

LECTURE ONE

Taking Ourselves Seriously

1] I suppose some of you must have noticed that human beings have a tendency to be heavily preoccupied with thinking about themselves. Blind, rollicking spontaneity is not exactly the hallmark of our species. We put considerable effort into trying to get clear about what we are really like, trying to figure out what we are actually up to, and trying to decide whether anything can be done about this. The strong likelihood is that no other animal worries about such matters. Indeed, we humans seem to be the only things around that are even *capable* of taking themselves seriously.

Two features of our nature are centrally implicated in this: our rationality, and our ability to love. Reason and love play critical roles in determining what we think and how we are moved to conduct ourselves. They provide us with decisive motivations, and also with rigorous constraints, in our careers as self-conscious and active creatures. They have a great deal to do, then, with the way we live and with what we are.

We are proud of the human abilities to reason and to love.

This makes us prone to rather egregious ceremonies and excursions of self-congratulation when we imagine that we are actually making use of those abilities. We often pretend that we are exercising one or the other—that we are following reason, or that we are acting out of love—when what is truly going on is something else entirely. In any case, each of the two is emblematic of our humanity, and each is generally acknowledged to merit a special deference and respect. Both are chronically problematic, and the relation between them is obscure.

Taking ourselves seriously means that we are not prepared to accept ourselves just as we come. We want our thoughts, our feelings, our choices, and our behavior to make sense. We are not satisfied to think that our ideas are formed haphazardly, or that our actions are driven by transient and opaque impulses or by mindless decisions. We need to direct ourselves—or at any rate to believe that we are directing ourselves—in thoughtful conformity to stable and appropriate norms. We want to get things right.

It is reason and love—the directives of our heads and of our hearts—that we expect to equip us most effectively to accomplish this. Our lives are naturally pervaded, therefore, by an anxious concern to recognize what they demand and to appreciate where they lead. Each has, in its own way, a penetrating and resonant bearing upon our basic condition—the condition of persons, attempting to negotiate the environments of their internal as well as of their external worlds.

Sometimes, to be sure, we energetically resist what reason

or love dictate. Their commands strike us as too burdensome, or as being in some other way unwelcome. So we recoil from them. Perhaps, finally, we reject them altogether. Even then, however, we ordinarily allow that they do possess a genuine and compelling authority. We understand that what they tell us really does count. Indeed, we have no doubt that it counts a great deal—even if, in the end, we prefer not to listen.

Among my aims in these lectures is to explore the roles of reason and of love in our active lives, to consider the relation between them, and to clarify their unmistakable normative authority. In my judgment, as you will see, the authority of practical reason is less fundamental than that of love. In fact, I believe, its authority is grounded in and derives from the authority of love. Now love is constituted by desires, intentions, commitments, and the like. It is essentially—at least as I construe it—a volitional matter. In my view, then, the ultimate source of practical normative authority lies not in reason but in the will.

I hope that you will find my analyses and arguments at least more or less convincing. I also hope, of course, that they will be clear. In this connection, I must confess to being a bit unsettled by a rather mordant piece of advice that comes (I understand) from the quantum physicist Nils Bohr. He is said to have cautioned that one should never *spea*k more clearly than one can *think*. That must be right; but it is rather daunting. In any event, here goes.

2] What is it about human beings that makes it possible for us to take ourselves seriously? At bottom it is something

more primitive, more fundamental to our humanity, and more inconspicuous than either our capacity for reason or our capacity to love. It is our peculiar knack of separating from the immediate content and flow of our own consciousness and introducing a sort of division within our minds. This elementary maneuver establishes an inward-directed, monitoring oversight. It puts in place an elementary reflexive structure, which enables us to focus our attention directly upon ourselves.

When we divide our consciousness in this way, we objectify to ourselves the ingredient items of our ongoing mental life. It is this self-objectification that is particularly distinctive of human mentality. We are unique (probably) in being able simultaneously to be engaged in whatever is going on in our conscious minds, to detach ourselves from it, and to observe it—as it were—from a distance. We are then in a position to form reflexive or higher-order responses to it. For instance, we may approve of what we notice ourselves feeling, or we may disapprove; we may want to remain the sort of person we observe ourselves to be, or we may want to be different. Our division of ourselves situates us to come up with a variety of supervisory desires, intentions, and interventions that pertain to the several constituents and aspects of our conscious life. This has implications of two radically opposed kinds.

On the one hand, it generates a profound threat to our well-being. The inner division that we introduce impairs our capacity for untroubled spontaneity. This is not merely a matter of spoiling our fun. It exposes us to psychological and

spiritual disorders that are nearly impossible to avoid. These are not only painful; they can be seriously disabling. Facing ourselves, in the way that internal separation enables us to do, frequently leaves us chagrined and distressed by what we see, as well as bewildered and insecure concerning who we are. Self-objectification facilitates both an inhibiting uncertainty or ambivalence, and a nagging general dissatisfaction with ourselves. Except in their most extreme forms, these disorders are too commonplace to be regarded as pathological. They are so integral to our fundamental experience of ourselves that they serve to define, at least in part, the inescapable human condition.

By the same token, however, our capacity to divide and to objectify ourselves provides the foundational structure for several particularly cherished features of our humanity. It accounts for the very fact that we possess such a thing as practical reason; it equips us to enjoy a significant freedom in the exercise of our will; and it creates for us the possibility of going beyond simply wanting various things, and of coming instead to care about them, to regard them as important to ourselves, and to love them. The same structural configuration that makes us vulnerable to disturbing and potentially crippling disabilities also immeasurably enhances our lives by offering us—as I will try to explain—opportunities for practical rationality, for freedom of the will, and for love.

3] When we begin attending to our own feelings and desires, to our attitudes and motives, and to our dispositions to

behave in certain ways, what we confront is an array of—so to speak—psychic raw material. If we are to amount to more than just biologically qualified members of a certain animal species, we cannot remain passively indifferent to these materials. Developing higher-order attitudes and responses to oneself is fundamental to achieving the status of a responsible person.

To remain wantonly unreflective is the way of nonhuman animals and of small children. They do whatever their impulses move them most insistently to do, without any self-regarding interest in what sort of creature that makes them to be. They are one-dimensional, without the inner depth and complexity that render higher-order responses to oneself possible. Higher-order responses need not be especially thoughtful, or even entirely overt. However, we become responsible persons—quite possibly on the run and without full awareness—only when we disrupt ourselves from an uncritical immersion in our current primary experience, take a look at what is going on in it, and arrive at some resolution concerning what we think about it or how it makes us feel.

Some philosophers have argued that a person becomes responsible for his own character insofar as he shapes it by voluntary choices and actions that cause him to develop habits of discipline or indulgence and hence that make his character what it is. According to Aristotle, no one can help acting as his virtuous or vicious character requires him to act; but in some measure a person's character is nonetheless voluntary, because "we are ourselves . . . part-causes of our state of character" (*Nic. Eth.*, III.5, 1114.b22) In other words, we

are responsible for what we are to the extent that we have caused ourselves—by our voluntary behavior—to become that way.

I think Aristotle is wrong about this. Becoming responsible for one's character is not essentially a matter of producing that character but of taking responsibility for it. This happens when a person selectively identifies with certain of his own attitudes and dispositions, whether or not it was he that caused himself to have them. In identifying with them, he incorporates those attitudes and dispositions into himself and makes them his own. What counts is our current effort to define and to manage ourselves, and not the story of how we came to be in the situation with which we are now attempting to cope.

Even if we did cause ourselves to have certain inclinations and tendencies, we can decisively rid ourselves of any responsibility for their continuation by renouncing them and struggling conscientiously to prevent them from affecting our conduct. We will still be responsible, of course, for having brought them about. That cannot be changed. However, we will no longer be responsible for their ongoing presence in our psychic history, or for any conduct to which that may lead. After all, if they do persist, and if they succeed in moving us to act, it will now be only against our will.

4) When we consider the psychic raw materials with which nature and circumstance have provided us, we are sometimes more or less content. They may not exactly please us, or make us proud. Nevertheless, we are willing for them to represent

us. We *accept* them as conveying what we really feel, what we truly desire, what we do indeed think, and so on. They do not arouse in us any determined effort to dissociate ourselves from them. Whether with a welcoming approval, or in weary resignation, we consent to having them and to being influenced by them.

This willing acceptance of attitudes, thoughts, and feelings transforms their status. They are no longer merely items that happen to appear in a certain psychic history. We have taken responsibility for them as authentic expressions of ourselves. We do not regard them as disconnected from us, or as alien intruders by which we are helplessly beset. The fact that we have adopted and sanctioned them makes them intentional and legitimate. Their force is now our force. When they move us, we are therefore not passive. We are active, because we are being moved just by ourselves.

Being identified with the contents of one's own mind is a very elementary arrangement. It is so ubiquitous, so intimately familiar, and so indispensable to our normal experience, that it is not easy to bring it into sharp focus. It is so natural to us, and as a rule it comes about so effortlessly, that we generally do not notice it at all. In very large measure, it is simply the default condition.

5] Of course, the default condition does not always prevail. Sometimes we do not participate actively in what goes on in us. It takes place, somehow, but we are just bystanders to it. There are obsessional thoughts, for instance, that disturb us but that we cannot get out of our heads; there are peculiar

reckless impulses that make no sense to us, and upon which we would never think of acting; there are hot surges of anarchic emotion that assault us from out of nowhere and that have no recognizable warrant from the circumstances in which they erupt.

These are psychic analogues of the seizures and spasmodic movements that occur at times in our bodies. The fact is that we are susceptible to mental tics, twitches, and convulsions, as well as to physical ones. These are things that happen to us. When they occur, we are not participating agents who are expressing what we really think or want or feel. Just as various bodily movements occur without the body being moved by the person whose body it is, so various thoughts, desires, and feelings enter a person's mind without being what that person truly thinks or feels or wants.

Needless to say, however dystonic and disconnected from us these mental events may be, they do occur in our minds—just as the analogous physical events occur nowhere else but in our bodies. They are, at least in a gross, literal sense, our thoughts, our feelings, and our desires. Moreover, they often provide important indications of what else is going on in our minds. Uncontrollably spasmodic movements of the limbs are likely to be symptomatic of some deeper and otherwise hidden physical condition. Similarly, the fact that I have an obsessional thought that the sun is about to explode, or a wild impulse to jump out the window, may reveal something very significant about what is going on in my unconscious. Still, that is not what I really think about the sun; nor does the impulse to jump express something that I really want to do.

6] What a person finds in himself may not just seem oddly disconnected from him. It may be dangerously antithetical to his intentions and to his conception of himself. Some of the psychic raw material that we confront may be so objectionable to us that we cannot permit it to determine our attitudes or our behavior. We cannot help having that dark side. However, we are resolved to keep it from producing any direct effect upon the design and conduct of our lives.

These unacceptable intruders arouse within us, then, an anxious disposition to resist. By a kind of psychic immune response—which may be mobilized without our even being aware of it—we push them away, and we introduce barriers of repression and inhibition between them and ourselves. That is, we dissociate ourselves from them, and seek to prevent them from being at all effective. Instead of incorporating them, we externalize them.

This means that we deny them any entitlement to supply us with motives or with reasons. They are outlawed and disenfranchised. We refuse to recognize them as grounds for deciding what to think or what to do. Regardless of how insistent they may be, we assign their claims no place whatever in the order of preferences and priorities that we establish for our deliberate choices and acts. The fact that we continue to be powerfully moved by them gives them no rational claim. Even if an externalized desire turns out to be irresistible, its dominion is merely that of a tyrant. It has, for us, no legitimate authority.

Some philosophers maintain that, just in virtue of having a desire, a person necessarily has a reason for trying to satisfy

it. The reason may not be a very strong one; there may be much better reasons to perform another action instead. Nevertheless, it counts for something. The very fact that a person wants to do something always means, on this view, that there is at least that much of a reason in favor of his doing it.

However, the mere fact that a person has a desire does not give him a reason. What it gives him is a problem. He has the problem of whether to identify with the desire and thus validate it as eligible for satisfaction, or whether to dissociate himself from it, treat it as categorically unacceptable, and try to suppress it or rid himself of it entirely. If he identifies with the desire, he acknowledges that satisfying it is to be assigned some position—however inferior—in the order of his preferences and priorities. If he externalizes the desire, he determines to give it no position in that order at all.

7] Reflexivity and identification have fundamental roles in the constitution of practical reason. Indeed, it is only by virtue of these elementary maneuvers that we have such a thing as practical reason. Without their intervention, we could not regard any fact as giving us a reason for performing any action.

When does a fact give us a reason for performing an action? It does so when it suggests that performing the action would help us reach one or another of our goals. For example, the fact that it is raining gives me a reason for carrying an umbrella insofar as doing that would be helpful as a means to my goal of keeping dry.

Having a goal is not the same, however, as simply being

moved by a desire. Suppose I have a desire to kill someone, and that firing my pistol at him would be an effective way to accomplish this. Does that mean I have a reason to fire my pistol at him? In fact, I have a reason for doing that only if killing the man is not just an outcome for which a desire happens to be occurring in me. The desire must be one that I accept and with which I identify. The outcome must be one that I really want.

Suppose that the man in question is my beloved son, that our relationship has always been a source of joy for me, and that my desire to kill him has no evident connection to anything that has been going on. The desire is wildly exogenous; it comes entirely out of the blue. No doubt it signifies God knows what unconscious fantasy, which is ordinarily safely repressed. In any case, it instantly arouses in me a massive and wholehearted revulsion. I do whatever I can to distance myself from it, and to block any likelihood that it will lead me to act.

The murderous inclination is certainly real. I do have that lethal desire. However, it is not true that I want to kill my son. I don't really want to kill him. Therefore, I don't have any reason to fire my pistol at him. It would be preposterous to insist that I do have at least a weak reason to shoot him—a reason upon which I refrain from acting only because it is overridden by much stronger reasons for wanting him to remain alive. The fact that shooting him is likely to kill him gives me no reason at all to shoot him, even though it is true that I have a desire to kill him and that shooting him might do the trick. Because the desire is one with which I do not

identify, my having it does not mean that killing my son is actually among my goals.

8] Practical reasoning is, in part, a procedure through which we determine what we have most reason to do in order to reach our goals. There could be no deliberative exercise of practical reason if we were related to our desires only in the one-dimensional way that animals of nonreflective species are related to whatever inner experience they have. Like them, we would be mutely immersed in whatever impulses happen at the moment to be moving us; and we would act upon whichever of those impulses happened to be most intense. We would be no more able than they are to decide what we have reason to do because, like them, we would be unable to construe anything as being for us an end or a goal.

In fact, without reflexivity we could not make decisions at all. To make a decision is to make up one's mind. This is an inherently reflexive act, which the mind performs upon itself. Subhuman animals cannot perform it because they cannot divide their consciousness. Because they cannot take themselves apart, they cannot put their minds back together. If we lacked our distinctive reflexive and volitional capacities, making decisions would be impossible for us too.

That would not alter the fact that, like all animals in some degree, we would be capable of behaving intelligently. Being intelligent and being rational are not the same. When I attempt to swat an insect, the insect generally flies or scurries rapidly away to a place that is more difficult for me to reach. This behavior reduces the likelihood that it will die. The

insect's self-preservative movements are not structured in detail by instinct. They are not inflexibly modular or tropistic. They are continuously adjusted to be effective in the particular, and often rapidly changing, circumstances at hand. In other words, the insect—although it does not deliberate or reason—behaves intelligently. Even if we too were unable to reason or to deliberate, we too would nevertheless often still be able—by appropriately adaptive adjustments in our behavior—to find our way intelligently to the satisfaction of our desires.

9) Let us suppose that a certain motive has been rejected as unacceptable. Our attempt to immunize ourselves against it may not work. The resistance we mobilize may be insufficient. The externalized impulse or desire may succeed, by its sheer power, in defeating us and forcing its way. In that case, the outlaw imposes itself upon us without authority, and against our will. This suggests a useful way of understanding what it is for a person's will to be free.

When we are doing exactly what we want to do, we are acting freely. A free act is one that a person performs simply because he wants to perform it. Enjoying freedom of action consists in maintaining this harmonious accord between what we do and what we want to do.

Now sometimes, similarly, the desire that motivates a person as he acts is precisely the desire by which he wants to be motivated. For instance, he wants to act from feelings of warmth and generosity; and in fact he is warm and generous in what he does. There is a straightforward parallel here

between a free action and a free will. Just as we act freely when what we do is what we want to do, so we will freely when what we want is what we want to want—that is, when the will behind what we do is exactly the will by which we want our action to be moved. A person's will is free, on this account, when there is in him a certain volitional unanimity. The desire that governs him as he is acting is in agreement with a higher-order volition concerning what he wants to be his governing desire.

Of course, there are bound to be occasions when the desire that motivates us when we act is a desire by which we do not want to be motivated. Instead of being moved by the warm and generous feelings that he would prefer to express, a person's conduct may be driven by a harsh envy, of which he disapproves but that he has been unable to prevent from gaining control. On occasions like that, the will is not free.

But suppose that we are doing what we want to do, that our motivating first-order desire to perform the action is exactly the desire by which we want our action to be motivated, and that there is no conflict in us between this motive and any desire at any higher order. In other words, suppose we are thoroughly wholehearted both in what we are doing and in what we want. Then there is no respect in which we are being violated or defeated or coerced. Neither our desires nor the conduct to which they lead are imposed upon us without our consent or against our will. We are acting just as we want, and our motives are just what we want them to be. Then so far as I can see, we have on that occasion all the freedom for which finite creatures can reasonably hope. Indeed, I

believe that we have as much freedom as it is possible for us even to conceive.

10] Notice that this has nothing to do with whether our actions, our desires, or our choices are causally determined. The widespread conviction among thoughtful people that there is a radical opposition between free will and determinism is, on this account, a red herring. The possibility that everything is necessitated by antecedent causes does not threaten our freedom. What it threatens is our power. Insofar as we are governed by causal forces, we are not omnipotent. That has no bearing, however, upon whether we can be free.

As finite creatures, we are unavoidably subject to forces other than our own. What we do is, at least in part, the outcome of causes that stretch back indefinitely into the past. This means that we cannot design our lives from scratch, entirely unconstrained by any antecedent and external conditions. However, there is no reason why a sequence of causes, outside our control and indifferent to our interests and wishes, might not happen to lead to the harmonious volitional structure in which the free will of a person consists. That same structural unanimity might also conceivably be an outcome of equally blind chance. Whether causal determinism is true or whether it is false, then, the wills of at least some of us may at least sometimes be free. In fact, this freedom is clearly not at all uncommon.

11] In the Scholium to Proposition 52 in part 4 of his *Ethics*, Spinoza declares that “the highest good we can hope

for" is what he refers to as "*acquiescentia in se ipso*." Various translators render this Latin phrase into English as "self-contentment," "self-esteem," or "satisfaction with oneself." These translations are a little misleading. The good to which Spinoza refers is certainly not to be confused with the contentment or pride or satisfaction that people sometimes award themselves because of what they think they have accomplished, or because of the talents or other personal gifts with which they believe they are endowed. It is not Spinoza's view that the highest good for which we can hope has to do either with successful achievement or with vanity or pride.

There is something to be said for a bluntly literal construction of his Latin. That would have Spinoza mean that the highest good consists in *acquiescence to oneself*—that is, in acquiescence to being the person that one is, perhaps not enthusiastically but nonetheless with a willing acceptance of the motives and dispositions by which one is moved in what one does. This would amount to an inner harmony that comes to much the same thing as having a free will. It would bring with it the natural satisfaction—or the contentment or self-esteem—of being just the kind of person one wants to be.

Unquestionably, it is a very good thing to be in this sense contented with oneself. Spinoza does not say that it is the best thing one can hope for; he doesn't say even that it is enough to make life good. After all, it may be accompanied by terrible suffering, disappointment, and failure. So why say, as he does, that it is the highest thing for which one can hope?

Perhaps because it resolves the deepest problem. In our transition beyond naive animality, we separate from ourselves and disrupt our original unreflective spontaneity. This puts us at risk to varieties of inner fragmentation, dissonance, and disorder. Accepting ourselves reestablishes the wholeness that was undermined by our elementary constitutive maneuvers of division and distancing. When we are acquiescent to ourselves, or willing freely, there is no conflict within the structure of our motivations and desires. We have successfully negotiated our distinctively human complexity. The unity of our self has been restored.

12] The volitional unity in which freedom of the will consists is purely structural. The fact that a person's desire is freely willed implies nothing as to what is desired or as to whether the person actually cares in the least about it. In an idle moment, we may have an idle inclination to flick away a crumb; and we may be quite willing to be moved by that desire. Nonetheless, we recognize that flicking the crumb would be an altogether inconsequential act. We want to perform it, but performing it is of no importance to us. We really don't care about it at all.

What this means is not that we assign it a very low priority. To regard it as truly of no importance to us is to be willing to give up having any interest in it whatever. We have no desire, in other words, to continue wanting to flick away the crumb. It would be all the same to us if we completely ceased wanting to do that. When we do care about something, we go beyond wanting it. We want to go on wanting it, at least

until the goal has been reached. Thus, we feel it as a lapse on our part if we neglect the desire, and we are disposed to take steps to refresh the desire if it should tend to fade. The caring entails, in other words, a commitment to the desire.

Willing freely means that the self is at that time harmoniously integrated. There is, within it, a synchronic coherence. Caring about something implies a diachronic coherence, which integrates the self across time. Like free will, then, caring has an important structural bearing upon the character of our lives. By our caring, we maintain various thematic continuities in our volitions. We engage ourselves in guiding the course of our desires. If we cared about nothing, we would play no active role in designing the successive configurations of our will.

The fact that there are things that we do care about is plainly more basic to us—more constitutive of our essential nature—than what those things are. Nevertheless, what we care about—that is, what we consider important to ourselves—is obviously critical to the particular course and to the particular quality of our lives. This naturally leads people who take themselves seriously to wonder how to get it right. It leads them to confront fundamental issues of normativity. How are we to determine what, if anything, we should care about? What makes something genuinely important to us?

13] Some things are important to us only because we care about them. Who wins the American League batting title this year is important to me if I am the kind of baseball fan who cares about that sort of thing, but probably not otherwise. My

close friends are especially important to me; but if I did not actually care about those individuals, they would be no more important to me than anyone else.

Of course, many things are important to people even though they do not actually care about them. Vitamins were important to the ancient Greeks, who could not have cared about them because they had no idea that there were such things. Vitamins are, however, indispensable to health; and the Greeks did care about that. What people do not care about may nonetheless be quite important to them, obviously, because of its value as a means to something that they do in fact care about.

In my view, it is only in virtue of what we actually care about that anything is important to us.¹ The world is everywhere infused for us with importance; many things are important to us. That is because there are many things that we care about just for themselves, and many that stand in pertinent instrumental relationships to those things. If there were nothing that we cared about—if our response to the world were utterly and uniformly flat—there would be no reason for us to care about anything.

14] Does this mean that it is all simply up to us—that what is truly important to us depends just upon what goes on in our minds? Surely there are certain things that are *inherently* and *objectively* important and worth caring about, and other things that are not. Regardless of what our own desires or attitudes or other mental states may happen to be, surely there are some things that we should care about, and others

that we certainly should not care about. Is it not unmistakably apparent that people should at least care about adhering to the requirements of morality, by which all of us are inescapably bound no matter what our individual inclinations or preferences may be?

Some philosophers believe that the authority of morality is as austere independent of personal contingencies as is the authority of logic. Indeed, their view is that moral principles are grounded in the same fundamental rationality as logically necessary truths. For instance, one advocate of this moral rationalism says: "Just as there are rational requirements on thought, there are rational requirements on action"; and because "the requirements of ethics are rational requirements . . . , the motive for submitting to them must be one which it would be contrary to reason to ignore."² On this account, failure to submit to the moral law is irrational. The authority of the moral law is the authority of reason itself.

The normative authority of reason, however, cannot be what accounts for the normative authority of morality. There must be some other explanation of why we should be moral. For one thing, our response to immoral conduct is very different from our response to errors in reasoning. Contradicting oneself or reasoning fallaciously is not, as such, a moral lapse. People who behave immorally incur a distinctive kind of opprobrium, which is quite unlike the normal attitude toward those who reason poorly. Our response to sinners is not the same as our response to fools.

Moreover, if it were possible for people to justify their conduct strictly by reason—that is, with rigorous proofs

demonstrating that acting otherwise would be irrational—that would provide no advantage to morality. In fact, it would render the claims of morality far less compelling, because it would take people off the hook. After all, being convinced by proofs does not implicate any of a person's individual preferences or predilections. Reason *necessitates* assent, and leaves no room for individual choice. It is entirely impersonal. It does not reveal character.

Construing the basis of morality rationalistically misses the whole point of moral norms. Morality is essentially designed to put people on the hook. Whether or not a person adheres to the moral law is not supposed to be independent of the kind of person he is. It is presumed to reveal something about him deeper and more intimate than his cognitive acuity. Moral principles cannot rest, therefore, simply upon rational requirements. There must be something behind the authority of the moral law besides reason.

15] Let us assume, then, that moral authority cannot be satisfactorily established by invoking just the bloodless support of strict rationality. Is there not a sufficient basis of some other kind for recognizing that moral requirements (and perhaps normative requirements of various other types as well) are genuinely important in themselves, regardless of anyone's beliefs or feelings or inclinations? In my judgment, there is not. There can be no rationally warranted criteria for establishing anything as inherently important.

Here is one way to see why. Nothing is important if everything would be exactly the same with it as without it.

Things are important only if they make a difference. However, the fact that they do make a difference is not enough to show that they are important. Some differences are too trivial. A thing is important only if it makes an important difference. Thus, we cannot know whether something is important until we already know how to tell whether the difference it makes is important.

The unlimited regress to which this leads is clearly unacceptable. If it were possible for attributions of inherent importance to be rationally grounded, they would have to be grounded in something besides other attributions of inherent importance. The truth is, I believe, that it is possible to ground judgments of importance only in judgments concerning what people care about. Nothing is truly important to a person unless it makes a difference that he actually cares about. Importance is never inherent. It is always dependent upon the attitudes and dispositions of the individual. Unless a person knows what he *already* cares about, therefore, he cannot determine what he has reason to care about.

The most fundamental question for anyone to raise concerning importance cannot be the normative question of what he *should* care about. That question can be answered only on the basis of a prior answer to a question that is not normative at all, but straightforwardly factual—namely, the question of what he *actually* does care about.³ If he attempts to suspend all of his convictions, and to adopt a stance that is conscientiously neutral and uncommitted, he cannot even begin to inquire methodically into what it would be

reasonable for him to care about. No one can pull himself up by his own bootstraps.

16] What we care about has to do with our particular interests and inclinations. If what we *should* care about depends upon what we *do* care about, any answer to the normative question must be derived from considerations that are manifestly subjective. This may make it appear that what we should care about is indeed up to us, and that it is therefore likely to vary from one person to another and to be unstable over time.

Answers to the normative question are certainly up to us in the sense that they depend upon what we care about. However, what we care about is not always up to us. Our will is not invariably subject to our will. We cannot have, simply for the asking, whatever will we want. There are some things that we cannot help caring about. Our caring about them consists of desires and dispositions that are not under our immediate voluntary control. We are committed in ways that we cannot directly affect. Our volitional character does not change just because we wish it to change, or because we resolve that it do so. Insofar as answers to the normative question depend upon carings that we cannot alter at will, what we should care about is not up to us at all.

Among the things that we cannot help caring about are the things that we love. Love is not a voluntary matter. It may at times be possible to contrive arrangements that make love more likely or that make it less likely. Still, we cannot bring ourselves to love, or to stop loving, by an act of will

alone—that is, merely by choosing to do so. And sometimes we cannot affect it by any means whatsoever.

The actual causes of love are various and often difficult to trace. It is sometimes maintained that genuine love can be aroused only by the perceived value of the beloved object. The value of the beloved is what captivates the lover, and moves him to love. If he were not responsive to its value, he would not love it. I do not deny that love may be aroused in this way. However, love does not require a response by the lover to any real or imagined value in what he loves. Parents do not ordinarily love their children so much, for example, because they perceive that their children possess exceptional value. In fact, it is the other way around: the children seem to the parents to be valuable, and they are valuable to the parents, only because the parents love them. Parents have been known to love—quite genuinely—children that they themselves recognize as lacking any particular inherent merit.

As I understand the nature of love, the lover does not depend for his loving upon reasons of any kind. Love is not a conclusion. It is not an outcome of reasoning, or a consequence of reasons. It creates reasons. What it means to love is, in part, to take the fact that a certain action would serve the good of the beloved as an especially compelling reason for performing that action.

17] We care about many things only for their instrumental value. They are intermediate goals for us, which we pursue as means to other things. Conceivably, a person's goals might all

be intermediate: whatever he wants, he wants just for the sake of another thing; and he wants that other thing just in order to obtain something else; and so on. That sort of life could certainly keep a person busy. However, running endlessly from one thing to another, with no conclusive destinations, could not provide any full satisfaction because it would provide no sense of genuine achievement. We need final ends, whose value is not merely instrumental. I believe that our final ends are provided and legitimated by love.

Love is paradigmatically personal. What people love differs, and may conflict. There is often, unfortunately, no way to adjudicate such conflicts. The account of normativity that I have been giving may therefore seem excessively skeptical. Many people are convinced that our final ends and values—most urgently our moral values—must be impregnably secured by reason and must possess an inescapable authority that is altogether independent of anyone's personal desires and attitudes. What we should care about, they insist, must be determined by a reality entirely other than ourselves. My account is likely to strike them as radically neglectful of these requirements. They will have the idea that it is unacceptably noncognitive and relativistic. I think that idea is wrong, and I will try to correct it in my next lecture.