Chapter 2
Seduction, Rationality, and Willpower

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ABSTRACT
This chapter starts by providing a definition and a basic taxonomy of actions of seduction, and clarifies some links between seduction and manipulation. It then considers Eric Cave’s (2009, 2014) thesis that actions of seduction are problematic if they alter motives by hampering rational capacities, in particular when they lack transparency. The chapter challenges this view by arguing that there are no intrinsically rational cognitive capacities, and that the non-transparency of some triggers of attraction may actually be valuable. Therefore, the ethical focus should not be on supposedly rational capacities, but rather on willpower capacities: a seduction process that would deplete such capacities would be seriously problematic. Such a depletion should however be distinguished from other seduction strategies that aim at increasing or decreasing various desires without impairing willpower capacities. The chapter concludes by proposing a general framework for evaluating the morality of an action of seduction.

INTRODUCTION
A classical moral worry about seduction endeavors is that they sometimes seem to be manipulative. For example, if Pat is attracted by Sam and wants to seduce him, she might act nicer than she usually does, use perfume and body language to at-
tract him subconsciously, put on a red dress to look more attractive (Elliot & Nesta, 2008), etc. Are such actions morally problematic – maybe because they address a nonrational part of the human mind, or because they influence in a non-transparent fashion? More generally, does seduction sometimes interfere with important cognitive capacities in a morally problematic manner?

This chapter aims at answering those questions through successive steps. It starts by proposing a philosophically sound definition of actions of seduction, and argues that some actions of seduction are indeed related to some forms of manipulation. To examine whether they are morally wrong, this chapter investigates with which morally relevant cognitive processes such seductive influences may interfere. The thesis of this chapter will be that actions of seduction that interfere with deliberative (and supposedly rational) capacities, or with cognitive processings, are not necessarily morally problematic; instead, the ethical focus should be put on willpower capacities, whose depletion during a seduction process – even partial – would be morally condemnable (or at the very least morally problematic). The chapter then concludes by summarizing a general framework to evaluate the morality of a given action of seduction, and comparing its strengths to an alternative account proposed by Cave (2009, 2014).

BACKGROUND: GENERAL DEFINITIONAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES

This section will define actions of seduction, dissociate two subclasses of them, and show the strength of this definition. It will then examine how the literature in philosophy of manipulation and seduction can help to spell out the moral problem of interference with cognitive capacities, which will be investigated in the remainder of the chapter.

Definition and Taxonomy of Actions of Seduction

Imagine that Sam wants to seduce Pat. For this, he will perform various actions that will be called “actions of seduction”, which are part of a “seduction process”. Obviously, each party in a seduction process can be the initiator of various actions of seduction; but in the following, when a specific action of seduction will be considered, the agent will be referred to as the “seducer”, and the other party as the “seducee”. Inspired by Conly (2004, pp. 111-112), actions of seduction will be separated in two classes: “positive” and “negative” actions.
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