



Frankfurt, Harry G. *The Reasons of Love*. Pp. 101. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. US \$14.95 (paper). ISBN: 9780691191478.

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Published online: November 2020

<http://www.jprstudies.org>

Harry Frankfurt's, *The Reasons of Love* is based on compilation of lectures given in the year 2000 at Princeton University (Romanell-Phi Beta Kappa Lectures or under its general title "Some Thoughts about Norms, Love and the Goals of Life" lecture series) and University College London (Shearman Lectures) in 2001. In this short book, Frankfurt explores the question, 'how should a person live?' In doing so, Frankfurt proposes to clarify, 'what is it we love', 'what is important to us', and 'what do we care about'. I note that Frankfurt focuses on providing a general account of love rather than an account of a particular form of love like romantic love.

The Reasons of Love is divided into three chapters. To begin with, the book's first chapter entitled "The Question: How Should We Live?" focuses on caring. Frankfurt writes that caring provides us with a framework of aims and interests, within which we lead our lives. Frankfurt ends the chapter by claiming that love is a particular mode of caring. The second chapter entitled, "On Love, and Its Reasons" addresses that love is in fact the most important form of caring. In this chapter, Frankfurt explains that "love is, most centrally, a disinterested concern" (42) that we have for our beloved(s). The third chapter, "The Dear Self," focuses on Frankfurt's argument that the purest form of love is self-love. Frankfurt concludes that the most basic form of self-love is nothing more than the desire of a person to love.

It is chapter two, "On Love, and Its Reasons", which I believe is the most interesting to romance scholars and to the study of romance. Within this chapter, Frankfurt aims to explain the distinctive features of love. Frankfurt proposes that there are "four conceptually necessary" features which must entail love. For Frankfurt, these features are considered distinctive features of all love. Frankfurt argues that the four conceptually necessary features of love are as follows: (1) love consists of a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved; (2) love is ineluctably personal; (3) the lover identifies with his beloved and (4) love is "not under our direct and immediate voluntary control" (44). To give the reader a better understanding of what Frankfurt means, I will briefly explain these features below.

(1) Disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved

Frankfurt states that love is disinterested. According to Frankfurt, this means that you cannot genuinely love your beloved if you value your beloved instrumentally – that is, if you value your beloved as a means to your own selfish ends. In contrast, for a person to have a disinterested concern towards an object or a person means that the person’s attitude of concern is not based on their own personal interest. For Frankfurt, a case of disinterestedness could be the example of a politician who decides to create a policy on modern slavery and child labour. Even if he knows that this would not provide any new votes or any personal advantage, the politician still continues to push for this policy to be put in place. The politician creates this policy thus not for his own personal benefit but rather to safeguard and increase the well-being of those individuals who are suffering because of forced labour. The politician’s concern is aimed at helping those people for their sake rather than his own.

Frankfurt himself recognises that the way he construes disinterested concern may not fit romantic or sexual love because romantic or sexual love “includes a number of vividly distracting elements, which do not belong to the essential nature of love as a mode of disinterested concern” (43). For Frankfurt, the types of ‘distracting elements’ that may entail romantic love or sexual love would be things like infatuation, lust, obsession and possessiveness.

(2) Love is ‘ineluctably personal’

Frankfurt thinks that when we love someone, the love is personal. However, what makes the love personal are the unique features we believe our beloved has. Furthermore, these unique features are not repeatable. In other words, for the lover, their beloved’s unique features could not be seen in anybody else in the world. For Frankfurt, the lover cannot coherently choose another person as a substitute for their beloved, regardless of how similar that particular person may be to the beloved. This suggests that the lover must love their beloved for themselves – for the distinguishing personal features they have – rather than as an “instance of a type” (44). I would recommend Frankfurt’s essay ‘On Caring’ in his book *Necessity, Volition and Love*, which gives a much clearer understanding of Frankfurt’s view on what it means to love someone in a distinctively particular way.

(3) The Lover identifies with the beloved

Frankfurt writes

A lover identifies himself with what he loves. In virtue of this identification, protecting the interests of his beloved is necessarily among the lover’s own interests. The interests of his beloved are not actually other than his at all. They are his interests too (61).

Frankfurt thinks that love is much more than just disinterested concern. For Frankfurt, when someone loves their beloved they must take their beloved’s interests as their own. According to Frankfurt, the lover must identify with their beloved and to identify

with your beloved is when you share or take your beloved's interests as your own, and vice versa.

(4) Love is "not a matter of choice but is determined by the conditions that are outside our immediate voluntary control"

Frankfurt underlines that love is an attitude determined by conditions that are outside of our immediate voluntary control. Frankfurt argues that if we were able to choose whom we loved, we would also be able to stop loving at will. Yet, for Frankfurt, it would not be love if we could stop loving our beloved at will.

Frankfurt writes

The fact that we cannot directly and freely determine what we love and what we do not love, simply by making choices and decisions of our own, means that we are often susceptible to being more or less helplessly driven by the necessities that love entails (63).

Frankfurt thinks that though we cannot choose who we love, that does not mean we will always invest ourselves wisely when we love. According to Frankfurt, love always brings with it commitments that we cannot disengage from and yet such commitments do not make us any less autonomous. The reason being, for Frankfurt, is that even if we cannot choose whom or what we love, the constraints that love brings with it on our choices are our own because they are created by our will and so love cannot be seen to constrain our free will. For those interested in finding out about Frankfurt's view on how an action can be outside of our immediate control yet still be a product of our free will, I recommend Frankfurt's article "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" in *The Journal of Philosophy*.

I highly recommend Frankfurt's *The Reasons of Love* to romance scholars from all disciplines, even if that scholar is outside the author's main discipline of Philosophy. The book is easy to follow, especially with regards to the writing style and the philosophical argument. I do admit that this book is not a traditional scholarly monograph, and this may make its usefulness to romance scholarship more difficult to discern. Fortunately, Natasha McKeever has written a paper entitled, "What can we learn about Romantic Love from Harry Frankfurt's account of Love?", in the *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*. In the article, McKeever argues that we can learn some important things about romantic love from the four Frankfurtian features of love mentioned above. McKeever helps the reader to understand the limits and limitations of Frankfurt's features of love when applying them to romantic love. I would strongly recommend that romance scholars read McKeever's article after reading Frankfurt's *The Reasons of Love*.

Works Cited

- McKeever, Natasha. "What can we learn about Romantic Love from Harry Frankfurt's account of Love?" *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 14.3 (2019): 204-226.
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