

# A Lover's Shame

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**Abstract** Shame is one of the more painful consequences of loving someone; my beloved's doing something immoral can cause me to be ashamed of her. The guiding thought behind this paper is that explaining this phenomenon can tell us something about what it means to love. The phenomenon of beloved-induced shame has been largely neglected by philosophers working on shame, most of whom conceive of shame as being a reflexive attitude. Bennett Helm has recently suggested that in order to account for beloved-induced shame, we should deny the reflexivity of shame. After arguing that Helm's account is inadequate, I proceed to develop an account of beloved-induced shame that rightly preserves its reflexivity. A familiar feature of love is that it involves an evaluative dependence; when I love someone, my well-being depends upon her life's going well. I argue that loving someone also involves a persistent tendency to *believe* that her life is going well, in the sense that she is a good person, that she is not prone to wickedness. Lovers are inclined, more strongly than they otherwise would be, to give their beloveds the moral benefit of the doubt. These two features of loving—an evaluative dependence and a persistent tendency to believe in the beloved's moral goodness—provide the conditions for a lover to experience shame when he discovers that his beloved has morally transgressed.

**Keywords** Love · Shame

## 1 Introduction: Understanding Love through Its Manifestations

It would seem that one of the best ways to understand the attitude of loving someone is to explore the ways in which one who loves is affected by the person he loves. Robert Nozick's often-discussed treatment of love in Chapter 8 of *The Examined Life* epitomizes this approach; at the beginning of his chapter, Nozick writes:

What is common to all love is this: Your own well-being is tied up with that of someone (or something) you love. When a bad thing happens to a friend, it happens to her and you feel sad for her. When something bad happens to one you love, though, something bad also happens *to you*. (It need not be exactly the same bad thing. And I do not mean that one cannot also love a friend.) (Nozick 1989, 68)

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