

# Respecting Love: Love, Autonomy, and Respect for Persons

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Many philosophers have noticed a prima facie conflict between the demands of love and respect for persons.<sup>1</sup> Love tends to be seen as inherently particularist and partial, whereas respect is understood to be intrinsically universalist and impartial. The response to this has been varied, some philosophers willing to restrict the scope of the universalist theories to make room for love, others demanding that love can be the source of morally permissible motives only insofar as those motives are consistent with the universalist moral theories.

In this paper, I attempt to delve under the surface of this conflict to show how, at least in paradigm cases, it is actually generated by fundamentally differing conceptions of autonomy. I thus have several goals. I show that respect for persons is not a ground principle of ethics, but a consequence of a particular conception of moral autonomy. Because Kant first articulated the demand for respect in a recognizably modern form, I provide a somewhat non-standard interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy to support this claim about autonomy, including an examination of Kant's reasons for viewing love as fundamentally incompatible with respect. I examine an interesting recent attempt by J. David Velleman to sidestep the problem, and argue that is inadequate. Finally, I offer a differing conception of autonomy derived from Harry Frankfurt's work that gives us a view

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Williams, especially in "Persons, Character, and Morality" (1982), was very influential in shaping the examination of many of these issues, which have since been taken up philosophers such as Harry Frankfurt, Samuel Scheffler, J. David Velleman, Allen Wood, and a good many others.

reconciling love and respect, while still retaining the essential moral features of both.

## Respect for Persons in Kant

The formal principle of equal respect for persons enters moral philosophy in Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* as the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means" (429). Kant thinks that the Categorical Imperative, in each of its three logically equivalent (according to him) forms, "alone purports to be a practical law" (420), and indeed is the ground of all morality.

In his recent book, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, Allen Wood notes that:

Kant thinks there is a basic tension in human nature between loving people and respecting them... Respect and love are not mutually exclusive: In rational philanthropy they even go necessarily together. But in our natural inclinations they make for an unstable combination. Love as inclination is based on the pleasure we take in another (or her perfections), but respect for others pains us by striking down our self-conceit. Love is an empirical inclination, however, it is not opposed to self-conceit and indirectly it is even an expression of it. (Wood [1999], 271)

I think understanding Kant's moral philosophy is central to gaining a fully grounded notion of respect for persons; in what follows I want to try to work out exactly what the source of this tension is. The interpretation I offer is slightly non-standard, in that I emphasize the transcendental nature of Kant's moral philosophy much more than do most contemporary readers of Kant.<sup>2</sup> I do this not only because I think it

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<sup>2</sup> What I consider the "standard" interpretation was first developed by Rawls and his followers. Consider this random example: on reading Rawls' "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy" (Rawls [1989], 81-113) one cannot help but notice that Rawls makes no mention of Part III of the *Groundwork* or the important themes therein. One might also wonder how far some of these interpretations (e.g. Christine Korsgaard's work) seek to "help" Kant out by saving him from

is more accurate Kant exegesis, but more importantly (for our purposes here) because it is necessary to have a fully grounded Kantian position.<sup>3</sup>

Some contemporary philosophers tend to take the Kantian demand for respect as a ground principle of their ethical systems, not in need of further support. In other words, the doctrine of persons as ends is understood as one of the fundamental premises of the theory, founded on nothing beyond putative facts about the nature of persons themselves. It is similarly sometimes thought that Kant himself takes the doctrine as a premise and derives all of morality from it. While it is certainly true that Kant thinks that all of morality is derivable from (each of the three formulations of) the categorical imperative, it is important to recognize that Kant derives the categorical imperative itself by means of a transcendental deduction; it is for him, “an a priori synthetic practical proposition” (420), which can only be known transcendently—i.e. from a critique of (pure) practical reason.

Thus, unlike many contemporary philosophers following broadly in his wake, Kant does not merely *assume* the doctrine of persons as ends, but rather *derives* it from the nature of practical reason itself. To appreciate the Kantian doctrine of respect for persons fully we must take the transcendental deduction seriously and see why Kant thinks respect is a ground principle of the good will. Although it is certainly possible to formulate a constructivist ethics that takes respect for persons as a kind of axiom, such an ethical theory will always be vulnerable to the charge of question-begging, especially since Kant himself

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himself, so to speak. In other words, many readers of Kant have been more impressed by (e.g. the universality of) the Categorical Imperative than its putative derivation from pure practical reason itself, and so have been inclined to stress the former and de-emphasize, if not downright disown, the latter.

<sup>3</sup> By extension, then, I believe that many contemporary philosophers who are highly influenced by Kant have fundamentally ungrounded positions. In particular, I have in mind both moral contractualists like Scanlon, and certain moral constructivists.

provides further considerations in support of respect which are rooted in his transcendental philosophy.

When Kant (or anybody else) claims that persons are ends, what does ‘ends’ mean? The second formulation of the Categorical Imperative clearly opposes *means* to *ends*. The requirement to treat humanity as an end suggests that I am not to treat persons as instruments for achieving some other purpose or goal of my own. However, what would it mean to treat a person *as* a purpose or goal? It seems much more natural to speak of a person *having* a purpose or goal, not *being* a purpose or goal. So what does Kant mean when he claims that persons are “ends in themselves”?

An *end*, according to Kant, “has in itself an absolute worth” and alone can be “a ground of determinate laws” (428). “[R]ational nature exists as an end in itself;” it has no further purpose beyond itself. When Kant talks of persons as ends, what he really has in mind is that persons are fundamentally *causes*. Persons are ends in themselves because, for the purposes of moral discourse, a person (and only a person) can be the self-sufficient end (i.e. beginning) of the causal chain whose effects are the sorts of actions we conventionally subject to moral evaluation.

In other words, to be a genuine agent, to bear responsibility for his acts, a person must be the free cause of those acts. With regard to the moral actions for which he is responsible, the agent must be a kind of Prime Mover, and it is only insofar as he is the first cause that he himself *acts*. Persons are ends in themselves insofar as they have the capacity to be free causes. This proposition is at the heart of Kant’s understanding of pure morality and accounts for the central importance of autonomy in his formal ethics. He begins section III of the *Groundwork* by claiming that the “will is a kind of causality belonging to living beings insofar as they are rational; freedom would be the property of this causality that makes it effective independent of any determination by alien causes” (446).

It is in virtue of being ends in themselves that persons are “objects of respect.” Respect is a necessary logical requirement of recognizing what persons most fundamentally are—i.e. free causes. It is this recognition that grounds the demand for respect because it is most fundamentally a recognition of another’s rationality—another’s capacity to be a self-existent end. This is why the second formulation notes that one must treat humanity, “whether in your *own* person or in the person of another” (emphasis added), as an end. Each “man necessarily thinks of his own existence” as a self-sufficient end, but so “also does every other rational being think of his existence on the same rational ground” (429). Thus, in recognizing myself as a self-sufficient end I must at the same time necessarily recognize every other rational being as a self-sufficient end. In other words, I cannot rationally conceive of myself as a free cause—as the ultimate source of my own activity—without conceiving of all other creatures with the same rational capacity in the same way. Another way to see the point: to fail to recognize the ultimate value of another rational being would constitute a failure to recognize my own rationality. It would be intrinsically irrational, much like denying a truth of mathematics, and would represent a fundamental misunderstanding of what is at issue.

Respect and autonomy are, in some sense, the flip sides of the same coin. The will that is a free cause, in order to value its own autonomy properly, must value every other rational creature in the same way by paying it respect. This is an absolutely key point, one missing from many discussions of respect for persons. This is why Kant thinks that respect comes out of the nature of practical reason itself; it is entailed as a logical consequence of the realization by each agent that he is a free cause.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I hope it is clear that here (and elsewhere where I am using quasi-perceptual verbs like ‘recognize’) I am not making a point merely about an agent’s subjective psychology. An agent is a free cause whether he realizes it or not; after all, Kant thinks agents were free causes before he

We are now in a position to answer a question that many modern constructivist accounts cannot: *why* must I show respect for persons? The answer is relatively straightforward: for a rational creature to cognize his own rational nature he must understand every other rational creature to possess the same nature he has. To disrespect another rational creature is to undermine one's own rationality; thus, reason itself requires respect because respect just is the practice of reason with regard to other instantiations of itself.

What this recognition actually entails is the realization that my own status as a moral creature—responsible for my moral actions—requires that my moral life play itself out within the space of moral reasons. Accordingly, anyone else who is also within that space of moral reasons is condign of the same regard I pay myself when I recognize myself as a moral agent. Thus, I cannot treat another as a means without in essence failing to understand *myself* as a locus of causation within the moral world. To treat another as a means is to abdicate my own rationality. To fail to pay respect to other rational creatures is to fail to see myself as an ultimate cause, and thus as a moral creature.

Within this context, then, we actually do have a fully grounded reason for the demand for respect. It is supposed to be an analytic requirement of practical reasoning to understand that practical reasoning must occur within law-like formulizations, what Kant calls “maxims.”<sup>5</sup> This is because agents have to serve as primary causes of their actions in order to be morally responsible for them. As such, the nature of practical reasoning itself compels the recognition of all who engage in law-governed practical reasoning *as* agents. The price of admission to

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came along to do his transcendental deduction. The point is merely that Kant thinks that he has shown how agents must think of themselves in order to have an adequate understanding of themselves *qua* agents.

<sup>5</sup> In a footnote at 401, Kant defines that a “maxim is the subjective principle of volition; the objective principle (i.e. that which would also serve subjectively as the practical principle for all rational beings if reason had complete control over the faculty of desire) is the practical law.”

the sphere of moral reasons is precisely the recognition of all fellow practical reasoners as ultimate moral causes. Thus, for Kant, respect is an *analytic* requirement of practical reasoning.

This is the source of that “very fruitful concept,” what Kant calls the “kingdom of ends” (433). The metaphor embodies the idea that “the will of every rational being” is “a will that legislates universal law” (431)—that is, the kingdom is “a systematic union of different rational beings through common laws” (433). The laws are common precisely because they are laws. Insofar as a law of the will is binding for *any* rational will, it must necessarily be binding for *all* rational wills. Thus, to legislate for myself—insofar as I give determinate form to a rational willing (i.e. a will in conformity to the Moral Law)—is to legislate the same law for all other rational creatures. Kant sees this as an analytic requirement of recognizing the nature of the will as a free cause.

It is vitally important to see that the demand for respect is a *logical* consequence of the freedom of the will. In other words, although Kant thinks that all of morality can in principle be derived from the demand for respect as embodied in the second formulation of the categorical imperative, the demand for respect itself is not a fundamental premise of Kantian ethics. The fundamental premise of Kantian ethics is the presupposition that the will is a free cause. Ultimately “morality must be derived solely from the property of freedom,” and so to ground his ethics Kant thinks that he “must show that freedom belongs universally to the activity of rational beings endowed with a will” (448).

Accordingly, whether and to what degree love is compatible with respect for persons in Kant can be determined only by finding whether and to what degree love is compatible with autonomy as he conceives of it. I want now to turn to this question and examine the way in which Kant thinks that love interacts with autonomy.

## Love and Autonomy

First, we must be aware of a distinction Kant draws between two types of love. For Kant, ‘love’ can either refer to “love as an inclination” or “benevolence from duty,” and it is only the latter kind of love which is “practical, not pathological” (399). Not only is the latter kind of “love” permissible, it is also a duty. On the other hand, Kant understands “love as an inclination” in terms of pleasure.<sup>6</sup> I suspect that many will find this dichotomy unsatisfying. Many people would not count “benevolence from duty” a species of love at all, but at the same time most would also think that love has to do with something more than merely “pleasure in the reality of the object.” Before I take this up, however, it will be useful to understand precisely what Kant thinks the problem with love “as an inclination” or pleasure is.

Kant calls “love as an inclination” not merely a temptation, but “pathological.” The pathology lies in what acting on an inclination is supposed to do to the will. When the will is determined to act from desire it becomes “heteronomous” so that it “does not give itself the law, but [its] object does so because of its relation to the will” (441). In other words, when motivated by a desire for pleasure the will is not free. It is being determined by something outside of itself—the object of the desire.

We must always remember that for Kant the deepest ground of morality is the freedom of the will. But, as I discussed above, the will is only free insofar as it is “a causality in accordance with immutable laws”, as a “law to itself.” Because the *pure* will is fully rational it necessarily conceives of itself as law-governed, and

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<sup>6</sup> Allen Wood writes that in Kant “Love as inclination is based on the pleasure we take in another (or her perfections),... Love is an empirical inclination” (Wood [1999], 271). Wood refers us to the *Second Critique* where Kant writes that in desire “the determining ground of choice consists in the conception of an object and its relation to the subject.... Such a relation to the subject is called pleasure in the reality of the object...” (21).

these laws must be a priori, i.e. universal and necessary. In the *Second Critique*, Kant writes that when a will is determined by a desire for pleasure it “must be always empirical” because “we cannot know, a priori, from the idea of any object, whatever the nature of this idea, whether it will be associated with pleasure or displeasure or will be merely indifferent” (21). Pleasure cannot inform a universal and necessary law because the “subjective susceptibility to a pleasure or displeasure” can “never [be] known except empirically and cannot be valid in the same form for all rational beings.” Thus, it “lacks objective necessity, which must be known a priori”, and “such a principle can never furnish a practical law” (22).

The idea is relatively straightforward—no given object will necessarily elicit the same pleasure response in all rational creatures. Whether or not some person takes pleasure in any given object is contingent and can only be discovered empirically (for instance, by exposing that agent to it). Accordingly, pleasure cannot determine a free will, because a will is free only insofar as it is determined by necessary and universal laws which it gives to itself. Thus, any will determined by pleasure is unfree, and since freedom is the ultimate ground of morality, a will determined by pleasure is, at least in part, “pathological” and immoral.

I suspect many will join me in finding the dichotomy unsatisfying. Although it is true that we tend to take pleasure in what we love, there is not sufficient reason to think that love not founded in duty is entirely reducible to a desire for pleasure. In turning to the phenomenon itself, it is surely obvious, but no less true for being so, that many of the objects of our love, far from being a source of pleasure, are often a source of great pain. In fact, we tend to think that loving something, or especially someone, makes one vulnerable to the greatest of possible pains. Now even if it were the case that the pleasures would generally tend to outweigh the displeasures, it is by no means the case that this generalization always holds, or, as literature reveals, even that the greatest and deepest loves will be characterized by the most pleasure.

Let us set aside these considerations, however, because the key for Kant is not really the reliability of the experience, but that the will is being moved by an *inclination*. At the heart of the problem is the idea that to be moved by a desire is for the will to be acted upon, rather than to act. This is the root of the pathology. It is pathological precisely because the will as determined by desire is forced to go against its essential nature—its fundamental rationality. When determined by a desire the will fails to express itself as a causality. The problem with love is that it is a feeling, an emotion, a suffering, a passion; that is, the problem consists in the fact that a will determined by love is, in some important sense, passive.

### Love as Moral Emotion

In a recent paper, J. David Velleman has tried to make a virtue of this necessity, by offering a neo-Kantian interpretation of love as what he calls a “moral emotion.” To do this, Velleman has to thread a needle. For the reasons I have already canvassed he cannot embrace the emotion itself as the determining ground of a free will. No emotion can ever be the determining ground of a *free* will for Kant. Instead, what Velleman wants to do is show how the divergent perspectives of love and morality can converge. Velleman’s “solution” is interesting and worth examining to help us understand how love as an emotion might be reconciled with Kant’s formal position that the will is a kind of causality.

Let us cut to the chase, Velleman writes:

All that is essential to love, in my view, is that it disarms our emotional defenses towards an object in response to its incomparable value as a self-existent end. But when the object of our love is a person and when we love him as a person—rather than a work of nature, say, or an aesthetic object—then indeed, I want to say, we are responding to the value he possesses by virtue of being a person, or as Kant would say, an instance of rational nature.

Before balking at this statement, recall the following tenets of Kantian theory: that the rational nature whose value commands respect is the capacity to be actuated by reasons; that the capacity to be actuated by reasons is also the

capacity to have a good will; and that the capacity for a rational and consequently good will is that better side of a person which constitutes his true self. I find it intuitively plausible that we love people for their true and better selves.

...For Kant, then, people have a capacity whose value we appreciate by respecting them; and that capacity, at its utmost, is their capacity for respect. I am suggesting that love is an appreciation for the same value, inhering in people's capacity to appreciate the value of ends, including self-existent ends such as persons (Velleman [1999], 365).

Velleman's move here is subtle and interesting. He is not saying that in loving someone my will is determined by the emotion. Rather, his view seems to be that love as an emotion is a kind of wedge, which, by prying open our "emotional defenses," makes it possible for us to appreciate another person for what she really is, viz. another instantiation of a rational nature. In other words, in loving a person we are in fact recognizing her intrinsic value—that is to say, we are actually respecting her.

This view does not fall prey to Kant's animadversions against "love as an inclination" because although it is presumably true that love inclines us towards another person (in terms of a feeling of attentiveness or awareness<sup>7</sup>), it does not in itself determine the will. Rather, as an emotion it acts upon other emotions, it lets us get past our "emotional defenses" which prevent us, according to Velleman, from appreciating another person as she really is—that is, of seeing her value. In his view, "love for others is possible when we find in them a capacity for valuation like ours, which can be constrained by respect for ours, and which, therefore makes our emotional defenses against them feel unnecessary" (366).

In Velleman's view respect is necessarily primary and love is secondary. Love is not itself an expression of the will; rather, as an emotion, it makes it possible for the will to penetrate the emotional carapace which generally inhibits

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<sup>7</sup> Velleman holds that love is not properly understood as conative, consisting in desires—conative views are "sentimental fantasy"—rather it consists in "an attitude toward the beloved" (354). So I take it that the way in which love inclines, for Velleman, is analogous to the way in which beauty inclines.

us from recognizing in others that they are worthy of respect. As I said before, Velleman seems to be trying to make a virtue out of a necessity.

It is presumably a fact about human beings that they are beset by emotions—both attachments and aversions. These emotions get in the way of the will's autonomy; they impede the freedom of the will to determine itself according to immutable laws. Given, however, that we do have emotions, Velleman wants to harness one of them, love, to cancel out some of the others—not as an end in itself, but as a means to achieving the true end of interpersonal relations, the recognition of another's value as an instantiation of a rational nature.

The pure will—i.e. the entirely good will—cannot be determined by emotions, because in being determined by an emotion the will is made unfree. When determined by an emotion a will becomes heteronomous; it is no longer a free causality. Given that human wills cannot really approach the condition of a pure will, and given that we will always have to deal with our emotions, Velleman's move is perhaps the best that can be done to reconcile the pure will to the conditions of its human embodiment.

The advantage of Velleman's view is that it makes our relationships to our loved ones come out correctly for a Kantian view—that is, it places our relationships fundamentally in terms of respect, where that is understood as the recognition of others' fundamental value as instantiations of rational nature. The danger of love as a temptation against duty is defused by making it an instrument whereby the embodied human will can recognize others as rational agents—i.e., as what they truly are, according to Kant.

Velleman's view is interesting because he concedes, in a way that Kant seems not to, that love as an emotion is an important fact in the moral lives of human beings. Nonetheless, his analysis does not offend against the fundamental nature of Kant's view, because it manages to do this without making love into a determinant of the will, and so undermining its freedom. Therefore, I think we

can agree that while Velleman's position is more or less consistent with Kant's view, it is highly unlikely that Kant held anything quite like this position. I think Kant was clearly less willing to have love as an emotion play such a large role in morality (even if only secondarily).

Our interest, however, is not pure Kant exegesis (neither for that matter is Velleman's), so the questions we need to ask are a bit different. First, is the view of love as emotion which Velleman presents the correct understanding of love? Second, and more important, is Kant's view (which Velleman implicitly supports) that a free will cannot be determined by love, correct? Is it truly the case that a will determined by love is so unfree that we cannot understand it as a causality which grounds morally responsible agency?

#### Is Love an Emotion?

I want to suggest several answers: first, I think Velleman's analysis fails to give the proper account of love; that is, it is inaccurate to the phenomena that characterize love. Second, I do not think that a will determined by love is necessarily unfree. Finally, I hold that a will determined by love can be a causality to the extent necessary to underwrite moral responsibility. Let us take each of these in turn.

Velleman holds that love is an emotion; it is a feeling which he describes as "a state of attentive suspension, similar to wonder or amazement" (360). It is not conative, he says, it does not have an aim, and does not consist in an "urge or impulse or inclination toward anything" (360). It "is essentially an attitude toward the beloved himself but not toward any result at all" (354). Velleman thinks that love does not consist in desiring anything, but rather consists in being made aware of the value of the object of that love. He notes that according to his hypothesis, "the various motives that are often identified with love are in fact independent

responses that love merely unleashes”—“the sympathy, empathy, fascination, and attraction that we feel for another person when our emotional defenses toward him have been disarmed” (361).

Velleman’s first (but not only) appeal is to the phenomenology of love; he says that love “does not feel (to [him], at least) like an urge or impulse or inclination.” While responding to someone else’s feelings with a report of your own is often fruitless, I think we have some reason to doubt whether or not this analysis is an adequate account of the phenomena. Velleman claims that any desires that arise from love are independent responses to the value that love as awareness allows us to see in the beloved.

My first response is simply to observe that I cannot really understand what it would be to love some object and not desire its well-being. This is, in fact, a popular criterion of love (which Velleman lumps together with others he rejects).<sup>8</sup> Velleman thinks a point in favor of his “hypothesis” is that the conative views which he rejects tend to have as their ultimate end a “sentimental fantasy—an idealized vision of living happily ever after” (353). For Velleman, love has an object but no aim or goal; it is directed at the beloved but entails no particular desires towards her.

Some of the desires that Velleman quotes the conative theorists as attaching to love do seem rather ridiculous. It seems to me likely that it is possible to love something without necessarily desiring to be with it, to cherish it, to please it, etc., even if those characteristics *are* common enough. Desiring its good, on the other hand, seems to be a rather different sort of desire. Immediately we notice

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<sup>8</sup> This view is held by Harry Frankfurt and many others. In his latest book, Frankfurt writes: “Loving something has less to do with what a person believes, or with how he feels, than with a configuration of the will that consists in a practical concern for what is good for the beloved” (Frankfurt [2004], 43). In his philosophical analysis of sexual desire, Roger Scruton writes that “higher friendship” (the friendship that sometimes leads to love) “includes the desire for the other’s well-being, together with the desire that desire be reciprocated” (Scruton, 229).

that the former sorts of desires can very easily become intensely selfish, whereas the desire for the beloved's good seems almost the essence of charity.

More important than any of this arm-chair introspection is this consequence of Velleman's move: he turns love into a quasi-perceptual property rather than a property of the will. This is a beautiful philosophical maneuver for a Kantian to make because it keeps love safely out of the will. As an analysis of love, however, it seems to do violence to some of our deepest intuitions about love; most importantly, to the intuition that my loving is somehow deeply *expressive* of something about me.

In other words, by understanding love as an emotion Velleman makes it into merely the means by which we apprehend some fact about the world (in this case, about another person). For him love is in no way expressive of my will; indeed it cannot be lest it run afoul of the Kantian restrictions (because if it were expressive of my will that would mean that my will was being determined by my love, thus rendering me unfree on Kant's analysis). However, I think it is fair to say that my loving is expressive of my will; indeed, it reflects something central to my identity.

A key feature of my loving lies not in the independent value of the object of my love, but in the fact that it is *my* love. This is not to imply anything about the value of the object. Indeed, the object may or may not have great objective value. In fact, we may even think that the (objective) value of the object of one's love determines the (objective) value of the loving. However, it is not a requirement of my love that I recognize the independent value of its object. Whatever reasons I have for loving *this* thing, my loving it entails nothing about its objective value (or even my perception of that value). It is probably a tautology to note that I value what I love, but that merely shows that I can place great value on objects that are not (from some neutral perspective, *sub specie aeternis*) independently valuable.

I think this becomes especially clear when we turn from Velleman's examples of loving persons (which, even if we are not Kantians, we may still think possess some kind of "absolute worth") to other sorts of things we commonly say we love. People love their jobs, their favorite bands, their pets, etc. This loving does not consist in the recognition of the independent value of the objects; it consists in the person being moved to consider the good of those objects important to him. They are what he cares about.

Let me be clear, I am by no means claiming that all of these loves are equally important or valuable in themselves. The objects of love may or may not be worthy of the love directed towards them. When pop-culture celebrities are adored this is generally a woeful thing to behold. Nevertheless, a fan's adoration is a fact about the fan. We may think it unworthy, inadvisable, or immature, but I think there is no a priori reason to think that it cannot be genuine love.

We might be tempted to follow Donne in *Love's Deitie* when he says, "it cannot bee / Love, till I love her, that loves mee." But I think here Donne is using 'love' as an intensifier; he is claiming that a requited love is a fuller or better love than an unrequited one. This, however, is no reason to think that unrequited love is not love, as both the fact of the poem's existence (accepting for the moment its internal narrative as true of its author) and common experience attest.

Velleman wants to insulate the will from love because he accurately understands it to be a threat to the will's rationality. He wants to "save" love by making it quasi-perceptual, an attentiveness or awareness to the independent value of the object of that love. However, this just does not fit the experience of our variegated lovings. Loving most centrally expresses facts about the lover, not about the objects of his love. In short, the proposition "X loves Y" (where X is a

person and Y is anything lovable) expresses an intrinsic property of X, but merely an extrinsic, relational property of Y.<sup>9</sup>

If Velleman's line is blocked, if the will cannot be insulated from love, because to so construe love is to do violence to its nature, then can the will be a loving will and yet be free? Recall Kant's ultimate concern, the reason why he rejects "love as an inclination" in the first place, is that the fundamental premise of his moral theory is that the will is a free cause. If autonomy can be reconciled with loving, then love can be admitted to its rightful place in the will, and yet the will can still remain the ground of moral responsibility as a free cause.

However, if we are to do this, we must do it in a way that preserves the essential fact about love that I noted above. We must have a conception of love as expressive of the will, not merely an awareness or attentiveness to the value of its object. In other words, we need a love that *determines* the will, a love that is fundamentally a property of the will and reflective of the agent's moral agency. Love cannot be merely secondary, an epistemic modality for the perception of the deeper value of rationality expressed through respect; it must be itself one of the central facts about the lover's will. For love does not just happen to a lover, it also is central to what the lover does (and intends to do).

### Autonomy Reconstructed

As we have seen, for Kant the will can only be free insofar as it gives itself necessary laws; that is, insofar as it is determined by immutable laws that hold for all other rational wills. Because the will is essentially rational, its nature can only be fully expressed in a priori laws. Love is incompatible with autonomy precisely

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, if Y is a person as well, Y might also love X, and might do so (at least in part) precisely because of X's love; these interactions of love would perhaps complicate but not invalidate my point.

because it is “empirical”; it cannot underwrite necessary and universal laws. The question we have to ask now is simple: is Kant’s understanding of autonomy correct?

Let us consider an alternative: Harry Frankfurt has famously introduced a significantly different conception of autonomy. Rather than understanding the will as essentially rational, Frankfurt has a structural theory of the will as divided into a hierarchy of desires and volitions. First-order desires are desires for particular objects external to the will (e.g. the desire for food). Second-order desires are desires whose objects are first-order desires. A paradigm example: the desire for a cigarette is a first-order desire; the desire not to desire cigarettes (e.g. as part of a commitment to stop smoking) is a second-order desire. He holds that autonomy consists in forming effective volitions in accordance with one’s second-order desires.

Frankfurt writes:

...the statement that a person enjoys freedom of the will means (... roughly) that he is free to want what he wants to want. More precisely, it means that he is free to will what he wants to will, or have the will he wants...

It is in securing the conformity of his will to his second-order volitions, then, that a person exercises freedom of the will... (Frankfurt [1971], 20).

For Frankfurt, autonomy consists in having the effective will that one wants to have. It does not require that I want a particular kind of will (e.g. one that desires that it be determined by necessary and universal laws); it only requires that I be committed to having the will I do, in fact, have. There is an important proviso; the autonomous agent needs to be reflectively committed to his second-order volitions. These second-order volitions determine with which of his first-order volitions he “identifies himself *decisively*” (21).

It is this decisive commitment to *identify* with some first-order volitions and to reject others that is at the heart of free agency. This emphasis on identification

is not accidental. What the agent identifies himself with determines who he is. The process of identification, a commitment that “resounds” through his will, is at the core of his autonomy, because this just is what it means to have the will he wants to have.

### Love as an Expression of Autonomy

Under Frankfurt’s account of autonomy there is no problem reconciling love and autonomy. On that account a will determined by love is free just insofar as that determination is one the agent wants to have. In other words, a will determined by love is autonomous just in case the agent wants to love what he does in fact love; that is, if his love is expressive of his second-order volitions.

This result is neither merely tautological nor trivial. It is possible, I take it, to have loves that one does not want to have. Someone, for instance, who grew up in an abusive home might still love his abusive parent (he might still have some complicated set of first-order desires towards the parent), even though he would say, on reflection, that he does not want to have such a love. Similarly, a jilted lover might wish that he no longer loved the woman who has left him, and yet, I think we would be inclined to say that, at least in certain circumstances, he still loves her. In a third case, someone might love something, such as kitsch, that he thinks unworthy of his love and wants not to love. In such cases, the agent is not free with respect to his loving. Accordingly, if he were to act on these first-order volitions he would be acting with a divided will. He would be unfree in a manner analogous to what Frankfurt calls the “unwilling addict”—a person who acts to gratify his addiction while simultaneously wanting not to have the first-order desires which constitute that addiction.

Thus, to love freely is to identify with the desires that constitute that love. If that is the case, then it is in my loving that I express who I truly am. On

Frankfurt's account the will itself is partially constituted by its "core commitments", i.e. what it most cares about. For it is these core commitments, these higher-order volitions, which regulate and determine the agent's free actions. The agent expresses his freedom in acting upon these core commitments, and so they can truly be said to constitute, at least partially, his identity and to ground his free agency. Thus, loving is not only compatible with autonomy, but an expression of it.

This quick sketch of Frankfurt's view does not do full justice to his position, but it is also true that the purely structural view of the will I have discussed here is itself vulnerable to certain important objections. In fact, elsewhere I attack the structural view for the apparent indifference Frankfurt often shows to the source of an agent's higher order volitions.<sup>10</sup> I argue that the view must be expanded to encompass a consideration of how it is possible to acquire freely higher-order volitions which embody a substantive moral outlook. However, this is well beyond the scope of what I can discuss here. For present purposes I offer the Frankfurt view not so much as my own, but as a possibility for showing the deep compatibility of autonomy and respect. I will take this up further below.

I want now to note some of the ways in which this alternate account of autonomy seems superior to Kant's. First, I think it is important to see how this account of the will lets us link love to the will at the deepest level. It allows us to

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<sup>10</sup> Frankfurt himself is quite explicit about this in his most recent book. There he writes: "In the end, [some of the things we love] are determined for us by biological and other natural conditions, concerning which we have nothing much to say" (Frankfurt [2004], 48 n.7). In fact, I disagree—I do have "much to say" about these things. I do this in the second half of my dissertation "On Loyalty." I basically argue that we have to have an understanding of how an individual moral psychology develops in reaction to and as a reflection of the moral social world. The developing will freely acquires higher-order volitions embodying moral commitments by identifying itself with the public social norms of its society. Nonetheless, this process is constrained by a fixed human nature, which will determine both what sorts of societies are possible, and the structure of the good within them.

see love, as I suggested above, not as a quasi-perceptual capacity, but as issuing from the identity of the agent himself. I think this does the most justice to the phenomenology of deep loves, where the good of the object of his love seems to become so integrated in the agent's self, that an insult to the object is an insult to the agent. In other words, since my freely loving Y consists in desiring the good of Y and wanting to desire the good of Y, for something bad to happen to Y is for one of my own desires, especially one I identify with, to be frustrated.

In addition to this phenomenological point, however, as a theory of the will this view has a significant advantage in how it construes love. On a Kantian view (whether Velleman's or Kant's own) love necessarily takes on a secondary role. Velleman thinks it makes us aware of the value of the object of our love, but beyond that it does not—cannot—*determine* the will. Thus, on Velleman's view my love is less about me than about the object of my love. Yet again, in the deepest loves, it seems as if my love issues from the very core of my being. It is at this point that we begin to descend (or ascend depending on how one looks at the matter) into the realm of poetry. But, I take it, the consistency in the metaphor that poets have used to express this point suggests something very important about the phenomenon itself, and to which Velleman's account seems inadequate.

Another advantage of this view, which is really the flip side of the last, is that the value of the object does not determine the nature of the love.<sup>11</sup> Velleman's view makes the love for a person intrinsically different than other (lesser) sorts of love. On his account, love makes us aware of the value of another, a recognition of which we are normally denied by our "emotional defenses." If that is the case, the love for a tradition, a community, an institution, etc. cannot have the same structure in the agent's moral psychology. Such loves must constitute an altogether separate category of loves than the love of persons.

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<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the value of the object may determine the *value* of that love. It is consistent with this view to hold that that certain loves are "higher" or better than others.

Of course, Velleman could bite this bullet and insist that these other sorts of “loves” are merely strong “likes” which are categorically different than our love for persons. Again, however, this strikes me as a needless complication, and one inconsistent with the way agents actually act and how they see themselves as acting. Agents commonly act out of love for objects which are not persons, and indeed commonly express greater love for non-personal objects, such as an ideal or a community, than they do for the persons they love. The more commonsensical, and I think correct, view is to accept that these loves are all the same sort of phenomenon, but that they are generally differentiated by the importance that agents attach to them—the degree to which they identify with them.<sup>12</sup>

One of the strongest intuitions in favor of Velleman’s view is his notion that “we love people for their *true and better selves*” (emphasis added, 365). I agree that in the best sorts of love (after all, love can be pathological in all sorts of ways besides Kant’s) we love people for their true and better selves. However, I do not think we have to understand another’s “true and better self” to mean her rational nature.

My survey of Kant shows why he believes this. Kant thinks that the pure will is perfectly rational, that it cannot be determined by anything less than a necessary and universal law and yet remain free. However, I do not think we have to follow Kant here. Although it is certainly the case that our rationality is an important part of our volitional structure, it does not seem to me correct to assume that an instantiation of rationality is who I essentially am. In fact, insofar as my will is strictly rational it must also be in a sense anonymous, for whatever laws it gives to itself apply to the same degree to all other rational wills. There is

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<sup>12</sup> It may be the case that agents generally attach their greatest loves to persons. Nonetheless, I see no reason that this need necessarily be the case; history is full of those who could say with Lovelace, “I could not love thee, dear, so much, / loved I not honor more.”

nothing about my will that makes it mine besides the bare “I think” that Kant notes, in another context, attaches to all of our cognitions.<sup>13</sup>

Delving into the metaphysics of identity is obviously far beyond the scope of the present effort. However, I do want to suggest that the relationship of love to identity matters, and supports the type of view I have sketched above. In short, if love can be an expression of a free will, then we can agree with Velleman that when loving another person I love her “true and better self.” However, I am not limited merely to respecting her as another instantiation of rationality, but I am free to love her for what makes her who she freely is—namely, the sorts of things that *she* loves, which make up *her* own core commitments.

None of this, we should note, implies that either the rationality of the agent or that of his beloved is unimportant. A will constituted by commitments that are rationally incompatible is incoherent, and quite possibly unfree.<sup>14</sup> We can and do subject our core commitments to rational reflection and it is quite proper that we do so. On this view of love and autonomy rationality is important; it just is not by itself the ground of all moral agency. The composite will, regulated by the requirements of rationality, but also expressing its internal structure as constituted by its higher-order volitions, is the true ground of agency.

This then brings us full circle. We began by wondering if love was compatible with respect. In his clever attempt putatively to reconcile the divergent requirements of love and Kantian respect Velleman has actually answered in the negative. His reconciliation actually consists in demoting love out of the will. I suggested before that our concern with respect for persons actually arises out of

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<sup>13</sup> Williams discusses this idea of the anonymity of the Kantian agent in chapter 4 of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>14</sup> Such a will would be unfree insofar as it would be wanton; that is, moving to gratify first-order desires merely as they present themselves, without an overarching set of high-order commitments to regulate them.

Kant's concern for securing the autonomy of rational agents. Respect, for Kant, is a logical consequence of rational autonomy.

The account I have offered reconciles respect and love, basically by rejecting Kant's view of autonomy. It is important to note that I have not rejected the importance of autonomy, nor its position as the ground of morality (my position can actually remain agnostic on the truth of the latter). Rather, I have tried to suggest that love and respect can be brought together if we realize that respect does not require us to recognize in another merely her pure capacity for rationality.

In fact, the view here suggests that respect consists in recognizing another for what he actually is, what is expressive of his will. If Frankfurt is correct, then although an agent's rationality will be a central part of his will, it will not constitute it entirely, nor will rationality necessarily be the most important thing about his will. Respect will consist in seeing the agent for what he is, and this respect will not be a merely formal property, as in Kant's understanding. It will require actually knowing something substantive about the object of respect, namely her loves and (especially her higher-order) desires—the constitution of her will. Obviously, much more can be said about the nature of respect informed by this notion of autonomy, but we must close for now.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to show that the *prima facie* incompatibility between loving an agent and respecting her can be reconciled. I have shown that the demand for respect for persons actually arises as a logical consequence of

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<sup>15</sup> Frankfurt's discussions in "Equality as a Moral Ideal", "Equality and Respect", as well as Raz's remarks in reply ("On Frankfurt's Explanation of Respect for People") show something about how such an account might go, but much more remains to be done in exploring this terrain.

Kant's understanding of autonomy. I have examined and rejected Velleman's account of love because he misconstrues love as quasi-perceptual, and thus divorces it from the will. Finally, by examining Frankfurt's account of autonomy I have tried to show that a free will can both love and be loved. Accordingly, by understanding love as a component of a free will I have suggested that there is no inherent conflict between love and respect insofar as our conception of respect is revised in line with our new conception of the nature of the will.

In order to be tolerably complete, I think our moral theories must make a central place for love in interpersonal relationships. Velleman's intuition that love is somehow centrally related to morality, that "its spirit is closely akin to that of morality," is correct. I have tried to show, however, why I think that love as an expression of the will is incompatible with a Kantian morality that reifies rationality to such an extent that it drives out of the will the very sorts of things many of us think are most important.

I have not intended to offer a fully worked out alternative view. I also did not intend wholeheartedly to endorse Frankfurt's view as I presented it, as I do believe it must be augmented with an account of the etiology of higher-order volition to be a complete account of moral psychology. However, I hope to have offered reasons for thinking that there is a deep incompatibility between love as we actually will it, and the overly rationalist conceptions of the will typical of Kant and his followers. The defect is not in Kant's or Velleman's skill of argument, but intrinsic to the very nature of the conception of love and the will which they defend.

As such, I take the argument of this paper to suggest a deep deficiency in the nature of Kantian ethics. The fault lies not in Kant's insistence that freedom (and therefore autonomy) is central to a theoretical understanding of ethics. Rather, the fault lies in thinking only that which is fully rational (i.e. the expression of an a priori law-like relation between the will and action) can be fully

free. We can be free with respect to our wills in our loving—and indeed ultimately can be free in no other way than by loving. For our wills are ultimately constituted by love, both by what I care about now, but also in how that will comes to be at all. For it is surely the case that we are all the products of love, and that some of the deepest constituents of our wills—our true and better selves—lie in our love for God, parents, children, spouses, and friends that have no ultimate rational ground. Without a recognition of that fact, there can be no genuine respect.

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