



Some Thoughts About Caring

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1. In their discussions of issues concerning the nature of human action, and also in their inquiries into the structure of practical reasoning, philosophers typically draw upon a more or less standard conceptual repertoire. The most familiar item in that repertoire is the indispensable, ubiquitous, and protean notion of what people want or — synonymously, at least in the usage that I shall adopt — what they desire. I believe that the elementary repertoire in which the concept of desire is so centrally situated needs to be enriched by the articulation of certain additional notions. It is more or less customary to identify the point of practical reasoning or deliberation simply as a matter of figuring out how to attain whatever goal it is that we want to reach. In many instances, however, what inspires our thinking and shapes our conduct is not that we merely want one thing or another. Often, what moves us is that there is something of which it is both more precise and more informative to say that we care about it or that we regard it as important to ourselves. In certain cases, it is appropriate to characterize what guides us in terms of a rather particular mode of caring — namely, love. It is with these concepts — what we care about, what we consider important to us, and what we love — that I shall here be concerned.

2. The philosophy of liberalism is devoted to elaborating and defending the ideal of a society that maximizes the freedom of its members to act in accordance with their desires. One argument in behalf of this ideal is that permitting people to do as they please enhances the likelihood that they will get what they want, so that ensuring their freedom facilitates their success in the pursuit of happiness. To be sure, the connection between

doing as we please and getting what we want is rather unreliable. What is perhaps even more uncertain is the connection between getting what we want and actually being happy. There are people, however, who believe that the entire character of happiness lies in nothing other than the fulfillment of desire. This is the view of Thomas Hobbes, who declares that happiness (he calls it ‘felicity’) is just “continued success in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continual prospering.”¹ In other words, happiness is entirely and exclusively constituted by the regular satisfaction of desire. What makes people happy is, simply and unconditionally, doing and getting whatever they want. In its wholesale reliance upon the sheer fact of desire, this seems egregiously indiscriminate. Hobbes is evidently not concerned that people may be misguided in what they want; he takes happiness to consist flatly in the satisfaction of whatever desires they actually have. Of course, this does not mean that every satisfaction of desire counts the same. Satisfying one desire contributes more to a person’s happiness than satisfying another when the person wants to satisfy the one more than he wants to satisfy the other — i.e., when he prefers satisfying the one over satisfying the other. But, resorting to the concept of preference does not provide adequately for the discriminations that an acceptable account of the relation between happiness and desire must be able to support. Even apart from the possibility that a person may be as misguided in his preferences as in his desires, the fact that one desire ranks higher than another in the order of someone’s preferences does not entail that satisfying the former will contribute more to his happiness than satisfying the latter. It may make no



difference to his happiness which of the two desires he fulfills. In fact, his happiness may be totally unaffected even if he fulfills neither of them. Whether someone is happy is not determined by what he merely desires, nor even by what he prefers. This is because certain of his desires and preferences may not be at all important to him. Surely his happiness cannot depend upon the satisfaction of desires that he himself does not care about. A person may prefer satisfying one of his desires rather than another, without regarding either of the things that he desires as being of any importance to him. The fact that he wants one thing more than he wants another does not entail that he cares about it more, since it does not entail that he cares about it at all. From my preference for chocolate ice cream over vanilla, for example, it cannot reasonably be inferred that chocolate ice cream is something that I consider to be important to me. Ranking things according to our preferences is not the same as ranking them according to how much we care about them. The conclusion that a person cares about something cannot properly be inferred from the simple assumption that he wants it. It might be suggested, on the other hand, that this conclusion does follow from the assumption that he wants it very badly. To the extent that a person wants something badly, after all, the frustration of his desire will make him uncomfortable; and we may suppose that people do care about avoiding discomfort. But even granting that a person who desires something badly will indeed care about avoiding the discomfort that frustration of his desire would bring, it does not follow that he will also care about satisfying his desire or about the object that he desires. If satisfying a desire were the only way to avoid being frustrated, then whoever cares about avoiding frustration would have to care about satisfying his desires. However, a person may be able to avoid frustration without getting whatever it is that he wants: namely, by ceasing to want it. Instead of satisfying his desire, he may give it up. In many circumstances, more-

over, people quite reasonably prefer to avoid frustration by giving up their desires rather than by satisfying them.

3. It is important to appreciate that caring about things is not the same as judging them to be intrinsically valuable, nor is it entailed by such judgments. If a person recognizes that something is intrinsically valuable, then this gives him a reason to desire it for its own sake and to pursue it as a final end. It does not mean, however, either that he does desire it or that he ought to do so. After all, it may not appeal to him; or it may not appeal to him enough. There are many things that we consider worth doing or having for their own sakes, but by which we are not strongly moved and that we quite reasonably decline to set for ourselves as goals. Suppose that someone does adopt a certain goal, which he values for its own sake and which he pursues as a final end. It still cannot be presumed that he cares about it. We often pursue goals that we desire to attain because of their intrinsic value, but that we do not regard as being of any importance to us. There are numerous pleasures, for instance, that we seek entirely for their own sakes but that we regard as utterly inconsequential. I may want some ice cream just for the pleasure of eating it. The pleasure is in that case a final end, which I desire simply for itself. But this hardly means that enjoying the ice cream is something that I care about. It is entirely coherent to appraise something as valuable in itself, or to pursue it actively as an intrinsically desirable final end, and yet not to care about it or to consider it important to oneself at all. In the processes of deliberation through which people design and assess their conduct, they have to make up their minds about a number of familiar issues — about what they want, which things they want more than others, what they consider to be inherently valuable and hence worthy of being pursued for its own sake, and what they propose to adopt as final ends that they will actually seek to attain. In addition, they



face another issue as well. They must decide what they care about, or what they regard as important to themselves. This is different than deciding what to want, what to prefer, what to value, or what to pursue for its own sake. The criteria for determining what people care about are not the same as the criteria for identifying their desires, their preferences, their attributions of intrinsic value, or their final ends.

4. What, then, does it mean to care about something? Suppose that someone plans to attend a concert devoted to music that he particularly enjoys. There are imaginable circumstances in which he might emphatically and sincerely declare that, while he wants and intends to go to the concert, he does not regard doing so as being at all important to him. Consider the following scenario. The prospective concert-goer is asked by a close friend for a favor. If he does the favor, he will be unable to get to the concert. He agrees to do the favor; but he incidentally mentions to his friend that this will require him to change his plans for the evening. The friend then becomes apologetic, expresses a reluctance to impose upon his good-natured readiness to forego the concert, and begins to withdraw the request for the favor. At this point, the music lover interrupts him, and says: "Don't be concerned that you may be taking advantage of me. The fact is that going to this concert is not at all important to me. I really don't care about missing it." There is a possibility, of course, that the music lover is not being altogether candid. Perhaps he is fully aware that he does care about missing the concert, but considerately chooses to deny this in order to protect his friend from embarrassment. I believe that what he says to reassure his friend may be the truth: missing the concert may really be of absolutely no importance to him. But suppose that what he says is not true? Suppose that, despite his disclaimer, he understands quite well that going to the concert actually is of at least some importance to him. What would that imply? One

thing that it would imply, it seems to me, is that foregoing the concert will cost him something: he will suffer a feeling of disappointment, or a sense of detriment or loss. If he does really care about going to the concert, then, in one way or another, missing it will hurt. And if foregoing the concert will hurt, that must be because going to the concert is something that he still wants to do. If he no longer had any desire to attend the concert, he would not be bothered by being unable to attend it. So the supposition that he still cares about attending the concert, after he has agreed to forego it, entails that he continues to desire to attend it although he now feels that it is more important to him to do the favor for his friend instead. Under the circumstances, he is willing to give up the concert; but his desire to go to it persists, albeit with a lower priority than before. That is why foregoing the concert imposes a cost on him. It causes him to suffer, in some measure, the pain of being frustrated or disappointed. The persistence of the music lover's desire to go to the concert would have no essential bearing upon whether he cares about the concert if it were only by some sort of inertia that the desire persisted. The reason that missing the concert will cause him to suffer frustration must not be that he is too negligent to revise his inclinations and his attitudes appropriately in the light of his decision to forego the concert for the sake of helping his friend. The continuation of his desire must be due to an unwillingness on his part to give the desire up. The fact that he cares about going to the concert implies, in other words, that he actively supports and sustains his desire to go to it despite his preference for satisfying another desire instead. Of course, we are not always able to shape our inclinations as we would like. So missing the concert may be costly to the music lover even if he does not care about it; his desire to attend the concert may persist despite the fact that he has no interest in sustaining that desire and makes no effort to do so. In that case, he has the misfortune of being stuck with a desire that he does not



want. But his relationship to this desire is estranged, and lacks a legitimate standing in his psychic economy. He may continue to find that desire alive within himself, but he has now alienated himself from the desire and disenfranchised it. Whether the person cares about the concert is not a question of how enthusiastic he is about going to it, then, nor is it a question of how much gratification he believes he would derive from going to it. Feelings and beliefs of those kinds do more or less reliably indicate whether a person cares about something, but they are not at the heart of the matter. The question of whether a person cares about something pertains directly not to what he feels or believes about it, but to his attitude towards his own desire for it. It has to do essentially with whether he is committed to this desire or whether he is prepared to give it up by expunging it from the order of his preferences. Now if this is at least part of a correct account of what it means to care about something, then it is of considerable significance to the character of our lives that we do in fact care about various things. Suppose we cared about nothing. In that case, we would be creatures with no active interest in establishing or in sustaining any thematic continuity in our volitional lives. We would make no effort to maintain any of the aims and ambitions by which we are from time to time moved. Needless to say, we would still be moved to satisfy our desires; that is irreducibly part of the nature of desire. We might also still want to have certain desires, and to be motivated by them in what we do; in other words, our capacity for higher-order desires and volitions might remain fully intact. Moreover, we might have higher-order desires and higher-order volitions that endure and that therefore provide a certain degree of volitional consistency or stability in our lives. But whatever coherence or unity might result from their endurance would be, from our point of view, a matter of mere happenstance or inadvertence with respect to which we are altogether passive. It would not be the result of any delibe-

rate guiding intent on our part. Desires and volitions of various hierarchical orders would come and go, sometimes lasting for a while. In the design and contrivance of their succession, however, we ourselves would play no concerned or defining role.

5. In my view, things are important to us, whether we recognize their importance to us or not, to the extent that we need them. Those things for which we have no need are of no importance to us; and things are of no importance to us only if we do not need them. As for the defining characteristics of necessities, or of things that we need, they have to do with what is necessary in order to avoid harm. If the harm is not significant, the need will be minor and inconsequential; but it will nonetheless be genuine as long as a failure to satisfy it is unavoidably harmful. The assertion that a person needs something means just that he will be unable to avoid some harm or other — he will inevitably suffer some injury or loss — if he does not have it. To lack something that we need is plainly against our interest. Therefore, it is in our interest to want what we need; that is, we have a natural interest in wanting those things that are in fact important to us. If we need them, then it is advantageous for us to desire to secure them. After all, things are likely to go worse for us if there are things that are important to us but for which we have no desire and which, accordingly, we are not inclined either to seek or to accept. Insofar as a person regards something as important to him, then, he will normally also consider it important to him to desire it. Moreover, insofar as he has a desire for something that he considers to be important to him, he will be similarly motivated to avoid losing this desire. It is good for us to be motivated to satisfy our needs. So it is a good idea for us to sustain that motivation and to support it when it might otherwise tend to fade. Thus, the fact that a person cares about something — i.e., regards it as important to him — consists partly in his being com-



mitted to his interest in it. This commitment is not a matter of merely endorsing or approving the way he feels. That is part of what caring involves, but it is not enough: a person may endorse or approve of something, and yet not be willing or prepared to engage in any active measures to protect it. If he cares about it, on the other hand, he is ready to take steps in order to prevent his desire for it from being extinguished. That he considers it important to him entails that he is disposed to act in ways designed to ensure that his interest in it continues.

6. Now there are many things that we consider genuinely valuable, that we want, and that we seek, but that we do not need. We do not need them because they are not indispensable to us. Failure to obtain them need not cause us harm, because wholly adequate substitutes for them are available at no greater cost. Whatever satisfactions they provide can be replaced without any additional cost by other satisfactions that are attainable in other ways. The things that we want and seek may be quite distinctive, or even in various significant respects unique, but we can get along just as well without them. Returning now to my example, suppose it is literally true that the person who had initially planned to go to the concert does not really care about going to it. In that case, he does not believe that he needs to go to it; he does not expect, in other words, that missing the concert will unavoidably bring him any incremental cost or harm. Very likely, he has a generic interest in devoting his evening to some activity that is inherently worthwhile; but he does not assume that going to the concert is the only way for him to accomplish this. He may well understand that the value to him of listening to the music would be intrinsic. But the alternative proposed by his friend offers him an opportunity that he considers to be no less intrinsically valuable; and, for one reason or another, he prefers it. A person who desires something exclusively for its intrinsic value (e.g., listening to music) may

be happy to accept instead something else (e.g., helping a friend), which also possesses intrinsic value but which possesses it by virtue of characteristics that are of a quite different sort.

7. Among the things that we care about are the things we love. The beloved object may be a person; or it may be a concrete individual of another type, such as a country or an institution. It may also be something more abstract, such as the moral and non-moral ideals to which a person is devoted and which I believe it is appropriate to construe as objects of love also. Or what is loved may be neither quite like an individual nor quite like an abstraction: for instance, a tradition, or a way of doing things. What I have in mind in speaking of love is, roughly and only in part, a concern specifically for the well-being or flourishing of the beloved object that is more or less disinterested and that is also more or less constrained. This concern is not equivalent to or entailed by any type of feeling or any type of cognition. Loving something is not the same as liking it very much, or as deriving or expecting to derive great satisfaction from it; nor does loving something necessarily follow from regarding it as especially attractive or from judging it to be especially valuable. Rather, love is essentially a somewhat non-voluntary and complex volitional structure, which bears both upon how a person is disposed to act and upon how he is disposed to control and to manage his motivations and his interests. Thus, it shapes a person's conduct with respect to what he loves, and it guides his supervision of his own purposes and priorities. Disinterested love must be distinguished from the sort of concern that is motivated basically by ulterior or prudential considerations. A person's interest in seeing to it that some object is in good shape may be motivated by his understanding that otherwise the object will be incapable of providing various benefits in which he is interested. The love that I have in mind is not in this way instrumental. In characterizing it as disinterested, I



mean that it is a concern in which the well-being of the beloved is desired for its own sake rather than for the sake of promoting any other interests. Love differs not only from a concern that is fundamentally instrumental. It also differs from disinterested concern that is essentially non-specific or impersonal. A charitable person who is selflessly devoted to helping the sick or the poor strictly for their own sakes may be quite indifferent to the personal identities of those to whom his efforts are addressed. What qualifies people to be beneficiaries of his concern is not their particular identities or their individuality, but just their membership in a relevant class. For someone who is eager to help the sick or the poor, any sick or poor person will do. With regard to what we love, on the other hand, there is no such interchangeability. In the case of a beloved object, substitution is not an acceptable and perhaps not even an intelligible option. The significance to the lover of his beloved is not generic; it is ineluctably particular. It makes sense for someone who is proposing to spend time with a friend over a game of chess to consider, as an acceptable alternative, going with his friend for a brisk walk in the country; and vice versa. These are acceptable substitutes for each other because the interest by which the person is motivated as he considers them is not an irreducible interest in either of them as such. It is a more generic interest in — let us say — spending an hour or two with his friend in some pursuit that both regard as intrinsically enjoyable. The interest of a lover in his beloved is not generic. He does not love it because it fulfills certain independently specifiable conditions, or because it belongs to a certain class. His love of it cannot be satisfied by anything except itself. A person cannot coherently agree to accept a substitute for his beloved, and imagine that the substitution might be accomplished without loss to him, even if he is certain that he would love the substitute as much as he loves the beloved that it replaces. The situation of a lover is fundamentally different from that of a

person who believes that he could satisfy all of his pertinent interests by substituting the pleasure of an invigorating walk in the country for the enjoyment of a game of chess. It might really be all the same to the latter person whether he spends his time in one of these recreational ways or in the other. It cannot possibly be all the same to the former whether he is selflessly devoted to what he actually loves or to something else instead. There is a widespread tendency to attribute an exaggerated importance to being unique. We are accustomed to being told that no two people are exactly alike, and that this has a significant bearing upon how precious every individual is and upon how individuals are properly to be treated. It is probably true that if people did not differ from one another at all, they would be less interesting, at least in the sense that there would be less reason for getting to know more of them. It seems to me, however, that the moral value of individuals — as distinct from their value as specimens — would not be diminished in the slightest even if they were all exactly the same. In any case, the reason it makes no sense to consider replacing what we love with a substitute is not that loving something entails supposing it to be different from everything else. Suppose that one day a young woman turns up of whom I discover that she is, and always has been, indistinguishable in every discernible physical, psychical and behavioral respect from one of my beloved daughters. I would find that bewildering; and it would certainly distress and inhibit me in various ways. But however confusing and disruptive the situation might be, it would surely not lead me to conclude that I had all along been somehow wrong to love my daughter because I had erroneously supposed that there was no one quite like her. The reason it makes no sense for a person to consider accepting a substitute for his beloved is not that what he loves is qualitatively distinctive. It is just the fact of its particularity. The focus of a person's love is not what makes his beloved describable, but what makes it name-



able — something that is more mysterious and that it is manifestly impossible to define.

8. In virtue of this particularity, which cannot conceivably be duplicated or shared and which hence cannot be available elsewhere, what a person loves is for him an irreplaceable necessity. In other words, the fact that a person has come to love something entails that the satisfaction of his concern for its well-being is something that he has come to need. If he understands that his beloved is not flourishing, then it is unavoidable that this causes him harm. Loving something imposes upon the lover, then, a kind of necessity. We need what we love; that is, we must have it if we are to avoid suffering some associated harm. This harm may be quite substantial. The well-being of our beloved is important to us; and since it is important to us, it is in our interest both to regard it as important to us and to desire it. Our interest in avoiding it helps to account, I believe, for an important aspect of love that is often misunderstood. With respect to what we love, there are certain things that we feel we must do. Love demands that we serve the interests of our beloved; if we disregard these demands, we betray our love. Now the grip and the forcefulness of the demands that love imposes upon us resemble the forcefulness and the grip of the demands made upon us by moral obligation. In both sorts of case, it seems to us that we are not free simply to do as we wish; love and duty alike leave us no choice but to do what they require. Moreover, dereliction in a case of either kind makes us feel guilty or ashamed and warrants an adverse estimate of our personal character. The similarity between the ways in which we experience and respond to the requirements of moral obligation and to those of love is not to be taken, however, as indicating that these requirements are essentially of a single kind. The authority that stands behind the imperatives of love is not the same as the authority with which moral imperatives are imbued. It is sometimes presumed that to betray

what one loves is fundamentally a moral offense; but this presumption is incorrect. The commands of love are not moral imperatives. The necessities that grip us in the one sort of case have different grounds than the necessities that grip us in the other.

9. Although much is sometimes made of the moral obligations that are allegedly entailed by love — especially by love for another person, and by variants of love such as friendship — I doubt that there are any such obligations. I do not doubt, of course, that people ordinarily have important moral responsibilities to those whom they love. Our relationships with the people we love are frequently intimate, and intimate relationships naturally lead to expectations and modes of dependency by which weighty obligations are engendered. Because of the particular character of the relationships within which they arise, these obligations tend to be heavier and wider in scope than those that less consequential relationships normally generate. Nevertheless, it seems to me that they are of the very same kind. In my judgment, there is no distinctive type of moral responsibility that derives specifically from love. For one thing, love may make no difference to the beloved. I may love a woman from a distance, with no opportunity to affect her in any way; and she may have no inkling even that I exist. Then my love has no consequences for her at all; and, more specifically, it generates in her no dependencies or expectations. Surely the mere fact that I love her would not, in such a case, make me in any way morally obligated to her. At least, I do not see how I could acquire duties to her simply by virtue of a psychic condition within myself by which she is neither directly nor indirectly affected. This leaves open the possibility that my love does nonetheless render me morally obligated in certain ways, though not obligated to her. Instead of exploring this possibility, I wish to suggest that there is a better explanation of the unquestionable truth that loving someone or something



entails that there are certain things we must do. The explanation I have in mind is grounded especially in two important facts about love. First, there is the fact that it is important to us to love. Second, there is the fact that the importance to us of loving something does not derive (at least, not exclusively) from an appreciation by us of the value of what we love. There are many instances in which something that would not otherwise have much (or even any) value to us becomes valuable to us (or becomes more valuable to us) from the very circumstance that we love it. We often make things important to us, or more important to us than they would otherwise be, simply by caring about them. The value to me of certain individuals would be considerably less than it is, for example, if those individuals were not my beloved children. Now besides the fact that my children are important to me, there is also the different fact that loving my children is important to me. My love for them is a valuable element of my life; my life improved when I began to love them. It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that the value to me of loving my children is derivative from or a response to their importance to me. There may be some truth in that supposition, but not much. In fact, it is not because I recognize how important to me my children are that I love them. On the contrary, the relationship between their value to me and my love for them goes essentially the other way: my children are so valuable to me just because I love them. The point is that loving is valuable inherently, and for its own sake. It is valuable in itself, and not in virtue of the value of what is loved. Other things being equal, our lives would be worse without it. Needless to say, of course, other things are not always equal. Thus, loving is not only inherently valuable; it is also risky. Lovers are vulnerable to profoundly distressing anxieties and sorrows when things do not go well for what they care about. For an infinite being, secure in its omnipotence, even the most indiscriminate promiscuity would be safe. God need not forego

any opportunity for enjoying the goodness of loving; guided by an entirely uninhibited love of Being, God may create a plenitude in which every possible object of love is included. Finite creatures like ourselves, on the other hand, cannot afford to be so heedlessly extravagant. We are not omnipotent agents, free of all passivity, to whom nothing can happen and who therefore have nothing to fear. We cannot be recklessly indiscriminate and permit ourselves the joy of loving everything. In view of the vulnerabilities that loving entails, we must set limits and conditions upon it.

10. The fact that particular instances of loving may be linked to undesirable contingencies is, of course, entirely compatible with the fact that loving has significant intrinsic value regardless of the character of its object. Love is valuable to the lover for its own sake, even though its value to him may be outweighed by the burdens and injuries that it imposes upon him. I cannot provide a satisfactory account of why it is that loving has this inherent value. I shall simply stipulate that without loving in one or more of its several modes our lives would be intolerably unshaped and empty. It is this, I believe, that gives love its commanding authority over us. The imperatives of love are not grounded in the strictures of moral obligation but in the compelling fact that loving is of decisive importance to our lives. For our own sakes, we need to love; otherwise, our lives will be miserably deprived. This means that we need for our own sakes to conduct ourselves in those ways that define loving. Suppose that someone fails to obey the commands of love, by neglecting or by refusing to be or to do what love requires. In that case, his condition or his conduct lacks an essential constitutive element of loving. Therefore, he is not actually loving at all. Insofar as a person is untrue to what he loves, he is not truly loving it. And to the extent that he fails to do what love requires, and hence fails to love, he necessarily loses from his life the immeasurable



value of loving. This has nothing to do with the dangers and costs of forfeiting the benefits of reciprocity. So far as those benefits are concerned, the false lover may in fact continue to enjoy them. What he is inescapably bound to lose are not the benefits provided by his beloved, but those that are inherent in his own activity of loving. The specific and distinctive reason against betraying what we love has no more to do with the risks of retaliation than with the penalties for violating the moral law. The reason that we must not betray what we love is that we must not betray ourselves.

11. It may perhaps seem that there is a certain inconsistency, or at least a disturbing tension, between my claim that the authority of love derives from the irreplaceable value to us of loving and the notion that it is essential to the nature of loving that it be disinterested. After all, how can the attitudes and actions of a person be disinterested if they are motivated at all by considerations of profound self-interest? But suppose that a man tells a woman that his love for her is what makes his life worthwhile. She is surely unlikely to feel — if she actually believes this — that what the man tells her means that he is exploiting her and that he cares about her only because it makes him feel good to do so. She will not think that the selflessness of his love for her is contradicted by the fact that loving her satisfies a deep need of his life. The fact that loving her is so important to him will not strike her as implying that he does not truly love her at all. The appearance of conflict between selflessness and self-interest disappears once it is understood that what serves the self-interest of the lover is, precisely, his selflessness. The benefit of loving accrues to him only if he is genuinely selfless. He fulfills his own need only because in loving he forgets himself.

12. In many situations, the requirements of love and those of duty coincide. For example, parents

are under normal circumstances obligated by impersonal principles of morality to provide for the welfare of their children. Parents who love their children may readily acknowledge that they have this duty. However, that ordinarily has nothing to do with what actually motivates the ways in which they treat their children. Loving parents do not generally look after their children out of duty, but out of love. They treat their children responsibly because they love them, not because they are morally obliged to do so. There is a significant structural difference between instances of acting out of duty and instances of acting out of love. Consider two situations in which someone gives money to a needy person. Let us suppose that in both situations the money is given just because the recipient needs it, and that it is given with the sole intention of helping him. The action and the reason for performing it are in both cases, then, the same: money is given, and it is given to help someone who needs it. But now let us suppose that the donor in one of the situations gives the money out of duty, while in the other the donor gives it out of love. What is the difference, in circumstances like these, between acting out of duty and acting out of love? Let us begin inquiring into the difference by considering why the supposition that money will be helpful to the needy person counts with each donor as a reason for him to make his gift. In the case of the donor who is motivated by duty, this counts as a reason because he considers himself morally obliged to help the needy person. For the donor who acts out of love, the fact that the money will help counts as a reason because the needy person is someone whom he loves. Up to this point, the practical reasoning in the one case parallels that in the other. There is an important difference, however, between these two explanations of why the dutiful and the loving donors take the fact that the money will help the needy person as a reason for giving it to him. In the deliberations of the donor who acts out of duty, his belief that he has a duty to help the needy person is based upon



some moral rule. The duty is established or inferred by invoking a universally valid principle, which the donor is inclined to accept and by which he considers himself to be bound. The deliberations of the donor who acts out of love, on the other hand, do not rely upon any inference — they do not invoke any belief that corresponds to the other donor's belief concerning what duty requires of him. For both donors, the fact that the money will help serves as a reason for giving it. What explains why this serves as a reason when the moving force is love, however, is nothing more than the fact that the needy person is someone whom the donor loves. This is part of what essentially constitutes loving: a lover necessarily, as such, takes the fact that an action would be helpful to his beloved as being ipso facto a reason for performing the action. That it provides him with a reason is not a conclusion that the lover reaches by deducing it from the premise that he loves his beloved. His taking it as a reason is a constitutive aspect of his loving: to love a person is essentially (in part) to take the fact that a certain action would be helpful to that person as a reason for performing it. It is a conceptual truth that a donor who acts out of love takes the fact that money will help the person he loves as a reason for giving it to him.

13. Love requires an object that is loved. As I have suggested, the object — by virtue of being loved — is needed by the person who loves it; for this reason, it is necessarily important and valuable to him. And in addition, his loving is valuable to him for its own sake; loving has an inherent value, which is not wholly derivative from the value of its object. But, of course, loving has this inherent value only because it has an object. The inherent value of loving is not due to its being pleasant or to its possessing some other desirable introspectible quality that might be experienced and appreciated without attending to the fact that the loving has an object. Loving is inherently valuable precisely on account of the fact that it is

focused upon its object. The beloved object, without which loving is not possible at all, is an essential and indispensable condition of the inherent value that loving possesses. Loving is indeed valuable inherently, but at the same time it depends upon its object for the value that is inherent in it. The relationships of independence and interdependence between the value of loving and the value of its object are curiously entangled. They strike me as analogous to certain peculiar and neglected features of the relationships between means and ends. Just as the value to us of loving is not straightforwardly derivative from or determined by the value to us of what we love, so the value to us of using means is not wholly derivative from or determined by the value to us of the ends that effective means enable us to attain. Just as loving has a value that is inherent in it as such and regardless of its object, so it is important to us for its own sake to engage in the use of effective means regardless of the specific outcome of what we do. As we need to love, so do we need to engage in productive activity. It makes a great difference, of course, whether what we love or what we produce is worthy of our love or of our effort. It also makes a great difference, needless to say, whether the contingent consequences of our loving and our working are on the whole beneficial or injurious to us and to others. Quite apart from considerations of these kinds, however, it is important to us for its own sake that there be something that we love. And it is similarly important to us for its own sake that we have some kind of work to do. In my view, the importance to us of having means is not simply tantamount to the importance to us of attaining our ends. It is a mistake to presume that the value of a means is exhausted by the value of the ends to which the means lead. My point here must not be confused with the commonplace that an activity possessing instrumental value may, independently of its value as a means, possess intrinsic value as well — in the way, for instance, that vigorous exercise may be enjoyable for its



own sake quite apart from the fact that it is also conducive to health, or in the way that food may be tasty as well as nourishing. The point I am making is that certain kinds of activity — such as productive work — are inherently valuable not simply in addition to being instrumentally valuable but precisely because of their instrumental value. Vigorous workouts and tasty meals are valuable to us for their own sakes alone simply because the exercise or the food is enjoyable, without taking at all into account whether they are also valuable because they conduce to health. On the other hand, useful work is valuable to us for its own sake regardless of whether we find the activity in which it consists to be enjoyable. The inherent value that productive activity as such possesses is not independent of the fact that the activity is instrumentally valuable. Quite to the contrary, it is inherently valuable only in virtue of the fact that it is useful. Without the goal-directed activity that is the locus of instrumental value, we would lack the indispensably foundational sense that we have of ourselves as agents. Our lives would be insupportably devoid of the cohesion and the meaning that are generated by solving problems, by making decisions, and by formulating and carrying out plans. The activity in which we engage can serve these foundational needs only insofar as it is guided by purposes or aims at products, but it is valuable to us not only for the sake of its goals or its products. It is also valuable to us in itself, because it is inherently important to us to have something useful to do. The fact that there is intrinsic value in having something useful to do suggests another rather surprising thought — namely, that even what we regard as our most final and unconditioned ends may also appropriately be considered to be means. If we had no ends, after all, there would be no such thing as useful activity. Our ends are necessary conditions, therefore, of there being something useful for us to do. It is a familiar saying that “all action is for the sake of some end.” It may also be said that all ends are for the

sake of action. We need ends in order to be able to engage in purposeful activity. From this point of view, a goal or end is an indispensable means to something — namely, useful activity — that is inherently valuable. The fact that something possesses terminal value as an end necessarily provides it with instrumental value too. Thus, paradoxical as it may seem, final ends necessarily possess instrumental value just by virtue of their terminal value as ends, and means are inherently important to us as final ends just by virtue of their instrumental value.

14. The fact that we have a variety of needs, and that we are therefore vulnerable to numerous kinds of harm, requires us to be more or less circumspect with regard both to love and to work. We cannot permit ourselves to be altogether thoughtless or impulsive in selecting their objects. This suggests a consideration that must have a certain degree of justificatory force when we are considering what to love or what work to do. The consideration that I have in mind has less to do with the comparative evaluation of possible objects of love or of work than with a judgment about ourselves. The judgment concerns what we are in fact able to love or what kind of work we are in fact capable of doing. As I have been emphasizing, love and work are important to us for their own sakes, whatever their objects may be. It follows from this that one good reason in favor of a certain prospective object of love is simply that it is possible for us to love it; and it follows similarly that one good reason in favor of undertaking a prospective type or piece of productive activity is simply that it is possible for us to do it. Whatever it is that we love, and whatever the work that we do, we will benefit at least from the inherent value of loving or of working. It is therefore always a good reason for loving something that we find it lovable, meaning by this not that we regard it as especially worthy of love but just that we are capable of loving it. The reason may not be good enough; it may be out-



weighed, of course, by other considerations. However, the possibility of loving something is in every instance a reason that tends to justify doing so. The same thing holds for work. The fact that a person is capable of doing a certain kind or piece of work is always a good reason, though of course not a decisive one, for him to do it.

16. I will conclude with a few observations concerning Thomas Hobbes' idea that happiness consists in getting what one wants. His account of happiness is nuanced by a complexity that Hobbes himself introduces. The truth of the matter, he says, is that simply getting whatever a person happens from time to time to want does not really suffice to make the person happy. Someone who always manages to get what he wants may nonetheless be occasionally or even chronically uncertain that he will get it. Hobbes appreciates that this anxiety concerning whether one will prosper is, even if one does prosper, incompatible with felicity. Thus he insists that our happiness requires not only that we satisfy our desires but also that we be steadily confident that we will do so. In addition to a succession of particular desires for one thing or another, then, we have a more generic higher-order desire to feel assured that our particular desires will be satisfied. Thus, Hobbes says that "the object of a man's desire is ... to assure for ever the way of his future desire; and therefore the voluntary actions and inclinations of all men tend, not only to the procuring, but also to the assuring of a contented life."² Every person has at all times a standing desire to be capable of satisfying any

and every one of the more specific desires that he may during his life come to have. "So," Hobbes declares, "I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."³ This endless desire for power is not at all, as Hobbes construes it, megalomaniacal or perverse. It is a natural and more or less reasonable desire to be confident that we will be able to attain the endlessly successive and unpredictable goals to which we will in the course of our lives aspire. The relationship between the value of confidence and the values of the various goals that we are confident of being able to attain parallels the relationships between the values to us of love and work and the values to us of what we love and of what we work to achieve. Confidence is a matter of feeling that one has sufficient power — in other words, the necessary means — for getting what one wants. It is tautological that power is useful. However, as Hobbes makes clear, the value of power is not only instrumental. Since the possession of power is an indispensable constituent of happiness, it is itself an end that is valuable in its own right and for its own sake. Now what makes the possession of power an essential constituent of happiness is simply, of course, the fact that power is instrumentally valuable. The only reason that we require it in order to be happy, and that we accordingly value it as an end in itself, is that it is valuable to us as a means. Like loving and like working, the possession of power derives inherent value from the fact that it is instrumental for the attainment of outcomes that are valued for their own sakes.

Notes

1. Thomas HOBBS, *Leviathan*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1955, Part I, Chapter 6, p. 39.
2. *Op. cit.*, Part I, Chapter 11, p. 63.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 64.