
OTHER TO SELF

FINDING LOVE ON THE PATH
TO MORAL AGENCY

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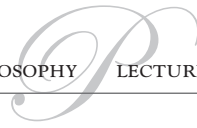
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ABSTRACT

"Other to Self" begins as a response to two related views: a philosophical tradition that takes love as the ideal of human relationship and Bernard Williams' criticisms of morality as objectionably presumptuous in assuming authority over what we may do for love. Using data from "attachment theory," a philosophically resonant branch of psychoanalytic theory, the paper argues for the co-evolution of the moral self and the mature ability to love and be loved. It's a dynamic process that works through such proto-moral mechanisms as anger, guilt, and repair, mechanisms that depend for their success on a primitive love relation they aim to supersede. What we come to see, in theory and in lived detail, is that the practice of morality and the trajectory of mature love are not in essential conflict, but depend on each other.

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Other to Self:

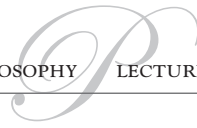
Finding Love on the Path to Moral Agency

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IN THE ARTIFICIAL WAY OF PHILOSOPHERS, suppose you were asked: Who would you rather spend your life with, the person moved by love or the person moved by morality? It's not a real question because the point in asking is already obvious. We prefer love for our private lives and moral concern for the rest (of course we want other things too – humor, practical intelligence – but as I said, it's not a real question). And while it's of course true that we don't want to spend our private time with liars and cheats, it's natural to think that if love is not enough to keep our friends and intimates honest with us, moral concern isn't going to help. Morality makes better sense as a companion for the more public aspects of life, or life among strangers: where we are not connected by bonds of intimacy, morality keeps us well-oriented amidst the tumult of competing interests.

Once you've gotten this far, you might well conclude that morality and love do not merely serve separate spheres, they also offer different ideals. Morality, one might think, is the pinnacle of principle- or reason-directed living – abstract, impersonal, impartial. Love is a path of depth and connection, of particularity. The different ideals carry different pictures of what we are like and how we should treat one another. Morality struggles to overcome a lower and selfish nature: competition yielding to coordination. Love guides us in escaping isolation: we enhance our lives through bonds with others. Because each offers a different norm for living, we have reason to fear that in honoring one we may violate the norms or values of the other. We lack a rule for making adjustments when that happens.



As familiar to philosophical theorizing as these views are, they strike me as “off” – misleading, false to the facts – an instance of analytical distinctions replacing and distorting the phenomena they analyze. And if they are false to the facts, what we take to follow from them is not likely to be reliable, either. That leads me to want to raise questions about some of the truisms, especially about love, and then about love’s potential for conflict with morality.

1. Two Puzzles

LET’S START WITH TWO THINGS I think we should find puzzling. First, philosophical discussions of love tend to focus on love-relations between pairs of adults, specifically romantic love relations and the love of mature friendship. While it is obvious that these two forms of love are deeply different from, say, parent-child love, love for country or a baseball team, or love for one’s domestic animal, it is not so clear that they arise from different roots in human personality, and so also not so clear that one is not missing something important in separating out the first two from the rest.¹ Second, love in philosophers’ discussions tends to be highly idealized, a perfection of perfections. But I wonder if it is wise to treat ‘love’ as a success term? It’s not just that things can go well or badly for people in their loving. The question is whether human love ever is or should even strive to be ideal love. (Not everything valuable has an ideal form.)

Many of the great thinkers who write extensively about love – Plato, Aristotle, Montaigne, are fair examples – focus on a driving desire to be known, to be revealed and reflected in the gaze of another, to have another self, to thereby selflessly love oneself.² It has the feel of a solution to a real problem about other minds, or to a profound loneliness, through a kind of intimacy with another; though, we should note, another who is so like oneself that what comes in return seems less like the true and wondering gaze of a real other than the know-

1 This is not to say that all loves or uses of ‘love’ are equal. Our passional natures are complex, with many overlapping strands, so we should not be surprised to find both direct descendants and kissing cousins of a primary passion all through our affective lives.

2 I have a suspicion that this is a gender thing, but I could be wrong.

ing glance of a mirror image. The intimacy is epistemic, often at a distance. Such love rarely involves being touched.³ There is throughout this literature a sense of throttled passion.⁴

In a very different literature, thinking about love begins with the early stages of human life. Parental love provides the environment, the soil, the nourishment of the human body and soul. Here the talk is about care and touching, about attention and attunement, about making the world real and safely knowable, and about making the body habitable. It is messy love, conflictual, asymmetric. It is a lot about play. But also about loss, and the dark trinity of injury, anxiety, and repair. So here's my question: What would happen if philosophical accounts let in the darker sides of love, the parts that involve vulnerability and risk, anger, and sometimes, as if an element of our loving, something like hate?

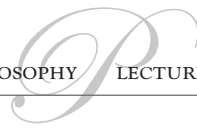
Once we begin to think developmentally, it's obvious that love or the love relation is one of the formative principles or forces at work in the production of normal personality and so, surely, of our moral agency. This opens the possibility that the relationship between love and morality is less a matter of contrast and more about process and result. We might come to see in successful early love, however complex and messy, a source, if not the condition, of our full ability for moral engagement. If we went there, and I will argue that we should, accounts of our moral agency that are true to how things are for us would have to take such love on board, even the most formal and austere moral theories, despite its appearing to put an awful contingency at the root of things. But before turning to that project, there's another issue about love and morality that we should have before us.

2. Love and Morality, First Pass: Re-setting the Question

AN INFLUENTIAL LINE of contemporary philosophical discussion begins with the idea that morality and love not only can conflict at the level of action, morality poses a threat to love (and to other deep passions) and so to the quality of our lives – what makes them worth liv-

3 It is not that often or not overtly about sex. Even the great novels, whether chaste or steamy, tend to treat love as epistemic intimacy. (Thus the shock of D.H. Lawrence, drawing into "the novel" some of the tropes of literate pornography.)

4 And very little tenderness. In romantic love, as in Dante, it is unfulfilled love that is most sublime, even more enhanced if there can be an early death of the beloved.



ing. The case for this was made most boldly by Bernard Williams through a set of famous examples – about the tension between commitment to art or genius and ordinary obligations (the example of Gauguin abandoning his family for his art), about the unattractiveness of overtly moral action when compared with an intimate gesture in response to need, and about the intrusiveness of moral justification in the decision to favor a loved-one over a stranger when both are in danger.⁵ The examples are designed to induce unease about the effect the moral theorist’s morality would have on human life. Morality, especially the morality of duty and principle, is cast as inhibiting feeling, interfering with normal and important relationships, and tending to over-value itself. It is claimed that forcing our passions and our valued relationships inside morality’s rule amounts to something like a betrayal of our human nature.

I find such claims about human nature hard to assess. They are not about how things happen species-typically. We don’t say that someone *betrays* human nature who doesn’t form and act from loving relations. Perhaps what’s claimed is that having attachments is central to the species life-form for humans, a way we are as-it-were “designed” to be. I don’t doubt this. But an element of so-called species-nature isn’t a brute and immutable fact. Parts of our nature should be overcome, like our natural suspicion of different races and ethnicities. The fact that a way of living requires an idea of itself and then work to bring it about can’t make what’s brought about *not* of our nature. Think of reading or driving or meditating. Some things that seem essential at a stage of our species history should be embraced, some rejected or transcended. (It should matter to our thinking about human nature that it has a history.) Moreover, the love that is prized in the tradition is hardly *natural* in any species-nature sense. It is at best an ideal and an achievement; not an easy one; not without costs; and not widely available. Why be so sure that the presumed tension between morality and love isn’t salutary, both for morality and for love?

Still, it is hard to ignore the facts Williams puts before us. It *can* matter more, and we can rightly value it more, when an action is done from love rather than duty. Since our helping actions both address and express our relationships, who would want morality always to

5 Cf. Bernard Williams, “Moral Luck” and “Persons Character and Morality,” collected in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), and “Morality and the Emotions” in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge University Press, 1973).

dominate? And even if there is no moral doubt that one *may* rescue one's intimate rather than the stranger, must we agree that it is morality's reasons that we must act on? It seems to many just obvious that the bonds and reasons of intimacy should direct the show, morality staying off-stage.⁶ Here, it is said, love trumps.

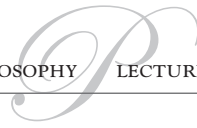
Now if there is to be a trumping of morality by love, a trimming of morality's pretensions – that it offers neither the first nor the best reasons – we should be able to say what it is about love that gives the cases that favor it their intuitive wallop. Is it anything more than our being powerfully drawn to it that makes love such a compelling source of reasons?

Again we are directed to this prized kind of adult relationship as among the greatest achievements available to individuals, in the pantheon of accomplishment alongside scientific discovery and artistic creation. Relationships valued and valuable as sources of real intimacy, shared knowledge and trust. Friends and lovers are freely committed to each other's good; in friendship and in love we transcend human isolation, we are more complete, more fully human in the activities we embark on with a friend or lover. Our seeing a sunset together or a Mondrian or a baseball game is more than one plus one. Able to be aware of one another's seeing and feeling, we see and feel more. We are more fully ourselves in being together. This, it is said, gives the love relationship its standing, its reasons their force.

But must the relationship be exquisite to make a moral difference? Suppose a couple are having doubts about their relationship – there was that flare of jealousy recently, or one of them had made a dishonorable decision to preserve a high-paying job and the other is disappointed, or they don't do as much together as they did in the heyday of romance. Do we think that if I am really mad at my spouse it *then* makes sense to stop and consider whether morality permits me to save him or a stranger when both are at risk? Hardly. I suspect that two lines of thought are being run together: the privileging of a kind of relationship prized for its connection to human excellence and the different issue of partiality, of the value of personal relationship, as a basis of preference in action.⁷ It's not clear how the first, the ideal, would make love, especially ordinary love, an independent source of morality-trumping reasons.

6 Although philosophical discussion is sometimes about what should be going through one's mind in the moment, mental chatter is beside the point. What's debated is whether the action should issue from an understanding of what may or should be done for someone you love.

7 There are many routes from within impartial morality that can explain why, even when the relationship



3. Love as an Engine of Human Development

ALMOST ALWAYS, the love that figures in these discussions is a good we come to as adults. Yet for those of us with reasonably normal lives, we have loved and been loved from the beginning. We are not surprised to learn that deprived of early love, a person can be hard pressed as an adult to love or be loved. There is little reason to think early love and adult love are merely homonymous states – sharing a name and not a life. And there is also little reason to think that primitive love is not a precursor to mature love, or that elements of primitive love are not carried forward, shaping the trajectory of later forms of love. Little of our development separates entirely from its origins. Then add that some of us are by nature disposed to love easily, as children and as adults; some are lucky in their first caretakers and their childhood; but some come to maturity with their capacity for love burdened because of one or the other kind of early deficit. If our aim is to make better sense of the complex intersection of morality and love, this spectrum deserves attention.

However, attention requires access, and that is not to be had via the usual philosophical routes of tidy example, intuition, or introspection. This is not a region amenable to a priori insight. For an informed account, I lean heavily on the clinical observations and developmental theories of a group of psychoanalysts, starting with Freud and including D. W. Winnicott, John Bowlby, and Daniel Stern.⁸ There are other useful sources; I don't assume these sources get everything right. I do think their views about early development are so manifestly interesting and, it seems to me, both humanly and philosophically plausible, that they compel a more complicated view of what love is and of the moment when love meets morality.

For the theorists in this group, love (sometimes called by the generic “attachment”) names a developmental force – something at work in us from the beginning of life, in instinct, disposition, and psychic form. Each of its phases, from infantile attachment on, leaves

itself isn't on the line, it is part of being in a relationship that one is responsible for and so (at the least) permitted to do more. For more on this, see my “The Scope of Moral Requirement,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 30 (2001).

8 Selected texts: John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss* (Basic Books, 1982); D. W. Winnicott, *Through Pediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (Basic Books, 1975) and *Psychoanalytic Explorations* (Harvard University Press, 1989); Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (Basic Books, 1985).

its mark. They are visible in the familiar (often healthy) regressive elements in adult love: we feel safe being childlike;⁹ we seek the solace of repetition; we find ourselves ‘acting out’ as a way of getting beyond new issues of attachment that emerge as mature love relations evolve (a different kind of repetition); and so on.¹⁰

When clinicians reports that an infant will not thrive who does not experience the steady availability of someone who cares for her, who provides loving touch and attention, we see the need for this kind of love as on a par with need for nutrition and physical safety.¹¹ In getting these, the infant gets access to a trustworthy world, a place where hunger calls forth food, where it is cosseted, and where it finds apt emotional response. And just as the infant is made for attaching itself to its parent (or primary caretaker), so the parent comes to take on the role of being the object of its need and is primed to love the infant in doing so.¹²

Descriptions and experimental studies of early infant life record a complex process of individuation and integration of psyche and body. It is through another’s touch that an infant learns where she begins and ends and what parts of her body matter. The emergence of a sense of agency arrives through continuous interaction with its parent in feeding, tending, and play. Its own otherness is not a psychic given, but a discovery and an accomplishment (both joyful and frightening). A loved infant seems to be involved in a primitive version of what we call shared agency – but one where the functional “we” exists *before* the infant has an effective sense of its own separateness. Freud argues that it’s not the joining but the separating that is the hard task. If things work well, the parent, affected by and reacting to what the infant does, lets the infant find its own ability to bring about states it wants to be in. A child’s intentional gaze or grasp, its putting a finger in the mouth of the parent feeding it, signal acknowledgment and participation, its expression of its loving and “being with”. Very

9 For a kind of evidence, were it needed, I recommend the powerfully evocative regressive images in Dusan Makavejev’s *Sweet Movie* (1974).

10 There is ample evidence on the cognitive side of parallel development: studies of counting and geometric skills show important continuities in the adult competencies with their origin in an initial ability. Cf. Susan Carey, *The Origin of Concepts* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

11 Experiments show that with many infant animals, given a choice of attachment object between an impersonal source of food and a source of caring touch without food, they attach to where touch is.

12 I speak for convenience of “the parent”; it is a functional, not a biological role.

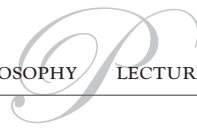
early on, the child learns cross-modal responses, completing something said by the parent with its own gesture, showing thereby that it registers a tone of voice as the expression of another's inner state. It's a tremendous and very early achievement.

Even in a good environment, things will and do go wrong; difficulties arise that can leave profound, unintended effects. A parent is ill or needs to be absent. The child and the parent are out of sync, not quite able to engage one another effectively. The result for the infant may be manifested in combinations of anxiety, anger, even primitive hate, that arise as a vicissitude of early love. When things are going reasonably well, the infant can tolerate frustration, some deficiencies. It is able to wait; it trusts; it recovers. The system is robust. If the infant has to work too hard to cope, fantasy may substitute for patience, or being *really good* can stand in for expressing need. Perfection is not a *sine qua non* for normal development, but there are limits.¹³

Then add to this the effects of an infant's internally driven needs which can appear demanding, even aggressive. In the best of cases it's not easy to meet them. From a nursing mother's point of view, the infant has been aptly described as a little cannibal. Quite a lot for love to accept. Of course the infant comes to have things to offer in return: its own touch and gesture, the smile that makes everything fine. If the parent tolerates the aggression, and does so over and over, an infant can freely enter the spirit of repair, learning the rudiments of an element of future-directed loving that we might, looking back on it, connect with guilt. It is the possibility of repair that will make guilt sustainable. Much of this happens, and *has to happen*, long before anything like authority or morality show up.

An infant also has to survive what Winnicott calls "the primitive agonies" or "unthinkable anxieties" to which children are naturally heir and which can make them "fall apart" (a bit later these are the monsters and terrors of nightmares and fairy tales). These responses are affective appraisals of an environment that the infant is poorly equipped to manage on its own. It is often the parent, not the child herself, who is in a position to offer a safe path to re-integration. There is an accumulation of experiences that color the world and establish

13 A parent attuned to a child will reinforce useful patterns of behavior, extend them, opening opportunities for new experiences. A different kind of parent damps down a child's experiences; another might dominate them. In the face of less attuned parenting, a child with a robust constitution may persevere and attempt to energize or entertain the parent; another might instead withdraw into a depressive position.



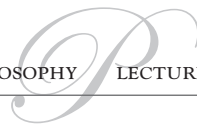
a sense of self – its needs, its attractiveness, its powers. To no small extent both world and self are shaped by and shape the dynamics of attachment and love. Depending on the contingencies of the caretaking relation, the world the infant accepts may be reliable, friendly, attentive, or, at the other end, removed, erratic, needing to be attracted and placated. The self acting on the world that comes into view will be attached, confident and responsive, if fortunate, or isolated, seductive and prone to magical thinking if things go less well.

4. The Dark Trinity

JUST THIS MUCH tells us something essential to our understanding of human agency. Being formed in and through the vicissitudes of love, we *begin* in a relationship of attachment that introduces systematic directions for development. However, to be formed in early love is also to be formed in anxiety, anger, and guilt. These are our dark trinity; they arrive early in various forms of aggression and resistance (we talk of tantrums because the child's behaviors are without control; they are not without meaning). It is no accident that the biblical path to human moral agency begins with a first bite.

The point is that even in healthy conditions, where the parenting is, in Winnicott's telling phrase, "good enough," the trajectory of the love relation inevitably goes through uneasy dependence, injury and anger, and then on to the complex of feelings and behavior that will belong to guilt. And because the child is sustained through whatever kind of attachment she has available, which can be hostile and fantasy-riddled or nurturing and attentive, a variety of necessary developmental tasks are shaped by the way the dark trinity is negotiated. Learning that asserting oneself causes injury that has consequences but is also *not* the end of the world or the end of being loved, and vice versa, that one can survive and still flourish when one's world contains independent others who are to be relied on even if they cause pain – all of this opens possibilities for sharing experience that draw the child beyond what she can do on her own.¹⁴ Aggression that is poorly acknowledged and incoherently worked through may deform the emerging sense of self and its relation to others, making it harder for the growing person to trust, or later, to accurately align feeling and judgment.

14 It's no surprise that attachment failure could here lead to both ego-anxieties and ego-excesses.



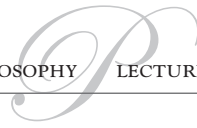
It is important to emphasize that in locating guilt in an early and *nonmoral* response to becoming active in the world, in finding guilt anchored in love or attachment, its role is a developmentally positive one, helping secure both a sense of reality and of responsibility necessary for moral agency. In this sense, there is no state of primal innocence: the early arrival of aggression and guilt are defining marks of human personality and agency.¹⁵ It's what we should have expected: that is, that primitive or proto-moral forms would show up in the story of development so that adult morality, when it is introduced to older children, connects and resonates with something already in place – something in the normal personality that has the appropriate structure and gravity to receive it.¹⁶

The connection of guilt and repair is of particular interest, for the focus is on the relationship more than the deed (unlike the more legalistic rule-breaking ideas of guilt). In guilt the infant senses herself as a threat to someone to whom she is attached. Indeed, the aggression belongs to the attachment. There is no baseline of indifference to be overcome: we arrive on the moral scene with the whole bundle of love, aggression and anxiety. It's not as if causing injury or pain or damage is avoidable; the infant who doesn't impinge or impede or provoke is seriously at risk. In order to become an agent, one who acts on the world and who affects others, it must from the outset be safe to cause (some) harm. Because the infant is attached, and because her program of development is to unfurl through her connection to objects loved and loving, the attachment relation enables the creation of an individual who can survive her own aggression and assume the responsibilities of moral agency, whatever they turn out to be.¹⁷

15 If this is right, it wouldn't follow that all morality is guilt-based. There are different ways to negotiate the social affects of aggression – hierarchy is a different path and shame its attendant. It is an interesting empirical question whether guilt has to be in the picture (even if not at the center of morality).

16 This sort of account sits easily with a non-cognitivist view that primitive emotions are what the norms of morality govern (cf. Alan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* [Harvard University Press, 1990], 141ff), but does not point to non-cognitivism.

17 We should be wary of reading too much of morality into the attachment relation. If the aim of morality is to secure relations between persons as equals, that feature is unlikely to have its source in infant development which is, among other things, organized around the creation of a strong ego. A question to investigate is about the limits of mutual adjustment for agential health. Not every culture is good for all of its members.



On this account of personality or ego formation, the idea that we as adults isolate selves only contingently connected with others describes a pathology, not a normal person. The conditions of the emergence of a coherent stable self or ego involve attachment and separation, in that order. It is the way the human finds something real – the external other, the boundaries of her own mind-body, the place where fantasy stops and reality starts. It is an emergent non-conceptual ability. The normal self so formed is other-oriented in its self-loving.¹⁸

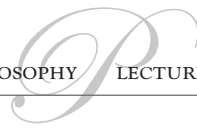
5. Love and Morality, a Second Look

IS THERE A THREAT OR CHALLENGE to morality in this love-centered story? I see nothing so far that even a committed Kantian need resist. Even if one held with Kant that morality's *authority* lies in practical reason and is not dependent on psychological contingencies, our moral *abilities* could well depend on how we negotiate the dark trinity and so to some extent on our experience with early love.¹⁹ There is a problem of luck that needs addressing, but overall, rather than posing a threat, I think the love-centered psychological story should reassure: morality can make better sense to us as agents if, in the course of normal development and individuation, we are being made for it.²⁰

18 David Hume understood this well. And though his sense of the complexity of self-formation got tangled in the crazy double-relation of impressions and ideas, his intuition was sound: that it is in how we respond to our interacting with persons and stuff while at the same time having a sense of others responding to our so interacting that we form (or fail to form) an idea of a self we can love.

19 It is common to make a mistake here, as when, to take just one example, researchers conclude from the fact that people are more generous after eating something sweet that morality is not a rational enterprise (“Taste Buds and ‘Tude,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 2012).

20 I see John Rawls' efforts in the third part of *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971) to naturalize the sense of justice through Kohlbergian developmental theory as having a similar aim. And more ambitious to the extent that what he would show is that there is a congruence between plausible developmental theories and the emergence of a sense of justice “as it might occur in a well-ordered society realizing the principles of justice as fairness” (461). The discussion I offer here has as its target replacing the supposed agonistic relation between love and morality with a dynamic developmental account that reveals their emergent interdependence.



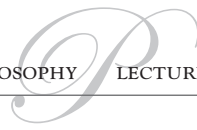
The greater threat may be to the ideal of the mature love relation. We are given a model of being with another person that is not just good at its core but good through and through. The dark side – anger, aggression, acting-out, projection, regression – all the things that send us to couples counseling, have no place. But how likely is it that the very factors that play so great a role in the formation of the human personality would be absent from even very fine mature relationships? And how likely that in loving we are finished with our developing? There is a criticism sometimes directed at high moral theory that it misses the messy realness of persons in its model of moral agency. I think that same criticism applies to the classical accounts of love.²¹

And what of Williams' worries? Does thinking about love as the engine of a developmental process that includes morality (or proto-morality) help? Williams' issue on love's behalf was that morality intruded on and wanted to dominate the love relation. Even if morality can allow for the shaping of our lives to give prominence to our loves, it is on its terms that we may do so. Whereas, from the inside, the love relation resists this claim, either because love transcends morality, or because it competes with morality for authority. When we escape the grip of moral theory, it's natural to see the love relationship as a better relationship, its reasons more compelling than moral reasons, at least in love's own domain.

If the issue is the primacy of love's reasons, we might register that many things other than morality claim our attention, and in their own terms. In addition to love, there is work, play, beauty – things that we are drawn to, care for, that we give a special role to in our lives. We also don't expect morality all by itself to be the route to a good life; not even Kant thinks that. It *would* be worrisome if we thought morality only a necessary evil, more like exercise in the pursuit of health, except without the benefit of endorphins.²² But this is an unnecessarily extreme view of how morality fits in a life.

21 The special role of love in Aristotelian virtue theory and Christianity explains some of the contemplative, high-mindedness of the ideal. But in these accounts love is exactly *not* a form of attachment, but either a completion of virtue in relation to an equal or a gift from God (*agape/caritas*) that opens a path to the sacred. Such love could not do its work if it was also in the ordinary ways sometimes dark and painful. Perhaps that partly explains why some of the great loves in the tradition had to be carried in letters or in other forms of absence.

22 Though perhaps Kant was onto something when he pointed to the sublimity of the moral law within – of-



The subtler version of Williams' complaint is that morality interferes with loving relationships because in the domain of things we ought to do, morality not only wants to identify what they are, but police our psyche and our reasons as well. If this role for morality has some attraction when the competing reasons are from below (reasons of bare self-interest, for example), it is much less compelling when the competing reasons are based in love. There are obviously cases, like keeping a promise, where unless we act on morality's reasons we are not keeping a promise at all. Williams could agree and still think that our responsiveness to a friend or lover's need is hardly improved by having to travel to its goal on moral tracks. We don't want to act that way; we don't want to be treated that way.

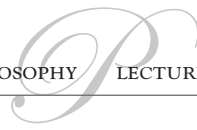
On a view that has morality and love as two independent and competing streams of reasons and motivation, one of which we have to suppress or set aside for the sake of the other, of course we would resist – especially if one, morality, directs our attention to “the person” in the abstract, and the other, love, takes “you” in all your delightful and loved particularity as its object. But we should instead resist this view.

The overriding moral question is: are we attending to and taking care of what warrants attention and care *out of recognition that it does*? Must this be an interfering requirement? I think a first reason we think it must be comes from a tendency to regard motivational elements as atomic, with relatively simple inter-relations (e.g., strength, direction, lexical ordering). Then, if some consideration is a condition for acting, it must in one of these dimensions dominate, controlling what we care about. However, the developmental story suggests that what we think of as motives are the results of internally connected elements of complex emergent behavioral structures.²³ They don't interact merely as valanced bits, pulling and competing; they are each, potentially, parts of a system, able to enhance, inhibit, even re-direct each other.²⁴ Successful development works to modify and integrate different

fering its own kind of high.

23 We shouldn't assume that the structure of human personality mirrors the analysis of the concepts of its parts.

24 In much the way that studies of animal and human systems of visual perception have enriched our understanding of both primitive and rational cognition, there is comparable gain to be sought in the broader science of motivational systems.

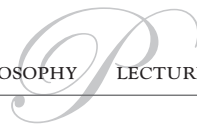


motivational sub-structures and tendencies. It is to be hoped that over time our motives can make common cause.

Second, once we can think of motivational structures developing in these ways, we should find the complexity of the reasons we can respond to developing as well. Though Williams wouldn't have developed the point in this direction, a central commitment for him is that motives (he uses the language of desires) and reasons work in tandem. I don't have a reason where I don't have a motive, and I do have reasons where my motives are responding to what I care about.

This shifts the question to one about the relation between the moral and the loving aspects of a human personality, about whether they are at bottom or in expression incompatible, living together, when they do, contingently and uneasily. What we should say in response is that although the complete etiology of mature love and moral character are not the same, they are not wholly separate, either. They co-evolve. One side of this is evident in the way the demands of love and the demands of morality are different – not necessarily in *what* they demand, but in the import of the demand *in* a relationship. The temptation to deceive to protect oneself *or* the loved other can feel more urgent and be more corrosive in relationships where we above all want to maintain connection. That's not just a conflict between morality and intimacy but a way intimacy can undermine itself in trying to sustain itself. Here morality can support intimacy (the intimacy worth valuing). We might make use of a promise inside a loving relationship as a way to put a lid on a cascade of disagreement or to correct an imbalance of de facto power.²⁵ But things also go the other way around. The nascent features of intimacy shape the die used for casting moral requirement so that morality isn't encountered just as a set of rules but as a way of being in relationship with others. (Taking up another's point of view is not merely an epistemic challenge: it's an essential affective ability that intimacy trains.) Indeed, if part of the route to morality goes through our experience of love – of loving and of being loved – and since morality is one of the ways we come to articulate the otherness of persons, wouldn't it make most sense to regard morality and love as vehicles for each other's normal expression? That they may conflict is either one

25 Cf. Seana Shiffrin, "Promising, Intimate Relationships, and Conventionalism," *Philosophical Review* 117 (2008).



of the “as it happens” things, or a tragedy, but in either case not something that arises from an inherent tension between two spheres of concern or command. Tension is not in any case a mark of failure; it’s a source of growth and change. Which is what you would expect if each system passes through the other as the human being matures.

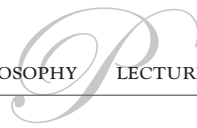
It seems both reasonable and supported by the evidence that the dynamics of the early love relation creates the possibility conditions for a normal moral personality. How else could it go? If a child reaching the age where we begin talking about how to treat others did not already have in view the existence of others who matter – who have needs, physical and emotional, who can hurt and be hurt, and who can survive being on both ends through various forms of repair – moral talk would have no grip. The practical problem of other persons has to be solved early.²⁶

But also, if mature love is part of a developmental account that includes morality, then morality isn’t merely a limit on loving but one of the systems that separates adult loving from love’s earlier forms. We learn that we cannot do just anything for love. Morality also connects the things we care about with each other and introduces new things that call for attention: the fate of distant others, our impact on the environment, are examples. We may, as a result, be able to do less for love than we would like. It cannot be a problem for love per se that not everything we will want to do for it is available to us, or not available for love’s own reasons. That last concern makes even less sense if the transformations morality introduces are also a part of the continuing development of our capacity for love.

Love also tutors morality. Situating morality within a developmental account puts pressure on morality to be realistic – that it be one of the ways (though not the only way) we make sense of ourselves as a person among persons with a coherent repertoire of actions and responses.²⁷ Consider the exclusiveness and passion of falling in love or the obsessively tiny

26 It has always seemed to me perverse to regard it a failing of the morality of principle that it cannot bridge the gap between self and other. If we had to wait on morality to create a path from self-interest to concern for others by argument from the generality of reasons or the impartial point of view, it will seem either to be an impossible task or to beg the question. But why would one ever expect, either in theory or in practice, that it was morality’s job to bridge *that* gap? On the other hand, morality cares a lot about the kind of traffic the bridge enables.

27 Stage theories of development suggest that abilities can arrive in discontinuous bundles. I wonder wheth-



world of new parents. Or, at the harder end, the depression that comes with the loss of someone loved, a condition that causes the world to dim and agency to feel out of reach. These are natural responses to stunning emotional events. They are also *not* ways of being that are consistent with the normal range of moral obligation. However, if morality is to be realistic, that is, for it to make sense in and about a human life, it has to make room for passion and loss, just as it does for absorption, not just in others, but also in work or art or politics. Making room is not, however, the same as ceding authority. Not everything is excused. Each kind of passionate attachment is shaped by specifics of self and object, offering avenues of creativity and satisfaction, but also of temptation and vulnerability. Some of these conditions are handled by the natural course of things: most of us over time reach a calmer state of love; new parents eventually get bored with telling stories about young Joey's exploits; grieving ends and depression lifts. Excesses of intensity and duration are less well tolerated. We have *obligations* to self and others that require that passion be tamed, depression resisted, and normal obligations taken up again. Of course not all regions of moral requirement are equally flexible during a period of dysfunction.²⁸

So do we now have enough to quiet love's worries? I think that once we can tell a plausible story about the links between mature intimacy and morality, concerns about being alienated from love in moral action should subside, as should concerns about the kinds of reasons we have when in an intimate relation: they are not wholly separate from moral reasons. Freely and directly, out of love, save your spouse.

6. Responsibility and Risk

SO FAR I HAVE BEEN TALKING mostly about normal development, robust systems, good-enough love, and the like. That's been sufficient to take egoism off the table as the default psychology that morality must overcome. Egoism is rather what it looks like, a symptom of something gone wrong that needs remedy or therapy. But what about those who arrive at maturity with-

er arrival isn't being conflated with appearance. It is in any case a task for the maturing person to manage the integration of arriving abilities into a relatively continuous narrative of self.

²⁸ Perfect duties, especially negative duties, are usually not, though the range of excuse may widen.

out an other-involved sense of self that morality can rely on and direct? Do we say that they are, because they were less effectively loved, not fully responsible moral agents?

One of the benefits of thinking about morality as a free-standing fully directive system is that the abilities it calls on seem to be ones generally relied on in practical activity – to recognize and follow rules. That makes the bar for where we hold persons responsible relatively low, or, in nicer terms, highly inclusive. Would that now change? One might think ‘yes’ if one thought the developmental account replaces the morality of rules with something like an attitude or disposition that the less fortunate in love might simply lack. Yet we don’t think whatever sad story led to my having insecure math ability gets me off the hook in doing taxes. Where my under-developed abilities stand in the way of something that needs to be done, I outsource to experts. I would be faulted if I didn’t.

Why not have the same view of our moral abilities? That humans are formed by and for morality doesn’t always make acting morally easy. In some regions we have warranted confidence in our feelings and judgment; in others we might have to rely on rules. Sometimes the problem is navigating external complexities; sometimes the trouble is closer to home. That a tough childhood might leave someone with diminished moral abilities isn’t by itself an excuse for bad action; short of the extremes of pathology, there are many routes to adequate moral behavior. There are obligations to self and others to be careful about the way we tax and manage our abilities. We should avoid situations where we’ve learned we are unreliable, or if we can’t do that, we need to be forthright, seek advice or a mentor. None of this lowers the bar of responsibility. Where things may look different is for the rest of us – *our* responsibility may increase to help identify and remedy deficiencies in others. If there are those with whom we interact who cannot be relied on, perhaps because they lack the basis for trust, then *we* have a problem that may require providing structural guarantees, or novel fail-safe procedures that will allow us to act together as we have to. The division of labor that sustains us as infants doesn’t drop away once we reach maturity, though it may take different forms.

There is a related issue that can arise even for the best of us, where the morality we know is indeterminate or restrictive or seems incorrect for the situations we encounter. We feel like we are acting on our own, vulnerable to getting things very wrong. The kinds of cases I have in mind range from sexual intimacy, provocative art and speech, down to something as simple as giving gifts. Here’s what I mean.

Gifts build and cement relationships: we communicate feelings and our value of the recipient through what we give. But as we all know, it can be hard to get this right. Without our intending it, a gift can go wrong: it can express a false or even threatening idea of relationship; it can convey lack of respect. It's often out of fear of such missteps that we give flowers or other conventional (and boring) gifts, foregoing real opportunities of expression. It's said, "It's the thought that counts"; but that's cold comfort.²⁹

Similar problems arise in areas where expression and going beyond the rules is the point of a kind of activity. What feels like offensive speech can be pressing the boundary of moral insight, in a good way. Transgressive art can be genuinely revelatory or go too far. Neither set rules nor the productive passion nor the immediate responsive reaction of others are reliable guides. We feel compelled to act or speak; we know we might be wrong.

There's also an interpersonal version of the problem that arises inside mature love itself. Intimate sexual activity is a good that can be expressive, powerfully felt, and spontaneous. It can be a welcome space for self- and mutual-discovery. But it is also a site of real risk, where unintended harms can occur. Here again rules would defeat the good of the activity. (And consent, as we've learned, isn't trustworthy.)

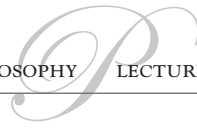
These are all regions of activity that involve experiment and risk-taking, where things can and will go wrong. If we were restricted to act only to the extent that we can foresee and prevent harm, or, if not, to avoid these regions of activity altogether, morality would stifle us.

However, looking back at our account of the co-evolution of morality and love, we should notice that this kind of problematic configuration is far from rare. "Testing limits" is one of the ways we describe periods of healthy development. A child is operating in a familiar sphere of do's and don'ts designed with her competencies and safety in mind. Then she breaks out, doing something we rightly see as dangerous or outrageous. We can repress and punish. Or we can be open to what the child is needing in pushing these limits, while still holding her responsible for some unhappy effects. In maintaining this balance we make it possible for children to grow into thoughtful moral agents.

29 Indeed, were there a rule, gifts could not play the role in our lives that they do (and in formal cultures where there are such rules – Japan, for example – they do not play the same role).

Translated to adult life the idea is that a realistic morality can cede some space for risk and pressure against prevailing norms, yet not cede authority. One might say that in these regions of valuable and expressive activity, morality has to trust the persons under its authority and give them space to invent near to moral limits. These are “proleptic spaces,” ones where we have moral permission to act creatively, where we are not and could not be guided by rules, and yet are responsible, *after the fact*, if things have gone wrong. That’s what we risk. But if the moral price of pushing the boundaries can be responsibility for unforeseen outcomes, the burden of repair need not fall entirely on the creative actor. Transgressive art may impose burdens of education on cultural institutions; venues of difficult speech may require careful provisions for access and exit. Preparation for intimacy may need to involve education: warnings and cautions about how things can go wrong. We learn the use of “safe words”; and so on.

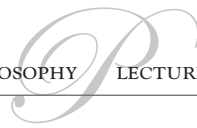
This is a picture of morality as both principled and open to expressive choice and moral risk. It complements the view of human development that places a dynamic account of the love relation as the training ground for moral agency. The examples may be unusual, but their moral structure is actually familiar. I’m thinking of imperfect duties: duties that call for some discretion about how we act for their sake. There is a tendency in the tradition to marginalize imperfect duties because it is assumed that the point of their discretion is to permit some control over our relation to morality – to give us a say about how much is demanded of us. A duty can’t be too central or serious if we can just decide how much to do, beyond some minimum. But if we consider the scope of imperfect duties, it doesn’t make sense that we have that kind of choice. These duties govern our relationships, our access to help and support, the way we organize our lives and pursuits. They are regions of activity where we have a regulative end (fidelity, providing aid, elaborating and modifying a life plan), and so values that need to be made real while being adjusted to each other. It is for that reason that we need discretion. If I have deep connections to a host of needy near and dear, then I cannot also devote myself to a life of travel and adventure. I may need to find less time consuming ways to satisfy my yen for novel experiences. Or it may be better for my near and dear to see a little less of me. There’s no rule or a priori answer. One has to make choices in the light of what’s of value, and so there is a risk of getting it wrong. And then a need for adjustment and repair. Sometimes it matters who acts (that it be me who helps my son or you who speaks



truth to power); sometimes getting it morally right can require creativity and vision. Much of this moral skill set is forged in the dynamics of early love.

7. Conclusion

SO WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED? Instead of intractable conflict between love and morality, we've uncovered a complex dynamic account of their mutual dependence. The remaining problems, of which there will be many, are more practical than philosophical. We are not egoists; we are not always nice. We are separate sites of agency; we are not essentially separate. We come to perceive ourselves as persons in the moral sense by first seeing an other as having to be treated both as an object of love and as a source of other-centered reasons. A welcome upshot of the view is that it casts morality less as a norm of constraint on our bad natures, or as a competitor to our loving, and more as a project continuous with the origins and development of us as persons who start out attached to others.



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