

The Fragility of the Moral Self:
Self-Love and Morality

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We find ourselves in a world in which considerable immoral behavior occurs: We are aware of ill-will, gratuitous hostility and violence, to say nothing of the various forms of X-ism (sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, and so forth). We need not look far to find instances where people have allowed greed, jealousy, and envy to get the better of them. And both child sexual abuse and rape stand as poignant reminders of just how insensitive people can be to the pain and damage they are causing others. We might think that if anything has an inescapable hold upon us, it is not morality, as Kantians claim,² but immorality.

The preponderance of immoral behavior is striking on two accounts. One is that in general such behavior is contrary to what people know to be wrong. In the attempt to deflect blame, it is common enough for people to deny, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that they have lied, stolen, or committed a murder; however, people usually do not further insist that they did not know that lying, stealing or committing murder is wrong. The second and far more significant consideration is that it is clear that we do not want either ourselves or our loved ones to be the object of immoral behavior; when we are, we display a cluster of what Strawson has called reactive sentiments.³ We are genuinely indignant and resentful toward those who have behaved badly toward us and ours. What is more, we morally blame the offenders. As Strawson has argued, this cluster of reactive attitudes, which I refer to as sentiments of moral outrage, reveals that people take seriously the idea that they have been morally wronged and so have been inappropriately treated by moral agents, as opposed to merely having been injured by a flood, a stroke of lightning or a so-called lower form of animal life.

This second observation enables us to bypass the question of whether genuine moral knowledge really exists. For whether it exists or not, there is unquestionably a set of shared beliefs about basic rights and wrongs; and people who wantonly act contrary to these beliefs in wronging others display great moral outrage toward those who wrong them. How can this schism be? And the schism is, indeed, genuine if the moral outrage is genuine. One can, of course, question whether such instances of moral outrage are genuine. Undoubtedly, some are. However, there is just no reason to believe that none are genuine, and there certainly are no formal considerations that would show that none are genuine.

In passing, we should notice that genuine sentiments of moral outrage are not properly occasioned by mere disappointment, and so by the mere failure to achieve desired ends, including ends deeply anchored in self-interested aims. Take competitive games, for instance, which are generally driven by self-interest. The aim is to enhance one's self-interest by winning. There is no pretense of performing some other service, let alone some moral good. The winning prize can be considerable; and, consequently, the disappointment that comes with not winning can be ever so bitter. Yet, such disappointment alone does not express itself in moral outrage at the winner or anyone else. One can debate whether life can be properly and entirely modeled after competitive games. My only point in this passing observation is that this way of modeling life does not suffice to explain genuine moral outrage, and so the schism to which I have drawn attention.

If we are to make sense of this schism, I believe that we must be mindful of how

fragile human beings are, and how delicate is the psychological structure that in general enables persons to act in accordance with their knowledge of right and wrong. To this end, I shall focus upon the psychological features of self-love. I shall argue that it is the absence of secure self-love that explains an important aspect of immoral behavior.

My thesis is not that all immoral behavior is attributable to the absence of self-love. Nor is it true that all persons who lack self-love act immorally. As to the latter, a person may act morally -- that is, perform the sorts of actions that are morally required -- for many reasons. Fear of reprisal, for instance, comes readily to mind. As to the former, persons with self-love can be adversely influenced by their environment, or subject to great moral pain that may overshadow their moral judgment. The Holocaust and American slavery were clearly moral evils, and I would not for a moment think that the absence of self-love was a primary factor as an explanation for either. My thesis is a much more limited one, though of considerable importance nonetheless. I hold that the absence of self-love gives us a fundamentally important insight into the prevalence of moral behavior that is not forthcoming from other considerations.

Kantians, of course, roundly criticize self-love as the basis for moral behavior because then inclination -- rather than reason -- stands as the source of moral behavior and, in the final analysis, any behavior based solely upon inclination is unintelligible.⁴ Surprisingly, perhaps, I shall not take issue with Kantians here; for my position is not that self-love should serve as the basis for moral behavior, but that having secure self-love is a general precondition for persons acting morally.⁵

Let me explicate the claim that self-love is a general precondition for persons acting morally. I begin with an example. Consider, for instance, literary work. Taking a rather simplistic view, such work requires either considerable mastery of the structure of literary texts or the ability to produce literary texts that exhibit masterful structure. In either case, having a rich command of a natural language is a precondition for producing superb literary work, because considerable skill with a natural language is required for a person to produce any literary work of quality. While a person could have a brilliant command of a natural language and not produce any literary work, it is clear that a person who does not have a good command of a natural language will not be successful in producing literary work of quality. Suppose we move to singing. With this art form, having a good ear for tonal differences is an analogous precondition for excelling, though not necessarily with respect to every one of its genres. It is just as difficult to imagine Luciano Pavarotti doing an Aretha Franklin growl as it is to imagine Aretha Franklin singing "*Nessun dorma*." For each genre of music has its rhythm, and a person who is masterful at distinguishing tones could nonetheless have considerable difficulty with the rhythm of a particular genre of music.

In this vein, then, to say that self-love is a general precondition for acting morally is to say that self-love is a psychological state, a self-regarding attitude, that somehow plays a vital role in realizing the demands of morality. Or, to put the point in a different way, as well as in both a somewhat weaker and more tendentious way, the paradigm example of a moral person will be one who has self-love. I

shall argue in what follows that that is the case.

Self-love

What is self-love? As we know, the term can have very narcissistic connotations.⁶ But fortunately, that is not inevitable. The origin of self-love is not some narcissistic instinct or desire, but parental love. As a result of parental love, the child comes to believe that it has value in the eyes of its parents that is independent of its performances and physical appearances. Out of love, of course, parents also praise their children and dote over their most minuscule accomplishments. And as they do, something very important takes place. The child comes to have the experience of others taking delight in its accomplishments and finding its performances meritorious, although the child's deeds have no significant instrumental value. Thus, parents communicate to the child that its development is a good thing, in and of itself.

I must add one further consideration. It goes without saying that out of love, parents play an indispensable corrective role in the life of the child. At its best, this corrective role comes to far more than teaching a child what it can and cannot do. Through correction, parents teach the child that what it does matters, meaning that its actions make a difference. They teach the child to be selective in its choices, even those that pertain to her or him alone. And, finally, they teach the child to be realistic in its assessment of its activities.

Putting the foregoing considerations together, then, let us understand self-love as a state of mind according to which 1)

the individual believes that her or his life has value independent of performances and physical appearances; 2) the individual values self-development as a good in and of itself, and so is generally moved by the prospects of achieving this end; 3) the individual is both selective and realistic in her pursuit of ends. Finally, 4) self-love produces contentment (not to be confused with complacency). Contentment may be understood as the capacity to appreciate the good of others without feeling threatened by it and the wherewithal to appreciate the good in one's own life without feeling superior to others.

I am not working with an overly idealistic view of parental love, because after all, children are naughty, and they often need to be pushed to do things. These considerations do not present a difficulty for what I have said. For what is central to my view is that children see themselves as having worth in their own right, and so they do not suppose that their worth is tied to fulfilling the dreams of their parents. Good parents will surely want their children to develop their skills, talents and abilities. But just as surely, such parents will be concerned that their children pursue their own dreams and aims.

The account of self-love presented here is not in any way narcissistic. To have self-love is not to be fixated with the self to the exclusion of others nor to have a sense of superiority over others. Nor is it the forerunner or psychological cousin of arrogance. As I have explicated the notion, self-love is eminently compatible with taking great delight in the successes and accomplishments of others; it is not a self-maximizing concept. Doing something well, in the final analysis, is about quality rather than quantity. Only as something of a joke could self-development be

understood as acquiring quantities of quality.

Before moving on, I should acknowledge that self-love is not an all-or-nothing matter; it admits of degrees. For the purposes of this paper, I distinguish persons having a full measure of self-love (or secure self-love) from those who do not. To have a full measure of self-love is to be such that occasional events that are disappointing to one or that constitute wrongful treatment against one occasion little or no self-doubt concerning one's value. In some sense, there is always more that persons -- parents, in this case -- can do to improve upon a situation. However, I hold that parents who generate a full measure of self-love in their children are not open to criticism for not doing more. Interestingly, I hold also that such parents are also excellent models for their children. We would not know how to live well in the absence of models; our parents, surely, are the models that we first encounter and, from a foundationalist view of development, the most important model that we encounter.

Psychological states are dynamic, meaning that they can be further reinforced or they can be weakened. I do not hold that if a full-measure of self-love is in place, at the outset, then nothing can weaken it. I hold only that it will not be readily weakened, given reinforcement from time to time. Persons without a full measure of self-love will be much more easily threatened by things around them. Things can go wrong, both from the beginning and along the way. A complete account of self-love would address these matters. I do not offer a complete account in this essay. Yet, it is striking just how much moral luck plays itself out in our lives.⁷ It is moral luck that we have

parents who afford us a full measure of self-love; it is moral luck that this full measure is generally reinforced rather than undermined by the circumstances of our lives.

Self-love and Living Morally

Although this account of self-love can certainly be improved upon, it is robust enough for our purposes. What I now want to do is to offer some remarks concerning how having a full measure of self-love facilitates living morally. That, of course, requires saying a word about what living morally requires.

As I said at the outset, there is general agreement about the basic rights and wrongs. Whatever the argument for these basic rights and wrongs might be, there is a texture to the moral life that we must keep in mind.⁸ To begin with, we want to know whether people are trustworthy with respect to following the precepts of morality. Second, we want to know whether those who act morally are sincere in their moral behavior. That is, we want to know whether their comments and remarks can be taken at face value. And third, we want to know, not only if the person has good intentions, although that is certainly important, but also if the person is likely to assess the situation correctly. To be sure, that requires making a proper determination concerning what is morally required. But there is a sense in which quite often that evaluation is clear enough: Nassar needs someone to stand up on her behalf; Cohen needs someone to comfort him; a couple of students need someone to be frank with them about their abilities; and so on. One can be manifestly clear about these things, but at an utter loss as to how to go about accomplishing them.

There is, then, what I shall call the salient demands of morality, on the one hand, and the textured demands of morality, on the other. There is much extended philosophical argument to show that we have a duty to help persons in need or to refrain from prevaricating or stealing. But I dare say that that is not what concerns the typical moral person, nor are dramatic displays of courage. Most of us will go through life without ever having the occasion to run into a burning building to save a life, or having to choose between killing a family member and saving our own lives. In most cases, our moral concerns are much more textured. For example, we must interact with Smith. Initially, we are not sure whether his tremendous social distance is owing to arrogance or to deep pain over having had his trust betrayed. Or, we are faced with how to respond to someone who is betraying another's trust. Oftentimes, we wonder whether an appropriate moment for self-disclosure has come about. And while it may be obvious that a desperate student should never make a sexual advance to a professor, it is far from obvious how the professor should handle the situation, over and above refusing the advance. The point is that when we move from the salient to the textured, the ability to identify the right thing to do generally calls for considerable monitoring skills.

In each of these areas just delineated, having a full-measure of self-love plays a most important role.

Let us begin with monitoring. If it is obvious that superb monitoring is a matter of properly grasping the behavior of another, it is hardly a truism. Everyone accepts that emotions can get in the way. A person can be too angry at another or too besotted with the comeliness of

another. It is equally true that feelings of inadequacy can get in the way. A person with a very low opinion of himself will often be too consumed by his own inadequacies to be good at monitoring others. The arrogant person, by contrast, will miss the mark in a different way, in that she or he begins with too low an opinion of others to grasp their behavior properly. But, as I have explicated self-love, there can be no better human template for monitoring the behavior of others than self-love.

At the outset, I was careful to define self-love not so much as an emotion, but a state of mind. It is a way of being psychologically configured. Naturally, people with self-love are as subject to the same range of emotions as anyone else. They are certainly not immune to experiencing anger, hurt or bitterness. They differ, however, in that they have considerable resiliency with respect to the negative emotions and considerable receptivity with respect to the positive ones. Persons with self-love value themselves appropriately; they are not disposed to undervalue themselves or their accomplishments, or to think more of themselves than the circumstances warrant. Obviously, no human being is perfect in monitoring the behavior of others. Nor is there any reason to deny that individuals bring their own perspectives to a social context or that sheer luck is often a factor in whether we get things right. Timing, for instance, is generally of enormous importance. Had one arrived on the scene even 30 seconds later, one would have had a different impression of the person's behavior. The truth of these observations, however, is compatible with the truth that some ways of being psychologically configured makes for better social

monitoring than others. Whatever the theory of morality might be, doing the right thing in textured situations will invariably be tied to correctly assessing the behavior of the persons involved. And I have claimed that we have reason to believe that persons who have the psychological configuration of self-love will be favored to arrive at a more accurate assessment than persons who do not.⁹

Now, if one agrees that the moral life is textured in the way that I have described, then one already appreciates the significance of being regarded as morally trustworthy. This trust is two-pronged: Not only is there trust that one will be moved to do the right thing, as revealed by duty, but there is also trust that one's monitoring skills are sufficiently honed that one will make the right assessment. The latter trust is far from insignificant. For we may have little confidence in a person's ability to correctly discern the right thing to do in a complicated situation, even as we are confident that he will do what he perceives to be the right thing to do. If the discussion concerning self-love and monitoring skills is sound, then we have already seen that, with respect to correctly discerning the right in a complicated situation, we have a reason to regard persons with a full measure of self-love as more trustworthy than those without it. But that is also true with respect to moral performance. Let me explain.

As I have indicated, what counts as the morally right thing to do can be particularly salient; indeed, anyone so situated would have immediately reached the same conclusion. The typical philosopher's example of saving a drowning person would be a case in point. Surely, no one with the ability to swim really wonders whether he should save a

drowning person. Accordingly, saving a life is as good a justification as one might have for not keeping most other commitments. If someone were to offer this reason for not keeping a commitment, no one would think that he needed to say more. And surely most people would be at a loss to say more. In general, then, hesitation about saving a drowning person will have nothing to do with doubting at the moment whether it is the right thing to do. Things are not always so clear, however. We can do what we believe is the right thing and have little or no confidence that others would share our judgment. In that situation, our ability to act correctly does not draw any of its support from the belief that anyone so situated would arrive at the same judgment. Interestingly, I have not said that there would not be agreement concerning the correctness of one's behavior after the fact. But widespread agreement after the fact is perfectly compatible with no little or no agreement beforehand. In these situations, the person is on her own, if you will. And many of the moral decisions that we must make are like that.

In these opaque contexts, what might incline a person to be confident in the correctness of her moral judgment? I hold that in these contexts no consideration is more important than purity of heart, understood as having innocent motives appropriate to the circumstances. Self-love is surely the best psychological configuration conducive to purity of heart. As is well known, Kant insisted that, in the end, we can never be absolutely certain that our motives are innocent. In the *Groundwork*, he wrote:

In actual fact it is absolutely impossible for experience to establish

with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action in other respects right has rested solely on moral grounds and on the thought of one's duty. It is indeed at times the case that after the keenest self-examination we find nothing that without the moral motive of duty could have been strong enough to move us to this or that good action and to so great a sacrifice; but we cannot infer from this with certainty that it is not some secret impulse of self-love which has actually, under the mere show of the Idea of duty, been the cause genuinely determining of our will. We are pleased to flatter ourselves with the false claim to a nobler motive, but in fact we can never, even by the most strenuous self-examination, get to the bottom of our secret impusions (407).

But what did Kant mean? He most certainly could not have meant that we always *act as if* our moral motives are tainted; for that would be tantamount to claiming that we have reason to believe that all of our moral behavior is suspect. And there is no evidence whatsoever that he thought that.

Why is self-love the best psychological configuration conducive to purity of heart, understood as having innocent motives appropriate to the circumstances? The answer is simply that with self-love one's psychological posture toward others can be described as evenness, owing to the feeling of contentment: One's sense of self is not tied to any desire to be superior, nor is one haunted by feelings of inferiority with respect to others. For obvious reasons, persons falling into either category are susceptible to unsavory motives. Each, in quite different ways, has a psychological configuration whereby he might be as much concerned to prove a point as he is

to do what is right. Or, again, each in quite different ways may more be more concerned with having a certain recognition for their actions than doing what is right. In addition, negative sentiments, such as jealousy or bitterness, generally give rise to unsavory motives.

I should hardly want to suggest that a person with a full measure of self-love never experiences negative feelings, for self-love does not entail moral perfection. The point is that with some psychological configurations, these negative sentiments are likely to be more enduring and more expressive. A person can wallow in her jealousy and bitterness. She can continually nurse them. Or, she can have the kind of psychological configuration whereby negative sentiments are more likely to dissipate. The psychological configuration of self-love recommends itself most fully here. Jealousy and bitterness are generally tied to the feeling that one's worth is threatened. That, to be sure, is certainly possible. But, typically, the person who is given to jealousy and bitterness is unwarranted in this assessment. By contrast, persons who have a full measure of self-love are less likely to be jealous or bitter, precisely because they are less likely to feel threatened without warrant.

I turn, finally, to the consideration of sincerity. To some extent, we have already touched upon this consideration. In introducing sincerity, I said that we want to know whether individuals' comments and remarks can be taken at face value. Clearly, the belief that someone is trustworthy goes hand-in-hand with the belief that he is sincere. Yet it is still the case that the two phenomena differ. In fact, we often trust people because we judge them to be sincere. As this

observation suggests, sincerity applies paradigmatically to a person's words. Thus, it underscores the significance of community and the conversations that take place therein. But interestingly, sincerity is generally communicated nonverbally.¹⁰ One can always add the expression "I mean that" or "I am sincere." Generally, though, these words are intended for emphasis, and are rarely needed to clinch the listener's assessment that the speaker is sincere. If I tell you, "I will stand by your side, no matter what happens," you will be inclined to believe me even if I do not add, "And I mean that." If these words make the difference, it will be because of the way I said them, and not simply because I said them.

As adults, we are so verbal that it can be difficult to imagine that nonverbal assessments could be that significant. But there is every reason to believe that nonverbal behavior is an integral part of human interaction and that human beings are quite adept at it. An infant who has loving parents feels loved long before it is capable of understanding the words "I love you." There is masterful nonverbal communication between loving parents and their child. Nonverbal behavior is at the very center of flirting behavior; typically, we are right about whether someone is flirting with us, although verbal confirmation is very rare. I offer flirting as a very intuitive and obviously compelling example. Needless to say, I hold that nonverbal behavior manifests in every aspect of social interaction: the cadence with which we speak, our tone of voice, our posture, our gaze, and so forth. Thus, at the beginning of our lives, as well as during our adult life, human beings engage in significant assessment of others' nonverbal behavior.

Now, sincerity is most apt to be forthcoming when a person has no ulterior motives for his interactions with us and for the good that he does for us. And while we cannot preclude unsavory ulterior motives on the part of anyone, it can be easily seen why a person with self-love is very unlikely to have such motives in his interactions with others. A final comment here. It is typical for philosophers to suppose that sincerity and, in general, the appropriate nonverbal behavior, can be easily feigned. One reason for this error is that philosophers fail to be mindful of the spontaneity of social interaction. It is one thing to know in advance that you are going to tell me that you have just lost your parents. I can prepare myself to display the appropriate nonverbal behavior, even though I am really indifferent to this loss. But so much of what happens and is said in social interaction is not known in advance; accordingly, delivering the appropriate nonverbal behavior *on the spot* is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to do.

I have offered a brief account of the significance of self-love to living morally, looking at things in a rather intuitive way. It is important to recall that my thesis is not that all persons with self-love are moral, but rather that such individuals are favored to be moral. But I began this essay by pointing to the preponderance of immorality and claiming that I would offer an explanation for the phenomenon of people being indifferent to the wanton wrong they do to others, while nonetheless expressing sentiments of moral outrage when they are themselves wronged. Now, while it should be clear that I want to say that the absence of self-love sheds considerable light on this schism, I want to

do more than just rehearse points that have already been made.

The Absence of Self-love: Being Morally Disadvantaged

Morality requires that we take seriously the lives of others. Self-love enters the picture because a precondition for taking seriously the lives of others is that we take seriously our own lives, and having a full measure of self-love is necessary for that. Here, Kantian formulations of moral theory are extremely useful.¹¹ The idea is that the mere fact that individuals are persons should give us a reason to behave toward them in certain ways, either to do things on their behalf or to refrain from doing certain things to them. It is a commonplace for Kantians to point out that the wrong of lying is that it does not take seriously the person who is being told the lie. In Kantian language, the point would be that one is failing to respect that person as a rational being.

But how are we grasp what it means to value another? How are to understand the significance of respecting another?¹² How are we to do these things in the right way, if we do not value ourselves, if we do not take ourselves seriously? The profoundness of respecting others, importance and the way in which it impacts upon the lives of others, cannot be adequately grasped in a vacuum. To be sure, rational reflection can give us some insight, but the insight that it affords will be ever so shallow when compared to the insight that experience affords. The insights that rational reflection yields certainly cannot substitute for those that experience yields. Everyone knows that the loss of a loved one is painful. Everyone knows that rape is painful.

These realizations come with having the appropriate intellectual understanding of these events. Yet, it is manifestly clear to everyone that actually experiencing either event has an emotional impact that no mere intellectual understanding could ever achieve; and it is that emotional impact that makes the difference. I may cry over your loss, and that is a very good sign that I have been appropriately touched by your loss. Still, it will be your loss and not mine. And if I should suffer the same kind of loss just days later, the impact will deepen my understanding of loss.

How much more, then, should experience be relevant to understanding the importance of taking others seriously? Experience provides an evidential touchstone, and a concomitant emotional resonance comes only with having undergone an event; reflection alone cannot yield emotional resonance. From afar, it is impossible to understand what is meant to take a life seriously. That is to say, a person can understand what it means to take the life of others seriously only because he takes his own life seriously. But just as taking others seriously does not require having an exalted view of them, taking oneself seriously is not about does not require having an exalted view of oneself. Just as taking others seriously involves grasping the fact that their life has value -- moral value, even -- taking oneself seriously involves grasping that one's life has moral value and the deep and abiding conviction that one's life value is not anchored merely by treating others in the appropriate way. Indeed, we have a name for treating the life of others with value, when our life lacks value. It is called servility.¹³

It might be objected that Kant can accommodate the foregoing view, although

he would place less emphasis upon feeling. For Kant does hold that seeing ourselves as having moral worth underwrites our having the proper moral respect for others.¹⁴ What I am claiming, however, is that there is a fundamentally important sense of worth that is prior to seeing ourselves as having moral worth and without which we would not be able to see ourselves as having moral worth. I shall elaborate upon this claim below.

As an aside, the above considerations shed some light on how we are to understand the Golden Rule "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." As everyone has pointed out, if we take this rule literally, then it yields rather horrendous results. I may be rather fanatical and think that I deserve to die if I should turn out to be a Jew. Or, I may have quite good reason to believe that I shall never need the aid of strangers, and so thereby excuse myself from aiding the stranger that I encounter. This is true enough. But surely Bishop Butler had a certain kind of individual in mind when he recommended this rule; and just as surely the kind of individual that he had in mind was not an evil or utterly self-centered person. The very idea that one could start with evil or ignominy and arrive at morality is ludicrous; accordingly, discussions of the Golden Rule that take this route are rather disingenuous. I hold that the "you" in the Golden Rule is an individual who has self-love in the way that I have explicated it. And the thesis is that the behavior of such an individual will give us enormous insight into what is morally correct behavior. I do not now claim that the Golden Rule thus understood has no difficulties, but only that it is not open to kind of simple-minded criticism that is often leveled against it.

I accept the Kantian claim that all life has intrinsic value. Rather, I have argued that no individual can properly appreciate the intrinsic value of another absent an appreciation of his own intrinsic value, and I maintain that having that appreciation is inextricably tied to having a full measure of self-love.

I should say a word about proper appreciation for the intrinsic value of human beings. As is well known, Kant distinguished between acting in accordance with duty and acting with a sense of duty. A person acts in accordance with duty if that she performs the act required. What Kant understood, of course, is that it is possible to act in accordance with duty for any number of reasons, including self-interested ones. A person acts with a sense of duty precisely when his behavior is motivated by and only by the pull of duty. In a similar vein, as intimated in the comment regarding servility, a proper appreciation for the value of others is not merely a matter of getting the required behavior right. The servile person can do that, as can a person who acts out of fear. In all of these cases, however, the person's behavior is under-informed; it lacks the evidential touchstone, and the concomitant emotional resonance, regarding the value of human beings. The person does not know the value of human beings from the inside. Accordingly, any extrapolation regarding the value of life that he draws from his own life will invariably fall short the mark. Thus, as with acting from a sense of duty, having the proper appreciation for the intrinsic value of life is possible only if one has the right psychological configuration. It is impossible if one does not have a deep sense of one's own intrinsic value, and it is impossible to have that in the absence of

self-love. Finally, no amount of rational reflection can generate self-love. Having that psychological state is inextricably tied to having been loved by one's parents or parental surrogates.

Kantians, of course, would insist that having a sense of one's intrinsic moral value is fundamentally different from having self-love. I agree. My point, however, is that insofar as it possible for persons to have an intrinsic sense of their moral value, it is because they first have self-love, as I have explicated it. It may be true that we are inescapably moral creatures, as I believe Kantians rightly maintain. But I hold that there is a valuing of the self that is ontologically prior to intrinsic moral value. In romantic loves and friendships, we rightly insist that the other's affection for us may not in any way be reducible to any algorithm of our moral behavior, even if our moral behavior is a factor. And our insistence reflects a human value that is certainly independent of intrinsic moral value. Likewise, when we insist good parents' love for their children is most certainly not a function of the moral performance of their children. This valuing is the most primitive of all valuing because it is in no way tied to reason, in the sense of justification; whereas precisely what is characteristic of moral valuing, certainly as Kantians conceive of it, is that it is tied to reason. It is here that my account goes against the very grain of Kant's moral philosophy.

Kant and Kantians want an account of the moral self that invokes reason throughout. It is reason that tells each and every individual that she, herself, has intrinsic moral worth; and it is reason that informs her that all other persons likewise have intrinsic moral worth. But if my account of self-love is correct, then there is

a valuing of the self that cannot be tied to reasons. To be sure, we all point out that there are parental duties; but even as we insist that there are such duties, we readily concede that such duties should hardly be necessary to convince parents that they should love their children. The thought is that parents who needed to be shown such consideration would not make fit parents. What is more, my claim is that it is only because individuals have self-love that they have the evidential touchstone necessary to grasp the idea of intrinsic moral worth. Self-love, one might say, is the precursor of the conviction that one has intrinsic moral worth. Without the former, we would not have the psychological resources to grasp the latter; for there would be no evidential touchstone upon which to anchor this moral conception. Rationality is not enough. If this claim is correct, then having a full-measure of self-love is precondition for morality; and there is a precondition for morality, involving the valuing of the self, that is not tied to reason. These considerations show the importance of attending to the moral self in its entirety. Much of moral philosophy theorizes about adults as if adults did not have a fundamentally significant past in childhood. This approach is fraught with difficulties.¹⁵

There is, without a doubt, an explanation for why each person has a full-measure of self-love, namely that the individual was deeply loved by his parents. But parental love is not about justification but simply having love for that which one nurtures. It is in this respect that the self-love that arises from parental love is ontologically prior to conceiving of oneself as having intrinsic moral value.

I want now to look specifically at the case of individuals who exhibit the schism

I described at the outset -- the schism of doing what they know to be morally wrong. I doubt that one explanation will cover all such cases. After all, there are a multitude of explanations for engaging in wrongful behavior. On the other hand, I should like think that there is one explanation that will be more prevalent than others regarding the schism that I have described.

There is a tendency to suppose that if a person objects mightily to being wronged by another, then he has a full appreciation of the wrong that he is doing to another. But that is a mistake. I may be morally impaired, and my impairment is masked by the fact that everyone uses the same language. We know that it is possible for two individuals to use the same words or hear the same words but have a very different appreciation of the significance of those words. At the very center of Kantian or any nonconsequentialist morality is the idea that persons have intrinsic rather than noninstrumental value. And it is precisely this vision of the other that is odds with the psychological configuration of those who lack self-love. Intrinsic value does not fully resonate with their sense of self. To see that this schism is possible, we need only consider the case of child abuse.

Children who have been victims of systematic child sexual abuse during some period of their lives grow up to use the language of love in the same way as adults who have not known child abuse.¹⁶ When adults who have been abused in childhood use the words "I love you," these adults sound very much like adults who have come from a wonderful parental environment. But the truth of the matter is that the former are typically unable to truly love another. Characteristically, people who come from abused backgrounds see

their lover or spouse as someone to control even as they say, with feeling, "I love you." It is striking that while they can often see that their behavior is out of line with a nonviolent conception of romantic love, they do not always see that their own behavior is unacceptable or, if they do, they do not always refrain from it. And in romantic love people often make the mistake of supposing that an individual can just overcome the deficit created by having been abused. While it is true that one can overcome this deficit, it false that doing so is just a matter of willing very hard. If overcoming psychological deficits were just this simple, certainly no one would have low self-esteem. I shall say a word about this at the end.

When in the case of love those who abuse cannot see that their behavior is inappropriate, I hold that if their abuse in childhood was profound enough, then they actually operate with a skewed concept of romantic love. And when they can see that their behavior is inappropriate, but do not refrain from it, I hold that they lack the emotional resonance with their beliefs that can be crucial in generating proper moral behavior.

Regarding people who wrong others but object to being wronged, I believe that an analogous set of claims applies. And my account of self-love gives us some insight into how that is possible in the moral realm. To complete my argument, though, I need to address one further matter.

While I cannot fully develop this point here, I believe that there is an asymmetry in our moral sentiments. In order to experience resentment or anger or indignation, it is not necessary to have secure self-love, because after all there is the fact of having been harmed or made

worse-off and because there is the belief that legitimate expectations have not been met, that others have failed to do their part. Resentment and indignation do not require the belief that one owes anything to others. Notice that slave owners resented slaves for failing to do their part, all the while supposing that they owed nothing to the slaves. Of course, slaves were not responsible for slave owners supposing that their expectations of slaves were legitimate. Be that as it may, when a person has what he takes to be legitimate expectations of others and they fail to live up to those expectations, then resentment and indignation are a natural response. In a reasonably just society, all of us have a legitimate expectation that people should not harm us. A person without self-love has this expectation no less than a person whose self-love is most secure. While the person without self-love can see that the other has violated her legitimate expectations, she is not able to see the other as having intrinsic worth. The case of American slavery shows that this psychological configuration is possible. It might be thought, though, that the case of American slavery shows too much, namely that all slave owners lacked self-love, since they regarded themselves as having legitimate expectations of slaves even as they believed they owed nothing to the slaves.

But we should be careful here. I invoked the case of American slavery as evidence that a certain kind of psychological configuration is possible, namely that of having legitimate expectations of another without regarding her or him as having intrinsic worth. And while I certainly want to say that the absence of self-love is one way in which this psychological configuration exists, I

do not suggest that it is the only way. Significantly, the case of American slavery also shows that servile persons can be made to mimic valuing others without ever coming to value themselves morally.

Let me point out, parenthetically, that the preceding remarks support the observations made earlier concerning the interpretation of the Golden Rule. Having the desire not to be wronged is not enough, since a person without self-love can fully have that desire and yet be quite unable to appreciate the intrinsic worth of others.

Conclusion

I want to conclude this essay by addressing the question of whether destiny is character.¹⁷ One of the claims most attractive about Kantian ethics is the importance it attaches to free will. I shall not enter into the free will debate. Rather, I want to allow that human beings can change for the better or the worse. I also want to allow that the past makes a difference, without maintaining that we are hostage to it. Indeed, I believe that choosing to do evil is not as easy as one might think if in general one's past has been a morally decent one. Suppose that you have been watching a wonderful film set in China, and you find yourself quite taken by the scenery. It makes perfectly good sense to speak of having been moved by what one saw to visit China. But suppose that you have been watching a devilishly wonderful murder mystery, where the murderer displays extraordinary ingenuity and skill. If up to this moment, your moral life has been relatively

admirable, it is most unlikely that you will be moved to commit a murder in order to experience the ingenuity of it all. The very desire to so behave could not obtain a purchase upon one's life. Yet you could become a murderer, your admirable past notwithstanding. Our past is not irrelevant to the ease and extent to which things can have an impact upon our lives. Our past can have such an influence upon our lives that sometimes we need help in order to make a change for the better. For on my view, making a change for the better is not just about having this or that desire or set of rational reflections, but the appropriate psychological configurations. A person who was not the object of tremendous parental love and so who lacks self-love can come to have self-love. But that will not simply be a matter of choice. She or he will need help -- perhaps even help recognizing that she needs help. Character is not destiny, but neither is it a negligible part of our lives.

In what sense, then, is the moral self fragile? The answer is that morality at its best is so inextricably tied to the gift of love. Yet whether or to what extent and in what way that gift is bestowed upon us at the beginning is not up to us, but to others. We are fragile because so very much has to be done in the correct way, and there are countless ways in which things can go wrong. We are fragile because moral luck bears upon the outcome, our best efforts notwithstanding. It is against the backdrop of this moral and social reality that hope is very appropriate and important to human survival and flourishing. But that is another essay.

Notes

1. In writing this essay, I owe much to conversations with Nasri Abdel-Aziz. I am especially grateful to him for points about the role of innocence and purity of heart.
2. A recent and most powerful statement of this position is to be found in the writing of Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). A similar expression of this view can be found in Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970).
3. In "Freedom and Resentment," in his *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974).
4. Cf. Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 165-69, and Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 229. In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant has passages suggest that something parallel to self-love is crucial to the our moral conception of ourselves. But as I shall argue, the supposed parallel simply fails to obtain.
5. For Kant, freedom is a precondition of morality, (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 449). Unless otherwise stated, all pagination for Kant's writings will be that of the Prussian Academy edition.
6. See Michael Stocker and Elizabeth Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions* (New York?: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 268ff. The authors show that narcissism is a sign of the absence of self-love.
7. The now classic philosophical essays on moral luck are those by Bernard Williams in his *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Thomas Nagel in his *Mortal Questions* (New York?: Cambridge University Press, 1979). The title of each author's essay is "Moral Luck."
8. Interestingly, I am inspired here by the work of a Kantian, Barbara Herman in *The Practice of Moral Judgment*. In the title essay of her book, she introduces the notion of rules of moral salience, which makes us appreciate situations and informs our moral judgments without being formally a part of the Categorical Imperative. For instance, it is because of rules of moral salience that a person realizes that life is more important than clothes. This ranking does not, on her account, flow from the Categorical Imperative procedure; rather, it is one that an individual brings to that procedure.
9. I use the notion of being "favored" in a technical but familiar way. In horse races, we say that *this* horse, LongArms, say, is favored to win. That means, roughly, that given the available comparative information concerning the horses in the race, it is more reasonable to

suppose LongArms will win rather than lose the race. Although LongArms may lose, the idea that it was favored to win is not thereby thought to have been trivial or empty, since a host of factors, beyond ability, bear upon the outcome. In a like manner, persons can be favored or not with respect to the achievement of certain goals. A child born of a wealthy and well-educated family is favored to do better in education than one born to an extremely poor and uneducated family. But, of course, the very opposite may happen. The latter may be exceedingly gifted, encounter a most encouraging set of teachers; whereas the former may suffer extraordinary setbacks owing to negative influences outside the family.

10. I have discussed this matter at length in "Evil and the Concept of a Person," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 20 (1996, Section II): 36-58.

11. See *Groundwork*, p. 398

12. I am inspired by Michele Moody-Adams, "Race, Class, and the Social Construction of Self-Respect," *The Philosophical Forum* 24 (1992-93): 251-266. As for the point concerning the importance of experience that I develop in this paragraph, see my essay "Moral Deference," *The Philosophical Forum* 24 (1992-93): 233-250.

13. See Thomas Hill, Jr., "Servility and Self-Respect," *The Monist* 57 (1973): 87-104.

14. *The Doctrine of Virtue*, "On Servility," p. 435

15. I am much indebted here to the work of Michael S. Pritchard, *On Becoming Responsible* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991).

16. I have discussed the topic of child abuse in my essay "The Grip of Immorality: Child Abuse and Moral Failure" in Jerome Schneewind, ed., *Reason, Ethics, and Society: Themes from Kurt Baier, with his Response* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996). The focus is upon child sexual abuse because of its saliency and immunity to excusing conditions. We might hold that no parent is justified in hitting a child, let alone hitting the child too hard. But we see how hitting might happen, for we can imagine that a child could make a parent sufficiently angry. Not so when it comes to child sexual abuse.

17. See Michele Moody-Adams, "On the Old Saw that Destiny is Character," in Owen Flanagan and Amelie Rorty, eds., *Identity, Character, and Morality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).