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WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT ROMANTIC LOVE FROM HARRY FRANKFURT'S ACCOUNT OF LOVE?

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HARRY FRANKFURT outlines a comprehensive and at times compelling account of love in several of his works, perhaps most notably in *The Reasons of Love*. However, he does not think that romantic love fits the ideal of love:

> Relationships that are primarily romantic or sexual do not provide very authentic or illuminating paradigms of love as I am construing it. Relationships of those kinds typically include a number of vividly distracting elements, which do not belong to the essential nature of love as a mode of disinterested concern, but that are so confusing that they make it nearly impossible for anyone to be clear about just what is going on.[1]

In this paper, I argue that we can, nonetheless, learn some important things about romantic love from his account. I will suggest, conversely, that there is distinct value in romantic love, which derives from the nature of the relationship on which it is based.

The structure of this paper will be as follows. I will first outline Frankfurt's "four main conceptually necessary features of love of any variety." These are:

(i) Love "consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved."
(ii) Love is "ineluctably personal."
(iii) "The lover identifies with his beloved."
(iv) "Love is not a matter of choice."[2]

After this exposition I will consider Frankfurt's theory as applied specifically to romantic love. I will then critically analyze Frankfurt's four necessary features of love as applied to romantic love. Finally, I will argue that Frankfurt fails to appre-

1 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 43.

2 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 79–80.

ciate the distinct value of romantic love, which is not *less* valuable than parental love, just valuable in a different way.

1. LOVE ACCORDING TO FRANKFURT

Frankfurt writes that there are "four main conceptually necessary features of love of any variety."[3] In this section I will briefly explain each feature; I will return to them later to discuss problems with them as features of romantic love.

(i) Love "consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved."[4]

According to Frankfurt, the only interest of the lover is to serve and promote the well-being of the beloved, and so to love someone for the hope of personal gain is not real love. The beloved is a Kantian "end in itself"; a "final end" in Frankfurt's words. Love requires valuing its object as an end rather than a means. So if Josie loves Jason for his money, she does not really love him at all, as her concern for him is really a self-interested concern for wealth. She cares for him only as a means by which to improve her own life, not for his well-being in itself. To love, Frankfurtian style, one must "forget oneself" and give love to the beloved "as a gift," as Gary Foster puts it.[5]

Frankfurt acknowledges that an objection might be that love cannot be entirely disinterested because "the beloved provides the lover with an essential condition for achieving an end—loving—that is intrinsically important to him."[6] Frankfurt thinks that love is necessary to enjoy living. Therefore, loving could be construed as self-interested because the beloved provides a means to prevent the lover from living without love. However, Frankfurt does not think this presents a problem for his view because the lover can only accrue the benefits of loving by loving disinterestedly: "what serves the self-interest of the lover is nothing other than his selflessness."[7] Although loving the beloved may serve the lover's desire to love, she can do this only by being selflessly devoted to the beloved.

3 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 79.

4 Note that in this phrase Frankfurt says that love is for persons, yet elsewhere he writes about love for objects, places, ideas, etc. I raise the objection later about whether love, as Frankfurt construes it, can just be for people.

5 Foster, "Romantic Love and Knowledge," 239.

6 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 59.

7 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 61.

(ii) Love is "ineluctably personal."

One might think that a disinterested concern for the beloved is really *agape,* a selfless, unconditional love for humanity. However, Frankfurt emphasizes that the kind of love in which he is interested is the love for irreplaceable individuals, not "instances of a type."[8] Thus, if she really loves Jason, Josie must love him as the particular person he is, not because he is a political activist with a good sense of humor. Furthermore, if she loves him, she would not love a substitute.[9] If she met Jason's even funnier and more politically active brother, Jerry, she would not just dump Jason in favor of Jerry. Even an identical duplicate of Jason would not do.

This links to Frankfurt's rejection of the "appraisal model" of love. He elucidates what it means to love something as a particular in his essay "On Caring":

> The reason is that he loves it in its essentially irreproducible *concreteness*. The focus of a person's love is not those general and hence repeatable characteristics that make his beloved *describable.* Rather, it is the specific particularity that makes his beloved *nameable*—something that is more mysterious than describability, and that is in any case manifestly impossible to define.[10]

What makes something or someone nameable is simply what makes them distinct from others; but this distinctiveness does not depend on their characteristics. I would still be the discrete entity I am if I lost my memory and my personality and appearance changed completely, though I would share few characteristics with my former self. Indeed, if a stranger was given two descriptions of me, one as I am now, and one from when I was 1 day old, they probably would not think the descriptions were of the same person. However, the "nameable" part of me is the same; it is just my "describable" bit that is different. Similarly, a duplicate of me would share my "describable" bit, but not my "nameable" bit. My characteristics are irrelevant to my nameability, though they are what make me describable. Therefore, if we love people on the basis of their nameability rather than their describability, we are unable to articulate the reasons for loving them beyond saying "because they are them." A rationalist account of love, on the other hand, focuses on the describable; if asked "why do you love her?" the rationalist would respond with a description of the beloved.

8 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 80.

9 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 46.

10 Frankfurt, "On Caring," 170.

(iii) "The lover identifies with his beloved."

To identify with someone, you take their interests as your own. When they achieve success, you share in their joy; when they suffer a loss, you share in their misery. This helps to explain how love is more than just disinterested concern or caring. When I give money to a homeless person because I care about her suffering I may be (if I do not gain anything from the transaction) showing disinterested concern for her. However, I do not take her interests as my own; indeed I might completely put her out of my mind after I have made the donation. Therefore, my motivation for giving the money is not love, as construed by Frankfurt. This links to Frankfurt's second feature of love, since you can only identify with a person or a thing if they are a particular, rather than merely an instance of a type. When I give money to the homeless person, it might be that I am giving money to her because I want to give to *a* homeless person, rather than to her in particular. My concern is for "the homeless"; any homeless person would have done just as well. In such a case, my motivation is disinterested concern for the homeless, but it is not love because it is not personal and does not involve identification.

Incidentally, identification seems to conflict with Frankfurt's first feature, that love is disinterested concern. This is because, in a way, the lover has expanded her interests: taking the beloved's interests as her own could be construed as simply acquiring more interests and thus more opportunity to acquire benefits. Josie wants good things to happen to Jason, in part, because this will make *her* happy. I return to this point later on.

(iv) "Love is not a matter of choice."

For Frankfurt, "love is not a matter of choice but is determined by conditions that are outside our immediate voluntary control."[11] This is, for Frankfurt, a necessary feature of love and caring. He argues that if we did not accept that caring was outside of our voluntary control, we would be unable to explain why we cannot just stop caring about something merely at will, why it imposes a kind of necessity upon us.[12] He argues that caring about something imposes a "volitional necessity" on us. A volitional necessity differs from a causal or logical necessity in that it does not limit our physical power to be able to do *X*; rather, it limits our will, making it impossible to bring oneself to do *X*.[13] For example, a wife of a serial killer might find that she just cannot bring herself to stop loving her husband even though she finds his actions unconscionable. This impossibil-

11 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 80.

12 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 88.

13 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 86.

ity is a volitional necessity, though not a causal or logical one. She knows that she *could* stop loving him, and believes that she ought to, but she cannot make herself *want* to do this enough to actually do it. Indeed, in order to be able to bring ourselves to make a change in our lives, we have to change what we care about; for example, I will not become thinner until I care more about being slim than about eating cake.

However, Frankfurt argues that the imposition of volitional necessities does not make love an infringement on our autonomy, since although we cannot choose what we love or how that love will make us want to act, the constraints on our choices are our own; they both constitute and are created by our will.[14] Thus, love is involuntary in the sense that we cannot consciously bring it about or stop it, but it is not like an unwanted addiction. Rather, love is intertwined with our will: "since love is itself a configuration of the will, it cannot be true of a person who does genuinely love something that his love is entirely involuntary."[15] What does Frankfurt mean by "a configuration of the will?" In an earlier essay, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," Frankfurt explains in detail how an action or emotion can be outside of our immediate control yet still be a product of our free will. He explains the concept of second-order desires, which are the desires to have or not to have other desires, and of second-order volitions, which are the desires for desires to be one's will or for other desires to be effective or ineffective.[16] For example, consider a woman who wants to want to perform an act of kindness for her child but is also angry with him for being naughty; she has conflicting first-order desires: to be kind to her child and to teach him a lesson. Perhaps she is experiencing a second-order desire to want to be kind to her child, but she has a second-order volition that this desire be ineffective. She will not be content until all of these desires become aligned. The configuration of the will is the arrangement of one's second-order desires and volitions, which are outside of one's direct control but that create and influence one's first-order desires, and it is love that makes up our configuration. Thus love is involuntary in a sense, but voluntary in a more important way: it underlies what voluntary choices we can make.

When we are wholehearted we identify with the configuration of our will and do not try to change our first-order desires or have conflicting ones. "[Wholehearted love] expresses what we, as active individuals, cannot help being.... Moreover, wholehearted love expresses—beyond that—what we cannot help

14 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 46.

15 Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition and Love*, 137.

16 Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 12–13, 16.

wholeheartedly wanting to be."[17] When we act wholeheartedly we experience ourselves as acting freely. Thus, the woman who genuinely feels no anger or resentment toward her naughty child, but only the wholehearted desire to be kind to him because of her wholehearted love for him, will experience her kindness toward him as a free action.

To sum up, love is involuntary in the sense that one cannot make oneself love or not love another merely by willing it be so.[18] This is because we cannot control our second-order desires and volitions; but this does not make love involuntary or make us unfree in the way that heroin addiction does. There is a more important conception of voluntariness that does not just mean being totally unconstrained, but rather means identifying with one's second-order desires and volitions. When one does this, one acts wholeheartedly and Frankfurt thinks that wholeheartedness is, *ceteris paribus*, more desirable than ambivalence.[19] It is, therefore, something toward which we ought to aim.

In the next part of this paper, I consider Frankfurt's views applied to romantic love. I begin with why we might think Frankfurt's theory fits common conceptions of romantic love and then consider some problems we encounter when applying it to romantic love.

2. Frankfurt and Romantic Love

There is a commonly held intuition that love is reasonless, arational, out of our control, that it can just take hold of us, leaving us resolutely in its grasp. This intuition is most widely written about and discussed with relation to romantic love; though other kinds of love—familial love and friendship, for example—can feel reasonless too. Indeed, love for objects, places, and pieces of art can all feel arational. This intuition supports Frankfurt's theory as it suggests that the claim that love need not have reasons is true. As my main focus is on romantic love, I will discuss the apparent arationality of romantic love. First, we might note, as John Shand and many others have, that we use the phrase to *"fall* in love," which implies "a non-rational event one is subject to and does not deliberately, let alone rationally, control."[20] Once a person has begun to fall it does not make sense to ask them to stop, however good one's reasons may be. There are at least two further sources of evidence for the intuition that love is reasonless: (a) we often find it difficult, if not impossible, to explain the reasons why we love people,

17 Frankfurt, "Taking Ourselves Seriously," 51.

18 Frankfurt, "Taking Ourselves Seriously," 41.

19 Frankfurt, "Reply to Susan Wolf," 250.

20 Shand, "Love As If," 7.

and (b) it is nearly impossible to persuade someone to love or not to love another. I will now consider each of these in turn.

2.1. Explaining the Reasons for Love

We often have trouble explaining the reasons why we love someone and sometimes find it inappropriate to ask a person why they love another.[21] Robert Solomon notes that "most people are quite incoherent if not speechless about producing reasons for loving a particular person."[22] To respond to the question "Why do you love him?" with "I just do" or "I know how I feel" is an often-heard and seemingly reasonable reply.[23] Indeed, to answer the question with a list of the person's qualities could imply that you do not really understand what love is or that you do not really love her. Shand makes an even stronger claim: "starting to give or even consider reasons for loving someone, and certainly presenting them to the beloved, may be seen as proof that one does not love them."[24] This might be too strong, but if your partner told you they were trying to work out the reasons why they loved you, you might reasonably take this to mean that they are unsure whether they love you at all. Conversely, to answer the question "Why do you hate her?" or "Why do you admire her?" with "I don't know, I just do" seems inappropriate and unreasonable. As Alan Soble highlights, "'agapic' hate looks pathological, and we would help someone experiencing it to get over it."[25] We expect people to be able to give reasons for admiring and hating others and, if they do not, we tend to think that they do not understand what it means to admire or hate another. Thus, love seems to be a different *kind* of emotional response to a person than these more reasoned responses.

2.2. Persuading to Love or Not to Love

In addition, we cannot be persuaded (via rational argument) to love someone or to stop loving them, whereas it does seem possible to persuade someone to admire or dislike another. I might say, "You should admire Jemma because she's intelligent, thoughtful, has great values, and has made it all on her own," and there is at least some chance that you will agree. However, I cannot persuade you to love her. This is, in part at least, because love does not seem to respond to

21 We might ask a similar question: "What do you love about her?" But the response this seems to be anticipating is more along the lines of: "What qualities of hers do you appreciate?"

22 Solomon, "Reasons for Love," 12.

23 Shand, "Love As If," 6.

24 Shand, "Love As If," 7.

25 Soble, review of *The Reasons of Love*, 6. Note that Soble also thinks that *agapic* love is pathological as he compares *agapic* hate with *agapic* love.

reasons in the way that other emotional responses to people do. I might suggest that you try to fall in love with a mutual friend who has many qualities I know you value, but I know that the most I could persuade you to do would be to spend time with her and try to get to know her. Indeed, many people have had the experience of really wanting, but failing, to feel romantic love for someone, perhaps their spouse whom they no longer love or a friend whom they know would make a great romantic partner. Ty Landrum notes that

> the compulsion to intimacy is not something that one can simply call up or discipline oneself to achieve. . . . A normative demand to feel the compulsion of intimacy toward persons for whom one simply does not feel that compulsion is an absurd demand.[26]

Further, though we sometimes try to persuade our friends and family *not* to love those whom we believe to be wrong for them, we seldom succeed. I may think that it is very unfortunate that you love your aggressive and dishonest wife and suggest that you remove yourself from a relationship with her, but even if I succeed in persuading you to leave the relationship, I cannot stop you from loving her. This is because your desire to continue loving her is, in Frankfurt's terms, a second-order desire that you cannot directly control. Solomon observes that "it is by now a trite movie scene, where the protagonist writes down in one column fifty reasons why he should leave his lover, and then in the other column simply writes 'I love her!'—and that clinches the decision."[27] Part of the reason you cannot be persuaded not to love your wife is because the simple fact that you do love her seems to override all the other reasons that I could give you not to love her. Frankfurt's view can easily explain this seeming irrationality: you can see all the reasons not to love her, but nonetheless you continue to love her because your love for her is not a matter of choice. Your love is not irrational, but *arational*; it is beyond the scope of reasons.

Frankfurt's distinction between the nameable and the describable is a possible way of illuminating the unexplainable element of love. Both of the above observations—that we find it difficult to explain the reasons why we love the people we do and why it is almost impossible to persuade someone to love another—seem to imply that love is not based on the describable aspects of a person as other responses to people's perceived value are, such as admiration or hatred. It is not usually difficult to explain why we admire or hate someone because we can simply respond with a list of the qualities of the person that justify the attitude toward her. In other words, we can *describe* the admirable or hateful

26 Landrum, "Persons as Objects of Love," 420.

27 Solomon, "Reasons for Love," 11.

features of that person and this will be sufficient to explain our feelings about her. Admiration and hatred are responses to the appraised value of the object. On the other hand, we tend to feel that no description of a person could fully account for why we love them. As Shand points out, although when trying to explain why I love my beloved I may begin by describing them, in the end I will feel that my description provides an insufficient explanation and l will have to say that I "just do" love them.[28] As explained earlier, the "nameable" aspect of a person is something over and above the totality of their properties, so if we love people for their nameability, no description of them will be able to fully account for the love. In addition, Frankfurt's distinction between first- and second-order desires and volitions provides another answer to the question of why love seems mysterious. If love is a configuration of our second-order desires and volitions then it is outside of our immediate cognitive understanding and control.

3. WHAT CAN FRANKFURT'S FOUR NECESSARY FEATURES OF LOVE TELL US ABOUT ROMANTIC LOVE?

In this section I return to Frankfurt's "four conceptually necessary features of love" and consider problems with them as features of romantic love in particular. Frankfurt would probably agree with me on some of the points I make, since he is clear that the kind of love in which he is interested is not romantic. However, my reason for analyzing these features in relation to romantic love is to show two things. First, I want to show that there are different kinds of love, and, in particular, that romantic love is a distinct kind of love. Second, I hope to show that romantic love is no less valuable than other kinds of love, though Frankfurt implies that it is. I will remain agnostic about how well his theory works for other kinds of love.

(i) Love "consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved."

It is a key feature of Frankfurtian love that it is selfless and disinterested. The beloved must be loved for her own sake, not because the lover will gain anything through loving her. However, romantic lovers do tend to benefit from their love and the benefit the love gives them is part of their reason for loving. If loving consists in caring for the well-being of the beloved and wanting to contribute to it, then the lover will be happy when the beloved is happy, since her loving desires have been fulfilled. This means that serving the beloved's interests necessarily serves the self-interest of the lover. Indeed, this seems to be exactly what

28 Shand, "Love As If," 6–7.

Frankfurt means when he says that the lover identifies with the beloved. This is, of course, not true only for romantic love. Parents, for example, are usually happy when their children are well and happy and there does not seem to be any problem with this. If their children's happiness did not make them happy we might question whether they really loved them at all (with some exceptions, such as if their children were made happy by acting in a way that conflicted with the parents' moral values). Nevertheless, Frankfurt could respond to this objection by reminding us that, since the lover's aim is to serve the beloved's needs disinterestedly, whether or not she is made happy through doing so is beside the point.

However, romantic love is more self-interested than familial love, and perhaps more than friendship love, because we expect more from it; we want it to make us happy and we demand reciprocity from it. The romantic lover is not usually content to love her beloved from afar; she wants to be loved back and she wants to be near her beloved. Indeed, knowing that one's beloved wants to contribute to one's well-being seems to provide a reason to love one's beloved in return. People seek out romantic love for the reason that it will contribute to their own well-being and happiness. Of course, people do not have children just so that they can selflessly dote on them either; in most cases, parents hope that having children will enrich their lives. However, parents are willing to tolerate a lot more from their children, in some cases an unlimited amount of misery, before abandoning them. Romantic partners, on the other hand, are more ready to leave each other if the relationship no longer makes them happy.[29] Even those who believe you should marry for life usually believe there are more circumstances in which it is acceptable to leave your spouse than your child. As love depends to an extent on the relationship, leaving a relationship with someone is akin to saying you no longer want to love them. Similarly, as friendship is usually less demanding than romantic love and more flexible, we are sometimes willing to tolerate more from our friends than our romantic lovers. Consequently, as explained earlier, Frankfurt does not think that romantic love fits the ideal of love that he is investigating.

> Relationships that are primarily romantic or sexual do not provide very authentic or illuminating paradigms of love as I am construing it. Relationships of those kinds typically include a number of vividly distracting elements, which do not belong to the essential nature of love as a mode of

29 Of course, romantic love requires a degree of commitment as well though. Being ready to leave at the first sign of problems might indicate that you are not really in love.

> disinterested concern, but that are so confusing that they make it nearly impossible for anyone to be clear about just what is going on.[30]

Frankfurt provides a few examples of what such "distracting elements" might be later in his book: "a hope to be loved in return or to acquire certain other goods that are distinct from the well-being of the beloved—for instance, companionship, emotional and material security, sexual gratification, prestige, or the like."[31] The suggestion is that there are self-interested desires and motivations intrinsic to romantic love, and these render it an impure or inauthentic kind of love.

I agree with Frankfurt that romantic love is full of self-interested desires, but I argue that these are part of what gives it its distinctive value. Romantic love is not "wholly unaccompanied by an interest in any other good," but we do not want it to be, because then it would lose its value as romantic love. The particular value of *agape* and parental love lies, in part, in their unconditionality and disinterested concern. The particular value of romantic love—and, to some extent, friendship—on the other hand, lies, in part, in its conditionality and contribution to our self-interest. This is partly because of the reciprocal nature of romantic love. That is, even if it is unrequited, romantic love always hopes for reciprocation and, therefore, to receive something in return. On Frankfurt's view, this makes it an inauthentic kind of love for, "love does not necessarily include a desire for union of any other kind. It does not entail any interest in reciprocity or symmetry in the relationship between lover and the beloved."[32] However, someone who does not even *desire* for their love to be returned does not romantically love their beloved. As Foster argues:

> We may not love someone simply because we want our love reciprocated, but reciprocation (at some point) or the hope of such is a necessary part of the development of romantic love.... The man who loves a woman who, in return, does not acknowledge his existence, can fairly be said to possess an illusory love.[33]

On the other hand, the mother who loves her son, despite him not knowing she exists, does not seem to possess only illusory love. Foster points out that for Frankfurtian love based solely on bestowal of value, reciprocation is not important: "the parent or the Christian God does not require reciprocation."[34]

30 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 43.

31 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 83.

32 Frankfurt, "Taking Ourselves Seriously," 41.

33 Foster, "Bestowal without Appraisal," 162.

34 Foster, "Bestowal without Appraisal," 163.

However, "romantic love and friendship are relational and rely on a dynamic of giving, receiving and sharing."[35] This is because of the nature of the relationships on which the love is based. Parental love and God's love do not depend upon a reciprocal relationship. Romantic love and friendship, on the other hand, ideally involve love between equals and thus require a measure of give and take. Of course, it would be an unusual parent who did not desire that their child loved them back, but parents are far more likely to tolerate their children not reciprocating their love and continue to love them regardless than romantic lovers are.

However, although it is reasonable to desire, indeed expect, romantic love to make the lover happy, the lover must also care about the well-being of her beloved. If this was not the case, then it would not be an instance of real love, for the desire to care for the beloved's well-being is a minimal requirement of love. Thus, although romantic love does not consist in totally disinterested concern, it necessarily involves caring for the beloved. Therefore, the kinds of interests that are served through love must be those that make the beloved happy or benefit her in some way too. For example, it is reasonable for Jason to love Josie, in part, because being with her makes him happier and feel more confident, as long as he cares that her being with him also makes her feel happier and more confident. Conversely, it does not seem like an instance of real love if your "love" for another makes you happy but them afraid, for example if you are stalking them, even if stalking them makes you very happy. Therefore, to care about the well-being of the beloved entails wanting to be good for them and so feeling happy when we are good for them. We therefore want their love for us to be at least partly self-interested so that our aim of making them happy can be fulfilled. We want them to love us because loving us makes them happy and this will, in turn, serve our own self-interest through seeing our project—making our beloved happy—realized. It will also serve our self-interest by boosting our self-esteem through having someone hold us in such high regard. This distinguishes romantic love from parental love: although we want our parents to hold us in high esteem, we tend to assume that they will continue to love us even if they cannot stand to be around us.

For these reasons, romantic love consists less of disinterested concern than parental love. Frankfurt agrees but implies that this makes it less valuable than parental love, which he claims is the purest kind of love.[36] I suggest, conversely, that the value is simply of a different kind, providing different goods to us.

35 Foster, "Bestowal without Appraisal," 163.

36 Frankfurt: "Among relationships between humans, the love of parents for their infants or small children is the species of caring that comes closest to offering recognizably pure instances of love" (*The Reasons of Love*, 43).

(ii) Love is "ineluctably personal."

By calling love "ineluctably personal" Frankfurt is denying that it is based on any "describable" features of the beloved—her properties, in other words. He is thus denying that appraisal features at all in love, other than perhaps by making the lover first notice the beloved. However, if love need not result from any prior value of the beloved, and the value of the beloved to the lover is purely the value that the lover has bestowed upon them, what we love seems to be arbitrary. Frankfurt says that "the object of love can be almost anything" and "love requires no reasons and can have anything as its cause."[37] He also addresses the question of why we care about some things and not others, though his response is rather unsatisfactory as an explanation of romantic love:

> It seems that it must be the fact that it is possible for him to care about the one and not the other, or to care about the one in a way which is more important to him than the way in which it is possible for him to care about the other. The person does not care about the object because its worthiness commands that he do so. On the other hand, the worthiness of the activity of caring commands that he choose an object which he will be able to care about.[38]

As Frankfurt describes love as a form of caring, I assume that this explanation covers why we love some people and not others. If so, what he says conflicts with how it is that we want to be loved: few would be satisfied with the answer to the question, "Why do you love me?" being "Because it is possible for me to love you and I need to love something." Furthermore, his account implies that no things or people are objectively more worthy of love than others. This is implausible though; it is surely objectively true that my child is more worthy of my love than my alarm clock, but for Frankfurt, I could bestow as much value on the clock as I could on anything or anyone else and thus could love it more than my child without doing anything objectionable. However, this seems false: a parent who loved an alarm clock more than their child would seem to be in need of either chastisement or help; we would not just leave them to it. This shows that there must be at least some reasons for love and that these reasons must be at least partly based on the qualities of the beloved. As Niko Kolodny explains, even if we cannot decide to love by weighing up reasons, it does not follow that there are no normative reasons for love. He compares love to belief: we cannot always just decide what to believe, but this does not entail that there

37 Frankfurt, "Taking Ourselves Seriously," 40–41.

38 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 94.

are no normative reasons to believe *X* and not *Y*.[39] As Susan Wolf notes, we have "an interest in living in the real world"; we do not want to be deluded. Thus, we have an interest in loving only things that are worthy of love.[40] Furthermore, as Annette Baier points out, if what we care about is as important to us as Frankfurt says it should be, and if caring involves a great deal of investment in the well-being of the beloved, it seems sensible to seriously consider what we should care about.[41] Indeed, Frankfurt himself says this too, suggesting that one should consider whether loving something will improve one's life.[42] However, it seems impossible to do this if love is not justified by the properties of the beloved.[43] If the reason for me loving *X* is merely that it is possible for me to love X and not *Y*, if I love *X* because of its nameability and not its describability, then how can I question whether loving *X* and not *Y* is the right thing?

Solomon agrees that the qualities of the beloved must have some role in explaining the reasons for love. He asks, "What is 'the person,' apart from all of his or her properties? A naked soul? Can one in any erotic (as opposed to agapic) sense love an ontologically naked, property-less soul?"[44] Such a soul is difficult to imagine, and probably even harder to love. If the love is not based on any properties of the beloved, then it seems that the lover could love the beloved without knowing anything about them, or indeed while knowing false information about them. Initially, we might think that this is true of parental love but not of friendship or romantic love. A mother might love a child she gave away at birth despite knowing nothing about him, or despite knowing false information about him. One might say that she loves him because of the "nameable" bit of him, not the "describable" bit. However, she does love him for something about him that *is* describable, and that is that he is her son. Thus, there is a puzzle here: parental love feels non-cognitive, but similarly it is not accidental that it is our own children that we love.

These issues are particularly salient with regard to romantic love because we are generally highly selective about whom we love romantically and this selectiveness gives romantic love part of its distinctive value. Being chosen from

39 Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 138.

40 Wolf, "The True, the Good, and the Lovable, 236.

41 Baier, "Caring about Caring," 274.

42 "The question of what to care about … is one which must necessarily be important to him" (*The Importance of What We Care About*, 92). See also Frankfurt, "Reply to Susan Wolf," 246–48.

43 Soble, review of *The Reasons of Love*, 8.

44 Solomon, "Reasons for Love," 7.

others makes romantic love boost the beloved's self-esteem.[45] Derek Edyvane observes that

> a large part of what we value about being the object of another's love is that we take it to imply an informed and positive (or at least not negative), objective evaluation of our character, we think of love as being more than the arbitrary expression of a subjective whim. We want to know that there exist reasons that can render this person's love for us intelligible to others.[46]

Though I do not necessarily want others to love my beloved, I want them to understand why I love him and not another; I want them to agree that I have chosen the right person to love. In other words, I want my love to be *justifiable* to others.[47] Furthermore, we want to be loved by someone who has chosen us and finds that choice intelligible. We do not want to be loved simply because it was possible for the lover to love us. To be loved by someone who could love someone whatever their properties are carries far less significance, and less value, than being loved by someone who loves us on the basis of our individual character. While we accept that our parents would have loved any child they had had as much as they love us, we want our romantic partners to love us because of what we are like. Foster highlights a common objection to the view that people are loved on the basis of their properties: that someone with the same properties could be loved just as much. However, if love is not based on properties at all, and the value of the beloved to the lover is solely bestowed value, then Frankfurt's beloved "may [too] feel that she could easily be replaced by someone else with very different qualities."[48] Nicholas Dixon takes this point further and argues that unless romantic love is based on the qualities of the beloved it is not love at all: "I do not love *you* if my love will continue no matter what you do and no matter how your qualities change, unless we are prepared to identify you with an immaterial Cartesian essence."[49] To be told that one will be loved romantically whatever one becomes, seems, as Troy Jollimore puts it, "as impersonal and alienating as 'I would love anyone who had your name and social security num-

45 Keller, "How Do I Love Thee?" 167.

46 Edyvane, "Against Unconditional Love," 72.

47 Baier makes a similar point: "It is a fairly good criterion for genuine love in Frankfurt's sense, namely, a genuine instance of love—typically the lover *does* want others to find the loved one lovable" ("Caring about Caring," 281).

48 Foster, "Romantic Love and Knowledge," 243.

49 Dixon, "Romantic Love, Appraisal, and Commitment," 383.

ber.'"[50] Of course, sometimes love does persist despite major changes in the beloved, such as after the onset of Alzheimer's disease or a serious stroke, and when it does, we tend to admire the strength of the lover's love rather than dismiss it as unreal. However, these are special circumstances, and might be more accurately described as instances of what Neil Delaney calls "loving commitment" than romantic love.[51]

(iii) "The lover identifies with his beloved."

Frankfurt argues that to love something means to identify with it so that its well-being becomes tied up with your own. For example, Josie feels happy when Jason gets a promotion at work, but sad when his boss belittles him in front of his colleagues. This is not because of the impact his happiness or sadness has on her, but simply because if he is unhappy then she is unhappy too because she loves him. This seems to be a reasonable expectation to have from love, particularly from romantic love. However, identification seems to be in conflict with some of Frankfurt's other ideas about love—that the lover does not need to know the beloved and that love is disinterested. Frankfurt does not seem to take seriously the fact that one is best able to identify with, and thus to love, someone with whom one is in a close relationship, and thus, once again, he fails to recognize the particular value of romantic love. Identification with the beloved requires intimate knowledge of a person that can be acquired only through spending a significant amount of time with them and through sharing intimate information with one another. In suggesting that, "I may love a woman, with no opportunity to affect her in any way; and she may have no inkling that I exist," and that "the beloved may be entirely unaware of the love, and may be entirely unaffected by it," Frankfurt implies that one can identify with another without sharing a relationship with them or even knowing them.[52]

Against this claim, Bennett Helm suggests that love is "distinct from compassionate concern" because in loving a particular person, "I must take an interest not just in his well-being but also in his identity itself, and the kind of interest I take in his identity must itself be deeply personal."[53] This is, in part, because the well-being of someone is tied up with her identity. To identify with a particular person requires that you love them "not merely as *a* person but as *this*

50 Jollimore, *Love's Vison*, 142.

51 Delaney, "Romantic Love and Loving Commitment," 350–51. Note that this is not necessarily to say that all the attitudes involved in love are reason-responsive. It could include both reason-responsive elements and elements that are not reason-responsive.

52 Frankfurt, "Duty and Love," 6, and "Taking Ourselves Seriously," 41.

53 Helm, "Love, Identification, and the Emotions," 41.

person, as having this particular identity."[54] There is more to being a person than having one's physiological needs met. Caring for someone as *a* person might mean giving them a certain amount of respect and dignity and making sure their basic needs are met. Caring for someone as *this* person entails caring for their identity, and it is this that makes love for a particular person different from care and concern for people in general. Returning to the example of giving money to a homeless person: when I give money to a homeless person (whom I do not know personally) I feel compassionate concern for the homeless; I care about their suffering and I want to try and ease it. I care for the homeless *as people*, but, without detailed knowledge of their lives, values, and personalities, I cannot care for them as *individuals*, and thus I can only identify with them minimally. Suppose I make friends with a homeless person called Joan, though: the more I get to know Joan, the better I can care for her as an individual, since I can appreciate and understand more and more the complexity of her needs and desires. It therefore becomes possible for me to love Joan, though it was not possible for me to love the homeless individuals to whom I gave money before but did not get to know. It is identification that distinguishes the love of particular people from *agape*. Frankfurt seems, in his account of love, to try to unite *agape*, an unconditional love for humanity, with the love of particular people. However, though an omniscient god could have intimate, detailed knowledge of everyone in a way that allows them to care for all people as individuals, humans are far more limited. If we are very good, we might be able to have compassionate concern for everyone, but we cannot love people we do not know because we can only identify with a few people.[55]

Frankfurt argues that love and caring involve taking on the beloved's needs and desires *as one's own*. In order to do this you need to share in their identity in some way; you need to feel that you have a stake in what happens to them. Romantic lovers are ideally located to do this because they share their lives and identities in such a way that their needs and values become intertwined with one another. We are wary of the notion of love at first sight, because the "lovers" have not had sufficient time to get to know each other. To illustrate what caring for someone's identity entails, Helm tells a story about his wife playing in a bagpipe competition. He suggests that he values piping, not because it is part of his identity, but because he shares in her identity, and thus he cannot help but share in the value that piping has to her. This means that he feels emotions very similar to what she feels during the competition: pride at winning and anxiety

54 Helm, "Love, Identification, and the Emotions," 46.

55 Frankfurt does distinguish love from compassion or "charitable concern" (*The Reasons of Love*, 44).

when things do not go well. In fact, he knows her and cares for her so well that he feels anxious, "even when she does not recognize the impending threat to her identity," such as when he is aware that other people in the audience think she is no good. Thus, he states, "I commit myself to the place playing bagpipes (among other things) has in the kind of life worth *her* living, and so I commit myself to feeling a broad pattern of other emotions focused on her and subfocused on piping."[56] Of course, we do this in other relationships as well: a parent, for instance, might be heavily emotionally involved with their child's performance at a school concert. However, it seems that there must be some kind of intimate relationship for such identification to take place, and romantic relationships are ideal for fostering identification.

Furthermore, as Foster points out, we need to know the beloved for as long as we love them and to continually renew our knowledge of them, because their interests will be continually evolving and changing: "We must come to know another person in order to be aware of her interests, but we should never let this knowledge become frozen so that we maintain a fixed concept of the other."[57] Thus, for Helm to care for the well-being of his bagpiping wife fully, he needs to converse with her; he needs to listen to her when she explains that she secretly wants to lose the bagpipe competition so will play deliberately badly because she really wants to learn to play the flute but she does not want her bagpiping friends to know this. We are wary when people continue to love someone with whom they once had a brief relationship because their love is based on a frozen image of their beloved and thus the object of their love really no longer exists. As Baier notes, the need for constant news about the welfare of those we care about is a sign that we genuinely care about them.[58]

Paradoxically, the desires to know another, spend time with them, and have them share secrets with us seem to be just the kind of self-interested concerns that conflict with Frankfurt's conception of love. However, these desires are closely aligned with the desire to care for the beloved as a particular individual. They are also essential for romantic love, which requires the lovers to share their lives in a significant way. Thus, it seems reasonable for Helm to be hurt if his wife does not tell him that she secretly wants to lose the bagpipe competition because, by not telling him, she is denying him the opportunity to identify with her. Due to the reciprocal nature of romantic love, if she does not want him to care for her, he might think that she does not care for him. Conversely, if Helm loves his wife in the Frankfurtian way, he should not require that his wife tell him

56 Helm, "Love, Identification, and the Emotions," 49.

57 Foster, "Romantic Love and Knowledge," 246.

58 Baier, "Caring about Caring," 274.

anything; he should love her regardless, and he has no obligation to share things with her. Thus, once again, Frankfurt appears to overlook some of the distinct value of romantic love and one of the ways in which romantic lovers might be particularly well-positioned to care for each other authentically. One of the best ways to gain detailed knowledge of the other in a way that allows you to identify with them is through sharing a life together in a close, reciprocal relationship.

(iv) "Love is not a matter of choice."

Frankfurt argues that love is outside of our direct control; we cannot love or stop loving someone merely by willing it to be so. This appeals to our intuition about love, but on further reflection, we seem to have more direct control over romantic love and friendship love than familial love. This is because both romantic partners and friends are chosen, and the love felt for our romantic beloveds and friends depends on us sharing a particular kind of relationship with them. Thus, as it is possible to extract oneself from these relationships, we have some control over whether or not the love continues, though Frankfurt is right that in some cases we will not be able to bring ourselves to leave the relationships. We do have control over whether we enter into a romantic relationship or friendship with another though; this distinguishes romantic love from familial love.[59] We would not even attempt to romantically love the majority of people, based on a rational decision that we would not get along with them, they would be bad for us in some way, or simply because we are not attracted to them.

Thus, romantic love does not just happen to us: it derives from a relationship that we choose to cultivate. The lover might feel that she cannot help loving her beloved, but whether she allows the love to develop in the first place is, to an extent, in her control. As Simon Keller notes, we can choose whether to "resist or embrace love": "when I find myself in love with someone, I can decide whether it would be better for me to send him flowers or to move to another city."[60] If I know someone is not right for me (perhaps they are violent or already have a partner), I can make the decision not to see that person anymore. At least during the early stages of love, many decisions are made regarding the romantic relationship, even if not entirely consciously. The lover decides whether to spend her Friday night with her friends or her new beloved, whether to ignore his annoying habits or allow herself to be bothered by them, whether or not to open herself up to him and tell him her secrets. All of these decisions will affect

59 A person might be able to choose whether or not to procreate, but they cannot choose what their children will be like so they do not choose to be in a relationship with that particular child.

60 Keller, "How Do I Love Thee?" 165.

whether the first flutters of love develop into something more long-lasting and substantial.

Perhaps Frankfurt would agree thus far; maybe he only believes that love is outside of our control once it has already taken hold of us. Nevertheless, the choices we have do not disappear once we are in love. The lover still has to make decisions that affect the relationship on which the love is based. For example, he can decide whether to move away for a promotion at work or stay with his beloved, whether to give up a drinking habit he knows she might leave him for, or whether to have sex with her friend who keeps flirting with him. Such decisions might appear not to be directly about love. The man who chooses to move away, continue drinking, or have sex with his partner's friend might still love her dearly. However, as he knows, his decisions will affect whether and how the relationship, on which their love depends, will continue and thus they are also decisions about the love shared between them. It is not simply a case of "if he loves her he'll sacrifice the promotion." Instead, the man faces conflicting desires and a choice over which he is in control; love does not simply always override all other reasons for action. Furthermore, he knows that he can decide to end the relationship, and that eventually he will stop loving his partner. Although it might be very hard to do this, if the reasons for ending the relationship outweigh the reasons for remaining in the relationship then he will be able to bring himself to leave; the limitation on his will is not total. It is not a necessity. Michael Bratman points out that "wholeheartedness and the absence of any intention to change need not involve an incapacity. That I quite sensibly *would* not change does not mean that I *could* not change."[61] This is evidenced by the vast numbers of people who do end relationships despite continuing to be in love. In his defense, Frankfurt could claim that they are not *really* in love, but this would be to beg the question. He could also say that people who end relationships with people whom they love just love other things, like their work, more than their romantic partners. However, even if this is true, they are still able to weigh the things they love and make decisions about them. In addition, it is debatable whether wholeheartedness, as Frankfurt construes it, is indeed always a good thing. Wolf reminds us that "wholeheartedness in the face or the context of objective reasons for doubt, seems indistinguishable from zealotry, fanaticism, or, at the least, close-mindedness."[62] Wholeheartedly loving someone who continually abuses you is pitiable or irrational; it is not admirable.

Frankfurt might also say that the comparative readiness we have to leave romantic relationships, and their being more in our control than familial love,

61 Bratman, "A Thoughtful and Reasonable Stability," 85.

62 Wolf, "The True, the Good, and the Lovable," 239.

is evidence of the lack of authenticity of romantic love. However, it might also be seen as evidence for the distinct value of romantic love. The reason why romantic love is more in our control than parental love is because romantic love depends, at least in part, on a chosen relationship, the workings of which can be voluntarily altered by one or both of the partners. One cannot totally withdraw from a parent-child relationship; even if a child is given away at birth, her birth mother will always be her birth mother. On the other hand, a romantic relationship requires voluntary commitment to the relationship by both partners. If one person no longer wants to be in the romantic relationship, then neither person can refer to herself as the other's partner. As it is possible to end the romantic relationship, romantic love is, to an extent, conditional on the success of the relationship. If one or both lovers stop working at the relationship, do not spend much time together, and stop being intimate with one another, then the relationship, and the love, will fall apart. Of course, we should work at our familial relationships as well, but familial love is far more likely to be unconditional, or nearly unconditional, than romantic love. This is partly because familial love is less voluntary than romantic love; families are bound to each other more tightly. They are necessarily bonded to one another in such a way that they may feel that their love is not a matter of choice. Romantic lovers are not bound to each other and know that either might stop loving the other at any point—even if they are married and very committed to one another. Nevertheless, this does not make romantic love less valuable than familial love. Having some control over whom you love romantically gives you greater control over your life, making you more likely to love someone who makes you happy. In addition, being loved by someone who could choose *not* to be in a relationship with you can be a greater boost to your self-esteem than being loved involuntarily by a family member. It also makes you more likely to treat them well.

4. CONCLUSION

Following this examination of Frankfurt's theory of love, I am in agreement with Foster in his rejection of Frankfurt's claim that "there is really one kind of love which comes in degrees of purity."[63] Frankfurt tries to take *agape* and reformulate it so that it can also account for love of particular people. While he succeeds, to some extent, in describing parental love, he fails to accurately describe romantic love and friendship, and, moreover, overlooks what is distinctly valuable about them. Although it was not his intention to describe romantic love, by failing to include features such as reciprocity in his account of love, Frankfurt

63 Foster, "Romantic Love and Knowledge," 162.

leaves no room for a kind of love that is important and valuable to many people. In addition, though they are not always easy to articulate, we do think that there are justifiable reasons to love some people and not others. There is a place for appraisal in romantic love and friendship.

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