

A Phenomenology of Love and its Necessity

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Introduction

It is always a significant question to ask about any philosopher: what is he afraid of?

(Murdoch 71)

The philosophical inquiry into the nature of love is full of uncertainty and ambiguities, with its very definition being contentious. Perspectives on love can vary significantly, ranging from interpretations of love as a profound union between the self and the beloved, to viewing it as a specific orientation towards appreciating the intrinsic value of the beloved, and even reducing it to a mere biological mechanism designed to propel reproductive processes. Predominant theories principally characterize love as: (1) an amalgamation of selves forming a sort of shared identity or a desire to; (2) a distinct and robust form of concern that transcends ordinary affection; and (3) a unique mode of perception and valuation that distinguishes the beloved from all others.

Despite the complexity of and disputes within its theoretical definitions and justifications, consensus exists on the experiential or phenomenological aspect of love: it is overwhelmingly perceived as a positive state, eliciting a strong desire in individuals to both give and receive love. The term 'overall' is employed here to acknowledge the paradoxical appearance of love, where profound joys coexist with potential sorrows. For instance, the anguish of unrequited love, the anxiety born from parental love, and the anguish from losing a loved one forever are perhaps some of the most intense negative emotions available for earthly experience. Yet, they do not in any sense lower the value of love in its entirety. Indeed, the notion of leading a life wholly devoid of the potential for love—and the potential

to be wounded by love—is for most, an inconceivable and alien concept, suggesting that love is not just an emotion or even state, but something that forms a core component of one's existential foundation.

Using this observation as a starting point, I will provide an analysis of the phenomenology of 'felt necessity' in love, exploring its significance and the role it plays in love¹. Curiously, contemporary theories of love often downplay the elements of necessity and attachment, focusing instead on other dimensions of love. My thesis seeks to address this gap by examining the following question: What is it about love that engenders a sense of necessity, making the absence of love appear intolerable or even terrifying? Why is it that—holding other factors constant—a life in which someone loves something or someone so much better than a life in which she does not love anything at all?

I propose that love situates the lover in a unique epistemological and ontological position, in relation to the beloved but also to the world at large. Here, we should note that there are two senses of necessity in love. There is the necessity for the specific lover once within the state of love. Then, there is the necessity for the experience of love itself. The first type of felt necessity can only be experienced while an individual is in the state of love, while the second type of felt necessity can be experienced regardless of the individual's current state. In other words, the first type is the felt necessity towards a specific object that love attaches to, while the second is the felt necessity towards the condition of loving an object.

¹ In my thesis, I will be focusing my discussion on romantic love. However, I believe the lines between romantic love and other types of love (especially between friends/companions) can often be blurred. Clearly delineating the difference between romantic v.s other types of love is beyond the scope of this thesis. Perhaps one way to think of what I mean by romantic love is that it is (1) one of the deepest types of love, (2) it is not something you are 'born' with, like love between family members, but something that is found through living in the world.

I will first elucidate the concept of need and felt necessity within the context of love, evaluating how this need is unique and differs from other kinds of experienced need. Subsequently, I will present a comprehensive review of two prominent contemporary theories of love which are generally seen as the stronger contestants for the definition of love: love as robust concern as proposed by Frankfurt, and love as an appraisal of value as theorized by Velleman².

Following this, I analyze the extent to which these theories align or diverge from the lived experience of ‘felt necessity’ in love, and show that neither theories are congruent with felt necessity—neither theories can fully account for the centrality that love plays in our lives. Finally, I will argue that what is missing from both theories of love is a theory of attachment. For this, I will draw on Edward Harcourt’s taxonomy of attachment and love. Then, I will propose a synthesis of attachment theory and the theory of need in love through the concepts of non-instrumental and instrumental self-interest, proposing an integrated framework that enhances our understanding of love in both Frankfurt and Velleman’s perspectives. This integrative approach aims to develop a more holistic and nuanced theory of love, one that resonates with both the intellectual and experiential facets of this profound human experience.

Section 1: Definition of Need and Felt Necessity

First, I will discuss what it means to *need* something. Alice is working late at the library and is on the brink of collapse due to hunger. Bob has fallen off his bike on the way to school and is bleeding profusely. In these scenarios, we could say that Alice needs food, and Bob needs to have his bleeding

² While the union view of love appears to characterize ‘felt necessity’ (you need the person you are sharing an identity with), I will not discuss it in my main argument because there is very convincing criticism against it. The main criticisms are (1) union diminishes the autonomy and independence of (2) love undeniably involves caring for the other in an unselfish way, but union eliminates any self/self-sacrifice and (3) the ontological status of the ‘we’ is unclear

stopped and to get bandaids. Thus, it would seem like when a needs x , a would be *harmed* in some way without x . In other words, we can define the state of ‘need’ as following:

a needs x at time t_j , and the only way for a to avoid serious harm during time period p , which includes t_j , is to have x at t_j (Wiggins 63).

We should note that the emotion of feeling need versus being truly in a state of need is not necessarily the same: there is an objective definition of need independent of a subject’s psychology. People often feel as if they need things they want. For example, I may really want a jacket during Black Friday and feel like I need that jacket, when in reality I would not be harmed if I simply wear the jacket I have right now. Thus, need is mostly independent of emotion—indeed, unlike desire, need does not depend on some mental state but on the objective relationship with a person, her situation, and objects that influence her state of wellbeing.

When it comes to needing *someone* in the context of love (as opposed to needing a thing), it can be difficult to distinguish whether we are truly harmed without them or simply think so. Furthermore, it appears that in love, the belief of harm can be a self-fulfilling prophecy: if we believe that we would be harmed without the beloved enough, we can experience their loss as a genuine harm. For example, consider that Alice and Bob have been in a relationship, but Bob mistreats Alice. In reality, it would be better for Alice for the relationship to end, and Alice truly does not need Bob. However, her felt need means that after the relationship ended, she falls into a depressive mood for weeks on end. Thus, in love, merely feeling that the object of love is a necessity can make it a necessity. Thus, we term the phenomenon of experiencing the person we love as a need ‘felt necessity’ (Wonderly 983).

After establishing a concept of necessity, let us begin characterizing felt necessity in love. Felt necessity in love has some qualities that differentiate it from other types of need. First, the felt necessity of love is often experienced with an intense strength and urgency. Consider the case where Alice is in class, has a slight migraine and would benefit from some Advil. But Alice may choose to forgo walking to the pharmacy and purchasing Advil, because she considers the harm done to her by a migraine to be less inconvenient than the trip to the pharmacy. In this case, while Alice does need Advil—her migraine objectively causes her pain and would be alleviated by Advil—the degree of need is relatively weak and not urgent. This example also shows that in a state of need, individuals can choose to forsake the object of need for something else, even if that something else is not a need (in this case, the convenience of staying on-campus).

Furthermore, while Alice needs Advil, this need does not attach to some specific Advil. Indeed, what Alice needs is not necessarily Advil: it is simply any medication that has the property of Advil, or any medication that has the appropriate therapeutic qualities could alleviate the symptoms of her migraine. If she were to purchase medicine, she would be indifferent to any specific bottle of medication on the shelf—any that satisfy the functional properties Advil would be enough to satisfy her need.

The above two characteristics of need in daily life—relative unimportance and substitutability of the object of need—are the opposite of felt necessity in love. Consider the scenario where Alice experiences Bob as a felt necessity in love. Let us say that Alice is given the opportunity to receive something else that would immensely benefit her and skyrocket her wellbeing, but the caveat is that it

would cause her to lose Bob. No matter how enticing the other offer and how much it would benefit Alice (e.g. one million dollars, an offer to her dream school or dream job), it would not seem reasonable to accept it. Indeed, some may argue that if Alice chose one million dollars over having Bob in her life, then she did not really love Bob at all. Thus, the felt necessity of love is typically thought to have importance and precedence over any other want or desire (Monique 984-985).

Next, while Alice would accept any medication that has the functional properties of Advil, she unequivocally rejects any person that is a substitute for Bob, even if they have the same qualities of properties of Bob—even if they were indistinguishable (e.g. Bob's twin). Thus, the beloved is in the felt necessity of love, i.e. the need depends not on specific property of the individual or anything that the individual can do for the lover. The need is directed specifically towards this and only this individual. Indeed, the irreplaceability of the beloved, even by identical twins or clones, has been noted by many love theorists, such as Nozick, Frankfurt, and Velleman, as one of the foundational features of love.

Furthermore, if Alice did accept medication, her need for Advil or be satisfied and she would no longer have this need until the next time she has a migraine. However, she would not consider spending time with Bob to satisfy her felt necessity for Bob, until the next time this felt necessity appears on her mind. Thus, need in love is ongoing and continuous, and while certain activities (e.g. going on a dinner date, taking a walk in the park) are motivated by this need, no activity can entirely satisfy this need. Referring back to Wiggin's definition of need where we established that for a to avoid serious harm during time period p which includes t_j , a must have x at t_p , we can say that both p and t_j span incredibly long periods—they span the remaining duration of Alice's life, as long as Alice still loves Bob.

Finally, the felt necessity of love is often seen as a proxy or a reflection of the depth of one's connectedness to the individual. Even when Alice experiences a need for medication, we would not expect her to constantly think about medication or modify her behaviours in ways other than to acquire the medicine. In other words, most needs are independent of psychological ties to the object. Yet, in a state of love, the individual who we love is often on our mind and thoughts, and we consciously reshape our identity in response to the beloved—not necessarily to please them, but simply because we love someone.

Thus, to conclude this section, we can say an individual needs x when they would be harmed without x . This is the same in love as in other objects, as the lover would be harmed without that person. However, the importance of the felt necessity of love presides above other needs. Individuals experience the felt necessity of love in a particularly strong and vivid way, the object of need is non-substitutable, and the experience both reflects and is constitutive of a deep connectedness to the beloved.

Section 2: Robust Concern & Appraisal and Valuation

In this section, I discuss robust concern and value views on love, focusing on Frankfurt and Velleman.

Then, I provide some criticisms relating to felt necessity in both cases.

Robust concern theorists posit that the hallmark and only requirement of love is that it consists of a distinctive type of genuine concern for the flourishing of the beloved:

loving someone always involves caring about the person for his own sake. That is, when one loves someone, one wants his good. One wants him to flourish, if flourishing is an option.

Moreover, one wants this at least in part unselfishly. (Wolf 189)

In other words, the lover should have the best interests of their beloved individual in mind, with no strings attached. Frankfurt provides a developed (and influential) view of robust concern, considering love to be a mode of caring that is a “disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of a beloved object” (*On Caring* 167). To clarify, disinterested does not mean ‘not interested’ but that there is no additional vested interest in the flourishing of the beloved: we want the beloved to thrive not because it benefits us—even in some roundabout way—but purely because we care about them.

Notably, he argues love is distinct from other emotions in that love is also “a somewhat non-voluntary and complex volitional structure” that can reorganize the structure of an individual’s will to shape a person’s “purposes and priorities” even about things unrelated to the beloved object (*On Caring* 165). Our love for someone may cause us to form second-order volitions in which we desire to desire what the beloved is passionate about. As an example, consider the case where Alice is very passionate about classical music, and wants to go to a New Year’s Eve concert at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra with Bob. Even if Bob has no understanding of and finds it difficult to appreciate such music, he would now *want to* want to enjoy and go to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In other words, love causes the lover to second-order volitions towards the first-order desires of the beloved.

Since Frankfurt views love as a volitional structure, he believes to perform deeds out of love is an exercise of autonomy and freedom—much like how Kant perceives deeds performed out of duty. When love demands sacrifices, we may feel compelled by its “unconditional authority” to perform a selfless and autonomous act of love. This is because, similar to moral duty, the beloved becomes essential and integral to the lover’s will. Indeed, Frankfurt writes that the essential nature of a person depends on the “volitional necessities” which constrain our will—things that we cannot help but care about (*On Caring* 165). Within love, “there are certain things that we feel we *must* do” and to not do these things would constitute a form of betrayal to the self (*On Caring* 171).

Thus, Frankfurt’s view places great importance on the notion of necessity:

the well-being of what a person loves is for him an irreplaceable *necessity*. In other words, the fact that a person has come to love something entails that the satisfaction of his concern for the flourishing of that particular thing is something that he has come to *need*. If he comes to believe that his beloved is not flourishing, then it is unavoidable that this causes him harm. (*Autonomy, Necessity and Love* 170)

Within the robust concern view, the wellbeing of the beloved becomes a necessity: there is a sense in which we are also hurt if our beloved is not well. This relates to another key aspect of the robust-concern view which differs from Frankfurt’s emphasis. While Frankfurt focuses on volitional structures and autonomy, other theorists foreground emotional vulnerability: one’s own emotions becomes inextricably tied to to the beloved: if they are threatened, we will feel fearful, if they are doing poorly, we may also feel sad or disheartened.

Finally, it should also be noted that Frankfurt rejects the argument that there are reasons for love, that love is a response to the qualities of the beloved, or that love is not a response to objective value. He writes that love is not a response to “the inherent values of its object”. For example, a parent does not love a child because they are aware of some value inherent in the child. Rather, he writes, love is “the originating source of terminal value”: love itself provides the reasons (*The Reasons of Love*, 38, 39, 55)³.

However, while the robust-concern theory provides an explanation of the necessity of the well-being of the beloved, it does not explain *why* we need the beloved themselves. Since we truly care about the beloved, we would be hurt to see them be unhappy. But what if their happiness does not involve ourselves? The robust-concern theory would then be forced to remove himself from the beloved for their flourishing, because that is the best way one can ‘care’ for the beloved. Frankfurt writes that caring possesses inherent value because it makes us “the distinctive kind of creature that we are”, that it is the “indispensably foundational activity through which we provide continuity and coherence to our volitional lives” (*On Caring* 163, 162). However, what seems essential here is the ability to care at all, not the ability to care about a specific individual. If our beloved were to have to leave, it would seem okay as long as we can care about someone else such that we can still live the distinctively human life of caring. Thus, while robust-concern explains why we need the well-being of the beloved, and we need *a* beloved, it does not fully explain why we need *the* beloved.

Next, let us turn to the value-appraisal theory of love. Velleman takes a stance against conative definitions of love, rejecting views of love that relate to motives, purpose, will and volition, or that

³ Abbreviated as TRL

based on the assumption that “love can be analyzed in terms of an aim”, even if the aim is the wellbeing of the beloved (*Love as a Moral Emotion* 354)⁴. Rather, for Velleman, love is a unique way of viewing the beloved and directed only towards the “the beloved himself but not toward any result at all” (LME 345). He writes that love is “an arresting awareness of a value inherent in its object” (LME 360). Here, ‘arresting’ refers to the fact that it arrests our natural tendencies for “emotional self-protection” (LME 361) and removes our defenses, making us “vulnerable to the other” (LME 361).

While Frankfurt’s definition is closely related to the structure of the will, Velleman’s definition of love is deeply rooted to one’s rational personhood: for love towards persons, “value” refers to the value the beloved has by virtue of being a person, which is an instance of the “rationalized will” that they possess. This is because the rational will constitutes the beloved’s “true and proper self” as it is “ideal” (LME 344). The rational will acts as a person’s “self-governing legal authority” which manifests by guiding the empirical self’s actions and decisions. Hence, the rational will is at the “heart of personhood” (LME 348), and love is a response to the actions and traits of the beloved which reveal this rational will that should be seen as a self-existent end. Thus, love can also be seen as an exercise in “*really* looking” at a person, and responding emotionally in a way that reflects our ability to *see* them (LME 361).

We should note that love is a response to a recognition of the rational will, which does not necessitate that the beloved must act in a ‘rational’ way or demonstrate any form of what we typically consider as ‘rational thinking’. All that is required is that the lover is able to recognize a rational self just like herself in the beloved: “a capacity of appreciation of valuation—a capacity to care about things in

⁴ Abbreviated as LME.

that reflective way which is distinctive of self-conscious creatures like us” through the beloved’s actions (LME 365). Through seeing this self-conscious and reflective mind, the lover first sees the individual as an object of respect as a self-existent end. Thus, for Velleman, love is a response to the same value as respect: “I regard respect and love as the required minimum and optional maximum responses to one and the same value” (LME 366), with respect being the lowest (acceptable) point and love being the highest point. The specifics of *what* actions enable this *seeing* depends on the compatibility between two individuals. For example, while I may find the tendency of my beloved to make corny puns endearing and symbolic of their rational self, another person might find it an uninteresting trait that does not enable them to see another self.

We should note here that Velleman differs significantly from Frankfurt’s view and rejects the the robust-concern view through love’s phenomenology:

“Love does not feel (to me, at least) like an urge or impulse or inclination toward anything: it feels rather like a state of attentive suspension, similar to wonder or amazement or awe.” (LME 360)

Velleman considers love to be essentially an attitude towards the beloved that does not necessitate any action, including those that benefit the beloved. As Velleman points out, we do not spend our days thinking of what would be in the best interest of our lover and then seek them out. When we think about someone that is dear to us and our heart fills with love, we do not feel an urge to ask how they are and offer our help to ensure that they are well. Indeed, someone who is always fawning over the beloved and thinking about how to “care and share and please and impress...would be an interfering, scc ingratiating nightmare” (LME 360).

Before moving on to the next section, let us address Velleman's argument that love does not involve attachment. He claims that desire to be around (and any other desire) is not a necessary part of love: "it is easy enough to love someone whom one cannot stand to be with" and gives the example of relatives that one has no desire to spend time with, such as a "meddlesome aunt, cranky grandparent, smother parent" but still is dearly and freely loved nonetheless (LME 353). This is possible even outside of familial relationships: "when divorcing couples tell their children that they still love one another but cannot live together, they are telling not a white lie but a dark truth" (LME 353). Velleman argues that because of real-life examples like this, "the notion that loving someone entails wanting to be with him seems fantastic indeed" (LME 353).

There are a few potential problems with this claim. First, if all that is required of love is this 'disarming' awareness of another person with no desire to spend time (or do anything else at all) with the beloved, then the attitude that one has towards e.g. a musician, a teacher, a parent, and a spouse would all become the same love. But clearly, while I have the same "arresting awareness" of a respected mentor who guided me throughout college, a musician who writes lyrics that I grew up listening to and that resonates deeply with my soul, and my beloved partner; the love that I have towards my partner is very different from the love or attitude I have towards the former two individuals. Indeed, one can even form a 'disarming' awareness of the dignity of someone that one sincerely hates.

Furthermore, if we view love as purely an exercise in seeing in others the "capacity for valuation like ours" that "makes our emotional defenses against them feel unnecessary" (LME 366), it seems like that is no upward limit towards how many individuals a person can love simultaneously. This seems intuitively incorrect, or at least problematic. Let's say A loves B. While A's love for B is not necessarily

diminished if A also loves C, it would seem strange if A could also love D and E and F and G and so on. Thus, perhaps rejecting that spending time (or at least desiring to spend time) with one's beloved is a part of love overlooks the fact that in real life love is something that requires time and energy—things that we only have a finite amount of.

Lastly, perhaps the very fact that we still feel some love towards people like a divorced spouse is proof of the role of attachment in love. There is a big difference between the love that one feels for a divorced spouse who one cannot bear to be with, than the love that one feels for the same spouse during the honeymoon phase. Perhaps what one feels towards the former is not love, but the understanding and care that remains after it—the vestiges of past love, of moments shared with one another. After all, married people divorce for a reason. If two people cannot even bear to spend time with each other, then if they did not have a prior history, there would be no love between them. Indeed, he writes “the immediate object of love...is the manifest person, embodied in flesh and blood and accessible to the senses” (LME 371). If one does not spend time with another, then the manifest person is not accessible to be loved, and the only way that love can exist is through the past, when one did spend time with the beloved—i.e. attachment.

This can be extended to the case of relatives as well. Velleman writes that “loving a person for the way he walks is not a response to the value of his gait; it's rather a response to his gait as an expression or symbol or reminder of his value as a person” (LME 371). If one cannot even bear to interact with one's grandfather, then it's hard to say that one loves him for trait X such that X is an expression of his value as a person. Rather, it would seem that one loves him because of the attachment one may have formed during childhood or by the attachment of being blood relations.

This concludes the overview of the robust-concern and value-appraisal theories of love. In the next section, I will further discuss some issues with Frankfurt and Velleman's views, and introduce a few puzzles that can help pinpoint the issues with downplaying the role of necessity and attachment in love.

Section 3: Three Puzzles in the Frankfurt and Velleman's Theories of Love

I will now argue that one shared weakness is that they both view love as purely an exercise of the rational mind, based on evaluation and judgment. Whether as an exercise of autonomy and freedom or as an appraisal of value, love appears as a sort of detached appraisal and analysis. Such a view of love is not compatible with the internal experience of love—especially in cases where our care for our beloved conflicts with other needs, such as the need to spend time with them. To fully elucidate these problems with robust-concern and value-appraisal, let us consider two thought experiments (adapted from Wonderly 993).

- (1) Imagine your partner receives the opportunity to go on a four year fellowship/scholarship and has to move to Europe. This fellowship would boost your partner's academic career like nothing else. You immediately respond enthusiastically, celebrate with them and help them order plane tickets and pack their bags. You know that this is the best for them, and since your interests are identified with your partner's this is in your interest too.
- (2) Similar to the thought experiment above, but imagine that your partner has to go away for ten years. This program is beyond anything your partner can achieve by staying next to you and anything you can provide, but during this program on a different continent, you will only be

able to have limited interactions with your partner. You still respond with extreme enthusiasm because your interests are defined with your partners and this is in their best interest.

Both of these situations are aligned with the robust-concern and value-appraisal theories of love.

Within the robust-concern view, the interest and wellbeing of the partner is a necessity to the lover.

Thus, if being separated from the beloved is overwhelmingly in the best interest of the beloved and

leads to their flourishing in life, then the lover should advocate for this. Similarly, since the

value-appraisal view calls that the lover responds to the personhood of the beloved as a self-existent

end, and Velleman does not believe that attachment (or spending time and interacting with each other)

is necessary for love, the lover should not consider her feelings and only consider what the end of the

beloved is.

The above reactions would be quite perfect when it comes to robust-concern and value-appraisal. Yet, we can easily see why someone might be upset at a lover's enthusiastic response. Of course, in the end, we would still want our lover to support our career. We would want our partner to ultimately care about us for our own sake, and not *actually* try to prevent us from pursuing our ambitions because they want to share their lives with us. So what is wrong with this response? The enthusiastic response implies that the lover did not feel significant harm in losing the opportunity to spend lots of time with the beloved—it implies that the lover does not need the beloved to be around them.

Indeed, in the above scenario, the lover has acted in an entirely selfless way. But perhaps, what is missing from Frankfurt and Velleman's characterizations of love is that we want to be cared about in a not-entirely-selfless way: we do not want the beloved to be hurt, yet we still want the beloved to

experience prolonged separation from us as a loss. We want the well-being of the beloved to be at least partly dependent on our proximity to them. Both the robust-concern and the value-appraisal theory of love somewhat overlook this undeniable self-regarding of love. In other words, the fact that we need to be needed—beyond felt necessity, there is a felt necessity towards felt necessity.

Then, relating to felt necessity of the condition of love, let us consider a third thought experiment:

- (3) A and B are identical twins living the exact same lives: they went to the same college, moved to the city, and have the same job, and the same income. Overall, their lives are very similar in their activities and by any standard of conventional success. However, there is one difference: A has a person they truly love, and B has never truly experienced love. Which life seems more preferable to inhabit?

Intuitively and perhaps obviously, we would pick the life of A to live. Frankfurt and Velleman would both agree with this. As mentioned above, Frankfurt writes that without love there would be nothing to maintain “the thematic unity or coherence in our desires or in the determinations of our will” as the “various tendencies and configurations will come and go” (16-17, TRL). Velleman writes that “love, like respect, is the heart’s response to the realization that it is not alone” and indeed a life with this realization seems preferable to a life without (366, LME). However, he does not further elaborate on *how* love causes this realization (or if this realization is possible without love) and why continued love is needed to maintain this realization.

In the next section, I will address the first two puzzles by utilizing attachment theory that being needed by a lover in a self-regarding manner is not only necessary, but also part of the value of love. I propose the concepts of ‘instrumental self-interest’ and ‘non-instrumental self-interest’ that can solve

the puzzles relating to felt necessity within love, and reconcile this concept with Frankfurt and Velleman's views on love. Then, in the final section, I will further consider the role that love plays in moral philosophy, focusing on the work of Susan Wolf and Iris Murdoch, and seek to unite Frankfurt and Velleman's views.

Section 4: Attachment and Self-Interest

One theoretical lens of approaching attachment and need relative to love is offered by Edward Harcourt through combining Aristotelian concepts of vice and virtue with Kantian ethics in *Attachment, Autonomy, and the Evaluative Variety of Love*. In this essay, Harcourt first proposes three 'desiderata' or criteria for love and claims that this system can apply to any form of love.

Harcourt observes that philosophical accounts of love are often idealistic: they define some standard that a relationship should live up to, and if it does not, then it is simply not love. This is true of both Frankfurt and Velleman's views. For example, if X claims to love Y but wishes for the flourishing of Y mostly because it would lead to a better life for X themselves, Frankfurt would argue that this is not love. In response, Harcourt argues that the first desiderata of a definition of love is to recognize that love, like many things, comes in various qualities and grades: we should allow room to make a distinction between "excellence of the kind and membership of the kind" (Harcourt 2). Second, Harcourt argues that while it is unclear what the 'best' kind of love is, we know that it must include respect for autonomy. Otherwise, love becomes merely a selfish desire to possess and own and interferes with the personhood of the lovers. Thus, the second desiderata of a theory of love is to "recognize the importance in love of autonomy" (Harcourt 2). The third desideratum is generality: that a theory of love can be applied not only to romantic interests, but parents, friends, and others as well. (Harcourt

3).

Harcourt then proposes an account of love based on the idea of distinctive ‘fields’ of values or virtues from *Nicomachean Ethics*. Within this theory, each virtue is seen as a skill that requires a complex mix of intellectual, emotional and social understanding and is ‘perfected’ through performing certain relevant actions. For example, the virtue of liberality is exercised by “the giving and taking of small sums of money” (Harcourt 5). Each virtue can be exercised in similar ways. For example, courage might be exercised through performing tasks that one knows must be done despite fear. Thus, Harcourt proposes to think of love, defective and perfective, to exist in various points in such an evaluative field.

Harcourt argues that the best way to specify and grade the evaluative subspace of love is attachment. Indeed, drawing from psychology, he shows that the taxonomy of attachments naturally share the same structure as Aristotelian virtues and vices. Attachment are “a specific type of emotional bond” (Simpson and Belsky 136) of one person to another that has four defining features (Collins and Feeney 164):

- (1) the attached wishes to be in close proximity to the attachment figure
- (2) the attached experiences distress on separation from the attachment figure
- (3) the attachment figure acts as a source of comfort and reassurance for the attached
- (4) the attachment figure serves a ‘secure base’ from which the attached explores the world

Then, based on the famous Strange Situation experiment, attachment types have been graded into ‘secure’ attachment, ‘insecure-avoidant’ attachment and ‘insecure-ambivalent’ attachment. These categories map perfectly onto Aristotelian evaluation sub-spaces, as it is clear that secure-attachment is

superior to and the goal within this subspace. This is because secure attachment is associated with the disposition to ask for help or comfort in a direct manner, the disposition to be independent without worrying or obsession over the attachment figure, and simple delight and joy in when the attachment figure is present. In other words, like other Aristotelian virtues, better attachment makes for a better life (Harcourt 5).

Finally, Harcourt proposes that love has the same structure as attachment, and that love is “human attachment”: non-human animals are able to form attachments, but love is a distinctively human form of attachment. This kind of human attachment is love in its non-idealizing sense: “attachment refracted through the human” becomes love.

This attachment-theory of love can be further extended through Aristotle's accounts of *philia*: he wrote that *philia*: could be divided into three types (from worst to best): ‘interest-friendship’, ‘pleasure-friendship’ and ‘character-friendship’. In character-friendship, the friend is the object of *philia* only for the sake of the friend; there are no ulterior motives, and nothing to be derived from this relationship except the friend themselves. In character-friendship one wishes and does what is good for one's friend, and wants the friend to exist and live for his sake, for no further purpose. This type of love is quite compatible with, and perhaps even similar to Frankfurt's view of truly caring and Velleman's view of truly seeing. However, Aristotle's character-friendship also includes a desire to be ‘living with’ one's friend for no further purpose. This seems puzzling: if one desires to share time with one's friend, it must be because one derives *some* form of utility from being near the friend, where it is joy or comfort or some other indescribable feeling. But then this seems to shift the relationship from character-friendship to pleasure-friendship—a friendship where friends are brought close through

pursuing pleasure or positive emotions. Yet, the desire to live with one's beloved friend, even if selfish, appears phenomenologically correct.

Before further examining this idea, let us consider interest-friendship: the lowest kind of *philia*. Pauline Chazan argues that interest-friendship maps onto 'narcissistic love', in which one depends on the beloved in a way that violates both of their autonomy and self-respect (Chazan 129-32). The narcissist only loves for his own good, the beloved becomes an instrument to satisfy the narcissist's ego. However, Harcourt disagrees with this mapping. He argues that narcissistic relationships, while defective, still map onto character-friendship rather than interest-friendship. This may seem counterintuitive: after all, narcissistic relationships are frequently more harmful than interest-friendships. In interest-friendships, one sees one's friend as merely a means to an end, whether it be money or power, or a favor. This end is entirely external to the character of the friend, and once the favor is done, the friend can immediately detach from the relationship because there is no longer an 'interest'.

However, when a narcissist 'uses' another person for their ego, there is a sense in which this 'use' is different from a purely instrumental relationship (such as for money). As Harcourt argues, the fundamental trait of narcissists is that they completely fail to see others as separate and different persons: "the narcissist characteristically has difficulty in seeing the other as a person in the round at all: he is intolerant of differences of mind, and so cannot see the possibility that his special others don't share his wishes, plans and so on" (Harcourt 6). Furthermore, even though the attachment of a narcissist is an unhealthy kind, the narcissist is still attached to that person, and needs "their presence, their understanding, and so on" rather than wanting something *from* them (Harcourt 7). The person

that the narcissist is attached to is still important and irreplaceable to them (albeit in a twisted way), but the friend that one befriends merely to receive a job referral is not. Thus, while narcissistic love is a bad form of love because it violates the other's autonomy, it is not defective in the sense of instrumentality or in the sense of interest-friendship, rather, it is a defective way of wanting someone for their own sake. Thus, narcissistic love is still love.

If we allow the possibility that narcissistic love is still love, then perhaps we can re-evaluate the question of selfishness when it comes to the problem of wanting to 'live with' (spend time with) the beloved.

To solve this problem, I propose to distinguish between two types of self-interest: 'instrumental self-interest' and 'non-instrumental self-interest'. The instrumental self-interest is what we typically think of when we say someone is 'using' someone as a means-to-an-end. In these cases, one individual forms a relationship with another for some desirable object that the other has or is able to offer. Thus, the other is merely an instrument to this desirable object. On the other hand, non-instrumental self-interest is interest simply *in* the other—it is directed at the other and nothing else. When one wants to 'live with' one's character-friend, one merely wants the friend to be nearby. This desire is undeniable, still in self-interest, but it is not instrumental because one does not desire any further good from the friend's presence. The simple fact that one is made happy by living with one's friend does not mean that this is instrumental.

How then, should we distinguish between instrumental and non-instrumental self-interest? The distinction may be trivially obvious in certain cases (such as the above wishing to befriend someone to receive some sort of help versus wishing to simply spend time with someone), and yet very

hard to distinguish in others. For example, consider the case where Alice and Bob are in a relationship and wish to spend time with each other. Alice is an otherwise happy person with a close circle of friends and various interests which she cares about. On the other hand, Bob is an unhappy person who frequently feels lonely and sad and has no other friends or activities to occupy himself with. Bob only feels at peace when he is around Alice, but Alice often feels peace with herself and others outside of Bob. In using Alice's presence as a distraction from loneliness and unease, Bob has instrumental self-interest towards Alice. On the other hand, Alice has no such *reason* behind wanting to spend time with Bob. Thus, we can say that Alice just wants to spend time with Bob, but Bob wants to spend time with Alice *to* not feel alone. Thus, we can say if there is a *to* after the object of a relationship, then the self-interest is instrumental.

Furthermore, this non-instrumental self-interest is not just inevitable, but perhaps beneficial to love. While we do not want our beloved to have any instrumental self-interest, we want them to have non-instrumental self-interest. We want to *be important* to our beloved, which is to say that we want to be needed, and hence, we want them to experience harm when they are deprived of our presence. This necessitates that they have at least some non-instrumental self-interest in us.

Now that we have characterized instrumental v.s. non-instrumental self-interest, let us further elaborate the concept, and show that this type of self-interest can be reconciled with and enrich both Frankfurt and Velleman's views on love.

Beginning with Frankfurt, in addition to the criticism mounted by Velleman that in real life, love does not look like a constant attempt to promote the wellbeing of the beloved, another potential objection towards robust-concern theory is that it is too passive of a conception of love. In

robust-concern, it seems like it is the lover's role to learn more and uncover the beloved's interests, and then somehow aid the beloved in their aspiration towards them. However, what does this *really* mean? Of course, the lover can lend a helping hand when the beloved needs a favor, provide a shoulder to cry on, and provide kind encouragement. These things can be selflessly provided at the detriment of the lover with no further interest, and would be what Frankfurt considers an exercise of love.

However, the things that people *really* want—the things that make a life worth living—are things that a person cannot realistically be helped with. For example, while perhaps the lover can provide financial support and introductions to a beloved who is struggling with their career, there is really nothing that a lover could do to help the beloved discover what kind of job they find meaningful. Indeed, other things like passion, hobbies, aspirations, and fulfilling relationships with friends and family are all things that a lover cannot and should not help with. All that a lover can, in fact do, is to be there. To try to do otherwise would not only be paternalistic, but would also infringe on the authenticity and autonomy of the beloved—the very last thing that a lover would want. This is where we can introduce non-instrumental self-interest: by recognizing that both sides have a non-instrumental self-interest towards the other, we prevent ourselves from making decisions such as described in the first two puzzles. Non-instrumental self-interest means that to promote the wellbeing of the beloved, one has to look beyond what might seem objectively beneficial for them, and recognize that the lover themselves is a part of the wellbeing. Indeed, to review the third puzzle, what makes A's life more desirable is 'the existence of a lover', not 'the existence of a lover that does so-and-so'. Thus, the concept of non-instrumental self-interest prioritizes the subjective experience of the beloved.

Now, let us move on to Velleman's views on love. I argue that the concept of non-instrumental self-interest can be used to elucidate what Velleman means by "lovable" by a specific individual. In describing love as a response to the rational nature of the beloved, Velleman writes that "the qualities for which we love someone are qualities that show us or remind us or symbolize for us that value to which we respond by loving him": when we find the crooked smile of our beloved to be lovable, we do not love them because their smile is crooked, but because the smile is somehow "emblematic" of what we actually love about them (Beyond Price 46). Furthermore, he writes that "almost everyone is worthy of being loved by someone", meaning that everyone can find someone who is able to respond to their outward physical or behavioral quirks in this way.

What Velleman does not fully describe is how certain people are able to appreciate the value of certain people, and not certain other people—i.e. the selectivity of love, since obviously, even though we do (or should) recognize the dignity of each individual and treat them with respect, we do not love the dignity of everyone. Velleman writes that what accounts for the selectivity of love is simply that the person is the right sort of fit for a specific other person. Here, I argue that we can introduce non-instrumental self-interest as a more specific explanation of the selectivity of love. When we feel this non-instrumental self-interest towards another person, when their mere presence provides comfort and joy to us is when we have found the 'right' sort of fit. Otherwise, without this non-instrumental self-interest, we would not be affected by being cut off from the person that we claim to love.

This concludes our discussion of the first type of felt necessity: the necessity of the specific beloved. In the next section, I will discuss the felt necessity towards the condition of love.

Section 5: The Necessity of the Condition of Love

In this section, I'll first summarize two views on the necessity of love in a human life (1) based on Wolf and Frankfurt that love is what gives humans a sense of 'coherence' in life (2) based on Velleman and Murdoch that love enables humans to achieve greater moral depths through *really* seeing. I then suggest that Frankfurt and Velleman's views are perhaps two sides of a coin: value-appraisal requires one to perform robust-concern, and robust-concern requires value-appraisal to be possible.

5.1 Love and Coherence

Wolf argues that love plays a crucial role in giving our lives meaning, as it guides us towards engaging with things outside of ourselves that are worth caring about. Wolf suggests that the quality of meaning of a life is deeply connected to our susceptibility to a certain kind of motivating reason (Wolf3). These reasons and motives do not contribute to either our happiness or our sense of impersonal, objective moral duty, such as justice, compassion, or fairness. Consider a person who performs laborious and time-consuming tasks out of love: staying overnight at a hospital when one's brother is sick, staying up all night writing and re-writing a philosophy essay. These things do not *really* make one happy, and one does not necessarily have a moral duty to perform these things either: "I act neither out of self-interest or out of duty or any other sort of impersonal or impartial reason". These kind of reasons—which in fact motivate the majority of our activities—are what Wolf suggests we call "reasons of love", and she argues that they have a distinctive and fundamental role in our lives (Wolf 4): "Proneness to being motivated and guided by such reasons...is at the core of our ability to live meaningful lives" (Wolf 7).

Wolf proposes that a life infused with meaning is one that entails a proactive involvement in endeavors that possess inherent value: “a person’s life can be meaningful only if she cares fairly deeply about some things or things, only if she is gripped, excited, interested, engaged”—in other words, if she loves something” (Wolf 9). Without this, she would be “bored and alienated” by everything she does. However, it is not merely enough that a person finds an activity exciting: a person who loves smoking pot, watching TV, or doing endless crossword puzzles all day long (and has the privilege of being able to indefinitely do so) still might not have life that we consider having the ‘depth’ that a meaningful generally has. The individual must engage with an object “worthy” of love in a positive way and a mere “passive recognition” and participation is not enough to construct meaning (Wolf 9).

Thus, engagement in ‘meaningful’ endeavors are distinguished by more than just an individual’s zeal and enthusiasm; they are also defined by their inherent merit. In this regard, love acts as the dynamic force that propels us towards these endeavors and maintains our commitment to them. It is the complex blend of emotional and volitional dedication to what we perceive as valuable, transcending the bounds of mere personal gratification or joy. Thus, the meaning emerges from the confluence of our personal passions and affinities (the things we love) and the universal significance of our endeavors (the things that merit love). In other words meaning arises when two conditions are satisfied: “subjective attraction” and “objective attractiveness” (Wolf 9).

Wolf also argues for the central role of meaningfulness within morality, and to recognize meaningfulness as a “distinct category of value” when evaluating the acts within a life (Wolf 53), and that the kinds of activities that sustain the meaningfulness of our lives seem to have a different kind of

moral weight than activities that do not. She notes that, outside of happiness and self-interest, we naturally “give a wider moral berth to people’s engagement with projects or realms from which they get meaning” as compared to people’s engagement with activities that are sheerly related to happiness or self-interest (Wolf 53). For example, consider the case when a person misses some sort of pre-scheduled appointment (say a seminar meeting). We would be less critical if the reason for missing this is that the person’s favorite philosopher was in town, and they went to listen to their lecture than if they went to go home and soak in a hot bath. Similarly, we are less critical of an amateur musician who steals money and spends it on an expensive piano, than if he were to spend the money on a flat-screen TV. This is true even if the flat-screen TV were to deliver objectively more value, or even if the amateur musician never became a professional musician. Thus, it appears that we naturally attribute more moral importance to activities that relate to meaning in life, regardless of the result.

5.2 Love and Realism

In *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch first explores the idea that engaging deeply with disciplines such as art, language learning, and various intellectual pursuits can serve as moral education. These activities demand a form of attention and humility that mirrors the selfless attention required in the moral domain. Murdoch uses the example of learning a foreign language to illustrate how such an endeavor commands respect and attention to something outside oneself, fostering an honest and humble approach to knowledge. This process, she argues, is analogous to the moral effort of seeing others truly, without the distortions of selfishness.

Murdoch then expands this discussion to the moral realm, suggesting that the clarity, humility, and realism cultivated in intellectual disciplines are directly applicable to moral situations. She contends that moral choices often seem muddled by our selfish attachments, making it difficult to discern the right course of action. However, Murdoch posits that the same qualities of attention and humility that aid in intellectual pursuits can help in making moral decisions. She emphasizes the importance of love in this process, suggesting that love—understood as a genuine seeing of others and the world—can transform our moral vision, leading us away from selfish concerns towards a more authentic engagement with reality. She writes, “Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real” (Murdoch 55). This statement underscores her view that love involves a selfless attention to reality, an acknowledgment of the other’s existence and value independent of one’s own desires or prejudices.

Thus, Murdoch argues the ‘Good’ in moral philosophy is akin to the reality one engages with in intellectual and artistic endeavors. Just as attention and love lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of art or language, so too do they enable a richer, more truthful moral life. Love, in Murdoch’s framework, is not a passive affection but an active, moral force that enables us to see beyond ourselves and to connect with the real world in a meaningful way. Hence, Murdoch emphasizes its centrality to our moral lives, showing that love is not only an emotional state but a fundamental orientation towards the world, and that love enables us to be more moral.

5.3 Conclusion: Uniting Frankfurt, Wolf, Velleman and Murdoch

After discussing Wolf and Murdoch’s views on the role that love plays in a meaningful life, the similarities between Frankfurt & Wolf and Velleman & Murdoch are obvious. The first pair believe

that love addresses the issues of boredom, isolation, and alienation through providing coherent motivating reasons. The second pair believe that love to *see* someone for who they *really* are, and Murdoch expands on Velleman's definitions of love to demonstrate that it enables morality through illuminating our perception of reality and preventing us from living in a state of fantasy or illusion.

I now argue that all of these views can be reconciled to form a combined view on love. First, consider the fact that robust-concern and value-appraisal also necessitate each other. If A were to truly care about the wellbeing of B, then in order to be helpful to B in a meaningful—rather than overbearing or patronizing way—they would first have to recognize the dignity that they have as a person, and also recognize their rational personhood. In other words, without the arresting awareness of the value of a person, without really *seeing* someone, the robust-concern offered by A would not be very robust. Similarly, since viewing individuals as self-existence ends necessitates them being seen as the proper object of respect and love, it would be impossible to care about their well-being in an instrumental way.

Thus, it seems that both robust-concern and value-appraisal are needed in life. Perhaps one way to think about all four views is this: love is something that grounds us metaphysically in the world, through providing coherence and structure to our lives and granting us closer proximity to reality. A life without a single love or care is indeed listless, and spent mostly in one's head. Love provides us both things to care about, and people who care about us—who grant coherence through bearing witness to our lives. Without love, everything appears distant from oneself, the external world appears to be barren with not much to do. With love, we see the world for what it is—not a wasteland, but a garden.

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