

Love and Caring

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The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love

Edited by Christopher Grau and Aaron Smuts

Subject: Philosophy, Moral Philosophy Online Publication Date: Feb 2020

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199395729.013.15

Abstract and Keywords

Is there a principled framework for understanding the distinction between mere caring and love? This chapter critically assesses extant accounts, showing that the distinctive requirements for love that they propose are either insufficient or unnecessary. After identifying and exploring views that describe types of intimacy that suffice, but are too demanding to deem necessary, for love, this chapter develops a more ecumenical proposal for love's distinctive character that unifies a central insight in the preceding views. On this proposal, the feature that is necessary and sufficient to distinguish love from mere caring is conceived in terms of love's intimacy as reflected in a specific form of vulnerability. The lover, but not the mere carer, is subject to damage in her sense of herself as an agent leading a meaningful life directly in virtue of being permanently separated from the relevant object or in virtue of that object faring poorly.

Keywords: love, caring, intimacy, vulnerability, need, identity, emotion, valuing, agency, meaningful life

It does not seem to be possible to love someone or something and yet not care about the object of one's love. If someone declared, "I don't really care about my sister, but you know, I still love her," we would deem the person confused. On the other hand, mere caring seems to be a weaker attitude than love, such that it is possible, and indeed common, to care about something but not love it. For example, a teacher may say that she cares about her students, but balk at the suggestion that she loves them. Or again, an admirer of fine arts might care about, but not *love*, her favorite painting at the local museum. It thus appears that Harry Frankfurt was correct in asserting that love is a mode of caring (2004, 42; 1999a, 155). Yet, this sets up a puzzle. What is the difference between mere caring and love that makes love a "stronger" or "deeper" form of caring? That is, what must be added to mere caring to make it love?¹

1. Two Views on the Distinction between (Mere) Caring and Love

Two prominent authors, Harry Frankfurt and Bennett Helm, have directly addressed this question, so our inquiry begins with them.

1.1. Frankfurt's Account

In the case of Frankfurt, we can fully reconstruct his understanding of what makes love a special form of caring without having to employ his own, finely specified conception of caring. Instead, we can simply work with an intuitive and general understanding of caring (if you will, the bare concept of caring), according to which you care about something if and only if that object is important to you (1999a, 155). (And this means that Frankfurt's story about how love differs from mere caring should be compatible with several different conceptions of caring, and not just with Frankfurt's own.)

Frankfurt describes love in terms of four key features (1999a, 165–170). First, love consists in disinterested concern for the beloved's well-being or flourishing. This is to say that the object of love is regarded as important for its own sake, not merely as a means to (or otherwise on account of) something else that is important. Second, love is volitionally constrained such that whether and/or how much one loves an object is not up to the lover, in the sense that these matters are not under the lover's immediate control. Third, the beloved object's significance to the lover is marked by a kind of particularity. That is, the lover's concern cannot be satisfied by anything other than the well-being of her beloved specifically, and thus, the lover necessarily regards her beloved as nonsubstitutable. Fourth, and finally, the lover identifies with the interests of her beloved. She is invested in the flourishing of her beloved, benefiting when it flourishes and suffering when it is harmed. Thus, in a sense, the beloved's interests are the lover's interests as well.

Frankfurt views these four features as necessary for love, while it is plausible to interpret him as denying that any of these features is necessary for caring. In fact, he unequivocally asserts this with respect to the first two features. He allows that an object of care may be regarded as important only as a means to something else, in which case one's concern for its well-being would not be disinterested as love requires. And he allows that whether and how much one cares about something is, at least sometimes, up to the carer (1999a, 165). Further, if we take concern to be a form of caring (or perhaps equivalent to caring), he thinks that one can care about an object where one's concern for its well-being is not rooted in its identity as a particular, but rather its membership in a certain class. For example, for an individual who is concerned to help the poor, any poor person will do, but *love* does not admit of such indifference to the beloved's identity (1999a, 166). Finally, he recognizes that one might be merely concerned for someone's interests without identifying with these interests in the same way that love requires (1999a, 168). It seems, then, that Frankfurt has offered an account on which love requires specific features that caring *simpliciter* does not.

Love and Caring

Importantly, though, while these four features may be necessary for love and may sometimes distinguish mere caring from love, they are not the ones that make love distinctive. To see this, note first that there are plainly cases of caring about something for its own sake that is not up to the lover, which nonetheless do not amount to love. Return to the teacher who cares about her students but does not love them. She may well care about them for their own sakes, and not merely for the sake of something else that is ultimately important. Second, it may well be that she would like to cease to care—for example, because she would prefer to focus all her energy on something else she cares about, such as her family—but it is nonetheless not within her immediate control simply to cease caring about her students or even to start caring less than she does now. Third, the teacher may be concerned for her students' well-being not qua members of a certain class (i.e., *her* students), but in virtue of their particular identities. For example, if given the choice between benefiting her student Steve and say, benefiting three of her other students instead, she might opt for the former for no other reason than that she is concerned specifically about Steve as an individual. What is more, her concern for his well-being might well persist—and remain just as strong—even when he is no longer her student. Fourth, it seems as though the teacher may identify with the interests of her students in Frankfurt's sense, while still falling short of loving them. Plausibly, she may be invested in her students such that changes in their well-being impact how she herself is faring. For example, when she hears about a student's troubles at home, she gets sad or depressed on the student's behalf. She, in Frankfurt's terms, "profits from [the students'] successes" and "[their] failures cause [her] to suffer" (2004, 61–62).² We need a way to distinguish this case of caring from love and, so far, Frankfurt's account lacks the resources to do this.

One might think that Frankfurt's view can meet our challenge in light of certain of what he terms "necessities of love." Frankfurt identifies two related types of "need" that are internal to love (1999a, 170–171). One is that the lover needs for her beloved to flourish. The other is that the lover needs to do—or to refrain from doing—certain things depending on what the interests of the beloved demand. In other words, the lover *must* take certain courses of action while he cannot bring himself to (i.e., *must not*) undertake certain others. However, as we see it, these two features, as Frankfurt describes them, are still insufficient to distinguish love from caring.

According to Frankfurt, love entails a need for one's beloved to flourish. He writes, "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" (1999a, 170, Frankfurt's emphasis). While it is certainly possible that love involves a distinctive sort of necessity that mere caring does not, this particular need seems ill-suited to play this role. Consider that on Frankfurt's view, to need something is to be such that one would be, in some sense or another, harmed without it (1999a, 163). The lover, then, would be harmed in some sense or another if her beloved failed to flourish. Yet, as we saw in our discussion of the lover's identification with the interests of the beloved, this requirement is not sufficient to distinguish love from caring. The teacher who becomes sad upon learning about her student's diminished well-being is arguably harmed in virtue

Love and Caring

of her sadness, but we should not infer from this that she loves the student. In fact, on most accounts, mere caring involves a susceptibility to emotional pain when the object of one's care is faring poorly (Shoemaker 2003; Jaworska 2007a, 2007b; Helm 2009b; Seidman 2008).

Consider next Frankfurt's second, related necessity of love. He explains, "[i]t is characteristic of our experience of loving that when we love something, there are certain things that we feel we *must* do. Love demands of us that we support and advance the well-being of our beloved, as circumstances make it possible and appropriate for us to do so; and it forbids us to injure our beloved, or to neglect its interests" (1999a, 170, Frankfurt's emphasis). Frankfurt discusses the musts and mustn'ts of love under the term "volitional necessity," and he clearly thinks they are distinct not only from physical necessities, but also from rational and moral necessities (Frankfurt 1999b, 129).³ What a lover must not do is neither literally impossible for him to do, nor is it a requirement stemming from the balance of reasons the lover recognizes, be it prudential, moral, or more broadly construed. Rather, volitional necessity is a matter of what is on the agenda of options that the agent is willingly prepared to pursue in given circumstances, when weighed against other reasons. Volitional mustn'ts are items that are excluded from the agent's agenda even if there are strong reasons in favor of the item, while volitional musts are items that dominate the agenda so that all realistic alternatives, no matter how attractive, are not viewed as live options.⁴ What matters for our present purposes is that such volitional limits are not obviously unique to love, but can exist in cases of mere caring. Imagine a teacher who cares about one particular fragile, struggling, and especially neglected student who lacks other mentors or authority figures for support. Though the teacher cares about many students, she feels particularly drawn to this one and feels as though she absolutely must help him, seeing no other option but to invest extra time in mentoring him—and to avoid neglecting him—as the circumstances make it appropriate.⁵ Simply adding this devotion to the emotional vulnerability to this particular student's weal or woe for his own sake is not sufficient to turn the teacher's caring to love.⁶ We thus need to keep looking for other conceptual resources to distinguish love from mere caring.

Note further that volitional necessities are not only insufficient but also unnecessary as a distinctive element of love. We can imagine a person who always felt that he did have a choice whether to attend to even the most pressing needs of his beloved but still reports love. What is more, both he and his beloved might well regard his love as all the stronger for lack of volitional necessity. Perhaps his beloved celebrates the fact that he freely chooses—again and again—to advance her well-being, absent the pressure of any (even self-imposed) compelling constraint on his decision. The man is not blind to other options when the promotion of his beloved's welfare is at issue, but he makes the clear-eyed choice to devote himself to her good despite acknowledging the presence of other possibilities when he so chooses. While we might disagree with the couple's assessment that his love is *better* for lack of volitional necessity, denying that his love is genuine is surely unwarranted. Volitional necessity may be special or important when it does occur, but it

Love and Caring

seems to go too far to discount attitudes or relationships as something less than love simply on account of lacking this quality.

1.2. Helm's Account

A second detailed and explicit account of the difference between caring and love has been put forth by Bennett Helm. In this case, the account of love builds on the specifics of an account of caring, so let us begin with the latter. According to Helm, caring in general about something means that the object is “the focus of a projectible, rational pattern of felt evaluations and evaluative judgments, such that one is motivated not only to feel and judge, but also to act accordingly” (2009b, 75). For example, if I care about my plant, then I will tend to feel joyous when it thrives, upset when it does poorly, fearful when its survival is threatened by dangerous parasites, and so on. And not only that, but I will also be motivated to promote and protect its well-being, for example, by watering it regularly and ridding my garden of the parasites that would harm it. On Helm's view, to care about an object is always to care about it under a particular description or to care about it “as something” (2009a, 44; 2009b, 80–82). For example, if I care about a plant merely as a decorative object, then I might be unconcerned, and even pleased, if it develops a defect that stunts its growth and shortens its life but enhances its aesthetic appeal. When it comes to objects of care that are agents, caring about an agent *as an agent* involves recognizing an expanded conception of the object's well-being. Agents have cares of their own—cares on which their well-being partly depends—so in caring about an agent as such, we must, to some extent, share that agent's cares. Returning to our teacher, then, if she cares about Steve as an agent, and Steve cares greatly about his basketball team winning the state championship, the teacher should, *ceteris paribus*, care about Steve's team's performance in the local play-off tournament. Of course, the teacher may care about Steve merely as a student—and not as an agent as such—in which case, she might be wholly unconcerned with his basketball endeavors, assuming that they do not impact his academic performance.

The description under which one cares about *a person* is particularly important for Helm's view of love. On his account, a person is a special kind of agent who cares about her own evaluative identity, and to care for a person as the particular person she is, is to love her. This involves an intimate concern for the person's well-being (and consequently, her evaluative identity) which, in turn, involves sharing her values for her sake in a way that is analogous to one's concern for one's own evaluative identity. Helm cashes out this sense of identification in terms of a rational pattern of person-focused emotions such as pride and shame, focused on one's beloved and subfocused on the values that constitute her evaluative identity. For example, if Steve values playing basketball—which is to say, he has brought it into his “evaluative perspective as a part of the kind of life worth his living” (2009b, 134)—then, one expression of his caring about his evaluative identity is his pride in excelling at basketball. In loving him, Steve's mother will also value his playing basketball (for *his* sake) and feel the same kind of pride toward his excelling at basketball that he feels when he excels.⁷

Love and Caring

Does Helm's view adequately capture the relationship between love and caring? We see several shortcomings. First, his account has no resources to explain what love for a non-person consists in.⁸ Plants, animals, and also infants are not persons on Helm's account since they lack the self-reflective emotions necessary for caring about one's own evaluative identity. Yet, presumably, while one individual might merely care about an infant, another individual might love that infant. A more complete account would not only leave room for this possibility, but would explain how the two individuals' orientations toward the infant differ.

Second, Helm's account of love is too demanding. Recall that for Helm, caring about a person as the particular person she is—that is, loving her—involves exhibiting a rational pattern of person-focused emotions such as pride and shame that track the values that constitute the beloved's evaluative identity. The problem is that one might love a person without exhibiting the particular value-tracking emotions that Helm's view requires.

One reason for this is that a lover may not get involved with many aspects of the beloved's identity, including important aspects, without compromising his love. In some such cases this would be because the beloved conceals aspects of her identity from the lover or because the lover disapproves of some elements of the beloved's identity, and perhaps Helm could accommodate these cases as exceptions for nonideal circumstances that do not threaten his overall view. What is more troubling for Helm's view, though, is that a lover may *choose* not to get involved with many aspects of his beloved's identity and this still does not undermine his love. For example, a father who genuinely loves his shy and eccentric daughter may be proud of her (for her sake) when she excels at her career, but his daughter may have many other values—which she has chosen not to reveal—and out of respect for her privacy, her father refrains from trying to discover them. Consequently, the father might not even realize that his daughter values pantomime, Zen Buddhism, and her relationship with a man who did not graduate from high school. The father cannot then track these values of hers with his emotions in any way, yet he loves his daughter all the same.

Further, a lover may not be involved as deeply as Helm's view requires with any of the key aspects of the beloved's identity without compromising his love. Thus, a variation of the previous case may be even more troubling for Helm. Suppose the father does know that his daughter values her career as a stand-up comedian, as well as pantomime, Zen Buddhism, and her relationship with the high school drop-out. He does not disapprove of these values but he is not able to share them either. Consequently, though he is excited for his daughter when these endeavors go well for her, worried when she faces challenges, sad for her when she suffers setbacks, and so on, he never feels *pride* or *shame* in response to her implementation of these values. Even in this case, the absence of those particular emotions does not imply that the father does not really love his daughter.

Thus, Helm's account appears to overreach: the features he emphasizes are not necessary for loving a person and hence not necessary to distinguish love from caring. But is what Helm proposes nonetheless sufficient for love? It does seem to be, once we focus on

Love and Caring

Helm's core idea that in loving a person, one values them in a way analogous to the way one values oneself. The specific type of emotional entanglement that Helm emphasizes is a kind of expansion of one's own identity where another's separate identity matters to the lover in the same way as the lover's own identity matters to him. Such profound emotional entanglement does appear sufficient for love.

This then suggests that Helm may have captured one specific instance of a more general feature that makes love distinctive. If we can specify the relevant feature, then we will have in hand a preliminary answer to this chapter's animating question: How must we augment (mere) caring to make it love?

2. Love's Intimacy Requirement

As we have seen, Frankfurt's account of love fails what we might call "the teacher test." In other words, his account of love's particular features does not suffice to distinguish love from mere caring. Helm's view, on the other hand, passes the teacher test. That is, if the teacher "intimately identifies" with her student in Helm's sense—that is, if she shares the student's values for the student's sake in a way that is analogous to her concern for her own evaluative identity—we would seem justified in describing her attitude as love as opposed to mere caring. Helm's view of love succeeds in this respect because it represents a form of connectedness between oneself and one's beloved that is sufficiently *intimate* to qualify as love. Nonetheless, his particular conception of the relevant intimacy is too demanding to require for love. What we need, then, is to identify a relation that is both sufficiently deep and personal to satisfy love's intimacy requirement, while remaining ecumenical enough to be considered necessary for love. Let us look to the philosophical literature on love and care for potential candidates.

Notice that, on Helm's view, the lover stands in an intimate relation to her beloved in virtue of sharing her beloved's values in a particularly rich sense. The lover values what her beloved values for the beloved's sake and, in fact, values her beloved's identity analogously to the way that she values her own. But we also find in Helm's work a notion of valuing that invokes a less demanding relation to its object while still tying the valued object to the valuer's identity. It will be instructive to consider whether this notion of valuing is a good candidate for our target intimacy relation.

According to Helm, there is a sense of valuing in which you value an object if supporting the object's flourishing is part of your identity, that is, if supporting it has import for you as part of the way you see your own worth or the kind of life worth your living (2001, 101).⁹ This would involve emotions such as pride and shame in response to your own efforts in supporting or failing to support the object's flourishing (respectively), but in this case, the pride and shame would be on your own behalf (as opposed to the pride and shame that the lover feels on behalf of her beloved in Helmian love). Might this notion of valuing represent a relation that is intimate enough, without being too demanding, to capture love's distinctive quality? Valuing so understood seems neither sufficient nor necessary for love. It is not sufficient, as it seems possible for one's self-esteem to be tied to a

Love and Caring

pursuit (e.g., being a good student) without loving that pursuit; and it seems possible for one's self-esteem to be tied to one's ability to support the flourishing of someone (one's struggling student, a friend's orphaned child) without loving that someone. Moreover, valuing of this sort is not necessary for love. Loving someone without feeling that supporting the beloved's flourishing enhances one's own worth and even while feeling ashamed rather than proud of the relevant support definitely seems possible. Think here of an individual who loves her abusive spouse but is ashamed of her contributions to the spouse's good, viewing them as detrimental to, rather than augmenting of, her own self-worth.

Perhaps we can find a more promising account of love's intimacy in what are called "union accounts of love," which seem tailor made for the task. On union accounts, love aims at the formation of a new entity, a "combined self" or a "we."¹⁰ In a more or less metaphorical sense, lovers merge—or on some views, merely desire to merge—identities with their beloveds. Union views adequately reflect the intuition that love requires a layer of intimacy that mere caring does not. They do not, however, give us the resources to identify a feature that is *necessary* to distinguish love from mere caring. Surely, one can be intimately connected to another in the way that love requires without combining selves or sharing identities (or even desiring to do so). We must look elsewhere, then, for an account of love's intimacy that passes the teacher test without imposing implausibly strong requirements on what love consists in.

As a stepping stone, let us consider other accounts of love that sufficiently capture love's intimacy, while nonetheless being too idiosyncratic to represent what is necessary for love. On Benjamin Bagley's view, love is akin to an improvisational project, where the two lovers jointly construct their (separate) identities in a kind of improvisational "dance" that starts from the inchoate core values that the lovers share and proceeds toward specification and elaboration of these values through a joint history of living by them (2015). The steps that one lover takes in specifying and elaborating her values have authority for and constrain how the other lover can go on specifying his values, such that the core values of each lover cannot take the shape that they do without the other lover's contributing activity. To be sure, his account meets the threshold intimacy requirement for love, and it does so without requiring a merger of selves or a shared identity. On the other hand, the idea that one must cede (even partial) control to another in shaping one's identity may be too much to require for love. We can add to this that Bagley's view obviously would not accommodate love for non-agents.

Sufficient intimacy can also be captured by shifting focus to something other than the lover's (and her beloved's) identity. Typically, one feels a deep sense of connectedness to the object of one's love. One is not only concerned that one's beloved flourishes, but one is also concerned that one engages with the beloved in meaningful ways. One way in which love's intimacy can manifest in just this manner is in terms of one's attachment to the beloved.

Love and Caring

Sometimes, persons become *attached* to their beloveds in the sense that they experience engagement with them as a felt need such that without their beloveds, they tend to suffer reduced confidence in their well-being and their agential competence. In colloquial terms, prolonged separation from their beloveds causes them to feel “out of sorts,” “off-kilter,” as though they are “no longer all of a piece,” and so forth, while engagement with their beloveds allows them to feel more centered, empowered, and capable of taking on life’s challenges (Wonderly 2016, 2017). Following the psychological literature on attachment theory, we might characterize engagement with the beloved as having a distinctive impact on the lover’s sense of *security* (Bowlby 1969/1980; Ainsworth 1988; Hazan et al. 2006; Mikulincer and Shaver 2007). Presumably, if the teacher needs the student in this deep respect, in addition to caring about him in all the relevant ways noted earlier, then it seems likely that she does love him. Thus, (this brand of) attachment passes the teacher test. Nevertheless, like Helm’s view, union accounts, and Bagley’s improvisational view, it seems too strong to *require* that all lovers have this particular intimate orientation toward their beloveds. For example, we might imagine a very secure woman whose confidence in her well-being and agential competence are relatively unaffected by engagement with her beloved daughter.

While we have not yet settled on a definitive answer to our guiding question, we have made progress. Love requires a type of intimacy that mere caring does not, but cashing out the *nature* of this intimacy is rather tricky. An adequate account must pass the teacher test without being so demanding that it rules out intuitively plausible cases of love. While love involves a distinctive and deep connectedness to one’s beloved, it seems that this required connectedness cannot be as specific as the particular entanglements with one’s (or one’s beloved’s) identity or sense of security proposed in Helm’s account, the union accounts, Bagley’s view, or an attachment-based account. We need instead to uncover what these proposals have in common that still captures the required distinctive sense of connectedness and intimacy.

3. Our Proposal

Our route forward, then, is to characterize the distinction between mere caring and love by trying to identify the common thread in those accounts explored in the previous section that successfully provide the lover’s intimate connection to the beloved.

3.1. Intimacy and Vulnerability

As a first approximation we can say that the beloved has, in an especially thick sense, import both to and for the lover such that being deprived of her beloved or major setbacks for the beloved would cause the lover to view her life as considerably impoverished in some significant respect. But this does not get matters specific enough as it does not describe the particular way in which the beloved “gets inside the lover’s safety zone” such that when things go wrong with the beloved or their interactions, the lover is not just impoverished but marred or damaged. What is partly at issue here is the distinction be-

Love and Caring

tween something impacting an agent by causing her to be better or worse off versus causing her to be altogether well or not well, to thrive or to falter. Thus our teacher might be worried for her student, about whom she cares, when she learns that he has been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Her worry makes her *worse off* than she would have otherwise been but it does not necessarily prevent her from thriving or completely deprive her of well-being. When someone notices her concerned expression and inquires whether she is alright, she might sincerely reply “Yes, I am fine. But my student is sick.” By contrast, if she learned that her beloved child, husband, or best friend received a similar diagnosis, her reply would likely be far different. She would not be merely worse off, but she would be altogether *unwell*, she may say heartbroken, on account of their misfortunes.¹¹

In light of this distinction, one may posit that love’s intimacy is best explained in terms of the following distinctively meaningful and impactful role that the beloved plays in one’s life. One is not only emotionally vulnerable to the object of love (as is always the case simply in virtue of caring, on standard views), but one also needs the object (and/or its flourishing¹²) such that without it one would be not only hurt or worse off, but one would not thrive or do well.¹³ Yet, as it stands this proposal is not yet precise enough.

First, note that emotions characteristic of caring, such as particularly intense sadness on behalf of a person one cares about, could also make the carer temporarily unwell, without elevating the caring to the level of love. So it is not just the result of making the lover unwell that matters, but rather a direct, unmediated connection, in the lover’s understanding of things, between, on the one hand, the object’s flourishing and/or the lover’s relationship to the object, and, on the other, the lover becoming unwell. It is not that problems with the beloved unleash some causal process (e.g., an overwhelming feeling) that can lead to the lover becoming unwell. Instead, to the lover, severe problems with the beloved amount, in the lover’s view of these matters, to becoming unwell. Intense feelings would then be a result or manifestation of becoming unwell rather than the cause of it. Call this the directness criterion. The directness criterion secures the focus of love’s intimacy on the beloved and allows our account to avoid an overly self-absorbed conception of love.

Second, we can further specify the sense in which the lover has the potential to be made “unwell” when her beloved fares poorly and/or departs from her life. As a first pass, we might make progress by noting that beloved objects (as understood by the lover) have the ability to directly and nontrivially impact (albeit perhaps only for a time) the lover’s self-understanding as a subject of a life: her sense of what she stands for, her agency, her understanding of herself as a bearer of a meaningful life narrative, and the like. Such self-related features are apt to be “damaged” by significant diminishments in, or permanent separation from, the beloved object. Of course, we must take care not to represent love as requiring a self-entanglement that is too strong. And we should also note that not just any enmeshment between just any aspects of the agent’s self and an object will suffice for love’s intimacy. On our preferred formulation, the sense in which a lover becomes “unwell” in virtue of great threats to a beloved object concerns the undermining of her self-

Love and Caring

understanding as an agent whose fundamental project of leading a meaningful life is on track. Call this the self-alteration criterion.

One particular way in which a person can lose her bearings as an agent leading a meaningful life involves not feeling up to the basic agential task of setting oneself to accomplish objectives one considers worthwhile, for example, being stymied in this basic task by expectations of failure. One is unwell because one's very functioning as an agent is undercut. And in some cases, the lover construes the object of love as directly necessary in some way to sustain or give shape to the lover's ability to carry on such basic agential tasks. The object of love—that is, what transpires with the object or the lover's interactions with it, as understood by the lover—then has a direct sway in holding together (when things go well) or undermining (when things go badly) one's very functioning as an agent. When things go wrong for or with the object, one's facility with the central agential task is not merely impaired but largely blocked (at least for a substantial duration). The object, given how it is taken up in one's attitudes, sustains or, in part, helps to constitute one as a properly functioning agent.¹⁴

Nonetheless, there are other ways in which a person can lose her bearings as an agent leading a meaningful life. For example, a person may lose grip on her life's meaning when her central interests are chronically or irredeemably frustrated. Or a person may lose grip on how to lead a meaningful life if she becomes disoriented in what she stands for or what her core values and projects are. Correspondingly, there are various respects in which an object of love, in virtue of how it is regarded by the lover, can durably unsettle the lover's tenacity as a subject of a meaningful life. One need not begin to fall apart as an agent in order to stop feeling on track in one's fundamental project of leading a life. (We often call a person "strong" when she does not fall apart in face of adversity, especially adversity that makes her unwell.) While the influence on the lover of how things stand with the beloved can be mediated only by the lover's conceptualizations and not by other causal factors, it is important to recognize variable possibilities within this constraint, such as, for example, the beloved partly supplying the criteria according to which the lover would assess the meaningfulness of her life. Thus the specifics of how this influence plays out will vary with the particular kind of love in question.

Taken together, our more precise proposal is that in the case of love, but not mere caring, the individual's sense of oneself as an agent leading a meaningful life is directly compromised without the object and/or when the object fares poorly. We are now positioned to see how this view helpfully unifies (what we deemed to be) the features sufficient to satisfy love's intimacy requirement, while avoiding the perils of positing these (we think, overly demanding) features as necessary for love.

3.2. Advantages of Our Proposal

Our proposal captures the unifying thread of the views discussed earlier that offered elements sufficient but not necessary for love's requisite intimacy. In some cases, one may see the beloved as essential to one's sense of self or to one's ability to function as an

Love and Caring

agent. That is, without the object she might feel as though she has lost a piece of herself or that her security and agential competence are undermined. These features track the types of damage represented by (some) union views and attachment-theoretical descriptions of love, but we noted that neither is necessary for love. One need not share a beloved's identity, or be wholly dependent on her for one's security, to love her. But what the two cases have in common is that the lover's sense of herself as an agent leading a meaningful life is directly impacted by significant diminishment in the beloved's well-being or by permanent separation from her.

Likewise for Helm's conception of loving a person in terms of that person's identity having import for one that is analogous to the import of one's own identity. We concluded that this type of connection is also sufficient but too strong to require for love's intimacy. (Centrally, a lover need not track many of her beloved's values via pride and shame on the beloved's behalf in a way analogous to how she tracks her own values.) Were one, nonetheless, to love another in this very strong Helmian form, one would be vulnerable to losses analogous to those that loom when one sees the beloved as essential to one's sense of self (as in some union accounts). A Helmian lover cleanly separates the beloved's identity from her own, but since the latter matters *to the lover* in the way the former does, the impact of the losses to or of the beloved on the lover's sense of herself as an agent leading a meaningful life would be analogous to that experienced if the lover's and the beloved's identities were merged.

Also consider Bagley's view. Since, on his account, one's core values define one's agential standpoint and supply the standards in terms of which one assesses one's life's meaning, it should be clear that how matters stand with the beloved has controlling influence over the lover's ability to make a meaningful mark on the world. The beloved not only has the power to validate or redeem the moves made by the lover, but also partly controls the shape of the lover's overall package of values and their dynamic evolution. In all four cases then, what and whom we love can deeply impact how we experience ourselves as agents and the shape of the lives that we lead.

Our proposal also helps to illuminate why not just any self-related enmeshment between an agent and an object is sufficient for love's intimacy. Recall, for example, that Helm's generic account of valuing—according to which the commitment to the object's flourishing is part of the agent's own identity, part of how the agent evaluates her own worth, with the corresponding pride and shame in response to one's successes and failures in upholding this value—falls short of the intimacy required for love. There are two reasons for this. First, suppose the valuing agent fails to support the valued object. The agent's sense of her own worth would be diminished (manifesting in shame), but in many cases the agent would not see herself as lacking worth, and so she would not lose grip of herself as someone able to carry on a meaningful life. And second, even in cases where the value is so central that the agent would feel worthless if the valued object fails to flourish due to the valuer's lack of support, the connection between the valued object's troubles and the valuer's inability to carry on is too roundabout to meet our directness criterion. What would be needed for intimacy is that the beloved's troubles directly make the lover

Love and Caring

unwell, but here what makes the valuer unwell, in the first instance, is her actions falling short of the standard of worth she sets for herself.

Our proposal can also help to clarify why mere caring—even when construed as related to one’s agency and even when particularly strong in its magnitude—does not suffice for love. First note that, on some accounts, caring is one of the chief cohesive tissues that connects, organizes, and directs central (affective, cognitive, and conative) features of the carer’s psychology and thus serves to “weave the web of unified agency” (Jaworska 2007b, 561). Doubtless caring serves an important structural role in the deployment and aims of one’s agency, but, importantly, no one particular object of (mere) care would be crucial to the agential web’s unity. Loss of, or damage to, a (merely) cared-for object would affect us emotionally, and may impact the priority structure and direction of our agency, but such a loss would not corrode our more fundamental sense of ourselves as agents leading a meaningful life. And it is the latter connection that reflects love’s intimacy.

But might we get the relevant kind of intimacy by simply caring or valuing a lot? In other words, perhaps to love someone or something just is to care about that person or object *so much* that one’s conception of oneself as an agent leading a meaningful life is negatively altered when one is permanently separated from the object and/or when the object fares poorly. While this is not an unreasonable construal of the view we have presented here, we are inclined to resist this characterization.

This construal suggests that there is some “quantity” of care such that when it reaches the requisite “amount,” the attitude becomes love. But given the rich complexity of both attitudes, it is not obvious how to conceive of love as some quantity (degree, extent, etc.) of caring. Presumably, a suitable metric would have to be a feature constitutive of caring that admits of degrees. Emotional vulnerability seems to be the best candidate. Note, however, that one might be emotionally vulnerable to an object in multiple ways. For example, a carer might be emotionally vulnerable to an object to such an extent that even a very slight reduction in the object’s well-being suffices to trigger her negative emotional response. But the carer’s vulnerability might instead manifest in the long duration, or again, the great intensity of her emotional response. If these are the metrics of the “quantity” of care, it may even be possible for an agent to care *less* for a beloved than she cares for an object that she does not love.¹⁵

One may nonetheless think that emotional intensity (rather than emotional sensitivity or response duration) would provide a suitable metric. After all, we do seem altogether unable to thrive whenever our negative emotions become sufficiently intense. But we need to be careful here. The causal path from the object’s ill-being to the carer’s impairment matters. If the carer is unable to thrive solely due to the intensity of her emotional pain, it is not clear that this response represents the sort of need internal to love. Consider that one might also be so overwhelmed, almost paralyzed, by *joy* at another’s flourishing that one is unable to thrive. There is a difference between being overwhelmed by intense emotional pain and being made unwell directly by a cared-for object’s ill-being—even if the

Love and Caring

latter warrants and so causes the former. To see this, consider that, in the case of an intense care, the carer's inability to thrive may well be just a matter of pain, and if so, the carer could be brought to thrive again by an effective (emotional) pain reliever, even as the object of her care continues to fare poorly and thus continues to detract from the carer's well-being to some extent. By contrast, we would expect a lover to be, in some sense, unwell due to her beloved's ill-being even if her emotional pain could be dulled or eliminated (just as a patient would continue to be unwell if (only) the physical pain associated with his heart failure were removed). Here, the source of doing unwell is not reducible to intense emotional pain.

It thus appears that there is no constitutive feature of care a suitable quantity of which could turn care into love. The intimacy of love is a new element, not necessarily present in mere care and this is why it is best not to think of love in terms of a *quantity* of care. A more fitting approach is to think of love not so much as an amount of caring, but rather as a depth of care—or perhaps better—a way of caring. And we have attempted to make more precise what this depth or way of caring may amount to: there are different possible versions, but they all involve the beloved's closer connection to what animates the lover's self or self-understanding. More specifically, significant threats or injury to the beloved or the lover's relationship with her have the potential to directly undermine the integrity (health, functioning, etc.) of the lover's sense of herself as an agent leading a meaningful life.

Our conceptualization of love's intimacy fits well with the popular culture understanding of love. Consider this sampling of how the heartaches of love are portrayed in popular music: "Ain't No Sunshine (When She's Gone)," (Withers 1971) "The scars of your love, they leave me breathless," (Adele 2010) "Inside my hope is fading / I'm just a clown since you put me down" (Robinson 1965). And some lyrics point to a specific way of losing one's bearings as an agent leading a meaningful life, a breakdown of agency: "I'm all messed up, I'm so out of line / Stilettos and broken bottles / I'm spinning around in circles" (Robyn 2010).

Once love's intimacy is conceptualized in the way we have suggested, several other plausible particular descriptions of love, which would be rightly viewed as too specific to capture the requirements of love, will nonetheless fit our proposed more general account. For example, a commonly cited but arguably not universal feature of love is the special importance of the beloved to the lover such that, as one may put it, without the beloved there would be "a hole in my life." What this metaphor may be saying is that, without the beloved, the narrative of the lover's life would be damaged: it would be difficult to pick up the pieces and go on. Insofar as knowing how to carry on is part of one's self-understanding as an agent able to lead a meaningful life, this is consistent with our proposal. In a perhaps related view, deep grief is often taken to be a mark of love, and in deep grief one does, of course, lose (albeit usually temporarily) one's bearings on agency or meaning or both.

Love and Caring

Our more general and more ecumenical view of the intimacy of love has another advantage over the existing views: it is not confined to the love between persons and can capture, for example, the difference between caring about an infant and loving the infant or between caring about an ideal (e.g., justice) and loving that ideal. Nonpersons cannot make or break our sense of ourselves as agents leading meaningful lives in certain specific ways—for example, they cannot develop values for us to share or construct together as required by Helm’s or Bagley’s account of love and they do not have selves like ours with which we can merge, as required by union accounts. But nonpersons can hold sway over our agential functioning and sense of our lives’ meaning in other ways—for example, through our attachment to them or through their central role in our lives’ narratives—and on the ecumenical proposal presented here this is sufficient for us to be intimately connected with them in a way that is distinctive and necessary for love. Think of feeling altogether spent or broken (perhaps a kind of grief) when a cause you have been fighting for suffers a defeat.¹⁶

Our proposal may also help to reshape the contours of the debate about love in a helpful way. Once it is clear that there are multiple ways of instantiating love’s intimacy, the seemingly competing accounts of love’s intimacy are no longer competing accounts of what love is. At the same time, one may begin to notice that some of the ways of instantiating love’s intimacy may be better or more worthwhile than others. For example, to some, being attached to the beloved such that interaction with the beloved is necessary for one’s sense of confidence and agential competence may not be as attractive as the kind of validation and extension of the self that becomes possible when we share the project of constructing our identities. On the other hand, one might find the strong ties of emotional attachment, which are nonetheless elastic enough to allow one to fully retain one’s own independent identity, more palatable than the seemingly more radical loss of self-independence implied by a merger of selves or identities. In this way, some of the debate can now shift from the question “What is love?” to questions such as “Which form of love is more worth having in one’s life?”¹⁷

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Notes:

(1.) While we think it will be a fruitful theoretical exercise to frame our project as locating the feature(s) that are necessary and sufficient for distinguishing love from mere caring, we doubt that love can be captured by a mere list of features. Love is too complex and elusive for this kind of analysis. Love is also likely defined in part by how such features came about and how they interact with one another. Our primary concern is not to define love, but rather to show how we might identify and better understand a central feature on which the difference between love and mere caring turns.

(2.) One might wonder whether this case fully captures the sense of love's identification that Frankfurt intends. In "On Caring," Frankfurt does not specify the sense in which lovers consider the interests of their beloveds "as their own." Elsewhere, though, he describes identification with an object in terms of an *investment* in it such that a person "makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced" (H. Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," *Synthese* 53 [1982]: 257–272, at 260; see also H. Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). We take it that the teacher in our example might identify with her students in this sense while falling short of loving them. The teacher, of course, does not literally identify all of the students' interests as her own, but Frankfurt does not seem to require such literal and complete identification (H. Frankfurt, "On Caring," in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999a], 168; Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, 62). Nonetheless, we remain open to the possibility that Frankfurt has in mind a sense of identification that he has not yet specified that is strong enough to pass our "teacher test."

(3.) Frankfurt also sometimes refers to the musts and mustn'ts of love as "volitional constraints" (Frankfurt, "On Caring," 171), but we find this terminology confusing insofar as he uses it elsewhere to denote a very different idea, namely, that love is not in the immediate control of the lover (Frankfurt, "On Caring," 165).

(4.) Frankfurt seems to allow that what emerges as a volitional necessity can vary by circumstance—as the above proviso "as circumstances make it possible and appropriate for us to do so" indicates. Thus, generally, making your loved one unhappy is a volitional

Love and Caring

mustn't, but in a specific circumstance, a more pressing need of a different loved one may overrule it. (If you love your husband, you must attend to his severe distress. But if you get called to pick up your sick toddler from preschool, attending to your distraught husband may no longer be what you must do right now.) Further, Frankfurt also allows for deeply conflicting volitional necessities within the same agent. He speaks of "unresolved discrepancies and conflicts among the various things that we love" that "put us at odds with ourselves," leaving us "subject to requirements that are both unconditional and incompatible" (Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, 50). Thus, two volitional musts may conflict in such a way that following each must is not a live option from the standpoint of the other must and the agent's integrity is ruptured. The agent may side with one of the musts, against the other must, and yet the chosen option still remains, in a deeper sense, not truly a live option for him because making this choice tears the agent apart and undermines his volitional integrity.

(5.) Volitional necessity can likely be born out of many circumstances that are not love. One might develop the sort of volitional necessity at issue due to, for example, one's guilt over *not loving* a person or due to a desire to facilitate love that has yet to exist. Imagine, for example, that our teacher promised her dying sister—a single parent—that she would look after and love her orphaned infant niece as her own. For some reason, though she finds herself caring about her niece in much the same way that she cares about (some of) her students, she cannot bring herself to love the child. She compensates for her lack of connectedness with an unwavering volitional commitment to promote the child's well-being, on a par with the commitment that she has to the well-being of her own children—all in the hopes that it might make up for her lack of love, or facilitate the development of a closer bond so that love might form. It is in part because she does not love her niece that she now feels as though she absolutely must advance the child's welfare.

(6.) As we understand them, such musts and mustn'ts of caring are strong requirements that resist being overruled in a given context, even by some requirements of love. Even if the teacher's beloved child will have to miss her favorite afterschool activity, or even if the teacher's beloved husband will have to fend for himself in his moment of stress, the teacher may still take helping the struggling student to be her only live option. This is not to say, though, that these must and mustn'ts are absolute; they may come into conflict with other requirements of roughly the same nature, and either be overruled or give rise to thorny dilemmas—just like what we saw with Frankfurt's understanding of the musts and mustn'ts of love (compare note 4). If the teacher in our example is called to pick up her sick toddler from preschool, attending to some pressing needs of her struggling student may no longer be what she must do. But if the toddler was very sick and the struggling student was in an immediate and dire need the teacher may well be volitionally stuck and torn apart.

(7.) Note that for Helm pride is not self-reflexive but rather "person-focused: involving a commitment to the worth of [its] focus as a particular person" (B. W. Helm, "Love, Identification, and the Emotions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 46 [2009]: 39–59, at 43).

Love and Caring

This is what would allow him to view Steve's pride and Steve's loving mother's pride in our example as of the same kind.

(8.) Helm's aim is only to offer an account of personal love, so this is a limitation only in our attempt to appropriate his proposal into a more general account of the difference between love and caring applicable to love of nonpersons.

(9.) Note that here we are drawing on Helm's earlier account of valuing (B. W. Helm, *Emotional Reason: Deliberation, Motivation, and the Nature of Value* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001]), which seems to differ in some respects from the account that he provides in *Love, Friendship, and the Self* (B. W. Helm, *Love, Friendship, and the Self: Intimacy, Identification, and the Social Nature of Persons* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009]).

(10.) For an instructive discussion of union accounts of love, see Helm, *Love, Friendship, and the Self*, 13–18. For examples of union accounts, see R. Solomon, *About Love* (Ontario: Madison Books, 2001); R. Nozick, "Love's Bond," in *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*, ed. R. Nozick (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 68–86; N. Delaney, "Romantic Love and Loving Commitment: Articulating a Modern Ideal," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33 (1996): 375–405; and M. Friedman, "Romantic Love and Personal Autonomy," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (1998): 162–181.

(11.) The idea that being adversely affected differs from a significant disruption in one's well-being is not uncommon, especially in the love literature. Nozick, for example, writes, "When love is not present, changes in other people's well-being do not, in general, change your own. You will be moved when others suffer in a famine ... you may be haunted by their plight, but you need not feel you yourself are worse off" ("Love's Bond," 68). One might think this implies that the difference between care and love is merely a matter of degree. We discuss this possibility later.

(12.) Though we lack the space to argue for this here, we suspect that the need of both the object and its flourishing is an essential element of love.

(13.) We believe there is also a flipside positive analog of this. When things go well with the object of love, one's well-being is enhanced in a special, particularly intense way: one is walking on clouds, "life is like a song," etc. However, since the nature of this special positive enhancement is difficult to specify beyond such metaphorical descriptions we decided to leave this for another occasion (see M. Wonderly, "Early Relationships, Pathologies of Attachment, and the Capacity to Love," in *The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy*, ed. A. Martin [New York: Routledge, 2019], 23–34) and focus here on the negative aspect.

(14.) On Frankfurt's account, unresolved, conflicting volitional necessities might fracture one's agency, resulting in an impairment of this sort (Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, 50). There is, however, an important difference between an impairment of agency due to an inability to meet love's demands versus an agential impairment due to what is happening

Love and Caring

with the beloved or your relationship/interactions. In the former, the root cause of damage consists in things going wrong with how one is able to love (and so is focused on the lover's abilities), while in the latter the root cause involves more directly the object of love and is thus better suited to meet our intimacy requirement (the directness criterion).

(15.) Imagine, for example, a woman who cares a great deal for her rose bushes. She desires their well-being for their own sakes, attends to them frequently throughout the day, and even minor declines in their well-being reliably cause her to experience mild, but prolonged emotional discomfort. In contrast, upon learning of comparably minor changes in the well-being of her grandson—with whom she interacts far less frequently—she is relatively unmoved. However, if she were to learn of a significant impairment or threat to his well-being, she would be *devastated* for at least a short period of time, whereas no degree of injury to her roses would elicit such an intense response. So described, one might think there is a sense in which she cares more about her rosebushes than her grandson but *loves* only the latter. One need not accept this case as a bona fide example of caring less about a beloved than about an object that one does not love in order to accept the broader point that the relationship between caring and love may be more complicated than a “love as a high degree of care” analysis can accommodate.

(16.) Interestingly, our proposal draws attention to the possibility of loving something that you have always taken for granted and perhaps did not even realize you loved: think of losing your bearings and your *joie de vivre* (“Ain’t No Sunshine”) upon learning that your fellow citizens have elected a political candidate who does not even stand for basic human decency.

(17.) We are grateful to UCR students in Phil 283 in 2017 and to this volume's editors for helpful comments on earlier drafts. We thank the John Templeton Foundation and the Princeton University Center for Human Values for financial support.

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