

Christian Maurer, Tony Milligan, and Kamila Pacovská (editors)

Love and Its Objects: What Can We Care For?

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Reviewed by Rachel Fredericks, 2016

Narrated by Theodra Bane

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Love and Its Objects: What Can We Care For? is an anthology of new philosophical works about love. It builds on existing literature in the analytic tradition by engaging with a cluster of questions about (a) whether there are reasons of, for, and/or to love and, relatedly, (b) the fungibility of love. The editors in their introduction frame the book as importantly different from previous work about the *reasons* of, for, and to love, in its focus on the *objects* of love (or, as they emphasize, love's intentionality). I agree that further exploration of the latter is well worth pursuing, though I would stress that the departure from the previous literature is more a matter of degree than of kind.

The anthology is divided into five parts, each of which contains two to four articles. The parts focus on (I) romantic and erotic love, (II) the appropriate objects of love, (III) strangers, (IV) humans and persons, and (V) nonhumans. Given the range of the contributions, I must restrict my discussion to a few aspects and parts of the volume that stood out the most to me.

I found the second section, about the appropriate beloved, to be notably strong. There one finds Katrien Schaubroeck's "Loving the Lovable." In it, Schaubroeck explains why she thinks Frankfurt's and Zangwill's defenses of the no-reasons view of love rely on an overly narrow conception of reasons (as do some defenses of the reasons view of love). She then shifts attention from justification to rationalization, which involves a different, attitude-dependent kind of reasons. For example, "The reasons for which Romeo loves Juliet are only reasons for Romeo who already loves Juliet" (112). She appeals to Anscombe's idea of a desirability characterization to argue, using the parallel idea of a lovability characterization, that people do love *for* nonuniversalizable, rationalizing reasons, though they do not have universalizable justifying reasons *to* love. I appreciated this shift of focus from justificatory reasons to rationalizing reasons, since it helps explain a range of everyday practices relating to the ways that many people talk about love, as when we respond to questions about what we see in our beloveds.

Aaron Smuts comes to a similar conclusion about justifying reasons and love. In "Is It Better to Love Better Things?," Smuts argues that if loving means having an attitude of non-self-interested concern for some person, then it is better (in terms of appropriateness, fittingness, or aptness) to love better people. However, he argues, the reasons why that is so (which could include reasons of prudence, truthfulness, and/or meaningfulness) are not the right kinds of reasons to *justify* love, for you cannot coherently be concerned about people for their own sakes for the sake of another value (like self-interest or truth). So Smuts's "yes" answer to the titular question is, he argues, compatible with no-reasons views of love. Along the way, he raises questions about whether the disgust and repulsion we may feel for moral monsters must or should make it impossible to love them, which I appreciated.

Some of those questions arise again in Kamila Pacovská's "Loving Villains: Virtue in Response to Wrongdoing," which highlights two common but opposed moral assessments of those who respond lovingly to villains: sometimes such people are portrayed as saints (see *Crime and Punishment*) and sometimes as fools or otherwise defective in character (see *Pride and Prejudice*). Pacovská argues that a person who knowingly loves a villain (by feeling compassion for one who has caused oneself to become a villain) has a saintly love that is morally superior to other possible responses. She sees this particularly virtuous love as "unconditional by approval" (127), and argues that such a response depends on the lover believing that they equal the villain in moral worth. However, a worrying aspect of this piece is the narrow range of responses to villainy that Pacovská considers; there are many possible responses other than loving or severing one's relationship with the villain, and we need to carefully consider a greater variety of them before we conclude, with Pacovská, that the specific kind of love described is the morally superior response to villainy.

In addition to those three pieces, the book's second section also contains the noteworthy "Self-hatred, Self-love, and Value" by Kate Abramson and Adam Leite. In it, the authors argue, by comparing self-love and self-hatred, that there are forms of self-love that are ways of valuing the self, but not because the love is a response to any antecedent value in the self. Crucially, they say that self-hatred, despite seeming to be a reactive attitude, is "not actually a response to the [negative] evaluations [of the self] that present as its justifications" (80). Rather, it is more like a mood, in that it "has a rationalizing structure that makes a person in its grip seek out apparent grounds for his emotional responses" (80). Thus, since it is possible to hate oneself while properly recognizing one's value as a person, that recognition is insufficient for self-love (86). Instead, relying on a distinction between valuing and responding to value, they propose that self-love is best understood as a positive valuing orientation, and self-hatred as a negative one. This perceptive article contains many insights regarding both self-love and self-hatred. For instance, the authors point out that although many people think it is permissible to have cruel thoughts about another person as long as we do not voice them, "there is no possibility of such a gap between thought and expression" in the case of cruel thoughts about oneself (81) and that one notable thing about self-hating people is their tendency to be unable to enjoy being alone with themselves.

Another contribution that I particularly enjoyed is Magdalena Hoffman's piece in the section on humans and persons. Her approach to defending relationship accounts of love, in "What Relationship Structure Tells Us about Love," involves focusing on the structural features of relationships to learn about the love therein, a strategy that I endorse. Hoffman aims to show how the structures of different types of relationships create different modes of love; the types she discusses are friendships and romantic relationships, which are quite similar, and parents' relationships to their young children, which are rather different. Despite my overall appreciation for this article, I have some questions and concerns about Hoffman's claim that there are more constraints on our exit from romantic relationships than from friendships because of some unspecified difference in our fear of loneliness relative to those two kinds of relationships (200). I also would have liked to see more engagement with ongoing debates in the literature about exclusivity in romantic relationships (198-99), though maybe, given her larger goals, it would have been equally good to set exclusivity to the side entirely in this piece.

Another piece that I want to single out for particularly favorable mention is by one of the editors, Christian Maurer, and is in the section about strangers. In "On 'Love at First Sight'," he argues that the phenomenon described as "love at first sight" is not actually a form of love, though it can form a foundation for love. I think Maurer does us a service by directing our

attention to what happens during love's first stages, since this phase of love is fairly under-theorized, despite frequently being a transformative experience. I also appreciate his challenge to the "romantic ideology that builds [love at first sight] into a conception of how 'true' love should emerge" (172). That kind of challenge to a hegemonic view of "proper" love is one that feminists of various stripes have advanced in various ways, and that has the potential to transform our culture for the better if taken up in a sufficiently widespread way.

When I turn to that bigger picture to consider how this anthology contributes to feminist scholarship, my feelings are mixed. Certainly by focusing our attention on affective and relational aspects of human lives, this anthology is situated firmly in a vein of scholarship about subjects that feminists have worked hard to make more visible to philosophers. For example, the first piece in the collection, Angelika Krebs's "Between I and Thou--On the Dialogical Nature of Love," picks up on themes explored within the significant feminist scholarship on relational accounts of the self. Krebs argues in support of a dialogical model of love, which portrays it as grounded in shared action and feeling, and thus as taking place between people, not within them as individuals; in doing so, she argues against the more standard curative model of love, which portrays love as opposed to egoism and yet still individualistic.

Elizabeth Drummond Young's "Love Reveals Persons as Irreplaceable" also picks up on a question that has guided a fair bit of feminist scholarship, a question about the degree to which living a morally good life involves partiality and impartiality. A discussion of the work of Raimond Gaita and Jean-Luc Marion forms the heart of this piece; Young's synthesis of those works leads her to conclude that love shows us that all people are irreplaceable, capable of being the object of a partial love, without which impartial love, she argues, could not exist (183).

Despite those thematic commonalities, I was surprised not to find more engagement with explicitly feminist authors in the volume and wish that significantly more attention had been paid to how power relations and in-group/out-group dynamics relate to love. I was able to find only two very brief mentions of love arising in the context of a power imbalance. First, Tomáš Hejduk, in "What Did Socrates Love?," describes how Socrates sees young boys as linked to the divine in a way that, contra the traditional view, makes the older lover somewhat subordinate to the beloved boy (58); this piece is noteworthy for being the only one in the volume devoted primarily to textual interpretation. Second, Hoffman briefly criticizes the work of Iddo Landau, who sees love across a power imbalance as appropriate under certain limited conditions (200?01).

One place where discussion of power dynamics might have been particularly fitting would have been in Michael Kühler's "Loving Persons: Activity and Passivity in Romantic Love." He argues that there is no conceptual incoherence in saying that romantic love must involve both activity (giving love for another's sake and promising to continue loving) and passivity (receiving love for one's own sake and being caused to fall in love), and that any plausible and comprehensive account of romantic love requires both. Since activity is often correlated with power and passivity with lack of power, it would be interesting to explore what Kühler can say about power dynamics and equality in the context of love.

It struck me as somewhat odd that in such a book I found no explicit mention of feminism, and very little mention of gender either, save an endnote in Jan Bransen's piece (157) and a passage in Aaron Ben-Ze'ev's "Ain't Love Nothing but Sex Misspelled? The Role of Sex in Romantic Love" (30). Unfortunately, Ben-Ze'ev, who argues that we should answer his titular

question with "no," conflates sex and gender, uncritically hews to a standard, simplistic view that men prefer sex and women prefer romance, and uses the phrase "the gender issue" in a way that seems to assume that the audience will or should somehow know what *one* issue relating to gender he has in mind (and which he attempts to deal with in less than a page of text).

On the whole, the book implicitly advances views of the lived experience of love as fairly monolithic, not recognizing, explaining, or critiquing differences across the dimensions of class, gender, race, ability, sexuality, and so forth. Consider, for example, Bransen's "Loving a Stranger," which outlines "how we could and why we might wish to love strangers" by exploring the reasons for and of love that do and do not exist, respectively, when someone becomes alienated from a loved one (152). However, the examples used in doing so highlight challenges faced by people of privilege: (a) a romantic partner who takes up an expensive and boring hobby and (b) a stranger in a nice restaurant who makes a loud, rude comment about his salad to the waiter. We are quite fortunate if these are the situations that test our ability to adopt a loving attitude toward others. Many other things, like poverty, illness, violence, and systematic discrimination also make it difficult to take up a loving attitude, but are not mentioned, which I see as, at best, a missed opportunity.

I did appreciate the inclusion of chapters about love for nonhuman animals (Tony Milligan's "Animals and the Capacity for Love") and for artworks (Daniel Gustafsson's "The Love of Art: Art, *Oikophilia*, and *Philokalia*") in the final section about nonhumans. In the former, Milligan argues, contra Frankfurt, Velleman, Kolodny, and Helm, that though love requires intimately caring for another, and thus agency (but not full personhood), some nonhuman animals can love and be loved. I think he is correct that this conclusion gains credence when we attend to the biological continuity between humans and nonhuman animals, challenge claims about the necessity of reciprocation for love, and avoid thinking of intimacy and love as overly cognitively demanding.

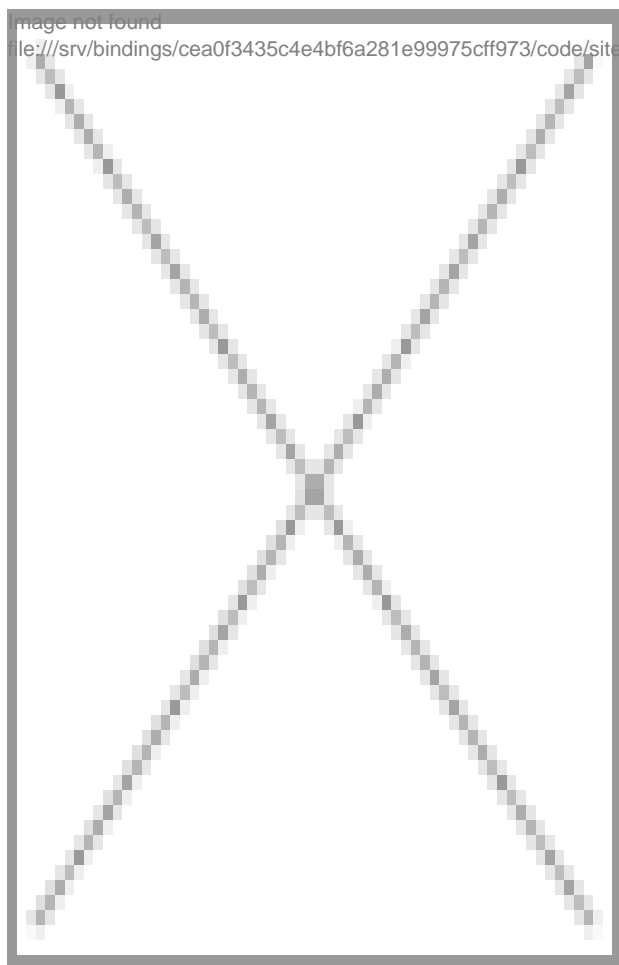
Gustafsson's piece is, however, less successful. In it, he offers "a model of the love of art, where this love is communal and outward reaching, embedded in cultural contexts but also reaching for transcendent goods" (239). The strength of the piece is its emphasis on communal aspects of art creation and appreciation. One of its significant drawbacks is its undefended reliance on various highly controversial assertions, such as the claim that the best account of beauty is a theological (and specifically Christian) one.

Although I was glad to see these two pieces about love of nonhumans, I would have liked to have seen more discussions of love for abstract objects. Given that the very name of our discipline refers to the love of wisdom, I would love to see someone take seriously the possibility that we can love even things, like wisdom, humor, and justice, that cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, love us back. These are not just things that many of us care about deeply; to the extent that we succeed in contributing to what wisdom, humor, and justice exist in the world, they are part of us and we are part of them, as many of us say about our human beloveds. Furthermore, if we take seriously the possibility of loving abstract objects, or even nonhuman concrete objects, the resulting views can be expected to contribute in interesting ways to ongoing debates about reasons to love, given that, if it is possible to love these things, it certainly seems plausible to say that we love them for reasons.

Rachel Fredericks is currently an assistant professor of philosophy in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. Her primary research area is moral psychology, with particular emphasis on moral responsibility for things other than actions, including desires, emotions, and character traits. She is also interested in collective moral responsibility for things like oppression and climate change, and has published in *Environmental Ethics* and *Ethics, Policy & Environment*.

rachelfredericks.com

rlfredericks@bsu.edu



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