

Chapter 11: Obligatory Ends

In this and the next chapter (“Moral Improvisation”) I aim to offer something like a brief in support of reinstating positive duties to a central place in moral theory, and certainly in Kantian moral theory.¹ General positive duties—duties to relieve suffering and to meet need, of self-development, perhaps to promote justice—are not always welcome in modern moral theories. (This is in contrast to other, more limited, positive duties: tightly restricted requirements; duties that arise from voluntary and special obligations; duties associated with certain roles and offices.) The general duties have infelicitous features. They tend to involve open-ended requirements to promote some good. Then, depending on the theory of value that generates them, or the theory of the person with which they must cohere, they are either very demanding, or they allow the agent extensive discretion in satisfying them. It is hard to be friendly to a moral category that either allows us great freedom in deciding when and how to act, or virtually no freedom at all.

Consider the positive duty to help the needy (the starving, the homeless...). There is a value—something that would be good to bring about—and it is incumbent on those who can to act to that end. Since there is a great deal of need, and much that can be done, it is hard to see how in our present circumstances we could be justified in doing less than quite a lot. Over against this we put our nice lives and families, the pleasures of a rich culture, and want to say that these give us reasons not to have to do very much to end hunger, AIDS, illiteracy. Striking a balance this way is not credible. A more reasonable thought is that the problem arises from the way we are looking at the issues: once the open-ended positive duty to help is on the table, the difficulty is inevitable. Perhaps, then, we should not think in terms of general positive duties. It does not follow that we will be indifferent to hunger, AIDS, and the like; but if, for example,

these are needs that must be met as a matter of justice, or there is a restricted duty of beneficence (delimited by the idea of a fair share), then we can negotiate such moral matters with fewer theoretical and practical discomforts.

My reason for wanting to look again at the idea of positive duties does not arise from skepticism about the viability of such solutions, though I do think they miss something (I will say more about this later). I am interested in positive duties as they belong to an element of moral requirement that applies first of all to *ends*, and only secondarily to actions. Now some might think that the idea of morality dictating ends—what we are to care about—is implausible on its face. The requirements of morality set constraints on what we may do (or may not omit) for the sake of what we care about. And although we should care about morality—have “acting morally” as an end—it cannot be a moral requirement that we do so. There are many good reasons to think that morality *is* directed at ends, but the ones I want to focus on make the connection by way of principles of rational willing. The positive duties that follow are end-supported rather than value-directed; and, as I will argue, because this does not require that we maximize or even promote anything, they avoid the infelicities associated with general positive duties.

The plan is to develop this idea along two fronts. In this chapter I will trace out an idea of obligatory ends that is introduced in the second part of Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* as a condition of free, rational action. In a somewhat surprising way, the positive duties obligatory ends generate—especially the duties to the self—are needed to complete an account of individual rational agency. In “Moral Improvisation” I will be looking at how this set of ends and duties provide us with essential deliberative resources to be morally responsive to the complex, and historically specific social world in which we have to act. Along the way, I will touch on a set of related topics that obligatory ends illuminate: the idea of rational ends; a deliberative basis for

the unity of persons; the effects of social institutions and the history of immoralities on individual obligation; something about the impartiality morality requires of us; and last, an idea of moral improvisation—the places in impartial moral space where the individual needs to be morally creative. Overall, obligatory ends make possible a holism of practical reason that enables morality to function seamlessly in everyday life. At the same time, they support positive duties that make us attentive to the dangers of that seamlessness—complacency, injustice—and responsible for resisting those forms of wrongdoing that result.

Although the view of obligatory ends and positive duties I offer emerges from an interpretation of Kant's moral theory, it is my hope that by the time we are done, their value will be obvious on their own, independent of this source. And to the extent that Kant-inspired intuitions are often the ones most resistant to the idea of positive duties, revealing this face of Kantian moral theory should help in recalibrating them.

Kant argues that unless there are obligatory ends there are no free actions.² He also holds that there are only two obligatory ends: one's own (rational) perfection and the happiness of others, each of which is a source of positive duties. It follows that the two ends must somehow be ends of *all* rational action.³ To see how one might arrive at this view, we will begin with a set of somewhat technical arguments about the role of the will in free action and choice. They will set the stage for a more wide-ranging discussion of the obligatory ends and their duties.

I

From a contemporary perspective, probably the most important claim that Kant makes is that *value*, and not just *valuing*, is a condition of free rational action, and so of morality. It is a variant of the *Euthyphro* argument. Valuing is an attitude that may be responsive to facts about the agent, to facts about objects, or to some standard of value that identifies an object as

appropriate to treat in a special way. Valuing, which need be no more than a fancy form of pro-attitude, requires some rational abilities, but not full-blown rational agency. Value is, by contrast, a standard of correctness for a sphere of activity. If there are rational standards for action—a way or ways it is correct to act—there is value. The Kantian thesis of volitional autonomy is that there is a general standard of correctness for action derived from (or representing) the constitutive principle of the power of rational action itself—that is, the will. If this were not the case, the will would stand in some to-be-determined relation to a standard or standards external to it—standards not necessary to its function as a rational will—satisfaction of which would determine when its willings were correct (even rational). And this, Kant claims, is not possible, if the will is free. Since a free will is neither a merely executive nor a fully elective power, if it does not in some sense supply its own standards for action and choice, then it is not a rational will—i.e., a power to effect the world according to reason.

The most unsettling claim that Kant makes about the general standard of correctness for action is that it is supplied by the moral law as the constitutive principle of the rational will—of free choice. It is unsettling both because it is hard to understand how *that* principle could be a necessary part or condition of willing generally, and hard to accept that the principle of morality is necessary for freedom of choice—hard if for no other reason than the difficulty in then explaining “bad” choices. The problem is that Kant’s view is not just that the moral law is somehow the metaphysical condition of freedom of the will, making free choice both possible and unconstrained. Rather, the full strangeness of the view is that the exercise of even *bad* choice depends in some way on the moral law as *its* determining ground.

One might have thought that to have a rational will is to have a will able to come to action for reasons, not causes, that is, able to act in accordance with principles: *all sorts* of principles. This is true, but misleading. There are, in effect, two options: either the capacity to

act in accordance with principles is fully independent of the content of the principles, or it is a capacity whose exercise depends on some principle that makes us able to act on other principles, even defective ones.⁴ Kant affirms the second option, and it commits him to two things: first, free choice is rational choice, and rational choice is only possible if there are objective reasons—correct standards for choosing; and second, the thesis of volitional autonomy, according to which correct standards for action have to be (or be derived from) the principle of the power of the rational will itself. *And*, since choice of action is with respect to ends, free choice requires standards of correctness for ends.

Now the idea of a power whose constitutive principle makes possible both its correct and its incorrect employment is actually not so strange. There is a class of familiar powers that we have that work this way: I call them “norm-constituted powers.” I discuss this notion at some length in chapter 10 (“The Will and its Objects”) and argue there for interpreting the rational will as such a power. Here I will do no more than briefly sketch the way powers of this sort work, and what the rational will would be like if it were one.

In the ordinary cases, persons come to have norm-constituted powers by inhabiting a social role. Some social roles give powers that are permissions (to inspect, investigate, direct); other roles confer powers that are partly constituted by a norm that sets a rule or standard of correct performance. Examples of the latter are teachers who assign grades, referees of games, tax assessors who determine property values. Only someone in the role can exercise the power⁵; and those in the role not only can, but should, in virtue of what the role is, act according to its standards (as set by law, or rule books, or common practices). The standards are guides for judging (and then acting) in accordance with principles of value, in the sense that they are connected to ends for the agent to realize in role-guided activity.⁶ It is a further feature of such roles that in conveying the power to act according to a standard, they also give the agent an

ability to subvert it. An agent in the role can let her judgment be affected by bribes, whims, or astrological signs, though (usually) not openly. This is not to say that the power is neutral with respect to which kind of thing is done: one is a use, the other a misuse of the power. The power that I have as a teacher is not the power to assign grades by merit *or* by personal preference, though having the power to assign grades by merit I am able to assign them by preference. But to misuse the power in this way, I must exercise it.

It is fairly straightforward to apply this model to the rational will. If the rational will is a norm-constituted power, it is a power defined by a principle, a principle of correctness (and so of value) for a kind of activity, that gives rational agents the end of pursuing that kind of activity according to its standard. Now add this to the way we also think of the power of the will: as enabling actions for reasons. This is not just action accompanied by thoughts of justification, but action that *comes from* judgments about reasons that are beholden to a standard of correctness. If the will itself is a norm-constituted power, the standard that the principle of the will's power introduces is a standard for reasons for action. We, who have wills, then have the end of acting for good reasons. But unlike teaching or refereeing, which one can engage in or not, the employment in choice and action of the power of the rational will is not up to us. *Whenever* we act purposively, we are subject to the standard of correctness in willing: it is our end if anything is. Since the principle that is the standard of correctness in willing is constitutive of the will's power, it cannot be elected (or rejected), though it bears on the election of other ends and the choice of action for ends as the condition of their possibility. Even bad choices must then be explained in its terms.

Here is a more canonically Kantian way of describing the same idea. The will is a faculty of desire, a way of bringing things about, whose principle of choice-determination is rational: an internal standard of goodness for choice (and so action) for rational beings of our kind (living,

finite, etc.). The will attends to, but is not determined to action by, natural and acquired desires or interests. The principle of the will as a rational cause determines choice of action in two related ways: as a norm for what we ought to do, and as the principle that enables us to choose and do what we ought—for its own sake. This power of choice and decision is free in the double senses of *not* being determined by external (alien causes), and of being determined by the principle of its own nature—a principle of value. There is no independent good to which the will is responsive.⁷ Kant refers to this as the “Paradox of Method”⁸: a rational will acts for the good, but the good is not prior to the moral law, and the moral law is the constitutive principle of (all) rational willing (the principle of the will’s causal power).

We make bad choices because we are not perfectly rational. The imperfection of our rational nature is not, however, about deficiencies of knowledge or attention or self-mastery. Our willing is imperfectly rational because the way the principle of the will determines choice is by means of our representation of that principle, and our representations can be *misrepresentations*: partial, incomplete, historically limited, even idiosyncratic. Thus, although we may describe the power of the will as a responsiveness to the good (choice determined by the will’s constitutive principle), the same power is exercised when an agent acts well or badly, so long as she takes herself to have reason to act as she does.⁹

II

Not surprisingly, having given elements of a philosophical or metaphysical account of rational willing, the challenge is to say something substantive about what the will’s principle is. We have it that the will is a norm-constituted power and a principle or law of rational causality. The first normative element of a rational principle of any sort is universality: a formal standard. We can think of it as a variant of the generality of reasons condition, a defeasible standard in the

sense that departures from strict universality are allowed if the domain is properly narrowed, so that the principle is exceptionless where it applies. Kant's version of the requirement is, roughly, that an agent's principle, or maxim, is not valid if a condition of its success as a principle of action is that it not be one (similarly situated) others act on. This picks out *moral* failures in Kantian ethics because violations of the standard fail to respect the rational power they depend on—that is, they are subversive misuses of the power of the will in the sense that *were* they, as the agent represents, valid principles of action, they could not be principles of a rational power.¹⁰ Disrespect for that in virtue of which rational agency is possible is what marks the domain of morality.¹¹ If no valid principle of action can have a form that is inconsistent with the will's principle qua rational cause, then we have a first piece of an account of how the rational will as an autonomous, norm-constituted power can be practically directive.

However, satisfaction of the universality requirement is only a necessary condition of rational action. An action is not rational (the effect of a possible rational cause) unless it can be “derived from” rational principles or ends. So something more is needed. We sometimes say we have a reason for action, or a *pro tanto* reason, when a consideration of a certain sort obtains—hunger gives a reason to get food or to eat. If there turn out to be more pressing considerations around, or no permissible action is available, we say our reason was not sufficient, or not sufficient in this case. The Kantian version of this is more restrictive. Given a consideration that inclines me to act, I may or may not have a reason at all. I cannot have a reason if the way I would act fails the universality requirement. But I also have no reason if all there is to say for the action is that I desire or want its object, whether or not there is anything to be said against the way of acting for it. The object of my interest must be of value; it too must have rational support. But if it is the principle of rational willing that provides a standard for action (a source of value), it has to be a source of value for our ends too *if* an agent acts for reasons or makes a

(rational) choice.¹² We might say: the will has to give itself at least one end for all its willings, if we ever act for reasons.

What could this end be? Here is one possibility. Since human agents do not automatically will correctly, one end we must have, insofar as we have a rational will, is: “will correctly.” According to the universality requirement, willings are not correct unless well-formed. Then agents with the end of willing correctly are enjoined to take whatever means are necessary to that end. In this way, a necessary condition for rational willing generates a sufficient one. This looks like a trick, but it’s not.

The argument works this way. Given the imperfection of our rational nature, there are many causes of our failure to meet the universality condition. We may think our maxim has universal scope, not noticing background assumptions to the contrary; we may mistakenly regard ourselves or our circumstances as unique. Correct exercise of a power often requires tools and preparation. If we are prone to error, in order to satisfy the end of willing correctly we must take preventive and anticipatory means. But since the maxims at issue are all of our maxims, the errors at issue will likely arise in all the areas in which we act. The necessary means will then be of two sorts: first, general abilities required for rational action—for getting things right—involving information acquisition, imagination, deliberation, self-governance; and second, activities and ways of living that support, or do not undermine, rational activity generally, and that police regions of activity where contra-rational temptation comes easily. Securing the conditions for rational willing is the purpose of duties to the self.

But there is an obvious problem. Although there will be much that we need to do to secure conformity with the universality requirement, it is not enough that we have *an* end that requires the development and sustenance of those skills and abilities to insure satisfaction of a necessary condition of rational action. The will’s standard of correctness was to be for all

willing, a source of value for reasons for a wide array of choices. So we appear to have reached a predictable stalemate. Either rational choice and action in general somehow do stand under the value set by the will's principle, or we can have no reasons for action in the usual sense at all. But how *could* the will be the value source of ends or reasons generally? It looks as though the end of correct willing and *its* material conditions are the only possible objects that the will gives itself.

The way out of the stalemate involves a shift in the way we look at its elements. Suppose we took reasons to be the upshot of courses of *reasoning*, and reasoning to be a sequence of thoughts connected by principles, then we have a reason to do X (eat, keep a promise, have a child) just in case there is a course of reasoning from justified or true premises to X. But what counts as a valid course of reasoning is a function of rational principles. So if, as Kant would say, the will just is practical reason, then through reasoning we must be able to "derive" actions from the will's principle. Our desires and interests give us material to reason about.

Now, principles of reasoning fit their subject-matter. It's not that there are special logics for physics and for ethics, but the fundamental category concepts for a kind of subject determine how we ought to think about it. To reason about how something works, or whether A causes B, we use rules of thought suited to the material world. Notions of cause and of power, of substance and motion, are, in the sense I have in mind, rules of reasoning. Because calling something a cause entails that it temporally precede its effects, satisfy some counterfactuals, be consistent with other known causal connections, etc., causal claims enter our reasoning about the material world in determinate ways. In the same manner, reasons-claims reflect determinate rules of thought about choice and action. That we conceive of ourselves as initiating action for ends implies that reasoning about our activity will have instrumental form. That we represent our lives as temporally extended and are at least not indifferent to how things go for our future

selves implies that some idea of happiness will influence our reasoning about what to do. And then because in reasoning about what to do we necessarily conceive of ourselves as free rational agents—that is, able to choose for reasons—our reasoning is further subject to whatever follows from that conception.

However, sound reasoning requires true or justified premises. Although an object of desire may be the target of action chosen for a reason, it is not as such an acceptable premise for a course of reasoning to action—it is not a premise at all. Objects of desire only appear to give us reasons because we take it to be in some sense good to satisfy a desire by realizing its object. But then that’s a different matter. When we choose to act in a way that will realize an object of desire, the choice is governed by a standard of correct willing. This is the point where obligatory ends enter. We get correct premises of practical reasoning when the objects for which we would act are objects for which we should or may act under the authority of an obligatory end.

The idea is this. In virtue of having the end “will correctly,” we have the subordinate (though obligatory) end of promoting and preserving our rational abilities. The scope of this end is not limited to any specific set of rationality-producing activities: possible ends are to be judged good (or bad) as their promotion tends to affect the ability to will and judge correctly. As we make choices, a condition of their value—what makes an object of interest an end—is that it be of a kind suitable to an agent with the end of “willing correctly.”

III

One of the reasonable worries to have when a moral theory introduces a ubiquitous, positive end, is that it thereby makes the content of that end the object of all action the end governs. It would be unacceptable, even silly, to think that in choosing to meet a friend for lunch, or to go to the movies instead of working an extra hour on this year’s taxes, we had to

choose for the sake of enhancing our rational abilities. We reject such dominant end views because, as Rawls put it, “the self is disfigured and put in the service of one of its ends for the sake of system”.¹³ But ends can relate to activity in ways that don’t generate this problem, even when the scope of the end is global. Think of the end of not violating rights (a side-constraint); or not acting foolishly or destructively (both regulative ends). Of course we can successfully *not* do all kinds of things while meeting a friend for lunch or going to the movies. If I am going here, I am not going there. If I meet you for lunch, I am not sending an armored brigade into Bagdad. If, however, I go here because I think I should not go there, or meet you for lunch on condition that I am not committed elsewhere, then the condition enters, as an end, into the story of my action, directing what I do, but not as what I do it for.

Obligatory ends play a similar but slightly different role. When I honor them, I do not go to a movie or have lunch with a friend because or on condition that these acts will benefit my rational nature. I act because I expect to have an enjoyable or stimulating time. The obligatory end’s role is to explain why or how these considerations can *justify* acting (what makes the object—enjoyment—an end). The answer they provide is that enjoyments and spending time with friends are *kinds* of thing it is good for us to do.¹⁴ Putting it a bit baldly: it is important for people to enjoy themselves because a life without pleasures makes us less able to sustain higher rational function. (It is no accident that depression is both a state without pleasure and one in which it is hard to think clearly.) Some enjoyments may themselves be thought good (aesthetic ones, perhaps), but even then, it is not as enjoyment, simply. It is of course not a condition on this or that trip to the movies or the museum that it provide rational benefit. Nor is there some amount of enjoyment, like the RDA for a vitamin, that is enough. When our lives work well, we get pleasure from many of the things we do, and it is important, not just nice for us, that this happen.¹⁵ Obviously, pleasures and enjoyments can also be bad for us. Some few are simply

hazardous. But most pleasures that cause trouble do so when they become the focus of large stretches of our life—we come dull, insensitive, rationally inert.¹⁶

Overall, obligatory ends explain why the way pleasure and enjoyment enter our lives requires our moral attention. They function as final ends, setting the terms for correct premises of practical reasoning, but without negating the heterogeneity of our interests.

There is no fixed set of activities that fulfill the conditions set by an obligatory end. Different societies (in the large and the small) will provide different opportunities. The role of the obligatory end is not to partition the space of possible actions, but to give agents a standard for their end-setting. This does not mean that we need always to be on the look out for opportunities for rational development. Our ordinary choices take place against a background of knowledge about what is and isn't good for us. On the other hand, since we are responsible for getting things right, we need to be aware of and attentive to how things can go wrong. Being a teacher or a doctor can involve kinds of activity that are friendly to our rational functioning, or stultifying and damaging. (HMOs are not bad only for their patients.) With decent institutions, and an interest in doing an activity well, we support our rational abilities as a matter of course. But work that involves callous treatment of others, or hours of boring and repetitive action, ought to be avoided: not chosen, but more importantly, not offered. Some conditions affect us all, others are person-specific—stress tolerance; the ability to make difficult decisions quickly; negotiating complex lines of authority. Having certain vulnerabilities, or just lacking skills, can make someone susceptible to injuries to her rational abilities. One can become hasty in judgment or with others, or deferential, or prejudiced, or someone who just follows orders.¹⁷

The significance of having an obligatory end depends on very general facts about us. We are active beings: we respond to stimuli; we initiate courses of action. We consciously act to make a difference—on ourselves, on the material world, and on others. How we go about this is

a project of self-making, or rational planning, or simply, the pursuit of happiness. Its upshot, not at all our intention, is that we acquire rational abilities. We learn to adjust desire to the world as we find it; we explore the limits of what we can change. We acquire skills to trim, modify, even abandon things we care about for the sake of what we care about more. One of the roles of obligatory ends is to provide a shape for this development; in a sense, they turn a natural process into a moral one, and, even when only weakly acknowledged, transform a being with rational abilities into a person.¹⁸ The effect is intimate. Since obligatory ends do not directly regulate action, but constrain us to attend to the contours of our life as a rational agent, they partly determine who we are, what we love.¹⁹

Although the authority of the mandates derived from obligatory ends is the principle of autonomous willing, the practical concepts an agent acquires will come from interaction with those who are responsible for her education and development. Partly this is because the process begins early, in the shaping of attitudes toward correctness in thought and action, partly it is because the actual concepts will tend to have social form. Children, and not only children, cannot be instructed: “go out and have a rationality enhancing life.” We learn about good and evil through tales of heroes and heroines, saints and martyrs; we learn about the shapes of lives a bit later, through story and example, biography and popular culture.

Whether we acquire the concepts and abilities we need for full moral agency is not, then, entirely up to us. Lacking adequate evaluative concepts, our reasoning will make less sense. At the extreme, if the social world makes the effects of action unpredictable, if good intentions are not likely to produce good results, skepticism about agency is a natural result. Kafka’s Joseph K. is the anti-hero of this story.

Mostly, however, when persons’ character is not morally well-formed, they will either act badly, or if not, because some other source of motivation is sufficient to keep their actions in

line, the relationship they have to morality is likely to be harder, more conflictual. The space for temptation is variable, a function of when one thinks that acting morally is a sacrifice, something hard to justify from within one's life, unconnected to what one most cares about. Some regard this as the start of a philosophical problem—how to prove that any normal person has sufficient reason to act morally; I think there is much to be said for treating it as a practical task—something to fix or prevent.

IV

To this point, I have discussed obligatory ends by way of just one end, the obligatory end of one's own perfection, which, I have argued, arises straightforwardly from the norm of correctness in willing. There is a second obligatory end—that of the happiness of others—and it is time to bring it forward. About each obligatory end, we need to address two questions. One is about how to argue *to* the obligatory end, the other about the end's content—what it requires of us.

So why should attending to the happiness of *others* belong to or be a specification of the principle of rational willing? The question is not: how do we show that morality requires that we attend to others? That, we may assume, is asked and answered long before we get to obligatory ends. What we need to know is why others' *happiness* should matter in the way that an obligatory end would require. As a start we might notice that it is by means of our effect on the happiness of others that we tend to affect their rational condition and abilities. We teach things someone wants to know, or we refuse to; we provide support and sustenance that allows them to pursue useful projects; we go to the movies and have lunch together. (Our reasons for promoting an element of another's happiness need not be the same as the agent's own.²⁰) But that doesn't explain why the welfare of the rational nature of others is an obligatory end for us. The connection is (and has to be) through the conditions of our own rational willing.²¹ In the full

sense of rational abilities that fall under obligatory ends as so far laid out—rational and moral abilities generally—we have very strong reasons to want those we interact with to have them. (Even moral skeptics argue that we have a strong interest in the moral character of others.) Our own rational abilities are in many ways dependent on those of others; indeed, the coherence to us of the human world depends on assuming that others act for reasons, that they care about doing things correctly. So, even if we might benefit in some way from the rational disability of others, we may not think it in general good that we do so. In having the end of the happiness of others, understood in this way, we express the value of giving, as much as we are able, rational and moral form to the world.

There is a further reason to have the happiness of others as an obligatory end. We are, from the beginning of our lives, involved with others as a way of becoming who we are. And if we do not get this connection right, our rational agency is impaired. This is a familiar theme in many accounts of infant development. They describe the infant as caught in a process that she neither initiates nor controls, but which is necessary for her to come to have the self-consciousness of a person with rational powers of action. Movement takes place from an initial sense of being one with another, through separation and anxiety, to new terms of connection. If the beginning is the feeling of identity, it is no surprise that even preconceptually separation is experienced as a threat of annihilation. In order to negotiate the project of becoming a human self, both dependency and aggression have to be domesticated by an infant who lacks all the strategies of rationalization and self-protection that adults routinely deploy. Not surprisingly, we remain sensitive to regression in both domains.

The upshot of this process is to establish a connection to others in which sorting this out is essential to being oneself—a self. The hard won terms of healthy connection depend not just on the recognition that the happiness of others—what they care about—can occasionally be

directed away from us without our being endangered, but also that their well-being is a source of pleasure to us, something that makes our lives go well. (Finding pleasure in giving presents is an accomplishment.) If in making the separation, a child is cold or ruthless about the well-being of the other, then she may be unable to love, and so fail to become a complete human self. On the other hand, the child's agency can also be compromised if the happiness she comes to value is not good for her—if it is hostile to her well-being. What we have is a natural developmental process that is not *for* morality but which, when reasonably successful, makes morality possible and which morality completes.²²

A healthy person cares about some others; morality directs her to be concerned for persons generally, and focuses her attention on their rational well-being.²³ Guilt, regret, and the desire to repair are part of the normal trajectory of intimate relations. Morality re-forms these basic patterns so that they reflect objective values. It is not just the lineaments of connection that need to be reformed, but the idea of happiness they carry as well. At the extremes, natural greed and the fantasy of making things whole again (wanting too much, doing too much), get replaced by a rational plan of life and a greater realism about the value of attachment (not everything can or should be “made better”) and the nature of the goods we should provide.

Morality, on this account, does not compete with our loves and attachments, but transforms them. One product of this process is a healthy, separate self, able to act for objective reasons. But things need not go well. Development can yield a defective self if the separation is made on different terms. Others may be seen as objects of manipulation (it may be useful to learn to pretend otherwise), or open exploitation. A form of self-conceit—to use Kant's term—can block the apprehension of the source of one's own value. Such an agent need not be less able to make her way in the world of things, but she will be incapable of some sorts of relationships, and so impaired in the world of persons and attachments.²⁴

If we think about a formed life, some things will typically function for a person as core values, anchors of meaning for the rest. They can be other persons: a child, a lover, a hero; but also an institution, such as a state or church, or a calling. There may be much or little that one can do for the sake of some of these basic goods; they can be outside our practical reach. Which sorts of things can anchor a life is an historically contingent matter. Institutions may be corrupt and so unworthy of commitment; child mortality has to be relatively low for it to be intelligible to organize life around one or two children; one has to be lucky in the match of one's talents with socially available forms of activity.

How one loves, and how one negotiates the loss of what or who is loved, implicate each other. Bernard Williams talks of the loss of “ground projects” leaving a person with no reason to go on living. And surely that can be so: without *this*—my son, my work, my country—life is not worth living. But it does not follow from the fact that things can be that way, that it is normal or healthy. Such losses are the topic of Freud's extraordinary essay, “Mourning and Melancholia,” where the obvious pathology in *some* responses to loss led him to suggest a pathology of attachment as part of its explanation.²⁵ Freud's suggestion bears on the importance to our psychic health of having objective value as a source of reasons or attachments rather than having our reasons arise from what we find ourselves valuing. (This is not about choosing one way or the other, but about the kinds of basic attachments one is able to make.)

It is normal for persons to suffer grave losses, and, after a period of mourning (or, as Freud says, “when the work of mourning is completed,”[245]), for them to recover and resume their lives, to form new attachments. A different and abnormal pattern arises in some cases where a loss leads to damage of a person's self-regard. Life, Freud observes, cannot resume for the melancholic because in his own eyes he has been shown not worthy of it. The puzzle is why “[a]n object loss is transformed into an ego loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved

person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego altered by identification” (249). Freud’s tentative thesis is that for this to happen it must already have been the case that there was an identification of the self with the loved object. The original object choice “had been effected on a narcissistic basis.” Thus the loss to be negotiated is a loss of self as well as a loss for the self, and to the extent that the loss occasions anger, self-reproach is one of its dimensions. Why this happens, why there would be this catastrophic mis-location of self-love, is, Freud argues, difficult to explain. But the features of depression—of melancholia—that he points to make sense together.

If an essential element of the history of my love for X is that *my* attraction to X was part of what made X attractive, then my love for X is in a sense about me. And if my love for X is important, a ground project, narcissistic identification would explain why it may not seem possible to forego the object in the face of practical or moral obstacles; why its absence might seem to undermine all reasons for living. If I am narcissistically identified with this love, or that ideal, failure or harms to them will be experienced as attacks on my ego, and my impotence to avert the loss makes myself an object of my own anger.

Where, by contrast, one’s love is based in the objective value of something—value secured not by one’s loving but by its worth—a loss is a severe blow, but it is a loss of something in the world, not, however it may feel, a loss of oneself. The world remains, and what is of value in it can, over time, reassert itself; new attachments can form. But where the ground projects we identify with endow our lives with meaning, make a world of value for us, their loss cannot be repaired in the normal ways: it is we who are lost. So it is an interesting question whether the remedy to Williams’ challenge to the authority of morality—how can we have reason to act morally if so acting would undermine a ground project—is philosophical or psychological.

A psychological story about the role of objective value in healthy attachment, and of the costs of narcissistic identification, does not show that there *is* objective value, or if there is, what it is like. It is meant mainly as an anti-skeptical caution. What may seem to be mere philosophical possibilities are sometimes real ones, and if they are real possibilities, they might sometimes be a sign of disorder.

It is hardly surprising that we are prone to evaluative pathologies. We are the center of what we care about, or at least we begin that way, and most of us continue to find the path of narcissistic identification easy. The pathologies (or our vulnerability to them) can also be greatly enhanced by institutions and groups that gain allegiance through the mechanisms of identification. They meet needs, but the satisfactions of regressive attachment also impose costs. One gets solidarity, perhaps visibility and voice, the possibility of shared anger; one risks hypersensitivity, tendencies to moral exaggeration and paranoia, ego-exposure. Institutions or allegiances that have this profile encourage attachments for the wrong reasons, creating unhealthy conditions of agency.

V

The morality of obligatory ends leads to an expansive conception of morality—governing all action that affects persons. But obligatory ends also frame a holistic account of practical reason—of norms governing willing. One might think this is not possible, for there are spheres of activity that do not impact rational beings. But, as Kant pointed out, even activities that are directed at animals or the environment are still matters of dutiful concern insofar as they also have an effect on our moral sensibilities.²⁶ Rather than seeing this as a back-end way to get something said about animals and the environment, I take it as a remark about how obligatory ends work at the limit. Kant’s point is that we can only have “duties to” those agents who can

put us under obligation, agents whose ends we can promote by our action. This leaves out animals and things, neither of which have ends; it also leaves out God, whose ends we can neither know nor affect. But from the fact that we cannot have “duties to” something, it does not follow that we are morally free to act towards it in any way we wish. Being indifferent to pain, wasteful, insensitive to the beauties of nature, are not ways of acting that can be included in sound courses of reasoning. They are not kinds of activity (as aims or as means) that are, in the obligatory end sense, good for us. This is not because if we are insensitive to animals we will be insensitive to persons (though that may be so), but because indifference and insensitivity are hostile to reason, to getting things right, and therefore not part of justified ways of acting. Animals do suffer; old growth forests are beautiful. This doesn’t settle questions about the use of animals or things; it is possible that for this or that purpose we must steel ourselves against the pain we must cause, or the loss of a forest. It brings these considerations into our reasoning about what we may do.

VI

I have so far discussed two roles for obligatory ends: as the value conditions for premises of reasoning to action, and as categories that direct our affective and conceptual practical development. They have a third role, the first one we tend to notice, in setting positive duties to act. In this last section, I want to look at how the form of these duties is shaped by the values that come from the obligatory ends.

With regard to our positive duties to others, it is customary to focus on beneficence alone: the duty to provide aid, as one is able, to others in need. But there is a long tradition, shared by Kant, that locates beneficence within a framework of other positive duties, both narrow and wide, that concern our response to the perceived differential between our own and others’ states

of well-being. So we are to resist temptations of disrespect when we feel superior: that we not expect others to think less of themselves in comparison to us; that we not expose others' faults for no reason, or make them the object of amusement. There are conditions of need that we must become sensitive to and may not ignore, but also directives that we not demean those we help. And then there is the duty of gratitude, strictly owed a genuine benefactor, and also psychologically necessary to maintain the principle of beneficence: the inability to be freely grateful as a recipient tends to undermine a will to provide unselfish help. The rationale for each of these duties fits the agenda of the obligatory end—that in our relations with others, that aspect of their happiness that affects their rational well-being must be our end.

Most of these positive duties, while difficult to get right, are not demanding in an intrusive way, though some are ubiquitous and some are stringent. Requiring that a person's idea of happiness have room for gratitude (acknowledging that one is not self-sufficient), or that well-being not depend on humiliating others, does not limit our liberty in unreasonable ways.

It is only the duty of beneficence, and elements of the duty of self-perfection, that, because of their open-endedness (more can always be done) might exhaust our abilities and resources, intruding to an unacceptable degree on what we care about. One response is to emphasize the fact that these are imperfect duties that leave agents leeway about fulfilling them. But this is hardly a satisfying answer. The idea of obligatory ends suggests a different line of thought.

We will, under beneficence, have some general duty to help others, but we will have much more demanding duties to help those whose happiness is enmeshed with our own. This is not because we need to honor our personal attachments, but because our understanding of the lives of those we are close to is often better (or ought to be better), and because what we are able to do can be more finely tuned to the actual needs we take on. Both my son and the checkout

clerk at the supermarket have needs. But there is little I can provide the clerk besides fungible resources. I am in no position to give him money on condition that he take a class that will get him out of this dead-end job, whereas, I can (sometimes) advise and support my son in ways that will shape his life. The genies and anonymous benefactors of popular fables either give wealth or wishes; more engaged benefaction depends on the development of a relationship in which there is understanding and trust. In mature relationships, we have reason to accept the judgment of others about what they need, though that does not diminish our responsibility for what we do. *If* the reason we are to be concerned with the happiness of others is that it is our point of access to their rational well-being, these are the results we should expect. Viewing beneficence in this way does not diminish our concern for their happiness in the usual sense; it rather introduces shared or shareable terms of judgment. When we are not in a position to exercise judgment, because need is at a distance, or the needy are strangers to us, or private charity is inappropriate, public institutions can do the work of beneficence for us, and that part of our general duty is met by contributing a fair share of support.

The full content of our duty toward others will therefore depend on the relationships we are in. Whether we form a family or have a wide circle of friends is up to us; but if we do extend ourselves into relations with others, we become implicated in their happiness and well-being. Of course, many of the goods of a human life come to us this way as well. Although more extensive relations may give us more to do by way of providing help, sometimes more than we expected or planned for, it is not the kind of sacrifice that those who are concerned with open-ended beneficence worry about.²⁷

A word about the demandingness of the duties of self-perfection. For the most part, our rational abilities and skills develop as we pursue a variety of activities. Unless an environment is terribly impoverished or culturally degraded, what the duty requires is taken care of as a matter

of course. Work and play, relationships, group activities are or can be demanding in ways that are both enjoyable and good for us. However, since it is often institutions, of education and law, that train abilities and provide useful opportunities, some failures are not primarily imputable to the individuals who remain deficient. But when things work well, there is no special burden, no set of exercises we must perform, no endless sequences of self-improvement classes.

Where the pursuit of happiness and the needs of our rational agency may come apart is in ways of living that are absorbed in self-destructive pleasures (self-destructive to our rational abilities as a result of quantity or kind.) Still, although it may be a nuisance to eat healthily, drink mainly in moderation, and attend to the needs of one's recalcitrant body, these also are not the sorts of burdens that give rise to worries about the demandingness of positive duties. Having to forego some pleasure, or a kind of activity to which we are attracted, involves some discipline, but no unreasonable sacrifice.

Things are much more complicated concerning our moral personality or character. Here I think we do have extensive and demanding duties, some provoked by the way in which it is easy to be selfish (the convenience of lying as a means, the attachment to wealth that leads to avarice, the servile willingness to trade status for benefits), others by our having ultimate moral responsibility for what we do (we require a competent conscience, and sufficient knowledge of our moral condition to make accurate and effective moral assessments). Some of this can be taken care of by the background structure of ordinary moral life: those who are decently brought up avoid a fair amount of moral difficulty as a matter of course. (A culture that values privacy probably has curtains; and inhibitions.) But moral environments are inevitably incomplete and faulty, and each seems to put some forms of wrongdoing within easy reach. Moreover, if we do not live in morally transparent times, if our institutions mask forms of wrongful activity, then we will need to be wary of unintended complicity with wrongdoing. And if, as I believe, we can be

responsible even in these situations for getting things right, then our duties of *moral* self-perfection, our duties to be and become effective moral agents, may turn out to be ones that are genuinely demanding.

So it is true, the requirements of morality regulated by obligatory ends and positive duties may be demanding, but not in the ways that call forth familiar objections. The demandingness is not quantitative—there is not some large amount of good we are to do—nor is it fully directive—picking out our actions at every step. Those concerns prompt arguments to limit the scope of morality for the sake of private ends—our freedom to do what we will. But obligatory ends do not in those ways determine what we are to do; they rather set conditions for having a life we can have reason to value. That is how they contribute to Kant’s claim that morality is the condition of our freedom.

Notes

1. Versions of these two chapters were delivered as Whitehead Lectures at Harvard in May 2003.
2. *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:385.
3. In chapter 9 (“The Scope of Moral Requirement”) I describe the two ends as “the complete material specification of rational nature as an end in itself for human rational agents.” Part of my purpose in this chapter is to more fully understand how that could be so.
4. In Kant’s terms, this is the question whether there can be a negative idea of freedom without a positive one.
5. Others can pretend or imitate, though they are not for that free of the standards (it must at least appear that they follow them, if their pretense is to be successful), even if their reasons for adhering to them are not the same.
6. Ends that may or may not be distinct from the instantiated standards.
7. This is *not* to say that there is nothing independent of the will to which it is responsive; if the principle of the will gives guidance for decision and action, it does so in light of some will-independent (subject)-matter.
8. *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:63.
9. One might say that in these ways authority and content can separate. This turns a

metaphysical feature into an epistemological problem.

10. Thus although agents take themselves to have reasons for action once they represent a means-end connection of interest to them, they have no reason at all unless the principle they would act on satisfies the formal standard of correctness. It then follows that, in Kantian theory, the so-called hypothetical imperative is not an independent standard of rational action.

11. Why this mode of disrespect is especially important can be described in various ways: the condition of our freedom, that in virtue of which our actions are truly our own, etc.

12. In the end one may want to abandon the project of translating Kantian ideas about rational action into our way of talking about reasons. We speak of good reasons and bad ones, *pro tanto* reasons and reasons all things considered. A person who wants to cause another pain has *a* reason to hit him. On Kant's account, such an action is simply not rational, not justified: one cannot have reason to do it.

13. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 554.

14. If we let ourselves go, we might enjoy all sorts of things. The world of the bad person or the wanton is larger than ours: there are all kinds of things that they can do that we cannot. But, we say, not everything we might enjoy is good for us.

15. We should expect that, given our rational natures, many of the things we naturally care about will be of the kind that we ought to care about. We might think in these terms of Rawls' Aristotelian Principle.

16. Whatever the cause of addictions, just their ability to cancel out judgment makes them morally dangerous.

17. The control of access to ability-enhancing work is one of the avenues of construction of a status-stratified society.

18. As with other norms of rationality, they affect cognition and judgment independently of self-conscious moral awareness.

19. They thereby introduce an idea of correctness into a region one might have thought was at most constrained by and not constituted by moral norms.

20. This is familiar with children: their idea that learning to play the guitar would impress their friends is not what we promote in arranging lessons. Issues are more complex with adults, where, for the sake of their happiness, we are more likely to omit support for things we judge harmful, than to support beneficial activities they value for inappropriate reasons.

21. Why don't I take what would be the easier route and argue that in virtue of our having the end "will correctly" we have an end of securing correctness in willing where and as we can—viz., by selective engagement with the happiness of others? Recall - I do not have the end of willing correctly because I value willing correctly (that would make it hard not to care about correct willing other places). I have the end "will correctly" because I have a will of a certain sort. What needs to be argued is that in virtue of this, I have reason to value the correct exercise of the rational powers of others (and so have their happiness as an end).

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22. We might think of this as the interpersonal variant of Kant's unsocial sociability.
23. Not the well-being of their reasoning per se, but on those elements of happiness that are part of a rational agent's, or *this* rational agent's, life going well.
24. Their may even be collateral benefits. Charismatic leaders, self-absorbed artists, may have powers that result from their flaws. The natural world is not a moral order.
25. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIV, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966).
26. *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:442-443.
27. The hardest cases—emergencies, extreme poverty—do not, I believe, fall under obligatory ends. Emergencies are directly governed by moral requirements on action; the circumstances of extreme poverty by complex considerations of justice. These issues are discussed in chapter 9, “The Scope of Moral Requirement.”