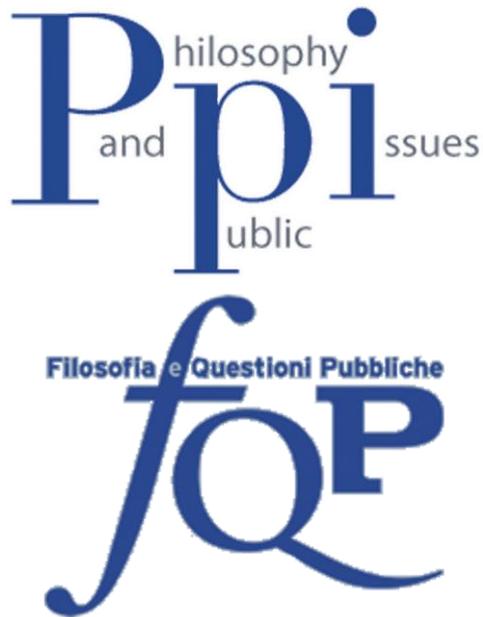


SYMPOSIUM
ENHANCING LOVE?



THE NON-INDIVIDUALISTIC AND SOCIAL
DIMENSION OF LOVE DRUGS

BY

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The Non-Individualistic and Social Dimensions of Love Drugs

Lotte Spreuwenberg and Katrien Schaubroeck

In *Love Drugs: The Chemical Future of Relationships* Brian D. Earp and Julian Savulescu discuss the moral permissibility of the medicalization of love through love drugs or anti-love drugs. They argue that love drugs may help ordinary couples work through relationship difficulties and strengthen their connection and that it may help others sever an emotional connection during a breakup. Earp and Savulescu build a case for conducting research into love drugs and explore their ethical implications for individuals and society. We sympathize with the authors' ambition to "[break out] of the individual-centered, disease-focused model of modern medicine" (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 6) and their efforts to look at the effects of drug-based interventions on romantic partnerships. We also appreciate them posing questions such as "how can we overhaul scientific research norms to take relationships more fully into account?" (*ibid.*, 15). However, we think Earp and Savulescu overlook certain interpersonal and social dynamics when they evaluate the moral permissibility of drugs for *interpersonal goals*, by measuring enhancement in terms of *individual happiness*. When investigating the moral permissibility of love drugs we believe it is important to

examine the sophisticated ways in which social norms filter into love relationships and, more specifically, into the interaction that plays out between two people. Our preferred understanding of love as a practice (section 2) invites such a broad evaluative examination of social and interpersonal dynamics (section 3). These positive suggestions are born out of critical questions about how the authors conceive of love (section 1) and enhancement (section 4).

I

Love as a psychological condition

Earp and Savulescu state that they do not want to give a single definition of ‘love’, because they don’t want their analysis of particular cases to depend on which theory of love you happen to agree with (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 19). We agree that it would be impossible to give a definition of what love is. We also agree that love has a dual nature as both a biological and psychosocial phenomenon. But we want to add that also the concept ‘love’ has a dual nature: it combines features of descriptive and evaluative notions. Since this aspect of the use of the term ‘love’ is not discussed in the book, a methodological question remains unaddressed: do the authors work with a descriptive understanding of love (what people think love is) or with a normative conception of love (how we should think about love)? As we will go on to explain, Earp and Savulescu seem to switch between these two approaches, despite their intention to stay out of normative debates on what love should be.

In the beginning of the book the authors talk about correspondence with a woman named Sofia. Sofia is requesting an anti-love drug, to get rid of the attachment bond between her and her oppressive and misogynistic partner: “Sofia knew she needed

to get out of the relationship but her heart kept saying no” (*ibid.*, 9). Those who are saying that Sofia could not have experienced real love (because she was in an oppressive relationship) adhere to a normative definition of love: the concept should be reserved for relationships that are essentially positive, good or healthy. Earp and Savulescu state they have no problem with “people who want to use ‘love’ in this restricted way” (*ibid.*, 10), but argue that they will not adhere to such a normative stance because of the risks: “Once we start defining for other people what love is, even overriding their personal judgments, we can slip into a narrowminded and paternalistic way of thinking that discounts their lived experiences” (*ibid.*). Normative theories run the risk of being immoral, so they argue, referring to how normative theories of love in the past (and in many places still today) have rendered love between same-sex partners a mistake on the basis of the idea that *real* love could only occur between a man and a woman. The authors’ point is that normative definitions of love often favour the group in power, and their perspective is not always justified (*ibid.*). Naturally such a normative stance of ‘healthy’ love would have consequences for the ‘medicalization’ of love. Earp and Savulescu therefore opt for what they call a “more neutral or descriptive route, giving wide berth to individuals to feel and conceive of love in their own way” (*ibid.*, 11). When they are talking about “people’s romantic experiences”, they will let “individuals who claim to be in love [...] speak for themselves [...]” (*ibid.*). Though we appreciate their willingness to include a wide range of experiences of love in their view, these statements of Earp and Savulescu actually end up with a narrow understanding of love as an individualistic feeling (note that the word ‘individual’ is used twice). Their choice to be democratic about what counts as love, seems neutral, but inevitably embodies a normative judgment, like all choices do. Namely the judgment that one should think of love as the name for a psychological condition that an individual has self-knowledge of.

But it is not obvious that love is best thought of as a psychological condition. It is not even obvious that this is how the word is understood in folk psychology. In fact, there is evidence that people understand the term to be a so-called dual character concept: a concept that encodes not only a descriptive dimension but also an independent normative dimension for categorization (Reuter 2019). Other paradigmatic dual character concepts are ‘scientist’, ‘teacher’, ‘art’. When applying such concepts to a certain instance, language users will not only check whether certain descriptive features are instantiated (e.g. having the right education, profession, institutional recognition), but also whether an implied ideal is met (e.g. being passionate about truth, being able to convey a passion for knowledge, expressing a deep truth about life...). It makes sense to say ‘technically speaking he is not a scientist, but in another sense he is a real scientist’, whereas it borders to nonsense to say ‘technically speaking he is not a bus driver, but in another sense he is a real bus driver’. The concept of ‘love’ (as opposed to the concept of ‘lust’) is treated in the same way as ‘scientist’ rather than ‘bus driver’, several studies have pointed out (see f.e. Phillips 2011).

In order to avoid methodological confusion, it is important that philosophers are aware of this double nature of the concept, and that they *distinguish* between a descriptive and an evaluative way of speaking (even if it is true that these dimensions cannot be separated, in the sense that every use of the term ‘love’ is both factual and evaluative). When the authors say that when someone is unable to have sex or too depressed to care about the feelings of the other person, there is no longer love (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 60), are they using ‘love’ in a descriptive or an evaluative sense? In the Opbroek study Earp and Savulescu refer to, users of antidepressants self-report significant blunting of emotions, and less ability to care about the feelings of others. But the survey did not ask about their ability to love. So the statement that the use of

antidepressants eliminates love is an inference made by the authors, not a factual observation. What if someone would insist that he still loves his child or partner, but is too depressed to show it? What if bystanders disagree about whether they would want to ascribe love to a depressed father? Arguably some will think it is harsh to deny the depressed father the capacity to love. Others will think it is hypocritical to console the child that his father still loves him while there is no evidence of it. Do we as philosophers then not need a criterion to distinguish the uses that are misled from those that are apt? (f.e. Naar 2013 offers this extra argument when he defends a dispositional view of love). The inference that there is no love when there is no loving behaviour, needs an argument. And without argument the inference relies on an implicit normative understanding of what love is.

Inversely, the statement that displaying loving behaviour (like wanting sex, sharing emotions) is sufficient to conclude that there is love, calls for an argument as well. The authors believe that if a drug makes you want sex, share emotions or makes you want to behave in certain ways, then this is enough to say that you love. Their argument is that if you started feeling and acting more lovingly toward your partner after drug-free therapy, no one would accuse you of being inauthentic. By analogy, if the limited use of a drug in a therapeutic setting also helped improve your relationship, it is hard to see why a different judgment should apply (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 97). But here is a counterargument to the idea that drug induced loving behaviour should be seen as authentic. We know that alcohol can be of great help in setting off romances. But not all alcohol induced romantic moves are alike. Suppose someone at a bar is flirting with you while being drunk. At this moment they have started to feel and act more lovingly towards you. One could argue that the drug (alcohol) has helped to reveal the flirter's authentic love. But their momentaneous lovely behaviour is not enough to prove this. We should zoom out. Is the

supposedly authentic love of the flirter reliable? Is the flirter really focusing on you or are you just another passer-by on which the flirter can focus their feelings and desires? And how do the two of you relate to each other? What is socially expected of the both of you in this moment? How do the social groups to which you belong relate to each other?

The two examples of the depressed father and the drunk flirter show that the application of the concept 'love' is never neutral or purely descriptive. The two examples show, moreover, that the applicability of the concept is not a one man's decision. Perhaps it is not up to the father alone to decide whether he still loves his child. Perhaps the child should have a say too. Perhaps the drunk flirter's self-understanding as loving someone sincerely is not reliable. Perhaps in interaction with the beneficiary of their behaviour or with bystanders and close friends, doubts can arise about the motives for the loving acts (does he or she feel guilty, does he or she need attention, etc...). These social aspects in the correct use of concepts is something that Earp and Savulescu draw attention to themselves when they talk about the *effectiveness* of a drug. Drug-effectiveness cannot be decided, they repeat throughout the book, merely by asking the drugtaking individual how he or she feels (*ibid.*, 2; 6; 15; 65). They defend that medicine research should study the effects of drugs on relationship quality as crucial determinants of the effectiveness of a drug. They even suggest to consider the effects of drugs on friendship and other relationships as the focal point or the intended outcome, and not the side effect (*ibid.*, 2; 70). They want improvement of people's lives along a relation axis to be the goal of drug-based interventions (*ibid.*, 2). So they bring relationality into the notion of a patient's flourishing, and hence into the notion of a medicine's effectiveness. It is all the more remarkable that they do not bring that social dimension into their notion of love. When one wants to know whether X loves Y, it is important but not enough to ask X.

Nor does it suffice to observe (the absence of) X's behaviour. One needs to pay attention to the interactions between X and Y, as well as to the social norms that guide that interaction.

The authors explain that they take the biological dimension of love as their focus since interventions in the psychosocial dimension of love get much more attention (*ibid.*, 59). But it is a mistake to think that we can set aside social influences when we talk about love, even if we talk about love as a biological phenomenon. Social norms always filter into the correctness conditions of the use of the term 'love'. Merely identifying someone as 'in love' already activates evaluative assessment patterns, as we explained with reference to the notion of dual character concepts, and these evaluative assessment patterns arguably are socially embedded and historically contingent as we will illustrate in section 3.

II

Love as a practice

Treating love as a practice rather than a psychological condition makes a difference to how we evaluate instances of love (as enhanced, or diminished). Earp and Savulescu might have recognized 'love' as a practice, when they quote from Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*. With Fromm they say: love is "a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise. If love were only a feeling, there would be no basis for the promise to love each other forever" (Earp and Savulescu 2020, iii and 188). Earp and Savulescu agree that there is a hidden danger in the view that love is something that just happens to you rather than something for which you must take personal responsibility, and work on, and try to improve. They ask: "What if to love is to practice an art, as Fromm argued, which requires conscious effort and discipline, as well as knowledge and

therefore understanding?” (*ibid.*, 188). While this is something we might be able to agree on, the subsequent question raised by Earp and Savulescu is where we part ways. They ask: “What if knowing how love works, in other words, right down to the chemicals between us, could help us be better at being in love?” (*ibid.*). Certainly, knowledge can support love. And love needs effort and work without a doubt. But all depends of course on what is meant with ‘knowledge’ and ‘work’. Earp and Savulescu seem to think that theoretical knowledge of the biological underpinnings, and subsequently efforts to tinker with this biology, counts as the relevant kind of knowledge and work. We disagree, and we are not sure Fromm would agree either. When he calls love ‘a decision, not just a strong feeling’, he probably wasn’t thinking of a decision to take a love pill, because that decision could betray precisely the view he opposes: that love is a feeling that is not under the agent’s control.

It is telling that Earp and Savulescu consider mental health problems like depression and PTSD to constitute a relevant comparison class for love. Depression and PTSD require theoretical knowledge about hormones and chemicals that allow to work on the neurological conditions. But the kind of knowledge and work involved in love are of a different kind. While depression is clearly a psychological state, it makes sense to think of love as much more than a psychological state. It makes sense to say that one can get better at loving someone, whereas there is no guiding ideal of what it means to be depressed. We think that love should rather be understood as a practice rather than a psychological condition, namely a practice of self-transcendence, or opening up to anything that is outside us. Such a concept of love is particularly helpful since it enables us to look past the problems posed in the previous section. On the one hand it makes it possible to conceive of love as something else than an individualistic psychological state, by incorporating an outward focus in its very description. A

practice of opening up to anything that is outside you is non-individualistic per definition: it transcends your individual being. This, in turn, makes it possible to discuss the social dimension to which we come back in the third section. On the other hand it responds to the discontent with the behaviourist view of love: love is not just displaying loving behaviour but rather engaging in the specific practice of opening up to others. Both the depressed father and the drunk flirter could engage in it or not. Whether they do, depends on how we understand the process of opening up.

A particular and useful way to develop a concept of love as a practice of opening up can be adopted from Iris Murdoch. For Murdoch, loving consists in looking outside oneself, focusing our attention to the particular and the unique. She holds that to love is to redirect our attention outside ourselves, to learn to perceive the truth about the world and to see what there is outside one (Murdoch 1997). Constantly attending to our individual needs, desires and thoughts alters our perspective on what the world is actually like and blinds us to the goods around us. Murdoch states that “in the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego” (Murdoch 1971, 51) and love, as focused attention, is steering away from the ego. We are often so much focused on ourselves, our own world of needs, that we are blind for the things and people around us.

Focusing on the particular and unique outside us helps us to transcend our individual selves. Love as a practice of opening up prevents us from falling prey to the dangers of the ego. bell hooks has argued that if we all came to the agreement that ‘love’ is a verb rather than a noun, then we would all be happier (hooks 2001, 4). Lotte Spreeuwenberg (2021) argues that this ‘verb’ should consist in a practice of attending to one another. Engaging in such a practice would keep us from being blind to the reality that the people around us have to offer. We would be better lovers, if we would think of loving as a kind of ‘unselfing’ (Murdoch 1971, 82).

Loving in this sense is trying to see the particular and unique beyond the limits of our own projections. When we do not engage in an outward focused practice, we run the risk of making up fantasies in our minds.

Take the example of Sofia requesting an anti-lovedrug (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 9). The example in the book tells us nothing about the husband besides that he is oppressive and misogynistic. Suppose his name is Donald and that he is either not aware that he is oppressive and misogynistic or convinced that this is a good thing. In our normative understanding of love we do not want to say that Donald loves Sofia. Donald is not focusing his attention on Sofia and her needs and desires. He might not even be focusing his attention on her experiences or how he comes across. By being blind for Sofia and her needs and experiences, he is able to fuel his own ego with reasons to justify his oppressive and misogynistic behaviour. Donald is living a self-serving fantasy and this fantasy doesn't do Sofia any good.

Breaking free from the self-serving fantasies of others is particularly valuable because this is a recurring theme in fighting for equality: love as a practice urges its addressees to attend to the reality of a certain individual or group, instead of projecting fantasies onto them, fueled by the blindness and egos of an oppressive group or society (Spreeuwenberg 2021). Murdoch is trying to tell us that it is not (good) love that is blind, but our ego. Love is meaningful to us when we are able to steer away from the ego and perceive the particularity and uniqueness of a person. Love is meaningful to us when it is outward-focused and transcends our individual selves. Love should be a non-individualistic practice, focusing us on the particular and unique outside ourselves, keeping us away from our moral enemy. Love should be a practice of self-transcendence, of opening up.

Earp and Savulescu seem to lean towards a behaviouristic concept of love: when someone is unable to have sex or to care about the feelings of the other person, there is no longer love (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 60). They also argue that if a drug makes you want sex, share emotions, makes you want to behave in certain ways, then this is enough to say that you love authentically (*ibid.*, 97). But love as a practice is love that can happen in the inner life: it is not something that should be measured by sex, actions or even feelings. Looking, attending and focusing one's attention all takes place in the inner life. Hence, for Murdoch, we can love someone from afar, we can love someone without them knowing and we can even love the dead. Some have characterized Murdoch's concept of love as a way of looking, or a vision (Jollimore 2011). That is certainly compatible with what she says. But we talk about love as a practice rather than a vision because we prefer to emphasize the active aspect that risks to be overlooked in the perception-metaphor. It does require effort to open up and to look at the world in a loving way. Or as Murdoch says: "Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real" (Murdoch 1997, 215).

Another difference with the behaviouristic concept of love is that engaging in loving attention is furthermore an *endless* task. This practice of self-transcendence is in itself characterized as a movement towards moral progress: Murdoch's concept of loving attention is a concept of progression (Murdoch 1971, 23). Murdoch argues that moral tasks are characteristically endless, not only because, within a concept, our efforts are imperfect, but also because as we move, really look and open up, our concepts themselves are changing (*ibid.*, 27). Love is getting to know an individual and this is not something that can easily be fixed by merely looking at the 'chemicals between us'. We should not look at love as the sole expression of love in forms of sex and feelings. Engaging in loving attention, focusing on the particular and unique

beyond our ego, is engaging in moral activity. It is not the facts, the outer activity or mental concepts that can be analysed that matter morally. It is the inner activity, the effort of directing our attention on individuals, of obedience to reality outside us as an exercise of love. By looking outside ourselves we are escaping our moral enemy. Love as a practice of self-transcendence is in itself characterized as a movement towards moral progress.

III

Love as an interpersonal and social practice

We suspect that Earp and Savulescu underestimate the sophisticated ways in which social norms filter into love relationships and into the interaction that plays out between two people. One explanation for this oversight might be that Earp and Savulescu focus on love as a psychological condition, rather than a practice or an activity that takes place in a social arena between at least two people.

The recognition that society has an influence on what we think love is (or should be) is in itself fairly uncontroversial. More contested, but argued by many love-scholars, is that the very idea that there is something like ‘romantic love’ is a construction. Critics of modernity, capitalism, and patriarchy (f.e. Illouz 2013) but also philosophers of emotion (f.e. Solomon 1988) have argued that the notion of romantic love is ‘an invention’, or the product of specific social modern institutions and practices. Earp and Savulescu object and assure us that romantic love is *not* a western invention (2020, 19). Evolution selected for the mechanisms of lust, attraction and bonding that underpin the social practice of romantic love, and thus it has been around as long as *homo sapiens* exists. But when they list three features of the contemporary western conception of love (*ibid.*, 20), they come very close to the characterization of what

Solomon calls Romantic Love as invented during modernity. For example the feature of ‘being made for one another’ cannot have been a feature of the social expression of lust, attraction and bonding during the Middle Ages, where marriages were economic transactions and there was no room to explore individuality and autonomy in the same way as during modernity. Whether one wants to call love in the Middle Ages romantic love or find that anachronistic, might seem a verbal dispute. But the point is that not paying close attention to the historical background of romantic love as we know it, is not without risk. Because it leads to a plea for love drugs without a critical analysis and rethinking of the framework within which the drugs are created, distributed and used. And this is not without risk, as we will show in this section.

In chapter 11 Earp and Savulescu do realize the difficulty of having to calibrate between individual happiness and social progress. They eloquently describe the concerns, and make an interesting parallel between aesthetic surgery and love drugs. But we think they underestimate the message that is built into their defence of the distribution and use of love drugs: this message is one of implicit reinforcement of established norms. They seem to think that it is possible to fight at two fronts: to make individuals happy by helping them to conform to social norms and to fight against the oppressing social norms that stand in the way of this individual happiness. They argue, for example, that surgeons could perform cosmetic surgery, while actively fighting the beauty norms such that they would no longer be asked to perform these operations (*ibid.*, 169). This strikes us as naive. More importantly, there is a disanalogy between cosmetic surgery and love drugs: the latter are not common practice yet. While cosmetic surgery due to unrealistic beauty standards will not go away anytime soon, MDMA-assisted couple therapy is not widely adopted yet. The authors think that society is on a fast track to a drug revolution, and that substances will be used more and more to help people

improve their lives (*ibid.*, 6). But should we hasten this process? Should we, as philosophers and as citizens, legitimize the use of love drugs well knowing the non-ideal societies in which they will be used?

Love relationships always take place in a particular society with a particular history, imbued by particular norms and expectations. Hence social surroundings affect the decision to take love drugs. In Chapter 11 the authors pay explicit attention to this complicating factor. They refer for example to feminist authors like Julie Bindel who refuse to have romantic relationships with men and call for all feminists to embrace lesbianism as a matter of political necessity and philosophical purity (*ibid.*, 166), similar to what Marilyn Frye writes about separatism (Frye 1983, 95-108). Earp and Savulescu use this example to show that it would be problematic if we were to grant these women access to HCT (high-tech conversion therapy) to modify their sexual orientation as a way of conforming their first-order desires to their higher-order preferences while sexual minorities, some of whom might sincerely wish to change their own sexual orientation for principled moral, political, or philosophical reasons, would not be permitted to do so. But the analogy seems to miss the point. Bindel did not need a drug. The whole point would be lost if their plea was read as a plea to ‘trick’ yourself into lesbian relationships although your heart went out to a man. The plea was uttered on the assumption that there are good reasons for women to allow themselves to feel a dislike of men. These reasons were supposed to do the work, which would be undermined by taking a love pill.

We think that the plea of these feminists should interest Earp and Savulescu for other reasons. Setting aside the radicality of their proposal, Bindel, Frye and others do convey a more broadly acceptable, minimal message which is that heterosexual relationships are burdened, that men and women in our society still

need to learn how to love one another from human being to human being – stripped down from power relationships. Earp and Savulescu might concede the broader point about power and individual suffering, but by discussing it in an isolated chapter that furthermore largely neglects power dynamics *within* love relationships, they do not consider the implications on some of their statements about the value of love drugs and the moral permissibility of taking them.

It would have been interesting for example to bring in ruling gender norms and typical dynamics in a forty-something heterosexual couple (with children) when discussing the example of Stella & Mario. It is said that “[t]hey are suffering a breakdown of their pair bond, part of the attachment system (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 101). As this is a fictional example, the authors can stipulate that the problem is the breakdown of their pair bond. But how would we know in real life that this is the cause of trouble? Given that social norms somehow always play a role in how interpersonal relationships develop it is very plausible that problems experienced by a heterosexual couple resonate features of patriarchal surroundings.

The movie-trilogy *Before Sunrise*, *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight* (Richard Linklater, Julie Delpy, Ethan Hawke) might serve as a useful alternative example. Although equally fictional as the example of Stella and Mario, this example is more detailed and less tailor-made, bringing it closer to real life. The trilogy is about an American man Jesse and a French woman Céline who meet on a transeuropean train when they are both in their twenties. They have a one-night stand, and then lose track of each other. They see each other again after nine years and it becomes clear both of them have not been happy in their love lives, partly because of their memory of this one-night stand. It turns out they still connect in the same spontaneous, intimate way as nine years before. They are

made for each other, the movie seems to suggest. In the third movie, again nine years later, the viewer finds out Jesse and Céline indeed got married and have six-year-old twin girls. But things are not well. We see them on their last day of a family holiday in Greece, where Jesse enjoyed a writer's retreat while Céline took care of the twins. We see a scene where Jesse discusses ideas for his next book with some male friends, idling on the beach, while Céline and the other wives are inside preparing dinner. Friends offer to babysit the twins for their last night in Greece, and the couple sets out for a long walk during which they fall easily into the pattern of deep and entertaining conversations, their trademark as a couple. But the atmosphere changes dramatically after some small bouts of irritation at what the other says. At one point Céline complains she is exhausted from taking care of the twins, the household and that she misses playing the guitar. Jesse does not see how he is responsible and says that he does not keep her from doing what she wants. Complaints and accusations go back and forth, and reach a particularly low point when Jesse says: "If you took one eighth of the energy that you spend on bitching, whining and worrying... If you put that energy into playing scales, you would be like fucking Django Reinhardt." Céline concludes the fight: "You know what is going on here? It's simple. I don't think I love you anymore." Jesse does not accept that conclusion and tries to win her back, by using his charm. This is how the movie goes. Now imagine that Jesse suggested that Céline would take a love pill. That would have been outrageous. Even if he suggested that this love pill would be accompanied by couple therapy, it would still be outrageous because it would suggest that the cause of the fading love is biological. Whereas the movie gives plenty of reasons to think that the cause is social.

Earp and Savulescu do not morally evaluate whether *suggesting* that someone takes a love drug is immoral. So they could agree that indeed it would be totally inconsiderate of Jesse to suggest that

Céline takes a love pill. Furthermore, the authors rule out all involuntary use of love drugs and anti-love drugs (*ibid.*, 151); Céline would never have to take the love pill if she did not want to. But such a focus on autonomy relies on a fantasy of autonomy that many do not experience. Autonomy is not a moral good that is equally available for every person in real life. Choices are always made in a social context. A wife might very well choose autonomously to take drugs, without her husband asking her to. But does she have valuable alternatives? Are there exit options? Could she be financially independent? Could she choose to take up another role in the relationship?

While autonomy is equally available in theory, in law, on paper, there is still an unequal division of moral-cum-social goods. When we zoom in on gender for example, our society still carries features of patriarchy. Kate Manne considers in *Down Girl. The Logic of Misogyny* (Manne 2017) the concept of a ‘human giver’: someone who is not privileged in most if not all major respects (like white heterosexual cis men are). The human giver, in the form of a woman for example, is held to owe many if not most of her distinctively human capacities to a suitable boy or man, ideally, and his children, as applicable. A giver is then obligated to offer love, sex, attention, affection, and admiration, as well as other forms of emotional, social, reproductive, and caregiving labor, in accordance with social norms that govern and structure the relevant roles and relations (Manne 2017, 301). This role of human giver furthermore maintains itself: “Trying to draw attention to it is illicit by the lights of the phenomenon itself, since [givers] are supposed to minister to others, rather than solicit moral attention and concern on their own behalf” (*ibid.*, 281-282). Misogyny consequently is the hostile reaction women get when they try to step outside the role of human giver. Women are considered ‘bitchy’, ‘whiny’, ‘nasty’, ‘shrill’ or ungrateful should they state that they no longer want to prepare dinner while their husband is idling

on the beach. If Jesse were to suggest to Céline that she took medicines without self-critically examining the reasons for her unhappiness in the relationship, he would just reinforce the patriarchal structures that allow him to flourish but are at the roots of her dismay.

Earp and Savulescu state an example of Susan and Will in *Elle* magazine, which supposedly shows the positive effects of the both of them taking antidepressants:

Before they got on antidepressants, Susan's tendency to rail at length (about whatever happened to be irking her) exacerbated Will's "extremely self-critical" tendencies: "whereas in her depression she'd tend to lash out, in mine I'd tend to sink inward," he says. "We were heading down a bad path." Now, though, they agree their marriage is much better balanced. Susan's rough edges have "softened," as Will puts it, and with this – plus the boost medication has given his own confidence – he's become more forthcoming: They're able to work together to solve problems. "We really are each other's best partners," Will says. "To call us soul mates I think would be accurate" (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 67)

In the ideal world – without power relations – this could work out for both Will and Susan and this would be a good thing. But seeing this example in the light of the questions and social mechanisms above, the situation of Susan and Will might be problematic (assuming this is a straight couple of two cis people). Do drugs reinforce oppression here? Does Susan take antidepressants to be 'a good wife', while being a good wife in patriarchal society is understood to be a 'human giver'? Maybe Susan has good reasons to 'rail at length', which means that 'softening' these tendencies enforces the social unequal dynamic

between Susan and Will. Will does not need to force the drug on Susan to create a problematic situation. Even if Susan ‘voluntarily’ chooses to take the drug, this may have been prompted by either Susan wanting to live up to the expectations of a good (‘non-hysterical’) wife, or not wanting or being able to deal with the burden of the image of an angry, aggressive, shrill killjoy and the hostility that often comes with such an image (Ahmed 2016; Manne 2017; West 2016).

A plea to take power dynamics within relationships into consideration would of course not only benefit women or marginalized groups. In a society where men are trained to be non-emotional ‘strong men’ and are socially punished for being insecure or ‘extremely self-critical’ (e.g. Will), one could turn to medicalization of love, but maybe we should leave room for Will and his social environment to investigate Will’s reasons for this tendency: maybe both Will and society need to evaluate the situation in function of individual, moral and social progress.

Taking into account the social and historical background against which romantic love is enacted, there is a real question about how we can choose to take love drugs in a justified, lucid way. We are therefore puzzled about the way in which Earp and Savulescu set aside the criticism of high-tech conversion therapy (HCT) by Delmas & Aas in Chapter 11. Delmas and Aas argue that we should prevent HCT from coming into existence, because of power dynamics between minorities and majorities. Since HCT doesn’t exist yet (but might become real in the future) Earp and Savulescu concentrate on low-tech drugs that do exist. Low-tech drugs are not successful in really changing a sexual orientation, instead they lower libido. But of course power dynamics play a role here too. So we wonder why the arguments by Delmas and Aas do not apply: shouldn’t we be equally concerned about the oppression of minorities? The authors argue that love-altering drugs are already

available, and that arguing against their existence is futile (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 149). But that reasoning seems flawed. By analogy: surely it still makes sense to argue against the use of f.e. chemical weapons, even though they already exist. There is still a lot one can do to prevent the use of a drug that exists. And it might be the responsibility of ethicists to contribute to this prevention.

IV

Individual happiness versus moral and social progression

If you see love as a moral endeavour and as a socially situated practice, you end up with other evaluative criteria for improvement or enhancement. Because Earp and Savulescu approach love as a psychological condition, they can measure its enhancement (or the enhancement constituted by its disappearance) in individualistic terms. As their emphasis on autonomy underlines, they think that it is up to the subject to decide what will count as enhancement. We do think that we should offer individuals a more complex and dynamic sense of what enhanced love might amount to.

For one thing, our Murdochian approach of love shows that love is about more than happiness. It is about what is meaningful to you. Loving is opening up for progress, to not get stuck with the individualistic desires, needs and fantasies of the ego. Love therefore is not necessarily about what makes you happy. Perhaps when Earp and Savulescu substitute flourishing for happiness, they intend to resonate with this broader notion of meaningfulness. As they do not give an extended description of what flourishing amounts to, it is interesting to take a closer look at the examples they give. How does flourishing come in when they describe the difficult case of homosexual love in orthodox communities in

Israel? Earp and Savulescu show awareness of the social pressures that can affect people's ideas about what counts as proper love. But they seem to accept that repressing homosexual love or frowned upon love or improper love may be the right thing to do after all. We think that is because they use as an evaluative criterion the short term goal of individual happiness. The reason in favour of taking love drugs is that the individual will be happier. But would the authors go further and say that one can *flourish* when oppressing such important parts of one's identity? We think not: while one might be happy one is not truly flourishing.

Secondly, our approach of love is inherently non-individualistic and focuses a lover's perspective per definition on what transcends their personal wellbeing. It focuses their perspective for example on what reality demands of them. To use the authors' terminology of flourishing: we want to point out that it can be conducive to flourishing when people refuse to choose for their personal happiness and rather give their life to reform societies. The point is not that we should frown upon people who do not think this will make them flourish and who choose for their individual happiness. But the point is that flourishing *allows* for such a broad understanding. And that flourishing in any case requires attention to moral duties, regardless of how wide the scope one can handle. Think of the responsibilities that an unhappy spouse has to their children. Earp and Savulescu acknowledge these responsibilities, and even use it as a reason in favour of the use of love drugs as a way to solve what they call "the dilemma of gray relationships" (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 74). But this is difficult to square with their adoption of the results of a study in *Freakonomics* (Levitt and Dubner 2014), where it becomes clear that Earp and Savulescu use a much more individual and amoral sense of happiness. Earp and Savulescu state their advice: when we are contemplating a big decision and have considered every scenario a million times, we should just go for it and make the change (whether it's taking a

relationship-enhancing drug or ending a long-term relationship) (*ibid.*, 50). The advice is based on a study by Steven Levitt in which participants who took life-changing decisions were, 6 months later, on average much happier than the preservers, the people who did not make the decision and chose to leave their life as it was. Individual happiness or relief or absence of doubt is taken to be the criterion of flourishing. But this individualistic understanding of flourishing is not transferable to the context of family decisions. It is misleading to use this experiment in the context of love-decisions. ‘What will make me happy in six months time’ is certainly an important factor in contemplating whether one should break up or not, but one should consider other factors as well. There are children and other people to be considered, as well as a longer time frame. Making oneself happy (in six months) is not necessarily always the right thing to do.

We don’t object to the use of love drugs, but we think more discussion is needed on the conditions in which the use is justified. For now we have explained why it will not do to measure enhancement in 1) individualistic terms of 2) happiness. By way of constructive suggestion we further propose to supplement the plea for love drugs with the following condition: could the use of love drugs in this case be understood as facilitating the process of opening up to progression?

We do not offer an objective account of what qualifies as progression. As explained in section 2 whether someone makes progress is not always verifiable or visible from the outside. So progression remains a personal process that, however, pushes a person beyond the ego and the self-centered concerns. Fear is an example of such a self-centered concern, that stands in the way of progression. Earp and Savulescu acknowledge the debilitating influence of fear in love decisions, when they write: “Staying in a relationship out of fear - fear of self-knowledge, fear of change,

fear of disappointing your partner, fear of disapproval from society – is rarely a good long-term strategy” (*ibid.*, 50). We are probably more pessimistic (or realistic?) than them about the chance, in current societies, that people would not be motivated by fear in love decisions. We think that a lot more effort should go into opening up society for acceptance, and even endorsement of a lot more love formations than is currently the case. Earp and Savulescu are not opposed to this social reform, but they think that even then not all obstacles will be overcome. They write: “although political solutions may often be better than medicalization for protecting vulnerable people’s health and well-being, it does not follow that interventions should never be medical. For even in the best of circumstances some people will need the help of medicine in addition to political change, or to cope with such change. And *when that is the case*, the medicine should be available” (Earp and Savulescu 2020, 185, italics added, similar remark on page 12). The problem is not only that we have not achieved the best of circumstances yet (and so how could we decide responsibly in favour of the medicine?), but also that using love drugs might slow down the process because it might disguise the truth. So our worry does not go back on the fallacious argument that the use of drugs would be unnatural, but our worry is that the choice to tinker with the biological dimension of love hinders moral progress, because it deprives us both of insights in our personal development (for more on the connection between falling out of love and personal growth, see Lopez-Cantero and Archer, 2020) and of an opportunity to protest social norms.

We agree with the authors that love should not be seen as a given. Love needs work. We wanted to draw attention to the work that love needs by calling love a practice of self-transcendence. Our understanding of love as progression could also offer advice to Sofia, the woman who appears early in the book and in our article, and who wants to *stop* loving her abusive partner. Love as a practice

of self-transcendence is in itself characterized as a movement towards moral progress. To focus our attention outside ourselves is an endless moral task (Murdoch 1971, 23). By focusing less on their biological (real) desires and needs, and focusing more on the world outside, people can create room for individual, moral and social growth. Sofia for example would make progress if she recognized the social harmful dynamic that is in place. If an anti-love drug is able to help her do this, this could be an argument for its moral permissibility. However, Sofia should also be able to expand her horizon regarding possible other romantic loves. In this sense an anti-love drug would hold her back in her individual progression. Hence the outcome of our advice to Sofia is not straightforward. Earp and Savulescu appreciate the difficult calibration between individual suffering and unjust social pressures in Chapter 11 and argue that ‘in the meantime’ we could provide people with a drug to relieve them of suffering. Will there ever be progression when we cover up uncomfortable symptoms of problematic standards? We have argued that by underplaying the social dimension of love – specifically by neglecting the power dynamics within relationships – the message of *Love Drugs. The Chemical Future of Relationships* is one of implicit reinforcement of established norms. Only when we have gained insight in the social conditions of our individual predicament, can we do the balancing act of calibrating between individual happiness and individual, moral and social progression.

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