

Sarah LaChance Adams, Christopher M. Davidson, and Caroline R. Lundquist (editors)  
*New Philosophies of Sex and Love: Thinking through Desire*  
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*Reviewed by Natasha McKeever, 2018*

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The editors of *New Philosophies of Sex and Love: Thinking through Desire* write in their introduction that "sex and love are inherently risky. Among their hazards is the productive undermining of our most cherished certainties." Continuing, they "hope this anthology will be more provocative than conciliatory" (4). They have achieved this aim with a collection of twelve articles that make the reader question some of their most basic assumptions about sex and love. Topics vary from *eros* in Greek literature and philosophy (Louis A. Ruprecht Jr.) to the failed medicalization of female sexuality (Rebecca Kukla). Further, an impressive range of style and methodology is used to convey ideas. Philosophers discussed include Plato, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Weber, and some of the articles use artistic and/or experimental methods to convey ideas, with several of the chapters using personal experiences to good effect. The philosophies of sex and love in this anthology do, indeed, feel "new."

The book is split into five sections. Part I, "Desire's Dissonance," provides an introduction and overview by the editors, where they note that the approach of the authors in the volume is to "dwell in dissonance," for this can help us to "become conscious of, and begin to explore the deep significance of our intuitions and our pre-reflective experience in all their chaotic dynamism" (3). The editors note that they are "particularly interested in the way that marginalized experiences may expand, lend nuance to, or even undermine our previous understanding of the phenomena in question" (4). This certainly comes through in the book: the writers come from a wide range of backgrounds, and they do not shy away from discussing unusual topics or marginalized groups of people.

Part II, "Defining Desire," has four chapters, each exploring the nature of love and relationships from different angles. The book starts early in the history of the philosophy of love with chapter 2, "Finding and Then Losing Your Way: Eros and the Other in Greek Literature and Philosophy," by Louis A. Ruprecht Jr., which explores ancient Greek ideas about *eros*. Ruprecht argues that *eros* exists in the space between self and other, for you can only desire something you do not have. However, once you do possess what you want, you want to have it forever, and thus *eros* "is the desire of a finite being for infinity" (27), a desire that has tormented, but also inspired, and continues to do both.

In chapter 3, "Love, and a Romantic Living Room: Remarks for an Inquiry on Ordinary Love Today," Chiara Piazzesi asks us to question what kind of a definition of love is possible, and what we want from one. She argues that a definition of love ought not to miss "the multidimensionality of the collective and individual production of meaning as a perceptive,

emotional, and discursive performance in space and time" (50). Thus, just as a minimal description of a living room that focused only on its features as a room would fail to capture the *meaning* of a living room, of how a living room is *experienced*, so too, a minimal description of love as an emotion, for example, would miss many important features of the *love experience*.

In chapter 4, "Love at the Limit of Phenomenology (à la Sartre and Marion)," Yong Dou (Michael) Kim takes the question of what love is in a different direction, asking, "what makes love possible?" Kim argues that love is not "a thing" but rather, using Marion's concept of "crossing," that love appears "in the persistent maintenance of crossing of two" (75). The lovers are changed through love, and love thus "insists that a new existence be affirmed" (77). Although love "appears as exuberance," Kim reminds us that it "also appears in a long labor easily lost, whose fragility and contingency are easily forgotten by the strength of its insistence" (77), a message that will no doubt resonate with many readers.

Chapter 5, "Monogamism and Polyamorism: A Weberian Analysis," moves us from looking at what love *is* to considering "the *meaning* of relationships." This clearly written chapter outlines the different worldviews associated with monogamism and polyamorism. In doing so, Erik Jansson Boström brings to light the norms and ideals associated with monogamy as well as polyamory, thus showing that the difference between them is not just quantitative, but qualitative as well: not just about how many sexual partners one has, but also about what makes a good relationship. Boström does not try to persuade the reader that one is better, but instead shows that both kinds of relationship have benefits, and which one is preferred will depend on one's own worldview.

Part III, "Sex, Love, and Agency," has three chapters covering a diverse range of topics. In chapter 6, "Friendless Women and the Myth of Male Nonage: Why We Need a Better Science of Love and Sex," Elena Cuffari argues that current scientific approaches to men's sexual behavior get it wrong. In particular, they deprive men of agency, by suggesting that men struggle with monogamy either because they are subject to biological processes, or to "the universal rationality of cost-benefit analysis" (102). In reducing men to nonagents, women are also made lonely, as their role is changed from that of friend to that of "babysitter" for their male partners. Further, women can't be friends with heterosexual men in case the "friendship" is just a veiled attempt on the part of the men to get the women to sleep with them, and women can't count on other women because they are paranoid their partners might sleep with one of them. Thus Cuffari finishes the chapter by arguing that we need a more nuanced understanding of monogamy and the commitment to it, which recognizes the complexity of what it means to make a decision or have an identity. This would create a more complicated picture, but would also allow heterosexual women to "approach their male partners as humans, and eventually as friends (117).

Chapter 7, "Revolutionary Politics of Love: Pussy Riot and Punk Rock as Feminist Practice," by Fulden Ibrahimhakkioğlu, herself a feminist punk musician philosopher and activist, argues that what was at the heart of Pussy Riot as well as other feminist activism (even Valerie Solanas's SCUM Manifesto) is love, "to which anger is instrumental" (127). She argues that the activist chooses both "to change the world and to celebrate life," which map onto anger and love (129), but it is the anger, not the love, that is usually discussed in relation to activism. Drawing on Audre Lorde's account of "the erotic" as aligned with "artistic creativity, aesthetic enjoyment, and our inherent capacity for feelings of joy and empowerment" (126), Ibrahimhakkioğlu argues that the anger found in feminist movements is "deeply rooted in the erotic" (137). Thus, she encourages us to look at Pussy Riot and other

feminist activism through a different lens, and not to underestimate its potential transformative power.

Chapter 8, "Practice in Paradox: What We Can Learn about Love from Relationships between Parents and Young Adult Children," by Christine Overall, takes a look at a different kind of love, the love between parents and children. This is not an oft-discussed topic in philosophy, and I was interested to see that it raises several important ontological and epistemological issues, in addition to moral ones. The "paradox" mentioned in the title refers to the fact that "the parent needs to acknowledge that the child both is and is not her child, and that she both knows and does not know her child" (159). She knows her child, in some ways, better than anyone else, having been there since the very beginning, but, equally, the adult child may not tell her parent the intimate details of her life. Overall finishes her chapter by noting that what we can learn from the love between parents and their young adult children is that love that is intense and continues over time can be found in relationships between people who do not share equal or consistent status. This is particularly interesting when comparing this kind of love with romantic love and friendship, which do seem to require equality.

In part IV, "Embodiment and Culture," we move away from love and toward sex, with three fascinating and very different chapters. Chapter 9, "Orchid Love," by Phoebe Hart, is based on an autobiographical documentary that Hart made about being intersex, and includes personal "reveals" she made in the film about her own experiences, a touch that helps the reader to understand a little more about what it *feels* like to be intersex, in addition to looking at the philosophical issues raised. For example, she acknowledges that when she reveals her body or her story to a lover, she worries that he might worry that he is gay, a sad but telling truth about people's sexual insecurities. Her story highlights the difficulties involved in having a body that is not considered "normal," particularly when it comes to love and sex, and the chapter makes us question the limited range of many people's desire and what can be done about it.

Chapter 10, "Failed Medicalization and the Cultural Iconography of Feminine Sexuality," by Rebecca Kukla, considers why it is that female sexual dysfunction (FSD) has *not* been medicalized, as male sexual dysfunction has been with erectile dysfunction (ED). Kukla notes that there are both benefits and drawbacks to medicalization; her main purpose here is not to argue for or against it, but instead to study what it is about FSD that means that pharmaceutical companies and others have not managed to medicalize it, despite the potential money to be made from doing so. Her hypothesis, for which she argues effectively, is that this is due to "deeply rooted ideological pressures" (195), one being that feminine sexuality is seen as mysterious and "unlocatable," indeed being not even "bodily" at all (198). The corollary of this is that ED is seen as a localized bodily problem, to be dealt with through pharmaceuticals, whereas FSD is seen as a result of many factors, including relationship dissatisfaction or depression, and whereas men are encouraged to take Viagra to deal with ED, women are encouraged to self-reflect and deal with the contextual factors making them uninterested in or dissatisfied with sex. Therefore, Kukla raises wider questions about how we see female and male sexuality and how this relates to gender norms more generally.

Following the theme of looking at the construction of gendered, sexual bodies, Amy E. Taylor has written chapter 11, "Being through Love: The Collaborative Construction of a Sexual Body." Through the story of "Michael," a man unable to get an erection following cancer treatment who learns to use a dildo to effectively give sexual pleasure both to himself and his partner, Taylor shows how the concept of the body can be expanded. She contrasts the story of Michael with Merleau-Ponty's story of Schneider, another sexually impotent

man, whom Merleau-Ponty describes as nonsexual, though, as Taylor points out, Schneider's sexuality had merely become *relational* (for example, he became aroused only when his partner initiated sex, and responded to her desire during it). For Taylor, Merleau-Ponty's way of describing sexuality missed this very important aspect of sexuality. As she describes it, "sexuality is created in the space between partners and shared; an ongoing invention" (221). Thus she highlights that although we inhabit our bodies, we are also "vulnerable to the responses of others to and upon our bodies" (224) and other people's responses to us can shape our identities.

The final section of the anthology, part V, "Truth and Deception," brings the book to a close with two pertinent essays on deception in sex and love. Chapter 12: "The Power of Seduction," by Alain Beauclair, explores the question of whether seduction is deception and might involve subjugation. He uses passages from male seduction manuals to show how male seduction of women could exploit women's vulnerability under patriarchy. However, through a discussion of a dialogue among Socrates, Lysias, and Phaedrus, Beauclair shows that seduction has a dual nature. At its worst it can be a corrupting force, making seduced persons betray themselves, and lose control of their desires. Thus, to be seduced in this way "connotes a loss of the self" (252). However, at its best, seduction can involve a process whereby the seducer finds out what the other truly desires. In this way, seductive speech can be "a manner of questioning fundamental to the pursuit of self-knowledge" (254).

The final chapter, chapter 13, "Some Notes on Faking," by Hildur Kalman, takes an issue I've not seen discussed by philosophers in any great depth before--faking orgasms--and shows us why philosophers should care more about it. She begins the chapter with a discussion of a call-out for a feminist anthology in Scandinavia for people to write about their experiences of faking orgasms. Interestingly, and unexpectedly, the authors received more contributions from men than women, and they also received letters from lesbian women, as well as heterosexual women. As Kalman points out, orgasms have cultural significance, and the fact that so many people fake them tells us something about what the "purpose" of sex is conceived to be. Kalman highlights some problems with faking orgasms: it can make us see our bodies and sex instrumentally, and, through faking, we lose the opportunity for genuine closeness. Furthermore, orgasm becomes the point of sex, rather than sex being seen as a playful erotic encounter. Thus, although people may fake for loving reasons, the overall outcome might be to miss out on some of the possible joy of sex.

In summary, this is an excellent collection of essays for anyone interested in the philosophy of sex and love and/or feminism and gender issues more broadly. One of its main strengths, in addition to the quality of the work, is the variety of chapters and the kinds of issues they cover. Although this can, at times, make the anthology feel a little disjointed, overall it is worth having such an interesting combination of chapters. In addition, the bringing together of such a range of authors should be commended. Not only are 75% of the authors women, they also come from a range of countries (including Canada, America, Australia, Turkey, and Sweden). Further, they represent a variety of academic backgrounds, including social work and psychology as well as philosophy, and there is a good mix of early-career researchers and those more established. Given the scope and importance of the questions raised in the philosophy of sex and love, it is wonderful to have such a variety of voices speaking about it in one place.