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On-Line Working Papers from the
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LOVE AND THE SHARING OF ENDS

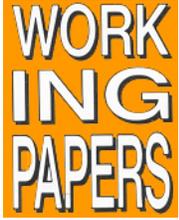
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Twenty-First Century Papers: On-line Working Papers from the Center for 21st Century Studies * <http://www.21st.uwm.edu> *ISSN 1545-6161
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Number 6
September 2005

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HELMER. But to part!—to part from you! No, no, Nora; I can't understand that idea.
NORA. That makes it all the more certain that it must be done.

—Henrick Ibsen, *A Doll's House*

Philosophers writing on love have often taken some form of psychological or even metaphysical union to be crucial to the kind of love that characterizes long-term intimate relationships such as marriage. And romantic love, understood as a form of love that may precede and lead to such relationships, is equally often taken to involve or even to be constituted by a *desire* for such union. While such views have a long history, Robert Solomon, Robert Nozick, and John Fisher are among their strongest and most frequently discussed contemporary proponents. Solomon, for example, uses Aristophanes' metaphor of re-unification as a spring-board for his thesis that "the dominant conceptual ingredient in romantic love ... is just this urge for *shared identity*, a kind of *ontological dependency*."¹ Nozick claims that "Love, romantic love, is *wanting* to form a *we* with [a] particular person"²; where the desired relationship is in fact established, he describes the resultant *we* as constituting a new entity in the world, produced by "two persons flowing together and intensely merging."³ Mark Fisher goes so far as to say that lovers come to "perceive, feel and act as a single person, so that the perception, feeling or act does not exist unless both persons participate in it, and neither can say who originated it."⁴

At the same time, it is quite common to find philosophers (sometimes even the same philosophers) arguing that the independence or individual autonomy of lovers is somehow crucial to the nature of their relationship. On one version of this idea, the beloved must in at least some minimal sense be an independent individual in order to be an *object* of love: love involves caring for the beloved for her *own* sake, not merely as an extension or a part of oneself, and so (the argument goes) the beloved must in fact be, and be recognized as, an individual with

a sake of her own, logically distinct from the sake of her lover.⁵ Moreover, since caring for a person for her own sake is often thought to require caring about her *as* an autonomous individual, it is also often claimed that love must include positive regard for the autonomy of the beloved. In either form, these thoughts express the intuition that some distinction between lover and beloved is crucial to the very possibility of genuine love.

Can these two ideas – that love somehow unites two individuals but at the same time depends on their distinction or independence from one another – be resolved in one coherent view? Some doubt that they can. In his paper “Union, Autonomy, and Concern,” for example, Alan Soble argues that the “union view” of love is simply unable to accommodate the conceptual requirement that a lover be concerned for the beloved for her own sake.⁶ Noël Merino endorses this pessimistic conclusion, and argues that the only sensible interpretation of *we*-claims in love relationships is one that doesn’t really rely on any notion of joint identity at all.⁷ I am sympathetic to the worries expressed by such critics, and my first aim in this paper is in fact to diagnose some problems with existing models of union. I argue that we should resist the temptation to think of lovers’ formation of a *we* either in terms of psychological or ontological fusion between identities or in terms of the mutual transformation of individual identities. Attempts to spell out such views, I’ll argue, lead us into intractable difficulties.

Nonetheless, I think we can find a way of combining union and autonomy in one coherent package that preserves core insights of those on both sides of the debate. My second aim in the paper is to make good on this claim. I argue for a practical conception of union, focusing on aspects of shared identity that depend on the persistence of dialogical, deliberative relations between distinct agents. The form of union I have in mind is quite different from what Solomon, Nozick and Fisher seem to imagine. It is at home in close friendships as well as in

more intimate relationships, though perhaps in different degrees, and it is not inherently threatening to individual identity or autonomy. It does not involve any blurring of *personal* identities, but instead involves a particular form of the phenomenon that Margaret Gilbert describes as “plural-subjecthood.” I argue that lovers form a *we* in jointly constituting the subject of a variety of activities, projects, and goals, one of which is often the quite general goal of sharing a life (or major parts or aspects thereof). In short, they share an identity in sharing ends, interests, and reasons, or in occupying what I will call a “joint practical perspective.” This practical conception of union coheres quite well, I suggest, with features that are commonly, and pre-theoretically, taken to be central to relationships of what I’ll call “companion love,” and may even illuminate the special nature of the trust often taken to be characteristic of those relationships.

As I will use the term, relationships of “companion love” include a mutual, overarching aim to share experiences, projects, and plans over the course of an indefinite period of time (at the limit, over the course of a life). The scope and extent of the desired sharing may vary quite widely from case to case, but in the form of relationship I have in mind the parties see themselves as forming a *we* in an ongoing, open-ended way, and not merely for discretely specifiable purposes upon whose achievement the *we* would dissolve. Companion love is not, of course, the only kind of love there is, but it is a form of love that plays a central role in many people’s lives, and it is also a form of love about which both of the above intuitions (about union and separation) have had real pull.⁸

In the first section of this paper, I disentangle some of the different claims that union theorists have made. While many union theorists do consider the sharing of ends to be crucial to love relationships, I argue in the second section that the models of union they have developed

thus far do not offer the resources we need to understand what it is to (non-pathologically) share ends or reasons with another. The third section suggests how we might draw on Gilbert's account of plural subjects to develop an alternative to the union views I discuss. In particular, I explain how a plural-subject account can accommodate genuinely joint or shared practical deliberation within relations of companion love. I will argue that sharing ends and reasons is, for lovers as much as for anyone else, a thoroughly *interpersonal* achievement, not something that results from the fusion of two individuals into one.

1. Union Views and the Sharing of Ends

Proponents of union views make a variety of different-sounding claims, which (though they sometimes overlap) can be usefully divided into two broad categories: “merger” claims, on the one hand, and “self-constitution” claims on the other. I begin by considering each in turn, with an eye to the conceptions of end-sharing they advance.

(i) Merger Views

Merger views, as the label suggests, are truest in form to Aristophanes' metaphor of reunification. The central idea is that there is some literal sense in which two previously separate individuals come to share one “enlarged” identity through their love. Nozick and Fisher both seem to hold versions of this sort of view. Nozick, for example, suggests that “If we picture the individual self as a closed figure whose boundaries are continuous and solid, dividing what is inside from what is outside, then we might diagram the *we* as two figures with the boundary line between them erased where they come together.”⁹ (Nozick also describes the phenomenon of merging as one in which lovers “pool their autonomy,” an idea to which I'll later return). Fisher, as already noted, takes it to be the case that lovers find it progressively more difficult to

distinguish any particular desires or beliefs as belonging to one party or the other, and argues that in this sense the “boundary between our two selves becomes vague.”¹⁰ Identity-fusion, on these pictures, is quite explicitly a psychological matter. Nozick claims that “Each [lover] becomes psychologically part of the other’s identity,”¹¹ which leads him to conclude that willingness to change partners (or to “trade up,” as he charmingly puts it) would be nothing less than a willingness to engage in *self*-destructive behavior: it would be “a willingness to destroy your self in the form of your own extended self,”¹²

On this sort of view, it seems that the sharing of ends is may be understood as a kind of mingling of what were once individual ends into a common pool that each, simultaneously, sees as his or her own. Nozick is quite explicit about this result:

What is common to all love is this: Your own well-being is tied up with that of someone (or something) you love. ... When something bad happens to one you love ... something bad also happens *to you*. ... The people you love are included inside your boundaries, their well-being is your own.¹³

Alan Soble points out that this sort of view seems to entail the disappearance of the robust distinction between altruism and egoism between lovers. The lovers merge to form a larger whole, in a manner that mingles their interests and ends together as monolithically *theirs*. In forming a new enlarged entity, they simultaneously come to have a similarly enlarged self-interest.¹⁴ Each lover, in serving what we’d normally think of as the ends of the other, in fact serves ends that are as much his or her own, and vice versa.

(ii) Self-Constitution Views

Self-constitution views share with merger views the general conception that relations of love are to be spelled out in terms of shared identities, but the picture of sharing on offer is (on its face) rather different. Solomon, for example, takes Catherine’s oft-cited love of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* as a paradigm example: “I *am* Heathcliff—he’s always, always in my mind,

not as a pleasure, anymore than I am always a pleasure to myself—but as my own being.”¹⁵

Catherine’s love of Heathcliff makes him central to her identity *qua* individual, as opposed to incorporating him into a larger entity of which each is a part. Solomon takes this relationship to illustrate the kind of shared identity that is characteristic of love: it is “not a mystical union nor a frustrated physicality but a sense of presence, always “in mind,” defining one’s sense of self to one’s self.”¹⁶ On this picture we learn who we are (and *become* who we are) in relations of love, through a process Solomon describes as one of “mutual self-identification.”¹⁷

Solomon paints his picture of mutual self-identification in quite broad strokes, but something much like his view has been developed in more detail in Harry Frankfurt’s recent work on love and volitional necessity. On Frankfurt’s view, love is not primarily an affective or cognitive state, but “a configuration of the will.”¹⁸ The lover cares selflessly about his beloved, where this means being “disinterestedly devoted to its interests and ends.”¹⁹ The lover’s devotion to his beloved subjects him to what Frankfurt calls “willing inability” to make (or not make) certain choices, in accordance with the demands of the beloved’s interests and ends. But far from eroding the lover’s sense of self, on Frankfurt’s view, this disinterested devotion is in fact self-defining. The constraints imposed by the beloved’s interests and ends are ones to which the lover submits entirely willingly: “His readiness to serve the interests of his beloved is ... an element of his established volitional nature, and hence of his identity as a person.”²⁰

In a pair of recent papers Frankfurt draws out some further implications of this view, arriving (like proponents of merger views) at the conclusion that love confounds the ordinary distinction between self-interest and selflessness.²¹ To love oneself, on Frankfurt’s view, would be to be devoted disinterestedly to one’s *own* interests and ends. But on the view just spelled out, one’s own interests and ends are determined by whatever it is that one cannot help caring

about. Thus, “the love of a person for himself is essentially a devotion to whatever it is that he loves.”²² Frankfurt thus argues that “[t]he apparent discrepancy or conflict between pursuing one’s own interests and being selflessly devoted to the interests of another disappears, in the case of love, once it is understood that what serves the self-interest of the lover is, precisely, his selflessness.”²³

The “merger” and “self-constitution” variations on the theme of union have in common the idea that lovers share ends or interests just insofar as each acquires or comes to treat the ends or interests of the other as her own—whether in virtue of the fact that the boundary between their identities becomes blurred or erased, or in virtue of the fact that each lover’s “essential nature” is (at least in part) constituted by her devotion to the other. On the first version the lover’s interests become inextricably intertwined with the beloved’s, while on the second, they are identified with or defined by the beloved’s. Proponents of both types of union view are drawn toward the claim that in relations of love the difference between altruism and egoism, or between selflessness and self-interest, quite literally disappears.

2. Some Difficulties With Union

In this section, I will raise two problems with the notion that one or the other of these forms of union is paradigmatic of healthy love relationships. The first concerns some counterintuitive results of collapsing the distinction between selflessness and self-interest, while the second concerns certain questionable attitudes toward others and their ends that such views are unable to diagnose as distortions (rather than healthy expressions) of love.

(i) Self-Sacrifice and Care

I begin with the first problem, returning initially to the merger view. Soble has argued that union theories such as Nozick's are completely wrong-headed, and that the idea that lovers "pool" anything beyond their resources, talents, and skills in different domains is a complete non-starter.²⁴ Though I, too, want to offer a critique of such views, I think Soble's condemnation thereof is in fact *too* strong. As I will later explain, I am not entirely dismissive of the idea of a shared identity or of "pooled" autonomy. I do, however, think that these ideas have been misconstrued by Nozick and others, and I'm firmly in agreement with Soble on at least one point: merger views offer a distorted picture of what it is to care for another.

Proponents of merger views portray lovers' interests as inextricably intertwined, such that (in the extreme) the lovers lose track of which interests or ends originally came from which party, and they come to be pooled together such that they are all of a piece. Taken at face value, these sorts of claims about unity of interest have implausible implications. In her book *Women and Human Development*, for example, Martha Nussbaum cites anthropologist Veena Das as holding the view that many women in rural India are "simply unable to form the concept of their own personal well-being as distinct from the well-being of family members."²⁵ Nussbaum concedes that the Indian women in her own case studies are highly devoted to their husbands and children and systematically allot more resources to their nourishment than to their own. But, as she points out, they do not lose track of whose health or comfort is whose: in their very acts of devotion they implicitly demonstrate "intense awareness of the separateness of the various family members, asking how much shall be spent on each one."²⁶ Of course, in the examples Das and Nussbaum discuss there is no reason to suppose that the pattern of behavior in question is specifically a product of love (as opposed, for example, to norms of authority and deference within the family unit).²⁷ But there is nonetheless an important conceptual point to be made here

about the sort of “unity of interest” to which love, on merger views, supposedly leads. Indeed, if family members’ ends really were inextricably merged in such cases, why couldn’t a devoted wife serve her family’s interests by putting milk in her *own* tea, just as well as by putting it in anyone else’s? Understood literally, the idea that lovers’ interests or ends become psychologically merged begins to seem absurd—and absurd in potentially insidious ways.²⁸

Robust care, as Soble has pointed out, seems to require that one care for another for her own sake. But on views like Nozick’s and Fisher’s, lovers’ interests and ends are to be understood as “melting together” into one common pool. Soble rightly questions how one can care for another specifically for *her* sake, if one’s *own* sake is not clearly distinguishable from hers. Care for another, on such views, seems to boil down to care for one’s extended self (or for a part of one’s extended self). In the case of the apparently self-sacrificing wife, we are left with the counter-intuitive result that (insofar as she acts out of love) this woman’s “sacrifices” are as indicative of self-concern as they are of concern for any other member of the family.

How do self-constitution views fare on this front? When understood in Frankfurtian terms, they seem at least to avoid vulnerability to straightforward, Nussbaum-style charges of silliness. A self-depriving wife needn’t, on this account, be accused of any inability to distinguish matters of her own health and comfort from questions of the health and comfort of other members of her family. Assuming, however, that she acts out of love for her family, we again run into difficulties in describing her behavior as self-sacrificing.²⁹

Suppose, first, that this wife is so single-minded in her love for the other members of her family that considerations of her own health and comfort are simply not among those concerns that define her “essential nature.” That is, they are not among those considerations that (for Frankfurt) constitute her own real interests. The fact that she loves the other members of her

family as she does means that she is constrained by willing inabilities to make certain choices—for example, that of putting milk in her own tea at the expense of the others. But depriving herself of milk and other goods in this manner turns out not to be a deprivation at all, since on the self-constitution view what serves her *self*-interest is her promotion of the interests of those to whom she is (selflessly) devoted. Her love just *is* a disinterested concern for their flourishing, and since her essential nature is defined by her love, she demonstrates self-love in the very act of promoting their flourishing.

Even if this self-depriving wife does have other real interests that she neglects in favor of her interest in her family's flourishing, it is still difficult to characterize her choice as genuinely self-sacrificial. On the self-constitutionist model, she is best understood as making a trade-off between different interests that are equally hers, rather than sacrificing some of her own interests for the interests of others. She is not altogether unlike the prudentially rational individual who trades off some immediate pleasure for a greater long-term good, in that the trade-off is, for her, a fundamentally *intra*-personal one. Making such intra-personal trade-offs may be difficult, and even painful. But just as we would not call the prudentially rational individual self-sacrificing in virtue of his abstention from short-run pleasure, it is difficult to conceptualize a so-called “selfless” agent as genuinely self-sacrificing for acting on what is her own greater good.

Thus while the self-constitution view of union seems not to be open to the specific objection that Nussbaum raises against Das, it still treats the case of the self-depriving wife in an unsatisfactory way. Pre-theoretically, at least, one wants to say that such a person devotes herself to her family at some considerable cost to herself. But this claim relies on precisely the distinction between self-interest and self-sacrifice that the self-constitutionist dissolves. We needn't say she is *selfish*, perhaps, since the point is meant to be that her self-interest is defined

in terms of service of another. But still, it just seems misleading to say that she is not self-sacrificing at all, and even worse to say that her behavior is straightforwardly self-interested. Moreover, if the woman's husband has no qualms about accepting her self-depriving behavior, we might want at least to question the quality of his care for her. But if single-minded devotion to husband and children defines her essential nature, then on the self-constitution view it would seem that the only way her husband *can* show love for her is by accepting or even encouraging her acts of self-deprivation. For in doing so, he promotes her real interests and ends. Strangely enough, the seemingly selfish husband can, on this picture, turn out to be just as selfless (and selfless in precisely the same sense) as the apparently self-depriving wife.

(ii) Appropriation and Self-Effacement

The first main problem with union views is thus that in collapsing selflessness into self-interest, they leave us with an impoverished account of attitudes like care and self-sacrifice. The second sort of problem with union views lies in the very notion that literally treating someone else's ends as one's own is a paradigmatic expression of love. Consider, for example, John Hardwig's telling claim that my loving you involves my "see[ing] you and the realization of your goals as part of me and the realization of my goals."³⁰ This way of formulating the point makes clear how the idea of devotion takes hold: if the realization of a beloved's ends comes to be part and parcel of the realization of my own, then (absent some other reason for restraining myself) it would seem natural that I should be oriented towards the beloved's ends in just the same way that I'm oriented towards any other ends of mine. It would seem natural, on this construal, both to devote myself actively to the achievement of the beloved's ends (insofar as I'm in a position to do so), and to take an especially direct interest in *her* devotion to promoting the ends in question. The stance one takes towards another's ends on this picture is explicitly modeled on

intra- rather than *inter-*personal relations, such that the other is treated as a part or extension of oneself.

Seen in this light, devotion to a beloved's ends has a distinctly sinister side. First of all, someone who regards another and her ends as part of him and his own ends might well appropriate her ends by doing things "for" her. But in absence of her request (or at least her consent), we'd normally regard this as a moral transgression and a form of disrespect. This seems at least as true in the case of a loved one as in any other case. Secondly, someone who takes a loved one to be a part of himself may regard her as accountable to him, in a strangely direct way, for success in her pursuits. After all, this conception of end-sharing is one on which each party's successes and failures bear directly on the other's good or bad fortune. Where one party suffers a setback, the other may well regard her as having failed *him* in failing to achieve an end that he now regards as among his own.³¹ But this, of course, sounds more like a feature of a pathological love relationship than of a healthy one.

A variation on this kind of pathology famously emerges in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. When things are going well, Torvald takes great pleasure in "showing off" his wife Nora. He regards her as so much an extension of himself that he can't imagine their being parted. Unfortunately, this also means that he cannot help but treat her "disgrace" as his own. And instead of offering sympathy or support of any kind, he reacts with horror and shame and announces a harsh series of punishments for her transgression. Moreover, in Torvald's view it is *he* who is saved when the crisis blows over—though he adds as an afterthought "You too, of course, we are both saved."³² Equally illuminating is the way in which the post-crisis Torvald shifts so readily from placing blame on Nora to reclaiming the responsibility "to serve as will

and conscience” for them both.³³ He oscillates between holding her responsible *to* him, as agent to principal, and taking responsibility *for* her, as a mere extension of himself.

The attitudes just described exemplify ways in which identification can degenerate into appropriation or felt “ownership” of another and her ends. But another, equally familiar outcome of identification with another’s ends is the degeneration of devotion into self-effacement and servility. In a much cited passage of *The Second Sex*, for example, Simone de Beauvoir describes “the woman in love” as follows: “[She] tries to see with his eyes; she reads the books he reads, prefers the pictures and the music he prefers; she is interested only in ... the ideas that come from him; she adopts his friendships, his enmities, his opinions; when she questions herself it is his reply she tries to hear”³⁴ Tellingly, she uses the same literary example as Solomon does, but to a much different end: “I am Heathcliff,” says Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*; that is the cry of every woman in love; she is another incarnation of her loved one, his reflection, his double: she is *he*.³⁵ On de Beauvoir’s view, this kind of relationship does not succeed in bringing one into communion with another but instead results in “the most bitter solitude there is.”³⁶ The lover is reduced to “an anguished and powerless onlooker at her own fate,” who fears the loss of her (self-constituting) relationship and is reduced to servility in her efforts to maintain it.³⁷ De Beauvoir draws out, as Nozick does not, the dark side of regarding the destruction of a relationship as (literally) the destruction of one’s self: the lover’s “salvation,” as she puts it, depends on another “who has made her and can instantly destroy her.”³⁸

In sum, merger and self-constitution views of love open the door to a variety of ethically defective forms of devotion. Frankfurt has claimed that love between adults is often impure in the sense that it is tainted by desire for reciprocity. But on my view, these union views are questionable as models of adult companion love precisely because they seem unable to give

reciprocity (between distinct individuals with distinct ends) a suitably central place. We should want an account of such relationships (and of the sharing of ends therein) against which appropriation and self-effacement appear as pathological variants, and not as paradigm forms. An account of such love should also leave us with conceptual resources to make sense of important interpersonal phenomena such as making genuine sacrifices and caring for another for her own sake. The interests or ends at stake in relationships where these attitudes are possible cannot all “belong” to both parties in the same way, nor can they be the ends of some enlarged entity with indistinctly individuated parts.

3. A Plural-Subject Account of the Sharing of Ends

One might be tempted to conclude, at this point, that any desire for (non-metaphorical) union is antithetical to healthy love between autonomous individuals, and that the parties to a healthy love relationship simply do not form a *we* in anything but the most straightforward, grammatical sense. I do not think we are forced to accept this conclusion. I will argue in this section that a rehabilitated concept of union does have an important place in our understanding of love relationships, and that, properly understood, such union neither threatens the autonomy of the individual parties nor erodes the boundaries of their own identities. On my view, forming a *we* is best understood as a practical (rather than an ontological or psychological) phenomenon, in which the participants’ deliberative, end-setting interactions are such as to constitute them as the joint (or “plural”) subject of a practical perspective.³⁹

I will clarify what I mean by a joint or plural subject in Section 3(i) below. By a “practical perspective,” I mean simply an agential standpoint from which certain considerations, and not others, appear as practical reasons. By a practical reason, I have in mind the generic

notion of a consideration that counts in favor of an agent's adopting some goal or taking some course of action. It is worth stressing that a practical perspective is an *agent's* perspective on the reasons she has (not a third-personal perspective or a God's-eye point of view); as such it is not infallible, but it is, normally, action-guiding for the agent. For a consideration to function as an agent's reason for action it must appear, to the agent, to count in favor of the action in question. To see a consideration as a reason to act is to see it as having recommending force, or as potentially *justifying* the course of action under consideration. As such, our reasons are not just action-guiding but also serve a second, related role: they are the considerations to which we appeal in accounting to others (and to ourselves, when we lose touch with or come to question our own motives) for what we have done or plan to do.

The view of practical union I defend here is intended to be compatible with a range of accounts of what makes something a reason, but I will take it for granted that our practical perspectives are at least in part determined by our particular aims, interests, and projects, or quite generally, by what we care about. Each of us, insofar as we are reflective, end-setting agents, has a perspective of this sort. Those who care about one another, I will argue, may also come to *share* such a perspective. They achieve this, in my view, by engaging one another as partners in ongoing processes (of varying degrees of explicitness) of joint deliberation, a special type of shared, discursive activity through which co-deliberators jointly accept certain reasons as applying to them as a pair, and adopt shared intentions on the basis of those reasons.

This practical, deliberative notion of union is, as I will later suggest, less coldly prosaic than it may at first sound (see pages 33-35 below). But it does challenge what I would characterize as an overly romanticized notion of love-based union, as involving such a deep sense of undifferentiated oneness that nothing so "impersonal" as joint deliberation could

possibly lie at its core. In a refreshing departure from such romanticization, both Neil Delaney and Marilyn Friedman have suggested that we should think of the parties to a love relationship as forming a *we* in something like the way in which previously sovereign states might form a federation.⁴⁰ As Friedman puts it, the previously separate states (or lovers) “retain some of their individual powers and capacities, but combine in joint ventures for the production of certain other ends.”⁴¹ In what follows, there’s a sense in which I pick up where Friedman and Delaney leave off—both by pushing the idea of a “joint venture” a bit further, and by suggesting a less metaphorical way of cashing out what’s important in the idea of interpersonal federation.

What we need, I suggest, is not simply a distinction between spheres in which the parties retain their individual powers and spheres in which they combine forces for the production of other ends. We also need a picture of this “combining of forces” that doesn’t just collapse into a more circumscribed version of merger or mutual self-constitution.⁴² My own view is that the kind of articulation of individuals required within the *we* of companion love is that which preserves their identities as distinct deliberators, *even within* the sphere of their joint ventures.⁴³

In Section 3(i) I offer an interpretation of *we*-talk that builds on an account developed over the course of several years by Margaret Gilbert, according to which two or more individuals may join together to form the single (but internally plural) subject of a goal, activity, intention, or belief just by exchanging conditional expressions of readiness to be committed to the goal (or activity, intention or belief) in question, in conditions of common knowledge. I take Gilbert’s account of plural subjecthood to have special application in relationships of friendship and love and, in particular, to the deliberative aims and activities characteristic of those relationships.

I argue, however, that we must augment Gilbert’s account of plural subjecthood with a conception of the deliberating parties both as individually reasons-responsive and as guided, in

their interactions, by a strong norm of mutual regard. In Section 3(ii), I attempt to show how a plural-subject account, thus augmented, can capture the important insights of both the defenders of union and of autonomy in love. This practical model of union, I'll argue, captures an appropriately strong and even intimate sense in which companions lovers form a *we*, but leaves appropriate room for (indeed, requires) their individual autonomy.

(i) Being a *we*

In referring to ourselves as a *we*, in the context of companion love, I've claimed that we are best understood as marking out a practical upshot of our relationship. More specifically, I've suggested that we are united in the relevant sense when we are partners in forging a shared practical perspective – a perspective from which certain considerations count, as I will put it, as reasons-for-us. I've already claimed that co-deliberators forge such a perspective by jointly accepting certain reasons as applying to them as a pair, as a basis for further joint deliberation and/or the adoption shared intentions. But how, in more detail, does this come about?

Margaret Gilbert's concept of a "plural subject" provides us with a particularly fruitful (if partial) framework for understanding the sharing of reasons. Gilbert does not apply her account to practical reasons in particular, but (as noted above) to the sharing of goals, intentions, beliefs, and a range of other attitudes. But her account is designed precisely to capture the strong sense of *we* in which we take some goal, intention, belief, or what have you to be ascribable to us *as a pair or unit* – or, as she often puts it, as a *body*. It is integral to her conception of plural subjecthood that once formed, neither party can unilaterally rescind the commitment in question—it can only be rescinded jointly by the pair, and until and unless such a joint rescinding occurs, each is answerable to the others for performance of her part. This idea, that to share a belief, intention, or other attitude is to be committed to it as a (mutually answerable) pair

or unit, makes Gilbert's plural-subject account of social phenomena less individualistic than many, and it is an aspect of her account to which I return below.

Gilbert argues that a group of individuals comes to form the plural subject of (for example) a goal when they exchange, in conditions of common knowledge, interlocking expressions of conditional readiness to be jointly committed to the goal in question. Each party must offer an expression of readiness that is conditional on every other party's offering an exactly similar expression of readiness, saying or otherwise indicating "I'm willing if you are" or its equivalent.⁴⁴ The condition on each party's commitment is discharged if and only if each of the other participants expresses a commitment which is conditional in just the same way.⁴⁵ Once such expressions of conditional readiness have been exchanged by all, in conditions of common knowledge, Gilbert argues that all are "simultaneously and interdependently" committed to the goal, such that they *jointly* form its (single) subject.⁴⁶ Gilbert refers to this process as the "pooling of wills."⁴⁷

The required exchange of expressions of conditional commitment need not amount to explicit agreement; though they must be clear enough to make common knowledge possible, indications of readiness much subtler than that can suffice. At the limit, one can indicate one's readiness just by beginning to do one's own part in some activity, and the other(s) can express their readiness by joining in. But however the outward transaction goes, each participant's actual subjective readiness or intention to be thus committed is crucial. It is for this reason that Gilbert describes her view as an "intentionalist" one.

I suggest (and, I take it, Gilbert would agree) that we ought to understand the sharing of ends in relationships of companion love as a plural-subject phenomenon.⁴⁸ More specifically, I want to elaborate what we might call a conversational or dialogical conception of this sharing, on

which the practical perspective that companion lovers come to share is, in paradigm cases, one of their joint, deliberative forging. In short, I suggest that union between companion lovers is best understood as a matter of their joining forces, in something like Gilbert's sense, as the plural subject of a set of practical reasons. To share a practical reason we must exchange, in conditions of common knowledge, symmetrically conditional commitments to treat some consideration as a reason-for-us. But, departing from Gilbert, I will argue that to share a practical reason we must also meet a dual condition of individual reasons-responsiveness and mutual regard. Our subjective readiness must meet a higher bar than Gilbert's own account suggests, if it is to engage us in a non-incidental relation of mutual answerability.⁴⁹

But consider, first, the exchange of conditional commitments itself. Why should this be required, for us to share a reason? Whatever view one holds of individual deliberation, there is good reason to think that shared deliberation has a distinctly constructive aspect. When we deliberate jointly, we assess reasons from a point of view that is neither mine nor yours, but *ours*. Insofar as a practical perspective is in part shaped by the interests, projects, and commitments of its bearer, just what *our* practical perspective will be is to some significant degree indeterminate until we have articulated the interests, projects, and commitments attributable to *us* as the bearer of the perspective in question. Ordinary experience and observation speak strongly against the idea that these interests are in any way limited to, or even necessarily include, the interests that the individual parties happened to have in common at the onset of the relationship. We may come to regard attending the ballet as a pursuit of ours, though only one (or neither) of us had an antecedent interest in this form of dance. Conversely, we may *both* be antecedently interested in running marathons, and yet never come to regard this as a pursuit of *ours* (we train separately, register for different races, and so forth). Now, this is not to say that the construction of a shared

practical perspective is entirely unconstrained—indeed, I will go on to suggest at least two ways in which it *is* constrained by the practical perspectives of the participants. But neither is it simply a matter of *discovering* some pre-existing perspective that is (already) ours. Until *we* constitute ourselves as a deliberative unit, there is no determinate perspective of this sort to discover.

What I draw from Gilbert, then, is the idea that we may constitute ourselves as such a unit by exchanging expressions of readiness of a certain form. More precisely, on this account a consideration R may become *our* reason only when, in conditions of common knowledge, we exchange expressions of conditional readiness to be jointly committed to treating it as a reason. We accomplish this by saying, or otherwise expressing to one another, something equivalent to “I hereby accept R as a reason-for-us, if you likewise accept it as a reason-for-us.”

Referring to R as a “reason-for-us” is a way of glossing the idea that the reason in question (once we’ve joined forces as its subject) applies to us as a pair or unit. While I do not necessarily accept Gilbert’s position that plural-subject phenomena are *the* paradigmatic social phenomena, lying at the heart of all forms and aspects of collective agency, the non-incidental relations of mutual answerability that she invokes do seem quite a good fit when it comes to the practical dimensions of companion love. To desire union in the practical sense, companion lovers needn’t wish for the world to lose sight of them as individuals and think of them as literally a single person, nor need they want others to assume they have all and only the same views, tastes, opinions, and interests. (Such tendencies and assumptions are far more likely to irk the parties to such relationships than to meet their aspirations.) But when it comes specifically to their *shared* decision-making and action, there is an unobjectionable and familiar sense in which it makes sense for them to want to set themselves up and behave as a unit, and

this sense does have much to do with mutual answerability. Insofar as their relationship is not structured by any hierarchy of authority, they want to arrive at an account of their reasons with which they are *mutually* identified, to which each can sincerely appeal (and count on the other to appeal) in accounting to others for what they jointly do, and which will serve as a defeasible starting point in their own future deliberations.⁵⁰

Such mutual identification expresses solidarity and mutual understanding, and, I would suggest, helps to generate the sort of trust between the parties that so many theorists have taken to be central to relationships of love. For in establishing shared reasons, partners are at the same time establishing a basis for an important kind of trust – trust that the accounts given by their partners of their joint decisions and actions will be ones jointly developed and endorsed, not ones that either disown responsibility or offer a privately subversive understanding of their shared lives. Where one party takes the relevant sort of solidarity to have been established, a violation of that understanding by the other is characteristically greeted as a transgression in the way Gilbert describes—this is the very stuff of discord and strife among lovers and friends. The violated party will feel entitled to take the other to task, and will also feel entitled to some kind of dialogical uptake – either acknowledgement of a wrong, or an exculpating explanation that makes the subversion itself understandable. Insofar as companion lovers aim at the sort of solidarity that underpins both this trust and mutual answerability for violations thereof, they effectively aim at *joint and symmetrical accountability* for the fruits of their shared deliberations. Partners who have constituted themselves as jointly and symmetrically accountable for their shared agency may legitimately expect one another to respond to “why”-questions in ways that reflect and draw on a shared understanding of the rationale behind their actions, whereas those who have not, may not. (I take up this last point in more detail below.)

If it is to underpin these relations of joint and symmetrical accountability, the process of joint deliberation cannot be entirely unconstrained. First, to count as deliberation at all, co-deliberators must somehow be in the business of assessing considerations for justificatory weight. The product of a fantastical or otherwise non-reasons-responsive exchange will not have the normative weight or constitute the sort of commitment associated, respectively, with having a reason or intention. In order for an exchange to be properly deliberative – to count as an assessment of considerations for justificatory status – the parties must be responsive to relevant reasons in their contributions to the constructive process. On the question of just what the relevant reasons may be, I remain neutral here. The central point is that an exchange will not count as deliberative, and its products will not be shared practical reasons, if one or both parties express readiness for commitment out of sheer fancifulness, or alternatively, out of fatigue, fear, or some other overpowering psychological force.

A second constraint flows more directly from the condition of mutual accountability discussed above. The sort of solidarity at which co-deliberators aim underpins an important form of trust and mutual answerability. I've already suggested that such solidarity depends on the partners *constituting* themselves as mutually and symmetrically accountable for the fruits of their deliberations. So constituting themselves depends on the presence of certain subtle, expressive elements of their deliberative stance towards one another. In particular, it depends on their guiding their deliberative behavior, in conditions of common knowledge, by a conception of the relationship as one that lacks a hierarchical structure of authority, and which instead presupposes the normative parity of their two points of view. Neither party may legitimately presume that a relation of mutual and symmetrical accountability has been entered into unless the two enjoy equal normative status in the context of deliberation, and it is common knowledge

between them that this is so. In the process of co-deliberation, in other words, it must be in the open between them that both of their *individual* points of view matter – and matter in the same way – to each party’s readiness to accept any particular outcome. Where such normative egalitarianism is in the open between them, dropping out of the perspective that has been forged (treating the other, but not oneself, as answerable for the decisions and actions in question) *is* a sort of transgression – a violation of practical unity that has been jointly forged in conditions of mutual regard and openness to dissent. But where such normative egalitarianism does not hold sway, refusing to shoulder an equal share of responsibility can be a way of signaling precisely that one was never *really* a full partner in this “shared” perspective in the first place. The practical unity sought in relations of companion love, I suggest, is best understood as one built on a strong conception of mutual regard.⁵¹

Now, one might object that such practical union is not sufficient for a relationship to count as a relationship of love. Surely those who are not in such a relationship may, for various reasons, be interested in achieving this sort of practical union as well. One might also object that practical union is not necessary, either, for a relationship to count as a relationship of love. Mightn’t two individuals love one another, and sustain a loving relationship, without engaging in any joint deliberation at all?

I want to say something about each of these claims, but first, it is worth emphasizing I do not mean to be offering a full definition of “love” or “loving relationship” in this paper. I do not offer deliberative union as either a necessary or sufficient condition of being in a loving relationship. Rather, I offer it as a way of understanding how an aspiration for some significant form of union *and* regard autonomy may coherently co-exist in a relationship that has many of the (pre-theoretically salient) features of love relationships. Otherwise put, I argue that it is

possible to conceive of union in relationships of love in a way that does not imply any erosion of the autonomy of the lovers.

Having said that, however, I strongly suspect that practical union is *not* sufficient for a relationship to count as a relationship of love. Indeed, I suspect that at the very least close friends aspire to union of this sort, and, to correspondingly lesser degrees, more casual friends (and perhaps even associates or acquaintances) may aspire to it as well. Thinking of love-based union in this way casts it as a stronger, more exclusive manifestation of a social impulse that has other outlets as well. This does not strike me as a theoretical defect, though I acknowledge that others may have other intuitions on this matter.

To me it seems rather more likely that practical union is at least *necessary* to love relationships, or, at any rate, to what I've been referring to here as relationships of companion love. I admit this may be partly a matter of definition—I've explicitly focused on relationships in which the participants aim to share experiences, ends and interests, over an extended period of time, and it is hard to imagine how lovers could further this aim without any joint deliberation at all. I will not, however, set out to defend in any more systematic terms that the idea that practical union is necessary to love. My main point, again, is that this plural-subject model offers a way of understanding union and autonomy as simultaneously realizable in love relationships of at least one important and relatively central sort. I elaborate on this thesis in the next section.

(ii) Deliberative Union, Autonomy, and Mutual Regard

If one is concerned about individual autonomy in relations of love, one might wonder why we should be interested in even this deliberative form of shared identity, rather than simply treating the parties to a love relationship as individuals who do *not* (as Soble puts it) pool anything other

than their talents and abilities, and so forth. What is theoretically attractive about the idea that lovers form the plural subject of a practical perspective? Viewing relationships of companion love through the lens of plural-subjecthood highlights the less frequently discussed fact that lovers and friends don't just care *about* or *for* one another, but also, to put it slightly inelegantly, care *with* one another about interests and ends that belong jointly to both. Moreover, they also (jointly) care about caring *with* one another; that is, they make the sharing of ends itself a shared end of theirs. In my view, it is in illuminating these features of companion love and friendship that the plural-subject analysis really comes into its own. It captures certain plausible features of the union view, without running roughshod over other, autonomy-related constraints. When we aim to share reasons that apply to us as a pair, we aim to do more than simply share activities and goals. We aim to share a framework of understanding, a framework for explaining and justifying our joint activities and decisions to others (and to ourselves). Sharing such a framework of understanding, in my view, may have both a pragmatic and an expressive point: in certain contexts it allows companion lovers to engage in practical reasoning on behalf of the pair, on a basis that they can reasonably take to be shared. It also reflects the regard each party has for the other as an equal partner in the framing and shaping of their practical lives.

At the same time, the plural-subject account of practical unity can comfortably accommodate core intuitions about the *separateness* of the parties to a love relationship – both the idea that a clear distinction between the individuals involved is conceptually necessary for robust care, and the idea that genuine love includes concern for the beloved as an autonomous agent. Forming the plural subject of a practical perspective clearly relies on the engagement of each party's intentional agency, since each must express her readiness to be jointly committed to the reasons in question. Gilbert, as I've noted, describes her own account of plural subjecthood

as “intentionalist” for just this reason, and she rests claims about *shared* activity significantly upon the involvement of each party’s agency. She describes, for example, a waltzing couple in which “unbeknownst to the observer, [the woman] is moving automatically, while her mind is a complete blank.”⁵² She then asks of this couple – as though the question were near-rhetorical— “Are they waltzing together? Are they doing anything together? Is *she* doing anything at all?”⁵³ To Gilbert it’s not at all clear that she is, and she clearly implies that if one dancer isn’t (strictly speaking) doing anything, then she and her ‘partner’ certainly can’t be doing anything together.⁵⁴ My point about joint deliberation is similar: for an episode of deliberation to be shared, each party’s participation in that episode must amount to an exercise of deliberative agency on her part. A would-be episode of joint deliberation in which the individual deliberative agency of one party or the other is compromised or inactive will fail to generate genuinely shared reasons, because the practical agency of the compromised party will no longer be engaged in the required way. The disengaged “deliberator,” like the automatic “dancer,” is not doing her part.

The upshot of this discussion, for my purposes, is that practical union is something that companion lovers must cooperate in bringing about, and which relies on the ongoing participation of each as a deliberative agent. Two implications of this more general point are especially relevant here: First, if joint deliberation (and hence the form of union I’ve described) positively *requires* that each party’s deliberative agency be maintained intact, then at least in this minimal sense, the autonomy of the beloved *must* matter to the lover, insofar as the lover seeks practical union. The beloved is, after all, the lover’s would-be partner in deliberation, and joint deliberation depends on both parties’ agential engagement. Secondly, union in this sense does not threaten the boundary between lover and beloved upon which robust concern seems to rely. Whether or not she explicitly adopts for herself many “individualistic” goals or interests, the fact

that the beloved is a distinct center of agency renders her a coherent object of concern, distinct from the lover who expresses that concern.

4. Union Reclaimed

[I]n God's intention a meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and noblest end of marriage.
—John Milton, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*

Some might find this view of union, as I put it earlier, unattractively cold or prosaic. I do not think, however, that it must be seen in that way. At the outset, I characterized companion love as a kind of love that includes an aim to share experiences, projects, and goals over an indefinite period of time, often in an especially exclusive way. Surely such sharing is an important component of our everyday understanding of the special intimacy of relationships of companion love.⁵⁵ The practical, deliberative conception of union deepens this conception of sharing by applying it to the way in which lovers *arrive at* shared interests and ends. While more ethically demanding, the idea that shared interests and ends properly have a dialogical genesis, in relationships of love, is not really an unfamiliar one either. Arguably, early liberal feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, who argued that marriage should be based on friendship between moral and intellectual equals, had something rather like this in mind.

Returning to the scene of *A Doll's House*, we may take our inspiration from Nora, who, as a way of illustrating just how alienating her union with Torvald has been, remarks on the fact that they've "never once sat down together and seriously tried to get to the bottom of anything."⁵⁶ The sadly benighted Torvald has just done precisely the wrong thing in offering to take all of Nora's decisions for her. What he regards as an expression of loving forgiveness now appears to her as so much evidence that they've never properly loved one another at all. Nora is on to something important here: if companion lovers are (non-pathologically) to form a *we*, they

must do so in a way that leaves room for genuinely *interpersonal* agreement and disagreement, agreement and disagreement of the sort that is hammered out in *interpersonal* processes of practical deliberation. The *we* of other union theorists, by contrast, often looks suspiciously like the *royal we*, a plural pronoun in its surface grammar only. One way of putting what I've argued is that companion lovers who share ends in a more democratic way – that is, in a way that makes room for genuinely joint deliberation – may form a *we* without losing the kind of personal distinctness that goes problematically missing in the union views.

Now, one might suggest that the merger views discussed in Section 1 at least reach towards something resembling a plural-subject account. Nozick, after all, speaks of lovers as “pooling” their autonomy, and claims that this means that many decisions will come to be jointly rather than unilaterally made. On a plural-subject account there is indeed a sense in which companion lovers “pool” their wills. Moreover, the plural-subject framework allows us to spell out a form of genuinely shared or joint practical deliberation. In this respect, my response to Nozick's view differs from Soble's, which (as I noted earlier) is that the very idea of such “pooling” is hopeless. Soble's view seems to be that joint deliberation necessarily eats away at individual autonomy, and that the only way of preserving autonomy in a love relationship is by establishing an equitable division of decision-making labor that reflects the partners' relative areas of skill and knowledge.⁵⁷ While this sort of division of labor obviously often occurs, I think Soble's reliance on it as the central form of decision-making in love relationships misses a kernel of truth in the union views—namely, that there's an important way in which individuals can and do deliberate *together* in relations of companion love. Merger views do not help us understand this process—indeed, they obscure it by blurring the distinction between the would-be deliberators themselves. But I have argued that we can draw on the resources of the plural-

subject analysis to explain how companion lovers can engage in joint deliberation *without* abandoning their autonomy.

Suitably constrained, then, the plural-subject view does preserve a kernel of truth from merger views like Nozick's: it provides us with a way of making sense of joint deliberation that doesn't just reduce it to the sort of division-of-labor model suggested by Soble. Moreover, the plural-subject account might also be taken to preserve a kernel of truth in the notion of mutual self-constitution. Understood one way, self-constitution views seem driven by the idea that in relationships of love, the beloved's ends exert a special sort of claim on the lover. We can now spell this idea out in a way that does not rely on the problematic notion of self-transformative devotion: the deliberative constraint of mutual regard (insofar as it requires that each party treat the other's *individual* practical perspective as normatively on a par with her own) seems to imply that the ends that structure each individual's practical perspective – the ends and interests which are sources of reasons for each, as singular agents – impose an open-endedly flexible constraint on the field of potentially shareable reasons. The flexibility of this constraint is, I think, an important part of the overall picture, since (as I have mentioned) it is reasonably clear that the interests and ends that come to be shared by close friends and lovers are not limited to those interests and ends that they have in common at the outset. Exactly how to construe the process of revising one's practical commitments in the context of a plural-subject relation is a question beyond the scope of this paper. But revisable as they are, the ends of each party nonetheless do exert a special claim on the other: these ends provide the evolving framework within which the process of establishing *shared* ends must unfold.⁵⁸

It seems to me that it is the possibility of a thoroughly interpersonal form of joint identity to which Nora is awakened at the end of *A Doll's House*, when she decides she must separate

herself from Torvald after eight years of seemingly happy marriage. In striking off on her own Nora is not rejecting the very project of sharing a life with another, but only a version of this project that she has now come to see as grievously flawed. Nora suggests that her life with Torvald had never constituted “real wedlock” at all.⁵⁹ She shocks Torvald by referring to him as a mere stranger, despite (indeed, in a way, because of) the fact that they have regarded themselves as inseparable for years. De Beauvoir claims in *The Second Sex* that “Genuine love ought to be founded on the mutual recognition of two liberties,” and that only in such conditions can lovers “together ... manifest values and aims in the world.”⁶⁰ Cryptic as it is, something in this remark rings true. In this paper I hope to have made plausible the idea that companion lovers share ends or aims not by taking one another’s (individual) ends as their own, but instead, by coming to occupy a new, shared practical perspective in which some ends and reasons are jointly theirs. The individual ends of each do not disappear or merge, but act as a mutually respected and open-ended framework within which the process of forging a shared perspective unfolds.

¹ Robert C. Solomon, "The Virtue of (Erotic) Love," in *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, ed. Kathleen M. Higgins (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 511.

² Robert Nozick, "Love's Bond," in *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, ed. Kathleen M. Higgins (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 418.

³ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁴ Mark Fisher, *Personal Love* (London: Duckworth, 1990), 28. These are but a few examples; others abound. Like Solomon, Jerome Neu traces the idea of union to Aristophanes' myth in Plato's *Symposium*, and notes that "the image of the search for one's missing half ... continues to resonate in individual experience. Another person may be regarded as part of oneself. It is not at all unusual for individuals in a couple to think of themselves more as parts of a "we" than as separate "I's" (Jerome Neu, "Jealous Afterthoughts," in *A Tear Is an Intellectual Thing* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75). Neil Delaney cites Nozick approvingly, and describes the desire to form a *we*, "to unite with a person in profound psychological and physical ways" as "perhaps the most important thing people associate with the ideal of romantic love" (Neil Delaney, "Romantic Love and Loving Commitment: Articulating a Modern Ideal," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1996): 340). Roger Scruton takes love to involve an erosion of personal boundaries through the formation of a community of interests (Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986)). For further examples, as well as critical discussion, see Alan Soble, "Union, Autonomy, and Concern," in *Love Analyzed*, ed. Roger E. Lamb (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997) and Marilyn Friedman, "Romantic Love and Personal Autonomy," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 22 (1998). I have learned a great deal from each of these papers, though (for reasons that will emerge later on) I think that neither one gives quite the right response to the union view.

⁵ See, for example, Soble, "Union, Autonomy, and Concern." In this paper I adopt the convention of using feminine pronouns as the default. In a few cases, where examples require me to refer to both lover and beloved in the same sentence, I use masculine pronouns for the second person to facilitate parsing of the sentence. This gives the unfortunate appearance of treating heterosexual relationships as the assumed norm. I do not, however, intend any of my account to apply solely to heterosexual love. See also note 8 below.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Noel Merino, "The Problem with "We": Rethinking Joint Identity in Romantic Love," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (2004).

⁸ Despite the fact that several of the authors I discuss seem to have a heterosexual norm in mind, and despite the way in which some of my own examples read, there is nothing about companion love that restricts it to heterosexual relationships. It may even be easier to be clear about the nature of such intimacy in same-sex relationships that do not carry the identity-melding historical baggage of heterosexual marriage. For an interesting discussion of "loving friendships" between women in 19th century America, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, no. 1 (1975). These intimate relationships existed side-by-side with heterosexual marriages which, if anything, appeared *less* companionate by comparison.

⁹ Nozick, "Love's Bond," 420.

¹⁰ Fisher, *Personal Love*.

¹¹ Nozick, "Love's Bond," 419.

¹² *Ibid.*, 424.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 417. Roger Scruton is even more explicit: "friendship ... becomes love just so soon as reciprocity becomes community: that is, just so soon as all distinction between my interests and your interests is overcome" (Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 230). While not drawing a sharp distinction between friendship and love in this way, David Brink gives a very interesting defense of the idea that personal relationships extend individual interests by incorporating the interests of others into a person's own. See, for example, David Brink, "Self-Love and Altruism," *Social Philosophy and Policy* (1997) and "Eudaimonism, Love and Friendship, and Political Community," *Social Philosophy and Policy* (1999). Though I don't directly discuss Brink's argument in this paper, I suspect it, too, will ultimately run into difficulties along the lines of those raised in Section 2 below. (For a criticism of Brink's view as involving "an unnecessary and potentially objectionable sort of colonization" see Jennifer E. Whiting, "Impersonal Friends," *The Monist* 74 (1991): 10.)

¹⁴ There is, in fact, an ambiguity here. Is it that *each* comes to have an enlarged self-interest, or that they together come to have an enlarged self-interest? Merger views tend to slide between these two readings, which may indicate a fundamental fuzziness about exactly what it would be to “merge” in the way they describe.

¹⁵ Solomon, "The Virtue of (Erotic) Love," 511.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 513.

¹⁸ Harry Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 137.

¹⁹ Ibid., 135.

²⁰ Ibid., 137. One might take Joseph Raz to be making a similar move in his comments on love in “Authority and Consent” (Joseph Raz, "Authority and Consent," *Virginia Law Review* 67, no. 97 (1981)). In his account of inspirational authority, Raz offers a particularly striking gloss on what he calls “the spiritual aspect of the image of the lovers merging to become one”: “Aspiring to such fusion includes the desire to have one will, not only through gradual adaptation, but also by the more immediate transformation of the will through love” (Raz, "Authority and Consent," 113). But instead of devoting oneself to the beloved’s ends as an expression of one’s disinterested devotion to the beloved’s flourishing, the volitional transformation Raz has in mind is one in which the lover acquires the same desires as the loved one because it will please her. This, too, is a type of self-constitution view, but it works somewhat differently than Frankfurt’s.

²¹ Harry Frankfurt, "The Dear Self," *Philosophers' Imprint* 1, no. 0 (2001) and "Some Mysteries of Love," *The Lindley Lecture, The University of Kansas* (2001).

²² Frankfurt, "The Dear Self," 8. More precisely, the love of self is constituted *either* by the love of whatever one loves, or, in the case of one who doesn’t know what he loves, by his sincere attempts to find out (Frankfurt, "The Dear Self," 9).

²³ Frankfurt, "Some Mysteries of Love," 13.

²⁴ Sobel, "Union, Autonomy, and Concern," 20.

²⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ I thank Rina Ghose for emphasizing the extent to which such behavior may be a product of the authority of particular family figures, such as the mother-in-law, over the household economy.

²⁸ Amartya Sen cites Veena Das on the same issue as Nussbaum does, noting that “It has often been observed that if a typical Indian rural woman was asked about her personal “welfare,” she would find the question unintelligible, and if she was able to reply, she might answer the question in terms of her reading of the welfare of her family” (Amartya K. Sen, "Gender and Cooperative Conflict," in *Persistent Inequalities*, ed. Irene Tinker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 126). Sen makes a slightly different point than Nussbaum does, arguing that even if she does in some sense lack a sense of personal welfare, this shouldn’t be taken to mean that the concept doesn’t apply to her. He goes on to point out that “[women’s] lack of a perception of personal interest combined with a great concern for family welfare is, of course, just the kind of attitude that helps to sustain the traditional inequalities” (Sen, "Gender and Cooperative Conflict," 126) between women and men in rural India.

²⁹ Again, I suppose that she acts out of love for sake of argument only, not because I take there to be no alternative explanation for such behavior.

³⁰ John Hardwig, "Should Women Think in Terms of Rights?," *Ethics* 94 (1984): 445. Like the union theorists cited above, Hardwig makes this claim in service of an argument that the difference between altruism and egoism disappears in “healthy intimate relationships” (Hardwig, "Should Women Think in Terms of Rights?," 445). Roger Scruton’s formulation of a similar point, in his book *Sexual Desire*, is perhaps even more striking: “friendship ... becomes love just so soon as reciprocity becomes community: that is, just so soon as all distinction between my interests and your interests is overcome. Your desires are then reasons for me, in exactly the same way, and to the same extent, that my desires are reasons for me. If I oppose your desires, it is in the way that I oppose my own ... The mere fact that you want something enters the forum of my practical reasoning with all the imperative character of a desire that is already mine. If I cannot dissuade you, I must accept your desire, and decree in my heart ‘let it be done’” (Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 230).

³¹ One might point out that a clear differentiation between the parties involved re-emerges at least in the cases where blame is being laid. But this, to my mind, is just an indication of the instability of the attitudes involved in the sort of fusion described in union views: even if one treats the ends of another as one’s own, one cannot help but treat her as having a separate will when one holds her responsible for achieving those ends.

³² Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 64.

³³ Ibid., 65.

³⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 653.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 668.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ I borrow the term “plural subject” from Margaret Gilbert (see her *Living Together: Rationality Sociality, & Obligation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1996), *On Social Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), and *Sociality and Responsibility* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000). I explicitly consider Gilbert’s account of the phenomenon in Sections 3(i) and 3(ii) below.

⁴⁰ Delaney, "Romantic Love and Loving Commitment: Articulating a Modern Ideal.", Friedman, "Romantic Love and Personal Autonomy."

⁴¹ Friedman, "Romantic Love and Personal Autonomy," 165.

⁴² Friedman, as I read her, adopts something too much like an unreconstructed merger view in characterizing the area of overlap, and thus does not realize the full potential of the idea of interpersonal combination. Friedman does, however, have a less univocally rosy view of merger than the typical union theorist, arguing that it carries significant risks as well as the much touted benefits of intimacy. Prominent among the risks with which she is concerned is a possible loss of personal autonomy, and she argues that women are more vulnerable to this risk than are men in our culture.

⁴³ I would argue that it must preserve their status as *autonomous* practical reasoners, in a rather more substantial sense of “autonomous” than I rely upon elsewhere in this paper. Developing a more substantive account of autonomy and fleshing out its role in deliberation would take us beyond the scope of this paper, but I discuss related issues elsewhere (Andrea C. Westlund, "Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?," *Philosophical Review* 112, no. 4 (2003)).

⁴⁴ Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 200.

⁴⁵ I draw here on David Velleman’s reconstruction of Gilbert’s idea of a “pooling of wills” in his “How to Share an Intention” (J. David Velleman, "How to Share an Intention," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57, no. 1 (1997)).

⁴⁶ Margaret Gilbert, "Walking Together: A Paradigmatic Social Phenomenon," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 15 (1990): 7.

⁴⁷ There is, of course, an extensive literature on shared agency and (more specifically) on shared intention, which I discuss in more detail elsewhere. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to offer a full defense of the Gilbertian analysis, but I do think there is good reason to prefer it to either a fully reductive account of collectivity concepts (such as that offered by Raimo Tuomela and Kaarlo Miller (Raimo Tuomela and Kaarlo Miller, "We-Intentions," *Philosophical Studies* 53 (1988).) or to an account on which we-intentions are utterly primitive (such as John Searle, "Collective Intentions and Actions," in *Intentions in Communication*, ed. Morgan Cohen, and Pollack (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990)). For other recent accounts of shared intention, see J. David Velleman, "How to Share an Intention" and Michael Bratman, "I Intend That We J," in *Faces of Intention: Selected Essays on Intention and Agency* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴⁸ For Gilbert, this conclusion follows from the fact that *all* social phenomena are plural-subject phenomena. I am more inclined to think of relations of friendship of love as special in this way, and of other forms of shared agency as potentially doing without plural-subject relations.

⁴⁹ By non-incidental, I mean not simply a matter of expectations we happen to knowingly create in one another in the course of our deliberation. The expectations that give rise to mutual answerability are part of the content of the joint commitments at which we aim in deliberating jointly.

⁵⁰ I take these starting points to be defeasible in the sense that constituents of a *we* always have the option of reconsidering their reasons (and, thereby, reshaping their joint identity). Contrary to what Gilbert’s model may suggest, being committed to treating something as a reason in the context of a particular joint decision does not commit either party unconditionally to treating it as a reason in all future deliberations. Unforeseen circumstances may arise which change one’s mind as to whether it makes sense to continue treating some consideration as a shared reason. Reasonable joint deliberators will be sensitive to this possibility in forming their expectations.

⁵¹ These two constraints – that of reasons-responsiveness and mutual regard – I gloss elsewhere as a condition of mutual reasonableness. Though this label is in no way crucial to the argument, it resonates loosely with the normative connotations that the concept of reasonableness has acquired in contractualist accounts of morality, as involving an ability to treat the points of view of others as normatively on a par with one’s own.

⁵² Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 165.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Later, Gilbert argues that each party to a shared goal or activity must take equal responsibility for the promotion of that goal or the performance of that activity (*Ibid.*, 411). This seems to invoke an even stronger form of reciprocity, which connects with the points made earlier about joint and symmetrical accountability.

⁵⁵ It is also central to Aristotle's conception of friendship: "[Friends] spend their days together on whichever pursuit in life they like most; for since they want to live with their friends, they share the actions in which they find their common life" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1172a1-6). Raja Halwani argues that Aristotle's requirement that friends live together should not be taken literally, as a requirement of co-habitation, but as amounting to "the idea that friends, if the friendship is to be a good one, ought to share their activities together" (Raja Halwani, *Virtuous Liasons: Care, Love, Sex, and Virtue Ethics* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2003), 166).

⁵⁶ Ibsen, *A Doll's House*.

⁵⁷ Soble, "Union, Autonomy, and Concern," 76 n20. In other words, one partner will "lead" in certain areas, and the other in others. But on Soble's own account, it seems that arrangement must entail each partner giving up autonomy in some areas while preserving it in others. This is, I suppose, one way of conceiving of reciprocity within a relationship, but I don't think it is the only way.

⁵⁸ There's some similarity between this account and the account of reciprocity that Christine Korsgaard gives in her paper "Creating the Kingdom of Ends: Reciprocity and responsibility in personal relations." There Korsgaard fleshes out a Kantian view of what it is to treat another as an end in itself. In a negative sense, she claims, "to treat another as an end in itself is to respect her autonomy—to leave her actions, decisions, and ends to her own choice. But this respect gets its most positive and characteristic expression at precisely the moments *when we must act together*. Then another's right to choose becomes the "limiting condition" of my own" (Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 193, emphasis added). In other words, a person's ends always make a claim of respect on others, but this claim takes on special significance when one embarks on activities with another. "Non-interference" is no longer the appropriate concept, since two people are trying to make choices and plans together. Instead, the choices and plans that either one proposes must be such that the other can accept them. Korsgaard herself, however, does not go all the way toward adopting plural-subject concepts for joint activities. She seems to imagine that the parties in question will be engaged primarily in attempts to involve one another in what are fundamentally individual projects: "If my end requires your act for its achievement, then I must let you make it your end too. Both what I choose and the way I choose it must reflect this constraint. You must be free to choose whether you will contribute to the success of my project or not" (Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 193). The notion of making the other's ends one's own appears here as well: "I must make your ends and reasons mine, and I must choose mine in such a way that they can be yours" (Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 193). This transfer of individual "end-ownership" doesn't take on the same questionable tone as it does in the union views, since the transfer in this case is explicitly one that gains its legitimacy from the choice and consent of the parties involved. But still, it doesn't quite capture the kind of *joint* "ownership" of ends that is illuminated by the plural-subject account. On the plural-subject account, as we've seen, sharing ends is not a matter of each party making the other's ends her own (even with the added component of consent), but rather, of each party expressing willingness to take certain ends as jointly theirs.

⁵⁹ Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, 72.

⁶⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 667.