

ON AN ANALYTIC DEFINITION OF LOVE

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LOVE is a notoriously difficult concept to characterize. The numerous uses and nuances of the word are varied and complex. The forms of love that can be found within human life, and concerning the things we love, are very diverse. It has thus been suggested that there is no analytic definition of love, and that none is possible. Hacker writes, “There is no analytic definition of love that captures in its net the use of the word.”¹ I hope to show in this paper that more can perhaps be accomplished toward providing an analytic definition of “love” than is suggested by this claim.

The present paper will put forward a proposal for the conceptual grammar—that is, a characterization of our use of language—concerning the expression “He/she loves . . .” where this expression is followed by some object that may, or may not, be a person. I will argue, as have others, that uses of such expressions involve either desire for some good or desire that good come to the object specified, but I will argue, in contrast to others, that it is the nonexclusive disjunction of these two desires that can be used to provide a precise analytic characterization of our use of “love” in ordinary language in English.²

The task in this paper is an analytic one, concerning our ordinary use of the word “love.” I will thus not directly be considering questions of what love *ought* to look like or how some might argue the word “love” *should* be used. I will only very briefly touch on the question of the various reasons for love or causes of love.³ And I will do so principally insofar as this is required to defend

1 Hacker, *The Passions*, 269.

2 Aquinas, Taylor, Sidgwick, and Stump, for example, all make reference both to the desire to be with, or be united with, the beloved and to the desire to contribute or have good come to the beloved object, sometimes requiring both desires to constitute love (e.g., Stump), whereas here it is being proposed that the nonexclusive disjunction of the two can be used to characterize our use of “love” in ordinary language. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.II.26.4; Taylor, “Love,” 157; Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 244; and Stump, “Love, By All Accounts,” 27.

3 Cf. Kraut, *Love De Re*; Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion”; Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship”; Stump, “Love, By All Accounts”; Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*; Jollimore, *Love’s Vision*; Setiya, “Love and the Value of a Life.”

the proposed analytic definition, though I will also return to the question at the paper's conclusion, when addressing some practical considerations and implications arising from the proposed definition. These other topics are undoubtedly important. However, there is arguably also value in focusing on ordinary language, both to better understand how that language is used in practice and to help resolve a number of puzzles and paradoxes concerning love.

While the principal aim of the paper is to propose and defend an analytic definition of love, doing so will also require considering the characteristics of love as they pertain to the proposed definition; questions concerning the strength and intensity of love, and of loving well; and issues related to the reciprocity of interpersonal love. Consideration of these issues will be necessary to provide an adequate account of how we in fact use our language concerning love and to explain a number of paradoxes that seemingly arise with our use of that language. In defending the proposed analytic definition, I will also argue that it is applicable to a diversity of objects, including not only love of inanimate objects, places, activities, ideals, and people but also love of God, love of neighbor, love of stranger, love of enemies, self-love, and love of pets. I will conclude with some of the practical considerations that arise from the proposed definition as it pertains to cultivating love within society, within marriages, and within political life as well as to the role of the media in shaping our loves.

1. LOVE AS THE DISPOSITION TO DESIRE A PARTICULAR GOOD OR GOOD FOR A PARTICULAR OBJECT

I propose that when the expression "He/she loves ..." is employed and followed by some object, then "love" as used in such expressions can be defined as "a disposition toward either (i) desiring a perceived good or desiring union with it, either as an end itself or with it being a source of delight in itself or (ii) desiring good for a particular object for its own sake."⁴ I refer to the first of these dispositions as *unitive love*, and I refer to the second of these dispositions as *contributory love*.

The distinction between love considered under the aspect of desiring union and under the aspect of contributing good is not new. It appears clearly in

4 I believe that this characterization pertains to many uses of the expressions "I love ...," but that such expressions, in the first person, also regularly constitute a specific type of perlocutionary speech act (Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*) wherein the speaker principally intends to evoke some sort of emotional, physical, or reciprocal response from the person to whom the words are addressed. I will not consider in detail such uses of this expression here and will restrict attention to the arguably somewhat simpler third-person expression "He/she loves"

Aquinas, an illuminating exposition is given by Stump, and it likewise appears elsewhere.⁵ In contrast to Stump, however, I propose that love is not desire but rather the disposition toward desiring. This arguably comes closer to the account given by Aquinas, who describes love as the principle of movement toward the object that is loved.⁶ The proposed definition here, however, adds further qualifications. With regard to unitive love, a disposition toward desiring a particular good is not on its own sufficient for love; rather, that good must be desired *either as an end itself or with it being a source of delight in itself*. This qualification will be important when considering means to various ends and whether it can be properly said that the means themselves are loved. With regard to contributory love, a disposition toward desiring the good for someone or something is not sufficient for love; rather, the desiring of good for the beloved object must be *for its own sake* rather than solely for the sake of some subsequent benefit that may accrue to oneself. There may indeed be subsequent benefit, but if that subsequent benefit to oneself is in fact the only end desired and if the desiring the good of the other is entirely a means, then, as discussed below, we would not generally refer to this as love.

Before proceeding with the analysis, I would like to be more precise about the claims I will be defending and about the nature of the analytic definition of love being proposed. As noted above, I define unitive love as “a disposition toward desiring a perceived good or desiring union with it, either as an end itself or with it being a source of delight in itself” and contributory love as “a disposition toward desiring good for a particular object for its own sake.” I will make the case that what is being asserted in any use of the expression “He/she loves . . .” followed by the specification of some object is an instance of unitive love, contributory love, or both. The first claim I thus seek to defend in this paper is that whenever the expression “X loves Y” is used, then it is always the case that at least one of the following two statements is in view:

1. “X has a disposition toward desiring Y, or union with Y, either as an end itself or with it being a source of delight in itself,” or
2. “X has a disposition toward desiring good for Y for its own sake.”

The second claim I will seek to defend is that, conversely, whenever at least one of 1 or 2 is in view, then *at least some people*, in their ordinary speech, would assert “X loves Y.” The second claim is in some sense weaker than the first. The qualification of “at least some people” arises because of cases in which one of

5 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (hereafter *ST*) I.II.26.4; Stump, “Love, By All Accounts”; Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*.

6 See Aquinas, *ST* I.II.26.1; alternatively, in the same question, Aquinas describes love as “the first change wrought in the appetite by the appetible object” (*ST* I.II.26.2).

unitive or contributory love is present but the other is absent. I will argue that in all such cases, many people would, in their ordinary speech, still say “X loves Y,” but others may not. Some may refrain because, especially in interpersonal relationships, there is a sense that unitive and contributory love ought both be present. Thus, when one of unitive or contributory love is present and the other absent, although the use of “X loves Y” is common in ordinary language, others may say “that is not *really* love.” This equivocation, or disagreement, over the use of “love” is a feature of our ordinary language about love and is a consequence of the disjunctive nature of how the word “love” is ordinarily used. Expressions such as “some may call that love, but it is not *really* love” arise in part because we often desire some distinction between those cases in which unitive and contributory love are both present and cases in which only one is present.

What is intended with the proposed analytic definition of love is a descriptive characterization of our ordinary language use of expressions of the form “X loves Y,” but one that also recognizes and respects what is sometimes equivocation over these statements. In summary, the proposed descriptive characterization is thus that the nonexclusive disjunction of 1 and 2 is a necessary condition for “X loves Y” in ordinary language and a sufficient condition for at least some people being willing to assert “X loves Y.”⁷

The disjunctive nature of the proposed analytic definition will be important throughout the discussion. The characteristics of unitive and contributory love are in many ways distinct and thus arguably best analyzed separately. In what follows, I will argue that many of the paradoxes about love, and disputes over objects of love, can potentially be resolved when we realize that certain aspects or properties of love pertain either only to contributory love or only to unitive love.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF UNITIVE LOVE

We tend to use love for a diverse range of objects. We love our children. We love desserts. We love our country. We love justice. We can love people, pets, things, places, communities, activities, ideals, the divine, and so on.⁸ For many of these loves, we desire the objects themselves or some form of union with them, and this was defined above as unitive love, a disposition toward desiring a perceived good or desiring union with it, either as an end itself or with it being a source

7 Velleman (“Love as a Moral Emotion,” 353) and Setiya (“Love and the Value of a Life”) effectively argue against the position that desiring to be with the other and desiring the other’s good are *necessary* conditions for love. However, under the proposed disjunctive definition, neither is necessary; rather, it is their disjunction that is proposed as necessary.

8 Hacker, *The Passions*.

of delight in itself. It is in this unitive sense that we might love ice cream. We are not trying to contribute toward the ice cream's good. We simply desire it.

However, simply desiring something is not sufficient for using the word "love" in ordinary language; that desire must have some consistency to it. We must have a disposition toward desiring it.⁹ If someone who normally feels ambivalence toward ice cream suddenly desires ice cream on a particularly hot day, we would not ordinarily say that that person loves ice cream. It is only concerning someone who consistently desires ice cream—who has a disposition toward desiring it—for whom we would say that the person loves ice cream. That consistency for desiring the object does not need to be exceptionless to qualify as love; if someone does not feel like having ice cream on a particular day, that does not disqualify him from loving ice cream. Rather, once again, a disposition toward desiring the object must be present. Similar issues pertain to activities. We might say someone loves skiing if that person has a disposition toward desiring to ski. For someone who has a desire to ski in order to "just try it once," we would not ordinarily say "she loves skiing." Trying it once, and enjoying it, may create a disposition toward desiring it and the love might ensue shortly thereafter, but the disposition toward desiring is necessary. There must be some familiarity with the object to be able to say that such a disposition is present.

Love, as defined above in its unitive sense, is arguably also applicable not just to things and activities but also to people, pets, places, communities, or even ideals. We may say we love a person (or pet or community) if we have a disposition toward desiring to be united with (i.e., to be with) that person (or pet or community). We may say we love a place if we have a disposition toward desiring to be united with (i.e., to be in) that place. We might say "he loves justice" if the person has a disposition toward desiring justice.¹⁰ In all of these cases, there is a desire that one's life be somehow united with some perceived good. In ordinary

9 "Disposition" here is being used in the sense of a tendency or proneness (cf. Hacker, *Human Nature*, 118–21; Hacker, *The Passions*, 302–3).

10 One might attempt to unify all the phenomena that relate to the word "love" with the notion of "a disposition toward desiring the good for something (either for oneself or for something else)." However, the phenomenon of love for an ideal renders this difficult. When expressions such as "love of justice" or "love of beauty" or "love of truth" are used, that for which one is desiring the good is less clear. This could perhaps coherently be rendered as good for one's community, for oneself, or for all, but it is not clear that it is the good of the community or oneself that is principally in view with expressions like "love of justice" or "love of truth." However, love of an ideal seems still to descriptively fit the proposed definition of unitive love as desiring the object itself; and it is the proposed definition of unitive, rather than contributory, love that seems to correspond to love of an ideal. With the love of justice (or truth, beauty, etc.), it is not the case that we desire good *for* justice; we desire justice (and may contribute to bringing it about since, indeed, our desires tend to prompt action), but it would be odd to say that one desires "good for justice."

language, we sometimes speak of desiring the perceived good itself, and other times only of desiring some form of union with it. We would usually speak of desiring to *be with* a pet, a person, or a community or to *be in* a place—that is, to be united with it in some way.¹¹ In other cases, when speaking of love of an activity or of an ideal, we speak of desiring the good itself, not of being united with it or of being with it. We say “I desire skiing” or “I desire to ski” but not “I desire to be with (or to be united with) skiing.” However, again, in all of these cases, there is a desire that one’s life be somehow united with the perceived good.

In instances of unitive love for people or pets or communities or places, we might also have a disposition toward desiring their good (i.e., contributory love), but we might not. Unitive love may be present without contributory love. Someone may love a particular beach, and want to be there, without necessarily having any desire to make it better or contribute toward its good.

In the proposed definition for unitive love, a disposition toward desiring a perceived good or desiring union with it is not, on its own, considered sufficient to be called love. Rather, the perceived good, or union with it, is to be desired *either as an end itself or with it being a source of delight in itself*. In many cases, the perceived good that is desired will be both an end in itself and a source of delight in itself. Such may be the case in one’s desire to be with one’s children, or to ski, to be in one’s hometown, or to have justice. In other instances considered below, the good that is desired may be desired either only as an end or only as a source of delight, but not both. However, in certain cases, one may have a disposition toward desiring some perceived good but desire it only as a means, not as an end and not as a source of delight, and it is not clear we would then always refer to love for that object. Someone, for example, may have a disposition toward desiring exercise not because it brings any delight—she may in fact find it unpleasant and painful—but because, without exercise, she quickly experiences depression. Exercise is sought purely as a means; it is not an end, and it does not in itself bring delight. In such cases, we would not usually say “she loves exercise,” even though she has the disposition toward desiring it.

However, in other cases, that which is desired purely as a means may nevertheless be a source of delight. I may take a medicine that tastes bad and has

11 We thus say “I desire to be with my baseball team” but not typically “I desire my baseball team.” Sometimes we can speak of desiring the thing or of desiring to be united with the thing, with the same meaning in view. We might say either “I desire ice cream” or “I desire to be united with (i.e., to eat) ice cream.” However, in other cases, we might appropriately speak of either desire for the object or desire to be united with the object, but the meaning may differ in these two uses. “He desires to be with her” indicates as its object a union of presence; “he desires her” has sexual connotations. Likewise, “he desires to be in Chicago” indicates a union of presence; “he desires Chicago” suggests some form of conquering or authority over it.

some unpleasant side effects but very quickly heals me. I may marvel at its efficacy. I may do so to the extent that I take a genuine delight in it. I may exclaim "I love this medicine." While the medicine is a means, it is also a source of delight in itself. In the case of exercise considered above, if a different person finds exercise similarly unpleasant, and exercises only to alleviate depression, yet also marvels at how well it works in alleviating depression, she might then say "I do love exercise, not so much for its own sake, but because of what it does for me." The difference between these cases is essentially in the subjective attitude the person takes to the means of exercise, viewing it only as a necessary evil for the purpose of some good (in the first case) or, alternatively, taking delight in the efficacy of it as a means (in the second). We usually would not speak of "love of exercise" in the first case, but we might in the second. Nevertheless, both with the medicine and with the second case of exercise, the good for which the person has a disposition to desire is only a means; it is not an end.

Likewise, there are arguably cases in which one might have a disposition toward desiring some end in itself, even when it does not bring notable delight in itself, and then we might arguably still properly speak of love. A parent with a difficult child may desire to spend time with the child, potentially independent of any good that she hopes to contribute, simply because it is *her* child. The child may behave dreadfully and may bring a great deal of sorrow, and the parent may even come to expect this. However, the parent may still have the disposition toward desiring to be with the child, as an end in itself. We would generally still say in such circumstances that "the parent loves the child." This arguably extends beyond contributory love: the parent wants to be with the child even beyond anything that she might contribute to the child's well-being. As another example, a man may live in a country that is at war, on the brink of devastation. There is nothing further the man can do to help his country. The man may nevertheless have a desire to remain in his country, even as it falls, simply because it is *his* country. There is little or no delight that the man is taking in his country, but yet he has a disposition toward desiring to be united with his country, as an end in itself. It is arguably proper then to speak of "love of country" because of the man's disposition to remain in it, even though this is not a source of delight.¹²

12 Even in these extreme examples, the attainment of any good, perceived of as an end, might be argued to bring at least a modicum of delight simply by the attaining of that desired end, even if this delight is minimal in comparison to the sorrow accompanying the attaining of that end. Strictly speaking, it may be possible to slightly simplify the proposed definition of unitive love to "a disposition toward desiring a perceived good, or desiring union with it, as a source of delight in itself," but again it would be somewhat odd in these extreme cases just considered to speak of the person's love for their country, or their love for their child, principally as a source of delight. Language concerning the beloved objects being sought as ends in themselves is arguably more appropriate.

The requirement that the beloved object is either an end itself or a source of delight in itself excludes certain pathological desires from being love. A kleptomaniac who derives no joy from the actual taking of trivial possessions from others would not generally be said to love these trivial objects, even though he has a disposition toward acquiring them. However, the requirement that the beloved object is either an end itself or a source of delight in itself does not necessarily exclude certain addictions from being loves. A person may be addicted to drinking liquor, see the damage the addiction is causing and desire to stop, and yet be unable, but nevertheless find some delight in the drinking. It would then arguably still be appropriate to speak of the person's love of liquor, because there is a disposition toward desiring it, and the object is a source of, at least some, delight. In such cases, we might be inclined to say "he wants to quit, but he does love drinking." This love is not incompatible with also wanting to refrain from alcohol, or perhaps even also simultaneously hating the beloved object.¹³ However, so long as the disposition toward desiring the object with its being a source of delight in itself persists, it is arguably appropriate to speak of love. Once again, when someone has a disposition toward desiring a perceived good or desiring union with it, either as an end itself or with it being a source of delight in itself, then we would typically say that that person loves that object or perceived good. Let us turn now to contributory love.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTRIBUTORY LOVE

Contributory love was defined above as "a disposition toward desiring good for a particular object for its own sake." We most characteristically think of loves of this type for persons. The mother loves her child. The husband loves his wife. The friends love one another. However, the objects of such contributory love extend beyond persons. One might have a disposition toward desiring good for

13 The possibility of simultaneously loving and hating some object may arise because one has both the disposition toward desiring it and the disposition toward avoiding it (under some other aspect or for some other reason), as in the case of addiction. Similarly, one might find the process of learning Spanish particularly difficult, but in spite of the hard work, even frustration, over the memorization and learning, one comes back again and again to desiring to learn it—if one has a disposition toward desiring to learn it and if one cannot escape the desire—then one might say, albeit perhaps in a somewhat resigned manner, "Well, I guess I do love learning Spanish." Again, love and hate of learning Spanish may be simultaneously present. However, it is also possible that love and hate may be said to be simultaneously present for some object if only one of unitive or contributory love is present and the other absent; one may have a disposition toward desiring good for someone, whilst being physically repulsed by their presence; or alternatively, one might be obsessed with another person physically and sexually and nevertheless be disposed to wish that person evil.

a place—for example, one’s hometown, community group, or school. We might then speak of “love” also in this contributory sense. Such contributory love may be present with or without unitive love. Someone may have a disposition toward desiring good for one’s hometown, for its own sake, without any sort of disposition toward desiring to return to it. Contributory and unitive love may both be present together, but one may be present without the other. As with unitive love, desire alone is not sufficient for contributory love. For desire to constitute love, that desire must be sufficiently consistent that a disposition toward desiring the good for the object can be said to be present. A sudden feeling of goodwill, or desire for the good of another, does not qualify as love. There must be some familiarity with the object for it to be the case that the person has a disposition toward desiring its good.

With contributory love, aspects of one’s own well-being, including for instance the satisfaction of one’s desires, depend on the well-being of the object under consideration.¹⁴ That one’s own well-being depends on the well-being of the other is effectively a necessary condition for contributory love; it follows directly from the definition of contributory love as a disposition toward desiring the good of the other. One might be tempted to take this as a sufficient condition for, or as a characterization of, contributory love, and indeed some have.¹⁵ We might think that one’s well-being depending on the well-being of another must be love. However, there are arguably exceptions to such dependence being a sufficient condition for contributory love—for example, when one’s own well-being depends on another’s well-being only instrumentally. Someone in a prison camp may be told that his life depends on keeping the others in the camp healthy. The person may not genuinely care about the others, but because his own life depends on the health of the others, he very quickly forms a strong disposition toward desiring their good. However, if the person only cares about the health of the others because his own life is at stake, we generally would not say that he loves the others in the prison camp. To handle such cases, it was proposed above that contributory love be defined as “a disposition toward desiring good for a particular object *for its own sake*.” We would only

14 So-called desire satisfaction theories of well-being effectively equate well-being with the satisfaction of one’s desires (or the desires one would have if fully informed; cf. Heathwood, “Desire-Fulfillment Theory”); however, one need not embrace the *equating* of well-being with desire satisfaction to take the position that well-being depends *in part* on the satisfaction of one’s desires.

15 Sullivan, in considering definitions of love, writes: “When the satisfaction or the security of another person becomes as significant to one as one’s own satisfaction or security, then the state of love exists. So far as I know, under no other circumstances is a state of love present, regardless of the popular usage of the word” (“Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry,” 20).

speak of love for another (in the contributory sense) if there is a disposition toward desiring the other's good for their own sake. This does not mean that no further benefit accrues to, or is desired by, the lover, only that at least one of the reasons for desiring the good of the other is for the other's sake. In the case of the prison camp, the person whose life depends on the health of the others in the camp might eventually come to desire their well-being for their own sake. That might coexist with his own well-being being a reason for desiring their health, and if the desire for their health for their own sake is sufficiently consistent that we could reasonably say that he has a disposition toward desiring their good for their own sake, then we might again properly speak of love.

Contributory love was defined above as a disposition toward *desiring* the good of the beloved object, rather than a disposition toward *acting* to bring about the good of the beloved or toward actually acting to bring about the good of the beloved. In using the term "contributory love," it is not necessarily the lover that is contributing the good; it is only that the lover desires that there be some good contributed to the beloved, but the source of that good may be the lover, another person, or even the beloved's own actions. Of course, in most cases a disposition toward *desiring* the good of the beloved object will bring about a disposition toward *acting* to bring about the good for the object and also actual actions to do so; these will all typically go hand in hand. It can thus be difficult to discern the characterizing features of love. However, there are arguably cases in which the disposition toward acting is present, but the disposition toward desiring is not, or vice versa.

If the disposition toward acting to bring about good is present, but without a disposition toward desiring that good, it is not clear that we would refer to this as love. Consider a physician who consistently acts to contribute to the health of his patients and is disposed to do so because this is his job. With regard to such circumstances, Hacker comments, "good doctors do not love their patients and conscientious shepherds do not love their sheep, although they care for them and protect them."¹⁶ If the doctor considers providing treatment for patients merely as his duty, as fulfilling the role for which he is paid, then indeed the doctor would not generally be said to "love his patients." Likewise, a shepherd who protects the sheep and keeps them alive simply because this is his job would generally not be said to love the sheep. In both cases, on account of their respective roles, there is a disposition toward *acting* to bring about the good of the patients and the sheep respectively, and yet we would generally not speak of loving patients or sheep. On the other hand, a doctor may, over time, come to know a number of his patients more deeply; his interest in their

¹⁶ Hacker, *The Passions*, 302.

well-being may increase. He may develop a disposition toward desiring the good of those patients for their own sake, and if that were the case, then we might properly speak of his loving the patients.¹⁷ A similar phenomenon might even be thought possible for the sheep. But it is not just a disposition toward acting to bring about the good of the object that qualifies as love but rather the disposition toward desiring the good of the beloved object for its own sake.¹⁸ Neither the disposition toward acting nor even actual action to contribute to the good of the other is a sufficient condition for love.

Moreover, actual actions to bring about the good of the other are not only not a sufficient condition for love but also arguably not even a necessary condition. A man may love his wife in the contributory sense of having a disposition toward desiring her good for her own sake but may not be able to act. One might imagine the husband being imprisoned in jail in a foreign country, with a life sentence and with no mode of communication with his wife being possible; he may also know that his wife has only three months to live because of a terminal cancer. In such a state, he is unable to directly act to contribute to her good and will not be able to do so during the remainder of her life.¹⁹ Yet we would likely still say that he loves her, on account of his continued disposition toward desiring her good for her own sake, even though he may be entirely unable to act on those desires.

A disposition toward desiring the good of the beloved object will in general result in a disposition toward acting to bring about the good of the object but may not always. Examples are conceivable in which someone genuinely has a disposition toward desiring the good of another but does not have the disposition toward acting to achieve that good because of, for example, lethargy, sloth,

17 Moreover, if this were the doctor's general pattern of interacting with patients, we might even be willing to say that the doctor loves not just those particular patients but even patients generally, as a class. The particular object of contributory love may be the specific individual patient, or in some cases, for some doctors, it might be the class of patients. Contributory love as a disposition toward desiring the good of the object for its own sake does arguably require familiarity, but if the object is taken as the class of all patients, the doctor might be properly said to have familiarity with this class and to have a disposition toward desiring patients' good for their own sake.

18 Hacker in fact uses the examples of the doctor and shepherd to argue against the idea of love being a disposition, but his examples are sufficient only to show that a disposition toward *acting* does not constitute love (*The Passions*); the examples are not in tension with the characterization of love as a particular disposition toward *desiring* the good of the other.

19 It is not entirely clear whether it would be appropriate to say that the husband has a disposition toward acting to bring about the good of his wife. Saying that he has a disposition toward acting might still be considered to be appropriate insofar as in the counterfactual scenario in which he were not imprisoned, he would act according to his desire for his wife's good. However, clearly, in actuality, he cannot act.

lack of knowledge, inattentiveness, or some deficiency of character, or simply because the disposition toward desiring the good of the other is weak. These considerations then bring us to questions of the strength of love and of loving well to which we will now turn, along with other potentially problematic or paradoxical examples concerning love.

4. THE STRENGTH AND INTENSITY OF LOVE

A disposition toward desiring the good of another for his or her own sake conceivably might not result in a disposition toward acting, possibly because the disposition of desiring is simply too weak. It may be dominated by other dispositions and motivations; action may not result, nor even any notable disposition toward action. The issue here then pertains to the strength or intensity of love.

If the account of love as a type of disposition toward desiring is correct, then the potency of love might be considered both with respect to the strength of the disposition in terms of the frequency of its operation and with respect to the intensity of desire that arises from it. A love might be considered weak either with respect to the disposition not being strong or with respect to the desire that results from the disposition not being intense. In some cases, the desire may be intense but the disposition not regularly operative: a woman may have an intense desire to ski each year upon the first snowfall, but once that desire is satisfied, it may not arise again until the following year. In other cases, the disposition may be strong insofar as it is frequently operative, even though the desire it generates is not especially intense: a man might consistently desire to have a sparkling water every day following his coffee; the desire for the water may not be especially intense, but it is always present; the disposition is strong even though the desire is not intense. The strength of the disposition in terms of frequency of operation might be considered both with regard to its numerical recurrence and with respect to the circumstances under which the disposition is operative. If a slight alteration of circumstances renders the otherwise regular disposition inoperative, then we would not generally speak of a strong love. In contrast, if the disposition toward desiring is operative even in the face of various obstacles and costs, we might speak of a strong, or, in the contributory case, perhaps even sacrificial, love.

We are arguably most likely to speak of loves as “loves,” rather than mere “likings,” when at least either the disposition is strong or the corresponding desire is intense, or both. A love that is both intense in the desire it generates and strong in terms of the frequency of its being felt may often occupy an important place in one’s life. Hacker thus also speaks of perhaps yet another dimension of love’s potency—the “depth of love,” which he describes as “the

manner in which it penetrates manifold levels of the personality of the lover, by its grip on the imagination, by the weight of the reasons for thought and action with which it furnishes the lover, by the extent to which it motivates behavior, and by its giving meaning to one's life."²⁰ Certainly, the intensity and strength will have an effect on love's depth, thus described. But the depth of love is also related to the fact that love, and the relationship of the lover to the beloved object, in some sense has a history—a beginning, development, present state, and future expectations.²¹ It is possible for the present state of a love to be not especially intense in feeling, or not frequently felt as a disposition, and yet still have depth because of the history of love within that relationship, as might occur in long-standing friendships, in marriage, or with family relationships.

However, returning to the considerations above, the issues of the strength and intensity of love can help us make better sense of cases in which the disposition toward desiring may be present but the disposition toward acting absent. In most circumstances, a strong, intense love will result in a disposition toward acting and in actual action. Thus, many of our judgments concerning the love of one person for another are based on actions. In much of life, it is easier to assess the actions of another than it is to assess their dispositions toward desiring. In most contexts, this is reasonable because a strong, intense love will typically result in action. However, again, this may not necessarily be the case, as a result of some physical impossibility, the love not being very strong, or the love being dominated by other loves and motivations. It might also not result in action, or at least not in actions that achieve the good of the other, because of lack of understanding as to how to act or as to what constitutes the good of the other, or out of mere inattentiveness or lethargy. This brings us to considerations of loving well.

5. LOVING WELL

Conceiving of love as a disposition toward desiring union with the beloved or toward desiring good for the beloved can give rise to what, on the face of it, may seem like paradoxical situations. Someone may desire the good of another

20 Hacker, *The Passions*, 304. He describes the "intensity" of love as that which is "exhibited in essentially associated emotions; the intensity of joy at reciprocated love, the intensity of the anxiety felt when the person one loves is endangered, the intensity of the delight in joint activities and successful projects, the intensity of the longing for the person one loves when absent and of the joy when reunited, in the grief of bereavement, and so forth" (304). But presumably the *intensity* of all of these essentially associated emotions arises principally from the intensity of the desire itself to be united with the beloved, or to contribute to the beloved's good, or both.

21 Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship"; Hacker, *The Passions*.

but, because of a lack of understanding, act in such a way so as not to attain that good, or even so as to cause harm. Alternatively, someone might desire the good of another and act so as to attain it, but the beloved may understand the good very differently and may not see the actions as loving. Are such examples then truly instances of love?

Concerning the first situation, an overly indulgent mother might genuinely desire what is good for her son and believe she is providing what is good for him by her actions. However, by giving in to the son's every whim, she may in fact be causing him harm. Her always giving in may prevent him from developing patience, fortitude, and self-control. Her continually providing him with sweets may cause harm to his health. Does she then love her son? In the definition of love proposed above, one would say yes, she does love him (even in the contributory sense) if the mother desires the son's good for his own sake. However, while the mother desires the son's good and genuinely believes that her actions are contributing to it, she is mistaken as to what contributes to his good. We might then say that she loves her son, but she is not loving him *well*. Her beliefs and actions are such that although she desires his good, she does not in fact contribute toward it. In this example, the mother's beliefs about what actually constitutes the son's good are in some sense deficient. As a variation of this example, one might alternatively imagine that the mother in fact understands what is good for her son, realizes it is best not to give in to his desires, and understands that excessive sweets may harm his health, but when he begs for them, she nevertheless, in spite of knowing better, gives in. She may thus genuinely desire the good of her son, and even know what constitutes that good, but because of weakness of character or lack of fortitude, she does not act in such a way to attain the desired end. Once again, we might say that she loves her son, but she is not loving well. In each of these cases, while the disposition constituting love is present, some deficiency in knowledge or character prevents the mother from appropriately acting to achieve the goal of her desires—her son's good.

We may thus say that love is indeed constituted by a particular disposition toward desiring the beloved or union with the beloved, or desiring good for the beloved, but that loving *well* is constituted by having knowledge, strength of character, and, whenever possible, actions so as to in fact render the attaining of good for the beloved, or union with the beloved, more likely. It would follow from this that stronger or more intense interpersonal loves will characteristically also entail the desire to love well, since this may be what is needed to actually attain the desired good.

Consider now one further related example in which the lover genuinely desires the good of the beloved and acts rightly so as to attain it, but the beloved does not understand his own good in a similar way. It is possible that the lover's

idea of what is good is, in some sense, correct, but if the beloved does not view the lover's action as loving, as seeking his own good, is this indeed still love? We might now imagine a mother who does genuinely want to develop her son's character and to provide him with a healthy diet, and so acts accordingly and resists her son's demands and desires for excessive sweets. We might imagine her son being very upset at this, persisting in his desires and perhaps feeling unloved because his mother does not give in to them. Here, we would again say that the mother loves the son because she consistently desires his good. We might even say that she is, for the most part, loving him well because she is resisting his demands for what is not good for him. She might even feel torn about giving him sweets, desiring to please him and wanting his love, but desiring also his ultimate good.²² However, if as a result of her actions or the way in which she goes about resisting, the son feels unloved, then we might be hesitant to say that she is loving well.

Human experience clearly indicates that one of the strongest and most universal human desires is the desire to feel loved. Feeling loved—both feeling desired by another and feeling that the other is seeking one's own good—is a part of one's own well-being; it affirms one's value and dignity.²³ Thus, if someone is genuinely seeking the good of another, this will include seeking to make the person *feel* loved—seeking to make the other feel that one desires the good of, and desires to be with, that person. Because feeling loved is a part of the good of the beloved, contributory love for the beloved will in general entail trying to communicate that love to the beloved. Loving well will, to the extent possible, involve trying to effectively communicate to the beloved that desire to contribute to the good of the beloved and to be with the beloved. In the case of the mother, it will involve not only resisting her son's inappropriate demands but also explaining why she is doing so, and that she loves him and wants what is good for him, and that this is the reason for her acting as she does. Such communication may not be effective, but contributory love will, if the mother is loving well, attempt to have the son feel that he is loved, even while resisting his desires.

If someone has a genuine, consistent desire for the good of the beloved, such love will also not be entirely inattentive to the beloved's desires being unmet. The lover who desires the good of the beloved will realize that unfulfilled desire is partially constitutive of some lack of good on the part of the

22 In more extreme cases, contributory and unitive love may be opposed. Someone may desire to be with the beloved as a source of delight but also know that in the circumstances, this is bad for the beloved, so that to contribute to their good one ought to depart.

23 See Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," and Pieper, *About Love*, for an account of how someone's being and feeling loved can give rise to this sense of their own value and worth or an affirmation of the goodness of their being.

beloved, even if circumstances are such that it is indeed genuinely best for those desires to remain unfulfilled. The loving mother will not give in to her son's demands but will nevertheless be attentive to the fact that his desires remain unsatisfied. Loving well—the desiring and rightly understanding and acting so as to achieve the good of the other—will not involve giving in to those demands and desires, but it may involve trying to change them. The seeking the good of the beloved may require trying to change the son's perceptions and desires so that they also are genuinely for what is good.

6. THE UNION OF UNITIVE AND CONTRIBUTORY LOVE AND THE RECIPROCITY OF LOVE

Especially with human relations, unitive and contributory love often occur together. Indeed, this is generally what we desire in our relationships. It is arguably what underlies friendship. It is what most hope for in marriage. However, the coming together of unitive and contributory forms of love can occur with objects other than persons. It may occur for a country in which one desires both to remain within one's country and to contribute to its good. It may occur with a work project concerning which one desires both to spend time on the project and to advance it toward its goal.

The disjunctive nature of the proposed analytic definition of "love" may also explain occasional disputes over what constitutes love in interpersonal relationships or what the essence of love truly is. As noted above, we sometimes hear statements along the lines of "we may call that 'love,' but it is not really love" or that "it is not true love." This can arise both with unitive and contributory forms of love. It might be said of a young man with strong attraction to a woman, "he desires to be with her, but he does nothing to help her; that is not true love."²⁴ Unitive love may be present, but contributory love mostly lacking. However, the reverse may be the case. In a context in which relations between husband and wife have grown cold, it might also be said, "she wants to help him, but she doesn't really even like being with him any longer; that is not real love."²⁵ Here, contributory love might be present, with unitive love weak. What may

24 A more extreme example might be constituted by attempts at purely sexual relationships. Each person may have a disposition to desire sexual union with the other as a source of delight. Someone might even say "I *love* her," perhaps intending nothing more than "loving to have sexual intercourse with her," but this may again be met with the response "that is not really love."

25 The doctor considered in section 3, who had developed a disposition to desire the good of a patient for her own sake, might be analogous. We might hesitate to say that he loved the patient if the desire to be with the patient was entirely absent.

be in view in these cases is the fact that either unitive or contributory love is absent. In ordinary language, we tend to use the word “love” when at least one of unitive love or contributory love is present, but we may not make reference to “true love.”²⁶ With respect to interpersonal relationships, there is often a sense that the two *ought* to go together or that the deepest forms of love, or real love, involve both. There can thus be some ambivalence, especially when the question is explicitly raised, as to whether it is appropriate to call a particular disposition “love” when only one of unitive or contributory love is present. In such cases, some may refer to this as love in their ordinary speech, and others may not.

The possibility that only one, versus both, of unitive and contributory love is present effectively creates space for dispute as to whether it is appropriate to say “X loves Y.” Within the context of interpersonal relationships, some may be willing to make this assertion, and others may not because either unitive or contributory love is lacking.²⁷ There can thus be disagreement over the use of the word even when there is agreement on the facts, and expressions such as “that is not really love” perhaps especially arise in such contexts. The claim made in this paper is thus that the disjunction of unitive and contributory love is a necessary condition for our ordinary language use of “X loves Y,” but this disjunction is only a sufficient condition for it being the case that *some* people will, in their ordinary speech, assert that “X loves Y.” Given that we use “X loves Y” disjunctively for many objects of love but often expect unitive and contributory love to accompany one another in interpersonal relationships, we perhaps then ought to expect some ambiguity over the appropriateness of “love” when the object of love is a person. This equivocation is a feature of our language concerning love, which makes it yet more difficult to analyze. However, when we appreciate the disjunctive nature of many of our uses of “love,” we can see also that this very equivocation helps us understand how the word “love” is used: ordinary language expressions such as

26 See Earp, Do, and Knobe, “The Ordinary Concept of True Love,” for experimental evidence that when “true love” is used in English it pertains either to love being especially good or valuable or to the reality of certain psychological states, rather than to love that is highly prototypical. The analysis of love as valuing a relationship given by Kolodny might be understood as an account of the conditions under which we would typically describe love truly as *real* interpersonal love—when we might say, “X really does love Y” (“Love as Valuing a Relationship,” 151). He does, however, also clearly recognize ordinary language uses of “love” outside those characterized by his account (137).

27 While the expectation that unitive and contributory love ought both be present is perhaps especially strong when the object of love is a person, that expectation can arise with other objects of love as well. Even if someone consistently desires good for his town of origin, we might hesitate to say that the person loves his hometown if he never desires to return to it. Some may be willing to speak of the person’s “love for his hometown”; others may say “that is not really love.”

“that is not *really* love” helpfully allow us to distinguish between cases in which just one, versus both, of unitive and contributory love is present.

The expectation that unitive and contributory love will often accompany one another is, however, not merely a linguistic phenomenon; it is arguably grounded in the very nature of these various aspects of love. Some of the reason both unitive and contributory love often seem to accompany one another may be because of the effects that each can have on the other. In contributory love, by desiring and seeking the good of the other, we may more closely engage with the other, and it is then also possible that our affections become more attached to the other and that we then more consistently desire to also be with the beloved. In unitive love, in seeking to be with the other and in actually being with the other, we see opportunities to contribute to their good, our affections may become more attached, and we may more strongly desire their good, giving rise to a stronger contributory love as well.

Both unitive and contributory love also have the capacity to evoke reciprocity from the beloved. Contributory love can give rise to consistent desire of the beloved to be with the lover, since the lover has become a source of good for the beloved. Unitive love can likewise sometimes give rise to consistent desire of the beloved to be with the lover, insofar as the lover’s unitive love may lead to the beloved feeling valued and thus wanting to further experience this sense of worth. This may also subsequently give rise to the beloved’s having contributory love toward the lover, possibly in part to demonstrate a sense of worthiness to the lover, so as to be further desired by the lover. The lover’s contributory love will often likewise give rise to contributory love on the part of the beloved, a phenomenon closely related to what is sometimes referred to as “reciprocal altruism.”²⁸ The relative weights of the various explanations for such reciprocal altruism are disputed, but the phenomenon itself is well documented.

Certainly, there are exceptions to the phenomenon of contributory love giving rise to unitive love, to unitive giving rise to contributory, or to unitive or contributory love evoking reciprocity. Contributing toward another’s good may evoke reciprocity, but it can sometimes evoke resentment; such resentment can, moreover, result in the lover’s desiring to withdraw. Unreciprocated unitive love can sometimes result in a sense of revulsion or disgust of the beloved toward the lover. This can occasionally result in a redoubling of the lover’s efforts but can also, especially if the repulsion persists over time, result in the lover ceasing to seek the beloved’s good or presence. While contributory and unitive love often evoke reciprocity, and often one leads to the other, these phenomena clearly do not always play out in this manner.

28 Trivers, “The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism.”

However, when unitive and contributory forms of love are both present, the effects both on the lover and on the beloved can be powerful, and yet more so when they are reciprocated. Unitive and contributory love together will then involve seeking both to be with and to benefit the other. The ensuing actions to contribute to the good of the other may further reinforce the disposition to desire the other's well-being. The seeking the good of the other will strengthen the affection underlying the disposition to desire the other. That one's own well-being depends on the well-being of the other strengthens the effect yet further. The seeking to be with the other, and the being in the presence of the other, may further motivate seeking the good of the other and may provide additional insight as to how to do so. The desire for union with the other may prompt a lover's desire for reciprocity, to have the beloved also desire union with the lover.²⁹ This may further prompt a desire to contribute to the beloved's well-being in hope of bringing about that reciprocity. The beloved's knowing this desire and feeling loved, the lover's seeing the beloved's delight at receiving some good, or the confirmation that the beloved recognizes that such contributions were intended as an expression of love will strengthen both forms of love yet further. These experiences can powerfully affect the lover.

When the beloved similarly has both contributory and unitive love toward the lover, the same dynamic again comes into play, potentially creating a powerful interplay of reciprocity, a virtuous cycle of love. Moreover, when both unitive and contributory love are mutual, the very presence of the lover contributes to the good of the beloved insofar as this is what the beloved desires: because of the beloved's desire to be united, the lover's unitive love itself can also become a contributory form of love. The result of the reciprocity of both unitive and contributory love—the merging of the two and the feedback and interplay of reciprocity—can of course be emotionally powerful, potentially culminating in a sense of ecstasy. When the intensity of desire is heightened yet further in romantic love—with unitive love taking on a sexual dimension, along with the powerful physiological and emotional forces that accompany this—being entirely overwhelmed by, and with, the beloved is not uncommon. The power of the union of unitive and contributory love, especially when it is reciprocal, can feel euphoric and enrapturing, as documented throughout art, literature, poetry, drama, film, and personal narratives. Perhaps because of this potential for reciprocal contributory and unitive love together to have such strength, intensity, and depth, there is sometimes hesitation to use “love” for

29 Interpersonal unitive love will in general entail a disposition toward desiring a reciprocation of love from the beloved in part because the union that is principally desired is more likely to be attained if the beloved also desires it and in part because the desired union may itself be constituted by a mutual desiring to be with the other—a union of affections.

any of the various less powerful loves and sometimes hesitation to utter the words “I love you,” both as concerns whether the use of the word is appropriate and as concerns what may ensue if these words are spoken to another.

7. SPECIFIC OBJECTS OF LOVE

In this section, I would like to briefly address various types of love or objects of love that may initially seem to fall outside the proposed analytic definition of love as a particular disposition toward desiring (union with) the other or desiring the good of the other. Each of these objects of love unquestionably merits greater attention than will be given here, and my primary goal in this section will be simply to argue that contrary to what may seem at first glance, these other types of love or objects of love do in fact conform to the proposed definition. In what follows, I will briefly consider love of God; love of neighbor, stranger, and enemy; self-love; and love of pets.

In monotheistic religions, considerable emphasis is placed on “love of God.” Love of God, in its unitive sense, would, if rendered according to the proposed definition, be “a disposition toward desiring union with God, either as an end itself or with it being a source of delight in itself.” From the standpoint of these religious traditions (both in general and especially within religious mystical traditions), such union is often construed as the primary end of human life. Love of God, in its contributory sense, would be rendered as “a disposition toward desiring good for God for God’s own sake.” Theologically, this might be seen as somewhat more problematic, but perhaps it is still intelligible with regard to the possibility of bringing about the good on earth that God desires in order to please God. Perhaps the greater challenge that the notion of love of God poses to the proposed analytic definition of love in this paper is the fact that, in these traditions, the love of God is *commanded*. If love is a disposition toward desiring, then how can desire be commanded? Even here, however, I believe a resolution is possible in terms of the theological understandings within the religious traditions themselves. One possible cause of unitive love is simply the apprehension that something constitutes a good for oneself, and thus is in some sense desirable. Such an apprehension is not sufficient for love, because it may be dominated by other desires, or one may become distracted, but such an apprehension can, sometimes at least, be a cause of love. In the case of love of God, in its unitive sense, the command to love might be understood to be fulfillable insofar as it is a command to understand God as the greatest good and therefore something to be desired.³⁰ Moreover, if it is thought that from

30 Cf. Aquinas, *ST II.II.44.1.4*.

God being the highest good it follows that God is worthy that each should contribute to God's good by seeking to carry out on earth what God allegedly desires, then contributory love for God could likewise be commanded.

Another potential cause of love may be a vow, agreement, or covenant. While it may be inappropriate to vow to desire a particular object, it is arguably not inappropriate to vow to be with or to seek the good of an object. One arguably cannot appropriately make vows concerning desires, but one can do so for actions. Moreover, a possible course of action is to seek to alter the dispositions of one's desires. Furthermore, once such a vow is in place, the vow itself can give rise to desire insofar as one desires to fulfill the vow. This does not on its own constitute love if these desires arise only *for the sake of the vow*. However, the vow may create and sustain a desire to be with the other and a desire for the other's good. If eventually that sustained desire gives rise to a disposition toward desiring to be with the other *as its own end* or to contribute to the good of the other *for the other's sake*, then the vow has itself effectively created love. A dynamic of this sort is arguably sometimes operative in marital vows, and later in the next section, I will consider this in greater detail. However, in certain instances it seems that a vow itself might, at times, give rise to love. This notion of vow or covenant was especially important in the Jewish understanding of the law and the love of God and was appropriated also by the Christian tradition.³¹ Such covenants or vows likewise provide another way to understand the command to love God.

The Jewish law, the New Testament, and the Qur'an also speak of, and even command, "love of neighbor," with the Jewish law extending this to "stranger" (Deuteronomy 10:19) and the New Testament even to "enemy" (Matthew 10:44). The context in all of these cases suggests love in a contributory sense of seeking good for one's neighbor or stranger or enemy, which would thus, under the proposed definition, be rendered as a "disposition toward desiring good for one's neighbor [stranger/enemy] for his or her own sake."³² Such contributory love, as a disposition, seems conceptually unproblematic except for the fact that, once again, it is commanded. However, under the exposition Aquinas gives, such contributory love for neighbor follows from and is derivative from one's love

31 Levenson, *The Love of God*.

32 Such love of neighbor may require a different analysis from the preferential love that arises within the context of a relationship (Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship"). In instances of love of neighbor in which there is no prior relationship, we might be more inclined to say "X is showing love" than "X loves Y" or "X really does love Y" (see footnote 17), where Y denotes the name of a person, though we might well still say "X loves his neighbor" or "X loves the stranger." The object of love with love of neighbor in the analytic characterization proposed here is arguably the person as a member of the class of neighbors.

for God.³³ As framed above, love of God, in its contributory sense, would be the disposition toward desiring to contribute to God's good, where that good is itself understood as bringing about the good on earth that God desires. However, the good that God desires includes good for one's neighbor, for the neighbor's sake. Thus, a disposition toward desiring to contribute to good for God entails a disposition toward desiring good for one's neighbor, for the neighbor's sake. In Aquinas's understanding, love of God and love of neighbor constitute a single precept with the latter effectively encompassed by the former, but with the latter explicitly articulated so as to make that entailment clear.³⁴ Within this understanding, it becomes comprehensible how love of neighbor, conceived of principally as a disposition toward desiring the good of one's neighbor, could be commanded, because it follows from love of God. While love of neighbor or stranger or enemy is arguably to be understood principally as love in its contributory sense, Stump argues that within the Christian tradition, there is also a unitive sense of love for neighbor or enemy, insofar as there ought to be a desire for final union with neighbor and even enemy, in union with God, in the life to come.³⁵ In any case, it seems love of neighbor, stranger, and enemy, and even the command to love, can be given a coherent rendering under the proposed analytic definition.

Let us now briefly consider self-love. The expression "self-love" is sometimes used simply to indicate selfishness or self-centeredness. There is, however, also a more morally neutral form of self-love, which might be understood as love in its contributory sense with oneself as the object of that love. Self-love thus understood would then be rendered as "a disposition toward desiring good for oneself for one's own sake." This disposition of self-love is natural and essentially inescapable. It is arguably this disposition of self-love, thus understood, that provides the sense and force to the command "Love thy neighbor *as thyself*." However, with respect to self-love, when this natural disposition of self-love severely neglects the good of others, we often speak of "selfishness," and when this disposition of self-love mentally dominates someone's life, we sometimes speak of "self-centeredness." However, self-love more generally can be understood simply as contributory love, with oneself as the object. Whether there is also a unitive sense of self-love is somewhat more obscure. It is not, on the face of it, clear what it would mean to desire oneself or union with oneself.³⁶ Accordingly, Hacker notes, "One cannot fall in love with oneself. . . . Nor can one yearn for reciprocity from oneself. . . . One cannot wish to share one's

33 Cf. Aquinas, *ST* II.II.25.1, II.II.44.2.

34 Aquinas, *ST* II.II.44.2.

35 Stump, "Love, By All Accounts."

36 Cf. Stump, "Love, By All Accounts."

experiences with oneself. . . . One cannot miss oneself, long for oneself, or long to be reunited with oneself.”³⁷ However, if the “union” were understood as that of perception, then a coherent understanding might be retained. Unitive love, with oneself as the object, might then be rendered as a “disposition toward desiring the perception of oneself, either as an end itself or with it being a source of delight in itself.” That perception of oneself might be principally physical or more generally how one views oneself as a person. There can certainly be a healthy natural desire to find some satisfaction or pleasure in the view one has of oneself, and we sometimes might refer to that as “self-esteem.” However, when that disposition toward desiring the perception of oneself physically, as a source of delight, becomes extreme, we would often refer to this as “vanity.” When that disposition toward desiring and delighting in the perception of oneself, as a person, becomes excessive, we might sometimes refer to this as “pride.” Thus, while the primary sense of self-love is arguably love in its contributory sense, it seems also that there is a coherent secondary sense of self-love in its unitive form, with this union being understood as self-perception.

Finally, as to objects of love, let us consider love of pets. An owner’s love of a pet, in consistently desiring to be with it or contribute to its good, seems unproblematic. The question of the pet’s love of its owner is perhaps more complex. Hacker claims that while an owner may love a pet, it is not truly proper to speak of a pet loving its owner because “the complexity of the emotion of love involves cognitive, cogitative, mnemonic, and imaginative abilities that are beyond the powers of non-human animals that lack a developed language.”³⁸ Nevertheless, we often do, in ordinary language, also hear speech about a pet’s love for its master. Here the distinction between unitive and contributory love and the disjunctive nature of the proposed definition may help. If unitive love is conceived of as a pet’s disposition toward desiring union with its master (i.e., being with its master), with such union being a source of delight in itself, then, arguably, manifesting such a disposition toward desiring is within the behavioral repertoire of a pet, even without language.³⁹ Hacker grants that “pets may show great affection for their master or mistress, and even pine away.”⁴⁰ However, contributory love, which in this case would be construed as a pet’s disposition toward desiring good for its master *for the master’s own sake*, is arguably outside of a pet’s behavioral repertoire. While a pet may have a disposition toward desiring good for its master, there is nothing within the pet’s behavioral repertoire that

37 Hacker, *The Passions*, 325.

38 Hacker, *The Passions*, 273.

39 This point arguably also pertains to an infant’s love for his or her mother.

40 Hacker, *The Passions*, 273.

allows us to distinguish whether the pet's behavior is done for the master's own sake or to somehow benefit the pet itself. Here, with regard to contributory love, one might agree with Hacker that such contributory love "involves cognitive, cogitative, mnemonic, and imaginative abilities that are beyond the powers of non-human animals that lack a developed language." However, that pets arguably can manifest unitive love may explain why we hear speech about pets loving their masters and not only speech about masters loving their pets.

Love may clearly be manifest in a variety of relationships. However, the nature of these types of relationships and also the cultural background and customs within which they operate can be highly variable. The forms of union that are appropriate between a parent and child, or between friends, or between spouses are all very different. Likewise, the good that one can contribute to a child, parent, friend, spouse, enemy, or stranger may be very different. In light of the diversity of "historically conditioned forms of reaction, expression, and response, as well as historically different motives for different kinds of actions," Hacker argues that, in contrast to other emotions:

The historicity of love is not merely a matter of different objects of love, but different emotions of love. The love of God, for example, is not "just like" the love of a man or woman, but for the fact that what one loves is God, not a human being. The *criteria* for loving God are very different from the criteria for loving a man or woman. . . . The *responses* that characterize these forms of love are altogether different, and so too are the ways in which such love is *expressed* in word and deed. . . . The differences between these social and historical forms of love are altogether unlike the differences in possible objects of fear at different times . . . where one might indeed say that the emotion is the same, the criteria for its ascription are the same, the web of subjective feeling and expression is the same, and only its objects change.⁴¹

While it is certainly the case that how love is *expressed* differs considerably by object, I hope to have shown in the preceding discussion that there is in fact more unity to the criteria for its ascription than Hacker suggests. There is diversity in the objects of love and the ways that love manifests itself, but there is a conceptual unity. With regard to diversity, Stump refers to the various types of relationships as "offices" that can powerfully shape the appropriate form of union and the appropriate good that can be contributed.⁴² Stump notes that

41 Hacker, *The Passions*, 280–81.

42 Stump, "Love, By All Accounts." Cf. Kraut, "Love De Re"; Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 139.

unitive forms of love will sometimes be more responsive to the intrinsic characteristics, and changes therein, of the beloved than contributory love.⁴³ However, the office, or history of the relationship or love, can also provide reasons for contributory love and unitive love to persist.⁴⁴ How each office is understood may differ by culture and by historical period, which further shapes how love in its unitive and contributory forms is experienced and expressed. There is thus diversity in the objects or offices and variability in the cultural and historical diversity as to how those offices are understood, but there is arguably yet still a unity in the criteria for ascribing love, namely, as “a disposition toward either (1) desiring a perceived good or desiring union with it, either as an end itself or with it being a source of delight in itself or (2) desiring good for a particular object for its own sake.”

8. SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I will conclude this essay with some practical considerations pertaining to and possible implications of the proposed definition of love as it relates to love (i) being a disposition, (ii) toward desiring, and (iii) in one or both of its unitive or contributory forms.

Society, it seems clear, would benefit from promoting greater contributory love. If each person is seeking the good of others, for their own sake, that good will likely more effectively be attained. Of course, most, or all, also desire fulfillment in some form of interpersonal unitive love, and this too can often result in the attainment of some good, though it can likewise result in actions that hinder the good for others and possibly even for oneself and for the beloved. However, if our loves can sometimes help bring about various goods, and if both loves are understood as dispositions toward desiring good of various kinds, this raises the questions of how such dispositions can be fostered and when it is right to do so.

How might love then be facilitated? This question seems more straightforward for unitive love than for contributory love. For unitive love, the mere recognition that the object is good for oneself has some potential to bring

43 In “Love, By All Accounts,” Stump argues that an understanding of love that accommodates both unitive and contributory desires can make sense (a) of the lack of substitutability of individuals with similar intrinsic characteristics, which “responsiveness” or “quality” theories (with love arising from attributes of the beloved; e.g., Jollimore, *Love’s Vision*) have trouble explaining; (b) of there being *reasons* for love that more “volitional” accounts (with love simply being a decision to seek the other’s good; e.g., Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*) have trouble with; and (c) of the phenomenon of love at first sight that “relational” accounts (with love arising from a relationship over time; e.g., Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship”) have trouble with.

44 Cf. Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship”; Hacker, *The Passions*.

about love, though there may be competition from love for other goods and the resulting love consequently may not be strong.⁴⁵ With contributory love, such love might arise if someone is seen as worthy of contributing good toward, which may come from the nature of the relationship or office, as with children; or possibly from a sense of moral obligation or even a vow; or from the recognition of the inherent human dignity of the person.⁴⁶ These things are not sufficient for love but may give rise to it. These things are not sufficient for love in part because love is not simply a disposition toward action, for which a vow might be sufficient, but a disposition toward desiring. The recognition of human dignity, or of an important relationship, moral obligation, or vow, may give rise to a disposition toward desiring the other's good, but it may not.

We might wonder, however, whether desire matters if moral obligations, a relational office, or human dignity sometimes suffice for action. A disposition toward acting for the other's good could of course itself accomplish a great deal. To see the importance of desiring the other's good, in addition to acting, it may be helpful to consider marriage once again. It is not an uncommon occurrence to hear spouses complain that they have "fallen out of love" or no longer feel the love that they used to. If the experience of love were simply a disposition toward acting for the good of the other or toward being with the other, the aforementioned complaints within marriage might be less frequent. In married life, often the presence of the other becomes routine. Likewise, habits and patterns of behavior—cooking, cleaning, repairing the car, providing an income—are established that make contributing toward the good of the other become routine. Because the spouse's presence and actions occur routinely, desire is no longer strongly felt and the experience of "feeling love" fades. This can be problematic if that feeling of love *for* the other and *from* the other is itself desired.

45 Thus, in Aquinas, the cause of love is the good (*ST* I.II.27.1).

46 Velleman's exposition of love might be understood as an account of the proper grounds for love, which is an appreciation of human dignity and personhood in its universal essential aspects. However, what that love constitutes is arguably, as proposed here, a particular disposition toward desiring to be united with the other or desiring the other's good. Proper appreciation of the other's human dignity might be viewed as sufficient grounds for both dispositions (Stump, "Love, By All Accounts"; Velleman, "Love as Moral Emotion"). Velleman, however, acknowledges that both because of our limited capacity to adequately appreciate the personhood of others and because of the practical constraints of time, we end up loving certain individuals and not others, and that this love might thus arise from a variety of other particular—perhaps sometimes even incidental—reasons (Jollimore, *Love's Vision*) or because of the office or relationship (Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship"). However, such things can also in turn give rise to someone's capacity to properly appreciate someone else's value as a person (Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion").

The problem, then, of love in marriage, when one's presence and contributions become routine, would thus seem often to amount to that of rekindling desire.

Given the natural reciprocity of both unitive and contributory love, a rekindling of desire may be accomplished by simple expressions of desire, either to be with the other or for the other's good, and might help reassure the spouse of that desire and help elicit similar reciprocal expressions of desire. Expressions of affection, thoughtful remarks, and unexpected gifts, especially when they depart from routine, might likewise often be taken as a sign of genuine desire for the spouse's good. Even periods of absence might help the rekindling of desire for the other or help to contribute to his or her good. Conversely, expressions of disdain, contempt, or revulsion, even if only uttered in a heated moment and even if there is a commitment to remain with the other, will keep a spouse from feeling loved because such things contradict the *desire* to be with the other. The presence of the other, the other's commitment, the other's contributing toward one's good are not enough to feel loved. It is, additionally, a sense of desire from the other that will often be needed to feel loved. That desire alone may not be sufficient to feel loved—most would desire not merely to be loved but to be loved well, and such love, as discussed above, will generally result in thoughtful action. But if love is indeed the disposition toward desiring the other or good for the other, then we can make better sense of the phenomenon of sometimes not feeling loved within marriage, even when both spouses are present to one another and contributing to the other's good.

The relationship between desire and action in love is also of interest in marriage insofar as a marriage itself is traditionally initiated and formalized by vows. While it may seem that a vow could at most create a disposition toward acting to be with the other and acting to promote the good of the other, the vow itself might in fact also create the disposition toward desiring these things. At the very least, the vow may create a disposition toward desiring these things *for the sake of fulfilling the vow*. This would not on its own constitute love. The disposition toward desiring union with the other must be *an end itself or a source of delight in itself*, and the disposition toward desiring good for the other must be *for the other's sake* and not simply for the sake of fulfilling the vow. Nevertheless, the vow may help sustain the disposition toward desiring, and the accompanying actions, until a time at which the disposition toward desiring union with the other is once again for its own sake and the disposition toward desiring good for the other is once again for the other's sake, rather than simply for the sake of the vow.

Recognition of a moral obligation, of human dignity, or of one's relational office may thus each give rise to love. However, they will characteristically only do so if there is some sense of solidarity with the other, giving rise to a

consistent desire for their good. This, again, may be brought about by time spent with the other, by actions contributing toward their good, by recognition of their own intrinsic goodness, or by recognition of their being worthy to contribute good toward. Such a disposition toward desiring, and not only toward acting, is in turn important in facilitating the other's feeling valued. A disposition toward desiring is furthermore important because, not infrequently, our actions follow our passions and desires, especially when these are strong or when there is limited time to make use of reason; love might thereby facilitate right action and the seeking of the other's good.

The understanding of love as a disposition toward desiring also arguably has important implications with respect to love within the context of political life and with respect to how the media shapes these and other loves. Within a national context, it seems that love of one's community or country—possibly both unitive and contributory—will often prompt the attempt to bring about good for one's community or country, though this might sometimes be at the expense of other communities. Love for the beloved community can sometimes lead to hate for some other community. It seems plausible that love of *country* will often be more conducive to the good of many than will the love of a single *political party*. When love of both party and country are present, the relative strength and intensity of these loves may strongly shape political and societal life and well-being. It is conceivable that even if unitive love is stronger for one's party, contributory love might nevertheless be stronger for one's country, which would include those of other parties. As noted above, loving well, in the contributory sense, will also require awareness of others' understanding of the good, and, when necessary, trying to explain how their understanding might be incorrect, but above all, genuinely desiring their good.

Today, our loves, or sometimes lack thereof, are arguably also powerfully shaped by the media. The media routinely presents us with various goods that can awaken unitive love. The media likewise reports on individuals, actions, and groups, sometimes in a positive, though more often in a negative, light. This too shapes our loves and our sense of solidarity with others, with our country, and with groups with whom we may disagree. The media shapes our sense of whether we want to contribute some good to others (or of whether we think they are worthy of our attempting to do so) and of whether we want to be with them. Our witnessing of positive or negative events, conveyed by the media, shapes whether we go on to act altruistically toward others, which in turn affects the actions of those with whom we interact.⁴⁷ The media thus shapes

47 Fowler and Christakis present experimental evidence that the recipient of an action of goodwill is more likely to go on to act similarly and that the contagion effects of altruistic action may extend so far that a positive interaction between two persons can propagate

both our actions and our loves. That the content of news media has become dramatically more negative over the past several decades should thus be cause for concern.⁴⁸ The effect of each individual viewing is likely to be minimal. However, since there is both repeated exposure and vast reach, with subsequent contagion of either benevolent or hateful actions and words, the cumulative effects of media and news exposure on our love of neighbor is likely profound. If love is a disposition toward desiring and dispositions are often shaped slowly, each instance inclining one toward or away from a particular desire is important. The role of the media in facilitating or hampering love and solidarity, and the ensuing consequences for human action and human well-being, may be one of the most important, and neglected, moral questions of our age. Further reflection on this topic seems warranted.

In this concluding section, I have touched on some of the practical considerations that may arise from the proposed analytic definition of love. There are undoubtedly many others. Frankfurt, in fact, puts forward the controversial thesis that effectively all of our reasons for action are grounded in love.⁴⁹ The claim is found in Aquinas as well, who furthermore sees love as the cause of all the various passions.⁵⁰ I will not further discuss these questions here, but if anything close to these claims is true, it would indicate that love ought to receive considerably more philosophical attention than it has been given. I hope in this paper that by trying to give an analytic characterization as to how we use the word “love,” future reflection on the topic will be facilitated.

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through a social network and ultimately affect the interaction of two other persons, neither of whom know either person in the original pair (“Cooperative Behavior Cascades in Human Social Network”). In their experiments, they estimate that each additional contribution a subject initially makes to the public good is eventually tripled by other subjects who are directly or indirectly influenced to contribute more as a consequence.

48 Leetaru reports an approximately three-standard-deviation increase in the negative tone of news reporting from world broadcasts between 1979 and 2010 (“Forecasting Large-Scale Human Behavior Using Global News Media in Time and Space,” fig. 11).

49 Frankfurt argues that love is the “originating source of terminal value,” thereby binding us to our final ends and conferring on other things their instrumental value as means, and he thus concludes that “love is... the ultimate ground of practical rationality” (*The Reasons of Love*, 55–56).

50 On every action being done out of love, cf. Aquinas, *ST* I.II.28.6; on love as the cause of other passions, cf. *ST* I.II.25.4, I.II.27.4.

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