The True, the Good and the Lovable: Frankfurt's Avoidance of Objectivity[1]

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In the title essay of Harry Frankfurt's first collection of essays[2], Frankfurt makes a plea for the importance of a topic rarely addressed by philosophers: what to care about. It is curious that the question of what is *worth* caring about comes up quite late in the essay and is treated as relatively peripheral. Even more curious is Frankfurt's answer: Some things, Frankfurt writes, may be important to a person independently of whether she cares about them.[3] But we care about many things that would not be important to us if we did not care about them - our individual friends, for example, and such activities as philosophy, basketball, or music. With respect to this category, Frankfurt's answer to the question of what to care about is striking: it is "suitable" he says to care about what it is *possible* for you to care about.[4] Care, in other words, about what you can. In "Duty and Love"[5] he writes in a similar vein about love.[6]

My main purpose in this paper will be to take issue with this provocative claim, or at least with the suggestion lurking behind it that the question of whether something is *worthy* of our love and concern is out of place. Though philosophers, perhaps especially moral philosophers, may tend to place too much importance on the worthiness of possible objects of love, the proper, albeit unexciting response, is to take a more moderate position rather than to reject the relevance of worth entirely. The bulk of this paper, then, is aimed at making this unexciting point and at exploring the

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[2] Harry G. Frankfurt, *The importance of what we care about* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[3] In personal correspondence, he explained that he has in mind things like background radiation or protein in one's diet that are important to something (such as health) that the person *does* care about. He did not intend to suggest that anything (even health, for example) might be important to a person independently of anything the person cares about. This is somewhat confusing in the text, for he writes that "the question of what to care about (construed as including the question of whether to care about anything) is one which must necessarily be important to him." *Ibid.*, p. 9. He immediately qualifies this, however, with the comment that even this may not be *sufficiently* important to the person to make it worth his while to care about it.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

[5] Harry G. Frankfurt, "Duty and Love," *Philosophical Explorations*, Vol. 1 (1), 1998, 4-9.

[6] Though Frankfurt does not discuss the relation between love and care at length, he evidently regards loving to be a type of caring – or, more precisely, he takes the varieties of loving to be types of caring. See "The importance of what we care about," *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

way in which worthiness does or should fit in to our considerations of what to love and care about.

The degree to which my position on this matter is opposed to Frankfurt's is not easy to pin down, for Frankfurt does not explicitly reject the relevance of worth entirely. He rather avoids the subject. But it is curious that Frankfurt's silence, or near silence, on the relevance of objective value to the questions of what to care about and love resonates with Frankfurt's discussion of other topics, where I also think inattention to (or silent denial of) the relevance of objective value leads Frankfurt to flawed conclusions. One such topic is wholeheartedness, a virtue for which Frankfurt has unbounded enthusiasm. Another is free will, which Frankfurt famously analyzes as the freedom to have the will you wholeheartedly want to have. I shall discuss these briefly at the end of this essay. On these issues, as well as on the question of what to care about, Frankfurt avoids an acknowledgment of the relevance of worth. Because of this - at least so I shall argue - his positions are ultimately unsatisfactory.

Frankfurt's view and its opposite

In both "The importance of what to care about" and "Duty and Love" Frankfurt's primary concern is not to address the question of *what* to care about but to stress the importance to us of caring about *something*. As Frankfurt emphasizes, caring about or loving things (activities, persons) other than ourselves makes an enormous difference to our ability to live fulfilling lives. Moreover, Frankfurt believes that "it is not so easy for most of us to find things that we are capable of loving."[7] These points together, presumably, lead him to conclude that we should care about what we can.

"What makes it more suitable," Frankfurt asks, "for a person to make one object rather than another important to himself?" He answers

> It seems that it must be the fact that it is *possible* for him to care about the one and not about the other, or to care about the one in a way which is more important to him than the way in which it is possible for him to care about the other. When a person makes something important to himself, accordingly, the situation resembles an instance of divine *agape* at least in a certain

[7] "Duty and Love," *op. cit.*, p. 7. I am more optimistic than Frankfurt about humans' capacity to find objects of love.

> respect. The person does not care about the object because its worthiness commands that he do so. On the other hand, the worthiness of the activity of caring commands that he choose an object which he will be able to care about.[8]

What Frankfurt is recommending, however, is not completely clear. What does it take to license the claim that a particular person *is able* to care about a thing (that is, that it is possible for him to care about it)? Although we cannot care (or cease to care) about things at will, with effort over time we can come to care about things that we do not care about naturally. Perhaps, and especially if we allow the use of nefarious or misguided psychological techniques, we can come to care about some very odd or very creepy things. One might come to develop a passion for making dishes that include marshmallow fluff as an ingredient - or more seriously, one might develop a love of torture.

Now Frankfurt nowhere suggests that we should care about everything we possibly can. So the fact that one *can* care, say, about torture, does not imply that one positively *should*. On the other hand, if we look to the passage above for advice about *whether* we should (or, for that matter, about advice about whether we should care about recipes with marshmallow fluff), the kinds of questions on which it urges us to focus seem to leave some salient considerations out (at least, it leaves them out as considerations having direct unmediated importance). Frankfurt seems to advocate that we care about what we can - and that, if we have a choice about what to care about, we care about whatever will be most fulfilling, rewarding, and satisfying to us to care about. If our make-up and circumstances are such that we will be more rewarded by caring about helping people rather than hurting them, then we should cultivate our sympathies. If, however, we would be more fulfilled by taking up the call of sadism, nothing in Frankfurt's remarks seems to discourage it.

These concerns should make us wary about Frankfurt's position - or at least cautious about stating it precisely. If the view that love need not reflect any judgments of worth in the beloved seems problematic, however, the opposite view - that love *should* reflect worth - may seem even worse. Indeed, I suspect that antagonism towards that view lies behind the extreme statement of Frankfurt's own position.

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[8] " The importance of what we care about," *Op. cit.*, p. 94.

The view I have in mind as the opposite view, that love should reflect worth, may be stated more precisely as the view that one's love of a person or object or activity should be proportional to its value or worthiness to be loved. One should love most that which is most deserving. One might put this by saying one should love the Good. Such a view seems more or less taken for granted by both Plato and Aristotle, and is at least implicitly suggested by some high-minded styles of Christianity and some versions of consequentialist thinking. Despite the venerable figures and traditions that have explicitly or implicitly embraced it, however, we have strong reason to reject it.

That there is *something* wrong with the view seems evident from the very thought of the conclusions it seems to imply: that we should love or care about one person more than another because she is a more worthy candidate of love (more intelligent, stronger, wittier, perhaps) is highly offensive. Even the view that one should care about activities or objects in proportion to their worth - classical music more than rock, for example, or philosophy more than fashion or food, seems absurd. A person who holds such a view and tries to pattern her cares after it seems alternately pompous, stiff, and self-righteous or naive, foolish, and pathetic. I can think of at least two different ways of trying to articulate what is so objectionable about these suggestions. Both seem to me to have something right about them.

First, one might think that the idea that some things are more worthy candidates of love and concern than others reflects a mistaken view about the existence or nature of objective value. The view that one should love what is good in proportion to its goodness evidently presupposes that some things are better than others. But, so the objection goes, this is simply false. Though people differ in intelligence, attractiveness, and virtue, they do not (it is said) differ in worth, so the idea that one should love according to worth is out of place here. Similarly, it may be argued the idea that some activities and interests are worthier than others is misguided. One activity is as good as another, if one can get equally enthusiastic about it. Pauline Kael's writing about movies is as good - for her and for the world - as Quine's writing about the indeterminacy of translation. My aerobics instructor lives as worthwhile a life as my doctor. The idea that one's loves should proportionally reflect the value of the objects of love thus may seem to reveal a false picture of the evaluative facts of the world. If we reject the false presuppositions about value on which the view is

thought to rely, the position may seem literally unintelligible.

Alternatively, one might regard the view in question as intelligible but horrible. The problem is not that there are no evaluative facts that could be a basis for channeling one's affections. It is rather that a world in which people did so direct their loves would be the worse for it. Perhaps, so this objection goes, some people and things are better than others. Mozart's body of work is presumably better than Salieri's. People like Mother Theresa are presumably better than drug-dealing slumlords. But the idea that one should love according to what's worth loving nonetheless seems seriously misguided. Just imagine the parent who loves one child more than another because the one is better (smarter, perhaps, or more unselfish).

The view that one should love what is worth loving and in proportion to its worthiness, then, seems horribly wrong. Yet the view that Frankfurt's work seems to suggest, that worthiness and love have nothing to do with each other, seems, for reasons already hinted at, problematic as well. This suggests that the truth lies somewhere in between - that worth figures in, somehow, to what it is desirable to care about, but not exclusively or perhaps decisively. In the next section, I shall explore what role worth might play in answer to the question of what ideally to care about. Following that, I shall take up the question of what, beyond or behind our intuitive responses might justify the view that worth plays a role.

The role of worth in what to care about

Staying, for the time being, at the level of intuitive responses, gives us some reason for thinking that the role worth plays in determining what to care about is to set a minimal condition. For it is not until we consider extreme examples - examples, we might say, of utterly worthless activities or objects - that the judgment that these are unsuitable objects of care wins general approval. When it comes to people, the dominant view is that all people are appropriate objects of love. Even regarding the question of what activities or interests to have, we are tolerant, even encouraging about a very wide range - sports and science, food and philosophy, cars, movies, antiques, jazz - all seem fine as objects of interest, even passion. Never mind whether and which things are better or "most important."

It is a common view of parents and teachers that it doesn't matter what a child cares about, as long as he or she

cares about *something*. This thought seems to support the Frankfurtian view, until we force the issue by looking at extreme cases. When parents say they just want their children to care about *something*, they mean they don't care whether it is soccer or ballet, mathematics or piano. But they start to get worried if their children spend all their time and money following the career of The Back Street Boys or playing bingo on the internet or working at breaking the world record for long distance spitting. Even worse if their interests veer to the morally objectionable - to hate groups or Satanic cults or sexual sadism, for example.

A plausible hypothesis is that there is a condition of worthiness lurking in the background of our views about suitable, desirable caring, but that it is a minimal condition. We want what people care about to have some worth, to go above some bottom line of goodness, but there is no need to try to match one's cares proportionately to relative amounts of goodness. As long as the things you care about are good enough (and most things people tend to care about are), you're fine. You don't need to worry about whether they are as good as other possible objects of care.

Successful as this view seems to be in matching most of our intuitive judgments, I don't think it is strictly right. The phrase "You can do better," offered in advising a friend about her love life or her job, is at least sometimes in order. As the use of the comparative suggests, its point is not to insist that the man or the job at issue is utterly worthless or even falls below some minimal line - it is rather that as long as one has or is in a position to cultivate having more options, there is something to be said for aiming higher for a more interesting or virtuous or appealing partner or a more challenging or responsible or socially useful job.

Furthermore, interests we might approve of, even delight in, as hobbies on the side, may worry us if they take over too much of a person's attention and energy. Being a fan of a sports team, a bridge player, a lover of musical comedies, adds interest and variety to life, and helps make one person different from another, giving us distinct identities. Interests like these are good and healthy - but they can take more time, and demand more sacrifice of other things than they are worth. These reactions suggest that some kind of proportionality requirement, rather than a simple minimal condition, is operating in shaping our judgments about what it is suitable to care about. People should care about only what is at least somewhat worth caring about; and how much

people should care about things, both in themselves, and relative to other things they care about, depends somewhat on *how* worth caring about the objects in question are.

But how can we accept such a requirement without committing ourselves to the view that we have already criticized - the view that you should love what is good and only insofar as it is good? A few further considerations may temper the requirement in ways that make it more acceptable.

The first is that in accepting the view that worthiness of an object is a factor in the suitability of that object to be an object of care, we are not committed to the view that it is the sole or dominant factor. Just as, to use a mundane example, expense and comfort are both factors in the suitability of a pair of shoes for purchase, worth may be one factor among others in the suitability of an objection for our affection. Indeed Frankfurt's own discussions of what to care about and what to love provide us with another factor. I shall call it affinity.

As Frankfurt notes, loving itself, caring deeply about some things, is itself of enormous importance to living a good and satisfying life. To go through life not loving anyone, not caring about anything is a horrible fate - far worse, most of us would say, than living with cares that bring with them considerable grief and frustration. Friendship and love bring with them the risk of pain at the beloved's misfortunes and sorrow; aspirations and ideals cannot be reached without difficulty, striving, and often stress. Few, however, would trade a life of love and commitment with its concomitant sorrows for a life free of risk and pain that lacked any real cares.

Caring, then, and loving, are goods in themselves - especially if the caring is deep and passionate. This - and the fact that one cannot make oneself care deeply and passionately about something at will - is what supports Frankfurt's judgment that one should care about what it is possible for one to care about. This is what is sensible in the parents' desire that their children just care about something.

Imagining a parent trying to find a suitable spouse for her child highlights the difficulties with the idea that a person can and should love according to some impersonal list of good qualities. It seems pointless even to try to love a person, career, or project that one cannot get excited about even if one recognizes that he, she or it is tremendously worthwhile. When it comes to choosing (insofar as one *can* choose) what to love or care about, then, the fact that one

activity, object, or person is not objectively as good or better than any number of others may pale in importance before one's enthusiasm for that particular one. Affinity, then, in addition to worth, is relevant to the question of what to care about.

Even this position - that worth and affinity are both factors that weigh in to the question of what to care about, factors that interact and possibly compete - would be dry and wrongheaded if taken in a certain way against the background of certain assumptions about value. If, for example, one believes or even takes seriously the possibility, that people can be rated and ranked rather precisely on some scale of merit - if one thinks, perhaps, that the traits our society standardly values in people, like intelligence, physical attractiveness, kindness, talent, make one person more valuable, and so more worthy of love than another - the view that worth and affinity are both factors determining the suitability of an object of love may remain as offensive as the original view that worth alone matters. For it suggests that it would be preferable if one's loves did match this ranking (would that I had a more objectively worthy child!), even if that consideration might be outweighed or compensated by affinity. This seems as repugnant as the "purer" view that one should love what is good just insofar as it is good.

The fact is, however - or at least I think the fact is - that the realm of value is both complex and pocketed with indeterminacies. Though total skepticism about value seems to me unwarranted, the idea that each person or object can be assigned a precise quantity of value on a scale by which it can be compared with others seems deeply mistaken.

In the domain of persons, the dominant view is that no person is more valuable than any other - not because there is no such thing as value, but because each person has a value beyond price. It would follow from this that the chilling idea that we should try to train our affections so as to love people in proportion to their value is out of place not because of any objection to the idea that value is an appropriate consideration in connection with what to love, but rather because, when it comes to people, any person qualifies as maximally satisfying this consideration.[9] By

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[9] This, however, appears to be at odds with our willingness to think "you can do better" in connection with a person's choice of partner, at least as I interpreted that remark earlier in this essay. I believe this reflects a serious tension or confusion in our thoughts on the value of persons that deserves more philosophical attention than it has received. One way of resolving this tension is to understand "you can do better" as a purely relational remark, referring not at all to how good a person the possible loved one is, but to how good it is *for the lover* to love that person. Another possibility is to distinguish two strands

contrast , there is less consensus on the appropriateness of showering comparable affection on a pet, a disagreement plausibly explained by doubts about whether lower animals *merit* the same kind and degree of devotion.

In evaluating possible objects of interest and love other than people - activities, projects, and inanimate objects, for example - we can expect to find similar indeterminacies and incommensurabilities. There may be no answer to questions like, 'Is it more worthwhile to pursue sculpture, basketball, or chess?' or it may be that, particularly when one breaks free of some traditional, elitist or otherwise narrow-minded assumptions, the answer to such questions is more often than might be expected, that each is in its own way more or less equally worthwhile.

Perhaps even more important than the considerations mentioned so far is a further point - namely, that affinity for an object, activity or person encourages or makes possible kinds of worth or value that would not exist without it, value that lies not in the object considered in itself, but in the lover of that object or the relationship between them. Some people bring out the best in each other; they allow or encourage each other to fulfill their potentials. Similarly, a person's affinity for a genre or for a more particular type of entity can inspire and stimulate him in ways no other thing can. One thinks of Glenn Gould's relation to Bach, of Merchant and Ivory's relation to post-Victorian fiction.

In asking what it would be best or "most suitable" for a person to care about or love, then, we are apt to take into account at least three sorts of consideration: whether (and how much) the object in question is itself worth caring about, whether (and how much) the person has an affinity for the object in question, and whether (and how much) the relation between the person and the object has the potential to create or bring forth experiences, acts, or objects of further value.

I conclude, then, that, when held in conjunction with the qualifications discussed above, the view that considerations of worth are relevant to the question of what to care about and what to love accords better with our considered untheoretical judgments than the view I have attributed to Frankfurt, that one should care simply about

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in our talk of the goodness or value of persons. In one sense, perhaps, all persons are of equal value, making them equally deserving of a kind of respect and certain forms of treatment; in another, some people are better than others, in virtue of their different qualities, and this may make them differentially deserving of certain kinds of love. I regret that I cannot do justice to this interesting issue here.

what one can, never mind how worthwhile what one cares about is.

Reasons why worth should play a role

That a view matches our untheoretical judgments (our intuitions, as they are often called, even though they are meant to embrace reflective and considered judgments and not just gut reactions) gives some support to the view. Still, we can look for reasons supporting or explaining the view we find ourselves pretheoretically to have. *Ought* we to care that the things we care about are worth caring about - that they meet some standard of objective value? What difference does it make whether what we care about is objectively valuable or not? I can think of two reasons for wanting our cares to be attentive to what is worth caring about, two reasons, that is, for thinking that worth should be a consideration for what to care about. One has to do with an interest in truth, the other with an interest in meaning.

We have, I believe, an interest in truth - or, more precisely, an interest in living in the real world. We do not want to be living in a fantasy world, to be deluded, particularly about aspects of the world with which we interact and on the basis of which we make decisions and orient our lives. This interest may not be universal - that there are some who are untroubled by the thought of a life plugged into Nozick's pleasure machine suggests that it is not. Nor need it be overriding - some truths may be so painful and disruptive that we would be better off not knowing them. Nor am I sure that the question of whether one *should* care fundamentally about the truth admits of any argument. Still, the interest is natural enough, prevalent enough, and sensible enough to allow us to say that, other things being equal, we are better off not being deluded, especially about things that play a significant role in our lives.

Among other things, this implies that we do not want to be deluded about the things that we love and care about. But if you love something, or seriously care about it, it is hard not to think of it as good. If you love something, you probably will think of it as good - though not necessarily better than things that you do not love. Often, love develops out of our finding or seeing something good about the things we come to love; our loving something also tends to make us look for and attend to the good that is in it. To love a thing that one doesn't regard as good or worthy of love is, at the least, uncomfortable. As Michael Stocker

notes, it is a mark of a good life that there be a harmony between what one cares about and what one thinks good.[10] This provides one reason why it is preferable to love what is worth loving: loving what is worth loving allows us to love happily, wholeheartedly, unashamedly[11] with our eyes wide open.

The second reason for wanting to love what is worth loving is related to the first. It is that, in addition to wanting to live in the real world, we want to be connected to it - that is, we want our lives to have some positive relation to things or people or ideas that are valuable independently of us. This, I believe, is at the core of the desire to live a meaningful life.[12] More specifically, I think meaning in life arises when affinity and worth meet. In other words, meaning in life arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness, when one finds oneself able to love what is worth loving, and able, further, to do something with or about it - to contribute to or promote or preserve or give honor and appreciation to what one loves.

Again, the interest in living a meaningful life may be neither universal nor overriding. Again, the question of whether one should care about living a meaningful life may not admit of argument.[13] Still the interest is natural enough, prevalent enough, and sensible enough to allow us to say that, other things being equal, it is better to live a meaningful life. If there is nothing we love or are able to love, a meaningful life is not open to us. But if what we love, and so what we devote ourselves to, is worthless, our lives will lack meaning as well.

In case these remarks seem harsh or overly judgmental, let me remind you that they are offered against the background assumption that the facts about value are likely to be highly pluralistic and complex and that in consequence our approach to questions of objective value should be tolerant and open-minded. The values recognized by somber

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[10] Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *Journal of Philosophy* 73, 14 (August 12, 1976) pp. 453-66.

[11] Unashamed, that is, with respect to this issue. It is, of course, possible to be ashamed, unhappy, and conflicted about loving something or someone for reasons other than the unworthiness of the object of one's love. It may be inappropriate to love someone, or to love her in a particular way, for reasons other than worthiness.

[12] See my "Meaningful Lives in a Meaningless World," *Quaestiones Infinitae* Vol. 19 (June, 1997), publication of the Department of Philosophy, Utrecht University, "Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life," *Social Philosophy & Policy* Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter, 1997) 207-225, and "Meaning and Morality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. XCVII (1997) 299-315.

[13] Though I offer one in "Meaningful Lives in a Meaningless World," *op. cit.* pp. 17-21.

moralists hardly exhaust the sorts of values that make things and people worth caring about and loving.

I assume, indeed, that most of what people love and care about - nature, culture, religious community, knowledge, sports, and of course family and friends - are well worth loving and caring about. And most of the time, the various things that people care about they care about to an appropriate degree. If this is so, one might wonder whether it is necessary to bother mentioning, much less harping on, the need for the objects of our love and care to be worth loving and caring about. Why bother mentioning a condition that is almost always satisfied without even thinking about it?

One reason to mention it is that it is part of a complete answer to the question of what to love and care about, even if a part that is easily satisfied in a wide variety of ways. Another is that even if most of what people love and care about is suitably worth caring about, not all of it is, nor is there a guarantee that, without attending to considerations of value, people's patterns of caring will forever meet this condition. If we forget that worthiness is a consideration relevant to the question of what to care about, we may become confused about whether and why we should encourage our children, for example, to develop some of their interests rather than others. Moreover, in a world in which people's tastes and passions are increasingly determined by market forces that do not have the good of their subjects or of the world at heart, the possibility that people will increasingly come to care about what is not worth caring about may be a growing danger.

Thus it seems to me we should accept the unexciting thesis I announced at the beginning of the paper - that relevant to the question of what to love is the question of what is worthy of love. It is better to love what is worthy of love than to love what is not.

Frankfurt's avoidance of objectivity

As I also mentioned at the beginning of this paper, this position, boring and common-sensical as it is, seems to me to go against the grain of Frankfurt's writings on what to love and care about. For the core of Frankfurt's message seems to be that it is important to care about, to love *something*, never mind what it is, and so, *a fortiori*, never mind whether it is worthy of love. At the same time, Frankfurt never explicitly rejects the position for which I have been arguing. Indeed, despite his claiming that one should care

about what it is possible to care about, he admits that caring a lot about avoiding the cracks in the sidewalk would be in some way regrettable.[14] And when he says that "the importance to us of loving does not derive from an appreciation by us of the value of what we love," he inserts the parenthetical phrase "at least, not exclusively."[15] These remarks suggest that Frankfurt does not so much reject the thesis that objective value matters, as that he wishes to avoid, or de-emphasize the subject. If this were right, then my difference with Frankfurt (on this issue, at least) would be merely one of emphasis - and a difference in emphasis need not be a *disagreement* about anything at all.

However, I suspect that there is a disagreement lurking behind the difference in emphasis. For the neglect or avoidance of considerations of objective value that I have been discussing in connection with the question of what to love and care about is part of a pattern in Frankfurt's work. There are a number of issues on which Frankfurt writes to which it seems to me a concern for objectivity is relevant. Since Frankfurt never expresses nor acknowledges such a concern, I suspect that he thinks it misguided or out of place.

One such issue concerns the desirability of wholeheartedness. In "The Faintest Passion,"[16] Frankfurt writes in glowing terms about the value of wholeheartedness, and in correspondingly negative terms about its opposite,

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[14] More precisely, he writes "No doubt he is committing an error of some kind in caring about this. But his error is not that he cares abut something which is not really important to him. Rather, his error consists in caring about, and thereby imbuing with genuine importance, something which is not worth caring about. The reason it is not worth caring about seems clear: it is not important to the person to make avoiding the cracks in the sidewalk important to himself. But we need to understand better just why this is so..." "The importance of what to care about," *op.cit.*, p. 94.

Frankfurt's claim to the contrary, it does not seem clear to me why, from Frankfurt's perspective, avoiding the cracks in the sidewalk is not worth caring about. (I leave aside the possibility that the person's care is based on a factual error – that he believes, for example, that if he steps on a crack he will break his mother's back.) Compare someone who cares about learning to play the Beethoven sonatas (I assume this would not be a mistake) with the person who cares about avoiding the cracks in the sidewalk. Why is it important *to* the former to make learning the Beethoven sonatas important to himself but not important *to* the latter to make avoiding the crack in the sidewalk important to himself? On my view, we may distinguish the worthiness of caring about these two aims by referring to the contrast between what is valuable about learning the Beethoven sonatas (it spurs the person to develop his skill at the piano, it brings him to a more intimate understanding of the beauty of the works, and so on) and what is valuable about avoiding the cracks in the sidewalk (precisely nothing). But this would not naturally be expressed in terms of its being important *to* the person to make the achievement in question important to himself. In any event, it does not seem to be what Frankfurt has in mind.

[15] "Duty and Love," *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[16] Harry Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) Chapter 8, pp. 95-107.

ambivalence. Indeed, he writes "It is a necessary truth about us that we wholeheartedly desire to be wholehearted."[17]

Now, I am inclined to describe myself as ambivalent about wholeheartedness (and correspondingly ambivalent about the opposite of wholeheartedness, ambivalence itself). For to be wholehearted about one's values, one's interests, one's loves is to be fully and unwaveringly committed to them, to harbor no doubts, nor any inclination or willingness to doubt whether to continue in one's attachment to them. But if one believes that one's values might be wrong, or that it might be a mistake to care or to care so much about something, then it seems to me a certain degree of ambivalence, or at least openness to ambivalence, is called for. To be sure, to worry too much about whether one's values are right can be neurotic, and ambivalence and the indecisiveness that tends to go with it, can be paralyzing. On the other hand, wholeheartedness in the face or the context of objective reasons for doubt, seems indistinguishable from zealotry, fanaticism, or, at the least, close-mindedness. That Frankfurt shows no concern for this as a problem suggests either that he thinks people cannot be wrong about what to value and what to care about or that being wrong about such things does not matter. But it does matter - or, at least, it may.[18]

The second issue on which, I would argue, Frankfurt's views suffer from his neglect or rejection of the relevance of objectivity is that of free will. As is well known, Frankfurt believes that freedom of the will - which, with freedom of action, is "all the freedom it is possible to desire or to conceive"[19] - consists in the freedom to have the will that one wants (wholeheartedly) to have. Roughly, it is the freedom to act from one's deepest, most authentic, or "Real" Self, as opposed to acting on desires that are not affirmed and supported by one's deepest level of reflection and feeling.

A problem with this, also well known, is that there are examples of people who meet Frankfurt's condition who do not seem intuitively to have free will - and certainly not to have "all the freedom it is possible to desire or to

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[17] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[18] This is not an expression of ambivalence about my ambivalence about ambivalence. Rather, I mean to say that even if it would be unwarranted to say that everyone ought to care about whether their values are sufficiently worthwhile and right, there is nothing wrong with people who do care about this. For those of us who do care, therefore, if not for anyone else, it is reasonable to be ambivalent about wholeheartedness.

[19] "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *The Importance of What We Care About*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

conceive." A person with paranoid tendencies, for example, or one with an obsessive concern for cleanliness might be perfectly content with her values, and consequently with the will (say, to maintain twelve locks on her apartment door, or to avoid public places where germs are rampant) that flows from these values and cares. Such people will have problems with the world, no doubt, but not with themselves. They may act wholeheartedly, exercising the will they want to have. But far from being free (or from having a free will), they seem to me to be examples of people who are trapped, constrained, shackled by psychological problems the very nature of which makes their problems (their shackles) impossible for them to see.

Incompatibilists take such cases to indicate an incompatibilist condition on freedom - something like the condition that people be able to create or control or choose their own deepest selves. Like Frankfurt, I think this condition is unsatisfiable (and indeed, with Frankfurt, I do not think anything valuable would be gained if it could be satisfied). But in fact I think these examples show something else which a compatibilist can grant, and which when properly appreciated, may be able to explain away some of our incompatibilist impulses. Specifically, the problem with the paranoid and the cleanliness fanatic is not that they lack complete control of their deepest selves - perhaps we all lack that - but that what <u>is</u> in control, in their cases, are irrational forces that warp their victims' ability to appreciate what is true and worthwhile, that is, to see things aright. When we say, with Frankfurt, that freedom of the will is the freedom to have the will one wants, we take for granted that the one who is doing the wanting (the real self, as it were) is a sane person, able to understand and appreciate reasons (for example, reasons for valuing some things more than others) for what they are. The relevance of objectivity thus seems to me to lurk in the background of the problem of free will, as it lurks in the background of what to care about and of whether to be wholehearted.

Let me conclude with a highly speculative suggestion about why Frankfurt, a philosopher otherwise so insightful and perceptive about what is important in our lives, should have a blind spot when it comes to the importance of objectivity. Though Frankfurt is generally silent about the relevance of objective judgments in our lives, he is not silent about another topic: the importance of morality. At the beginning of "Duty and Love," for example, Frankfurt

confesses that "it seems to (him) that many philosophers...are excessively preoccupied with morality." "In my opinion," he goes on to say, "this pan-moralistic conception of practical normativity is mistaken."[20] As Frankfurt has also noted, philosophers have, in recent centuries, focussed relatively little on other spheres of practical normativity, and for this and other reasons, talk of objective value and worth tend to be associated or identified with specifically moral value and moral worth. My speculation is that Frankfurt's distaste for moralism and his view that morality is less central to our lives than moral philosophers tend to think is behind Frankfurt's avoidance of considerations of objectivity, of truth and goodness, too. But this seems to me regrettable.

If one focuses on what Frankfurt urges us to focus on - on what is important to us, what gives our lives meaning, what makes us the persons we are - one will see that there is much that is valuable without being morally valuable, much that is worth doing and caring about that is not morally worth doing or caring about. Nonmoral value need not have any universal practical or even emotional implications - that an activity is valuable does not imply that everyone ought to engage in it, or even want to engage in it. That an individual is worth loving does not imply that everyone ought to love her. Nor do claims about what is nonmorally good need to be cashed out in terms of what is good *for* anyone. There is much, for example, that is worth doing despite its being of no particular benefit to humankind.

These last remarks seem to me to be in the spirit of Frankfurt's philosophy. But they use a vocabulary of objective value and worth, which Frankfurt's own writing avoids. What I have tried to suggest in this paper is that if we want to get complete and adequate answers to the questions Frankfurt himself wants us to ask, we cannot avoid such language. We cannot in other words avoid the relevance and the value of objectivity.

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[20] "Duty and Love," *op. cit.*, p. 4.