

LOVE AND ATTACHMENT

Monique Wonderly

ABSTRACT

It is not uncommon for philosophers to name disinterestedness, or some like feature, as an essential characteristic of love. Such theorists claim that in genuine love, one's concern for her beloved must be noninstrumental, non-egocentric, or even selfless. These views prompt the question, "what, if any, positive role might self-interestedness play in genuine love?" In this paper, I argue that attachment, an attitude marked primarily by self-focused emotions and emotional predispositions, helps constitute the meaning and import of at least some kinds of adult reciprocal love. In this way, attachment represents a type of self-interestedness that not only contributes positively to such relationships but is also essential to them.

It is not uncommon for philosophers to name disinterestedness, or some like feature, as an essential characteristic of love. Theorists have suggested, for example, that in order to qualify as genuine love, a person's concern for her beloved must be "noninstrumental," "non-egoistic," or even "selfless." Such views, in highlighting various respects in which self-interestedness undermines loving relationships, prompt the question, "what, if any, *positive* role might self-interested attitudes play in genuine love?" Though this question has received relatively little attention in the extant philosophical literature, it warrants closer examination if we wish to arrive at a fuller, more accurate picture of the structure and normativity of love. In this paper, I propose an answer to this question that centers on a particular way that people come to need one another, and I employ the philosophically neglected notion of attachment in order to articulate the relevant type of need. Specifically, I argue that attachment, an attitude marked primarily by self-focused emotions and emotional predispositions,

represents a distinctive form of needing another that helps to constitute the meaning and import of romantic love. In this way, attachment represents a type of self-interestedness that not only contributes positively to such relationships but is also *essential* to them.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 1, I give a brief overview of the positions on love and self-interestedness that we find in the philosophical literature. In section 2, I introduce and assess different senses in which concern for another's well-being might be self-interested, and suggest that some are compatible with genuine love. In section 3, I argue that *wholly* selfless or disinterested concern is actually undesirable in romantic loving relationships. In section 4, I argue that while security-based attachment is an essentially self-interested attitude, it represents a distinctive form of needing another that can help to illuminate certain aspects of love. Finally, in section 5, I discuss some advantages of employing an attachment-theoretical framework to articulate a positive role for self-interestedness in love.

§ I. OBSERVATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE

Perhaps unsurprisingly, by and large, theorists have tended to characterize self-interestedness as inimical to love. Love, after all, requires that the lover be concerned for the beloved's well-being *for the beloved's own sake*.¹ This requirement is an important one that serves, in part, to rule out baser, fundamentally self-regarding attitudes from counting as genuine love. Consequently, theorists have often insisted that concern for one's beloved must be disinterested.²

We find perhaps the strongest formulation of a disinterested concern view of love in Harry Frankfurt's work. In "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," Frankfurt writes: "In active love, the lover cares selflessly about his beloved. It is important to him for its own sake that the object of his love flourish; he is disinterestedly devoted to its interests and ends" (1999a, p. 135). In a later work, Frankfurt elaborates on this view, characterizing love as follows:

What is essential to the lover's concern for his beloved is not only that it must be free of any self-regarding motive but that it must have no ulterior aim whatsoever. To characterize love as merely selfless, then, is not enough. Although the term "disinterested" is—from the point of view of rhetoric—a bit misleading in its tone and associations, it has the virtue of conveying the irrelevance to love not just of considerations that are self-regarding but of *all* considerations that are distinct from the interests of the beloved. (1999b, pp. 167–168)

Thus, on Frankfurt's account, concern for one's beloved must be selfless and more besides. Such concern must be motivated by the interests of one's beloved alone. All other considerations are irrelevant.

Frankfurt, of course, does not deny that we typically do (and should) regard love—as well as those whom we love—as good *for us*. Yet, for him, somewhat mysteriously, selflessness is an essential condition for

fully experiencing the goods of love. He states, "The benefit of loving accrues to [the lover] only if he is genuinely selfless. He fulfills his own need only because in loving he forgets himself" (1999b, p. 174). On Frankfurt's view, then, there is little room for self-interestedness to play anything other than a negative role in love.

While most theorists agree that genuine love cannot countenance purely instrumental concern for the other's well-being, not all views entail the full-scale rejection of self-interestedness that we find in Frankfurt's work. To see this, consider how other theorists have framed the issue.

According to Gabriele Taylor, "x cannot be said to love y if he regards benefiting and being with y solely as a means towards, say, obtaining social status and wealth (1975, pp. 156–157). John Brentlinger states, "All love views its object as valuable for its own sake and not merely as a means" (1989, p. 143). Irving Singer explains that though his beloved may satisfy his needs, the lover "refuses to use her just as an instrument." Singer continues: "Eventually, the beloved may no longer matter to us as one who is useful. Treating her as an end, we may think only of how we can be useful to *her*" (1991, p. 270). These remarks all point toward a conclusion that most of us take for granted: I cannot properly claim to love another if I view or treat her welfare only as a means to *my* pleasure, *my* status, or any other aspect of *my* good as opposed to her own. Notice, though, that these theorists tend to employ certain qualifiers in describing the attitudes they mean to discount as love: for example, love doesn't admit of using the other as "just" an instrument or viewing her "merely" or "solely" as a means. These descriptions leave conceptual space for the possibility that a lover might (acceptably) be concerned for her beloved, at least *in some part*, because she regards her beloved's well-being as a means to her own good.

One might wonder whether some theorists have articulated and defended a view on which self-interested concern for the other's well-being makes a *positive* contribution to love. I have yet to come across a sustained defense of such a view. However, one can find, scattered about the literature, remarks in which theorists explicitly reject the idea that love is selfless and afford self-regarding concerns some integral role in their views of love.

Robert Solomon, for example, posits that, in practice, self-regarding considerations pervade love of all kinds. He writes, "Our motives are always 'mixed,' and while we would all rather be loved 'for ourselves' instead of for our utility to someone else, these two are always intertwined. . . . All love is a mixture of self-interest and self-image and care and concern for the other; there may be no such emotion as wholly 'selfless love'" (2001, p. 132). Here, Solomon seems to suggest that love is always and inevitably self-interested to at least some degree.

Relatedly, Neil Delaney advances the idea that in romantic contexts at least, we often *welcome* being loved for "selfish reasons." We want our beloveds to care for us, in part, because they (correctly) perceive that the "advancement of [our] interests and securing of [our] needs" is "*directly* connected to [their] well-being" (1996, p. 341). Though Delaney acknowledges that such care would be, in a sense, selfish, he thinks this is unproblematic. He explains: "Given my view that the romantic ideal is primarily characterized by a desire to achieve profound consolidation of needs and interests through the formation of a 'we,' I don't think a little selfishness of the sort described should pose a worry to either party. After all, isn't it gratifying to feel needed?" (1996, p. 346).

Notably, Solomon and Delaney both subscribe to a "union view" of love. On union accounts, love consists in, or has as its aim, the formation of a new entity: a "combined self" or a "we."³ The lover and her beloved,

in a more or less metaphorical sense, merge identities. It is easy to see why such views would reject attributing selflessness to love. Insofar as the lover and her beloved are one, there is no real distinction between concern for her beloved and self-concern. To aim at the good of one's beloved just is to aim at what is good *for oneself*.

To sum up, theorists generally agree that self-interestedness is, or at least can be, pernicious to love. Some advance the claim that care or concern for a beloved's well-being must be altogether disinterested—which is to say "free of any self-regarding motive" or something of the sort. Frankfurt, perhaps the most ardent exemplar of this view, adds that love must be selfless (among other things). Others, while rejecting a purely instrumental view of love, seem to tacitly allow that self-interestedness might play some role in love. Finally, a small number of theorists explicitly deny that love is selfless and afford self-interestedness a place in genuine love.

For my part, I join Solomon and Delaney in maintaining that self-interestedness has a role to play in love. Yet while the aforementioned theorists make it clear that we should countenance self-interestedness in love—because it is inevitable or in some sense satisfying, I go even further. I offer an articulation and sustained defense of the view that a particular kind of self-interestedness is not only permissible in, but essential to, romantic love.

I begin by critically examining the claim that self-interested concern for another is inimical, or at best peripheral, to genuine love. If we take a closer look at why and when such concern poses a worry, we can bring into focus different varieties of self-interested concern for one's beloved and discern a particular kind that seems quite favorable to love.

§ 2. VARIETIES OF SELF-INTERESTED CONCERN FOR ANOTHER

To be sure, some forms of self-interestedness are inimical to love, but it is important to

articulate just *what it is* that makes them problematic. In this section, I identify and assess three kinds of self-interested concern for another. I suggest that two are problematic with regard to their aptness in love, though not equally so—and I explain wherein the problems lie. The third variety of self-interestedness, I argue, points the way toward understanding a type of self-interested concern that is integral to romantic love.

Let's start by revisiting the notion of purely instrumental concern for another's well-being from section 1. Consider the case of Selfish Sam. Suppose that Sam purports to love his wife, but upon learning that she has contracted a serious illness, he sincerely confesses, "I sure do hope she gets better, but only because she makes a mean pot roast, is an expert lover, and lavishes me with expensive gifts." In this scenario, Sam doubtless exhibits an objectionably instrumental view of his wife's well-being. He views her good *solely* as a means to his own. If we were to overhear Sam's confession, we would likely be appalled, and we would surely be justified in doubting that Sam really loves his wife. But why exactly should this be?

Regarding another in this crude manner not only seems to run afoul of basic respect for persons in general, but by most accounts, it amounts to a particularly egregious offense against love. One possible reason for this is that though (presumably) we ought to recognize that all persons have intrinsic worth, it is often supposed that genuine love for another entails a *special* recognition of the other's value. Richard White, for example, states: "Love . . . involves a very deep appreciation for the absolute value of the other person" (2001, p. 5). Neera Badhwar describes the "look of love," as an especially "perceptive look"—one that "seems really to *see* the loved object" and "to affirm the object's value in its own right" (2003, p. 43; emphasis in original). David Velleman characterizes love as an "arresting awareness" of a value inhering

in its object (1999, p. 360). And he suggests that being loved involves "having another heart opened to us by a recognition of our true selves" (p. 363). To love another is to see her value *up close*, as it were. Owing to Sam's purely instrumental attitude toward his wife, he does not recognize her inherent worth, and so he cannot appropriately respond to, or engage with, her value. All this speaks against his attitude as representing genuine love.

This, of course, is the *easy* case. Sam's concern for his wife is exhausted by wholly self-regarding motives. In practice, our emotional orientations toward others are rarely this simple. To see this, consider another (what I take to be) more realistic variant of the Selfish Sam case.

Imagine now that Sam corrects himself, explaining: "I hope my wife recovers because she is an incredible person, one whom I value for her own sake and in her own right, but I am also concerned that she get better, in part, because she does a terrific job at satisfying my culinary, sexual, and material desires." I take it that Sam's new response, while still objectionably selfish, fares a bit better than his first. In this case, his concern for his wife is at least partly motivated by the recognition of her value *apart from* the benefits that she bestows upon him. She is not merely an instrument for his satisfactions although, as he readily acknowledges, that she satisfies certain of his desires does play some role in motivating his concern for her.

How might we evaluate Sam's attitude toward his wife given his new response? To be sure, proponents of strong "disinterested concern" views would seem to have trouble countenancing Sam's attitude as genuine love. Frankfurt is clear on this: the lover's concern for her beloved's well-being must be free of *any* self-regarding motive. And there are certainly self-regarding motives at work in Sam's concern for his wife here. To my mind, though, Frankfurt's claim is suspect. The source of a person's concern

for her beloved's well-being is not unary, but rather it often consists in a thicket of rich and complex mental phenomena (including desires, emotions, and emotional predispositions) that situate the good of her beloved at the forefront of her cares. At first glance, it is unclear why genuine love would require that *none* of these be self-interested. I'll say more on this in a moment, but for now let's take a closer look at how a Frankfurtian conception of love might evaluate Sam's complex concern.

One way of accommodating Sam's appreciation for his wife's ability to satisfy his desires is to insist that though he may have such an appreciation for her, such factors must not be operant in motivating his concern for her well-being. Another approach is to suggest that there are two streams of concern for his wife's well-being at work here, one of which is purely for his wife's own sake and the other of which seems primarily centered on his own interests. In this case, one might hold that the stream of concern that is motivated by self-interestedness is not an aspect of his love for her. The relevant idea here is that some attitudes that we commonly associate with love are not constitutive of, or essential to, the love itself. Frankfurt highlights this point in *Reasons of Love*, when he states that "lovers often enjoy the company of their beloveds, cherish various types of intimate connection with them, and yearn for reciprocity. These enthusiasms are not essential to it" (2004, p. 42). So far, it seems that at worst, Sam's self-interestedness serves only to pollute his concern for his wife's well-being, and at best, plays no essential or important role in constituting his love for her. Given the nature of Sam's self-regarding concerns, this might seem like just the right result. After all, when we look at the specific self-interested desires that Sam identifies as integral to his concern for his wife, they do not seem to be the sorts of things that we would want to associate with love.

Consider, for example, that presumably anyone, or at least a variety of different persons, could provide Sam with tasty entrées, pleasing sex, and expensive gifts. In fact, given the proper financial resources and practice honing one's culinary and sexual skills, there is no reason to think that any number of people couldn't satisfy his appetitive and material needs just as well as his wife can satisfy them. Yet love—at least on many accounts—takes its object as nonsubstitutable.⁴ If *these* are the sorts of considerations that ground Sam's love for his wife, it is unclear why he should not regard her as wholly fungible.

Also, aspects of concern for another's well-being, insofar as that concern is constitutive of love, ought to reflect love's depth. Of course, satisfying meals, sexual pleasure, and presents can be good for us, but typically they seem to be what we might call "surface pleasures." We would expect the distinctive benefits that love provides to reside, not on the surface, but to reach to the heart of who we are and how we live. Thus, the particular self-regarding considerations that motivate Sam's concern for his wife are in tension with love's depth and the nonsubstitutability of its object. This, however, is not the whole story.

Consider one final version of the Selfish Sam case. Suppose now that Sam laments his wife's illness in the following way: "I do hope she recovers because she is a wonderful woman in her own right, but also, in part because without her, my life would be less meaningful—less fulfilled. Without her, I would not be able to get along in the world as well. And for a time at least, I would not be okay, but I would feel as though I were fractured, adrift, and no longer all of a piece." Though this response, much like the preceding variants, is still largely self-focused, it strikes the ear as the least distasteful. I urge that this is because the content of the self-interested desires that motivate his concern in this case are importantly different.

Satisfying another's culinary, sexual, or material desires is not central to love, but making a rich contribution to the fulfillment and betterment of that person's life is. Now Sam attributes to his wife a particularly meaningful role in how he views himself and how he lives his life. To my mind, though this is a self-interested response, it is a loving one nonetheless. And it is not merely that we can countenance his self-interestedness here, but now, unlike the selfish desires that Sam appealed to before, he has identified something that seems deeply important about his love.

These cases suggest two points: First, it matters whether one's concern for another's well-being is wholly, or only partially, self-regarding. Second, the nature of the self-regarding considerations that constitute one's concern for another also matters. Assuming one recognizes, and appropriately responds to, the inherent value of one's beloved, if the self-regarding considerations that partially motivate one's concern for the beloved are of the right kind, they may not only be *acceptable* aspects of love, but deeply important ones. This point is thrown into stark relief when we consider a case of (purported) love in which self-interested considerations are altogether absent from one's concern for the other. I now turn to this possibility.

§ 3. THE TROUBLE WITH WHOLLY SELFLESS LOVE

What might it look like for a person's concern for her beloved to be *wholly selfless* or *completely disinterested*? I do not know that any of the aforementioned theorists would endorse the following case as representing optimal (or even genuine) love, but I think that exploring the following possibility will help to highlight an important role for self-interestedness in loving relationships.

Consider the case of Alejandro and Denise:

Alejandro claims to love his fiancée Denise. His feelings for her are wholly selfless. In seeking to preserve and promote her well-being, he

thinks nothing of himself or his own interests. In their interactions, he is concerned exclusively with how best to contribute to her welfare. He also sees her as special and unique, and cannot imagine valuing anyone else in the same way that he values her. This morning, Denise learned that she has been offered a wonderful opportunity to realize her life's dream of embarking on a six-year space mission. Unfortunately, during this time, she would be unreachable to all earth dwellers, including her beloved fiancé. When she relays the news to Alejandro, he is overjoyed and immediately offers to help her pack. When she expresses concern over being apart from him for such a long time, he cheerfully replies, "This is what's best for you, and that's really all that matters to me!"

To my mind, while there is something laudable about Alejandro's attitude toward Denise, there is another sense in which it is somewhat disturbing.

Notice first that Alejandro's attitude exhibits many of (what are generally taken to be) love's defining features. He values and cares for her deeply and disinterestedly. He seeks the good of Denise for her sake alone. He is also emotionally invested in her welfare. He is overjoyed at her long-awaited opportunity; likewise, he would be very distraught should her well-being become compromised. Also, Alejandro's concern for Denise's well-being is particular to her, and she is not, in any sense, substitutable. Finally, he identifies with her good, and her interests serve to guide and constrain his will in deep and impactful ways. Despite these facts, however, an important quality of genuine romantic love seems conspicuously absent here.⁵

Alejandro cares deeply for Denise. She is important *to him*, insofar as he is both committed to preserving and promoting her well-being and disposed to have (the requisite type of) emotional reactions to changes in her well-being. But in barring his own interests from motivating any concerns, desires, or actions toward her, there is a significant sense in which Alejandro fails to experience Denise

as particularly important *for him*. After all, he is relatively undisturbed at the thought of being without her, provided that she is flourishing. Of course, *ceteris paribus*, he desires her company—if only insofar as he can better promote her well-being when she is nearby—but this desire is easily trumped by the thought that she might be thriving elsewhere.⁶

We would surely understand, then, if Denise were disappointed that Alejandro's response to her wasn't just a bit *less* selfless. It is likely that Denise, assuming she loves Alejandro too, would prefer that he view her not only as important in her own right, but also as important, at least in part, because of her impact on him. This is not to say that true love would necessitate Alejandro falling to his knees and tearfully begging Denise to stay. But at the very least, we would expect him to be pained at the thought of losing her for so long. This pain would not be inconsistent with, for example, Alejandro insisting that Denise go when she offers to decline the mission to stay near him. Nevertheless, we would expect him to experience her extended absence as a significant loss for him. In feeling only joy for Denise and no distress at all at the prospect of parting from her, Alejandro's feelings are generous and pleasantly supportive, but would seem to represent at best an impoverished form of (romantic) love. Loving Denise, after all, requires more than seeing her as merely a locus of interests that ought to be promoted, or again, as a unique treasure in which to take awe. Insofar as Alejandro loves her, he should experience *her* (and not simply her welfare) as an essential source of enrichment in his life, and it is unclear how he could do such a thing while maintaining a purely selfless attitude toward her.

In romantic love, in particular, we value not only being cherished for our own sakes, and not merely being enjoyed or regarded as a valuable ingredient in another's life, but we also value being *needed*.⁷ To need

something means that one will be, in some sense or another, harmed without it (Wiggins 1998; Frankfurt 1999b). This seems to be the trouble with Alejandro's attitude toward Denise. He suffers when Denise's well-being is threatened, but it is less clear that he would suffer without her. He purports to love her, and he certainly needs for her to flourish, but in an important sense, he doesn't really seem to need *her*.

Experiencing another as a felt need is primarily, if not completely, a self-interested affair. We do not need others for *their* sakes, but for our own. And the desires and emotions that constitute the phenomenology of needing are typically self-focused. Experiencing someone as a felt need has a powerful conative structure. The agent feels *drawn* to the object of her need, and in virtue of (what she experiences as) her need for it, she is pulled this way and that.⁸ It is unclear how a person's concern for those objects and persons that she really *needs* can be understood as wholly independent of her need for them.

The point here is that romantic love involves a distinctive kind of needing, one that infiltrates many, if not all, of our attitudes toward that person—including our concern for the other's well-being. This need is doubtless self-interested, but this brand of self-interestedness does not *spoil* love, but rather adds to its shape and substance.

In what follows, I employ a conception of attachment in order to articulate the sense of needing another that I take to be integral to (some kinds of) love, and I argue that viewing romantic love through the lens of attachment has important practical and theoretical advantages.

§ 4. ATTACHMENT AS A SELF-INTERESTED NEED OF ANOTHER

Thus far, I have argued that romantic love involves a distinctive way of needing another. I am now concerned to show how a particular conception of *attachment* can

help to elucidate the kind of need at issue. Attachment, though largely neglected in the philosophical literature, has received wide attention among developmental and clinical psychologists. In these venues, *attachment* typically refers to the relationship between a child and her primary caregiver, but some views do allow for adult attachments, where an adult's "attachment object" is her long-term romantic partner (Rholes and Simpson 2004; Mikulincer and Shaver 2007). Notably, adult attachment theorists posit a strong relationship between attachment and love. To see why, let's start where attachment theorists start—the infant-primary caregiver bond.⁹

According to "attachment theory," between six and twenty-four months of age, infants develop a special bond with their primary caregivers. John Bowlby, known as the father of attachment theory, defined attachment in terms of a set of evolutionarily adaptive behaviors that serve to provide the infant with a sense of security. The attached infant attempts to remain in close proximity to her primary caregiver, treats her as a "secure base" from which to safely explore unfamiliar surroundings, seeks her out for protection as a "safe haven" when threatened or hurt, and protests separation from her—for example, via clinging, crying, and other displays of distress (1969/1982).

Theorists who work on "adult attachment" suggest that long-term romantic partnerships share important commonalities with the infant-primary caregiver bond.¹⁰ Mikulincer and Shaver note several similarities between romantic adult interaction and the interaction between an infant and her primary caregiver. The authors explain: "Love in both infancy and adulthood includes eye contact, holding, touching, caressing, smiling, crying, and clinging" (2007, p. 20). Similarly, other theorists have noted the tendency of romantic partners to "coo, sing, talk baby talk" and "to use soft maternal tones," in their

communication with one another (Shaver, Hazan, and Bradshaw 1988, p. 75).

One can also (frequently) observe Bowlby's "attachment behaviors" in adult romantic relationships. Minimally, adults do seek proximity to their romantic partners and protest long-term separation from them. Psychologists have also persuasively argued that our romantic partners function both as secure bases and safe havens for us. When our romantic partners are nearby, we feel more competent to explore new environments and to take on challenging situations. In addition, we tend to turn specifically to our romantic partners for comfort and support during periods of significant stress.¹¹

In a previous work, I argued for a broader view of attachment—one that represents a rich and ubiquitous brand of emotional connectedness that we experience toward a variety of persons and objects throughout our lives, including but not limited to romantic partners (Wonderly 2016). On my view, security-based attachment has three key marks: (1) The attached party has a relatively enduring desire for engagement with a nonsubstitutable particular. (2) The attached party suffers a reduced sense of security upon prolonged separation from the object or even at the prospect of such separation. (3) The attached party experiences an increased sense of security upon obtaining the desired engagement with her attachment object. These key marks bring to the fore the senses of need and security that, on my account, are integral to attachment relationships.¹²

Explaining one's need of one's beloved in terms of felt security may strike some as a bit disenchanting. After all, we typically do not view our long-term romantic partners first and foremost as providers of protection and comfort. Importantly, though, the notions of protection and comfort do not exhaust the concept of security. The sense of security at issue on my view is roughly a feeling of confidence in one's well-being and in one's

agential competence.¹³ In colloquial terms, without our attachment objects, we tend to feel as though we are “less together,” on unstable ground, no longer “all of a piece,” and so forth. Conversely, engagement with our attachment figures helps us to feel more “solid” and empowered to take on life’s challenges. One’s felt security is a deep and important aspect of one’s sense of self, and experiencing another as essential to it affords that individual a profound and powerful role in how one views oneself and leads one’s life.

The relationship between one’s attachment object and the attached party’s felt security helps to distinguish security-based attachment from caring. I take it that we care about someone or something, insofar as we desire for that person or object to flourish and we are prone to respond to how that object or person is faring with a specific pattern of emotions.¹⁴ For example, if my cousin, whom I care about, is faring poorly and I learn of this, I will experience negative feelings on her behalf. If she is in danger, I will fear for her safety; if she escapes unharmed, I will be relieved. If she is unwell, I will feel bad *for her*. In this way, it’s clear that she is important to me.

My fiancé, however, to whom I am attached, is both important to me and, in a different sense, important *for me*. If he is faring poorly, now in addition to feeling bad for him, I also experience his misfortune as having a more *direct* impact on my own well-being. His presence in my life affects the way that I function day-to-day, and his life being in danger affects not only his well-being (which makes me feel bad for him) but my own sense of security and well-being (which makes me feel as though something bad is happening to me). Of course, in feeling bad for my poor cousin, I am harmed in some way. The negative feelings I have regarding her predicament are painful. I do not, however, think of her predicament as something that is happening *to me*. Without her, I would

be hurt and I would certainly miss her, but the ways in which I exercise my agency, the way I function in my day-to-day life, might remain largely unaffected. Her loss is less personal, less intimate. She is important to me. My fiancé, however, is both important to me (in virtue of my caring for him) and also important *for me* (in virtue of my attachment to him).

Being attached to, as opposed to caring for, another is an essentially self-interested attitude. This type of connection represents a security-based need of the other. We may care about others for *their* sakes, but we are attached to others for our own. Oftentimes, one both cares for and is attached to the same individual, and interestingly, the self-interested dimension that attachment provides serves to enhance the relationship. Think here of what’s missing in the case of Alejandro and Denise. Alejandro inarguably cares about Denise, but he is not (in the relevant sense) attached to her. His desire for her good deeply registers with him and guides and constrains his actions accordingly, but he does not experience engagement with her as something that he needs in order to sustain his sense of well-being and how he is able to get on in the world.

In the following and final section, I enumerate some advantages of employing an attachment-theoretical framework to understand the kind of self-interestedness that is integral to romantic love.

§ 5. ATTACHMENT AND THE VALUE OF SELF-INTERESTEDNESS IN LOVE

Understanding love’s need of another through the lens of attachment has certain advantages. First, attachment reflects a type of self-interestedness that is not only permissible in, but (typically) *very good for* loving relationships. In addition, attachment helps to account for two of romantic love’s central features—its depth and the idea that love necessarily takes its object as nonsubstitutable,

and it does so without succumbing to many of the problems that plague union theories of love.

We often experience our romantic partners as security-based needs, and in doing so, we afford them a particularly powerful role in our lives. In providing us with a secure base, our partners make significant contributions to our “self-esteem, perceived (and actual) competency, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and greater willingness and effort to pursue personal goals, accept challenges, take risks, and learn new things” (Collins et al. 2006, p. 158). By serving as safe havens for us in times of need, our attachment partners help to regulate our emotions and restore impaired functioning (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007, p. 49). We tend to feel better, and to function better, when in the presence of our romantic attachment partners. Playing this role in the life of one’s beloved and allowing her to play such a role for oneself in return can serve to foster trust and closeness in genuine romantic loving relationships.¹⁵

Providing attachment security to another not only benefits the recipient, but it tends to benefit (what psychologists refer to as) the “caregiver” as well. Attending to another’s attachment needs often enhances one’s own feelings of competence and generativity (Mikulincer 2006, p. 31). Also, serving as an attachment figure for one’s beloved can imbue one’s life with a sense of meaning or purpose, reduce stress, speed recovery from physical illness and/or depressive symptoms, and improve one’s overall mental health via the production of positive relationship-centered emotions (Schulz and Monin 2012, pp. 185–187). Thus in cases of romantic love, a mutual attachment can enhance the lives of both parties and significantly strengthen the relationship as a whole.

It should now be clear that fulfilling a person’s attachment needs contributes to her well-being in a way that is importantly different from, say, fulfilling her appetitive and

material needs. One difference between the sort of fulfillment at work in the former and latter cases involves the notion of *nonsubstitutability*. As we saw in the case of Selfish Sam, any number of persons might come to fulfill his appetitive and material needs just as well as his wife. Attachment, however, is defined by a kind of particularity—a point that attachment theorists often emphasize in the psychological literature.¹⁶ When we are low or feeling threatened, others can help us in certain respects, but without our specific attachment partners, we often feel lost. Young children who face extended separation from their primary caregivers sometimes become inconsolable, rejecting all efforts by others to provide care.¹⁷ And most of us are all too familiar with cases of older couples in which the death of one partner quickly, and inexplicably, follows the death of the other. Though such cases represent extreme examples, they call to mind an important point: when one is attached to a person, only *that* person can contribute to one’s sense of security or well-being in the way that she does.

While one might be attached to several persons, each plays a unique role in the type of fulfillment that she provides. This is why we don’t experience our attachment objects as interchangeable or substitutable. The particularity at work here makes it clear that when one is attached to an individual, that individual plays a very special role in one’s life that literally no one else can. This quality seems constitutive of at least some types of love (Brown 1987; Nozick 1989; Frankfurt 1999b, 2004).

In addition, the nature of the benefit that one provides in being another’s attachment figure is importantly more intimate than the mere satisfaction of appetitive desires. Again, consider Sam from section 2. He may enjoy his pot roast, sex, and gifts, but it is unlikely that he feels as though those things play integral roles in how he views himself and how he is able to get along in the world. Via

our attachments to others, we afford those persons important roles in how we live our lives and how we feel inside—they have the power both to help shape our agency (e.g., we function better with them; they play stabilizing, balancing, and corrective roles in our lives) and to cripple us in deep and devastating ways. Experiencing a person this way, as integral to one's felt security, involves a far more intimate connection than merely that of a purveyor of material goods or physical pleasures. A person may maintain a very impersonal stance toward another who satisfies only appetitive needs, but in taking up another as important for her well-being in the thick sense associated with security-based attachment, she removes a barrier between herself and the other. The connection is very personal, and, in fact, according to some theorists, literally “resides inside” the attached party (Hazan, Campa, and Gur-Yaish 2006, p. 65).¹⁸ I take it that this type of intimacy is another defining feature of some kinds of love.

Recall that union accounts also make sense of the intimate type of need for another that romantic love involves. If an individual and her beloved share a self or an identity, then they need one another in the deepest sense; each is a *part* of who the other is. I take it that one advantage of utilizing an attachment framework to account for the depth of love's need for another is that it survives some of the difficulties that plague union theories. As I am not concerned to deliver a detailed refutation of union theories of love, I will only rehearse a few of the relevant challenges here.¹⁹

First, insofar as union views suggest the formation of a “new entity,” they invite potentially worrisome metaphysical questions. What exactly is a “we”? What properties does it have? What are the conditions of its creation and destruction? To be sure, there are different union theories of love, and they will have different answers to these questions. I take it, however, that one benefit of

using an attachment framework to explain the need that constitutes romantic love is that we needn't bother with such questions.²⁰

Also, union views of love can seem rather intrusive. An attachment affords another a distinctively important role in one's life, and in so doing, it can facilitate an intimate connection between oneself and the other. It does not, however, require a merger of selves. There is something to be said for preserving the distinction between one's own identity and that of one's beloved. Unsurprisingly, critics have charged that in blurring or eliding this distinction, union views suggest a needlessly invasive and potentially dangerous view of love.²¹

Proponents of the union view might (quite rightly) point out that the notion of a shared self often better captures the phenomenology of love than does the idea of mere attachment. After all, it is not uncommon for lovers to report feeling a sense of “oneness” or “unity” with their beloved.²² To be sure, these locutions are familiar enough, and I do not wish to deny the insight behind them. Yet even if one grants that this is a fitting characterization of *some* loving romantic relationships, it is far from clear that all instances of romantic love can be captured in these terms.²³ Insisting that romantic love *require* a shared identity or a combined self—or even a desire for such a thing—might be unduly demanding.

Attachment represents a particular way in which we experience certain special persons in our lives as felt needs. While attachment is a largely self-interested attitude, needing another in this way—or again, being needed in this way—can be a deeply rewarding and powerful thing. Sometimes we don't want those who love us to, in Frankfurt's terms, “forget themselves,” but we want them to love us with their selves in *full view*, as it were, because only in so doing can they, and we, fully experience the value of romantic love.²⁴

NOTES

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1. While I do think that we can love objects, ideas, and other nonpersons, in this paper, I restrict discussion to love for persons. Also, though I focus on romantic love, I suspect that much of what follows applies to some kinds of friendship and perhaps, with some modification, to parental love as well. Those, however, are topics for another day.
2. See, for example, Frankfurt (1999a; 1999b; 2004); Robert Brown (1987); Alan Soble (1990); and Kate Abramson and Adam Leite (2011). For a thorough and insightful treatment of what he refers to as “robust concern” accounts of love, see Helm (2010; 2013).
3. Robert Nozick (1989) and Marilyn Friedman (1998) also advance union theories of love. For a more comprehensive discussion of union accounts of love, see Helm (2009; 2010; 2013).
4. See, for example, Kraut (1987); Brown (1987); Nozick (1989); and Frankfurt (1999b; 2004).
5. Importantly, Frankfurt doubts that romantic relationships provide “especially authentic” paradigms of love. He explains: “The attitudes of romantic lovers toward their beloveds are rarely altogether disinterested, and those aspects of their attitudes which are indeed disinterested are generally obscured by more urgent concerns that are conspicuously or covertly self-regarding” (1999b, p. 166). I take it, however, that Frankfurt does not mean to exclude romantic relationships from his account of love altogether, but rather he thinks that they typically fall short of ideal love. In other works, he employs some examples that seem romantic in nature (Frankfurt 2004, pp. 42, 60).
6. One might suspect that the problem is that Alejandro doesn’t really *enjoy* Denise, but that he promotes her interests only out of obligation or something of the sort. In this way, Alejandro would resemble the dutiful but false friend that Scanlon (1998) describes in *What We Owe to Each Other*. Scanlon explains: “A person who did not regard friendship as a good to him, did not enjoy it and see it as an important ingredient in a good life, would not be a real friend . . . but only following a strangely cold imperative. Being a friend involves both feeling friendship’s demands and enjoying its benefits” (1998, p. 162). I take it that Scanlon’s point is that part of what it means to be a true friend is to experience one’s relationship with her friendship-partner, minimally, as a benefit to oneself. Likewise, this reasoning would also apply to romantic relationships. This, though, is not Alejandro’s problem. There is no reason to think that he doesn’t take pleasure in Denise’s company or that he doesn’t experience her—and his love for her—as a good for him in many respects. Promoting her good adds value to his life, and for all that has been said so far, we have no grounds for assuming that he fails to appreciate, or enjoy, the benefits of being with and loving her. When it comes to Denise’s flourishing, though, he simply does not consider such things. His concern for her and his caring actions toward her are completely divorced from any thought to his own good. And *this* is precisely where the problem lies.
7. One way to illuminate this idea is to consider Dan Moller’s remarks on the empirical finding that people are more resilient to being negatively impacted by the deaths of loved ones than typically supposed. According to Moller:

We like to believe that we are *needed* by our husband or wife and that consequently losing us should have a profound and lasting effect on them. . . . Most of us tend to assume that our relationship with the ones we love

- is so important to them that severing that relationship would make a deep impact on their ability to continue to lead happy worthwhile lives. The fact that our beliefs about these matters are false and that our loved ones are resilient to the loss of us seems to show that we don't have the significance that we thought we did. (2007, p. 309; emphasis in the original)
8. See Wonderly (2016, p. 228).
 9. Interestingly, in his "Fragment on Love," G. W. F. Hegel also draws a connection between romantic love and the infant-primary caregiver bond (1971, esp. pp. 307–308). Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for *American Philosophical Quarterly* for bringing this to my attention.
 10. See, for example, Rholes and Simpson (2004); Brumbaugh and Farley (2006); Hazan, Campa, and Gur-Yaish (2006); Shaver, Hazan, and Bradshaw (1988); and Mikulincer and Shaver (2007).
 11. See, for example, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007, p. 17); and Collins et al. (2006, pp. 156–158).
 12. Note that this account is meant to capture a specific type of security-based attachment, not attachment *tout court*. My view allows that there other kinds of attachment that are not related to one's sense of security.
 13. I discuss this notion of security at length in Wonderly (2016). This conception of security is consonant with many views of security on offer in the psychological literature. Abraham Maslow characterized security as a "syndrome of feelings," that includes, *inter alia*, feelings of "being at home in the world," "emotional stability," "self-esteem," "self-acceptance," and "courage" (1942, pp. 334–335). In developing what came to be known as "security theory," William Blatz identified security as "the state of mind which accompanies the willingness to accept the consequences of one's acts" and he named "serenity" as the feeling associated with that state (1966, p. 13). In attachment theorist Mary Ainsworth's words, Blatz "seemed to equate feeling secure with feeling competent or effective" (1988, p. 1). Ainsworth herself speaks approvingly of a conception of security that she gleans from John Bowlby's work—that is, security as "an 'all is well' kind of appraisal of sensory input," or "an 'Okay, go ahead' feeling" (Ainsworth 1988, p. 1).
 14. For examples, see the accounts of caring described in Shoemaker (2003); Jaworska (2007a, 2007b); Seidman (2008); and Helm (2010).
 15. See also Collins and Feeney (2000); and Collins et al. (2006).
 16. In attachment theorist Mary Ainsworth's words: "An attachment figure is never wholly interchangeable with or replaceable by another" (1991, p. 38). For more on this point, see Bowlby (1969, pp. 308–309).
 17. See, for example, Spitz (1945); Spitz and Wolf (1946); Bowlby and Robertson (1953); and Bowlby (1973; 1980).
 18. I take it that the notion of a connection "residing inside" oneself (as opposed to another person being *a part* of oneself) and the idea of removing a barrier between oneself and another (as opposed to removing *all* such barriers) help to capture love's intimacy without presupposing a shared identity or merger of selves. In other words, an attachment view of love is not synonymous with a union view of love. I discuss this further in what follows.
 19. For a more spirited and thorough critique of union theories of love, see Soble (1997).
 20. This is not to say that all union views of love posit a particularly strange or incomprehensible entity, but they do posit a *new* entity and therefore require an account of that entity's underlying metaphysics. Explaining love's depth in terms of the more familiar (and widely investigated) phenomenon of attachment—as opposed to a "shared self"—sidesteps this challenge. Relatedly, an attachment is not necessarily incompatible with a union. I see no reason why, in principle, both an emotional attachment and a shared identity could not co-exist in the same relationship. In fact, it might be difficult to imagine

a pair of merged selves who were not also attached in the sense described above. Importantly, however, an attachment can exist without such a merger, and for the reasons enumerated above (and for others that I adduce in what follows), I take this to be an advantage of viewing love's need of the other through the lens of attachment.

21. Irving Singer, for example, suggests that the notion of merging or fusing identities calls to mind the dissolution of one's own identity as a distinct individual, and if this is what love requires, then it might well be something that should be avoided (Singer 2010, p. 30). For other accounts on which union views of love objectionably threaten individual identity or autonomy, see Soble (1997); and Helm (2010). Admittedly, the attachment view of love is not necessarily immune to all varieties of the intrusiveness objection. Attachments do, after all, affect important aspects of the attached party's self. Some, being unwilling to countenance a connection to others in which those persons have a distinctive impact on one's senses of well-being and how one is able to get along in the world, might reject the attachment view of love as too intrusive as well. My point here is that for those who grant that romantic love involves a deeply impactful type of connectedness to its object but balk at the thought of sharing identities or merging selves, the attachment view would seem to represent a less intrusive alternative than the union view.

22. It is worth noting that the notion of attachment can also explain some of the locutions that lovers use to describe their intimate connection. Take, for example, the idea of one being "enhanced" or "empowered" (as opposed to simply being expanded) by one's beloved.

23. In cases of unrequited love, for example, it would seem odd to describe love's depth in terms of a new, combined self. In this case, there is no "we." Still, if it is to qualify as genuine love—as opposed to say, unrequited infatuation—there must be some feature of the lover's orientation toward her beloved that accounts for its depth. The union theorist might locate the source of love's depth in the lover's (sadly unreciprocated) *desire* to form a "we" with her beloved. But I suspect that such a desire is neither necessary nor sufficient to capture love's depth.

24. Importantly, it is no part of my view that mere attachment is synonymous with love. Love also involves valuing the other and desiring her good for her own sake. An individual's concern for her beloved cannot be *wholly* self-interested. However, absent attachment, or some similarly self-interested attitude, some forms of love would seem deeply lacking.

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