277, and Facts and Values [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press], 32ff.; the basic point of logic being reiterated in Irving M. Copy, Introduction to Logic, 6th ed. [New York: Macmillan, 1982], 86 n. 8, 153, 168). Here in the AA debate, also on the relevance of rhetoric to ethics, corresponding analysis should be conducted on the definitions of pivotal terms (passim pervasively) such as ‘affirmative’ and ‘action’, or ‘diversity’ vis-à-vis ‘critical mass’ (of AA admittees), or ‘quotas’ vis-à-vis racial ‘factor’ AA, or institutional ‘racism’ (157) vis-à-vis ‘prejudice’ or ‘stereotypes’ (cf. 104, 224, 262), or ‘qualified’ applicant vis-à-vis ‘outreach’ (cf. 41, 45, 202ff.).

In normative ethics, it would be useful to analyze the pro and con AA arguments of this debate in terms of their Kantian and utilitarian foundations. Neither author explicitly develops that. Such an analysis would require articulating the premises of these arguments in terms of not only the “basic values” being postulated or presupposed (e.g., whether Kantian or utilitarian) but also of the “facts” which are there asserted or implied.

As related to ethics, this book offers minidebates in three other areas. In philosophy of education, there’s thematic material on the relevance of “objective” exams vis-à-vis more subjective factors, such as writing scores. In political philosophy, the debate broaches the nature of a “democratic” society, the relation of AA to political correctness, or even to post-9/11 racial/ethnic profiling. While Sterba is apparently (and, arguably, overly) skeptical about such exams, both Oxford debaters otherwise could be seen as arguing here along “conservative” lines.

In philosophy of law, although the book contains much legal analysis, the historic Bakke precedent is essentially relegated to two footnotes (248 n. 56, 289 n. 6), and neither author exactly predicted the U.S. Supreme Court’s Gratz/Grutter decisions of 2003. Arguably, the latter is jurisprudentially a mirror image of the former. Nevertheless, contra Sterba (205, 358), the current 2003 decisions significantly introduce a ticking clock on AA.

This essay began with the observation that the Oxford 2003 debate epitomizes, for example, as pertinent to philosophic ethics, the historic controversy. In my view, Cohen could be regarded as having “won” this debate as a matter of rhetoric, whatever extra arguments are available in logic and ethics. As also indicated, however, both debaters end up somewhat discombobulated about the Bakke background vis-à-vis the post-Gratz/Grutter future of such racially preferential admissions procedures at universities. In also these respects, then, this Oxford 2003 dialogue surely reflects, while philosophically elaborating and illuminating, the national consciousness.

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In The Reasons of Love Harry Frankfurt addresses a question that is “both ultimate and preliminary: how should a person live?” (5). It is an ancient philosophical
question, and Frankfurt evidently has this ancient background in mind. Although he is perplexed how anyone could be perplexed by some of the things that perplexed Socrates (e.g., how someone could become shorter than another without shrinking), like Socrates and Plato he thinks it important to keep in mind how philosophical questions arise in ordinary life. People do wonder what sort of life to lead, and when they do, “what presses [them] to inquire . . . is not disinterested curiosity or puzzlement, or wonder, or awe. It is psychic distress of another variety altogether: a kind of nagging anxiety, or unease” (5). Frankfurt remembers this living context of his philosophical question, and the result is a book that is ambitious, plainspoken, funny, and often extraordinarily provocative. Anyone familiar with his earlier work will be interested to see how he brings together ideas about freedom, caring, selfhood, identification, and practical reasoning that he has developed and defended in greater detail elsewhere. In fact, having that background will be a help. The book is succinct. (It is a revised version of the Romanell–Phi Beta Kappa Lectures Frankfurt gave at Princeton University and the Shearman Lectures he gave at University College London.)

What is striking, to me at least, is that the answer Frankfurt gives to his question looks, at first glance, an awful lot like the answers of Plato and Aristotle. Simply put, according to Frankfurt we discover how to live by discovering our ultimate ends and, in particular, by discovering what ends we truly love. It puts one in mind of Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, or of the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle claims to be looking for a target at which to aim one’s life. I do not think that these similarities are superficial. Frankfurt himself appeals to an argument of Aristotle’s about the importance of final ends, and his distinction between loving and other ways of having final ends is, I believe, an important corrective to Aristotle’s ethical theory. But anyone with even a passing familiarity with Frankfurt’s work will realize that whatever similarities there are here, the differences are extraordinarily deep. Most important, Frankfurt does not believe that any particular love can be justified by reasons, and so he does not think it philosophy’s job to argue in favor of a life devoted to one set of ultimate ends rather than another. Furthermore, he does not believe that the relationship between instrumental and final ends is asymmetrical, as Aristotle and many other philosophers have supposed. The arguments for these positions are among the most provocative sections of the book. But before I discuss them in detail, I will describe the larger argument in which they play a crucial part.

In chapter 1, “The Question: ‘How Should We Live?’” Frankfurt wants to avoid a prematurely moral answer to this question. For one thing, morality cannot give a sufficient answer, since it is consistent with an insipid or otherwise undesirable life (6). But more than that, it is not overriding in its authority. As he understands it, “morality is most particularly concerned with how our attitudes and our actions should take into account the needs, the desires, and the entitlements of other people. Now why should that be regarded as being, without exception, the most compelling thing in our lives?” (7). From a rhetorical point of view, this argument is odd. (Kantians, e.g., do not derive the overriding authority of the moral law from a commitment to our relationships with other people.) But most readers will grasp the point he wants to make: there are ideals—religious, aesthetic, cultural, and environmental—whose authority seems
to be independent of the demands made on us by other people, their needs, and so on. Figuring out how to live is, in part, a matter of discovering what these ideals are and how much weight to give them. Frankfurt thinks this shows that, in the end, it may be reasonable to decide that it isn’t so important to obey the moral law (9). But if morality purports to tell us how we should take account of the needs and desires of other people, where the ‘should’ in question is like the ‘should’ of the question, “How should I live?” there is another, more likely (and more familiar) implication; namely, that we cannot adequately understand how to treat other people without simultaneously considering the other values we might pursue. That is to say, we cannot develop a plausible moral theory in isolation from the broader ethical thinking Frankfurt advocates.

Be that as it may, Frankfurt urges that we expand our “rather meager conceptual repertoire” (10) beyond the notion of desire to include the connected concepts of what we care about, what is important to us, and what we love. The notion of caring is the central one here. Love is a mode of caring, and things are important to us only in virtue of their relationship to what we care about. Caring about something is not the same as wanting it very much or more than other things. Nor is it the same as believing that something is intrinsically valuable. We may attribute intrinsic value to all sorts of things that we nevertheless have no inclination to pursue. And even if we did pursue something as a final end on account of its intrinsic value, we still might not care about it. Frankfurt says that he feels this way about eating ice cream cones. (This suggests a criticism of Aristotle. Like Frankfurt, Aristotle interprets the question about how to live as a question about what goals to pursue. But if he does regard this highest good as being lovable, he nevertheless seems to have thought that, for the purpose of understanding its structural role in the happy life, it is adequate to conceive of it as being simply an absolutely terminal end. That is to say, Aristotle draws no distinction between being a final end and being an object of love or care.)

We begin to get a handle on what caring is, Frankfurt suggests, by noticing that when we don’t care about something we desire, then if we find something better to do, our original desire simply disappears. When we care about something, by contrast, our desire for it persists even when we delay satisfying it. It persists not because of its own intensity but also because we are willingly committed to it: “The person who cares about what he desires wants something else as well: he wants his desire to be sustained” (16). Furthermore, this higher-order desire is not ephemeral but is one “with which the person identifies himself, and which he accepts as expressing what he really wants” (16).

Unless talk of identification is just a way of saying that a desire does, as a matter of fact, persist over time, I am not sure why Frankfurt thinks that identifying with a desire-to-have-a-desire makes it any less transient than the desire to desire on its own. Couldn’t a person be flighty about what he identifies with or commits himself to? Be that as it may, Frankfurt is interested in capturing not only the way that caring maintains a life’s “thematic unity” over time but also the intuition that what we care about is somehow close to or constitutive of who we are. On his account, “caring binds us to ourselves” (17). By desiring what we desire and furthermore by identifying with that attitude, we make it the case that the desires which move us are our own.
Since the “totality of the various things that a person cares about—together with his ordering of how important they are to him—effectively specifies his answer to the question of how to live,” we can rephrase our initial question as whether we should care about what we do care about (23). But here, Frankfurt argues, we face a problem. In order to justify what we care about, we need criteria of importance. But as we saw earlier, things are important to us only by virtue of being connected to something we already care about. Thus, “there can be no well-ordered inquiry into the question of how one has reason to live” (26). Of course, once there is something we do care about, we will have criteria of importance to use for recognizing that other things ought to be important to us as well. Meanwhile, since the hope of providing an external justification for our answer to the most fundamental question of practical philosophy has been exposed as a “pan-rationalist fantasy,” what we need, Frankfurt says, “is not reasons and proofs [but] clarity and confidence” (28).

If Frankfurt is right about the origins of this investigation in anxiety and self-doubt, his prescription of clarity and confidence instead of arguments will likely make our stomachs churn. Luckily, he argues, we are surrounded by examples of a kind of practical confidence that is not in the least bit arbitrary even though it is not justified by reasons. This is the confidence born of love.

In chapter 2, “On Love, and Its Reasons,” Frankfurt explains that four essential characteristics of love are important in this regard: (1) it is directed toward a particular object—abstract or concrete—rather than to some instantiation of a class; (2) it is disinterested in the sense that it involves caring for its object as an end rather than as a means; (3) the lover identifies not only with his desire to promote the interests of the beloved, but with those interests themselves; and (4) it is beyond our immediate voluntary control.

This analysis is relatively uncontroversial, and Frankfurt’s discussion of it is rich in detail. But he adds to it the claim that love is not a response to value (I’ll return to this argument later) and infers the still more striking claim that love is the origin of reasons for the lover. “Loving someone or something essentially means or consists in, among other things, taking its interests as reasons for acting to serve those interests” (37). Now in a way, everything we care about gives us a reason for acting since everything we care about thereby becomes important to us. But whereas caring about a class of people (e.g., the poor) would still leave open the choice of which particular people to help, love does not admit of arbitrariness in this regard. It is a mode of caring that is necessarily for someone in particular. Love also involves caring for its object as an end; thus, the reasons it gives are unconditional. Finally, since we cannot choose what to love by an act of will, our willing commitment to it is, for us, necessary. The lover is constrained to act in certain ways not because he is hindered from the outside, but because his will is bound. He cannot directly bring himself to reject either his desire for the beloved’s well-being or his approval of that desire. Thus he cannot, as a practical matter, seriously consider the desirability of harming or neglecting what he loves.

Even if it is inevitable that we will grant love authority on any particular occasion, however, we may wonder from a more reflective point of view whether the fact that we do so is reasonable. Frankfurt does not say so explicitly, but it seems to me that this question is not at all an idle one. Our answer determines
whether we view our lives as absurd or instead achieve “the more intimate comfort of feeling at home with ourselves” (5). He has two responses to this worry.

First, what reason do we have not to act on the reasons a particular love gives us? Most people love more than one thing, and so there is always a risk that what their loves require will conflict. When they do, a person will have reasons on both sides for disobeying one or the other command of love. But suppose there is no conflict, or that he loves one thing more than the other. In that case he would have no reason (or no better reason) to act against what he loves: “It cannot be improperly arbitrary for a person to accept the impetus of a love concerning which he is well informed, and that is coherent with the other demands of his will, for he has no pertinent basis for declining to do so” (51). On the contrary, it would be arbitrary to resist the volitional necessity of love via some ad hoc maneuver.

Second, the constraints of love are not “some external or alien force” (46). Love determines what a person can, cannot, and must will; what he can, cannot, and must count as a reason for acting. Thus love’s necessities “fix his shape as an active being” (50). The “motivations that love engenders are not merely adventitious or (to use Kant’s term) heteronymous. Rather, like the universal laws of pure reason, they express something that belongs to our most intimate and most fundamental nature. Unlike the necessities of reason, however, those of love are not impersonal. They are constituted by and embedded in structures of the will through which the specific identity of the individual is most particularly defined” (48). When we act from love’s reasons, we act on the basis of reasons that are ours in the deepest sense.

The idea that confidence in the authority of love amounts to confidence in ourselves is one that Frankfurt returns to in another, very interesting way. Although we have no reason to love the particular things we do, he argues that self-love gives most of us a reason to love something or other. It is important to most of us to have meaningful work to do, Frankfurt says, because otherwise we would be bored. Things would cease to be important to us, and so we would stop paying attention, and, at the extreme, our conscious field would become completely homogeneous. An aversion to being bored “expresses a quite primitive urge for psychic survival” (54). But what makes it possible for our work to be meaningful and interesting to us? Developing a suggestion from Aristotle, Frankfurt argues that activity cannot be meaningful unless it is aimed at an end that is final, chosen for its own sake and not for the sake of something further. The point is not that we need final ends to make activity purposeful. A life consisting solely of doing one thing for the sake of another, for the sake of yet another, would have plenty of purpose. But unless that activity culminates somewhere in an end chosen for itself, our purposeful activity will have no point. “Since what it aims at is always a preliminary or a preparation, it will leave us always short of completion” (53). Final ends, he concludes, are not only intrinsically valuable; contrary to what philosophers have thought, they have instrumental value as well, assuming that we care about psychic survival. But “in what acceptable way can our need for final ends be met?” (55). The answer, of course, is love since, as he has argued, it binds us “to final ends by more than an adventitious impulse or a deliberate willful choice” (55). Frankfurt says at first
that love is the only acceptable way of providing ourselves with ends, but soon he suggests that it is the only way of doing so: “Insofar as love is the creator both of inherent or terminal value and of importance, then, it is the ground of practical rationality” (56).

In chapter 3, “The Dear Self,” Frankfurt concludes his book by arguing that self-love, far from being unseemly, is “in a certain way the purest of all modes of love” (80). That is because the person who loves himself most clearly and unequivocally satisfies the four essential criteria of love elucidated in chapter 2. A person who loves himself takes the interests of his beloved as his own—indeed, they already are his own. His love is not just out of his direct voluntary control, it is especially immune to indirect efforts at manipulation. Self-love is essentially directed to a particular object. And, although this sounds paradoxical, it is disinterested. For the person who loves himself pursues his own interests not for any ulterior purpose, but for its own sake. It thus emerges that “a person’s self-love is simply, at its core, a disinterested concern for whatever it is that the person loves” (85). In fact, even if a person does not love anything beyond himself, he will, as a genuine lover of self, have at heart the desire for meaningful work, the work which staves off boredom and psychic death. Thus, “self-love is tantamount just to a desire to love” (90).

This reconciliation between love of self and of others is ingenious. And there is much more of interest in this chapter, particularly the argument that ambivalence is a failure of self-love. But rather than examine that, I want to turn back to Frankfurt’s crucial arguments in chapter 2 that final ends have instrumental value and that love is not justifiable by reasons.

Recall that Frankfurt argues for the usefulness of final ends by developing an argument of Aristotle’s to the effect that unless there is some final end, our activity will be “empty and vain” (Nicomachean Ethics I.2). In other words, Frankfurt says, activity without ultimate ends is pointless, boring. (This may be what Aristotle has in mind, but I doubt it. However, the exegetical point is not important here.) If final ends make our activity meaningful, and meaningful activity is itself something desirable, then, Frankfurt reasons, final ends have instrumental value. He may well be correct that meaningful work—taking the appropriate means to some end we regard as final—is interesting, and therefore desirable for itself. It may even perform the action-guiding function of an end, for example, by directing us to put ourselves in the way of finding something to love. But this does not show that the ends at which meaningful work aims are themselves instrumentally valuable. What makes work interesting (and thus desirable for itself) is our attitude toward it, namely, that we consider it to be aimed at something of genuine final value. Thus, it is not the final end—the object of desire—that promotes meaningful, interesting work, but our idea of it as final. And so it is not the final end that has instrumental value, but our treating ends as final. This point may not be immediately apparent unless we distinguish, as Aristotle does, between something’s having final (or instrumental) value as a genuine end (or instrument) and our desiring something as having value of this sort. When Aristotle notices the asymmetry of instrumental and final ends, he has in mind that the instrument’s value, regardless of whether we desire it, depends on its connection to the end, but not vice versa. Now perhaps Frankfurt would say that treating something as an end just constitutes
its having final value. Thus, if treating something as an end has instrumental value, then its final value has instrumental value. But this reasoning is unlikely to move Kantians and Aristotelians who have been especially interested in the asymmetry of conditional and unconditional ends.

That leads to the second point. Frankfurt writes, “I can declare with unequivocal confidence that I do not love my children because I am aware of some value that inheres in them independent of my love for them. The fact is that I loved them even before they were born—before I had any especially relevant information about their personal characteristics or their particular merits and virtues” (39). The example is important for him because he thinks it shows especially clearly that love is not a response to the beloved’s value. I have misgivings about treating parents’ love for their babes in the womb as a paradigmatic case. But even if we do grant the example, I don’t believe that it supports Frankfurt’s position. His thought seems to be that since he was not aware of any valuable characteristic in his unborn children that differentiated them from others (why shouldn’t their being his qualify?), his partial love for them cannot be grounded in a response to their value. But a reason to love A does not need to be a reason to love A and not B. Something more or less widespread, such as being cuddly or looking like one’s spouse, might be the lovable quality parents respond to in their infants. (Whether those are good reasons is another story.) To be sure, we must still account for the partiality of love. And Frankfurt is right that the cause of our coming to love one person rather than another is mostly due to contingent factors. I am inclined to say that these contingencies explain why we come to appreciate the value in one person rather than another. But even if we were to grant that a perception of value is not what Frankfurt calls a formative condition of love, that would not show that it is not a grounding condition in the sense of being a source of justification. If love is partially constituted by the belief that the beloved is valuable (notice, it need not involve believing the beloved is more valuable than everyone else), then love is to that extent, like any other belief, justified or grounded by the evidence. It may indeed be arbitrary that this is the person whose value I have come to see, but once I have seen it, my luck in this regard does not make my love for it arbitrary. My point here is not that love is a response to objective value—it may be that the value to which love responds itself depends on what we already care about. My point is only that I see no reason to second-guess the common experience of love as a response to value of some sort or other. But if this is so, the mere fact of love on its own cannot definitively answer the question of what to live for.

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