

BOOK REVIEW

The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy

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The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy contains thirty-nine chapters by individual philosophers within the field of philosophy of love. Each chapter explores some aspect of the nature or history of the philosophy of love utilizing the author's disciplinary methodology in its own way. The editor of this volume, Adrienne M. Martin, has collated this collection into seven distinct sections: I. Family and Friendship; II. Romance and Sex; III. Politics and Society; IV. Animals, Nature, and the Environment; V. Art, Faith, and Meaning; VI. Rationality and Morality; and, finally, VII. Traditions: Historical and Contemporary. Topics in this collection range from the morality of not loving one's children ("Mama, Do You Love Me?: A Defense of Unloving Parents," by Sara Protasi) to the history of the discourse surrounding love in Islamic thought ("Love in Islamic Philosophy," by Ali Altaf Mian).

Given the diversity of chapters and authors, one may find this volume useful in gaining an overview of certain conversations within the philosophy of love. The individual sections themselves may be valuable to those teaching relevant courses: for example, I used two chapters from part VII (Lenn E. Goodman's "Love in the Jewish Tradition" and Ali Altaf Mian's "Love in Islamic Philosophy") in a course titled *Philosophies of Desire*. These chapters provided my students with a broader understanding of love and desire than is usually provided in collections on this theme. The chapters in part VII, which focus on the place of love in various historical traditions, explore the place and history of love in traditions from Confucianism to neuroscience; these chapters could be an excellent starting point for scholars interested in historical and contemporary philosophies of love.

There are few such large anthologies on the philosophy of love (or on love in philosophy) as such—most collections feature sex rather heavily, as the philosophy of sex and love is an established subdiscipline of philosophy spearheaded by the philosopher Alan Soble. Christopher Grau and Aaron Smuts have a forthcoming edited collection—*The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love* (Grau and Smuts [forthcoming](#))—on the same topic and in which at least one author from the text under review has published. A major difference between the Routledge and Oxford handbooks is that the Routledge handbook concerns itself in large part to rationalistic conceptions of and inquiries into the nature of love. The Oxford handbook seems to be focused more on the topic of love throughout more types of philosophical discourse (continental philosophy is well represented).

The fields within philosophy represented in *The Routledge Handbook* cover a wide array of subjects and concerns. However, none of the authors in this book self-categorize their chapters as feminist philosophy, and there are few citations of existing feminist thought on subjects that abound in the feminist philosophical literature. In 489 pages, the word “feminism” appears eight times. None of the occurrences of the word “feminism” actually occurs in the context of a feminist argument or discussion. Although “Kantian feminism” is in the index, “feminism” is not. The word “feminist” appears twenty-three times, but the word “Kantian” appears fifty-four times. It is clear that this text is not focused on feminist perspectives on love.¹

The lack of even a single a chapter in the *Handbook* with a focus on feminist philosophy of love hampers this collection. Within the field of feminist philosophy, of course, there is much discourse on love, though there do not seem to be any larger edited volumes collecting these writings as yet. Several short collections and special issues focus on the topic, such as *Hypatia*'s own special issue on Feminist Love Studies. One resource that future editors looking to make a collection on the philosophy of love may look to is the Feminist Love Studies Network, an interdisciplinary network of feminist scholars who work on the study of love (see the link in the References section). If that resource is not sufficient, it is important to note that there are many, many living feminists who have worked and are currently working on the philosophy of love (Sarah Ahmed, Sandra Bartky, Susan Bordo, Megan M. Burke, Skye Cleary Ann Ferguson, bell hooks, Alison Jaggar, Jackson Katz, Christine M. Koggel, Vivian M. May, Laura Roberts, Lindsey Stewart, Silvia Stoller, Shira Tarrant, Margaret E. Toye, Nancy Tuana, Carolyn Ureña, Allison Weir, and myself, to name a few). The list is longer when one expands to those feminist scholars doing interdisciplinary philosophical work in other disciplines (psychology, sociology, classics, gender studies, and so on).

A notable and timely aspect of this collection is the philosophical examination and exploration in several chapters of African and African American philosophies of love (for example, Myisha Cherry's “Love, Anger, and Racial Injustice,” Sandy Koullas's “Love, Practical Reasons, and African Philosophy,” and Colleen Murphy's “Love and Political Reconciliation”). The inclusion of these chapters helps this guide stand out among its peers. Several specifically take up the philosophical import to the philosophy of love of the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. However, there are still problematic aspects to other chapters that discuss race: one essay claims, without citation, that the Reverend was “no longer a Christian in his later years” (J. L. A. Garcia, “Love and Moral Structures: How Love Can Reshape Ethical Theory,” 331). It is shocking that this claim was left in the text at all, especially as it was given as an aside and was not necessary for the author's argument. I could not find any corroborating evidence for this claim apart from those made on neo-Nazi and white power blogs, which I will refrain from citing here.

The *Handbook* represents and analyzes the lives of human beings in the context of several cultures, religious traditions, and time periods. However, women's lives as such are rarely the subject of discussion in these chapters, apart from the use of she/her pronouns in thought experiments. This is surprising as there are many references to Diotima's speech from Plato's *Symposium*—a missed opportunity.² The fact that human beings are treated as a whole reproduces a major issue in the realm of traditional philosophy: doing so obliterates any differentiation and makes one kind of lived experience the only kind. On average, the contributions to this volume take very little interest in gender as a category of inquiry, with the exception of Maren Behrensen's essay

“Queer Bodies and Queer Love,” which claims that current philosophical discourse on love excludes the experience of those with queer bodies: “while we have understood how the *queer body* can be desired, we have not yet understood how *queer persons* can be loved” (93). Behrensen’s is a challenging essay that I am looking forward to assigning in my Philosophy of Sex and Gender course.

The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy is composed of a diverse array of chapters that provide, as a whole, an adequate introduction to how “love” as a category can be (and is) examined in various philosophical contexts. *The Routledge Handbook* is not exhaustive—how could it be!—and leaves out important aspects of the study of love. Several of the chapters have added to the scholarship in this field (and in their own fields) in a profound way, although often in a way that does not consider the impact gender, lived experience, and sexuality have on the nature of love. Perhaps the greatest difficulty in gathering such a volume is in determining what “counts” as philosophy. What is worthy of inclusion in the canon? With so complex and ancient a topic as love, it is likely that it is impossible to truly “do” philosophy without intense interdisciplinarity. Socrates himself wore many hats, drawing on all known fields of knowledge in order to come to the realization that what might make him wise (or at least wiser than poets and politicians) is his ability to know when he doesn’t know something, to know when philosophy just isn’t enough. Or, following Diotima, how philosophy can help open an individual person to the divine in a way that reveals the wild, beautiful divinity existing in each individual.

Notes

1 This collection is not the only one that overlooks the importance of feminist philosophy in the field of love: The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on Love mentions “Kant” twice and “Kantian” once in the body of the entry. “Feminism” occurs only once in the bibliography and “feminist” not at all.

2 Pregnancy, despite being a natural result of the topic of this book, is not discussed as much as one would imagine. “Pregnancy” appears five times (all in Sara Protasi’s “‘Mama, Do you Love Me?’ In Defense of Unloving Parents”), “pregnant” nine times, “birth” thirty-one times, “Diotima” forty-eight times. That pregnancy, even as a metaphor, is outstretched by birth to such a degree is interesting and worthy of a longer study. The more androcentric, active term “procreation” appears nine times, “procreate” four, and “procreative” ten.

References

- Feminist Love Studies, 2017. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 32 (1).
 Feminist Love Studies Network. <http://feministlovestudies.azc.uam.mx/>.
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