

Love, Reasons, and Desire

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Abstract

This essay defends subjectivism about reasons of love. These are the normative reasons we have to treat those we love especially well, such as the reasons we have to treat our close friends or life partners better than strangers. Subjectivism about reasons of love is the view that every reason of love a person has is correctly explained by her desires. I formulate a version of subjectivism about reasons of love and defend it against three objections that have been made to this kind of view. Firstly, it has been argued that the phenomenology of our focus when we have reasons of love does not fit with subjectivism about those reasons. Secondly, it has been argued that the phenomenology of our motivations when we have reasons of love does not fit with subjectivism about those reasons. Thirdly, it has been argued that subjectivism about reasons of love has deeply counterintuitive implications about what our reasons of love are. I argue that none of these objections succeeds.

1. Introduction

This essay defends subjectivism about reasons of love. By *reasons of love*, I mean the normative reasons we have to treat those we love especially well, such as the reasons we have to treat our close friends or life partners better than strangers. (Hereafter I will refer to normative reasons just as “reasons.”) *Subjectivism about reasons* is the view that a person’s reasons are correctly explained by her desires. *Subjectivism about reasons of love*, then, is the view

that a person's reasons to treat those she loves especially well are correctly explained by her desires. Subjectivism about reasons of love can also be described as the view that a person's reasons to treat those she loves especially well are *determined* by her desires, or *grounded by* her desires. The view has also been called subjectivism about a kind of *partiality*, and subjectivism about *reasons of intimacy* (Keller 2013, Lord 2016, Jeske 2001, 2008).¹

There has been no argument for subjectivism specifically about reasons of love by philosophers as far as I am able to tell.² However, if subjectivism about reasons is correct, then

¹ Note that although reasons about love are a *kind of* reasons for partiality we can have reasons for partiality that are not reasons of love; I might have reason to be partial to colleagues, to particular foods, to relatives I don't love, or to a particular football team, for example (Keller 2013, Lord 2016).

² Some philosophers have taken Bernard Williams, Richard Rorty, and Susan Wolf to argue for subjectivism specifically about reasons of love in the form of the *Projects View*. I argue those philosophers are mistaken in those attributions, in section 2.3. Simon Keller also gives Frankfurt as an example of someone who is a subjectivist specifically about reasons of love (Keller 2017: 5). While it is safe to assume that Frankfurt would subscribe to subjectivism about reasons of love, like anyone who is a subjectivist about all reasons, Frankfurt does not state or clearly imply, when speaking of reasons of love, that reasons of love are explained by desires. He states that loving grounds some reasons (Frankfurt 2004: 37), and that loving requires having certain desires (Frankfurt 2004: 42), but it doesn't follow that those reasons are explained by those desires; it's possible those reasons are explained by the inherent value of an object, to which Frankfurt says love is sometimes a response (Frankfurt 2004: 38, 40).

all reasons are correctly explained by desires, and so subjectivism about reasons of love is also correct. Subjectivism about reasons is a prominent contender among metaethical views (e.g. Hubin 1999, Manne 2014, Schroeder 2007, Sobel 2016a, Street 2010, 2012, 2016, Williams 1981a), and this is a reason to take subjectivism about reasons of love seriously.

As subjectivism about reasons is the view that *all* reasons are correctly explained by desires, if there is a kind of reason that is not correctly explained by desires—such as reasons of love—then subjectivism about reasons is false. Thus, it matters for metaethics whether objections to subjectivism about reasons of love are successful: if they are, then subjectivism about reasons, a major metaethical theory, is incorrect.³

There are several arguments for subjectivism about reasons that could be employed to argue for subjectivism specifically about reasons of love. These include the argument that reasons must have the power to motivate, and thus there must be a sound deliberative route for a person between the conclusion that she should do a certain thing and her desires (e.g., Williams 1981a, 1995); the argument that subjectivism is the best explanation of the correlation between differences in desires and differences in reasons (Schroeder 2007); and the argument that as reasons in matters of mere taste are determined by desires, and it is parsimonious to posit just one source of reasons, all reasons are determined by desires (Sobel 2005). In this essay I will not give a positive argument for subjectivism about reasons of love, or give negative

³ Of course, it could be that subjectivism about reasons of love is true but subjectivism about other kinds of reasons is false; I do not aim to defend subjectivism about all reasons in this essay.

arguments against objective reasons of love. Rather, I will present a subjectivist theory of reasons of love, and argue that it can withstand the objections that have been made against such views, and that moves to find a better theory have thus been too hasty.

In discussing possible justifications for reasons of love it is common for philosophers to first argue against subjectivism about reasons of love, and then, motivated by its apparent failure, turn to another option they find more plausible. These options include the *individuals* view (Keller 2013), which holds that reasons of love are correctly explained by characteristics of the people who are loved; the *objective agent-relative* view (Jeske 2001, 2008), which holds that reasons of love are correctly explained by the objective value of relationships of love and are analogous to reasons of fidelity and prudence; the *joint projects* view (Stroud 2010), which holds that reasons of love are correctly explained by the projects of plural agents; and a mixed view (Lord 2016) which holds that reasons of love are correctly explained by characteristics of the people who are loved and intensified by facts about relationships.

Three main objections have been made to the kind of subjectivism about reasons of love I defend here. Firstly, it has been argued that the phenomenology of our focus when we have reasons of love—how we experience that focus—does not fit with subjectivism about those reasons. Secondly, it has been argued that the phenomenology of our motivations when we have reasons of love—how we experience those motivations—does not fit with subjectivism about those reasons. Simon Keller makes these two arguments, and I respond to them in Section 3. Thirdly, Diane Jeske has argued that subjectivism about reasons of love has deeply counterintuitive implications about what our reasons of love are, and I defend subjectivism against this argument in Section 4.

2. Subjectivism about Reasons of Love

In this section I will give a formulation of subjectivism about reasons of love, give a brief account of what I take love to be, and explain why the view I defend is not subject to the objections made against a form of subjectivism about reasons of love called the Projects View. In the sections that follow this one I will defend the view I describe in this section against objections.

2.1 A Formulation of Subjectivism about Reasons of Love

I will defend the following theory:

Subjectivism about reasons of love [SRL]: Every reason of love a person has is correctly explained by her desires; and if a person has the desires that are necessary for love, she has reasons of love.

It follows from the first clause of SRL that *desires* are *necessary* for reasons of love. It follows from the second clause that the *desires of love* are *sufficient* for reasons of love.

I have formulated SRL with the intention of meeting two criteria in particular. One is that it should be in keeping with views that purport to be or are generally thought to be subjectivist about *all* reasons. In explaining how SRL can respond to objections I will often draw on the best accounts of subjectivism about reasons, as the best subjectivist explanations of how reasons work can be usefully employed in subjectivist explanations of how reasons of love work. I do not defend subjectivism about reasons here, however, and it is not implied by SRL. Subjectivism about reasons is the following view:

Subjectivism about reasons [SR]: Every normative reason a person has is correctly explained by her desires.

Versions of SR are argued for by, for example, Schroeder (2007) and Sobel (2016a).⁴ Sobel describes subjectivism about reasons as follows: “What one has reason to do, according to subjectivism, is determined by what one [desires], at least when one is not misled [*sic*] about the nature of the object of one’s [desires]” (Sobel 2016a: 2).⁵ Thus, what it means for a reason to be correctly explained by desires is that the fact that a person has that reason is determined by her desires. SRL simply applies subjectivism about reasons to reasons of love; thus, according to SRL, when a person has a reason of love—a reason to treat a person she loves especially well—that she has that reason is determined by her desires. Subjectivism about reasons of love can also be described as the view that such reasons are *grounded by* desires (Keller 2017: 6). I see no difference between reasons being correctly explained by, determined by, or grounded by desires relevant to the purposes of this essay; I use only “correctly explained by” in my formulations above, and hereafter, for simplicity and consistency.

⁴ Schroeder defends the Humean theory of reasons, not subjectivism; like many philosophers, I take the Humean theory of reasons to be a form of subjectivism.

⁵ In the quoted passage Sobel speaks not of “what one desires” but of “what one loves and cares about,” but Sobel accepts “desire” as an umbrella term for the kinds of attitudes he has in mind (Sobel 2016a: 3), and that term is clearer in the context of this essay.

The other criterion for the formulation is that it should be in keeping with the targets of the objections I discuss. I will thus accept an unusual restriction Keller places on subjectivism about reasons of love in his objections to it. Keller describes subjectivism about reasons of love as what is sometimes called an *unrestricted desire* view, the view that that your reasons of love follow “straightforwardly” from your desires. For reasons to follow straightforwardly from your desires, Keller says, they cannot “be correctly explained as emerging from your higher-order desires, or the desires of your deepest or true self, or the desires you would have if you were fully informed and rational” (Keller 2017: 9). This is a problematic definition of subjectivism about reasons of love, as many who are avowed subjectivists about reasons or usually thought to be subjectivists about reasons hold *restricted desire* views in which the desires that entail reasons are restricted in the ways Keller rules out (Frankfurt 1971, Lewis 1989, Watson 1982, Brandt 1979, Smith 1994).⁶ Keller’s stipulation is motivated by trying to identify the forms of subjectivism that he believes can accord with moral error theory—the ultimate target of the paper in which he argues against subjectivism about reasons of love—rather than trying to characterize subjectivism as used in the literature on reasons. I will accept Keller’s stipulation that only unrestricted desire views count as forms of SRL, however. This form of subjectivism about reasons of love is more vulnerable than restricted desire versions, and I aim to show that even this form withstands the objections that have been made against it.

⁶ Not all these philosophers are subjectivists; rather, the restrictions they place on desires are examples of the kind of restrictions subjectivists favour.

2.2 Love

SRL states that the reasons of love are correctly explained by desires, and the most obvious candidate desires for explaining reasons of love are the desires a person has if she loves. So it is important, before defending SRL against particular objections, to give an account of what those desires are.

Desires are motivational dispositions that include wanting, valuing, preferring, having plans, and having projects.⁷ Theories of love that hold that love requires desires tend to posit two such desires, the desire for the beloved's wellbeing for her sake, and the desire for union with the beloved (where to be in union with someone is to be in one of a number of kinds of special relationship with her, such as friendship, romantic partnership, life partnership, siblinghood, and so on, not simply to be in her presence). I help myself to the view that love requires these two desires, and for reasons of space will not argue for it here.⁸

⁷ Valuing tends not to be considered a kind of desire by objectivists, but it tends to be considered one by subjectivists. For examples of views in which valuing is a kind of desire, see Davidson (1978), Lewis (1989), Frankfurt (1971), Sobel (2016a), and Street (2012).

⁸ For views of love that hold that it requires the desire for union with the beloved, see Delaney (1996), Greenspan (1988: 55), and Lyons (1980: 64); for views of love that hold that it requires the desire for the beloved's wellbeing, see Frankfurt (1998, 2004), Kant (1797/1996: II,1.1 25-30), Rawls (1971: 190), Rorty (2016), Sobel (1990, 1997: 65), and White (2001); and for views of love that hold that it requires both those desires, see Nozick (1989), Sidgwick (1874/1981: 244), Stump (2006), and Taylor (1975).

The desires for others' wellbeing for their sake and for union with them come in varying degrees and kinds, and some degrees are insufficient, and some kinds incorrect, for the kind of love we are discussing. For example, a person might be generally benevolent and thus have a desire for the wellbeing of all people for their sakes, and have a desire for union with all people, as she desires that all people share the Earth in peace. Such a person might be said to love everyone. But there is some, albeit indeterminate, degree of strength of these desires required for the kind of love we think justifies treating the loved person especially well, and there are just some kinds of union that count as unions of love. That degree of strength is not only absolute, but relative—if my desire for my beloved's wellbeing is to justify my treating her especially well, for example, I must desire her wellbeing not only to a certain degree, but also more than I do that of others.

Thus, in this essay I am concerned with a kind of love for particular individuals typified in close, healthy, intimate relationships, such as between close friends, long-term romantic partners, and close family members. In the ancient Greek scheme, the kind of love I am concerned with is a kind of *philia*, not a kind of *agape* or *eros*.⁹

⁹ *Eros* is a kind of passionate desire, typically sexual, and *agape* is a kind of love impartial toward the persons who are its objects and not responsive to their qualities. *Philia* is a personal, partial love responsive to the qualities of its objects, and includes such things as friendships and committed romantic partnerships. The view of love I work with, however, excludes the kind of *philia* Aristotle discusses in which someone is valued as a friend only for their usefulness to oneself (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII). I

According to the view I defend here, then, our reasons for treating those we love especially well are typically correctly explained by our desire for their wellbeing for their sake and our desire to be in union with them. Other desires may also explain our reasons to treat those we love especially well, such as the desire to be a good wife or father or a good person, or to be thought well of; but as the desire for the beloved's wellbeing for her sake and the desire for union with her are the desires necessary for love, we can expect those desires to have the most important explanatory role in our reasons of love.

In defending SRL against objections it is important to note that reasons of love are reasons we have to treat *those we love* especially well. We cannot have reasons of love towards those we do not love. So a condition of having reasons of love is loving; and in my view, loving requires having certain desires. It is important to stress this, because as we will see, objections to subjectivism about love sometimes appeal to situations in which, the objector claims, a person must have reasons of love, but would not have such reasons if subjectivism about reasons of

exclude such purely utility-based attitudes from the attitudes of friendship for two reasons. Firstly, this is not the kind of attitude that is of concern in the objections to subjectivism about reasons of love I respond to which discuss friendship: in those objections friendship is not a purely utility-based relationship but one which requires a concern for the other's wellbeing for her sake. Secondly, I believe the view that having the attitudes of friendship toward someone can consist of valuing them only for their usefulness to oneself is now rare enough to leave aside for the purposes of this essay. (For example, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on "Friendship" takes it as uncontroversial that being a friend to someone requires a concern for that person for her own sake [Helm 2017].)

love were true; and in some such objections the person in question does not love, because she lacks the necessary desires. In such cases, the absence of the kinds of reasons we think a person who loves has is correctly explained by the fact that the person under consideration just isn't in a situation in which reasons of love apply.

2.3 *The Projects View*

The subjectivist theory of the reasons of love most discussed by philosophers is the Projects View, according to which a person's reasons of love are correctly explained by her "ground projects," personal projects that are essential to her personal identity.¹⁰ Keller and Lord reject the Projects View on the grounds that it excludes too many reasons (Keller 2013: 40, Lord

¹⁰ Williams and some other philosophers are taken as arguing for the *Projects View* by Keller and Errol Lord (Keller 2013, Lord 2016), but I believe this is a mistake. Keller and Lord attribute the view to Williams's "Persons, Character, and Morality" (1981b), which argues that impartialist moral theories ask too much as they demand that we act against our ground projects. Williams writes that "a commitment or involvement with a particular other person might be one of the kinds" of ground project (Williams 1981b: 16), but does not claim that *all* such commitments are ground projects, or that our reasons of love are always or even generally correctly explained by ground projects. The view has also been attributed to Richard Rorty (1997), Susan Wolf (1992) and Williams's "Internal and External Reasons" (1981a) (in Keller [2013: 12] and Lord [2016: 571]), but neither Rorty nor Wolf says that our reasons of love are correctly explained by our personal projects, and Williams does not claim our ground projects are the only, or even most common, aspect of our subjective motivational set from which we can correctly deliberate to our reasons of love.

2016: 572): Reasons to treat people we love especially well can be found within kinds of relationships that are not ground projects, such as some friendships; we have friendships that are not essential to our personal identity. I agree that this rules out the Projects View. The theory I defend here does not face this problem. If I am a friend to someone—of the kind under discussion here—then I love her. I thus desire her wellbeing for her own sake, and my friendship with her. According to SRL, having a desire of love entails having a reason of love. Therefore, according to SRL I have reasons to treat everyone I love especially well, including friends (and others I love) who are not part of my ground projects.¹¹

3. The Phenomenology of Reasons of Love

One argument against subjectivism about reasons of love is that it does not fit with what Keller calls the “phenomenology” of those reasons, how we experience our reasons within relationships of love (Keller 2013: ix). Keller claims that when we consider how we think about those reasons and how they motivate us they seem to us to be objective, not subjective. Keller’s argument in his (2017) is that we *take* our reasons of love to not be subjective, not that they *are* not subjective. In his (2013), however, Keller makes clear that he believes that the correct

¹¹ Keller also objects to the Projects View on the grounds that there can be cases in which someone has ground projects involving relationships but has no reasons of partiality towards the other people in those relationships (Keller 2013: 40-41). But as Keller and Lord define it, the Projects View does not hold that all ground projects involving relationships give reasons, just that all reasons of love are correctly explained by ground projects.

explanation for reasons of love should fit our phenomenology of them (e.g. 2013: 43, 62, 79-80, 86-87, 94, 96, 128, 130, 139-140, 152-153). In arguing that the phenomenology of our reasons of love is not subjectivist, he can thus be taken to be arguing that our reasons of love are not subjective.

This objection takes two forms. There is the objection that subjectivism about reasons of love does not fit with what we focus on when we have such reasons, which I will call the *Focus Problem*, and the objection that subjectivism about reasons of love does not fit with the motivations that we take ourselves to have when we have such reasons, which I will call the *Motive Problem*.¹²

3.1 The Focus Problem

In arguing that subjectivism has the Focus Problem, Keller claims that “When you posit an obligation to do something, you posit a reason to do it. A reason corresponding to an obligation of love will [seem to you] an objective reason” (Keller 2017: 6). When, for example, you know of a plot to harm your friend, “Your reason to tell your friend about the plot will not strike you as emerging from *your* desires; you hold the obligation to your friend, not yourself” (Keller 2017: 6). When we have obligations of love, our focus is not on our desires, so our reasons of love are not explained by our desires.

¹² Lord uses the term “Focus Problem” with reference to this objection to the Projects View (Lord 2016: 573); I adopt it to describe Keller’s similar objection to subjectivism about reasons of love.

It is true that in such cases our reasons do not strike us as emerging from our desires, and that we feel such obligations to be to others, not to ourselves. Keller is correct that our focus in such cases is on our loved ones and their wellbeing. However, that focus is in keeping with SRL. Here I employ a feature of SR to explain SRL. According to SR, reasons are correctly explained by desires, but need not be desires. Schroeder calls the idea that a reason must include its correct explanation the *No Background Conditions* view (Schroeder 2007: 23). Under that view, anything that has to be appealed to in order to correctly explain a reason must be part of that reason. But, as Schroeder points out, this is not the way we generally see explanations; in many domains we think that a correct explanation need not be a part of the thing it explains. To be a piece of corn on the cob, the object on my plate must have been grown on a maize plant, but the fact that the object on my plate was grown on a maize plant isn't that object, or even part of it; the object before me is just a piece of corn on the cob (Schroeder 2007: 24).¹³ Likewise, that reasons are correctly explained by desires does not require that they always *are* desires. SRL says that reasons of love are correctly explained by desires, not that they always are desires, and so it is in keeping with SRL that your reason to help your friend will not strike you as being your desires. Thus, SRL allows that your reason for helping your friend seems to you to be that your friend is in danger, rather than any of your desires (such as the desire that your friend be safe). When you think about your reasons, it is in keeping with SRL that you focus on your

¹³ Philip Pettit and Michael Smith also argue for the "strict background view of desire," according to which a desire can figure in a person's reasons without her being aware of it, in their (1990).

friend, not your desires. Subjectivism about reasons of love, then, is in harmony with the phenomenology of the focus of our deliberations.

In periods of reflection, we may consider not just what our reasons are, but why we have them. At such a time, what we take to be the correct explanation for why a friend's danger is a reason for us to help him *does* plausibly include our desires: what we take to be the explanation may include thoughts like "I care for him deeply," or "I would hate to see him get hurt," and these thoughts about our desires are consistent with loving our friend. It is in keeping with SRL that in urgent cases such as danger to a friend our first deliberations will be about our reasons, and so we will be focused on the person or people we love; and that when we deliberate about *why* we have those reasons, in a cool hour, we might think of our desires.

Even in cases where our reasons are less important than reasons of love and we happily take our reasons to be subjective, we do not tend to focus on our desires. If there is a football game that Ananya takes herself to have reason to watch on TV because she wants to see it, her focus is on the game, not on her desire to watch it. While watching the game it might never occur to her that she wants to keep watching it; that desire might only be salient to her if, say, the television stops working. With more important reasons, as reasons of love tend to be, it is even more likely that the focus of our deliberations will be on our reasons themselves rather than on the desires that explain them.¹⁴

¹⁴ Neil Sinhababu notes this feature of desire, which he calls its *Attentional Aspect* (Sinhababu 2017: 33).

It is true that when we reflect on our obligations of love they don't feel as obviously and strongly related to our desires as many of our reasons do. This is explained well by Sinhababu (2009: 473-481, 2017: 45-51), who points out that desires come in two "flavours," positive desire and aversion:

The motivational state driving action out of a feeling of obligation typically is aversion, rather than positive desire . . . Positive desires produce delight when we have thoughts of getting what we want and disappointment when we have thoughts of failing to do so. Aversions produce relief when we have thoughts of avoiding the object of aversion and anxiety when we have thoughts of failing to avoid it Discovering that we have to violate obligations typically causes anxiety rather than disappointment. And discovering easy ways to satisfy onerous obligations or being freed from them typically causes relief rather than delight. (Sinhababu 2017: 48)

While we experience positive desires when motivated towards objects like delicious foods, our favorite musical performances, and making love to people we find attractive (Sinhababu 2017: 32), we experience aversion when motivated by obligations (among other things).¹⁵ Thus if Ananya believes she has an obligation to help a friend in danger that obligation might not feel to her like a positive desire. Rather, she might feel averse to not helping her friend, anxious if she is not able to do so, and relieved when she is able to do so. In this way, subjectivists are able to explain the phenomenology of our focus when we take ourselves to have obligations of love.

¹⁵ There is not space here for an account of why we experience positive desire in the case of some objects and aversion in the case of others, such as obligations; see Sinhababu (2009, 2017) for discussion.

3.2 *The Motive Problem*

The other objection to subjectivism about reasons of love from phenomenology is the Motive Problem, the objection that the motives that we would be moved by if subjectivism about reasons of love were true are not the motives that we feel we are moved by. Keller makes this argument by first discussing sacrifice. He writes that “What you are prepared to sacrifice, for the sake of the person you love, is yourself,” and “To be prepared to make sacrifices of love . . . is to place yourself in the service of something that matters beyond yourself” (Keller 2017: 6).

Imagine a future in which your husband becomes very sick and requires your constant care. Imagine that caring for him will require you to sacrifice professional opportunities, leisure pursuits, and other relationships, and will not be very rewarding; mostly, it will be menial and unpleasant. Considering this possibility, you may well feel that looking after your husband would not give you the life you most want and value. It would mean sacrificing your own goals and projects for the sake of your husband. Yet if you love him, then you will feel that you have reason to make the sacrifice. (Keller 2017: 6)

As you feel you are moved to care for your husband despite doing so not according with your goals and projects, Keller argues, your motivations do not appear to be related to your desires.

Keller also describes a version of Williams’s case (Williams 1981b: 17-18) in which you stand on a pier and see that your wife is in the water and needs to be saved from drowning:

Suppose that you are moved by thoughts of all the work you have put into your marriage and of the part of your life that will be lost if your wife is no longer around; suppose that you are moved to save your wife by your concern with protecting your investment. (Keller 2017: 7)

Keller holds that these are the motivations that subjectivism about reasons of love predicts, and that being moved by these considerations would not be being moved by love.

The argument is that our motivations from reasons of love do not feel to us to be subjectivist, because when we are moved by such reasons we do not feel moved by our desires to further our interests and plans. But SRL is the claim that our reasons of love are correctly explained by our desires, and we have desires that are not for the satisfaction of our own interests or plans. For example, we have desires to further the wellbeing, interests, and rights of others.¹⁶ SRL does not require that the only things people desire are aspects of themselves, such as the fulfilment of their own interests or plans; that would be not subjectivism, but psychological egoism. Love, I claim, requires desiring the loved person's wellbeing for his own sake and desiring union with him. As the person who loves desires her beloved's wellbeing for his own sake, she does not desire only the fulfilment of her own interests and plans. And there is no reason subjectivists about reasons of love must think that a person must desire the fulfilment of her interests and plans so much that she cannot have reason to sacrifice herself for those she loves. Her reasons will depend on what she desires, but a person can desire other things more than her own projects, plans, and even her life. It is in keeping with SRL that you may desire your husband's wellbeing more than your own interests and plans. Thus, when

¹⁶ Williams makes this clear about ground projects: "Ground projects do not have to be selfish, in the sense that they are just concerned with things for the agent. Nor do they have to be self-centred, in the sense that the creative projects of a Romantic artist could be considered self-centred (where it has to be *him*, but not *for him*)" (Williams 1981b: 13).

your husband is dying and needs your care, and that will mean sacrificing your interests and plans, your motivation to care for him need not strike you as objectivist.¹⁷

I expect Keller did not mean to imply that human desires must be self-interested. But in attempting to construct a case in which it would feel to us that if we were moved by desires we would not be moved by love, he chose self-interested desires, as they are desires that clash with loving. A convincing argument of this type against SRL would have to use more realistic desires, however: it would have to argue that we don't feel moved by love when we feel we are moved by our desires that our beloved be well and happy, live a long life, and be cared for by us, for example. It seems very unlikely that such an argument can be made, as having such desires is so much in keeping with the experience of loving.

In the case of the drowning wife, it is in keeping with SRL that the consideration that Arjun (say) feels motivates him to save his wife when she is drowning is that she is drowning, not any consideration about himself. If Arjun is responding to reasons, the correct explanation *why* that his wife is drowning moves him to save her, according to SRL, is that he has certain desires: he has (for example) very strong desires that his wife not suffer, that she have a long and happy life, that he doesn't have to live without her, and so on. But these are explanations

¹⁷ Keller might be arguing that when our motivations are desires, we are not moved by love, because when we are moved by the desires he lists in his example we are not moved by love. But it is no objection to SRL that there exist *some* desires such that, if we are motivated by them, we are not motivated by love; SRL does not imply that *all* desires entail reasons of love.

for the considerations that move Arjun, they are not those considerations themselves. And they are explanations consistent with him loving his wife: if he reflects on why the fact that his wife was drowning motivated him to save her, the thought that he cares deeply for her and wants her to live a long and happy life is consistent with him loving her. Thus the subjectivist explanation of why he is moved by the fact that his wife is drowning is perfectly compatible with being moved by love.

Keller's argument could be understood as saying that you might have no desire whatsoever to care for your sick husband, but would still have a reason to care for him, and so SRL is wrong. If you have no desire that gives a reason to care for your husband, however, you do not love him, as a desire for a person's wellbeing is necessary for loving him, and your desire for your husband's wellbeing gives you a reason to care for him. If you have no desire at all to care for your dying husband we are thus no longer talking of reasons of love—reasons of love are the reasons we have to treat *those we love* especially well. It is no complaint against a theory of reasons of love that it does not ascribe such reasons to one person with regard to another when that person does not love that other. This is not to deny that we have obligations to those we don't love; it is just that those obligations are not obligations of love. Thus if Keller's argument is that SRL is wrong because you might have no desire whatsoever to care for your sick husband but still have a reason to care for him, that argument doesn't succeed.

I have mentioned two aspects of subjectivism about reasons of love that help show that the arguments from phenomenology are mistaken: that SRL does not imply that our reasons must always be our desires, and that SRL does not imply that we must be moved only by deliberations about our own interests and plans. Another aspect of subjectivism about reasons

of love that helps show the objections mistaken is that like SR, SRL is not a decision procedure. Subjectivism about reasons gives a criterion for reasons in which any reason is correctly explained by desires, but does not prescribe or predict that we think about our desires when thinking about our reasons (Sobel 2016b). Likewise, SRL gives a criterion for reasons of love in which any such reason is correctly explained by desires, but does not prescribe or predict that we think about our desires when deciding what our reasons of love are. It is thus not problematic for SRL that our desires are not always the focus of our deliberations of love and are not always what we feel motivated by when acting on reasons of love. With these three points in mind, we can see that subjectivism about reasons of love does not conflict with the phenomenology of our focus or motivations.

4. The Plausibility of Subjectivism about Reasons of Love

Another objection to subjectivism about reasons of love is that it has counterintuitive implications about what reasons we have. Diane Jeske has an argument of this kind, in which she presents a hypothetical case and argues that a subjectivist view cannot give satisfactory answers to the questions the case raises (Jeske 2001, 2008).¹⁸

¹⁸ Rather than talking of “subjectivism about the reasons of love,” Jeske talks of “the Humean account of reasons of intimacy.” Humeanism about reasons of intimacy is the view that the reasons we have to give preferential treatment to our intimates are “subjective agent-relative reasons” which are “grounded by our desires” (Jeske 2008: 29-30). Humeanism about reasons of intimacy is thus the same thing as subjectivism about reasons of intimacy. In her argument against subjectivism about reasons of

In Jeske's example she has a friend, Tracy. Jeske cares about Tracy's health and happiness, wants to spend time with her, and wants herself and Tracy to support each other in times of crisis. Jeske has the opportunity to be friends with a second person, Emma, and this is attractive to Jeske as she enjoys receiving expensive gifts and Emma is wealthy and generous. According to subjectivism about reasons of love, our reasons of love are correctly explained by our desires, so Jeske concludes that as she desires to receive expensive gifts she should be friends with Emma rather than Tracy:

If I decide I would rather be close to Emma than to Tracy, then the rational course of action is to shift my affections and attention, unless the opportunity costs are too high or my friendship with Tracy continues to be instrumentally valuable in some way . . . If my friendship with Tracy is not a means to anything else that I want and the cultivation of friendship with Emma would go quickly and smoothly, then, on the Humean account, it would be irrational to maintain my relationship with Tracy; rather, I ought to get out of that friendship and into one with Emma as quickly as possible. (Jeske 2008: 33)

This, Jeske says, is implausible, and so subjectivism about reasons of love cannot be correct.

intimacy, Jeske uses just one kind of intimate relationship, friendship. As intimate friendship, as Jeske describes it, is a relationship of love, I take it she is arguing against subjectivism about reasons of love with this example, though her ultimate aim is to also object to subjectivism about reasons of intimacy with regard to intimates we don't love.

However, there is an aspect of Jeske's example that means the example is not an objection to subjectivism about reasons of love. The only desires Jeske might have that could give her reason to stay friends with Tracy are, she says, instrumental: she can only have reason to continue to be friends with Tracy if that friendship is "a means to [something] else that I want" and is "instrumentally valuable in some way." Jeske does care about Tracy's welfare, but must not desire it for Tracy's sake. Now, a person who values another only instrumentally is not that person's friend. Jeske's relationship with Tracy may have the appearance of friendship, as they spend time together and support each other in times of crisis. But as Jeske does not desire Tracy's wellbeing for Tracy's sake, she is not Tracy's friend.

The case, then, is not an example of friendship and is thus not a counterexample to SRL. In attempting to construct a case in which a person has reasons of love towards another that subjectivism does not account for, Jeske has inadvertently created a case in which the person does not love that other, and so the reasons of love do not apply; and it is no objection to a theory of reasons of love that it doesn't attribute reasons of love to a person with regard to someone she doesn't love. I will consider below a case better formulated to target SRL, but will first consider Jeske's discussion of cases in which one person ceases to have the desires of love for another person.

In Jeske's example, we could surmise that Jeske used to love Tracy but has ceased to do so. Jeske acknowledges that if a person ceases to love someone she no longer has reasons of love with regard to that person. Subjectivism about reasons of love is nevertheless wrong, she claims, as it cannot justify our trying to maintain a friendship when it will dwindle away without effort to maintain it (Jeske 2008: 35-36). Jeske appeals to the intuition that when we

have a friendship and our desires of love begin to wane, we ought to sustain and strengthen those desires, even if we have no desire to do so (Jeske 2008: 36, 156 n. 13). I do not share this intuition, and do not know of good evidence that it is commonly held. Further, there is good reason to think the intuition is not commonly held. Practically everyone lets many friendships wane; not many middle-aged people are still friends with all those they were friends with in high school, for example. This is not generally considered irrational or wrong, and this is evidence that the idea that we should always try to sustain waning friendships is counterintuitive.

The most straightforward justification for not trying to sustain waning friendships is that our plans, beliefs, and interests (in things) change. My (hypothetical) high school friend Manu and I no longer wish to do the same things, and no longer share important common beliefs. He gradually became a devout Catholic and socialist who likes quiet evenings at home, and I (let's say) became a fiercely anti-religious libertarian who likes to go clubbing. We wish each other well, but no longer have the desire to be together in any way; this desire waned over time and, given our increasing differences, we had reason to let it do so. Jeske appeals to the intuition that it is wrong to let friendships wane, but the example of Manu and me is not counterintuitive. I suggest explanations of justifiably letting a friendship lapse work like this example does.

Jeske acknowledges that it *is* sometimes appropriate to end friendships, but says that this does not help counter her argument from the example of Tracy and Emma, as explaining the case will require more information than Jeske provides about her own desires, and if more information about Jeske's desires than she gives is necessary then subjectivism about reasons of

love is wrong (Jeske 2008: 34). The information Jeske provides about her own desires is sufficient, however, to show that the Tracy and Emma example is not an objection to SRL, as it shows it is not a case where reasons of love apply. And when we consider normal cases of letting friendships end, such as that of Manu and me, we do not think those involved acted wrongly, and information about the desires of those in such friendships is sufficient to explain such cases. This is not to say that all cases of letting friendships wane are justified; it is to say that Jeske has not given good reason to think that subjectivism justifies letting friendships wane in cases where we think it would be wrong to do so.

We can thus strengthen Jeske's example to make a better objection against SRL. Here is a case in which the person whose reasons are in question does love a friend, and in which it seems that person would be acting wrongly to let the friendship wane:

Xindi is a longstanding friend of Tracy. She cares about Tracy's wellbeing for Tracy's own sake, and for her relationship with Tracy. Xindi meets Emma, who is wealthy and generous, and Xindi would very much like to become friends with Emma, as Xindi desires receiving expensive gifts. Tracy is evicted by her landlord and needs Xindi to help her move out on Saturday. Emma invites Xindi to spend Saturday together. Xindi desires being friends with Emma so strongly that, if SRL is right, she has more reason to spend Saturday with Emma than to help Tracy.

This seems to me like a good objection to SRL. It is possible, under SRL, that a person could desire becoming friends with someone so much that her desires give her reason to harm an existing friendship. This is also an example of a friendship which is in danger of declining,

and it appears the person responsible should do something to avoid this happening. I believe subjectivism about reasons of love allows such cases, and this is something proponents of the view must accept. This weighs against the view.

However, that weight is greatly reduced when we consider two aspects of the case. Firstly, Xindi's desiderative profile is very strange. Her desire to receive expensive gifts is stronger than her desire that her close, longstanding friend who has been evicted not have to move house by herself, and stronger than her desire to maintain their longstanding friendship. Thus, Xindi is a very strange person, one who has a desire that is not unusual—receiving expensive gifts—but who has that desire to an extremely high degree in relation to her other desires, including the desires of love she has for her friends. The most obvious explanation for this is that she is shallow, greedy, and disloyal.

Here again I believe a feature of SR applies to SRL. It is a well-known objection to subjectivism about reasons that it allows that people can have reasons to do strange or abhorrent things, such as harming a friend or a friendship. Subjectivists about reasons typically accept that very strange people have very strange reasons, and so need not be irrational in acting to fulfil their very strange or abhorrent desires (e.g. Street 2009, 2016, Sobel 2016a: 17). I too am happy to bite this bullet, for subjectivism about reasons of love. Whether subjectivism about reasons is right about such cases is something that cannot be settled here, but we can be clear about the question: Do people who love but have very strange or abhorrent desires, such as Xindi, have very strange or abhorrent reasons with regard to those they love? There is a clash of intuitions between subjectivists and objectivists about this, but the Xindi example does not

give any additional weight to the objectivist view; at best it helps clarify for us which intuition we have.

Secondly, an important aspect of her case, Jeske claims, is that subjectivism does not allow that the person who switches friends is criticisable (Jeske 2008: 34). This is not true: we can criticize Xindi for being shallow, greedy, and disloyal—for being an awful person who does awful things. We can also criticize her for being *the kind of person who has reasons* to do awful things.¹⁹ So our intuition that there is something wrong about what Xindi does is not problematic for SRL. The intuition about the case that *does* clash with SRL is the intuition that Xindi is acting *irrationally*, acting not in accordance with the reasons she has. Subjectivism about the reasons of love accepts that it cannot accommodate that intuition; but it is not an intuition subjectivists about reasons of love are likely to have—I do not have it myself—and I don't know of any evidence that it is widespread.²⁰

5. Conclusion

Philosophers' arguments for objectivist theories of reasons of love typically proceed by first considering subjectivism about reasons of love (among other views) and rejecting it. If I am right, and those arguments for rejecting subjectivism about reasons of love are unsuccessful, the motivation for accepting objectivist theories philosophers propose instead is greatly reduced.

¹⁹ For ways in which we can rightly attribute blame to a person for acting on her reasons, see (Williams 1995).

²⁰ For perhaps the most extensive argument against the intuition, see Vogler (2002).

The success of subjectivism about the reasons of love will ultimately depend on a positive argument for the theory, which I have not given here. I have shown, though, that current objections to subjectivism about the reasons of love are unsuccessful.²¹

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