

Entitled to Love: Relationships, Commandability, and Obligation

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ABSTRACT *The notion of uncommandability has been central to how we perceive our emotional lives, and particularly romantic love. According to this notion, while we can control how we treat people, we have little control over how we feel about them. The argument from uncommandability is often evoked as a way of sidestepping moral obligations regarding our romantic emotions. One challenge to uncommandability is the potential to manipulate our emotions through psychopharmaceuticals. Much of the debate on so-called 'love drugs' has concerned the permissibility and worth of these interventions. By comparison, there has been less exploration of their implications for moral obligation and responsibility. How might the emergence of these interventions change what can be emotionally demanded of us? We ultimately suggest that it is necessary to view the complex morality of our emotional lives through different evaluative paradigms: one concerning moral duty and obligation, where we have no claim to each other's romantic love irrespective of its commandability, and the other concerning the appropriateness of our reactive attitudes, where we are at times justified in feeling morally injured by another person on account of their failure to love us, regardless of whether they had control in the matter.*

1. Introduction

Bertrand Russell married Alys Pearsall Smith in 1894. The match was strongly opposed by members of Russell's family, but his deep love, admiration, and attachment to Smith prevailed. For seven years they lived contentedly as man and wife. Then one unremarkable day Russell set out for an afternoon cycle and was struck by an emotional epiphany. 'Suddenly, as I was riding along a country road, I realised that I no longer loved Alys', he recounted in his autobiography. 'The problems presented by this discovery were very grave'.¹

Indeed they were: for Russell, no doubt, but graver still for Smith. To put her state of personal catastrophe into some sort of perspective, one only need consider her later reaction, recounted in her journal, on learning that a tumour she had found in her breast was non-malignant:

'Now my blissful hope of six months is destroyed', she wrote. 'Even the chance of death. I do so long to leave Bertie free to live with a woman who ... does not bore him desperately and get on his nerves as I do ... Little duties keep me going from day to day. But they don't satisfy the awful craving hunger for Bertie's love ... If only I could die – it's such a simple solution'.²

As it was, Russell went on to love many more times (including three further marriages); Smith never loved again. She remained devoted to Russell for the next 50 years, mostly

from afar, and confessed to watching him reading to his subsequent children ‘thro’ the uncurtained windows of his Chelsea house’.³

What was it to have loved Russell so? In some respects it sounds utterly life-ruining: so much was snuffed out and made impossible by that unconquerable, unreciprocated love. ‘Unfortunately, I was neither wise enough nor courageous enough to prevent this one disaster from shattering my capacity for happiness and my zest for life’, Smith later wrote.⁴

In other respects, however, it can be viewed not as life-ruining, but rather as life-enhancing or even life-defining. The enormity of love itself might have its own innate value to the person who feels it. This is true even if it is rejected; indeed, the intoxicating abjection of unrequited love might feel more significant, more meaningful, to the person who feels it than any number of stable and functional relationships. Smith finally confessed her unwavering commitment to Russell at the end of her life, adding that ‘my devotion makes no claim, and involves no burden on thy part, nor any obligation’.⁵

As for Russell, he described his loss of love as a ‘discovery’, and a grave discovery at that. It was as though it were an objective, unfortunate fact in the world, concerning which he had no role nor any control; like discovering, equally gravely, that he or Smith were severely ill, or that an enormous asteroid was hurtling unstopably toward Earth.

In a way the defining presumption behind the story of Russell and Smith is the uncommandability of their feelings for each other. Smith could do nothing to lose the love she felt for Russell; Russell could do nothing to retrieve the love he had lost for Smith. Both, in turn, had no choice but to live with the grave situation presented to them by their respective emotional lives.

In some respects the emergence of this grave situation, and its repercussions for each of them, seems to exist outside of moral judgment. Although Russell’s loss of love was so devastating for Smith, it is not straightforward to claim that he was ‘duty-bound’ or ‘morally obligated’ to feel the love that he did not, and perhaps could not, feel. This is true even if some might simultaneously hold that their relationship grounded special obligations of conduct, irrespective of the continuity of romantic love, and that Russell might therefore have been obliged to ‘stick it out’ despite his loss of feeling, or even to disguise his loss of feeling in his conduct.⁶

The notion of uncommandability has been central to how we perceive our emotional lives, and particularly romantic love (which is the focus of the present article).⁷ According to the notion of uncommandability, while we can control how we act toward people, there is ultimately little we can do concerning how we *feel* about them.⁸ We cannot love by deciding to love (no matter how firm our decision); we cannot cease loving by deciding to cease.

For many people, an implication of this uncommandability is that we can have no robust moral duties or obligations regarding how we feel toward others. Kant famously rejected a duty to love as ‘an absurdity’ since ‘love is a *feeling*, not a willing, and I cannot love because I *will* to, still less because I *ought* to’.⁹

The argument from uncommandability is often quickly evoked as a way of sidestepping certain moral imperatives from our emotional lives. But you can sometimes sense, equally, that this exception is not established with much regret. Instead, we are rather relieved to lay claim to an emotional life around which the language of ‘moral duty’ and ‘moral obligation’ can have little traction.

In turn, challenges to the alleged uncommandability of our emotions are unsettling on a variety of levels. For if we cannot quickly exempt our emotional lives from the demands of duty and obligation, we are forced to have a more complicated conversation about the

intersection of emotions and morality, or the lack thereof, that necessitates an exploration of the nature and limits of morality, and its role in our innermost worlds.

One challenge to uncommandability is the potential to manipulate our emotional lives through psychopharmaceuticals. The prospect of so-called ‘love drugs’, in particular, has recently generated wide-ranging debate among philosophers and bioethicists.¹⁰ One of the most prominent questions within this debate has concerned the circumstances, if any, under which the use of such interventions would be permissible. A related debate concerns the value of these manipulated emotions in comparison to their ‘natural’ or ‘real’ counterparts. Under what conditions would such interventions be justified? What sort of worth would we attach to the resultant feelings and bonds?¹¹

By comparison, there has been less exploration of the implications of these interventions for moral obligation and responsibility. How might the emergence (or proliferation) of these interventions change what can be emotionally demanded of us?

In this article we will seek to address explicitly the implications of interpersonal psychopharmacology for moral obligation and responsibility. We will begin (in Section 2) with an overview of some of the recent conversation about interpersonal psychopharmacology: both the need to better understand the interpersonal ramifications of extant and prospective drugs, and the potential to develop drugs that have profound effects on our emotional and interpersonal lives. Following this, in Sections 3 to 5, we will turn to some of the ethical questions that arise with interpersonal psychopharmacology, particularly concerning the moral demands that potentially emerge with greater pharmaceutical control over our emotions. We will consider these potential moral demands both in the context of our extant personal relationships, and also in the context of broader social and political questions relevant to who we love and why. Throughout, we will interrogate the assertion that we can be morally obliged or duty-bound to love. We close, in Section 6, by reflecting on the different paradigms of moral evaluation implicit within this conversation – one concerning evaluations of moral duty and obligation; the other concerning the web of our reactive attitudes, and when certain reactions are warranted and appropriate – and by considering how these paradigms might enable us to make more fine-grained distinctions about our moral answerability for our emotions, whether they are in our control or not.

Ultimately, we aim to make sense of the claim that while Russell was *not* morally obligated to love Smith, it would nevertheless be warranted and appropriate for Smith to feel morally injured (and angered) on account of his loss of love. That is to say: Smith may be entitled to Russell’s love in a way which makes these feelings entirely warranted, appropriate, and valid, even if she is not entitled to his love in a way which makes his ceasing to love her morally wrong.

Contrary to the argument from uncommandability, we argue that this assessment applies *irrespective* of the commandability of the relevant emotions. The way in which we hold others responsible for their emotions toward us neither calls for nor requires their control over those emotions, and is therefore not established or unsettled by new biotechnologies of emotional control.

2. Interpersonal Psychopharmacology and ‘Love Drugs’

In their recent book *Love Drugs: The Chemical Future of Our Relationships*, and a series of related papers, Brian Earp and Julian Savulescu have called for a fundamental shift in

research practices concerning psychopharmaceuticals.¹² Present practices often focus on a narrow set of symptom outcomes for individuals, and pay little attention to the short- and long-term interpersonal and relational effects of drugs. Though these effects are understudied, many widely used drugs are likely to have significant interpersonal dimensions that ought to be better understood.¹³

While many psychopharmaceuticals indirectly affect intimate relationships, few have been developed with the goal of intervening in intimate relationships directly. However, emerging research has tentatively begun exploring the relational dynamics of certain substances – including hormones such as oxytocin and testosterone, as well as MDMA, LSD, and psilocybin in conjunction with psychotherapy – opening the possibility that more direct interventions may be developed with these or related substances.¹⁴

This ethical debate is in some respects premature – as noted, the evidence with regard to the current and future possible effects of drugs on intimate relationships is underdeveloped – but in other respects, it is overdue. Unregulated explorations into the role of psychedelics within romantic relationships are longstanding and have once again become commonplace, including organized ‘retreats’ in which couples are dosed with psychedelics and guided through forms of couple’s counselling. ‘Can MDMA save a marriage?’ ran a headline in the *New York Times* in February 2022, describing one such retreat: a last-ditch effort from a couple on the brink of divorce, who have now allegedly restored their relationship thanks in no small part (they claim) to their now biannual MDMA sessions.¹⁵

More speculatively: if we grant that aspects of our emotional lives are biologically and chemically based (even if we reject *reducing* our emotional lives to these biological states), it becomes theoretically feasible that we could exert more extensive biological and chemical control over our emotions and attachments. Gene therapy, for instance, has been used successfully to turn promiscuous voles into monogamous voles.¹⁶ On this view, future drugs could potentially be used to intervene more deliberately in certain relationships, and psychopharmaceuticals could become part of the arsenal we deploy in initiating, improving, or even ‘designing’ our relationships with others; or indeed, in ending them.¹⁷

This is, in some respects, an extremely discomforting notion, and it generates a range of distinct ethical and philosophical concerns, beyond the familiar issues of safety, justice, inequality, and so on, that pertain to the emergence of all new biotechnologies.

Within the debate concerning the incursion of pharmacology into our emotional and interpersonal lives, many writers have acknowledged our uneasiness about the overreach of science and medicine into parts of our lives where they do not belong, and our fears about industries endeavouring to pathologize and profiteer in sacred and intimate spaces. Dystopian imaginings present themselves easily: worlds in which falling in and out of love is something you are obliged to do under medical supervision, and most likely with a prescription (after all, there are not insignificant risks and harms involved in love gone wrong); or worlds in which we are incessantly drugged up, in order to feel one way or another, and have lost contact with our spontaneous and ‘authentic’ emotional selves (although, dystopian imaginings aside, we need not endorse dichotomies between ‘authenticity’ and the use of psychopharmaceuticals).¹⁸

These, however, will not be our concerns in the present analysis. Instead, we suggest that another aspect of the discomfort we feel with the prospect of interpersonal psychopharmacology, and particularly ‘love drugs’, concerns not only our worries about the overreach of science and medicine, but also our worries about the overreach of *morality*

itself. Part of what we have to confront in the debate about ‘love drugs’ is what this discomfort consists in, and relatedly, what this might reveal about different paradigms of moral and interpersonal evaluation, and their respective remits and limits. Aside from its significance in exploring the moral dimensions of our emotional lives, the vantage of ‘love drugs’ might therefore also be meta-ethically revelatory.

3. Interpersonal Psychopharmacology and Interpersonal Demands

The paradigmatic case of permissible love enhancement is presented as two people, equally willing, wishing to revive a worthwhile and longstanding relationship. But it is also interesting to consider nonparadigmatic cases where both parties are *not* equally committed to such an intervention. These sorts of asymmetries are commonplace in close relationships, and yet they do not always seem straightforwardly to undermine autonomy. ‘Love shapes people’s choices’, as Pilar Lopez-Cantero emphasizes in her response to Earp and Savulescu.¹⁹ She draws on Andrew McGee, who suggests that ‘a mutual shaping of choices’ is in fact a requirement of love.²⁰ We sometimes endeavour to change our preferences, and change our desires, due to the interests and influence of the people with whom we are in intimate relationships.

The potential value of love drugs would lie in their capacity to allow us to fulfil our higher-order desires (i.e. a higher-order desire to stay in a long-term relationship, despite a lower-order waning of romantic interest; or a higher-order desire to move on from destructive feelings for someone, despite a lower-order romantic obsession with them). It is in aligning with these higher-order desires that love drugs could potentially affirm (and even forward) autonomy, even if they run contrary to our lower-order desires and occurrent emotional states.²¹ The lower-order desires of the ‘sparkless’ couple might have little to do with love and romance, but their higher-order desires might be to reinstate these feelings for each other.

Many a person, however, finds themselves in a less conflicted state. Often when we stop loving someone, we also stop *wanting* to love them. Here lower- and higher-order desires converge. From our love-less vantage, they stop seeming worthy of our love, in ways we do not necessarily want to overcome. With his love for Smith snuffed out, Russell felt very differently about what he used to take to be his wife’s many virtues. ‘She tried to be more impeccably virtuous than is possible to human beings, and was thus led to insincerity’, he wrote of her, justifying his loss of feeling.²²

However, as Lopez-Cantero points out, one of the powerful aspects of love drugs is their potential to *initiate* new higher-order desires. Perhaps it is only once a certain emotional response has been (artificially) initiated that a person can begin to *want* to love their partner again. Could one ever be rightfully compelled to undertake an intervention precisely in order to have different sorts of higher-order desires? Could you ever owe it to someone to endeavour to make this change? And insofar as the new higher-order desire emerges in response to pharmacological intervention, would this desire ultimately align with or conflict with autonomy?

Paradigms of autonomy that focus strictly on individual higher-order desires might therefore be inadequate to appraise the complex sorts of desire and choice matrices that emerge dynamically within our closest relationships, where the divisions between even one’s higher-order desires and the desires of those with whom one is intimate do not

always admit of stark boundaries, and where *their* desires can exert a not insignificant claim, and invariably come to shape, and in some cases form, the projects and goals that are mutually pursued. Lopez-Cantero points to relational accounts of autonomy – which emphasize the interplay between relationships and (free) choice – and calls for debates around interpersonal psychopharmacology and enhancement to ‘re-formulate the discussion of love enhancement by introducing more fine-grained views on relationships, autonomy and informed consent’.²³

Imagine, in some alternative history, that among the many chemical compounds isolated and synthesized during the 19th century there was one that had a significant effect on loving attachment (call it Drug X). When imbibed it could help revive lost feelings of beneficence and attachment within intimate relationships, and on the basis of this temporary revival it could sustain long-lasting changes in a couple’s feelings toward each other.

After Russell returned from his cycle, and announced to his wife that he had lost his love, would she have a legitimate moral claim on him to endeavour to retrieve those feelings, and use the best means available to him to do so? More to the point: would she be entitled to ask, among other things, that they try this new Drug X she had heard so much about to see whether it would return his love to him and rescue them from the very grave situation his loss of feeling had generated?

These questions bring us back to the central issue of duty and emotion, and particularly duty and love. And it is in returning to these questions that we can begin to see the limits of ‘commandability’ as an evasion of the sorts of moral obligations that might arise within our emotional lives. As we will argue: if we are discomforted by the assertion of obligations and duties under these circumstances, then the basis of this discomfort is not merely the commandability, or voluntariness, of our emotions, but speaks instead to a deeper unease about moral demands on our emotional lives.

4. Commandability and Moral Obligation

As noted, a prevalent and influential position holds that there could never be a duty or moral obligation to love, because emotions such as love are not within a person’s voluntary control. This position is regularly invoked to sidestep any claim that failing to love could constitute a moral wrong. ‘We generally have little voluntary control, if any, over whether we love’, Harry Frankfurt states, summarizing this position. ‘For this reason, if not also for others, there is nothing morally illegitimate in what we do – there is no breach by us of any moral imperative – if it happens we cease loving something or someone’.²⁴ Separately, while Niko Kolodny’s influential relationship theory implies that ceasing to love in the context of an established, valued relationship is ‘inappropriate’, he is careful to note that it would not necessarily be *wrong*, insofar as ‘these attitudes are not under one’s direct voluntary control’.²⁵

But how robust is the claim that love is essentially beyond our control? In some respects the assertion of uncommandability can feel overstated. And while we cannot have particular emotions ‘at will’, nor are we mere spectators to our emotional lives, hopelessly feeling this way and that. Instead, we can and often do exert our agency, to a certain extent, over how we feel toward others, including who and how much we love.

S. Matthew Liao explores several ways in which we can exert control over our emotions.²⁶ Per Liao: ‘Contrary to the views of some people, emotions generally and the

emotional aspect of love in particular are commandable'.²⁷ We can intervene by drawing on our faculties of reason to motivate certain emotional reactions in ourselves. If it was possible for Russell to reason himself into believing that Smith's virtues were vices in disguise, could it likewise be possible to reason himself into believing the opposite: to endeavour to view her character and dispositions in a generous and positive light once again? We can deeply reflect on our emotions and why we have them (including through therapy), and endeavour to cultivate different emotional responses if we believe they will be more appropriate or beneficial. We can also change our circumstances in ways that will indirectly initiate change in our emotions; for example, by avoiding someone we don't want to develop romantic feelings for. Finally, we can 'fake it til we make it', cultivating emotional change through behavioural change.

Part of what is particularly compelling, and simultaneously disconcerting, about the prospects of pharmaceutical intervention in our emotional lives is the impression that they may be far more efficacious than these more ordinary methods. As with other areas – where stark binaries are drawn between 'traditional' and 'pharmacological' means to the same ends – we are often more concerned or perturbed by the prospects of pharmacological interventions. Although errant, in many instances, folk conceptions of drug-based interventions often perceive them as magic bullets. We further have the impression that drug-based interventions are capable of 'bypassing' rather than working through our agency, as opposed to the case of more ordinary interventions. One way of thinking about this is to consider the prospect of *involuntary* intervention: while we could never involuntarily reason or reflect, and thereby undergo emotional change, we could potentially involuntarily imbibe a drug or medication which had the same effect.

Those encouraging serious discourse around 'love drugs' and other interventions in interpersonal psychopharmacology are careful to reject 'magic potion' impressions of prospective therapies. Instead, they envision pharmaceuticals used in conjunction with other methods – like therapy, or the methods Liao describes – to cumulatively achieve far greater success in changing our emotional states, 'not through witchcraft or wizardry, or by bypassing a person's will completely, but by acting as a chemical nudge on the ancient brain systems involved in human love and pair-bonding, including libido, sexual attraction, and attachment'.²⁸

Conceivably, the combination of these methods would be efficacious enough to undermine many evasions of moral duty or obligation based on uncommandability alone. The prospect of more advanced interpersonal psychopharmacology therefore seems to challenge the view that we cannot be morally obligated, or duty-bound, to have certain kinds of emotional responses. If many of our evasions with regard to duties to feel certain emotions stemmed from the 'uncommandability' of those emotions, what is the moral implication of developing greater and greater recourse to nudge, manipulate, and influence how we feel?

More to the point: if we want to hold that such *abilities* to control our emotions do not generate *duties* to control them, we are now required to further explore and articulate the reasons for this exemption. What, aside from uncommandability, prevents the emergence of emotional duties and obligations, including duties to love? What makes our emotional life unique from a moral point of view? The answers to these questions are important to explore overtly, especially as we seek to navigate the complex social and ethical terrain that may emerge with advancing interpersonal psychopharmacology.

To return to our initial example: could Russell have forsaken a moral duty in not loving Smith, if his experimentations with Drug X would have successfully restored his romantic attachment? Or when he later fell in love with Lady Ottoline Morrell, could he have been duty-bound to take Drug Y if it would have successfully snuffed out or suppressed his feelings for her?

A positive answer to these questions has been gestured to within these debates, although often quite evasively. In an early paper on the topic, Savulescu and Sandberg suggest that: 'If there is a duty to be faithful to one's partner, or a duty to do the best for one's children (and so remain in a stable relationship), these could ground a duty try to influence love through enhancement'.²⁹ The duty to have certain emotions is therefore approached indirectly, derived from duties of action, and the likelihood that certain emotional dispositions would better enable the execution of these non-derivative duties.

A more overt treatment of these potential duties and responsibilities suggests that couples with children would, in particular, have a special responsibility to endeavour to sustain their relationships (including pharmacologically, if necessary);³⁰ and, more generally, that one may have a duty to make 'every reasonable effort' to honour the commitments and oaths made in long-term partnerships and marriages (including, potentially, a duty to love): 'As love drugs become safely and cheaply available; if they could be shown to improve love, commitment, and marital well-being – and thereby lessen the chance (or the need) for divorce; if other interventions had been tried and failed; and if side-effects or other complications could be minimized, then using them might in some cases fall within the bounds of "every reasonable effort."'³¹

In many respects, the alleged emergence of these moral demands can feel disconcerting. Insofar as they emerge in response to the advancement of interpersonal psychopharmacology, the development of these drugs can present us both with concerns about the overreach of science and medicine, intervening in sacred personal spaces, and also with concerns about the overreach of morality itself, as previously privileged domains – concerning our innermost emotional worlds – become increasingly subject to the logic of control, duty, transgression, and obligation.

This exemption has a value to us, and aligns with aspects of mental privacy and freedom: that what we *feel*, this private inner space of our beings, is in some respects privileged, and is not subject to the same scrutiny, evaluation, and critique that concerns what we do or how we act.³²

In the next section we consider some of the further complexities (besides commandability) that pertain to our romantic attachments, and draw out how these complexities further complicate alleged obligations with regard to who we love and why.

None of this is to say that someone like Russell, in his brutal change of heart, is not open to moral critique. But it is to say that not every form of critique needs to be construed as a breach of moral duty or obligation. In our final Section 6, we will explore this division further by elaborating on two paradigms of moral evaluation: one concerning duty and obligation; the other concerning the web of our reactive attitudes, and when they are warranted and appropriate. Here, we will argue that while Russell was not obligated to love Smith, Smith would nevertheless have been entitled to feelings of moral injury and moral anger on account of his loss of love for her.

5. Love, Prejudice, and Partiality

Aside from their allegedly involuntary nature, another concern about the role of emotions in the moral domain is their inherent partiality.³³ Love is in some respects fundamentally incompatible with impartiality: its central nature is the elevation of a particular individual above others. And in deciding who to love, objective considerations can only take us so far (as evidenced by the familiar ‘good on paper’ conundrum faced by many people unable to muster feelings of genuine enthusiasm or attachment for potential partners who seem ‘objectively’ worthy of those feelings).

There is a longstanding theoretical debate within moral philosophy between (what are often called) partialists and impartialists. This fundamental tension has already emerged within debates about psychopharmacology and morality. Certain alleged moral bioenhancers, such as oxytocin, have sometimes been shown to increase feelings of beneficence and goodwill *toward an in-group*.³⁴ On the other hand, they may make us more hostile or indifferent to those who fall outside of this inner circle. In such a case, while the drug might increase morality perceived in partialist terms (by making us more loving and benevolent to those close to us), it may actually *decrease* morality perceived in impartialist terms (by making us even more indifferent to the needs of those outside of our existing communities).

The tension emerges again, and with particular force, when we appraise the moral dimensions of interpersonal psychopharmacology. Part of what is presumed by a ‘duty to love’ is a correlating ‘right to be loved’, or the assertion that we can be morally entitled to and morally deserve the love of another.

We can consider this both with regard to extant attachments and relationships, and with regard to those attachments and relationships we come to form (or, arguably, that we *should* come to form).

While it is clear that we can be enormously harmed by someone’s ceasing to love us (as the case of Smith demonstrates), it is also uncomfortable to say that anyone *deserves* to be loved or that they have the *right* to be loved indefinitely by someone else, in order to avoid this harm.

Some have objected to ‘love bio-enhancement’ on the basis that it undermines precisely what we value about someone’s love, which is the belief that *we* are its source.³⁵ As Sven Nyholm puts it: a large part of what we value, innately, about being loved is the belief that we have inspired this love; ‘we ourselves have a sort of internal power or ability to call forth, and sustain, the said disposition’.³⁶ It is certainly true that few people would be torn in deciding which scenario they would prefer: one where their partner loved them ‘naturally’, or one where their partner sustained their love using pharmaceuticals.

But is it true that in the former scenario ‘we’ are the source of love? Richard Rorty remarked that love ‘looks different after one has read Freud’.³⁷ (The same could be said about reading Darwin.) More broadly: what traits could we possess that would make ‘love’ the warranted or appropriate response to us, or rightly ‘draw it forth’?³⁸ And if, objectively speaking, we are the possessors of these exalted traits, why should not everyone love us? In some sense it is spurious to believe that love arises *because of us*, in any objective sense attached to our value, and it is particularly spurious to believe that the cessation of love toward us, or the failure of love to form toward us, could ever be construed as an error or mistake on someone’s part. This sort of entitlement is out of place when it comes to

love; even a little abhorrent. To be romantically loved is not merely to be given what we are *owed*; it is always to be given more than that.

This misplaced entitlement might be part of what makes assertions of a *duty* or an *obligation* to love feel particularly disconcerting. On what basis do we *deserve* love, particularly romantic love?³⁹ If we don't allow that people merely 'love who they love' or 'desire who they desire', on what basis *should* we love or *should* we desire?

Citing moral reasons for love enhancement, Savulescu and Sandberg point to concerns of justice: 'Currently, the natural lottery creates inequality. Some men are successful and some women are attractive, having the widest choice of mates. Others are less desirable. Chemically inducing lust and attractiveness might give those lower on the tree of life a chance to climb higher. This could create a more level playing field and allow those less attractive to compete on other traits'.⁴⁰

So far we have been concentrating on the sorts of moral demands that could arise within extant relationships. These are interpersonal demands arising from special obligations and close relationships (and are therefore aligned with partialist moral reasoning). But as the preceding quotation illustrates, there are also a range of broader, *impartialist* social, political, and moral issues which can arise concerning who has access to love, devotion, partnership, sex, and so on, and who does not. As the argument above indicates, one potential moral use of 'love drugs' could be to endeavour to address broader social prejudice and inequities in these spheres.

What happens when we bring the discourse of justice and desert (or inequality and prejudice) into intimate spaces? Although written long before the notoriety of 'incels' (or the 'involuntarily celibate'), Savulescu and Sandberg's argument with regard to justice shares something in common with the logic that animates certain incel communities, who claim that the unequal distribution of sexual access (and access to romantic partners) can be unjust in the same way as the unequal distribution of other societal goods is unjust.

Central to this logic is a claim of moral entitlement, but it is a moral entitlement that feels distinctly out of place. Even if there are complex social, political, and moral questions at play regarding sex, love, and attraction, this need not imply that any one person is ever *morally entitled* to the romantic love or sexual attraction of any other person.⁴¹

Again, our aversion to *entitlement* in these cases would have equal grounds irrespective of whether Drug X existed or not. The contemporary incel logic would not suddenly become legitimate because of the emergence of Drug X. And if the 'commandability' of these emotions would not suddenly generate new obligations, it seems clear that it was not the uncommandability of these emotions which spared them from the remit of moral duty and obligation in the first place.

When we have no extant relationship with someone, their entitlement to love and attraction seems particularly illegitimate, irrespective of whether these feelings could easily be summoned or not. But one of the central features of close relationships is the emergence of certain entitlements that are illegitimate elsewhere. If not through a discourse of duty and obligation, how should we capture and honour the emergence of these more legitimate entitlements?

In the next and final section, we will reflect on the moral challenges that have emerged in response to interpersonal psychopharmacology, and explore what these challenges reveal about the different paradigms of moral evaluation implicit within this conversation. In particular we will distinguish realms of evaluation concerning deontic status and realms of evaluation concerning moral worth. In making this distinction, we will show that the

way in which we hold others responsible for their emotions toward us (and vice versa) neither calls for nor requires their control over those emotions, and is therefore not established or unsettled by new biotechnologies of emotional control.⁴²

6. Paradigms of Moral Evaluation

As we have seen, evasions of ‘duties to love’ have often relied on the alleged uncommandability of our emotional lives. We cannot control who we love, and therefore we cannot be morally obliged or duty-bound to love anyone (or to cease loving them). A related argument concerns culpability and answerability for our emotions: because we cannot control who we love, we also cannot be blameworthy or culpable for loving anyone (or for ceasing to love them).

These two paradigms – of deontic status (assessments of permissibility and impermissibility) and of moral worth (assessments of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness) – are often treated as interchangeable, but it is important to note the ways in which they come apart.⁴³ Straightforwardly, one can commit wrongdoing and yet be blameless (this is what successful excuse achieves). More controversially, some philosophers have argued that one can act impermissibly in ways that are nevertheless praiseworthy, or that one can act permissibly in ways that are nevertheless blameworthy.⁴⁴

The division between deontic status and moral worth can be particularly stark when analyses of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness are taken to turn on our attitudes and mental orientations, as in prevalent Strawsonian theories of blameworthiness.⁴⁵ Paradigmatically, on such theories, when someone feels unjustified contempt for us, we are warranted in blaming them in turn. This remains the case irrespective of whether that person *couldn't help* but feel contemptuous toward us; that is, irrespective of their control over these attitudes and orientations. The fundamentally interpersonal paradigms that govern the appropriateness of our reactive attitudes operate in a separate realm from the paradigms that might be most apt in appraising permissibility and impermissibility.

The distinction between these paradigms of evaluation may help reveal some of the complex moral dynamics at play in moral judgments concerning our emotional lives, where such judgments seem in some respects so utterly out of place, and in other respects so essential. Furthermore, an analysis of these dynamics might reveal that while what we can ‘control’ has relevance to certain moral assessments, it can also be irrelevant to others. In making this case, we will argue that certain judgments concerning culpability for emotion stand *irrespective* of whether emotions are commandable or not.

The outcome of this analysis is that we can make sense of the claim that Russell was within his moral ‘rights’ to cease loving Smith (his change of feeling was not morally *impermissible*), and yet Smith would also not be making some sort of mistake in feeling deep moral hurt, and even anger, on account of his cessation of love. That is to say: she may be entitled to his love in a way which makes these feelings entirely warranted, appropriate, and valid, even if she is not entitled to his love in a way that makes his ceasing to love her morally wrong.

As for the availability of Drug X: just because he *could* potentially retrieve his lost romantic feelings for Smith, it does not mean that he would be duty-bound or morally obligated to do so, or that he would act impermissibly in refusing to attempt the treatment.

It is not merely on the basis of uncommandability that we do not have a right to the love of another, and the emergence of this commandability would not establish this right.

Nevertheless, the availability of Drug X could change certain kinds of appraisals regarding when and how we have been let down by one another. For instance, should Russell refuse to take Drug X, Smith might well feel that his refusal epitomizes how comprehensive his lack of concern and care for her is – his refusal even to try, etc. – but the legitimacy of her moral complaint would turn fundamentally on what the availability of Drug X *reveals* about his lack of care and concern, rather than the availability of Drug X, and commandability, in and of itself.

Importantly: the legitimacy of these reactions is highly dependent on the nature of the existing relationship, and the sorts of entitlements and demands that can emerge interpersonally. What we owe to one another, in terms of what qualifies as due concern, is fundamentally dependent on the nature of our relationships to each other.

Say some fan of Russell, whom he had never met, fell in love with him after reading his work. Now this stranger would have no legitimate claim that Russell love her back, and if she were morally hurt and angered on account of his disinterest in her, we would think she were making entirely inappropriate (and even deranged) claims upon him. The stranger (like the case of the incel) would be *neither* ‘entitled to his love’ in a way which made his failing to love her impermissible, *nor* ‘entitled to his love’ in a way which made her hurt and anger toward him for not reciprocating warranted or appropriate.

However, in the case of Smith, the situation is quite different. And one way of describing what we put on the line when we enter into close relationships with other people is precisely the legitimacy of their moral disappointment when we fall short of the expectations that the relationship invariably establishes. More broadly, emphasizing the division between deontic status and moral worth grounds an analysis whereby our emotional reactions cannot be said to be ‘morally wrong’ or ‘morally impermissible’, while it nevertheless remains true that we can also be legitimately morally answerable to others for our feelings and attitudes toward them.

This distinction is hugely explanatory in this context. Recognizing these separate realms helps us to honour the legitimacy of certain claims to be loved – the legitimacy, in certain instances, of hurt, pain, anger, sadness, even sometimes resentment, and so on, in finding that someone has ceased to love us, or that they love another – while simultaneously recognizing that no one has a *duty* to love us, or acts impermissibly in ceasing to love us.⁴⁶ It also explains why even these limited claims to the love of another can only emerge in the context of close relationships, where the legitimacy of these expectations was mutually established, and why they are so illegitimate and inappropriate outside of these contexts.

This can be true *even if* their lack of love is not accompanied by hurtful actions. Imagine an alternative scenario in which Russell kept his emotional epiphany to himself, and dutifully remained with Smith as a devoted husband, disguising his loss of love as best he could. Imagine further that one day she discovered a secret journal in which he revealed that he had long-since ceased to love her. Even here, where we might think Russell’s self-sacrificing behaviour is morally exemplary in terms of its deontic status, it might *still* be legitimate for Smith to feel hurt, wounded, and even angered on account of the revelation that his love has ceased.

Returning to the question of ‘commandability’: we can see now that a certain paradigm of answerability for our emotions arises *irrespective* of whether they are commandable or not, and need not be tossed hither or thither by new biotechnologies of emotional control.

The significance of these technologies will not concern *commandability* after all – since, in many respects, commandability is irrelevant to our moral claims within these emotional and attitudinal realms. Instead, these interventions will become another aspect of a complex interpersonal negotiation regarding the legitimacy, or illegitimacy, of disappointed expectations to the love of another.

So while our lack of ‘duty to love’ (especially romantically) does not actually depend on uncommandability, our simultaneous answerability for how we feel toward those close to us does not depend on commandability. Even if we had full control over our emotions, it would not render us duty-bound to feel one way or the other toward any particular individual. On the other hand, we can be rightly held to account for how we feel toward others *even if* we cannot control those feelings.

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NOTES

- 1 Russell, *Autobiography*, p. 138.
- 2 Strachey, *Remarkable Relations*, p. 222.
- 3 Russell, *Autobiography*, p. 519.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid, p. 521.
- 6 One can distinguish duties of love – the special obligations that arise in loving relationships – from duties to love, or the obligation to *feel* love for another. Our focus in the present article is on the latter, though the implications of the cessation of love for duties of love in the context of longstanding relationships is a complicated matter (cf. Wallace, “Duties of Love”; Kolodny, “Love as Valuing”).
- 7 We are focused on what Kolodny refers to as ‘attitude-dependent’ relationships, which fundamentally rely on a certain pattern of concern, as opposed to ‘attitude-independent’ relationships, such as familial relationships. Certain attitude-independent relationships (particularly the relationship between parents and their young children) have unique qualities when it comes to an alleged ‘duty to love’. S. Matthew Liao has defended this duty (and the right of children to be loved) at length (Liao, “Idea of a Duty”; Liao, *Right*). While we will not engage with Liao’s unique grounds for this duty in the context of children, we will return to his arguments against the alleged uncommandability of love, which also have relevance in the case of romantic love, in [sect. 4](#).
- 8 While we use both ‘feeling’ and ‘emotion’, we do not mean to imply that emotions are *merely* feelings. For instance, emotions can also contain unfeelt affects, and can be justified by reasons (cf. Liao, “Idea of a Duty”; Scarantino and de Sousa, “Emotion”). It is also important to note that our aim is not to contribute to the philosophical understanding of love itself, including romantic love, but rather to explore what the possibility of commandability might imply for the moral dimensions of our emotional lives. For this reason we will be referring to love, and romantic love, in broad terms. Although there are many compelling accounts of what love consists in, our focus for present purposes will concern love conceived as a feeling.
- 9 Kant, *Metaphysics*, cited in Liao, “Idea of a Duty,” p. 1.
- 10 Cf. Earp and Savulescu, *Love Is the Drug*; Earp and Savulescu, “Love Drugs”; Savulescu and Sandberg, “Neuroenhancement”; Naar, “Real-World Love Drugs”; Nyholm, “Love Troubles”; Spreeuwenberg, “Taking the Love Pill”; Lopez-Cantero, “Love”; Wasserman and Liao, “Issues”; Spreeuwenberg and Schaubroeck, “Non-individualistic”; Earp *et al.*, “Addicted to Love”; Earp *et al.*, “If I Could Just Stop”; Earp *et al.*, “Natural Selection.”
- 11 See Naar, “Real-World Love Drugs”; Nyholm, “Love Troubles”; Spreeuwenberg, “Taking the Love Pill.”

- 12 Earp and Savulescu, *Love Is the Drug* (particularly chap. 4); Earp and Savulescu, “Psychedelic”; Earp and Savulescu, “Love Drugs.”
- 13 Examples include SSRIs, Ritalin, hormonal birth control, finasteride, certain blood-pressure medications, cocaine, alcohol, and marijuana (Earp and Savulescu, “Love Drugs,” citing Opbroek *et al.*, “Emotional Blunting,” and Fisher and Thomson, “Lust”; also Janowsky *et al.*, “Interpersonal Effects”).
- 14 Savulescu and Sandberg, “Neuroenhancement.”
- 15 Caron, “MDMA.”
- 16 Lim *et al.*, “Enhanced” (as cited in Savulescu and Sandberg, “Neuroenhancement”).
- 17 See Earp *et al.*, “If I Could Just Stop,” on anti-love drugs and the ‘chemical breakup’.
- 18 There is longstanding debate on the compatibility of psychopharmacology and authenticity in the relevant sense, and even the prospect of psychopharmacology facilitating authenticity (cf. Wasserman and Liao, “Issues”). We will return to related questions – concerning autonomy, as well as the value of these induced emotions in comparison to their ‘real’ counterparts – in [sects. 3 and 5](#).
- 19 Lopez-Cantero, “Love,” p. 158.
- 20 McGee, “Love Drug,” p. 87.
- 21 Earp and Savulescu, *Love Is the Drug*.
- 22 Russell, *Autobiography*, p. 139.
- 23 Lopez-Cantero, “Love,” p. 178.
- 24 Frankfurt, “Duty and Love,” p. 5.
- 25 Kolodny also considers the circumstances under which the value of a romantic relationship itself is undermined, and therefore love’s cessation is potentially appropriate. One such circumstance, which Russell seemed to be attempting to evoke in his dismissal of Smith’s alleged virtues, is ‘loss of respect’ for one’s partner, or else the belief that one’s partner is ‘no longer who they once were’. More complicated, in Kolodny’s analysis, is the role of ‘loss of attraction’, and when and whether such loss is inappropriate in the context of a longstanding relationship (Kolodny, “Love as Valuing,” p. 163).
- 26 Liao, “Idea of a Duty.”
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 28 Earp and Savulescu, “Psychedelic,” p. 4.
- 29 Savulescu and Sandberg, “Neuroenhancement,” p. 38.
- 30 Earp *et al.*, “Natural Selection” (note that they specify that ‘having a responsibility to perform some action does not entail that it should be mandatory or legally coerced’).
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 563.
- 32 Cf. Bublitz, “Moral Enhancement,” on ‘freedom of mind’.
- 33 Cf. Ben-Ze’ev, “Emotions”; Wallace, “Duties of Love”; Kolodny, “Love as Valuing.”
- 34 De Dreu *et al.*, “Oxytocin.”
- 35 Nyholm, “Love Troubles.”
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- 37 Rorty, “Freud,” cited in Velleman, “Love,” p. 349.
- 38 Cf. Velleman, “Love”; Frankfurt, “Reasons of Love”; and Kolodny, “Love as Valuing,” for further debate on the role of personal attributes in the reasons for love.
- 39 Again: the case of children presents a more complex example which we are not addressing here (cf. Liao, “Idea of a Duty”; Liao, *Right*).
- 40 Savulescu and Sandberg, “Neuroenhancement,” p. 38.
- 41 Cf. Srinivasan, *Right*; Barn, “Ethics,” for further explorations of this complexity.
- 42 Although, as we will explore, these biotechnologies may have an indirect impact on the relevant assessments.
- 43 Cf. Pummer, “Impermissible”; Graham, “Sketch.”
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 It is this framework that Graham applies.
- 46 In recent work, Stephen Darwall has distinguished between ‘attitudes of the will’ and ‘attitudes of the heart’. While both can emerge in response to the cessation of love, he aligns anger and resentment to *deontic reactive attitudes*, and hurt, sadness, heartsickness, and heartbreak to *nondeontic reactive attitudes* and heartfelt responses (Darwall, “Attitudes of the Will”). While it seems that hurt and sadness are plainly appropriate reactions to the cessation of love (or even to love’s rejection), we are arguing that in the context of certain relationships, anger, moral injury, and even resentment can also be appropriate responses to learning that someone no longer loves you, or that they love another.

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