

WHOLEHEARTED LOVE:
AN AUGUSTINIAN RECONSTRUCTION OF FRANKFURT

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Abstract

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Harry G. Frankfurt's work on agency and reflexivity represents one of the most important attempts in the current philosophical literature to elaborate the structure of agency. Frankfurt wishes to provide an account of what I call the "deep structures" of agency – those features of agency, such as care and love, in virtue of which the surface features, such as desire, are to be explained and understood. These deep structures are important because of their power to explain unified diachronic patterns in our lives rather than just individual actions. In doing so, Frankfurt seeks to be a Humean in Aristotelian clothing: he desires the richness of a broadly Aristotelian moral psychology – specifically, an Augustinian variant of this – built out of the resources of a Humean human nature in which the "passions," or here, those objects we care about, are fundamental.

Thus Frankfurt develops concepts such as second-order desire, identification and dissociation, wholeheartedness, and love without incurring significant metaphysical costs. Through these concepts Frankfurt provides an account with extraordinary richness.

However, I argue that Frankfurt's minimalism conflicts with his attempts to provide so rich an account of our moral lives. In particular, his attempt to make caring foundational for practical reason undermines his conception of identification and dissociation. Frankfurt's Humeanism commits him to a tragic moral universe in which the dissociation of desire is little more than an exercise in self-deception rather than a means of guaranteeing psychic unity.

I then argue that a superior account of moral life and the moral self can be constructed through greater reliance upon Augustinian ideas concerning the nature of love that is rooted in two concepts: *affinity* and *peace*. The concept of affinity provides a basis for evaluating what is worth loving and the concept of peace, central to Augustine's moral psychology, is used to analyze the structure of love itself in its many manifestations. This account is less minimalist than Frankfurt's but is more faithful to our moral experience and provides a more powerful and nuanced analysis of moral life and the self.

This is for Koelle, *sine qua non*.

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CHAPTER 1:
FRANKFURT'S MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Harry G. Frankfurt's work on the philosophy of action has been immensely influential over the past three decades. His writings on wholeheartedness and weakness of will have no equal in the contemporary literature. However, readers have not realized how minimalist and essentially mechanistic his theory is, and how few commitments he is actually willing to make. Only when we understand his ideas accurately can we correctly evaluate their contributions to ethics and the philosophy of action.

There are both dialectical and protreptic, or moral, goals in Frankfurt's writings. His dialectical goals include what he hopes to achieve within current debates and which positions he hopes to displace or undermine, and his moral or protreptic goals are the goals that he thinks people should adopt themselves. Now, Frankfurt does not show his wounds; his writings rarely include more than one or two specific references to the debates he wishes to influence or the specific targets of his arguments, and the references he does include rarely provide a very full picture of where he has situated himself. Nor does he provide lengthy explanations of his intentions or concerns. Nonetheless we can constructively speculate about his immediate goals and provide an account that likely bears some resemblance to the truth, even if it is not accurate in every detail.

The general atmosphere of ethics during the last century was extremely austere, like a starving mother's cupboards stocked with Spaghetti-O's and Ketchup. Immersed in

this atmosphere, the question was not, for Frankfurt, whether or not to replace such simple fare with the feast of pre-modern ethics. Yet, faced with so straitened a conception of moral life, he appears to have recognized its inadequacy.¹ As a result, he endeavored to provide the kind of moral structures needed to capture those aspects of our lives that are most important to us – what we love and care about – without recourse or reference to “natures,” “immaterial essences,” “noumena,” or even the grandiloquent dialectical machinery of Marx. Using the simplest tools possible he endeavored to provide for a moral life that was both satisfying and frugal.

This, or something similar to this, must have characterized Frankfurt’s goals when he began writing about second-order desires, care, love, and wholeheartedness. The concepts in play in ethical debates of this period were unsuited to providing an account of human life or much guidance to the matters that actually dominate our lives. They were too narrow, too brittle, and too restricted in scope to make philosophical analysis of human action worthwhile. But Frankfurt plainly did not desire to conjure up the metaphysical commitments haunting ethical thought in previous centuries. In this way, his project emerges as an attempt to satisfy our need for thick “moral” or “ethical” concepts without incurring any significant metaphysical or theological debts. Frankfurt wished to provide a Humean moral psychology with the power and complexity of an Aristotelian one. Or more precisely, he wished to provide it with the resources of an Augustinian psychology; for although the teleological framework for Augustine’s moral psychology is Aristotelian in essentials, the topics of reflexivity, wholeheartedness, and love are more peculiarly

¹ Taking “moral” in a sense that Frankfurt himself does not appeal to, but which more nearly captures his area of concern than any other word does.

Augustinian, and it is these with which Frankfurt is concerned.² This, then, appears to have been Frankfurt's dialectical goal.

Now, what of the moral vision contained in Frankfurt's philosophy and proposed to his readers? He intends to provide us with reasons for doing certain kinds of things and for refraining from doing other things by demonstrating that there is a certain ethical ideal that we cannot help but care about. This ideal, which must be important to each of us, is becoming or remaining wholehearted.³ Whatever our goals might be, whatever ends or persons we might care about deeply and devotedly, we must be concerned about whether this involvement is wholehearted. For if someone is not, then he will undermine what matters most to him and ensure that, no matter how matters turn out, his life shall be unsatisfactory.

This goal of establishing unity within the self is not novel; in one form it goes back to the concerns of the Post-Kantian German philosophy (in, e.g., Schiller, Hegel, or the German Romantics), and in another form, it goes back to Augustine and his long lineage of successors. There is even a foreshadowing of it in Plato. Frankfurt makes judicious references to the *Confessions*, but he strips wholeheartedness of its historical baggage. The problem is not that sin and rebellion against the truth and God has vitiated our minds and wills, so that habit now prevents us from clinging to the Good that we can identify by means of reason and revelation; but rather that *something* or other has left us unable to wholeheartedly pursue whatever objects we care about. Nor is it reason, in the Kantian sense of a reason proposing moral laws, that brings us into conflict with our own desires;

² Or Kierkegaardian concerns.

³ What some call the virtue of "constancy."

it is simply reflection upon ourselves that spawns this opposition. A person's goal is not a beautiful soul whose feelings accord with what he discerns his duty to be, but simply a state in which he is happy with who and what he is and what he cares about. Schiller wished to change who someone was, so that he could be happy following the Kantian moral law; Frankfurt wishes to undo the damaging effects of self-doubt and neurotic worries about "getting it right."

Although Frankfurt has pointed out that the project of explaining action solely in terms of belief and desire leaves the notion of desire "heavily overburdened" and "a bit limp,"⁴ the comparison with the Romantics and Augustine should make it clear that he values Humean frugality as much as his opponents do. Like them, he has drawn every source of reasons for action into the internal volitional structure of the agent, and he will even go so far as to say, "Caring about something may be, in the end, nothing more than a certain complex mode of wanting it."⁵ The dispute is more about the structural complexity and temporal properties of our interior volitional states than about their ontology. The debate is most certainly not over whether there is any kind of intellectual power that could provide reasons for action, whether Aristotelian "right reason" or Kantian "pure practical reason," nor over the role of human nature in determining what we should care about. Care establishes the bedrock from which all human meaning stems, and the only *necessarily* universal human end is wholeheartedness.⁶ This is the moral end that Frank-

⁴ Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 10.

⁵ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 11.

⁶ Using "meaning" to signify what Frankfurt calls "importance." Of course, we might speak of two universal ends: to be wholehearted and to find things to love and care about. The second is easier to achieve, and Frankfurt provides it with rather less justification.

furt proposes within his theory of action.

So what should we make of these two projects? Can Frankfurt succeed in his goals? My conclusion is that because he cannot successfully motivate the universal value of wholeheartedness with the frugal resources that he has gathered, his two goals cannot be harmonized. In fact, wholeheartedness is much less desirable within his moral universe than it appears. The universal desirability of wholeheartedness depends upon the capacity of reason, or some other source of normativity, to provide us with grounds for caring or loving about certain objects but not others. His theory contains a deep incoherence that requires him to embrace either the minimalism he feels necessary, or the richer kind of theory he desires, wholeheartedly. Hume cannot be reconciled with Aristotle or Augustine.

The present chapter is concerned with outlining Frankfurt's theory of action, especially its Humean minimalism. My main goal is to make it clear what Frankfurt's theory commits him to and what kind of explanatory power it possesses. Because his theory of akratic action requires all its elements, focusing on it is the best way to bring out the entirety of his philosophy. Therefore, the second chapter will turn from Frankfurt's theory of action to this conception of *akrasia*, as a testing ground for his theory. It is unusual that, despite the frequency with which Frankfurt discusses topics relating to *akrasia* and the prominence of his work in discussion of this subject, Frankfurt has never set out his understanding of akratic action in any systematic form. He has never put his view forth in a way equivalent to, say, Book VII of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or Donald Davidson's "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?" So, I am going to construct Frankfurt's theory of akratic action from the ground up, with the goal that when this construction is

complete we will be capable of evaluating his theory of action as a whole. It is here that we will find the internal strains of his theory brought to the surface, and I will argue that Frankfurt ought to embrace *either* an even more minimal theory than his own, *or* a richer theory, but that the theory as it stands is conflicted.

I shall first discuss and reconstruct Frankfurt's model of agency and then look into how he marshals those resources to explain akratic action. I shall test Frankfurt's ideas against some of the challenges that have been raised against it as we proceed, attempting to provide as sympathetic a reading as possible, and sharpening the edges of his account by drawing light to his differences with other writers on the theory of action. Then, after I have developed his account of *akrasia*, we shall see that Frankfurt divides akratic action into two kinds: (1) merely apparent akratic action that is caused by forces external to the agent and (2) genuine akratic action caused by the volitional structure of the agent. We need to make an additional distinction within the latter. Although Frankfurt can answer the "standard" question about *akrasia* – in very simplified form, "How is it possible for a person to knowingly and intentionally choose the worse course of action?" – I will contend that engaging with his deepest insights requires that we mold the question to his own philosophy.

Frankfurt's theory of action is constructed along minimalist lines. He uses as few distinct components as possible by building up more complex ideas out of simpler ones. Because of this there is little leeway in reconstructing his account. We cannot begin with one part as easily as another. Instead it is necessary to begin with the simplest parts and proceed from these to the increasingly complex ones constructed from the first elements. Therefore I shall present Frankfurt's ideas in order of their complexity, beginning with

the hierarchical model of agency and proceeding through his theory of identification, his account of wholeheartedness, his conception of care, and finally his ideas about akratic action.

1.1. The Hierarchical Model of Agency and Identification

1.1.1. First- and Second-Order Desires

One of the achievements that Frankfurt is best-known for is his development of the hierarchical model of agency, which makes an important distinction between first- and second-order desires. A first-order desire is for things or activities or states of affairs. For example, consider Augustine's life as described in his *Confessions*. He says that he desired "honors, profits, and wedlock."⁷ These were first-order desires, desires for things, activities, or states of affairs. But when he reflected upon himself, he was, as one translator puts it, "out of love with himself."⁸ When he considered the burning passions that made up his life, he was repulsed by himself. He considered honor and wealth to be vain, and his desire for wedlock a desire for sexual activity reaching the level of idolatry. In Frankfurt's language, when Augustine contemplated his first-order desires, he formed

⁷ Augustine, *Confessions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), VI.6.9: "Inhiabam honoribus, lucris, coniugio, et tu inridebas." However, it seems misleading for Augustine to say that he desired "coniugio" rather than "desiderium concubitus" (as he puts it later, VIII.6.13), because he appears to have desired this solely as a means of furthering his desires for honor and wealth, on the one hand, and sexual activity, on the other.

⁸ William Watts's chapter summary of VIII.7.16 from the Loeb edition of the *Confessions*. Augustine actually says that God "was twisting me back to my very self" and "setting me before my face, that I might see how repulsive I was, how misshapen and filthy, spotted and swollen": "tu autem, domine, inter verba eius retorquebas me ad me ipsum, auferens me a dorso meo, ubi me posueram, dum nollem me adtendere; et constituebas me ante faciem meam, ut viderem, quam turpis essem, quam distortus et sordidus, maculosus et ulcerosus."

second-order desires in response to them; he had desires that were themselves about other desires he possessed – in this case negative ones pressing to reject the first-order desires in question. This is because a human being is not restricted to only taking up attitudes towards what he perceives in the world, but can also adopt attitudes towards what he perceives within himself.⁹ In Augustine’s case he resisted the idea of these desires constituting his will. He was not satisfied with them leading him to action. When someone reflects on his desire to do something it is possible that he is thoroughly satisfied and doesn’t oppose its moving him to action. Returning to our example, even at this time Augustine had desires that he approved of; for example, he was thoroughly satisfied with his desire to converse with his friends and to listen to the sermons of Ambrose, and he brooked no resistance to these desires moving him to action. He was content to allow these desires a place within his ends.

According to Frankfurt, then, conversing with his friends is one of the things that Augustine *really* wants to do. He identifies with this desire, where “identification” is the relation an agent holds to those of his desires that are “really his.” This desire is his, *simpliciter*, without qualification. This seems plausible enough. What Frankfurt promises us is grounds for asserting that – given certain conditions – Augustine’s desire for what he disapproves of are not what he really wants. When we act on desires we do not really want, then we do not really act; the action occurs in our history, of course, but we are not responsible for it. So if Augustine meets Frankfurt’s conditions and these desires overcome him despite his disapproval – for example, if he were to have furtively slipped out

⁹ Frankfurt elaborates his view of the peculiar element of reflexivity in human self-consciousness in (amongst other places) Harry Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 159–176, pp. 159–163.

to sleep with a prostitute – we can say that he did not *really* want to do this and he was not in fact responsible for what he did. According to Frankfurt, when two of our desires conflict, our reflexivity allows us to “take sides,” so that we identify with one of the two and triumph when it prevails and are conquered when it is mastered by its rival. So when, for example, a heroin addict who has sided against his addiction succumbs to a desire to inject himself, this does not represent one part of him triumphing over another part, but the triumph of a desire over a person.¹⁰

The alternative to being able to take sides in this way is to be what Frankfurt calls a “wanton”: a being who acts upon whichever of his desires is strongest but isn’t concerned one way or another with the question of which desire should triumph. He might, like the unwilling addict, simultaneously desire to inject himself and desire not to. He might, like the unwilling addict, sometimes act upon one desire and sometimes upon the other, or always favor one over the other. The difference between the wanton and the unwilling addict is that the wanton doesn’t have any preference between the two desires. It is not that he is perfectly satisfied with either one moving him; rather, the question of being satisfied with the desires never arises. The wanton is not a question to himself because he is unable to question himself.

1.1.2. The Influence of Second-Order Desires

What influence do second-order desires impose upon our lives and actions? No one has pressed Frankfurt sufficiently for an answer on this point. We all know what a

¹⁰ This is, of course, not how Augustine describes the same phenomena – he uses the language of parts, the “greater part” being the one enjoying the approval of reason. But our discussion concerns not Augustine’s theories but Frankfurt’s.

desire effects: “The primitive sign of wanting is trying to get.”¹¹ But what does a second-order desire *do*? Does it do anything? If a second-order desire is a desire, shouldn’t it express itself in the attempt to “get” the desire it is directed towards? From the beginning Frankfurt’s readers appear to have assumed that the nature of second-order desires, as desires, was perfectly clear, but as a matter of fact, their nature is obscure. It is not clear how someone could try to acquire a desire he lacked, if wanting it was insufficient for this purpose.

Although it has not occurred to him to explain the exact import of possessing a second-order desire, there is a consistent implicit explanation within Frankfurt’s writings. First of all, for Frankfurt it is only the person with what he calls a “free will” who is characteristically able to translate his second-order desires into effective first-order desires.¹² But Frankfurt does not believe that this is the ordinary case: “The enjoyment of freedom comes easily to some. Others must struggle to achieve it.”¹³ Agents’ second-order desires are not necessarily reflected in their effective first-order desires. So, Frankfurt does not see a second-order desire as naturally moving someone to possess its corresponding first-order desire. The only influence that Frankfurt consistently attributes to second-order desires is influence upon an agent’s inner life. They influence whether or not he is satisfied with the desires that he has. It then appears that according to Frankfurt, it is an open ques-

¹¹ Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 67.

¹² Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 11–25, p. 20.

¹³ Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 22. Comments entailing the same picture are found elsewhere, e.g., in Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 172, where he comments that identification may or may not lead to a conflict between first-order desires being resolved.

tion whether or not Augustine's second-order desires endorsing his desire to visit Ambrose, or to converse with his friends, or to seek a monastic life of inquiry and contemplation, help these first-order desires to prove effective. But these endorsements necessarily move him to find the desires in question acceptable. Second-order desires, whatever else they do, move us – in some sense of “us” – towards or away from these desires themselves. They fill an agent with either distaste or approval for these, and thereby move him towards either identifying with them or separating himself from them. Second-order desires may sometimes help to explain action in special circumstances, but they always help to explain identification and the constitution of the self.

1.1.3. Second-Order Desires and Identification

It is easy to overestimate the importance of second-order desires within Frankfurt's theory, and some early critics of Frankfurt forced him to articulate their role more carefully.¹⁴ For example, the naïve reader might think that those desires that are “really” ours are marked out just by our having pro-second-order desires towards them, or that a person's desires are more truly *his* to the degree that they stand above others in the hierarchy. But Frankfurt claims that this is not the case: “The mere fact that one desire occupies a higher level than another in the hierarchy seems plainly insufficient to endow it with greater authority or with any constitutive legitimacy.”¹⁵ This rejection makes good sense. If an agent's true desires are determined by their place in his hierarchy of prefer-

¹⁴ Notably Gary Watson's “Free Agency,” *Free Will*, 2nd Ed., ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 337–351.

¹⁵ Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 166.

ences, then it is hard to see how he can ever have any, unless he has an infinite number. For if some desire D1 is really his only if he has formed a higher-order desire D2, then plainly D2 needs to be really his also; so he will need a third desire D3, to legitimize D2; and then a fourth, D4, to legitimize D3; and so on, *ad infinitum*.¹⁶ If this is all there is to it, then (as Frankfurt rather gloomily puts it), “[the] whole approach appears to be doomed.”¹⁷ It will be unable to provide an account of what our true wills are. The truth is that, in Frankfurt’s view, Augustine’s approval of his desire to converse with his friends is distinct from his identifying with this desire, and even distinct from his reflectively identifying with this desire. The hierarchy is only an attempt to present the particular kind of reflexivity manifested in our interior life in “the most authentic and perspicuous way.”¹⁸ We have to add something else to our account to explain identification.

1.1.4. Second-Order Desires and Evaluation

It is easy to overestimate the importance of these second-order desires in another way. Given their role in identifying what an agent really wants, it is natural to assume that what distinguishes those second-order desires that ground the agent’s identification with some first-order desire is that these preferences rest upon or reflect some kind of

¹⁶ Cf. Gary Watson, “Free Agency,” *Free Will*, pp. 348–350; Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 166–167.

¹⁷ Harry Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion,” *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 95–107, p. 105.

¹⁸ Cf. Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 164.

evaluation. That is, it makes sense to conclude that these second-order desires represent “something’s seeming to [the agent] to be a reason”¹⁹ or the agent’s “rational endorsement”²⁰ of the first-order desire in question or some other kind of moral or rational evaluation of a desire along similar lines. This is all the more tempting because it appears as if something along these lines would avoid the regress problem mentioned above: It would not be the case that such a second-order desire was equivalent to the first-order desire because it would constitute an expression of reason, say, whereas the first-order desire would not. Comparing the two would then be like comparing a gut inclination and a careful scientific prediction: although the latter might not be immune to challenge it is obvious that it does not stand in need of support in the same way that the former does. Someone’s disapproval of his desire to smoke is not on a par with his second-order aversion to this intrusive disapproval moving him to act. The one is based upon his rational apprehension of what is in his own best interests, whereas the other, we might think, is based upon lingering physiological craving. There are also passages in some of his earlier papers that suggest that he holds a view that falls somewhere within this spectrum of ways to conceive of the relationship of second-order desires to identification, such as when he says that “a person’s second-order volitions” actually “*constitute* his activity” in such a way that “the question of whether or not he identifies with them cannot arise.”²¹ But whether or not Frankfurt once held a view of this kind, it is certainly inconsistent with

¹⁹ T. M. Scanlon, “Reasons and Passions,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 178.

²⁰ Richard Moran, “Frankfurt on Identification: Ambiguities of Activity in Mental Life,” *Contours of Agency*, pp. 189–217, p. 193.

²¹ Frankfurt, “Three Concepts of Free Action,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 47–57, p. 54.

Frankfurt's current beliefs.

Frankfurt's views here are illuminated by his exchange with Michael Bratman in *Contours of Agency*. In the paper, "Hierarchy, Circularity, and Double Reduction," Bratman is concerned with how to provide an account of second-order desires that avoids the regress problem. He is not intending to provide an interpretation of Frankfurt – by this time his views on this matter were clear – but because he does intend the essay to rely upon the resources made available in Frankfurt's theory of action it is illuminating to consider their exchange. Bratman wishes to build identification into a certain kind of second-order desire that has a form somewhat like, "The agent has *X*-type higher-order attitudes in support of *D*'s functioning as end-setting for practical reason."²² We do not need to go into the exact details of Bratman's account, according to which the type of higher-order attitude is one grounded in a self-governing policy with which the agent is satisfied, to see why such a desire would be different from a mere desire to do or have *X*. It includes an explicit affirmation of the desire as end-setting *for practical reason*. A second-order desire of this kind would not only motivate action but would provide a justifying reason for acting on it.²³ This is in large part akin to Eleonore Stump's "Revised Frankfurt Account," in which she casts second-order desires as creations of the intellect of the

²² Michael Bratman, "Hierarchy, Circularity, and Double Reduction," *Contours of Agency*, pp. 65–85, p. 76.

²³ Michael Bratman intends the definition to tie together two roles played by desires that Donald Davidson thought always went together: "as an effective motive of intentional action" and "as something the agent is disposed to treat...as...providing a justifying reason for action" (Bratman, "Hierarchy, Circularity, and Double Reduction," *Contours of Agency*, p. 67).

agent placing some end under the aspect of the good.²⁴ When we consider someone's aversion to his desire to smoke, this is more or less how we conceive of it: his preference not to smoke provided a justifying reason in a way that his mere desire to smoke did not.

In his response to Bratman's essay, Frankfurt says that in his theory, "[the] higher-order attitudes that are formed in processes leading to identification involve "evaluations" only in a sense that is strictly value-neutral."²⁵ Frankfurt does not distinguish any special kind of second-order desire that might provide a justification for identification. Second-order desires do not reflect the agent's determination that a desire merits identification; they signify "nothing more than that the agent *accepts* it as his own," without any suggestion of the grounds, if any, for his acceptance.²⁶ It does not seem as if Bratman could not accommodate what Frankfurt says. He could easily claim that second-order desires need not signify anything more than acceptance, but retain a distinction between those that merely *signify* acceptance and those that *justify* acceptance. But this distinction is just what Frankfurt finds superfluous. He does not think that we need to make this kind of distinction in order to understand identification. Perhaps Bratman could admit this too, but distinguish between mere identification and justified identification. What is really significant about their differences, then, is just this: Frankfurt does not appear to think that anything of significance rides upon whether or not the agent's identification with a desire is justified. For Frankfurt, this question is neither an interesting nor perhaps

²⁴ Eleonore Stump, "Sanctification, Hardness of Heart, and Frankfurt's Concept of Free Will," *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), ed. John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, pp. 211–234.

²⁵ Harry Frankfurt, "Response to Michael E. Bratman," *Contours of Agency*, pp. 86–90, p. 87.

²⁶ Frankfurt, "Response to Michael E. Bratman," *Contours of Agency*, p. 87.

even meaningful. The question of value comes in only *after* the agent has settled upon which desires he is going to identify with and include as possible ends, and then turns to arranging these “in an order of precedence.”²⁷ Here we see Frankfurt’s minimalism at work: Although we are tempted to think that normative notions have come into play with second-order desires, in fact these desires are themselves no more than vectors pulling towards or pushing away from first-order desires. Frankfurt has not added normativity to his theory of action, but structural complexity.

1.1.5. Identification as a Negative Concept

What, then, is Frankfurt’s positive account of identification? Consider someone who has decided to quit smoking.²⁸ Suppose that we go back to the time just previous to his decision to quit smoking and to dissociate himself from his desire to smoke. He experiences a conflict within himself between two desires and he doubts whether his current volitional structure is in perfect order. He both desires to smoke and desires to be healthy, and these conflict. Thus, he asks himself whether he is satisfied with his desire to smoke. It is possible that he sensed this conflict for some time before he acknowledged it. In turning his attention to the conflicting desires he responds to them with either attraction or aversion, forming second-order desires towards them. Even if his desires are quite unequivocal in their support of living healthily, this won’t entail his identification with it. Identification occurs when he no longer hesitates with respect to one desire and ceases to

²⁷ Frankfurt, “Response to Michael E. Bratman,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 88. Even at this point there need not be any question about the intrinsic goodness of one course of action over another; Frankfurt sharply distinguishes this from the value of one course of action compared to another *to the agent*.

²⁸ I earlier relied on Augustine, but his example will not do here, because his account of identification is simply too different from Frankfurt’s, and it would be confusing to bring it in to explain the latter.

experience any inclination to draw back from it. This might involve some process of practical reasoning, but Frankfurt does not consider identification to be dependent on this. It may be that when he looks at the situation carefully he is wholeheartedly repulsed by one desire and experiences no such reaction to the other. But if he isn't entirely satisfied with one of these desires, for example if he thinks that his repulsion to smoking is simply due to social influences and that these are unsatisfactory guides to conduct, then may still hold back from identifying with one desire. Identification occurs only when he lacks significant aversive sentiments towards one desire and is satisfied with being moved by it.

In one of his earlier attempts to fully explain identification, Frankfurt relies upon an analogy between identification and arithmetic. We cease worrying about finding the correct sum not when we have a proof that we have performed the sum properly, and a proof for this proof, etc., but when we no longer have grounds to doubt our result. If someone carefully examines his calculations or computes the result using an alternative method and still reaches the same result he will be satisfied, not because this constitutes a proof, but because at this point it is unreasonable to continue worrying about the matter. Thus Frankfurt says that when an agent commits himself to a desire he does so “in the belief that no further accurate inquiry would require [him] to change [his] mind.”²⁹ It is clear how this analogy might lead someone into believing that Frankfurt endorses an account similar to Bratman's, illustrated above. It would resemble Augustine restless wandering in search of a satisfactory philosophy or religion in the *Confessions*. Indeed, what activity could possess a more cognitive basis than mathematics? But of course the only

²⁹ Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 169.

part of the analogy that we are meant to carry over to the concept of identification is the lesson about what is required for us to be satisfied with a decision. It illustrates how we can commit ourselves to something once we see no reason to resist going along with it, *without* requiring any additional positive act of endorsement or evaluation. The only judgment involved in identification is the one that is “constituted by the absence of any tendency or inclination to alter [her psychic system’s] condition.”³⁰ It isn’t a judgment that there *are* no grounds for doubt, but rather her simply not finding any.³¹ There is no separable act of identification at all beyond this negative condition of no longer resisting the desire.³² Thus, if we’re looking for a parallel in the *Confessions*, it would not be Augustine’s conversion but his decision to become a catechumen in the Catholic Church; for he did not do this because he had come to believe that the doctrines taught in the Church were correct, but because he no longer experienced an aversion to it. Even if he did not accept the truth of the Catholic doctrines taught by Ambrose in his sermons, he was willing to listen to them.³³ So, what is perhaps the most common reading of Frankfurt on this topic is incorrect.

1.1.6. Non-Reflective Identification

When an agent commits himself in this way to his preference for acting on some desire, X, then we can say that X is what he really wants to do; he has the desire to X “by

³⁰ Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion,” *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 104.

³¹ As he puts it in another place, “It is a matter of simply *having no interest* in making changes” (Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion,” *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 105; emphasis in original).

³² See too Frankfurt, “Reply to Richard Moran,” *Contours of Agency*, pp. 218–226, p. 218: “It is not by virtue of any act on our part, however, that such identification comes about.”

³³ See Augustine, *Confessions* VI.1-5.

his own will,”³⁴ not in the sense that his will is the cause of the desire, but in the sense that, by virtue of the structure of his will, he has made it “his own” so that it now “constitutes” what he really wants. Frankfurt rarely explains this, but “in very large measure, [identification] is the default condition,” both “ubiquitous” and “intimately familiar” to us.³⁵ He believes that the agent pre-reflectively identifies with his desires until he experiences some kind of doubt about them and then either reflectively identifies with them, re-orders them, or dissociates himself from them. It is this, more than any other element of his view, that shows how different his view of identification is from those like Bratman’s or Stump’s. Why is it not generally recognized that Frankfurt thinks that we naturally identify with our first-order desires? The two reasons appear to be his own early formulations of identification, where the matter is still unclear to him, and the extensive work Frankfurt has expended describing reflective self-evaluation, which draws our attention away from the essence of his theory of identification.

Consider this passage from “Identification and Wholeheartedness”:

When the decision [to identify with a desire] is made without reservation, the commitment it entails is decisive. Then the person no longer holds himself apart from the desire to which he has committed himself. It is no longer unsettled or uncertain whether the object of that desire – that is, what he wants – is what he really wants: The decision determines what the person really wants by making the desire on which he decides fully his own.³⁶

The repeated “no longer” statements suggest to us that, previous to this time, the agent

³⁴ Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 170.

³⁵ Harry Frankfurt, “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 1–26, p. 8.

³⁶ Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 170.

had not identified with his desires. But this only represents the “bracketing” of desires that occurs when we begin to doubt ourselves. In one of his early papers he mentions a theory of identification that he regards as too simple, according to which desires or passions “are internal when, at the time of their occurrence, we welcome or indifferently accept them.”³⁷ This condition can be met by any desire, whether reflected upon or not. Tellingly, when Frankfurt rejects this minimal conception of identification, he rejects its claim to lay down sufficient conditions rather than rejecting it wholesale.³⁸ Although this subject appears to draw little interest from Frankfurt in later papers, his claims are always in agreement with this principle. In “The Faintest Passion” he explains his views on identification as follows:

It is possible, of course, for someone to be satisfied with his first-order desires without in any way considering whether to endorse them. In that case, he is identified with those first-order desires. But insofar as his desires are utterly unreflective, he is to that extent not genuinely a person at all.³⁹

In *Contours of Agency* he affirms that it is possible that someone “mindlessly identifies” with a desire if it arises out of “noncognitive circumstances” and he has “no inclination to distance himself from it.”⁴⁰ So it is evident that identification does not require reflective acceptance of the desire at all; reflection is part of the project of personhood but identification is common to all agents. It is clear, then, that interpreters or adapters of Frankfurt who make the formation of second-order desires *essential* to identification are either mis-

³⁷ Frankfurt, “Identification and Externality,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 63.

³⁸ Some critics think that Frankfurt did not come back to this conception of identification until later, perhaps in “The Faintest Passion.” See, e.g., Angela Smith, “Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life,” *Ethics* 115 (2005): 236–271, p. 239n3.

³⁹ Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion,” *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, pp. 105–106.

⁴⁰ Frankfurt, “Reply to Richard Moran,” *Contours of Agency*, pp. 222–223.

reading him or striking out on their own.

1.1.7. “That’s all right, then.”

Frankfurt emphasizes conflicts of desires because these are a characteristic way in which natural identification is broken up and the reflective construction of the self-initiated. But suspicion or paranoia will also do the trick, and a sufficiently reflective person has no need to wait for conflicts among his unreflectively accepted desires before he subjects them to critical examination and either includes them or separates them from himself.⁴¹ Identification *simpliciter* consists in being satisfied with a desire moving oneself to action. Reflective identification consists in being satisfied in this way and also having “made up one’s mind” to allow this. It is important that, because identification is defined independently of any reflective decision on the part of the agent, the agent’s making up his mind does not *constitute* identification. Identification *is* just being unopposed to a desire. What the decision does accomplish is to make identification possible after doubt has arisen; the decision signifies that the agent has cleared away the worries that held him back from the desire. Reflective identification is not characteristically accomplished by an agent saying, “I shall constitute myself *thus*,” but thinking, “Ah, well, that’s all right then,” and being satisfied again with the desire in question. Whereas it is common to think that identification must involve some kind of evaluation, by making identification consist in the absence of resistance, Frankfurt has pushed everything of significance out of identification and into dissociation. Once again, no normativity has been

⁴¹ Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 169.

brought into the theory. At this point everything remains pushes and pulls.

1.1.8. Dissociation

The flip side of identification is dissociation. Until we understand this concept we cannot understand identification either. A desire that I identify with is really mine, and when I act upon such a desire, it represents what I really want. A dissociated desire, however, in no way represents my true will. The sense in which Frankfurt means this can be illustrated by how he thinks that identification and dissociation affect whether a desire provides an agent with a reason for action. One of Frankfurt's foils is Hobbes. Hobbes maintained that the possession of a desire, on its own, provides a reason for acting on it. Frankfurt argues that this is nonsense. When two desires irreconcilably conflict and I identify myself with one of them, then the other must be dissociated and denied any place within my volitional structure.⁴² Such a desire is neither a reason for action (not even a very weak reason) nor even a candidate to be taken as a reason.⁴³ Frankfurt points out that a freak desire, generated by who knows what within him, to kill his son does not give him a "reason" for shooting him; if it did then in circumstances in which he couldn't satisfy any of his other desires, he would then have reason to act on it. This desire is so completely cut off from the ladder of reasons that under no circumstances does it act as a reason. It is the same as his "unwilling addict." His desire to take the drug, despite its power to compel action on its behalf, doesn't appear as a potential reason within his voli-

⁴² Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 172, etc.

⁴³ Harry Frankfurt, "Taking Ourselves Seriously," pp. 11–13; and Frankfurt, "Reply to Michael E. Bratman," *Contours of Agency*, pp. 88–89.

tional structure, although Hobbes would apparently have to admit that the addict's desire does constitute a reason for injecting himself with the drug.⁴⁴ One feature that distinguishes dissociated desires from those with which an agent identifies, then, is that they do not function as reasons for action under any circumstances.

According to Frankfurt identification is essentially the same as being satisfied with a desire, where being satisfied implies having no significant disinclination to being moved to act by the desire. Augustine for example was not resistant to conversing with his friends.⁴⁵ So he was not repelled by the thought of his will leading him into conversation with them. Dissociation is the converse of this: A desire is external to an agent if he is never able to become satisfied with it, that is, if he possesses what Frankfurt describes as "an anxious disposition to resist."⁴⁶ Thus was Augustine's *desiderium concubitus*: he could not make peace with the idea of this being his will, and despite the constancy of this desire, he found himself steadily drawn away from the thought of this activity constituting his will and actions. Now, someone's uneasiness could be quite powerful, say on the order of complete revulsion, but need not be as dramatic as that to prevent identification. All that is required is that he never becomes satisfied with the idea of this desire moving him to act because of his "anxious disposition to resist" its constituting his will.

⁴⁴ This isn't as bad for Hobbes as it appears; it isn't as if Hobbes would claim that the addict has, all things considered, reason to take the drug, given that it conflicts with other desires. In fact it isn't clear that it would ever provide someone with reason to do so if he also desires his son to continue living.

⁴⁵ If you pay attention to Augustine's ordinary circumstances in the *Confessions*, in which he is constantly surrounded by friends, you might come to the conclusion that the most undeveloped yet omnipresent influence in the period of his life described by the work was friendship.

⁴⁶ Frankfurt, "Taking Ourselves Seriously," *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, p. 10.

1.1.9. Persistent Resistance

Note well two properties of externalization: First, it is not necessarily based upon just any kind of negative appraisal of the desire. Someone does not dissociate one of his desires because he considers it bad, or base, or unpleasant. He dissociates it when he is unwilling to act in accordance with it. He might be willing to act badly or basely or to do something unpleasant; but when he externalizes a desire it must be because he is completely opposed to acting in accord with the desire. Of course, people are commonly unwilling to think of themselves as acting badly or basely or unjustly, so Frankfurt can admit that sometimes these properties *do* spur someone to dissociate a desire to do something thought bad, base, etc. The second condition is that this negative attitude must be persistent. It can't be a transient attitude. Being opposed to acting upon a desire for a moment isn't the same as dissociation. This is one reason why caring is so important for Frankfurt's conception of agency.⁴⁷

As he does with identification, Frankfurt repeatedly describes reflective dissociation as the agent's "making up his mind." This is only natural because reflective identification and dissociation generally occur together, and dissociation only occurs in conjunction with an act of identification. I only dissociate a desire in order to retain my identification with another desire with which the first conflicts.

Once again we must note how minimal Frankfurt's approach is. Dissociation is difficult to understand without a cognitive theory of desire – because on such a theory a

⁴⁷ It is in virtue of this requirement of persistence that care acquires its importance for identification. If identification is not a positive act then nothing can *move* us to identify with something. The relevance of my caring about something is in explaining why I *cannot* identify myself with something rather than in explaining why I do, except in a negative formulation ("You know, X is incompatible with your desire to Y." "Well, I don't really care about X." "Ah, that explains it."). We'll return to this matter in a moment.

desire can be judged “false” and thereby excluded in a way that completely excludes it from consideration – but Frankfurt has given us a theory of dissociation that allows desires to be no more than vectors. Dissociation, rather than implying an epistemic or axial evaluation of a desire, rests upon our own internal resistance to the desire. The normativity that was drained out of identification did not end up in the concept of dissociation. Neither of the two elements of dissociation – unwillingness and persistence – involve normative elements. Constant resistance to something is just a fact about a person’s makeup and invokes nothing more sophisticated than the pushes and pulls that Frankfurt has utilized for other parts of his theory. The only concepts that Frankfurt has invoked up to this point in the development of his admittedly complex theory are the very simple ones of aversion, attraction, and persistence. Although it is not obvious that this strategy will work, we cannot evaluate this until we have Frankfurt’s full theory of action in hand.

1.1.10. Integration and Reordering of Ends

Alongside identification and dissociation lies an agent’s establishment of relationships of priority amongst the various ends that he has identified with. Although conflicts of desires can prompt dissociation, they can also be resolved through someone establishing new relationships of priority amongst his desires:

On the one hand he must decide, with respect to each desire, whether to identify himself with it or whether to reject it as an outlaw...On the other hand he must decide, with respect to the various desires with which he does identify, what relationships of priority to establish among them.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Frankfurt, “Reply to Michael E. Bratman,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 88. See also, Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 170; Frankfurt, “Reply to T. M. Scanlon,” *Contours of Agency*, pp. 184–188, p. 184; Frankfurt, “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, p. 11; etc. In the text immediately following the passage quoted Frankfurt offers a rather picky denial that even desires with which I have identified give me a

Should an agent identify with an end he must also give it some place relative to his other goals. When desires conflict contingently rather than irreconcilably this can generally be resolved by determining what priority one desire should have relative to the other. Thus Augustine might have desired both to converse with his friends and to listen to the sermons of Ambrose, to determine for himself how eloquent Ambrose's speech was. He had to determine a particular place for both of these ends within his life. Sometimes they might conflict with each other – if for example an opportunity to converse with his friends were to occur at the same time as one of Ambrose's sermons – but he had no desire to dissociate either desire. Frankfurt would suggest that Augustine only needed to establish some kind of relative ranking. The nature of such ordering is, plainly, of significant interest, but it is not one to which Frankfurt has devoted considerable energy.

1.2. Frankfurt's Moral Ideal of Wholeheartedness

1.2.1. The Self-Construction of Persons

Frankfurt frequently connects his theory of reflective identification to a rhetoric of personhood and self-construction. For example, he claims that although we possess unre-

reason for action. It is far from clear what he means when he distinguishes between a desire's possessing "any specific role in deliberation as a justifying reason for action" from its "giving him a reason to take it seriously in a certain way" by needing to be assigned "some place in the order of his priorities." In particular, identification with a desire turns it into one of his ends, and it is hard to see what else a reason for action needs to be beyond an end. In other places what he says suggests that he takes someone's reasons for acting to be dependent upon his making up his mind or deciding upon something (see e.g. Frankfurt, "Reply to T. M. Scanlon," *Contours of Agency*, p. 185: "If the desire [in question] tends to provide us with a reason, that is because the decision by which the desire is created is precisely the decision concerning what is to count with us as a reason." Then later: "The upshot of deciding...is not really that one begins to desire something...but that one begins to take something as a reason for acting").

flective endorsements, we do not identify with these desires *as persons*: “insofar as [a person’s] desires are utterly unreflective, he is to that extent not genuinely a person at all.”⁴⁹ He has held to this claim throughout his career. Frankfurt also claims that it is through identification, dissociation, and subordination that I constitute my *self*: What it is that I am. “It is these acts of ordering and of rejection – integration and separation – that create a self out of the raw materials of inner life.”⁵⁰ Determining exactly how we should respond to and interpret these claims is difficult. Frankfurt himself has admitted that he has encouraged “various misunderstandings of my views” through “certain unfortunate terminological usages.”⁵¹ Thus Scanlon confesses, “I may have, for years, been misreading Frankfurt’s talk of first- and second-order desires” by taking these to signify concepts richer than Frankfurt had intended.⁵² This is why the history of Frankfurt criticism has been, in many respects, deflationary. Readers *thought* that Frankfurt was saying something awfully ambitious and rather exciting, but then discovered that his claims were more limited than they had realized, in the same way that *A Theory of Justice* was much more exciting, if less defensible, when we were able to read it as Michael Sandel did in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Consider Charles Taylor’s treatment of Frankfurt in

⁴⁹ Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion,” *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, pp. 105–106.

⁵⁰ Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 170. Compare what he says in Frankfurt, “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, p. 7 and also on p. 19, and the qualification he offers to this in Frankfurt, “Reply to J. David Velleman,” *Contours of Agency*, pp. 124–128, pp. 124–125.

⁵¹ Frankfurt, “Reply to Michael E. Bratman,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 86.

⁵² Scanlon, “Reasons and Passions,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 177. But even when Scanlon realizes that he has given Frankfurt too rich a concept of first-order desires, he does not strip back the concept of second-order desires that he attributes to him sufficiently, building a kind of authority into them, so that Frankfurt complains that, in fact, he does not conceive of first- and second-order desires as distinct from each other in the way that Scanlon supposes (see Frankfurt, “Reply to T. M. Scanlon,” p. 184–5).

“Responsibility for Self”: although Taylor’s “strong evaluation” was inspired by Frankfurt’s concept of self-evaluation it does not bear it much resemblance, precisely because it is so much more ambitious. Like Rawls, Frankfurt has sacrificed boldness for the sake of a more easily defended philosophy. Therefore, it seems that we ought to be exceedingly careful as to how we interpret Frankfurt’s meaning on this point.

Identification and the construction of the self are distinct. One of the errors of Frankfurt interpretation has been in taking these two concepts to be closer to each other than Frankfurt intends. This mistake is not without foundation: *reflective* identification and the construction of the self seem inseparable. An agent doesn’t require more than some desires with which it identifies.⁵³ But a self requires desires that the agent has reflectively identified with, and personhood appears to consist in being able to construct or being in possession of a self. Therefore the question of what selfhood amounts to depends crucially upon answering the same question for reflective identification. Reflective identification consists in an agent recognizing that he has no reason (in a very weak sense of “reason”) to hold back from identifying with some desire that he possesses. This action does not consist in constructing a new *entity* out of the “raw materials” of our psychic lives: Frankfurt denies that the self is an entity.⁵⁴ Nor, if the self is not an entity, does it consist in discovering an antecedently existing self.

If reflection does not consist in either creating or in discovering some *thing*, then

⁵³ See Frankfurt’s “Response to Michael E. Bratman,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 90: “[Agency] is not unique to human beings or even to humans together with those various less evolved animals that may be regarded as also capable of some mode of practical reasoning...When they are active rather than passive, the members of those species function as agents...”

⁵⁴ “I am not inclined to construe the self as an “entity” at all,” Frankfurt, “Reply to J. David Velleman,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 124.

in what *does* it consist? Plainly Frankfurt thinks that persons construct something, and discover something. What “awaits being found is not the self” but “the *limits* of the self,”⁵⁵ by which Frankfurt means those constraints upon the will, or volitional necessities, that determine the range of what someone can be. Reflective identification consists in experiencing no stubborn disposition resisting the idea of acting in accord with some desire. Dissociation just consists in finding such a disposition. The role of reflection in both processes is in *discovering whether or not there are any such limits opposed to a given desire*. So reflection solves the problem of inner division; but it is also the cause of it. We are capable of becoming divided only because we can reflect on ourselves: we are able to “focus our attention directly upon ourselves” and as a result we may respond to our desires with disapproval, anxiety, and worry.⁵⁶ In this way we can damage our psychic health and unity. Subhuman animals do not face this danger, but they do not have selves either: “Because they cannot take themselves apart, they cannot put their minds back together.”⁵⁷

The self then is what emerges at the end of this process of taking apart and putting back together. It is what has been subjected to the acids of reflective consciousness and been reconstructed from what remains. This reflective consciousness is not exactly an agent’s reflexive application of reason to himself. He is not determining whether his desires are “good” or “rational” according to any standard outside of himself. He is reintegrating his volitional state through his reflective knowledge of which desires are really

⁵⁵ Frankfurt, “Reply to J. David Velleman,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 124.

⁵⁶ Frankfurt, “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Frankfurt, “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, p. 12.

his and which are not. Therefore, the self is a kind of self-knowledge that engenders wholeness. Insofar as the self *is* anything it is an agent's self-knowledge and volitional structure and not anything other than this. Personhood, then, is being condemned to take oneself apart and being called to reflectively reintegrate oneself into a self.

1.2.2. The Ideal of Selfhood

What should we make of this project? Plainly Frankfurt believes this project of constructing the self is *desirable*. But we should not allow the rhetoric he utilizes to beguile us into thinking of it as some other project than it is. It is not, for example, the project engaged in by Hegel or by the German Romantics, no matter how much it might resemble these in certain respects. Even though all of these thinkers have maintained an ideal of self-conscious wholeness, it is not the same project. For example, Hegel's analogous project requires nothing less than reason becoming at home with itself and the world. The ideal that Frankfurt appeals to is lower than theirs, because it requires so much less of reason both in the role of destroyer and in the role of restorer of wholeness. As J. David Velleman says, "The ideal implicit in Frankfurt's conception of the self is the ideal of wholeheartedness."⁵⁸ Wholeness is, for Frankfurt, just wholeheartedness, and not the integration of reason and feeling, or reason and life generally. This ideal is not nothing, but we've yet to see what exactly what it is and what, if anything, is desirable about self-consciousness or wholeheartedness as Frankfurt conceives of them. To this point, we've only seen normativity pushed back, step by step. But now we shall see where Frankfurt's locates the seat of normativity. It is also where we can find the center of his

⁵⁸ J. David Velleman, "Identification and Identity," *Contours of Agency*, pp. 91–123, p. 100.

account of *akrasia*. We must now seek a fuller understanding of his conception of wholeheartedness to see how this all hangs together.

1.2.3. Two Ways to Lack Wholeheartedness

The concept of wholeheartedness is extremely important both for understanding Frankfurt's thought in general and for understanding his explanation of *akrasia*. His account of wholeheartedness allows for a person to lack wholeheartedness in what are, *prima facie*, two ways: "In discussing ambivalence, I am concerned with conflict sufficiently severe that a person: (a) cannot act decisively; or (b) finds that fulfilling either of his conflicting desires is substantially unsatisfying."⁵⁹ What he appears to mean is that an agent may either indecisively fail to identify with or dissociate himself from one of his goals, or he may inconsistently refuse to dissociate from either of two conflicting goals he has previously identified with.

The first possibility – let us call it volitional indecision – covers a person who fails to identify himself decisively with any of his second-order desires relating to some particular first-order desire. In such a situation, an agent is both drawn to and pulled away from his desire to *A* and is unsure whether he prefers to act upon it or not. He cannot reach the point where "no further inquiry would change [his] mind." In this case there is "no unequivocal answer" as to what he really wants to do.⁶⁰ This was how Augustine described his youthful pursuit of wisdom. Upon examining himself he felt that he did after all want to do pursue wisdom in a small community of like-minded persons. But was it

⁵⁹ Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 99n11.

⁶⁰ Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 165.

worthwhile to pursue something he might never find? In this way his uncertainty regarding whence wisdom might be found undermined his resolution and for many years he wavered in indecision. Someone in this state of indecision may act on his desire to *A* or not act on it without really being sure that he is doing what he ought to do, and without any firmness of decision. Such a person lacks wholeheartedness and suffers from a crucial kind of ambivalence about who he is.

Second, it is possible that the different desires an agent has committed himself to conflict with each other, perhaps in a way unknown to him. Let us call this volitional incoherence. For example, someone may not yet realize that the career he has committed himself to, and his desire to pursue this career, are inconsistent with his love for his family and his desire to go on loving them and acting in a loving manner towards them. This is what occurs in the movie “Ray” depicting the life of musician Ray Charles. Although Charles appears to believe that he can be completely devoted both to his career as a musician and to his family and be successful both as a great musician and as an exemplary family man, he is mistaken. This would be true even if we don’t take into account the mistresses he sleeps with and the heroin he takes when he is on the road traveling. His total commitment to his music does not allow him to be sufficiently devoted to his family for him to achieve both of his goals. Without his recognizing this, his heart is divided between two courses of action he cannot simultaneously pursue.

1.2.4. Ambivalence and Self-Defeat

It is important to make at least a provisional distinction between these two kinds of failure, even though Frankfurt never makes much of the difference. He describes both

as “self-defeating”⁶¹ but the nature of the defeat differs. In volitional incoherence, when someone has endorsed two incompatible ends, the defeat is more nearly literal. I endorse one end and pursue it, but in pursuing it, I undermine another end I have endorsed. So I literally defeat my own ends and prevent their realization. If both ends draw me with sufficient strength then I shall perhaps be unsuccessful in achieving either of these ends to any acceptable degree, at one time pursuing one, at another time pursuing the other, and at all times undermining one or another of these ends, so that my life ends a miserable wreck and failure.

Volitional indecision – which Frankfurt makes so much of in *The Reasons of Love* – has to be conceived of differently. The conflict involves whether or not I shall adopt a given end and integrate it into my volitional structure, not between two ends already integrated within it. So how – unless this dithering and indecision undermines an end I have already adopted – does this uncertainty about adopting an end justify the rhetoric that Frankfurt deploys on its behalf? He says, for example, that this kind of ambivalence is “the counterpart in the realm of conduct to self-contradiction in the realm of thought” because it allows us to do two contrary things at the same time.⁶² Although it is true that, when I am undecided in this way, I possess two desires that conflict with each other and act upon one at one time and another at another time, what grounds do we have to claim that *I* am defeated, no matter how things go? For at this point I haven’t identified with either desire and given it a place in my ordering of ends. If we speak with perfect precision, although the conflict takes place within my mental history it is not within *me* at all

⁶¹ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 96.

⁶² Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 96.

because the parties to the conflict are not ends with which I have constituted myself. It appears as if I am not defeated at all, let alone by myself. Now, if I possess some kind of inescapable interest in self-construction, then my indecisiveness would defeat *this* goal, and we could point to a clear defeat of myself by myself, and Frankfurt in fact does think that we all possess such a goal. However, this doesn't seem to be quite what he is intending, so at this point the language of "self-defeat" appears more suitable as a description of volitional incoherence than volitional indecision.

1.2.5. Frankfurt's Conception of Wholeheartedness

Frankfurt's conception of wholeheartedness is not difficult to define. It is the absence of any conflict, potential or actual, between desires with which an agent identifies. An agent is wholehearted when he lacks any conflicts between his second-order desires about what kind of first-order desires he should like to possess and his first-order desires are not in conflict with each other. This does not imply that every desire he experiences harmonizes with the others, but only that the desires with which he *identifies* are in harmony. A subhuman animal cannot be wholehearted because it cannot, in this sense, have "heart" at all, that is, take up an attitude towards its own will. The wholehearted agent may not have a perfectly free will; dissociated desires might still sometimes move him to act, despite his opposition to these. But although there is conflict in his life, there is no conflict within him about who he is to be and how he would like to live. This is itself a kind of freedom. The ambivalent man is, to the degree that he is ambivalent, unfree to pursue his goals. This is because he constantly interferes with his own goals, undoing at

one moment what he did at another.⁶³ The wholehearted agent has achieved the ideal of personhood, in that he has achieved self-conscious wholeness.

1.2.6. Wholeheartedness and Self-Love

Wholeheartedness is so important, according to Frankfurt, that it is one of the two ends of self-love. Self-love consists in part in a disposition to promote my own true interests. Because, according to Frankfurt, my true interests are defined by what I care about – indeed, because my having any true interests at all is dependent upon my caring about things⁶⁴ – self-love requires wholeheartedness. Otherwise I shall undermine my own true interests. Effectively loving something requires that I be wholehearted in this love. Without wholeheartedness a satisfactory life is impossible. We shall have to return to this topic when we have considered Frankfurt’s thoughts about the nature of caring.

1.2.7. The Effects of Wholeheartedness on Life

There is something odd about Frankfurt’s conception of wholeheartedness that is brought out in J. David Velleman’s essay in *Contours of Agency*. Velleman notes that for Frankfurt “the well constituted self” is marked by its wholeheartedness, but that Frankfurt doesn’t intend this to include “the complete absence of conflicting motives.”⁶⁵ It separates us from these conflicting desires and our responsibility for them but doesn’t elimi-

⁶³ Frankfurt refers to wholeheartedness as “a fundamental kind of freedom” in Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 97.

⁶⁴ The second half of self-love consists just in making sure that the agent does find things to love and to care about.

⁶⁵ Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 100.

nate them nor prevent them from producing action. There are two ways to interpret this claim: (1) Wholehearted support for something doesn't entail the complete elimination of lingering motivational impulses or the total avoidance of acting on conflicting motives, even dissociated ones; in rare and difficult circumstances these other motives might break through and lead the person to action. (2) Wholehearted support for something doesn't entail not acting in ways that systematically undermine what one supports; someone could wholeheartedly love his family but gamble obsessively to the detriment of his family. This is equivalent to asking what connection wholeheartedness has to what Frankfurt terms "free will," namely, the ability to act on desires that we identify with (or to do what we *really* want). It is striking that Frankfurt has not, to my knowledge, ever broached this topic. He has said, regarding both free will and wholeheartedness, that they are difficult to achieve and, to a large extent, whether we achieve them or not is not up to us. Can we go further and provide some explanation of their relationship?

First, it is not easy to see how Frankfurt's other commitments would allow him to endorse (1). Endorsing (1) would require that second-order desires and identification possess more power than he has given them. A second-order desire to *X*, recall, does not move someone to desire to *X* any more than before. It only moves someone to *consent* to perform *X*. This word, "consent," itself invites us to imagine that there is a rational agent whose consent is necessary for action, but this is not how Frankfurt ever describes the situation. "Consent" here just means "being content." Someone might be at war with a desire within himself that repeatedly produces actions he finds repulsive. "Consent" is the opposite of this kind of strife, and does not signify anything more than this. Similarly, if the person has dissociated a desire, this only means that he is *not* content with its moving

him to act. This doesn't mean that he has the inner strength to avoid acting so. Such a person *wants* the strength to resist, but need not have it. So we must conclude that Frankfurt endorses not (1), but (2): someone might wholeheartedly endorse his love for one thing, but frequently act on motives conflicting with this love. The distinction between someone who is wholehearted and someone who is not rests in this, that the wholehearted person is constantly disposed to resist the motivation and does what he can to resist it, only with this limit, that all he can do might prove to be too little. The person who is not wholehearted, however, wavers between consenting to his motives for one end, and his motives for a conflicting end. Thus, despite first appearances, his concept of wholeheartedness actually differs from Augustine's on many points: for he would not have described himself as free until he was wholehearted, nor as wholehearted until he was free.

1.3. What We Care About

1.3.1. The Concept of Care

Frankfurt's concept of care depends upon and enriches all the other elements of his philosophy. He defines caring about something as a volitional state that acts as a persistent mode of guiding oneself.⁶⁶ A care is fundamentally something that an *agent* does with *himself*. It is a mode of shaping his life over a long period time by determining what he shall count as important to himself. A care is not like a desire to eat. Wishing to eat is not a volitional state, but a physical appetite. Because of this, it is something that the

⁶⁶ Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 83.

agent passively experiences rather than something he does with himself, even though it has an obvious impact upon the shape of the agent's life.

1.3.2. Activity

How can caring be active? Doesn't Frankfurt admit that it is largely beyond our powers to choose to care about something? According to Frankfurt, caring is active largely because it is a state of the will. When he wishes to explain how an agent can experience a volitional necessity (which is essentially a care that an agent cares about maintaining) actively in some respects and passively in others, he says the following:

Resolution of these difficulties lies in recognizing that: (a) the fact that a person cares about something is a fact about his will, (b) a person's will need not be under his own voluntary control, and (c) his will may be no less truly his own when it is not by his own voluntary doing that he cares as he does.⁶⁷

Caring is like a volitional necessity in that it is a state of will; caring is unlike one in that its power over the agent is not as inescapable. Thus we can apply the same lesson here. Caring is active – unlike a physical desire – because it is the agent's own doing. It is the agent's own doing because it is a state of his will, even when this state is not a result of a conscious choice or presently subject to such choice. So long as it is a fact about the will, it represents the activity of the agent. In this matter, Frankfurt's conception of the will is not so far from that of Augustine and others who conceive of the will as possessing a natural inclination towards happiness: this inclination is not generally conceived of as something that an agent passively bows down to, but as a part of the essence of his agency, because it defines the nature of his will. So too what an agent cares about defines

⁶⁷ Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 88.

something like the adopted “nature” of his will.

1.3.3. Reflexivity

We might also find Frankfurt’s claim that caring is reflexive to be puzzling. Shouldn’t we say that Ray Charles cared *about music*? Isn’t care, like desire, concerned with some object outside the agent? Readers of Augustine experience a similar paradox: on the one hand, he claims that the man who loves himself, does not love God, while the man who loves God, does not love himself. But when Augustine reflects upon the misery that *amor sui* leads to and the blessedness of *amor Dei*, he discovers that the man who loves himself rather than God, does not love himself, although the man who loves God rather than himself, really loves himself properly. That is, true *amor Dei* is true *amor sui*, but common *amor sui*, producing self-destruction, is anything but love for oneself. Augustine’s paradox can be solved by recognizing that his concept of love is both transitive and reflexive, in different respects. It is transitive in that it involves the agent regarding some *object* as his good. But it is reflexive in that it involves the agent regarding some object as *his* good. Thus, for someone to love something, in Augustine’s view, involves both his taking up an attitude towards an object and a way of relating this object to himself. We could explain desire in like manner if we could describe it as an activity of the agent. But because the experience of desire is often so passive, we should hesitate to refer to it as reflexive.

Frankfurt’s conception of care is fundamentally similar, precisely because the agent is so active in caring about something. If someone cares about painting then his caring is both transitive and reflexive; the painter takes up certain attitudes towards the ac-

tivity of painting, but in such a way that these attitudes relate in part to the shape of his own life. He is active in this because it is his own will that imposes these demands upon himself. As such, caring about something is like a command issued by the agent to the agent concerning what ends he should value in his life. So although we typically care about some *thing* or *activity*, the nature of care is such that it essentially acts as a guide for us, directing *us* to treat what we care about in a certain way. This activity is reflexive because in the last analysis we are both the ones who guide and the ones who are guided.

1.3.4. Self-Guidance

In what way, however, does care guide an agent? How does it function in his life? According to Frankfurt a care is a “volitional structure” by which he means certain “attitudes and interests” and “a complex set of cognitive, affective, and volitional dispositions and states” related to these interests.⁶⁸ Caring about something shapes someone’s life by disposing him to think, feel, and do certain things in response to the condition of what he cares about. So a man who cares about painting is guided by his care in that when he sees some particularly beautiful or interesting scene, it will dispose him to think about how he might render this himself, what colors and techniques he might utilize, and so on. When he feels that other concerns are crowding his life to the point that his painting suffers, this will provoke anxiety in him to ensure that he has enough time for this activity. In the same way, when someone believes that the welfare of the one he loves is threatened, he will be disposed to experience fear and alarm, determine how he might help her, and take

⁶⁸ Frankfurt, “The Importance of What We Care About,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 85. Cf. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 87: “Love is a configuration of the will, which is constituted by various more or less stable dispositions and constraints.”

action on her behalf. So the way that caring about something guides an agent is by providing him with a set of consistent dispositions relating to the object that he cares about.

Now, although it might seem as if philosophical use of “care” is novel to Frankfurt, this is not the case. As Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out some time ago, the category is actually residual from pre-Kantian ethics.⁶⁹ MacIntyre is skeptical about whether there is any unity to the subject, envisioning it as essentially what is left over when the affections are driven out of ethics. However, his account of the matter leans too heavily upon the Aristotelian stream of pre-Kantian ethics. He believes that the question, “What is it important to care about?” replaces, “What goods ought we to desire?”⁷⁰ In truth, Aristotelian moral theory does not contain an adequate analogue for caring. “Desire” – even in its Aristotelian sense – doesn’t capture what Frankfurt is interested in. To find suitable pre-Kantian analogues, we need to turn to the Stoic analysis of emotion, which shaped the entire Hellenistic debate on this subject.⁷¹ Augustine is responsible for turning the Stoic analysis of emotion into an account of love, in this way producing an account that possesses even more in common with Frankfurt’s own. Here we find real precursors for his concept of caring, particularly with respect to how someone, by caring about something, can guide his own conduct. Among the Stoics we can find an analogue in their concern with what someone judges to be important, i.e., to be good or bad, and what someone judges to be an appropriate reaction to such; the combination of these produces what we call the emotions. Cicero provides a representative example:

⁶⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, “Comments on Frankfurt,” *Synthese* 53 (1982): pp. 291–294.

⁷⁰ MacIntyre, “Comments on Frankfurt,” *Synthese* 53 (1982), p. 291.

⁷¹ And perhaps Spinoza, but I do not possess experience with Spinoza sufficient to comment on this.

So *distress* is a fresh judgment of present evil, in which it is seen as appropriate for the mind to be lowed and contracted. *Pleasure* is a fresh judgment of present good in which it is seen as appropriate to be carried away. *Fear* is a judgment of impending evil which is seen as being intolerable. *Appetite* is a judgment of good to come such as it would be useful to have present now and here.⁷²

Thus, such judgments establish a certain attitude in the agent's will, establishing dispositions to think and feel certain ways about objects that have been judged important. Augustine develops his concept of love to express the Stoics' idea that what someone takes to be important, and thinks of love as establishing affective dispositions of joy, desire, fear, and grief. These schools differ from each other and from Frankfurt in how they answer what it is important to care about; for the Stoics nothing is worth caring about except the rational will, whereas for Augustine there is only one transcendent good worth caring about for its own sake, and for Frankfurt the answer appears to be that it is important to care about whatever one can manage to care about (within the limits of one's power, knowledge, and affinities), but there is nothing that we ought to care for on its own merits.⁷³

Now, when we return to Frankfurt's concept of identification and dissociation with this understanding of caring in mind, we can see why what an agent cares about is so important for determining which of his first-order desires he identifies with. We can also see that for Frankfurt the role of caring in identification and dissociation is strikingly different from those who've written on these topics before him. In his view, identification is being satisfied with being moved to action by a desire. It consists in no more than being willing, or resigned, or not possessing any persistent hostility, to being moved by some

⁷² Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 4.14.

⁷³ In this Frankfurt appears most like Rafael Furtak's portrait of Kierkegaard. See Rafael Furtak, *Wisdom in Love* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

desire. Now, although it is very tempting to read Frankfurt as if what an agent cared about *led* her to identify with certain ends rather than others, the truth is that what she cares about *prevents* her from identifying with certain ends rather than others. She shall naturally identify with most of her desires, and some of these she shall reflectively endorse. But this endorsement comes down to no more than finding no conflict between a desire and what she cares about. Conversely, when she dissociates herself from a desire, this is not because, in the first instance, she judges the desire to be irrational or despicable; it will be because she finds that when push comes to shove, it is incompatible with what she cares about. She cannot resign herself to being moved to action by it. She cannot abide its having any influence over the shape of her life.

Unlike the Stoics or Augustine, Frankfurt does not conceive of someone as dissociating a desire by rejecting the corresponding, care-grounding, judgment. We need the concept of caring to make sense of identification and dissociation rather than vice versa. Frankfurt's minimalist concepts of identification and dissociation finally begin to make sense only when caring comes on the scene. For Frankfurt what we care about is rooted in things like our biology or history, and not in our judgments. Thus, care precedes dissociation, and gives it significance. The idea that dissociation consists in an anxious disposition to resist some desire only looks like a concept of dissociation when this anxiety is rooted in rejecting what conflicts with what someone cares about. Someone dissociates a desire when he senses that it cannot be reconciled with what he cares about and therefore makes up his mind to reject its legitimacy.

1.3.5. Persistence

This explains, in part, why Frankfurt also says that caring is persistent. When someone cares about some end, he resists anything conflicting with this end. Thus, when a person cares about something, this caring will tend to persist despite conflicting motivations. If we care about doing something, then “[we] want to *go on* wanting it” and identify with this desire, as care involves “a commitment to the desire”⁷⁴ in question. Such a commitment involves hostility to any desire I have that would lead to any diminishment of the care. A guide must always be ready both to point towards the goal in question and to those behaviors and qualities of his charge that are either suited to achieving the goal or dangerous to its achievement.⁷⁵ Thus, when Augustine was on the verge of converting, he represents himself as being confronted by the hostility of his old loves: “my cronies of long standing still held me back, plucking softly at my garment of flesh and murmuring in my ear, ‘Do you mean to get rid of us? Shall we never be your companions again after that moment ... Never ... never again?’ ...”⁷⁶ The thought of embarking on a new course aroused an anxiety of resistance. This persistence is due, in part, to the fact that what caring provides is not an impulse, but a set of dispositions. What is most interesting in Frankfurt’s treatment of this is the attention he gives to an additional side of this resistance: amongst these dispositions are some of a particular kind, which might be regarded

⁷⁴ “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, pp. 18–19.

⁷⁵ It may be important to note that, as Frankfurt characterizes cares, they need not be endorsements of second-order desires with universal application. It is possible both to care about going to concerts (which would involve an endorsement of “desires to go to concerts are themselves desirable”) and to care about going to *this* concert (which would involve an endorsement of “the desire to go to this concert is itself desirable”).

⁷⁶ *Confessions* VIII.11.26: “antiquae amicae meae et succutiebant vestem meam carneam et submurmurabant: “dimittisne nos?” et “a momento ista non erimus tecum ultra in aeternum”...”

as self-defense mechanisms. If an agent cares about something, he is not only disposed to act on *its* behalf, but to act on behalf of the care itself. He will be disposed, amongst other things, to preserve the dispositions in which it is constituted. This is why Augustine is so hesitant to convert; he is acting to protect these old concerns and to preserve a place for them in his table of ends. Perceiving a threat to these concerns, he is disposed to dispel this threat. Cares persist not only because they are dispositions but also because they – so to speak – defend themselves.

1.3.6. Foundational

According to Frankfurt, it is only in virtue of the fact that we care about things that anything is important to us. He says, “Some things are important to us only because we care about them,” such as who wins the American League batting title.⁷⁷ He admits that other things are important to us even though we don’t care about them, but what he gives with the one hand he takes back with the other. As Frankfurt construes the matter, those things that are important to us regardless of our not caring about them only because of the relationship they hold to things that we *do* care about: “it is only in virtue of what we actually care about that anything is important to us.”⁷⁸ Avoiding the influenza virus was important to Julius Caesar, but only because he also cared about his own well-being. Because a person’s true interests are determined by what is important to him, a person’s true interests are determined by what he cares about (and not, for example, by what he

⁷⁷ “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, p. 20.

desires).⁷⁹ What is valuable *to an agent* is determined in this way by what he happens to care about, rather than by whatever standards of objective value there happen to be.

This contention that caring has no grounds is the primary difference between Frankfurt's concept of caring and the analogues of caring in the Stoics and Augustine. Both Stoics and Augustinians give a primary place in their treatments of caring or loving to the role of judgment, richly endowing their analogues of care with cognitive content. This leads to a striking difference in the concepts of identification and dissociation. For example, although Augustine possesses no explicitly developed concept of dissociation, it is plain that he operates with something like one in *Confessions* VIII, and it is just as plain that he thinks of dissociation as following judgment. To dissociate a desire is to form a firm judgment about the unimportance of attaining its object. The Stoics agreed. A desire or other emotion can be dissociated by overcoming the judgment of importance that it is rooted in. Identification is just the inverse of this, less important to the Stoics than to Augustine, consisting in recognizing what is important *as* important. Frankfurt's theory of action is rich from the perspective of a "belief-desire" account, but its Humean minimalism is apparent when it is compared with its historic forebears on this topic – for better or for worse.

⁷⁹ This might seem to conflict with what Frankfurt says in Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 85: A person's true interests "are governed and defined by what he loves" as "[it] is what a person loves that determines what is important to him." Because this plainly conflicts with what Frankfurt says earlier, later, and even elsewhere in the very same book (I. 9, p. 22) about care determining what is important to a person, and because there seems no reason for him to retract this claim, I can only understand Frankfurt to be simplifying somewhat here by using "love" – the kind of care with the greatest significance for our lives and with which Frankfurt is particularly interested in the book in question – in the place of its genus. He admits to a similar simplifying in his reply to Susan Wolf's "The True, the Good, and the Lovable," in *Contours of Agency* p. 252n1: "The notions of caring and loving are not the same. For the sake of convenience, however, I shall use them interchangeably in my discussion of Wolf's essay." So I shall assume that he is adopting a similar practice in *The Reasons of Love* and that what he says applies equally to care whenever it appears that the distinguishing feature of love – viz., its being a disinterested concern with the interests of some particular beloved – aren't relevant to Frankfurt's conclusions.

1.3.7. Not Subjective?

Frankfurt insists that his view is not in fact as subjective as some critics make it out to be. He commonly appeals to various species-wide volitional necessities (super-cares that we cannot help caring about) that provide us with common conceptions of what is important to us. This does not seem especially helpful to me; his critics are not usually concerned with whether individuals have the power to determine what is worth living in accordance with by subjective whim, but rather with the apparently deeper roots of what is good or just. But in his reply to Susan Wolf's critical assessment of his divorce of value from love Frankfurt appears to allow for a richer way of conceiving the relationship between an agent and what he cares about. Wolf argues that it is better to love what is worthy of love than to love what is not, but qualifies this by saying that someone should allow both what she calls "affinity" and the potential of a love for producing future value to help determine what someone should care about.⁸⁰ She does not tell us exactly what she means by affinity, but she seems to think of it as a kind of "subjective attraction."⁸¹

To this Frankfurt replies:

Given [Wolf's] distinction between worth and affinity, I believe that there may actually be no advantage to a person in loving what is worthy as she understands it. People certainly do have an interest in loving things for which they have an affinity. They benefit by modes of loving that provide them with rich opportunities for fulfilling their most satisfying capacities, and that enable them to flourish. However, it may be no better for them to love something that is worthy by some measure other than affinity than to love something that is not.⁸²

⁸⁰ See Susan Wolf, "The Good, the True, and the Lovable," *Contours of Agency*, pp. 227–244. She introduces affinity on p. 233 and summarizes the view on p. 235.

⁸¹ "The Good, the True, and the Lovable," *Contours of Agency*, p. 233.

⁸² "Reply to Susan Wolf," *Contours of Agency*, p. 245.

Were Frankfurt to develop this thought, it would constitute a significant contribution to current moral theory. What kind of subjective attraction is this affinity that makes a love make sense, and how would it shape our understanding of love? Unfortunately, to this point, Frankfurt has done nothing of the kind. Even when he decided to write a book-length treatment of love, he did not devote any space to considering what this concept of “affinity” might amount to. His closest approach is to draw attention to the importance of “the mere possibility of loving something”⁸³ in determining what to love.

We *do* have an intuitive idea of what “affinity” amounts to. Ray Charles obviously had an affinity for music such that caring about music was better for him than caring about counting blades of grass, a task for which he would have been ill-suited. But this doesn’t exempt Frankfurt from expanding upon this comment if it has any importance for the concept of love. It is notable that when he considers how we can answer the question “How ought we live?” he does not mention affinity as any factor at all in determining what to love. So, whatever the relationship between affinity and the activity of loving or caring about something, Frankfurt’s idea of affinity does not give it much weight in determining what to care about. If he did, then we could settle the question without recourse to what we already care about, which Frankfurt claims is the only possible method for answering the question.

This strikes me as important for the following reason. It is generally thought that Frankfurt’s conception of care and love is especially opposed to what is frequently called “Platonic Eros.” This conception of love, according to which an agent loves, or ought to

⁸³ “Reply to Susan Wolf,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 246.

love, what is most valuable, is very different from his own conception, according to which value is only one concern amongst many determining what an agent should love. Augustine, for example, stresses the importance of “ordered love,” that is, he enjoins us to love objects in relation to their *worth*.⁸⁴ Frankfurt’s approving citation of the philosophical theologian Anders Nygren in “The Importance of What We Care About,”⁸⁵ along with the visible shadow that Nygren casts over Frankfurt’s work on these matters, only serve to reinforce the impression that Frankfurt has arrayed himself against this conception of love and is working within a very different tradition of thought on the nature of love, according to which love is unmotivated by the worth of its object, or indeed by thoughts of worth of any kind; for Nygren is the most famous exponent of this view of love, which he identifies with Biblical Agape, and his opposition to Platonic Eros.⁸⁶

But there is another side to the Eros conception for which it is notable: quite frequently what is enjoined is not the love of what is good precisely in virtue of some abstract goodness that it possesses, but for what is good *for the agent*, i.e., what would fulfill his nature. Thus Aquinas, whose conception of love is, in this respect, thoroughly Platonic, says, “Assuming what is impossible, that God were not man’s good, then there would be no reason for man to love Him.”⁸⁷ So although, *prima facie* the dominant opposition view possesses a conception of love compared exactly opposite to Frankfurt’s,

⁸⁴ E.g., see Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), I.xxvii.28.

⁸⁵ Frankfurt, “The Importance of What We Care About,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 94.

⁸⁶ See Nygren’s masterpiece, *Agape and Eros*. The standard English translation is Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

⁸⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), Iiallae Q. 26, art. 3.

there is a significant common ground. For neither claims that one must love what is possesses the highest degree of intrinsic goodness, precisely on the ground of its goodness; if they claim this it is because they hold that there is a coincidence between what is intrinsically good (for Plato, the Forms; for Augustine and Aquinas, God) and what completes or perfects man's nature. This is why Diotima's argument about what ought to be loved concludes by recommending the object it would bring the greatest happiness to love,⁸⁸ and why Augustine claims that we love whatever we think will make us happy.⁸⁹

As is commonly noted, it would be a mistake to assume that these diverse authors are referring simply to the subjective experience of happiness; rather, they are concerned with the question of what best fits man's nature and what will put it into its best possible condition. That is, they are concerned with whatever end man has a natural affinity for. It seems arguable that all of these thinkers would agree with the sentiment of Aquinas' conclusion and if there were, say, some object *X* that possessed a superlative degree of intrinsic value but which by nature was inaccessible to human beings, so that we could neither know nor interact with this *X*, and *X* similarly had no impact upon human lives, a being that existed in a realm who knows where and whose activities had nothing to do with human beings, then they would agree that there would be no reason for any human being to *love* this being.

For something to be lovable it must in some sense be related to the agent's perfec-

⁸⁸ E.g., see Plato, *Symposium*, 205d: "Every desire for good things or for happiness is 'the supreme and treacherous love' in everyone." From *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

⁸⁹ "Unde se fieri putat beatum, hoc amat," *De disciplina christiana*, in *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense* 2, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), vi: "From what he thinks he will be made happy, this he loves."

tion. (This feature is what commonly draws out the attacks of opponents; does this not render such love at bottom egoistic and contradictory to what we consider essential to love?) But if Frankfurt is willing to admit that affinity may play an important role in determining what we ought to care about, then it would seem that his position may occupy a middle ground between these two camps that Nygren has set in opposition to each other, the Agape conception and the Eros conception, in which love or care is not motivated by worth, but is still responsive to the fitness of the object to the agent. We even find that his argument for affinity crucially depends upon what sounds like appeals to happiness: he says persons “benefit by modes of loving that provide them with rich opportunities for fulfilling their most satisfying capacities, and that enable them to flourish.” If Frankfurt were to develop this thought he could do much to ease the subjectivism of his account.

1.3.8. Volitional Necessities

Frankfurt has devoted considerable attention to *volitional necessities*. He thinks of these as especially persistent and important cares that place such implacable limits upon our agency that he refers to them as “the limits of the self”: they determine what it is that a person can become and still be the same person, in some sense of “same” and “person.” Frankfurt says that love is an example of a volitional necessity, although hardly the only kind. Because the differences between a volitional necessity and a care are not especially relevant to my project I will not devote any sustained attention to them beyond this brief section. The short account of a volitional necessity is that it is a care that an agent cares about preserving. Cares are themselves already quite persistent, as we saw above. But although no one can choose not to care about something, someone could attempt to erode

these dispositions. This is likely to be slow work. A volitional necessity possesses self-defense mechanisms that are significantly stronger; according to Frankfurt, if an agent has a volitional necessity of some kind, then “he is *unwilling* to oppose it and ... his unwillingness is *itself* something which he is unwilling to alter.”⁹⁰ This is why I stated that a volitional necessity is like a care that an agent cares about. When Frankfurt says that I care about some of my cares, he is saying that the disposition to preserve this care – which every care seems to have – is, in this instance, just as powerful as a care all by itself.

One need only compare a volitional necessity with an ordinary care to see how they differ. A volitional necessity is something like parents’ love for their children. Most parents are especially concerned with the place of this end in their lives and, if they feel it is threatened, are very concerned about it. Even in the worst circumstances, when their children are morally contemptible, few parents cease to love their children. They are unwilling to stop loving them, and as Frankfurt says, unwilling to become willing. Not every care is of this kind. Someone might care very much about what others think of her, but not care much whether or not she continues to care about this. She might even wish she didn’t take others’ opinions so seriously and attempt to reduce how much she cares about this. It may be difficult for her to cease caring but given time it is hard to see why she shouldn’t be able to greatly reduce the power of this concern. But suppose that she cared about this concern and especially identified herself with it, being unwilling to relinquish caring about what others think of her because she had tied her identify to how oth-

⁹⁰ Frankfurt, “The Importance of What We Care About,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 87.

ers perceive her. Then her only strategy would be to attempt to stop caring about preserving the care before she could try to stop caring so much about people's opinions of her. So she would find it very difficult to eliminate the concern. In this way, just as it is very difficult to choose not to care, it will be very difficult to even take steps to undermine a volitional necessity. It is not even clear what the psychology of a person attempting to do this would be like, although, off-hand, it seems to require a good deal of self-deception. (Does it then follow that we ought not always consider self-deception to be a bad thing?) In general it seems that Frankfurt thinks that a person more commonly loses a volitional necessity through an external influence than through his own will.

1.3.9. Reasons for Action

When Frankfurt says that what a desire presents is not a reason but a problem, this is not on a par with saying that desires are mere "appearances" or "seemings" that require rational confirmation before they are able to act as reasons for action. We need to be careful to recognize just how minimal his view really is. He considers an account that makes our desires rich with cognitive content in this way, such as T. M. Scanlon's, to be "excessively intellectualized or rationalistic."⁹¹ A desire is merely "impulsive or sentimental,"⁹² and as such seems to be more or less similar to fatigue, a mere tug upon the will. Given this, his statement that a desire is a problem is readily understandable and even quite sensible. The fact that an agent experiences a force tugging him in one direction or in another can never, just on its own, constitute a *reason* for moving in the direc-

⁹¹ Frankfurt, "Reply to T. M. Scanlon," *Contours of Agency*, p. 184.

⁹² Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 99.

tion of the force.

This helps us to explain one of Frankfurt's ideas that is, at first glance, puzzling.

He says,

It seems to me that a desire – even when the agent identifies with it as his own – never provides as such a reason for action...The fact that the agent identifies with a desire does mean, I suppose, that he is prepared to assign it some place in the order of his priorities. Perhaps it might be said, then, that identifying with a desire gives the agent a reason to do *that*. However, this just that identifying with a desire gives him a reason to take it seriously in a certain way. It does not mean that he is committed to treating the desire as having any specific role in deliberation as a justifying reason for action.⁹³

What is so strange to most readers – especially to those prepared to assign a rich role to second-order desires or identification – is that when an agent identifies with a desire, he *still* lacks a reason to act upon it. Now, even if desires are completely mute in the way that Frankfurt thinks, once they had been identified with they would provide reasons for action, if identification were essentially a rational endorsement of a desire. But once we have Frankfurt's account of identification in hand we can see why even desires that an agent identifies with do not provide reasons for action. A push or a pull, even if someone is not completely opposed to it, simply isn't the right kind of thing to act as reason for him to act. Because he is not opposed to it, he only has a reason to "take it seriously in a certain way," where this means that he has a reason to compare it with his other ends and assign it some kind of rank relative to these ends.

It is not, however, clear what it would take for one of these pushes or pulls to become a reason for Frankfurt. He does believe that caring about something gives a person a reason to act in certain ways; he says that, because nearly everyone cares about many

⁹³ Frankfurt, "Reply to Michael E. Bratman," *Contours of Agency*, pp. 88–89.

things, “there are a number of considerations that count as reasons for preferring one way of living over another,”⁹⁴ and “[love] is itself, for the lover, a source of reasons.”⁹⁵ What is difficult to determine, however, is why caring about something should provide a reason for action if desiring something cannot. Frankfurt claims that nothing would be important to someone who didn’t care about anything. Such an agent would experience various desires, but because he didn’t care about anything, he would have no interest in what these desires were. We might think that second-order desires would be enough. But Frankfurt ties importance to persistence, and of course second-order desires need be no more persistent than first-order desires. But it isn’t clear why persistence would transform something that isn’t a reason for acting into a reason for acting. If there is some other factor involved, Frankfurt does not plainly explain what it is.

1.3.10. Are Frankfurt’s Reasons Vectors?

On the other hand, some of Frankfurt’s claims suggest that he might conceive of reasons themselves as being little more than pushes and pulls. Consider the picture that Frankfurt paints in his “Reply to T. M. Scanlon” in *Contours of Agency*. Scanlon describes three ways that desires may conflict in his paper, “Reasons and Passions.” The third kind of conflict is one between an appearance and an assessment, “the kind of conflict that occurs when it seems to me that showing my colleague in a bad light is a reason for mentioning a certain incident in a department meeting, but I judge this not in fact to

⁹⁴ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 27.

⁹⁵ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 37.

be a good reason for doing so.”⁹⁶ According to Scanlon such a conflict involves “conflicting claims” about the features of some course of action or state of affairs. Sometimes it may *seem* good to a person to do one thing, but upon reflection, the person may recognize otherwise. Scanlon then claims that he cannot see how any desire can enter into such a conflict if the conflicting desires do not involve “seemings,” that is, claims about what is the case. He then says that it is just this kind of conflict that appears to be required for Frankfurt’s notion of dissociation to work. When an appearance is assessed to be false, it is completely dismissed, and not merely assigned a lower status. Scanlon says that he cannot see what other kind of desire could possibly be declared an “outlaw” in the way that Frankfurt describes. If all desires are on a par with feelings such as fatigue, then it is hard to understand how they could be dissociated.

Frankfurt responds to Scanlon saying that, as he understands Scanlon, those who are moved by vanity or greed or other motives they have rejected see these as providing a reason for the action, “but not a *good* reason.” But, Frankfurt argues, this must be incorrect, because if the person has genuinely rejected the desire then “the attitude provides him with no reason for action at all.”⁹⁷ He then says:

To see something as a reason for performing a certain action is to see it as in some degree supporting or warranting the performance of that action. It adds a certain weight to considerations in favor of the action. The reason may not be a very good one. It may be a weak reason, which provides very little support; there may be far weightier considerations against performing the action. But nothing is seen as a reason for performing an action unless it is seen as providing *some* support in favor of the alternative of performing that action.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Scanlon, “Reasons and Passions,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 175.

⁹⁷ Frankfurt, “Reply to T. M. Scanlon,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 186.

⁹⁸ Frankfurt, “Reply to T. M. Scanlon,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 186.

But those who have rejected these motives “do not weigh up the interests of vanity, or greed, or cowardice on one side of the balance, and find them outweighed by interests on the other side of it,”⁹⁹ so Scanlon’s account must give the wrong account of the facts. Frankfurt’s reply is peculiar in that it appears to completely miss Scanlon’s reason for using the concepts of appearance and assessment. The fact that an oar *seems* to become bent when it is placed in the water does not provide “*some support*” in favor of the proposition that solid objects bend when they are immersed in liquid. At most it provides *initial* support to this proposition. When the illusion is recognized for what it is, it is entirely defeated and carries no weight in our theoretical reasoning at all. When we assess an appearance to be false it is completely dissolved. This is why Scanlon argues that only conflicts about claims – conflicts about what is in fact the case – can appropriately result in the complete dissociation of one party, no matter how good the one claim initially appeared. Specious charm does not make a false claim any weightier.

But if Frankfurt’s response is inadequate, why does he believe reasons to function in this way? It is true that even if reasons function in the way that Scanlon supposes them to, some conflicts of reasons will be the way that Frankfurt describes. For example, a conflict over whether someone should go to the movies or to a concert will rarely involve a true conflict of claims because both “*seemings*” might be accurate without being decisive. Was Frankfurt struck by this kind of reasoning? Perhaps. The other alternative is that Frankfurt tends to think of reasons as vectors, as pushes or pulls, in just the way that he conceives of desires as functioning, but distinguished by other factors such as their place in the agent’s volitional structure. If he does, this would explain why he was so

⁹⁹ Frankfurt, “Reply to T. M. Scanlon,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 186.

blind to the thrust of Scanlon's argument and why he would describe reasons as always providing some weight for practical reason. This would, in any case, make it a bit easier to explain how caring can generate reasons even if there is no cognitive content on hand anywhere amongst the agent's ends. This would also fit into the minimalism we have seen Frankfurt embrace in every other aspect of his philosophy.

1.3.11. Summarizing Frankfurt's Theory of Action

At this stage we have the majority of Frankfurt's theory of action in view. Some elements of his philosophy will be better brought out in the discussion of *akrasia*, but at this stage it will be helpful to summarize the theory so far and consider its implications. The most obvious attraction of Frankfurt's theory is its attempt to construct a subtle and complex account of agency out of a rather minimal set of resources. His theory of action is, as Barbara Herman has pointed out, an attempt at *bootstrapping*. Frankfurt's conception of a desire, whether first-order or second-order, is of a push or a pull. Desires move us towards acting on a course of action. Second-order desires move us towards identifying with a first-order desire. There is little or nothing more to desires than this. Their motive force does not consist in their presenting something to us *as* good, or *as* desirable, or anything of this sort. They are merely impulses without any cognitive or intentional content.

For this reason the hierarchical theory of agency is simpler than it seems. What does it consist in? Nothing more than the reflection of an agent's volitional state into her own consciousness, so that she may be drawn towards some desires and repulsed by others. The account carries no implications of any cognitive activity occurring in this reflec-

tion: it is quite literally simply reflection, the representation of one object in another. This is why Frankfurt says that the hierarchy is an attempt to explain *reflexivity* and not *identification*. Its resources are far too meager to explain identification.

Caring, for its part, does not involve any greater cognitive activity or normativity than desire. It simply consists in holding a certain set of attitudes and being disposed to think, feel, and act in certain ways. Caring about something does not entail that the agent think it especially worthy, although, given what Frankfurt says in his reply to Susan Wolf, it seems possible that an agent might judge it especially worthy *for her* to care about it. But whatever Frankfurt wished to admit by allowing affinity, he has not yet thought it so important that he ought to mention it, even when we might think it clear that he ought to. I say this because, although we might think that parents would generally judge themselves especially fit for loving their children, such considerations are completely ignored in the portions of *The Reasons of Love* that consider the nature of such love. He only considers rooting love in the value of the *object* (which he rejects) and rooting it in the value of loving *in general* (which he appears to accept) and does not discuss whether it could be rooted in judging *some particular mode of loving* to be especially valuable.

Identification, finally, is conceived of in the most minimal way possible: an agent identifies with whatever desires he isn't consistently disposed to reject being moved by. This means that an agent identifies with a desire so long as it does not conflict with anything he cares about. Identification, again, is not a positive act, whereby an agent declares one of her desires to meet minimal standards of rationality, goodness, etc. It is not even the experience of some ineffable force, whether meager or powerful, drawing her toward

the object of desire. It merely consists in her being willing to be moved by a desire, where this simply means that she possesses no actual and effectual resistance to accepting being so moved by it. This doesn't entail that she is actually in any way specially equipped to stop acting on the desire, although presumably she will act on it less often if she rejects it than if she identifies with it. It does mean that when she experiences it she pulls herself back from it in repulsion. Finally, although desires are not always reasons for action, reasons seem to be no more sophisticated – or cognitive – than Frankfurt's desires, distinguished by their place within the agent's volitional structure. Reasons, too, appear most plausibly to be just another vector within the agent. So in the end, if we must judge Frankfurt's success in developing a theory that reaches the most important parts of human life while using no more than the simplest parts, parts which even the most hard-headed philosopher could not justify excluding, then we must conclude that he appears to have succeeded on at least one front: his theory is thoroughly mechanical, because its most basic parts are nothing more sophisticated than pushes and pulls, while everything else is built up from these components. But can we judge how successful its portrayal of human life is? Can Frankfurt really fit Augustinian elements into a Humean framework? To do so we should put the theory in motion and examine how it must analyze *akrasia*. When we do this we can see that the theory is under significant strain from within.

CHAPTER 2:
AKRASIA AND WHOLEHEARTEDNESS IN FRANKFURT

Now we are ready to examine Frankfurt's theory in more detail and, finally, to judge how it stands. We shall do this by exploring Frankfurt's conception of *akrasia* and how he conceives of akratic action. When we do so we shall bring to bear all the parts of his theory simultaneously and find that its various elements pull in very different directions. But let us leave this until we are ready for judgment. The thesis I pursued in the first chapter was that Frankfurt's theory of action was minimalist and mechanical in nature. Despite his desire to represent the thick moral concepts such as wholeheartedness, second-order desires, and love, he is thoroughly Humean. Now we must see how this theory is brought to bear in explaining akratic actions. There are two main topics to cover. First, we must examine the implied distinction between *akrasia* properly so-called and apparent *akrasia* that emerges from Frankfurt's concept of dissociation. Following this we need to consider how he explains genuine *akrasia*. As mentioned earlier, even here we can distinguish two kinds of *akrasia*, depending on whether we try to force his theory to answer the standard question, or whether we apply it to a concept of *akrasia* that fits his own theory. It is this last application of Frankfurt's views that we begin to see the deeper implications of his theory of action and why, if Frankfurt is right, life is far more tragic than he is ordinarily willing to admit, and why his concept of dissociation may be an illusion.

2.1. Frankfurt's Three Accounts of *Akrasia*

2.1.1. Distinguishing Full Actions from Simple Bodily Movements

The first item on the agenda is to explain Frankfurt's distinction between *akrasia* and merely apparent *akrasia*. Most philosophers have seen their task as either explaining how akratic action is possible or merely explaining it away. It is noteworthy that, because of his theory of identification and dissociation, Frankfurt pursues both strategies. According to Frankfurt, some bodily movements do not count as genuine actions because of how they originate. Frankfurt lays some of the rudimentary foundations for this idea in his early paper, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," when he grounds responsible action in what kind of force moves someone to act – a theme he continues to develop throughout his early work on action.¹⁰⁰ By focusing on what moves someone to action, we can distinguish between different forces, some of which produce true actions, others of which merely produce movements. For Frankfurt, the most important distinction between the forces moving someone to act is that holding between desires with which someone identifies and desires from which someone has dissociated himself. This distinction divides those desires that belong to an agent from those that merely happen to

¹⁰⁰ In this article he says, "The fact that a person could not have avoided doing something is a sufficient condition of his having done it. But, as some of my examples show, this fact may play no role whatever in the explanation of why he did it" (Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *The Importance of What We Care About* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1–10, p. 8). The conclusion of the essay then suggests that it is not alternative possibilities, but acting on what one really wants to do, that guarantees responsibility. This shows that his focus is already on this matter of distinguishing the causes of actions, which later grows into much more. Other developments can be seen in "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" and "Three Concepts of Free Action" (both contained in *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 11–25 and pp. 47–57).

him. The “willing addict” and the “unwilling addict” both act upon desires of some kind or another, and in both cases the “moving principle” is something inside the person. Frankfurt’s theory of identification promises to explain how even an internal moving principle, such as a desire, can fail to belong to an agent. In Frankfurt’s theory we need not invoke a whirlwind or even an involuntary muscle spasm to absolve someone of responsibility for her bodily movements. Because it can do this it can also distinguish between genuine akratic action and merely apparent akratic action. Any action, whether akratic or not, is not done intentionally if the agent does not identify with the desire that produced the action.

Someone acts akratically whenever she knowingly and intentionally acts against her best judgment, refraining from whatever course of action she believes most desirable and performing what is on balance an undesirable action instead. For example, it seems natural to conclude that a person who injected herself with a drug while fully acknowledging that this was not best for her behaved akratically. But if we agree with Frankfurt’s reasoning, then we may deny this. True, her action was produced by a desire originating within her physical body and occurring within her mental history. But Frankfurt claims that “[certain] events in the history of a person’s mind...have their moving principles outside him” and so although “all the events in the history of a person’s mind are his” in a certain sense, “this is only a gross literal truth, which masks distinctions” that are valuable to make: “There is in fact a legitimate and interesting sense in which a person may experience a passion that is external to him, and that is strictly attributable neither to him nor to anyone else.”¹⁰¹ When someone has dissociated a desire then it is no longer attrib-

¹⁰¹ Harry Frankfurt, “Identification and Externality,” *The Importance of What We Care About*,

utable to her, as a person, because she is wholeheartedly opposed to its moving her to act. Even faced by such opposition, however, passions do not lose motive force: the “thrust” of a passion “is no less forceful, for being external to the person in whose history it occurs.”¹⁰² Externalized desires, just like regular ones, vary in strength, some being so strong that they are irresistible, others so weak that a person can brush them aside without strain.¹⁰³ In light of this notion of externalized desires Frankfurt is able to write that “the struggle among our own desires may be for us either a victory or a defeat” depending on whether *we* act or the desire does.¹⁰⁴

2.1.2. Free Will and Merely Apparent *Akrasia*

In this way Frankfurt’s doctrine of identification legitimizes our distinguishing between apparently akratic actions and truly akratic ones. The unwilling addict, for example, only acts against what he thinks it would be better to do because he lacks free will. He is not able to translate the second-order desires he identifies with into effective first-order desires. Therefore his action, not being voluntary, is not intentional either. *Akrasia* interests us because it appears incoherent to knowingly choose what is undesirable. For example, Davidson argues that we have good reason to accept two “Aristotelian” principles of action that *prima facie* threaten to make *akrasia* impossible: (i) if an agent wants to do *x* more than he wants to do *y* and he believes himself free to do either *x* or *y*,

pp. 58–68, p. 61.

¹⁰² Frankfurt, “Identification and Externality,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 62.

¹⁰³ Frankfurt, “Identification and Externality,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁴ Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 18.

then he will intentionally do x if he does either x or y intentionally; (ii) if an agent judges it would be better to do x than y , then he wants to do x more than he wants to do y .¹⁰⁵ These appear to form an inconsistent triad if we admit that (iii) sometimes an agent judges it better to do x than y but does y . But no such paradox arises if we deny that the *agent*, qua agent, acts. If she doesn't act as an agent, then *a fortiori*, she doesn't act intentionally.

This is one of the classic escapes that a writer can adopt to evade the paradox of *akrasia*, as Michael Kubara points out: a writer can deny akratic action by withdrawing or downgrading one or another element of the description of akratic action (she knowingly acted badly), by denying that she really *knew* that the act was bad, or denying that *she* knowingly acted badly, or denying that she really acted *badly*, or denying that she really *acted*. Of course, once you downgrade one element, others tend to follow suit.¹⁰⁶ So, if we follow Frankfurt, then we must allow that some apparently akratic action is explained by the agent's lack of free will, and so the act is not really free, nor intentional, and so not akratic.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Donald Davidson, "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?" *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 21–42, p. 23.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Kubara, "Acrasia, Human Agency and Normative Psychology," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 5 (1975): 215–232, p. 215–216.

¹⁰⁷ Although, as Frankfurt admits, the general muddiness of human motives makes it unclear which cases really do involve movement prompted by desires the agent in question has dissociated herself from.

2.1.3. Explaining Conventional *Akrasia*

We can also marshal the resources in Frankfurt's theory of action to explain what is conventionally thought of as akratic action – a task of somewhat greater interest. The closest he comes to giving a straight account of conventional *akrasia* occurs when he explains volitional necessities. He claims that a volitional necessity is just like a compulsive externalized desire “in that the agent experiences himself as having no choice but to accede to the force by which he is constrained even if he thinks it might be better not to do so.”¹⁰⁸ But make no mistake: when someone acts on a volitional necessity, she does indeed *accede* to the action. She is bound not against her will, but by her will. What she chooses is so dear to her that she can – like Martin Luther – do no other.¹⁰⁹ This means that for Frankfurt someone can act contrary to her own best judgment either because of the overwhelming force of a desire external to her volitional structure, or because of a power constituting the shape of her very will. But Frankfurt does not even provide an example of how volitional necessities accomplish this. Nor does he claim that these two alternatives – acting under compulsion and acting on a volitional necessity – are the only way someone can act akratically. So we shall need to do some reconstructive work to establish what Frankfurt's reasoning is here.

So, how can someone can knowingly and intentionally choose the less desirable of two options before her (using “desirable” to signify something like “good”)? We do not need to appeal to anything as powerful as volitional necessities to do this. Care is

¹⁰⁸ Frankfurt, “The Importance of What We Care About,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 80–94, p. 86.

¹⁰⁹ Frankfurt, “The Importance of What We Care About,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 80–94, p. 86.

enough. If a person simply doesn't care that much about what is desirable or good then this will suffice to explain why she acts contrary to her judgment of what is best; or, she might care much more about another one of her goals. Many of a person's internal desires are those prompted by what one cares about. Desires opposed to what someone cares about, on the other hand, are generally either dissociated (if generally opposed to what one cares about) or subordinated (if contingently opposed). This means that if someone doesn't care about the good in question, or if someone cares more about something else than this good, then the person will either dissociate or subordinate the desire for the good and act instead on the desire prompted by what she cares about. When Augustine, as described in his *Confessions*, struggled to bring his life into accord with what he intellectually discerned to be the good life, this was because (according to Frankfurt's model) he cared more about his ambitions and sexual pleasures than he did about the life of contemplation and chastity. He may have cared about both of these, but in the end, he cared more for the former than the latter and subordinated the latter desires. Someone else might think that health is better than the pleasure obtained by eating chocolate cake but nonetheless not care much about his health, while caring to some significant degree about the pleasures of eating sweet foods. Frankfurt does not believe that caring is proportionate to perceived value.¹¹⁰ If someone did care most about the good then it would follow that his desires would be weighted in accordance with it; but it would be impossible for such a man to act akratically.

¹¹⁰ Frankfurt also says that care does not track desirability. This appears to be because he conceives of desirability as being equivalent to intrinsic value, rather than (as the term might suggest to some) value-to-an-agent. Of course, even if we were to use "desirable" to mean "valuable to an agent," care wouldn't track desirability – it would establish it.

2.1.4. Why the Foregoing Was So Quick

Why is this so simple for Frankfurt to explain? Shouldn't it be more difficult to explain akratic action than this account makes it out to be? The reason why Frankfurt finds it so easy to solve the problem is that his concept of caring does all the work, and he divorces this concept from any concern for value, or any other kind of ground. For Frankfurt, caring reflects, and is accountable to, nothing. Caring is foundational. According to Frankfurt it is impossible to answer the question "How should we live?" except on the basis of what we already care about:

The question of what one should care about must already be answered...before a rationally conducted inquiry aimed at answering it can even get under way. It is true, of course, that once a person has identified *some* things to as important to him, he may readily be able on that basis to identify others. The fact that he cares about certain things will very likely make it possible for him to recognize that it would be reasonable for him to care about various related things as well.¹¹¹

Caring does not, as caring, reflect judgments about the way things are. Nothing can justify caring about something except the general importance of the activity of caring. But caring is the foundation of our moral lives (taking "moral" in a wider sense than Frankfurt would) insofar as it is rock bottom for our reasons for action.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, Frankfurt insists that his view is not in fact as subjective as some critics make it out to be. He commonly appeals to various universally held volitional necessities that provide us with common conceptions of what is important to us. But unless his appeals to evolution are intended to establish fitness as the ground of the good – a suspect proposition in need of much argumentative support – this point does

¹¹¹ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 26.

not appear to me to be especially helpful for rebutting his critics, and not relevant to what I have to argue here either; for both his critics and my argument are concerned not with whether individuals have the power to determine what is worth living in accordance with individual whimsy, but rather with the apparently deeper roots of the good and the just. It is this deeper lack of rootedness that they are concerned with and that my own argument depends upon.

Given that care is not rooted in anything in particular, let alone in a moral foundation of some kind, it is not surprising that someone could fail to care about what is good or desirable. So the problem breaks down in this way: suppose that someone knowingly adopts her worse course of action. Was she moved by a desire that she identified with? If not, then the act is only apparently akratic. But if she identifies with the desire, this can only entail that she doesn't care about whatever ends it happens to presently conflict with, or that she doesn't care about these as much as what the moving desire aims at. So if it is contrary to the end that she judges best to pursue, then it follows that she cares neither about the particular good nor about doing what is best in general as much as the end she does pursue.

Consider an alternative account of identification that does not permit this move. Suppose that identification proceeds somewhat along the lines of the way that Scanlon thought that Frankfurt conceived of it: when an agent identifies with a desire this requires, in part, that the agent consider the desire to accurately represent the goodness of its object.¹¹² (This would be akin to the Stoic theory of the emotions). If identification

¹¹² T. M. Scanlon, "Reasons and Passions," *Contours of Agency* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 165–183, pp. 174–179.

occurred in this way then it would follow that an agent could not consistently act in accordance with a desire that he both identified with and gave a negative assessment. On this account, negatively assessing a desire – recognizing that it is a false appearance – is the same as dissociated the desire. So if this were Frankfurt’s account of identification, genuine *akrasia* would be just as puzzling as it is for most philosophers.

2.1.5. The Independence of Morality from Reasons

It is illuminating to consider another way that Frankfurt’s explanation of akratic action could be undone. According to Frankfurt – as we’ve seen in the last section, 2.1.4 – it is impossible to answer the question “How should we live?” except on the basis of what we care about. So it is clear that Frankfurt would agree with the essentials of Bernard Williams’s principle of internalism: “A has a reason to ϕ only if there is a *sound deliberative route* from A’s subjective motivation set ... to A’s ϕ -ing.”¹¹³ But – unlike Williams – Frankfurt appears to think that there is something called “morality” that is independent of and identifiable without reference to an agent’s subjective motivational set. He claims that the question “*how to behave*” is separate from the question “*what to care about*” and identifies the former as delineating the subject-matter of ethics.¹¹⁴ It is possible that later in his career he brought these closer together; in *The Reasons of Love* he thinks that morality, as a mode of normative practical reasoning, is subordinate to the mode concerned with what we care about because the latter both is “more inclusive, with

¹¹³ “Internal and External Reasons, with Postscript,” *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*, ed. Millgram (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), pp. 77–98, p. 91.

¹¹⁴ Frankfurt, “The Importance of What We Care About,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 80.

respect to the types of deliberation it considers,” and also “embraces issues pertaining to evaluative norms that are more comprehensive and more ultimate than the norms of morality.”¹¹⁵ But morality still seems to be defined independently of care and based upon certain principles governing “how our attitudes and our actions should take into account the needs, the desires, and the entitlements of other people,”¹¹⁶ and he frequently allows that certain objects, goals, or ideals may have intrinsic value independent of anyone’s caring about them. So, according to Frankfurt, only caring can generate reasons, but moral value persists in a realm of its own.

It is unclear why he gives morality this quasi-independent status. Once we have adopted a principle of internalism like Williams’s it is natural to decide that whatever general ethical principles happen to exist must be based in the subjective motivational sets of the various agents involved. It would be different if Frankfurt simply spoke of independently existing justice or utility. It would be less paradoxical to claim that there is an antecedently identifiable and definable concept of justice, but that whether we had a reason to act justly depended upon what we cared about.¹¹⁷ However, Frankfurt steadfastly maintains that there is such a thing as “morality” and “intrinsic value” independent of what an agent cares about, possessing however no preemptive force. If we wished to maintain Williams’ internalism we might wish to challenge Frankfurt on this, claiming that Frankfurt’s distinction between “what to care about” and “how to behave” is no more

¹¹⁵ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ Like the early Philippa Foot. See “Morality As a System of Hypothetical Imperatives,” *Twentieth Century Ethical Theory* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995): pp. 448–456, p. 454: “If he himself is a moral man then he cares about such things...”

than unconvincing hand-waving. He has already admitted that the answer to “How should we live?” is supplied by what we care about and not by any universal standards of morality. Once morality is deprived of its preemptive status nothing resembling morality truly remains. But, evidently, this is what Frankfurt means when he says that a volitional necessity may lead an agent to act contrary to his own best judgment, though not because of any lack of power.¹¹⁸ A course of action serving what someone cares about may be much more important to her than the course of action manifesting the highest degree of intrinsic value, which it is pitted against – so much so that it is completely obvious to the agent which course of action to choose. Such “value” is but the bloodless and eviscerated cousin of the concept of the good that would make *akrasia* an interesting phenomenon.

No matter what we think of this issue, it is apparent that once someone denies that morality has an existence outside of our subjective states, Frankfurt’s method of explaining akratic action is barred to him. *Caring* about some end or another will be the only means of establishing value of any kind. So correctly judging that an end is valuable just is judging that it is cared about. (It would not consist in judging that something *ought* to be cared about.) Therefore, it would be impossible to claim that an agent simply doesn’t care about the good in question; by definition, he does care about it.

Taking Frankfurt’s approach, however, results in a paradox. When we divorce morality from our reasons for acting and give ultimate presumptive force to caring, not morality, *akrasia* dissolves. The answer that Frankfurt’s theory provides for the conventional problem of *akrasia* allows that *it might not be irrational* to act contrary to one’s best judgment because one’s reasons for action depend on what one cares about and one

¹¹⁸ See Frankfurt, “Rationality and the Unthinkable,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 177–190, p. 184.

might not care about what one judges to be better. If an agent only has reason to do something if he cares about it in some way, then he only has a reason to abide by his best judgment if he cares about this. Because Frankfurt's explanation of *akrasia* depends upon an agent not caring about this, he obviously has no reason to not to act akratically. But part of the puzzle associated with *akrasia* is that it is necessarily irrational: the agent appears to do something that he necessarily lacks reason to do. The theories of action for which *akrasia* is an interesting problem are those for which one necessarily has a reason to do what one judges best to do. So it seems as if no matter which way we turn, Frankfurt only explains *akrasia* away. External *akrasia* is of course no *akrasia* at all, for the agent does not act; but internal *akrasia*, despite being both knowing and intentional, loses all of its peculiar character of irrationality, and *akrasia* is not *akrasia* if it is not irrational.

2.1.6. Reformulating the Problem

Can we reformulate our definition of *akrasia* so that it is necessarily irrational on Frankfurt's theory? In fact, we can, by building *akrasia* around the fragmentation of agency: ambivalence is inherently irrational on Frankfurt's theory of action because I necessarily have a reason *not* to be ambivalent, and ambivalence – as we'll see – can be applied to cover the phenomena we ordinarily consider akratic. Ambivalence renders my will self-defeating and therefore conflicts with my volitional structure, no matter what it is. According to Frankfurt there is a close connection between an agent's "true interests," on the one hand, and what he cares about and his wholeheartedness in pursuing these cares on the other hand. It is in terms of these that we can get to the bottom of what Frankfurt's theory of *akrasia* consists in. According to his theory, an agent's true interests are

determined by what is important to him, or by what he cares about. Therefore, we can recalibrate the akratic puzzle for Frankfurt's philosophy of action by replacing the conventional question – “Why did you knowingly act contrary to what you judged the better course of action?” – with the question “Why did you knowingly act contrary to your own true interests?” This latter question is, I shall argue, always answered by ambivalence. At this point we possess true *akrasia*: We are asking somebody why, if he judged one course of action be contrary to what he cared about, he nonetheless acted in this way.

This suggests just how widespread Augustine's influence is upon Frankfurt's philosophy of action; for it neatly fits the picture of *akrasia* that Augustine provides in his *Confessions*, where he describes himself as riven by his incompatible loves for a political career, sexual pleasure, and a life of religious contemplation. Frankfurt's theory also captures the kind of akratic behavior we see in the life of the musician Ray Charles Robinson, as portrayed in the movie “Ray,” in which he makes every attempt to deceive himself about the compatibility of his various cares – for his music, for his family, for heroin, for his mistresses – before finally realizing how he has made his life futile and incoherent wreck. When a person whose life is riven by this kind of incoherence recognizes his condition, he is likely to think that he ought to do something about it, and give up one of his concerns or subordinate one to another. But many persons simply cannot bring themselves to do this. As a result they fail to achieve their goals, whatever these may be, because every course of action they pursue undermines these goals. The fragmented man does indeed knowingly and intentionally act contrary to his true interests. In this way, *akrasia* can return to the stage as “a kind of irrationality” analogous to “self-contradictory

belief’ that renders our lives “incoherent.”¹¹⁹ That is, if this is how we conceive of *akrasia* on Frankfurt’s theory, then we finally have akratic behavior that is necessarily irrational and genuinely *akratic*.

2.1.7. Which Ambivalence Counts

But what kind of ambivalence counts? Does ambivalence amongst desires cause akratic action or is this only accomplished by the “radically entrenched ambivalence”¹²⁰ that Frankfurt at one point calls “volitional fragmentation” concerning what an agent cares about?¹²¹ Our answer can only be the latter. Only volitional incoherence can give rise to truly akratic behavior on Frankfurt’s account. A person’s true interests are determined by what he cares about, not by what he desires, and in reframing the problem we’ve directed it towards what one’s true interests are, not what one’s desires happen to be. Only caring about something can generate reasons for action; desires alone do not. Because they do not, an agent has no reason not to deny his desires. Behavior flowing from ambivalent desires will be irrational in some sense, but not all irrational behavior – not even all behavior that the agent performs knowing it to be irrational – is akratic, and on Frankfurt’s account the distinction is especially important. This is because caring is the only notion in Frankfurt whose role is analogous to that of the good or the desirable in a more Aristotelian (or even Davidsonian) conception of agency. So, although someone’s being ambivalent with respect to desires that he has identified himself with is unfortunate for

¹¹⁹ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p.96.

¹²⁰ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 92.

¹²¹ In order to keep matters clear I will use the term “volitional incoherence” exclusively to denote ambivalence with respect to what a person cares about.

him, this doesn't cause akratic behavior.

Moreover, it is unfortunate for him only if it is important to him to keep his desires unified. But perhaps he doesn't care about this and thinks that it would be too much trouble to be wholehearted about all of his desires. It is enough for him to be wholehearted in what he cares about. For such a man, these actions won't be contrary to his true interests. We could only make them so by imagining him to care about unifying them while intentionally upsetting this project. But now we are invoking cares again, so plainly this won't do. Whether ambivalence with respect to desires is akratic turns upon whether there is some further ambivalence on the level of what someone cares about. In any case it appears extremely likely that the common examples paraded out to illustrate *akrasia* – eating too much and the like – are plausibly on the level of what we care about. So our concern will be with volitional fragmentation alone.

2.1.8. All Volitional Fragmentation Is Volitional Incoherence

Volitional fragmentation is ambivalence within what someone cares about. Earlier I identified two kinds of fragmentation: volitional incoherence and volitional indecision (1.2.3). Incoherence consists in caring about conflicting objects. Indecision consists in an inability to firmly commit to one object. When I introduced this distinction, I expressed my doubts that the two could be kept clear of each other. In the end it seems that nearly all volitional indecision collapses into volitional incoherence. I do not know whether Frankfurt agrees with this point – and I doubt that he does – but it seems inescapable, given his premises. I should be perfectly upfront: my argument depends on this being so. I do not, however, see how anyone with Frankfurt's commitments can avoid affirming it;

consider the following argument.

Volitional indecision describes a person who fails to identify herself decisively with any of her second-order desires relating to some particular first-order desire. In this case there is “no unequivocal answer” as to what she really wants to do.¹²² She wavers between pursuing some goal *X* and turning aside from it, but has no persistent feelings on the matter. She may act on her desire to pursue *X* or not act on it without really being sure that she is doing what she ought to do, and later turn aside from what she had just decided, to do the opposite. Volitional incoherence describes someone who has committed herself to different ends that are in conflict with each other, perhaps in a way unknown to her. She may not yet realize that the career she has committed herself to, and her desire to pursue this career, are inconsistent with her love for her family. She may find, like Ray Charles, that successfully pursuing her career requires her to sacrifice her family, while successfully caring for her family requires that she be less than successful in her career. Her devotion to the one undermines her devotion to the other, leading to self-defeating behavior.

Now, my claim amounts to saying that all volitional indecision is reducible to volitional incoherence. Why should we think so? Consider the agent who is vacillating and dithering between whether or not to commit to a course of action. Why doesn't she just *make up* her mind? If she persistently wavers between doing one thing and doing another, this persistent vacillation is best explained by her possessing conflicting dispositions to do each of these things. But what can explain these conflicting dispositions except what

¹²² Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 165.

she cares about? Conflicts of this kind are, after all, the most common reason for vacillation, and it is why Sartre's young man cannot make up *his* mind whether to care for his mother or serve his country. Someone who couldn't make up her mind even when she cared nothing for either alternative strikes us as neurotically indecisive, as overly attached to her freedom; that is to say, she appears to care too much about keeping her options open. It is perfectly intelligible for a person to care about doing this, but she does so to an excessive degree. But the very fact that she is seeking out something else to care about, beyond keeping her options open, suggests that she must care about devoting herself to some goal other than this. Otherwise she would not experience a persistent conflict over whether to commit herself to the goal in question. So the only plausible answer is that her indecisiveness is rooted in a conflict within what she cares about.

When we consider the kind of examples that Frankfurt himself is fond of, the same considerations appear accurate. Why is it that a man cannot make up his mind about whether to commit to loving some woman? Is it not because he is afraid that committing to the relationship will interfere with other things that he cares about – his freedom, perhaps, or his fear that the relationship will ultimately fail and prove to be too painful to be worthwhile? Or suppose that we shift the example somewhat, and take it further into the territory of Frankfurt's peculiar conception of love, and consider two parents who are asking themselves whether they wish to adopt a child. On the one hand they are powerfully moved by the needs of the many children who require adoption. On the other hand they are worried about the difficulties of adopting another child; they are concerned about the added strain of providing for it, about the novel parenting difficulties this might entail, about the reactions of their other children and even those of their friends and family

members, and about the substantial financial costs. They waver between doing the one and doing the other and cannot find peace on either side. Can we doubt that the concerns preventing them from pursuing adoption are precisely what they care about?

2.1.9. The Frankfurtian Theory of *Akrasia* at Work

Now let us turn to some concrete examples of akratic action under this model. Someone cares deeply about some course of action, ideal, or end. She deliberates about how to achieve it and she fully intends to act upon the conclusion of her practical reasoning. But then, when the moment for action arrives, she acts otherwise. Why? We have excluded the possibility of acting through the intervention of some externalized desire that would not be truly akratic. Instead, the problem is that at the moment of action another care of some kind intrudes and prevents her from acting. Suppose that we consider a painter, whom we find in love with both painting and with a woman whom he intends to marry. He finds that he cannot imagine life without her and sees that life will be unsatisfactory for him unless he does so. He is certain that she would agree to his proposal and he performs all the preparatory steps leading up to proposing to her: he considers the occasion, he buys the ring, and makes various plans about how to actually propose, deciding to make his proposal at the couple's favorite restaurant. But then when he is at dinner with her, and still fully intending to propose, he is suddenly struck by powerful aversions. He is possessed by thoughts that in marrying this woman he might limit his ability to develop as a painter, preventing himself from ever living up to his potential; or else, and even worse, that after marrying, he might be provoked by these limits to abandon wife and children for the sake of his painting, like Gauguin. Just as he cannot imagine living

without this woman, he cannot imagine living without his painting, or, worse yet, sacrificing his painting to mediocrity. This sacrifice is unspeakably repulsive to him. Embroiled in this conflict throughout dinner, he is unable to act on his intention to propose. He knows that this is irrational, understanding that he will be unhappy if he does not propose to her; acting as he does is injurious to his own interests and not at all what he really wants – or rather, is in conflict with *one* of the things that he really wants. He has fixed himself to what seem to be contrary purposes. The story could be told in other ways; perhaps a man intends to marry but is struck by his conflicting desire to marry some other woman; he might be prevented from entering one career rather than another, say becoming a missionary rather than a businessman, because he cares about the goods made possible in both careers but cannot bring himself to deny either category of goods to himself.

The most common examples of *akrasia* involve pleasure conquering reason. This too is possible under Frankfurt's model. Consider the man who is determined to eat healthily. His health is precarious, in no small part because he has eaten poorly in the past. He now fully intends to adopt superior eating habits, forming a plan to eat only such-and-such foods and only in such-and-such amounts. But his adherence to the plan is inconsistent; often, he finds that he simply cares too much about the pleasure of eating his favorite foods to forgo them as the plan demands. His commitment to the plan was not wholehearted. He cares about his health, but he also cares about eating certain kinds of foods, rather pleasant ones. As a result he is ambivalent and unstable in his ways. For Frankfurt this man can, and must, be distinguished from the man who is wholly committed to eating healthily but is overcome by an outlawed desire to eat his favorite foods, despite himself. One is true *akrasia*, the other only apparent.

Frankfurt's solution to the puzzle of *akrasia* is rather simple once all of his machinery is in place. There is no necessary unity to human agency, so what a person cares about might be in conflict. Likewise, there is no reason why a person's self-love has to be strong enough to overcome this weakness. A person's self-love might fail because she doesn't care enough and doesn't love herself enough. Since she cannot simply will herself to love or to care, she may find herself powerless to achieve this love. And as a result, her situation may be hopeless: she may have no resources to achieve wholeheartedness. In addition to these problems, there can be no *answer* to the question, "How should I constitute my will?" The only answer is that she should wholeheartedly care about whatever it is that she cares about, and care about all that she is able to care about. But this answer is useless to her. Her true interests are not antecedent to her establishing what she cares about. It would be different if there were a cosmic order that she might consult to bring her will into conformity with this order; then she might at least achieve a rational grasp of what she ought to care about. But Frankfurt's internalism rules out this possibility. There is no fact of the matter about what she ought to care about until she does care about it.¹²³

2.1.10. The Sources of Fragmentation

Frankfurt provides very little explanation of how someone can become fragmented, or indeed, how anyone comes to care about anything at all. The matter remains

¹²³ His position seems to be due to the two following considerations: First, Frankfurt has an almost hyper-Kantian conception of morality; morality has nothing to do with our empirical motivations or ends. But secondly, he seems sure that although teleological conceptions of ethics are incorrect (in particular, the notion of objective ends is incorrect; see Harry Frankfurt, "On the Usefulness of Final Ends," *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 82–83) they nonetheless come closer to articulating what is truly important to us.

somewhat obscure for him, although, no doubt, the phenomenon is obscure enough. Frankfurt's focus has always been the structural rather than the diachronic features of agency. Still, we can ask a more limited question: In virtue of what features is a Frankfurtian agent vulnerable to ambivalence? What is it that makes it easy for us to become ambivalent and difficult for us to escape from this state? According to Frankfurt, people who are wholehearted generally seem to maintain it, but those who lack it generally can't achieve it. Given Frankfurt's low view of human beings' insight into their own motives and ends, it is more likely that he would attribute the stability of the former group's wholeheartedness to the stability of their deepest feelings than to their possession of accurate knowledge of themselves. But what about those who are fragmented? Why are they unsuccessful in finding wholeheartedness?

The reason why we cannot save ourselves from this "disease of the will"¹²⁴ is two-fold: One problem is cognitive, the other, volitional. The cognitive problem is due to Frankfurt's internalism: There just is no good answer to what the fragmented agent should do. On Frankfurt's view, Sartre's young man, divided between his caring for his mother and serving his country, can only solve his difficulty if he is able to discover that he cares more deeply about one goal than the other.¹²⁵ What he certainly cannot do is determine which he *ought* to care about more deeply, if this is supposed to imply something more than which one he *does* care about more. Supposing him to be equally divided, there is no answer as to which one he should devote himself to. He must somehow make

¹²⁴ As Frankfurt echoes Augustine's "disease of the mind" (*Confessions* VIII.9.21) in Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 100.

¹²⁵ Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 80–94, pp. 84–85.

up his mind, but make it up by means of an arbitrary act of will that is not grounded in any reason. Fragmentation “cannot be overcome merely by acquiring additional information.”¹²⁶ Of course, at least Sartre’s young man needn’t decide to amputate one of his concerns. His task is merely to subordinate one concern to the other. But both the young man, and the agent whose volitional structure is more severely compromised by his fragmentation, cannot possibly discover an authoritative answer outside of this structure.

This is only the beginning of the difficulties for the ambivalent agent. Now it is true that she “cannot possibly be satisfied” with being ambivalent.¹²⁷ The volitional problem consists in the fact – unrecognized by Frankfurt – that according to his premises, the severely fragmented agent cannot possibly be satisfied with making up her mind about the matter, either. Frankfurt avoids this problem by predominantly discussing the ambivalence of indecision. But as we’ve seen, the ambivalence that manifests itself in vacillation is frequently reducible to a form of volitional incoherence, and this manifests special difficulties. For what is unsatisfying for an agent is determined by what she has a persistent disposition to resist, and if some desire is contrary to something that she cares about she cannot be satisfied with it (as part of what it means to care about something is to wish to go on caring about it) and she must dissociate herself from it. But then she cannot ordinarily be satisfied with any desire to separate herself from one of her cares. So, she must outlaw any desire opposed to what she cares about. But if this desire is produced by something else that the agent cares about, then she is in a pretty pickle. For she will possess a consistent disposition to resist *any* desire hostile to either of these cares. The idea

¹²⁶ Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion,” *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 100.

¹²⁷ Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion,” *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 106.

of amputating either of them therefore cannot satisfy her.

This is the volitional problem. A fragmented agent cannot be satisfied either with being fragmented or with the amputation that would make wholeheartedness possible. When the conflict concerns volitional necessities – goals we are unwilling even to consider abandoning – then the problem achieves its fullest force. There are various qualifications and limits to this problem. For example, a person might care much more about one thing than about another; in such a case, if these objects come into irreconcilable conflict, she will have no doubt which concern she ought to identify herself with. More pointedly, however, even if two minor concerns come into an irreconcilable conflict with each other, it would be gross exaggeration to state that the agent must face any severe struggle over these. For there are many objects that we care about but which do not occupy central places in our lives, and we are not wholly unwilling to eliminate them. When such minor concerns conflict we might array ourselves behind one or the other without worrying too much about the matter. But in other cases the conflict in question concerns two objects that are central to our lives and it is to these cases that the volitional problem applies.

The agent cannot be satisfied with either option because to be so she would require some other kind of motivational power beyond what is supplied by her caring about various things. Indeed, it seems as if her problem is worse: it seems as if she cannot even be satisfied with what she *does* care about. If so, we might wonder whether or not she truly identifies with either of her conflicting ends. Perhaps this ambiguity about whether she can successfully identify with *anything* is why Frankfurt says that “[there] is no final unequivocal truth, no straightforward fact of the matter” concerning what such a person’s

goals are.¹²⁸

2.1.11. The Tragic Dilemma of Frankfurt's Fragmented Man

Given these two problems then – the one cognitive, the other volitional – it is not surprising that Frankfurt should consider ambivalence to be all but permanent. What he does not appear to be sensitive to is the precise nature of the tragic dilemma faced by the fragmented agent. The nature of this dilemma follows the pattern that Hegel and Alasdair MacIntyre take to exemplify both a certain way of life and a certain kind of tragic drama best seen in Sophocles' *Antigone*. In this play, the drama begins after Polyneices, the son of Oedipus, has been killed attacking his own city of Thebes. During the battle for the city, he and his brother Eteocles killed each other. Creon, the king of Thebes, has ordered that whereas Eteocles' should receive in full the honors due the dead, for Polyneices' treason, this traitor's body should be left exposed "unwept, unburied, a dainty treasure for the birds."¹²⁹ But the law of the family requires that Antigone bury her brother so that, like his brother, and "have his honor among the dead."¹³⁰ Antigone responds to Creon's edict saying that, "It is not for him to keep me from my own."¹³¹ The drama that ensues drives towards the tragic outcome that must result from Creon's adherence to the law of the polis and Antigone's to the law of the family. Each is utterly devoted to one law and suffers for wronging the opposite one.

¹²⁸ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 93.

¹²⁹ Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *Sophocles I: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*, trans. David Grene (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), lines 34–35.

¹³⁰ Sophocles, *Antigone* line 29.

¹³¹ Sophocles, *Antigone* line 54.

According to the Hegel/MacIntyre interpretation of the *Antigone*, the tragic dilemma consists in the merely contingent unity between two sources of valid ethical claims, the family and the polis. When things are going well, there is no difficulty between the two. Each plays an essential role in the life of the other, for the city depends upon the family, and the family upon the city. But it is also possible for the law of the family to come into conflict with the law of the polis; when this happens, we encounter a tragic dilemma. According to MacIntyre, “our situation is tragic in that we have to recognize the authority of both claims.”¹³² A citizen may not disobey the laws of the city. But equally, it is not open to a sister to refuse her brother burial. In this situation we cannot avoid choosing one ethical community over the other; but obeying the claims of one doesn’t excuse us from the claims of the other community, “[for] to choose does not exempt me from the authority of the claim which I go against.”¹³³ Both claims are valid, neither may be disobeyed, and the one demands what the other forbids. So according to this interpretation, the tragic hero lacks any satisfactory options. He is burdened with a dilemma and the need to make a choice; but, because of circumstances beyond his control, he will go wrong no matter which choice he makes.

Now consider the situation faced by one of Frankfurt’s fragmented agents. The fragmented agent, in virtue of her fragmentation, cannot possibly *figure out* what she ought to do. At most, the agent can discover that she cares about both objects. Her only option is *to make up her mind*. But, from her current perspective, the claims of the one

¹³² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd Ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 141. MacIntyre’s interpretation, although indebted to Hegel’s, is far simpler. Hegel’s reading involves several claims that would go beyond what is required here involving his account of the rational requirements of *Sittlichkeit* and the specific character the laws of the family vis-à-vis the laws of the city.

¹³³ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 141.

are just as good as the other. So she cannot be satisfied with making up her mind; she has as much reason *not* to do this as she does to do it. The fragmented agent, then, is trapped within a tragic dilemma that requires her to choose between incommensurable goods, neither of which it is permissible to sacrifice. Quite often, she will attempt to avoid picking sides, and will not make up her mind. But if she refuses to sacrifice one she must undermine the claims of both. The situation of the fragmented agent is tragic in that every choice before her is unsatisfying. It may well be that it is more desirable for her to undermine only one of her cares rather than both. But this cannot be said to be *desirable* in itself, any more than it is desirable, in itself, for Sophie to choose one of her two children to die, in order only to avoid the Nazis' killing both of them.¹³⁴ Given what Frankfurt says about dissociation, it is also clear that she is in constant danger of disintegration as a person: At every moment it seems that she is threatened with having her entire volitional structure ruptured, so that there no longer is an "inside" or an "outside" but a seething mass of conflicting goals and desires united only in their constant warfare with each other. Should she act, it will be arbitrary, senseless, and tragic.

2.1.12. Conflicts That Cause Incoherence

Someone could object to the preceding argument saying that, as a matter of fact, conflicts of care are never, or very rarely, so dramatic as the confrontation between the "law of kings" and the "unwritten laws" of the gods that appears in *Antigone*. Conflicts of caring, it would be argued, require not amputation but subordination or integration. For example, if someone cares about listening to music at concerts and also about one of her

¹³⁴ See William Styron, *Sophie's Choice* (New York: Random House, 1979).

friends, then putting off a concert to help her friend move out from the apartment she shares with an abusive boyfriend doesn't require that she amputate her concern with listening to concerts – it only requires that she have integrated these two cares in the proper way so that there is a clear domain for each. Caring for something, it may be said, is usually very general – it is essentially a concern with preserving the place of something in one's life – and so particular conflicts between cares cannot reverberate back to the level of the care itself. The problem in the *Antigone* arises only because Antigone and Creon are both so stubborn and singly devoted to their causes – Antigone to her family, Creon to his city – to the point that compromise appears impossible to them. Indeed, different characters in the play accuse each figure of madness for their commitments.

It must be granted to this objection that many conflicts are of this kind, but there is an aspect of caring that it ignores. In her book *Reasonably Vicious*, Candace Vogler divides reasons for actions into three temporal categories: those that look to the future, to the present, and to the whole of life.¹³⁵ Now, caring about something involves wishing to preserve a place for it within one's life, as the objection states. This means that the kind of reasons that caring about something produces are those relating to the whole of life, to which Vogler also gives the suggestive name of "patterning principles." These impose a certain pattern upon someone's whole life. Thus, for example, caring about listening to concerts may give someone a reason to ensure that she preserves a certain amount of time and attention for the sake of concerts over her whole life. The specific pattern that she wishes to impose upon her life may be quite particular, but is likely to require, for example, seeing a certain number of concerts in a year, spread out in a certain way, devoted to

¹³⁵ Candace Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 35.

certain kinds of music. A distributive pattern like this can easily accommodate adjustments. But are all patterning principles distributive, requiring only that the object of concern be distributed throughout one's life to a certain degree?

The answer is no, and the objection itself provides us with an example. A person's concern for her friend cannot be considered distributive. There are certain aspects of it that can be – for example, allocating time to spend with the friend – but others are not. Her responsiveness to her friend's needs must not only be distributed across her life, but present *throughout* her life. Thus the example can only be inverted with difficulty: what circumstances would justify leaving her friend's side to go to a concert? Only, one supposes, if the concert were exceedingly rare or incredible and the friend's need either not pressing or rather insignificant. Attendance to non-pressing needs (e.g., help with cleaning and cooking for a friend with broken legs) follows a distributive pattern. But if her friend is in need *right now* – say stranded with a broken down car in a dangerous place – then the inversion is dangerous. Plainly, she must violate the friendship to abandon her friend for the concert.

The need for amputation arises when two such concerns come into persistent conflict with each other. A momentary conflict is painful and can perhaps cause permanent damage to what one cares about, but need not require amputation. Conflicts requiring amputation arise only when a conflict is of a sort whose solution cannot lie in any shuffling about of resources and which will not cease until one or another of the concerns is outlawed. Eros, for example, does not admit company. I take Eros to be an ideal of love that requires the undivided devotion of each partner to the other; hence someone who has Eros for two different persons cannot continue on in this way. One love must be ampu-

tated.¹³⁶ We see a similar pattern within monotheistic religions, which arises because devotion to a single God requires that similarly undivided devotion. Such a devotion requires that the one who is worshipped act as a standard (in some way or another) for the whole of life. We cannot say, “You are the one we serve, the only one we need” and then say, “But you, also.” No one can serve two masters.

Why is this? Perhaps it will become clear with a non-theological example. Can someone devote herself to two different and distinct conceptions of justice? Could someone devote herself to both a Marxist conception of justice and a liberal one? Plainly, no one could live under two such standards. Standards of justice are not distributive, but patterning principles that apply throughout one’s life. *All* of our actions must conform to the demands of justice. No one can conform her actions to two distinct standards of justice with different demands simply by allocating each a certain portion of her life.¹³⁷ Standards of justice apply to the whole of life *all* and *at once*.

The same restriction appears in certain kinds of aspiration. Someone cannot devote herself to becoming a certain kind of person – one who is wise, or courageous, or honest, or temperate – and yet allow contrary tendencies to persist. Someone who is aspiring to be an honest person cannot countenance an ongoing concern with making herself as pleasing or popular as possible. This does not imply that someone aspiring to temperance faces a mortal conflict over whether she should eat this piece of cake right here. Her aspiration does not put her into conflict with the piece of cake or with eating this par-

¹³⁶ I do not mean to say that someone could not take two spouses, love each, and even split one’s erotic attentions between them. I only mean to say that this would not be Eros.

¹³⁷ To begin with, whichever standard she gave herself to first would thereby become her only standard, insofar as one of its demands would be not to adopt the other standard.

ticular piece of cake, but (for example) with an unruly appetite that demands far more than temperance allows.

Now, what does this conclusion mean for Frankfurt's account of *akrasia* as fragmentation and ambivalence? Suppose that someone cares about his family and wishes to care for them and provide them with whatever he is able to give them. This is one side of him. The other side of him desires the thrill of the roulette wheel. It yearns for this activity and he frequently wishes to abandon himself to it. These are patterning principles that cannot accommodate each other. Each demands far too much of exactly the same resources: attention, time, money. Someone who was torn between these two concerns equally would face a tragic dilemma in Frankfurt's moral universe because there are no grounds for him to amputate either of these concerns beyond the concerns themselves. Neither option can satisfy him because he has a persistent disposition to resist whatever conflicts with what he cares about, and each option produces conflict, as in Augustine's description of his old loves' saying to him, "Do you mean to get rid of us? Shall we never be your companions again after that moment ... never ... never again?"..."¹³⁸ He is trapped without any way of making his choice. We of course know what he ought to do. But within Frankfurt's structures, he cannot know, because there is no answer to be known.

2.1.13. Wholeheartedness Is Not the Answer

Frankfurt does not conceive of his moral universe as tragic. He might think of it as unfortunate or difficult, but not as tragic. For Frankfurt the primary commandment is,

¹³⁸ *Confessions* VIII.11.26.

“Be wholehearted!” This is the root of the ideal of personhood articulated in 1.2.1–2. This principle ought to provide someone faced by a dilemma of this kind with a positive way forward, although adhering to this principle will surely prove difficult. Frankfurt’s moral universe, in which wholeheartedness is extremely difficult to attain but always desirable, may be stern and even harsh, but not tragic. It bears many similarities to the universe that Augustine describes. There is always a way, however hard it may prove itself.¹³⁹ Because of this, Frankfurt does not believe that the dilemma faced by ambivalent agent is tragic; he is always confident that what the agent really needs is just *wholeheartedness*. If he is correct that wholeheartedness is universally desirable, then he is also correct to pay no mind to the question of whether his moral universe is tragic. If there is always some course of action that is desirable in itself, then there can be no tragedy, not in the sense that we are now using the term “tragedy.” A tragic dilemma requires that *every* choice go wrong, so Frankfurt’s ideal plays an important role in shaping the nature of the world as he describes it. However, when we examine the impasse that constrains the fragmented agent, it becomes clear that wholeheartedness is not as desirable as Frankfurt makes it out to be. Whether it is completely desirable depends, to a large degree, upon moral luck. Some agents inhabit a moral universe without tragic conflicts; others, less fortunate, find their worlds defined by such a conflict.¹⁴⁰

Let us question the ideal of personhood animating Frankfurt’s moral philosophy. According to this ideal there is something worthwhile about achieving a *reflective whole-*

¹³⁹ Indeed, for Augustine the way through is actually impassible for us, but not in principle, and open even for us if we can obtain help.

¹⁴⁰ Given how love unites the interests of the beloved with those of the lover, those who love someone facing the tragic dilemma shall themselves be drawn into the same conflict. To the degree that they identify with the interests of their beloveds their own lives cannot be entirely satisfactory, either.

heartedness, to the point that there is finally nothing more to “getting it right” than this. But granted that it is indeed better to be wholehearted than not, Frankfurt does not appear willing to acknowledge the existential costs associated with his moral theory. It would also be better for Antigone and Creon if the laws of the family and the polis were in agreement. But given the true situation, it would be foolish for us to make light of the tragic dilemma they face by continuing to merely say, “Well, what you really need is a coherent set of laws!” That route has already been closed off. It only remains to dishonor one for the sake of the other.

Frankfurt’s ideal of wholeheartedness, then, is unsatisfactory. It is not, in actuality, intrinsically desirable. According to Frankfurt, wholeheartedness is so desirable that “[to] be wholehearted *is* to love oneself.”¹⁴¹ But this cannot really be correct. What is important to an agent is determined by what she cares about. It will follow that *if* an agent is wholehearted, then wholeheartedness is desirable. This is because it is important to her not to screw up what she already cares about. These ends are important to her and lacking wholeheartedness would mean interfering with these ends. But if she is not wholehearted, then any desire for wholeheartedness is repugnant from the perspective of what she cares about. For it will entail just this interference with her ends. Frankfurt neglects this because, I suggest, he misunderstands what kind of wholeheartedness the fragmented agent desires. He is quite correct to say that fragmentation is not a state with which any agent “can possibly be satisfied.”¹⁴² It is inherently undesirable. Even the fragmented agent wishes that she were not fragmented. But what she hopes for when she wishes this is that

¹⁴¹ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 95.

¹⁴² Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion,” *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 106.

her ends did not conflict. She is, after all, marked by her “greed” and wish “to have things both ways,”¹⁴³ and this desire is *constitutive* of her fragmentation, being entailed by her caring about incompatible objects and not just another volition added on top of her other volitions. Her hope for wholeheartedness does not include a wish for *amputation*, but for reconciliation. The necessity of amputation is merely the painful reality.

Now, it might be objected that this line of reasoning does not render wholeheartedness itself undesirable. It only shows that its value might sometimes be outweighed by the undesirability of its cost. In this case, the price of amputation is too severe, but wholeheartedness itself remains desirable.¹⁴⁴ But a distinction between the subjective desire for wholeheartedness and the objective desire for it shows how problematic this approach is.¹⁴⁵ It is true that the subjective desire for wholeheartedness is universal. But the subjective desire for wholeheartedness is just the wish that everything that one *does* care about should cohere. It can’t be separated from the desire to have it both ways. The objective desire for wholeheartedness, however, is not universal. This desire aims at some *particular state* in which one would be wholehearted. This state cannot be separated from its cost, because it is the person’s volitional state following amputation. This is not universally desired. The universal subjective desire for wholeheartedness cannot do the work of an ideal because it does not identify any path forward beyond petitioning for the repeal of the law of non-contradiction. To someone who is fragmented the objective desire for

¹⁴³ Frankfurt, “The Faintest Passion,” *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 99.

¹⁴⁴ I am grateful to Angela Smith at the University of Washington for suggesting this objection to me.

¹⁴⁵ The definition of virtue Meno offers at *Meno* 77b fails in part because of his failure to make this kind of distinction concerning the desire for beautiful things.

wholeheartedness is repellent. Hence wholeheartedness provides no path forward avoiding going wrong.

2.2. Frankfurt and Augustine on Wholeheartedness and *Akrasia*

The mind becomes clear through comparisons.¹⁴⁶ Before we begin to poke and prod Frankfurt's account of *akrasia* and its implications for his theory of action, it will be worthwhile to compare it with a more traditional account of *akrasia* to clarify its salient features. It will be particularly valuable to compare it with Augustine's account of *akrasia* because of their shared focus on wholeheartedness. This comparison reveals the many ways that Frankfurt's theory echoes, but transforms – whether plainly or subtly – Augustine's account of weakness of will. It is the uneasy alliance of these echoes and transformations that endangers Frankfurt's theory. In the end, Frankfurt himself shows a bit of “greed” himself in “trying to have it both ways.”

2.2.1. Self-Love and the Unity of the Self

I would like to approach this comparison a bit obliquely. Consider the relationship between akratic behavior and self-love. Here Frankfurt appears to echo Augustine by defending a certain better sort of self-love against an inferior, self-indulgent, self-love. Now, on a teleological account of ethics, the better course of action is always better *for the agent*, even when this behavior is altruistic.¹⁴⁷ This is because virtuous behavior is included as a constituent of the good life; as a result, even when an agent sacrifices a

¹⁴⁶ As Alexis de Tocqueville said in a letter to his father dated 24 January 1832.

¹⁴⁷ As evidenced by *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.8, 1169a4.

good for the sake of his neighbor's good, he is, *eo ipso*, acting for his own good as well. As a result, self-love is frustrated by akratic behavior. When an agent knowingly acts badly this is the same as his knowingly frustrating his own pursuit of the human end. Akratic behavior is also self-frustrating in Frankfurt's account. According to Frankfurt, an agent's true interests are determined by what he cares about. He also claims that love is essentially a concern with the true interests of the beloved. Accordingly a person's self-love is a concern with his own true interests, or "a disinterested concern for whatever it is that the person cares about."¹⁴⁸ This effects not so much a useless iteration of the person's cares as a reflexive reinforcement of them. Self-love (in addition to prompting him to seek out things to care about) stands opposed to whatever it is that prevents him from caring about what he cares about, including fragmentation. The man who loves himself, then, will earnestly seek to be wholehearted in his commitments.

This point of contact illuminates a distinct difference between Augustine and Frankfurt. Now for Augustine – like any writer with a teleological ethical theory – *all* bad behavior, not just akratic behavior, is contrary to self-love, construed in the right way.¹⁴⁹ Thus Augustine says, "in some inexplicable way, he who loves himself and not God, does not love himself; and however loves God and not himself, does love himself."¹⁵⁰ In this passage Augustine uses "self-love" in two distinct manners, neither of which exactly

¹⁴⁸ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 85.

¹⁴⁹ For Frankfurt failure to love oneself is almost coextensive with akratic behavior. The only other failure consists in failure to care about anything at all. As a result its failure is more directly connected to explaining akratic behavior than it is for the former thinkers. Given that someone already cares about things, the only way for her self-love to go wrong is for it to fail to prevent her from becoming or remaining fragmented. As a result lack of self-love becomes more than just a description of bad behavior (whether akratic or not); it is now an *explanation* of akratic behavior.

¹⁵⁰ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992–1995), tract. cxxiii. 5.

corresponds to Frankfurt's use of it. The first use of "self-love" is the love that elevates one's own will above the will of God and puts oneself above the truth. It is the love that resists turning to God because this would reveal one's own shameful dependence. In general, it is the love that wishes that everything owing to God should instead be owed to oneself. The other self-love plays a very different role in one's life. It plays a structural role in unifying the self by directing the person towards whatever she has identified as her good. It is natural, ineliminable, and implanted by God. Frankfurt's concept of self-love as the love for whatever someone loves comes closest to this notion, with a notable exception. Augustine's natural self-love is both objectively and subjectively fallible, but Frankfurt's is only subjectively fallible. By this I mean that, for Frankfurt, the only mistakes someone can make in loving herself are those of self-interpretation. She can make a mistake about what she happens to love, but not about bestowing the love itself. Augustine would affirm this kind of fallibility, but his version of self-love is objectively correctable as well because someone can be wrong not only in her self-interpretation but in the objects that she loves. For Augustine, self-love hungers after something in particular and can only be filled by its natural object. Thus self-love offers a standard for its own correction. This is due to its offering a "because" clause for love – one loves something *because* it is good. The person who wants a drink of water but mistakes some vodka for water, wants vodka, but yet doesn't really want vodka; she wants some water. The person who loves power and believes it will satisfy the restless hunger of her soul, in some sense, *really* wants God, not power, because she has made a mistake about the object that would satisfy the hunger the love aims to fill.

Now, both Frankfurt and Augustine rely upon self-love to help someone escape

from ambivalence and incoherence into unity. Frankfurt, in fact, relies upon it to provide a universal ideal of aspiration. But this difference with Augustine endangers the whole enterprise. It places all authority in what one loves, and reserves none for the correction of what one loves. Whence, then, the authority needed to underwrite an amputation required to restore wholeheartedness?

Consider how Frankfurt's account of self-love deflates some of the traditional perplexity over *akrasia*. For Augustine the human will is naturally and incorrigibly ordered to happiness or perfection.¹⁵¹ Part of what makes akratic action so perplexing for someone with a teleological account of agency, like Augustine, is the idea that the human will is naturally and ineluctably ordered to a single end, which is identical with what is good. The will is both the power whereby a person chooses the means to pursue this end and the power whereby she clings to what she apprehends as the good. Given this, how can a person knowingly choose what is contrary to her own good? This is just to love herself. It is fantastic that someone should know what she needs and yet act contrary to this knowledge.¹⁵² For Frankfurt the will is not so unified, and self-love follows suit. What is important to an agent is as diverse as her cares, and, possessing no intrinsic unity, these may be no more than a plurality. So in Frankfurt's conception there is no deep unity to human agency in terms of a single end towards which everything else is ordered. Any

¹⁵¹ "His autem rebus quibus quisque beatus vult effici serviat necesse est, velit nolit," Augustine, *De vera religione*, in *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense 2*, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), xxxviii, 69 (As one translation (*Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. J. H. S. Burleigh. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), puts it, "Whether he will or no, a man is necessarily a slave to whatever things by means of which he seeks to be made happy").

¹⁵² When discussing it, he refers to it as "monstrous" – he asks, "Unde hoc monstrum? et quare istuc?" *Confessions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), VIII.9.21 ("Whence this monstrous situation? And to what purpose?" – translation my own).

such unity would be accidental and a bit surprising. As a result, even the most interesting form of Frankfurtian *akrasia* is much less perplexing than traditional *akrasia*. It is not that, for Frankfurt, there is no principle at all similar to the Aristotelians' "all men desire happiness": this role is played by self-love. It is universal¹⁵³ and it effects, or attempts to effect, the unification of agency.¹⁵⁴ But it diverges from its counterpart with respect to its weakness, its content, and its place within agency. Unlike the eudaemonistic desire for happiness common to the thought of Augustine and other ancient and medieval authors, Frankfurt's self-love is one passion amongst many, with variable strength. Its content differs because Augustine takes human happiness to be determined by human nature, so that self-love consists in the reflexivity embedded in an agent's love for *her* good. But for Frankfurt, its content is determined by whatever else it is that she loves or cares about in addition to herself, the desire to love whatever she loves. It is this greater generality that drives the fragmented agent into her tragic dilemma. Both kinds of self-love are concerned with my true interests; it is just that, for Augustine and others like him, someone's true interests are for the most part fixed by her nature, whereas Frankfurt considers her true interests to be fixed by whatever she loves, some natural, some contingent or personal, and none grounded by anything prior to itself.

The place that Frankfurt assigns to self-love within his overall theory of agency differs from that given the natural ordering to happiness that Augustine roots self-love in because despite being "constituted to love loving" or to possess some degree of self-love,

¹⁵³ "It is widely presumed" – and Frankfurt does not demur – "that for a person to love himself is so natural as to be more or less unavoidable" (Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 71).

¹⁵⁴ "To be wholehearted *is* to love oneself" (Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 95) and "this man [who is ambivalent] may manifest love for himself by a concern to resolve his ambivalence" (*The Reasons of Love*, p. 93).

this love does not act as a teleological ordering of our others loves, cares, and desires. Augustinian self-love organizes human agency by embedding a certain reflexivity in it such that human desires and loves are all directed towards a single end, which is its good. But in Frankfurt, human desires and cares do not receive an *end* or *object* from self-love. Rather, self-love takes *them* as *its* object. So the unification it effects has a character opposite that of the Augustinian conception; it is an *efficient* cause of unity, and if it is lacking, this unity may fail to come to be. This is why it is so fragile and fallible. The Augustinian unity is natural, the Frankfurtian one contingent; the one unifies as a final cause, the other unifies as an efficient cause. Given this, it is surprising for Augustine to discover that he is *not* wholehearted and acts akratically. But for an agent in Frankfurt's moral universe, this discovery would be unfortunate but not exactly surprising. There is no particular reason why you should be unified. And so the status of *akrasia* naturally differs a great deal. This has the interesting implication, however, that Augustine's and Frankfurt's explanation of *akrasia* – although both in terms of an agent's lack of wholeheartedness – are not on a par. The plurality of agency – which Frankfurt can almost take for granted – itself requires an explanation for Augustine.

2.2.2. Tragedy

In 2.1.12 we saw that Frankfurt's moral universe is tragic. He does not acknowledge this, but this result is almost guaranteed once we allow that someone can possess a plurality of incommensurable fundamental ends, as there is always the possibility that two of these ends will conflict with each other, and that this conflict will be irreconcilable. Such conflict becomes tragedy when these ends are fundamental and constitute

what is of ultimate importance to someone. For Augustine, tragedy is impossible. Everyone has only a single ultimate end around which all other ends must be ordered. Although Augustine is perhaps the only past thinker to ascribe as much importance to wholeheartedness as Frankfurt does, they describe ambivalence quite differently. In Augustine's account, the ambivalent man is miserable, but he does not face either of two problems with which Frankfurt loads him. He faces a cognitive problem – not because there is nothing to know, but because he doesn't know the truth. He faces a volitional problem – not because he cannot be satisfied with either solution, but because he cannot manage to choose the one he recognizes to be best. He might have lost his ability to discern what his good is, but this knowledge is not *in principle* inaccessible to him, any more than walking is in principle cut off from someone kept invalid by a burning fever. He might, after all, be healed. Similarly, although the fragmented agent cannot hold tight to anything with his shattered will, this is not because his contradictory goals exert equal authority. On the contrary, their authority is only under the aspect of the good, and so the actually good goal completely displaces the authority of the false goal. There is no question which goal it would be more satisfying to achieve, or of there being any grounds for regret in choosing it. What the ambivalent man needs is a physician of the soul. But this is a state of cognitive and volitional health that is distinct from his actual state while remaining authoritative for it. This is what Frankfurt's ambivalent agent cannot possibly have. His cure must remain an act of violence whereby he is changed, but not precisely *healed*, because the new state lacks the special significance and authority that health has for a sick man in relation to the ambivalent man's present situation and circumstances.

2.2.3. The Limits of Reflection

Frankfurt's ideal consists in both wholeness and reflection. But the value of reflection is greatly limited if reason does not retain its traditional power of guiding us through such dilemmas. If reflection were what Augustine took it to be, then it would be extremely valuable indeed. For Augustine it was extremely valuable for someone to turn inward to themselves in reflection, because by doing so they could discover their need for God, the human good.¹⁵⁵ Reflection always held out the promise of leading the person to what she most desired. For Frankfurt, reflection allows someone to clean up her messy desires, but because it cannot promise to show her what she most needs, it cannot help her solve her deepest crisis. Reflection is the mirroring of our volitional state in consciousness. As such, it will help her determine what she does care about, and will allow her to overcome the lower kinds of ambivalence that consist in her holding desires that are inconsistent with what she cares about. But it cannot help her achieve wholeheartedness if she is fragmented. So its value is more limited than it would be for Augustine, and again, it is valuable primarily to the wholehearted agent. It cannot guarantee that it will lead to the human good. It can promise only to reveal the truth about the agent's situation. Given that it is also reflection that is responsible for "[generating] a profound threat to our well-being" by exposing us to "psychological and spiritual disorders that are nearly impossible to avoid" and that can be "seriously disabling" it must be considered to be a

¹⁵⁵ As, for example, he recommends in Book IV.12.18: "He is most intimately present to the human heart, but the heart has strayed from him. Return to your heart, then, you wrongdoers, and hold fast to him who made you." ("intimus cordi est, sed cor erravit ab eo. Redite, praevaricatores, ad cor, et inhaerete illi, qui fecit vos." Books VII – X taken as a whole makes his opinion quite clear.

mixed blessing, at best.¹⁵⁶ Even when it can lead someone to wholeheartedness, this may only be at a significant cost to the agent in terms of what he cares about.

2.2.4. “The Worse Option”

Therefore, when we consider akratic action based upon ambivalence, we need to be careful how we describe this. On Frankfurt’s model, such action is inevitably action contrary to the agent’s own true interests, carried out in full knowledge that it is so.¹⁵⁷ But although this bears some similarity to the traditional puzzle, it also presents a striking dissimilarity. When someone knowingly and intentionally chooses what is contrary to her good on Augustine’s account, we can also describe her as knowingly and intentionally choosing the *worse* course of action. But this need not follow on Frankfurt’s account. When an agent acts against her true interests, in Frankfurt’s view this implies no more than that she is divided, and that her true interests conflict with each other. Getting from this to saying that she has chosen the worse option is more difficult. We might get there if we decide that it is always worse for her to confirm herself in her fragmentation rather than seek wholeheartedness. Then, whichever option she chooses will be worse just so long as she fails to amputate one of her concerns. But the significance of saying this differs from what we said about the traditional account, because the specific option she chose – to pursue *this* end – is not any worse than the other specific option she might have chosen. Only her failure to amputate one of the options qualifies as being worse,

¹⁵⁶ Frankfurt, “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, pp. 4–5.

¹⁵⁷ It is probably far commoner for people to hide their incoherence from themselves, but we are only interested in those times when they do not hide from what they are doing.

perhaps, than not amputating.

2.3. How Tragic Dilemmas Reveal a Deep Dilemma in Frankfurt's Theory

2.3.1. Frankfurt's Commitments

Consider the following propositions I have argued for over the past two chapters:

- (1) Care is foundational for agency, reflective of, and accountable to, nothing (1.3.6).
- (2) Persistent ambivalence is generally due to incoherence within what an agent cares about (1.1.9).

Frankfurt has made it quite plain that he accepts (1). He nowhere argues for (2), but I argued in 1.1.9 that ambivalence is (in most cases) otherwise unintelligible. Now, it is because of (1) and (2) that Frankfurt ends up with the tragic condition I argued for in 1.2.2.

We can label this (3):

- (3) Any ambivalent agent faces a tragic dilemma without any satisfactory options.

Now, (3) might seem to be rather surprising at first, but not actually all that dangerous for Frankfurt. He does not recognize this aspect of his philosophy, but at first it seems as if this is just one of its more interesting consequences, and not anything he ought to worry about. But consider this claim:

- (4) A disposition to resist a desire produces dissociation, usually through conflict with what someone cares about. Lack of such a disposition produces identification (1.1.8–9).

For reasons that will become clear in a moment, I am going to argue that the conjunction of (1) – (3) with (4) is in tension, if not quite in contradiction. The most plausible solutions open to Frankfurt are to reject either (1), his claim that care has no grounds, or (4),

his claims about dissociation. These claims are at odds with each other, and the tragic universe that emerges from his concept of care is inconsistent with his concept of dissociation.

2.3.2. Rejection and Outlawing

At first it appears that Frankfurt's concept of dissociation will dissolve the analogy with the hero's dilemma. Dissociation will limit the cost of amputation to the time leading up to separation. Once completed, the agent is home free. Frankfurt's agent is decidedly unlike Sophie in that he has no regret for what he has given up. But this is incorrect. When Frankfurt's concept of dissociation is subjected to more careful scrutiny, it turns out to remain in alignment with the Hegel/MacIntyre interpretation of tragedy. This then exposes a deep difficulty with the concept, and an incoherence within the theory as a whole. Frankfurt's notion of dissociation cannot, given how he describes the process itself and how he describes its effects, possibly be a notion of dissociation at all.

Now, according to this interpretation, a tragic dilemma pits incommensurable goods against each other so that the hero must pick one or the other, and in so doing, transgress against the rejected good. The tragedy of the hero's dilemma is that, even when the hero chooses one good over the other good, she must suffer the consequences of rejecting the claims of the other good. She is not exculpated by choosing the one good, but cursed for rejecting the other. It might be thought – as mentioned just above – that Frankfurt's concept of dissociation protects him from this particular aspect of Sophoclean tragedy. Whatever pain the agent faces is limited to the pain of decision. Once she has made up her mind, the amputated concern is rendered an outlaw, without rightful claims.

It is true that the agent, by making up her mind for one, has rejected the claims of the other. She has opposed her will to these claims. This is not the same as saying that these claims do not retain a kind of valid authority over her, even if this is only the authority of force. Thus, although Antigone rejects the claims of the city, she is not exempt from its threats; and likewise Creon is not exempt from the power of the authority he rejects.

This is, in fact, how Frankfurt himself regards the situation of the agent who has dissociated some desire. Even when we have “resolved to keep [the dissociated desire] from producing any direct effect upon the design and conduct of our lives” and “[we] refuse to recognize them as grounds for deciding what to think or what to do,” nonetheless “we continue to be powerfully moved by them” and their force over us is sometimes the “irresistible” force “of a tyrant.”¹⁵⁸ Similarly, when Antigone rejects the claims of the city, she comes to see the power of the city as illegitimate; because, although ordinary usage suggests that we call Antigone the outlaw, the law of the city has itself become outlaw from her perspective. Faced by the conflicting demands of the family and the city, she “is no longer uncertain which side [she] is on” in the conflict.¹⁵⁹ In this way the conflict is transformed “into a conflict between *one* of them and the *person* who has identified [herself] with its rival.”¹⁶⁰ It goes without saying that if this is the way that dissociation functions, then the effect of the decision “is not necessarily to eliminate the conflict

¹⁵⁸ Frankfurt, “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁹ Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 172.

¹⁶⁰ Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 172.

... or even to reduce its severity.”¹⁶¹ Deciding between the two standards did not help Antigone and Creon much either. The conflict does *not* cease when someone identifies herself with one side of the conflict; it is then that she herself enters into the conflict. Dissociation does not protect someone from suffering the force of what is outlawed.

But Frankfurt’s account is unlike the tragic picture in that the rejected power appears to be completely alien and without any rights, whereas in the tragic picture the rejected good is “wronged” and retains its just authority over the hero. That is, for Frankfurt, the agent suffers, but her suffering is not “just” because she is not responsible for anything that results from an externalized desire. She is not responsible for how it interferes with her life. If Frankfurt’s account followed the tragic one here, we would expect something different; we would expect that the dissociation would not in fact alienate the agent’s responsibility, but retain it, and that dissociation would be treated as being something of an illusion whereby an agent protects himself from feeling any responsibility for something of his own, but which he does not wish to accept. Creon surely wished to deny that he had any responsibility to live up to the demands of the laws that Antigone invoked; but ultimately it was the punishment for violating these laws that led him to acknowledge their legitimacy. Had he remained in denial, then he would be the analogue of one of Frankfurt’s agents, denying his responsibility for the punishment he suffered until vengeance swallowed up not only his family’s lives but his own as well. So is Frankfurt’s model of dissociation really just a model of self-deception?

¹⁶¹ Frankfurt, “Identification and Wholeheartedness,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 172.

2.3.3. Dissociation and Repression

J. David Velleman has pressed Frankfurt upon this point, although perhaps without yet seeing the full implications. In “Identification and Identity,” Velleman notes that for Frankfurt “the well constituted self” is marked by its wholeheartedness, but that Frankfurt doesn’t intend this to include “the complete absence of conflicting motives.”¹⁶² It separates us from these desires and from responsibility for them but doesn’t eliminate them or prevent them from moving us to act. He finds this idea troublesome and calls attention to one of Freud’s patients called “the Rat Man.” This “Rat Man” had “the desire to dissociate himself from his own hatred and hostility”¹⁶³ for his father, while “acknowledging only his love.”¹⁶⁴ The result of this was a severe neurosis “which often involved repeatedly doing and undoing an action, or thinking and contradicting a thought.”¹⁶⁵ The Rat Man’s desire to dissociate his feelings of hatred from himself led him to “conceal their true significance” by “[insisting] that they were merely “trains of thought” rather than hostile wishes.”¹⁶⁶ He insisted upon this even though the “trains of thought” continued to result in actions, claiming that “these thoughts were entirely foreign and repugnant to him.”¹⁶⁷ Velleman appeals to the similarity between what the Rat Man did with what Frankfurt recommends, and notes how similar Frankfurt’s dissociation is to Freud’s belief

¹⁶² J. David Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 100.

¹⁶³ Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 102.

¹⁶⁴ Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 101.

¹⁶⁵ Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 101.

¹⁶⁶ Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, pp. 101–102.

¹⁶⁷ Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 102; quoting Sigmund Freud, “Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey et al., Vol. X (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–1974), p. 184.

that a wish becomes an “obsessional or compulsive idea” when the ego “[places] itself in complete opposition to it” and “[regards] it as something foreign to itself.”¹⁶⁸ He concludes that although there are some differences between what Frankfurt recommends and the repressive practices of the Rat Man, “the suspicion remains that this prescription ... would hardly have been more healthy.”¹⁶⁹ Externalization appears to represent “the fears that move us to defend ourselves against our own emotions.”¹⁷⁰ That is, it is a defensive posture against our own emotions, but does not actually succeed in rendering them *not ours*.

Frankfurt protests that Freud’s patient should certainly have accepted that he was ambivalent rather than deceive himself about this fact, but argues that it is obvious that he would be better off wholehearted than ambivalent in either way.¹⁷¹ The patient’s mistake was not in seeking to be wholehearted, but in seeking it in the wrong way and failing to achieve it. He claims that what he calls dissociation “does not entail repressing the wish or making it unconscious, and it is in no way pathogenic.”¹⁷² I am not much of a Freudian (or one at all), but there is a valid point that we can draw from the criticism: given that these passions persist and even continue to move us to act, by what right do we declare them to be “outlaws” and utterly beyond our responsibility? If in fact these “outlawed” desires are still ours, it is not desirable to deceive ourselves about their status. I take it

¹⁶⁸ Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 102; quoting Sigmund Freud, “Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis,” p. 162–63.

¹⁶⁹ Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 103.

¹⁷⁰ Velleman, “Identification and Identity,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 104.

¹⁷¹ See Frankfurt, “Reply to J. David Velleman,” *Contours of Agency*, pp. 125–27.

¹⁷² Frankfurt, “Reply to J. David Velleman,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 126.

that this is what actually motivated Velleman to develop this Freudian criticism and his worry that, if this is all that Frankfurt's conception of identification amounts to, then it seems as though the agent is merely "playing" at being the sort of person who is constituted by the desires that the agent has ostensibly identified himself with.¹⁷³ Frankfurt cannot simply *stipulate* that his notion of dissociation, carried through, does not in fact result in the psychological disorders mentioned. No doubt, as he conceives of the matter, it does not. But that is not the question we are interested in. We wish to know what will happen to *us* if we follow Frankfurt's advice. Can someone actually render a desire external to himself in this way? Does "[coming] to stand decisively"¹⁷⁴ for one or another of conflicting desires in the way that Frankfurt describes actually dissociate a person from the other one? Velleman's doubt is based on the suspicion that it does not, in fact, work, and the relevant energies remain those of the agent himself. Frankfurt's protest appears beside the point.

Frankfurt may have a point that his theory of dissociation does not prescribe what is precisely called "repression," since repression requires that someone make a wish unconscious and push it out of consciousness, whereas Frankfurt's idea is to face the wish squarely and oppose oneself to it. Escaping from one form of self-deception doesn't mean that you have escaped it entirely, however. Repression involves a certain kind of self-deception that hides a motive entirely from oneself. But there are other avenues for self-deception. We can see where Frankfurt's theory might go wrong by further comparing it with Freud's. Freud explains his theory of repression using metaphors such as blocked

¹⁷³ Although for Velleman, this criticism is directed towards our motivation for accepting the theory, and not directed at the theory itself, I shall use the criticism more directly.

¹⁷⁴ Frankfurt, "Reply to J. David Velleman," *Contours of Agency*, p. 126.

rivers and angry men locked out of rooms. His idea appears to be that such passions are drives that well up within us and operate much like vectors. Someone cannot eliminate these by simply setting up an opposing force. If she does, then they are likely to find new channels of expression (like a river) or keep banging on the door and trying to break in (like the man locked out of the room). One does not eliminate a force by pressing back against it. Repression occurs when the pain of the conflict becomes so great that one “hides” it from oneself in the unconscious.

The problem for Frankfurt is that his theory of desire and care fits in all too well with Freud’s conception of drives. Both concepts are “agent-centered” rather than “object-centered” – they conceive of these powers as welling up within the agent, rather than being elicited by the object.¹⁷⁵ As such, it is difficult to see how they can be subjected to rational control. Like the unwritten laws that Antigone champions, “no one knows from whence they’ve come”¹⁷⁶ – or as Hegel succinctly summarizes these laws, “They *are*.”¹⁷⁷ Like such a law, when one of these desires is frustrated, “a power which shuns the light of day” strikes back against its violator.¹⁷⁸ This is why Freud conceives of repressed desires as rivers with blocked channels, which, like such rivers, form new channels once they are repressed. Such desires *are*, and cannot be eliminated, but must be controlled and directed. Pushing them aside and violating their dictates only results in neurosis and psychosomatic symptoms. Now, Frankfurt may not recommend that we hide these con-

¹⁷⁵ This oversimplifies, of course. Any desire must involve both agent and object, but there is a matter of focus, and it does determine how the overall theory should look.

¹⁷⁶ Sophocles, *Antigone*, line 457.

¹⁷⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 261.

¹⁷⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 283.

flicts from ourselves. But he does require that we cease to identify ourselves with the desire or take responsibility for it. Now perhaps this is not repression; what is difficult to see is how it amounts to a kind of radical *dissociation* or *outlawing* that unifies the agent. Whence comes *outlawing*?

It seems to enter in when someone says that she wholeheartedly opposes one of the desires driving her, thereby identifying with the other desire. But if dissociation requires no more than an anxious disposition to resist, plus making up one's mind, then this places a strenuous weight upon making up one's mind. Given Frankfurt's picture, someone suffering from fragmentation has a persistent disposition to resist each concern. But when the playing field is leveled in this way between the two concerns, and one has equal grounds for the one as for the other, then making up one's mind must be quite arbitrary. Can we really believe that making an arbitrary decision suffices to remove one's responsibility for a desire? Can the mind outlaw its own contents by *fiat*? This picture of dissociation makes the most sense when someone dissociates a more transitory desire in the name of what she cares about. In this case she appeals to a higher law to revoke a lower. But when the issue is volitional fragmentation within what someone loves or cares about, there can be no appeal, and her decision becomes arbitrary. Is it more likely that this is a genuine outlawing, or a new form of self-deception? Willing not to hide the conflict, but to hide one's responsibility for it?

In our own practical lives, we have no doubt. When a friend consistently undermines her own goals, we do not believe her protestations that she has nothing to do with her continued failures to stop smoking, lose weight, stop dating reckless men, or to accomplish whatever it is that she claims to *really* want. We instead believe that she is

trapped in a web of her own deceptions, hiding her own responsibility for her painful failures. Our friend is merely playing the part of someone who has made up her mind to do these things.

It is easy to read past what Frankfurt says about a person's making up her mind not "*necessarily*" affecting the conflict. But he means this. Dostoyevsky struggled with what is now often called "compulsive gambling" throughout much of his adult life, despite the ruinous consequences this had for him. According to Frankfurt the only difference between taking Dostoyevsky to be subject to a completely externalized compulsion of some kind and his simply caring about gambling a great deal – despite the incoherence of this with the other things he cares about – would be whether Dostoyevsky was wholeheartedly opposed to the desire or not. If he is opposed to it, then it is a compulsion; and if he approves of it, then it is a care. The difference does not lie in the degree or kind of power that the desire has to express itself in his life.¹⁷⁹ Like the tragic hero, the Frankfurtian agent is doomed even after he has made up his mind to continue to face the force of the desire he has chosen against. A more suspicious man might suspect that despite what he has been told, the desire has not yet been successfully "externalized" and that the person is not really wholehearted yet. A reformed addict ought not be able to say (to rip a quote from a contemporary song quite out of context), "I want to smell that sweet addiction on my breath." Although Velleman's suggestion that the agent would be better off recognizing her own ambivalence does not seem to do justice to the difficulty of her situation, this gives more evidence to his claim that someone who has followed Frank-

¹⁷⁹ According to a statement made by Frankfurt at the University of Notre Dame Philosophy Colloquium April 13, 2007, when I asked him this question.

furt's advice about dissociation is not very likely to have actually dissociated herself from the desire.¹⁸⁰ The suspicious reader is likely to agree with Velleman that Frankfurt's conception of wholeheartedness embodies "the fears that move us to defend ourselves against our own emotions," in particular, the fear of knowing the truth of what we are.¹⁸¹ As Frankfurt himself says: "The facts about ourselves are often hard to take."¹⁸²

Even if Frankfurt's dissociation is not repression, it certainly can't be what he makes it out to be. Nor can Frankfurt help himself to a better version of dissociation – one that actually eliminated the motivational force of the outlawed desire, or at least made the dissociating person's decision non-arbitrary. Given his view of desires as vectors without reasons, it is difficult to see how they could be defeated rather than just channeled, or how – when the conflict is a full-scale fragmentation – there could be any reason for the decision to dissociate. The decision to outlaw must be arbitrary and feckless.

2.3.4. Reasons and Dissociation

We need to ask what conception of desire and care *can* accommodate dissociation of this kind. Plainly, I have already foreshadowed what I think the correct approach would be. T. M. Scanlon, however, has made a similar suggestion in *Contours of Agency*: according to Scanlon we can only understand a conflict between desires ending in the complete outlawing of the other if it is something like the conflict between an appearance

¹⁸⁰ See 2.2.3.

¹⁸¹ Velleman, "Identification and Identity," p. 104.

¹⁸² Frankfurt, "The Faintest Passion," *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, p. 95.

and an assessment, “the kind of conflict that occurs when it seems to me that showing my colleague in a bad light is a reason for mentioning a certain incident in a department meeting, but I judge this not in fact to be a good reason for doing so.”¹⁸³ When an appearance is judged to be illusory, it forfeits *all* of its authority to guide us and does not remain as a lingering source of justification. But if a desire (as opposed to a sensation like hunger) is a “seeming,” then it is natural to think that its power to produce action ought to be cognitively sensitive. As Augustine observed, a dramatic change of heart requires that one possess overwhelming reason to pursue some goal or course of action. In the presence of this reason, contrary desires lose their power. This response could never work for Frankfurt, however. Why not? If a universe is tragic, then its dilemmas are between conflicting goods that agents lack adequate grounds to establish any distinction of value or truth. Thus, in Frankfurt’s reply to Scanlon, he explains that he conceives of desires as no more than vectors or forces, and of course caring – which depends on nothing for its validity – has to be conceived of in the same way. There just are no grounds for determining what to care about. So Scanlon’s picture of dissociation is impossible within Frankfurt’s framework. Given this picture, it isn’t easy to see why wholeheartedness *should* produce freedom of will. Why would opposing one vector against a second eliminate the influence of the latter? It is unclear why this need occur. The gears could be arranged that way, but there is no particular reason why it should occur.

For Augustine, caring about something – or rather, loving something – is (potentially) cognitively sensitive in just the way that Scanlon suggests, and insofar as some desires are defined by Augustine in terms of love, these too will be (at least potentially)

¹⁸³ Scanlon, “Reasons and Passions,” *Contours of Agency*, p. 175.

cognitively sensitive. Freedom of will is difficult to achieve because desires are only potentially sensitive to reason, but part of the problem is the difficulty sinners have in truly believing what they believe. This is why dramatic changes in what Augustine cares about result in dramatic changes in how he lives. It is true that his intellect precedes his will in arriving at the truth. But the only reason that he finds wholeheartedness is that in the end his will can, in principle, be influenced by his understanding, and increased enlightenment can cause his false desires to lose their authority over him. If we are less tempted to burden Augustine with Velleman's charges against Frankfurt, then it seems to be because his desires actually did lose their grip upon his life.¹⁸⁴ Should we believe that he genuinely dissociated his desire for honors, wealth, and sexual activity in favor of his desire to pursue wisdom if these motives persisted with similar strength, sometimes leading him to the same kinds of activities? Or would we insist that he is merely playing the *part* of a monk like St. Antony? When dissociation is a marshalling of reason against appearance, against the habit of seeing something a certain way, it becomes much more intelligible how a desire could lose its authority.

2.3.5. Frankfurt's Dilemma

This argument does not establish that Frankfurt must abandon the notion of desires as no more than forces or the notion that caring has no foundations. Nor does it show that he must abandon the idea of dissociation. But he must do one: either modify his philosophy or abandon his notion of dissociation. If Frankfurt retains his notion of

¹⁸⁴ Of course, Freudians usually load Augustine with a bevy of psychological neuroses. But why take these seriously?

caring, then it is difficult to see how he can continue to say that agents lack responsibility for their externalized desires. Instead, he should say that they are practicing a kind of self-deception. Dissociation belongs to a universe in which we can make decisive decisions about our lives on the basis of their true value. A world in which our attitudes do not possess either truth or falsity has no room for this. It does seem overwhelmingly plausible to me that when we make up our mind, and we cease to care about something, it is the model proposed by Scanlon and Augustine that describes the nature and behavior of our volitional states correctly. But if Frankfurt disagrees with this then he ought to recognize the tragic character of human life in his philosophy, abandon his notion of dissociation, and admit that there is no escape from the hero's dilemma.

CHAPTER 3:
AFFINITY, ACTIVITY, AND PLEASURE

3.1. The Dialectical Motivation for an Augustinian Account of Love

3.1.1. Velleman and the Grounds of Love

So: What went wrong with Frankfurt's account of caring? And what else do we require for it to perform the functions we need from it? What we wished from it was an account of *akrasia*; it faltered through divorcing care from any kind of antecedent ground. Without this, the account was faced with an uncomfortable dilemma between implausible alternatives.

In Chapter 2 I argued that Frankfurt faced a dilemma – either abandon his notion of caring as foundational, or abandon his idea of dissociation. It does not appear that he can retain both of these. They belong to different moral universes. I believe that the correct route is the former: we must acknowledge that love does indeed have foundations. But how should this be spelled out? Where can we find a philosophical doctrine of love or caring that makes it accountable to reasons and incorporates evaluative judgments into the grounding for love? Today, it is most frequently Kantians, or those sharing in their approach, who argue for such an approach. J. David Velleman provides a good example of this. But if our goal is to explain as wide a range of phenomena as Frankfurt, especially *akrasia*, then these accounts will not suffice. First of all, those working in the Kant-

ian tradition are only rarely concerned with the wide spectrum of concerns that makes Frankfurt's work so useful for approaching weakness of will. Their focus is nearly exhausted by concern for other persons and only rarely are they interested in explaining other forms of caring. Second, the accounts that they do provide for personal love are not transferable to other realms. Their accounts of personal love are such that it couldn't possibly apply to anything *but* persons. The only way to get something else in is to make it symbolic of, or otherwise connect it to, narrowly moral concerns. So if we are interested in seeing how evaluative judgments can stand amongst the grounds of love or caring in general, current work by Kantians is not going to be very helpful, since it doesn't address this question directly, and there is no easy way to apply their arguments indirectly either, by transferring them from the narrowly moral realm to the broadly moral realm.

Any Kantian approach regiments its resources towards the values of personhood and so neglects the kinds of care or love that we associate with akratic actions. It is not clear how it would be able to explain the actions of someone who cares about the pleasures of eating or the esteem of others, or any of the other kinds of factors that typically factor into akratic behavior, much less worthwhile concerns such as mountain climbing, writing poetry, or other activities that people care about. Kantian approaches to ethics and love will usually say one of two things about ends: Either (1) only persons will be treated as ends-in-themselves, with an intrinsic value that demands respect, a respect which can be perfected in love, or (2) they admit that objects other than persons can have intrinsic value, but provide no substantial explanation of their value or how we might love them. This is because it is commonly a powerful appreciation of the value and irreplaceability of persons that inspires Kantian accounts of ethics, and such an appreciation provides

precious little guidance for determining how we ought to respond to other goods in life. This regimenting of all resources towards the goal of understanding, explaining, and defending the value of persons makes it difficult for Kantians to provide any good account of *how* caring about or loving other kinds of objects can be grounded in their intrinsic value, insofar as the value of these other objects are not likely to be similar to the value of persons, and therefore are likely to require very different resources to understand.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, the reflexive character of Kant's justification for treating other persons as ends in themselves cannot be applicable to anything but persons. Hence, Kantian philosophers generally either restrict "end" status to persons, or, acknowledging intrinsic value outside of persons, neglect to provide a rigorous explanation of its nature. In either case, leaving so much of our lives out of the picture, such accounts naturally fail to explain *akrasia*.

J. David Velleman's philosophy of love provides a good example of this neglect. Velleman offers an account of love in "Love as a Moral Emotion" and "Beyond Price" that interprets love as a response to the capacity for autonomy within another person. It is a rare recognition of another person *as* a person. According to Velleman, a person can respond to other persons in a moral way with two different attitudes: respect and love. Respect is the arresting of my motives to use another person merely as a means to one of my ends. Love is the elimination of my emotional defenses against this person. Both are tied to the recognition of another person *as* a person. Respect is the minimal response to this recognition: when I recognize another human being as a person, I recognize him as someone who possesses the same capacity for valuation that I possess. Precisely because

¹⁸⁵ Many Kantians working in action theory don't appear to really care whether people's goals are worthwhile or not, so they haven't been in a rush to provide a theory.

I must take my own capacity for valuation seriously in order to set values on anything, I must take his own identical capacity for valuation seriously, and refrain from violating it. I must treat him as a self-subsisting end to be respected. This is the minimal response to recognizing someone as a person. According to Velleman, the maximal response is love, which requires that I drop my emotional defenses to the other person. Such emotions “feel unnecessary” when I recognize that some individual is capable, just as I am, of respecting other persons.¹⁸⁶ Thus it is a kind of intensification of respect that leaves me more ready and willing to do various things for the sake of the person whom I love.

Why is this not helpful for our current project? It is plain that no matter how much the pieces of Velleman’s account are wiggled about, it cannot be applied to anything other than persons. The key to Kantian accounts of morality is their reflexivity. This element of Kant’s ethical thought is just as present in Velleman’s account of love as it is in Rawls’s justification of the First Principle of Justice. Thus Velleman’s account of love cannot help us understand what might be involved in loving the mountains or loving the esteem of others, any more than Rawls’s Original Position can be used to explicate non-instrumental concerns for preserving the natural world. That’s just not what it is about. “What we respond to, in loving people,” Velleman says, “is their capacity to love: it’s just another way of saying that what our hearts respond to is another heart.”¹⁸⁷ According to Velleman, the feeling of love is “an arresting awareness of value” and “more specifically, an awareness of personhood.”¹⁸⁸ Necessarily, such an arresting awareness could

¹⁸⁶ J. David Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Self to Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 101.

¹⁸⁷ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Self to Self*, p. 100.

¹⁸⁸ J. David Velleman, “Beyond Price,” *Ethics* 118:191–212.

only be an illusion when applied to other objects. In “Love as a Moral Emotion” Velleman suggests that we can value and love works of nature and aesthetic objects, but he provides no explanation of how the values embedded in a work of nature or an aesthetic object could come to be loved. After saying that Kant “[rules] out the possibility of responding to objects other than persons as self-existent ends” and adding, “I am inclined to differ from Kant on this point,” he does not provide any guidance about how a Kantian account of dignity and respect can be applied to objects other than persons.¹⁸⁹ In “Beyond Price” he mentions the possibility of certain activities or aims possessing “intrinsic value,” but once again there is little explanation of what such value might consist in.¹⁹⁰ This leaves it obscure how one might ever come to value anything other than persons, although it doesn’t rule it out. We could try to explain the love of art or of nature by referring these to morality in some fashion, such as by making them symbols of morality or autonomy or our rational nature, and thereby explain why someone could love painting, but even if we can do this, it’s the wrong approach. Someone’s love for painting is an answer to the question, “What should I do with my life?” but the reductions described above make it puzzling why this should be. Or on the other hand, we could admit that there might be other, very different, kinds of values and the justification for valuing them might follow quite different lines, without reference to morality, autonomy, and the rational will, and say that the typical Kantian account of love or caring doesn’t rule this out; it merely fails to consider such a realm.

This, then, is a significant lacuna for our purposes.

¹⁸⁹ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Self to Self*, pp. 99–100.

¹⁹⁰ Velleman, “Beyond Price,” p. 205.

But there is another reason why Kantian accounts run into difficulty beyond the realm of self-subsisting ends. This is the focus on autonomy. Persons, we're told, are ends in themselves, and beyond price. How, though, should someone manage his life? Velleman says that his son's end of playing lacrosse "derived some of its value from its being that in pursuit of which he chose to realize his autonomy."¹⁹¹ The rest of its value is presumably derived from the intrinsic goodness of the activity. But he never explains where this value could come from; instead, all the focus falls onto autonomy. Velleman's discussion of the good of the beloved does not focus on anything as rich as (say) MacIntyre's practices, but instead on how the beloved's goods consists in "the unimpeded realization of his personhood"¹⁹² or "the realization of his autonomy."¹⁹³ According to Velleman, lovers are particularly concerned with the autonomy of their beloveds; lovers respond to the "powers constitutive of [their beloveds'] personhood," and being autonomous is "essential to – perhaps definitive of – being a person."¹⁹⁴ This emphasis upon autonomy turns attention away from saying anything philosophically interesting about how one should live one's life, beyond being moral. One gets the feeling that Velleman would provide such an account of value if he could, but that, although a Kantian account of personal love does not rule out non-personal love and care being grounded in reasons, the role that autonomy plays in Kantian ethics tends to make such concerns more difficult to make sense of.

¹⁹¹ Velleman, "Beyond Price," p. 206.

¹⁹² Velleman, "Beyond Price," p. 205.

¹⁹³ Velleman, "Beyond Price," p. 206.

¹⁹⁴ J. David Velleman, "A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics," *Self to Self*, p. 43.

No matter the merits of Velleman's account of love in other respects – and its merits are considerable – because of its limited range of application it is useless for explaining the same range of phenomena as Frankfurt's theory of caring, including most akratic behavior. Kantian accounts include cognitive judgments of value in grounding love, but they don't provide a sufficiently general framework for understanding how caring in general could be subject to such judgments. The contemporary focus on one species of love has yielded a dearth of reflection on the genus and a significant lacuna in our understanding of love and care.

3.1.2. Augustine and the Grounds of Love

If Frankfurt's account of agency only broke down in its attempt to explain *akrasia* because it completely divorced value from care, and Kantian accounts fail because they restrict value to persons, then our goal must be to find a way of capturing what is valuable to both of these. We must find an account that can ground care in evaluative judgments but still extend beyond the realm of the narrowly moral. I suggest that we look to the Platonic tradition, and particularly the Augustinian strand of it, for assistance. Now it is plain from the various references he makes that Frankfurt connects his account of ambivalence and *akrasia* to Augustine's. Both make the fragmentation of the agent's volitional structure central to explaining how he can intentionally act against his own interests. But it is also clear that the two accounts differ in significant details, as the last Chapter illustrated. Although both Frankfurt and Augustine emphasize the centrality of the will to any account of responsibility, and both emphasize the way that our moral attitudes and feelings may reveal the deepest truths about ourselves, they differ in how they de-

scribe these attitudes. For Frankfurt these attitudes are ultimately grounded in (or are just identical with) what a person cares about, and caring is foundational; our attitudes reflect our evaluative commitments, but these commitments don't reflect anything else. For Augustine, however, these attitudes reflect our judgments about what holds importance, and a being sins or to acts badly precisely when it replaces "the scale according to the order of nature" with one that "decides the position of each thing" according to "its own interests."¹⁹⁵ Although these accounts are not precisely opposites, they nonetheless ascribe opposite kinds of "fit" to our commitments. For Frankfurt our commitments are world-shaping and even world-creating, insofar as they create the moral world within which live. For Augustine such commitments have the opposite kind of fit. They reflect our perception of the world and ought to reflect the actual value of things in the world: "man was created right, on condition that he should live by the standard of his creator, not by his own, carrying out not his own will, but his creator's."¹⁹⁶ Because Augustine identifies God with truth, he immediately draws the corollary: man was created to live according to the standard of truth. Cashing this out is a complex problem for Augustine scholars, and I will not endeavor here to solve the difficulty of tying together the different strands of Augustine's thought on love. However, it might be helpful to begin with some observations about Augustine's account of love that distinguish it from Frankfurt's and illustrate how our beliefs can bear on our love.

Augustine says, "That from which someone thinks that he be made happy, this he

¹⁹⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), XI.16.

¹⁹⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.4.

loves.”¹⁹⁷ This statement jars us, striking us as taking what we love to be crudely instrumental to our self-interest, and therefore also seems to us as being untrue of any morally valuable sort of love. We feel this way even though some interpretation of it is, upon reflection, obviously true. Why else do people love hobbies and vocations unless it is because engaging in these activities makes them happy? And what activities are people less likely to view instrumentally than their hobbies or vocations? Indeed, these just seem to *be* a person’s final ends, and a final end is precisely what a person does not view instrumentally. Be that as it may, Augustine believed that our judgment about what is good or what is fitting for us, whether explicitly or implicitly formed, logically precedes our commitment to what we love. So how is *akrasia* possible? How can someone not love what he judges his good? Somehow, the human will has been vitiated; it has fallen into a diseased state. This initial fall – which Frankfurt refers to as Augustine’s explanation for ambivalence – is inexplicable. But Augustine finds no difficulty in explaining the present ambivalence that sinners face; it is due to habit:

So also when the delight of eternity draws us upwards and the pleasure of temporal good holds us down, the identical soul is not wholehearted in its desire for one or the other. It is torn apart in a painful condition, as long as it prefers the eternal because of its truth but does not discard the temporal because of its familiarity.¹⁹⁸

The eternal draws the will “because of its truth” – that is because the mind judges it to be the true good that the human soul was made for – but the temporal draws the will because of “its familiarity:” “We are dealing with a morbid condition of the mind which, when it

¹⁹⁷ Augustine, *De disciplina christiana*, in *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense 2*, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), vi : “unde se fieri putat beatum, hoc amat.”

¹⁹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), VIII.10.24.

is lifted up by the truth, does not unreservedly rise to it but is weighed down by habit.”¹⁹⁹ The natural motion of the will is to follow after what it judges good, to hold fast to it by love, but now it has somehow become mistaken; and when its direction is thus distorted “the result ... is passion,” which, assented to repeatedly, becomes an habitual state of the will.²⁰⁰ So, on the one hand, the will is not fully obedient to judgment. The will follows the tracks laid out by habit and does not always follow what is presently seen as best.

But repeated assent to passion produces not only habits within the will, but habits of belief, and there is some reason to believe that these habits are more essential to someone’s fallen state than are the habits of the will. When someone has, again and again, assented to the goodness of some object, his mind is clouded by habit. Turning our will to the wrong objects distorts our sense of what the right objects would be; when someone loves the wrong kind of object it “disturbs his mind with errors” so that “when he thinks, he believes he understands” but is actually “deluded by shadowy phantasms.”²⁰¹ Commenting on the difficulty of intellectually apprehending the truth, he explains this as a result of our habitual lust for various other goods: “And what weight is it, I ask, that drags you back” from this apprehension of the truth “but the birdlime of greed for the dirty junk you have picked up on your wayward wanderings?”²⁰² Habit, then, can corrupt

¹⁹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions* VIII.9.21.

²⁰⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* VIII.5.10. It is rather important to note that Augustine does not use “passion” and “emotion” or “sensation” as interchangeable terms. The emotion is part of the natural created order; “passion” is a consequence of sin, and it is noteworthy precisely for its appearing as if an alien force, resistant both to reason and to the will. See John C. Cavadini, “Feeling Right: Augustine on the Passions and Sexual Desire,” *Augustinian Studies* 36.1 (2005): 195–217 for further discussion of this distinction in Augustine’s thought.

²⁰¹ Augustine, *Of True Religion*, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 40.

²⁰² Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), VIII.3.

our cognitive capacities. Thus, when Augustine is struggling in the garden, he represents “the overwhelming force of habit” as saying to him of his past pleasures, “Do you think that you can live without them?”²⁰³

My reason for thinking that the habits of belief are more essential than the habits of will is this: his liberation occurs precisely when it becomes overwhelmingly obvious to him that he *can* live without his habitual pleasures and that he will be even better off with the eternal goods he is to exchange them for. That is, when his mind is fully clear, he is able to dissociate the false pattern of assent. The lingering habits of will are not enough to prevent him from changing his life once his mind has been so enlightened. As a result Augustine has a much less difficult time explaining how even an overwhelming attachment can be dissociated. It is dissociated when it appears utterly false. While Augustine is still struggling to assent to what he judges true, both his beliefs and his will are divided. He really does believe that God is the only good he needs. He also believes that he needs these other goods. Once he has a firm intellectual grasp of the truth and “is quite sure about it,” he is able to say “more of me was in that which I approved in myself than in that which I disapproved,”²⁰⁴ but he cannot prevent himself from continuing to believe that he needs these other goods. So Scanlon’s criterion for dissociation is fulfilled: Augustine’s conflict is between “seemings” and, to the extent that one seeming is confirmed as the truth, the other loses its authority. And although Augustine allows that someone can dissociate himself from a desire but still be subject to its force, the degree of conflict is still subject to the degree to which he really believes the truth – although the

²⁰³ Augustine, *Confessions* VIII.11.26 (“diceret mihi consuetude violenta: “putasne sine istis poteris?”).

²⁰⁴ Augustine, *Confessions* VIII.5.11.

degree to which someone may believe the truth is subject to the degree to which he is *willing* to embrace the truth, so that there is a kind of mutual reinforcement of will and intellect in this matter. When this conflict is settled quite decisively in favor of one of the parties, the result is the dramatic conclusion of Book VIII of the *Confessions*.

But how can we appropriate any of the resources in such a theory today? It would be dialectically foolhardy to rely upon the once widely shared teleological considerations to which Augustine appealed. I argue that the concept of affinity can do much to support such a theory, however, and it can do so in a way that is relevant to contemporary debates. First, it is worthwhile to show how affinity fits in with Augustine's own account of love, and is not simply alien to it. This task must necessarily be abbreviated: we don't yet have a fully articulated account of affinity with which to work. The reason we can hope that affinity can mesh with the Augustinian account is that, for Augustine, love for an object is always mediated by some kind of activity on the part of the love that centers on the beloved, and this activity is always thought of as pleasant to the lover. Affinity fits into this picture in the following way: if, for example, someone has an affinity for an activity, then he will take pleasure in it; and if love always involves activities, then affinity will at least help us limit which objects someone is eligible to love, by mediation of the activities they involve. If loving something requires that someone engage in a certain activity, and someone lacks any affinity for that activity, then this person has little reason to love this. This won't get us all the way there – presumably Augustine did not find his attachment to sexual affairs frustrating because he wasn't able to engage in the activity with pleasure, but because its promises ultimately proved hollow – but it will still allow us to bring some objectivity to the picture in a way that is at least consonant with Augustine's pic-

ture.

3.1.3. Explanatory Power

First, we need to appreciate what the Platonic account promises: Explanatory power. It claims wider explanatory power than any Kantian account and deeper power than Frankfurt's. Plainly, unlike a Kantian account, it is not restricted to persons. But it is deeper than Frankfurt's account, and more precise. Consider Frankfurt's concepts of "care" and of "love." Although Frankfurt provides some idea of what he means by "love," he still leaves us largely in the dark about the nature of many kinds of caring. He claims that caring is a persistent mode of guiding oneself, but this is, truthfully, disappointingly vague, and his concept of love simply doesn't cover enough cases to satisfy us. The Platonic account of love covers many more kinds of love (or care) than Frankfurt's does. We can see the problem by considering the following declarations:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (1) Jack loves the mountains | (5) Frank loves seeing others suffer |
| (2) Jack loves painting | (6) Frank loves eating |
| (3) Jack loves philosophy | (7) Frank loves to be esteemed |
| (4) Jack loves Suzanne | (8) Frank loves making money |

Frankfurt can cover any of these with his concept of "care," but at the cost of precision about what is involved in caring about such things. Although it is accurate to say that each is a persistent mode of self-guidance, this doesn't go very far in explaining how a painter, for example, relates to his painting. Yes, he cares about painting, and is disposed to preserve his desires to paint; but this is equivalent to naming a triangle a polygon, then going on to explain the properties that all polygons share with one another. It isn't

enough. On the other hand, his concept of “love” may not apply to any of the loves mentioned above. It would be nonsensical to ascribe metaphorical “interests” to the objects of these loves so that we can describe them as a disinterested concern and identification with the true interests of some particular beloved. For although loving to engage in an activity yourself does commonly make one an evangelist and apologist for it, it appears clear that this is not what the mountain climber, the painter, or the philosopher mean when they say that they love what they do. Even when they act to promote the activity, this is because this other love they have for it is more basic and they view the activity as one that is fundamentally worthwhile for human beings to engage in, and in particular, something worthwhile for the lover himself to engage in. And this cannot possibly be captured by Frankfurt’s definition of love. For their part, Kantians rarely have much to say about the inner workings of such loves, and will not be able to add much to what Frankfurt has to say about them. Velleman’s account of love, for all its richness, is not going to be any more helpful here; it is expressly restricted to persons.

The Platonist, however, has – or ought to have – an account that covers all of these loves under a single common concept of “love.” In the *Symposium*, Plato writes:

The whole of desire for good things and for happiness is ‘the supreme and treacherous love’ to be found in everyone; but those who direct themselves to it in all sorts of other ways, in making money, or in their love of physical training, or in philosophy, are neither said to be ‘in love’ nor to be ‘lovers,’ while those who proceed by giving themselves to just one kind of love have the name of the whole, ‘love’ – and they’re the ones who are ‘in love’ and ‘lovers.’²⁰⁵

Plato apparently considers his account to provide a single, unified account of love that can explain all of these passions and why different people organize their lives in pursuit

²⁰⁵ Plato, *The Symposium of Plato: The Shelley Translation* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002), 205d1–7.

of these different objects and ideals. Augustine is even more explicit in the number of activities he intends “love” to include, to the point that citations are pointless. It is this feature of the Platonic account of love to which I point when I refer to its “explanatory power.”

3.2. The Concept of Affinity

3.2.1. Affinity: An Initial Overview

Earlier I argued that Frankfurt ought to have acknowledged the role of “affinity” in determining what to love and care about more thoroughly (in 1.3.7 and 1.3.11). According to Susan Wolf, “meaning in life arises when affinity and worth meet. In other words, meaning in life arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness.”²⁰⁶ Apparently, then, affinity is something like “subjective attraction” – perhaps like being capable of enthusiasm for something. This is the sense of affinity that Frankfurt agreed to. However, if we limit affinity to subjective attraction, then our definition will turn out to be deeply defective. I will argue that affinity – even as seen by common-sense – points us towards something like the Aristotelian concept of pleasure, and involves both subjective and objective references. The Aristotelian concept of pleasure links pleasure to activities that contain their own ends, and is not the same as, say, a thrill, or some other kind of sensation.²⁰⁷ I will argue that our ability to engage in an activity with pleasure

²⁰⁶ Susan Wolf, “The Good, the True, and the Lovable,” *Contours of Agency* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 237.

²⁰⁷ The connection with MacIntyre’s practices and internal goods should be noted, but the notion of activity is much broader than that of practice. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd Ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). Practices – in MacIntyre’s sense – are social by nature and

provides us with grounds for caring about the activity in question, or loving it. So, contrary to Wolf, this concept does not consist only in a subjective response to the activity, but requires objective fitness to engage in the activity as well, and it is possible to make mistakes about those activities for which we have an affinity. When we have this concept in hand, then we can see that caring is not exactly a bedrock, and cannot be, because our own natures and characters have a say in what it is best for us to care about.

3.2.2. Affinity and the Befitting

Affinity is a concept that is neither much used nor well understood within contemporary ethics. It deserves better treatment. Affinity has an interesting relationship with the concept that Candace Vogler calls “the befitting.”²⁰⁸ “Fit” in the sense of “being befitting” explains a certain kind of desirability characterization. An action is fit in this sense if it is not “out of sync with some larger scheme of things you mean to have order the relevant portion of your affairs.”²⁰⁹ It is meant to explain why a given action is, or is not, desirable given the kind of person that you are or the kind of life that you aim at. Some action might be befitting for someone as a teacher, or as a father, or as a husband, or as a novelist, etc. It might be befitting for a novelist to write at least two pages a day, if this kind of work ethics is part of what it is to be a novelist today. Sometimes what befits a person under one category conflicts with what befits him under another category: thus it

involve standards of excellence, whereas activities may lack both of these properties. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.4–5; also, *Metaphysics* Theta, Chapter 6, 1048b18–35, on actuality (or activity) and change.

²⁰⁸ See Candace Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 97–125.

²⁰⁹ Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious*, p. 98.

is fit for a teacher to treat students impartially and equally, but it is not fit for a father to do the same; he ought to take responsibility for, and will be held responsible for, the education of his own children in a way that he need not and will not be for the education of other children. So if a teacher's classroom includes one of the teacher's own children and he takes both norms seriously, he will have to find a way to prevent this conflict. For example, he might decide to act according to one principle in one kind of context, and the other principle in other contexts.

Now, what is befitting for someone to do derives partly from that for which he has an affinity. What is befitting is determined by a consideration of the nature of some activity, vocation, or role, but it is fitness that determines what activities, vocations, or roles someone has reason to pursue, practice, or occupy. For example, a person with a certain quality of mind is fit to be a philosopher: She has an affinity for the activities and practices that make up the philosophical life. Should she actually adopt this life then it will be befitting for her to perform those activities. That is: The normative power of the befitting gains its strength for her from her both having the right kinds of qualities to *be* a philosopher, and from actually *having become*, to some extent at least, an actual philosopher by vocation. As a child of six she may have had the same qualities of mind that bestow the affinity, but if, perhaps through impish intransigence towards the suggestion, she has not taken the trouble to activate these powers and become a philosopher, then the category of what befits a philosopher has no normative sway upon her.

Affinity, like what Vogler calls "taking pleasure" in something, involves "the *fit* between agent, circumstance, and act."²¹⁰ An affinity involves a relation between the

²¹⁰ Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious*, p. 81.

agent, the action under consideration, and present circumstances, such that there is a certain fit between the three. What kind of fit? Affinities exist primarily within a person's (or animal's, or plant's) nature and character, but also exist within the person qua subject, in the form of such factors as enthusiasm and the ability to take pleasure in the activity for which an affinity exists. If Sally has an affinity for philosophy, this indicates both that she has that peculiar quality of mind required for philosophical activity and that she is capable of taking pleasure in the activity. The existence of an affinity, in the fullest sense, requires both elements to be present. If someone finds an activity that she performs well to be distasteful, or if she is consistently frustrated in her attempts to perform it, then it is unnatural to say that she has an affinity for it. It is also clear that no matter how enthusiastic someone is for some activity, he does not have an affinity for it if he is utterly frustrated every time he attempts it. No affinity is grounded solely in an agent's specific attitude towards the activity in question.

But it is more unnatural to speak of an affinity in the second case than the first. The question is not exactly *competence* – for there might be many degrees of excellence separating some with an affinity from others with the same affinity – but the ability to perform the activity without frustration, without going wrong and ending up in a dead end. The young student has just as much of an affinity for philosophy as the experienced practitioner, even if the latter is much better at the activity. What separates both of these from those without the affinity is that these latter constantly find themselves in a state of incomprehension about the concepts in play, losing the logical path of arguments, and without any firm understanding of the importance of this statement or that statement in relation to the whole project an author is discussing. Similarly, the millions of Americans

who golf regularly but who could never compete on the PGA Tour with Tiger Woods and Vijay Singh do, nonetheless, possess an affinity for the game. Thus, there are many people who can engage in philosophy to the point of taking pleasure in it, but who are not so talented as to find it worthwhile to take a degree in it, let alone make a career of it. But such people will nonetheless often continue to read philosophy for the rest of their lives, in a manner akin to the many golfers who will never compete for any serious reward but the activity itself. So, although the possession of an affinity for an activity also seems to call for taking pleasure in it, this question of the ability to perform the activity under normal circumstances without these frustrations appears far more important to identifying who possesses the affinity in question. This may only be because this division of ability appears permanent whereas the division between those with and without enthusiasm is potentially bridgeable, but this fact is itself suggestive that this is only because the causes of the former are deeper than those of the latter.

A general lack of enthusiasm for an activity for which one is otherwise fit to perform can usually be traced back to conflicts between the activity and other activities or ends that the person cares about. For example, Augustine was an extremely skilled orator, and we may assume that he took pleasure in this activity. But after his conversion – and even leading up to it – he lost enthusiasm for this activity because making speeches without concern for the truth conflicted with what he now cared about. Similarly, someone might have an affinity for management within capitalist corporations, but come to be repulsed by this activity when he acquires communist convictions. Still, in both of these cases, other activities remain for which the person might have enthusiasm; for Augustine, preaching might be that activity, and for the communist, there might be other ways of

manifesting leadership that do not conflict with his convictions.

Now, one popular way of constructing “befitting” style appraisals of human activity is to appeal to human beings’ status as rational beings. That is, the idea is to claim that certain acts can be judged fitting or unfitting for a person on the basis of his or her status as a rational being, capable of using reason. But these claims about what it befits a rational being to do are also supposed to owe nothing to any enthusiasm the person has for acting in accordance with reason. If a person has an objective affinity for acting rationally – by which I mean a *merely* objective affinity that is not expressed in the subjective feelings of the person – this is supposed to be enough to be sufficient for judging the person according to the standards of what befits a rational being. This is unusual, since, as we’ve seen, the movement from affinity to judgments of what is befitting ordinarily depends upon the person having made some kind of commitment to the activity in question, for example, as a vocation. A person does not have any obligation to act in a manner befitting a philosopher simply by having the quality of mind necessary to be one.

3.2.3. Affinity and Pleasure

I mentioned above that affinities, like pleasures, involve a certain fit between agent, circumstance and act. This connection is not accidental: taking pleasure in some activity is our most immediate indication that we have an affinity for it. By “pleasure” I mean pleasure in the Aristotelian sense, which Gilbert Ryle describes particularly well:

“Pleasure”...is sometimes used to denote special kinds of moods, such as elation, joy, and amusement. It is accordingly used to complete the description of certain feelings, such as flutters, glows, and thrills. But there is another sense in which we say that a person who is so absorbed in some activity, such as golf or argument, that he is reluctant to stop, or even to think of anything else, is “taking pleasure

in” or “enjoying” doing what he is doing, though he is in no degree convulsed or beside himself, and though he is not, therefore, experiencing any particular feelings.²¹¹

Now, if taking pleasure involves the fit between agent, circumstance, and act, then taking pleasure in something indicates the matching of these elements together, and signals that an activity is worth spending time upon. It should be clear to the reader how, in his own case, it was just such an experience that led him to whatever activities he has judged worthwhile to spend his life upon. It is when someone is “absorbed” in doing philosophy to the point “that he is reluctant to stop, or even to think of anything else,” that he has grounds to judge both that he is taking pleasure in the activity and that he has an affinity for it.

This “fit” between agent, circumstances, and action is what psychologists call “flow,” and was popularized by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, where he characterizes “flow” experiences as those involving challenging but conquerable tasks that call upon someone’s full attention and skills to master, in which someone has “a sense that one’s skills are adequate to cope with the challenges as hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how well one is performing.”²¹² Csikszentmihalyi professes a debt to Aristotle, and also notes the importance of “the autotelic experience,” which refers to activities that are enjoyable for their own sake.²¹³ He describes such experiences as focus-

²¹¹ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949), pp. 107–108.

²¹² Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1991), p. 71.

²¹³ Csikszentmihalyi says that Aristotle’s “notion of the “virtuous activity of the soul” in many ways prefigures the argument of this book” (*Flow*, p. 20) and refers to the autotelic experience in *Flow*, p. 67.

ing all the attention of the person onto the task at hand while simultaneously avoiding anxiety and boredom.

Not every affinity is enduring. Whereas someone with an affinity for philosophy as a young woman is likely to continue to possess this affinity until she is well into old age, others are ephemeral. Vogler imagines circumstances in which she takes pleasure in paying the bills, and continues the activity simply for the sake of continuing it. But this occurrence does not indicate that she will regularly take pleasure in this activity or even that she will ever do so again. Affinities, like pleasures, involve a fit between agent, circumstances, and act and so depend to varying degrees on contingent or essential features of the agent, the circumstances, or the act itself. Taking pleasure in paying the bills may depend upon a number of transitory features of each of the three factors making up the situation: the particular mood of the person, the particular bills to be paid, the absence (or presence) of other demands, etc., may each make a contribution to establishing this particular affinity. When these conditions cease to obtain then the affinity will disappear, as well as the pleasure of it. The persistence of an affinity for, and the capacity to take pleasure in, an activity like philosophy is more enduring because it is rooted more deeply in the nature and character of the person.

3.2.4. Affinity and Frustration

Taking pleasure in an activity is the sign of an affinity or fitness for it. Frustration is the sign of the opposite: it signals that something does *not* fit together between the agent, circumstances, and act. Frustration is not simply the result of finding something to be difficult. As Csikszentmihalyi argues, difficulty often provides a vital element for op-

timal experience, and enjoyment is possible “when the challenges are just balanced with the person’s capacity to act.”²¹⁴ An activity is difficult when successfully performing it requires great time, energy, attention, or pain; it is frustrating when, despite any reasonable expenditure of these, successful achievement of the end or purpose of the activity remains out of reach, or to hinge upon nothing but chance. Someone can take pleasure in working at solving an extremely difficult philosophical problem or reading a difficult philosophical text; indeed, there are some for whom philosophy is always difficult, but continue to find it pleasant to engage in as a hobby. This will not happen if someone finds philosophy not only difficult, but frustrating, and because she can never get into the flow of philosophical reasoning at all, every attempt she makes to work through a philosophical problem or to understand a philosophical text ends without comprehension or understanding.

It would appear plausible that we cannot be frustrated in an activity without recognizing this fact, but this is false. We are often frustrated without recognizing it. We might even take pleasure in an activity until we recognize our mistake. Taking pleasure in something depends upon the appearance of fit, not the reality. Someone might take pleasure in an activity that he believes himself to be performing adequately only to discover later on that his efforts had been without result, as sometimes happens to someone who is both new to philosophy and extremely bad at it. It is possible, I suppose, that such a student takes pleasure in *some* activity or another (BS’ing, perhaps), but it is not the philosophical search for truth from which he gains this pleasure and, should he recognize that his own activity is not directed towards the truth, he would lose any pleasure derived

²¹⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 52.

from the illusion that he was pursuing it. (He might decide he likes the other activity better.)

Frustration only appears problematic from this angle because we use the term to refer both to the objective state of affairs that we are attempting to achieve or maintain and to a certain state of mind. It is possible for these to come apart and for someone to see the picture of perfect success in his activity while accomplishing nothing he supposes himself to do, and comedy is rife with examples of this – one need only consider Don Quixote or Bottom from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Don Quixote is comical precisely because he believes he has an affinity for knightly activities that he plainly lacks – even if his conception of a knight's duties were accurate, he would remain painfully inadequate for them – and Bottom because his estimate of his affinity for acting so poorly matches his actual skill at the activity. Or we might consider a professor whose teaching is incompetent because of the wild exaggerations and generalizations he relies upon, as well as the wild harangues and tangents he constantly engages in making, who wildly gesticulates as he lectures and paces about the podium wildly. The flaws in his teaching style are not due to simple inexperience or incompetence, let us say, but due to his a complete mismatch between his actual abilities and those called for by teaching. But, we shall suppose, the students in his class pay rapt attention to him and show all the signs of learning from him, because they are drawn in by his bizarre and erratic behavior and finding it entertaining. At the same time the teaching assistant for the class is a gifted teacher and supplies the students with the knowledge they ought to receive from the class. In this way the professor is deceived concerning the nature of his own activity. On the one hand, when he observes the students during his lectures, they appear to pay close attention to what he says,

which indicates to him that they are interested and attentive. On the other hand, when he examines the students' work their understanding of the material impresses him. And so he judges that his teaching is successful and takes pleasure in it. Yet the reality is that his own best attempts to teach are unsuccessful. Despite his taking pleasure in the activity, he does not achieve the end he thinks he does. He has made a mistake about his possessing an affinity for teaching.

There is a problem: does the professor take pleasure in his apparent teaching, mistakenly thinking that he is successful in this, or in his actual crazy behavior, while mistakenly taking this to be the thing called "teaching"? The best answer we can provide is conditional: if this professor should come to realize that his behavior did nothing to advance his avowed end of teaching, would he then cease to take pleasure in it? If so, then he took pleasure in teaching, but mistakenly; he lacked any affinity for it but believed he did. If not, then he took pleasure in his antics, but misunderstood what they were. When we look at more concrete cases, the first option appears more likely to be correct. Would Don Quixote continue to take pleasure in his adventures if he recognized his own inadequacy for knighthood?²¹⁵ Would Bottom, our lovable ass, still take pleasure in his acting if he knew how poorly he performed? Would we, in their positions? The answer is, very nearly always, "no." Regardless, it is possible for someone to take pleasure in an activity while sorely mistaken about what end, if any, his actions serve.

²¹⁵ Does Quixote finally recognize his inadequacy when he is defeated by the Knight of the White Moon?

3.2.5. Kinds of Affinities

Affinities come in many kinds. Some depend upon essential features of those involved, some upon contingent features, and some upon both kinds of features; of those that are contingent, some are primarily rooted in our characters, others primarily in circumstances; and both essential and contingent affinities can be either actual or potential, and if potential, potential according to different degrees; and we can also divide affinities into those that involve our whole being, and those that only partially involve our personalities and powers; and amongst those that are partial, some are harmonious with our other powers, others conflicting.

An essential affinity is something like the affinity that Plato supposed that we possessed for contemplating the Forms, or Augustine said we had for the contemplation of God. These affinities are mostly potential because they are crusted over by various distracting passions and habits, but they cannot be erased because they are rooted in the essence of who we are. The affinity could only disappear if either we or the Forms or God ceased to exist. I will use the term in a somewhat wider sense, to include such powers as moving our limbs about, and generally to cover any power that is natural to us. A contingent affinity rooted in character is like the affinity that an accomplished novelist has for writing or a trained carpenter for crafting wood furniture. Such an affinity might be lost without destroying the person or any of his essential or natural properties. However, these characteristics often function as specifications of essential features, insofar as powers such as reasoning and empathy might be essential or natural features of a person, but novel writing is a contingent power specifying the direction those essential features take. Vogler's pleasure in paying her bills is a contingent affinity rooted in circumstances; it

depends not only upon her nature and character, but also upon passing moods and external circumstances being aligned in the particular way that they are.

An actual affinity is one that is in fact *actual*; the best we can do to get at what this means is simply to contrast it with a potential affinity. An accomplished novelist has an actual affinity, or a close to actual affinity, for writing, that she did not possess when she was only an aspiring novelist in college. At that point she had a potential affinity that sufficed well enough to draw her into making the activity her vocation. But it was a potential and not an actual affinity because at that time there were still many features of her character that prevented her from fully engaging in the activity. Another example is young lovers. Although their affinity for each other may be true enough, in many respects it is still only potential. They wish to live their lives together and live for each other, but they still possess many traits – some rather innocent, some positive vices – that will inhibit the goal of their love being achieved. When their habits of doing things their own way, their misunderstandings of each other's and their own character, and their selfishness and thoughtlessness is finally erased, then the affinity is actual.²¹⁶

Finally, an affinity is whole to the extent that the activity it aims at engages the whole person, and partial to the extent that it engages only one or a few parts of the person. Such wholeness might be specified to the person's essential powers, or to include her contingent character as well. For example, someone's affinity for Italian food is only partial. It does not engage very many of his powers and as interesting as it might be for him if his sole occupation were eating Italian food, this would starve many parts of his personality. In addition, some of these partial affinities, depending on some one or few fea-

²¹⁶ Obviously, most loves never do become fully actual.

tures of someone, actually entail conflict with other features of the person. The appeal of an activity such as smoking may depend to some degree upon the affinity a person feels for what it provides. But it also conflicts with *other* parts of the person – such as his desire for health, or to put it more bluntly, his lungs. Engaging in an activity for which we have only a partial and conflicting affinity will always be bittersweet, at best. It is also possible for an affinity to become conflicting only when it is allowed too large a place in someone’s goals. Some person might have an affinity for boxing, but recognize that allowing this passion to become consuming would be destructive to some of his more valuable features. For he might know that it calls up certain dark and destructive passions within him that can only be controlled in moderation, so that if he were to box more than he does, many other features of his personality – say his virtues of compassion and gentleness – would suffer for it. Finally, some affinities are self-destructive. Someone could have an affinity for an activity, which activity tends to undermine a person’s ability to engage in the activity, and to take pleasure in it. The first experience of the activity might be quite thrilling, but repeated engagements become dull and unexciting. We shall return to this in 3.2.8.

3.2.6. Affinities for Objects

Up to this point, I have spoken of affinities for engaging in certain activities or pursuits. However, we also speak of someone possessing an affinity for *objects* or *persons*, and sometimes even for certain kinds of *environments*. Speaking of playmates, we might say, “Beth and Katy have quite an affinity for each other.” This usage reflects an important fact and, although more complex than affinity for activities, is constructed from

the same elements. Now an affinity for an activity consists in the ability to engage in the activity and to take pleasure in doing so. An affinity for a person is essentially the ability to engage in a joint activity with shared or common goods with that person while each takes pleasure in doing so. So in the example of playmates, this usage reflects the fact that the two children have the ability to enjoy engaging in play together, for example to engage in different games together (games being a paradigm example of an activity with shared or common goods).²¹⁷ Similarly, when someone's environment or surroundings play a vital role in living a certain way, he can be said to have an affinity for that environment, and lovers might be said to have affinities for each other when they see each other as someone who can play a vital role in romantic (and erotic) activities, someone in whom they can lose themselves. I expect that many readers will object that affinities for persons are not related to activities, but just to the person; such readers might suppose that affinities of this kind should be interpreted as implying that someone has the ability to take pleasure in someone's company, or something along these lines. It is really impossible to answer this objection at this point and it really amounts to nothing more than the objection to including "relationships" within the ambit of "activities." Both objections must await the account of relationships offered in the next chapter.

3.2.7. Affinity, Pleasure, and Love

Let me return to the role of affinity in coming to love, which was at the center of the discussion between Susan Wolf and Harry Frankfurt on what we should love. Neither

²¹⁷ This is why two children with an affinity may grow apart as they age. Their affinity for each other is rooted in common activities for which they have affinities; as they grow, the activity of play is replaced by new activities, and there is no reason why the new activities for which the two have affinities should be the same.

of them however spends much – or any – time thinking about *how* affinity plays into coming to love something. Perhaps this is because they divorce love from activity. Their view of love might as well be purely sentimental and volitional. However, I do not think that this is the case, as I shall argue in Chapter 4. In my view, love always includes a reference to an activity involving what is loved. Someone who loves wisdom – that is, a philosopher – enjoys engaging in certain activities devoted to the pursuit of wisdom: reading books, participating in discussions, following and constructing arguments, and understanding and contemplating different subjects. Erotic or romantic love involves a number of rather obvious activities, but foremost amongst these are two activities: the adoration of each partner by the other, and the formation of a “we,” or the integration of each person’s general activity of living into one activity of living. A parent’s love for a child, on the other hand, is not just an ardent wish for well-being, but a desire to engage in activities meeting the needs of the child and educating the child, in the broadest sense, so that he or she can become a worthy partner in life; that is, parental love involves desiring to make the child someone worth being friends with.

So now let us consider how possessing an affinity for an activity centering on some object should lead to loving, or how affinity and love are related to each other. Consider how taking pleasure in something explains the way in which someone discovers a vocation. To discover a vocation – the kind of activity which you wish to spend your life doing – is to come to love whatever lies at the center of the activity, in the particular manner appropriate to yourself. Discovering philosophy as your vocation is coming to love the discovery and contemplation of the truth, in the manner particular to philosophy rather than, say, physics. It is a love of truth of the most general kind. This discovery

typically involves an initial period of delight or pleasure that is implicitly recognized as a sign of your affinity for the activity in question. Just as difficulty is not equivalent to frustration, so too possessing an affinity for an activity is not the same as finding it to be *easy*. People rarely take pleasure in activities that they find easy, whereas many activities that people love are anything but easy; all that can be said is that there is a certain kind of fit between the object and our potential and actual powers. So the student new to philosophy may not find philosophy easy – quite the opposite! – but he does not find it frustrating either. He finds that his mind follows the lines of argument and he delights in the glimmers of understanding that he captures. There is a fit between the student and the work. If his experience with philosophy involves this kind of pleasure regularly enough, then this is enough to provide a sufficient reason for adopting it as a hobby or side-pursuit. But sometimes such occurrences are fortuitous and circumstantial; if this is the case, the student might not ever find this kind of affinity between himself and philosophy again, or perhaps find it only rarely, or only with particular authors. If he discovers that philosophy is usually frustrating for him to study then he will certainly not pursue it further unless driven on by an external motivation.

Yet suppose that he does take pleasure in the activity with reasonable regularity. Although there are times when it is frustrating, often enough he experiences this pleasure arising from his being able to get into the “flow” with the work of philosophy that he realizes that this may be the kind of work that he should do for the rest of his life, if he is able to. So it appears on the list of possible careers alongside other ones – perhaps his list is lawyer, programmer, philosopher – and, if circumstances do not interfere, he will continue in the practice and may eventually come to identify this as *the* activity for which he

has the greatest affinity, or fitness, to perform. At this point he must give serious thought to making it his life's work.

Is this not how it is to discover a vocation, and isn't this how pleasure plays into that decision? Love for the object of the vocation often arises through taking pleasure in the object with some frequency, and when we take pleasure in something more frequently or with greater satisfaction than with other objects, we select it as the object to which to devote our lives. Taking pleasure in something, then, is not only a sign of an affinity, but also a cause of love when decision is added to it. Habitually taking pleasure in performing an activity is one way in which we can come to love that which the activity is for.

I must point out that there is no presumption that when taking pleasure in someone or something has led to loving it as well, that taking pleasure is all there is to the love. This would be an absurd result. It is a stimulus to love because it is a recognition of the fitness between oneself and what one takes pleasure in. The excitement and freshness of new erotic love is due to the frequency with which the partners take pleasure in the company or thought of the other person; but this pleasure frequently fades as the relationship matures and the great difficulty of actually living together becomes apparent. Likewise, the excitement experienced upon a first encounter with philosophy or some other vocation is not matched by what follows when it has become an occupation. Whereas it seemed impossible to get too much of philosophy during that initial period, matters appear different later on (say, in graduate school). Love is not exhausted by taking pleasure in something although it does seem to me that it must include the desire to take pleasure in it. Taking pleasure in something is a sign of an affinity for it; loving it is rather a commitment to the object of this affinity as an end within one's life. Pleasure acts as an ap-

peal to love and remains a goal of love, but the structure of love is not exhausted by pleasure and, indeed, love seems to function as a way of ensuring our commitment to an object is not dissuaded by periods of difficulty. An important reason for this is that, quite frequently, our fitness for what we love is not as great as it initially appeared. The student who falls in love with philosophy remains in many respects incapable of performing the kind of tasks constituting philosophical activity. He is still not very good at “doing” philosophy. And a man who falls in love with a woman and wishes to spend his life with her is not yet actually very good at this; he generally lacks many of the virtues necessary to love her well. Both student and lover continue to find sources of frustration within their own character. Given human nature as it is, it would be impossible to devote oneself to any particular object or activity if the condition for this were perfect actual fitness. What is required is more frequently a good degree of *potential* fitness, sufficient for sometimes taking pleasure in the activity or object. It is the encounter with the demands for total fitness, and the difficulty of meeting them, that evaporates the flush of new love and produces either abandonment of love or commitment to it. Love, then, is devoted to – among other things – converting potential fitness into actual affinity by erasing the flaws and smoothing out the rough spots that prevent one from dedicating one’s life to this activity or object.

3.2.8. Errors Regarding Affinity

Finally, we need to ask what kinds of errors our judgments of affinity admit of. In what ways may we *get it wrong* about what we have an affinity for? At first it seems as if there is a presumption that, when it comes to someone’s own affinities, he cannot be

wrong. This may be because affinity is frequently reduced to its subjective components, which are supposed to be perfectly open to consciousness, e.g., to whether an activity “feels good.” That is, it is frequently believed that taking pleasure in something is *the* sign for affinity: An affinity is present when pleasure is present, and absent when it is absent. And it is this that explains why someone might think that a romantic relationship is over as soon as the first excitement fades. He judges that the affinity between him and his beloved must not actually exist, or that at any rate it no longer exists, if he no longer takes pleasure in the company of his erstwhile beloved but finds frustration instead. Frustration, like pleasure, is frequently taken to be *the* sign that no fitness exists. This, however, is mistaken, as the above should make clear. Don Quixote and Bottom both illustrate the ease with which, on this matter, we succumb to delusions. In the case of the eccentric professor there is a mistake about either which affinity he actually possesses or about the end or purpose of the actual activity he has an affinity for. There are many ways in which such judgments may go wrong; someone can be mistaken about whether an activity is sustainable, whether it conflicts with other activities or objects that the person values, what purposes or ends it serves, whether an activity will be satisfying, what the result of developing an affinity will be, and about whether an affinity exists or not – to name a few.

The first kind of mistake we may make about an affinity is its sustainability, or its internal coherence (a mistake about the continued presence of resources necessary to keep performing an activity is a type of mistake too, but not about the nature of an affinity, so much as the nature of the circumstances surrounding an affinity). The pursuit of some activities is such as to undermine the affinity itself. Thus, the activity is, in some

sense, incoherent. This might be an accurate way to describe dipsomania: the alcoholic's love of intoxication leads him to seek this to a degree that undermines his own ability to take pleasure in the activity any longer. There is something in the activity itself that decreases his fitness for enjoying it. Someone could, theoretically, engage in the activity knowing full well that this was the case. He might go forward saying, "I know that this activity is not sustainable; I know that it undermines itself. Nonetheless – let it be! It is worthwhile even so. Live fast, die young, and leave a pretty corpse." Then there would be no mistake. But, typically, people in this situation do mistake the sustainability of the activity and believe that it can be continued and that its experience will not become hollow for them. Of course, this kind of "the more, the less" effect isn't limited to alcohol or even to drugs. One of the adages contained in the book of Proverbs declares that "Death and destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man" (Proverbs 27:20). The lover of money follows a trajectory much like that of the dipsomaniac. The wealth that once excited him and gave him pleasure to contemplate soon evokes no interest or excitement. Quite the contrary: It drives him to pursue *more* wealth in the hopes that when he has *that* much rather than *this* much he will finally be able to take pleasure in what he possesses. The same pattern reappears everywhere: in gambling, pornography, and affairs as mundane as eating or not-eating. In all of these cases the relationship between agent, circumstances, and act is such that the agent is transformed so that he is less and less capable of engaging in the activity in question.

In addition to errors about whether an affinity is sustainable in itself, if actualized, there is a question of whether it conflicts with other aspects of our lives or with other activities or objects that we value. The first is a question of internal coherence, the latter of

external coherence. When we are interested in external coherence, the question is whether or not we shall become different people by actualizing a given affinity, and, if there are such changes, whether or not they shall conflict with what else we value; or else, if there is no conflict at this level, then whether or not it is possible to actually activate two or more given affinities during the same period of our life. What we are asking about is whether or not becoming a loving spouse or loving parent is compatible with a particular career that is particularly valued as a vocation. It is possible for someone to have an affinity in both of these directions, one pointing towards the intimate life of the family, the other pointing perhaps in the exciting but unpredictable life of a stage director, and it is not at all easy to see whether these may be successfully combined with each other in a single life. In at least some instances, it is not possible to do so. In other circumstances it may be quite clear that the affinities are not compatible at all – say when the vocation in question is one of monastic devotion or – moving in the opposite direction – life as a mafia “enforcer.” And, at least sometimes, the person faced with the decision between two ways of life refuses to make a decision because he or she cannot recognize the conflict in question. Sometimes this may be a conflict between a career and home that cannot be resolved; other times it may be a conflict between living for others and living for oneself that cannot be resolved. Regardless, this is another area in which error is certainly possible.

Someone can also mistake the significance of an affinity. By “significance” I have chiefly in mind the purposes, ends, or results of the activities that we have affinities for, not their value or importance. For the moment I am only concerned with how someone can make a mistake about what *results* from activating an affinity he possesses. Let us

return to the example of the eccentric professor, with slight modifications: rather than simply behaving eccentrically, he makes it his deliberate policy to entertain his students, upon the supposition that by increasing their interest in his lectures he shall also educate them more effectively. Now as a matter of fact although his lectures are entertaining, the effects on his students' learning is slight, even non-existent. So although this professor does have an affinity that he takes pleasure in – namely for entertaining – he is mistaken in thinking that the activity aids his teaching. In this manner someone may possess an affinity, but be mistaken about the result of activating it.

In addition to mistakes about the significance of activating an affinity, someone can make a mistake about what will come of developing it in himself. Most affinities that we discover are largely potential affinities; they require significant development. A student might be capable of doing philosophy to some degree, but continue to encounter frustration in certain areas. He needs to acquire a set of different skills and talents and develop the kinds of habits and dispositions appropriate to a philosopher if he wishes to develop this affinity. Naturally, it is possible to be mistaken about the results of doing this. As an undergraduate a professor told us the story of one of his former students. The student was young and idealistic and wished to make a difference in the world. He decided that he could acquire the skills to do so if he went to law school, and so he did. But when he spoke with this professor later, he said, “They’ve made a lawyer of me.” He wasn’t the same person anymore. In developing the habits and skills of a lawyer, his own character had been transformed. He had made a mistake about what it would mean to develop one of his affinities.

Finally, we might consider another way someone could be mistaken: It might ap-

pear to someone that it will be supremely satisfying to completely activate an affinity and engage in its corresponding activity, but when he is finally able to do – when his own character and present circumstances are such as to ensure perfect act – he might find that it is not, in fact, satisfying. Candace Vogler describes someone in this situation, saying: “Or perhaps it was like this: you were not carried away at all. You did *exactly* what you set out to do, and succeeded brilliantly by dint of calculation and concentrated effort. Surveying your accomplishments, you hate yourself.”²¹⁸ Thus one’s efforts to activate an affinity could end in misery. You did not make any mistake about which affinity you possessed or how to develop it. You did *exactly* what you set out to do, and succeeded brilliantly by dint of perspicacity and concentrated effort. But engaging in the activity, you hate yourself. The promise of happiness was no more than an illusion. Someone might discover, after a life filled with one-night stands and dozens of affairs, that he is actually quite lonely and his life very empty, and not at all as satisfying as he had supposed it would be; or that the leadership he had craved had brought more paranoia, fear, and toil than he had bargained for, and the more solitary life he had once led, he now yearned for wistfully.

Finally, someone can be mistaken about whether an affinity exists; and there are three separate ways that someone could be mistaken about this which in practice are frequently compounded together: By believing one exists that does not, by believing one does not exist when it does, and finally by mistaking the existence of one for the existence of another. This should follow as a manner of course from the example of the eccentric professor, who mistakes himself to have an affinity for teaching when in fact he is

²¹⁸ Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious*, p. 97.

only providing a bizarre display of unusual behaviors.

3.2.9. The Subjective and Objective in Affinities

Possessing an affinity for something is not simply a matter of feeling enthusiasm for it or having the right emotional make-up to love it. There is something far stronger to the notion than this. To have an affinity for an activity is not simply to enjoy it, but to be able to engage in it without frustration; and to have an affinity for a person is not simply to find the person pleasant, but to be able to engage in activities with, or centering on, that person. An affinity for art – even a curator’s affinity – cannot be understood apart from some sort of activity, be it painting or studying artwork. There is a strong connection between the subjective and objective sides: the subjective side, taking pleasure in the activity or person or object, ordinarily corresponds with the objective side. We take pleasure when we experience objective fit between ourselves, our activity, and other circumstances. But we can also be mistaken here, because sometimes this fit does not exist, or is quite different, from what we take it to be.

Someone might object that I have only offered a new concept with the same name, and that I am not actually writing about the same thing that Wolf and Frankfurt did in *Contours of Agency*. I do not think that this is right. Consider Aristotle’s use of the term “happiness.” Translators and scholars sometimes wish to translate Aristotle’s *eudaemonia* as some word other than “happiness” – as “flourishing,” perhaps. They are usually driven to this because the associations of Aristotle’s *eudaemonia* feel quite alien to us if *eudaemonia* is happiness. They attempt to elide the differences between Aristotle’s concept and ours by using different words for them. Richard Kraut has argued that

this is a bad strategy, “[resting] on an oversimplified view both of happiness and of *eudaimonia*.”²¹⁹ Kraut says that the concepts are identical, it is only the specific conceptions that vary: both require that someone be in a certain state of mind, and that he meet a certain standard. The difference between the two lies in Aristotle’s setting an objective standard for happiness, while the contemporary view sets a subjective one. The same can be said for my use of “affinity.” It may at first seem alien to our view of affinity to say that someone can be wrong about it, or that there is more to it than enthusiasm. But in fact the concept is just the same: the concept of affinity is a concept of intimate fitness between two things. Taking pleasure in something is the subjective sign of this fitness, but the objective fit is prior to it, and subjective affinity does not provide an infallible indication of objective fitness.

Thus, the notion of affinity can provide aid in our attempt to find grounds for love. Because it invokes objective standards, it makes it possible for someone to be in the wrong about what they care about. Someone who is not wholehearted can seek guidance not only by examining his subjective attitudes towards his conflicting goals, but by examining whether his affinities for the two are equal. This in no way guarantees a solution, but it may well provide help in some situations. Recognizing that you are in fact not able to do something with any real success is a sound ground for expelling it from amongst your ends. Moreover, as we saw from the variety of mistakes possible regarding affinity, there are many ways in which errors about affinity could provide grounds for amputation: e.g., because the love is self-destructive or unsustainable.

²¹⁹ Richard Kraut, “Two Conceptions of Happiness,” *The Philosophical Review*, 88:167–197, at p. 168.

CHAPTER 4:
THE NATURE OF LOVE

Now that I have outlined my theory of affinity, it is time to construct a general account of love. According to this account, loving something always expresses an attitude towards the object, or some feature of it, and is always expressed in an activity that someone has an affinity for. Thus, someone's love for the mountains is grounded in a certain attitude he holds towards them and is expressed in the activity of mountain climbing, in the activity of aesthetic contemplation, or in some other way, and someone's love for understanding is rooted in his attitude of wonder and expressed in the activity of doing philosophy. In the realm of the everyday, the love for food is rooted in one's delight in the pleasure of eating the food, and is expressed in the activity of eating it.

The chief objection to this theory is bound to be that, although such an account might fit in well with certain kinds of loves, it fits poorly with other loves, including those we hold most important: love for other persons. For – it will be said – that's *just not what they're like*. This objection rests on a misunderstanding; although accounts of love usually draw attention to the phenomenology of love, or to its distinguishing properties, my own account does not begin in this way. Instead of beginning with what distinguishes love or which of its features hold greatest interest for us, it begins with asking what *sort* of thing love is. We are turning to abstract notions such as activity and affinity, which do not appear on the surface of our loves, but which form their framework. Naturally, the

framework for loves is *just not what they're like*; a framework for something isn't the same as what is framed. The objection might be pressed: how likely is it that a framework like yours is going to actually accomplish this? To which the only answer can be the result. So let us see to it.

4.1. Outlining the Concept of Love

4.1.1. The Example of Philosophy

The example that I shall begin with is the love of philosophy. In general, philosophical examples should be easily understood, or at least be drawn from those things with which the reader can be assumed to be familiar. At the same time, examples should present the idea of which they are proofs in a particularly pure and unadulterated form. In both respects, the love of philosophy is ideal for my argument. All but a few readers should be familiar with it and its love manifests the structural elements of love that I wish to emphasize with special clarity.

To do philosophy is to engage in an activity of seeking the truth about certain important, highly general, and extremely difficult questions. It involves seeking the most basic truths about the world and about ourselves, truths so basic and puzzling that it is not easy for us to even frame the questions that they are answers to, and difficult even to know whether we have a satisfactory means of telling whether or not they are correct. This is one way of conceiving of the matter; no doubt there are others, but no matter how we conceive of it, philosophy will certainly possess at least the following characteristics:

(i) When someone engages in doing philosophy, she has a goal (e.g., discovering some-

thing, demonstrating something, etc.); (ii) when doing philosophy, she performs a sustained series of actions unified by their being ordered towards this goal (e.g., forming inferences, providing examples, tracing conceptual connections, etc.); (iii) when she is successful in doing philosophy, she has succeeded both in her subordinate actions and in achieving her final goal (e.g., her deductive reasoning must be both valid and sound, etc.). I take these to be something like necessary conditions for doing philosophy, but not sufficient.

That some people have an affinity for philosophy while others lack any affinity at all for the subject must be obvious to everyone who has bothered to teach the subject, or even to seek conversation with others about it. The affinity appears to depend upon two factors: the ability to successfully perform those subordinate actions and the ability to take pleasure in the activity. As I wrote earlier in the section on affinity, it is rare that someone has the ability to perform an activity, yet lacks any enthusiasm for the activity and takes no pleasure in it. I cannot remember many students whom I've taught who've met the first criteria yet failed the second. This isn't to say that every student with ability becomes a philosopher. Students have many affinities and must settle upon only one vocation. For some of the students, philosophy may remain an occasional pastime, for others, merely a subject they once enjoyed; for a tiny minority, it comes to define their lives. Regardless, no one spends her time doing philosophy unless she has an affinity for it.

Finally, there is the pleasure of doing philosophy. The proof of philosophy's pleasure is that it is possible to lose oneself in doing it and become so wrapped up in its practice that one loses track of everything else. I'm not referring to the obsessive compulsion we sometimes experience with respect to a particular problem when we are con-

sumed with solving it. This is more likely a response to failure at doing philosophy, than success in it. No, what I refer to is the kind of pleasure that we take sometimes when reading, sometimes when preparing or delivering a lecture, sometimes when hearing one, sometimes in discussion, and sometimes when writing: the pleasure in following these subordinate actions towards their due end. We rarely make it all the way, of course, but we take pleasure nonetheless when the individual moves themselves are performed skillfully. We also take pleasure in reading and hearing someone do philosophy in a way that is unlike the pleasure that spectators take in witnessing a marvelous athletic performance, because a spectator witnesses, but does not perform, the marvel, whereas in philosophy the listener or reader is invited to engage in the activity alongside the speaker or the writer. For this reason the pleasures of doing and of witnessing philosophy resemble each other, and encountering it can reveal the affinity just as much as doing it does. It is worth noting, too, that we take pleasure in the activity itself, in the result of the activity, and in the individual moments of the activity. We value *doing philosophy*, but also *drawing clever inferences*, and *understanding this*.

Why do we ever come to love philosophy? It seems to me that Plato (and Aristotle following him) was correct to assign the responsibility for this love to wonder, claiming, “there is no other beginning of philosophy than this.”²²⁰ When we are struck by wonder, we are deeply impressed by the existence of something that we cannot understand. We are *struck* by it but puzzled as well, and filled with the desire to see the puzzle

²²⁰ Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d3. In the Cooper *Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997) this is translated as “For this is an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher, this wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else.” However, a literal rendering of the Greek – ou gar allê archê philosophias ê hautê – yields my own translation provided above.

through, and to *understand*. Thus the affinity for doing philosophy consists both in the capacity for awareness of such puzzles, sensitivity to wonder at them, and the ability to progress in resolving them. Coming to love philosophy is dependent upon activating this affinity by seeking to understand what provoked our wonder, engaging in this activity, and judging it worthwhile to continue. Coming to love philosophy consists in large part in being tortured by one's inability to resolve puzzles evoking wonder that stand beyond one's present state of understanding. The love for philosophy is not equivalent to the love of truth, first of all because the discovery of the truth would dispel all philosophy, and second because philosophy in this sense is only concerned with resolving rather puzzling impediments to knowing the truth. The love for philosophy is loving a particular way of getting at the truth, and loving getting at particular kinds of truths. God, whom I presume loves the truth, cannot love philosophy in this way because he cannot be puzzled or experience wonder at all.

Structurally, it seems that the love of philosophy requires that someone both possess an affinity for doing philosophy and care about preserving and increasing this affinity.²²¹ The usual caveats about caring apply; just because someone cares about philosophy doesn't mean that she will necessarily pursue it; it is not an indefeasible concern and so other goals might receive priority over it. What she will not do, so long as she cares about philosophy, is exclude it from her table of final ends. Within her deliberations, it will always carry some weight. Someone who loves philosophy will also care about activating her affinity for it; she will have an ongoing concern with actually *doing* philoso-

²²¹ If I am wrong about someone needing to possess the affinity to love philosophy, then I would need to amend this so that anyone who loves philosophy but lacks the affinity must care about acquiring the affinity for it.

phy. She wants to want to do philosophy, and this second-order desire has some degree of efficacy. She is not an inverted “unwilling addict” who wants to want to do philosophy, but just doesn’t want to. If she fails to do philosophy, this is because it has become crowded out by other things she cares about, or the lack of material conditions for doing philosophy. And if she loves philosophy, then she also takes pleasure in doing philosophy and enjoys it. Occasionally she even finds joy in it and delights in the activity. It is such moments that lead many of us to adopt philosophy not only as a pastime, but as a vocation. For, if someone loves philosophy, then it is eligible to be chosen as this person’s vocation. It is the kind of thing that she can imagine spending her life doing. For many people there may be other concerns that either appear more desirable or otherwise crowd out her love for philosophy. In other words, the love for philosophy provides a possible answer to a question like, “How should I live my life?” It does not only provide a goal for one’s life, but also the constitutive material out of which one could construct one’s life.

4.1.2. The Elements of Love

Important elements in the love of philosophy, essential to what love is, can be generalized to other loves. I will call these elements “reality” and “otherness,” on the one hand, and “peace,” “reconciliation,” or “union” on the other. Let us begin with reality and otherness. What is it to wonder at something? Earlier I said that we wonder when we are struck by the existence of something that we cannot understand. Both its existence, and its incomprehensibility, are part of what provokes us to wonder. We go through much of our lives without really *noticing* the existence of things. As Iris Murdoch says, “Love is

the difficult realization that something other than oneself is real.”²²² In many ways we are like those in Plato’s Cave, seeing nothing but shadows, because we just do not *notice* what *is*. These shadows are in large part our own fantasies about the world, fantasies fed by culture but accepted and modified by us to reflect our own peculiar tastes. The conspiracy theorist is only the most notable fantasist: for all of us share in his vice of putting together the world we want to live in. It often pleases us more to imagine that setbacks for oneself or one’s political ideals are due to the nefarious purposes of others than to the true causes, which are usually utterly mundane. We are aware of other beings existing, but this is not the same as being – in the strong sense – conscious of their reality. Self-deception requires not calling to consciousness something we are nonetheless aware of, and we frequently treat the world around us in the same manner.²²³ That something should exist in a manner independent of our will is a scandal to our everyday egoism. We are aware of things but hardly concern ourselves with their existence or their independence from ourselves. When we wonder at something, we are, however, dreadfully aware of its existence, precisely because we are aware of its otherness, its incomprehensibility.²²⁴ This drives us out of our concern with ourselves and provokes us to desire to understand. Plato is the greatest philosopher not because he arrives at the best answers to philosophical puzzles, but because he is the best at provoking us to philosophical wonder.

²²² Iris Murdoch, “The Sublime and the Good,” in *Existentialists and Mystics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 215.

²²³ This – I believe – is because our inattentiveness to the world really just *is* a manifestation of our habitual egoism and self-deception.

²²⁴ It also happens that when someone’s veil of self-deception is pierced, and he suddenly sees through to himself, that he frequently finds himself incomprehensible to himself, and is struck by just this resistance of himself to himself and the divided nature of his own soul. Thus it is not until Augustine begins to see through his own self-deceptions that he can state, “I have become a question to myself” (*Confessions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), X.33.50: “mihi quaestio factus sum”).

The desire to understand what provokes wonder seeks a kind of peace, reconciliation, or unity with it by understanding it. This amalgamation of words might strike the reader as a bit of a mess, or as overly metaphorical; some readers might wish to mutter words echoing Jonathan Edwards' aside, "it seems to me, the meaning of some of this affair is not sufficiently explained."²²⁵ However, each involves a core idea that is required for understanding both the desire to understand and the nature of love. As I am using the term, "peace" indicates the subordination of a plurality to a common principle of order, where the members making up the plurality are in some kind of contact with each other. There are two conditions opposed to peace: one is the state of a plurality in conflict; the other is plurality that lacks any common principle, so that conflict is possible but not occurrent. Peace exists when some kind of standard has been set up to govern the whole. Now sometimes this involves one element being placed above the others, and at other times, every element is placed under a common standard external to the original group. So if we considered a situation involving two persons in a state of nature – i.e., the situation when there is no conflict but no common standard either – then a state of peace could obtain if one person were to submit to the other person (as occurs in Hegel's state of nature in the master/slave dialectic), or if the two were to submit to some common standard to rule over them, perhaps a third person (as would occur in a Hobbesian state of nature). These can arise in a myriad of fashions: the first might occur if one party attempts to dominate the other, but it might also occur if one simply decides to submit to the other, and the Hobbesian solution is most likely if the two fear each other, but might also occur

²²⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Dissertation II: The Nature of True Virtue*, in *Ethical Writings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), ed. P. Ramsey, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. II, pp. 537–627, at p. 541.

if they hold the third person in a great deal of trust (Locke imagines adult children deciding to give authority to their father for this reason). Now whereas two squirrels hunting for nuts in a park may be aware of each other, they are not interested in the fact that they live under no common standard; human beings, of course, usually respond by seeking to dominate each other.

When what strikes us provokes wonder, we can make peace with it by understanding it. Understanding works in the opposite direction of domination, by submitting our minds to what is real rather than our own fantasy. Puzzlement and incomprehension show that no common principle governs both our minds and what puzzles us: what has provoked wonder in us is subject to some principle we scarcely understand. For some, puzzlement generates a shrug. But in others this produces the desire to understand, and to understand something is to subject one's understanding of it to its reality. So it is in this sense that the desire to understand is a desire for peace. The word may or may not still provoke some readers, but this definition and explanation ought to relieve them of any suspicion about its role in the argument. Peace is the subordination of a plurality to a common principle or goal, and understanding is the achievement of this subordination by submitting the mind to its object. This should also clarify how the desire to understand could be described as seeking a "reconciliation" or "unity," insofar as both these words refer to bringing two things into contact with each other under a common standard or harmonious relationship.²²⁶ This is all that I mean by them.

So to love philosophy is in part to be utterly taken up by the desire to dispel won-

²²⁶ I am tempted to warn readers against investing these words with too metaphysical a meaning, but the truth is that what the reader might complain of as being too metaphysical is really just too *metaphorical*.

der, replacing it with understanding. Doing philosophy is an attempt to reconcile ourselves with this fact and to seek a kind of peace – or even a truce – with what is real. Parenthetically: Velleman claims that he knows no theory beside his own that can explain how we can love someone for a flaw such as a crooked smile, according to which “[to] find someone’s crooked smile endearing is not to find him more valuable in virtue of smiling crookedly; it is rather to find the smile emblematic of what is valuable about him, which would still be valuable even if his smile were straight.”²²⁷ But this same crooked smile can just as easily remind us of someone’s reality, for we would not have given him such a smile – but there it is!

With our conceptual resources augmented by the addition of reality, otherness, and peace to activity, affinity, and pleasure, we can now begin to apply this account of love to some emblematic cases. Consider the love of the mountains. To love the mountains is, I would suggest, to be struck by their reality and independence from oneself in a certain way, and to wish to either climb them, or to contemplate them, and to somehow – as Alvin Plantinga has said – become *one* with them. The connection between love and pleasure is that when one takes pleasure in something, one is involved in some kind of activity centering on it, and there is a kind of “fit” between oneself, the activity, and what is loved; and because both lover and beloved are, in virtue of this fit, oriented towards a single goal, the lover experiences unity with what he loves. Unity or peace is the subordination of many to one goal or principle, and when there is fit sufficient for flow, the goal of the activity unites lover and beloved, even if the beloved – in this case the mountain – is quite unaware of its being so. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who has been at the forefront

²²⁷ J. David Velleman, “Beyond Price,” *Ethics* 118.2: 191–212, at p. 197.

of psychological studies of optimal experience or “flow,” says that this experience is

based on a concrete experience of close interaction with some Other, an interaction that produces a rare sense of unity with these usually foreign entities...[the] climber, focusing all her attention on the small irregularities of the rock wall that will have to support her weight safely, speaks of the sense of kinship that develops between fingers and rock, between the frail body and the context of stone, sky, and wind.²²⁸

A bit later he goes on to say, “When a person invests all her psychic energy into an interaction – whether it is with another person, a boat, a mountain, or a piece of music – she in effect becomes part of a system of action greater than what the individual self had been before.”²²⁹ Like the union of the living body, which is held together by the various processes ongoing within it, the union of lover and beloved depends on the ongoing activity of the lover. Someone who loves the mountains wishes to engage in activities which bring the mountains within her life, so that they are no longer so independent, and she does this by engaging in activities that focus her attention exclusively upon the mountains and that allow her life to be filled with activities centered upon the mountains. In this way her love for the mountains depends on the affinities that she possesses to engage in certain activities, and these activities attempt to reconcile her to, or make peace with, the mountains that she loves, a peace founded upon her own surrender and submission to the mountains.

In addition to the many kinds of subordination that mark love, there are many goals or standards under which love can seek unity. The Aristotelian division of utility, pleasure, and the good provides a useful guide to how this takes place. Someone who

²²⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1991), p. 64.

²²⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 65.

creates fine woodwork because he believes it is a good thing to do might take pleasure in the activity itself, and love the work both for its goodness and its pleasure; and if there are any tools that he regularly uses that aid him in this work, he may come to love them too, but because they are useful. Each category provides a goal which can unify a person with what he loves: what is useful is united with him in pursuit of whatever goal he uses it for; what is pleasant is united with him in pursuing pleasure; and what is good is not devoted to what he pursues, but *is* what he pursues, and so is not subordinated to his pursuits, but is that to which he subordinates his own life. Friendship, of course, is love for those who pursue certain common goals with us, and we are brought together under a common standard by our common pursuit. Finally, there are tyrannical loves, and love for tyrants; the tyrant loves those who obey him, and sadly, there are many who not only fail to live up to Sallust's observation that "few desire liberty; most wish only for just masters," but even go so far as love obeying a tyrant, to be a piece within his great projects. The fascist leaders did not force themselves upon their peoples. These loves do not appear to be directed towards utility, pleasure, or the good; but I will take up this topic again in 4.1.4.

4.1.3. The Grounds of Love

Love is not based on compelling reasons, but rather justifying reasons, so we would speak more precisely if we called these reasons "grounds." The ground for loving something derives from its reality, i.e., the ground is that essential property of the object that struck us with great vividness. When we love something, our love for it is premised upon the reality with which it struck us. Now different objects provoke us through differ-

ent features. For example, philosophical problems provoke us into wonder through their puzzling natures, and the mountains provoke us through their visible majesty into aesthetic appreciation. Whatever feature provoked someone into recognizing the reality of something else and then loving it is a ground for love. Thus, what Velleman takes to be the “essence of love” – i.e., “[a] sense of wonder at the vividly perceived reality of another person” – is in my view only a *ground* for love, even if it is one of the more important grounds for interpersonal love.²³⁰ Understood in this sense, there are many grounds for love, and there can be many different grounds for loving something. Because grounds need not be compelling, failure to love something worthy of love need not be irrational, *pace* Cicero.²³¹ As justifying reasons, grounds explain the *rationality* of loving something. They explain why loving it makes sense. Because there is more than one kind of ground for loving something, grounds are also pluralistic. Your love of philosophy and your love for your mother do not share the same ground. Hence, someone might love someone on account of the person’s goodness, without suggesting that this is the only ground for loving something, or even that this is the only reason to love this very person, or finally that everyone must love something or someone just because it is good. (It might turn out that all grounds are species of a common genus, or can be unified in some other way; if so, it would be true that all love had a common ground, but only when we restrict ourselves to the genus).

²³⁰ Velleman, “Beyond Price,” *Ethics* 118.2: 191–212, at p. 199.

²³¹ In *Tusculan Disputations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) IV.35.76, Cicero says “if love were natural,” that is, subject to “some regular and rational principle” (*ratione certa*), then “all would be in love, and always so, and all love the same object” (“si naturalis amor esset, et amarent omnes et semper amarent et idem amarent”). He says this because he appears to believe only in compelling reasons for love that make love rationally obligatory, not justifying reasons which make love rationally permissible, and therefore thinks that if it is rational to love something, then one must love it.

4.1.4. The Attitude of the Will

When we love something, the ground of love prompts our will to take up a certain attitude towards what is to be loved. This attitude is the root from which love grows. The most fundamental distinction we can make between the attitudes giving birth to love is that between *affirmative* attitudes and *negative* attitudes. An affirmative attitude responds to the reality of the object to be loved with enthusiastic consent and even gratitude, because it expresses thankfulness for something's existence. Someone who adopts an affirmative attitude towards what he loves is not only glad that it exists but holds profound good will towards it. He wants it to go on existing and feels the universe would be a poorer place if it were absent, and feeling that he owes thanks to the universe or God for its presence. Above all, however, the affirmative attitude expresses the desire to lose oneself in what one loves, to allow it to dominate one's attention, thoughts, and actions. The ground partially determines the kinds of activity through which the lover should seek to achieve his end, and the specific nature of the union sought. A negative attitude does not reject the existence of the object – even here, the object is appreciated for the sake of its ground – so much as its existing independently of the lover's will. Someone who takes the negative attitude is pained to be provoked by something whose reality is so striking yet not subject to his own control. The person taking the negative attitude appreciates the value of the object but rejects its independence from his will. Thus his will expresses not a desire to lose himself in the object, but the desire that the object be lost in him: that his will should determine *its* standing.

To love something is in part to possess an ongoing concern with engaging with it

in a way that expresses one's attitude towards it. Having an ongoing concern with something is itself in part to possess a set of dispositions relating to the object of concern. In this case, the dispositions are volitional, because love begins in the attitude of the will towards what is loved. (I've already noted the role of these dispositions in Frankfurt's account, and the Stoic roots of this idea, in 1.3.4.) The dispositions are related to the end one wishes to achieve with what one loves, and they produce emotions, thoughts, and desires appropriate to achieving this end. Loving something means being subject to a variety of responses on its behalf as a result of adopting a certain attitude towards it. Thus Augustine, echoing the Stoics, asks, "what is desire or joy but an act of will in agreement with what we wish for? And what is fear or grief but an act of will in disagreement with what we reject?"²³² Once we have set our will towards an object in a certain matter, this produces dispositions to respond to circumstances accordingly. Thus if someone endeavors to begin his own business, he will grieve when this activity fails or rejoice should it succeed. In the same way, once someone has set his will towards something by adopting a certain attitude affirming it, and endeavoring to become one with it, he will be disposed to certain emotions, thoughts, and desires relating to this goal. When someone loves something, then, his will adopts a certain attitude towards it, either consenting to it or negating it, and because of this attitude he acquires a set of dispositions.

This division between affirmative and negative attitudes of the will helps to explain an important matter in the philosophy of love, by allowing a more useful and plau-

²³² Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), XIV.6: "quid est cupiditas et laetitia nisi voluntas in eorum consensione quae volumus? Et quid est metus atque tristitia nisi voluntas in dissensione ab his quae nolumus?" (See *Civitate dei* in *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense* 2, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 2004)).

sible distinction between loves that are non-egoistic and those that are egoistic. According to a popular view, the difference between an egoistic love and a non-egoistic love is that the former subordinates what is loved to one's own happiness. Accordingly, true love does not relate what is loved to happiness; it is selfless, and acts for the sake of the beloved and without reference to lover's good or happiness. Loving your friends for the sake of your own happiness – even if your friends' happiness counts for determining this – is egoistic and devoid of ethical merit.

This view is inaccurate and a bit clumsy. The relationship between love and happiness is extremely complex because what is loved is not generally an instrumental means to the lover's happiness, but constitutive of it. The person who loves philosophy, for example, finds that doing philosophy is part of his happiness, and even the most "selfless" and "disinterested" mother finds that the welfare of her children cannot be separated from her happiness, and not at all because they are *means* to her happiness. More fundamentally, this view's appreciation of egoism is quite naïve. Dostoevsky's appreciation of what is at stake for the egoist is more profound. The "underground man," who appears in *Notes from Underground*, illustrates a rival conception of egoism that captures a truth that conventional pictures of egoism obscure. Dostoevsky's underground man is an incredible egoist – no one can deny this – but he does not value happiness. He regularly sacrifices his happiness for the sake of the power of his own will. Egoism thus understood consists not in referring all things to one's own happiness, but to one's capacity to express one's will, even – or especially – at the expense of one's own happiness.²³³ Thus

²³³ See Part I of *Notes from the Underground*, particularly Chapter VII of Part I, where the underground man declares that our "most advantageous advantage" is "[one's] own free unfettered choice" (*Notes from Underground* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992), p. 17).

true egoism can recommend injuring another person even if this leads to no material advantage, because imposing one's will upon others is the essence of egoism. An egoist who is asked to choose between happiness and the ability to have his own way may grieve at having to make the choice, but will choose the latter.²³⁴

I am not convinced that Dostoevsky had this entirely right, either, but it is a useful corrective to contemporary analyses of "egoistic love." An egoistic love is not one that refers back to the lover's happiness. This move is simply wrongheaded. What distinguishes an egoistic love is the lover's rejection of the object's independence from his will. Insofar as we are not merely dicker about words, and referring to an actual phenomenon in our lives, it is this kind of love that deserves to be called egoistic. If, in general, love begins with noting the independence and reality of what is to be loved, then the activities that loves are ordered to can be distinguished by how they attempt to resolve this. The love for philosophy is distinguishable from the love for sophistry – its close cousin – by the fact that the love of philosophy seeks to engage in an elaborate form of submission. Doing philosophy consists in unraveling what provokes wonder so that one can understand it, and in understanding something, one does, after all, stand *under* it. It is the submission of the mind to reality and the expulsion of fantasy in the name of truth. Here love allows what is loved to set the terms of the peace which love seeks. Egoistic

²³⁴ At least sometimes the underground man does not imagine that one need grieve; just consider the tenor of this story he weaves: After imagining a situation in which material prosperity was ensured through a kind of central planning, he says, "I, for instance, would not be in the least surprised if all of a sudden, *a propos* of nothing, in the midst of general prosperity a gentleman with an ignoble, or rather with a reactionary and ironical, countenance were to arise and, putting his arms akimbo, say to us all: "I say, gentlemen, hadn't we better kick over the whole show and scatter rationalism to the winds, simply to send these logarithms to the devil, and to enable us to live once more at our sweet foolish will!" (Notes from *Underground*, p. 17). Here, the sacrifice of happiness to will is joyful and even gay. Still, the picture of the underground man painted in Part II suggests that Dostoevsky himself views the sacrifice of happiness for "unfettered choice" as, in fact, a rather grim exchange – something that perhaps the underground man himself knows but is unwilling to acknowledge.

love is rather like eating. When someone consumes food, he becomes one with the food because the food becomes part of his body through the process of metabolization. Through this process, the eater incorporates the food into himself. What was once physically independent from him has become physically identical to him through his annihilation of its independence. It is subjected to the eater's own biological processes and activity of living. This is how an egoistic lover treats what he loves. A genuine motherly love and a tyrannical one are distinguished by the different attitudes of the mothers and the different relationships that these attitudes express themselves in. One mother is concerned with the happiness of her child, and if he must become independent, wishes this; the other mother structures her love for her child around her own will, and enjoys seeing her child as an expression of herself and her own dreams, aspirations, and influence. The tyrannical mother is even willing to sacrifice her happiness for the sake of her love, but this is part of what makes her love so despotic. She sacrifices her happiness for the sake of control, and if she has to express her attitude towards her child, she is likely to recount the many sacrifices she took for the child's sake and say, "He is mine, do you understand? Mine, mine, mine, for ever and ever."²³⁵ The voluntaristic model of egoism helps explain why she does so and why this is still egoistic. Egoism is the ardent desire for one's will to constitute truth, and egoistic love contains the ardent desire to bring the beloved under one's will. What is so loathsome about a matchmaker meddling with her friends' love lives (whom she only wishes "to help") is that rather than being motivated by what is best for her friends, she is always driven on by her own petty fantasies of how her friends

²³⁵ The words of such a mother in C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London: The Centenary Press, 1945), p. 86.

ought to “match up” and be made happy.²³⁶

Despite all of this, I am content to call such a perversity “love.” It is not a valuable form of love, but it still bears its mark. However, one must qualify this love as somehow failing to live up to what love should be. This need not be a moralistic concern: we might think of the egoistic love as being like a three-legged tiger. It is a tiger, all right, but there is something wrong with it. It doesn’t have everything that a tiger ought to possess. In this case, egoistic love does not have everything it ought to have; love, as a response to the reality of something, is defective when the response is to swallow up what is to be loved into itself. This is *amor curvatum in se*, love curved in upon itself.²³⁷ It is a broken love.

²³⁶ As C. S. Lewis points out, Emma’s love for her friend Harriet in Jane Austen’s *Emma* is perverse in this respect: “Emma intends that Harriet Smith should have a happy life; but only the sort of happy life which Emma herself has planned for her” (*The Four Loves*: New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), p. 51).

²³⁷ Augustine described fallen humanity as *homo curvatus in se*, a striking image reappearing in the works of Luther, albeit with different connotations: Augustine used it to describe man fallen out of love with God and in love with himself; Luther, man in love with himself and failing to love his neighbor likewise. Without wishing to engage in any extended exegesis of either author, I think that this image does capture something very important about egoistic love. All love consists in a desire to engage in an activity achieving union or peace with what is loved. All love also expresses some attitude that the lover holds towards what is loved, related to his recognition of the beloved’s reality. We could divide these attitudes into those that affirm the reality of the beloved and those that affirm the reality of oneself. The second involve a kind of retreat into oneself in response to something in what is loved. So whereas the former attitudes produce a wish to join what is loved in a union of lover and beloved that preserves the identities if not the independence of both, the latter produce aversion to losing independence for the sake of union, and therefore wish to bring what is loved *within* oneself. Or if that is overly metaphorical, we might say that such attitudes become expressed in a desire to achieve a union consisting in the subordination of what is loved to one’s own will. The love begins with a recognition of what is to be loved but it curves back in on itself and attempts to bring what is loved with it. So, there is a structural difference between non-egoistic and egoistic love, but it is not at the level that would distinguish love from other passions. All love seeks a union with what is loved; but the union can either exalt what is loved or exalt oneself. And this marks the distinction between the two loves. In the next chapter we will consider what is defective in this kind of love more thoroughly.

4.1.5. Activities and Practices

Love always expresses itself in a form of activity, and, as I am using the word, “activity” designates a goal-oriented complex of actions with an internal end.²³⁸ It is helpful to compare these activities with the “practices” around which Alasdair MacIntyre constructs his account of the virtues. MacIntyre defines a practice as

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.²³⁹

Several features distinguish practices from activities. First, MacIntyre’s practices are “socially established” and “cooperative” by nature. I do not wish to restrict “activities” in this way, even if most of the activities in which love is expressed *are* social in nature. It appears to me that love could be expressed in an activity like contemplation, where a person contemplates what he loves – as the lovesick are apt to do, and as Augustine and Aquinas and others claim the blessed do – and contemplation is not a social activity; it is neither socially established, nor cooperative.

Second, I am uncertain of the proviso MacIntyre adds on to the end of the definition, about practices’ extending human powers and excellence. It does not seem likely

²³⁸ Some activities, in the sense used by Aristotle, do not involve complexity: God’s contemplation of himself is an example of such an activity. This might be important if we wished to stretch the definition of love to include divine love as well. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Theta, Chapter 6, 1048b18–35, on actuality (or activity) and change (*energeia* and *kinêsis*); also, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X.4–5 on the relationship of activity and pleasure. The reader should not assume that I am using the word with all the connotations that Aristotle attaches to it, however. In particular I am not utilizing the notion of an internal end, which is not at all the same as an internal good, and which limits the application of the concept to a much smaller number of cases than my own concept of activity.

²³⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd Ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 187.

that all activities, even those involved in love, are like this. Does contemplating what one loves extend human powers? Certain powers of the mind? It is hard to say. Whether this is so or not appears to make only a small difference to our discussion of love, however.

Finally, MacIntyre's "standards of excellence" are often wrapped up in the "socially established" side of practices. The activities I'm discussing here do involve standards of excellence, but obviously, because I'm dropping the "social" side of practices, these are not a kind of social standard adopted by practitioners of the activity. However, my concept of activity completely agrees with his concept of a practice insofar as the standards of excellence are conceived of as being "appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity."²⁴⁰ This is because the end of an activity is internal to it and the success of the activity can therefore be determined with reference to success at achieving or maintaining this end. Sometimes these may well be socially established standards – e.g., successful chess-playing cannot be determined apart from such standards – but in other instances this will not be the case, as in contemplating the beauty of nature.

Perhaps the most important aspect of MacIntyre's practices is the concept of "internal goods." MacIntyre relies upon the example of chess and other common activities, and points out that "there are goods internal to the practice of chess which cannot be had in any way but by playing chess or some other game of that specific kind," goods which a child who plays chess only for the sake of winning candy cannot appreciate, although "we may hope" that "there will come a time when the child will find in those goods specific to chess ... reasons now not just for winning ... but for trying to excel in whatever

²⁴⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 187.

way the game of chess demands.”²⁴¹ Here I will not lean too heavily on the specific way to conceive of internal goods. On this, MacIntyre’s practices and my own activities are on the same page. What we need for my account of love is the notion of complex activities that are worth doing for their own sake, because of ends internal to the activity itself, as for example philosophy is worth engaging in because it is worthwhile, all on its own, to unravel wonder. Thus climbers say that “The mystique of rock climbing is climbing; you get to the top of a rock glad it’s over but really wish it would go on forever. The justification of climbing is climbing, like the justification of poetry is writing.”²⁴² The activities in which love is expressed are their own justification.

We also need to say a word about the kind of activities that love seeks. Love expresses itself in activities that achieve a kind of unity between oneself and what is loved, and especially in those that focus one’s attention on a particular object. Lovers have no monopoly upon such activities. Mountain climbers frequently describe their activity in terms that make it clear that they do see their activity as one achieving a kind of union with the mountain, the other climbers, and the activity itself.²⁴³ Many climb mountains without loving them although they take pleasure in doing so, and the same can be said for the other activities that love expresses itself within (including, obviously, the ordinary expressions of erotic love). These activities express love in their attempt to achieve a kind of union but can be engaged in without being motivated by love. Someone can come to

²⁴¹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 188.

²⁴² Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 54.

²⁴³ See e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow* p. 64 on becoming one with the mountain (quoted above in 4.1.2), pp. 41–42 on the unity achieved amongst different climbers, and p. 53 on becoming identical with the activity.

love not only that upon which he focuses his attention – as the philosopher focuses on a problem, the climber on a mountain, the painter on a scene in the world or his imagination, a lover in the ordinary sense upon the person he loves – but also those who are involved in this activity with him. Thus do we come to love friends in the Aristotelian sense, those who are allies with us in our most important endeavors, those who climb with us, paint with us, reason with us. They are not that upon which we direct our attention, but they are allies with us in this project and we achieve a kind of union with them, each of us subordinate to the final goal of the activity in which we share, this goal, the standard of our peace.

4.1.6. Coming to Love

We come to love something by one of two paths. The first path begins with a kind of recognition or arresting awareness of the reality of something else, as something else. This requires that we are shocked into awareness by a profound feeling of some kind, such as wonder, awe, aesthetic delight, identification, or even fear. Somehow, what we are to love must become vividly present to us as something with an existence of its own that stands apart from us. This produces love when it generates a desire to seek peace or unity with what is to be loved, along with certain volitional dispositions to support this desire. The lover then seeks an activity creating unity that is expressive of his attitude towards what he now loves. It is possible that he cannot find any such activity if he lacks the relevant affinities; in this case his attitude is likely to lapse into a deep respect for what was to be loved, which is not strictly speaking love but which might become love if given the opportunity and which remains love in the sense that the seed of an oak tree is a

form of oak; it is incipient love.²⁴⁴ There are many philosophers who disagree with this assessment: they think that, say, good will is sufficient for love. This does not seem likely to me. I will consider the objection raised by J. David Velleman to a view more like my own below, and explain what I think is missing from a view that limits love to good will without accounting for the activity of seeking unity.

The other path into love is through engaging in an appropriate activity, i.e., one that achieves a kind of unity with something, and then coming to appreciate it on that account. This is for example a typical way we come to love friends, but sometimes – perhaps frequently – how we come to appreciate the reality of certain objects. We can imagine someone coming to love philosophy not by beginning with a sense of wonder, but because engaging in the activity made him aware of those twisted knots at the center of philosophy that provoke wonder. Some loves will almost always be approached by the second path because the value of what is loved is otherwise difficult to discern. It is rare, for example, for someone to come to love the game of chess except by engaging in the activity of playing it. It is only in this way that he becomes aware of the goods internal to the game that make it worth loving. However, when someone’s attention is focused upon some object through engaging in an activity that achieves a kind of union with it, then its existence and reality can become quite vivid to him and this can act as grounds for loving it.

²⁴⁴ It would be useful here to possess not only an English equivalent for *incipiens amor* (“beginning love”) but also one for *incipiendum amor* (“love which is to begin”), which more nearly approaches what I am attempting to say here.

4.2. Interpersonal Love

4.2.1. What Kind of Activity Is a Relationship?

In the last few sections I interjected occasional examples of interpersonal love, but I haven't yet shown how an interpersonal relationship can be thought of as an activity. Here, it might be thought, the account will prove useless; "doing philosophy" may be an activity, and so too may other pursuits such as painting and mountain climbing, but a personal relationship is not like these. Such loves are not distinguished by the activities they are ordered to. In my view, however, relationships between persons *are* a kind of activity. An activity, let us recall, is a goal-oriented series of actions that includes internal goods, in virtue of which an activity can be engaged in for its own sake. The objection is likely to be that many relationships have no goals to speak of, hence are not activities, even if they are worth engaging in for their own sake. Although this line of reasoning has plausibility, it neglects a central feature of interpersonal relationships. Maintaining a relationship with someone requires that one maintain a kind of peace with them. As Augustine says, the peace of rational creatures is "an ordered agreement of mind with mind."²⁴⁵ When a husband and wife are constantly at war with each other, there is no relationship between them any longer. Enjoying fellowship with another person – I'm using the word to refer to the relationship between those organized in pursuit of a common goal – also requires that we must have a common standard of some kind, such as a creed, a manifesto, or a political platform, and often a common authority, made up of leaders ap-

²⁴⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, in *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense 2*, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), XIX.13: "pax hominum ordinata concordia."

pointed, elected, or coming some other way to the office of authority, which each member has voluntarily subordinated himself to. Maintaining the fellowship in question means continuing to accept the same standard and showing each person the respect appropriate to his place within the party, society, organization, church, etc.

The same seems true of all relationships. A relationship can only persist if those constituting the relationship maintain whatever peace accords with the relationship in question, requiring various kinds of respect and in some cases, love. In certain cases we can see that, as the kind of peace uniting two persons changes, so too does the specific relationship they are engaged in alter. The “underground man” whom Dostoevsky created claims that “Once, indeed, I did have a friend,” but what he describes is his pursuit and exercise of complete domination over his friend.²⁴⁶ Even if these two were at one point friends, they were friends no longer once the relationship was grounded in the complete authority of one over the other. This is indeed a possible relationship, but hardly friendship, which requires some kind of equality and affection. Erotic love inverts this tendency, and consists in someone’s willing submission to the one whom he loves, in the sense that this person becomes a kind of standard for him, an end in herself, and her good becomes a guide and measure for his actions, and she herself becomes the object of his actions, as he concentrates all of his attention upon her and seeks above all to fill his mind with nothing but the one he loves. An erotic *relationship*, however, is not a relationship of domination (one could have such a relationship, but by my definitions only *one* partner would be acting out of erotic love, and the dominating partner out of something rather different). An erotic relationship consists in both parties submitting to the other.

²⁴⁶ Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, Part II, Chapter 3, p. 47.

This makes it perhaps the most complex kind of relationship to analyze, and we will leave it until later to do so.

So it does make sense to speak of relationships as including goals. The goals of relationships, however, are not the hoped for *results* of the relationship, but are constituents of them and necessary to their continuation. Thus, if interpersonal loves are devoted to establishing a relationship of some kind with the beloved, then describing loves in terms of the activities they are ordered to will be as appropriate for these loves as it is for the loves with which we began, such as the love for philosophy. But although this supports the idea that relationships include constitutive goals, and hence can be described as activities, many philosophers are bound to object that the account still founders on the fact that interpersonal loves are not ordered towards relationships at all. It seems plausible that if someone desires a relationship with someone else, then he also wishes to be in this person's company, at least from time to time. Frankfurt maintains a conspicuous silence about whether lovers seek relationships with those they love; Frankfurt mentions that it is "not essential" that a lover "enjoy the company" of his or her beloved,²⁴⁷ but never considers whether or not the lover should at least seek and desire such company. We don't always enjoy what we desire, after all. Velleman actively opposes the idea that love can be equated with a desire for the company of the beloved, and his argument can be deployed, with some tweaks, against my view that love entails seeking to maintain a relationship with the beloved. To seek a relationship with someone entails wanting their company at least from time to time. On Velleman's view, love consists in responding to the recognition of a person as another person like oneself by lowering our emotional de-

²⁴⁷ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, p. 42.

fenses to him in such a way that although in many cases it might make sense to seek a relationship with him, it is not entailed by loving him. On the other hand, Robert Adams has written, “It is an abuse of the word ‘love’ to say that one *loves* a person, or any other object, if one does not care, except instrumentally, about one’s relation to that object.”²⁴⁸ I’m inclined to agree with Adams here, and so in the next section I shall therefore consider Velleman’s view of love and then his objection, and consider how this objection can be warded off.

4.2.2. Velleman’s Objection

In Chapter 3 I briefly outlined J. David Velleman’s theory of love, but it is worthwhile to go over the theory again, this time in a little more detail. Velleman conceives of love as a kind of emotional disarmament. In two essays, “Love as a Moral Emotion” and “Beyond Price,” he interprets love as a response to the capacity for autonomy within another person. It is a rare recognition of another person *as* a person, a “sense of wonder at the vividly perceived reality of another person.”²⁴⁹ According to Velleman, a person can respond to other persons in a moral way with two different attitudes: respect and love.²⁵⁰ Respect is the arresting of my inclination to use another person merely as a means to one of my ends.²⁵¹ Love is the elimination of my emotional defenses against

²⁴⁸ Robert Merrihew Adams, “Pure Love,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 8.1:83–99, p. 96.

²⁴⁹ “Beyond Price,” *Ethics* 118.2: 191–212, at p. 199.

²⁵⁰ E.g., see J. David Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Self to Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 101.

²⁵¹ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Self to Self*, p. 94: “[Respect] can motivate us, . . . by deterring us from violating it; and the violation from which we are thus deterred can be conceived as that of using the object as a mere means to other ends.”

this person.²⁵² Both are tied to the recognition of another person as a person. Respect is the minimal response to this recognition: When I recognize another human being as a person, I recognize him as someone who possesses the same capacity for valuation that I possess. Precisely because I must take my own capacity for valuation seriously in order to set values on anything, I must take his own identical capacity for valuation seriously, and refrain from violating it. I must treat him as a self-subsisting end to be respected. If this is the minimal response to recognizing someone as a person, then the maximal response is love. Love requires that I drop my emotional defenses to the other person. Such emotions “feel unnecessary” when I recognize that some individual is capable, just as I am, of respecting other persons.²⁵³ Thus it is a kind of intensification of respect, which leaves me more ready and willing to do various things for the sake of the person whom I love. People sometimes wonder how Kantian respect could act as a motivating force, and according to Velleman it does so by “[arresting] our self-interested designs on a person.”²⁵⁴ It does not provide a *new* motivation for acting, but disarms motives that conflict with treating someone as a self-subsisting end. Velleman sees love in a similar light; according to him, “love arrests our emotion defenses” against someone we love, “leaving us emotionally vulnerable” and “susceptible to all manner of other emotions toward him.”²⁵⁵ Love, that is, eliminates certain emotions – those with which we defend ourselves against

²⁵² Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Self to Self*, p. 99: “All that is essential to love, in my view, is that it disarms our emotional defenses toward an object in response to its incomparable value as a self-existent end.”

²⁵³ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Self to Self*, p. 101.

²⁵⁴ Velleman, “Beyond Price,” *Ethics* 118.2: 191–212, at p. 201.

²⁵⁵ Velleman, “Beyond Price,” *Ethics* 118.2: 191–212, at p. 201.

others – and opens us up to other ones which “[favor] involvement and engagement.”²⁵⁶ Love does not, however, correspond with any particular kind of engagement or caring for this person: it merely opens up the possibility of such engagement.

Now, according to an early work of Robert Adams on love, “The central case of *Eros* is passionate desire for a personal relationship” which “need not be based on the belief that [the relationship] would be good for anyone.”²⁵⁷ Adams then argues that Agape – a kind of love often thought of as purely focused upon the good of the beloved – includes *Eros* within it, because even Agape includes a passionate desire for a personal relationship with those whom we love, pointing out that even Anders Nygren conceives of Agape as establishing fellowship with the beloved. Now, I am not so certain that this is indeed the central case of *Eros*, but Adams is surely correct to think that the desire for relationship is at least central *to* erotic love; *Eros* without any desire for a relationship with the beloved is inconceivable. The lover wishes to be accepted by and to be in the company of the one he loves. According to Adams, then, love cannot be conceived of apart from desire for relationship with the beloved.

Consider what is often offered a paradigm example of an Agape-type love: the love that parents bear for their children (the love that Frankfurt believes best illustrates what he means by “love”). Does this love include a desire for a relationship? We must admit that Adams is correct; it is the passionate desire for relationship included in parental love that makes it so difficult for mothers to give up their children for adoption even when they are reasonably certain that this will be for their children’s own good. The con-

²⁵⁶ Velleman, “Beyond Price,” *Ethics* 118.2: 191–212, at p. 201.

²⁵⁷ Adams, “Pure Love,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 8.1:83–99, p. 95.

flict is not between the mother's self-interest and her love. It is not as if keeping her child is in her *own* interest either. Nor is this a conflict between egoistic and a non-egoistic elements in her love; the conflict is not about whether she shall seek a certain *kind* of relationship with him, but whether there will be any relationship at all. Nor is the conflict between some weird infatuation or compulsion and her love. The conflict is, most plausibly, located within her love for the child, fought between different parts of that love. She desires a relationship with her child along with its own good and is torn by the conflicting demands of these desires.

So let us consider Velleman's objection, tweaked to attack this relational view. He conceives of love as the disengagement of our emotional defenses towards a person whom we recognize to be a person like us, capable of acting for reasons and out of respect for our own personhood. This disengagement may create a state in which it makes sense to seek the company of the one we love, but it isn't identical with any desire to do so. To support this contention, Velleman invokes the example of a separating or divorcing couple who continue to love each other but somehow cannot manage to live with each other. His point is that it makes sense to allow that they love each other even when they find it impossible to live together or to keep company with each other. "When divorcing couples tell their children that they still love each other but cannot live together, they are telling not a white lie but a dark truth."²⁵⁸ The argument can be tweaked to attack the relational theory of love by adding that, on one interpretation of the argument,²⁵⁹ if

²⁵⁸ Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Self to Self*, p. 86.

²⁵⁹ I say "on one interpretation" because it is possible that what Velleman wishes to argue is somewhat more nuanced: Not the view that one can love someone and never wish to be in his company, but the view that it is possible to love someone and not wish to uphold an intimate and long-term arrangement that entails being in his company, the kind that one typically has with someone that one has married. But

the conclusion is correct, then it rules out not only accounts of love that *equate* love with the desire to be with the one we love, but also any view of love that entails that lovers must sometimes seek the company of those they love. For on Velleman's view, it must be possible for someone to love a person but to never wish to be in his company.

The first thing that must be said about this example is that it is not clear how much work a counter-example of this kind can do in this kind of context. Even if we assume that the counter-example is rightly described, it is possible that it proves much less than supposed. Counter-examples are effective when the argument concerns necessary and sufficient conditions, or universal laws of some kind; they are much less useful when we are dealing with domains concerned with paradigm cases or complex systems. A single counter-example can sometimes be an effective method of refuting a hypothesis within physics, but its status is more ambiguous in a science such as biology, where the entities are more complex and contingency holds greater sway. An entity traveling faster than the speed of light would be a crisis for physics; sighting a three-legged tiger wouldn't invalidate the conclusion that tigers do, after all, have four legs. Of course, crucial experiments – even in physics – are very rare, and even mathematics is largely concerned not with necessary and sufficient conditions or universal laws as much as it is with paradigm cases.

The question is: is love the kind of thing – simple, universal, uniform – that can be refuted by a single counter-example, or is it the kind of thing – complex, subject to contingency – for which the significance of counter-examples is, at best, ambiguous?

his remarks about annoying relatives, with whom one rarely possesses such an agreement, militate against this reading.

Surely it is the latter. We cannot immediately conclude that love does not essentially include a desire for a relationship with the beloved from the fact that, sometimes, love does not include such a desire.

We are not concerned about the three-legged tiger because we understand the role of contingency in biology. If a tiger lacks a leg, we assume that it fails to conform to the paradigm of a tiger because something has *gone wrong* in its history. There was a genetic defect, or the gestational environment was not ideal, or the leg was lost due to violence of some kind. Something that ought to have been present was not, or something that ought not to have been present, was. Mutilation is a result of contingency and so history is crucial to understanding the significance of a three-legged tiger. Aristotle, for example, would not be concerned with Velleman's counter-example; he includes both goodwill and a shared life as the marks of friendship, but not every friendship has both of them, and changed circumstances can turn a friendship with both characteristics into a relationship with only one. According to Aristotle, "those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends" and this is a mark of "perfect friendship."²⁶⁰ Friendships organized around utility and pleasure do not include this true goodwill, but for Aristotle this only means that it falls short of perfect friendship, not that it fails to be friendship at all. Bad men, for example, who are incapable of an ideal friendship, are bad for reasons much like those explaining the three-legged tiger; they have fallen short of nature because they have lacked the right kind of upbringing, or in some other way something went wrong, and Aristotle would not be concerned about the counter-example that their friendship poses for his theory because he doesn't need to believe that paradigm cases are always

²⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), VIII.3, 1156b10.

achieved.

So it is crucial to note that in Velleman's example, history has already intervened. The love he presents us with has already been modified by contingency. It is essential that the example would be incomprehensible if the couple did not already possess a complex history together that made it make sense for them to separate. Without this history, the example is flatly unintelligible. If the couple told us that they did not desire to have any relationship with each other in the hour they first loved each other, we could not understand what they were saying and would doubt whether they themselves knew what they meant by their words. Their actions are only intelligible in light of what has occurred between them.

The second fact deserving mention is that the example proves too much. If it succeeds then it tells against his own conception of love as much as those he is concerned with opposing. If the couple's emotional defenses against each other have truly been disengaged, then why do they find it impossible to live with each other? If they continue to love each other but are divorcing, then isn't this likely to be because they have hurt each other in the past?²⁶¹ If so, then it will be difficult to explain the couple's history and decision to separate without concluding that the emotional defenses that were disengaged at birth of their love have been replaced by new defenses responding to the injuries caused by the other partner. These injuries might be something as apparently trivial as occur when a wife cares about keeping a neat home and is put off by her husband's continued messiness and unwillingness to take what she cares about into consideration, thinking that even if he does not care about this particular object, he ought to care about what she

²⁶¹ Some people divorce because they are bored with each other.

cares about in a general way; in this instance, not caring displays a certain hardness of heart. What matters is that it is only through events like these that the partners' divorce comes to make sense, and it is because events like these raise the original emotional defenses all over again. That is, if the couple is breaking up and does not desire any relationship at all with each other because of past injuries caused by the other partner, we cannot conclude that the couple's emotional defenses are still disengaged. They may continue to feel sympathy for each other, but the kind of arresting awareness of the other person that Velleman describes could not be present. So if Velleman is correct and love is essentially this emotional disengagement, then we shall have to say either that the couple doesn't love each other after all, or that their love, like the three-legged tiger, has suffered a kind of violence and mutilation. It is not fit as a counter-example to the view that love does essentially include a desire for relationship with the beloved.

Finally, I am not convinced that we should accept the counter-example, even on its own terms. Velleman is attempting to argue that love need not include a desire to be in the beloved's company; his conclusion only requires admitting that someone could love someone and desire to not be in his company. Yet we are notoriously complex and incoherent creatures. It is not unusual for us to find conflicting desires within ourselves; it is not hard to imagine someone both desiring not to be in another person's company, and yet still wishing for his company, in the same way that a drug-user might wish not to inject himself, but still wish to do so, even simultaneously. Robert Adams mentions cases of "tragic or destructive" love in which "a close personal relationship is strongly desired by both of the parties to it although neither of them believes it will be good for either of

them.”²⁶² A case like this would be an example of a love that produced conflicting desires because two of its aims – for relationship and for the good of the beloved – could not be reconciled. Thus I worry that the plausibility of Velleman’s example depends upon trading between two different situations: one in which the couple no longer loves each other and despite vestigial sympathy simply wishes to part, and one in which the couple continues to love each other, but no longer wishes to maintain a life together because doing so would be too destructive. That is, we can imagine separating couples who simply do not wish to be with each other any more, but who no longer love each other; and separating couples who continue to love each other but are now divided about desiring the company of the other person, who continue to experience that “arresting awareness” of the other person but also find their love too problematic and emotionally disturbing to be maintained.

4.2.3. Affinities for Interpersonal Loves

How does the concept of affinity play into the account of interpersonal love, which interprets relationships as a kind of activity (in the technical sense of “activity” defined above)? It makes sense to speak of someone either having or lacking an affinity for an activity like philosophy, painting, or mountain climbing; does this carry over into the domain of relationships? Can we sensibly speak of someone having an affinity for certain relationships but not others? The ordinary usage of “affinity” is only suggestive in this regard. We do sometimes use the word to indicate people who get along exceptionally well, but this doesn’t advance our inquiry very far. The base idea we have been

²⁶² Adams, “Pure Love,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 8.1: 83–99, p. 95.

working with is that if someone loves some person or thing, then this love is ordered to some activity that the lover has an affinity for, where this activity is somehow related to uniting the lover and beloved. When someone loves another person, she expresses her love in a relationship, and relationships all include the constitutive goal of peace between lover and beloved. How do we spell out the relationship between affinities and relationships?

Earlier, when we were discussing non-personal loves, we could easily distinguish between people who possessed the affinity for the activity in question from those who did not; some people could engage in philosophy successfully and with pleasure, some could not. It is natural to pursue the following line of reasoning: does it make sense to distinguish people in respect to relationships? Can we plausibly distinguish between people who are and are not able to engage in a certain kind of relationship, say friendship? Does this make sense? We might think not. Can't any ordinary adult human being engage in most relationships? And if so, what use is the notion of affinity here?

The line of reasoning confuses types of relationships with specific relationships. Affinity continues to play an important role in interpersonal loves because it makes sense to ask whether some specific person has an affinity for a specific kind of relationship with another specific person. It is sensible to ask whether or not Jack should engage in a romantic relationship with Suzanne, or if such a relationship would be doomed to frustration; or if Jack should be friends with Frank, or if their goals are too different to allow a friendship; or whether Jack should mentor a boy named Cody. When we restrict our questions in this way, it then becomes clear that the notion of affinity continues to play a role in determining the suitability of someone's loving someone. Affinity plays a role in

determining whether someone should love another person in a certain way – *as* a romantic partner, *as* a friend, *as* a mentor. It may turn out that certain kinds of relationships are unrestricted in both domain and range; perhaps there is a kind of love and relationship that it is appropriate for everyone to seek with everyone. (In fact, I think that this is the case, but I have no argument for it.) Although the argument suggests that there are restrictions for some people for some relationships, it doesn't rule out the existence of unrestricted relationships and love.

This is one area where the difference between a potential and an actual affinity can be crucial. Consider the question of whether Jack should mentor Cody. Suppose we ask the question when Jack is 17 and is in the midst of what he'll later call his "misspent youth:" his days are filled with drugs, alcohol, partying, and violence. He is charismatic and intelligent, but uses his talents poorly. At this point he has no actual affinity for mentoring anyone. But we look again when Jack is 27. He has escaped his earlier life and begun to make a life for himself that is worth living, and possesses greater maturity and character. Cody is a young teenager in danger of following the same path Jack did at his age, but although Jack survived to make something of himself, Cody has no guarantee of doing the same. This information, combined with our knowledge of other aspects of Jack and Cody's personalities, allows us to answer the question differently. Jack's merely potential affinity for mentoring at 17 is now actual.

Affinity can be used in the same way when discussing other kinds of relationships. It also helps us to resolve a puzzle about value, virtue, and relationships. At first it might trouble us that love sometimes seems to take virtue into account, and sometimes fails to do so. When we are looking for lovers or friends, virtue seems relevant; but when

we consider our children, or when we try to love our neighbors, this seems not only irrelevant, but repulsive. In general we are rather squeamish about loving according to merit. On the other hand it is undeniable that it plays a role in our deliberations. Whence this inconsistency? Susan Wolf struggles with this for a while before writing,

The phrase, “You can do better,” offered in advising a friend about her love life or her job, is at least sometimes in order. As the use of the comparative suggests, its point is not to insist that the man or the job at issue is utterly worthless or even falls below some minimal line – it is rather that as long as one has or is in a position to cultivate having more options, there is something to be said for aiming higher for a more interesting or virtuous or appealing partner, or a more challenging or responsible or socially useful job.²⁶³

Rather than clarifying the matter, by running together “interesting,” “virtuous,” and “appealing” partners, these remarks actually serve to make it muddier. What is relevant to the question is the person’s capacity to engage in a particular kind of relationship with another particular person. Perhaps what Wolf says is correct, but insofar as we are looking for the influence of merit on love, not all of these factors are relevant. Whether someone is “interesting” or “appealing” is only likely to impact the success of a relationship if the other partner lacks virtue. When we think that merit matters to love, it is because when we seek a lover we seek someone we can share our lives with. Someone who is unjust, cowardly, intemperate, or foolish will not be easy to live with, even for a virtuous person. “You can do better” need not be directed so much at the value this person has, either as a person or as an object of interest, as to the ability this person has to engage in the relationship in question. In most cases the abilities in question are the same as those that determine the goodness of his character. The person might have a potential affinity

²⁶³ Susan Wolf, “The True, the Good, and the Lovable,” *Contours of Agency* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 232.

for the relationship, but only make this actual with greater maturity. The same holds true of friendship. There are people whom we can treat with goodwill, but cannot be friends with, because they – or we – lack certain virtues or other abilities required for friendship. It is not easy to be friends with someone who is dishonest or unjust. The love we give to children, however, is not like this; it is a love that is directed at their good, and so is not ordinarily limited in any way. The weight falls upon the parents: *they* might lack the virtues necessary to love their children well, but the children don't need any virtues to receive this love. The relationship in question doesn't require virtue of them.

Finally, the concept of affinity allows us to understand why we sometimes wish to judge a relationship to be based on a mistake or in error. A relationship can be in error when someone mistakenly judges an affinity to exist – that is, a relationship can be based in error when someone thinks that he has an affinity for a specific relationship with a specific person, but no such affinity exists, because it will be impossible to engage in such a relationship with that person successfully and with pleasure. The relationship will actually involve constant frustration, whether or not the person recognizes this frustration or not. For example, a woman might believe that she could have a successful relationship with a certain man and be encouraged to believe this by him, not realizing that he is only stringing her along because he believes that convincing her that he is committed to a long-term relationship with her is the only way he can convince her to go to bed with him. If he is a good actor her beliefs about their compatibility will be based on deceit. So despite her belief that a certain kind of romantic relationship is progressing in good order, the truth is that no romantic relationship even exists. The person she believes she has a relationship with is far too dishonest, disrespectful, and intemperate to engage in a ro-

mantic relationship with her. The same could occur in the domain of friendship; someone might only play at being friends with another person for the sake of ulterior goods such as popularity, advancement, or influence. But perhaps deception in love is most commonly caused by self-deception, when we hide our own faults or those of others from our conscious minds. We want the benefits of love even when we know they will not be forthcoming.

4.2.4. Goodwill and Relationship

Finally, let us turn to the benevolence or goodwill that appears to be a necessary concomitant of interpersonal loves, and compare its place in love to that of the desire for relationship. At first it might seem as if to love something *necessarily* involves wishing it well in *some* way. Even the man who loves something other than a person or animal wishes what he loves well. The man who loves the mountains wouldn't like to see them destroyed. But although this follows for non-egoistic loves, it is not a plausible condition to place on love in general. Someone who loves food actually wishes to destroy what he loves. He wants there to be *more* food for him to eat later, but he isn't particularly concerned with the welfare of what he wishes to eat, except insofar as this serves him. As Aristotle points out, "it would surely be ridiculous to wish wine well; if one wishes anything for it, it is that it may keep, so that one may have it oneself."²⁶⁴ Such a love is, for Aristotle, wholly related to what is good for oneself. As indicated above, however, this won't capture egoistic loves, because voluntaristic egoism is not directed towards one's own happiness, but towards establishing one's own will. Egoistic loves demand some-

²⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.2, 1155b29.

thing even stronger to be said. What someone loves need not be antecedently useful to her; loving might only be advantageous insofar as establishing her “own free unfettered choice” is, as the underground man says, her “most advantageous advantage.”²⁶⁵ So these loves are not related to what is good for oneself, nor what is good for what is loved, but what establishes, maintains, or extends the sway of one’s will. So a man who loves women, in the sense that he enjoys sleeping with them in order to establish his own power over them, might wish a partner well, but not for her own sake, nor even for the sake of his own pleasure, but only insofar as she should match whatever fantasy he has for her.

Ordinarily, it is understood that when we speak of love including goodwill, we are indicating just the non-egoistic loves that do involve goodwill. My goal here however is to deal with the general category of love in the same way that Frankfurt dealt with care. Caring for someone and caring for Guinness imply very different attitudes, but attitudes bearing the same structure. So too here; it is too often assumed that there is no deep similarity between different loves and that we can simply focus on one without ever considering the others. This strikes me as a great error. Although in one sense, love requires benevolence, it is not always so, and the loves that lack benevolence has the same generic structure as the love that requires it. Both are ongoing concerns with engaging in a certain activity with a specific object, concerns that we care about preserving and that are partially constituted by dispositions to think, feel, and act in certain ways, and which is not within our power to choose or refuse possession of. Both arise from an awareness of the

²⁶⁵ Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, Part I, Chapter 7, p. 17. The underground man himself uses scare quotes.

reality and independence of some object and a determination to bridge the independence by forging some kind of unity between oneself and what one loves. The difference between the two loves does not consist in any of these features but in the kind of unity or peace the lover seeks to establish with what he loves. If his goal is to overcome the independence by subordinating what he loves to himself, to bring what he loves within himself – so to speak – and to substitute its dependence upon himself for its independence from himself, then the love is egoistic, and appears as an especially pernicious form of gluttony, lust, or ambition.

The loves that we admire seek a different kind of peace than domination. There is not just one kind of non-egoistic love; peace might be sought by attempting to subordinate oneself to the one you love, by seeking a mutual subordination of each to the other, by means of mutual submission of each to some common standard, or by other means of finding a harmony, if there is one. Even the fact of domination does not rule out a love being non-egoistic. Parents do, and should, have charge of their children. But their dominion is not for the sake of dominion or a fantasy of a parent, but for the sake of the child; and such love in fact seeks a peace of subordination of oneself to the one whom is loved.

Now the question arises why for these loves, if love need not always possess benevolence, it should nonetheless require it in some cases. Some philosophers define love as a kind of benevolence or as essentially including it. In my own account however it is the desire to establish a relationship that has, so far, been given priority. Now it is time to make up for this. According to Robert Adams,

The benevolent person need not care who promotes the well-being of the one whom he wishes well, so long as it is promoted. But to the lover it is not indiffer-

ent who promotes the good of his beloved. He wants to be the one who serves his beloved – or at least one of those who do. Similarly the lover not only desires that misfortune and annoyances should not befall his beloved; he is particularly concerned that *he* not cause harm or displeasure to his beloved.²⁶⁶

How does one's desire for relationship and one's goodwill become entwined in this way?

This is what I aim to explain here. In my view, the reason that such loves include goodwill is rooted in the same recognition that the original desire for relationship was.²⁶⁷

Agreeing with Iris Murdoch and J. David Velleman, I said above that love is grounded in the awful realization that something *else* is *real*. As I see the matter, there are several elements to the response to this recognition. The first moment is that in which (1) the will adopts either an attitude of consent to the object's independence and reality, or a denial of it. The first attitude leads to non-egoistic loves, the latter to egoistic ones. Following on this is (2) a hunger to bring oneself and what is to be loved together, a hunger that is not easy to explain but is at least sometimes based on a perception of need, and at other times is due to more obscure motives. The combination of these two responses issues in (3) a desire to express this love in an activity achieving this union or peace in a manner reflecting the attitude of one's will, either consenting to the object's existence, or rejecting its independence. It is from here that the desire for a relationship comes. Whence benevolence? Two kinds of goodwill are present in love; the first is (4) a general goodwill arising from the attitude of consent. This consent is no grudging admission, but an enthusias-

²⁶⁶ Adams, "Pure Love," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 8.1:83–99, at p. 96.

²⁶⁷ A word about method: Velleman offers a Kantian explanation that does not, from what I can tell, connect very nearly with his treatment of the phenomenology of love. I am not going to discuss what the reason is, or whether we have reason, to act in accordance with this awareness. This is not because I do not think such a project is worthwhile, but because it seems to me to more arduous and lengthy than can be justified here. I am going to begin by simply trusting the phenomenology, because it is sufficient why we do what we do, even if it cannot explain why we should do so.

tic affirmation; to consent in this way, being glad for the existence of the object, naturally produces a desire that the object continue to exist and fare well. Thus, our desire for a relationship with those we love shares one of its two roots with our goodwill. However, this general goodwill is not exactly the goodwill normally associated with love. The goodwill of love is a product of this general goodwill in combination with our desire to express our love in an activity uniting us with what we love, (5) a desire for our own actions to honor and benefit what we love.

So, a loving mother seeks a relationship that expresses her enthusiastic consent to her child's existence, and not a relationship that makes the child an extension of her pride or molds it according to a fantasy. Because the origin of her love includes the desire to honor what she loves, it demands goodwill. She wishes her actions to express her attitude towards her child, which means she wishes to benefit her child, if she can (how miserable she will be if she can't!), and taking care not to harm (how much more miserable she will be can't). In this way the attitude of consent for what is real, and the hunger for union with what is independent, combine to explain the entwining of desire for relationship and goodwill in lovers.

Adams believes that in the case of a tragic or destructive love, the benevolent aspect will – or should – take priority if the love is genuine.²⁶⁸ Why, though? Adams himself acknowledges that Eros has no basis in a calculation of interest, and sometimes it seems good and even noble to engage in a relationship even when this is not in either party's self-interest, to let the union triumph, whatever the cost to the lovers. C. S. Lewis points out,

²⁶⁸ Adams, "Pure Love," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 8.1:83–99, at p. 95.

Everyone knows that it is useless to try to separate lovers by proving to them that their marriage will be an unhappy one. This is not only because they will disbelieve you. They usually will, no doubt. But even if they believed, they would not be dissuaded. For it is the very mark of Eros that when he is in us we had rather share unhappiness with the Beloved than be happy on any other terms....To Eros...calculations are irrelevant...Eros never hesitates to say, "better this than parting. Better to be miserable with her than happy without her. Let our hearts break provided they break together."...This is the grandeur and terror of love.²⁶⁹

What is to be said about this? Is it more noble to call off the love, because of a concern with happiness, or to consummate it with all the more determination for the pain in which it is borne? In all loves other than Eros – by which I mean romantic love involving two persons – I believe that Adams is correct to say that one's goodwill must triumph over one's desire for union with what is loved. This is because to destroy what one loves conflicts with the basic consent of the will to what one loves, which determines the form of the activity with which one seeks union. An activity that is intended to express consent to the beloved's existence and well-being would become incoherent if it were also destructive of the beloved's well-being. The ground for the love prohibits harm. Eros, however, demands a more thorough treatment. Its case is more complicated.

4.2.5. Eros

The reason Eros is more complicated than other loves is the complexity of the union sought. A relationship of complete submission, complete domination, or mutual submission to a common goal or standard is relatively simple to describe. It is easy to see the sense in which any of these relationships can be termed "peace." In each of these three relationships either one party, or a third party, is made the standard under which the two

²⁶⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), p. 107.

are united. The union is a straightforward affair: one person submits to another, or dominates another, or two persons each submit to a common standard; the intoxicating union sought in Eros differs from all of these. In Eros each partner submits to the other and makes the other his or her own standard. Each partner focuses his or her attention entirely upon the other partner and is entirely wrapped up in pleasing and benefiting the other partner. In a relationship where one person rules the other, there is a single standard for both persons: the good, or will, or rule, of the ruling partner. This is not always despotic; it is to this that a philosopher's love of wisdom, or a climber's love of the mountains, is akin. The lover is remolded to fit the beloved. The reverse, however, when one partner simply establishes his will as the standard for another person, is egoistic love. In friendship, where both persons are devoted to a single end, there is again a single standard covering both partners.

But in Eros the partners' goal and standard is union itself. Each partner is simply devoted to union with the other partner, and in practical terms, this standard operates quite differently for each of them: each partner must fit him- or herself to the other person, must harmonize his or her goals with the goals of the other person, and must seek to please the other person. Not only does this leave room for a great deal of specialization, as Nozick points out,²⁷⁰ it requires certain kinds of specialization: each partner specializes in delighting the other partner, and as each partner's interests and pleasures are distinct from the other's, the two will specialize in very different kinds of pleasing. Therefore

²⁷⁰ Nozick includes "a certain kind of division of labor" as a suggested criterion for the formation of joint identity at the heart of love. (So too does Marx see the division of labor at the heart of marriage, but for Marx the division of labor is a rather pernicious thing). *The Examined Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 72.

they have different standards than each other – at the highest level their goal is identical, for it is their own union, but their practical standards are different from each other’s because their practical standards *are* each other. Eros is a play of mutual submission, and its union is a dance. It is a dance because each partner must constantly respond to the other partner, while the other partner is him- or herself responding to the first partner. So although many kinds of peace or union have a certain degree of stasis, because their standards are relatively fixed, the union of Eros is not static but evolving. This is not to say that erotic partners do not seek a peace with each other. They constantly seek to be in harmony with each other and to bring goals and interests into unity. Peace here is defined not in opposition to activity, but in opposition to war and to indifference.²⁷¹ A country at peace is not a country whose life has been stilled, but a country within which the elements of life requiring community – such as trade, science, and the arts – may flourish and there is a single political order integrating each part of the country into one whole. Eros seeks the most intimate – perhaps Quixotic – peace of all, the peace of a completely shared life of attentional and telic interpenetration wherein each life comes to include the goals defining the other.

To what does this union amount? Lovers wish to possess each other and to be possessed by each other, seeking what Robert Nozick describes as a “we.” As I see it the heart of the union *is* the union; that is, the heart of the union is the harmonization of goals and each partner’s directing his or her attention to the other person’s goals and pleasures. The lovers seek a peace consisting in the submission of each to the other in the sense that each lover’s standard becomes the other lover. Making the other person one’s standard

²⁷¹ See 4.1.2 above.

consists in allowing the other person's goals to shape one's own, to become one's own. This need not be mindless: if you love someone who has a foolish or wicked goal, you need not adopt it, and would love her better by helping her change the goal than by helping her achieve it. You should seek what is good for your partner in addition to her more explicit goals. I call this "telic interpenetration" because both lovers, insofar as they are lovers, practice this adoption of ends, so that the goals of each end up penetrating each other's.

Friendship requires shared attention, but in friendship this requires each friend to pay attention to just the same things: they share an interest in movies, books, or political causes. The harmony of goals grounds the love and directs its focus. Eros, rather than springing from shared goals, produces them, and rather than relying upon shared attention, turns the attention of each partner to the other. Lovers focus their attention upon each other, both in being alert to what affects each other and in simply thinking about the other person, looking at the other person, delighting in the other person, a focus that is very intense during infatuation and later needs to be regularly maintained by engaging in specific activities – dates, sex – that allow the lovers to focus attention upon each other. This is not different in kind from the way that climbers focus their attention upon the mountain and climbing, or philosophers focus attention upon philosophical questions, and needing to do this periodically to maintain their love. Telic interpenetration is not sufficient for Eros. Two persons whose goals shaped each other, but not because each person was focused on the other person and concerned with this harmonization, would not have Eros. Making love – as opposed to sex simply – is the most intense and perhaps even most perfect manifestation of this aspect of Eros, as it is the time when each person's at-

tention is most focused upon delighting and delighting in the other person and the goals of each become most thoroughly woven together.

Nozick draws attention to a different interpenetration, that of well-being with autonomy. Speaking of well-being, he says, “[bad] things that happen to your loved one happen to you. But so too do good things.”²⁷² Well-being is shared, and each lover wishes to care for the well-being of the other lover. Lovers also limit their individual “decision-making power and rights” as to decisions about important matters that can be made together.²⁷³ These are important points, but they are the results of Eros’ union, not its constitution.

In many ways the love of wisdom at the heart of philosophy is like Eros because it involves an exhilarating submission of the mind and will to the pursuit of truth and the unraveling of wonder. The same might be said of loves for nature, for painting, for scientific understanding, and for anything else in pursuit of which it is worthwhile to devote a human life. But the love of wisdom is utterly unlike human Eros in that the truth does not submit to us in return. Christian love for God, however, involves an ecstasy more akin to human Eros: the message of the Gospel is that God has, in defiance of all human expectations, come down to us, so that in a certain way there *is* a mutual submission and devotion: Paul describes marriage as an image of Christ and the Church because each completely submits to the other. Christ, of course, takes the lead in this dance; mutual submission implies that there is no domination, not that there is no one to lead. So, too, merely human Eros need not exclude one partner’s taking the lead in the dance of love,

²⁷² Nozick, *The Examined Life*, p. 70.

²⁷³ Nozick, *The Examined Life*, p. 71.

only such leading is not domination, and it must be devoted to enjoying and benefiting the other partner – to continuing the dance. Taking the lead cannot mean turning the union towards the imposition of one’s own fantasies upon the other person, reducing him or her into a thing of fancy, nor towards the meeting of one’s own needs or one’s own pleasure. Partners might, perhaps, *play* at such domination, but that is not the same as turning Eros into domination. In any case I am not certain that human beings, as they are, can manage merely to play at domination; it is, at the very least, difficult to tell whether or not this is not just another guise for the same old *libido dominandi*, the lust for mastery that has to be expelled from non-egoistic loves, and ultimately not just another way to transform erotic life from the admiration of another person into the admiration of “one’s own capacity for sovereignty.”²⁷⁴

This complex interplay complicates the relationship between goodwill and the desire for relationship at the heart of love. When we compared them above it seemed that goodwill must triumph over the desire for relationship, because the attitude of consent determined the shape of the relationship the lover sought with his beloved. When we love someone we wish to engage in an activity that expresses our attitude towards this person. A destructive relationship would not express this attitude. But in Eros, where there is mutual submission of each partner to the other, it becomes difficult to separate enthusiastic gratitude for the other person’s existence from that other person’s own desire for union with oneself. We lose sight of any self belonging to the other person antecedent to our mutual love. The person we enthusiastically respond to is him- or herself wrapped up in

²⁷⁴ John C. Cavadini, “Feeling Right: Augustine on the Passions and Sexual Desire,” *Augustinian Studies* 36:1: 195–217, at p. 209.

us; if I am devoted to my wife's goals, then I am devoted to meeting her need to love me, and both our union is important to both her and myself. Nozick is correct to say, "the central fact about love is the relationship between the lovers" and "[the] central concern of lovers, as lovers ... is the other person, and the relation between the two of them."²⁷⁵ So when we must ask if the relationship conflicts with our enthusiastic consent to the other person, we cannot divide the beloved's good from our relationship with the beloved in any simple way; for his or her good *includes* the relationship itself. More prosaic concerns fall by the wayside when they are compared with the good of union in Eros; as the Song of Solomon (8:7) declares,

*If a man offered for love
all the wealth of his house,
he would be utterly despised.*

So must lovers renounce a mutually destructive love? This hinges upon what is "destroyed." If we are speaking of material resources for happiness – say because the lovers are of different races and will be outcast from society if they marry, or because they belong to families who hate each other and who will disown them if they marry, or because they might lose standing within society for some other reason – it isn't obvious that these considerations should outweigh the good of the union itself. Their own union may well hold more importance to each lover than any of these things.

But it is far from clear that Eros is so important that it can trump all concerns whatsoever. If the lovers possess any love other than Eros, and their mutual love would destroy *this* love, then we cannot conclude that their desire for union ought to trump all. No Christian, for example, would think that one ought to sacrifice one's love for God for

²⁷⁵ Nozick, *The Examined Life*, p. 80.

one's love for another human being, and few would think that one ought to sacrifice one's already existing children's happiness for the sake of such a union, if such a union would mean that they would badly suffer. In other cases, Eros might well have the right of the exchange. But unless Eros is destructive of another love it is an open question, I think, whether it ought to be renounced for the sake of the beloved's well-being. Eros itself holds too important a place within the beloved's well-being to be separated from it.

However, it might well be that Adams is thinking of something different than any of these situations when he speaks of "tragic and destructive" love. He might have in his mind a situation involving two persons who are utterly incompatible with each other. Now I personally think that we often overplay "compatibility." But as I argued in the section on affinity in interpersonal love, affinity between two persons for a relationship requires consideration: when the persons are not sufficiently virtuous, or perhaps I should say when the persons are excessively vicious, union might prove impossible. In *these* circumstances, deliberation is quite different. An impossible or nearly impossible union cannot stand as one of the most important goods in a person's life. One does not pull back from the love because something outweighs the union, but because one doesn't believe that union will in fact come off. When someone does not believe that he could succeed in forming a union it is not a betrayal of love to abandon its prospects.

4.3. Plato, Nygren, and Augustine: A theological aside

It is Augustine's conception of Caritas that comes closest to articulating both Eros and divine Agape, for Augustine alone conceives of a love that involves a union of mutual activity and submission. Plato's conception of Eros falters, not because of its pur-

ported egoism, but because it is overly focused upon the experience of one individual lover, and struggles to articulate what is involved in mutual love (despite the brilliant myth he puts into the mouth of Aristophanes). Plato has many things to say about love, especially a love that yearns for what is still beyond it, but few words about consummated love. Indeed in Plato's view there is only activity on one side of the relationship, and love's consummation is also its expiration.²⁷⁶ For Augustine, by way of contrast, love is intensified with consummation. There is no question of love grounding an ideal requiring mutual interplay. On the other hand, Nygren's concept of Agape encounters difficulties because it, too, is too one-sided, focusing excessively upon the lover. Nygren has very little to say about fellowship, although he conceives of this as the very goal of Agape; his conception of love puts all the weight upon the lover, leaving nothing for the beloved. Now the New Testament calls both the love of God for man, and of man for God, "agape." So Nygren's characterization of Agape entirely in terms of the love of God for man – as unmotivated, self-emptying, etc. – cannot easily be applied to both of these loves, and naturally he finally gives up the love of man for God, replacing it simply with "faith."²⁷⁷ Thus, despite many difficulties with his view, Augustine alone seems to me to have come very close to describing this love correctly, and only after much labor; for he alone made love between man and God into a love involving mutual activity; i.e., interaction and response. His conception of Agape is better than Nygren's *because* it is more like Eros – I mean Eros as it is – and better captured why Paul, for example, relies so heavily upon images from Eros to explain the love between Christ and his bride, the

²⁷⁶ See e.g. Plato, *Symposium*, 204a.

²⁷⁷ See e.g. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 127.

Church. Augustine's doctrine of love has many defects – including its failure to explicate, or even come close to explicating, his conception of the love a Christian ought to bear for his fellows, his neighbors, and his enemies – and I am not at all saying that his doctrine of Caritas contains a serious and explicit account of the mutual interplay between lover and beloved. This element may not receive an explicit treatment, but in Augustine's Caritas it is nevertheless present.

Nygren treats Augustine's Caritas as a "synthesis" of Eros and Agape, treating God's Agape as a means to man's Eros.²⁷⁸ If one defines Eros simply as what Plato meant, this might – might – make some sense; but the truth is more that Augustine conceives of Agape as a spiritual form of Eros, Eros not in Plato's sense, but in the sense of being a "dance" between two partners. Agape, or Caritas, cannot of course be quite like human Eros. For one thing the two partners are not even close to being equals – there is an infinite distance between them – and this means that God's humbling himself for the sake of man is qualitatively different than man's loving response to God. God's side of the bargain makes no sense; it is "divine foolishness." God's love leads, and must lead. This is the heart of Augustine's charge against Platonism.²⁷⁹ These criticisms of the Platonists for failing to see the necessity of God's love preceding man's should be applied with double force because the point is not just theological and soteriological, but should be extended to our underlying conception of love. It is true that Augustine himself does not appear interested in analyzing human Eros or in viewing Caritas as, precisely, a love of mutual response. But the glimmers are there and the seeds of a more *social* view of

²⁷⁸ Nygren makes this point many times, e.g., saying that for Augustine "Agape is a necessary corrective, without which Eros cannot reach its goal" (*Agape and Eros*, p. 472).

²⁷⁹ He makes this charge in many places, e.g., *Confessions* VII.9.14.

love are planted. As flawed as it is, Augustine's Caritas is a better representation of Eros than Plato's and a better representation of Agape than Nygren's.

It is also possible that if Augustine had paid more attention to this element of mutual response he might have solved the defect just mentioned, regarding how to encompass within Caritas love for other human beings. For if Eros involves the unification of the two lovers' goals, then it is plain why, if love for God is akin to Eros, Caritas would produce love for others. For in loving us God has adopted our goal of happiness as one of his own goals, and in loving him we adopt his goals, which includes his love for others. This view might, in fact, legitimize Augustine's theoretical view that others are loved as a "means" to loving God, if we understand the concept of a means to include the concept of a part. First, for someone to be motivated by Eros to seek union with another person requires him to incorporate the other person's goals into his own, not precisely as means to this union, but as a part of achieving this union; and second, this adoption of goals requires *actually* adopting these as goals – that is, it requires loving these persons the same way that God loves them. That is, if Agape is a kind of Eros, then it can include Nygren's idea that our love for others must be a way of acting as a "channel" for God's love for others precisely because it is like Eros

4.4. Love Based on Need, Authentic and False

Many people today give love based in need short shrift. Philosophers and theologians are tempted to view it as less than love, or at least very different from the loves about which we care. They view such love as egoistic or at the very least as being motivated in the wrong way. I do not share this view. Love is an ongoing concern with

achieving union or peace with someone or something through engaging an activity for which you have an affinity, and this idea of love is able to include love based on need. We must consider how someone comes to love what they need. This happens when someone recognizes his dependence upon something, determining to cling to it to prevent his own mental, emotional, spiritual, or physical anguish or dissolution. This is the love that young children express for their parents and religious adherents for their gods. It is also the love present in many egoistic and even neurotic loves, which is one reason why many people dismiss it. This is because they do not take care to distinguish between genuine need and willful need.

Although every love – as I see it, anyway – begins with a “hunger” for what is loved, this hunger marking all loves is not a ground for the love, but a response to the ground. Someone may acquire a hunger to understand something provoking wonder, but this hunger doesn’t exist prior to his puzzlement. When love is based in need, however, the lover begins with the recognition that if he is to avoid anguish or even death then he must achieve a kind of union with something else, whether by submitting to it, clinging to it, incorporating it into himself, or in some other way. This is not to say that all need produces love. People need water, for example, but I suppose that in ordinary circumstances no one loves it, despite that fact that drinking is plainly an activity that achieves union of the most literal kind. In the same way it is possible to conceive of a scenario in which all persons depend upon a bureaucracy to meet some need, and to receive its support they must submit to its authority, but it is hard to imagine those living under these conditions coming to love the bureaucracy upon which they depend and to which they submit. No one loves a bureaucracy. It may even be possible to hate that upon which you depend,

either because of your dependence, or because of its hatefulness. Someone who longs for independence may hate the guardian upon whom he depends, but the clearest example of hatred based on need is the hatred held for a blackmailer, someone who exploits one's needs.

What conditions need to hold for a need to ground love? I can see three conditions that, to the degree that they obtain, produce conditions favorable to loving what supplies us with a need: (i) The supplier of the need has an important and vital role in supplying the need, either *constituting* what we need, or *producing* what meets the need, or *providing* it after it has been produced (the first of these being more likely to produce love, the last least likely); (ii) it is possible to take pleasure in interaction with the supplier of the need; (iii) the supplier of the need does not produce frustration in other parts of one's life. The bureaucracy fails both (i) and (ii); drinking water can be pleasant, but finding something pleasant – even intensely pleasurable – is not the same as taking pleasure in something, and so water fails (ii); the resented guardian fails (iii); a blackmailer usually fails all three conditions. These conditions encourage and support love for the supplier of a need, but they are not strictly necessary. In a given situation the supplier of a need might come to be loved even if one of the conditions fails.

When these conditions are met, however, then it is common for someone seeking union with the supplier of a need through some relationship or activity and who takes pleasure in this activity to love the supplier. Many needs are met precisely by achieving a kind of peace or union with something supplying this need, and since this is central to the activity of love, it is not surprising that need should so often produce love. The structure of meeting a need already comes so close to love that it is easy to slide from one to the

other. When we meet a need we frequently engage in an activity with the supplier of the need for which we have an affinity and in which we take pleasure – e.g., the relationship that a young child has with its mother supplies its many needs but also provides it with pleasure, and instinct is enough, once this relationship is established, to make it an ongoing concern. Or when we eat to supply a need for food, we engage in an activity that literally makes the supplier of the need one with us and in which it is both easy and natural not only to find pleasant, but to take pleasure in; so many people come to love food, the glutton most of all. In the same way does a religious worshipper come to love the god he worships when he comes to him out of need and submits himself to his rule and takes pleasure in the one he serves. In meeting a need, we are frequently so far along the road to love that very little is required to make us love one who supplies us with what we need.²⁸⁰ Custom, if nothing else, can turn pleasure into love.

So it is also natural that those who supply a need frequently come to love those whose needs they supply. They too engage in the same activity or relationship, in virtue of which a kind of peace or union is maintained between them, and if they take pleasure in this activity, then they too shall come to love those whose needs are met in the relationship. However, this only seems to occur if the supplier has a sufficiently vivid sense of the recipient. Infants and kittens and similar cases easily evoke this love because of the vividness with which their needs strike us. Without a vivid sense of the other person, affection or pity may be possible, but meeting his needs is unlikely to lead to love, as a

²⁸⁰ Does it simplify matters or make them more complex for Augustine when he makes all action, including the maintenance of bodily health, the satisfaction of appetites, and acting under right reason, as seeking peace? Those two categories include most of what we would call needs, and this implies that in meeting them we are by definition seeking peace – not a peace with the object, *per se*, but a peace *through* the object, i.e., we do not seek a new peace with the object, but maintain the peace of our bodies, e.g., with the object.

worker in a daycare setting who has many children to care for may discover. Even infants will not evoke love when they are not vivid enough to us.²⁸¹

Why are loves based in need so disreputable, then? Many might suggest that there is a certain selfishness present in such love that sullies it. But this is not always true, and even when it is, I think that the selfishness is misunderstood. Selfishness is not simply seeking one's own happiness or welfare. This becomes selfishness only when it is rooted in an insistent willfulness, demanding one's own at unreasonable expense to others. Selfishness requires the elevation of oneself over others. Perhaps the idea is that they aren't *selfless* enough? No doubt they are very different from selfless loves, perhaps even inferior to them, but this doesn't mean that they aren't love. However, there is no requirement that a need-love should be based in such willfulness.

According to Harry G. Frankfurt's distinction between two kinds of need, two kinds of need-love can be distinguished: categorical need and "false" need.²⁸² Both kinds of needs involve what someone cannot help desiring, and from which someone will suffer frustration if he fails to obtain it. But a categorical need precedes the desire; e.g., Batman may desire to find a hidden bomb because otherwise it will kill him. A false need, on the other hand, is fully volitional. It does not reflect a preexisting need. Rather, the desire for the object creates the need. Frankfurt illustrates the moral difference between these two

²⁸¹ Although I include both a love based on having a need met, and one based on meeting a need, I do not think that all love can be classified as either "need-love" or "gift-love," as C. S. Lewis did. For the sake of clarity, I would only identify something as one of these types if the love expresses itself in an activity or relationship devoted to meeting a need. Other loves may involve giving and receiving – notably romantic or erotic love – but are not grounded in meeting a need. In fact, it seems plausible that if someone loves something, then he needs it, but only because he loves it.

²⁸² See Harry Frankfurt, "Necessity and Desire," in *The Importance of What We Care About*, pp. 112–116.

kinds of needs through the example of a man with a gratuitous and perverse desire for a sports car:

[Suppose] a man is seized by the *idée fixe* that his life will be worthless unless he has a certain sports car; and suppose the frustration of his desire for the car would be so deep that it would indeed ruin his life. The man cannot help wanting the car, and he wants it so badly that he will suffer sustained and crippling misery unless he obtains it.²⁸³

We cannot feel that the man's desire was prompted by the actual qualities of the car. It is not some feature it possesses, which he cannot live without, that renders his life worthless. Rather, if his life becomes worthless, it will only be because the desire he has for the car – a desire that he need not possess – is frustrated. Not all such needs are so absurd; Stump imagines “needing” to listen to Beethoven in this way. But such needs are not on all fours with other needs.

Now, many need-loves are based in volitionally grounded needs. These usually involve an insistence upon having one's way, the force of long habit, or a false understanding of what one needs: one of these or all three. This explains a comment made by Augustine in the *Confessions*:

So also when the delight of eternity draws us upwards and the pleasure of temporal good holds us down, the identical soul is not wholehearted in its desire for one or the other. It is torn apart in a painful condition, as long as it prefers the eternal because of its truth but does not discard the temporal because of its familiarity.²⁸⁴

If we understand Augustine to be thinking of a need-love then we can understand why he would describe one love as drawing by its truth, and another because of its familiarity.

Augustine did not actually need wealth, honor, and sexual pleasure. His life would not be

²⁸³ Frankfurt, “Necessity and Desire,” *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 113.

²⁸⁴ *Confessions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), VIII.10.24: “ita etiam, cum aeternitas delectat superius et temporalis boni voluptas retentat inferius, eadem anima est non tota voluntate illud aut hoc volens; et ideo discerpitur gravi molestia, dum illud veritate praeponit, hoc familiaritate non ponit.”

worthless if he lacked these. But they continued to draw him by the force of custom and by nagging self-deception. His need for the eternal, however, was genuine. With all due respect for Eleonore Stump, she is wrong to say, speaking of Augustine's restless desire for God, "what is needed is not needed in order to ward off deficiency or remedy a defect in Augustine," and to interpret his need as being based in nothing "*other than the fulfillment of the desire itself.*"²⁸⁵ As Paul J. Griffiths says in a related context, "This is to give altogether too much independence to *natura.*"²⁸⁶ For Augustine, it is an essential fact about created natures that they are created *ex nihilo* and tend towards nothingness without their Creator. A human person's need for the eternal is indeed quite real and logically precedes his desire for it.

This sort of love deserves disrepute. It is harmful to the lovers and annoying to those around them. Despite being so destructive, such loves are difficult to eliminate. Love based in need is probably the most persistent and demanding form of love. Its initial impetus derives from our desire for happiness and for freedom from pain. It feeds on these desires and is increased by them, and then becomes confirmed in our character as habit, becoming disorders like gluttony, anorexia, or bottomless greed. The person loves something that is not needed, but is believed necessary, and hence loved. Even when the truth is known, the force of custom draws the person back to the same practices. The anguish of giving these things up does not derive from any genuine need, but from the roots that custom have established in him and the pain of breaking his will.

²⁸⁵ Eleonore Stump, "Presence and Omnipresence," *Liberal Faith: Essays in Honor of Phil Quinn* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), p. 72. Emphasis in original.

²⁸⁶ Paul J. Griffiths, "Self-Annihilation or Damnation?" *Liberal Faith: Essays in Honor of Phil Quinn* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), p. 115n39.

When we think of a love based in need, we might also be thinking of the “needy lover” who clings to the person he or she loves, making an undignified show of how necessary this person is for his or her well-being. We’re repulsed to see such love, but this is not because love based on need is inherently repulsive, but because the need in question is plainly untrue. It is also quite different from needing those we love, just because we love them: We see nothing unseemly in a mother being evacuated from a city about to come under attack during a war declaring that she needs her children, because we understand that this need is based on her love, and not a basis for it. The needy lover however does not need the other person to the degree that is declared, or rather, the need is based entirely in some neurotic fantasy. So although this love is repulsive, it is not an indictment of love based in need. Instead, it illustrates how love based in need ought indeed to be based on genuine need. A lover might need someone in order to satisfy sexual desire (which is the ordinary, and generally acceptable, context for saying “I need you”), but not in order to have a worthwhile life.

Before we finish with the relationship between need and love, we must consider self-love. All love seeks a kind of union, or peace; what self-love seeks is the continuation of a person’s own peace, that is, his integrity and unity as a person. It is thus related to whatever he needs. If a person loves himself, then he ought to respond appropriately to whatever he needs, just because he needs it and he loves himself. Thus someone’s love for himself consists largely in seeking out whatever else he loves, because what he needs is in large part just what he loves. It also consists in attempting to unify these loves for the sake of his own unity. Because self-love consists primarily in devotion to what one loves, it is not inherently unethical. It can become so if what someone loves is itself

wicked, or if the love becomes egoistic. Self-love is not inherently egoistic: it always seeks happiness because in seeking what it loves, it is seeking what makes it happy; but egoistic self-love seeks not happiness, but its own way, and the most striking feature of an egoistic self-love is that it rejects any happiness that does not come on its own terms. The devil knew what he was losing when he rejected Heaven.

4.5. The Nature of Love

Love is essentially an ongoing concern with engaging in a certain activity achieving union with what is loved. This activity aims to bring the lover and beloved into a kind of unity and is constrained by the affinities of the lover and beloved and by the adequacy of the activity for expressing the lover's attitude towards what he loves. It is prompted either by an especially vivid awareness of what is to be loved as something real, both existing and independent of the one who is to love, that produces a desire to seek unity with what is to be loved, or by engaging in an activity such as a lover would choose with some object, and becoming aware of the goodness or value of what is to be loved in that manner. An incipient love becomes a mature love when the attitude prompting the lover to seek union with what he loves becomes a disposition of his will. A relationship is a form of activity seeking peace with a person.

This account of love avoids both the trap into which Frankfurt fell and the one that prevented Kantians like Velleman from solving the problem. Frankfurt couldn't provide an adequate explanation of caring and love because he did not permit these the possibility of possessing grounds; they were themselves the first grounds of action, in the sense that one's true interests for which one acted were determined by these concerns, but

these concerns had no grounds whatsoever. But without grounds it becomes difficult to understand how dissociation can take place or how we can explain what happens when someone ceases to care about something in virtue of dissociating it. Kantians like Velleman at least offer grounds for love, but their concern is too narrow to canvas action generally. Kantian love and respect are concerned exclusively with persons and the structure that Kantians assign to these attitudes is heavily imbued with these concerns. One cannot use a Kantian account of love to explain *akrasia*, for example, something that Frankfurt's account was most clearly designed to say something about.

This account solves the initial difficulty by finding cognitive bases for loving something and by expanding the notion of love to cover a far broader array of attitudes than a Kantian account can manage. It provides two kinds of cognitive basis for love. The first of these rests in the attitude that love expresses. These attitudes are those arising from judging something to have a certain kind of value; what kind of value one judges it to have partially determines what kind of love one should bear towards it. The kind of love that Kantians are most frequently interested in, the love of a person *as* a person like ourselves, can be accounted for by this theory; but I am supposing that Velleman's love is, in my terms, more like "incipient love" than love *per se*, an invitation to love but not the actual passion. This may amount to no more than quibbling about words, but love appears to be something *active* and therefore it is hard to accept the idea that love is no more than the disarming of our emotional defenses. This might be accomplished by a kind of profound compassion – the kind of compassion that is often associated with love – but it is difficult to call it love. What Velleman calls love is really an attitude that love can seek to express, not love itself, the seed from which the tree may grow, but not ex-

actly the tree itself.

There is a second cognitive basis for love that avoids the objections of both anti-realists about value and those who may be realists about value, but do not think that value grounds love. The anti-realist is likely to say that the first basis only grounds love in a feeling, not in a fact about what is loved; the most we could get from this would be a Lockean account of secondary qualities. The other objector will say that this account still provides no good explanation for why we love the things we do, and provides no reason for loving one person over another or one thing over another thing. But we can deploy the account of affinity to cover this flank. To the first objector, the anti-realist, we can say that what someone has an affinity for is grounded in objective fact, and is not an immediate expression of his will or preferences. Whether a person has an affinity for some person or object, i.e., for some kind of relationship or activity centered on this person or object, depends upon facts about the person and what he is to love. It is possible to make mistakes about what to love or how to love something because it is possible to make mistakes about what one has an affinity for, and these mistakes are not just mistakes of instrumental rationality. To the second, we can point out that the concept of affinity likewise limits what he can love and the manner in which he can love it; and the requirement that love be expressed in activity limits how many objects he can profitably love. (Or at least it limits the kind of love he can have towards them; one can love many people and seek only fellowship with them, but one cannot be *friends* with the same number.) My judgment that I have an affinity to engage in a certain activity with something – the thought that I am fit for something – is grounds for engaging in this activity and loving with this object. Affinity, then, provides us with a limited account of the cognitive basis

for loving something that can be accepted even by anti-realists and others who do not think that love can be held accountable to anything.

CHAPTER 5:
VIRTUE AND THE CONSTITUTION OF LOVE

To love something is in part to possess an ongoing concern with engaging with it in a certain way. Having an ongoing concern with something is itself in part to possess a set of volitional dispositions relating to the object of concern. It is crucial to note the importance of dispositions in loving something. When we are concerned with something we are disposed to possess certain desires towards it, desires that accord with our good will towards the object of our concern. We do not love something if we *only* possess corresponding higher-order attitudes. Someone cannot love philosophy unless he possesses the desire to *engage in* philosophy; it isn't enough to simply wish he had this desire. Nor is it enough to have an irregular, transitory, and but recurring desire to engage in philosophy, like a desire for a burrito. Someone who loves something, however, is disposed to possess the relevant desires at appropriate times corresponding to his attitude towards what he loves. Otherwise, such a concern would be feckless; this is one reason why the Stoics, beginning with Chrysippus, required *two* judgments at the base of every emotion, one judging something good or bad, another judging a certain reaction appropriate to the circumstances. Richard Sorabji explains that, for the Stoics, "an impulse is stirred not by the first appearance that there is good or bad at hand, but only by the second appearance of

how it is appropriate to react,” and the same holds true of love.²⁸⁷ Love desires to seek union through an activity, but this is not enough to prompt action. A lover must not only think that doing so is worthwhile, he must approve more specific courses of action. A certain man loves a woman; it is her birthday; therefore, he wants to do something special to please her; or if she is in danger, he will wish to protect her from it.

For the moment I am going to call such dispositions, which produce desires to engage with what we love in certain ways and suppress contrary desires, *focusing dispositions*. They direct our attention and emotions to respond to what we love in ways we judge appropriate. Sometimes focusing dispositions must compete with other impulses to direct our attention or prompt out feelings; then they must act to suppress these competitors. If someone loves something he does not allow just any desire he has to override his desires to engage with what he loves; he might allow this if what he loves interferes with something else that is important to him, but if he loves something he is quite willing to ignore many matters and treat them as unimportant distractions. If Henry Crawford of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* had loved Fanny Price better, he would not have allowed his vanity to provoke him into seducing Maria Rushworth. A better lover than he would have experienced the full rebellion of his feelings against the impulse to do so.

Insofar as these dispositions become confirmed parts of who we are, they become true elements of our character. In this way love produces character. Ordinarily, forming a second-order desire need not shape our first-order desires. Love alters these because it produces focusing dispositions. Love changes who we are because acting on these desires

²⁸⁷ Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 33.

transforms our dispositions for a desire into a settled habit of desire. I think that when Augustine spoke of us becoming what we love, this is part of what he meant: Loving something produces dispositions to desire certain things; obedience to love confirms these dispositions within our character as settled traits; thus our character slowly becomes adapted to that of what we love. The first objects that a child loves then can have a profound influence on the person that child becomes. The doctrine of original sin can be understood in part as stating that we are all born with a certain kind of *self*-love that infects and interferes with everything else we do because, as our original love, it is most deeply confirmed in our character and has shaped our desires for the greatest length of time.

But although loving something entails having focusing dispositions, it does not entail that the lover will always have the appropriate desires. Most of us our focusing dispositions are crude. Sometimes a lover will ardently desire to possess a specific desire – say, the desire to bravely defend someone he loves in public – but never acquire the desire in question. Or he might passionately desire to no longer desire something that conflicts with his love – he might love to do philosophy and, knowing that his desire to drink interferes with this, wish that he didn't have this desire – but never eliminate the conflicting desire. Or a lover might wish that his desires were more responsive to the fine grain of circumstances, or that his desires were driven less by first impressions and better reflected his settled judgment about his beloved. Loving something requires that we have certain dispositions. Loving something *well* requires something in addition. It seems to require that the dispositions be strengthened, fine-tuned, and regulated by practical wisdom. That is: Loving well requires something like virtue. Loving something well requires that our focusing dispositions function in ways akin to the virtues of bravery, temperance,

justice, practical wisdom, and other virtues. Aristotle spoke of virtues as settled dispositions of the mind or soul that determine what we feel and what we do and that are regulated by practical wisdom, and here we can see that this is exactly what the lover needs. His dispositions must become regulated by an understanding of what is important about what he loves.

I'm going to trace out this connection in three stages. First I am going to sketch out a "relativized" account of virtue, which I will call "quasi-virtue." Quasi-virtue is virtue relative to an object of love. It is not what would ordinarily be called virtue because it might be subordinated to a wicked or evil object, e.g., tyranny. Quasi-virtue is what would count as virtue if it were to act *as if* what the person loves were the human good itself, rather than some more limited object. Sketching out the relationship of virtue and love is a useful way to see the relationship that holds between them, and can help us to understand both love and virtue better. Love, I will argue, is constituted by virtue. We will begin with the simplest case, a monophiliac who loves only one object, and then consider the more complex case of someone who loves more than one object. This leads us to the second stage: The role that wholeheartedness or peace must necessarily play as a normative standard for love. Quasi-virtue requires wholeheartedness or peace. It is here that we can see why Frankfurt would give wholeheartedness so great a place within his "moral" philosophy and also see how this demand is connected to a certain kind of virtue ethics. This standard also provides the resources we will need in the next chapter to explain *akrasia*. Finally, we'll consider, in outline, how the whole account can be put together into *full* virtue.

5.1. Quasi-virtue

5.1.1. Loving and Loving Well

There is a difference between loving something and loving something well. It is true that we do not actually speak of someone loving well or loving poorly, but our practice testifies for us; we constantly judge love, either criticizing its failures or being pleased by its purity. Who has not criticized himself for failing to love someone as he judged that he ought? The difference between loving well and loving poorly does not consist in the lover's powers of execution: the Spartans and their armor-bearers who fell at Thermopylae did not love Sparta less well than if they had succeeded in repelling the Persians. The question concerns character. More precisely, it concerns those causes of success and failure internal to the agent, particularly his will. It is not the man who dies at the hands of the enemies of his country whose love for his country fails, but the one whose fear prevents him from doing what his love demands of him. The coward may love his country – but he didn't love it *well*. The will he wanted to possess was not the will he had. Probably no one need look beyond the circle of his own experience for examples of unrewarded excellence and undeserved failure. Parents who loved their children well, but could not save their lives; parents who loved their children, but whose fear or greed or vanity prevented them from doing what their love demanded of them.

Although there are many ways that we can fail to live up to our love, it is not difficult to classify the main avenues of failure. An ongoing concern consists in part in a higher-order desire in favor of certain desires related to the object of concern. As we all know, even when we at least possess the desire we approve of, approval is not enough to

produce action. Why not? One problem is that conflicting desires direct us elsewhere.²⁸⁸

These desires can be classified by their manner of redirecting our attention.

1. Aversive (e.g., fear, laziness, disgust)
2. Attractive (e.g., hunger, lust, greed)
3. Adulterating (e.g., pride)

This list is not complete, but it captures the major routes failure takes. If someone loves someone and this love demands taking a risk, the lover can fail to love well if his fear averts him from taking the loving course of action. Then the structure of the failure will be something like this:

1. X loves Y.
2. Loving Y requires doing R.
3. X wants to want to R.
4. X wants to R.
5. Doing R seems dangerous to X.
6. X fears to R.
7. X does not R.

In this case, there is no particular thing that the lover wants to do that leads to his not doing what love requires. Rather, it is the recommended course of action's prospect of pain or another aversive quality that drives him away from action. In everyday life danger is rare, and we are more likely to be averted by disgust or laziness – e.g., fathers who let mom change all the diapers might be acting from either of these motivations or both. But the threat of pain is the paradigm for this pattern of action.

On the other hand, someone might instead be attracted to some particular course of action that conflicts with the one recommended by its promised pleasure. In this case, the failure will look something like the following:

²⁸⁸ I am using the term “desire” broadly, to include passions like fear or anger, which are not ordinarily called “desires.” The reader might prefer a term without the baggage or associations carried by “desire,” but I am going to continue using this term.

1. X loves Y.
2. Loving Y requires doing R.
3. X wants to want to R.
4. X wants to R.
5. Doing Q seems pleasant to X.
6. X wants to Q.
7. X cannot do both R and Q.
8. X does Q.

In this situation the promise of pleasure along some course of action is too great for the lover to turn down. Doing what love demands may not be inherently painful or even unpleasant, but the alternative promises to be far more pleasant or enjoyable. For example, some father might find that loving his son requires playing catch with him (something he does not find unpleasant), but also expect it to be far more pleasant to play poker with his friends. Temperance might be a virtue more typical of romantic love, where its failures are devastating when it leads to infidelity. But that is not its only role. Alongside the danger of seeking sexual pleasure from someone other than one's spouse, there are the infinite number of ways that someone might favor any pleasure to honoring a romantic commitment and the demands of love. The opening number for the musical "Damn Yankees" illustrates the difficulty. Meg sings:

When we met in nineteen thirty-eight, it was November
 When I said that I would be his mate, it was December
 I reasoned he would be the greatest husband that a girl had ever found
 That's what I reasoned
 That's what I reasoned
 Then April rolled around.
 ...
 Six months out of every year
 I might as well be made of stone
 Six months out of every year when I'm with him I'm alone.
 ...
 Six months out of every year
 He doesn't take me anywhere
 Six months out of every year, when I play cards
 Solitaire.

The other six months out of every year
We are hardly ever seen apart
But then the Washington Senators take over my place in his heart
Six months out of every year.

This is a drastic case, but demonstrates why temperance is so important to love.

The third and final grouping was what I am calling “adulterating desires.” These do not act by averting us from the course of action that love requires or by turning us aside after some other goal, but rather by replacing and subtly transforming the original desire, especially its motivation. Adulteration can occur whenever someone loves more than one thing, and consists in turning an action done for one love into an action done for the sake of another. This is usually done for the sake of self-love. Thus what was originally a mother’s desire for her child to succeed becomes a desire that he succeed so that his success shines on her, or what was originally a lover’s appreciation of the beauty he sees in his beloved becomes a self-admiring delight in his own possession of her. The chief cause of such perversion of love’s demands is pride. Pride is especially dangerous to love because it can perfectly do what love demands but, in altering the motivation, it distorts the structure of the love, transforming non-egoistic love into egoistic. But anyone who loves two things can see one love supplant the other by adulterating actions in this way. For the present we will not address these – they are not relevant to quasi-virtue because the man of quasi-virtue loves only one thing. Let us consider this man more carefully.

5.1.2. The Man of Quasi-virtue

The man of quasi-virtue loves just one person or thing. Restricting ourselves to just aversive and attractive desires, we can easily see that loving something requires something akin to – if not completely identical to – courage and temperance, diligence and moderation. Love is partly constituted by dispositions to certain kinds of motivations, and these dispositions can be more or less perfect in how they respond to danger and distraction. A man who loves one thing and whose dispositions are perfect in this sense possesses *quasi-virtue*, including limited temperance, limited courage, and various other quasi-virtues related to what he loves. I make no argument that any lover of this kind must possess *every* virtue in a limited status. Some he may not possess any analogue of at all, if they are completely unrelated to what he loves. But no love can dispense with the virtues of temperance and courage and the minor virtues similar to these.²⁸⁹

This implies not only that such quasi-virtues are necessary for someone to love something well, but that when someone loves something well, his love is partly constituted by these quasi-virtues. Part of what it is to love something is to have certain dispositions: Consider: Loving someone is, in part, being disposed to feel, think, and act in certain ways that concern the beloved. Loving someone is being concerned when she hurts and being delighted when she is present – at least *sometimes*. Loving someone is considering how your actions will affect her. Loving someone is taking actions on her behalf and doing things to express your love towards her. Doing any one of these, or all three, *right now*, need not display love; someone might do all three of these but not love the

²⁸⁹ My approach to this topic has some similarities to that adopted by Mike W. Martin in his *Love's Virtues* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

person at all. But if someone is disposed to do these things should appropriate circumstances arise, we cannot deny his love. Loving something, or caring about it at all, is often more a matter of what someone *would* do than what he *is* doing. A man asleep does not cease to love whatever he loves. If he was a loving father awake, so he is asleep. Similarly, a man might love something but feel nothing in particular towards it at the moment. His love for his wife does not disappear because his attention is currently entirely focused on guiding his company through a crisis; it is proved by the fact that when she enters the door of his office he smiles. So although it would be absurd to suppose that someone might love his wife and yet never feel a thing for her, it would be mistaken to extrapolate this to the idea that he must continually feel something to love her, even if he loves her perfectly. The question is whether or not he feels the appropriate emotions at the right moments or not.

So when we consider the man of quasi-virtue, his virtue is not separable from his love because it is part of his love. His virtue is just the honing of his love into good form. It is in light of this that we can see the need for certain intellectual virtues. Previously I argued that love is a response to one who is to be loved that includes a recognition of this being's reality and independence from the lover. This requires, as Iris Murdoch wrote, "really looking."²⁹⁰ Thus love requires a virtue of attentiveness. To love something well we must pay careful attention to it and understand what it is and how we might honor or benefit it. Defending our muddled actions on behalf of those we love with a statement about the heart being in the right place is often a feint. If the heart had been in the right place, then in many cases the lover would have investigated the matter more thoroughly

²⁹⁰ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 91.

to better understand the one he loved and found a more appropriate way of expressing his love. To love someone is to pay attention. The man of quasi-virtue, then, will be exquisitely attentive to what he loves. This does not imply omniscience, but only that he is alert to the one he loves and canny to his own fantasies and wishful thinking, being careful to give credence to his observations and to exclude his fantasies from any role in his actions.

The man of quasi-virtue must also possess a limited practical wisdom relating to the one he loves. This wisdom of course cannot exist from the moment of his love; it is perhaps a common fallacy today to think that love could be absolutely perfect at its genesis and not require perfecting. Wisdom is the fruit of attentive observation. Wisdom consists in the knowledge of what is good and how to obtain it. As Nozick said, it is the understanding of what is important.²⁹¹ The limited wisdom that is ordered to a single object of love is oriented towards what he loves. So if this man loves just one person (for example) then his wisdom will consist in knowing such things as how to successfully maintain the relationship they are engaged in, how to benefit him or her, what is important to this person, and similar matters. He will know what it is important to be aware of in order to engage in the kind of relationship he has with this person well, what kinds of things make a difference to the relationship and the other person. (And if he must know what is important to the relationship, mustn't he know himself?) This still doesn't mean that he can always accomplish what he wills; to recycle a trite example, he might know that what his love requires is an expensive drug but not be able to afford it or even be able to steal it (by hypothesis, he only loves one thing, so we shouldn't suppose that he will be hindered

²⁹¹ Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 267.

by any concern he might have for the law, which cannot be stronger than his disposition to benefit his beloved).

Is his limited wisdom really a part of his love? Even if we admit that affective dispositions like temperance and courage can be constituents of someone's loving something or someone else, this appears *prima facie* different from admitting the same about wisdom. We might be tempted to say that although the dispositions to feel and do certain things could be part of loving something, wisdom is more or less the know-how to act on these promptings, and such know-how is certainly not constitutive of the love. But this draws too wide of a line between about someone's understanding of something and his affective and volitional dispositions towards it. We cannot subtract wisdom from temperance and courage in the manner suggested. If we conceive of these as simple fonts of energy that direct someone in a certain direction – as drives, if you will – then we can subtract wisdom from them. We might have this idea if we conceive of the role of wisdom in love as essentially involving something like supplying the means to carry out compassionate motives. But the idea of a virtue is entirely distinct from that of a drive. A virtue consists in finely honed responses to different situations (we don't need to worry about *how* finely grained these responses are; they need not distinguish every situation perfectly, but only as well as human nature is capable of). A drive is a vector bursting out in a particular direction. So to possess a virtue is to naturally respond to different situations differently and in a way that is shaped by a proper understanding of what is called for in the present situation. Wisdom is embedded in the other virtues.

When we say that some kind of limited courage is part of loving someone well, this does not imply that someone has a certain reserve of "courageous energy" ready to

be directed towards any danger or even that his love is basically a kind of energy able to push him on through danger for the sake of the one he loves. Your lover will not be impressed if you risk your life to save her second-favorite egg-beater from a burglar. The limited courage embedded in loving someone or something requires being able to judge the relative importance of different objects to the relationship and one's beloved appropriately. The limited temperance contained in loving someone or something well must similarly be calibrated by some kind of judgment about the relative importance of distinct options. Even supposing a monomaniac of love as we are, temperance cannot just be a power of ignoring all pleasures but the beloved. The activities or relationships by which we seek peace with those we love are complex and involve many different sub-activities promising pleasure that we must be able to weigh against one another. Even the sub-activities frequently involve numerous subdivisions; for instance, the activity of "play," an integral part of any interpersonal love. "Play" includes activities as diverse as sex and Scrabble, each of which may have its place within a loving relationship. Both promise pleasure, and a lover must not allow himself to be driven to pursue whichever one of these promises the most pleasure to him at the moment, but by an understanding of what is important for the relationship and for the one he loves. Wisdom, then, is integral to temperance. If virtues such as courage and temperance include wisdom within themselves, then so too loving someone well must include wisdom within it.

Having come this far I must say a word about the fourth of the cardinal virtues. Does loving someone or something well somehow involve justice? The case seems almost hopelessly complex. Egoistic loves are devoid of justice; they are not fundamentally concerned with giving what is loved its due. The concern is focused entirely upon the

subordination of what is loved under one's will. But are non-egoistic loves just? On the one hand, it is easy to see the initial response to the one to be loved as a kind of desire to *do justice* to the beauty or goodness or to some other quality of the one to be loved. That is, when recognizing the reality of something produces an attitude of consent in response, this attitude includes a desire to give the one to be loved its due. This is justice. On the other hand, it is hard to see love as an exercise in justice; love frequently demands both more and less than justice, soaring above both its requirements and forsaking retribution in the name of forgiveness; "love covers a multitude of sins."²⁹² The just man is not concerned with having more than his share of benefits, but the lover is frequently concerned with offering even his own share to those he loves. The just man need have no desire to forgive someone who has wronged him, but the lover ought to forgive one he loves for wronging him. If we draw a connection at all, it would be that the lover does not wish to be unjust to the one he loves. But does he desire this out of his desire to treat those whom he loves justly, or out of his love? The union sought by two lovers seems to negate the relevance of justice.

Let us turn now to the first virtue of love. More important to love than any of these is the virtue of mindfulness. Loving something well requires keeping it in mind in a certain way. Love is grounded in someone's attitude to his recognition of the reality of what he loves, in accordance with some feature or quality of the object that acts as the ground for his love. This attitude is volitional: it is rooted in the will, not in habit, or physiology. Thus it is more easily lost than one might expect; loving people frequently act unlovingly to those they love because they simply did not think of them. This happens

²⁹² 1 Peter 4:8.

even though they would have acted lovingly if only they *had* thought of them. Consider Angela Smith's statement:

I forgot a close friend's birthday last year. A few days after the fact, I realized that this important date had come and gone without my so much as sending a card or giving her a call. I was mortified. What kind of a friend could forget such a thing? Within minutes I was on the phone to her, acknowledging my fault and offering my apologies.²⁹³

Smith then asks, "what, exactly, was the nature of my fault in this case?" She did not *choose* to forget her friend's birthday. In this case the problem was that she failed to keep her friend in mind. This is why mindfulness is the first virtue of love: It is impossible to love anything well if we do not keep it in mind. This cannot be a merely intellectual presence. Suppose that a husband is away on a long trip and enjoying the society and conversation of an attractive woman he has met; somehow, he finds himself intending to commit adultery with this woman. He wonders at himself, but although he is aware of his wife and his love for her in an intellectual way, these are vague and shadowy presences in his mind. The problem is that he has not kept his wife present to his mind in the right way. She is not present with the right kind of vividness to present him with the grounds of his love for her. Without this, his ability to obey the demands of love is undermined. Once something else occupied his attention, this new object motivated him instead of his love.

²⁹³ "Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life," *Ethics* 115:236–271, at p. 236.

5.1.3. The Need for Quasi-virtue

All of the preceding applies to non-personal loves as much as to interpersonal ones. Frequently such loves will require a different set of quasi-virtues than love for a person would require, but I do not think that any love can lack temperance, courage, and wisdom. Every love must experience the temptations of other pleasures and the fear of dangers, and no love can do without an understanding of what, relating to what one loves, is important. Hence the man who loves philosophy well must be disposed to turn aside from conflicting pleasures for the sake of philosophy, and likewise be willing to embrace the dangers of sometimes speaking what is unpopular or despised. He must be on guard particularly against the pleasures of sophistry, wishful thinking, and fantasy. He must likewise not be dissuaded by disgust or shame when these would prevent him from seeking the truth about something. It is not hard to see how the same considerations apply to someone who loves painting or the mountains. The painter cannot allow some peculiar “itch” that he has for painting things a certain way, which he knows will produce poor results yet always tempts him, draw him from painting something as it ought to be painted; nor can he worry about what others shall think of his painting, and paint solely to please their tastes, rather than his vision of what is to be painted. And he must certainly be canny enough to know when these temptations and fears are likely to intrude and what the proper response to them would be – here we see that the wisdom of painting is distinct from the know-how of painting – and understand what is important in his vision, true to what he is painting, as distinct from what is irrelevant, in poor taste, or distracting. This does not imply that he will paint well. He might not have the physical abilities needed to perfectly execute what he can conceive, and he might not have the kind of rare

novel insight or inspiration required to be truly great.

The monophile, who loves just one object, can fail to love well despite being a fanatic. He can do so because his dispositions to think, feel, and do certain things for what he loves may not be well-ordered. Even if we grant him purity of heart his instincts and understanding may be too flawed for him to love what he loves well. He might act for the sake of love with an entirely pure heart and no conflicting motivations, but undermine his own best efforts because his instinctive dispositions are flawed. He might experience deep disgust at doing certain things demanded by love. He might think things pleasant that are harmful to his relationship or the one he loves, and the benefits of different activities beneficial to the relationship that he takes pleasure in might not correlate to the pleasure he takes in them. He must learn what is good for the relationship and for the one he loves and this knowledge is not *a priori*, and this understanding must be reflected in his dispositions.

The perfect monophile is the man of quasi-virtue. The dispositions constituting his love for what he loves are properly ordered to his love, and he understands what is important to what he loves and acts according to this understanding. According to Aristotle, "Virtue then is a settled disposition of the mind determining the choice of actions and emotions, consisting essentially in the observance of the mean relative to us, this being determined by principle, that is, as the prudent man would determine it."²⁹⁴ Quasi-virtue can be defined as a settled disposition of the mind determining thought, emotion, and action, consisting essentially in the observance of whatever principles will promote or maintain the activity or relationship by which a lover seeks union with what he loves.

²⁹⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), II.6, 1107a15.

This is also essentially the same as feeling and acting in accordance with what practical wisdom declares important for what you love and the relationship or activity by which you seek union. The man of quasi-virtue acts in ways that will promote and maintain the activity or relationship by which he seeks union with what he loves, and if fortune favors him then he succeeds as well as a human being might. *He* at least does not interfere with the achievement of this union.

5.1.4. Quasi-virtue and Virtue

It should be noted that quasi-virtue need not be anything like virtue *tout court*. Aquinas' writings on vice provide a good example of the reason why: Aquinas' account of vice distinguishes certain "capital sins" – what are ordinarily, and misleadingly, called the "seven deadly sins" – that act as "heads" of other kinds of sins, and what virtue is for the good person, vice is for the person devoted to one of these sins. In fact, he expends some effort in explaining how different vices serve different sins, to the point where someone who was wholeheartedly devoted to sin might find his works a useful manual of character.²⁹⁵ Such a man would be inveterately vicious, but would certainly possess quasi-virtue.

²⁹⁵ See e.g. Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans. Richard Regan (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003).

5.2. Wholeheartedness and Peace

5.2.1. Wholeheartedness and Quasi-virtue

Now in my mind the character of the man of quasi-virtue is the kind of character that people think of when they say that someone is wholehearted: A person who wholeheartedly loves something must possess quasi-virtue. But some philosophers, notably Frankfurt, think that wholeheartedness does not require this kind of orderliness to one's dispositions. For Frankfurt wholeheartedness consists entirely in one's internal attitude towards a given source of motivation, and loving something wholeheartedly simply means being entirely in favor of being moved by it, where this favorable attitude is not necessarily connected with someone's *behavior* always measuring up to the standards of the favored love. There are no *internal* sources of conflict, but what is internal for Frankfurt is essentially just the desires with which someone identifies himself; he can still be moved to act (or to "act") by external desires that he does not identify himself with. It is not worth arguing over words; we could grant Frankfurt this use of "wholehearted" even if we think it ought to be used differently. Now it seems as if, for Frankfurt, there is nothing more to getting it right than being wholehearted, and that self-love consists in little more than wholeheartedness. This cannot be correct. Any person who loves anything at all must necessarily desire at least quasi-virtue in addition to this.

Consider the justification Frankfurt gives for the universal desirability of wholeheartedness: Without it, a satisfactory life is impossible. His reasoning is that because someone's true interests are defined by what he cares about – because his having any true interests at all is dependent upon his caring about things – self-love requires wholeheart-

edness. Otherwise he will undermine his own true interests. His effectively loving something requires that he be wholehearted in this love. Without wholeheartedness a satisfactory life is impossible. The importance that Frankfurt gives to wholeheartedness is reminiscent of Augustine's treatment of the topic. That Augustine treats this topic in the *Confessions* is well-known to most philosophers, but the moral teleology he constructs in the *City of God* is more theoretically developed. According to Augustine, whatever else anyone might desire, he must desire peace in addition to this. "Peace" does not signify an experience or an inner state of the soul, e.g., the peace of mind that might be achieved through intense meditation and prayer. Peace is rather a kind of unity by which several parts are held together without conflict. It is the ordering of several things together according to a single principle. According to Augustine, the peace of the rational soul is the "duly ordered agreement of cognition and action"²⁹⁶ – a state in which we are able to act according to what we know and understand. This is the state in which the whole creature is subordinate to a single standard; it is contrasted with the situation of the man who judges one thing right, but does another. By this Augustine appears to understand something like the ability to act upon what one judges to be good or right to do, in a moral or ethical sense.

Suppose we weaken this to a state in which there is a duly ordered agreement between what he cares about and what he does. Call this "limited peace." Now this is stronger than simple wholeheartedness (in Frankfurt's sense) but it admits of the same justification that Frankfurt provides for wholeheartedness. If someone cares about some-

²⁹⁶ *Civitate dei*, in *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense* 2, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), XIX.13: "pax hominum ordinata concordia."

thing then he cannot be indifferent to whether he actually acts upon it or acts akratically. Now Frankfurt's concept of wholeheartedness at least excludes "internal conflicts" arising from someone not knowing which of two desires to identify himself with. But it does not exclude someone who acts against his true interests because an externalized desire moves him to act. Even when we have stripped it down, Augustine's concept of peace is stronger than Frankfurt's and captures this intrinsically desirable state. The superior desirability of limited peace to wholeheartedness manifests the basic flaw in Frankfurt's idea that what matters most is just making up one's mind, if this is thought to allow continued action in defiance of one's true interests. *This* kind of unity of character is not subject to the same kinds of worries about self-deception that Velleman raised against Frankfurt.

5.2.2. The Need for Perfect Quasi-virtue

It is inherent in the nature of wishing to do something that one wishes to choose the correct means to do this. Whatever else we desire, we all desire to choose the right means to what we desire.²⁹⁷ Call this the *principle of appropriate means*. Conjoining this simple principle of action with the universal desirability of limited peace yields the conclusion that everyone who loves one thing must desire perfect quasi-virtue, for perfect quasi-virtue, including mature practical wisdom, is the same as limited peace plus accurate knowledge of means. Limited peace requires that someone always act in the way that

²⁹⁷ Unless we so lack confidence in ourselves and do not wish to be successful in our endeavors that we cannot try another tack. But because even this reflects a higher order worry about means and ends – say, about figuring out which of two desires is itself more satisfactory in light of some third concern – it does not constitute an exception to this rule.

he supposes will serve his true interests, which is defined by what he loves. But, by the principle of correct means, he must also wish that his *intentions* line up with his highest-order desire, i.e., that his choices to promote and maintain his relationship with what he loves and that his choices to benefit what he loves should accurately pick out actions that serve his purposes. This means that he requires limited wisdom. Because he also possesses limited peace, it follows that his dispositions follow his intentions, and if his intentions are guided by a limited practical wisdom, then so too must his dispositions accord with his limited wisdom. And this state is what is indicated by “quasi-virtue.” So it follows that everyone who loves one thing desires quasi-virtue.

5.2.3. Appropriate Activities

It also follows from this that everyone who loves one thing must desire to seek union with it through an appropriate activity or relationship. That is, we look for relationships and activities that we possess affinities for. Part of the humor of Plato’s *Symposium* arises from different speakers’ attempts to justify their own erotic relationships, without complete success. The speech of Pausanias is a notable example. According to Pausanias there is a heavenly love and a vulgar love, and one of the chief distinctions between them is that someone who loves with the heavenly love loves the soul of his beloved rather than his body and desires to fill his beloved’s soul with virtue and wisdom, whereas someone who loves with the vulgar love adores the body and does not care for the soul. But if this is so, it is hard to see why the heavenly love ought to involve either sexual desire or sexual activity; why should a longing to educate express itself in the desire to achieve physical union? Thus Pausanias’ attempt to justify his erotic relationship with the

younger Phaedrus comes to absurdity, and Alcibiades unknowingly counters it through his portrayal of Socrates: Socrates, whose love for Alcibiades was a desire to educate his soul, did not seek sexual intercourse with him on that accord. In fact such a response would have undermined the relationship he actually did seek. Pausanias is eager to justify his own relationship because he senses that it is in some sense inappropriate, and its inappropriateness consists in his turning a love that should be expressed in the activity of education into one that is expressed in the activity of sexual intercourse. He is mistaken about which affinity exists between himself and Phaedrus, and it is possible that this mistake undermines what he himself understands to be the true goal of their relationship. Pausanias' mistake is due to his lacking sufficient virtue and wisdom to understand what is important for his relationship or to act on this understanding. If an affinity for education exists, this cannot be served by seeking a sexual relationship.

5.2.4. Conflicting Loves

Now most of us love more than one thing. This adds great complexity to how we must think about wholeheartedness, limited peace, and quasi-virtue. I will raise only two of the difficulties that arise from loving more than one thing: Conflicts between activities and conflicts between characters. When someone loves something, he has an ongoing concern with engaging in an activity that achieves union with the object of his love. Loves limit each other through the kind of union they are ordered to. Without making any claims about whether the intrinsic nature of marriage requires monogamy and rules out not only adultery but polygamy also, we can all admit that some loves are indeed of this kind, seeking a kind of complete devotion between partners that excludes any thought of

these, such as the Eros I described in 4.2.5. In such cases, the kind of union that is sought limits other kinds of loves from the start. If someone seeks a union that demands exclusivity in certain areas, then plainly the person cannot consistently seek to fulfill the demands of other loves requiring what has been pledged to the first love. Religious devotion is noteworthy for being especially exclusive in this regard, and it is not surprising that writers in both the Old and New Testaments use the image of exclusive marriage to portray the nature of this devotion. Such devotion is always exclusive in this way because the worshipper completely entrusts himself to his deity, achieving a peace of complete subordination of the self to the God. Now if it were just a matter of *trust*, religious devotion would not be exclusive. Someone can trust as many people as he likes without any conflict. But no one can entrust himself completely to more than one person. One cannot say, “I give myself entirely up to you, and trust you to care for me” to more than one person at a time; the second entrusting would mean giving up on the first, and trying to maintain both at once, entrusting oneself to two different gods, is, in the last analysis, to fail to subordinate one’s will to either god. Seeking a partial devotion to different gods would be like the loving different musicians’ music: there is no difficulty in appreciating both Bruce Springsteen and Louis Armstrong, but this is not religious devotion.

Outside of such exclusive commitments, one love frequently limits another through its demands for time, or psychological space. When Frankfurt speaks of our being limited in what we can love, he frequently seems to be thinking of limits of these kinds. Loving something or someone requires devoting some amount of time to the activity or relationship. In this way one love, or several loves, can exclude another love by accident, as it were. In this case the limit may be only partial, and prevent someone from

loving something well, rather than preventing him from loving it at all. There may be no intrinsic conflict between loving philosophy, loving the mountains, loving painting, loving one's spouse, and loving one's children. But it may turn out that someone cannot live up to the demands of all of these loves at once. It may only be possible to love two or three of them well. To love each of them well would require more time than anyone has available. Loves also demand what I will call psychological space. It is hard to devote ourselves to many different pursuits at once because we find it difficult to keep track of each of these at once. Different individuals have different limits, of course, but it seems likely that even with more time, most people couldn't love 144 different objects at once. Not only do we lack the ability to split our attention in so many directions, we would likely be overwhelmed by the number of feelings suggested by the different things we love: What shall we feel if 42 of our loves are doing poorly and the rest doing well?

Two loves can also conflict by requiring different kinds of character. We can begin by examining a single very specific example: writing style. Why are there so few great philosophers who are also noteworthy within literature? Excellence within both of these fields demands many of the same qualities, after all, such as keen insight and attention to detail. It shouldn't be so rare to find someone with the ability to excel at both. But in fact it is very difficult to succeed at writing both good philosophy and good literature. Although both must be true to their subjects, the kind of clarity, precision, and completeness required for good philosophical writing is very different from the beauty and evocative power needed for literature. Developing these skills involves not only the development of a certain kind of writing style, but also developing certain ways of paying attention to things and thinking them through. It is not easy for someone to develop two such

writing styles without their impinging upon, and muddying, each other. When we consider those philosophers who have actually succeeded within literature – for example, Plato, Rousseau, Sartre – or whose writings most nearly approach literary writing – such as Augustine and Nietzsche – we see evidence of this muddying. Plato alone can be said to come even very close to succeeding in doing justice to both styles. The same problem plays out in more vital areas of our character. Loving something involves possessing and refining one’s dispositions to think, feel, and act in certain ways. But it is possible for different loves to each requisition the same aspect of our character and require it to track a different “mean.” This is the insight underlying Joseph Raz’s account of toleration. He points out,

The excellences of character which make for excellence in chairing committees and getting things done, when this involves reconciling points of view and overcoming personal differences, those very traits of character also tend to make people intolerant of single-minded devotion to a cause.²⁹⁸

Raz treats both of these as valuable, and hence they are competitive values. He goes on to claim that there are “many other examples” of this kind of “competitive pluralism” in which two different valuable things produce conflicting demands. (Thus the virtue of toleration requires us to tolerate not only wickedness but also deficiencies related to pursuit of certain values.) We can focus this by considering someone who loves both mediation and reconciling different parties but is also devoted to some cause that does not allow compromise and requires confrontation. This might happen if someone living in 1930’s Germany loved practicing mediation and reconciling disputes but also had a deep love for the Jews; the second love might lead him to fight against Nazi oppression; but how long

²⁹⁸ Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 404.

might his other instincts hinder him from taking this necessary step? And how often will his instincts conflict with each other, because each devotion requires different things from him?

The greatest conflicts will arise when one of the loves rests on an egoistic attitude and the other on an attitude of consent. Someone who loves power and delights in possessing it will find it difficult to reconcile this love with the love he has for his wife and children. Someone who loves to be esteemed by others will find this conflicting with his love for painting, because the love for painting demands that one be true to one's subject, but popularity demands pleasing others. Greed demands acquiring as much wealth as possible, but religious devotion may require giving up everything for the sake of one's devotion – one cannot serve both God and mammon, as it is said. Devotion to these conflicting goals will produce incoherent character: In this case, the quasi-virtue appropriate to one love is contrary to that required by the other. One cannot possess both sets of quasi-virtue. One cannot succeed in loving both objects well.

When someone loves in this way, limited peace is impossible for him. Peace requires that a plurality be subject to a single principle of unity, but such a man has two principles of unity that conflict with each other and that are each vying for mastery. He cannot have peace, and he loves to no avail.

5.3. Full Virtue

What would be required to turn this account of quasi-virtue and wholeheartedness into a full account of virtue? If ethics is basically teleological, and the final end is to be pursued in love, then this account of love could be expanded into a full virtue ethics. If,

however, ethics either is not teleological, or the final end is not to be pursued in love, then this account can only play a minor role in shaping our account of full virtue. Now, if there is a final end that man is to pursue in love, then the virtue relative to *this* love would be virtue itself. The difference between quasi-virtue and virtue *tout court* would just be the object of the love. If there are multiple objects that human beings should love, then it will be the dispositions emerging from the harmonization of these loves that will count as full virtue. (If there are incommensurable and conflicting ends we should love, then ethics will be tragic.) Thus, if ethics is dominated by love for God or for other human beings or both, then this account of love will also provide a virtue ethics. The good life will be the life spent loving these objects well, and virtue will be those states of mind and character that constitute such love. So if someone believes that God has indeed revealed his law to us, and his law is love, then he could take this theory as the basis for his ethics. If this is the case, then quasi-virtue is different from true virtue only in its object. Is there a philosophical approach for turning this account of love into a theory of virtue? There is, and it complements the theological approach. This is to begin with the problem of vocation. Someone could determine what it is best to love by determining what object he has the greatest affinity for loving. If it is possible to determine by means of reason what someone's greatest affinity consists in, then indeed, one might end up with an ethics this way, too. There is no guarantee that this will work out; but it would be a project worth attempting.

If, however, the final end is not something pursued in love, and virtues are defined independently of love, then this account must play a more minor role. Consider Philippa Foot's ethics, as presented in *Natural Goodness*. For her the virtues are all inde-

pendently defined by their relation to the life form of the species.²⁹⁹ So, instead of love grounding virtue, the reverse is likely to be the case: good loves will be those loves that manifest the antecedently defined virtues, and loving well will be defined partially in terms of achieving union, partially in terms of acting virtuously. These need not conflict: sometimes the virtuous thing to do is just to act in accordance with your love. For example, it is possible that the virtuous thing to do when both one's wife and another person are endangered is always to save your wife, even if the other person is, say, a renowned medical researcher. But there is no guarantee of such convergence. Love for my children may move me to do quite unjust things to other people and their children for the sake of my own. Hence love will be constrained by virtue, as an external influence. (I do not mean to say that on the sketch of an ethics above, love would never be constrained by virtue as an external influence; rather, the *chief* love would not ever be influenced in this way, and virtue would always be in accordance with *some* love.)

Finally, if we look at this through, say, the eyes of a simplified Rawlsian project, then virtue is going to take its primary orientation from justice, not from love. Imagine a simplified Rawlsian project according to which the right is prior to the good, the right consists in the two principles of justice, and the good is any goal compatible with these two principles. On such an account virtue would have two foundations: first, it would be principally ordered to the two principles of justice. Those would have priority over everything else, and the most important dispositions to possess would be those supporting them. In such a case, this account of virtue would only play a subordinate role: for what is most important isn't what we love. This account of virtue might have some influence,

²⁹⁹ See Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

insofar as any good compatible with the principles of justice might be loved and might provide some final tweaking of virtue, but in the end the principles of justice are going to take the lead. Love will be given much room – quite possibly more than it would in Foot’s view – but justice must take precedence.

CHAPTER 6:
THE DEEP STRUCTURE OF AGENCY AND THE PRICE OF LOVE

In this dissertation I have endeavored to provide a suitable groundwork for an account of agency that is adequate to life and capable of comprehending those structures of agency most important to understanding human life. It is not enough to understand why someone performs individual actions; we must seek to understand why someone's life as a whole has the shape and direction that it does, and what patterns within which individual actions are meant to fit. In the contemporary literature Frankfurt is foremost amongst those who have turned attention to this matter. He has thought carefully and deeply about how to explicate the deep structures of agency that shape and unify our lives in a manner that applies to even the everyday lives that some philosophy of action obscures. Whereas it is far from clear what role "life-plans" (to name just one example) play in ordinary persons' lives, no one can doubt that the influence of second-order desires, care, and love upon the structure of ordinary lives. However, there is a significant cost to Frankfurt's approach, one that has remained obscure to most readers, and the goal of my theory is to provide this same understanding of human life without incurring this cost.

I have referred above to the "deep structures" of agency. To what are they "deep" in comparison? Frankfurt frequently compares care with desire. The difference between these begins with the fact that desire can be transitory, whereas care is persistent. Desiring to go to a concert tomorrow does not resemble caring about going to concerts: know-

ing one of these facts provides information relevant to determining what someone is likely to do tomorrow, whereas knowing the other fact provides information relevant to determining what someone's life as a whole is likely to look like. But care is not "deeper" than desire because it is more persistent. After all, *some* desires can be quite persistent. It is deeper than desire because it can explain it. Caring about something is partially constituted by a set of dispositions to experience certain desires at certain times, when it is appropriate to do so to advance or maintain whatever it is that someone cares about: if someone cares about going to concerts, then it is a combination of this fact with his belief that there is a concert tomorrow that produces his desire to go to a concert tomorrow. Caring can explain desiring, and hence is deeper than it. The genius of the Stoics consisted in their recognizing the degree to which emotions such as joy, desire, fear, and grief were due to factors within us deeper than the emotions themselves.

The deep structures of human agency are those factors that explain why we desire what we desire and feel what we feel. Frankfurt's approach to explaining these factors resembles that of the Stoics, but even more that of Augustine, who made love central to agency. But unlike both of these Frankfurt aims at minimizing his metaphysical costs – if "metaphysics" is the right word – by building these deep structures up with a purely mechanical conception of agency. His account is extremely multi-layered, but peeling back each layer in pursuit of the truth about agency finally reveals only mechanism, the basic forces of the push and the pull. Desires are mere vectors. Second-order desire does not reflect someone's judgment about the value of a desire; it reflects whether someone is pulled towards accepting or pushed towards repudiating a desire; that is, a vector towards or away from another vector. Identification does not consist in judgment either; it only

requires that someone feel no resistance towards it. Even dissociation requires no judgment of value, but only persistent resistance – of whatever kind – to the idea of a desire constituting one’s will. It is a persistent vector. Caring does not have grounds, and it acts by disposing someone towards certain feelings, desires, and so on, but feelings and desires have no cognitive content whatsoever. Caring is just being disposed to experience certain pushes and pulls within oneself at appropriate times. Volitional necessities are not grounded in any rich conception of nature, but in evolution, which cannot guarantee their value, in past, present, or future, but merely a hypothetical utility for reproductive fitness at some past date. Frankfurt wants to do justice to the phenomenology of everyday life, but when he plumbs the deep structures, it turns out that far less presents itself than we had supposed. All the way down it is mechanism.

The accounts offered by the Stoics and by Augustine differed in many respects, but were alike in making the deep structures of agency depend upon our judgments about what holds importance in human life. The deep structures of human life possess cognitive bases. Frankfurt repudiates this doctrine, inverting the relative priority of judgment and concern; for him, there is no fact of the matter about what we should love or care about, and we cannot answer how we should live our lives until we already love or care about someone or something. Hence for Frankfurt, the deep structures are also the deepest structures there are: nothing explains who and what we are like love and care, and nothing explains them. Reason comes on the scene too late; it helps us manage the lives established by what we love and care about, but plays no vital role in determining what is loved or cared for.

Frankfurt’s account’s lack of commitments, its fidelity to ordinary experience,

and the depth it adds to our understanding of this experience constitute its power. Frankfurt's critics are many, but they cannot challenge objectionable presuppositions, for he has discarded whatever might count as one. Mechanism is a safe haven. At the same time it offers to explain ordinary human life in terms understandable to it, such as care and love. Frankfurt takes the "phenomenology" of ordinary moral life seriously, and as Aristotle recognized, if you can save the phenomena, you should do so. Finally Frankfurt adds depth to ordinary experience that it otherwise lacks. In plumbing care and love and desire, he has provided them with illumination and with structure and precision. We can summarize Frankfurt's achievement thus: he has provided a reflective account of ordinary moral experience in terms of a deep structure that saves the phenomena without incurring severe philosophical debts.

However, there is a tension between the two sides of this achievement, arising from Frankfurt's refusal to follow the Stoics and Augustine in making the deep structure of moral life dependent upon cognitive bases. Frankfurt's wish to do justice to ordinary moral experience appears to be behind his account of dissociation. Although there is no single name for this phenomenon in everyday language, we do seem to take it for granted that someone can dissociate himself from what he desires in this manner. But Frankfurt's desire to be free from philosophical commitments leads to his repudiating the idea that any basis for caring about or loving something can exist. Reconciling these two positions is not at all easy. We see the problem arise in Frankfurt's treatment of wholeheartedness and fragmentation. Someone is fragmented, or as Frankfurt usually says, ambivalent, when he is unsure whether to commit himself to something or someone. For Frankfurt such ambivalence is generally treated in monadic terms: he considers the case of some-

one who is divided over whether to commit himself to *this* goal, *this* person, and who cannot make up his mind whether to do so. But it is plausible that nearly all such conflicts are rooted in another kind of ambivalence: division over which of two conflicting goals or persons to commit oneself to. Except in unusual circumstances – such as when one just isn't sure about whether one *does* care about something – it is only in light of this kind of conflict that we can understand why someone would waver back and forth over such a commitment. Frankfurt's repudiation of any cognitive bases for caring, however, produces a great difficulty for someone so fragmented – he has no reason to amputate either concern for its own sake. Hence, he faces a dilemma requiring an arbitrary choice.

This tragic dilemma faced by fragmented agents brings the tension in Frankfurt's position to light. According to Frankfurt, dissociation depends upon a persistent disposition to resist something's becoming one's will. But it is difficult to see how this could suffice for true dissociation, if this is meant to free the agent from responsibility, or indeed to map onto anything important in our experience. First, it looks too much like Freudian repression. Like Freud, Frankfurt views desires and cares as kinds of vectors, and as such resistance only applies pressure to these forces, it doesn't eliminate their sources. The deep structures have no grounds, and hence can be opposed, resisted, or pushed down, but not eliminated by attacking their sources. The Stoics, for example, would press someone to consider how unworthy the object he cares about is of the importance he accords to it. T. M. Scanlon agrees that he cannot conceive of dissociation that does not make desire into something like a "seeming." Someone can dissociate a desire or concern if he can recognize that it is groundless, as occurs when someone gives up drinking because he realizes that it does not provide what he seeks in it; and this is dis-

tinct from someone simply opposing it with other concerns but who continues to experience it as powerfully as he did before this. It is true that, unlike Freud, Frankfurt does not describe someone who dissociates as hiding the presence of the desire from himself; but whether or not someone hides what he cares about from himself or not, there is no reason to think that simply opposing other motivational factors against it would mean that it was dissociated, especially if it continues to motivate behavior – a condition that Frankfurt must, and does, allow. In light of this it seems that Frankfurt must pull back either from his minimalism or his concern with common sense moral phenomena like dissociation. For it seems that he cannot have both of them.

I have designed my own conception of love to take this cost into account, and to avoid its pitfalls. It seems highly plausible to me that we do, from time to time, genuinely outlaw some of our desires; hence, considering this dilemma, it makes sense to adopt the horn of common moral experience over the horn of minimalism and mechanism. Taking this horn, we see that what causes Frankfurt difficulties is the groundless status of love and care. There is no reason to care about anything, and hence, there is no way to undermine one's attachments. There is nothing supporting them anyway: so someone who is divided between two different ideals of life, between seeking power and seeking a monastic life devoted to wisdom and prayer, for example, ultimately cannot choose which to care about on the basis of any reason. If he cares about both of these to the same degree – or to something close the same degree – then he is doomed to perpetual frustration. When the deep structures are the deepest structure, their conflicts cannot be unraveled.

My account carves out an escape from this problem by focusing upon the concept of affinity. Under pressure from Susan Wolf, Frankfurt allows that affinity may play a

role in determining what we should love, but he never says what role this might be, and never returns to the concept again in later writings on love. Both Wolf and Frankfurt appear to think of affinity as an equivalent to enthusiasm. This is a mistake, due to their thinking that love is, perhaps, just an attitude of some kind. But plainly no one speaks of someone having an affinity for chess if the man in question has all the enthusiasm in the world for the game, but plays with a rating of 500 (a promising beginner plays around 1000, and the best players are ranked in the upper 2000's). Affinity is primarily oriented to kinds of activities, and requires two abilities: one to take pleasure in the activity in question, and one to engage in the activity without frustration. When we speak of someone possessing an affinity for a person or object, we usually speak with reference to a particular shared activity: e.g., we might speak of one child having an affinity for another child, in the sense that they play well together, or that a baseball player has an affinity for a certain type of glove, because of the way it helps him to field a baseball. An affinity is essentially the ability to engage in an activity and take pleasure in doing so.

Like Frankfurt, I see love as a “deep structure,” something that explains our thoughts, emotions, and desires. But in my account, the concept of love is constructed around that of affinity. Love is essentially an ongoing concern with achieving union or peace with something or someone through engaging in an attention-focusing activity for which one has an affinity, motivated by an attitude of the will adopted in response to a recognition of the reality and independence of the object to be loved. By “union” and “peace” I mean a state of affairs in which two or more parties are joined together in pursuit of a common goal or in obedience to a common set of standards. Attention-focusing activities are those activities that engage our attentions and in which we can lose our-

selves during their performance due to the demands put upon our attention by the activity. I see the activity of philosophy as a paradigm for the kind of activity in which love is expressed. It is motivated by someone's sense of wonder, which is a kind of recognition that something in the world is utterly unlike our expectations for it. When we are struck by wonder, we are deeply impressed by the existence of something that we cannot understand. We are struck by it but puzzled as well, and filled with the desire to see the puzzle through, and to understand. Moved by this desire we focus our attention upon the problem at hand and attempt to gain this understanding that we lack, engaging in the activity of philosophy to bring one's mind into submission to the object to be understood. Philosophy is, as the etymology suggests, a form of love. The love for understanding acts as a deep structure by providing emotions, thoughts, and desires relevant to achieving its end. The account can be applied in like manner to other activities and ends.

My account explains interpersonal loves as involving relationships, which are a particular species of activity. An activity is, more or less, a goal-oriented series of actions that includes internal goods, in virtue of which an activity can be engaged in for its own sake. Maintaining a relationship with someone requires that one maintain a kind of peace with them – as Augustine says, “an ordered agreement of mind with mind”³⁰⁰ – and a relationship can only persist if those constituting the relationship maintain whatever peace accords with the relationship in question, requiring various kinds of respect and in some cases, love. Maintaining such a peace is just to engage in an activity, and one can only possess those relationships with other persons for which one has an affinity. Just as in philosophy, such love acts as a deep structure by providing lovers with thoughts, emo-

³⁰⁰ *City of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), XIX.13.

tions, and desires relevant to maintaining this relationship.

Love also acts as a deep structure by generating those thoughts, emotions, and desires expressing the attitude of our will towards what we love. There are two basic attitudes of the will upon which love is based: consent and denial. The affirmative attitude expresses thankfulness for something's existence, and wishes to lose himself through focusing his attention upon it and allowing it to shape his life. A negative attitude does not reject the existence of the object, but rejects its existing in a manner independent of the lover's will. Someone who takes the negative attitude is pained to be provoked by something whose reality is so striking yet not subject to his own control. These two attitudes produce non-egoistic and egoistic loves, respectively. In both cases the attitude of the will shapes how the love in question operates as a deep structure. The non-egoistic lover is concerned with the well-being of what he loves and, being thankful for its existence, grieves when it is harmed, rejoices when it is benefited, fears when danger threatens it, and desires not only union with it, but also desires what will benefit it. The egoistic lover however is concerned that the object be subject to his will and fears when it seems the object might escape from his power, grieves when it actually is so, rejoices when his will rules over it, and desires to have and dominate it.

Unlike Frankfurt's account, my own provides grounds for dismissing or outlawing a deep structure. It provides two loci for dissociation of what someone loves, points where what someone loves can be said to involve a false appearance, or seeming: either an affinity or a ground could be illusory. We can think an affinity exists when no affinity exists at all, as I explained in Chapter 3. The most common reason for this is that taking pleasure in an activity is the subjective sign of an affinity, but is not a perfect indication

of one. It is like an appearance or the seeming of an affinity for the activity. But in certain circumstances we are mistaken about whether our activity is frustrated, and take pleasure in what we are doing without quite understanding what we are doing, enthralled by an illusory experience of success. When a person discovers that his success was an illusion, his first experience is painful shock. Recall the eccentric professor of Chapter 3; if he were to learn the truth, that he is a wretched educator, he would certainly receive this as a blow. The temptation to deceive himself will certainly be great. But it is hard to imagine his continuing to love teaching once he has discovered that he lacks an affinity for it. Don Quixote did not respond well to his defeat by the Knight of the White Moon.

The second area where love can involve falsity is in its grounds. Even if there are no properly normative grounds for love, love is based upon some kind of vivid awareness of what is to be loved, involving a kind of recognition of it *as* something. If the object only appears to have this feature or quality but actually lacks it, then the love is groundless. Thus, even if “being a person just like me” is not a *normative* reason for love, it is a reason for some loves, and if it turns out that what one loves on this basis is in fact not at all like oneself – e.g., it is robot, or an illusion, or an hallucination – then one’s love will have no basis. Even when we turn to those most “groundless” loves, such as parents’ love for their children, there is a vivid and arresting awareness of their children as *real* and *in need*. A parent’s love would be heavily modified if the infant needed nothing from the parent, and be destroyed if the infant were in fact just an extension of the parent without any reality. Frankfurt has made the mistake of assuming that a ground for loving someone must be a universal reason to love it. It could be that such grounds as I’ve described *are* universal reasons for loving something – which we do not obey because we lack the

requisite omniscience and omnipotence – but even if they are not, they may act as grounds.

My own account of love is not without costs. As I have said, my own account abandons Frankfurt's commitment to minimalism, and takes a tack towards the kind of deep structures outlined and defended by the Stoics and Augustine. These deep structures possess cognitive grounds. Therefore it is only right to conclude by noting the cost of this approach, and that cost is the assumption that it can *make sense* to love something. On an approach like Frankfurt's, it makes sense to love, or at least this is what Frankfurt assures us is the case. Our lives are empty without things to love and about which to care. But it cannot make sense to love this or that thing in particular: when asked why we love something, the only answer Frankfurt allows us is, "Because I can." Let me make clear this cost: when we are asked why it makes sense to believe things, we can say that this is because some things are true. We believe particular propositions because of evidence or warrant or whatever other epistemic features they possess leading us to think them true. Except in desperate circumstances that include only impoverished information, we do not cite the fact that it is better to believe something than nothing as justification for believing something. So when I say that my account presumes that it can make sense to love something, I mean to say that it assumes that there are reasons to love something that are, in some sense, akin to evidential or warranting features of propositions, reasons in virtue of which it makes sense to love certain things. My account assumes that it makes sense to wonder.³⁰¹

³⁰¹ Someone might wish to construct a similar account that dropped the grounds, but kept affinity. This project is not impossible; its philosophical costs would be lower than my own, but it would also be more distant from the phenomenology of love. In any case it is not the project in which I am interested.

The approach I have adopted, despite its added cost, increases the value of love for explaining our moral lives. I note just one area where this account thrives that an account like Frankfurt's leaves vague and imprecise: choosing a vocation. It explains why someone would wish to devote his life to pursuing some object through some kind of activity – as a philosopher seeking the truth, as a painter seeking to capture the beauty of the world, or as a mother seeking to instill virtue and joy into her children. On my account, the deep structure of love can explain any of these: why someone would adopt these lives and why their lives acquire the structure that they do. One could, of course, rig Frankfurt's account to explain these. But it would require a lot of ad hoc rigging to explain all the details: why such concerns would be expressed in activities; why they seek the kinds of ends they do; why they respond to the world in the way that they do; why are motivated in the way that they are. On my own account, all of these elements are included in the concept of love itself. Frankfurt's account incurs fewer debts. But it seems to me that the ability to explain why someone judges a certain kind of life worth living, and the broad structure of that life, is something for which it is worth paying.

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