



# Loving *Somebody*: Accounting for Human-Animal Love

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## Abstract

In the philosophy of love, the possibility of loving a non-human animal is rarely acknowledged and often explicitly denied. And yet, loving a non-human animal is very common. Evidently, then, there is something wrong with both “human-focused” accounts (e.g. Niko Kolodny, Troy Jollimore), which assume we can only love human beings, and “person-focused” accounts (e.g. David Velleman, Bennett Helm), which understand the nature of love in terms of its being essentially directed toward those with a capacity for normative self-reflection (i.e. “persons”). Even aside from the experiences of those who love a non-human animal, on which I draw, we already have reason to be worried about these latter, “person-focused,” views, insofar as they deny the possibility of loving the various human beings who do not meet their criteria for “personhood,” including at least some human beings with “severe” or “profound” cognitive disabilities. With this in mind, I argue that what we need is the (broader) notion of a “somebody” as a distinctive kind of love-object. This is the notion of a kind of presence of which we are acutely aware when, for example, we look into another’s eyes and see that there is “somebody home.” With this presence, there is a possibility of “togetherness,” and I suggest that it is precisely in the realm of togetherness that the possibility of love arises; the kind of love we speak of when we speak of loving our friends, family and romantic partners, and also, I argue, our animal companions.

**Keywords** Philosophy of love · Companion animals · Animal ethics · David Velleman · Human-animal relationships · Loving animals

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## 1 Introduction

In October 2016, I adopted Gracie, a six-month-old Wheaton Terrier-Poodle mix. I still remember the day she arrived – how she approached me with a gentle sniff and then, looking up at me, wagged her tail. And I remember that first night, the way she hopped casually up onto the foot of the bed and started making herself comfortable, settling this way and that until she had moved my legs into a satisfactory position, and I felt the warmth and the weight of her body against me. By the morning, I had fallen in love.

I had not been prepared for how deeply I would love her. I soon realized that I had not adopted a pet but a family member, an intimate companion, a best friend. And I came to understand what had already been evident to others: that one can genuinely, fully, with all of one's heart, love a non-human animal.

In my love for a dog, I am not alone. (Indeed, in my love for *this* dog I am not alone, for I share this love with my husband, who adores Gracie completely.) George Pitcher, in his memoir *The Dogs Who Came to Stay*, gives a moving narrative of his and his partner, Ed's, loving relationship with their rescued dogs – Lupa, and her son, Remus. Of both dogs, Pitcher says “we simply loved them with all our hearts” (Pitcher 1996: 147).

In *Pack of Two: The Intricate Bond Between People and Dogs* – the memoir of her relationship with her dog, Lucille – Caroline Knapp announces on the first page: “I have fallen in love with my dog” (Knapp 1998: 1). Describing a moment of intimacy between her and Lucille, she writes:

I crouched down by the sofa to scratch her chest and coo at her, and she hooked her front paw over my forearm. She gazed at me; I gazed back. I have had Lucille for close to three years, but moments like that, my heart fills in a way that still strikes me with its novelty and power. ... I adore this dog, without apology (15).

Loving relationships between humans and non-human animals, especially between humans and dogs, are very common. And yet, serious consideration of the possibility of loving a non-human animal rarely appears in the philosophical literature on love.<sup>1</sup> A number of philosophers (taking a “human-focused” approach to love's possible objects) claim that love occurs, properly speaking, only between human beings. Other philosophers (taking a “person-focused” approach) argue that love is, more narrowly, something that occurs only between “persons,” defined by the capacity

<sup>1</sup> There are a few philosophers who pay serious attention to human-animal love. Tony Milligan has recently drawn attention to the philosophical neglect of human-animal love and has argued for its possibility (Milligan 2014, 2018). Elisa Aaltola also has recent work on love for animals and the role it might play in animal ethics (Aaltola 2019). Raimond Gaita gives love of non-human animals serious philosophical treatment (Gaita 2002). George Pitcher talks extensively of his love for his dogs in his memoir *The Dogs Who Came to Stay*, and he was, of course, a philosopher. Martha Nussbaum treats Pitcher's testimony there with philosophical seriousness, drawing on it to argue not just that humans can love non-human animals but that non-human animals can love us in return (Nussbaum 2001: 120–124). Nonetheless, these philosophers are in the minority.

for normative self-reflection. Neither kind of view can account for the possibility – experienced by many – of loving a non-human animal. And this is a problem – an adequate account of love should give us a conception of love that tracks the way we actually use that concept and that answers to our actual experience. The problem with these kinds of exclusionary approaches is perhaps best illustrated by a passage in which David Velleman (2015) reflects on his attitude toward his deceased dog:

I am quite sure that my feelings for my late poodle were a response to the experience of seeing someone there in his eyes. In clearheaded moments, I don't believe that there really was someone there, but I am still under the illusion after his death, remembering him as I would a deceased person – not a lost toy for which I felt a fond attachment but a beloved personal presence, even though he was only a dog (51).

Velleman's philosophical commitment to the idea that we can only love other "persons," understood in terms of the capacity for normative self-reflection, is leading him, it seems, to undermine his actual experience. In his effort to think in a "clear-headed" manner, he is driven to talk about his real dog as though he were not real, and his own grief as though it lacked lucidity. This centers on a strange conflation of the notion of a "someone" with that of rational personhood: to lack the capacities definitive of personhood is to be nobody at all, equivalent to a mere thing. But of course, this is not right: a dog is not a mere thing; a dog is a somebody. Indeed, the notion of a somebody – as distinct from a (mere) *something* – is the very notion that we need, I will argue, in order to understand the nature of love for a companion animal. I argue that loving one's friends, family members, romantic partners, and animal companions, are all instances of the broader phenomenon of loving *somebody*. This is, I think, the view that is most true to experience.

One might think that, in order to account for the love of companion animals, we should adopt a "commodious" approach to love's possible objects, according to which there is no conceptual distinction between the love one can have for a human or person, a non-human animal, or, for example, an artwork, social cause, or vocation. However, as I argue in Sect. 2, such an approach neglects an important conceptual distinction between the love one can have for one's "special somebodies" or "nearest and dearest," on the one hand, and any kind of attitude one can have toward a mere thing, on the other.

This distinction is upheld by both "human-focused" approaches and "person-focused" approaches, but at the expense of excluding non-human animals. The problem with human-focused approaches, I argue in Sect. 3, is not only that they exclude the possibility of loving non-human animals, but that they lack an adequate principle for doing so, citing features of human beings (their "complex inner lives"), in virtue of which they are distinctive objects of love, that are obviously shared with other animals. In Sect. 4, I consider person-focused approaches, which exclude non-human animals on principle, but at the cost of also excluding infants and some humans with severe or profound intellectual disabilities. They are motivated by the thought that we can capture the distinctiveness of the love of one's "nearest and dearest" only by explaining it as something that occurs *essentially* between "persons." I argue that

what we need in order to capture the distinctive nature of this love – the kind of love that one has for one’s “special somebodies” – is not the notion of personhood but precisely the notion of a “somebody,” a notion that includes many non-human animals. In developing this notion of a somebody, in Sect. 5, I emphasize the possibility of *being together with* another somebody. It is this possibility of togetherness, I suggest, that distinguishes one’s friends, family members, romantic partners, and animal companions as objects of love.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Commodious Accounts of Love

For some philosophers, who take a “commodious approach” to love’s possible objects, there is no conceptual distinction between the love we might have for a wide variety of different kinds of object, including, for example, one’s sibling, partner, or friend, but also an artwork, a social cause, or a particular vocation.<sup>3</sup> I want to begin by briefly discussing these views, for two reasons. First, since they allow for love of non-human animals, they might seem to be the natural home for a view like mine, according to which we need to take such love seriously. So I want to explain why I do not simply take this approach. Second, the intuition guiding my rejection of such an approach is the very same intuition that seems to motivate both the human-focused approaches and the person-focused approaches. This discussion should thus reveal a common core between both of those approaches and my own approach.

Notable examples of the commodious approach can be seen in the work of Susan Wolf and Harry Frankfurt, respectively. Susan Wolf claims that there is no conceptual distinction between the love one can have for another person and the love one can have for such things as “philosophy, or music, or the Great Smoky Mountains” (Wolf 2017). Similarly, as Harry Frankfurt construes love, the object of love “may be a person; but it may also be [for example] a country or an institution,” or “a moral or a non-moral ideal,” or “a tradition, or a way of doing things” (Frankfurt 1999: 166). For both Wolf and Frankfurt, what distinguishes love, as a form of caring about something for its own sake, from other, non-loving forms of caring (about something for its own sake), has to do not with the nature of the object of love, but rather with the role that it plays in the volitional or motivational life of the lover – as a meaning-making or identity-constituting commitment – a role that could be played, in principle, by any kind of object (though the lists they each give serve as examples of what we might consider, in practice, *apt* objects for such roles).<sup>4</sup> There is thus no

<sup>2</sup> This is not to deny that there are numerous further distinctions that could be made. The love one has for one’s friends, children, parents, siblings, and romantic partner are all of course in various ways different from one another. Nonetheless, notwithstanding these various differences, we do tend to treat them as falling under the umbrella concept of loving one’s “special somebodies.” What I am suggesting in this paper is that we should understand the love one has for one’s companion animals as falling under this umbrella, though it, too, differs in various ways from all the rest.

<sup>3</sup> I borrow the phrase “commodious approach” from Shpall (2017).

<sup>4</sup> Wolf (2017) distinguishes love as a form of caring for something (for its own sake) that “roots us motivationally to the world.” On her view, it gives us a stake in the reality of the world outside of ourselves, and in being in it, that *mere* care does not. For Frankfurt (1999), loving constitutes the very core of a

conceptual difference, on these views, between the love one might have for one's child and the love one might have for a work of art.

I think, however, that this is a mistake. I do not want to deny that there is a meaningful sense in which one can "love" a mere *thing*, such as an artwork, or justice, or any of the other things mentioned in the "commodious" approaches to love's objects. And understanding love as involving a meaning-making or identity-constituting commitment does capture, I think, what all of these instances of loving have in common – a feature in virtue of which we consider them genuine cases of *love* rather than instances of more trivial uses of the term. But, while there is genuine commonality here between the senses in which I could love an artwork, cause, or vocation, on the one hand, and my sibling, parent, or spouse, on the other, there is also an important difference, such that the latter should not simply be reduced to an instance of the former. Were somebody to tell me that they loved the Mona Lisa, I would *not* take them to mean the same thing as when they had told me that they loved, for example, their child, sibling, or romantic partner. And if they told me that, in fact, they loved the Mona Lisa *in just the same way* that they loved their child, sibling, or romantic partner, I would find the claim unintelligible. Thus, the problem with commodious approaches is that they are insensitive to a conceptual distinction that is actually quite central to our experience and understanding of love.<sup>5</sup> Both Wolf's and Frankfurt's accounts lack the resources for capturing what is distinctive about loving one's "nearest and dearest."<sup>6</sup>

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person's volitional identity, guiding him or her "in supervising the design and the ordering of his [or her] own purposes and priorities" (165). Thus, "without loving, life for us would be intolerably unshaped and empty" (174).

<sup>5</sup> The distinction, as I will argue below, is between loving *something* and loving *somebody*. I think this distinction is a helpful one, but it requires some flexibility in its application. I recently presented an abbreviated version of this paper in a talk at Western Carolina University. In that talk I used the Great Smoky Mountains as my example to be contrasted with loving friend or family member, and I received some helpful pushback. For some of the audience members, it was *not* unintelligible to say that one loves the Great Smoky Mountains in just the same way that one loves, for example, one's mother. The consensus seemed to be that the problem lay not with the distinction between "something" versus "somebody," but rather with the assumption that one could not experience a mountain range as a "somebody." I am especially grateful to David Henderson for raising this point, and to an undergraduate student who was a member of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation and gave a particularly enlightening perspective.

<sup>6</sup> A note of clarification: Sometimes I speak of loving "somebody" and sometimes I speak of loving one's "nearest and dearest" or "special somebodies." What distinguishes the particular kind of love under discussion is, in my view, that it is directed at one's "nearest and dearest" or "special somebodies" (phrases which I use interchangeably). And, moreover, as the phrase "special somebodies" suggests, these are to be understood as, necessarily, *somebodies* and not mere *somethings*. Thus, one must be *somebody* in order to be a possible object of this kind of love. But this doesn't mean that we can make sense of a particular somebody loving *just anybody*. To make sense of Jane's loving Tim in this way requires, as I argue elsewhere, not just that Tim is somebody, but that Tim is one of Jane's special somebodies – that is, that they have a certain kind of relationship (Hogg-Blake 2022: 69–73). Thus, just as it would be bizarre for Jane to give a list of those she loves most in the world as including her spouse, her two children, her one brother, her oldest friend, and the Mona Lisa, so too it would be strange for this list to include her spouse, her two children, her one brother, her oldest friend, and some random guy, Tim, who she had just seen in passing. But the lists would be bizarre in different ways: including Tim is strange because he is not one of Jane's "nearest and dearest," and including the Mona Lisa is strange because it *could not*, in principle, be one of Jane's "nearest and dearest." While Tim is *just anybody* the Mona Lisa is *not somebody*. Similarly, what makes Gracie an appropriate addition to my list is not just that she is *some*

### 3 Human-Focused Accounts of Love

Many philosophers share this intuition about the distinction between loving one's "nearest and dearest" and any attitude we might have toward a mere *thing*, but it has largely been interpreted as distinguishing love as something that is directed only toward other human beings, or more narrowly (in practice if not in principle) toward other rational persons. I'll discuss "human-focused" approaches here and "person-focused" approaches in the following section.

It is quite common for philosophers to start their inquiry into the nature of love by acknowledging that we use the term "love" in a variety of quite loose ways, many of which are directed at mere *things*, and then quickly specify that they are interested in a distinctive kind of love that is directed only towards other humans or persons (where the two notions appear to be treated as synonymous<sup>7</sup>). Thus, for example, Newton-Smith (1989) notes that "we speak of loving persons, food, countries, art, hypothetical divine beings, and so on," before clarifying that in his "conceptual investigation of love" he will be "interested only in cases where the object of a love is some one or more persons" (201–202). Similarly, though acknowledging its wider English usage, Kolodny (2003) says that he is interested in love only as "a state that involves caring about a person" (137). Jollimore (2011), too, acknowledges a wide notion of "love" that we often use in common parlance, according to which "one can be said to love a great many things: Thai food, Bach's concertos, playing or watching baseball, one's country, and even life itself," before noting that he is "especially, indeed exclusively, concerned with love for *persons*" (xi). Though none of these philosophers gives an explicit definition of "person," they each seem to be understanding it as roughly synonymous with "human." Harcourt (2017), too, specifies that he is interested solely in the "love of human beings for other human beings" (39).

Kolodny (2003) takes love for persons to be in some sense paradigmatic, noting that "the species of love that involves caring for another person is the species that most attracts the interests of moral philosophers" (137). Newton-Smith (1989) offers a similar justification, calling love for persons the "home territory of the concept of love" claiming that "the use of 'love' in conjunction with objects other than persons is best understood as an extension of this use" (202).

What, then, are we to make of love for non-human animals? Notably, none of these philosophers explicitly mentions the case of love for a non-human animal – betraying a lack of serious acknowledgment of this question. Given that they are non-human, or non-person, we can only assume that they are meant to fall into the category of love objects on a par with, for example, Thai food, art, or baseball.<sup>8</sup> The problem with this, of course, is that it runs contrary to experience.

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dog – and therefore somebody – but that she is *my* dog, where this signifies a kind of (intersubjective) relationship that I simply could not have with a mere *thing*. I thank two anonymous reviewers for pressing me to clarify some of these issues.

<sup>7</sup> In Sect. 4, I will discuss "person-focused" approaches according to which these terms are *not* synonymous.

<sup>8</sup> There actually seem to be a number of distinctions grouped together here. On the one hand, sometimes we use the term "love" in a trivial sense, as for example when I say that I love chocolate. What I mean here is that I like chocolate, or like eating it, a lot. This could be what someone means when they say that

At Lupa's death, Pitcher (1996) describes he and Ed as "plunged into a world of grief" and writes that "her death has left a great empty place in the center of our ... life" (115). Nonetheless, he writes with gratitude: "she taught me how to deal with the death of someone I love" (117). He goes on:

She taught me how to be with a person in her dying, how to comfort her. ... She taught me not to resent a beloved person for dying but rather to cherish her all the more. She taught me how to say farewell. And she taught me, at last, how to grieve (118).

That Lupa teaches Pitcher how to grieve speaks, I think, to the continuity between the love he has for her and the love he has for certain human beings. Indeed, what all of these testimonies suggest is that insofar as there is a distinctively profound form of love that we can feel for other humans, such as our close friends and family members, it is this kind of love that we can feel, too, for certain non-human animals, such as our dogs.

Indeed, this is suggested not only by the testimony of those who love a non-human animal but also by the very grounds on which the love of human beings is supposed to be distinguished. The "crucial and deep difference," Jollimore (2011) writes, between the love one can have for a person and the love one can have for Thai food, baseball, etc., "has to do with the nature of the love object: the fact that a person, unlike other objects of love, possesses a profound and complex inner life and exists as a subject in the world" (xi-xii). In a similar vein, Harcourt (2017) distinguishes the "love of human beings for other human beings" from anything else we might call "love" (39) citing the special nature of the human being as a "*locus of experience*" and a "*locus of initiative*" (46).

What is interesting is that these characterizations clearly do not, contrary to the authors' intentions, distinguish human beings from all other animals. That many non-human animals have such "complex" inner lives and exist as loci of experience and initiative is quite obvious: it is obvious to those who spend time or have relationships with non-human animals, and it is now quite generally granted by scientists and philosophers.<sup>9</sup> Thus, human beings cannot be distinguished from other animals on this basis.<sup>10</sup>

To anybody who has spent time with, for example, a dog, it is clear that they are conscious beings who experience pleasure and pain, have desires and goals, successes and disappointments, and experience emotions such as fear, anxiety, excite-

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they love baseball, but they might also mean something more serious – maybe playing baseball is their reason for living. There might also be an important distinction between abstract nouns (such as art) and concrete individual things (such as the *Mona Lisa*) as objects of "love." My claim is that none of these instances of the use of the term "love" captures what is meant when one says that one loves a non-human animal companion.

<sup>9</sup> On the emotional lives of animals, see, for example, de Waal (2019), Bekoff (2007), and King (2013).

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, I am not really suggesting that either Jollimore or Harcourt would, upon reflection, deny that non-human animals are loci of subjective experience and initiative, with "complex inner lives." Since this is so obvious, I think it is more likely that they simply hadn't registered its significance, having instead simply assumed that humans are special objects of love and only cursorily defended that assumption.

ment, joy, boredom, frustration and sadness. It is clear, too, that they are curious, that they learn, explore, and play, and that they communicate and form deep social bonds. I have no doubt, for example, that when Gracie greets me or my husband when we return home, her tail wagging her whole body; or when she runs bouncily alongside her friends at the park, tongue lolling out the side of her mouth; or rolls on I-don't-know-what, her little legs dancing in the air; she is happy – joyful, in fact. Her joy radiates. Similarly, it is clear that when she licks my face in the morning she intends to wake me up, because she wants to be fed; and again when she taps me on the knee in the afternoon. It is obvious, too, that when my husband packs the car to go away on a trip, and she watches the door and whines, that she is anxious; and that after he leaves, she is upset. Her contentment, when she lies on her back, across the length of the sofa, slightly twisted with limbs in the air, is plain. Thus, the ethologist Frans de Waal (2019) recommends that “any academic who doubts the depth of animal emotions ought to get a dog” (50).<sup>11</sup>

#### 4 Person-Focused Approaches

Another, quite influential, kind of view, holds that love occurs, properly speaking, only between “persons,” where personhood is defined by a capacity for normative self-reflection – a capacity which does seem to exclude all non-human animals. I’ll focus, in particular, on the views of Helm (2009) and David Velleman (1999, 2015), respectively. Whereas commodious approaches fail to distinguish the love we have for the special people in our lives from the love we can have for a wide variety of things, these “person-focused” approaches begin by singling out these cases as distinctive. They then argue that we can capture what makes love distinctive only by explaining it as something that occurs essentially between persons.

According to Helm (2009), for example, we can capture the “distinctively intimate” and “deeply personal” nature of love – a form of caring for the beloved for her own sake that is distinct from other, impersonal, modes of caring about another for her own sake, such as compassion or moral concern – only when we understand it as essentially directed toward a person (39). “To be a person,” Helm writes, “is, roughly, to be a creature with a capacity to care not merely about things or ends in the world but also about yourself and the motives for action that are truly your own.” This is the capacity to *value* – and the identity of a particular person is constituted by her values. Moreover, to value something is to be committed not only to the thing that is valued but also to its place within one’s identity – it involves a commitment to oneself and to being true to oneself (46). This commitment to one’s own identity implicit in the act of valuing gives a certain kind of depth, we might suppose, to the lives of persons. And it constitutes, in Helm’s view, *self-love* (48). When one loves another person, in Helm’s view, one takes to heart *her* value-constituted identity in a way that is analogous to one’s commitment to one’s own identity in love for oneself. In this way, the

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Bekoff (2007) writes that “To live with a dog is to know firsthand that animals have feelings. It’s a no-brainer.” (xx) In any case, this paper is not addressed to those who seriously doubt that at least some non-human animals have complex inner lives.



lover is said to share in the beloved's values, not in the sense of absorbing them into the lover's own identity, but sharing them *as her values*, for *her sake*, presupposing "a commitment to the import of the particular person she is" and thus preserving her *otherness*. Love, for Helm, is to be understood as a kind of "intimate identification" in which the lover takes the beloved "to heart," as the particular individual that she is, while preserving her separateness (50–51).

This picture is supposed to capture all at once the senses in which love is deep, personal, and intimate. It is "personal" in the sense that it is caring about another not just as *a* person but as the particular person that she is – as *this* person with this particular identity. In its essential reference to the reflective-value-constituted identity of the person, it goes deep. And the love of another finds its intimacy in its structural analogy to self-love. Thus, whereas for Wolf and Frankfurt, love is a kind of commitment that could, in principle, take any kind of object, Helm distinguishes love as essentially directed toward a person. The distinctive nature of love cannot be captured, according to Helm, except as something that occurs exclusively between persons.

Velleman (1999), too, portrays love – of the kind that we have for, for example, "our own children, spouses, parents, and intimate friends" (372) – as something that occurs, essentially, between persons. Love is, Velleman argues, an "arresting awareness" of the beloved's value – phenomenologically similar to awe, reverence, or wonder – that "disarms our emotional defenses" and "makes us vulnerable to the other" (361). Specifically – and what makes the love of persons distinctive – it is a response to the value that the beloved has "by virtue of being a person or ... an instance of rational nature," understood in terms of "a capacity to care about things in that reflective way which is distinctive of self-conscious creatures like us" (365). This capacity for reflective valuation, definitive of personhood, is to be understood as, "at its utmost," the capacity to love, and thus, "what our hearts respond to" in loving someone is "another heart" (366).

Both Helm and Velleman go some way toward capturing the spirit of what is distinctive about the kind of love we are interested in. Helm gives a picture of love that makes an essential reference to the perspective of another, thereby distinguishing it from any attitude we might have toward a mere thing, where that perspective is fleshed out in a particular way (specifically, as a value-constituted identity). Velleman captures this poetically in the idea of "another heart." And both thereby also allude to the idea of something going on *between* lover and beloved – a kind of connection that is not possible with a mere thing.

However, I think they are wrong to distinguish love in terms of an essential connection to *personhood* (as they are understanding the term). First, by limiting the possible objects of this kind of love to persons, these views give an overly narrow view that fails to fully capture the variety of experience. Second, I want to show that, precisely in their exclusion of (beings who are) non-persons as objects of love, they thereby fail to fully capture the nature of love, even when it takes a "person" as its object. Third – a closely related point – though they do allude to a certain kind of connection that distinguishes this kind of love, and a person as a distinctive object of love, their notions of connection in fact remain strangely one-sided. I'll discuss the first two points presently and the third in the following section.

#### 4.1 An Overly Exclusive View of Love's Possible Objects

Not only do such views fail to capture the possibility of loving non-human animals in the way suggested by the testimonies I opened with; they would also exclude certain human beings from the range of love's possible objects, viz. those who lack the capacities definitive of "personhood" so described. Helm (2009) is quite explicit about this with regard to non-human animals and infants: "On this understanding of love," he writes, "dogs and infants, insofar as they are not (yet) persons . . . , are not proper objects for our love" (52).<sup>12</sup> It would also, though Helm does not acknowledge this, seem to exclude some human beings with "severe" or "profound" intellectual disabilities.<sup>13</sup> This is a problem insofar as it contradicts experience.

It is something of a truism in our culture that parents love their infant children. It might thus seem unnecessary to drive the point home. Nonetheless, I refer to the written experience of a new mother. Anne Lamott, in her memoir *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*, documents the experience of encountering this new, world-changing kind of love. When her son, Sam, is one month old, she writes:

I look down into his staggeringly lovely little face, and I can hardly breathe sometimes. He is all I have ever wanted, and my heart is so huge with love that I feel like it is about to go off." (Lamott 1993: 60).

At only one month old, Sam was not yet a "person" in Helm or Velleman's sense, and yet it seems plain that his mother loves him. Presumably, if all goes well, Sam will develop the capacities definitive of personhood, and so he is someone who has personhood in his future. And indeed, when one loves an infant, one's love might be shaped by this expectation. But it will not do simply to say that we can love infants qua potential persons, since some humans – humans who are loved – will never be persons in this sense. Kittay (1999) writes lovingly of her "severely" (161) intellectually disabled daughter, Sesha, at twenty-seven:

I am awakening and her babbling-brook giggles penetrate my semiconscious state. Hands clapping. Sesha is listening to 'The Sound of Music.' Peggy, her caregiver of twenty-three years, has just walked in and Sesha can hardly con-

<sup>12</sup> Velleman is a little more ambiguous about who can be an object of love. In "Love as a Moral Emotion" he concedes that "love is felt for many things other than possessors of rational nature." However, the account of love that he gives is specifically an account of loving a "person," and it is an account of such love as being quite distinctive (Velleman 1999: 365). And, as we have seen, in his later paper, "Beyond Price," he characterizes his love for his dog as dependent upon projecting onto the dog a personhood that he does not have, and in that sense as being delusional (Velleman 2015: 50–51).

<sup>13</sup> There is of course vast diversity between individuals with intellectual disabilities. The American Psychiatric Association diagnoses intellectual disability on the basis of "deficits in intellectual functions" and "deficits in adaptive functioning" that have their onset in "the developmental period," and distinguishes between different "levels of severity" of intellectual disability – "mild," "moderate," "severe," and "profound" – "on the basis of adaptive functioning" (American Psychiatric Association 2013: 33). Presumably only a small minority of those with intellectual disabilities, and probably only those with "severe" or "profound" disabilities (and not necessarily all of those in these groups), lack the capacities definitive of "personhood," as it is here being defined.

tain her desire to throw her arms around Peggy and give Peggy her distinctive kiss—mouth open, top teeth lightly (and sometimes not so lightly) pressing on your cheek, her breath full of excitement and happiness, her arms around your neck (if you're lucky; if not, arms up, hands on hair, which caveman-like, she uses to pull your face to her mouth). Sesha's kisses are legendary (and if you're not on your toes, somewhat painful) (160).

Sesha does not have the capacities definitive of "personhood," in Helm and Velleman's sense, and she never will; and yet it is plain that – of course – her mother loves her. Clearly, there is something wrong with those views that would deny or demean the possibility of such love. Indeed, if the principle for excluding non-human animals from the range of love's possible objects leads also to the exclusion of certain human beings, this should be cause for doubt over that principle, even for those not initially convinced by the testimonies given in the Introduction of loving a non-human animal.

Helm (2009) presumably seeks to appease such an objection when he claims that his distinction between the genuine love we can have for a "person" and the mere "care" we can have for those deemed "non-persons" is "largely a matter of stipulating a linguistic convention" (52). His aim is thus not to describe how we in fact use the term "love" but, rather, to say how we in some sense ought to use the term. But even leaving aside the dubious moral status of such a linguistic stipulation, there is a further, conceptual problem. For, the linguistic distinction was supposed to be grounded in a conceptual distinction, and that conceptual distinction was supposed to hinge on the "deeply personal" and "distinctively intimate" nature of love proper – qualities that distinguish it from, among other things, the kind of moral concern we might have for just anyone. But Lamott's concern for her infant son, and Kittay's concern for her cognitively disabled daughter, are not the kinds of concern they might have for just anyone. Indeed, whatever might distinguish these instances of concern from modes of care one could have for a "person," it surely cannot be that the latter are "deeply personal" and "distinctively intimate" while the former are not; for there is nothing impersonal or non-intimate about the former. It seems then that the intimate and personal nature of love cannot be dependent on personhood so understood: however we account for the intimate and personal nature of love, it will need to be broad enough to include these cases.

Indeed, part of the point of Kittay's writing about loving her severely cognitively disabled daughter, I take it, is to show that it is simply an instance of *loving one's daughter*. Thus, we should resist any urge to distinguish between a distinctive sense of "love" that we can have only for other "persons," and a second sense of "love" that we can have for a human or non-human animal deemed a "non-person" (while perhaps reserving a third sense of "love" that we can have toward a non-being, such as an artwork or cause).<sup>14</sup> That we should resist any such urge is also suggested by

<sup>14</sup> This is not to deny that there are various differences between the love we can have for a "person" and the love we can have for a "non-person," just as there are various differences between loving, for example, one's friend, partner, child, or parent. What I am suggesting is that when we understand the special kind of love that we have for our nearest and dearest purely in terms of their personhood, we thereby give an impoverished picture not only of who we can love but also, as I discuss presently, of how we love. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this.

the testimonies I started with, of loving non-human animals.<sup>15</sup> That we should *not* consider love for persons as fundamentally distinct from loving beings who are “non-persons” is further supported by the following observation, to which I now turn: that even when the object of our love is a person, so conceived, we do not love them only *qua* person; that is, our love is directed not only toward their “personhood,” and its nature cannot therefore be characterized purely in reference to the fact that it takes a person as its object.

## 4.2 An Overly Narrow Focus

It is important to note that while our experience as “persons” is fundamentally shaped by our capacity for reflective valuation, we are not *only* reflective valuers, and much of our experience is continuous with those who lack such a capacity – human and non-human alike. For we are also animals, and the richness of our experience is not reducible to our capacity for reflective valuation. It thus seems implausible to say that when we love another person, we love them purely *qua* reflective valuer.

This is not to deny that when we love a person we do love them precisely as, *among other things*, somebody with the capacity for reflective valuation – that is, as a person. Thus, a loving concern for their well-being ought to be sensitive to how *they* conceive of their good, to whether they are proud or ashamed of themselves, and whether they are living the kind of life they want to lead. What it denies is that our love must thereby be focused *purely* on their personhood, and thus sensitive only to those twists of fate that bear on some reflectively held value.

Helm (2009) is particularly explicit about what he sees as love’s narrow focus. He says that things have import to us *under some particular description*, and that love involves a commitment to the import of another person *understood as a person (in his technical sense)*, or, more precisely, *as this person, with these particular values*. He says further that the well-being of a person understood in this way “crucially depends ... on whether she has upheld the values constitutive of her identity” (46). A loving concern, for another or for oneself, is thus, in Helm’s view, *always* to be understood as, ultimately, a concern about whether the object of one’s love is living up to her values. But this focus of concern is implausibly narrow. We have a deeply personal and intimate aversion to, for example, the physical pain or injury of our loved ones. And we share, for example, in their sadness, joy, or contentment, even when (as is, I think, most often) these emotions have no focus on their “identity” and its affirmation or transgression.

<sup>15</sup> I want to tread carefully here. To reiterate: my aim is not to make a comparison between loving a severely cognitively disabled human and loving a non-human animal, such that both are to be understood as different from loving a cognitively typical adult human – a “person” in Helm’s and Velleman’s terms – and thereby to suggest that Sesha is more “animal” than “human,” whatever exactly that means. It is against the backdrop of these kinds of comparisons, manifested in claims about Sesha’s moral status, that Kittay (2005, 2009) is forced to defend, and thereby to emphasize, Sesha’s humanity – something that I have no interest in doubting. What I am trying to emphasize is what we all have in common – something that might be expressed by stating the obvious point that we are *all*, human and non-human, person and non-person, *animals*. But, moreover, we are all a special kind of animal – a *somebody* – and are thereby capable of being somebody else’s *special somebody*. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for asking me to clarify this.

Gracie is not a “person,” in Helm’s or Velleman’s sense, but she is *somebody*, capable of striving and suffering, vulnerable to the world.<sup>16</sup> She has a vivid sensory experience, in many ways like my own and in many ways unlike it. She experiences pleasures and pains and a rich array of emotions and desires. And my love for her involves caring for her precisely as a being with this kind of experience. I delight in her joy just as I delight in, for example, my husband’s. I am invested in her getting what she wants, with various qualifications, just as I am invested, also with various qualifications, in my husband getting what he wants. Her pain or danger evokes in me distress, sadness, and sometime panic, just as with the pain or danger of my other loved ones.

Part of what is valuable about Helm’s account of love is that it captures the sense in which you “take your beloved to heart” without simply taking on her values and concerns as your own and thereby absorbing her identity into yours. But we can have a version of this insight without reference to personhood or value-constituted-identity. We might construe it as, for example, seeing those things that are important to your beloved as important precisely *as* things that are important to her; thus distinguishing between her perspective and your own, while at the same time investing her perspective with a certain level of importance. Indeed, the loving act of taking another’s perspective to heart is perhaps most important and challenging – and thereby most radical – when that perspective is very different from one’s own. An example of this kind of radical empathy can be seen when one of Sessa’s caregivers recounts her realization about how this caregiving role would work: “Thank you for being my teacher, Sessa. I see now. Not my way. Your way. Slowly.” (Kittay 1999: 165).

Part of what is involved in my loving Gracie is my taking her perspective to heart. This can be seen in something as simple as letting her sniff. I have learned to cultivate patience on our walks together, stopping with her as she sniffs a tree, or a post, or a particular spot of grass, often in painstaking detail. Stopping several times each minute, I can often feel bored and impatient – a sense that our journey is being continually interrupted. Such sniffing has no point to me. But it has a point to her, and so I control my emotions, I slow down, I step outside of myself and my own urges, and I acknowledge that it is important to stop and wait precisely because it is important *to her*. This is just one of many ways in which I take to heart not just her well-being, understood in some objective sense divorced from her own subjectivity, but moreover her perspective as a subject and as an agent (or in Harcourt’s words: as a locus of experience and initiative).

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<sup>16</sup> One might of course disagree with Helm’s and Velleman’s definitions of personhood and argue that, while Gracie does not have the capacity for normative self-reflection, she is nonetheless, in an important sense, a person. I am, indeed, sympathetic to this approach. However, for the sake of ease of exposition, I will follow Helm and Velleman’s use of the term “person” and grant that Gracie is not a person, in that descriptive sense.

## 5 Loving Somebody

What distinguishes both Sessa and Gracie from such things as music, or philosophy, or the Mona Lisa, and what they have in common with those deemed “persons,” is that they are *somebodies*. Indeed, whatever initial plausibility Velleman’s view has seems to trade, in part, on his conflation of the notion of a “person” (understood as having a “rational nature”) with this notion of a “somebody” or “someone.” We see this in the passage I quoted in the Introduction, in which he says that “I am quite sure that my feelings for my late poodle were a response to the experience of seeing someone there in his eyes,” before asserting that “in clearheaded moments, I don’t believe that there really was someone there,” since his poodle was not a “person.” It is quite plausible that the nature of Velleman’s love for his poodle owed to the fact that he saw somebody there in his poodle’s eyes. What is *implausible* is the claim that this was a mere “illusion,” that there was not really anybody home. And this latter, quite odd, claim stems from his unwarranted assumption – with the evidence to the contrary literally staring him in the face – that *somebodiness* entails rational personhood.<sup>17</sup>

Velleman is too quick to dismiss his own experience. In fact, I think the primary mode of identifying another “somebody” is precisely through this felt awareness of a particular kind of *presence*, and only secondarily through the ascription of various features.<sup>18</sup> Thus, when we ask what the features are that make a somebody, we should be sensitive to what exactly it is that we are experiencing when we feel the presence of another somebody. And what we see in this case, when we look at another somebody, is hard to articulate, but is often captured in terms of seeing that there is “somebody home,” or that there is somebody *looking back* at me. And what we mean by this is something different, I take it, from seeing “rational personhood,” or the capacity for normative self-reflection, in the other. Thus, we cannot dismiss the experience as an illusion on the basis that the other does not in fact have such a capacity.<sup>19</sup>

Experiencing the presence of another somebody – the experience that there is “somebody home” or somebody *looking back* – is to experience intersubjectivity. To look at someone and have them look back *just is* to be in the realm of intersubjectivity. What is distinctive about a somebody, in this sense, is that when one is *with* somebody, one is not alone. It is here, I think, in the realm of *togetherness*, that we get to the heart of the distinctiveness of a somebody as an object of the distinctive kind of love in which we are interested – the kind of love that we are speaking of when we speak of loving our friends, family and romantic partners, and also, I propose, our animal companions.

Thus, if we want to define a “somebody,” understood as a possible object of this kind of love, we might think in terms of the characteristics that make such a connection possible. We might then characterize a “somebody” as, most minimally, a locus

<sup>17</sup> I emphasize the strangeness of this claim not to be mean-spirited or overly critical – there is, after all, much to be admired in Velleman’s discussions of love, and my own view is in some ways heavily indebted to his – but rather to make plain the trouble caused by the singular focus on rational personhood.

<sup>18</sup> For a beautiful discussion of the nature of such encounters, see Smuts (2001).

<sup>19</sup> My claim is not that we never make mistakes in seeing. Rather, my claim is that we should defer to instances of “seeing somebody” (even when such seeing is mistaken) to determine what it is we tend to be claiming when we claim that there is “somebody there.”

of experience and initiative, or as having a more or less “complex inner life,” or more richly as someone for whom there is a way that it is to be her, capable of striving and suffering, vulnerable to the world. Our description of these characteristics should be sensitive to the kind of connection we are trying to describe. I want to use the notion of “togetherness” as a thicker notion than mere intersubjectivity, moments of interaction marked not only by a mutual recognition of each other as a somebody but also by a mutual openness, receptivity and attunement to one another as such.<sup>20</sup> These notions should always be sensitive to careful descriptions of the multitude of actual experience. Here I will give some brief descriptions of the ways in which Gracie and I connect.

Together we meander through trails in the woods. I turn one way and she follows; she turns another and I follow her. We are constantly keeping track of, and keeping up with, one another’s movements. I take in the sights and sounds while Gracie walks slightly ahead following scents, leading the way, looking back to make sure I am following. Sometimes she loses herself in a scent and I overtake, lost in thought. I call her name, she looks up, and bounds toward me, joining me again. I break into a run, call her name and gesture to her, and she runs alongside me, ears flapping in the wind. We run just to run together.

The way in which Gracie and I are continually, mutually aware of one another’s living, embodied presence, and are open and attuned to one another as such, is such that we experience ourselves as being and doing *together*. At home, we are usually in the same room. When I make to leave, she often gets up and casually follows – unexcited by the obviousness of the fact that she will be joining me. She joins me even in the bathroom, laying at my feet with a sigh, or sniffing around me intrusively. When I nap, or sit down to watch TV, I call her name and she joins me. Sometimes we lie touching, other times we are at opposite sides of the bed. Sometimes she comes to me and lies on my foot as I sit, and I feel her heartbeat against my toes.

Such togetherness might be more or less intimate, and more or less in the foreground of our focus. It is a mark of our familiarity that our togetherness often recedes into the background – as when close friends can comfortably share a silence. Sometimes we recline on opposite ends of the sofa, while I work and listen to the rhythm of her breath. Sometimes our intimacy is pronounced, when she leans into me and I hold her close.

My thought is that understanding the possibility of my loving Gracie – in the full and proper sense of this word – begins with understanding the possibility of our relating, connecting, bonding, all understood as involving various forms of togetherness.

## 5.1 A Further Note on Helm and Velleman

Indeed, another strange feature of both Helm’s and Velleman’s accounts is that, while they are both concerned with the kind of love we have for those special somebodies with whom we share a relationship, their picture of love remains, perhaps unexpectedly, one-sided. For Helm, the “intimacy” of love lies purely within the subjectivity

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<sup>20</sup> I have developed this notion of “togetherness” at more length elsewhere (see Hogg-Blake 2022: 79–85, 125–129).

of the lover, in the structural analogy between her self-love and her love of the other. What is important is that she takes her beloved's identity to heart – but she could presumably, at least in principle, do this without ever actually *interacting with* her beloved. The very possibility of *being with* another person thus becomes tangential to what makes, for Helm, a person a possible object of this distinctive love.

Velleman's account is similarly one-sided. Though the notion of love as a heart responding to another heart captures a sense of connectedness to the object of love, on Velleman's model this connection exists purely within the subjectivity of the lover. Though he speaks of the significance of the possibility of somebody *looking back* at him, the *dialogical* nature of this interaction is not significant for him. It doesn't matter, for his view, that when you look at somebody and they look back, there is a kind of *mutual awareness*, something going on genuinely *between* the two of you. Rather, such looking is only, for Velleman, of epistemic significance – seeing somebody looking back at you is just evidence that there is, indeed, “somebody home,” and thus that they have the kind of value that makes them loveable. But you might also see this just by *watching*, maybe from afar – the beloved needn't, in principle, even know that you are there.<sup>21</sup> When Velleman writes that love is “the heart's realization that it is not alone,” he means to say, it seems, that love is a distinctive kind of emotional awareness, or seeing, that somebody else is out there. But “out there” does not mean, for him, “right here *with* me,” and thus “aleness” is not to be contrasted, in his view, with a robust form of “togetherness,” such that the two hearts actually *meet*. It is precisely the possibility of a *meeting* of hearts, however, that we might have thought especially significant to the kind of love we have for our nearest and dearest.

## 5.2 A Meeting of Hearts

We might say, then, that love has its home in a meeting of hearts. Now, there are of course various differences in the ways that I can be together with Gracie, on the one hand, and the forms of togetherness that I might have with a typical adult human, or “person,” on the other. I cannot, for example, discuss my hopes and fears with Gracie, or converse about what it means to love. Nor, however, could I do this with a young child, and nor could Kittay do this with Sessa, and yet we would not want to say that this precludes the possibility of a meaningful relationship. Moreover, even when the other is a “person,” the nature of our togetherness cannot be understood purely in terms of our shared rational capacities. On the contrary, such togetherness is paradigmatically *bodily*, involving more or less intimate physical proximity.<sup>22</sup> Such physical proximity is not *necessary* for togetherness – it might be achieved, when each has

<sup>21</sup> I do not want to deny that we can use the term “love” in this way, understood as something that might occur from a distance. Nussbaum (2022), for example, gives an example of this kind of love in her daughter's love for whales (261). But it is not the kind of love I am interested in here. Moreover, Velleman, like Helm, means to be picking out the kind of love that we have for our close friends and relatives, in which case we might have thought that the *somebodiness* of the beloved would be relevant not just in terms of her value but also for the possibility of *interaction*.

<sup>22</sup> This is not to suggest that togetherness must necessarily, or even paradigmatically, involve *touch*. The physical proximity may simply take the form of being in the same room. The level and intimacy of touch will depend on kind of relationship and its particular details.



the relevant capacities, via technology such as the telephone or video calling.<sup>23</sup> But these physically distant forms of connection are usually experienced as derivative and deficient forms of such togetherness, as is clear, for example, from the collective dismay at “social distancing” during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, then, there is continuity rather than disconnection between the ways in which we can be together with those who share our rational capacities and the ways in which we can be together with those who do not share these capacities.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, emotional connection does not depend on shared rational capacities. Consider, for example, the mutual joy and affection that seems to be of central importance in the bond between Gracie and me.<sup>25</sup> At our regular family “dance parties,” my husband and I will put on some kind of up-beat song and dance around, as Gracie joins in, jumping up, spinning around, wiggling and wagging her tail. Our days are filled with play. In hide-and-seek, I go to another room and hide, under a desk or behind a door, and call Gracie’s name. My husband accompanies her as she looks for me, excitement building. I hear her little footsteps getting closer, and then retreating. I call her name again, and back she comes, this time closer, until eventually she sees me, wagging her tail or jumping up as we reunite. In the garden, or in the living room, we play tug-of-war with her rope toys. I am sure to let her win, if she doesn’t anyway, and she trots around holding the rope in her mouth with her head held high. When my husband or I return home, Gracie greets us at the door, jumps up at us, licks us, and wags not just her tail but her whole back end, for minutes. For Gracie, all separations from either me or my husband, no matter how short, are deserving of such a reunion. This delight is, of course, mutual.

I have argued elsewhere that love should be understood as “caring attachment” (Hogg-Blake 2022: 108–115). Insofar as love involves caring for the beloved for her own sake, then one way in which loving somebody is distinct from any attitude we might have toward a mere *thing* is that a somebody has “her own sake” in a way that is ontologically distinct from any way in which a mere thing might have *its* own sake – since a somebody is, by definition, a subject of experience – and thus the possible object of care in each case is quite fundamentally different. But, although this feature of love has often been neglected or denied by philosophers, love also involves an attachment to the beloved, understood as a felt need to be together with her (90–108).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Nor is such physical proximity sufficient for togetherness, since I can be, for example, in the physical proximity of a mere thing. Further, I can be physically near somebody without one or either of us knowing it. And even where there is mutual awareness of one another’s presence, this doesn’t by itself entail togetherness. I might, for example, sit next to a stranger in a waiting room, where we are mutually aware of one another, and may even interact, without being or waiting “together” in the sense intended, for there is not the required openness between us.

<sup>24</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to clarify this.

<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Kittay (1999) emphasizes “the capacities for love and for happiness”: “These allow those of us who care for [Sesha], who love her, who have been entrusted with her well-being to form deep and abiding attachments to her. Sesha’s coin and currency is love. That is what she wishes to receive and that is what she reciprocates in spades.” (160–161).

<sup>26</sup> For Helm, Frankfurt, and Velleman, respectively, love is essentially disinterested and distinct from attachment. For Helm (2009), love is *nothing but* a form of caring for the beloved *for her own sake* (41). Frankfurt (1999) is adamant about the disinterested nature of love (165). Love is understood, in Frankfurt’s

Attachment can be understood as one side of a dyadic *affectional bond*, in which the participants experience mutual enjoyment and affection in one another's presence, seek at least some frequency of togetherness with one another, miss one another during times of separation, delight in reunion, and would experience a form of grief in the face of permanent loss or separation.<sup>27</sup> This is, as I have tried to show, the kind of bond that I have with Gracie.

### 5.3 Love and the Need for Connection

At this point, we can return to the commodious approaches of Wolf and Frankfurt, discussed in Sect. 2, and look at them from a new angle. Recall that, for both Wolf and Frankfurt, love is distinguished by the role that it plays in the volitional or motivational life of the lover. Part of what it is to understand love, on these views, is to understand its distinctive importance in the lives of creatures like us.<sup>28</sup> It seems that, for Wolf, we are essentially creatures for whom there is meaning, and love gives meaning to the world; it gives us reasons to live (Wolf 2018: Sect. 5). For Frankfurt, we are distinguished as persons by the structure of our wills, and loving constitutes the very core of a person's volitional identity. "Without loving," he writes, "life for us would be intolerably unshaped and empty" (Frankfurt 1999: 174).

We are, indeed, beings for whom there is meaning: beings for whom things can deeply, profoundly, and categorically *matter*. Our sensitivity to the meaning of things is such that we can be, for example, existentially shattered by tragic events.<sup>29</sup> And, further, we *need* meaningful lives. Sometimes when people suffer from depression they express their state of mind in terms of experiencing things – life, the world – as having no meaning (for them, anymore). Any kind of object might, in principle, play

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view, as a particular form of concern for the "well-being or flourishing" of the beloved, and he insists on "the irrelevance to love not just of considerations that are self-regarding but of *all* considerations that are distinct from the interests of the beloved" (167-8). For Velleman (1999), love is an "arresting awareness" of the beloved's value, understood as "rather like a state of attentive suspension, similar to wonder or amazement or awe" (360). The recent works of Wonderly (2016, 2017) and Harcourt (2017), respectively, are notable exceptions to the general neglect of attachment in the philosophy of love.

<sup>27</sup> These notions of "attachment" and "affectional bond" are influenced by the work of Bowlby (1977, 1997) and Ainsworth (1991). However, our terminology differs slightly. I am using the term "affectional bond" to refer to a dyadic relationship, whereas the term is used by Bowlby and Ainsworth to refer to an attitude of one individual toward another within the dyadic relationship, for which I am using the term "attachment" (see, for example, Ainsworth 1991: 38). Ainsworth and Bowlby reserve the term "attachment" for something more specific – as just one kind of what I am referring to as "attachments" – in which the attachment figure provides a sense of security (see, for example, Ainsworth 1991: 38; Bowlby 1977: 203; 1997: 376–77).

<sup>28</sup> Wolf (2018) for example, asks "What can we mean by 'love' when we so much as entertain the thought that it makes the world go round?" (Sect. 3. See also Wolf, Sect. 2.)

<sup>29</sup> It is not clear, however, that this capacity for meaning-making is peculiar to human beings or that it should be reduced to the capacities typically supposed to be definitive of rational "personhood." Consider, for example, Jane Goodall's description of grieving chimpanzees: "I have watched chimpanzee children, after the death of their mothers, show behavior similar to clinical depression in grieving human children – hunched posture, rocking, dull staring eyes, lack of interest in events around them. ... Sometimes, in this state of grieving, chimpanzee orphans – like Flint and Kristal – die." (Goodall, *Foreword* in Bekoff 2007: xiv).

this role, and thus, both Wolf and Frankfurt take a commodious approach to love's possible objects.

But, when we consider the importance of love in our lives, our need for meaning is not, I think, the only thing that should come to mind. The love that we have for our "nearest and dearest" can be seen as distinctive, when thinking in terms of the importance of love in the lives of creatures like us, insofar as it relates to our basic need for connection with others. We need connection not just to the world in general but also, specifically, to other somebodies; this is a need for bonding and intimacy, and for secure, ongoing relationships in which such things take place.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the possibility of loving a non-human animal can be explained by our having something deeply in common, viz. the need and capacity for affectional bonding. Love truly is, in this sense, a heart responding to another heart.

## 6 Conclusion: Love as a Moral Education

I want to conclude by turning to the question of moral status, and to think about the ways in which reflections on love might help us to think about that. As a kind of appreciative response to the value of a person – the value that they have *qua* person – love is, Velleman argues, a "moral emotion." For, the value to which the lover responds is the very same value that demands Kantian respect: respect and love are, Velleman says, "the required minimum and optional maximum responses to one and the same value" (Velleman 1999: 366). Further, Velleman ends his paper by suggesting that love is a "moral education" (374). I take it that what he means by this is that in loving someone we get a particularly deep acquaintance with their value, such that we are better able to see and appreciate this value in others and are thereby more prone to be moved by their fates.<sup>31</sup>

But if love is a moral education – if it is in some sense revealing of this special value of individuals – then we should let it be a moral education. That is to say, we should not have strict and inflexible preconceptions about who is in fact loveable, and to what features their special value owes. Thus, it is Kittay, and not Velleman, who seems to truly treat love as a moral education, when she describes her experience of learning of Sessa's cognitive disability:

"Her impairment in no way mitigated my love for her. If it had any impact on that love it was only to intensify it. She was so vulnerable. .... We didn't yet realize how much she would teach us, but we already knew that we had learned something. That which we believed we valued, what we—I—thought was at

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Wolf (2018) notes that the phrase "love makes the world go around" is usually understood as referring to love for other people (Sect. 3). This would in fact suggest that the need for connection is more basic than the need for meaning.

<sup>31</sup> This is, I take it, what Velleman is suggesting in his criticism of Bernard Williams' famous "one thought too many" argument. (Velleman 1999: 373–374. See also Williams 1981: 16–18.)

the center of humanity, the capacity for thought, for reason, was not it, not it at all.” (Kittay 1999: 159–160.)<sup>32</sup>

Love can be a humbling experience, and it can reveal to us things that we didn’t, and perhaps couldn’t, already know. We do it a disservice when we seek to undermine or pathologize it in terms of things we thought we knew. I think this is precisely the mistake that Velleman makes when reflecting on his grief over the death of his dog. Left to do its work, love might teach us something about the moral value of animals. It has certainly taught me something about their value. Sometimes as Gracie and I lie together, I really look at her, her rounded stomach, her legs extended to almost the length of the bed, those paws, those ears, her soft grey-and-black-and-white fur, her expressive brown eyes. The rhythmic sound of her breath, the feel of her heartbeat, her body gently rising and falling. And I think to myself, *God, I can’t put you into words*. In moments like this, I am confronted with a value in her that is incomparable. And through the window of my love for her, I see the world anew; not only do I smile at each dog that walks by; I see more clearly, too, the individuality of each squirrel, bird, or deer that I encounter, more heavily impressed by the thought that we are fellow creatures on this earth.

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<sup>32</sup> Kittay does suggest, and argues elsewhere (2005, 2009), that the value to which she is responding in Sessa is a distinctively *human* value (though she is not arguing that we cannot therefore love non-humans). I find Kittay’s work instructive for debunking the focus on rational capacities of “persons,” but I do not directly address the further claim about the specialness of human beings simply in virtue of being human.

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