

1-2005

Review of “The Reasons of Love”

Alan Soble
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.pacificu.edu/eip>

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Soble, Alan (2005) "Review of “The Reasons of Love”," *Essays in Philosophy*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 30.

Essays in Philosophy

A Biannual Journal

Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2005

Critical Review

The Reasons of Love, Harry G. Frankfurt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. 101 (no preface, no bibliography, no index; "Acknowledgment," p. 101). Cloth, \$19.95. ISBN 0-691-09164-1.

Love and Value, Yet Again

I. Augustine, Beauty, and Love

In the *Confessions* (written 397), St. Augustine reveals to us his (earlier) thoughts about a philosophical (or psychological?) puzzle, which his attempt to solve explains how he came to write his first book, *Beauty and Proportion*:

I was in love with beauty of a lower order and it was dragging me down. I used to ask my friends "Do we love anything unless it is beautiful? What, then, is beauty and in what does it consist? What is it that attracts us and wins us over to the things we love? Unless there were beauty and grace in them, they would be powerless to win our hearts." (*Conf.* 4.13)

Augustine had been entertaining the idea that that which is loved must be beautiful, an idea that Plato has both Socrates and Diotima assert about *eros* in *Symposium* (201a, 202d, 203c, 204d, 205e, 209b; Augustine does not refer explicitly to Plato) and also held by Aristotle: "No one falls in love who has not first derived pleasure from the looks of the beloved" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1167a3-8). Will Augustine stick to this thought, perhaps refining it by distinguishing between beauty (or beauties) of "a lower order" (say, the beauty of the body that incites sexual desire, and in particular his own sexual desires that "dragged him down" and occasioned the self-criticism of books 2 and 3) and more significant beauty (or beauties) of a "higher" order (Diotima's strategy; *Symp.* 210a-d) that will "pull him up"? Or will he break free of Plato's *eros* and decide that love for the ugly and the bad is possible (*contra* Aristotle; *NE* 1155b15-20, 1156b5-15, 1157a15-20, 1165b12-15) and even either praiseworthy or obligatory, joining sides with the longsuffering *agape* (or *caritas*) described by his admired St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13.

Augustine, at least sometimes, takes the first route. He praises God for His perfection, His infinite beauty and goodness ("Your beauty drew me to you, but soon I was dragged away from you by my own weight . . . the habit of the flesh"; *Conf.* 7.17) and claims that God is what he had been seeking all along in his lesser loves with lesser beauties ("my real need was for you, my God" [*Conf.* 3.1], a theme reminiscent of Diotima on "Absolute Beauty"; 210e-211a). Producing a definitive account of Augustine on love would be difficult. He wrote many books over many years and we would be unfair to expect complete consistency. Regardless, consider how Augustine continues his

meditations in *Conf.* 4.13:

When I looked at things, it struck me that there was a difference between the beauty of an object considered by itself . . . and the beauty to be found in a proper proportion between separate things. . . . This idea burst from my heart like water from a spring.

Augustine does not seem to reject the significance of beauty but to offer another metaphysical understanding of it. There is (apparently) the beauty of individual things and the beauty that exists as a relation between things. *Maybe* Augustine is saying that (1) the beauty of individual things is not real beauty but illusory, (2) the beauty that exists in virtue of a proportional relation between things is not illusory but genuine (hence superior) beauty, (3) even ugly individual things (whose ugliness is also illusory) may contribute to proportional beauty that exists in virtue of their bearing a relationship with other things, and (4) the only sense in which individual things may be judged (derivatively) beautiful is in light of their contribution to proportional beauty. This reading has the advantage of seeming to square with one of his solutions to the problem of evil, which comes later in the *Confessions* (7.13):

in the separate parts of your creation there are some things which we think of as evil because they are at variance with other things. But there are other things again with which they are in accord, and then they are good. . . . [T]hough the higher things are better than the lower, the sum of all creation [i.e., “the whole of creation”] is better than the higher things alone.

A thing *X* is evil or ugly if it is not in proper balance with another thing *Y*, but *X* may be good or beautiful if it is in proper balance with some other thing *Z*. (It seems to follow that *X* cannot be intrinsically evil/good or beautiful/ugly, and hence these features of *X* are illusory.) This looks like a variant of the argument based on the “tapestry” analogy: an individual thread or patch may look ugly, but it still contributes to the beauty of the whole, which depends on the proper relationship between all the individual pieces. This is how the whole of God's creation is beautiful and good, despite the fact that discrete portions of it *appear* ugly and evil. Indeed, Augustine also provides an ingenious, but fallacious, argument that individual evil things *cannot exist* (7.12) and concludes “whatever is, is good” (a line used centuries later, in 1732, by Alexander Pope in his “Essay on Man,” First Epistle, X.14).

It is not clear how this metaphysics of beauty helps answer Augustine's original questions: “Do we love anything unless it is beautiful? . . . What is it [other than beauty] that attracts us and wins us over to the things we love?” Perhaps Augustine is saying that beauty does play this role in love, but warns us that this beauty is illusory. Perhaps he is also implying that love for things that are beautiful in the nonrelational sense is not genuine love, not a robust love, or not the best love. The implication might be that only “the whole of creation” is lovable or deserves to be loved or that only God is lovable, since in either case the object of our devotion (as in Plato) manifests the highest beauty. Augustine, however, had another (pragmatic) reason to promote loving only God. In *Conf.* 4.4-4.6, he recounts his sadness over the death of a friend:

My heart grew sombre with grief. . . . My eyes searched everywhere for him, but he was not there to be seen. . . . I had no hope that he would come to life again. . . . I was heartbroken and had lost my joy. . . . I lived in misery, like every man whose soul is

tethered by the love of things that cannot last and then is agonized to lose them.

God cannot be lost, and is the only thing that cannot be lost, so the agony of loss cannot arise from being “tethered” to God by loving Him.

Note that Augustine in *Conf.* 4.13 fails to keep distinct beauty as the object of love (that which is loved) and beauty as the basis of love (why, the reason or cause, the thing that is loved is loved). When Augustine writes, “I was in love with beauty of a lower order,” he seems to say that beauty is the object of love (as it was, arguably, for Plato: “we . . . love in persons . . . the 'Image' of the Idea in them”; Gregory Vlastos, p. 110; but see Nussbaum; Osborne, p. 116). Augustine's other questions, however (e.g., “Do we love anything unless it is beautiful?”), are compatible with beauty's being either the object or the basis of love, or both. Similar confusions have occurred throughout the history of the philosophy of love.

II. Love and Value

From the ancients through the 20th Century, whether beauty/goodness is the basis (and/or object) of love, or has little or nothing to do with love, has been thoroughly discussed. Although some secular philosophers (Harry Frankfurt, for one) have denied that beauty (or other value) is the basis of love, the denial is more commonly found in accounts of love inspired by Christianity. For example, Søren Kierkegaard, in *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses* (1847), counters the *eros*-Platonic perspective and asserts the *agape*-Christian perspective in his characteristically provocative way: “the task is not: to find--the lovable object; but the task is: to find the object already given or chosen--lovable, and to be able to continue finding him lovable, no matter how he becomes changed” (p. 158, italics omitted; contrast Aristotle, *NE* 1165b3-35, who is ready to jettison the changed ex-beloved). The philosophical question concerns the relationship between love and value, or between loving something and valuing it. Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* is a well-known theological treatment of the issue. More recently, Irving Singer provided a sustained historical and philosophical examination of the topic from Plato to the 20th Century in his monumental trilogy, *The Nature of Love*, in which he distinguishes between the “appraisal” dimension or concept of love, i.e., love as a response to antecedent, independent value, and love as “bestowal,” i.e., the attribution or creation of value (vol. 1, 2nd ed., pp. 3-22). Nygren distinguished the two in the 1930s (p. 210; in Soble, p. 94); Emil Brunner, following Nygren's lead, made the distinction in 1945 (see Outka, pp. 81-83, 157-58), and many other scholars have discussed it (see, e.g., Brentlinger). What we have is a *Euthyphro* problem: do I love Melinda at least in part because Melinda is, so I think, beautiful, or do I think that Melinda is beautiful because I love her? The problem remains if “beautiful” is replaced by any other valuable property or set of properties, such as wit, charm, and intelligence.

Getting ahead of our story a little, here is Frankfurt weighing in on the bestowal-*agape* side:

It is true that the beloved invariably is, indeed, valuable to the lover. However, perceiving that value is not at all an indispensable *formative* or *grounding* condition of the love. It need not be a perception of value in what he loves that moves the lover to love it. The truly essential relationship between love and the value of the beloved goes in the opposite direction. It is not necessarily as a *result* of recognizing their value and of being captivated by it that we love things [and people]. Rather, what we love necessarily

acquires value for us *because* we love it. The lover does invariably and necessarily perceive the beloved as valuable, but the value he sees it to possess is a value that derives from and that depends upon his love. (*The Reasons Of Love*, pp. 38-39; all italics are Frankfurt's)

We do indeed have a *Euthyphro* problem. (It is hardly new to Frankfurt, although he writes as if none of his contemporaries has grappled with it.) As Frankfurt observes, love and the beloved's value *invariably* go together. What we must figure out is the relationship between them, just as about the invariable correlation between God's commanding act *A* and *A*'s being right we must decide whether God commands *A* because it is right or *A* is right because God commands it (a variant of *Euthyphro* 10d-11b; pp. 31-33). Frankfurt's reply to the love dilemma is analogous to saying that *A* is right because God commands it. Of course, we ask: if *A* is right *because* God commands it and not because *A* is right, why does God (bother to) command it? Similarly, we ask: if I evaluate my beloved Melinda as beautiful and good because I love her and not because she *is* beautiful and good (and maybe I love her despite the fact that she is bad and ugly; "such things happen," says Frankfurt [*ROL*, p. 38; he makes the same point in replying to Susan Wolf in 2002, p. 249; see also Jenefer Robinson]), then why do I love her at all? The title of Frankfurt's book is *The Reasons of Love*, not *The Reasons for Love*. He emphasizes how love provides us with reasons for doing things, especially for the sake of the beloved ("Love is itself, for the lover, a source of reasons"; *ROL*, p. 37), and he rejects any Platonic, Aristotelian, or Augustinian view about loving something only if or because it is good or beautiful. Indeed, for Frankfurt, there may be *no* reasons at all *for* loving someone, and we can love *anything* (although not everything).

But we do love, and we love *Y* instead of *Z*. *Why?* (As an exercise, try all this out on hate. "I disvalue you because I hate you. Why do I hate *you*? I have no idea. It has nothing to do with you. It is not that you are antecedently hate-worthy, as if you did something nasty and cruel to me. I might even hate you were you especially *nice* to me." "Agapic" hate looks pathological, and we would help someone experiencing it to get over it. Not so for "agapic" love, according to its proponents. See Hamlyn.)

III. Hume and Kant

Moving beyond the ancients, we find in the contrast between David Hume and Immanuel Kant a pertinent example from a later period in the history of philosophy. In "Of the amorous passion, or love betwixt the sexes" (*Treatise*, 2.2.11 [1739-40]), Hume offers this account:

love, which arises betwixt the sexes . . . in its most natural state, is deriv'd from the conjunction of three different impressions or passions[:] The pleasing sensation arising from beauty; the bodily appetite for generation; and a generous kindness or good-will.

About these three "impressions or passions" from which love is "derived," Hume makes two remarkable claims.

First, that "there arises such a connexion betwixt the sense of beauty, the bodily appetite, and benevolence, that they become in a manner inseparable." *Inseparable*, by golly (although only "in a manner"). I will explain below why this claim is surprising. Note, though, that Hume is in effect raising the *Euthyphro* love dilemma: love and beauty (or value in general) are constantly conjoined.

Hume is on the verge of telling us why.

Second, that “we find from experience, that 'tis indifferent which of them advances first; since any of them is almost sure to be attended with the related affections.” Thus the “inseparable connexion” of these three elements of the “amorous passion” can arise, for Hume, in *three* ways, the first two of which are unusual and striking: (1) sexual desire occurs first, from which an appreciation of the beauty of the object and kindness toward him or her both result; (2) kindness occurs first, from which both sexual desire and an appreciation of the beloved's beauty follow; or (3), in Hume's words, “the most common species of love is that which first arises from beauty, and afterwards diffuses itself into kindness and into the bodily appetite.”

Although Hume concedes that love need not be grounded in the lover's perceiving beauty (or other valuable properties) in the other person, this is the most common way in which love and the value of the beloved come to be constantly conjoined. Perhaps Hume observed what Frankfurt does: “Love is often understood as being, most basically, a response to the perceived worth of the beloved” (*ROL*, p. 38). In Frankfurt's view, however, that means only that those multitudes who understand love this way are mistaken and that many cases of love described this way are not the real thing.

Now, what is so remarkable about Hume's account? The thesis that the “amorous passion” is an inseparable mixture of sexual desire, an appreciation of the beloved's beauty, and generous kindness is already, in itself, a shocker. But no matter. It is *especially* unlikely given Hume's view of sexual desire, or the bodily appetite, which he calls the soul's “most gross and vulgar” passion. By contrast, Hume says that benevolence is “the most refin'd passion of the soul.” If benevolence and sexual desire are so different, how could they ever be joined together (and inseparably)? Hume sees the problem: “Kindness or esteem, and the appetite to generation, are too remote to unite easily.” Thus it must be something very special or very powerful that is able to unite such disparate passions. For Hume, this magical ingredient is the “pleasing sensation arising from beauty.” Roger Scruton has commented that Hume's three components are “incongruously stewed together” (*Sexual Desire*, 217). “Hume then has the problem,” he says, “of explaining how the sense of beauty and the 'bodily appetite for generation' may be related.” I disagree. Not only does that not seem to be a problem at all--it is no mystery that beauty arouses sexual desire--but it is also not Hume's problem, which is explaining how the sexual appetite and benevolence are joined.

Still, Hume's solution to the problem is troublesome: “The love of beauty is plac'd in a just medium betwixt them, and partakes of both their natures: From whence it proceeds, that 'tis so singularly fitted to produce both.” *Perhaps*. Note that if the bodily appetite and benevolence are “too remote to unite easily,” this also applies to the other two mechanisms described by Hume by which the three components become connected, but in which the power of beauty cannot do the cementing, since it is an effect of some other component. This might explain why the first two mechanisms are not nearly as common as the third, but that explanation depends on our already being able to explain how beauty does the trick. I'm not sure how it does. Bernard Mandeville, a few years before the *Treatise*, was more candid than Hume: “What we call love . . . is not a genuine, but an adulterated appetite, or rather a compound, a heap of several contradictory passions blended in one” (*The Fable of the Bees*, Remark “N,” p. 86; “N” was added to the 1723 edition).

Maybe we should seek an answer to Hume's problem in evolutionary biology, which would talk

about the adaptive significance of *responses* to beauty (both physical and mental?) in instigating procreation, pair-bonding, and the “generous kindness” that accompanies them, and the adaptive significance of possessing beauty (that which causes sexual arousal) as a marker of fertility. I mention this possibility because Frankfurt (to my mind, disappointingly) shores up his account of love by appealing to an inchoate mix of evolution and biology (naturalism pervades the entire book). For example, since he has denied that love is a response to the perceived value of its object, Frankfurt has some responsibility to resolve our doubts about why, exactly, *X* loves *Y* either at all or instead of *Z*. Frankfurt nearly brushes off the question: “Love may be brought about--in ways that are poorly understood--by a disparate variety of natural causes” (*ROL*, p. 38). His point is that no matter how love is caused, by the beauty of the beloved, by her ugliness, or by a biological arrangement that triggers releases of dopamine at precisely the right moments, then, if it is the genuine article, the lover will behave in ways toward the things he or she loves as a result of that love. Singer, back in the 1960s, had urged this point: the causal antecedents (the basis or ground) of love are irrelevant to the nature of love (*The Nature of Love*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., p. 13). Love is the bestowal of value on the things loved; as long as this love-bestowal of value occurs, it matters not at all why the love exists or how it came about.

This is but one example of a defect in Frankfurt's book. Much of what Frankfurt writes in the slender *Reasons of Love* has been said before, and said well enough, by others, both in the long history of philosophy and by many contemporary philosophers, some now dead, others alive and kicking. It is annoying that Frankfurt fails to acknowledge almost every single one. Is he not familiar with this literature? Or does he know it, or at least knows *about* it, but has deliberately chosen to ignore it, thereby not giving credit to his predecessors when credit is due? *Reasons of Love* began as lectures given at Princeton University in 2000 and University College, London in 2001; these lectures were later revised for publication. Perhaps this partially explains ignoring the literature. But Frankfurt in *Reasons* also ignores his own earlier work in the area, not bothering to list or mention these essays and not informing the reader that he has said such-and-such before. This gives the impression either that the theses of *Reasons* are new or that there has been no development, no rethinking, of Frankfurtian ideas over the last twenty or so years. Or Frankfurt, since he doesn't blow the horns of others, isn't willing to blow his own, either.

Why are sexual desire and benevolence “too remote to unite easily”? Although Hume does not provide the details, Kant does. “True human love . . . admits of no distinction between types of persons, or between young and old. . . . Human love is goodwill, affection, promoting the happiness of others and finding joy in their happiness” (*Lectures on Ethics*, Ak 27:384; Infield, p. 163, Heath, p. 155). Kant is claiming that love is not grounded in the perception of the beauty or other value of the beloved. At least, this is what I take “admits of no distinction” to mean. So, there is one difference between Hume and Kant. Further, Kant claims that love is benevolence, and this is another difference, for Kant singles out only one of Hume's three components as love. (See also Kant's distinction between “practical” love and “pathological” love, which arises from inclination; *Groundwork*, Ak 4:399.) A third difference is that Kant is quite willing to conclude, which Hume tried to avoid, that love and sexual desire are so disparate that they *cannot* be joined. Kant says about sexuality:

a love that springs merely from sexual impulse cannot be love at all, but only appetite. . . . [I]t is clear that, when a person loves another purely from sexual desire, *none of these*

factors [e.g., benevolence] *enter into the love*. . . . Sexual love makes of the loved person an Object of appetite. . . . [A]s soon as a person becomes an object of appetite for another, *all motives of moral relationship cease* to function, because as an object of appetite for another a person becomes a thing. . . . [A] man wishes to satisfy his desire, and a woman hers, they stimulate each other's desire; their inclinations meet, but their object is not human nature but sex, and each of them dishonours the human nature of the other. They make of humanity an instrument for the satisfaction of their lusts and inclinations, and dishonour it by placing it on a level with animal nature. (Ak 27:384-385; Infield, pp. 163-64; Heath, pp. 155-56; emphasis added)

Hume and Kant agree about the (opposing) natures of sexual desire and benevolence, but whereas Hume relies on beauty to bring them together, Kant sees no prospect of a reconciliation. Indeed, it is not merely that sexual desire and love cannot be combined: “benevolence . . . *deter[s]* one from carnal enjoyment” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 180; Ak 6:426; emphasis added). We have returned to Plato (*Phaedrus* 254a ff.) and Augustine: “Whoever loves another as himself ought to love that in him which is his real self. Our real selves are not bodies. . . . Human nature is to be loved . . . without any condition of carnal relationship” (*De vera religione*, in O’Connell, *St. Augustine’s Confessions*, 111).

In this respect, of course, Kant is not alone, even if he makes the point too dramatically. Many times we have heard that love is affection and good will, it involves behavior of prolonged care and concern, etc., while sexual desire is an appetite quickly satisfied (“Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame,” Shakespeare, *Sonnet* 129, line 1), does not involve care and concern, and so forth (e.g., Stafford, p. 58). Or, as Scruton puts it, “Love has an aim which is separate from that of desire. Love seeks companionship, in which mutual well-being will be the common purpose” (*Sexual Desire*, 216). Frankfurt, too: “relationships that are primarily romantic or sexual do not provide very authentic or illuminating paradigms of love as I am construing it” (*ROL*, 43). This repeats a claim Frankfurt made in a 1997 lecture, “On Caring,” later published in *Necessity, Volition, and Love*: “it is not a good idea to suppose that romantic relationships provide especially authentic paradigms of love” (166).

IV. “The Importance of What We Care About”

As far as I know, Frankfurt began his investigations into love with “The Importance of What We Care About,” published in 1982. One claim he made in that paper, which appears also in *Reasons of Love*, is that a “person who cares about something is . . . invested in it. He *identifies* himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses [recall Augustine] and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced (*Importance*, p. 83; see “On Caring,” p. 168). In *Reasons of Love*, Frankfurt similarly writes about love (“an especially notable variant of caring”; p. 11) that the lover “takes the interests of his beloved as his own. Consequently, he benefits or suffers depending upon whether those interests are or are not adequately served” (p. 80). For Frankfurt, this is one of the four “conceptually necessary” features of love. It is an idea with a long history, going back at least to Montaigne’s essay on friendship, Kant (*Lectures*, Ak 27:388; Infield, p. 167, Heath, pp. 158-59), and Hegel’s brief remarks on love. In 1980, J. F. M. Hunter defined love in part as involving “the wish to unite one’s interests with those of another person.” When two people love each other, they satisfy this wish together by each person’s “treat[ing] the loved one’s interests as if they were [his] own” (*Thinking*,

pp. 75-76). Not long afterwards, Robert Nozick (“Love's Bond”) also used the idea in his account of love. For Nozick, the intention in love is “to identify one's fortunes in large part with [the] fortunes” of a joint “we” (p. 78). Thus “your own well-being is tied up with [the well-being] of someone you love” (p. 70): “when something bad happens to one you love, . . . something bad also happens *to you*” (p. 68), and “as the other [person] fares, so (to some extent) do you” (p. 69). This feature of his theory is Nozick's fine gold thread of love, that which all love and all types of love have in common (p. 68).

In “The Importance of What We Care About,” Frankfurt addresses the *Euthyphro* love dilemma, although here he speaks about caring about something instead of loving it. It makes no difference. The dilemma concerns the relationship between a person's caring about something and that thing's being important to the person. Frankfurt asserts that “The person does not care about the object because its worthiness commands that he do so” (*Importance*, p. 94), but “caring about something *makes* that thing important to the person who cares about it” (p. 92). This is analogous and perhaps equivalent to saying that in loving something, we create value in or bestow value on it. That which we love has value because we love it; that which we care about is important to us because we care about it. Now, just as we asked, earlier, why we do or should love what we love, given that our love is not a response to our beloved's value but creates that value, we can ask why we do or should care about what we care about, given that caring about it is not a response to its (antecedent, independent) importance but makes it important. Frankfurt acknowledges, “When the importance of a certain thing to a person is due to the very fact that he cares about it, . . . that fact cannot provide a useful measure of the extent to which his caring about the thing is justified” (*Importance*, p. 93). If the value my beloved has is due to my loving her, I can hardly rely on that value to justify (or explain) my love--on pain of circularity. Recall that, for Frankfurt, when we care about something, we “invest” in it. Hence we need to deliberate seriously about what to care about, what to make important to us. Frankfurt expresses this in his characteristically convoluted way: “the question of what to care about [i.e. of what to make important to us] . . . is one which must necessarily be important to” us.

What will “justify” caring about something or “justif[y] . . . making the thing important . . . by caring about it”? Frankfurt approaches a solution by claiming that “the only way to justify doing this is in terms of the importance of the activity of caring as such.” This is also part of his answer to the *Euthyphro* love dilemma in *Reasons of Love*, that love or loving is itself important to us (p. 51). But this claim generates its own tangles. Suppose we inquire about the source of the importance of caring as such. Either caring as such is important because we care about caring as such and so make it important (for us), or the importance of caring as such is antecedent to our caring about caring as such. If the latter, care-independent importance underlies caring after all, as it does in the other horn of the dilemma: we judge caring as such important because caring as such has value antecedent to and independently of its being cared about. If the former, however, we must wonder about the origin of our caring about caring as such, i.e., why we have made caring as such important by caring about it. That is, how is it that *that* thing, caring as such, was selected as being the recipient of our caring about it, when we cannot appeal to its care-independent value or worthiness to be judged important?

You see, the importance of caring as such justifies, if it justifies anything at all, only caring *simpliciter* about things and making them, whatever they turn out to be, important. It does not

justify caring about any particular thing or making any particular thing important to us. Frankfurt knows this and so continues with the rest of his solution:

What makes it more suitable . . . for a person to make one object rather than another important to himself? It seems that it must be the fact that it is *possible* for him to care about the one and not about 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. (*Importance*, p. 94)

I'm struck, first, by Frankfurt's change in vocabulary from "justified" to "suitable," whatever that means. Apparently this horn of the *Euthyphro* dilemma technically collapses, because we do not get the justification we were seeking. I am also struck by "possible," which Frankfurt soon repeats: "the worthiness of the activity of caring commands that he choose an object which he will be able to care about." Frankfurt tells us that "the choice of the object[s]" to care about is not "arbitrary." But that we are *able* to care about something is not a very sharp or helpful test in to employ in deciding exactly what we should make important to us by caring about it. It seems to leave the field wide open. Frankfurt's test rules out only objects that we *cannot* care about (logically cannot? in virtue of natural laws? psychologically cannot?), which is useless advice: if we cannot care about them, we certainly cannot choose to care about them. Does this looseness also apply to choosing to care about caring as such? If our caring about something in particular depends on our being able to care about it and so make it important to us, then our caring about caring as such depends on its being possible for us to care about caring as such. So if we are unable to care about caring as such, then at least in our own lives we have no justification for caring at all (*simpliciter*, for anything, it matters not what).

Frankfurt's argument seems to be that it does not matter very much what we care about in particular as long as we care about something, in virtue of the importance of caring as such. This is a large part of his treatment of the issue in *Reasons of Love*, as we shall see. Yet, Frankfurt has a point. God in his omnipotence can care about everything (and thereby bestow importance on all his created things), and God is not vulnerable (to loss, or to anything else). We humans cannot care about everything. So we must choose some things to care about from the infinite stock of things. At the same time, there may be from our perspective very little that is worth caring about to begin with. Given these meager pickings, we should care about whatever it is possible for us to care about, so as to at least engage in caring and reap the benefits of caring as such.

Frankfurt's theory of love in *Reasons of Love* owes a great deal to the Christian *agape* tradition. But the claim in "The Importance of What We Care About" that we should care about that which we are *able* to care about is not Christian. (There are other nonChristian elements in Frankfurt's account of love. For example, there is not to be any turning of the other cheek: "Why should we not be happy [!] to fight for what we wholeheartedly love, even when there are no good arguments to show that it is correct for us to love it?" *ROL*, p. 31.) Listen to Kierkegaard: "True love is precisely [to find] the unlovable object to be lovable" (*Works of Love*, p. 343). That is, true Christian love is caring about the "unlovable," that which it is ordinarily *not possible* for us to care about or is very difficult for us to care about (the physically offensive, homeless, conniving drug addict). That which we are able to love is often easy for us to love. In particular, it takes no skill, determination, mentoring, or moral sense to love, care about, or make important that which is lovable. For example, given our natures it is no trick to love the self, let alone the beautiful, smart, charming,

congenial, talented--and clean--people that surround us and with whom we have loving relationships. Frankfurt has a reply of sorts in *Reasons of Love*: loving the self is *difficult* and the purest form of love: “coming to love oneself is the deepest and most essential--and by no means the most readily attainable--achievement of a serious and successful life” (p. 68). In “On Caring,” published five years before *Reasons*, he had already begun this argument: “love of self may even appear to be in a certain way an exceptionally pure form of love” (p. 168). Be that as it may, Frankfurt's claim that we should care about that which it is possible for us to care about, if that means that we should (and may) care about that which we find lovable and therefore easy-possible to care about, grants much to Hume, who claims that in most cases we love those whom we find beautiful--independently of loving them. If we are to select, as the things to care about, those things that we find lovable (hence possible to love), then our loving is, *contra* Frankfurt, a response to the perceived value of its object. (“For most men it is easier to bestow value upon a beautiful rather than an ugly woman”; Singer, vol. 1, 2nd ed., p. 23.) Even if bestowing value as a result of love is an important part of love, underlying this later bestowal of value on the things we love because we love them is an *initial* perception or judgment that they are antecedently worthy of our caring about them, worthy of having further value bestowed on them. If so, Frankfurt has not avoided traveling down Plato's “appraisal” horn of the love dilemma.

V. Between “Importance” and *Reasons*

“The Importance of What We Care About” received critical attention from Annette Baier in *Synthese* in 1982, briefly from me in 1990 (*The Structure of Love*, pp. 129-30), and from Susan Wolf in 2002, in a book of new essays all devoted to Frankfurt's work (he replied to each essay). “Importance” was published in 1982 and *Reasons of Love* in 2004. Between them, but closer to *Reasons*, Frankfurt wrote at least three other substantial pieces on caring and love (other essays included bits and pieces). They are, in chronological order, “Autonomy, Necessity, and Love” (published in 1994 in German and not in English until 1999, when it appeared in his collection *Necessity, Volition, and Love*); a 1997 lecture, “On Caring,” that appeared in print for the first time in *Necessity*; and “Duty and Love,” published in a new journal early in 1998. I want to mention a few things about “On Caring” and “Duty and Love,” which together are a preview of (or prequel to) *Reasons*.

First, in “On Caring” Frankfurt expresses and defines a central claim of *Reasons*, that (genuine) love is “disinterested,” by which he means that it is “unmotivated by any instrumental concern” (p. 168). In “Autonomy” (p. 134), Frankfurt suggests that our love for our children is disinterested in this sense. This is one consideration that leads Frankfurt to think that “the loving concern of parents for their infants or small children is the mode of caring that comes closest . . . to providing pure instances of what I have in mind in speaking of love” (“On Caring,” 166), as opposed, for example, to romantic and sexual loves. In *Reasons*, Frankfurt makes much of the quality of our love for our (small) children. In “Duty and Love,” he uses this love to illustrate his thesis about the relationship between love and value: “it is not fundamentally because I recognize how important to me my children are that I love them. On the contrary, the relationship between their value to me and my love for them goes essentially the other way. My children are valuable to me in the first place just because I love them” (p. 6). I presume that his children would have antecedent importance or value for him, and he would “love” or care about their welfare on the basis of that importance if, say, he is thinking that his children will eventually mind the farm and take care of him in his old age. In

that case, his caring about and for them is not disinterested, but instrumentally motivated.

Second, in “On Caring” Frankfurt begins to connect together caring, love, and what is important to us (a connection that becomes very tight in *Reasons*). Thus, “Among the things that we care about there are some that we cannot help caring about; and among the things that we cannot help caring about are those that we love” (p. 165). What I find interesting about this claim is not the connection it establishes between caring and love--for, of course, any treatment of love is going to link loving something and caring about and for it--but rather the suggestion that there are some things that *we cannot help caring about*. We had wondered, because it is caring about something that makes it important and not its antecedent importance that makes us care about it, what we should care about and why. Frankfurt didn't quite provide a justification of caring about one thing instead of another; we were advised to care about what we are able to care about. But if there are some things we *cannot help* caring about, then (1) we won't be faced all that often with having to *decide* what to care about and (2) a kind of “vindication,” even if not a justification, of what we do care about is in the air. No complaints can be raised about our caring about things we cannot help caring about, and we should not feel as though we always have to explain ourselves just because we care about something. In *Reasons*, I think, Frankfurt pushes this point and ends up with an account of love that is significantly *naturalistic*.

Third, in “On Caring” Frankfurt introduces yet another theme, the “particularity” of the beloved. For Frankfurt, “it makes no sense for a person to consider accepting a substitute for his beloved” (p. 170), a claim that legions of writers before Frankfurt have also made. Why is the claim important, or what is supposed to follow? Usually, the argument goes like this: Suppose that John loves Mary and a Jill comes along that strongly resembles Mary in salient ways. If John's love for Mary is based on her (repeatable, general) properties, John should also love Jill--or love her instead, if her properties are a wee bit better than Mary's. But John, who (genuinely) loves Mary, will not substitute Jill for her. Ergo, Mary's properties do not ground John's love. (Then what does? It doesn't matter.) That is, the substitution argument is about the basis or ground of love. Frankfurt does not traverse the argument in this detail (see Bernstein on it), but nearly hops right to his conclusion, which is, partially in virtue of the word “focus,” ambiguous between a claim about the ontology of the beloved and the basis of love: “The focus [object? basis?] 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*” (p. 170). So love, for Frankfurt, is in some sense *de re*, not *de dicto* (see Kraut), which is another way to state his disagreement with Plato. (But, about the basis or object of love? If I love you “because you are you,” then your particularity is the basis of my love. If I love the particular that you are, for whatever reason, your particularity is the object [target] of my love for you.) Frankfurt admits that particularity is “mysterious” and “impossible to define” (p. 170), which might be taken as a defect of his account of love, since it generates what is perhaps an unsolvable puzzle. A bunch of contemporary philosophers have struggled with the concepts “particularity,” “substitutability,” “irreplaceability,” “uniqueness.” Frankfurt neither acknowledges their existence nor shows that he has learned something from them (see, for starters, Badhwar, Bernstein, Brown, Fisher, Lamb, Nozick, Rorty, and Scruton), for he has added nothing to this ongoing discussion. He does employ “particularity” for his own purposes, though: “In virtue of this particularity, which cannot conceivably be duplicated or shared and therefore cannot possibly be available elsewhere, the well-being of what a person loves is for him an irreplaceable necessity” (p. 170). Particularity, then, is important in

Frankfurt's account because it generates uniqueness and irreplaceability. He does not consider, however, the objection that particularity is not required to secure either uniqueness or irreplaceability (which are, in any event, not the same thing), for we are all unique simply in virtue of our properties, or we are all unique in virtue of the special way in which we put our repeatable properties together (see, for example, C. S. Lewis, pp. 58-59). Uniqueness does not strictly depend on particularity if uniqueness can be generated by appropriate descriptions, and Frankfurt has not told why we should prefer one way of securing uniqueness to another. Uniqueness-by-description (rather than uniqueness-by-name) may be quite enough to explain both non-substitution and why “the well-being of what a person loves is for him an irreplaceable necessity.”

Fourth, in “Duty and Love,” Frankfurt surprisingly claims that “I may love a woman from a distance, with no opportunity to affect her in any way; and she may have no inkling even that I exist” (p. 6). We do not have to state the case so dramatically to raise a problem in Frankfurt's account of love. Unrequited and nonreciprocal loves abound, in which John loves Mary but Mary (who may know John: they work in the same firm or live in the same apartment building) does not love John. It is difficult to explain this situation as one in which John genuinely loves Mary (note that Frankfurt writes that “I may *love* a woman,” not “I may '*love*' a woman”) if one also holds that love involves “investment.” Recall what Frankfurt said about this feature of love: a “person who cares about something is . . . invested in it. He *identifies* himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced” (*Importance*, p. 83); the lover “takes the interests of his beloved as his own. Consequently, he benefits or suffers depending upon whether those interests are or are not adequately served” (*ROL*, p. 80). But in unrequited or nonreciprocal love, it is either impossible or insuperably difficult that the lover “takes the interests of his beloved as his own.” What opportunity does he have to do so? His nonreciprocating beloved does not make such an opportunity available. (Will he be happy, and happily invested, if any old Tom, Dick, or Harry promotes her welfare instead? Maybe here he is *too* vulnerable.) The upshot is that if we assume “investment,” then love is necessarily reciprocal and there cannot be any situation in which John loves Mary but she does not love him. In Frankfurt's “love at a distance” case, then, we would have to say that John wanted to love Mary or John was trying to love Mary, not that he actually loves her. There are philosophers who do claim that love is necessarily reciprocal (e.g., Ehman, “Personal Love,” p. 123; Wojtyla, pp. 85-86), but the claim is counterintuitive and runs into a mess of problems. Just to mention one: if love is necessarily reciprocal, i.e., John loves Mary if and only if Mary loves John, then it cannot be the case that one person unilaterally stops loving the other person. Hence, if love is reciprocal, then love is necessarily constant (it never ends) or one person can stop loving the other if and only if the other, at the same time, stops loving the first. (By the way, at the end of this paragraph in “Duty and Love,” Frankfurt apparently claims that love is “a psychic condition within myself.” That is an odd ontology of love, an account of the *kind* of thing love is. Further, and again, it seems not to square with actual as opposed to merely desired “investment.”)

Fifth, in “Duty and Love” Frankfurt picks up his discussion, left off somewhat abruptly at the end of “Importance,” about what we should care about. He mentions again that God has no problem because God is omnipotent: He can care about everything. But “we need to exercise a cautious selectivity and a defensive restraint” (p. 7; see almost the same line in *ROL*, p. 63). There are two factors we need to take into account in choosing what to care about, to love, to bestow importance

on: (1) because care and love involve investment, our well-being will vary according to the well-being of our beloved--risky business; and (2) again, we should care about what we are able to care about. "It is not so easy for most of us to find things that we are capable of loving," Frankfurt seems to bemoan; "people vary in their capacity to be deeply touched" (p. 7). I do not want to belabor a point I made earlier: the fact that we love the things by which we are "deeply touched" implies that we love them because we find antecedent value in them. At this place in "Duty and Love," Frankfurt again raises the question of the value of care or love as such, going beyond "Importance" and giving us some hints where he will eventually go in *Reasons*. He concedes that "it is obscure to me why" love as such, i.e., disinterested concern for the well-being of the beloved "should be so precious to us." (I had said as much above.) But let us not worry that in Frankfurt's account of love, particularity is "mysterious" and our making the value of love as such important is "obscure." We can always say, "love is of course mysterious, once we think about it, and what we have succeeded in doing is revealing the ways it is mysterious." (Or we could say, with Kierkegaard, that "he who would end with the inexplicable had best begin with it and say not a word more, so as not to become an object of suspicion"; *Stages on Life's Way*, p. 50.) What Frankfurt does say is this: "In any case, I shall simply stipulate that without loving . . . our lives would be intolerably unshaped and empty" and "miserably deprived" (p. 7), a claim he elaborates, without stipulations, in *Reasons*. What Frankfurt needs to do, however, is not simply convince us that love as such has value, but that love *in his sense*, which includes disinterested concern, as such has value, that love in other senses doesn't have as much if any value. For what Frankfurt claims here is that unless we have disinterested love in our lives, our lives will be empty and miserable. What we find in *Reasons*, however, doesn't meet this challenge. Frankfurt claims, "It is by caring about things that we infuse the world with importance" and hence with purpose (*ROL*, p. 23). By loving we make things important and as a result we have aims, ambitions, and goals (*ROL*, pp. 52-53). Now we know why love as such is important, why we consider it to be precious: without these things (aims, goals, etc.) that are made possible by love "we would be dreadfully bored" (*ROL*, p. 53). "Boredom is a serious matter. . . . [T]he avoidance of boredom is a profound and compelling human need" (*ROL*, pp. 53-54; see Neu). So the emptiness and misery that is avoided by loving as such is the emptiness and misery of boredom. But here the argument collapses, for there is no reason (or Frankfurt provides none) to think that it must be disinterested love that permits us to have aims and goals and thereby to avoid being bored. (For a sophisticated critique of Frankfurt on the relationship between having goals and boredom, see Millgram.)

As we saw before, however, even if we grant that love (in Frankfurt's sense) as such has value, this does not help us decide what in particular to love; it shows us only that a life in which we love something or another is likely to be better than a life in which we love nothing at all. Yet we have made some progress, for now the prospective lover of a particular thing or person can tell himself or herself: "I know that by loving this thing I will be reaping the value of love as such, so all I need to figure out is whether I am able to love this thing without too much difficulty, not so much as to offset the value of love as such, and whether the risks to my well-being through investment are not so high as, again, to offset the value of love as such." So, if the value of love as such is very high, and if we have on top of that a need to love, then taking on improbable and risky beloveds would be justified. Let us happily hunt down that physically offensive, homeless, conniving drug addict whom we scorned just a few paragraphs ago. By contrast, if the value of love as such is not high, we would do better waiting for more palatable specimens of humanity. (Maybe what underlies Kierkegaard's Christian notion that we should love the unlovable is the idea that the value of love as

such is infinite.) It might even turn out, if we are going to do this type of calculation, that loving a high-quality specimen of humanity will offset the lesser value of love as such, where that love is not always or ever disinterested.

Sixth, in “Duty and Love” Frankfurt argues, which he argues at greater length in *Reasons*, that the fact that before loving we take into account the difficulty of loving that particular object and how much of a risk that object poses to our own well-being through investment, does not mean that love is, after all, self-interested: “what serves the self-interest of the lover is, precisely, the fact that his love is disinterested. The benefit of loving accrues to him only if he is genuinely selfless” (p. 8). I suppose we can make sense of the idea, and perhaps even agree with it, that one who loves disinterestedly because doing so makes him happy is not being selfish, self-interested, or self-centered at all. But notice that Frankfurt's handling of this issue depends on the claim that *only* genuine love, i.e., disinterested love, has value as such. For if nondisinterested love has appreciable value as such, then love *would* be self-interested, and Frankfurt could not *object* to that. For if nondisinterested love has appreciable value, through the power to prevent our lives from being empty and miserable, then Frankfurt has no way to urge that we pursue one type of love instead of the other or that one type is superior to the other.

It is also relevant to note that Charles Fried (among others) has argued that in reciprocal love there is a “mutual sharing of interests. . . . There is . . . a new pattern or system of interests which both [persons] share and both value. . . . In this way reciprocal love represents a kind of resolution of the paradoxes of self-interest and altruism” (*An Anatomy of Values*, p. 79). The point is that in arguing that love is not self-interested, Frankfurt need not appeal to love's being disinterested. He could, instead, appeal to the “investment” of (reciprocal) love. As a matter of fact, he does: “a lover *identifies himself* with what he loves. In virtue of this identification, . . . [t]he interests of his beloved are not actually *other* than his at all. They are his interests, too. . . . The lover is invested in his beloved: he profits [ironic word] by its successes, and its failures cause him to suffer” (*ROL*, p. 61). Nothing in this argument, or this characterization of love, depends on assuming love is disinterested. (And I am still troubled by the fact that the person in whom I invest in love has been culled by a “defensive selectivity” [*ROL*, p. 63], apparently a self-interested consideration.)

VI. Susan Wolf

In “The True, the Good, and the Lovable: Frankfurt's Avoidance of Objectivity,” Susan Wolf takes on “Importance” (and “Duty”). She begins by stating that she likes neither horn of the *Euthyphro* love dilemma, and she eventually proposes a solution to the puzzle. On the one side, she finds the idea (in Plato, Aristotle, et al.) “that one should love what is [antecedently] worth loving and in proportion to its worthiness” to be “horribly wrong” (p. 231). On the other side, she finds “problematic as well” the central idea behind Frankfurt's claim that it is “suitable” to care about what it is possible to care about, viz., that “the question of whether something is *worthy* of our love . . . is out of place . . . [,] that worthiness and love have nothing to do with each other” in this way (pp. 227, 231). For Wolf, it seems strange that on Frankfurt's account there is nothing amiss in saying that Adolf Hitler's love for Naziism was “suitable” because it was possible for him to care about it, give it importance in his life, and treat it as worthy of his efforts. Hence, in her title, the “avoidance of objectivity.” (Annette Baier had made the same point, that Frankfurt's “possible” criterion lacks critical power, unable to distinguish between caring about Naziism and caring about the environment. Some things should not be cared about because they are worthless, or worse. See

her “Caring about Caring,” p. 277.)

Wolf proposes that what is “most suitable” for a person to care about or love depends on three sorts of considerations: (1) “whether (and how much) the object in question is worth caring about” antecedently (a tip of the hat to Plato and Aristotle); (2) “whether (and how much) the person has an affinity for the object” (a tip of the hat to Frankfurt's “possible,” although Wolf means much more by “affinity,” as I explain later); and (3) “whether (and how much) the relation between the person and the object has the potential to create or bring forth experiences, acts, or objects of further value” (p. 235). In the third condition I sense another tip of the hat to Plato and Aristotle: Plato's begetting *kalos* on/with the *kalos* (*Symp.* 206b, 209a-c) and Aristotle's virtuous friendships that issue in more virtue (NE 1172a10). On Wolf's proposal, Hitler's caring about Naziism is not “suitable,” for Naziism is not antecedently worthy of anyone's love and the relation between Hitler and Naziism did not create further value but destroyed value. That Hitler had an “affinity” for Naziism, which made it possible for him to care about it, does not by itself make his caring for Naziism “suitable.” The objectivity of values, were there such a thing, would allow us to reject Hitler's loving Naziism. (I wonder about Wolf's conditions: is (1) satisfiable in virtue of (3)'s being satisfiable, so that (3) does the work?)

Frankfurt's reply to Wolf's common sense may strike some as his going off the deep end. Consider someone for whom it is possible to care only about “avoiding cracks in the sidewalk.” Frankfurt claims that “it would be better for him to care about that than to care about nothing” (p. 252n4), given the value of loving as such. (See also Gabrielle Taylor: “we tend to think of love as such a good . . . that it may be better to have loved irrationally than not to have loved at all” [“Love,” p. 161]. Both Frankfurt and Taylor get dangerously close to the folk wisdom that says “it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all,” a piece of *bullshit* if I ever heard one. On “bullshit,” see Frankfurt and Cohen.) Frankfurt's claim is perfectly general, so we can substitute anything at all in “care about *that*.” Hence, it would be better *for Hitler* to care about Naziism and promote it than not to care about it at all, if that were the only thing he could care about; this, too, is justified by the value of loving as such. Of course, right here we could raise a Wolfian moral objection, but let us wait. For we should be considering a more plausible case, discussed earlier, in which there are at least several things that Hitler could care about, and he is in a position to make a choice, yet he chooses to care about Naziism instead of painting. Now we raise the Wolfian moral objection: it is not “suitable” for Hitler to choose to care about Naziism instead of painting, because the former destroys value and the latter may very well create value. Frankfurt's reply is astounding: “Morality has no independent claim in determining what to care about” (or love). Frankfurt admits that Hitler's Naziism “was a dreadful evil.” But “is this a reason [as Wolf would have it] for regarding it as unsuitable to be loved?” Frankfurt answers no. He provides what (I think) are two separate arguments.

First, “It is possible . . . that immoral lives may be good to live” (p. 248). How so? Hitler's life, as evil as it was, might have brought him “contentment and fulfillment and joy.” It is Hitler's *happiness* in his immoral life that makes it “suitable” for him to love Naziism. The evil of his life counts only against the *moral*-suitability of Naziism, not against the distinct thing *love*-suitability. But, we ask, does not moral suitability take precedence over love suitability, at least in this sort of case? No, replies Frankfurt. Moral suitability is only one kind of suitability, and it does not trump every other kind (perhaps love suitability and moral suitability are incommensurable). Indeed, moral

suitability is greatly overrated. “Morality has no independent claim in determining what to care about” (p. 252n4).

Second (perhaps this argument grounds the first or fills it out), the relationship between care and love, on the one side, and morality on the other side, is not what we have usually taken it or expected it to be. Wolf and her comrades have been assuming that we can first identify that which is moral and then care about or love it. But--this is a theme to which Frankfurt returns in great detail in *Reasons*--moral claims can be derived only from what we do in fact care about (p. 252n4). If anything is to have value, including moral value, it is just because we care about it: “The loving itself is fundamental” (p. 249). As Frankfurt makes the point in *Reasons* (p. 55), “Love is the originating source of terminal value.” (I think here of the Beatles' refrain, “All You Need Is Love” [1967], but also the punk rebuttal of the J. Giles Band, “Love Stinks” [1980].) Hence there could be no such Wolfian thing as deciding independently that something is morally worthy and then loving it on its own merit. Its merit as morally worthy comes from its being loved. Frankfurt has taken his agapic love thesis, that we do not love something because we perceive its value but grant it value because we love it, and has expanded it to include that which has moral value. All grounds for complaining about Hitler seem to have been swept from under our feet. So we wonder: where does this love come from, if not based on independent value? And how does such free-floating, ungrounded love acquire such power to determine the value of *everything* else?

VII. *The Reasons of Love*

In Frankfurt's account of love, there are four “conceptually necessary features” (ROL, pp. 79-80). *First*, love is “disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved.” Recall that Frankfurt intends “disinterested” to mean “unmotivated by any instrumental concern.” Hence we consider the objects of our love to be “valuable in themselves” and they are “important to us for their own sake” (ROL, p. 42). Of course, they are not *really* valuable in themselves; it is our loving them that grants them that lofty rank. Second, love is “ineluctably personal.” We have already come across this mysterious element of love, its “particularity.” Here Frankfurt elaborates: “The person who is loved is loved for himself or for himself as such, and not as an instance of a type” (ROL, pp. 79-80; see p. 44). I find this elaboration confusing. What does being loved “for himself” mean? Its meaning is not transparent. The contrast is supposed to be with being loved “as an instance of a type,” but it is unclear whether *this* claim is about the ontological status of the object of love or, instead, about the basis of love. So the contrast does not clarify “for himself.” When an ordinary person, for example my sister, says she wants to be loved “for myself,” what she means is that she wants to be loved just the way she is (which is now the type of love she insists on from all decent men, who have Billy Joel to blame for their predicament). That is, when my sister says “for myself” she means something about the basis of love: that he will love her for the properties she actually has and he does not expect her to change, improve, or make herself into his ideal image of a woman. If Frankfurt simply means by this condition that love creates value instead of antecedent value creating love, he should have said so more clearly. *Third*, the lover “identifies with his beloved.” Frankfurt does not touch on the question whether identification and investment rule out X's loving both Y and Z. Montaigne thought so: “each gives himself so entirely to his friend that he has nothing left to share with another” (p. 215), and Kant relies on similar reasoning in arguing that marriage must be monogamous (*Lectures*, Ak 27:388). But there is room for disagreement. *Fourth*, love “is not a matter of choice but is determined by conditions that are

outside our immediate voluntary control” (*ROL*, p. 80; see p. 44). I will have something to say about this condition soon; it may be the key to Frankfurt's account of love: its *naturalism*.

Because these four conditions are individually necessary, the absence of any one entails that the phenomenon in question is not love: if I ever help you primarily *because* I see that it will benefit me to do so, and not because it is good for you, I do not love you; or if I move toward you as a type, say as a tall, thin, brunette academic, a type that especially appeals to me, then I do not really love you (as if I violated Henry Blossom's “Because You're You”); or if part of me is “severed” and “held back” from you (Hegel, p. 306), so that I retain some autonomy, in which case sometimes a bad thing will happen to me without (gladly!) its automatically making you worse off, and thus our identification with each other is not complete, then I do not really love you; or if I chose to love you rather than being caused, determined, forced, or compelled to love you (as if by a potion), then I do not really love you. If these are the necessary conditions of love, the world has known very little of this idealized love, perhaps as little as it has known of genuine Aristotelian *philia* (*NE* 1156b25).

Another point is that even if these conditions are necessary, they are not jointly sufficient for love--at least Frankfurt never claims they are. After laying out these four necessary conditions of love, Frankfurt immediately launches into his argument that there is a kind of love that we can call “self-love” that satisfies all four conditions. To be brief: loving the self can be disinterested, it particularizes the beloved, it identifies with the beloved, and it is not chosen but determined. I do not want to quibble over whether Frankfurt's arguments that loving the self satisfies the individual conditions are trivial or profound. I do want to protest that having shown, to his own satisfaction, that loving the self satisfies all the conditions, Frankfurt proceeds to speak as if the conditions are jointly sufficient for making self-love “love.” Indeed, throughout the book, whenever Frankfurt talks about *X*'s loving *Y* he assumes that what he is talking about really is love, even though the cases in question have (at most) only satisfied (some of) the four necessary conditions. That is, Frankfurt does not restrict himself (and rarely restricts himself) to locutions like “here there is no love, because this condition is not satisfied,” but speaks in a positive way about genuine cases of love. But in virtue of *what else* is loving the self really love, and in virtue of *what else* is *X*'s loving *Y* genuine love? Could it be that it is merely “possible” for *X* to love *Y*?

Susan Wolf had suggested that “affinity” must figure into love, but in a broader sense than Frankfurt's “possibility.” What she means is that there is some *affective* component to love. W. Newton-Smith similarly claims that “A likes B,” “A is attracted to B,” and “A feels affection for B” are all “love-comprising relations” in addition to, among other things, the standard “A wishes to see B's welfare promoted” (p. 204). An intriguing idea, then, is that if we add some affective component (the *what else*) to Frankfurt's list of four conceptually necessary conditions, we end up with a candidate set of sufficient conditions for love: not only is my concern for you disinterested; not only are you (for me) an ineffable particular; not only are my interests comprehensively tied to yours; not only is my relationship with you beyond my control; but, on top of all this, I truly *like* you, I feel *affection* for you, I want to *hold your hand*. It would seem that Frankfurt should be open to this suggestion, even though he plays down the romantic and erotic dimensions of love. “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,” writes Frankfurt (*ROL*, p. 43; see p. 82). I humbly suggest that it is in virtue of parental affection for their children, in

addition to the other conditions, that makes this abundantly true; the *what else* that turns mere parental attention into parental love is the fondness parents feel for their children. Further, it sounds peculiar to say “I *love* myself but I do not *like* myself” or “I *love* my baby but I do not *like* her.” Yet Frankfurt is committed to that locution: he denies that “attraction” or “liking” are essential to love. “As in other modes of caring, the heart of the matter is neither affective nor cognitive” (*ROL*, p. 42), and we can love things or people that we find revolting (*ROL*, p. 38). But even if Frankfurt is right that the affective is not essential to love, we still have the problem of uncovering the *what else* that allows him to speak with confidence about *love* throughout the book. Why does Frankfurt think he must reject affection? Might it be possible to mount an argument showing that were the affective added as a fifth condition, the result would be an inconsistent (or unsatisfiable) set of propositions? Or perhaps adding “affection” as a necessary condition would, in Frankfurt's mind, imply that self-love is not a case of love after all, because it is difficult to make sense of affection for the self? I don't know. However, I will suggest that Frankfurt's *naturalism* itself provides him with a good reason, after all, for including the affective in his account of love.

It is finally time to reveal why I call Frankfurt's view of love “naturalistic,” even though he never uses that word. Recall that in “Importance” Frankfurt raised the question, “What should we care about?” and provided the answer: what it is possible for us to care about. In *Reasons*, he is more blunt, extreme, even nihilist: “No attempt to deal with the problem of what we have good reason to care about . . . can possibly succeed” (p. 24). I do not wish to repeat entirely Frankfurt's arguments for this conclusion, but to give only a hint of his thinking. We would have to rely on evaluative criteria to weigh and compare the things we might care about, and we would first have to choose those evaluative criteria. On the basis of what? By referring to what we care about! So choosing the evaluative criteria involves us in a “circularity” that is “both inescapable and fatal”: “the question of what one should care about must already be answered . . . before a rationally conducted inquiry aimed at answering it can even get underway” (*ROL*, p. 26; Elijah Millgram alerted me to Aurel Kolnai's similar “fundamental paradox of practice,” which dates from 1962). The upshot is that the normative question, “what to care about?” (or “how to live?”), is to be replaced by the factual question, “what *do* we care about?” This is one reason I call Frankfurt's view naturalistic; all we can do is determine what we *in fact* care about. So when Frankfurt writes, “Nobody can pull himself up by his own bootstraps” (*ROL*, p. 26) I am reminded of John Stuart Mill's famous claim in *Utilitarianism* that “the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it” (chap. 4, para. 3; p. 37).

My second reason for calling Frankfurt's view naturalistic is that he invokes evolutionary biology in figuring out what it is that we do in fact care about. The answer to the question “what should we care about” is already answered for us by our evolutionary history that has determined for us what we *must*, not merely do, care about (*ROL*, pp. 27, 47-48). I found this answer to the original question, posed twenty years ago in “Importance,” to be both disappointing (a let down) and dismaying. We had wondered, philosophically: where does love come from, if not based on independent value? And how does such free-floating, ungrounded love acquire such power to determine the value of everything else? *Human biology*. Detecting himself at the end of his rope in trying to answer the original question (pushed there by Baier and Wolf), perhaps Frankfurt lunged for anything that might help, and evolutionary biology is all the rage these days, even among many philosophers. Regardless, Frankfurt is serious about the role of evolutionary biology in his account of love. Ironically, however, what might be wrong with Frankfurt's account of love is not that he

invokes evolutionary biology at all, but that he doesn't take it seriously enough, or he underestimates and misunderstands its implications.

About these innocuous biological claims I have no complaints: “We are moved more naturally to love ourselves . . . than we are moved to love other things” and “Our dispositions to be loving parents and to love ourselves are innate” (*ROL*, p. 81). We generally do love our children, “the explanation presumably [lying] in the evolutionary pressures of natural selection” (*ROL*, p. 40). And “thanks to natural selection, we are innately constituted to love living” (*ROL*, p. 41). None of these applications of evolutionary biology is controversial or likely to raise eyebrows. Of course evolutionary pressures will favor those who take care of themselves, their mates, and their children. But what would a hardcore, thoroughgoing (and not dilettantish) evolutionary biology say about Frankfurt's characterization of love? The news is bad. Would natural selection favor disinterested concern over interested concern, if not selfishness? Hardly, for exactly the reason that evolutionary pressure makes us cling to survival, i.e., to love living. Would natural selection favor the lover's seeing the beloved as an ineffable particular instead of a type? Hardly. Evolution adores types, especially types that are easily recognizable as erotically and romantically arousing and hence potentially procreative. Does love involve joint interests? Only in part: women try to hoard the resources of the men that father their children, but men try to spread their resources around as widely as possible, wherever they can successfully leave their fertilizing sperm. (Or men try to have their cake and to eat it, leaving the sperm but not the resources.) Would natural selection favor identification, that is, people who so strongly identified with their mates that they would be routinely willing to suffer just because their mates suffered? I don't think so. Ah, but *affection*? Yes, natural selection would favor parents who felt affection for their children (but that affection would actually help the parents, so it is not disinterested affection), as it would favor mates who felt affection for each other, benefiting their children for as long as they remained together.

Alan Soble
 Philosophy Department
 University of New Orleans
fs.uno.edu/asoble
asoble@uno.edu

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terence Irwin. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1985.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin. New York: Penguin, 1961.
- Badhwar, Neera. “Friends as Ends in Themselves.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48:1 (1987), 1-23. Reprinted in Alan Soble, ed., *Eros, Agape, and Philia*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, 165-86.
- Baier, Annette. “Caring about Caring: A Reply to Frankfurt.” *Synthese* 53:2 (1982), 273-90.
- Bernstein, Mark. “Love, Particularity, and Selfhood.” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 23 (1986), 287-93.

- Brentlinger, John A. "The Nature of Love." In *Symposium*, trans. Suzy Q Groden. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970, 113-29. Reprinted in Alan Soble, ed., *Eros, Agape, and Philia*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, 136-48.
- Brown, Robert. *Analyzing Love*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Buss, Sarah, Lee Overton, eds. *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2002.
- Cohen, G. A. "Deeper into Bullshit." In Sarah Buss and Lee Overton, eds., *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2002, 321-39. (Frankfurt's reply, 340-44.)
- Ehman, Robert R. "Personal Love." *The Personalist* 49 (1968), 116-41. Reprinted in Alan Soble, ed., *Eros, Agape, and Philia*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, 254-71.
- ¾¾¾, "Personal Love and Individual Value." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 10:2 (1976), 91-105.
- Fisher, Mark. *Personal Love*. London: Duckworth, 1990.
- ¾¾¾, "Reason, Emotion, and Love." *Inquiry* 20 (1977), 189-203.
- Frankfurt, Harry G. (1994) "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love." In *Necessity, Volition, and Love*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 129-41.
- ¾¾¾, "Duty and Love." *Philosophical Explorations* 1:1 (1998), 4-9.
- ¾¾¾, "The Importance of What We Care About." *Synthese* 53:2 (1982), 257-72. Reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 80-94.
- ¾¾¾, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *Journal of Philosophy* 68:1 (1971), 5-20.
- ¾¾¾, (1986) "On Bullshit." Reprinted in *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 117-33.
- ¾¾¾, (1997) "On Caring." In *Necessity, Volition, and Love*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 155-80.
- Fried, Charles. *An Anatomy of Values*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Hamlyn, D. W. "The Phenomena of Love and Hate." *Philosophy* 53 (1978), 5-20. Reprinted in Alan Soble, ed., *Eros, Agape, and Philia*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, 218-34.
- Hegel, G. W. F. "On Love." In *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*. Translated by T. Knox. New York: Harper and Bros., 1948, 302-308.

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1968.

Hunter, J. F. M. *Thinking about Sex and Love*. New York: St. Martin's, 1980.

Kant, Immanuel. (1785) *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. Translated by H. J. Paton. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964.

¾¾¾, (ca. 1780) *Lectures on Ethics*. Translated by Louis Infield. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1963.

¾¾¾, *Lectures on Ethics*. Translated by Peter Heath. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

¾¾¾, (1797) *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by Mary Gregor. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Stages on Life's Way*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1945.

¾¾¾, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses*. Translated by Howard and Edna Hong. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

Kolnai, Aurel. "Deliberation Is of Ends." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 36 (1962). Reprinted in Elijah Millgram, ed., *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2001, 259-78.

Kraut, Robert. "Love *De Re*." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 10 (1986), 413-30.

Lamb, Roger E. "Love and Rationality." In Roger Lamb, ed., *Love Analyzed*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997, 23-47.

Lear, Jonathan. "Love's Authority." In Sarah Buss and Lee Overton, eds., *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2002, 279-92. (Frankfurt's reply, 293-97.)

Lewis, C. S. *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1960.

Mandeville, Bernard. *The Fable of the Bees*. Edited by E. J. Hundert. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1997.

Mill, John Stuart. (1863) *Utilitarianism: With Critical Essays*. Edited by Samuel Gorovitz. Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971.

Millgram, Elijah. "On Being Bored Out of Your Mind." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104:2 (2004), 163-184.

Montaigne, Michel de. "On Affectionate Relationships." In M. Screech, ed. and trans., *The Essays*

of *Michel de Montaigne*. London: Penguin, 1991, 205-19.

Neu, Jerome. "Boring from Within: Endogenous versus Reactive Boredom." In *A Tear Is an Intellectual Thing: The Meanings of Emotion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 95-107.

Newton-Smith, W. "A Conceptual Investigation of Love." In A. Montefiore, ed., *Philosophy and Personal Relations*. Montreal, Can.: McGill-Queens University Press, 1973, 113-36. Reprinted in Alan Soble, ed., *Eros, Agape, and Philia*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, 199-217.

Nozick, Robert. "Love's Bond." In *The Examined Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989, 68-86.

Nussbaum, Martha C. "The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of the *Symposium*." In her *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 165-199. Revised from "The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of Plato's *Symposium*." *Philosophy and Literature* 3:2 (1979), 131-72.

Nygren, Anders. *Den kristna kärlekstanken genom tiderna* (Part I, 1930; Part II, 1936). *Agape and Eros*. England: S.P.C.K. House, 1932, 1938. Philadelphia, Penn.: Westminster Press, 1953. Translated by Philip S. Watson. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1982. (Small parts reprinted in Alan Soble, ed., *Eros, Agape, and Philia*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, 83-95.)

O'Connell, Robert J. *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Osborne, Catherine. *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love*. Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Outka, Gene. *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972.

Plato. Euthyphro. In *The Last Days of Socrates*. Translated by Hugh Tredennick. New York: Penguin, 1969.

$\frac{3}{4}$, *Phaedrus*. In Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, translated by R. Hackforth. New York: Pantheon, 1961, 475-525.

$\frac{3}{4}$, *Symposium*. Translated by Tom Griffith. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989.

Robinson, Jenefer. "Emotion, Judgment, and Desire." *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983), 731-41.

Rorty, Amélie. "The Historicity of Psychological Attitudes: Love Is Not Love Which Alters Not When It Alteration Finds," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 10 (1986), 399-412.

Scruton, Roger. "Attitudes, Beliefs and Reasons." In John Casey, ed., *Morality and Moral Reasoning*. London: Methuen, 1971, 25-100.

$\frac{3}{4}$, *Sexual Desire: A Moral Philosophy of the Erotic*. New York: The Free Press, 1986.

- Singer, Irving. *The Nature of Love, vol. 1: Plato to Luther* [1st ed., 1966], 2nd ed. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1984; vol. 2: *Courtly and Romantic*, 1984; vol. 3: *The Modern World*, 1987.
- Soble, Alan. "Analyzing Love" [Review essay of *Analyzing Love* by Robert Brown]. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 19:4 (1989), 493-500.
- ¾¾¾, "Irreplaceability." In Alan Soble, ed., *Sex, Love, and Friendship*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997, 355-57.
- ¾¾¾, Review of *The Nature of Love, vol. 3: The Modern World* by Irving Singer. *Canadian Philosophical Reviews* 8:2 (1988), 74-76.
- ¾¾¾, Review of *Personal Love* by Mark Fisher. *Canadian Philosophical Reviews* 12:1 (1992), 24-25.
- ¾¾¾, *The Structure of Love*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990.
- ¾¾¾, "Union, Autonomy, and Concern." In Roger Lamb, ed., *Love Analyzed*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997, 65-92.
- ¾¾¾, "The Unity of Romantic Love." *Philosophy and Theology* 1:4 (1987), 374-97. Reprinted, revised, in Alan Soble, ed., *Sex, Love, and Friendship*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997, 385-401.
- ¾¾¾, ed. *Eros, Agape, and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love*. New York: Paragon House, 1989; corrected reprinting, 1989.
- ¾¾¾, ed. *Sex, Love, and Friendship: Studies of the Society for the Philosophy of Sex and Love, 1977-1992*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997.
- Stafford, J. Martin. "On Distinguishing between Love and Lust." *Journal of Value Inquiry* 11:4 (1977), 292-303. Reprinted in *Essays on Sexuality and Ethics*. Solihull, Eng.: Ismeron, 1995, 53-64.
- Taylor, Gabrielle. "Love." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 76 (1976), 147-64.
- Vlastos, Gregory. "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato." In *Platonic Studies*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973, 3-34. Reprinted in Alan Soble, ed., *Eros, Agape, and Philia*. New York: Paragon House, 1989, 96-124. (Reference is to Soble.) Also: "Appendix II: Sex in Platonic Love," 38-42 (in Soble, 124-28).
- Wojtyla, Karol [Pope John Paul II]. *Love and Responsibility*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981.
- Wolf, Susan. "The True, the Good, and the Lovable: Frankfurt's Avoidance of Objectivity." In Sarah Buss and Lee Overton, eds., *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt*.

Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2002, 227-44. (Frankfurt's reply, 245-52.)

I offer my apologies to all the other fine contemporary philosophers who have published on love, including (among others) Lara Denis, Ronald de Sousa, and A. W. Price, whose writings I was not able to acknowledge in this review, even though I do care about these pieces (in virtue of their significance).

Copyright © 2005, Humboldt State University