you are not entirely sure where this journey will take you. To the extent that the disposition to be led and interpreted by one's lover is more profound and further ranging than one's disposition to be drawn by friends, it is all the more intoxicating—and all the more dangerous.

However, we also say that erotic love is *different* from friendship in important ways. It has *an essential initiating condition*: erotic love arises from a certain syndrome of feelings. What is the feeling that gives rise to the friendship-like disposition to be led and interpreted by the other in erotic love? To describe these feelings adequately is probably the province of poetry, not philosophy. But without delving into the full phenomenology, we can make the following general observations. Obviously sexual desire is a component. But there is also the desire that this desire should be reciprocated. So far, perhaps, this is no more than what is experienced in a lustful glance across a crowded nightclub. In addition, there is a certain fascination with the object of love—a desire to explore every corner of the lover's body and soul. This fascination and the extent of sexual desire is often so intense as to drive out sexual interest in pretty much anyone else. Finally, lovers feel delight in the presence of the other and miss him or her when he or she is absent.

These, at least, are some necessary conditions. There may be more feelings that are relevant, but these clearly are. It seems incoherent to say that A feels romantic love for B, but doesn't desire B sexually. It also seems

incoherent to say that A is in love with B and wants her, but doesn't want B to want him. It also seems analytically wrong to say that A is in love with B but is not particularly interested in anything about her. Equally, there's *prima facie* something wrong with the case in which A is in love with B but doesn't want to be around her. It might be objected that Catullus loves Lesbia, but doesn't want her in his sight.⁸ We reply that Catullus has and continues to have the feelings that can engender the loving disposition, but no longer has the disposition and perhaps doesn't want to have the feelings.

On our view, these feelings may engender a disposition in lovers to be directed and interpreted by the other. While this disposition resembles that of friendship, the dimensions along which one will permit oneself to be led in one's interests or interpreted to oneself are typically much more far-reaching. This fact about the ways in which lovers are disposed to be led and interpreted by one another should be unsurprising on reflection. The experience of sexual intimacy involves a certain level of trust. Even if we disagree with part of Evelyn Waugh's famous *bon mot* about sex—that the expense is damnable and the pleasure momentary—it remains true that the position is faintly ridiculous to the disinterested spectator.⁹ We trust our lovers not to be such disinterested spectators and with that trust comes trust in much else. Our sexual identities are a large part of our whole identities. While it may be friends, as well as lovers, who constitute us as the subjects that we are, lovers fill in some particularly crucial spaces in the drawing of the self. We submit that the explanation for this fact lies in the particular causal origins of our disposition to be led and interpreted by them. The depth of the willingness to be led and interpreted to oneself is directly proportional to the degree of centrality of the sexual aspects of the self. It is also a measure of extent of trust in the other that arises from the vulnerability inherent in sexual relations.

Of course the disposition to be led and interpreted by the lover is not exhaustive of the dispositions that arise from the feelings of love. Lovers also *care* for the other's welfare and are disposed to act unselfishly to please them and make them better off. This much is common to nearly all accounts of the nature of love generally, including friendship and erotic love.¹⁰ From this disposition to care for the welfare of friends or lovers, you might try to derive an obligation to your friend's or lover's welfare and such an obligation might be thought to provide *moral* reasons that counter the disposition to draw or be drawn by them in certain ways. After all, how *could* it be in their best interests for you to support them in wrongdoing say? You do not, so the argument goes, have a reason of love or friendship to do so. While this may sometimes be the case, it is not invariably so. Moreover, because other accounts of the nature of love do not start from a relational view of the self, we think they get entangled in certain non-issues. For instance, if Sid loves Nancy, does Sid seek to promote Nancy's *actual* good or Nancy's own (potentially very misguided) *conception* of her good? On the one hand, there is a temptation to say that it must be her objective good that he has

reason to promote, for otherwise we may have to face the result that where Sid sees the gap between Nancy's real good and Nancy's mistaken conception of her own good, he intentionally harms her out of love. But, on the other hand, if we say that love requires that Sid promotes Nancy's real good even when this runs contrary to Nancy's own conception of her good, then in what sense can we say he is in love with *Nancy*, as opposed to Nancy's welfare? Even if this argument is too quick—and we grant that it may be—it points to a problem that we believe lurks in the background for theories of love or friendship that presuppose non-relational views of the self. We say the puzzle about whether the care characteristic of love is care for the lover's perceived or actual good is to some extent dissolved by our view. It arises because theorists presuppose that selves come fully formed to love (or indeed to friendship)—that they bring with them a determinate internal conception of the good for the kind of person that they take themselves to be, and that, being fully formed, there is already a determinate external fact of the matter about what is the good for the kind of person that they are. If selves are partially constituted as the selves that they are in and through relations of love and friendship, then the question of what constitutes their objective good and so of the reasons that could arise out of a concern for their good, is to some extent open in the same way that their own conception of their good is open to negotiation and adjustment.¹¹

Furthermore, we think that many examples that other theorists resort to the criterion of care to rule out as genuine instances of love are equally plausibly ruled out by the absence of a disposition to be led or interpreted by the other. One can argue that Humbert Humbert doesn't *care* about Lolita's welfare and *this* is why this is not a case of love at all. And this may be so. But it is surely more obvious that he is not at all disposed to be led in his interests by her. Rather, the molding is all one way: she contributes nothing to constituting him as a self—or at least not in the way characteristic of love, though one might put a case that she constitutes him in something like the way Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic constitutes the Master.¹² We can take the similar quick way with the wife-beater who nonetheless professes his love for his partner, even as he drags her around the flat by her ankle.¹³ We need not wonder how *often* this has to happen before it is right to say that he does not care for her welfare. We say that the same rigidity of character that makes such men incapable of friendship makes them incapable of love. Often the root of their violence is the desire that the lover should be a certain way or behave in certain quite regimented ways.

4 The Trajectory of Intimacy in Love and Friendship

In this section and the next, we answer a common objection to the drawing account of close companion friendship. Our response to this objection will help show why our account is in fact best able to characterize the intimacy of love and friendship.

An objection that is sometimes raised to the drawing account is that in many close friendships we don't observe much in the way of mutual drawing, so it can't be a central governing condition of friendship. A typical case would go like this. Dan and Bill play pool on Thursday nights and go to the footy together when their teams are playing just like they've been doing for years, but they don't seem to spend any time trying new things at each other's direction or noticing things about each other that they are keen to interpret and explore. They have distinct preferences and each is tolerant of the other's differences, focusing instead on those things they have in common. We notice, for example, that while one refuses to go to action movies, the other won't attend art house movies; one thinks cricket is unbelievably boring, the other loves it; neither talks much about their work, but they enthuse over their kids' sporting prowess and despair over politics and it's been like this for years. Yet their relationship, characterized as it is by mutual affection and well-wishing and shared activities is surely one of close friendship.

Cocking and Kennett (1998) argued that even in such cases mutual drawing could not be entirely absent for it is necessary if the friends are to be capable of responding, as friends must, to the significant interests of the other across a variety of situations. How could I know when my friend's serious interests are at stake if I have no interpretation of what those interests are and of the various ways in which they may be affected in the situations my friend faces? To the extent that I respond to those interests, I am being directed by them. To the extent that I don't, we may question the closeness of the friendship.

Here, however, we want to concede that *the drawing process naturally tends to a point of equilibrium*; at first it will be intensive, but progressively, as friends and lovers fill in the outlines of the other and establish the particular contours of the relationship its prominence diminishes. Dan and Bill's friendship has reached such a point of equilibrium, but it still counts as a close friendship to the extent that each is *counterfactually* disposed to be directed and interpreted by the other in response to changed circumstances or changes in the friend. If the counterfactual disposition to be drawn and directed by the other disappears altogether, then, whatever else the relationship may be, it no longer qualifies as a close friendship. Perhaps it is now best characterized as a lesser pleasure- or utility-friendship. If Bill has nothing to offer in the way of interpretation of Dan when Dan suffers depression or goes through a mid-life crisis, a relationship breakdown, or a major career change, then it is plausible that the friendship will fade. Indeed, we suspect that in many instances where friends drift apart it is because they sense that the other's disposition to respond directly to them is gone and that the friend's reasons for action where they are concerned are now filtered through a range of other considerations.

We think this conclusion about the trajectory of intimate relationships and their terminating conditions is even more obvious in the case of love. Nevertheless, since the disposition to engage in mutual drawing is driven

in erotic love by a particular constellation of feelings, there are some distinctive features to lovers' strategies to avoid getting into a rut, which are illuminated by our account.

In many long-term love relationships, as in friendship, we find that the partners' activities, expectations, and views of each other and of their relationship have reached a point of equilibrium. Sometimes the equilibrium thus established is benign and amenable to adjustment. The lovers remain responsive to each other over the routines they have established. In other cases the relationship becomes fixed and resistant to revision. Accompanying this loss of the disposition to engage in mutual drawing is likely to be a loss of sexual interest in the other, and we argue that these losses will be mutually reinforcing. Of course the partners may stay together out of habit or for the sake of the kids. In many such cases, they lead parallel lives. In other cases, they may substitute other bases for the disposition to be led in one's interests, life plans, and so on by their partner. Perhaps the well-being of the children can form the basis for such a mutual, though restricted, process of directing and interpreting. On our view, this is not being in love. This is working it out for the sake of the children. We see such cases as grist to our mill. When the erotically charged disposition to be drawn by *this* person is gone, it's the end of *that* relationship and (perhaps) the substitution of another. Erotic love is a package deal: it is a certain disposition caused and sustained by certain feelings. A similar disposition sustained by something else is not erotic love.

It may be objected that this may be an adequate account of *falling in love*, but not of *being in love*. While these feelings may be that which *engenders* love, love is not a feeling and love may well be a proper descriptor for long-term relationships where caring and concern is exhibited through ingrained routines and interactions. In reply, we argue that it is a part of being in love that lovers *want* to sustain their mutual disposition to be directed and interpreted on the basis of the same feelings—or feelings that are similar enough—to those that engendered the disposition in the first place. So when either the disposition or the feeling is lost and no attempts are made to reinstate them the partners are no longer in love. We can see that lovers want this because of the strategies that they engage in to keep their love fresh.

Strategies aimed at maintaining the constellation of desires and emotions that characterizes erotic love and drives the initial intense period of mutual drawing that we observe in such relationships have, we suggest, both a backward looking dimension and a forward looking dimension. Lovers spend a lot of time celebrating and re-creating the conditions of the past. The intimate anniversary dinner, the return to the place they first met—all these are strategies to keep the basis of their love enough like it was when it was new. But lovers need to target and refresh the disposition to engage in mutual drawing just as much as they need to rekindle the set of desires that drive it. Indeed, we take it that it is well recognized that doing new things together, being directed in new ways in the relationship, can revive the erotic

spark. This is commonly what relationship counsellors and agony aunts recommend, as exemplified in an episode of a reality TV series where a couple in the doldrums were sent off to various adventure activities to refresh their relationship. Engaging in new and interesting activities together helped them to see each other anew. They became directly responsive to each other again, rather than to a set of habits and fixed conceptions about the other, and this did indeed revive desire and attraction. Equally, such a holiday may confirm the suspicion that the love is dead. Joanne suspects that John doesn't love her anymore because he never *really* pays attention to her. We say that what she suspects is that he no longer exhibits the counterfactual disposition to be led in his interests and interpreted to himself by her on the basis of the feelings constitutive of the phenomenal aspect of love. But it's hard to say because their life together is pretty predictable—as predictable as John's distracted responses to her conversational forays over breakfast. On the adventure holiday, new interests beckon and new circumstances reveal hitherto untested aspects of character. When John nonetheless remains unresponsive in the right kinds of way, Joanne may then be confirmed in her suspicions about John's counterfactual properties.

A consequence of our view is that it honors our ambivalence about whether love is something outside one's power or whether one may work at staying in love. The answer, of course, is both. It is not up to me *directly* to feel a certain way and to sustain the disposition to be led and interpreted by my lover on the basis of that feeling. Yet we may engage in strategies that make it more likely that we'll feel that way, just as people in anger management classes may take steps to determine how they will feel and what reasons they will be responsive to in future situations.

It is an interesting question why people seem less inclined to institute strategies for maintaining their friendships than they do for maintaining their erotic relationships. One explanation is that the demise of a friendship doesn't typically carry with it the practical complications of the demise of a love relationship or a marriage. We don't typically buy a house, for instance, with a friend. But there is likely a deeper explanation. We have argued for a view about love and friendship that is set within the context of a relational view of the self. We are constituted in part as the persons that we are by the direction and interpretation of friends and lovers. Because of love's connections with sexual intimacy, lovers fill in the blank spaces of the other's subjectivity in particularly important and far-reaching ways. When a marriage of twenty years dissolves, one partner may well wonder, 'Who am I really?' On a relational view of the self, the answer to this question is that he or she is in no small measure the person who was constructed in that relationship. It is little wonder if the end of long-term love relations threatens the agent's sense of self-worth and self-identity. We work on our love relationships not just to save the investment in our house: we work on them because we want to save the people that we have come to be through the love relationship.¹⁴

5 The Sting in the Tail: Erotic Love and Moral Danger

Cocking and Kennett (2000) argue that friendship is a relation that can lead one into moral danger because the relation itself gives rise to reasons for action that remain good reasons, even if they are reasons to do things that are imprudent or immoral. Someone may be a good friend, but a bad person. This notion of being a good friend is not a matter of there being a moral duty that one has qua friend—a duty that one can perhaps fulfil only by doing things that would *normally* be accounted wrong but now are, in the context of the friendship, permissible.¹⁵ Rather, friendship is in significant part a non-moral good that can enter into competition with moral reasons for action in such a way that one may find oneself in circumstances where one can be a good friend or a morally good person, but not both. Some friendships are like that and each of us should sincerely hope that we do not find ourselves in one. The friendships we make are yet another facet of the phenomenon of moral luck.

We think that erotic love is similar to friendship in giving rise to reasons for action that are not subject to moral or prudential filters. Erotic love may be an even more dangerous relation, since its origin in a syndrome of sexual feelings makes the resultant disposition to be led and interpreted by the lover pervasive and deep. To the extent that the aspects of the self that are constituted through erotic love are more fundamental than those constituted through friendship, erotic love is the more morally dangerous relation.

Perhaps there are some agents for whom erotic love poses no danger. They are people who are fully determinate selves in matters of moral character antecedent to the mutual shaping of the self that occurs in love. They are such that their love could not give rise to reasons for doing any serious moral wrong, or even if it did, there is no chance that these are reasons that this person would act upon. Imagine that Jim and Tammy are conservative Christians who have each found Jesus well before they found one another. If they are in love, they will construct one another's selfhood along a variety of dimensions, but their moral character may be one dimension that is quite resistant to certain kinds of alteration. Because Tammy insists that Jim really does have a good voice—it just requires training—he may take voice lessons and come to see himself quite differently in the context of the church choir. Because Jim loves rock-climbing, Tammy may come to share his hobby and become a much more physical and bold woman than she was hitherto. But no reasons arising from her relation to Jim would be sufficient to entice Tammy into robbing banks. If Jim expressed a desire to go in for a bit of armed robbery, she would rightly, though no doubt regretfully, regard this as a terminating condition of their loving relationship.

Nonetheless, we think that there are limits to the moral immunity that pre-existing character traits, values and habits may confer upon lovers. Imagine that, as their children enter secondary school, Tammy desires to take up a part-time job—a desire that runs somewhat contrary to their previously

shared understanding of the moral role of women as mothers and homemakers. If Jim is resolutely resistant to *any* change in Tammy's understanding of her place in their relationship—whether it be part-time job, volunteer work or whatever—then we may well wonder whether he exhibits the appropriate responsiveness to her that is essential to erotic love. We begin to harbor the suspicion that Jim does not love *Tammy*: he merely wants a mother for his children, a companion for church picnics, and cheerful domestic staff.

For most of us erotic love holds the potential to make us morally worse persons, as well as morally better ones. This is because love, like friendship, gives rise to reasons for actions that may be *good* and compelling reasons even if they are reasons to do bad things. It is important to be clear about the sense in which these are good reasons. It is not merely that they are reasons that we are *likely* to act upon. Ordinary usage sometimes equates good reasons with motivationally efficacious ones, and there is doubtless utility in this, especially in attributions of reasons to other persons. (It is useful to be able to anticipate the kind of reason that will move someone else to act.) But we don't mean just that love gives rise to *motives* for action that lovers are likely to act on, even though there are stronger moral reasons not to. The notion that passion can swamp judgment is hardly new and the heady early days of erotic love can be a particularly dangerous time in this regard. A person may well emerge from a period of infatuation and wonder what they could have been thinking when they engaged in some wrong or imprudent actions. Their friends and family may likewise talk of them as being under the spell of a lover. This isn't "the real Kate," they might say. We don't wish to deny such cases, but they are not central to the analysis of moral danger that we offer here. For many such cases will not meet our condition of mutual responsiveness to the other. They will not be cases of erotic *love* but rather cases where one party exerts erotic dominion over the other.

Lovers who do bad things with or for the other are not necessarily weak-willed or reckless (though some might be). We want to distinguish cases in which love moves the lover *against* reason—perhaps by blinding them to all other considerations—from those cases in which the reasons for which they act make reference to substantive non-moral goods that may rationally compete with acknowledged moral goods.

Our analysis casts some light on how this competition may arise. Sometimes the fact that we love a person means that we find ourselves with reasons to do things with and for them that we judge are morally wrong. In Jim's view, it is at least somewhat morally wrong for Tammy to work outside the home, or for him to be led by her desires that they take up the tango or read some risqué novels and by the view of him as erotic subject that this implies. To reject the action-guiding force of the reasons provided by Tammy's desires and interests is (to some extent) to reject the relationship *qua* one of erotic love. Relationships of erotic love are plausibly substantive

goods that cannot be cashed out in moral terms. If Jim's current moral principles *really are* at odds with Tammy's aspirations, then he is faced with a decision between being a good Christian or being a good husband, and no moral consideration can help him resolve this conflict for it is not a conflict between moral reasons for action. In practice, however, it is overwhelmingly likely that Jim will find that he is now able to see how his earlier understanding of Scripture was defective. In his relation of love with Tammy, he will be constituted as a rather more liberal Christian than he was before. From the standpoint of the man he presently is, this is a kind of moral danger.

We say that the moral danger that may arise from erotic love is more profound and insidious than that which arises from friendship, and we can now see why. Relations of erotic love, like those of friendship, constitute us as the selves that we are and do so in ways that are strongly reinforcing. But erotic love provides us with unusually vivid and potent experiences of self. Seeing ourselves through our lovers' eyes is to see ourselves in a particularly flattering light. In doing so, we experience ourselves positively, as beautiful, fascinating, desirable, funny, and so forth. We are drawn as selves within the relationship in ways that are attractive to us. So to the extent that these relationships constitute us as the selves that we are at present, rejecting those relationships *also* amounts to rejecting especially central and valued aspects of our own identities.

Some agents presumably *should* do just this, but their reason to do this is a reason that is seen as motivating from the point of view of the better person that they should be. From the standpoint of the deeply flawed agents that they actually are, it is not highly motivating. Perhaps there is even a sense in which it *shouldn't* be. Augustine famously prayed, "Lord, give me chastity—but not yet." The man he reflectively thinks he should be is one free from sinful carnal desires. We submit that the man that he presently is—one who quite enjoys the satisfaction of his present carnal desires—has reasons not to be the man he thinks he should be, or at least not to be him *yet*. To undertake the transition to becoming that man might be to lose certain central and valued aspects of his present identity, viz the ways in which he is constituted as a subject in those sexual relationships. The extent to which they are good reasons presumably depends upon the centrality of Augustine's erotic relationships to the identity of his present self. It may be that to wish to be free of these desires and the relation of erotic love that they sustain is to wish to be profoundly different—perhaps not the *extinction* of his present self, but a sea change so profound that it strains the powers of his imagination to integrate that future person into the narrative that he presently tells himself about himself. To want to be *that man* is to want to be something he can barely understand. It is not irrational to want to avoid that.

Erotic love is morally dangerous for much the same reason that friendship is, but erotic love may be even more morally dangerous. If the argument of our paper is correct, then the wish to be 'lucky in love' is a more complex wish than one might initially suspect.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Catriona Mackenzie (2000).
- 2 Anyone not familiar with Escher's famous 1948 lithograph can see it at <http://www.mcescher.com/gallery/mathematical/drawing-hands/>.
- 3 We do not claim that it always makes it *most* rational.
- 4 The view of friendship summarized below is introduced and defended in Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett 1998 and 2000. See also Jeanette Kennett and Steve Matthews 2008.
- 5 Cf. Bernard Williams (1981).
- 6 This is obvious in the case of direction, but applies equally to interpretation. Consider my taking on of my friend's interpretation of me as someone who looks good in red. A big part of whether I look good in red depends on how I *feel* in red for this affects how I wear it and how I wear it affects how good I look in it. Objective facts about skin tone or eye color constrain to some degree the interpretations that constitute us, but as this example suggests, we think these constraints are looser than we might initially imagine. We are grateful to Katrien Schaubroeck for suggesting this parallel with the claim we make below regarding the indeterminacy of an agent's good independent of the intimate relations that constitute her as the agent she is.
- 7 It might nonetheless be said that there are some vague goals of their interaction: their mutual good, or having a good time, or the continuation of their friendship. This end need not be not integrated entirely into their system of value. If it were, friendship could never be a source of moral danger. That is, the way in which we are directed and interpreted by our friends would be run through the filter of our notions of right and wrong. But Cocking and Kennett defend a view according to which the reasons that arise from friendship may be outside of, and compete with, moral reasons.
- 8 Catullus's poems for Lesbia evince a variety of attitudes that may or may not track the ups and downs of his relationship with Claudia Metelli Celeris. The adoring poem 5 seems chronologically prior to 8: 'Break off fallen Catullus; time to cut losses.' We think the poet is not over the love affair just yet—though he is trying hard to convince himself that he is.
- 9 In a letter to Nancy Mitford dated 5 May 1954. A similar quip is credited to Lord Chesterfield.
- 10 Cf. Mike W. Martin (1996) and Raja Halwani (2003).
- 11 There are, of course, limits to how greatly the good of persons may vary from case to case. We are not denying that there is a great deal of commonality in human nature and human needs, which sets limits on what could constitute someone's welfare and so on what would count as caring about their welfare.
- 12 We think that there is a similar asymmetry in the disposition to be led and interpreted by one another in Plato's account of pederastic love in the *Phaedrus*. The older lover seeks to mold the character of the younger man into an image of the god that their souls followed in their guided tour of the Forms (*Phdr.* 253c5–d2). It is not the 'unspeakable vice of the Greeks' that makes this a mistaken ideal of erotic love. It is the fact that there is not a *reciprocal* disposition on the part of the lovers to be led and interpreted by the other.
- 13 The example is drawn from Raymond Carver's short story, "What We Talk about When We Talk about Love," cited in Halwani (2003, 95).
- 14 Of course this is not a full account of our motivations for trying to save a relationship.
- 15 We acknowledge that there are moral duties to one's friends, including moral duties to favor friends under certain circumstances, but we think they do not exhaust the duties of friendship.

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