

## What Is the Tension, If Any, between Love and Caring about Being Loved?

MILAN URBANIK

Love is central for human beings. People desire to love and be loved in return. These two desires interact with each other. Unreciprocated love can cause suffering that may become an insurmountable obstacle for the lover. As a result, desire to be loved in return can push away lover's love. In this essay, I explore the tension between love and caring about being loved. In order to resolve this tension, I suggest that a commitment to love over caring about being loved satisfies the desire to be loved because love invites reciprocated love in return. The essay starts with the outline of H. G. Frankfurt's account of love and the self and proceeds with the exploration of the case of the mother that suffers because she is not loved by her son. The essay proposes the argumentation that caring about being loved explains the suffering of the mother and outlines the tension between love and caring about being loved. The essay follows with the proposition that commitment to love can help solve the tension.

*Milan Urbanik graduated from University College London in September 2019 with a BSc in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. In late September, he started studying MSc Behavioural Science at London School of Economics and Political Science. His philosophical interests include democracy, love and moral psychology.*

*Frankfurt's Account of Love and the Self*

For Frankfurt (*Autonomy, Necessity, and Love* 128), love is a volition to disinterestedly promote the interests of the beloved. Disinterested means without ulterior motives. When someone loves a person, love is the configuration of his will: He wills to do good for the person. The lover loves the beloved for the lover's own sake. The lover does not promote the interests of the beloved as an instrument to something else, as a means to some other goal, but the interests of the beloved are the goal in itself. The lover takes the interests of the beloved as his own; love is the reason for acting to serve those interests. Volitional essence of love means that love inspires his action to serve the beloved's interests. Love constitutes human agency because it dictates the will for the actions of the lover – the actions that serve the beloved's interests. In other words, love provides stable motivational structures that guide and limit the conduct of the lover (Frankfurt; *Autonomy, Necessity, and Love* 129).

To illustrate this I examine an example in Shakespeare's work. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo is in love with Juliet—this for Frankfurt does not mean that the essence of Romeo's love is that he feels strong emotion towards Juliet. Nor does Frankfurt mean that Romeo's love is a thought or a belief but that Romeo has a very strong and important thought that he should look after Juliet. If Romeo loves Juliet, love should drive his action to do good things for her and to promote her interests. Love is Romeo's will to do good for Juliet. It is the source of reasons for action, a motivation to do good for the beloved.

To understand the Frankfurt's definition of love, it is important to observe Frankfurt's theory of the self, especially the concept of caring, because for Frankfurt love is a particular mode of caring (Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* 31). Caring is a complex desire because people want this desire to be sustained—when the desire fades away, they act to renew it. Human actions are motivated by desires. Some desires simply come and go, like a sudden desire to eat chocolate before going to sleep. People are not committed to these desires in the sense that they do not care to make the desires last. They may want to fulfil them, but once their desires leave, people do not seek to prolong them or bring them about again. Caring is a more complex desire because when people care about something, they continue desiring it (Korsgaard 2). This means that if people neglect this desire, then they feel negative and act to revive said desire if needed. Subsequently, caring about something means being concerned with what concerns the object of caring (Frankfurt, *What We Care About* 83). When people care about something, they take its interests as their own and act to satisfy those interests.

Caring is not a simple acknowledgement of the interests but the will to act on these interests. Caring forms the people's will in a very concrete way. It specifies the action people decide to undertake. They decide to perform an action that serves the interests of particular things about which they care. Therefore, caring constitutes the people's will by determining a course of action. By doing so, it determines what type of person an agent is and wants to be. He is the person that cares about these specific things. Caring is intimately linked with an agent's identity because it specifies what course of action the agent decides to do.

Love is a particular mode of caring because it forms the will to disinterestedly serve the interests of its object but differs from caring by being personal (Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* 79). When people love someone, they love this particular person and no other person. Whereas with caring, the object can be much broader, like caring for a football club or caring about the well-being of the poor. If the object is the poor, then anyone who belongs to this category subsequently becomes cared for. With love, the object is personal, it is this person and not the other.

Imagine a student that cares about his country and loves his fiancé. The student will perform such actions that will serve these interests. Thus, he will vote in the elections because he cares about his country and he will take his fiancé out for dinner, as this promotes her good. The things and people he loves motivate his action, and not just any action, but concrete action that promotes their interests—voting and taking his fiancé out for dinner. The care and love configure his will such that he performs these actions rather than other actions or no action. Love and care are intimately linked with the student's identity because they constitute his will in a very particular way. By constituting his will, they determine what type of person he is—a proud patriot and the lover of his fiancé. Thus, love and caring are intimately linked to his identity.

### *Love and Suffering—the Case of the Mother and Her Son*

In the following paragraphs, I would like to explore Frankfurt's definition of love on what he proposes to be a paradigmatic case: the case of a mother and a son. Assume that the mother loves her son volitionally, as Frankfurt proposes. Thus, the mother has the will to do things that promote the interest of her son. She loves her son, but the son is completely indifferent to her love. He is willing to receive her love but does not reciprocate it and does not respond with any action. In practice, this means that if the mother prepares a lunch for her son, he will take the lunchbox but

will neither express gratitude, nor do anything in return. He just passively receives his mother's love.

If the attention is turned to the mother, it may be worthwhile to explore her feelings regarding the indifference of her son. The mother will experience feelings of unrest, perhaps even deep suffering, because of her son's indifference. These feelings are common for many parents when their sons and daughters do not respond to their love. This suffering is caused by the fact that she loves her son, but he does not respond; the love is not reciprocal. Subsequently, the suffering would vanish if her son loved her back.

However, the suffering when love is not reciprocal seems at odds with the volitional account of love. If love is the volitional and disinterested concern, then the example satisfies both important parts of the definition. The mother can fully express her will—her love—because the son receives the action which aims to promote his interests. Since it is the disinterested concern, the mother does the action not as an instrument to be loved in return—an instrument for reciprocity. Thus, under Frankfurt's account, the mother should continue performing the loving action disinterestedly and the feeling of suffering should not occur. In this regard, Frankfurt's account needs to be complemented to explain the phenomena associated with love; in this case, the suffering from not being loved back.

#### *Complementation of Frankfurt's Account – Caring about Being Loved*

To explain what are the reasons that the suffering occurs, it is important to complement Frankfurt's account of love by painting a more concrete picture of the nature of human beings. Under Frankfurt's account, the identity of human beings is constructed by things they care about. I would like to present an argumentation that most people care about being loved.

Given the definition of caring, caring about being loved is the sustained desire to be loved. People take the interests of the object as their own and act on these interests. Therefore, if people want to be loved, they will act in such a way that would result in being loved. Being loved here entails different degrees of Frankfurt's love – a disinterested promotion of the beloved's interests. By different degrees, I mean that people may feel loved, even though the action that satisfied this desire was not a result of a proper love by Frankfurt. The important aspect here is a perception. If people perceive that the action directed towards them was disinterested, aimed at the promotion of their interests and personal in a sense that it

was them and only them that were the recipients of such action, the desire to be loved could be satisfied.

For a person that faced abandonment and exclusion, the simple gesture of kindness and invitation into the community may result in a feeling of being loved—a call up to a barbecue gathering of flat owners can be an example. He could perceive that it is not every person in the world that was called up to the meeting, but only a chosen few—the flat-owners. Furthermore, the action aimed to promote his interest because it asks him to be a relevant member of the community. The call up is disinterested because they do not want to call him up only to fulfil his duties as a flat-owner, but because they value him as a person, his views and preferences. It does not really matter, whether this is the truth motivation of the call up, the distinguishing factor is the perception. If the person perceives that the action which he was the object of was disinterested, personal and promoted his interests, then he will feel loved and his desire will be satisfied.

To care about being loved is shared by most human beings, it comes from their nature. This seems hardly controversial. Empirically it was studied by psychologists and psychoanalysts on various occasions. Spitz studied that if babies are deprived of love, they grow up psychologically harmed. Perhaps it is a deep need of humans that stems from the biological drive for survival as Bowlby's Attachment Theory indicates (Bowlby 5–33). Perhaps it is a conscious desire to be loved that drives people to perform an action that would make them feel loved, form relationships, or gain social capital. The precise form of this desire seems to be less important. The important part of the definition is that it is shared by most humans throughout their lifetime. In this regard, it fulfils the demands of Frankfurt's definition that it is a sustained desire that motivates people to action. Therefore, it can be concluded that most human beings care about being loved.

This conclusion is important for the case of the mother discussed earlier. If the mother cares about being loved but is not loved by her son, she suffers, because her desire to be loved is frustrated. It may remain a question, why she suffers when her son does not love her back if she is thoroughly and wholeheartedly loved by her husband. Her desire to be loved would be satisfied by the loving of her husband. It may be argued, however, that her son is special to her, so she from the bottom of her heart desires not to be loved by any person, but especially by this very person. Her son is special to her because he is part of her identity, the mother takes his interests as her own. In other words, her son is special to her because she loves him. Thus, from all people in the world, she would most prefer to be loved by her son because he is important to her because she loves him.

*The Tension between Love and Caring about Being Loved*

When people love, they also care about being loved, this is what was argued earlier and what is demonstrated in the case of the mother. As love is a particular mode of caring, love and caring about being loved are two desires. If the mother loves but is not loved by her son, she suffers. The same presumably holds for most of the people, when they love a person but are not loved in return, they suffer. The frustration brings strongly negative emotion in this case, suffering. This suffering is something that people prefer not to experience. Thus, when they suffer, they perform actions in order to diminish the suffering. Since suffering comes from the frustration of the desire to be loved, the way to end the suffering is to somehow induce or motivate the beloved to love back.

The strength of a desire is measured by the capacity with which it can push away other desires and inclinations (Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* 11). As suffering is a very strong emotion, the desire to be loved can consequently push away the love of the lover towards the beloved. Thus, the lover would stop disinterestedly promoting the interests of the beloved because he suffers from not being loved in return. This resembles the relationships who break down because one of the lovers does not feel loved by the other person. Perhaps an empirical illustration of this may be that the third most cited reason for divorce in the UK is that “we fell out of love” (The National Archives).

Caring about being loved works against the love of the beloved. Humans experience this tension because they should love their beloved disinterestedly, regardless of whether they are loved in return or not. However, they cannot because the suffering from the frustration of the desire to be loved is sometimes too strong and it pushes away love. Frankfurt (*The Reasons of Love* 62) identifies precisely this situation, when he claims that love conflicts with what people care about. This conflict causes inconsistencies in the lover when he does not know which action to choose: love disinterestedly and continue suffering or give up on loving and end the suffering. Most human beings experience the workings of the two desires. However, it seems impossible to demand the suppression of the desire to be loved, since it is deeply knitted in the human nature. On the other hand, equally unintelligible seems the alternative to give up on love. Therefore, it may be desirable to propose a solution to this tension in order to help people find consistency and wholeheartedness in their love and life.

*The Solution to the Tension Between Love and the Desire To Be Loved*

I would like to propose that one solution to this tension is that the commitment to love over caring about being loved helps satisfy the desire to be loved. Love supports reciprocity of love, or, more precisely, love invites to love in return in two very important ways. First is the appeal to the beloved's desire to be loved and second is by building trust.

The characteristics of caring about being loved predetermine that this desire is relatively hard to satisfy because the action that would result in being loved must come from another person's free decision. The person that cares about being loved cannot force someone to love him because the love would not be genuine in that person's eyes. Free choice makes love valuable. Presumably, if the person had the possibility to give a love potion to anyone, he would prefer not to, because the person would not love him for who he is, but merely because of the workings of the potion. Thus, the desire to be loved must be satisfied by the free decision to love—to be loved for oneself (Nozick 75). Since the satisfaction of the desire falls out of the scope of direct influence, when someone decides to love him, it is deemed very valuable by the agent.

This invites reciprocal action of the beloved towards the lover. If an agent performs an action that promotes the a person's interests, the person senses that this action was done out of love, disinterestedly and regards it very valuable, because it satisfies his caring about being loved. He feels sympathy towards the person that performed this action and may be more likely to decide to return the action. Subsequently, he can fall in love, when his will is configured to promote the interests of the lover. The agent may be more likely to reciprocate because the lover's action that was motivated by love is regarded as valuable. Such a mechanism was studied by Gouldner when he concluded that if an agent performs an action that promotes the interests of another person, the other person is likely to respond with the positive action (Gouldner). Therefore, love invites reciprocated love as it appeals to the desire to be loved.

Furthermore, building on the invitation to reciprocity, love helps to build trust between the lover and the beloved. When a lover loves the beloved, the lover takes the interests of the beloved as his own and acts disinterestedly to promote these interests. When a person perceives that the agent is promoting the person's interests because of love, the person knows that the agent does not want to serve those interests as a means to something else but as an end in itself. In other words, if the agent loves the person, the person knows the agent does not promote the interests of the person in order to gain something else for himself. He merely does it from

love. Therefore, the person knows that he can trust that the agent's action is not partial.

Trust, then, is an important condition to configure the will because it aims to promote the interests of the other person. If the beloved does not trust that the lover's actions are true and not just manipulation to some other end, the beloved may respond with politeness and reciprocity but may find it hard to love the lover because love is a commitment to serve the interests of the other person. If the beloved cannot trust the interests of the lover, he does not want to commit to them. Love invites to love in return and sends a message: I love you. I would love to be loved by you because I care about being loved and you are part of my identity. You can trust me that everything I do I do to serve your interests disinterestedly; I will not misuse you in any way.

Thus, one of the solutions to the tension between love and caring about being loved is to remain committed to love. Love invites reciprocity by appealing to a beloved's desire to be loved and by helping to build the trust between the lover and the beloved. Since love is an invitation, it does not guarantee that people will avoid suffering. However, if the other person decides to respond, it will be genuine love that comes from a person's free will because he was not obliged to respond to the lover. This gives rise to freedom—love's demanding condition.

This essay aimed to explore the tension between love and caring about being loved. When people are not loved by their beloveds, they suffer, and suffering can push away their love. I propose the solution to this tension between love and caring about being loved. I argue that commitment to love can invite the beloved to reciprocal love and thus satisfy the desire of the lover to be loved.



## Works Cited

- Bowlby, J. "Attachment theory and its therapeutic implications." *Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 6, 1978, 5–33.
- Frankfurt, H.G. *The importance of what we care about: Philosophical essays*. Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Frankfurt, H.G. "Autonomy, necessity, and love." *Necessity, volition, and love*, Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Frankfurt, H.G. *The reasons of love*. Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Gouldner, A.W. "The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1960.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. "Morality and the Logic of Caring." *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting it Right*, by Harry G. Frankfurt, Stanford University Press, 2006, pp. 55–76.
- Nozick, Robert, *Examined life: Philosophical Meditations*. Simon and Schuster, 1990.
- Spitz, R.A. "The Psychogenic Diseases in Infancy: An attempt at Their Etiologic Classification." *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1951.
- The National Archives, "What Percentage of Marriages End in Divorce?" 2016. <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160106011951/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/divorces-in-england-and-wales/2011/sty-what-percentage-of-marriages-end-in-divorce.html>. Accessed 5 Apr. 2019.