

## Preface

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In 2004, distinguished philosopher Harry Frankfurt delivered The Tanner Lectures at Stanford University. The lectures were entitled “Taking Ourselves Seriously” and “Getting it Right.” Commentaries were given by Christine Korsgaard (Harvard University); Michael Bratman (Stanford University); Meir Dan-Cohen (University of California-Berkeley, Boalt Hall School of Law); and Eleonore Stump (Saint Louis University). The comments of the first three scholars are included within this volume.

Frankfurt’s Tanner Lectures are concerned with the structure of our most basic thinking about how to live. For the last thirty years, since the publication of “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” Frankfurt has explored in lucid and elegant prose the nature of what it means to be human.

As human beings, we are perhaps uniquely capable of reflecting on ourselves, on who we are and about our reasons for doing what we do. But this cherished ability to reflect,

which allows us to be autonomous agents, is also a source of difficulty for us. When we reflect on our desires and goals, we may find that we are ambivalent about them. We may feel uncertain as to whether these are worth caring about at all. The ability to reflect can forge an inner division and lead to self-alienation. Reflection is thus a human achievement, but it is also a source of internal disunity, confusion, and paralysis.

In these lectures, Frankfurt explores the ways that our capacity to love can play a role in restoring unity to our agency. Love gives us ends for our actions, and helps to structure our deliberations. On Frankfurt's view, love is a form of caring especially tied to self-integration. Love plays this role because love is a matter of necessity. We cannot help but care about the things we love—as in Martin Luther's famous remark that here he stands, he can do no other. When we love, we overcome our ambivalence and come to care about people and things wholeheartedly.

Frankfurt denies that either reason or morality can play this role in re-establishing our unified agency. This is because neither reason nor morality can help us to determine what it is we should care about.

The fact that reason tells you that something is valuable to have does not tell you that you should care about having it. A thing may be valuable but not valuable to you. Similarly, the fact that morality commands that we adopt certain ends leaves it an "open question how important it is for us to obey those commands."

On Frankfurt's view, to overcome self-alienation we must find some things with which we can identify whole-heartedly, a set of structured final ends around which we can organize our lives. These are ends that we cannot but accept, ends whose rejection is literally unthinkable for us. Frankfurt calls these ends "volitional necessities." A person who is subject to a volitional necessity accedes to certain constraints on his will because he is unwilling to oppose it; moreover his unwillingness is itself something that he is unwilling to alter. Very roughly, if caring for something is volitionally necessary for you it is not in your power to give it up at will. It is also not in your power to change this fact about yourself at will, and you wholeheartedly—that is, without any ambivalence on your part—favor all this. Volitional necessities give us powerful reasons to act and a set of values around which to structure our action.

Frankfurt distinguishes between two forms of volitional necessities. First, there are those necessities that all human beings share, simply as human beings. For example, most of the time we are wholeheartedly committed to our continued existence. Second, there are individual volitional necessities—carings that differ from person to person. Frankfurt's suggestion is that the worthiness of what we love—as individuals or as members of a common species—is not important for our ability to figure out how we should live; what matters is that we love something. Volitional necessities are not necessarily grounded in any cognitive process; it can be a brute fact about us that we love someone or some-

thing. Our beloved may lack objective qualities of worthiness. In fact, our love may not rest on any reasons at all.

Frankfurt supposes that the necessities to which he alludes involve our wholehearted support. Unlike the addict, who “necessarily” accedes to his addiction because he lacks sufficient strength to defeat it, when I act under a volitional necessity, I am unwilling to alter the constraint this necessity imposes on my actions. I may have the strength of will to alter my love for my son, but I cannot imagine my doing so. Giving up my love right now at will is unthinkable. To the extent that a person is constrained by volitional necessities, there are certain things he cannot but help willing and other things that he cannot bring himself to do. The fact that a person cares about something, or that something is important to her, means that she is disposed to behave in certain ways. Love provides us with “final ends to which we cannot help being bound.” It provides us with something to care about. Frankfurt locates the meaning of a person’s life in the activity of loving.

The themes of Frankfurt’s essays are central for human beings who must cope with the difficulties of being reflective agents while trying to determine how they are to live. This volume presents Frankfurt’s latest thinking on this subject along with responses by eminent philosophers and law professors who probe the implications of his work.

In her contribution to this volume, Christine Korsgaard examines the relationship between caring and morality. Does morality give me reasons to act only if I care about morality?

Unlike Frankfurt, Korsgaard thinks that the normativity of morality for an agent does not depend on that agent's directly caring about morality. Morality provides reasons even for the person who thinks morality is unimportant. In her response to Frankfurt, Korsgaard argues that caring has a logic that extends beyond the objects a person cares about. Caring for something, by itself, may commit me to universal shared values, including morality.

Michael Bratman questions whether the volitional necessities of love are indispensable planks in our human psychology. Perhaps other weighty but not necessary carings could ground our self and actions. Some of these weighty reasons may come from a person's desire to maintain a cross-temporal coherence and unity to her life. Indeed, perhaps some of these weighty reasons—projects and plans that are important to her—can override claims of love.

Meir Dan-Cohen explores the implications of Frankfurt's essays for holding people responsible. If I am acting under a volitional necessity, and thus am acting on desires that I wholeheartedly identify with, does that mean I am fully responsible for my actions? If I less than wholeheartedly identify with my desires and actions, am I thereby less responsible? Who determines the degree to which a defendant in a criminal trial identifies with his internal states? The defendant? The jury? Dan-Cohen suggests that we need to think about the drawing of the boundaries of the self as a social and not merely an individual task.

Taken together, this collection of essays and commentar-

ies provide a context for reflecting on the problems of living a reflective life. They are original and highly stimulating essays that should be of interest not only to philosophers, but also to psychologists, law professors, political scientists and, indeed, to anyone who thinks about the meaning and purpose of her life. They are also incredibly enjoyable to read.