

All Hearts In Love Use Their Own Tongues: Concepts, Verbal Disputes, and Disagreeing About Love

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*Warning: this is a very early draft of a work in progress!
It contains many errors and is totally sketchy and incomplete!
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1. Introduction

For the sake of concreteness, this paper investigates disputes of one specific form. I will be looking at disputes between two parties A and B, each of whom sincerely makes an utterance of the following kind:

A: X is a case of romantic love.

B: X is not a case of romantic love.

I will further stipulate that in the relevant disputes the very same situation X is being referred to by each speaker, and they both know this to be the case. Moreover, A and B take themselves to be disagreeing about the status of situation X. I will be exploring the possibility, and the significance, of diagnosing a *merely verbal dispute* in such a situation.

First, a quick terminological note: throughout this paper, I will sometimes refer use ‘love’ as a convenient shorthand for ‘romantic love’. (Where other kinds of love are or may be at issue, I will make this explicit.)

Disputes of the target form can arise for many reasons. For example, X might be party A’s relationship with their same-sex partner, and party B might be a social conservative who does not consider any same-sex relationships to be genuine instances of romantic love. (In such a situation, B may classify A’s relationship as “just lust”, or “confused”.) Other disputes of the target form might occur between, say, a teenager (A) and their parent (B), with the former claiming to be truly in love and the latter describing A’s situation as merely “a crush” or “puppy love”. Yet others may involve two friends A and B discussing whether Mr. Darcy is really in love with Jane Eyre at the time when he first proposes to her, or whether their mutual friend C’s abusive relationship counts as a genuine case of love. And so on.

In addition to their pure intellectual interest, disputes of this form can be important. They are often laden with personal, emotional, practical, political, and/or ethical significance. The consequences at stake in these disputes can include ones that matter at an individual level (such as whether or not one’s relationship will be treated with respect by one’s family), and ones that matter to society at large (such as whether or not to change the conditions for entering into a legal marriage). This is perhaps most obvious in instances where A is attempting to defend the status of her relationship as genuine love against a

disbelieving interlocutor B. But we should not overlook the significance of other instances; even a friendly debate about a fictional character, for example, can have significant impacts on one's own—and one's interlocutor's—future judgments and experiences. For such debates can be an important part of *attempting to figure out what love is*, and it hardly needs saying that what people think love is can have very significant impacts both on individual lives and on broader social conditions.

These disputes are a big deal because romantic love is a big deal. A key social fact in the background here is that being accepted as a genuine case of romantic love is strongly correlated with that relationship receiving broad social acceptance and validation. One symptom of this correlation is that the kinds of alternative characterizations liable to be deployed by parties B in disputes of the target form are often dismissive or belittling: “*just lust*”, “*just a phase*”, “*just a crush*”, etc.. If a relationship is classified as not one of genuine love (but “*just*” something else), it is very likely to be *for that reason* perceived as less valuable, less respectable, less worthy of support, less likely to last, and so on. (This last, of course, can be a self-fulfilling prophecy: relationships that lack social acceptance and validation are *ceteris paribus* harder to sustain.)

Recent movements towards respect and recognition for same-sex relationships have made very effective use of this background social fact. The suasive success of such slogans as “love is love” and “same love” is premised on the pre-existing widespread agreement that once same-sex relationships are accepted as potentially cases of *real love* they can no longer be permissibly treated as second-rate, or as ineligible for the benefits accorded to opposite-sex loving relationships (including, significantly, legal recognition through marriage).

These considerations point back to an even more basic social fact: romantic love is, on the whole, viewed very *positively*. (This is a generalization, of course, and not an exceptionless rule about every opinion anyone has ever held on the subject!) I leave open for the purposes of this paper whether this positive valence is built into the semantics of the phrase ‘romantic love’ and/or the concept or concepts thereby expressed, or whether it is some other, weaker, kind of association (a connotation, an implicature, etc.).

Another social phenomenon that builds upon love's positive valence—but goes beyond it in various ways—is *amatormativity*. This is defined by Elizabeth Brake (2012, pp. 88-9) as the ‘disproportionate focus on marital and amorous love relationships as special sites of value’, manifesting as ‘the assumptions that a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in that it *should* be aimed at in preference to other relationship types’. Brake argues that *amatormativity* is a form of discrimination which systematically devalues all forms of caring relationship except the normative romantic form.

The phenomenon Brake is describing here is prevalent both in everyday life and in the work of academics, philosophers included. Bertrand Russell, for example, once wrote that if a person has not experienced mutual sexual love with another, then they ‘cannot

attain their full stature, and cannot feel towards the rest of the world that kind of generous warmth without which their social activities are pretty sure to be harmful'. He also says that 'the resulting disappointment inclines them towards envy, oppression and cruelty' (Russell 1929, p. 83). Russell's facility for clear expression results in a stark formulation, but the sentiment he is expressing is not an unusual one. Amatonormativity may be morally alarming, but it is also a very important piece of the background against which we must understand our practices of classifying 'romantic love'.

In what follows, I will explore the hypothesis that many disputes of this paper's target form, even if they initially appear to be substantive factual disagreements as to whether a single specified thing is of a single specified kind, in fact turn out to be merely verbal disputes. I shall suggest that this is quite a plausible hypothesis. I shall then explore the further hypothesis that despite being merely verbal, such disputes are also *serious*: as important and non-trivial to resolve as are many non-verbal disputes about important matters. Again, I shall conclude that this is quite plausible.

In short, I'll be suggesting that many disputes of the target form are viably diagnosable as examples of what I have called *serious verbal disputes* (see Jenkins 2014b). My notion of a serious verbal dispute emerges from what I have described as a 'Quinapian' position in metametaphysics. Drawing on work by Amie Thomasson (2007, 2010) which illuminates the connections between Carnapian and Quinean metaontologies and their corresponding first-order ontological views, I have argued that aspects of the Carnapian and Quinean approaches can be blended to create a Quinapian compromise. I initially developed the notion of a serious verbal dispute to provide a possible diagnosis of certain ontological disputes about the existence of ordinary objects. In this paper, however, I will suggest that the notion of a serious verbal dispute can be a useful resource in connection with disputes about love (and potentially also in other areas of social metaphysics).

In order to explain how all this works, I shall begin by briefly overviewing the relevant background on Carnap, Quine, and Thomasson, leading in to a sketch of my 'Quinapian' metametaphysics. This will occupy section 2. Next, in section 3, I'll apply the Quinapian machinery and the idea of a serious verbal dispute to develop a diagnosis of at least some (and perhaps many) disputes of this paper's target form. Section 4 then draws out some points of contact, and some points of contrast, with Sally Haslanger's recent work on conceptual analysis in areas of socio-political significance. I finish up this section (and the paper) by suggesting that analogous moves may be relevant in the diagnosis of structurally similar disputes about other topics, such as gender and race.

2. *Serious Verbal Disputes*

The account of merely verbal disputes that I have defended (see Jenkins 2014a¹) is as follows:

¹ This is actually a slightly simplified version of the account, but the complexities will not matter here.

MVD: Parties A and B are having a merely verbal dispute if and only if they are engaged in a sincere prima facie dispute D, but do not disagree over the subject matter(s) of D, and merely present the appearance of doing so owing to their divergent uses of some relevant portion of language.

“Divergent uses of portions of language” come in many varieties, but for current purposes I want to focus attention on situations where A and B are engaged in a sincere prima facie dispute of the target form, i.e.

A: X is a case of romantic love.

B: X is not a case of romantic love.

and where party A uses the phrase ‘romantic love’ to express one concept—call it RL_1 —and party B uses the same phrase to express a different concept—call it RL_2 . *Concepts* (on my use of the term) are sub-propositional mental representations. They are the mind’s tools for making sense of the structure of the world, at a more basic level than the propositional.

Donald Davidson once expressed a rather widely-shared philosophical sentiment when he said that ‘[i]f the mind can grapple without distortion with the real, the mind itself must be without categories and concepts’ (1974, p. 7). The idea motivating such claims is that concepts, being the mind’s own tools for representing and classifying, are therefore somehow necessarily going to *distort* reality as soon as one applies them. I disagree (and have never seen a convincing argument for this assumption). In my 2008, I sketched a possible account of how—under epistemically favourable circumstances—the structure of our concepts could *reflect* rather than distort the structure of reality. The basic idea is empiricist in its motivation: through responsiveness to sensory input, our concepts can become an accurate on-board map of the world’s structure. But once one’s concepts are in this sense *empirically grounded*, reflecting on them in ways that would normally be called *a priori* can lead to knowledge of the world’s structure, including significantly its arithmetical and logical structure.

Carnap’s take on concepts—or conceptual *frameworks*, to use the Carnapian vocabulary—is rather different from either the Davidsonian take (concepts as necessarily distorting) or my own (concepts as potentially providing an accurate map). For Carnap,² a conceptual framework is adopted on pragmatic grounds. Once adopted, it neither reflects reality nor distorts it. It simply *adds structure*.

A Carnapian approach to metametaphysics classifies first-order metaphysical questions as either ‘internal’ to a given conceptual framework—i.e. to be answered taking that framework for granted—or ‘external’ questions, which are addressed to the issue of whether to adopt the framework in the first place. A question like ‘Are there any numbers?’, construed as *internal* to the framework of arithmetical concepts, is treated as trivially answerable in the affirmative through an elementary a priori investigation of the arithmetical concepts. Construed as an *external* question, it amounts to asking whether

² See Carnap 1950.

the framework of arithmetical concepts should be adopted, and a Carnapian treats this as a pragmatic matter: if that framework is useful we should adopt it, but there's no other sense in which there could be a "right" answer to the *external* question as to whether there are numbers. For a Carnapian, all a posteriori investigation proceeds within a chosen framework, while all a priori knowledge (including all knowledge of arithmetic) is knowledge *about* a framework, i.e. appreciation of the analytic connections between its constituent concepts.

This—(in)famously—contrasts starkly with a Quinean metametaphysics, which treats all knowledge, including all knowledge of metaphysics, as of a single kind: empirical, a posteriori, and holistic. For the Quinean, the question 'Are there any numbers?' is to be approached like any other question: by employing the best possible scientific methods to arrive at a theory of the world. If this theory indispensably quantifies over numbers, we should conclude that there are numbers; otherwise, we should conclude that there are not. The Quinean rejects analyticity and the a priori.

Thomasson (2007, 2010) helpfully contextualizes these Quinean and Carnapian metametaphysical positions by explaining how they have impacted first-order ontological debates. She notes that although some contemporary metaphysicians appear to be engaged in constructing sensible arguments against the existence of ordinary objects, from a Carnapian perspective (which Thomasson herself shares) there is actually no substantive debate to be had about this. One can ask an *internal* question—internal, that is, to the framework of ordinary-object concepts—whether (say) tables exist. But (Thomasson argues) this internal question is trivially easy to resolve by, say, looking at a table. Once one is looking at a table, the only options open are to accept that there are *at least* particles-arranged-tablewise in front of one, or to believe something so implausible that it deserves no serious credence (evil demons, holographic projections, etc.). But, Thomasson contends, once one accepts there are particles-arranged-tablewise, one is no longer at liberty to reject the table. This is because she thinks, in Carnapian spirit, that there are *analytic entailments*—i.e. relationships among the concepts in the ordinary-object framework—that render it *incoherent* to accept the particles-arranged-tablewise without accepting the table. These analytic connections make a commitment to particles-arranged-tablewise sufficient for a commitment to tables.

Of analytic entailments, Thomasson says this (2007, p. 16):

If claim ϕ analytically entails claim ψ , then competent speakers can infer the truth of ψ merely by knowing the truth of ϕ and knowing the relevant meanings of terms (and being competent reasoners).

For Thomasson, then, there is no room for a serious debate about the existence of tables from within the ordinary-objects framework. You either believe in tables, or you accept something akin to conspiracy theory (evil demons, holographic projections etc.). As for the *external* question about whether to adopt the framework of ordinary-object concepts, this for Thomasson—as for Carnap—is a purely pragmatic question, and as such not to be approached by weighing empirical evidence, or examining arguments for and against

the existence of such objects. It is simply a matter of whether the framework is useful or not.

Typical arguments put forward by ontologists against the existence ordinary objects, Thomasson says, make an illegitimate attempt to address an external, framework-independent, and wholly general question about what ‘things’ exist. They try to do this by deploying a framework-independent, wholly general, or in Thomasson’s terminology *bare*, quantifier. While a Quinean metametaphysics permits one to approach matters this way (indeed, it seems to require doing so), on a Carnapian metametaphysics this literally makes no sense: there is no bare quantifier.

Thomasson’s conclusion is that what appear to be substantive philosophical disputes over whether there are ordinary objects are in fact merely verbal, and trivially easy to resolve once the misunderstandings are cleared up. A philosopher who seriously asserts ‘There are no tables’ is attempting to use a quantifier in an illegitimate manner, and so ends up asserting nothing truth-evaluable at all. Such a philosopher may enter into a *seemingly* substantive dispute with another philosopher who asserts ‘There are tables’, but provided the latter is employing a (legitimate) sortal-relative quantifier (which she must in order to be asserting anything intelligible), there is no common content that is being asserted by one philosopher and negated by the other.

The metametaphysical position I find most appealing is neither Quinean nor Carnapian, but blends aspects of both. On this ‘Quinapian’ alternative, as for Carnap, enquiry includes both the investigation (or analysis) of concepts and regular a posteriori investigation of the world. However, unlike the Carnapian, the Quinapian maintains that conceptual framework choice is not a purely pragmatic business, but one that should be responsive to empirical input.

In Jenkins 2008 I sketched a theory of *concept grounding* on which receptivity to input received through the senses can—and, if things are going well, does—guide us towards the formation and/or retention of concepts that accurately map the mind-independent structure of the world. Such an empirically grounded conceptual scheme is neither (*pace* Davidson) a distortion of reality’s structure, nor (*pace* Carnap) an imposition of additional structure. The Quinapian sides with the Carnapian against the Quinean in maintaining that one can legitimately arrive at certain beliefs just by coming to an awareness of the connections between one’s concepts—the analytic entailments, in Thomasson’s terminology.

But for the Quinapian, unlike the Carnapian, doing this can amount to learning something about the structure of reality (as mapped by one’s conceptual scheme). The Quinapian sides with the Quinean against the Carnapian in maintaining that all of our knowledge is ultimately answerable to the tribunal of experience. For the Quinapian, our concepts must be responsive to sensory input (not just pragmatically useful) to be in good epistemic standing. For this reason, the Quinapian also sides with the Quinean in regarding all knowledge—even that which is derived from an appreciation of the relationship between

one's concepts—as on a single level, and susceptible to empirical revision. Nothing is “immune”.

Significantly for the purposes of this paper, a Quinapian accepts that concepts can be *improved* upon: we might be able replace them with others that better map the structure of reality. By contrast, for a Carnapian, conceptual revision could only occur for pragmatic reasons (if the new concepts are more useful). Also significant for current purposes is the fact that a Quinapian is open to viewing merely verbal disputes as potentially being *serious* in a number of ways. Let me explain.

Carnapians and Quinapians alike can diagnose (at least some) merely verbal disputes as arising on account of *conceptual difference*: parties using a single phrase to express two different concepts. But a Carnapian won't have much to say by way of making progress after diagnosing such a dispute; she certainly cannot talk about one party's concept being *correct*. At most, a Carnapian could say that one party's concept is more pragmatically useful. Only in rather extreme cases of merely verbal disputes, where one party's use of the relevant portion of language fails to express *anything truth-evaluable at all*, could the Carnapian call a win for the other party (as Thomasson does for disputes over ordinary objects). Otherwise, all the Carnapian sees is a kind of stalemate as far as truth and accuracy are concerned.

A Quinapian has more options. For her, the conceptual difference at play in a merely verbal dispute might be the difference between a concept that enables us to map the structure of reality accurately and one that seriously misrepresents that structure. For this reason, a Quinapian believes that a merely verbal dispute generated by conceptual differences can be *very serious business*. For the Quinapian, concepts—just like beliefs—can get things right or wrong; just like beliefs they are answerable to empirical input, and ultimately to the world. They can be challenged and debated, on empirical grounds, with the goal of better understanding what reality is actually like.

3. *Disputing Love*

Folk theories of *what romantic love is* tend to be extremely vague, fuzzy, disparate, or missing altogether. This is one upshot of what I have elsewhere³ described as the ‘romantic mystique’ (named after Friedan 1963's analogous ‘feminine mystique’). The romantic mystique is a bundle of ideas which includes the following main themes: (1) love is incomprehensible, (2) love is special and valuable partly *because* it is incomprehensible, and (3) we should passively accept love as it is rather than trying to defy or change it, because (4) attempts to defy or change love will only make us miserable and are in any case doomed to failure.

The romantic mystique is among the factors that make it extremely difficult to pin down what—if anything—people are talking about when they use the phrase ‘romantic love’ (or related phrases such as ‘in love’, or simply ‘love’ with its romantic sense). This has

³ Jenkins Forthcoming, chapter 1.

many problematic consequences; miscommunication in relationships, obviously, is high on the list. hooks (2001) argues that the lack of any shared definition of ‘love’ puts us at significant risk, because the lack of clarity leaves us open to mistaking abusive relationships for loving ones. She contends that a commonly accepted definition of love would ‘make it much easier for us to learn how to love’ (p. 4). She is here discussing love generally, not just romantic love, but romantic love is among her concerns.

However, in a somewhat (though not entirely) analogous debate about how and whether to define ‘marriage’, Corvino *resists* pressure to provide a single comprehensive definition, describing such pressure as a strategic move usually made with ‘the ulterior motive of proving that same-sex unions either can or cannot count as marriages’ (Corvino and Gallagher 2012, p. 42). He argues that this produces only question-begging definitions. Corvino points to a few necessary conditions and some typical features of marriage, but says ‘any pithy definition of marriage will be partial and imperfect’ (p. 43). Analogues of Corvino’s points might be raised in response to at least some efforts at defining ‘romantic love’, and pressure to provide a definition might be resisted on similar grounds.

I fall part way between the two polar positions on the question of whether it is wise to attempt a definition of ‘romantic love’. I take the Corvino line with regard to ‘pithy’ and comprehensive definitions; that sort of thing is little more than an invitation to philosophers to wheel out their counterexample machines. And no doubt many attempts at definition are motivated by pre-existing ideological commitments. Indeed, the involvement in ideology in shaping our concepts and definitions of romantic love will be a key issue in what follows.

But I take the hooks line on the dangers of unclarity. In addition to the dangers hooks describes, I am concerned that the fuzzy-to-missing folk theory of romantic love acts as a protective forcefield against philosophical criticism: if we cannot pin down what we *mean* by ‘romantic love’, we cannot critique it or even discuss it in any depth or with any kind of rigour. In my work (Jenkins 2015 and Forthcoming) I am trying to develop a theory of romantic love that can give us enough of a grip on the phenomenon to have a serious philosophical conversation about it. But I certainly do not attempt any aphorism-like definition, or any checklist of necessary and sufficient conditions.

In any case, one consequence of the fuzzy-to-absent folk theory of romantic love is that it creates more or less the ideal conditions for merely verbal disputes to flourish. It is not hard to imagine situations in which one party uses ‘romantic love’ to refer to a bundle of sensations while the other uses it to refer to a divine gift whose purpose is to unite two straight people for the purpose of engaging in some relatively sin-free production of biological offspring. Or situations where one party uses that phrase to refer to an evolved neurochemical response while the other is talking about a socially constructed set of behaviours. And so on for a rather bewildering array of dimensions of possible and (plausible) variation.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that mere *disagreement* about the nature of a phenomenon necessarily results in merely verbal disputes. Two parties can disagree about whether cats have four or five claws on their hind paws and both be using 'cats' in the same way. But notice two features that make the situation with respect to 'romantic love' rather unlike this kind of case. First, the divergences in current understandings of 'romantic love' map onto *huge* differences in ontological category: differences concerning even the fundamentals of what broad kind of thing is under discussion. (Even if you believe in reference magnetism à la Lewis 1983, there are limits to what it can be realistically expected to achieve.) Second, there is no kind of *arbiter* or *expert* to whom we, as a linguistic community, can successfully defer when it comes to love. No single person, group, or institution 'owns' romantic love, or has the last word over what counts as such. Nothing even comes close.

Marriage, by contrast, is a legal status, and as such is 'owned' and regulated by states: they have the last word, the authority to stipulate what counts and what doesn't. Even gender is something that states *attempt* to arbitrate and regulate, through (e.g.) issuing birth certificates and other forms of identification and documentation which specify the bearer's sex and/or gender. (Their degree of success is debatable, of course. I suspect, partly for this reason, that gender may be another arena in which verbal disputes of a serious kind are prevalent and in need of investigation.) By contrast, there is no kind of official documentation one can obtain that specifies whether one is in love or not. (A marriage certificate doesn't certify that the bearer is, or ever was, in love.) There are no state guidelines on what counts as love and what doesn't. Religious and spiritual leaders offer opinions, but wildly different ones. Relationship advice columns, and other popular media concerned with the subject, reflect similarly wide divergences.

The absence of any generally accepted theory of romantic love or *even a sketch of the fundamentals*, together with the absence of any group or institution generally accepted as authoritative on the subject, presents us with situations where it is really only to be expected that usage of the phrase 'romantic love' will be all over the map. Recall that this paper is focusing on disputes of the form:

- A: X is a case of romantic love.
- B: X is not a case of romantic love.

Given the current situation, I contend, it is not hard to imagine that in many such disputes A and B using 'romantic love' to express *different concepts*, and do not in fact disagree about the applicability of either concept to situation X. (One has to be a little careful about what this amounts to: it means the parties do not disagree about whether the applicability conditions for each concept are met. This doesn't mean accepting that each concept is in good standing—grounded, accurate, etc.—indeed, as I explain below, the parties may go on to reject such claims.)

For example, we can easily imagine teenager A using 'romantic love' to express a concept that refers to a confluence of intense emotions, and parent B using 'romantic love' to express a concept that refers to a trusting relationship that must be built up over

years of intimacy, with neither party disagreeing that situation X involves the relevant intense emotions and lacks the relevant long-established trust and intimacy.

Or we might imagine A using ‘romantic love’ to express a concept that refers to a kind of committed relationship that can hold between persons of any gender, and B using ‘romantic love’ to express approximately the same concept as the old-fashioned phrase ‘love between a man and a woman’, with neither party disagreeing that situation X involves a committed relationship and is not a case of love between a man and a woman.

However, the key point that I want to make in this paper is that by the Quinapian’s lights, a diagnosis of merely verbal dispute in a case like this does not mean that the relevant disputes are trivial, insignificant, or easy to resolve. The fact that two parties are deploying different concepts of romantic love, and don’t disagree about the applicability of either, doesn’t mean that everyone is right and everyone can now go home in a spirit of irenic tolerance. For the Quinapian, some concepts are *flawed*: they supply an inaccurate map of reality’s structure. And this means that, for the Quinapian, a merely verbal dispute might be anything but trivial. It just might be the locus of a deep disagreement about the structure of reality.

In this paper, I’m interested in merely verbal disputes where party A uses the phrase ‘romantic love’ to express concept RL_1 , while party B uses the same phrase to express a different concept, RL_2 . Recall that from a Carnapian perspective, a dispute of this kind cannot be regarded as serious business. It can either be dismissed as a simple talking-past, that has no “winner” and is trivially resolved as soon as the misunderstanding is straightened out, or it can be arbitrated on purely pragmatic grounds (because one party’s concept is not as useful as the others). The only possible grounds for *choosing* between RL_1 and RL_2 would be pragmatic: if a framework containing RL_1 is more useful, we should prefer RL_1 . But there would be nothing objectively wrong with using RL_2 instead.

For a Quinapian, by contrast, it is of more than just pragmatic importance that we use the right concepts. There are straightforward concerns about getting things right: it is a *mistake* to use concepts that inaccurately represent the structure of the world. A concept like *tonk*—the connective whose introduction and elimination rules collectively permit inference from any proposition to any other—is a disastrously inaccurate concept. There is, in reality, no relation of entailment between *All cats are green* and *All fish like football*, so the fact that *tonk* allows us to infer as if there were one is indicative of how *tonk* misrepresents the world’s real logical structure.

However, inaccurate concepts can also have more sinister consequences than simply getting reality wrong. Such concepts can also serve create and sustain forms of injustice and oppression, operating at a deeper level than belief. These forms of harm can be insidious, protected from detection and criticism by *appearing* to be analytic or true by definition. They can be lodged right in the core of how we think, classify, and understand.

One example of an inaccurate concept with unethical impact can be found in the work of Michael Dummett. In a discussion of ‘linguistic change, of the kind we should characterize as involving the rejection of revision of concepts’, Dummett discusses the term ‘Boche’. On his account of the meaning of this term, it can be applied to anyone of German nationality, and its application implies that the subject is ‘barbarous and more prone to cruelty than other Europeans’ (Dummett 1973, p. 454).

In my 2008 I suggested that ‘Boche’ expresses an inaccurate concept. Like *tonk*, the *Boche* concept misrepresents the structure of reality: if we adopt and use the *Boche* concept, we thereby represent the world as a place where German nationality entails barbarism and cruelty. This is inaccurate, of course, but not merely inaccurate: it is also harmful and unjust. The concept embeds a prejudice and should be rejected for ethical reasons *as well as* reasons of inaccuracy. (Other kinds of conceptual inaccuracy may be morally harmless; we would have only one kind of reason for rejecting such concepts.)

Getting closer to the topic of this paper, consider the situation of a person who has no words or concepts to express his own romantic preference except ones that also build in a negative valence and/or additional negative content. A gay man, say, who only knows pejorative words and concepts to describe gay men is in such a situation. Among other harms—such as the psychological impacts of internalized homophobia—this is an instance of what Miranda Fricker (2007, ch. 7) has called *hermeneutical injustice*, where ‘someone has a significant area of their social experience obscured from understanding owing to prejudicial flaws in shared resources for social interpretation’.⁴

Among the areas of social experience that get obscured in a situation like this is the very possibility of same-sex romantic love. As mentioned above, ‘romantic love’ has strong positive associations, and the classification of a relationship as a loving one is a route to securing for it kinds of social validation and respect that are denied to relationships classified as “just” something else (lust, a crush, etc.). For this reason, disputes of this paper’s target form are often liable to be ideologically laden, and motivated (consciously or otherwise) by value judgments concerning *how the positive associations and social privileges associated with ‘love’ should be apportioned*.

Now suppose we encounter a dispute of the target form, where situation X is a same-sex relationship and party B disapproves of same-sex relationships. It is not difficult to see how this could result in B making the assertion ‘X is not a case of romantic love’, motivated (consciously or otherwise) by something like the following reasoning:

1. Romantic love is *good* (to be taken seriously, worthy of social privileges, etc.).
2. X is *bad* (not to be taken seriously, not worthy of social privileges, etc.).
3. Therefore relationship X is not a case of romantic love.

Now, let’s also suppose that A proceeds to criticize B on the grounds that B’s verdict is *prejudiced*. B might respond that she is deploying a concept of *romantic love*—call it

⁴ This phrasing, which I think provides the best summary, comes from an abstract to chapter 7 provided in the electronic version of Fricker 2007 (hosted at Oxford Scholarship Online).

RL_2 —by the lights of which it is analytic⁵ that such love can only arise between a man and a woman. Moreover, let's suppose it is *true* that B is using such a concept,⁶ and that A acknowledges that this is the case. Notice how this move by B effectively conceals any possible role for premise 2.

It is my contention that A should now be able to object that there is *something wrong with B's concept*. And the Quinapian notion of conceptual accuracy provides A with the structural tools to press an objection of this kind. If A is a Quinapian, he can now contend that B is deploying a concept that is *inaccurate*: one that misrepresents the structure of reality. There are various ways this kind of point might be argued, but A could for example argue that B's concept serves to misrepresent reality by presenting same-sex attraction, relationships, marriages, and so on as significantly morally and/or phenomenologically different from their opposite-sex counterparts, whereas in fact there is no moral or phenomenological difference of the envisaged kind. A could point out that, just as Dummett's *Boche* enables erroneous inferences:

- i. *X is German.*
- ii. *X is Boche.*
- iii. *X is cruel.*

so B's concept RL_2 enables erroneous inferences:

- I. *X is a same-sex relationship.*
- II. *X is not a case of RL_2 .*
- III. *X is not worthy of social privileges.*

Earlier, I left open the question of whether the positive associations of 'romantic love' are built into the concept(s) expressed by that phrase. The same goes for the association with deserving special privileges not accorded to other relationships (a facet of amatonormativity).⁷ If there is amatonormative content packed into concept RL_2 , then the analogy with *Boche* may be very close: something like the step from II to III could then be analytic of RL_2 . That is to say, this concept may be packing enough of a normative punch to enable its user to conclude that same-sex relationships are not worthy of social privileges. And like *Boche*, in addition to being inaccurate, such a can be criticized on moral grounds for the role it plays in the systematic and discriminatory devaluation of same-sex relationships, with all its attendant harms.

⁵ We need to be a bit careful with terminology here; I do not call this an *analytic truth*, but something that is *analytic of* the concept RL_2 .

⁶ Some forms of semantic externalism may not permit the public-language phrase 'romantic love' to have two different meanings or definitions when used by the two speakers. In my 2014a I suggest that a proper understanding of the nature of merely verbal disputes requires us to be able to focus on a *speaker's use* of language (and perhaps relatedly, the *utterer's meaning*) as distinct from (perhaps additional to) any externally-determined semantic content.

⁷ My guess is that the phrase 'romantic love' probably expresses analytically amatonormative concepts on some occasions of use and descriptive concepts on others.

If the association between RL_2 and amatonormativity is of some less intimate kind, then step II-III is not necessarily analytic. In that case, someone critical of the inference I-II-III might argue that the problem is not really with the concept RL_2 but rather with some enthymeme deployed at the second step, such as *All and only romantic love relationships are worth of social privileges*. There certainly are significant moral objections to be raised against this kind of proposition. However, even in this kind of case, B's overall conceptual scheme can also be subject to scrutiny and criticism. If by 'romantic love' B expresses RL_2 , which is approximately equivalent to *love between a man and a woman*, then what words and concepts does B have to describe, classify, properly evaluate, or even *think and talk about* same-sex loving relationships? If B has no such words and concepts, then B's conceptual scheme is lacking the resources B needs to represent the social world accurately. It is in that sense *inadequate*. It is also (thereby) contributing to the kind of hermeneutical injustice that excludes same-sex love from being so much as considered or discussed (which is an effective way of stifling relevant debates about the distribution of social privilege among relationships).

Because the Quinapian picture demands a lot of our concepts, a Quinapian stands ready to diagnose inaccuracies and inadequacies at the conceptual level which may require significant further attention after the diagnosis of merely verbal dispute. The diagnosis of merely verbal dispute is often not be the end of the discussion, but the first step in an investigation of the merits of the divergent concepts at play. For the Quinapian, it is not good enough to treat concept choice as if "anything goes", nor to approach it in the spirit Carnapian pragmatism. If we treat concepts as floating free from accuracy constraints, we risk being seriously wrong about how the world is, and causing moral harm in the process. We risk concealing prejudices from detection by rendering them unassailable "matters of definition". For the Quinapian, "matters of definition" are *by no means* unassailable. On the contrary, we have to be prepared to roll up our sleeves and get to work at the conceptual level, scrutinizing and critiquing our interlocutors' concepts. And, for that matter, our own.

4. Operative and Manifest Concepts; Conceptual and Ameliorative Analyses

Haslanger (2005, 2006 and elsewhere) has provided some valuable structure for understanding the place of concepts and conceptual analysis in social metaphysics. Two of her distinctions in particular can help contextualize my project in this paper: that between *operative* and *manifest* concepts, and that between *conceptual* and *ameliorative* projects of conceptual analysis. I will discuss each of these distinctions, and its relevance to the project of this paper, in turn.

An operative concept is (approximately) a concept that a person *uses* to classify or categorize. By contrast, a manifest concept is (approximately) a concept that a person *takes* herself to be using. This is tidily illustrated by one of Haslanger's own examples (see Haslanger 2006). Asking someone to tell you his definition of 'parent' would be a way to investigate his manifest concept of *parent*. But to investigate his operative concept of *parent*, one would need to do things like look at whom he includes on a list of

‘parents’ when sending out a letter to the ‘parents’ of all children at a particular school. Manifest and operative concepts can come apart: as Haslanger argues, even if one’s manifest concept of *parent* is roughly equivalent to *immediate biological ancestor*, one’s operative concept of *parent* may be something more like *primary caregiver*.

My sense is that there is currently a huge and diverse range of manifest concepts of *romantic love*, most of which are extremely fuzzy and ill-defined. (Try asking lots of different people for their definitions of ‘romantic love’, and you’ll get a sense of what I am talking about.) In fact, many people may not even possess anything sufficiently determinate to *constitute* a manifest concept. This—like the related phenomenon of the vagueness or absence of shared folk theories of romantic love—is an upshot of the romantic mystique.

The mystification process does not, however, necessarily impact operative concepts in the same way. Operative concepts of *romantic love* can function quite effectively in the absence of any well-defined folk theory or manifest concept, by means of an “I know it when I see it” approach to classification and categorization. What the romantic mystique *does* do is effectively ensure that our operative concepts are poorly understood and rarely brought to awareness. They are thus shielded from investigation and criticism.

Disputes of the kind under discussion in this paper are important in part because they can be a significant source clues as to where the contours of our operative concepts diverge. When party B refuses to classify X as a case of romantic love (and is not making a straightforward mistake about the facts of the case, nor misapplying her own concept), party A gets some evidence about the shape of the operative concept B is deploying.

These interactions are significant in another way too: particularly in the realm of social metaphysics, operative concepts can be *contagious*. When one notices that others are classifying cases differently to oneself, that creates pressure to adjust the contours of one’s own operative concept to match what seem to be the socially accepted criteria. As social creatures who want to communicate, we—often without even noticing—try to *align* our conceptual schemes with those of the people around us, to form a shared background structure within which we can then discuss other matters (in Carnap’s sense, internal questions). Being more aware of what is going on in the kinds of disputes discussed in this paper can give us the resources to *resist* social pressure to adopt bad concepts.

Haslanger’s second distinction, between conceptual and ameliorative projects of analysis, is approximately the difference between analyzing “our” concept as it is (using intuitions and introspection), and figuring out what would be the best version of that concept given our (legitimate) purposes in having and using such a concept. Neither is precisely what my envisaged Quinapian reaction to serious verbal disputes about love is up to, but there is an important connection to amelioration that is worth spelling out.

The Quinapian understands concepts as answerable to the world for accuracy and adequacy. Haslangerian amelioration is not the same thing as conceptual improvement of

these kinds; some forms of amelioration could in principle lead to a *decrease* in accuracy (at least if one's purposes do not include the accurate representation of reality, or if this goal is outweighed by others). However, many ways of improving one's concepts from a Quinapian point of view could also be forms of Haslangerian amelioration. For example, in exposing the inaccuracy of a concept such as *Boche*, and ditching or revising the concept for that reason, we are thereby advancing the social aim of counteracting the oppressive prejudice built into the inaccurate concept. The change is ameliorative insofar as our legitimate aims in classifying by nationality cannot be served by concepts that build in moral prejudices against certain people.

In a similar vein, revising the heteronormative (operative) concept of *romantic love* so as to include same-sex love can lead to improvements in conceptual accuracy and/or adequacy, and also thereby advance the social aim of counteracting discrimination against same-sex relationships. The change is ameliorative insofar as our legitimate aims in classifying cases of romantic love cannot be served by concepts (or conceptual schemes) that build in moral prejudices against certain relationships.

To finish up, let me briefly observe that the key points I am making in this paper—that serious verbal disputes can arise in areas of social significance, and that these might be productively addressed in a Quinapian spirit by shedding light on the harms done by bad concepts—are not limited to disputes about 'romantic love'. This is merely one important case study; an area of discourse where it is particularly important to look at verbal disputes for evidence of the contours of our operative concepts (because our manifest concepts are such a mess).

Analogous-looking disputes certainly arise in connection with gender and race, for example:

C: 'X is a woman.'

D: 'X is not a woman.'

E: 'X is white.'

F: 'X is not white.'

In each of these cases, it is not hard to imagine how ideology may be underwriting the position of one or both parties, how a poor understanding of the relevant areas of social life may have led to a situation where the parties' manifest concepts are extremely fuzzy (or missing) and their operative concepts significantly divergent, and how some of the operative concepts in play could be inaccurate or inadequate for representing the structure of social reality, and for that reason harmful in morally criticizable ways.

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