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Doubting Love

Larry A. Herzberg*

7.1) Introduction

In Graham Greene’s novel *The End of the Affair*,¹ Maurice, the protagonist and narrator, recounts the following moment with Sarah, the married woman with whom he’d been having a romantic love affair-

...she said to me suddenly, without being questioned, ‘I’ve never loved anybody or anything as I do you.’ ...We most of us hesitate to make so complete a statement – we remember and we foresee and we doubt. She had no doubts. The moment only mattered. Eternity is said not to be an extension of time but an absence of time, and it seemed to me that her abandonment touched that strange mathematical point of endlessness... What did time matter – all the past and the other men she may from time to time (there is that word again) have known, or all the future in which she might be making the same statement with the same sense of truth? When I replied that I loved her too in that way, I was the liar, not she, for I never lose the [126] consciousness of time: to me the present is never here: it is always last year or next week. (Greene 1951, 50-51)

Maurice’s insecurity and anxiety, which make it impossible for him to relax and fully appreciate his liaisons with Sarah, are time-driven: they are consequences of his inability to love in the present moment. As a result, he can never fully accept the love Sarah

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¹ Thanks to Stewart Cole for suggesting this novel to me.

expresses when she tells him that she loves him, because (like “most of us”) he has doubts about anyone’s ability to sustain love. These doubts are based on his own experience and beliefs about human nature, but in this particular case they are strengthened by his knowledge of Sarah’s history, for she has confided to him that she’d had many prior affairs due to her husband’s inability to sexually satisfy her. Her insistence to Maurice that her love for him is *unprecedented* fails to convince him not because he thinks that she might be deceiving *him*, but rather because he fears that she might be deceiving *herself*. After all, despite her sincere professions of love to him, she had not yet given him any indication that she was willing to leave her husband in the foreseeable future. Sarah, by contrast, is unconcerned about both the past and the future. By loving entirely in the present, she can focus on love’s feelings as they occur. This allows her to love not only without anxiety about the future, but also without remorse, regret, or guilt – emotions usually aimed at one’s past actions. Also, Sarah’s extraordinary way of loving is no less rich for being focused exclusively on the current moment, for as Maurice muses, if eternity is considered to be *timelessness* rather than everlastingness, Sarah can love him *eternally in the present moment*.² This, Maurice suggests, allows her to love without the sort of *doubt* that relentlessly plagues him. But is that so? Even if Sarah can love entirely in the present, does that really inoculate her against *all* doubts about the truth of her own professions of love, or at least make such doubts *avoidable*? Conversely, if Maurice can love only in the “ordinary” way, with one eye on the past and the other to the future, does it really follow that, for him, doubts about the truth of his own professions of love are *unavoidable*? My answer to both of these questions will be ‘not necessarily’, and laying the groundwork for that answer is the main task of this essay. But before further addressing the epistemological questions about belief and doubt [127] that concern us, we must settle on a plausible conception of what love *is*. Here I will describe what I take love to be only in general terms, and fill in relevant details as the essay progresses.

My view of love has much in common with psychologist R. J. Sternberg’s “triangular theory”.³ On both of our views love has three main components, two of which (emotional intimacy and passion) are primarily felt or *affective*, the third (“decision/commitment” for Sternberg) being primarily cognitive and *volitional*.⁴ We agree that love’s “core” *emotional* feelings include those of closeness, affection, care, and concern, but I further hold that love’s emotional aspect includes dispositions to feel various

² Greene’s point here seems to be inspired by Wittgenstein’s comment: “If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.” (1922, 6.4311)

³ Sternberg is Professor of Human Development at Cornell University. See Sternberg (1986 and 1988) for the original formulations of his “triangular” theory of love; see (1997) for “construct validation” of the surveys he uses as measurement instruments. For a non-technical introduction to his work, as well as a full listing of his scientific papers on love, see <https://lovemultiverse.com> (accessed 21 October 2020). I am not the first philosopher to have been impressed by his research; see de Sousa (2015, 80-84).

⁴ I further explicate these terms – particularly ‘volition’ – below. Of the many philosophers of love, Henry Frankfurt (e.g., 2004 and 1999) is perhaps best known for having developed a “volitional” conception of love. However, by ‘love’ Frankfurt means something far more general than interpersonal love, and his use of ‘volitional’ equivocates between two distinct senses of the term. For an excellent critical discussion of Frankfurt’s views, see Ferreira (2015). For an illuminating history of the *idea* of volition or willing, see Davenport (2007).

other sorts of emotion related to one's beloved, given certain sorts of situations.⁵ For instance, to mention an example to which we will return below, if I love you, I am probably disposed to feel anger on your behalf whenever I judge that someone has unjustly insulted you, even if *you* would not feel angry about it at all. Such "self-originating" emotional dispositions contrast with any empathetic disposition I may also have to share your emotions as I become aware of your interests and viewpoint. Secondly, for the type of love that concerns us here, love's *passionate* feelings typically include those of sexual attraction towards one's beloved, as well as feelings of certain desires, such as the desire for companionship and [128] the desires to love and to be loved.⁶ The satisfaction of these desires often adds to the positive phenomenology of being in a loving relationship (for instance, by grounding feelings of gratitude towards one's beloved), but when the passions are intense they can also generate negative emotions, such as jealousy. Also, when such passions are stronger for one lover than for the other, the imbalance can lead the "needier" lover to feel ashamed, and the "less needy" lover to feel resentful. Thirdly, love's *volitional* aspects include any conscious, voluntary *decision* one may make to behave lovingly towards one's beloved, as well as any disposition one may have to so behave, regardless of whether it was established by one's voluntary decision or not. In other words, love's volitional aspects include both *commitment-making* and *being committed*, where "being committed" entails merely having a disposition to behave lovingly towards one's beloved, regardless of its cause.

That love involves feelings should be uncontroversial. Semantically speaking, 'love' is a perfectly acceptable answer to the question, 'What do you *feel* for me?', and the 'for me' here indicates that the relevant feelings are not simple sensations like itches or burns, but rather are *directed at* (or *about*) someone, and hence *emotions*. Emotions are felt responses to mentally represented objects, events, persons or situations that are in some way *significant* to the emotional person.⁷ So love's feelings qualify as being emotional insofar as they are felt responses to one's representation of one's beloved. Some passionate feelings, such as feelings of sexual attraction elicited by representations of another's body, can also count as emotional.⁸ But if love consisted entirely of emotional and passionate feelings, it would be difficult to explain the *defensiveness* of a typical response to the question 'Do you love me?' when it is posed in a long-term romantic relationship: "Of

⁵ Dispositions are tendencies defined in terms of *manifestations*, *triggers*, and *masks*. Fragility is a commonly cited example. Breaking easily is the main manifestation of an item's fragility, but a fragile item might never break if events that would trigger the manifestation (e.g. dropping) never occur, or if the manifestation is masked (e.g., if the item were wrapped in bubble-wrap). Similarly, what is key to having a *psychological* disposition is that one *would* psychologically react and so behave in a certain way *were* a triggering event to occur, absent any masking conditions.

⁶ Sternberg takes love's passion component to include desires for "self-esteem, succorance, nurturance, affiliation, dominance, submission, and self-actualization" (1986, 122), but these seldom show up in his research, or in the research of others using his constructs. To the extent that such desires contribute to love's phenomenology, it is their *felt satisfaction or frustration* that is relevant, not their mere existence. The same is true for the desire to love and the desire to be loved, which cannot be considered *constituents* of love on pain of circularity; rather, I view them as being common motivations to love and to enter into loving relationships.

⁷ For more on this sort of view, see Ekman (1999), Lazarus (1991), Damasio (2004), Prinz (2004), and Deonna and Teroni (2012). To understand how my view diverges a bit from these, see Herzberg (2018, 2012, and 2009).

⁸ See Herzberg (2019) for a defense of this claim.

course I love you. How could you even [129] ask me such a thing?” For such a response clearly indicates that the respondent has interpreted the question as a sort of accusation, and accusing someone is reasonable only if they can be held *responsible* for having acted wrongly. The problem is that, generally speaking, we are *not* responsible for our having or not having emotional or passionate feelings. Rather, we are responsible for the voluntarily formed intentions that result from our consciously *deciding* or *willing* to pursue some goal, and of course for any actions that follow from these. Similarly, if love were merely affective it would be difficult to explain the appropriateness of believing oneself to have been *betrayed* by one’s beloved after they unexpectedly end the relationship, as Maurice believes himself to have been betrayed by Sarah when she ends their affair without explanation.⁹ For one can betray (or renege upon) only a commitment, agreement, or understanding that one has at least implicitly made or entered into; one cannot in the same sense betray a combination of feelings. These observations, along with others to be discussed below, indicate that any credible view of love, and in particular of *romantic* love, must include a volitional component.

But what, exactly, do I mean by ‘romantic’? Here I diverge a bit from Sternberg’s use of the term, and to explain why it will be helpful to list the eight “types of love” he generates from possible combinations of emotional intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. These are *non-love* (no component present), *liking* (emotional intimacy only, the main ingredient of friendship), *infatuated* love (passion only), *empty* love (decision/commitment only), *romantic* love (emotional intimacy and passion), *companionate* love (emotional intimacy and decision/commitment), *fatuous* love (passion and decision/commitment), and *consummate* love (all components present).¹⁰ With his inclusion of “non-love”, mere “liking”, and “infatuated love” (his main example of which is having sex with a prostitute), I think that it would be better to call this a non-exhaustive list of *relationship types* rather than of *love types*. But more importantly, I think that Sternberg is mistaken when he suggests that romantic love does not include a significant level of commitment. He cites Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* as portraying a paradigm case of romantic love, but here we should recall one of Juliet’s most famous lines, which she addresses to Romeo *prior* to their marriage: “O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant [130] moon, that monthly changes in her circled orb, lest that thy love prove likewise variable.”¹¹ Surely this suggests that Juliet would take commitment to be essential to the sort of love she wants to share with Romeo, because it is needed to ensure *constancy* in a way that passion and emotional intimacy by themselves can not.¹² Remarkably, even Sternberg notes that *consummate* love, with its significant levels of all three components, “is a kind of love toward which many of us strive, *especially in romantic relationships*.”¹³ So I use the term ‘romantic love’ to refer to what Sternberg calls ‘consummate love’, and

⁹ Much of Greene’s novel consists of Maurice’s attempt to find an explanation for Sarah’s apparently having betrayed him in this way. What he discovers is the novel’s major plot twist.

¹⁰ Sternberg (1986, 122).

¹¹ Shakespeare (2014), Act II Scene II.

¹² See Fehr (1988) for independent empirical support that the ordinary concepts of romantic love and commitment significantly overlap. Fehr (559-560) takes her results to be inconsistent with Sternberg’s theory, but I think that this conclusion is based on the erroneous assumption that on Sternberg’s view the concept of commitment is *entirely* contained in the concept of love.

¹³ Sternberg (1986, 124), italics added.

what he calls ‘romantic love’, with its high levels of passion and emotional intimacy but negligible amount of commitment, I call ‘sexual friendship’.

Obviously, there is much more to say about the components of romantic love. In particular, I have not yet specified the *contents* of romantic commitments, nor have I explained the important roles they play in romantic relationships. Such details will be filled in as needed while we address the epistemological questions that are our main concern. First, in the section entitled “On Believing That I Love You: Two Potential Sources of Bias”, I will outline two potential sources of bias that may cause one to believe that one romantically loves another when one does not. Then, partly on the basis of those potential sources of bias and partly on the basis of more specific issues, in “On Believing That I Am Experiencing Love’s Emotions Toward You” and “On Believing that I Am Making Love’s Commitments to You”, I will argue that, at least to the extent that one is aware of these issues, one may reasonably doubt that one is experiencing romantic love’s emotional feelings (even when one *is* experiencing them), and one may reasonably doubt that one is making love’s commitments (even when one *is* making them). Finally, in “Concluding Remarks”, I order by relative dubitability the propositions that must be true about one’s passions, emotions, and commitments towards another in order for one to romantically love them, and explain why doubts about these propositions are neither always *avoidable* when loving in Sarah’s extraordinary way, nor necessarily *unavoidable* when loving in Maurice’s ordinary way.

[131] 7.2) On Believing That I Love You – Two Potential Sources of Bias

Suppose you ask me whether I love you romantically, and I seriously consider the question for the first time. I understand that whether I love you in this way depends on whether my attitudes toward you include emotional feelings of closeness, care, concern, and affection, passionate feelings of sexual attraction, and various sorts of commitment. There are at least two reasons for me to think that any belief I may now form that I love you is unjustified. The first is that I might so desperately *want* to be loved by someone I love that, given your apparent willingness to enter into such a relationship with me, I may immediately develop a “confirmation bias” that skews my judgments about my feelings and commitments towards you.¹⁴ The second is that it is probably easier for me to identify my feelings of sexual attraction towards you than it is for me to identify the various types of my emotional feelings towards you,¹⁵ due to the more distinctive and localized bodily conditions that feelings of sexual attraction register, as well as the fact that there are more types of emotion to potentially confuse, as will be illustrated in the next section. Of course, if I do first recognize that I am sexually attracted to you, this gives me reason to believe that I have met at least one of the conditions of romantically loving you. But it also gives me another reason to think that I may be biased when making judgments about how I otherwise feel towards you, as well as about my level of commitment (or willingness to

¹⁴ The motivational power of a desire to be loved should not be underestimated. In extreme cases it can lead to horrendous behavior. This was noted by Patricia Krenwinkel, the former “Manson Family” member: “It is countless how many lives were shattered by the path of destruction that I was part of, and it all comes from just such a simple thing as just *wanting to be loved.*” <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/05/opinion/my-life-after-manson.html> at 6:54, accessed 21 October 2020, italics added.

¹⁵ See Sternberg (1986, 120-123).

commit) to you. After all, if I know that you are looking for romantic rather than infatuated or fatuous love, the ongoing satisfaction of my sexual desire may well depend on my maintaining a relationship with you that includes at least the *expressions* of emotional intimacy and commitment. This may motivate me to behaviorally *simulate* emotional intimacy and commitment, as some people simulate sexual passion to ensure the satisfaction of their other needs. Importantly, such simulation need not amount to intentional fakery. Particularly in the case of emotional intimacy, I may fool myself as much as I fool you. For [132] passion-simulators are more likely to be aware of their lack of passion than emotion-simulators are likely to be aware of their lack of emotion, given that passion – or the lack thereof – is more *accessible* to conscious awareness.¹⁶

So if I desire to be loved and I am sexually attracted to you, I initially have at least two reasons to think that any judgment I make that I love you may be biased and hence lack adequate justification. This bias could affect both my introspective judgments concerning my present attitudes towards you, and any inferences I might draw from my memories of how I've behaved towards you.¹⁷ It is true that if I remember that I've expressed very few of love's feelings and commitments towards you, that *may* be evidence that I do *not* love you. But my lack of expression could also be due to quirks of my personality of which I am unaware; for instance, I might simply tend to squelch any expressions of emotional intimacy due to insecurity. By the same token, if I remember that I *have* expressed many of love's feelings and commitments towards you, I have to allow that those expressions may have been due to the sort of strongly-motivated simulation just discussed. Of course, I might also try to remember the relevant feelings and voluntary acts of commitment-making themselves, rather than merely their expressions. But using my memory here would seem to be no more reliable than attempting to introspect my current mental states and attitudes, despite additional concerns that may arise about the reliability of *that* process. Since those additional concerns do not entirely overlap in the cases of emotional feeling and commitment, I will explore each of them in turn.

7.3) On Believing That I Am Experiencing Love's Emotions Towards You

Can I reliably type-identify, conceptualize, or “label” love's emotions based merely on the way they *feel* to me? For the moment, let's assume that I can always tell what my emotional feelings are *about*, so we can focus only on the nature of the feeling itself. Let's also assume that the qualitative properties of such feelings can, like those of sense perceptions, be [133] embedded in *phenomenal concepts* and stored in long-term memory for later use in recognizing the types of “incoming” emotional feelings.¹⁸ For instance, suppose that as young children we have sensational experiences that we can recognize based on their qualitative properties (*how they feel* to us), and given the situations in which they occur, we learn from our linguistic communities to label those types of sensations as feelings of *fear*, *anger*, *sadness*, *joy* and so on. Even on those assumptions, there are good reasons to doubt the reliability of any process of emotion-type recognition that rests

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Sternberg recognizes the possibility of bias in his subjects' self-reports of their feelings and commitments towards their partners due to their “tendencies to idealize their own relationships.” (1997, 317)

¹⁸ See Chalmers (2003) for discussion of phenomenal concepts and Gertler (2001) for discussion of how the “embedding” of qualia in concepts might take place.

exclusively on qualitative comparison. For *ranges* of sensations can count as being of the same type, and the borders of those ranges tend to be vague. This is clearest in the case of color sensations, where it may be explained by the continuity of the light frequencies registered by the retina, as well as by the visual system's limitations when it comes to distinguishing between some number of adjacent frequencies. Think, for instance, of the many shades of blue, and the narrower range where it seems arbitrary to conceptualize a color sensation as being a shade of *blue* or a shade of *turquoise*. Such indeterminacy and vagueness seems similarly evident in the emotional case, where ranges of somatosensory sensations can count as being of the same qualitative type, and we have good reason to believe that there is even more vagueness between emotion types that feel similar, given that the bodily conditions the somatosensory system registers during emotion occurrences – heartrate, respiration, muscular tension, hormone levels, and so on – substantially overlap between emotion types. Even the most *central* instances of emotional feeling types seem qualitatively similar to those of other types, including types relevant to forming a justified belief that one loves another. For instance, in trying to determine whether my feelings toward you are those of romantic love or merely those of infatuated or fatuous love, it would be important for me to figure out whether I tend to feel *affection* for you, or whether I tend only to feel *sexually attracted* to you. But based merely on the ways they feel, low levels of sexual attraction might be mistaken for moderate levels of emotional affection; that is, a simmering level of passionate “heat” might easily be misinterpreted as a moderate level of emotional “warmth”.¹⁹ [134] But if I tend to experience only sexual attraction toward you, I do not love you romantically.

Consider next a case in which recognizing what my feeling is *about* is necessary for me to determine its type, but in which I am not able to discriminate between two relevant alternatives. For instance, suppose that shortly before you ask me whether I love you, you mention to me that you've been feeling a bit ill, and this conversation is taking place during a deadly pandemic. I immediately feel distressed, but I'm not sure whether I am feeling *concern about your condition* or rather *anxiety that I might catch the disease from you*. If I am experiencing the concern, I should probably count it as evidence that I love you (such concerns being among love's core emotions), but if I'm rather experiencing the anxiety, I probably should not; indeed, it might even provide me with evidence that I do *not* love you. To the extent that concern and anxiety have similar qualitative properties, it might be impossible for me to discriminate between the two emotions based merely on how they feel. But how then can I tell that my feeling is about *you* or about *me*? Especially if I have prior knowledge that I tend to feel anxious about catching deadly diseases, I may well be unable to justifiably infer that I am feeling concern about your condition, even if I *am*.

There are also reasons to be concerned about the reliability of emotion-type identifications based on what one takes to have caused or elicited one's feeling, even when one has no trouble determining this. For instance, suppose that what justifies inferences from an emotion's cause to its type is that emotion types are strongly associated with “paradigm scenarios” to which they are normal or appropriate responses.²⁰ More

¹⁹ Sternberg (1986, 122) distinguishes between emotional *warmth*, passionate *heat*, and cognitive *coldness*. The temperature metaphor's aptness is easy to explain if we view emotional and passionate feelings as being somatosensory registrations of bodily conditions, and cognition as being primarily neurological.

²⁰ See de Sousa (1987) for a discussion of paradigm scenarios.

specifically, suppose that any emotion felt in response to a situation that sufficiently resembles a paradigm scenario of a given emotion type is highly likely to be an emotion of that type. Using such a view by itself to justify emotion-type identifications fails to adequately allow for unusual emotional responses due to atypical emotional dispositions. For instance, a paradigm scenario of fright is suddenly being attacked by a dangerous predator. However, “adrenaline junkies” often react to situations closely resembling this with *glee* instead of fright; consider surfers *thrilled* rather than frightened by the sudden approach of a thirty-foot wave. Furthermore, using paradigm scenarios to justify emotion-type identifications does not adequately take into account the fact that what *caused* an emotional feeling is [135] not always what the emotion is *about*. For instance, when you tenderly express your love for me, I might know quite well that you are presenting me with a paradigm scenario for my feeling affection towards you. However, if my character is – perhaps unbeknownst to me – somewhat vicious, your tender expression may elicit in me only an emotion of *happiness that I can now take advantage of you*. In this case, what my happiness is about (that I can now take advantage of you) is quite different from what a feeling of affection would have been about (your tenderness). But, given the qualitative similarity of happiness and affection, if I happen to at least implicitly accept the popular (but mistaken)²¹ view that what an emotion is about is *necessarily* what the subject takes to have caused it, I may fail to even notice what my emotion is actually about, and focus instead on the scenario that I correctly take to have caused it. This may result in my erroneously believing that my *happiness that I can now take advantage of you* is an emotion of *affection for your tenderness*. That is, in such a case I might get wrong both my emotion’s type *and* that which it is about.

It might here be objected that an emotion’s type is never to be inferred directly from its cause’s resemblance to a paradigm scenario, but rather from how its cause has been *evaluatively appraised* by the subject. So if I am in fact feeling happy that I can now take advantage of you, that emotion must have been caused by my appraising your tenderness as an opportunity to exploit you, rather than as a gesture worthy of my affection. However, this raises the question of the extent to which we are aware of the appraisals that may cause our emotions. According to many emotion theorists, such appraisals are seldom consciously and cognitively articulated by the subject; rather, they usually occur automatically and unconsciously. Indeed, “affect-program” theorists argue that the proper function of an emotion is to prepare the subject to react to the causal event more quickly than any consciously articulated cognitive appraisal would allow.²² In a similar vein, Jesse Prinz (2004) argues that in most cases the [136] automatically occurring emotional feeling just *is* the evaluative appraisal. Such a view perhaps ensures that the subject is *aware* of the relevant appraisal (since the appraisal just is the feeling), but it resurrects the problems already discussed about attempting to infer an emotion’s type from its qualitative properties alone.

²¹ The view that *what an emotion is about is necessarily what the subject takes to have caused it* is fairly widespread among emotion theorists. For instance, Damasio (1994, 161) seems to accept the view as a matter of *psychological* necessity. Prinz (2004, 62) appears to accept it as a matter of *semantic* necessity. Lazarus (1991) and other causal-evaluative appraisal theorists at least implicitly accept it when they hold that an emotion’s type is determined by the subject’s appraisal of its *cause*, and that the resulting evaluative judgment remains a sustaining part of the emotion (providing it with direction). See Herzberg (2009) for an extended argument that the view is mistaken.

²² Cf. Griffiths (1997) for a defense of affect program theories.

If my happiness case seems too far-fetched or pathological to be convincing, the same points can be illustrated using a more normal case – one that does not require me to have an atypical emotional character, or to accept the view that one’s emotions are always about what one takes to be their causes. Suppose that I hear someone say something negative about you, and I am suddenly aware of feeling either *anger* or *contempt* (disdain) towards the speaker – two emotions that feel quite similar to me. If it is anger, I should probably count it as evidence that I love you, for, as I mentioned in the introduction, feeling anger in such circumstances is probably the manifestation of a “self-originating” disposition characteristic of love. Anger can have this status because it is properly directed at someone one appraises to have been unjustly offensive to oneself *or to someone to whom one feels close*, including family members, close friends, and lovers. Contempt, by contrast, is typically not felt on anyone’s behalf, and is directed towards those one appraises to be unimportant or unworthy due to their ineptitude, stupidity, or low social standing.²³ Now, given that it is the speaker’s *remark* to which I am reacting in either case, I must try to determine whether I appraised the remark as *unjustly offensive towards you* (in which case I should infer that I am feeling angry at the speaker), or whether I appraised it merely as a sign of the speaker’s stupidity (in which case I should infer that I am feeling contempt towards the speaker). If immediately after hearing the remark but prior to experiencing the feeling I happened to have consciously thought, “That’s unjustifiably insulting to you”, I could perhaps strongly infer that my feeling is one of anger. But, as noted above, emotions are probably rarely caused by such consciously articulated appraisals. Of course, I could now deliberately *re-appraise* the remark, but there is no guarantee that this would have the same effect as [137] the automatic, unconscious process that originally caused the emotion.²⁴ So, even if inferences from appraisal type to emotion type are reliable, it can be difficult to determine the specific appraisal that actually caused one’s emotion, especially when the emotional feeling’s qualitative properties fail to disambiguate between relevant alternative emotion types.²⁵

Finally, we also need to recognize that many people simply misconceptualize the types of their emotions because they have a less than perfect grasp on the relevant emotion concepts. For instance, many people appear not to understand the difference between jealousy and envy; in particular, they tend to misconceptualize feelings of envy as being feelings of jealousy. Such people are likely to say to someone who has bought something they covet, “I’m so jealous of you!”. They may have forgotten, or never learned, the two emotions’ distinct analyses, jealousy being a response to a valued relationship’s being threatened by a third party, envy being a response to someone’s having something one wants. But if I tend to misconceptualize feelings of envy as feelings of jealousy, I may falsely believe that I have an emotional disposition characteristic of the sort of “ordinary

²³ These characterizations of anger and contempt are drawn from Aristotle’s uses of the terms in *Rhetoric*, Book II, chapter 2. The characterization of ‘anger’ is also consistent with Lazarus’ (1991) “core relational theme” of anger: “A demeaning offense against me and mine.” Although some view contempt to be a blend of other emotions, I agree with Ekman (1999) that it is more likely a “basic” emotion that evolved to help us navigate through social hierarchies.

²⁴ Multi-level appraisal theories contrast conscious, deliberate, cognitive appraisals with the automatic, unconscious appraisals made by the sub-personal emotional system. Doing so helps to explain *phobic* emotions, among other phenomena. Cf. Teasdale (1999) for a concise overview of such theories.

²⁵ See Herzberg (2016) for my positive view of how we may be able to reliably identify the types of our emotions.

love” Maurice feels towards Sarah in *The End of The Affair*. For instance, suppose that you have a close friendship with someone other than me that revolves around your mutual interest in playing tennis, a game for which I have no aptitude. I might then come to believe that I am jealous of your friend (and take my jealousy as a sign that I love you), when in fact I am merely envious of them for having an ability that enables the two of you to engage in a fun activity closed to the two of us.

These are just a few of the ways in which one can be wrong about the types of one’s emotional feelings, particularly in regard to the feelings of love. I am not suggesting that *in general* the underlying processes are so unreliable that everyone always has sufficient reason to doubt that they experience love’s emotions towards another. Rather, my point is merely that *some* people under *some* psychological circumstances seem likely to form false beliefs that they emotionally love another, and so have sufficient reason to doubt that they do so (at least insofar as they are aware of the relevant circumstances). Let’s assume for the sake of further exploration [138] that I am one of those people. Upon reflection, I’m unsure whether I love you or not, emotionally speaking; my confidence level that I tend to experience love’s emotions towards you is below 50%. Should I therefore *doubt* that I love you romantically? Perhaps, but let’s further suppose that I am no more confident that I usually do *not* experience love’s emotions toward you. In other words, I have insufficient evidence to justify either belief or doubt that I love you. This allows me to *suspend* both belief and doubt, and to merely “entertain the hypothesis” that I love you, pending further evidence. However, to gain more evidence I need to remain close to you, so I consider whether to now make love’s commitments to you, and to express my doing so by telling you that I love you. After all, in contrast to my feelings, whether I make commitments or not is entirely under my control, right? Admittedly, the love that results might be *empty* (commitment only) or at best *fatuous* (commitment and passion), but some “arranged marriages” provide evidence that what begins as empty or fatuous love can become romantic over time.²⁶ So let’s suppose that I now exclaim “I love you!”, sincerely *believing* that I am making love’s commitments to you. Does it follow that I *am* making those commitments to you, and hence that I love you in at least that limited way?

7.4) On Believing that I Am Making Love’s Commitments to You

Unfortunately, not quite. But before I explain why, I need to be clearer about what I take to be the main commitments of romantic love – those that are implied by one’s sincerely stating ‘I love you’ in a romantic context. Since in many cultures romantic love provides a good ground for marriage (‘Because we love each other’ being a perfectly acceptable answer to ‘Why are you getting married?’), and in many contemporary cultures such love might even be considered necessary for a successful marriage, marriage vows can provide some guidance here. Such vows often require the couple to pledge monogamous fidelity to each other, regardless of future circumstances.²⁷ They also stress the intended irrevocability of marriage commitments at least until the death of one of the [139] spouses. Some also involve pledges to demonstrate such virtues as honesty, respect,

²⁶ See Sternberg (1986, 123). Remember that I am using ‘romantic’ as Sternberg uses ‘consummate’, the type of love that requires adequate degrees of all three components.

²⁷ See <https://www.theknot.com/content/traditional-wedding-vows-from-various-religions> (accessed 10/22/2020) for marriage vows from many religious traditions,.

and forgiveness towards one's partner, which is reasonable insofar as the exercise of such virtues involves voluntary activity; one is not implausibly pledging to experience feelings over which one has little if any control. By contrast, non- or pre-marital romantic lovers usually are not committing to a life-long relationship when they tell each other 'I love you', nor are they committing to share their lives with each other to the extent found in marriage; for example, they need not commit to cohabitation. However, telling someone that you romantically love them does imply that you intend the relationship to last for at least *some* time; in contrast to mere infatuation, romantically loving someone seems incompatible with intending merely to have a "one night stand" with them. Romantic lovers also implicitly commit themselves to being *accessible* to each other on an ongoing basis, in a way that resembles the "to have and to hold" clause of some marriage vows. More specifically, they commit themselves to being open to ongoing emotional intimacy and sexual activity (the other two components of romantic love), to a degree that exceeds mere sexual friendship, but which may fall short of what is expected in an ideal marriage. They also commit to a significant degree of *practical dependability*, to come to each other's aid and to prioritize each other's interests over those of their mere friends. They perhaps commit to being *honest* about any firm intentions they may form to discontinue the relationship. Finally, while two romantic lovers need not commit to romantically loving *only* each other, *de facto* "fidelity" typically results from the practical difficulty of maintaining with multiple partners the levels of emotional and sexual accessibility just mentioned.²⁸

Importantly, the commitments one makes to one's romantic partner, like those to one's spouse, are addressed to their *singular individuality*; they are not conditional on one's beloved's maintaining inessential properties. As Shakespeare famously put it, "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds..."²⁹ By contrast, while one's friends are certainly valued, they usually are valued for their properties. As a result, friends are *interchangeable* in a way that lovers are not. For instance, if one of my friends can no longer meet me for a hike, another friend who is equally competent [140] at hiking (and perhaps at conversing) will do just as well. Similarly, if one is *merely* sexually attracted to someone, one should be equally attracted to their identical twin as well, *ceteris paribus*. Indeed, if one were *not* so attracted to each twin, one might reasonably be viewed as inexplicably fickle. But there is nothing similarly incoherent about romantically loving one twin but not the other, and this can be explained by the fact that love's commitments are addressed to the singular individual who is loved.³⁰ This also helps to explain the exceptional degree of value most people place on *being loved*, as opposed to merely *being admired* for their properties or their accomplishments. For they understand that through another's love, their singular individuality is recognized and affirmed in a way not found in other forms of relationship. Also, the exceptional degree of value one places on being loved in this way explains why many spouses and romantic lovers would prefer their partners to have casual sex with a stranger rather than with a sexual friend with whom they may share an emotional intimacy, and with a sexual friend over a competing lover to whom

²⁸ I do not rule out the possibility of polyamorous romance, but for simplicity's sake I am concerned here with bi-lateral relations.

²⁹ Shakespeare (2004), Sonnet 116. For some disagreement on this point, see Rorty (1986/1993).

³⁰ This is what philosophers mean when they observe that love is not "fungible". See, for instance, de Sousa (1987).

they may be committed. For those other forms of relationship are less threatening to the commitments that hold between spouses or romantic lovers *qua* singular individuals. Finally, none of this entails that one's emotional and passionate responses to another's properties play no role in helping one to *select* a lover. The fact that your particular properties trigger in me certain positive feelings may well be why I decide to address love's commitments to *your* singular individuality rather than to someone else's, even though *everyone* is a singular individual. But although one's emotional and sexual responses to another's properties helps to explain romantic love's *selectivity*, an important function of commitment is precisely to transcend the relative shallowness of such selectivity.

Mutual commitment plays another important role in romantic relationships: it allows the lovers to form a *union* that amounts to a *merging* or *interlinking* of their interests. For if I value your commitments to me (which I should, given my desire to be loved and willingness to be loved by you), I thereby have an interest in *your* maintaining *your* commitment to me. My recognition of this interest should motivate me to make and maintain a reciprocal commitment to you that *you* similarly value and recognize, providing *you* with an interest in *my* maintaining *my* commitment to you. I should then also value the maintenance of *my* commitment to [141] *you* at least insofar as it acts as a means of maintaining *your* commitment to *me*, and *vice versa*.³¹ Of course, each of us may also have an independent interest in our commitments to each other, insofar as we each desire *to love* in addition to desiring *to be loved*. But commitments motivated *only* by a desire to love would not require any relationship, and hence would be unlikely to generate one. Finally, mere mutuality of affect (be it passionate or emotional) seems unlikely to generate a stable relationship or merging of interests, since one's passions can be satisfied – and one's emotions can be elicited – by anyone with the relevant properties. So it seems that only *mutual commitments* addressed to each other's singular individuality and motivated by each partner's desire to be loved can create the sort of interest-merging that results in the maintenance of a loving relationship. Note that once this interlinkage of interests is in place, each lover also has a stake in helping their beloved pursue whatever interests they may have *external* to the relationship, insofar as their doing so should strengthen the other's commitment to them, and as a result their commitment to the other.³²

Let's now return to our epistemological question: does it follow from my merely *believing* that I am making love's commitments to you that I *am* making them? Is this an aspect of loving about which doubt is *always* unreasonable? As I stated above, *not quite*. For even if any commitment I make is entirely under my control, it does not follow that any *belief* I have that *I am now making love's commitments to you* must be true. What may make it seem otherwise is the conceptual truth that *one voluntarily makes a commitment if and only if one knows that one is doing so*. Call this "C". It follows trivially from the truth condition of knowledge that if one *knows* that one is making a commitment, then one is doing so. And it follows from the definition of 'voluntarily' that if one voluntarily makes a commitment, then one *knows* that one is doing so. For one cannot voluntarily do *anything*

³¹ This is consistent with Robert Solomon's observation that the "grand reason" to love "is because we bring out the best in each other." (1988, 155) My love for you brings out the best in me insofar as I want to be the best person I can be in your eyes in order to reinforce your commitment to me, and *vice versa*.

³² Notice that on this account of commitment and interest-merging in a romantic relationship, the merger does not generate a new "we-entity" separate from each of the lovers' singular individualities. See Helm (2017) for discussion of such views. Rather, on my analysis, it is essential that each lover maintain their autonomous ability to *withdraw* their commitment to the other.

without knowing what one is doing. To put this somewhat [142] differently, any voluntary act *implicates* the agent; this is why one can always be held *responsible* for one's voluntary actions, including one's commitment-makings. Finally, since one cannot *make* a commitment without *knowing* that one is doing so, and one cannot *know* that one is doing so without *justifiably believing* that one is doing so (since knowing entails justifiably believing), the beliefs that are partly *constitutive* of acts of commitment-making are both *justified* and *made true* by those acts themselves. However, little of epistemological importance follows from C. For like all conceptual truths, C fails to settle any non-conceptual factual issues. In particular, it does not follow from C that just *any* belief I may have that I am making a commitment is true, for such a belief might be produced in any number of ways other than by my commitment-making. For instance, a sufficiently crafty neurologist might implant such a belief in me despite its being false. Or, more realistically, I may hold the belief as a result of hypnosis, or I might form such a belief due to wishful thinking or the two potential sources of bias discussed earlier. In other words, C does not provide me with any means for discriminating *true* beliefs that I am making a commitment from *false* beliefs that I am doing so.

Someone might here object that there is no need to discriminate true from false beliefs that one is making a commitment, because *to believe* that one is making a commitment *just is* to make the commitment. Indeed, the objector might claim, merely uttering the words 'I hereby make this commitment...' *makes it so*. The objector's strategy here is to assimilate commitment-making to a merely *performative* analysis of promising. On such an analysis, if I say to you, "I promise to have dinner with you tomorrow", my saying the words *makes it true* that I have promised to have dinner with you tomorrow. It does not matter whether I am stating the words sincerely or not. Indeed, even if I am being thoroughly *deceptive* when I say 'I promise you...', I nevertheless *have made the promise* to you. If commitment-making is similarly performative, then my merely *saying* 'I am making love's commitments to you,' is *critical* of my having made those commitments. So if I merely *say* to you 'I love you', understanding the commitments that love requires, I thereby *in fact* love you (at least in Sternberg's *empty* sense). But surely that is not the case. Rather, the truth of my words depends on whether I am *willfully* making love's commitments to you – that is, on whether I am forming an *intention* to *keep* those commitments (even if that intention goes unfulfilled). So if the objector were to insist that promising and commitment-making must share a *single* analysis, I would argue that we should give up the performative analysis of [143] promising in favor of a volitional one, rather than give up the volitional analysis of commitment-making in favor of a performative one.³³

However, the epistemological problem of how I can tell my true from my false beliefs that I am making a commitment may not be as serious as it appears, for two reasons. First, it seems likely that there is a *phenomenological* difference between my believing that I am making a commitment when my will is engaged versus my so believing when my will is not engaged. That is, there seems to be a *feeling of resolve* that accompanies the making of a commitment, and perhaps I can reliably tell when that feeling is present or absent. Note that resting the ability to tell true from false beliefs that I am making a commitment

³³ The paradigm of a performative practice is the "christening" or naming of a ship: exclaiming, for instance, "I hereby christen this ship the Santa Maria!" Such a paradigm seems quite distant from the practice of promising.

on my being able to correctly identify a feeling of resolve need not open up a can of worms similar to the ones that supplied reasons to doubt that I was feeling love's emotions. For in the emotional cases, the problems all involved the difficulty of discriminating between *different types of emotion* that felt qualitatively similar, while in the commitment case there seems not to be *different types of willing* that could feel qualitatively similar. Secondly and more importantly, even if I do not know *how* I can reliably distinguish true from false beliefs that I am making a commitment, it does not follow that I cannot *in fact* do so, and so my mere lack of knowledge in this regard does not provide me with a positive reason to *doubt* that I can distinguish them.

This second point can be further elaborated by noting an epistemological principle that applies to both beliefs about one's commitment-makings and beliefs about the types of one's emotions: *absent good reason for judging such propositions to be false, one is justified in accepting them as true "by default"*. In this respect, introspectively and reflectively produced beliefs resemble perceptually produced beliefs about the presence and types of physical objects in the world.³⁴ Both are similarly "foundational", epistemologically speaking.³⁵ If I perceptually believe that *there is a cat on the mat*, I am justified in believing that proposition unless my default justification [144] for it is *defeated* by some good reason to think it is false, such as that my perceptual or cognitive abilities are malfunctioning due to unfavorable conditions of some sort. Similarly, if I introspectively believe that I am making love's commitments to you, I am justified in believing *that* proposition unless my default justification for it is defeated by some good reason to think it is false, such as that my introspective and cognitive abilities are malfunctioning, or are biased by the sorts of factors mentioned in "On Believing That I Love You: Two Potential Sources of Bias". The same point applies to my introspectively produced beliefs that I am experiencing a particular type of emotion towards you, only in this case there are potentially additional reasons for doubt of the sort outlined in "On Believing That I Am Experiencing Love's Emotions Toward You". It is important to stress that only beliefs produced primarily by foundational processes like introspection and perception can enjoy this sort of default justification, and that such justification certainly does not guarantee that the believed propositions are *true*. However, it does rule out one's being justified in *doubting* the same propositions at the same time (absent some evidence of their falsity).

Of course, even when one is justified in believing that one is *making* love's commitments, one cannot be similarly justified in believing that one *will remain* committed between those acts of commitment-making, nor can one be similarly justified in believing that one *will keep* the commitments one has made. For such *predictive* beliefs can be justified only by inference from what one justifiably believes about one's own history, and in this way they are similar to the beliefs one might have about one's beloved's ability to keep their commitments. In many cases, the more one knows about the relevant history, the more reasonable it may be to doubt that a commitment will be kept. Ideally, making a commitment establishes a disposition to behave consistently with its content until the

³⁴ Note that this claim does *not* require that we view mental states as otherwise analogous to physical objects, nor does it require introspectively and perceptually formed beliefs to have default justifications of the same type or strength. This foundational sort of justification can of course be supplemented by a belief's consistency and coherence – and defeated by its inconsistency and incoherence – with other beliefs.

³⁵ See, for instance, Audi (2002) for his version of fallibilistic foundationalism.

commitment has been revoked by the agent. But given the less-than-perfect reliability with which such dispositions operate, as well as the fact that psychological dispositions are not directly observable and can be inferred only through observations of their manifestations, the best evidence I may have that I remain committed might be behaviors that others could observe and assess at least as reliably as I. So as long as I keep in mind that my overt expressions of love could be misleading, others' estimations of my character might provide me with a valuable "reality check" on the nagging question of whether my love is *true*.

[145] 7.5) Concluding remarks

Although we have merely scratched the surface of the conceptual and psychological aspects of romantic love and the epistemological issues related to justifiably believing or doubting that one loves another, it seems safe at this point to draw a few conclusions. To begin with, one can certainly be *wrong* about whether one romantically loves another. That is, one's beliefs on this matter are clearly *fallible*. However, fallibility does not by itself entail dubitability. One is justified in believing that one loves another unless one has good reason to doubt the reliability of one's introspective, reflective, or inferential processes, and the potential reasons for doubt can vary from person to person, case to case, and target only propositions about one's having particular components of love, some of which seem more readily dubitable than others.

We can now order by their relative dubitability the propositions that must be true about one's passions, emotions, and commitments towards another in order for one to romantically love them. First, one may be *best* situated to justifiably judge whether one is experiencing passionate feelings of sexual attraction to another, thanks to their distinctive qualitative profiles, which can be explained by the particular bodily conditions they register. There may also be other subjectively observable mental signs of sexual arousal and attraction, such as distinctive forms of attention, perceptual focus, and imagery, that we cannot delve into here. So whatever doubts one may have that one is experiencing feelings of sexual attraction toward another are probably rarely justified. Secondly, one appears to be *fairly* well-situated to justifiably judge whether one is making love's commitments to another, at least if there is a distinctive *feeling of resolve* produced by the engagement of one's will that allows one to tell when one is *really* making a commitment. If such feelings exist, identifying them should at least not fall prey to the sorts of problems that can diminish one's ability to recognize one's emotional feelings. After all, there is presumably only one type of feeling of resolve that can be produced by willing, unlike the many types of qualitatively similar emotional feelings that can be produced by a wide variety of situations with a number of potentially emotion-eliciting properties. On the other hand, unlike emotional feelings, feelings of resolve seem not to be associated with the sorts of publicly observable "paradigm scenarios" that may facilitate one's ability to conceptualize or linguistically label one's emotional feelings (despite the problems that can arise when inferring emotion type from scenario [146] type). So the epistemological usefulness of feelings of resolve remains somewhat indeterminate, and here we may have to rely on the general principle that introspectively produced beliefs are justified absent good reasons for doubting their contents, such as reasons to believe that the potentially biasing factors outlined in "On Believing That I Love You: Two Potential Sources of Bias" are operative. Finally, it seems clear that one is *least* well-situated to justifiably judge

whether one is experiencing love's emotional feelings towards another, given the many ways one can misconceptualize their types outlined in "On Believing That I Am Experiencing Love's Emotions Toward You", in addition to the two potential sources of bias. But here again, one's introspectively produced beliefs about the types of one's emotional feelings are justified by default, absent good reasons to think that their contents are false.

I can now explain why Maurice is not necessarily right to suggest that doubt is always *avoidable* when loving in Sarah's extraordinary way, and always *unavoidable* when loving in his own ordinary way. For even if Sarah loves only in the present, she could still have justified doubts about the types of her emotions and even about the truth of her apparent commitment-making. She might be insensitive to feelings of resolve, or her will may not produce them with sufficient intensity, or she may be biased by her sexual attraction to Maurice or by her intense desire to be romantically loved. Indeed, the only sort of doubt that Sarah may always be able to avoid is about commitment-*keeping*, insofar as she is *unconcerned* with the future. Of course, one may wonder whether she can make any commitment at all, given that she loves entirely in the present, and commitments are *essentially* future-directed. But Sarah's way of loving is not incoherent; it merely represents a compromise with human imperfection. As we have noted, no commitment's *making* can guarantee its being kept; any commitment can be revoked for good reason, irrational influences on one's will can result in inconsistent willings, and psychological dispositions to behave in various ways are not failsafe. Sarah, like anyone else, can *make* a commitment by forming the necessary *intention* to keep it in the future, without being *concerned* about keeping it in the future.

Maurice, by contrast, can experience only the sort of ordinary love that breeds resentment and hatred when its commitments are unexpectedly revoked, and insecurity or jealousy even when they are kept. Perhaps the best he can do when Sarah proclaims her extraordinary love for him is not to deny the *value* of her commitment-making at the moment it occurs, however justified his concerns may be about her ability to keep it. Of [147] course, when he loves in his ordinary way, he will probably be more prone to doubts about *all* of love's components. His anxiety about the future may undermine his ability to experience love's emotional and passionate feelings in the present, even when he may have been able to feel them otherwise. Similarly, the doubts generated by his perhaps justifiable anxiety might *themselves* interfere with his ability to experience love, and so become *self-fulfilling*. However, not everyone who can love only in Maurice's ordinary way must meet such an unhappy fate. If one is lucky, one's history might provide *no* strong grounds for doubt, one might be able to counterbalance anxiety with *hope*, and one might have no good reason to ever doubt that one is experiencing love's feelings. In the end, despite the causal relations that can occur between them, what may be most important to recognize is the fundamental *independence* of our passions, emotions, and commitments from whatever beliefs or doubts we may form about them. It is one thing to love, and quite another to believe or doubt that one loves. As long as we keep that firmly in mind, our doubts are at least less likely to interfere with our loves.

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