

JOURNAL *of* ETHICS
& SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

VOLUME XIV · NUMBER 3

February 2019

ARTICLES

- 179 The Contribution of Security to Well-Being
Jonathan Herington
- 204 What Can We Learn about Romantic Love from
Harry Frankfurt's Account of Love?
Natasha McKeever
- 227 Culpable Ignorance and Mental Disorders
Dylon McChesney and Mathieu Doucet

The *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* (ISSN 1559-3061) is a peer-reviewed online journal in moral, social, political, and legal philosophy. The journal is founded on the principle of publisher-funded open access. There are no publication fees for authors, and public access to articles is free of charge and is available to all readers under the CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION-NONCOMMERCIAL-NODERIVATIVES 4.0 license. Funding for the journal has been made possible through the generous commitment of the Gould School of Law and the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences at the University of Southern California.

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THE CONTRIBUTION OF SECURITY TO WELL-BEING

Jonathan Herington

MANY PEOPLE'S LIVES involve grave risks to their well-being. Their incomes are vulnerable to layoffs and economic downturns. Their housing status is at the mercy of capricious landlords. Their health is especially threatened by disease and injury. For some people these risks mature in ways that make them obviously worse off: they are actually deprived of their income, home, or health. But even those who are lucky enough to never actually be deprived of these goods seem badly off. A life of grave vulnerability and insecurity, even if it never actually involves being deprived of important goods, strikes most of us as undesirable. Not only do we want to enjoy the good life, we want to enjoy it securely.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to explain precisely how security contributes to an individual's well-being. Of course, security is instrumentally good. The absence of risks to our future enjoyment of prudential goods is, *ex ante*, indicative that we will actually enjoy those goods. But can security be basically good? Can risks to prudential goods diminish the goodness of a life even if, *ex post*, the individual is never actually deprived of those goods? To clarify the question, consider three different lives.¹

Ava, Bao, and Carol are counterparts whose lives have been equivalent up until their thirtieth birthday. On their birthday they receive an echocardiogram, which results in the following set of divergent circumstances. Ava's test indicates that she has a congenital heart defect that, in any given year, has a 30 percent chance of causing her sudden death. The results of the test are accurately reported to her, and she immediately apprehends the grave risk to her life. Bao's test also indicates that she possesses the congenital heart defect, but owing to a mix-up in the lab, she is told that she has a clean bill of health. No one, including Bao, is aware of the grave

¹ This case is a modified version of that presented in Selgelid, "The Value of Security," 40.

risk to her life. Carol's test indicates that her heart is in fine working order, and this is accurately reported to her.

Now suppose that, despite the overwhelming odds, Ava, Bao, and Carol all die on their fortieth birthday, the victims of an automobile accident. Suppose further that, between their thirtieth and fortieth birthdays, Ava, Bao, and Carol live externally indistinguishable lives: they experience the same set of circumstances, make the same choices, enjoy the same successes and failures. While Ava's and Bao's congenital defect could have cut short their lives, it luckily did not. Was Ava's life as good as Bao's? Was Bao's as good as Carol's?

One set of views suggests that only Ava is worse off. On these views, Bao's and Carol's lives are equivalently good because the unrealized and unknown risk to Bao alters neither her external circumstances nor her experience of those circumstances.² On the other hand, Ava's awareness of the risk to her life, even though it does not alter her circumstances or choices, undermines her subjective experience of those circumstances. In sum, because "fear itself is something to be dreaded" Ava's lack of subjective security makes her worse off than Bao and Carol.³ Thus, on this view, while objective security is not prudentially valuable, subjective security contributes directly to the well-being of individuals.

Many, however, are tempted by a more robust connection between security and well-being.⁴ On this view, Carol's life is superior to Bao's life because the mere risk of harm that Bao suffers seems to directly undermine her well-being. Certainly, given a choice between Bao's and Carol's lives, many of us would prefer the security of Carol's (even knowing that their lived experiences would be identical). Bao might still be better off than Ava, but the presence of subjective security does not erase the undesirability of her fragile existence. For many of us it is hard to shake the intuition that objective security contributes directly to the well-being of individuals. Several authors have attempted to justify this intuition. Finkelstein, for instance, claims that risk frustrates a desire to be secure, and hence even unrealized and unknown risks harm their victims.⁵ Likewise, Pettit's account of modally robust goods at first glance seems to imply that risks to a good can undermine the enjoyment of its modally robust counterpart.⁶

2 Arneson, "Disadvantage, Capability, Commensurability, and Policy," 346; Goodin and Jackson, "Freedom from Fear"; Perry, "Risk, Harm, Interests, and Rights."

3 Waldron, "Safety and Security," 469.

4 Finkelstein, "Is Risk a Harm?"; John, "Security, Knowledge and Well-Being"; Selgelid, "The Value of Security."

5 Finkelstein, "Is Risk a Harm?"

6 Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good*.

Finally, John has argued that risks to one's vital needs undermine an individual's capacity to make and pursue reasonable plans.⁷ Taken together these arguments suggest that objective security may be basically good for individuals, according to at least some popular theories of well-being.

I disagree. In this paper, I argue for the view that only subjective security contributes directly to individual well-being. Moreover, I deepen this account by showing that we need to distinguish between the contribution of (i) our beliefs about the security of prudential goods and (ii) our affective responses to the security of prudential goods. The paper proceeds in five parts. In section 1, I argue that the traditional distinction between objective and subjective security elides a more useful distinction between fact-relative, belief-relative, and affective senses of security. In the remainder of the paper, I investigate the prudential value of security in the context of four common understandings of well-being: as positive hedonic states, as the satisfaction of desires, as the possession of objective goods, and as the exercise of our distinctive capacities. In section 2, I explore the connection between affective security and hedonistic conceptions of individual well-being. I argue that the affect of security is a plausible hedonistic good, and that neither belief-relative nor fact-relative security are necessary conditions for affective security to contribute to individual well-being. In section 3, I explore the contribution of desires for security. I argue that, on actual desire accounts, it is difficult to see how the unknown satisfaction of a desire for security benefits an individual, and on an ideal desire account, it is implausible that we should desire the fact-relative security of a good given full information about whether we would actually enjoy that good. In section 4, I move on to consider the relationship between security and the possession of modally robust goods. I show that while the modal robustness of some goods may be constitutive of individual well-being this cannot explain the value of security *per se*. Finally, in section 5, I explore the claim that the absence of risks to our "vital needs" is necessary to be able to form reasonable plans, ultimately arguing that belief-relative security, rather than fact-relative security, is necessary in order to form rational plans. Hence, on any theory that takes rational planning or achievement to be basically good, belief-relative security is also basically good. Thus, I conclude that we have good reason to reject the view that fact-relative security contributes to individual well-being. Nonetheless, we should endorse the claim that both belief-relative security and the affect of security are basically good according to theories of well-being that endorse the prudential value of positive hedonic states, rational planning, or achievement.

7 John, "Security, Knowledge and Well-Being."

1. PRELIMINARIES

Roughly put, an individual's security with respect to some prudential good (e.g., happiness, physical health) is simply their probability of enjoying at least that good. It is, in this sense, a measure of the extent to which they can rely upon enjoying that good. But this simple definition obscures a great deal of nuance that is relevant to the contribution of security to individual well-being. Let me clarify some important considerations.

First, while the word "security" has a close association with freedom from physical violence, I am interested in the security of a much broader range of prudential goods.⁸ One can talk coherently of the security of binary goods (e.g., the probability that *S* will at least enjoy "sufficient clean water") or increments of a scalar good (e.g., the probability that *S* will at least enjoy "an annual income of \$20,000"). Likewise, we can talk of the security of a good at a particular moment in time (e.g., the probability that *S* will at least enjoy "sufficient clean water tomorrow"), or the continuous enjoyment of that property over time (e.g., the probability that *S* will enjoy "sufficient clean water each day for the next twenty years"). The security of certain prudential goods may be especially valuable—e.g., the security of one's freedom from violence or the security of one's social bases of respect.⁹ However, I am interested in whether the security of prudential goods *in general* contributes to individual well-being. Most discussions of the harm of risk focus on the imposition of risks and benefits by other agents, such as your neighbor playing with explosives in their basement or a friend gifting you lottery tickets.¹⁰ These examples muddy the waters. Plausibly, if I impose a risk on you then I *wrong* you—even if that risk never harms you—because such an imposition disrespects your status as a moral and political equal.¹¹ But not all risks involve disrespect from other agents, and so our intuitions about cases of agent-imposed risk mix judgments about wrongful conduct with judgments about individual well-being. Since I am concerned with the prudential disvalue of risk *per se*, I will frame each example case around risks imposed by the world, not by other agents.

Second, the traditional distinction between objective and subjective security obscures a more useful distinction between fact-relative security, belief-relative

8 For a discussion of the "pure safety" account of security, see Waldron, "Safety and Security," 461–66.

9 Waldron, "Security as a Basic Right (after 9/11)"; Wolfendale, "Moral Security."

10 See Finkelstein, "Is Risk a Harm?" 968; Arneson, "Disadvantage, Capability, Commensurability, and Policy," 346.

11 Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good*, ch. 3; Placani, "When the Risk of Harm Harms."

security, and the affect of security. The fact-relative security of some prudential good G for an individual S at some time t is the *objective* probability that S will enjoy G , given the state of the world at t .¹² This is the chance at t that S will enjoy G . Note that, because the chance of enjoying G is conditional on the state of the world at t , fact-relative security is determined by the content of the *possible futures* of the actual world.¹³ This distinguishes the security of a good from the robustness of that good, i.e., the probability that S would enjoy G , not just in the possible futures of the actual world at t , but also given some relevant set of changes to the actual world at t .¹⁴

The belief-relative security of some good G for an individual S at some time t is S 's subjective probability of enjoying G , given her beliefs at t . This is S 's credence at t that S will enjoy G .¹⁵ Importantly, both fact-relative and belief-relative security should be intelligible according to most contemporary interpretations of probability. For instance, one could believe that claims about objective probability are claims about the "long-run" frequencies of events, inherent "propensities" of the world, or the credences that an idealized agent would adopt given access to the best account of the laws of nature.¹⁶ Likewise, one could believe that subjective probabilities are beliefs about objective probabilities, degrees of belief, or some admixture of the two. In my view, the debate between these interpretations of probability is orthogonal to the claim that security contributes to well-being. The frequentist can consider the belief-relative security of an event

- 12 Talk of fact-relative security implicitly assumes that at least some facts about the future are unsettled, but some contend that all of the facts about the future are determined by the current state of the world and a set of deterministic laws. See Schaffer, "Deterministic Chance?" If the world does indeed have deterministic laws then fact-relative security would be easy to characterize: the probability will be either zero or one, dependent on whether or not the agent enjoys the good in the actual world. I think, however, that we have good reason to think that we ought to treat the future as "open" (Barnes and Cameron, "The Open Future"). This may be because of an irreducible metaphysical property that creates indeterminacy (for a survey, see Gillies, "Varieties of Propensity"), indeterminacy over the "best account" of the laws of the universe, or the inclusion of indeterministic laws within the "best account" of the universe (Lewis, "Humean Supervenience Debugged"). In this respect, I think we have good reason to suppose that fact-relative security is a meaningful concept.
- 13 Possible futures of a world w at t are those possible worlds that are "historically indistinguishable" from w at t . See Feldman, *Doing the Best We Can*, 18–19.
- 14 Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good* and "Freedom and Probability"; List, "Republican Freedom and the Rule of Law."
- 15 Note that S may or may not have an explicit belief about the probability of enjoying G . For instance, in some cases, she may explicitly believe that "the probability of being employed at the end of the year is 80 percent," while in other cases her credence that she will be employed at the end of the year will be implied by her total set of beliefs.
- 16 For a summary of the competing interpretations, see Mellor, *Probability*, chs. 3–4.

X to be the individual's belief about the long-run frequency of X , and fact-relative security to be the actual long-run frequency of X . Likewise, the Bayesian can consider belief-relative security to be the individual's credence that X , and fact-relative security to be the credence that X adopted by some idealized observer.¹⁷ In this paper I will adopt a broadly Bayesian perspective, but all that I say here can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to other accounts of probability.

The affect of security is an emotional state of calm assurance. Almost all of us can identify with the fearfulness of the lost toddler, the anxiety of the job seeker in a bad market, or the "pit-of-the-stomach" unease of the patient with the suspect mole. Likewise, we are familiar with the felt quality of calm that occurs when we are reunited with our parent, offered a job, or told that the mole was benign. Indeed, the word "security" has long been associated with an affect of calm assurance. Consider that the Latin *securitas* (literally "freedom from care") was often used among Roman and early medieval scholars to denote a state of "impassiveness (or) calmness."¹⁸ Likewise, in many Stoic and Epicurean writings of the Roman period, *securitas* captures the Epicurean concept of *ataraxia* (ἀταραξία), understood as: "a state of contentment and inner calm that arises from the thought that one has or can easily get all that one needs, and has no reason to be afraid of anything in the future."¹⁹ Importantly, the affect of security is not a cognitive state like a belief or an attitude, but rather a felt quality of tranquility. It is the directly apprehended experience of freedom from anxiety, rather than the belief that one is safe or secure.

Finally, we can distinguish between an *ex ante* and *ex post* perspective from which to judge whether security contributes to individual well-being. The security of prudential goods is of obvious relevance when making *ex ante* judgments about which life we would prefer, or who is subject to greater disadvantage.²⁰ Since the constant risk of catastrophe severely diminishes Ava's and Bao's *expected* well-being, one has strong reason, *ex ante*, to prefer Carol's life. I am interested, however, in our *ex post* judgment of whether an insecure life is all things considered as good as a secure life. Moreover, security may be *basically* good for the individuals who possess it, or merely *instrumental* to the enjoyment of some properly basic good. In what follows, I interpret something to be basically good for an individual if (i) it is a constituent of individual well-being or (ii) it is necessary to the enjoyment of constituents of individual well-being. For instance,

17 Lewis, "A Subjectivist's Guide to Objective Chance."

18 Hamilton, *Security*, 51; Herington, "The Concepts of Security, Liberty, Fear and the State," 23–24.

19 Striker, "Ataraxia," 100.

20 Wolff and de-Shalit, *Disadvantage*, 65–72.

according to some objective list theories of well-being, “achievements” are constitutive of individual well-being.²¹ And while we might not take the ability to form and revise plans to be a constituent of well-being *per se*, the formation and execution of a plan is a necessary component of an achievement. In this sense, our planning capacity can be basically good for us, even if it fails to be a constituent of well-being.

In what follows I explore whether fact-relative, belief-relative, or affective security can be basically good for individuals. I do so by exploring whether and how four broad approaches to well-being—hedonic, desire-satisfaction, objective-list, and perfectionist theories—might analyze the prudential value of security. Ultimately, I conclude that arguments for the prudential value of fact-relative security fail to go through on any of these accounts, but that both affective and belief-relative security can be prudentially valuable on a wide range of theories of well-being.

2. HEDONISM AND THE AFFECT OF SECURITY

We begin with the relationship between security and hedonistic constituents of well-being. Hedonistic accounts of well-being hold that *S* is better off than *S** if and only if *S* experiences more happiness (or less suffering) than *S**. Different accounts of hedonism differ with respect to whether “happiness” refers to a “felt quality” of pleasure or a more complex cognitive attitude.²² Likewise some hedonists evaluate lives according to the happiness experienced in each moment, whereas others evaluate lives as a whole. Uniting these accounts, however, is a commitment to the view that well-being is determined by an individual’s phenomenal perception: that *S* may be benefited, or harmed, by something only if “it affects her experiences in some way.”²³

According to this account of hedonism, it seems likely that the affect of security would be a constituent of individual well-being. Recall that the affect of security is best understood as a feeling of calm assurance (*ataraxia*), and that this affective state has a storied history as a distinctive constituent of well-being. For Epicurus, *ataraxia* was, alongside freedom from bodily pain (*aponia*), one of the two components of happiness.²⁴ For later hedonists, *ataraxia* assumed even more importance, prompting Cicero to describe *securitas* as the “object of

21 Bradford, *Achievement*; Griffin, *Well-Being*, 64.

22 Bramble, “The Distinctive Feeling Theory of Pleasure”; Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*.

23 Bramble, “A New Defense of Hedonism about Well-Being,” 88.

24 Striker, “*Ataraxia*,” 99.

supreme desire.”²⁵ One need not be an Epicurean, however, to acknowledge the contribution that the affect of security makes to individual well-being. Modern hedonists are also cognizant of the harm wrought by anxiety about the future. For Bentham, the “pain of anticipation” that accompanies uncertainty with respect to prudential goods is a “peculiar evil” that may be as disvaluable as the actual loss of those goods.²⁶ These views provide one explanation for why Ava’s life seems impoverished, despite being externally indistinguishable from the lives of Claire and Bao. We suppose that Ava experiences anxiety or fear at the thought of sudden death, and these feelings undermine her well-being by depriving her of a positive hedonic state. Importantly, one need not commit to a view about whether *ataraxia* has a particular “felt quality,” or whether it is valuable because the individual possesses some pro-attitude toward it. Neither does one have to be a strict hedonist to endorse the value of the affect of security. All that needs to be the case is that, *inter alia*, positive hedonic states (however understood) are partly constitutive of an individual’s well-being. We therefore have good reason to suspect that the affect of security directly contributes to an individual’s well-being on accounts of well-being that take it to be composed, at least partially, by positive hedonic states.

Importantly, there is no necessary connection between the affect of security and either belief-relative or fact-relative security. Ordinarily, of course, individuals are likely to experience the affect of security only if they also possess belief-relative security with respect to central prudential goods. But as those with anxiety disorders understand, one can have belief-relative security and yet lack affective tranquility. Likewise, the undocumented migrant taking antianxiety medication may experience the affect of security, even while they lack belief-relative security with respect to their freedom, employment, or housing status. While there are obvious cognitive inputs into affective responses, the affect of security is precisely the thing that is felt rather than the beliefs that might inspire that feeling.

Is the affect of security sufficient to improve an individual’s well-being? Or is it simply a component of a more complex bearer of hedonistic value? One might object that a lack of security is often hedonically valuable, and so the affect of security cannot be sufficient to improve individual well-being. As aficionados of extreme sports, theme park rides, and horror movies know well, a felt quality of risk can be exhilarating, and this suggests that the affect of security may simply be a means to some more fundamental contributor to individual well-being. There are two potential responses to this concern. The first is to note that these examples involve fear that is both superficial and momentary. It is superficial insofar

25 Rothschild, “What Is Security?” 61.

26 Bentham, “Principles of the Civil Code,” ch. vii.

as it does not typically involve the kind of existential dread that accompanies the fear that one might be attacked, diagnosed with a terminal illness, or unable to provide for one's family. The feeling of risk is normally experienced as valuable when it is either the product of simulated risk (e.g., the rush from watching a horror film), or the risk to one's basic goods is relatively small (e.g., the thrill of a flutter on Cup day). The appeal of this kind of insecurity is that it is borne of relatively inconsequential risks. Moreover, such insecurity is momentary insofar as it does not provide a permanent backdrop against which the agent lives their life. Those subject to persistent risks to their basic needs do not describe that risk as exhilarating.²⁷ At best they adopt an affect of security despite those risks. More often they describe the feeling of risk as an oppressive component of their experience. The hedonic value of fleeting moments of insecurity therefore seems predicated on the possession of a more general, and deeply felt, affect of security.

A second concern may be that the contribution of the affect of security to an individual's well-being is dependent on the reasonableness of the individual's affect. The affect of security often fails to neatly track fact-relative security, and is heavily influenced by a complex set of psychological and sociological facts. This is troubling insofar as some individuals seem to possess a "false sense of security" and hence systematically endanger themselves. On the view just sketched, these unreasonably secure individuals would be better off than the reasonably fearful, but, so the objection goes, this has the contribution backward! It is those who respond appropriately to the existence of threats who are better off, insofar as they can take action to avoid threats of death or severe deprivation.

I think this objection is confused, for two reasons. First, the claim is that the possession of an affect of security at t is *associated* with an all-things-considered decrease in S 's well-being at some future point in time t_2 . Yet this does not show that S is all-things-considered worse off at t , only that she is *likely to be* all-things-considered worse off at t_2 . That the affect of security is constitutive of S 's well-being at t is compatible with the fact that this is associated with a decrease in her future well-being. Second, this objection appears to conflate possessing inappropriate beliefs with possessing inappropriate affects. While it may be advantageous to have fitting beliefs with respect to your security so that you may plan carefully and responsibly, it does not seem advantageous to fear fittingly.²⁸ Given fear's well-demonstrated impact on cognitive reasoning and decision-making, it would appear to be best to possess fitting beliefs but *unfitting* affective responses. A cool, calm, calculated approach is highly likely to maximize future well-being.

27 See Narayan et al., "Anxiety, Fear and Insecurities."

28 I will explore the effect of belief-relative security on planning in section 5.

Given these considerations, hedonistic accounts have a ready explanation for the judgment that only Ava's life is worse than Carol's (while Bao's is equivalent-ly good). The affect of security is a positive hedonic state, and neither belief-relative nor fact-relative security is necessary for this state to contribute to individual well-being. And while there is certainly an *ex ante* instrumental connection between fact-relative security, belief-relative security, and one's possession of the affect of security, there is nothing necessary about this connection. Therefore, those who are tempted to endorse the view that both Ava and Bao are worse off than Carol must turn elsewhere to justify the claim that fact-relative security is basically good.

3. A DESIRE FOR SECURITY

I turn now to desire-satisfactionist theories of well-being. At its most basic, desire satisfactionism holds that your well-being consists in the satisfaction of at least some of your desires. More precisely, *S* is better off than *S** if *S*'s desires (of a suitable sort) are satisfied (in the relevant sense) to a greater extent than *S**'s desires are satisfied.²⁹ As we shall see, precisely which kinds of desires—actual or idealized, self-regarding or holistic—contribute to individual well-being is an open question. Likewise, there is controversy over whether a desire for *X* is satisfied by the mere existence of the state of affairs *X*, the *belief* that *X*, or the simultaneous combination of *X* and a belief that *X*.³⁰ Different combinations of answers to these controversies make for more or less plausible conceptions of desire satisfactionism. And unfortunately, the theories that best make sense of a desire for fact-relative security are also the least plausible conceptions. Instead, the best conceptions seem to support the value of belief-relative security.

To begin with, the desire satisfactionist can readily make sense of the value of the affect of security, since if an individual desires to feel secure (to experience *ataraxia*), then they are benefited by the affect of security. Likewise, if an individual desires the *absence* of the affect of security (at a particular time and in a particular way) then that individual is benefited by its absence. And since most of us, most of the time, have a desire for the affect of security, we are benefited by experiencing it. This is no surprise.

More interestingly, one might appeal to desire satisfactionism to motivate

29 This is a very general account of desire satisfactionism. A full account will identify the relative contribution to individual well-being of (i) satisfying a greater number of desires and (ii) satisfying stronger desires.

30 Heathwood, "Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism"; Lin, "The Subjective List Theory of Well-Being."

the value of fact-relative security, and so vindicate the judgment that Carol is better off than both Ava and Bao. Some have claimed that fact-relative risks to personal goods directly undermine well-being because they frustrate a desire to be free from risk *per se*. Claire Finkelstein holds a version of this view, which she calls the “Risk Harm Thesis”: insofar as we prefer to have a lower rather than higher chance of being harmed, merely being subject to a risk of harm is a “set-back to a person’s most fundamental interests.”³¹ It is plausible to presume that many of us possess a preference to be free from risk *per se*—few people regret paying premiums for insurance policies that never mature, or purchasing additional safety features in cars that never experience an accident. If the satisfaction of desires is constitutive of well-being, and it is true that many of us possess a desire to be free from risk, then fact-relative security may be basically good. Unfortunately, Finkelstein’s view is plausible only on the most general description of desire satisfactionism. Once we are more precise about the kinds of desires that contribute to well-being, the Risk Harm Thesis faces a dilemma between (i) embracing an implausible *actual-desire* theory or (ii) embracing an *ideal-desire* theory that is unlikely to treat desires for fact-relative security as coherent. I explore each horn of this dilemma in turn.

3.1. *Actual Desires for Security*

The first horn of the dilemma is embracing the *actual-desire* account. On this view, *S* is benefited by a state of affairs *X* (at a time *t*) if and only if *S* *actually desires X* (at *t*) and it is the case that *X* (at *t*). Moreover, on the standard account of this view, *S* is benefited by *X* regardless of whether or not *S* believes that *X* obtains. The value of fact-relative security is easy to appreciate from this perspective. Since it is plausible that many people would prefer (at each moment in time) to be free of risk, the fact-relative security (at each moment in time) of prudential goods (enjoyed in the future) satisfies that desire and so makes those individuals better off. Unfortunately, the actual-desire account is implausible, for two widely known reasons.

First, satisfying many of our actual desires seems contrary to our good. For instance, the actual-desire account implies that satisfying an instrumentally confused desire benefits individuals, even if satisfying that desire frustrates the individual’s pursuit of goods they take to be intrinsically valuable. Consider an individual who desires to drink a glass of liquid, because they take that glass to contain a delicious chardonnay, when in fact it is filled with an awful sherry. While they are radically mistaken about whether their desire for the liquid will

31 Finkelstein, “Is Risk a Harm?” 967–69.

satisfy a more basic desire, satisfying their instrumental desire for the liquid in the glass benefits them according to the actual-desire account.³²

Second, placing to one side the plausibility of appealing to actual desires, allowing *unknown* satisfactions of a desire to improve an individual's well-being entails some implausible judgments. Consider the following case:

Suppose I spy a very attractive stranger on the subway. Despite being uninterested in a romantic relationship, I desire that the stranger find me attractive. Suppose further that, unbeknownst to me, the stranger has been stealing glances at me and is also attracted to me (and perhaps has the same desire I do). We both remain stony-faced, and leave the train at different stops, never to be made aware of our mutual attraction.³³

I find it implausible that, in this case, I am made better off by the unknown satisfaction of my desire to be seen as attractive. While it is true that I get what I want, in some sense, I never appreciate or experience the satisfaction of that desire. The satisfaction of the desire is alien to me. Perhaps the unknown satisfaction of that desire is good, impartially speaking, but the sting of dissatisfaction will linger *for me*. While not everyone will view these kinds of cases as a decisive objection to traditional desire satisfactionism, the burden appears to be on advocates of the Risk Harm Thesis to explain how the unknown satisfaction of a desire to be free from risk contributes to our well-being in the absence of the belief that I am free from risk.

Interestingly, one solution to the problem of unknown satisfactions is to adopt "subjective desire satisfactionism."³⁴ On these views, *S* is benefited by *X* (at *t*) if and only if *S* desires that *X* (at *t*) and *S* believes that *X* (at *t*). Because your well-being is determined by which states of affairs you *believe* have been realized, your prudential good is not alienated from your experience in the same way as traditional desire satisfactionism. But on this view, while the individual's desire may be for fact-relative security, it is *belief-relative security* that is the well-being-conferring object. Thus, while subjective desire satisfactionism would make sense of the judgment that Ava is worse off than Bao, it would not support the judgment that Carol is better off than Bao. On this view, belief-relative security, but not fact-relative security, is basically good.

32 For a defense of the actual-desire account from this problem, see Heathwood, "Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism."

33 Thanks to Rosa Terlazzo for suggesting this example.

34 Heathwood, "Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism"; Lin, "The Subjective List Theory of Well-Being."

3.2. Idealized Desires for Security

The other horn of the dilemma facing the Risk Harm Thesis is to endorse an *ideal-desire* account. On ideal-desire accounts, the desires that are relevant to an individual's well-being are those that she would possess were she to be fully rational and fully informed about the world, including the outcome of her choices, the phenomenal experience of those outcomes, and the ways in which particular satisfactions would interact.³⁵ This is a more attractive theory than the actual-desire account, insofar as it eliminates the problem of instrumental desires: our individual, having full access to the relevant information, is no longer benefited by drinking the awful sherry. Yet as others have noted, if one is fully informed about the world, then one must have knowledge of whether or not a risk of harm at t_1 actually will result in harm at t_2 .³⁶ For instance, in the process of idealizing Bao's desires, we would have to consider her desires were she to know both that she possesses a congenital heart defect *and* that it would not actually affect her life in any way. Yet when the outcome of a risk is transparent to the agent, the claim that the agent would possess a desire to be free from that particular risk becomes less plausible. There seems to be little reason for a fully informed, ideally rational version of Bao to desire that Bao is free of a risk that the advisor knows will not materialize. Once again, the burden of proof seems to shift to the proponent of the Risk Harm Thesis: this time to give some compelling rationale for why an ideal advisor might value fact-relative security.

Note, however, that there are clear reasons why an ideal advisor might desire belief-relative security for their advisee. As I will explore in section 5, belief-relative security may be a necessary condition for rational planning. Some advisors may desire for their advisees the ability to make rational life plans because it involves an exercise of their will. Others may value planning insofar as making and executing plans is constitutive of what it means to *achieve* our goals rather than fulfilling them fortuitously. These kinds of complex rationales for a desire are available to ideal-advisor theorists, even if the advisees do not actually desire cognitive coherence or planning, so long as they resonate with the core values of their advisee. In this respect, the ideal-desire account can claim that belief-relative security, but not fact-relative security, is basically good.

Thus, the proponent of the desire-satisfaction explanation of the value of fact-relative security faces a dilemma. If they embrace an actual desire view then they must (i) defend an intuitively implausible theory and (ii) show why un-

35 Sobel, "Subjectivism and Idealization."

36 Oberdiek, "The Moral Significance of Risking," 347; Perry, "Risk, Harm, Interests, and Rights," 200-1.

known satisfactions of actual desires can contribute to an individual's well-being. If they embrace an informed-desire view then risk preferences cease to be plausible. Importantly, the proponent of desire satisfactionism does not face this dilemma with respect to belief-relative security.

4. OBJECTIVE-LIST THEORIES AND MODALLY DEMANDING GOODS

I now turn to consider two recent accounts of the value of fact-relative security. Both rely on objectivist accounts of well-being. On the objectivist account of well-being, at least some of the things that are good for an individual are good for her regardless of her attitude toward those goods. More precisely, S is better off than S^* if S possesses to a greater degree than S^* those goods $\{g_1, g_2, \dots, g_n\}$ that are the basic constituents of individual well-being. Different accounts of objectivism differ with respect to the goods that constitute the basic constituents of well-being. At least some candidate goods include pleasure, knowledge, achievement, moral virtue, friendship, and self-respect.³⁷ Furthermore, there is a split between "objective-list" theories that simply enumerate the set of goods that constitute well-being, and "perfectionist" theories that attempt to explain the content of the list by reference to the kinds of creatures that human beings are. Importantly, objectivists need not be insensitive to an individual's judgments about their own good. Most acknowledge that, while it is good for you to possess the relevant objective goods, it is better for you to value or take pleasure in your possession of those goods.³⁸ In this respect, most objective-list theories can readily make sense of the value of affective and belief-relative security. Insofar as pleasure or the satisfaction of desires is on the objective list, we can readily explain why Ava is worse off than Bao and Carol. But because objectivist accounts do not solely rely upon individuals' attitudes toward their lives, they also appear to be a natural way of arguing for the prudential value of fact-relative security.

One such argument might appeal to the concept of "modally robust" goods, those "rich" goods (e.g., friendship) whose existence depends upon the enjoyment of a "thin" good (e.g., care), not only in the actual world but in a salient class of non-actual circumstances.³⁹ For instance, in order to enjoy the good of friendship, one must enjoy another person's care and concern, not just in the

37 Fletcher, "A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being," 214; Griffin, *Well-Being*, 67; Hooker, "The Elements of Well-Being."

38 Kagan, "Well-Being as Enjoying the Good"; Fletcher, "A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being," 215–17.

39 Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good*; Southwood, "Democracy as a Modally Demanding Value."

actual circumstances but across a wide range of ways in which your circumstances could be different (such as if you were poor or you were a vegetarian). If this other person would stop caring for you were you to lose all your money, then they are not your friend. This general pattern seems to apply to a wide range of goods, including freedom, democratic self-rule, and the rule of law.⁴⁰ If fact-relative security of a thin good (e.g., care) captures the robustness of your enjoyment of that good across a wide range of possible futures, then it appears to be a necessary condition for the enjoyment of the modally robust counterpart (e.g., friendship). Hence, some might claim that Bao is worse off than Carol because, while Bao may actually enjoy care from her loved ones, this care will fail to be robust throughout the possible futures.

It would, however, be a mistake to try to explain the disvalue of risk by reference to modally demanding goods. First, security and robustness capture two distinct modal conditions. As I have defined it, fact-relative security is determined by future subjunctives (i.e., possible futures), whereas robustness is concerned with true counterfactuals (i.e., possible worlds).⁴¹ To possess the “thick” good of friendship at t involves facts about whether you would enjoy your friends’ care were the world relevantly different at t , but to be secure in your friendship at t involves facts about how likely you are to remain friends at some future time t_2 given the way the world is structured at t . Of course, in practice it will often be the case that the security of a good will track the robustness of a good, yet there will also be cases where the two modal qualities come apart. If your friends’ care is dependent on your enormous wealth, it may be secure insofar as you are highly unlikely to lose your wealth in the future, but may not be robust insofar as if you were (counterfactually) a pauper your friend would not care for you in the present.⁴² In this respect, we cannot straightforwardly appeal to the value of modally demanding goods in order to claim that fact-relative security is prudentially valuable.

40 Pettit, “Freedom and Probability”; Southwood, “Democracy as a Modally Demanding Value”; List, “Republican Freedom and the Rule of Law.”

41 As an anonymous reviewer points out, this distinction is dependent on my stipulated definition of security. Some might be motivated to define individual security as modal robustness, i.e., as the degree of counterfactual change to the actual future such that the individual no longer enjoys the good. This definition might seem to explain the value of fact-relative security (of at least some goods) because robustness (in certain respects) is necessary for the instantiation of modally robust goods. As I discuss below, however, Pettit’s account of modally robust goods does not support the value of robustness in general, merely robustness in certain respects.

42 Pettit himself is careful to make this distinction. See Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good*, 258.

Second, even if we were to define security as modal robustness, the class of modally demanding goods is small, and their instantiation does not require robustness *in general*. Pettit, for instance, suggests that modally demanding goods are “rich” goods such as love, respect, and honesty that are instantiated by the robust possession of the “thin” goods of care, restraint, and truth telling, respectively.⁴³ Moreover, these thin goods need not be robust across all possible changes, merely a subset of relevant changes. For instance, in order to enjoy the love of someone else, one need only enjoy their care across changes in their *disposition toward you*, not a more general set of possible changes. For Pettit, the value of modally demanding goods is that they involve protection from the arbitrary will of others—they instantiate a particular relation between oneself and others that is intrinsically valuable.⁴⁴ Thus, while the fact-relative security of *certain goods, in certain respects* may directly contribute to one’s well-being, Pettit’s conception of a modally demanding good does not establish that fact-relative security is prudentially valuable in general.

5. PERFECTIONISM, RISK, AND PLANNING

A second objectivist argument for the value of security might appeal to a broadly perfectionist account of well-being. Such accounts include many of the goods found in objective list theories (pleasure, knowledge, etc.), but ground their prudential value in the relation of those goods to individuals’ exercise of their distinctively human capacities. In this respect, they often place a special emphasis on goods related to an individual’s agency: knowledge acquisition, life planning, and the achievement of our rational aims.⁴⁵ This has prompted an argument that fact-relative security is prudentially good because it is necessary to the formulation of reasonable plans. This proposal has recently been pursued by Stephen John, who argues that when we are exposed to grave risks to our “vital needs” we lack a crucial component required to form reasonable plans.⁴⁶ Since John claims that we have an objective interest in being able to form reasonable plans, fact-relative security of our vital needs is basically good. I argue, however, that perfectionist accounts of the value of planning support the prudential value of belief-relative security, rather than fact-relative security.

43 Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good*, 108.

44 Pettit, *The Robust Demands of the Good*, 121.

45 Hurka, *Perfectionism*.

46 For John, an individual “has a vital need for X, if and only if she will fail to achieve a normal level of physical functioning if she goes without X.” John, “Security, Knowledge and Well-Being,” 74.

John draws upon Michael Bratman's theory of planning agency in order to make his case for the view that "physical security ... is a constituent element of well-being."⁴⁷ Roughly put, John's argument is as follows. If an individual *S* lacks the capacity to make "reasonable" plans, then *S*'s well-being is diminished. If *S* cannot reasonably presuppose her vital needs, then *S* lacks the capacity to make reasonable plans. If *S* lacks fact-relative security with respect to her vital needs, then *S* cannot reasonably presuppose her vital needs.⁴⁸ Therefore, if *S* lacks fact-relative security with respect to her vital needs, then *S*'s well-being is diminished. As we shall see, this argument is confused about the way in which risks undermine the noninstrumental value of planning. A tighter consideration of these questions suggests that it is *belief-relative* risks that directly diminish individual well-being.

To see why, consider that, on Bratman's view, plans are commitments to pursue a particular end and do not require a full specification of the intermediate steps one will (optimally) take in order to realize that end.⁴⁹ Thus, if I plan to grade exams this afternoon, I need not specify *all* of the steps I will take to realize that end. Instead, I may be content to commit to doing the things *necessary* to meet that goal, without specifying precisely how I will ultimately realize that goal. Importantly, for my plan to count as rational it must be "means-end coherent," in the sense that if I intend to ϕ , and believe that *m* is a necessary means to ϕ , then I must intend to *m*.⁵⁰ Moreover, if my intention to ϕ is rational, I must believe that *m* (and all other necessary means to ϕ) will be available to me. Thus, if I intend to grade some exams, and I believe that collecting the exams from the

47 John, "Security, Knowledge and Well-Being," 76. For Bratman's theory, see Bratman, *Intention, Plans and Practical Reason*.

48 John's account of the security of vital needs is couched in terms of possessing the "warrant" for the belief that the agent will continue to meet her vital needs "across the range of plausible futures" ("Security, Knowledge and Well-Being," 73). However, I take this formulation to be equivalent to the fact-relative security of the agent's vital needs. To consider why, note that John is an *externalist* about justification, such that an individual has the warrant for a belief if "the world ... [is] such that this belief would, in fact, be justified" ("Security, Knowledge and Well-Being," 73). In this respect, we can analyze the *warrant* for the true belief that *S* will meet her vital needs across the range of plausible futures as simply the *fact* that *S* will meet her vital needs across the range of plausible futures. Moreover, the fact that *S* will meet her vital needs across the range of plausible futures is extensionally equivalent to the claim that it is objectively certain (or near certain) that *S* will meet her vital needs. While the probability of a future event can come apart from its robustness *tout court* (see section 4), the robustness of an event across the set of *possible futures* of the world as it is at *t* should be read as extensionally equivalent to the probability at *t* of that event.

49 Bratman, *Intention, Plans and Practical Reason*, 3.

50 Bratman, "Intention, Practical Rationality, and Self-Governance," 412.

office is a necessary means to grading the exams, I ought to believe that I will be able to collect the exams from the office (and intend to do so). John introduces an additional “reasonability” condition on planning. For John, the reasonableness of a plan is determined by whether the beliefs that the plan presupposes are “likely to be true.”⁵¹ Thus, if you intend to ϕ , and you believe (or presuppose) that m is a necessary means to ϕ , then your plan is “reasonable” only insofar as m is fact-relatively secure.

The connection between fact-relative security of vital needs and reasonable plans thus becomes apparent. For any plan to ϕ , one of the necessary means to ϕ is that you will survive until you ϕ . If you are subject to serious fact-relative risks to your vital needs, then you cannot presuppose that you will survive and so cannot make a reasonable plan with respect to *any* ϕ . Thus, John claims that individuals with grave risks to their vital needs lack the ability to make reasonable plans. It is this *ability* to make reasonable plans, not the making of reasonable or rational plans *per se*, that he claims is constitutive of individual well-being.⁵² John’s view contributes much to our understanding of the connection between security and individual well-being, but we ought to reject it for two reasons.

First, fact-relative security is not sufficient to be a planning agent. According to John’s view, an individual who is free from risks to their vital needs, but believes that they are at grave risk, will count as being able to form plans.⁵³ Yet, this is mistaken. Consider the following case:

Imagine two counterparts, Ava and Dina, who both believe that they possess a congenital heart defect that, in any given year, has a 30 percent chance of causing their sudden death. While it is true that Ava does possess such a defect, Dina is not actually afflicted and has a great deal of evidence that this is the case. Owing to their beliefs, both Ava and Dina make only the shortest and most cursory of plans, and while their lives are filled with moments of happiness, they fail to achieve much at all. They both die at the same age, having lived externally indistinguishable lives.

On John’s view, Ava is better off than Dina merely by virtue of the fact that she possesses the *warrant* for the belief that she will meet their vital needs. Yet what prevents both agents from forming and pursuing complex plans is that they *believe* that there are grave risks to their vital needs. While it is true that Dina could

51 John, “Security, Knowledge and Well-Being,” 77.

52 John, “Security, Knowledge and Well-Being,” 77.

53 John claims that “what matters to successful planning is not our conscious belief that we are secure, but rather that there is warrant for the belief presupposed in our planning that we will continue to achieve physical functioning” (“Security, Knowledge and Well-Being,” 80).

make reasonable plans were she more responsive to the facts, she is no more able than Ava to *actually* make reasonable plans given her beliefs. Plans must be made with the beliefs and presuppositions that we actually have, and it is of no direct benefit to you that were you to, counterfactually, presuppose your vital needs, you would be warranted in doing so.

Second, the fact-relative security of vital needs is not necessary to enjoy the good of being a planning agent. John claims that being a reasonable planning agent is valuable because if your plans are based upon warranted presuppositions (or beliefs) you will be more successful at pursuing your aims.⁵⁴ Of course, reasonable plans will be instrumental to a good life, insofar as agents who adopt plans based upon warranted presuppositions will be more likely, *ex ante*, to fulfill their ends. Unfortunately, our noninstrumental interest is in being a rational, not reasonable, planning agent.⁵⁵

Consider that there are three potential ways in which being a planning agent might make a noninstrumental contribution to well-being, and none require being a reasonable agent in John's sense. The first noninstrumental account holds that planning agents are better off by virtue of the fact that this satisfies an interest in understanding their own actions.⁵⁶ On this view, planning to ϕ is valuable because it entails the *belief* that you will ϕ , and thus contributes to your "self-knowledge," i.e., your knowledge about the kind of agent that you are.⁵⁷ As should be obvious, self-knowledge is unique in that the conditions for obtaining the warrant for the beliefs are all *internal* to the agent: my plan to ϕ does not need to be based on externally warranted presuppositions in order for me to know that I intend to ϕ . Thus, regardless of whether this position is tenable as an account of planning's contribution to our well-being, it does not require that an agent possess fact-relative security of their vital needs.

The second noninstrumental account holds that plans are constitutive of certain kinds of intrinsically valuable activities.⁵⁸ Consider, for instance, the value of *achieving* something.⁵⁹ In order to achieve an end, as opposed to merely en-

54 Specifically, John claims that our interest is "in being able to function as a reasonable planner" and that "one way in which plans can fail to be reasonable is when they are based on beliefs which are unlikely to be true (even if the agent is unaware that they are unlikely to be true)" ("Security, Knowledge and Well-Being," 77).

55 Bratman, "Intention, Practical Rationality, and Self-Governance," 430; Ferrero, "What Good Is a Diachronic Will?"

56 Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reason," 717.

57 Velleman, "What Good Is a Will?" 211, and "The Possibility of Practical Reason," 719.

58 Ferrero, "What Good Is a Diachronic Will?" 412–16.

59 See Bradford, *Achievement*; Griffin, *Well-Being*, 64–65; Hurka, *Perfectionism*, 123–28

joying it, we must have planned and pursued that end: inheriting \$1 million does not count as an achievement, but planning, building, and running a business that generates \$1 million is an achievement. Indeed, the *purposeful* pursuit of most life goals (e.g., professional success, loving relationships) is partly constitutive of what we take to be worthwhile about those ends. Importantly, the standard accounts of the value of such achievements do not require that the planning and pursuit of those achievements be based upon warranted beliefs. Rather, the value of achievements is grounded in the exercise of an agent's practical rationality or will.⁶⁰ In this respect, the value is determined by the relationship of the achievement to the individual's agency, rather than the reasonableness of the plans employed to realize it.

The third noninstrumental account holds that plans are constitutive of an agent's "self-governance."⁶¹ This account, favored by Bratman, claims that planning constitutes and maintains the appropriate "Lockean" connections and continuities between the individual time slices of an agent.⁶² By adopting overlapping plans to perform future actions, we constitute a narrative connection between earlier and later versions of ourselves.⁶³ Once again, the beliefs that these plans presuppose need not be warranted. The mere fact of believing oneself to be able to ϕ , and to be able to undertake the necessary means to ϕ , is what allows the agent to see themselves as a contiguous inter-temporal agent.

On any of these three accounts of the direct contribution of planning to individual well-being, our plans need not be reasonable. Instead, what matters is being a *rational* planner: being the kind of agent who forms plans that are internally consistent and means-end coherent.⁶⁴ Importantly, being a rational planner requires *belief-relative* security of our vital needs. In order to make means-end coherent plans, we must believe (or presuppose) that we will possess all of the necessary means to realizing those plans. Ava and Dina are thus unable to make rational plans of any great complexity, since neither believes that it is likely they will be alive to fulfill any plan longer than one to two years. On the other hand, Bao's ability to rationally plan is unaffected by the unknown and unrealized risk she faces. Thus, while it might be true that "reasonable" plans (and hence fact-relative security) are *ex ante* instrumentally valuable, it is belief-relative security that undergirds the *ex post* prudential value of being a planning agent.

60 Hurka, *Perfectionism*, 124–26; Bradford, "The Value of Achievements."

61 Hurka, *Perfectionism*; Griffin, *Well-Being*, 66; Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 124.

62 Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency" and "Intention, Practical Rationality, and Self-Governance."

63 Ferrero, "What Good Is a Diachronic Will?" 416–19.

64 Bratman, "Intention, Practical Rationality, and Self-Governance," 413.

6. CONCLUSION

Given the foregoing considerations, we ought to abandon the revisionist view that fact-relative security is, in general, *ex post* prudentially valuable. In some respects, this vindicates a traditional view about security: that a risk of harm cannot itself be a harm, and that it is only the subjective experience of risk that diminishes our well-being. But by engaging deeply with sophisticated attempts to establish the value of fact-relative security, I have hopefully achieved two goals.

First, I have argued that attempts to establish the prudential value of fact-relative security often implicitly rely upon particular theories of well-being, and that once these theories are more explicitly specified, the plausibility of the claims about the value of fact-relative security evaporates. To wit, while it is plausible that some people have desires for fact-relative security, it is unclear how the unknown satisfaction of those desires benefits those individuals. Moreover, on ideal-desire accounts, we struggle to explain why an ideal advisor would desire fact-relative security given full knowledge that their advisee would enjoy the good regardless. And while some objective-list theories may include modally robust goods, and so appear to place value on security, the instantiation of modally robust goods is meaningfully distinct from the fact-relative security of goods. While the fact-relative security of certain “thin” goods (i.e., the care of others) may be correlated with the possession of modally demanding goods (i.e., the love of others), these special cases do not establish that fact-relative security is prudentially valuable in general. Finally, while perfectionist theories might treat rational planning as prudentially valuable, the fact-relative security of our vital needs is neither necessary nor sufficient for rational planning. Of course, ensuring that our enjoyment of prudential goods is secure is *ex ante* prudentially important because it is instrumental to our future well-being. Moreover, we may have moral or political obligations to ensure that others are not subject to grave risks.⁶⁵ But, once we more precisely specify the theories of well-being that undergird different accounts of its value, we are left with the conclusion that fact-relative security is not *ex post* basically good for an individual.

Second, I have tried to deepen our understanding of the ways in which subjective security contributes to individual well-being. Disambiguating between affective security and belief-relative security affords the opportunity to show that the experience of security has both hedonic and cognitive benefits. In particular, affective security is *ex post* prudentially valuable on any theory that takes positive hedonic states to be partially constitutive of an individual’s well-being. Belief-relative security, on the other hand, is a plausible bearer of prudential val-

65 Shue, *Basic Rights*; Perry, “Risk, Harm, Interests, and Rights.”

ue because it is a necessary precondition for formulating rational plans. Since rational planning is held to be prudentially valuable by a wide range of perfectionist, objective-list, and ideal-desire satisfaction theories, belief-relative security appears to be *ex post* prudentially valuable. This goes beyond the standard explanation of the disvalue of believing oneself to be at risk—which is that such beliefs may engender feelings of fear and anxiety. Instead, we might be able to posit a rational and agency-centered sense in which our lives are diminished by a lack of security. Thus, insofar as being able to exercise our agency is considered a central prudential, moral, and political good, we may have good reason to promote belief-relative security.⁶⁶

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⁶⁶ Thanks to Bruce Glymour, Jon Mahoney, and Rosa Terlazzo for reading early drafts of this paper, and to audiences at the Australian National University and Monash University for helpful feedback. My special thanks also to the anonymous reviewers of this paper, whose careful and kind comments were invaluable.

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WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT ROMANTIC LOVE FROM HARRY FRANKFURT'S ACCOUNT OF LOVE?

Natasha McKeever

HARRY FRANKFURT outlines a comprehensive and at times compelling account of love in several of his works, perhaps most notably in *The Reasons of Love*. However, he does not think that romantic love fits the ideal of love:

Relationships that are primarily romantic or sexual do not provide very authentic or illuminating paradigms of love as I am construing it. Relationships of those kinds typically include a number of vividly distracting elements, which do not belong to the essential nature of love as a mode of disinterested concern, but that are so confusing that they make it nearly impossible for anyone to be clear about just what is going on.¹

In this paper, I argue that we can, nonetheless, learn some important things about romantic love from his account. I will suggest, conversely, that there is distinct value in romantic love, which derives from the nature of the relationship on which it is based.

The structure of this paper will be as follows. I will first outline Frankfurt's "four main conceptually necessary features of love of any variety." These are:

- (i) Love "consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved."
- (ii) Love is "ineluctably personal."
- (iii) "The lover identifies with his beloved."
- (iv) "Love is not a matter of choice."²

After this exposition I will consider Frankfurt's theory as applied specifically to romantic love. I will then critically analyze Frankfurt's four necessary features of love as applied to romantic love. Finally, I will argue that Frankfurt fails to appre-

1 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 43.

2 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 79–80.

ciate the distinct value of romantic love, which is not *less* valuable than parental love, just valuable in a different way.

1. LOVE ACCORDING TO FRANKFURT

Frankfurt writes that there are “four main conceptually necessary features of love of any variety.”³ In this section I will briefly explain each feature; I will return to them later to discuss problems with them as features of romantic love.

- (i) Love “consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved.”⁴

According to Frankfurt, the only interest of the lover is to serve and promote the well-being of the beloved, and so to love someone for the hope of personal gain is not real love. The beloved is a Kantian “end in itself”; a “final end” in Frankfurt’s words. Love requires valuing its object as an end rather than a means. So if Josie loves Jason for his money, she does not really love him at all, as her concern for him is really a self-interested concern for wealth. She cares for him only as a means by which to improve her own life, not for his well-being in itself. To love, Frankfurtian style, one must “forget oneself” and give love to the beloved “as a gift,” as Gary Foster puts it.⁵

Frankfurt acknowledges that an objection might be that love cannot be entirely disinterested because “the beloved provides the lover with an essential condition for achieving an end—loving—that is intrinsically important to him.”⁶ Frankfurt thinks that love is necessary to enjoy living. Therefore, loving could be construed as self-interested because the beloved provides a means to prevent the lover from living without love. However, Frankfurt does not think this presents a problem for his view because the lover can only accrue the benefits of loving by loving disinterestedly: “what serves the self-interest of the lover is nothing other than his selflessness.”⁷ Although loving the beloved may serve the lover’s desire to love, she can do this only by being selflessly devoted to the beloved.

3 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 79.

4 Note that in this phrase Frankfurt says that love is for persons, yet elsewhere he writes about love for objects, places, ideas, etc. I raise the objection later about whether love, as Frankfurt construes it, can just be for people.

5 Foster, “Romantic Love and Knowledge,” 239.

6 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 59.

7 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 61.

(ii) Love is “ineluctably personal.”

One might think that a disinterested concern for the beloved is really *agape*, a selfless, unconditional love for humanity. However, Frankfurt emphasizes that the kind of love in which he is interested is the love for irreplaceable individuals, not “instances of a type.”⁸ Thus, if she really loves Jason, Josie must love him as the particular person he is, not because he is a political activist with a good sense of humor. Furthermore, if she loves him, she would not love a substitute.⁹ If she met Jason’s even funnier and more politically active brother, Jerry, she would not just dump Jason in favor of Jerry. Even an identical duplicate of Jason would not do.

This links to Frankfurt’s rejection of the “appraisal model” of love. He elucidates what it means to love something as a particular in his essay “On Caring”:

The reason is that he loves it in its essentially irreproducible *concreteness*. The focus of a person’s love is not those general and hence repeatable characteristics that make his beloved *describable*. Rather, it is the specific particularity that makes his beloved *nameable*—something that is more mysterious than describability, and that is in any case manifestly impossible to define.¹⁰

What makes something or someone nameable is simply what makes them distinct from others; but this distinctiveness does not depend on their characteristics. I would still be the discrete entity I am if I lost my memory and my personality and appearance changed completely, though I would share few characteristics with my former self. Indeed, if a stranger was given two descriptions of me, one as I am now, and one from when I was 1 day old, they probably would not think the descriptions were of the same person. However, the “nameable” part of me is the same; it is just my “describable” bit that is different. Similarly, a duplicate of me would share my “describable” bit, but not my “nameable” bit. My characteristics are irrelevant to my nameability, though they are what make me describable. Therefore, if we love people on the basis of their nameability rather than their describability, we are unable to articulate the reasons for loving them beyond saying “because they are them.” A rationalist account of love, on the other hand, focuses on the describable; if asked “why do you love her?” the rationalist would respond with a description of the beloved.

8 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 80.

9 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 46.

10 Frankfurt, “On Caring,” 170.

(iii) “The lover identifies with his beloved.”

To identify with someone, you take their interests as your own. When they achieve success, you share in their joy; when they suffer a loss, you share in their misery. This helps to explain how love is more than just disinterested concern or caring. When I give money to a homeless person because I care about her suffering I may be (if I do not gain anything from the transaction) showing disinterested concern for her. However, I do not take her interests as my own; indeed I might completely put her out of my mind after I have made the donation. Therefore, my motivation for giving the money is not love, as construed by Frankfurt. This links to Frankfurt’s second feature of love, since you can only identify with a person or a thing if they are a particular, rather than merely an instance of a type. When I give money to the homeless person, it might be that I am giving money to her because I want to give to *a* homeless person, rather than to her in particular. My concern is for “the homeless”; any homeless person would have done just as well. In such a case, my motivation is disinterested concern for the homeless, but it is not love because it is not personal and does not involve identification.

Incidentally, identification seems to conflict with Frankfurt’s first feature, that love is disinterested concern. This is because, in a way, the lover has expanded her interests: taking the beloved’s interests as her own could be construed as simply acquiring more interests and thus more opportunity to acquire benefits. Josie wants good things to happen to Jason, in part, because this will make *her* happy. I return to this point later on.

(iv) “Love is not a matter of choice.”

For Frankfurt, “love is not a matter of choice but is determined by conditions that are outside our immediate voluntary control.”¹¹ This is, for Frankfurt, a necessary feature of love and caring. He argues that if we did not accept that caring was outside of our voluntary control, we would be unable to explain why we cannot just stop caring about something merely at will, why it imposes a kind of necessity upon us.¹² He argues that caring about something imposes a “volitional necessity” on us. A volitional necessity differs from a causal or logical necessity in that it does not limit our physical power to be able to do *X*; rather, it limits our will, making it impossible to bring oneself to do *X*.¹³ For example, a wife of a serial killer might find that she just cannot bring herself to stop loving her husband even though she finds his actions unconscionable. This impossibil-

11 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 80.

12 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 88.

13 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 86.

ity is a volitional necessity, though not a causal or logical one. She knows that she *could* stop loving him, and believes that she ought to, but she cannot make herself *want* to do this enough to actually do it. Indeed, in order to be able to bring ourselves to make a change in our lives, we have to change what we care about; for example, I will not become thinner until I care more about being slim than about eating cake.

However, Frankfurt argues that the imposition of volitional necessities does not make love an infringement on our autonomy, since although we cannot choose what we love or how that love will make us want to act, the constraints on our choices are our own; they both constitute and are created by our will.¹⁴ Thus, love is involuntary in the sense that we cannot consciously bring it about or stop it, but it is not like an unwanted addiction. Rather, love is intertwined with our will: “since love is itself a configuration of the will, it cannot be true of a person who does genuinely love something that his love is entirely involuntary.”¹⁵ What does Frankfurt mean by “a configuration of the will?” In an earlier essay, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” Frankfurt explains in detail how an action or emotion can be outside of our immediate control yet still be a product of our free will. He explains the concept of second-order desires, which are the desires to have or not to have other desires, and of second-order volitions, which are the desires for desires to be one’s will or for other desires to be effective or ineffective.¹⁶ For example, consider a woman who wants to want to perform an act of kindness for her child but is also angry with him for being naughty; she has conflicting first-order desires: to be kind to her child and to teach him a lesson. Perhaps she is experiencing a second-order desire to want to be kind to her child, but she has a second-order volition that this desire be ineffective. She will not be content until all of these desires become aligned. The configuration of the will is the arrangement of one’s second-order desires and volitions, which are outside of one’s direct control but that create and influence one’s first-order desires, and it is love that makes up our configuration. Thus love is involuntary in a sense, but voluntary in a more important way: it underlies what voluntary choices we can make.

When we are wholehearted we identify with the configuration of our will and do not try to change our first-order desires or have conflicting ones. “[Wholehearted love] expresses what we, as active individuals, cannot help being. . . . Moreover, wholehearted love expresses—beyond that—what we cannot help

14 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 46.

15 Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition and Love*, 137.

16 Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” 12–13, 16.

wholeheartedly wanting to be."¹⁷ When we act wholeheartedly we experience ourselves as acting freely. Thus, the woman who genuinely feels no anger or resentment toward her naughty child, but only the wholehearted desire to be kind to him because of her wholehearted love for him, will experience her kindness toward him as a free action.

To sum up, love is involuntary in the sense that one cannot make oneself love or not love another merely by willing it be so.¹⁸ This is because we cannot control our second-order desires and volitions; but this does not make love involuntary or make us unfree in the way that heroin addiction does. There is a more important conception of voluntariness that does not just mean being totally unconstrained, but rather means identifying with one's second-order desires and volitions. When one does this, one acts wholeheartedly and Frankfurt thinks that wholeheartedness is, *ceteris paribus*, more desirable than ambivalence.¹⁹ It is, therefore, something toward which we ought to aim.

In the next part of this paper, I consider Frankfurt's views applied to romantic love. I begin with why we might think Frankfurt's theory fits common conceptions of romantic love and then consider some problems we encounter when applying it to romantic love.

2. FRANKFURT AND ROMANTIC LOVE

There is a commonly held intuition that love is reasonless, arational, out of our control, that it can just take hold of us, leaving us resolutely in its grasp. This intuition is most widely written about and discussed with relation to romantic love; though other kinds of love—familial love and friendship, for example—can feel reasonless too. Indeed, love for objects, places, and pieces of art can all feel arational. This intuition supports Frankfurt's theory as it suggests that the claim that love need not have reasons is true. As my main focus is on romantic love, I will discuss the apparent arationality of romantic love. First, we might note, as John Shand and many others have, that we use the phrase to "*fall* in love," which implies "a non-rational event one is subject to and does not deliberately, let alone rationally, control."²⁰ Once a person has begun to fall it does not make sense to ask them to stop, however good one's reasons may be. There are at least two further sources of evidence for the intuition that love is reasonless: (a) we often find it difficult, if not impossible, to explain the reasons why we love people,

17 Frankfurt, "Taking Ourselves Seriously," 51.

18 Frankfurt, "Taking Ourselves Seriously," 41.

19 Frankfurt, "Reply to Susan Wolf," 250.

20 Shand, "Love As If," 7.

and (b) it is nearly impossible to persuade someone to love or not to love another. I will now consider each of these in turn.

2.1. *Explaining the Reasons for Love*

We often have trouble explaining the reasons why we love someone and sometimes find it inappropriate to ask a person why they love another.²¹ Robert Solomon notes that “most people are quite incoherent if not speechless about producing reasons for loving a particular person.”²² To respond to the question “Why do you love him?” with “I just do” or “I know how I feel” is an often-heard and seemingly reasonable reply.²³ Indeed, to answer the question with a list of the person’s qualities could imply that you do not really understand what love is or that you do not really love her. Shand makes an even stronger claim: “starting to give or even consider reasons for loving someone, and certainly presenting them to the beloved, may be seen as proof that one does not love them.”²⁴ This might be too strong, but if your partner told you they were trying to work out the reasons why they loved you, you might reasonably take this to mean that they are unsure whether they love you at all. Conversely, to answer the question “Why do you hate her?” or “Why do you admire her?” with “I don’t know, I just do” seems inappropriate and unreasonable. As Alan Soble highlights, “‘agapic’ hate looks pathological, and we would help someone experiencing it to get over it.”²⁵ We expect people to be able to give reasons for admiring and hating others and, if they do not, we tend to think that they do not understand what it means to admire or hate another. Thus, love seems to be a different *kind* of emotional response to a person than these more reasoned responses.

2.2. *Persuading to Love or Not to Love*

In addition, we cannot be persuaded (via rational argument) to love someone or to stop loving them, whereas it does seem possible to persuade someone to admire or dislike another. I might say, “You should admire Jemma because she’s intelligent, thoughtful, has great values, and has made it all on her own,” and there is at least some chance that you will agree. However, I cannot persuade you to love her. This is, in part at least, because love does not seem to respond to

21 We might ask a similar question: “What do you love about her?” But the response this seems to be anticipating is more along the lines of: “What qualities of hers do you appreciate?”

22 Solomon, “Reasons for Love,” 12.

23 Shand, “Love As If,” 6.

24 Shand, “Love As If,” 7.

25 Soble, review of *The Reasons of Love*, 6. Note that Soble also thinks that *agapic* love is pathological as he compares *agapic* hate with *agapic* love.

reasons in the way that other emotional responses to people do. I might suggest that you try to fall in love with a mutual friend who has many qualities I know you value, but I know that the most I could persuade you to do would be to spend time with her and try to get to know her. Indeed, many people have had the experience of really wanting, but failing, to feel romantic love for someone, perhaps their spouse whom they no longer love or a friend whom they know would make a great romantic partner. Ty Landrum notes that

the compulsion to intimacy is not something that one can simply call up or discipline oneself to achieve. . . . A normative demand to feel the compulsion of intimacy toward persons for whom one simply does not feel that compulsion is an absurd demand.²⁶

Further, though we sometimes try to persuade our friends and family *not* to love those whom we believe to be wrong for them, we seldom succeed. I may think that it is very unfortunate that you love your aggressive and dishonest wife and suggest that you remove yourself from a relationship with her, but even if I succeed in persuading you to leave the relationship, I cannot stop you from loving her. This is because your desire to continue loving her is, in Frankfurt's terms, a second-order desire that you cannot directly control. Solomon observes that "it is by now a trite movie scene, where the protagonist writes down in one column fifty reasons why he should leave his lover, and then in the other column simply writes 'I love her!'—and that clinches the decision."²⁷ Part of the reason you cannot be persuaded not to love your wife is because the simple fact that you do love her seems to override all the other reasons that I could give you not to love her. Frankfurt's view can easily explain this seeming irrationality: you can see all the reasons not to love her, but nonetheless you continue to love her because your love for her is not a matter of choice. Your love is not irrational, but *arational*; it is beyond the scope of reasons.

Frankfurt's distinction between the nameable and the describable is a possible way of illuminating the unexplainable element of love. Both of the above observations—that we find it difficult to explain the reasons why we love the people we do and why it is almost impossible to persuade someone to love another—seem to imply that love is not based on the describable aspects of a person as other responses to people's perceived value are, such as admiration or hatred. It is not usually difficult to explain why we admire or hate someone because we can simply respond with a list of the qualities of the person that justify the attitude toward her. In other words, we can *describe* the admirable or hateful

26 Landrum, "Persons as Objects of Love," 420.

27 Solomon, "Reasons for Love," 11.

features of that person and this will be sufficient to explain our feelings about her. Admiration and hatred are responses to the appraised value of the object. On the other hand, we tend to feel that no description of a person could fully account for why we love them. As Shand points out, although when trying to explain why I love my beloved I may begin by describing them, in the end I will feel that my description provides an insufficient explanation and I will have to say that I “just do” love them.²⁸ As explained earlier, the “nameable” aspect of a person is something over and above the totality of their properties, so if we love people for their nameability, no description of them will be able to fully account for the love. In addition, Frankfurt’s distinction between first- and second-order desires and volitions provides another answer to the question of why love seems mysterious. If love is a configuration of our second-order desires and volitions then it is outside of our immediate cognitive understanding and control.

3. WHAT CAN FRANKFURT’S FOUR NECESSARY FEATURES OF LOVE TELL US ABOUT ROMANTIC LOVE?

In this section I return to Frankfurt’s “four conceptually necessary features of love” and consider problems with them as features of romantic love in particular. Frankfurt would probably agree with me on some of the points I make, since he is clear that the kind of love in which he is interested is not romantic. However, my reason for analyzing these features in relation to romantic love is to show two things. First, I want to show that there are different kinds of love, and, in particular, that romantic love is a distinct kind of love. Second, I hope to show that romantic love is no less valuable than other kinds of love, though Frankfurt implies that it is. I will remain agnostic about how well his theory works for other kinds of love.

- (i) Love “consists most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved.”

It is a key feature of Frankfurtian love that it is selfless and disinterested. The beloved must be loved for her own sake, not because the lover will gain anything through loving her. However, romantic lovers do tend to benefit from their love and the benefit the love gives them is part of their reason for loving. If loving consists in caring for the well-being of the beloved and wanting to contribute to it, then the lover will be happy when the beloved is happy, since her loving desires have been fulfilled. This means that serving the beloved’s interests necessarily serves the self-interest of the lover. Indeed, this seems to be exactly what

²⁸ Shand, “Love As If” 6–7.

Frankfurt means when he says that the lover identifies with the beloved. This is, of course, not true only for romantic love. Parents, for example, are usually happy when their children are well and happy and there does not seem to be any problem with this. If their children's happiness did not make them happy we might question whether they really loved them at all (with some exceptions, such as if their children were made happy by acting in a way that conflicted with the parents' moral values). Nevertheless, Frankfurt could respond to this objection by reminding us that, since the lover's aim is to serve the beloved's needs disinterestedly, whether or not she is made happy through doing so is beside the point.

However, romantic love is more self-interested than familial love, and perhaps more than friendship love, because we expect more from it; we want it to make us happy and we demand reciprocity from it. The romantic lover is not usually content to love her beloved from afar; she wants to be loved back and she wants to be near her beloved. Indeed, knowing that one's beloved wants to contribute to one's well-being seems to provide a reason to love one's beloved in return. People seek out romantic love for the reason that it will contribute to their own well-being and happiness. Of course, people do not have children just so that they can selflessly dote on them either; in most cases, parents hope that having children will enrich their lives. However, parents are willing to tolerate a lot more from their children, in some cases an unlimited amount of misery, before abandoning them. Romantic partners, on the other hand, are more ready to leave each other if the relationship no longer makes them happy.²⁹ Even those who believe you should marry for life usually believe there are more circumstances in which it is acceptable to leave your spouse than your child. As love depends to an extent on the relationship, leaving a relationship with someone is akin to saying you no longer want to love them. Similarly, as friendship is usually less demanding than romantic love and more flexible, we are sometimes willing to tolerate more from our friends than our romantic lovers. Consequently, as explained earlier, Frankfurt does not think that romantic love fits the ideal of love that he is investigating.

Relationships that are primarily romantic or sexual do not provide very authentic or illuminating paradigms of love as I am construing it. Relationships of those kinds typically include a number of vividly distracting elements, which do not belong to the essential nature of love as a mode of

29 Of course, romantic love requires a degree of commitment as well though. Being ready to leave at the first sign of problems might indicate that you are not really in love.

disinterested concern, but that are so confusing that they make it nearly impossible for anyone to be clear about just what is going on.³⁰

Frankfurt provides a few examples of what such “distracting elements” might be later in his book: “a hope to be loved in return or to acquire certain other goods that are distinct from the well-being of the beloved—for instance, companionship, emotional and material security, sexual gratification, prestige, or the like.”³¹ The suggestion is that there are self-interested desires and motivations intrinsic to romantic love, and these render it an impure or inauthentic kind of love.

I agree with Frankfurt that romantic love is full of self-interested desires, but I argue that these are part of what gives it its distinctive value. Romantic love is not “wholly unaccompanied by an interest in any other good,” but we do not want it to be, because then it would lose its value as romantic love. The particular value of *agape* and parental love lies, in part, in their unconditionality and disinterested concern. The particular value of romantic love—and, to some extent, friendship—on the other hand, lies, in part, in its conditionality and contribution to our self-interest. This is partly because of the reciprocal nature of romantic love. That is, even if it is unrequited, romantic love always hopes for reciprocation and, therefore, to receive something in return. On Frankfurt’s view, this makes it an inauthentic kind of love for, “love does not necessarily include a desire for union of any other kind. It does not entail any interest in reciprocity or symmetry in the relationship between lover and the beloved.”³² However, someone who does not even *desire* for their love to be returned does not romantically love their beloved. As Foster argues:

We may not love someone simply because we want our love reciprocated, but reciprocation (at some point) or the hope of such is a necessary part of the development of romantic love. . . . The man who loves a woman who, in return, does not acknowledge his existence, can fairly be said to possess an illusory love.³³

On the other hand, the mother who loves her son, despite him not knowing she exists, does not seem to possess only illusory love. Foster points out that for Frankfurian love based solely on bestowal of value, reciprocation is not important: “the parent or the Christian God does not require reciprocation.”³⁴

30 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 43.

31 Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 83.

32 Frankfurt, “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” 41.

33 Foster, “Bestowal without Appraisal,” 162.

34 Foster, “Bestowal without Appraisal,” 163.

However, “romantic love and friendship are relational and rely on a dynamic of giving, receiving and sharing.”³⁵ This is because of the nature of the relationships on which the love is based. Parental love and God’s love do not depend upon a reciprocal relationship. Romantic love and friendship, on the other hand, ideally involve love between equals and thus require a measure of give and take. Of course, it would be an unusual parent who did not desire that their child loved them back, but parents are far more likely to tolerate their children not reciprocating their love and continue to love them regardless than romantic lovers are.

However, although it is reasonable to desire, indeed expect, romantic love to make the lover happy, the lover must also care about the well-being of her beloved. If this was not the case, then it would not be an instance of real love, for the desire to care for the beloved’s well-being is a minimal requirement of love. Thus, although romantic love does not consist in totally disinterested concern, it necessarily involves caring for the beloved. Therefore, the kinds of interests that are served through love must be those that make the beloved happy or benefit her in some way too. For example, it is reasonable for Jason to love Josie, in part, because being with her makes him happier and feel more confident, as long as he cares that her being with him also makes her feel happier and more confident. Conversely, it does not seem like an instance of real love if your “love” for another makes you happy but them afraid, for example if you are stalking them, even if stalking them makes you very happy. Therefore, to care about the well-being of the beloved entails wanting to be good for them and so feeling happy when we are good for them. We therefore want their love for us to be at least partly self-interested so that our aim of making them happy can be fulfilled. We want them to love us because loving us makes them happy and this will, in turn, serve our own self-interest through seeing our project—making our beloved happy—realized. It will also serve our self-interest by boosting our self-esteem through having someone hold us in such high regard. This distinguishes romantic love from parental love: although we want our parents to hold us in high esteem, we tend to assume that they will continue to love us even if they cannot stand to be around us.

For these reasons, romantic love consists less of disinterested concern than parental love. Frankfurt agrees but implies that this makes it less valuable than parental love, which he claims is the purest kind of love.³⁶ I suggest, conversely, that the value is simply of a different kind, providing different goods to us.

35 Foster, “Bestowal without Appraisal,” 163.

36 Frankfurt: “Among relationships between humans, the love of parents for their infants or small children is the species of caring that comes closest to offering recognizably pure instances of love” (*The Reasons of Love*, 43).

(ii) Love is “ineluctably personal.”

By calling love “ineluctably personal” Frankfurt is denying that it is based on any “describable” features of the beloved—her properties, in other words. He is thus denying that appraisal features at all in love, other than perhaps by making the lover first notice the beloved. However, if love need not result from any prior value of the beloved, and the value of the beloved to the lover is purely the value that the lover has bestowed upon them, what we love seems to be arbitrary. Frankfurt says that “the object of love can be almost anything” and “love requires no reasons and can have anything as its cause.”³⁷ He also addresses the question of why we care about some things and not others, though his response is rather unsatisfactory as an explanation of romantic love:

It seems that it must be the fact that it is possible for him to care about the one and not the other, or to care about the one in a way which is more important to him than the way in which it is possible for him to care about the other. The person does not care about the object because its worthiness commands that he do so. On the other hand, the worthiness of the activity of caring commands that he choose an object which he will be able to care about.³⁸

As Frankfurt describes love as a form of caring, I assume that this explanation covers why we love some people and not others. If so, what he says conflicts with how it is that we want to be loved: few would be satisfied with the answer to the question, “Why do you love me?” being “Because it is possible for me to love you and I need to love something.” Furthermore, his account implies that no things or people are objectively more worthy of love than others. This is implausible though; it is surely objectively true that my child is more worthy of my love than my alarm clock, but for Frankfurt, I could bestow as much value on the clock as I could on anything or anyone else and thus could love it more than my child without doing anything objectionable. However, this seems false: a parent who loved an alarm clock more than their child would seem to be in need of either chastisement or help; we would not just leave them to it. This shows that there must be at least some reasons for love and that these reasons must be at least partly based on the qualities of the beloved. As Niko Kolodny explains, even if we cannot decide to love by weighing up reasons, it does not follow that there are no normative reasons for love. He compares love to belief: we cannot always just decide what to believe, but this does not entail that there

37 Frankfurt, “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” 40–41.

38 Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 94.

are no normative reasons to believe *X* and not *Y*.³⁹ As Susan Wolf notes, we have “an interest in living in the real world”; we do not want to be deluded. Thus, we have an interest in loving only things that are worthy of love.⁴⁰ Furthermore, as Annette Baier points out, if what we care about is as important to us as Frankfurt says it should be, and if caring involves a great deal of investment in the well-being of the beloved, it seems sensible to seriously consider what we should care about.⁴¹ Indeed, Frankfurt himself says this too, suggesting that one should consider whether loving something will improve one’s life.⁴² However, it seems impossible to do this if love is not justified by the properties of the beloved.⁴³ If the reason for me loving *X* is merely that it is possible for me to love *X* and not *Y*, if I love *X* because of its nameability and not its describability, then how can I question whether loving *X* and not *Y* is the right thing?

Solomon agrees that the qualities of the beloved must have some role in explaining the reasons for love. He asks, “What is ‘the person,’ apart from all of his or her properties? A naked soul? Can one in any erotic (as opposed to agapic) sense love an ontologically naked, property-less soul?”⁴⁴ Such a soul is difficult to imagine, and probably even harder to love. If the love is not based on any properties of the beloved, then it seems that the lover could love the beloved without knowing anything about them, or indeed while knowing false information about them. Initially, we might think that this is true of parental love but not of friendship or romantic love. A mother might love a child she gave away at birth despite knowing nothing about him, or despite knowing false information about him. One might say that she loves him because of the “nameable” bit of him, not the “describable” bit. However, she does love him for something about him that *is* describable, and that is that he is her son. Thus, there is a puzzle here: parental love feels non-cognitive, but similarly it is not accidental that it is our own children that we love.

These issues are particularly salient with regard to romantic love because we are generally highly selective about whom we love romantically and this selectiveness gives romantic love part of its distinctive value. Being chosen from

39 Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship,” 138.

40 Wolf, “The True, the Good, and the Lovable,” 236.

41 Baier, “Caring about Caring,” 274.

42 “The question of what to care about . . . is one which must necessarily be important to him” (*The Importance of What We Care About*, 92). See also Frankfurt, “Reply to Susan Wolf” 246–48.

43 Soble, review of *The Reasons of Love*, 8.

44 Solomon, “Reasons for Love,” 7.

others makes romantic love boost the beloved's self-esteem.⁴⁵ Derek Edyvane observes that

a large part of what we value about being the object of another's love is that we take it to imply an informed and positive (or at least not negative), objective evaluation of our character, we think of love as being more than the arbitrary expression of a subjective whim. We want to know that there exist reasons that can render this person's love for us intelligible to others.⁴⁶

Though I do not necessarily want others to love my beloved, I want them to understand why I love him and not another; I want them to agree that I have chosen the right person to love. In other words, I want my love to be *justifiable* to others.⁴⁷ Furthermore, we want to be loved by someone who has chosen us and finds that choice intelligible. We do not want to be loved simply because it was possible for the lover to love us. To be loved by someone who could love someone whatever their properties are carries far less significance, and less value, than being loved by someone who loves us on the basis of our individual character. While we accept that our parents would have loved any child they had had as much as they love us, we want our romantic partners to love us because of what we are like. Foster highlights a common objection to the view that people are loved on the basis of their properties: that someone with the same properties could be loved just as much. However, if love is not based on properties at all, and the value of the beloved to the lover is solely bestowed value, then Frankfurt's beloved "may [too] feel that she could easily be replaced by someone else with very different qualities."⁴⁸ Nicholas Dixon takes this point further and argues that unless romantic love is based on the qualities of the beloved it is not love at all: "I do not love *you* if my love will continue no matter what you do and no matter how your qualities change, unless we are prepared to identify you with an immaterial Cartesian essence."⁴⁹ To be told that one will be loved romantically whatever one becomes, seems, as Troy Jollimore puts it, "as impersonal and alienating as 'I would love anyone who had your name and social security num-

45 Keller, "How Do I Love Thee?" 167.

46 Edyvane, "Against Unconditional Love," 72.

47 Baier makes a similar point: "It is a fairly good criterion for genuine love in Frankfurt's sense, namely, a genuine instance of love—typically the lover *does* want others to find the loved one lovable" ("Caring about Caring," 281).

48 Foster, "Romantic Love and Knowledge," 243.

49 Dixon, "Romantic Love, Appraisal, and Commitment," 383.

ber.”⁵⁰ Of course, sometimes love does persist despite major changes in the beloved, such as after the onset of Alzheimer’s disease or a serious stroke, and when it does, we tend to admire the strength of the lover’s love rather than dismiss it as unreal. However, these are special circumstances, and might be more accurately described as instances of what Neil Delaney calls “loving commitment” than romantic love.⁵¹

(iii) “The lover identifies with his beloved.”

Frankfurt argues that to love something means to identify with it so that its well-being becomes tied up with your own. For example, Josie feels happy when Jason gets a promotion at work, but sad when his boss belittles him in front of his colleagues. This is not because of the impact his happiness or sadness has on her, but simply because if he is unhappy then she is unhappy too because she loves him. This seems to be a reasonable expectation to have from love, particularly from romantic love. However, identification seems to be in conflict with some of Frankfurt’s other ideas about love—that the lover does not need to know the beloved and that love is disinterested. Frankfurt does not seem to take seriously the fact that one is best able to identify with, and thus to love, someone with whom one is in a close relationship, and thus, once again, he fails to recognize the particular value of romantic love. Identification with the beloved requires intimate knowledge of a person that can be acquired only through spending a significant amount of time with them and through sharing intimate information with one another. In suggesting that, “I may love a woman, with no opportunity to affect her in any way; and she may have no inkling that I exist,” and that “the beloved may be entirely unaware of the love, and may be entirely unaffected by it,” Frankfurt implies that one can identify with another without sharing a relationship with them or even knowing them.⁵²

Against this claim, Bennett Helm suggests that love is “distinct from compassionate concern” because in loving a particular person, “I must take an interest not just in his well-being but also in his identity itself, and the kind of interest I take in his identity must itself be deeply personal.”⁵³ This is, in part, because the well-being of someone is tied up with her identity. To identify with a particular person requires that you love them “not merely as a person but as *this*

50 Jollimore, *Love’s Vision*, 142.

51 Delaney, “Romantic Love and Loving Commitment,” 350–51. Note that this is not necessarily to say that all the attitudes involved in love are reason-responsive. It could include both reason-responsive elements and elements that are not reason-responsive.

52 Frankfurt, “Duty and Love,” 6, and “Taking Ourselves Seriously,” 41.

53 Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” 41.

person, as having this particular identity.”⁵⁴ There is more to being a person than having one’s physiological needs met. Caring for someone as *a* person might mean giving them a certain amount of respect and dignity and making sure their basic needs are met. Caring for someone as *this* person entails caring for their identity, and it is this that makes love for a particular person different from care and concern for people in general. Returning to the example of giving money to a homeless person: when I give money to a homeless person (whom I do not know personally) I feel compassionate concern for the homeless; I care about their suffering and I want to try and ease it. I care for the homeless *as people*, but, without detailed knowledge of their lives, values, and personalities, I cannot care for them as *individuals*, and thus I can only identify with them minimally. Suppose I make friends with a homeless person called Joan, though: the more I get to know Joan, the better I can care for her as an individual, since I can appreciate and understand more and more the complexity of her needs and desires. It therefore becomes possible for me to love Joan, though it was not possible for me to love the homeless individuals to whom I gave money before but did not get to know. It is identification that distinguishes the love of particular people from *agape*. Frankfurt seems, in his account of love, to try to unite *agape*, an unconditional love for humanity, with the love of particular people. However, though an omniscient god could have intimate, detailed knowledge of everyone in a way that allows them to care for all people as individuals, humans are far more limited. If we are very good, we might be able to have compassionate concern for everyone, but we cannot love people we do not know because we can only identify with a few people.⁵⁵

Frankfurt argues that love and caring involve taking on the beloved’s needs and desires *as one’s own*. In order to do this you need to share in their identity in some way; you need to feel that you have a stake in what happens to them. Romantic lovers are ideally located to do this because they share their lives and identities in such a way that their needs and values become intertwined with one another. We are wary of the notion of love at first sight, because the “lovers” have not had sufficient time to get to know each other. To illustrate what caring for someone’s identity entails, Helm tells a story about his wife playing in a bagpipe competition. He suggests that he values piping, not because it is part of his identity, but because he shares in her identity, and thus he cannot help but share in the value that piping has to her. This means that he feels emotions very similar to what she feels during the competition: pride at winning and anxiety

54 Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” 46.

55 Frankfurt does distinguish love from compassion or “charitable concern” (*The Reasons of Love*, 44).

when things do not go well. In fact, he knows her and cares for her so well that he feels anxious, “even when she does not recognize the impending threat to her identity,” such as when he is aware that other people in the audience think she is no good. Thus, he states, “I commit myself to the place playing bagpipes (among other things) has in the kind of life worth *her* living, and so I commit myself to feeling a broad pattern of other emotions focused on her and subfocused on piping.”⁵⁶ Of course, we do this in other relationships as well: a parent, for instance, might be heavily emotionally involved with their child’s performance at a school concert. However, it seems that there must be some kind of intimate relationship for such identification to take place, and romantic relationships are ideal for fostering identification.

Furthermore, as Foster points out, we need to know the beloved for as long as we love them and to continually renew our knowledge of them, because their interests will be continually evolving and changing: “We must come to know another person in order to be aware of her interests, but we should never let this knowledge become frozen so that we maintain a fixed concept of the other.”⁵⁷ Thus, for Helm to care for the well-being of his bagpiping wife fully, he needs to converse with her; he needs to listen to her when she explains that she secretly wants to lose the bagpipe competition so will play deliberately badly because she really wants to learn to play the flute but she does not want her bagpiping friends to know this. We are wary when people continue to love someone with whom they once had a brief relationship because their love is based on a frozen image of their beloved and thus the object of their love really no longer exists. As Baier notes, the need for constant news about the welfare of those we care about is a sign that we genuinely care about them.⁵⁸

Paradoxically, the desires to know another, spend time with them, and have them share secrets with us seem to be just the kind of self-interested concerns that conflict with Frankfurt’s conception of love. However, these desires are closely aligned with the desire to care for the beloved as a particular individual. They are also essential for romantic love, which requires the lovers to share their lives in a significant way. Thus, it seems reasonable for Helm to be hurt if his wife does not tell him that she secretly wants to lose the bagpipe competition because, by not telling him, she is denying him the opportunity to identify with her. Due to the reciprocal nature of romantic love, if she does not want him to care for her, he might think that she does not care for him. Conversely, if Helm loves his wife in the Frankfurterian way, he should not require that his wife tell him

56 Helm, “Love, Identification, and the Emotions,” 49.

57 Foster, “Romantic Love and Knowledge,” 246.

58 Baier, “Caring about Caring,” 274.

anything; he should love her regardless, and he has no obligation to share things with her. Thus, once again, Frankfurt appears to overlook some of the distinct value of romantic love and one of the ways in which romantic lovers might be particularly well-positioned to care for each other authentically. One of the best ways to gain detailed knowledge of the other in a way that allows you to identify with them is through sharing a life together in a close, reciprocal relationship.

(iv) “Love is not a matter of choice.”

Frankfurt argues that love is outside of our direct control; we cannot love or stop loving someone merely by willing it to be so. This appeals to our intuition about love, but on further reflection, we seem to have more direct control over romantic love and friendship love than familial love. This is because both romantic partners and friends are chosen, and the love felt for our romantic beloveds and friends depends on us sharing a particular kind of relationship with them. Thus, as it is possible to extract oneself from these relationships, we have some control over whether or not the love continues, though Frankfurt is right that in some cases we will not be able to bring ourselves to leave the relationships. We do have control over whether we enter into a romantic relationship or friendship with another though; this distinguishes romantic love from familial love.⁵⁹ We would not even attempt to romantically love the majority of people, based on a rational decision that we would not get along with them, they would be bad for us in some way, or simply because we are not attracted to them.

Thus, romantic love does not just happen to us: it derives from a relationship that we choose to cultivate. The lover might feel that she cannot help loving her beloved, but whether she allows the love to develop in the first place is, to an extent, in her control. As Simon Keller notes, we can choose whether to “resist or embrace love”: “when I find myself in love with someone, I can decide whether it would be better for me to send him flowers or to move to another city.”⁶⁰ If I know someone is not right for me (perhaps they are violent or already have a partner), I can make the decision not to see that person anymore. At least during the early stages of love, many decisions are made regarding the romantic relationship, even if not entirely consciously. The lover decides whether to spend her Friday night with her friends or her new beloved, whether to ignore his annoying habits or allow herself to be bothered by them, whether or not to open herself up to him and tell him her secrets. All of these decisions will affect

59 A person might be able to choose whether or not to procreate, but they cannot choose what their children will be like so they do not choose to be in a relationship with that particular child.

60 Keller, “How Do I Love Thee?” 165.

whether the first flutters of love develop into something more long-lasting and substantial.

Perhaps Frankfurt would agree thus far; maybe he only believes that love is outside of our control once it has already taken hold of us. Nevertheless, the choices we have do not disappear once we are in love. The lover still has to make decisions that affect the relationship on which the love is based. For example, he can decide whether to move away for a promotion at work or stay with his beloved, whether to give up a drinking habit he knows she might leave him for, or whether to have sex with her friend who keeps flirting with him. Such decisions might appear not to be directly about love. The man who chooses to move away, continue drinking, or have sex with his partner's friend might still love her dearly. However, as he knows, his decisions will affect whether and how the relationship, on which their love depends, will continue and thus they are also decisions about the love shared between them. It is not simply a case of "if he loves her he'll sacrifice the promotion." Instead, the man faces conflicting desires and a choice over which he is in control; love does not simply always override all other reasons for action. Furthermore, he knows that he can decide to end the relationship, and that eventually he will stop loving his partner. Although it might be very hard to do this, if the reasons for ending the relationship outweigh the reasons for remaining in the relationship then he will be able to bring himself to leave; the limitation on his will is not total. It is not a necessity. Michael Bratman points out that "wholeheartedness and the absence of any intention to change need not involve an incapacity. That I quite sensibly *would* not change does not mean that I *could* not change."⁶¹ This is evidenced by the vast numbers of people who do end relationships despite continuing to be in love. In his defense, Frankfurt could claim that they are not *really* in love, but this would be to beg the question. He could also say that people who end relationships with people whom they love just love other things, like their work, more than their romantic partners. However, even if this is true, they are still able to weigh the things they love and make decisions about them. In addition, it is debatable whether wholeheartedness, as Frankfurt construes it, is indeed always a good thing. Wolf reminds us that "wholeheartedness in the face or the context of objective reasons for doubt, seems indistinguishable from zealotry, fanaticism, or, at the least, close-mindedness."⁶² Wholeheartedly loving someone who continually abuses you is pitiable or irrational; it is not admirable.

Frankfurt might also say that the comparative readiness we have to leave romantic relationships, and their being more in our control than familial love,

61 Bratman, "A Thoughtful and Reasonable Stability," 85.

62 Wolf, "The True, the Good, and the Lovable," 239.

is evidence of the lack of authenticity of romantic love. However, it might also be seen as evidence for the distinct value of romantic love. The reason why romantic love is more in our control than parental love is because romantic love depends, at least in part, on a chosen relationship, the workings of which can be voluntarily altered by one or both of the partners. One cannot totally withdraw from a parent-child relationship; even if a child is given away at birth, her birth mother will always be her birth mother. On the other hand, a romantic relationship requires voluntary commitment to the relationship by both partners. If one person no longer wants to be in the romantic relationship, then neither person can refer to herself as the other's partner. As it is possible to end the romantic relationship, romantic love is, to an extent, conditional on the success of the relationship. If one or both lovers stop working at the relationship, do not spend much time together, and stop being intimate with one another, then the relationship, and the love, will fall apart. Of course, we should work at our familial relationships as well, but familial love is far more likely to be unconditional, or nearly unconditional, than romantic love. This is partly because familial love is less voluntary than romantic love; families are bound to each other more tightly. They are necessarily bonded to one another in such a way that they may feel that their love is not a matter of choice. Romantic lovers are not bound to each other and know that either might stop loving the other at any point—even if they are married and very committed to one another. Nevertheless, this does not make romantic love less valuable than familial love. Having some control over whom you love romantically gives you greater control over your life, making you more likely to love someone who makes you happy. In addition, being loved by someone who could choose *not* to be in a relationship with you can be a greater boost to your self-esteem than being loved involuntarily by a family member. It also makes you more likely to treat them well.

4. CONCLUSION

Following this examination of Frankfurt's theory of love, I am in agreement with Foster in his rejection of Frankfurt's claim that "there is really one kind of love which comes in degrees of purity."⁶³ Frankfurt tries to take *agape* and reformulate it so that it can also account for love of particular people. While he succeeds, to some extent, in describing parental love, he fails to accurately describe romantic love and friendship, and, moreover, overlooks what is distinctly valuable about them. Although it was not his intention to describe romantic love, by failing to include features such as reciprocity in his account of love, Frankfurt

63 Foster, "Romantic Love and Knowledge," 162.

leaves no room for a kind of love that is important and valuable to many people. In addition, though they are not always easy to articulate, we do think that there are justifiable reasons to love some people and not others. There is a place for appraisal in romantic love and friendship.

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CULPABLE IGNORANCE AND MENTAL DISORDERS

Dylon McChesney and Mathieu Doucet

IGNORANCE, more than pure malice or ill will, explains a great deal of our morally troubling behavior. People who perform morally wrong actions often do not *know* that they do so. Instead, they tend to think that their behavior is morally unimpeachable. This can happen in all kinds of ways. People can engage in self-deceptive rationalization or hypocritical special pleading, but they can also simply fail to pay attention to, and so to notice, the morally relevant features of the situation in which they find themselves. Their ignorance can be clearly negligent, but it can also arise after sincere and extensive moral deliberation. In all such cases, people are ignorant of the moral status of their actions. When wrongdoing emerges from ignorance, how should we react? Should we blame unwitting wrongdoers, or should we—at least sometimes—see their ignorance as an excuse?

To explain when ignorance is (and is not) culpable is to offer an epistemic condition for moral responsibility, akin to the common control condition that has played such an important role in the debates about moral responsibility. Just as it is often suggested that moral responsibility requires the capacity to control our actions, it might also require the knowledge of what it is we are doing. In fact, these conditions might even be linked, since the relevant kind of control might require a form of knowledge.

In this paper, we argue that a range of mental disorders can cause agents to be ignorant of the moral status of their actions, and that a viable epistemic condition of moral responsibility must acknowledge the ways in which such ignorance can serve as a reason to withhold blame from actions that would otherwise be blameworthy.¹ Our argument has important consequences for a range of competing

1 A note on terminology: we will be discussing conditions that are described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition (DSM-5), the most widely used resource for the identification, classification, and diagnosis of mental disorders. We have therefore chosen to follow that source's use of "mental disorder" as the general term for the range of conditions under discussion. But the term "disorder" is problematic, as it threatens

accounts of culpable ignorance and of moral responsibility more broadly. A successful account of moral responsibility must include a broad range of moral agents, and that means taking seriously the moral agency of those with mental disorders.

Section 1 sets the context for the debate about culpable ignorance, section 2 explains George Sher's recent account of the epistemic condition, and section 3 argues that Sher's account unjustly blames those whose ignorance is the blameless result of a mental disorder. In section 4, we begin setting out our own view by distinguishing it from accounts that deny full moral agency to people with mental disorders. Section 5 considers the view that agents are only responsible for actions and attitudes that emerge from features of the self that they *endorse*, and argues that this view also fails to properly account for the ways in which non-culpable ignorance can be caused by mental disorders. Section 6 explains why many cases of mental-disorder-generated ignorance are non-culpable by drawing on an account of moral responsibility that links it to an agent's degree of moral concern. Finally, in section 7, we show that our account is compatible with blame for an important subcategory of mental-disorder-generated ignorance.

1. THE CULPABLE IGNORANCE DEBATE

One influential version of the epistemic condition requires conscious awareness. On this view, to be responsible for a wrongful act the agent must have been aware that it was wrongful; to be responsible for the consequences of an action the agent must have been aware that those consequences were possible; and to be responsible for failing to act the agent must have been aware that the unperformed act was a genuine option. George Sher calls this the *searchlight view*, drawing an analogy between conscious awareness and the beam of a searchlight. As he describes the view, "an agent's responsibility extends only as far as his awareness of what he is doing."² The searchlight view reflects the idea that assessments of moral responsibility are of agents whose actions emerge from a deliberative perspective that involves the conscious formation of intentions and weighing of reasons.

One consequence of the searchlight view, or so it seems, is that we are rarely responsible for actions that we perform from ignorance. You are not, for example, responsible for failing to help someone if you did not know that she needed help, or for harming someone if you were unaware that your actions might cause

to both over-medicalize and stigmatize the conditions in question. As we point out below, some of these conditions are not seen as disorders by those who have them, and in such cases "atypicality" may be a more appropriate term.

2 Sher, *Who Knew?* 4.

him harm. This has led some philosophers to argue that people are almost *never* morally responsible for their wrongful behavior.³

Despite this radically skeptical implication, the searchlight view has obvious appeal. First, it reflects the link between responsibility and deliberative agency. Assessments of praise and blame are more than evaluations of the consequences of an action; they are also evaluations of an agent's role in bringing those consequences about. What the agent did and did not know is often central to such evaluations, since it can make all the difference to the nature of the agent's deliberative engagement with the action.

Second, it explains common, intuitive reactions to many cases. If Rosa intentionally poisons a dinner guest by putting arsenic in his tea, then she is clearly to blame: she knowingly tried to kill him. But if an assassin snuck into Rosa's house in the middle of the night and mixed arsenic into her sugar bowl, then although it is of course a very bad thing that her guest died, Rosa is not to blame. (If you think she *is* to blame, ask yourself when you last did a chemical analysis of the contents of your sugar bowl before serving tea.) Cases like this suggest that the searchlight view is right that some morally wrong acts are only morally blameworthy if they are done knowingly or with conscious awareness.

One problem for the searchlight view, however, is that it does not seem to explain how Rosa could be blameworthy for unknowingly but *negligently* poisoning her guest. If she stores her arsenic in the kitchen next to the sugar, then even if she did not know she was putting poison in her guest's tea, she probably should have checked, and so *should have known*; this makes it tempting to think that she is responsible for her guest's death. A standard approach to such "should have known" cases traces the wrongdoing back to a previous wrongdoing of which the agent was consciously aware.⁴ If Rosa knew when she stored the arsenic next to the sugar that there was a chance that she would later mix them up, *and if she served the sugar anyway without checking*, then her responsibility for the poisoning "traces back" to her responsibility for knowingly storing the poison in a dangerous way. Such an approach arguably captures many cases of negligent wrongdoing while preserving the core commitment of the searchlight view.

That is the terrain on which much of the debate about culpable ignorance takes place. In the abstract, an awareness requirement can seem reasonable, since in some contexts ignorance is a legitimate excuse, and since the requirement captures the sense that responsibility is tied to deliberative agency. A strong con-

3 Smith, "Culpable Ignorance"; Zimmerman, "Moral Responsibility and Ignorance" and *Living with Uncertainty*; Rosen, "Culpability and Ignorance" and "Skepticism about Moral Responsibility."

4 Smith, "Culpable Ignorance."

scious awareness condition, however, has radically skeptical implications, and moreover does not seem to capture the sense that it can be appropriate to blame people who *should have* been aware, even if in fact they were not. So the challenge, for those who reject the skeptical implications of an epistemic condition that includes a strong knowledge requirement, is to develop an account of the conditions in which it is justified to say that someone *should have known*, and so to hold them responsible for their ignorance.

2. SHER'S EPISTEMIC CONDITION

Sher's aim is to replace the searchlight view with an alternative account of the epistemic conditions of moral responsibility that does not depend on conscious awareness and so better handles culpable ignorance.

His argument begins by pointing out that, in a broad range of cases, the searchlight view conflicts with "our actual ground-level judgments about who is responsible for what."⁵ We hold people responsible for unwitting wrongdoing brought on by things like involuntary lapses of attention, the exercise of poor judgment, and a lack of moral insight, and we do so even when "tracing" explanations are unavailable.⁶ Sher's aim is to make sense of why blame is appropriate in such cases, and so he offers an account of the epistemic conditions of moral responsibility that draws on *both* facts about what the agent believed *and* objective facts about the agent and her situation. He calls it the partial epistemic condition (PEC). Here it is:

When someone performs a wrong or foolish act in a way that satisfies the voluntariness condition, and when he also satisfies any other conditions for responsibility that are independent of the epistemic condition, he is responsible for his act's wrongness or foolishness if, but only if, he either

- (1) is aware that the act is wrong or foolish when he performs it, or else
- (2) is unaware that the act is wrong or foolish despite having evidence for its wrongness or foolishness, his failure to recognize which
 - (a) falls below some applicable standard, and
 - (b) is caused by the interaction of some combination of his constitutive attitudes, dispositions, and traits.⁷

5 Sher, *Who Knew?* 23.

6 Sher, *Who Knew?* 24.

7 Sher, *Who Knew?* 88. He later defends the full epistemic condition (FEC), which also accounts for neutral and praiseworthy actions (Sher, *Who Knew?* 142–44).

The crucial conditions are 2a and 2b. Condition 2a is a normative condition—it says that we can be responsible for our ignorance whenever we have sufficient access to evidence that it is fair to say that someone in our position *should have* known—and 2b specifies more precisely what kinds of ignorance in the face of sufficient evidence are blameworthy by appeal to a causal, and so descriptive, criterion. Ignorance is blameworthy when it can be explained by reference to facts about the agent: in particular, facts about her characteristic psychological traits and dispositions that cause her to be unaware of the morally relevant facts of which she ought to have been aware. So according to the PEC, someone who behaves negligently because he has just suffered a concussion in a car crash is not necessarily blameworthy for his negligence. On the other hand, someone who behaves negligently simply because he characteristically forgets to consider the riskiness of his behavior *is* culpable for that negligence.

We have, then, a clear alternative to the searchlight view's emphasis on conscious awareness. According to the PEC, an agent can be responsible for unwitting wrongdoing so long as (a) she *should* have known that her behavior was wrong, and (b) her failure to know it was caused by facts about *her*—that is, by her constitutive attitudes, dispositions, and traits. If successful, the PEC would offer a clear account of the conditions of culpable ignorance.

3. THE PEC AND MENTAL DISORDERS

The PEC has its strengths, but it faces a very significant problem: it unjustly blames some people whose ignorance is not blameworthy. Here is the argument for that conclusion:

1. According to the PEC, ignorance is culpable if it falls below the relevant standard and is caused by the ignorant person's constitutive attitudes, dispositions, and traits.
2. There is a range of mental disorders that both (a) involve the agent's constitutive dispositions and traits and (b) explain the agent's ignorance.
3. Mental disorders are sometimes *excusing conditions*: they explain why the agent is not to blame for their ignorance.
4. Therefore, the PEC is mistaken, since it sometimes blames those whose ignorance is caused by what are in fact excusing conditions.

Consider some examples of the ways that mental disorders can lead to ignorance. The diagnostic criteria of intellectual disability include “deficits in intellectual functioning, such as reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking,

judgment, academic learning, and learning from experience.”⁸ These deficits can make it more difficult for someone with an intellectual disability to, for example, draw inferences from evidence, make successful generalizations and apply them in new cases, and identify the optimal solution to a complex problem.⁹ These deficits can therefore prevent the formation of true belief and correct judgments, and so can lead to ignorance in contexts where the knowledge is necessary for performing the morally correct action.

Among the symptoms characteristic of those on the *autism spectrum* are deficits in “social communication,” “social emotions reciprocity,” “non-verbal communicative behaviors used for social interactions,” and “understanding relationships.”¹⁰ These traits can make it more difficult for those on the autism spectrum to recognize that others are angry, upset, or in need of comfort, or to recognize some of the ways in which their behavior violates conventional social norms.

The “essential feature” of *attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder* (ADHD) is “a persistent pattern of inattention . . . that interferes with functioning.” This can include “wandering off task, lacking persistence, having difficulty sustaining focus, and being disorganized.”¹¹ ADHD can make it much more difficult for someone to notice or properly appreciate morally relevant facts, and so can lead to ignorance of those facts.

These three disorders are very different, but each of them involves deficits that are primarily *intellectual* or *cognitive*: impairments in the ability to acquire or process information, and so to form true beliefs. In some contexts, the missing information is important for making the correct moral judgment. These deficits are not all domain general: those on the autism spectrum, for example, have deficits in understanding a range of social information, but need not have any intellectual deficits about acquiring or processing other sorts of information.

Not all mental disorders are primarily intellectual or cognitive, however. A broad range of disorders is instead *affective* or *motivational*. While such disorders are not primarily characterized by deficits in acquiring or processing information, they can nevertheless also lead to ignorance, since intellectual, affective, and motivational processes are often closely connected. Consider two examples. *Generalized anxiety disorder* is characterized by “excessive anxiety or worry” that

8 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 33.

9 In making this claim, we do not mean to suggest either that those with intellectual disabilities are *incapable* of these tasks, or that those who lack mental disorders are infallible at them. All we intend to claim is that intellectual disabilities—and the other mental disorders discussed below—make it *more difficult* for a person to acquire the relevant knowledge.

10 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 50.

11 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 61.

is difficult to control. Its symptoms include “difficulty concentrating or mind going blank,” and individuals with this disorder “find it difficult to . . . keep worrisome thoughts from interfering with attention to tasks at hand.”¹² Anxiety can therefore lead to ignorance in much the same way as more purely cognitive disorders, since difficulty concentrating and paying attention to the task at hand can impair a person’s ability to acquire and process information, including morally relevant information.

Finally, *major depressive disorder* is characterized by a “depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day” and by “markedly diminished pleasure in all, or nearly all, activities.”¹³ But while it is primarily characterized in terms of a person’s mood, its symptoms also include a “diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness.”¹⁴ Severe cases can be accompanied by delusions and hallucinations. All of these symptoms can cause a person to fail to notice things, forget things she once knew, form false or unjustified beliefs, and make poor judgments and decisions.

Depression and anxiety are not primarily cognitive or intellectual disorders. The main ways in which they impair a person’s functioning have to do with their effect on moods, emotions, and motivations, and they need not directly impair a person’s ability to acquire and process information.¹⁵ Nevertheless, since our cognitive capacities are significantly dependent on our moods, emotions, and motivations, mood disorders can also contribute to impairments in acquiring and processing information and, when they do, they can lead to ignorance. This means that a very broad range of mental disorders is potentially associated with an increased risk of ignorance across a range of contexts, including moral contexts.

Intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, anxiety, and depression are all very different conditions. They have different etiologies and different characteristic manifestations. They are experienced as very different by those who have them, who face different social uptake and stigma, and they impair individual functioning in different ways and to different extents. In raising the examples, we do not intend to simply group everyone together into the category of “people with mental disorders”; the differences both within and between disorders are as significant as the similarities. We group them together only to highlight two features they share that are relevant to the PEC. First, each involves specific psychological traits and dispositions; indeed, most of them are defined in terms of those traits and dispositions. Second, those psychological traits and

12 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 222.

13 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 160.

14 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 161.

15 Our thanks to Kate Norlock for encouraging us to clarify this point.

dispositions can cause the agent who has them to lack awareness of facts that an agent without the condition would more easily recognize.¹⁶ So according to the PEC, agents are blameworthy if their potentially culpable ignorance is caused by a mental disorder.

If the PEC does indeed require us to blame people whose ignorance reflects conditions such as major depression or moderate intellectual disability, then the PEC is dramatically out of step with our ordinary practices of assigning blame. Consider first the legal assignment of blame. Many jurisdictions employ some version of the M’Naghten test, according to which a defendant is not criminally responsible if, at the time of action, a mental disorder prevented her from knowing the act was wrong.¹⁷ Such legal tests aim to distinguish cases of blameworthy negligence from blameless ignorance by appeal to the cause of the ignorance. If the ignorance was caused by a mental “disease, defect, or disorder,” then the person is not criminally responsible. So the criminal law, at least, recognizes that certain mental traits and characteristics can cause a person’s ignorance in ways that either *diminish* blame or *excuse* them from blame, rather than *explain* why they are blameworthy.¹⁸

Legal responsibility is often closely connected to moral responsibility, but the two are not identical; not all judgments of legal responsibility carry implications of moral responsibility, and vice versa. Perhaps more relevant, then, is that our ordinary, on-the-ground practices of assigning praise and blame are sensitive to the reasons for an agent’s ignorance, inattention, forgetfulness, poor judgment, and lack of moral imagination. Consider some everyday examples: a stranger does not see you and cuts in front of you in a queue, a friend forgets to wish you

- 16 None of the conditions make it *impossible* for those who have it to recognize the relevant facts. Those on the autism spectrum, for example, are capable of social communication and of understanding nonverbal communication used in social relationships. Many, however, have a deficit in these abilities relative to the norm set by the neurotypical population.
- 17 In the United States, a judgment of not criminally responsible is appropriate if “the defendant, as a result of a severe mental disease or defect, was unable to appreciate the nature and quality or the wrongfulness of his acts.” 18 U.S.C. § 17. In Canada, “no person is criminally responsible for an act committed or an omission made while suffering from a mental disorder that rendered the person incapable of appreciating the nature and quality of the act or omission or of knowing that it was wrong.” Criminal Code, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-46, s. 16(1).
- 18 These are not perfectly analogous: in the legal case the mental disease or disorder can be temporary and so need not be seen as constitutive of the agent. In many cases, however, the disease is *not* a temporary one. A recent Canadian study of individuals found not criminally responsible on account of mental disorder found that 72 percent had at least one previous psychiatric hospitalization, and that the most common diagnosis—at 71 percent—was a psychotic spectrum disorder. Crocker et al., “The National Trajectory Project of Individuals Found Not Criminally Responsible on Account of Mental Disorder in Canada.”

a happy birthday, or a colleague tells a story that thoughtlessly reminds everyone of your recent embarrassing misadventure. These are all low-stakes, everyday instances of behavior that would typically merit low-level blame or resentment. But if you learned that the stranger who cut in front of you has a general anxiety disorder triggered by something in the immediate area, or you know that your friend who forgot your birthday is suffering from clinical depression, and that your colleague who tells the embarrassing story is on the autism spectrum, these facts will likely color your reaction to their behavior. Behavior that would have otherwise seemed objectionably thoughtless and selfish can be reinterpreted as entirely blameless in light of this knowledge.

To put the point another way: your reaction to someone who does not notice your distress because he is an inconsiderate jerk is (we hope!) quite different from your typical reaction to someone who does not notice your distress because she is depressed or on the autism spectrum.¹⁹ Reactive attitudes like blame and resentment are standard in the first case, but inappropriate in the second, which might call instead for understanding and, sometimes, compassion.²⁰

Sher, however, does not distinguish between ignorance-causing constitutive traits that are responsibility *generating* and those that are *exculpatory*. It is not just that he does not consider this distinction: rather, his view is explicitly committed to its denial. He argues that a person can be held responsible for their ignorance if it is caused by their constitutive psychological traits, and, on his view, a constitutive trait is simply one that “is among the elements of the system whose causal interactions determine the contents of the conscious thoughts and deliberative activities in whose absence [the agent] would not qualify as responsible at all.”²¹ For Sher, ignorance caused by “aspects of [an agent’s] mental make-up—*whatever they are*” is ignorance for which the agent can be blamed.²² As a result of his view of what makes a condition constitutive, Sher requires us to blame

19 Eric Schwitzgebel defines a jerk as someone who “culpably fails to appreciate the perspectives of others around him,” and so links being a jerk to a kind of ignorance (“A Theory of Jerks”).

20 For another example, consider the extensive philosophical literature on addiction. A common view is that one of the crucial distinctions between addiction and mere weakness of will concerns moral responsibility: the merely weak-willed can be blameworthy for actions for which addicts are not (Yaffe, “Recent Work on Addiction and Responsible Agency”). That is not to say that addicts are treated as entirely *blameless*: having addiction as the cause of a crime or of immoral behavior does not typically serve to let the offender off the hook entirely. It often does serve, however, to *diminish* responsibility (Yaffe, “Lowering the Bar for Addicts”).

21 Sher, *Who Knew?* 121.

22 Sher, *Who Knew?* 8, emphasis added.

those whose ignorance is caused by the kinds of conditions that should often be treated as excusing conditions.

In assigning blame to ignorant wrongdoing where the ignorance was caused by the agent's constitutive attitudes, traits, and dispositions, then, the PEC is in conflict with our ordinary practices of assigning blame, and it unjustly and mistakenly blames a group of often-vulnerable people whose mental disorders should be recognized as a reason to withhold blame.

4. AVOIDING AN OBJECTION

Before we evaluate alternative approaches to culpable ignorance and mental disorders, we want to be clear about the aims of the previous argument, so as to prevent a potential misunderstanding. We are not arguing (and we do not believe) that people with mental disorders cannot be held responsible because they are incapable of full moral agency. Our argument should therefore be distinguished from several arguments that also explore the connection between mental disorders and moral responsibility.

First, Nathan Stout argues that autism spectrum disorder presents a substantial challenge to two distinct accounts of moral responsibility. In a recent pair of papers, he argues that people on the autism spectrum satisfy the conditions for moral responsibility set out in both the influential "reason-responsiveness" account, and Michael McKenna's "conversational" account.²³ Stout therefore concludes that both theories are mistaken, since on his view those on the autism spectrum are not in fact "fully responsible agents."²⁴

Second, David Shoemaker has recently argued that a range of conditions, including clinical depression, autism spectrum disorder, dementia, and intellectual disability, can preclude an agent from being full-fledged members of the moral community. On his view, such agents represent cases of "marginal agency," in which agents are responsible in some ways but not in others.²⁵

Finally, some accounts of moral agency include a form of moral or normative competence as a requirement for moral responsibility. In order to be responsible on such views, an agent must be capable of appropriately responding to moral reasons.²⁶ Those who lack such competence are not appropriate targets of blame,

23 Stout, "Reasons-Responsiveness and Moral Responsibility" and "Conversation, Responsibility, and Autism Spectrum Disorder"; Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*; McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility*.

24 Stout, "Conversation, Responsibility, and Autism Spectrum Disorder."

25 Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins*.

26 See, e.g., Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*; Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphys-

since it is not reasonable to expect them to adjust their behavior in light of moral considerations.²⁷

Each of these three very different positions depends on the idea that mental disorders can prevent fully competent recognition of and engagement with moral reasons, such that the respective disorders are a barrier to full moral agency and responsibility. Whether or not this moral competence requirement is a good one, it is not one that plays a role in our argument. We do not claim that those with mental disorders lack moral competence, and we accept that those with mental disorders are often capable of recognizing and responding appropriately to a range of moral reasons. Our claim is much narrower: some mental disorders can lead agents to fail to recognize *particular* morally relevant facts, and these particular cases of ignorance serve to exempt them from blame. This exemption is compatible with the robust possession of moral competence.²⁸ So our objection is with *how* the PEC treats people with mental disorders as agents, not *that* it treats them as agents. It is often unfair to blame them for their unwitting wrongdoing, but that does not mean that they are beyond moral responsibility altogether, or indeed that they are anything less than fully responsible moral agents.

In fact, we accept that agents with mental disorders can be culpably ignorant. First, many mental disorders are episodic: while bipolar disorder is typically a lifelong condition, those who have it can experience long stretches between manic or depressive episodes. If they negligently harm someone between such episodes, their condition might not be reason at all to withhold blame.²⁹ Second, someone with a condition that is not episodic can nonetheless be culpably ignorant if the ignorance is unconnected to the disorder. Finally, foreseeable cases of mental disorder-generated ignorance that are avoidable with advanced plan-

ics of Responsibility” and “Character and Responsibility.”

27 For a criticism of the moral competence requirement, see Talbert, “Moral Competence, Moral Blame, and Protest.” One worry about the moral competence requirement is that it seems to leave us unable to blame psychopaths. For discussion of this issue, see Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins*.

28 Our argument is *also* compatible with the claim that such agents lack full-fledged moral agency. We are not contradicting Shoemaker’s and Stout’s claims: we are simply approaching the question in a different way. Given the broad spectrum of impairments included in intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder, for example, it is likely that some people with those conditions *do* lack the capacities required for full moral agency, while others do not. Our claim is that even those who possess full-fledged moral agency can be excused for local cases of ignorance.

29 Whether they are to blame may depend in part on the potential residual effects of previous episodes.

ning—either through medication, the adoption of a routine, or some other indirect method—may be blameworthy, at least if the “tracing” accounts of blame for ignorance are correct.³⁰

There are, then, several ways in which people with mental disorders can nonetheless be culpably ignorant. None of them, however, undermines the argument that ignorance caused by a mental disorder is often non-culpable, and the PEC is therefore a misguided account of the epistemic conditions for moral responsibility.

5. CONSTITUTION AS ENDORSEMENT?

How might a plausible account of culpable ignorance avoid unjustly blaming those whose ignorance is caused by a mental disorder? One clear virtue of Sher’s argument is that it connects our responsibility for our ignorance to facts *about us* and our character. Something, after all, does seem plausible about the idea that you are more likely to be blameworthy for ignorance that is the result of your selfish character than you are for ignorance that is a result of a concussion or a plot by others to keep you in the dark. This idea also fits more broadly with the common idea that we are most responsible for actions that flow from our most settled character, and that we are less responsible for actions that are entirely out of character.³¹

The core problem with the PEC is Sher’s entirely descriptive understanding of what counts as a constitutive condition. So perhaps one approach would be to adopt a normative interpretation of constitutive traits that could *deny* that mental disorders are constitutive of the agent. In other words, perhaps mental disorders are properly understood as external to the self in the sense relevant to moral responsibility; this would explain why the ignorance they cause is non-culpable.

This suggestion, of course, raises the question of just what it means for an attitude, trait, or disposition to count as “constitutive.” One way of pursuing this approach would be to say that a trait, attitude, or disposition is constitutive of an agent only if it would be endorsed by the agent upon reflection. Harry Frankfurt’s influential model of agency, for example, draws the distinction

30 Whether this tracing account of blame will apply in any particular case will depend in part on whether the agent is to blame for not taking earlier steps to prevent it. If the medication is prohibitively expensive or has particularly unpleasant side effects, for example, then it could be that the agent is not to blame even if they know that a consequence of not taking the medication is future instances of forgetfulness or inattention that would otherwise be blameworthy.

31 We can find varying expressions of this idea in Aristotle, Hume, contemporary virtue theory, and contemporary “true self” or “deep self” theories of moral responsibility.

between attitudes that are “internal” to the agent and those that are “external” in something like this: for a desire to count as an agent’s own, it should be one that the agent *wants* to want, or that the agent reflectively endorses.³²

This approach could be extended beyond attitudes like desires to include psychological traits and dispositions such as mental disorders of the kind that cause ignorance. On this view, an agent’s mental disorder would not be constitutive if she experienced it as an external imposition on her agency that she wished to be without and that she did not endorse. This likely reflects the internal perspective of many people with mental illness, who often see their condition as an external imposition, something that gets in the way of their being who they really are.

Since the endorsement proposal would allow for a degree of normativity that Sher’s descriptive approach rules out, it might offer a way of preserving the basic insights of his account of the epistemic condition while still properly accounting for those with mental disorders.

This proposal, however, faces significant challenges.³³ First, its scope is too broad. Many lazy, inattentive, and thoughtless people do not endorse their traits: they really do wish that they were more dedicated or had keener moral insight and better judgment. These faults are far from the exclusive domain of those with mental disorders, and while a desire to be better might be admirable, it does not by itself exempt someone from blame. You might want very much to be a kinder person and lament your quick temper, but on its own that does not make your relative lack of kindness blameless. “Lack of endorsement” seems too broad a criterion, as it can be too easily satisfied by those who are, nonetheless, responsible for the actions that emerge from the character trait that they do not endorse.

Second, and more importantly, the scope of the proposal is too narrow, as it would apply to only some agents and some excusing conditions. Many people on the autism spectrum, for example, resist the suggestion that they have a disability that is external to them and that they would be better off without, and instead see their condition as part of their identity and as a source of pride.³⁴ The same is true of some people with other mental disorders. The Icarus Project, for example, recasts such atypicalities as “a dangerous gift to be cultivated

32 Frankfurt’s model has evolved: his early work emphasized the hierarchical ordering of desires (“Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”), while in more recent work he has shifted the focus to “endorsement” or “wholeheartedness” (“Identification and Wholeheartedness”).

33 Sher himself calls this approach “distorting and tendentious” (*Who Knew?* 135). Our own objection is very different from his.

34 Autistic Pride Day has been celebrated since 2005 (Gander, “Autistic Pride Day”). See also Humphrey and Lewis, “‘Make Me Normal’”; and Hurlbutt and Chalmers, “Adults with Autism Speak Out.”

and taken care of rather than as a disease or disorder needing to be ‘cured.’”³⁵ Perhaps some of these claims are mistaken, or are simply manifestations of the conditions in question, but to insist that they are all mistaken would be to categorically deny a central element of the agency and self-conception of many people with mental disorders.

More generally, an approach that treated all mental disorders as alienated and external impositions that played no constitutive role in a person’s identity would face resistance from social models of disability that emphasize the ways in which disabilities are “mere differences” that only make people worse because of how society treats those differences.³⁶ On such views, there need be nothing shameful about disability, and no reason for disabled people to treat their conditions as externally imposed constraints that they would be better to be without. Instead, such models can treat a disabled agent’s *condition* as a constitutive part of her, while treating the *impairment* linked to the condition as externally imposed and created by inadequate social supports.

To treat all mental disorders as external impositions, then, would be to deny a central element of the agency and self-conception of many people. So even if we recast our understanding of an agent’s constitutive conditions to build in an explicitly normative criterion, the idea that we are responsible for any ignorance that arises from an endorsed constitutive condition would still threaten to unjustly blame those whose ignorance is the non-culpable result of a mental disorder.

Still, we are closer to being able to see the shape of a successful account of the epistemic condition for moral responsibility. It will have a normative, rather than thoroughly descriptive, understanding of which kinds of explanations for ignorance in the face of evidence are sources of blame, and which are genuine excusing conditions. Moreover, it will avoid a too-narrow focus on idealized, neurotypical, nondisabled agents. This focus excludes far too many people from the account, and deeply misunderstands the kinds of ignorance that are blame-worthy. A proper epistemic condition for moral responsibility must instead take into account the full range of responsible moral agents in all of their variety. It is to the development of such an account that we now turn.

6. IGNORANCE AND MORAL CONCERN

Our account builds on the prominent approach to moral responsibility according to which judgments of praise and blame involve an assessment of the depth of an agent’s moral concern. On this view, the degree of praise or blame an ac-

35 DuBrul, “The Icarus Project,” 259.

36 Barnes, “Valuing Disability, Causing Disability.”

tion merits reflects the degree to which the action displayed (or failed to display) the right kind of attitudinal outlook on morality. Part of the aim of this approach—an aim it shares with Sher—is to offer a way of understanding moral responsibility that does not ultimately depend on an agent’s conscious control, since many of the most important attitudes of moral concern are not directly under our conscious control.

This view can take different forms, depending on the attitudes it identifies as most fundamental to moral concern. Arpaly and Schroeder link an agent’s blameworthiness for an action to the degree of ill will or moral indifference that the action manifests.³⁷ Ill will and moral indifference, in turn, are defined in terms of the agent’s *intrinsic desires*: ill will is “an intrinsic desire for the wrong or the bad” and “moral indifference is a lack of good will” with goodwill understood as “an intrinsic desire for the right or good.”³⁸ So on Arpaly and Schroeder’s view, the blameworthiness or praiseworthiness of an action is a function of the attitudes—and in particular the intrinsic desires—that motivate the action. And one important way in which an action can be blameworthy is if it reflects moral indifference—an insufficient concern for moral considerations.

Angela Smith argues that we can be held morally responsible for our attitudes, even though they are not always under our voluntary or conscious control, because of the ways in which our attitudes reflect our evaluative judgments. We can be asked to provide reasons and justifications for such judgments, and asked to “give them up or modify them if an adequate defense cannot be provided.”³⁹ Such demands for rational justification are, on her view, at the core of the normative demands involved in holding agents morally responsible. So for Smith, assessments of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness are often fundamentally assessments of an agent’s (often nonvoluntary) attitudes, since those attitudes reflect reason-responsive evaluative judgments.

There are significant differences between Arpaly and Schroeder’s and Smith’s respective views. Arpaly and Schroeder’s is grounded in an agent’s intrinsic desires, while Smith’s emphasizes an agent’s reason-response evaluative judgments. These are very different attitudes, of course, and the distinction between them is at the heart of a number of intense debates in moral philosophy. As important as these differences are, however, we can set them aside for the time being in order to note some important similarities between the two views. First, both Smith and Arpaly and Schroeder argue that assessments of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness for *actions* are fundamentally tied to the (often nonvoluntary)

37 Arpaly and Schroeder, *In Praise of Desire*, 170.

38 Arpaly and Schroeder, *In Praise of Desire*, 162–63.

39 Smith, “Culpable Ignorance,” 270.

attitudes that underpin them. An agent's degree of engagement with morality is often revealed by those attitudes, and the nature of that engagement is at the heart of assessments of moral responsibility. Second, both argue that our moral concerns (whether measured in terms of intrinsic desires or evaluative judgments) significantly influence what we attend to, notice, and remember, and of course what we ignore, overlook, and forget. A lack of moral concern, on both accounts, can therefore contribute directly to an agent's ignorance.

As Arpaly puts it, someone who "does not care very much about morality may not give much thought to some things to which a more morally concerned person would pay more attention."⁴⁰ This is because "desire influences our attention patterns."⁴¹ Other things being equal, the more someone has an intrinsic desire to, for example, reduce suffering, the more they will be disposed to not only *act* to prevent suffering, but also to *notice* and indeed *look for* instances of suffering to address. Someone who does not notice the suffering of those around them would not normally be described as having a strong intrinsic desire to reduce suffering, even if she did act to reduce it on the rare occasions that she took any notice.

Smith makes a very similar point in terms of evaluative judgments. In fact, her argument that we can be held responsible for our attitudes opens with a case of small-scale culpable ignorance: she suggests that if a friend forgets your birthday, you could be justified in feeling hurt and resentful because of the way that his oversight might reveal something about how much he cares about you and your relationship. If your friend really did judge your relationship to be important, he would have remembered your birthday. There is, as Smith puts it, a "rational connection between what we notice and what we evaluate or judge to be important or significant" and so we can be "criticized or asked to acknowledge fault for failing to notice something if this failure can reasonably be taken to reflect an [objectionable] judgment that the thing in question is not important."⁴²

Both Smith and Arpaly and Schroder, then, argue that one's attitudes of moral concern (whether these are understood as intrinsic desires or evaluative attitudes) often influence what one notices, looks for, and pays attention to, and also what one ignores, overlooks, or fails to notice. This failure to notice something morally significant can reflect one's relative lack of moral concern. A lack of moral concern can therefore lead to ignorance by affecting one's patterns of attention.

This "moral concern" account of moral responsibility offers a compelling way of explaining both what makes ignorance culpable (when it is) and why igno-

40 Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 233.

41 Arpaly and Schroeder, *In Praise of Desire*, 125.

42 Smith, "Culpable Ignorance," 244, 270.

rance generated by mental disorders is so often *non-culpable*. Ignorance in the face of available evidence is culpable when it reflects a lack of moral concern, whether we take that to be moral indifference or misplaced evaluative judgments. If you are ignorant because you do not care enough to notice or learn, then you are to blame. But ignorance that does *not* reflect a lack of moral concern need not be blameworthy at all. That is because, while attention and ignorance are certainly *evidence* of a person's moral concerns—whether that be her intrinsic desires or her evaluative judgments—that evidence is defeasible: not all ignorance in moral contexts reflects a lack of moral concern.

In explaining the link between moral concern and ignorance, Smith argues that valuing something “should (rationally) have an influence on our unreflective patterns of thought and feeling. We commonly infer from these unreflective patterns, or from their absence, what a person really cares about and judges to be important.”⁴³ These common inferences are often warranted, and when we rightly infer that moral ignorance was caused by a lack of moral concern, we are justified in treating the ignorance as culpable. But while such inferences are often justified, they can be mistaken. Smith emphasizes that while the connection between what we notice and what we take to be important is close, it is also indirect and not conceptual.⁴⁴ Not all ignorance reflects an evaluative judgment of the potential object of attention's importance. Arpaly and Schroeder make a similar point about the nature of intrinsic desire on attention: while desire is often reflected in what an agent attends to, notices, and remembers, this effect on cognition is “typical of desire, but do[es] not constitute its essence.”⁴⁵

Both Smith and Arpaly and Schroeder, then, acknowledge that attention and ignorance are often, but not *always*, evidence of moral concern. And when ignorance is *not* a reflection of the agent's evaluative judgments or lack of moral concern, the ignorance could qualify as non-culpable. This broad account seems to capture much of what is plausible in Sher's own alternative to the standard searchlight view, since like Sher it explains culpable ignorance by appeal to facts about what the agent is *like*: an agent's intrinsic desires and evaluative judgments are, typically, relatively stable and well-integrated into their broader set of attitudes, traits, and dispositions. But this account also avoids the pitfalls of Sher's account, since its understanding of the way our psychological dispositions can make ignorance culpable is thoroughly normative. It can recognize that different constitutive sources of ignorance should be treated differently from the perspective

43 Smith, “Culpable Ignorance,” 247.

44 Smith, “Culpable Ignorance,” 205, 270.

45 Arpaly and Schroeder, *In Praise of Desire*, 125.

of moral responsibility. This means that it does not unjustly blame those whose ignorance is the result of a mental disorder, *rather than* a lack of moral concern.

Our proposal for explaining the ways in which mental disorders can generate non-culpable ignorance builds on this moral concern account of responsibility. Ignorance can be culpable when it reflects a lack of moral concern; failing to recognize that someone is in distress can be caused by a selfish lack of concern for their welfare, since such a lack of concern influences what you are inclined to notice. Such ignorance is blameworthy. A failure to recognize someone's distress can *also* be caused by clinical depression, or anxiety, or by some common diagnostic features of autism spectrum disorder. As we argued above, a range of mental disorders can lead to ignorance by affecting an agent's attention, concentration, or ability to take in relevant information. In such cases, we need not suppose that a failure to recognize someone's distress reflects a lack of moral concern for their welfare. The inference from ignorance to a lack of concern is defeated by an alternative, and better, explanation: the ignorance is caused by a mental disorder that is unconnected to the agent's goodwill or her evaluations of what is and is not morally significant. Someone with clinical depression may care a *great deal* about the welfare of others, but one of the effects of her depression might include an impairment in the ability to translate that concern into awareness of their distress. By pointing to the existence of a mental disorder in explaining otherwise culpable ignorance, we are often identifying reasons withholding blame, precisely because we are identifying explanations of the ignorance that do not reflect a lack of moral concern.

The moral concern account of moral responsibility therefore offers a plausible explanation of the ways in which mental disorders can serve as genuine excuses for what would otherwise be blameworthy ignorance. Moreover, it does not do so by arguing that those with mental disorders lack full moral agency. The presence of a mental disorder can make awareness of some specific morally relevant facts much more difficult, and so block the inference from ignorance to lack of moral concern, but this is compatible with the full possession of moral competence and moral agency. The impairment may well be local and limited, and not undermine the agent's broader moral competence. Fatigue and stress can likewise affect our ability to acquire and process information in ways that do not necessarily reflect our depth of moral concern, but this does not mean that fatigue and stress should be understood as conditions that undermine our moral agency. Those of us with mental disorders can be—and indeed, often *are*—full moral agents whose actions reflect appropriate moral concern.

7. CULPABLE IGNORANCE AND PERSONALITY DISORDERS

One important consequence of our account is that mental disorders, as a class, do not serve as a blanket exemption from blame for ignorance. On the view that we have defended, mental disorder-generated ignorance is non-culpable when that ignorance does not reflect a lack of moral concern. Some mental disorders, however, are primarily characterized by impairments in interpersonal functioning that include concern for others. The “essential feature” of antisocial personality disorder, for example, is “a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others.”⁴⁶ Persons with the disorder tend to display “reckless disregard for safety of self or others” and are often “indifferent to . . . having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from someone.”⁴⁷ The diagnostic features of narcissistic personality disorder include a “lack of sensitivity to the wants and needs of others” and “difficulty in recognizing the desires, subjective experiences, and feelings of others.”⁴⁸

Some *DSM-5* mental disorders, in other words, seem to include something very close to “lack of moral concern” as an essential *diagnostic criterion*. We argued above that a lack of moral concern can lead to moral ignorance, and that when it does, that lack of concern explains why the ignorance is culpable. In mental disorders where a lack of moral concern is among the core diagnostic criteria, ignorance generated by those disorders may well be culpable. That is because, in such cases, identifying a personality disorder as the cause of the ignorance is not an *alternative* explanation, making the inference to a lack of moral concern unjustified; rather identifying the personality disorder as the source of the ignorance is simply another way of describing that lack of concern.

At this point, a skeptical reader might be tempted to accuse us of running afoul of our own argument. Our main objection to Sher’s account was that he unjustly blames those whose ignorance is caused by conditions like depression and autism spectrum disorder. Since our own account *also* blames those whose ignorance is caused by some mental disorders, it might seem as if our own view is vulnerable to the very same objection. Is blaming someone whose ignorance is the result of antisocial personality disorder not just the same as blaming someone whose ignorance is the result of anxiety disorder?

There are two points to make in response to this objection. First, we have not claimed that those with personality disorders ought to be blamed for their moral ignorance. Perhaps there are independent reasons for supposing that they

46 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 659.

47 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 660.

48 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 670.

ought to be exempt from blame; if so, those reasons will be very different from the reasons we have offered here. Second, the objection misunderstands the aim of our argument. We have not argued that mental disorders offer a blanket exemption from blame, and we have insisted that those of us with mental disorders can nonetheless be fully responsible moral agents. The reason to withhold blame from ignorance caused by, e.g., depression, anxiety disorder, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder is that such ignorance need not reflect any core lack of moral concern on the part of the agents who have the conditions. Their conditions can sometimes make it harder for them to notice or appreciate morally significant facts, but this impairment does not necessarily reflect their values, intrinsic desires for the good, evaluative commitments, or moral motivations. Our objection to Sher's account is not simply that it blames people with mental disorders, since we accept that those of us with mental disorders can be legitimate targets of blame. Our objection is rather that the PEC blames people with mental disorders when their ignorance does not reflect any failure of moral concern. Our aim is not to treat mental disorders as conditions that put people entirely outside the reach of responsibility and blame. In fact, the conclusion that mental disorder-generated ignorance can be culpable fits with our broader aim to give an account of moral agency and culpable ignorance that takes seriously the idea that those with mental disorders are capable of full moral agency, and that their conditions do not leave them outside, or even on the margins, of the moral community.⁴⁹

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49 The authors would like to thank Vanessa Lam for her invaluable research assistance; audiences at the University of Sheffield, the University of Waterloo, and the 2017 Canadian Philosophical Association meetings at Ryerson University; two anonymous reviewers for this journal; and the students in Mathieu Doucet's 2015 seminar on ignorance and responsibility: Phillippe Bériault, Andria Bianchi, Chris Braithwaite, A. Y. Daring, Evaleen Hellinga, Catherine Klausen, Tiffany Lin, Cam MacKinnon, Kathryn Morrison, and Justin Singer. This research was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Insight Development Grant.

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