

Does Romantic Love Make Sense? Some Puzzles Underlying Romantic Love

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ABSTRACT Romantic love, our most complex emotion, includes various puzzles that impede the achievement of enduring, profound love. These related puzzles involve two opposing poles on a given continuum, yet both seem necessary for enduring, profound love. I discuss here a few of the major opposing poles, which I gather into three main groups: (a) *Temporality*: change—familiarity; consummation—perpetuation; (b) *Freedom*: freedom—bondage; belonging—possessing; (c) *The good-fortune of the partner*: jealousy—compersion. Coping with these conflicts requires several conceptual distinctions; the key ones discussed here are the distinction between romantic intensity and romantic profundity and the distinction between extrinsically and intrinsically valuable activities. While admitting the presence of the opposing poles, I argue that in profound love, these poles can coexist. Such coexistence has significant consequences for the nature of romantic relationships, for instance, admitting the presence of romantic ambivalence and indifference and acknowledging the value of brief, casual sexual encounters.