

Volume

## Love, Justice, Autonomy

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### *Abstract*

Questions concerning love and its role in morality have been with us since antiquity. They have given rise to a long and complex debate about the nature of love, the lovers' emotional and attitudinal characteristics, and about how love shapes and is in turn shaped by the lovers' (practical) self-understanding and their (individual) autonomy. In this context, an important question concerns the relation between love and justice, be it within relationships of (romantic) love or concerning love's alleged incompatibility with morality's demand for general impartiality.

Part of the complexity of the debate stems from the fact that the tradition distinguishes three different construals of love: love as *eros*, love as *philia*, and love as *agape*. As per the account epitomized in Plato's *Symposium*, '*eros*' is associated with passionate and romantic love. Though typically (but not necessarily) carnal in its initial stages, *erotic* love can be purified, as it were, into love of beauty itself, perhaps even further. '*Philia*,' on the other hand, is meant to characterize the relation of mutual well-wishing in the dimension of the good. According to Aristotle, '*philia*' refers to the loving relationship that relates true friends and, in its lesser forms, people who share certain goals or pleasures. '*Agape*,' finally, is said to refer to a kind of selfless and unconditional love. In the Christian tradition, the term is associated with love's highest form, charity, is said to be properly attributed to the bond between man and the divine, but is also used as a label for the love the religious is to feel for her neighbor.

Arguably, acts of love on either interpretation may come into conflict with considerations of justice, e.g. when rather than considering the claims of everyone involved equally and impartially, one favors a loved one over others. Moreover, lovers are prone to interfere with the freedom or autonomy of their beloved out of a loving concern for their well-being. In doing so, they may fail to meet the moral demand of respecting another person's autonomy. At least in such cases, it seems that the demands of love and justice are incompatible.

Within more contemporary theories of (especially romantic) love, the following threefold distinction introduces a further level of complexity: on *individualist accounts*, love is analyzed as a specific stance—broadly conceived—of an individual person, with the beloved being the *object* of love. On *union accounts*, love is spelled out in terms of the lovers forming a "we," especially in terms of a shared "we-identity." Proponents of *interpersonal accounts*, finally, characterize love in terms of a (dialogical) relationship between the lovers, in which the lovers mutually see each other as *subjects* of love. For each of these approaches, the question whether love and justice really are incompatible must be addressed, with respect to issues of justice and, especially, respect for autonomy *within* loving relationships, but also with respect to possible tensions between love's partiality and justice's demand for impartiality more generally.

Relatedly, the stance one takes on these issues has broader political implications. Since loving relationships play an important role in society, it is an open question how to incorporate any position on the relation or tension between love and justice in a more encompassing political framework. If love and justice are indeed incompatible in certain respects, must we accept love's partiality within a normative political framework and step back from justice's general

demand for impartiality? Or are we to enforce the latter? Also, are issues of justice within loving relationships a political issue or should we treat them as a private matter?

We are especially interested in what role autonomy may play in these debates. Consider the prevalent distinction between *individualist* and *relational* accounts of personal autonomy. According to *individualist* accounts, personal autonomy can be analyzed solely in terms of a person's internal conditions, e.g. in terms of a formal configuration of the structure of a person's will. According to *relational* accounts, in contrast, a person's self and autonomy are developed and can be constituted only within suitable social relations and thus depend on external conditions. Especially noteworthy among the latter are feminist relational accounts, whose proponents have helpfully pointed out the special importance gendered power dynamics may assume in one's reflections on autonomy and justice. As they criticize individualist accounts for disregarding the fundamental influence social relations have on the development and constitution of personal autonomy, these proponents focus not only on autonomy fostering social relations, but also point to social relations and conditions that may endanger or impede autonomy. Generally, we need to ask how issues concerning the relation between love and justice look from the perspectives offered by various accounts of autonomy. In this context, relational accounts may provide an especially fertile ground for analyzing and addressing the apparent tension between love and justice in general, including its bearing on political contexts.

Against the background of these various distinctions, we invite authors to further explore the relation between love, justice, and autonomy along the following three broad dimensions:

1) *Justice within relationships of love*

We invite contributions that shed light on conceptual (and practical) issues concerning the (in-)compatibility of love and justice, with the latter construed primarily in terms of respect for autonomy amongst the lovers. For example, are loving relations inherently unjust? Might love require justice? Or do love and justice belong to distinct moral domains?

2) *Loving partiality and moral impartiality*

We invite contributions that address issues arising when considering the relation between the lovers on the one hand and their broader societal environment on the other. Specifically, we invite reflections on how love and impartiality are related. Are they compatible or not? And from a moral point of view: is it unjust to favor one's beloved?

3) *The political dimension of love and justice*

We invite contributions that address the implications any position in the first two dimensions may yield in the political realm. How, for instance, do various accounts of (romantic) love stand to, and perhaps inform, how we are to relate to our fellow citizens? Should political norms or laws favor loving partiality over general, impartial solidarity or *vice versa*? Or is this ultimately a false choice? If love is taken to play an important role in fostering or hindering the development of personal autonomy, what are the political implications that need to be addressed, and how?

Through addressing these questions, the resulting volume, we hope, will engender a better understanding both of conceptual and practical issues regarding the relation between love, justice, and autonomy as well as their broader societal and political implications.