



André Grahe, Natasha McKeever, and Joe Saunders (Eds).  
*Philosophy of Love in the Past, Present, and Future*. New York:  
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This volume presents a collection of original essays on the philosophy of love, organized thematically around its past, present, and future.

Part I delves into what the history of philosophical thought can teach us about love, exploring the works of Ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, as well as Kierkegaard's critique of preferential love and Erich Fromm's mystical interpretation of sexual relationships. Part II focuses on contemporary understandings and practices of love. The essays in this section examine how love evolves over time, the process of falling in love, the erotic aspects of romantic relationships, and a fresh interpretation of grandparental love. Part III looks to the future, addressing how technological advancements such as algorithm-based dating apps and robotic companions might shape the way we experience love. It also explores the potential of polyamory as a future model of romantic relationships.

Ginger Tate Clausen opens the book by examining Plato's views on love as presented in the *Symposium*. She defends a Platonic conception of love, focusing on the idea that love involves opening oneself to transformation through another person's beauty, which evokes a sense of eternity and permanence. Clausen draws an intriguing parallel to Paul Thomas Anderson's film *Phantom Thread* to illustrate how this kind of love operates.

In the second chapter, Anna Mense shifts the focus to Aristotle, addressing the current crisis in romantic love. She argues that Aristotle's concept of *philia* – or friendship – can provide a solution. Mense proposes that romantic love is a form of *philia*, suggesting that this perspective can offer a more relaxed and sustainable understanding of romantic relationships, free from some of the unrealistic expectations often associated with romance.

Terence Irwin then explores the biblical command to “love your neighbor as yourself,” debating whether this is a single command or two distinct ones: to love both yourself and your neighbor in a similar way. Irwin provides an in-depth analysis of self-love as discussed by thinkers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Augustine, Calvin, Luther, and St. Paul. He argues that Jesus' commandment is best interpreted as two interconnected but separate directives.

Daniel Watts continues the discussion of Christian love by offering a fresh interpretation of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*. While Kierkegaard is often seen as dismissing human love in favor of a purely Christian, non-preferential love, Watts argues that Kierkegaard's critique is not against human love itself, but against its self-undermining tendencies. Watts contends that Kierkegaard is calling for a transformation of ordinary love, not its rejection, into a new, improved form of preferential love.

In the final chapter of Part I, Christopher Bennett explores Erich Fromm's work on love, sex, and union. He argues that sex plays a critical role in love by facilitating a search for a kind of knowledge about another person that transcends language. While Fromm connects this search to mysticism, Bennett reinterprets it through a Romantic lens, proposing that sexual relations act as expressive gestures akin to artworks, symbolizing key emotional truths about the relationship.

In the second part of the book, five authors explore contemporary philosophical issues related to how we understand love today. These thought-provoking essays prompt us to reflect on love's connection to time, its different stages, and the various forms it takes.

Troy Jollimore begins by examining how love is intertwined with time in his chapter, "Love and the Past (and Present, and Future)." He emphasizes the significance of narrative in romantic relationships, arguing that the history shared between lovers profoundly shapes how they experience their relationship in the present.

Next, Pilar Lopez-Cantero addresses the early stages of romantic relationships in "Falling in Love." She challenges the common association of falling in love with limerence or infatuation, arguing that this process should not be reduced to these negative concepts. Instead, she proposes a more neutral interpretation of falling in love as the initial phase of romantic love, deserving of its own thoughtful examination. Neil Delaney's chapter takes a deeper look at romantic love, focusing on its erotic aspect and how it relates to the "properties theory" of love – the idea that we love others for their qualities. He draws a parallel between our desire to be loved for the traits central to our identity and the desire to be sexually desired for attributes we can understand as arousing to others.

Joe Saunders shifts the focus to the impermanence of love in "Loves Passed." He explores what various theories of love reveal about the end of romantic relationships and what the passing of love tells us about these theories. He concludes that no single theory can fully explain love's end and offers a holistic account of love, which he argues better captures both the nature of romantic love and its passing.

The final chapter by Christine Overall introduces a type of love that has received little attention from philosophers: grandparental love. In "'Ain't Love Grand?' Looking at Grandparental Love," Overall highlights the unique and valuable roles grandparents and grandchildren play in each other's lives. She argues that grandparental love is philosophically significant for two reasons: the large age gap enriches the relationship, making it distinct from other types of love, and the role of parents as intermediaries adds complexity to how this love is expressed.

The third section of this book includes five essays that explore the future of love, focusing on how evolving social habits, state policies, and emerging technologies may

shape our understanding and experience of love. These contributions offer a thought-provoking look at the ways love could transform and how we might navigate these changes.

The first essay, by Luke Brunning, questions whether polyamory could represent the future of love. While acknowledging that polyamory challenges the conventional monogamous model, Brunning also notes that some polyamorous practices replicate existing social norms in slightly altered ways. He suggests that real progress requires a more fundamental shift in the way we think about romantic relationships – a “wholesale alteration of romantic character,” rather than merely adopting polyamory as a new norm. I found this chapter to be one of the best argued.

André Grahle’s chapter presents a social critique of contemporary romantic dynamics, arguing that much of our current relationship practices are driven by a possessive desire for the other person, rooted in a fear of losing them to competition. This possessiveness, he contends, undermines love itself, leading to the very loss it seeks to prevent. In contrast, Grahle advocates for a future of love free from possessiveness – one that requires significant social change in how we relate to one another.

Alison Toop examines how the institution of marriage may conflict with the core principles of political liberalism. She explores possible reforms or alternatives to the traditional model of marriage that would better support a wider range of intimate caregiving relationships, beyond just romantic ones. Although Toop recognizes the need for legal recognition of diverse relationships, she argues that romantic relationships hold a distinct value, meriting specific attention from the state.

Sven Nyholm, John Danaher, and Brian D. Earp turn their attention to emerging technologies and their potential to reshape how we view love. They examine the impact of “quantified relationship” technologies, biomedical love enhancements (such as “love drugs”), and the possibility of humans forming romantic relationships with robots or artificial intelligences. While they raise valid concerns about these technologies, the authors remain cautiously optimistic about their potential to positively influence the future of love.

Natasha McKeever offers a more critical view of two specific technologies – online dating platforms and love robots – arguing that they may distort our romantic ideals. She suggests that the quest for the “perfect match,” whether human or robotic, encourages unrealistic expectations of a partner who must be perfectly suited to our desires, replaceable at any time, and exist solely to meet our needs. This, she warns, undermines the essence of love as a selfless, disinterested connection with another person.

While the future of love is speculative, these chapters highlight the importance of reflecting on how social and technological developments could affect our relationships. By anticipating these changes, we may better understand their ethical implications and maintain some control over how love evolves in line with our needs and values.

My biggest frustration with this book pertains to the many ways “love” is understood. This is hardly the fault of the essay writers. And given the diversity of love notions in the past and present, it may have been impossible for the editors to offer a uniform definition of love. But the meaning of love varies widely across these

essays. And this diversity veered into chaos at times. A final essay comparing and contrasting love definitions with an all-encompassing view of love would have been helpful. When wrestling with the problem of evil, philosophers often do not contemplate what a loving God would be like. This book has shown that many different ways exist to understand and define love. The problem of evil will be significantly affected depending on how love, in general, and God's all-encompassing love in particular, is understood.

While this book draws from important ideas pertaining to love, it does not aim to be comprehensive. Most essays are aimed at specialists and address only a sliver of the possible concerns the author might address. Aimed at researchers and advanced students in moral and social philosophy, the volume offers a rich exploration of the philosophy of love across time. I suspect that specialists will turn to one or two specific chapters in this book when addressing their own research.

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