

Social Philosophy & Policy, vol. 10, no. 1 (1993), pp. 135-165

## **SELFLESSNESS AND THE LOSS OF SELF\***

**By JEAN HAMPTON**

The biggest danger, that of losing oneself, can pass off in the world as quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc. is bound to be noticed. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* 1

Sacrificing one's own interests in order to serve another is, in general, supposed to be a good thing, an example of altruism, the hallmark of morality, and something we should commend to (but not always require of) the entirely-too-selfish human beings of our society. But let me recount a story that I hope will persuade the reader to start questioning this conventional philosophical wisdom. Last year, a friend of mine was talking with me about a mutual acquaintance whose two sons were in the same nursery school as our sons. This woman, whom I will call Terry, had been pregnant with twins, but one of the twins had died during the fourth month of pregnancy, and the other twin had just been born prematurely at six months with a host of medical problems. We were discussing how stressful this woman's life had been while she was pregnant: she was a housewife, and her two boys, aged three and five, were lively, challenging, often unruly--a real handful to raise. Her husband worked long hours in a law firm, so the vast majority of the childcare and household chores fell on her shoulders. "You could see that she was exhausted by end of the first trimester," I maintained, "because her eyes were tired, and her cheeks were sunken--she looked almost like a cadaver." My friend agreed. I went on to blame her exhaustion on the fact that she had to do too much during a pregnancy that anyone would have found difficult. "I don't understand her husband," I maintained. "Surely he could how badly she looked. If he had concern for his future children, why didn't he do something to help her so that the pregnancy had a chance of going better? And if he loved *her*, why didn't he cut down his hours so that he could help out at home? Surely he could see just by looking at her that she was in trouble," My friend said nothing at the time, but after a week she called me, and told me that my criticism of this woman's husband had bothered her all week. "You're wrong about Terry's husband not caring enough about her, They have a good marriage," she insisted, and then she continued: "You know, you're not like us, We accept the fact that we should do most of the childcare and housework. Terry's husband wasn't doing anything wrong expecting her to take responsibility for that side of things."

What troubled me most about my friend's remarks was her assumption that it was not only permissible but appropriate for "her kind" to care for other people, even to the point where they were endangering their own health (and in this case, also the health of those they were responsible for nurturing), And I realized that Terry herself bore some of the responsibility for these events: not only had she harmed those fetuses by insisting on carrying the entire burden of care in the family, but she had also harmed herself by putting enormous stress on her body, in a way that had bad physical and, one suspects, bad psychological repercussions.

Often philosophers who commend altruism assume that someone who cares for another even at the expense of her own welfare is an impressive and highly moral figure. But surely the story I have just told indicates that the truth is much more complicated: not all self-sacrifice is worthy of our respect or moral commendation, and not all such sacrifice really benefits those at whom it is aimed. Often men and women who give to others at their own expense are called "selfless," and I find that a revealing term, because "selfless" people such as Terry are in danger of losing the self they ought to be developing, and as a result, may be indirectly harming the very people for whom they care.

This essay attempts to explore the sort of "selfless" act that is bad, and the sort of "selfish" conduct that is  
\*\*\*\*\*

\*I have been greatly benefited by a number of people in the course of writing this essay. impetus to write it came from a discussion of a related paper of mine at Yale Law School's Legal Theory Workshop. I also wish to thank Neera Badhwar, Jules Coleman, David Schmidtz, Elizabeth Willott, the other contributors to this volume, and its editors, for their comments, criticisms, and ideas. (I trust their help was authentically offered!)

Social Philosophy and Policy Foundation. Printed in the USA.

good, I am using the terms 'good' and 'bad' in the preceding sentence as moral terms, so my understanding of what counts as 'moral' is unconventional. The adjective 'moral' is normally understood to be a term referring to traits of character or actions that are, in either a direct or indirect way, other-regarding. But this paper attempts to pursue what might be called the "self-regarding" component of morality, a component which has been curiously neglected over the years,

## 1. TWO CONCEPTIONS OF MORALITY

I want to begin by exploring traditional conceptions of what morality is, and how they tell us to evaluate altruistic action. By the term 'conception of morality' I do not mean any particular theory (such as Kantianism or utilitarianism) justifying or attempting to define moral conduct, I mean the deeper understanding of morality which moral theories are *about*-- our intuitive sense of what morality is, which we use to recognize moral actions and about which we develop moral theories to defend or precisely define it. There are two conceptions of morality that have undergirded moral theories in modern times, both of which, I shall argue, are problematic.

In order to flesh out these conceptions, I will make use of Carol Gilligan's interviews with two children-- interviews that address real or hypothetical moral problems, which she has presented in a number of forums, most prominently in her book *In A Different Voice*. On the basis of interviews such as these, Gilligan argues that in our society there are currently two different "moral voices," which she calls the "ethic of justice" and the "ethic of care," and she finds some evidence (albeit controversial) associating the first with men and the second with women.<sup>2</sup> Now Gilligan's work is that of a psychologist, and thus she is not concerned to be very clear about what a "voice" is, nor does she attempt to use the resources of moral philosophy to clarify or define any theoretical details involved in these voices. But as a philosopher I have found her work valuable because it takes seriously the moral views and perspectives of everyday people, and thus offers us a way to uncover what I am calling "conceptions of morality" by exposing the deep-seated assumptions people in our society have about what morality is, what it requires of us, and the nature of its authority over our lives. And (as I shall show at length in a discussion of the work of one philosopher below) such conceptions are an important source of the intuitions upon which we philosophers are subtly relying when we generate moral theories. Hence, in this section I want to present Gilligan's two voices, and then go on to discuss how they can be understood as (in my sense) two different moral conceptions.

As I have noted elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> two of Gilligan's interviews with older children clarify these two "voices" nicely. Gilligan originally initiated these interviews in order to test Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which Gilligan believed did not adequately describe the moral development of many females. Eleven-year-old Jake, whose answers to the interviewers earned him high marks on Kohlberg's moral-maturity scale, gave the following answer when asked: "When responsibility to oneself and responsibility to others conflict, how should one choose?" He replied with great self-assurance: "You go about one-fourth to the others and three-fourths to yourself."<sup>4</sup> When asked to explain his answer to the question about responsibility to himself and others, Jake replies:

Because the most important thing in your decision should be yourself, don't let yourself be guided totally by other people, but you have to take them into consideration. So, if what you want to do is blow yourself up with an atom bomb, you should maybe blow yourself up with a hand grenade because you are thinking about your neighbors who would die also.<sup>5</sup>

As this remarkable example shows, he regards "being moral" as pursuing one's own interests without damaging the interests of others, and he takes it as a matter of moral strength not to allow the interests of others to dictate to him what he ought or ought not to do. For Jake, morality defines the rules governing noninterference. Contrast the following answer to the same question given by eleven-year-old Amy, whose answers to the interviewers earned poorer marks on Kohlberg's scale:

Well it really depends on the situation. If you have a responsibility with somebody else [sic] then you should keep it to a certain extent, but to the extent that it is really going to hurt you or stop you from doing something that you really, really, want, then I think maybe you should put yourself first. But if it is your responsibility to somebody really close to you, you've just got to decide in that situation which is

more important, yourself or that person, and like I said, it really depends on what kind of person you are and how you feel about the other person or persons involved. 6

When asked to explain this answer, Amy replies:

. . . some people put themselves and things for themselves before they put other people, and some people really care about other people. Like, I don't think your job is as important as somebody that you really love, like your husband or your parents or a very close friend. Somebody that you really care for or if it's just your responsibility to your job or somebody that you barely know, then maybe you go first. . .

.7

Whereas Jake's remarks take for granted the idea that being moral means following rules that preclude interference in other people's pursuit of their interests, Amy's remarks make clear that for her, moral conduct is beneficent involvement that may require, at times, self-sacrifice. And her discussion of other moral problems reveals the assumption that being moral means actively pursuing the well-being of others. Whereas Jake sees others' interests as constraints on the pursuit of his own ends, Amy believes others' ends are ones that morality obliges her to help pursue. 8

Many feminist theorists maintain that, in contrast to the ranking Kohlberg would assign to them, the kind of moral voice Amy exemplifies is clearly "higher" or more advanced than Jake's.<sup>9</sup> On Jake's view, morality is seen as--to use Annette Baier's term--"traffic rules for self-assertors,"<sup>10</sup> and Baier argues plausibly that such a perspective on morality is neither a sophisticated nor a mature moral perspective. It appears to derive from the mistaken assumption that each of us is self-sufficient, able and desirous of "going it alone." Amy is surely right that this is false. Her perspective on morality, which emphasizes caring for and fostering the well-being of others, appears to be a richer, sounder theory of what genuine moral behavior is all about. Such a perspective is one which women (and especially mothers) are frequently thought to exhibit more than men.

However, Amy's conception of her moral role is certainly not beyond criticism. Maybe she can put herself first, she says, if not doing so would mean losing out on something that she "really, really" wants. But only maybe. Jake is convinced not only that his interests count, but that they count far more than other people's (three quarters to one quarter). Amy appears to be having trouble figuring out whether or not her interests count at all. Even in a situation where she takes her responsibility to others to be minimal, she finds it difficult to assert the priority of her own interests. On the basis of these children's observations and remarks, we can outline two conceptions of morality which they are assuming as they answer the interviewers' questions; and we will see that neither of the conceptions is fully acceptable. First, although they disagree in many ways, both children accept the following tenet:

(1) Moral behavior is almost exclusively concerned with the wellbeing of others and not with the well-being of oneself.

In his discussion of Marx's criticism of morality, Allen Wood argues that something along the lines of tenet (1) must be included in any adequate understanding of what morality is. Although he admits that the word 'morality' can be used to include certain forms of self-regarding behavior, nonetheless he writes that

there is a narrower and I think more proper sense of 'moral' in which we distinguish moral goods and evils from nonmoral ones. We all know the difference between valuing or doing something because conscience or the 'moral law' tells us we 'ought' to, and valuing or doing something because it satisfies our needs, our wants or our conceptions of what is good for us (or for someone else whose welfare we want to promote - desires for nonmoral goods are not necessarily selfish desires). 11

Both children seem to agree with Wood that "nonmoral goods" include most of what we want for ourselves, goods whose pursuit often competes with activities that we "ought" to do for others - activities that most of us tend to find less compelling precisely because they do not lead to self-benefiting goods. However, although they both accept tenet (1), Amy and Jake have very different conceptions of what it means to be "other-regarding." Amy assumes it means caring for others, and accepts the following tenet:

(2A) A perfectly moral person is one who actively seeks out ways of benefiting others, and offers her services and/or her resources in order to meet others' needs.

In contrast, Jake assumes that "being moral" primarily involves not hurting others. Although he is prepared to choose to be responsible toward others "one quarter" of the time, when he gives an example of moral behavior, it is a "noninterference" example: Le., do not interfere with others when you are engaged in your pursuits (in his example, the pursuit is "blowing yourself up"! ). So for Jake, being moral is primarily perceived as a negative activity; he accepts the following tenet:

(2J) A perfectly moral person does not do anything to interfere with or injure other people or their (noninjurious) activities.

Now Amy would certainly agree that (2J) is part of being moral, but only because it is implied by (2A). However, Jake would likely reject (2A) as being too responsive to other people; after all, he insists, we are permitted to put ourselves ahead of others "three quarters" of the time.

Because they have different conceptions of how moral behavior benefits others, Jake and Amy have different understandings of what altruistic behavior is, and how it should be commended. Because Jake believes that morality generally only requires him to refrain from hurting people, he is convinced that this is a realizable ideal, allowing him plenty of room for his own activities. Now he is prepared to go beyond this and offer help (giving other people one quarter of his attention, and reserving for himself three quarters), but I would suspect, if he did so, that he would often perceive this help to be something over and above the demands of morality--analogous to "moral extra credit." The tone of his remarks makes it clear that he would not feel terribly bad about refraining from performing costly care, since such care is not, strictly speaking, morally required in any case (morality is primarily about not hurting others), and thus an "extra" that any of us can forego with a fairly easy conscience. Therefore, someone with Jake's conception of morality accepts the possibility that there are what philosophers call "supererogatory acts." To put it precisely, such people believe:

(3J) There are acts that benefit other people which are morally commendable but not morally obligatory (i.e., supererogatory acts).

However, for people such as Amy, foregoing beneficial activity is not so easy. Any beneficent involvement in another's life is mandated by morality, and because so many people are in need in our world, Amy is the sort of person who will constantly feel the tug of conscience, chastising her for not doing more to care for others. Of course, many of these obligations may be defeasible, given other obligations she is under; but the point is that they would still be obligations, as opposed to mere "moral recommendations." This means that Amy accepts:

(3A) Any act that could benefit another person is a prima facie moral obligation.

One who accepts (3A) believes that there is no such thing as a morally supererogatory act (or "moral extra credit").

Although Gilligan's research suggests that people divide on gender lines in their advocacy of either of these conceptions, in fact it is interesting to note that over the centuries there have been entirely male-developed moral theories that have drawn from both conceptions. Consider, for example, that for the utilitarian, the fundamental business of the moral person is the pursuit of the happiness of the community, which is a difficult and demanding task. And while this pursuit may allow or even require one to serve one's own interests on occasion, it may also require considerable self-sacrifice. Moreover, at least one utilitarian has recently championed something like (3A); recognizing that the beneficence required of the utilitarian leaves no room for moral extra credit. 12

On the other hand, there are also plenty of Jake-like theories. Consider, for example, Locke's formulation of what he takes to be the fundamental law of nature:

Everyone as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his Station wilfully; so by the like reason when his own Preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of Mankind, and may not unless it be to do Justice on an Offender, take away or impair the life, or what tends to the Preservation of the Life, Liberty, Health, Limb or Goods of another. 13

At first, it seems Locke perceives morality as an active and beneficent activity when he calls on people to do as much as they can to preserve others; but when he gives instances of moral activity later on, each prescribes a form of noninterference. In general, he tells us, do not "take away or impair" others' ability to preserve themselves, and this seems to be what he means by the phrase "preserve the rest of Mankind." Finally, note that he gives permission to behave in ways that can be damaging to others' lives if one's own preservation requires it ("when his own Preservation comes not in competition"). So while Locke, like Jake, perceives morality as an other-oriented activity, he does not perceive it to be so demanding that it would require one always--or even usually--to choose to serve others' needs over one's own. He even seems prepared to sanction behavior that is destructive of others' interests if one's own preservation requires it.

Let us return, then, to the topic of altruism: on one conception, there are altruistic behaviors that are recommended but not required; on the other conception, all altruistic behaviors are *prima facie* moral obligations, to be performed unless there is a higher altruistic obligation in place. But note one interesting fact: both conceptions assume that if one has a choice between doing something self-regarding or doing something that is genuinely beneficial for others, the beneficent act can never be immoral. This is most obviously true for the utilitarian -- assuming, of course, that the community would benefit more from your service to others than it would from your service to yourself: and any action that would further the happiness of the community according to the utilitarian calculation, is a moral action, and thus an action to be morally commended, no matter what it might do to you. Moreover, while Locke gives his readers moral permission to choose themselves over others when their own self-preservation is at stake, he never considers the possibility that someone who did the reverse might be an immoral person. And this is probably because he assumed that such a person would be even more moral "than normal" insofar as he would be choosing to serve others even when permitted not to do so.

## II. MORALITY'S HEGEMONY

Which conception of morality is right? Although philosophers have tended to line up on both sides, and have rigorously debated this issue, we should consider how we react to the two children's articulation, in crude but pure terms, of the moral conception each accepts: we think each conception is wrong, and indeed, immature. But if we criticize both conceptions of morality, shouldn't we also criticize any moral theories that are based upon the assumptions of either of these conceptions?

We should. I have already alluded to Annette Baier's attack on Jake-like moral theories, which I will discuss later in this section. But we can just as easily criticize Amy-like moral theories; in fact, without realizing it, Susan Wolf develops such a criticism in her "Moral Saints." 14 In a nutshell, Wolf argues that two leading moral theories, utilitarianism and Kantianism, along with the "common-sense" morality accepted by nonphilosophers, all regard moral activity as almost exclusively other-regarding and beneficent, so that were a person to become perfectly moral (i.e., a moral saint) as defined by any of these approaches, he would be so focused on pursuing the well-being of others that he would have neither the time nor the "moral permission" to develop a variety of the talents, skills, traits of personality, and vocations that make each of us an interesting and well-rounded person:

If the moral saint is devoting all his time to feeding the hungry or healing the sick or raising money for Oxfam, then necessarily he is not reading Victorian novels, playing the oboe, or improving his backhand. . . . There are, in addition, a class of nonmoral characteristics that a saint cannot encourage in himself for reasons that are not just practical. There is a more substantial tension between having any of these qualities unashamedly and being a moral saint. . . . For example, a cynical or sarcastic wit, or a sense of humor that appreciates this kind of wit in others, requires that one take an attitude of resignation and pessimism toward the flaws and vices to be found in the world. . . .

[A]lthough a moral saint might well enjoy a good episode of *Father Knows Best*, he may not in good conscience be able to laugh at a Marx Brothers movie or enjoy a play by George Bernard Shaw. 15

Wolf goes on to argue that human institutions such as haute cuisine, high fashion, interior design, and perhaps even fine art could not be said to be worth as many resources as we standardly put into them, given how these resources could be used in many morally superior ways. Hence, she concludes that although morality is a highly valuable and important human activity, it cannot be said to be always authoritative over all nonmoral

options: in particular, there are, she insists, judgments that are neither moral nor egoistic, about what would be good for a person to do or be, which are made from a point of view outside the limits set by the moral values, interests, and desires that the person might actually have. These judgments arise from what she calls the "point of view of individual perfection," and are governed by ideals and values that have nothing to do with morality. She argues that, like moral judgments, these perfectionist judgments claim for themselves a kind of objectivity and a grounding in a perspective which any rational and perceptive being can take up. Unlike moral judgments, however, the good with which these judgments are concerned is not the good of anyone or any group other than the individual himself. 16 She insists that we are sometimes (perhaps even often) permitted to choose this perfectionist good over the values and dictates of morality. So, Wolf's conclusion in "Moral Saints" is that the unrelenting pursuit of morality is a bad thing, where 'bad' must be understood in some sense other than 'immoral'.

Now Wolf claims that all contemporary moral theories fall prey to her criticisms, and her attack on the currently popular moral approaches is supposed to reveal the mistake that pervades all contemporary approaches to morality. But the analysis in the preceding section of the two divergent conceptions of morality in our society should make it clear that Wolf is actually criticizing only one "common-sense" conception, namely, the "Amy-like" one. To see this, consider that Wolf takes it for granted that all three conceptions she criticizes have a highly active, "caring" conception of morality. Thus, she takes it for granted that, on any of these views, a perfectly moral person would be going out in the world looking for ways of benefiting others, offering her services, using her money for philanthropic gestures, constantly surveying her world to see how she could help, either by using her time and personal skills, or by using her financial resources. Moreover, Wolf assumes, along with Amy, that this beneficent involvement is not only commendable but also morally required. It is not surprising that Wolf finds it easy to argue against such an exhausting and self-limiting ideal. Our intuitive rejection of the ideal of the moral saint she describes is not unlike our alarm at the kind of person Amy says she wants to become: Amy and the moral saint are so taken up with the needs of others that they seem to have no time to develop into interesting, distinctive (and not always "nice") human beings in their own right.

However, Wolf's criticisms do not seem to work against those moral theories and common-sense views that are more Jake-like. If you assume a Jake-like conception of morality, you view being moral as primarily a negative activity, requiring only that you refrain from hurting others, and not demanding that you do everything and anything you can in order to benefit them. So on this conception, the ideally moral person is both practically and logically able to pursue many nonmoral ideals. Admittedly, this conception would still preclude development of certain character traits or participation in certain activities that are harmful or interfering in the affairs of others, for example, the development of a caustic and wounding wit or a taste for clothing made by processes that injure workers. But many would insist -- contra any claims to the contrary that Wolf might make -- that this is not a drawback of this conception because such traits and activities are, in their view, correctly viewed as morally inappropriate.

Indeed, it is possible to interpret Kant's moral views so that they are more like Jake's than like Amy's, thereby allowing the Kantian theory to escape many of Wolf's criticisms. Consider that Kant seems to conceive of his moral law as that which merely checks the moral permissibility of one's behavior ("Could this action be a universal law of nature?" one is supposed to ask), and not something used to uncover beneficent, nurturing behaviors that might not otherwise occur to one without the help of the law. We are told that after we have consulted our (nonmorally defined) desires to formulate a maxim about what to do, we should use the law to find out if the maxim is morally permissible; we are not told to use morality in a more positive fashion, to formulate our maxims directly. So we could use Kant's law appropriately to evaluate our maxims for action and still be oblivious to a variety of ways that we could actively help others, if such ways of helping never occur to us. Indeed, why would they occur to us if desires are the source of all maxims and these ways of helping are opposed to the satisfaction of our desires?

So Kant's theory seems to leave plenty of room for the pursuit of individual perfection, but note that it does so only because, on this interpretation, it is a "reactive" rather than a "proactive" theory, unable to pick out and require the beneficent involvement in others' lives which might never be proposed by our desires, but which common sense tells us is nonetheless morally required.

However, just because Kant's theory, so interpreted, escapes Wolf's criticisms, does not mean that it is a successful portrayal of morality. To think of morality along Jake-like lines gives us *too much* room for self-development; such an approach assumes that we should look out for and respect others only insofar as they happen to be in the way of our own plans for self-gratification; it does not encourage us to see ourselves as having some responsibility for fostering others' plans for self-gratification apart from any impact those plans might have on us. Hence, it discourages us from recognizing and coming to the aid of those who are in need, and misleads us about the extent to which any of us can satisfy his or her own desires without the help and support of others. (Some of us may like to be so misled, finding it unpleasant to remember that each of us starts life as a helpless infant, and ends life "sans teeth, sans hair, sans taste, sans everything," 17

I regard this Jake-like way of reading Kant as disappointing, and I will develop an alternative way of using at least some of his moral views in the next section. The challenge is to develop a conception of morality that recognizes the importance of beneficent involvement in other's lives, but which not only "leaves room" for the development of one's self, but also makes that development a moral requirement. In what follows, I will maintain that Wolf's moral saint is not only a failure from the standpoint of individual perfection, but also from the standpoint of morality itself, properly understood.

### III. HUMAN WORTH, HUMAN FLOURISHING, AND HUMAN SELF-AUTHORSHIP

The ability of Jake-like people to incorporate room for themselves in a moral life is, I believe, the best part of their moral conception. On the other hand, as it stands, that conception fails (as I have noted above) to capture genuine morality. In what follows, I will contend that in order to understand what an ideally moral person would look like, we must define a new conception of morality which recognizes that any "altruistic" behavior is morally wrong when it prevents one from paying moral respect to oneself. What does it mean to be a moral respecter of yourself? I want to argue that such respect involves having the following three characteristics:

- (a) a sense of your own intrinsic and equal value as a human being,
- (b) a sense of what you require, as a human being, to flourish, and
- (c) a sense of what you require, insofar as you are a *particular person*, to flourish as that particular person,

Let me explicate each of these in turn.

First, a person's conception of his own worth as a person is derived from his overall conception of human worth. Such a conception defines for this person how human beings are to be valued, and how to appraise each individual's value. Philosophers have varied in how they have understood the nature of human value; for example, Hobbes regards human value as no different from the value of any commodity: "the value of each person," he insists, "is his price." 18 So on his view our value is entirely instrumental: we are worth what anyone would give to make use of our skills, labor, or other characteristics. Naturally, such a position is going to accord people different values, depending upon the marketability of their various traits.

There are a variety of noninstrumental conceptions which grant people inherent or intrinsic worth on the basis of one or more characteristics. Many such conceptions are inegalitarian, granting human beings (unequal) value depending upon their sex, or race, or caste, or alternatively, on the basis of how intelligent, or accomplished, or morally worthy they are. Others are egalitarian, insisting that people are equal in worth insofar as they all share certain critical, worth-defining characteristics. One popular egalitarian theory is that of Kant, who grants each of us equal worth insofar as we are all rational and autonomous. Now Kant does not deny that we can be evaluated in ways that make us unequal-- noting, for example, that some of us are vastly better, and morally more worthy, than others. Nonetheless, he takes all such inegalitarian evaluations-- including assessments of moral worth -- as *irrelevant* to defining the kind of moral respect a person deserves. On his view, our moral obligations to people do not increase with, say, their moral virtue; instead, we are obliged to respect our fellow human beings equally, no matter the state of their moral character, insofar as each of us is an autonomous, rational being (although Kant would certainly maintain that how this respect should be demonstrated can vary depending upon the state of a person's moral character).<sup>19</sup> This "democratic" conception has been highly popular in the modern world (some arguing that it is the offspring of Judeo-Christian religious teaching).<sup>20</sup>

I want to propose that our conception of morality is properly understood to involve a Kantian conception of worth, i.e., a conception of human beings as intrinsically and equally valuable, where that value is not straightforwardly capable of aggregation in the way that some utilitarian doctrines characterize it. If this conception of our value is adopted, one must respect the value not only of others but also of oneself, and must therefore reject any roles, projects, or occupations which would be self-exploitative. So the first, and most important, way in which morality involves self-regard is that it demands of each of us that we take a certain kind of pride in ourselves--not the pride that, say, a white supremacist takes in his alleged superiority, but the pride that arises from a sense of our own inherent worthiness in a world of intrinsically valuable equals. Henceforth, I shall say that to call us "persons" is to accord us this kind of intrinsic and equal worth.

It is this sort of pride which people such as Terry in my earlier example do not have. They perceive themselves as subordinate, a different kind of human being whose role is to serve others. Unable to put their interests and concerns first, they struggle to feel satisfied as they care for others. And to those (especially their children) who observe them, they teach the permissibility of their own exploitation by submitting to, and even supporting, their subservient role. Often these beneficent "saints" are revered by those whom they serve because of their caring ways, but the appropriateness of their devotion to the service of others at their own expense is never questioned or challenged, probably because those who revere them unconsciously recognize that such people are highly useful to them, given their own self-interested concerns. What better way to promote this useful servitude than by continually commending such people as "moral," "saintly," "devoted," "virtuous"?

The second way in which morality involves self-regard concerns what I will call the conception of the legitimate needs of human beings. If you respect others' value, you make sure that they have what they need to thrive as human beings and as persons, where that includes air, water, food, shelter, clothing, and medical care to meet physical needs, along with a decent measure of freedom, self-control, and love to meet psychological needs. But those who respect their own value will be just as concerned that these needs be met in their own cases. Leaving aside conditions of severe scarcity where resource allocations are agonizing and highly controversial, the saint who devotes herself and virtually all the resources at her disposal to benefiting others is in danger of damaging herself, and in this way failing to respect her own needs as a human being. In Terry's case, her persistent service to her family left her little time to rest, to the point where her body became severely stressed. Rather than understanding that she should rightfully demand time off from her childcare and household duties given her physical problems, she continued her regimen of care. To those readers who, like Jake, find it easy to put themselves first, it may seem fantastic that a person could be so other-regarding that she would literally make herself sick rather than take time out to care for herself. But Terry's behavior is not unusual. As another example, consider that Virginia Woolf's life and the content of her novels (especially *To The Lighthouse*) were strongly influenced by the example of the early death of her mother, Julia Stephen, which, according to Woolf, resulted from exhaustion brought on by caring unceasingly for seven children and a demanding husband.<sup>21</sup> Woolf's novels strongly suggest that such behavior is connected to a conception of self as servant, which makes one a less-important, second-class kind of person. Indeed, that self-conception would figure in a general explanation of why it does not seem more obvious to obsessive care-givers that in order to be able to care for others properly, they must care for their own needs, since the importance of these needs is never clear to them.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, not all self-denying care-givers are female. One colleague of mine told me about her father's insistence on helping his friends and relatives to the point of risking his health and well-being (for example, throwing out his back helping a neighbor repair her fence, or risking the severing of his fingers helping his daughter move a freezer into the basement). Indeed, his desire to help has been sufficiently extreme that he once locked his daughter out of the garage so that he could unload her luggage from the trunk of a car! How do we explain his obsessive, self-damaging, and (for the recipients) frequently suffocating interest in "helping"? Part of the explanation seems to be that he, and others like him, not only have a poor sense of self-worth and a poor grip on what they owe to themselves in order to meet their objective needs, but also a dearth of plans, projects, and goals that are uniquely their own. Thus, they decide to satisfy the ends of others because they have so few ends of their own to pursue.<sup>23</sup> This explanation accounts for why those of us who have received help from such obsessive care-givers frequently resent and feel violated by the help: it is as if our own ends of action have been seized and taken away from us by these "helpers" when they insist on pursuing them for us.

Such behavior illustrates a third way in which morality involves self-regard: namely, it requires us to ensure that we have the time, the resources, and the capacity to develop the characteristics, skills, plans, and projects that make us unique individual selves. One of the traits that mark us out as human beings is our capacity to develop distinctive personalities. Granted, some of the distinctiveness that differentiates us from one another is the product of the environments in which each of us grows up--our families, schools, religious organizations, political institutions, and so forth. And some of it is the product of biological characteristics, destined to develop in us because of our genetic make-up. But some of that distinctiveness is what I shall call "self-authored." There are many times in our lives when we choose what we will be. For example, when a young girl has the choice of entering into a harsh regimen of training to become an accomplished figure skater, or else refusing it and enjoying a more normal life with lots of time for play, she is being asked to choose or author whom she will be. When a graduate student decides which field of her discipline she will pursue, or when a person makes a decision about his future religious life, or when someone takes up a hobby--all of these choices are ways of determining one's traits, activities, and skills, and thus ways of shaping one's self--of determining one's self-identity. Nor are these self-determining choices always earthshaking or major. In small ways we build up who we are: if we successfully forgive a friend a misdeed, we thereby become a little more generous, or if we give way to anger and hit a loved one, we do a little bit more to build an abusive personality. Just as a sculptor creates a form out of a slab of rock, so too do people (in concert with their environment and their biology) create a distinctive way of interacting with, thinking about, and reacting to the world. It is this distinctiveness which each individual plays a major role in creating, that I am calling the "self." Whereas we say that we respect one another as "persons," we say that we love or hate, approve or condemn, appreciate or dislike, others' selves.

This self-authorship is not only something that we do, but also something that it is deeply important for us to do; through self-authorship we express our autonomy and prosper as human beings, To be prevented from self-authorship is to undergo brutal psychological damage, Therefore, morality requires that others give each of us the opportunity to author ourselves, and it requires of each of us that we perform that self-authorship, But the objective requirement of self-authorship is satisfied by an individual when she subjectively defines who she is, what she wants, and what she will pursue in her life. Whereas the conception of legitimate needs is objectively defined, reflecting a theory of what it is that each of us requires, as a human being, to flourish (where this includes, among other things, the ability and opportunity to engage in self-authorship), the conception of "personal needs" sets out what one requires as a particular personality or self, and is subjectively defined, arising from a person's decision to be a certain way, to have certain aspirations, and to undertake certain projects--all of which are up to her to determine

So who I am is partly "up to me." Nonetheless, to make sense of self-authorship each of us needs to understand when we are genuinely engaged in self-defining, as opposed to self-denying, activities. I shall now argue that in order to define what counts as genuine self-authorship, we require objective constraints. The subjectivity of preference formation only counts, from a moral point of view, as self-authorship if that preference formation occurs in a certain way, when a person is in a certain kind of state. In the discussion that follows, I will attempt to suggest the rough nature of these objective constraints, but this is theoretically difficult terrain, and as the reader will see, I will leave many questions unanswered.

#### IV. UNDERSTANDING SELF-AUTHORSHIP

To determine the nature of self-authorship, we must answer a number of questions. First, we need to know what state a person must be in, such that he, and not some other person or thing, is doing the self-authoring. That is, we need to know when the plans and preferences are genuinely subjectively defined (i.e., defined by the subject), and not by something (some drug or other agent) other than the subject. Consider Ulysses before, during, and after his interaction with the Sirens. Before and after he heard their song, Ulysses preferred to stay on course with his ship, rather than steer towards the rocks where the Sirens sung. But while they were singing, his preference was reversed. Now it is natural to say<sup>24</sup> that Ulysses *really* preferred staying on course rather than steering towards the rocks, and presumably that judgment rests on the idea that the person who was in thrall to the Sirens was in some way "out of his mind" - not the *real* Ulysses, and thus not capable of forming a genuinely authentic preference. But making this evaluation requires developing objective criteria for what counts as a real and satisfactorily operating person. I want to suggest that we use such criteria often, as when, for example, we discount the preferences of seriously ill people, or those whom we consider to be insane or in some way mentally defective (e.g., because they are on mind-altering drugs), or when we

discount some (but certainly not all) of the preferences of very small children (who can get very confused, overtired, or over-emotional). Specifying what state a person has to be in, such that he or she can be considered capable (at that time) of generating authentic preferences, is highly difficult, and I will not attempt to elaborate such an account here. Suffice it to say that such an account is morally required if we are to understand what self-authorship is actually like, and would certainly involve specifying what we take to be at least a minimally rational person.

But once we have such an analysis, we are not done. To be self-authored, it is a necessary condition that a preference be subjectively defined, but it is not a sufficient condition. I want to propose that there are objective constraints on what can be the content of an authentic self-authored preference. This means that not everything that a self decides to pursue or prefer can count as a preference we are prepared to attribute to that self. This is not to say that morality should play any significant role in defining our vocations, or avocations, or skills, or personality traits (which is one point Susan Wolf certainly wants to make).<sup>25</sup> But morality does place constraints on what we can legitimately choose to pursue, and different moral theorists disagree both about how strong these constraints can be and about the role political institutions should play in enforcing them.

I shall argue that it is a necessary condition of a preference's being self-authored that its content not conflict with what is required to meet that person's objective needs as a human being. The following example illustrates this point: I once knew friends of a man who appeared to author the desire to be tied and beaten during sexual relations with young men. The violence in his desire makes it repulsive to most of us, and it is certainly in conflict with common-sense understandings of legitimate human needs. But it is at least arguably authentic insofar as it was a subjective preference of this human being (who was not obviously impaired or irrational). Nonetheless, most of his friends discounted the legitimacy of this desire, and attempted to interfere with his actions to satisfy it, partly because of what they saw as the reason he had the desire. According to them, this man was periodically filled with self-loathing (in virtue of a number of cruel deeds he had committed over the years), and it was during such a bout of self-loathing that he would solicit this kind of experience which, tragically, his friends concluded, only increased his self-loathing when it was finished. So in their view, he solicited the experience as a kind of self-punishment.

In what sense did this man "want" to undergo this experience? We are rightly uneasy in straightforwardly attributing to him a desire for it in the way that we might attribute to him, say, the desire to play chess. We want to discount it, in the same way that we want to discount the desire of, say, the addict for his drug. Why? I believe this is because, as Aristotle would say, we believe that subjectively defined preferences are only authentic if their content is consistent with what we take to be the objectively defined needs of human persons qua human persons. To the extent that one is renouncing or repudiating the meeting of these needs (as this masochist did), one will be incapable of authoring authentic preferences. Indeed, in an interesting passage in Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that this is true of anyone whom we criticize as bad or evil:

And those who have done many terrible deeds and are hated for their wickedness even shrink from life and destroy themselves. And wicked men seek for people with whom to spend their days, and shun themselves; for they remember many a grievous deed, and anticipate others like them, when they are by themselves, but when they are with others they forget. And having nothing lovable in them they have no feeling of love to themselves. Therefore also such men do not rejoice or grieve with themselves; for their soul is rent by faction, and one element in it by reason of its wickedness grieves when it abstains from certain acts, while the other part is pleased, and one draws them this way and the other that, as if they were pulling them in pieces. <sup>26</sup>

If Aristotle is right, the harmful preferences of people not only toward themselves but also toward others cannot be considered authentic preferences of those selves, because they are the product of people in turmoil, who cannot author preferences satisfactorily. Because they are unable to understand or secure what it is they owe to themselves as human beings, they are unable to function effectively as human beings, and hence become impaired in their ability to develop preferences that accurately reflect who they are and what they require as persons. Or at least so I would like to argue. Actually developing such an account would involve developing Aristotelian-style criteria for what is objectively required for human flourishing--which is, to put it mildly, no easy task.

Note that to say a preference is not genuinely self-authored or "authentic" is *not* to say that one is not responsible for it. While it is "his" preference in the sense that he chose it, and thus must bear the consequences for having done so, it is not "his" preference in the sense that it is genuinely self-creating or self-expressing. This last remark assumes some kind of idealized conception not only of what a flourishing human being is like but also of what it is to be a particular, distinctive human person. Flourishing human beings will be different from one another, in their traits, activities, projects, and skills, in part because flourishing human beings are interested in and capable of defining themselves in distinctive and original ways.

The preceding remarks aim to disqualify the preferences of the wicked as self-authored. But I also believe they disqualify the preferences of people such as Terry as self-authored. Terry is certainly not what we would consider a wicked person, but like a wicked person or like the masochist in the example above, she has made choices about what to do and how to be that are personally destructive. "I love looking after my kids," Terry might insist, or "I love the domestic arts," or "I love helping out at the nursery school." But we would be suspicious of such enthusiasm for activities someone of her gender and class is "supposed" to like, and that suspicion would be confirmed if we found her life to have little in it that she "wants for herself." Her statements would therefore have all the hallmarks of inauthenticity. It is not so much that her preferences and activities are inauthentic because she has chosen to define herself by stepping into a (societally defined) role -- after all, each of us must live life by choosing roles to some extent, e.g. when we choose our careers, or when we choose (or decline) to be married, or to have children, etc. Moreover, as I shall discuss in the next section, it is perfectly possible for a woman to make the authentic choice to be a housewife and mother. But in Terry's case, what primarily justifies our criticism of her choice as inauthentic is that her role, as she understands it, permits her to have very few ends other than those of her family, and thereby makes her, at virtually every turn, their servant. Although none of them wants to hurt her, they make use of her so thoroughly that she is not only unable to meet many of her objective needs as a human being, but also has very little room for engaging in self-expressing or self-defining activities outside that role.

There is something else that troubles us about Terry's choice. Many women make that choice in contemporary American society; whether or not these women work outside the home, they conceive of themselves as being responsible for most (and sometimes all) of the care-giving in the family (and those who work sometimes suffer enormous guilt to the extent that their jobs preclude them from doing what they are convinced they ought to do). These women's choice of this role therefore seems to be, in part, a social phenomenon, one that they have made in order to avoid the disapproval of their friends, or family, or church, or colleagues, who expect them to make it. So even if Terry had redefined her role in the home so that her objective needs could be met, we would still reject the idea that the choice was authentic if we perceived it to be a choice she made in order to avoid such social disapproval.

Consider, in this regard, a male example of an inauthentic choice resulting from social pressure: in the spring of 1991, American newspapers recounted the story of an investment banker who, as a teenager, wanted to be a clown. His parents strongly discouraged it, regarding it as inappropriate for someone of his background and abilities, so he went to MIT and got a job working in Silicon Valley in computers. Still he was dissatisfied and decided things might go better if he had an MBA. With this degree he got a job on Wall Street making a lot of money in a high-powered investment bank. But one day, he claimed, he woke up realizing that if he kept working on Wall Street, he would end up close to death never having gone to clown school. So he quit his job, and did exactly that. This is a nice story of someone who struggled to author himself, while under pressure to be what people in his social group expected of him. Like Terry, he faced pressure to submit to a social role, to take on preferences, interests, and projects that he did not really want. He experienced understandable relief when he reclaimed himself.

These examples illustrate how people can choose not to author themselves. Self-authorship involves more than an autonomous choice: it involves a decision to develop the traits, interests, and projects that are not only consistent with meeting your objective human needs but that are also ones you want, and not ones that others prefer that you want (and perhaps try to persuade you to want). When Terry and the MBA gave up the chance to author themselves early in their lives, they "sold out" to certain societal groups that believed they had the authority to determine who and what these individuals should become. Such "selling out" has been a common subject of story and legend in many cultures. Consider, for example, Stravinsky's *L'histoire du Soldat*, a work

based on the story of a soldier who sells his violin, representing his soul, to the devil for money. Only when he reclaims that violin and gives away all his money -- repudiating all that led him away from who he really was -- does he reclaim his soul. It is perhaps hard for the MBA or for women such as Terry to see that they too have sold out by accepting the particular social role our society has created for them. And this may be particularly hard in Terry's case: how can embracing such a caring, beneficent role be a devilish act, or be considered "selling out"? Yet is it so much better to give up the ability to define your own life in order to avoid sanctions from social groups you fear, than to give it up in order to secure money or power? And is it any easier for Terry or the MBA to reclaim themselves than it was for the soldier? Not only must they reconsider and redefine their goals and projects, but they must also reconsider and redefine their conception of who has the authority to determine or even criticize what they would pursue in life. 27

These last remarks suggest that, like the MBA and the soldier, women such as Terry bear responsibility for succumbing to the temptations of embracing a self-denying social role. Many feminists may question how fair this is, given the societal assault on people such as Terry, and the high cost such women must pay if they do not succumb. The extent to which women must take responsibility for "selling out" is an issue discussed in novels, such as those by George Eliot and Jane Austen (think of Austen's Anne in *Persuasion* in contrast to Charlotte in *Pride and Prejudice*, or think of Maggie Tulliver in Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*). And the most striking discussion of this point by a philosopher is by Kierkegaard. 28 In *The Sickness Unto Death* Kierkegaard argues that sin is a kind of despair, generated by the failure to be who we are, and he distinguishes masculine and feminine forms of sin. Whereas the masculine form is a kind of defiance -- a failure to accept the limits of selfhood, the feminine form, he says, is a kind of *weakness*, a loss of self which he links to the woman's service to others.<sup>29</sup> Such devotion he takes to be a kind of sinful self-abnegation: "the woman in proper womanly fashion throws herself, throws her self, into whatever she abandons herself to. If you take that away, then her self vanishes too, and her despair is: not wanting to be herself." <sup>30</sup>

To call this loss of self "sinful" is to suggest that the woman--a woman like Terry -- is responsible for it, no matter how much she tries to excuse herself by appeal to "social pressure." But it is surely reasonable to wonder how far she, or indeed the MBA, can be blamed for making choices which her parents, teachers, and community members may be prepared to enforce with severe social sanctions (involving not only ridicule but also ostracism). Although I will not be able to pursue this point further, the possibility of self-authorship would seem to be as much the responsibility of society as it is of the individual; it would seem that society must not only be prepared to respect a variety of nonstandard choices, but must also provide what each person needs (e.g., educational opportunities, health care, etc.) in order that she be able to engage in self-authorship.

## V. ALTRUISM

Let us return to the issue of altruism. I have argued that service to others is only morally acceptable when it arises from an authentically defined preference, interest, or project undertaken by one who pursues her legitimate needs as a human being, and who accepts a Kantian conception of human value. So one who lives up to these requirements not only accepts severe constraints on what she can do to others, but also on what she can do to herself. Such a person can certainly have authentically defined preferences leading her to serve others, but she will refrain from such service when it will lead her to become (to use a Hobbesian term) "prey" for those whom she serves.

But can't there be people who authentically choose to help others at some cost to themselves, and whom we are right to praise for their unusual generosity and fellow-feeling? For example, can't there be women who really want to stay home to care for their children, even while knowing that this will set back their career for years and mean a substantial loss of income, and whose choice we ought to value? Aren't there people (such as Mother Theresa) who are genuinely devoted to the poor at considerable cost to their own comfort, and who seem to be exceptionally fine people? Haven't major religions continually celebrated the martyrdom of saints and heroes who die for the benefit of others and their cause? Does my argument require that we cease our commendation of such people, and even criticize them for their self-sacrifice?

It does not, as long as that sacrifice is authentic and done out of love, as I shall now explain.

I have a friend whom I consider to have made an authentic choice to be a housewife and mother and who lives a life very different from that of Terry. She stayed home to care for her children because she adored them, and

she genuinely liked the control over her own time that the life of a housewife gave her. Moreover, she has been quite capable of limiting her care to her family over the years whenever she thought they were demanding too much, by using a kind of prickly sarcasm they have been loath to experience. Her life has always included all sorts of projects and plans (e.g., involvement in art organizations and women's organizations; self-study projects that have made her an expert in the flora and fauna of her region) that she greatly enjoys and that have helped to make her a fascinating individual to know. So she is a richly developed person, and her care of others is a natural result of what she has chosen to love in her life.

Nonetheless, I do not believe she deserves any special commendation for crafting this kind of care-giving life; those whose life-choices do not include caring for children, or the aged, or the infirm are not thereby less impressive. We value genuine, richly developed persons, and that development can take all sorts of forms, only some of which involve extensive care-giving. Susan Wolf assumes that when we value those people who are not care-givers, our valuing must be nonmoral. But this is importantly wrong: we morally value all people with authentic lives, whether or not they are care-givers, when we appreciate that each has had the strength to respond morally to herself, and thus has resisted pressure to make her life into something that is not authentic. It is abusive to demand of everyone (and in particular all females) that they lead a life with considerable service to others--and just as abusive to demand that no one, and in particular no female, should lead a life with any considerable service to others; such demands fail to recognize the diversity of talents and pleasures that make more or less care-giving lives appropriate for different people. Those who yield to such demands can become disabled from developing an honest and authentic life.

Indeed, such demands may actually reflect the self-serving interests of the community. There is a doctor I know whose service to his community has been extraordinary: as a young man he became interested in drug addiction, and finally founded a free clinic in Northern California to treat addicts and provide medical service to the poor. What is striking about this doctor is that he will tell you that he has always enjoyed dealing with addiction problems, and has been very happy in his medical career. Thus, his service has always been authentically and happily given. Clearly he deserves our deep appreciation. But does he really deserve more praise than a doctor whose authentic choices are such that he intensely dislikes dealing with such problems, runs a medical practice that gives a decent share of free service to the poor but primarily serves the medical needs of the middle class, and who vastly prefers rock-climbing to volunteering in Oakland drug clinics? Doesn't our community betray its own selfishness if it calls the first doctor "better" than the second, insofar as the services of the first are rarer and thus instrumentally more valuable to the community than those of the second? Many of our commendations of what look to be altruistic behavior may be more self-serving than we realize.

But what about people who devote their entire lives to serving the poor, or parents who risk their lives to save their children: don't these extraordinary acts of altruism spring from authentic preferences, and yet don't they involve great harm to self? Shouldn't we commend them as highly moral and hold up those who perform them for emulation, or at least consider the acts supererogatory and hence morally fine even if not morally required?

I am inclined to argue against doing either. Such behavior is morally commendable and only morally permissible when it is done authentically, out of a love that unifies the one who serves with the one who is being served. The love about which I am talking is not a feeling (although a feeling may often accompany it), but a point of view, a way of conceiving of oneself in connection to others, and it comes in more than one form. Those who experience such love are so unified with those whom their acts are attempting to benefit that what they regard as good for themselves is what will be good for those with whom they are unified.

From a moral point of view, the most important form of this love is that which connects us to our fellow human beings by virtue of our common humanity, such that we will naturally recoil at others' suffering and desire (authentically) to stop it. It may be that 'love' is not a particularly good word to use to describe this point of view (although it is commonly used for this purpose in Christian literature).<sup>31</sup> More particular and frequently more powerful forms of love are experienced by parents for their children, and by friends and spouses for each other; in these relationships there is an intimate connection between the parties--to the point where the pleasures of each are advanced when the other's needs and desires are satisfied. Contrast this kind of loving care to the self-sacrificing service of a reluctant benefactor who performs his caring deeds only because he

believes it is his "duty" to do so: when we know that our benefactor believes he has brought (uncompensated) damage upon himself by serving us, not only do we take no joy in that service, but we may also feel guilty and undeserving of help purchased at this cost, and we may be angry at how little our own good is a good for the reluctant benefactor, and thus regard his help with resentment. (There is nothing that kills the pleasure from a gift quite so much as the gift-giver's intimations that he has suffered a great deal too much in order to give it to you.) This sort of selfish and dishonest altruism deserves no commendation. 32

However, those who feel no love for others, and thus (quite authentically) refuse to help them, are not thereby exempted from moral criticism. There are situations when moral criticism of them is appropriate, not because they did not help (their refusal is, after all, honest and authentic), but because they did not have the love -- by which I mean the perception of connection with others, and not a mere feeling--from which such help would inevitably spring. (The appropriateness of such a connection is something that Amy can teach Jake.<sup>33</sup> On my view, when we commend real altruists, we celebrate not only the authenticity of their choices, but also the point of view they have (authentically) adopted that has resulted in them wanting to make such choices. We commend their deeds not because these deeds are extraordinary acts of self-sacrifice; they aren't --real altruists do not understand their actions in this way. As Neera Kapur Badhwar makes clear in her essay "Altruism Versus Self-Interest,"<sup>34</sup> most of the rescuers of the Jews in Europe during World War II told interviewers that it was "easy" to decide to help the Jews, because they felt a deep sense of union with them as fellow human beings. Hence, they refused to understand their deeds as self-sacrifices or acts of martyrdom. When we commend the acts of such altruists, we are actually commending *these people*, and the point of view they took toward their fellow human beings.

Does morality require that all of us take a loving point of view toward all of our fellows? This is a theoretically difficult question, for it is surely right that *some* fellow-feeling is morally required of all of us (which is the point Christianity tries to make), and yet the strength of the love the rescuers had for those whom they saved is extraordinary and unusual. To expect such love from everyone would seem to be unrealistic given the diversity of human personalities, and to socially pressure people to try to develop such love would likely result only in dishonest approximations of the real thing. Nonetheless, we are prepared to criticize severely those who aided the Nazis for their appalling lack of fellow-feeling. Moreover, there are certain situations where we do think that morality demands that people develop particular forms of love. For example, a parent who risks his life to enter a burning building to save his children strikes us as animated by an appropriate love binding him to his children, whereas a parent who refuses to do so insofar as he takes himself to be removed from, and more important than, his children strikes us as (deeply) criticizable.

It is impossible in this essay to explore when and how each of us is morally required to make various loving commitments to others (or when those commitments surpass such requirements), although our response to the examples of the rescuers and the parents risking their lives for their children illustrates that we believe such requirements exist,<sup>35</sup> constraining the territory over which morally acceptable authentic choices can be made. As I noted before, commendable authentic choices always operate subject to moral constraints. If Aristotle is right, we should not regard these constraints as unwelcome limits on what we can choose, but rather as directives which, when followed, will make our own lives better.

However, even love is not sufficient by itself to make such service worthy of our commendation. To be commendable, one's service to others must be performed in a way that fully recognizes one's own worth and distinctiveness. Terry may have thought that her self-sacrificing service to her children arose from her love for them, but since she was unable to bring a sense of herself and her own importance to her union with her family, she not only inflicted harm on herself but also on them. Commendable, effective love does not mean losing oneself in a union with others; instead, it presupposes that all parties to the union have a self, which they understand to be important, and which they share with one another.

It may even be that *real* love -- and the sort of love that deserves moral commendation--only exists if this sense of self accompanies it. Consider, in this regard, the following Victorian poem about mothers -- of the sort Terry is:

There was a young man loved a maid  
Who taunted him, "Are you afraid,"

She asked, "to bring me today  
Your mother's head upon a tray?"

He went and slew his mother dead,  
Tore from her breast her heart so red,  
Then towards his lady love he raced,  
But tripped and fell in all his haste.

As the heart rolled on the ground  
It gave forth a plaintive sound.  
And it spoke, in accents mild:  
"Did you hurt yourself, my child?" 36

To love another deeply should not mean to lose all sense of oneself in another's personhood and to be unable to make any independent claims of one's own. Self-sacrifice cannot be commendable if it springs from self-abnegation. That Kierkegaard calls it a sin is rightly suggestive of the way it is immoral, a way of being deeply disrespectful to oneself. If we are so "altruistic" that we become unable to develop and express our selves properly, we become unable to give to others what they may want more than anything else.

Real care for others looks and feels much different from any socially encouraged, self-damaging imitation. We see the real thing in a story of a mother and her family who waited in a shelter in Texas while a tornado destroyed their home: as they waited, the mother sat and worked on a quilt, recalling later, "I made my quilt to keep my family warm. I made it beautiful so my heart would not break." 37 This mother's care for her family that day came from enormous strength and self-confidence, as she looked disaster in the eye and insisted that her family believe, despite the destruction, that something good would prevail. She used her talents and gifts as an individual to create a sign of that good. The service of such a mother is neither reluctant, nor soul-destroying, and may be extraordinarily important to those who receive it.

Real care may also come from human beings who do not in any way appear to be altruistic, saintly, or "good." A minister I know once told a story about a man named Doc that makes this point:38

Where I spent a good deal of my childhood in a small New England town, the meanest man in town owned the garage and fixed everything mechanical that went wrong. He was a foul mouthed, hostile fellow who had been brought up as a state boy. After going through numerous foster homes he had ended up as the foster child of the town's auto mechanic. He and his foster father got along badly, but he turned out to be an automotive Einstein, a total genius with any kind of machinery, and he learned everything in this line that his foster father had to teach him. When he got to be eighteen he was convicted of armed robbery and sent to prison for five years. By the time he got out, his foster father had died, but the foster father had left him the garage. The mythology of the town was that he had returned to arrange for its sale, but that he had decided suddenly and impulsively to stay and run the garage when he discovered that the townspeople greeted him warmly and even solicitously. And he had stayed, and he had run the garage. From the early 1930's to the middle 1950's you knew that if you lived in that town and ran out of gas late at night you could call Doc and he would arrive half drunk in his wrecker mumbling obscenities about anyone that idiotic, but Doc would arrive with a can of gas, or if your car had broken down, with the needed tow. People, especially kids, were a little scared of Doc, but the farmers knew that if their equipment broke down during mowing or if they got into any kind of mechanical jam, Doc would stay up all night fixing what needed to be fixed. People were willing to put up with Doc's awful temper and acid remarks because he was utterly trustworthy. As Doc grew older, his rages resolved into mischievous wit which, though not often kind, was always funny. The boys and young men of the town went back to hanging around the garage and many of them absorbed the mechanical skills which Doc possessed in such abundance. They also learned something about trustworthiness and dedication to service they might not have learned otherwise. Eventually Doc married, and he and his wife had two children. He even took to going to church occasionally.

This is hardly the portrait of an Aristotelian man of practical wisdom. But it is a portrait of a real altruist, someone who cared deeply about people in his community and who served them hard, long, and well--in large part out of gratitude for their acceptance of and faith in him. In no way do we see his caring as self-destructive, but indeed as quite the opposite --a way of coming to terms with himself, his anger, his frustrations, and his losses as a child. This is certainly not a man who serves others in order to fulfill some kind of social role. His caring is the real thing.

## VI. AUTHENTICITY AND CONFLICT

There is a contemporary song by Tracy Chapman, which recounts the story of a young woman who faces a choice between living an authentic life of her choosing but abandoning her alcoholic father whom she loves, or serving the father but thereby accepting a life of poverty, drabness, and frustration. What ought she to do? If her love for her father is authentic and deep, she may choose to stay with him, and in those circumstances, that action would be self-authored. Indeed, to do anything else might mean she would be full of regret the rest of her life. Yet this decision will allow her few of the resources necessary to develop skills, talents, projects, and traits of character that are the mark of a well-developed self. Hers is a nasty choice, and in many respects, a deeply unfair one. Compare it to the choice of the character that Jimmy Stewart plays in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life," who has an authentic desire to help the poor of his town, but satisfying this desire requires such self-denial on his part that he comes close to suicide later in his life.

Note that both desires here are authentic -- so authenticity alone does not help us to resolve how we ought to act in life in order to be respectful not only to others but to ourselves. The problem is that each of us has a set of authentic desires, and the other-regarding ones can require that we do things that preclude the self-regarding ones. So how do we choose? Conventional wisdom celebrates the other-regarding choice in these sorts of situations (although it may not always require it). But why should "being moral" always involve choosing in favor of others -- why can't it sometimes involve choosing in favor of oneself? 39

In situations where self-development and service to others conflict, we have the familiar problem of balancing moral claims. Normally that problem is perceived as involving the conflicting moral claims of people other than yourself, all of whom have some call on you. In a conflict between your needs and others' needs, service to others has normally been considered the moral choice -- either morally required, if you think as Amy does, or else merely recommended (but not required) if you think as Jake does. But I want to argue that in these situations, choosing in favor of yourself can be a morally permissible choice, and perhaps in some circumstances the morally required choice. 40

Hence, I do not agree that all community-benefiting, other-regarding actions are morally required, and I believe that the advocates of the concept of supererogation are right to maintain that we are sometimes morally permitted not to choose an altruistic, self-sacrificing act, but to act, instead, to benefit ourselves. However, this is true, on my view, (only) in situations where either choice is morally acceptable--that is, (only) in situations where duty to others and duty to self are opposed and we are morally permitted to choose either one. Moreover, I have also argued that in some situations in which duty to others and duty to self are opposed, the self-regarding choice is actually the morally superior and obligatory choice. To be "impartial" from a moral point of view does not always mean excluding oneself and one's own needs from moral deliberation. To treat all people equally does not mean giving everyone but oneself equal concern. Moral people do not put themselves to one side; they include themselves in the calculation and give themselves weight in the determination of the right action to take.

How much weight? To know the answer to that question is to have a moral theory that correctly adjudicates conflicting moral claims not only between others but also between oneself and others. I have no such theory (nor does any other philosopher!). 41 But surely Jake is wrong to think that we can answer the question with some kind of easy formula; how that balance should be struck depends upon many things, including the circumstances and context of our lives (so, for example, that balance should rightly be struck one way if one is a student fighting to get a degree, and another way if one is the parent of a newborn infant). And it is just as easy for many of us to overestimate the weight our interests should get, as it is to underestimate it. If, after all I have said in the name of self-authorship, it still seems unsettlingly wrong to spend \$200 per person at a fancy New York restaurant in the name of individual self-expression when so many people in our society and around

the world are unable to meet their most minimal human needs, then maybe that's because it really is wrong to do such a thing. I am arguing that we should not allow ourselves to be pressured - by society, by our religion, or by some philosopher's conception of our "moral duties"- -to become the servant of others; but I do not want to deny that many of us who are privileged err in the other direction, and serve ourselves too much and others too little.<sup>42</sup> The art of living well is to know how to balance competing moral obligations - some of which are to yourself.

Philosophy, University of Arizona

**Notes.**

1. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), pp. 62-63.
2. See Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). She has revised and expanded her ideas since then. See a variety of articles about Gilligan's recent work in *Mapping the Moral Domain*, ed. Carol Gilligan, Victoria Ward, and Jill McLean, with Betty Bandige (Cambridge: Center for the Study of Gender, Education, and Human Development, 1988). And see Carol Gilligan, "Moral Orientation and Moral Development," In *Women and Moral Theory*, ed. Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987), pp. 19-33.
3. The discussion of Jake and Amy is partly drawn from my paper "Feminist Contractarianism," in *Analytic Feminism*, ed. L. Antony and C. Witt (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).
4. Gilligan, *In A Different Voice*, pp. 35-36.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
8. I am indebted to Elizabeth Willott and David Schmitz for this way of contrasting the children's moral outlooks.
9. Annette Baier, "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?" *Nous*, vol. 19, no. 1 (March 1985), p. 62.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 126-27.
12. See Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
13. The quote is drawn from section 6 of the *Second Treatise* in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 311.
- 14 Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 79, no. 8 (August 1982), pp.419-39.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 420-21.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 436.
- 17 From Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Act III (in a speech by Jacques).

18. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. c.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), chap. 10, para. 16, p. 42.

19. For example, Kant maintains that those who are morally bad can deserve punishment, but he is also well-known for insisting that punishment is a way of respecting a person's autonomy, and represents neither a violation nor a suspension of that autonomy.

20. See Jeffrie Murphy, "Afterword: Constitutionalism, Moral Skepticism, and Religious Belief," in *Constitutionalism: The Philosophical Dimension*, ed. H. Rosenbaum (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 239-49. I was struck recently by how many people in American culture accept this view of worth when I read a letter written by parents of children in a Tucson-area elementary school, calling upon the school to foster the idea that "all people are equal." In attempting to explain this equality, the authors of the letter noted that although each of us is different, our differences do not affect our equality. As they put it: Just as  $3 + 3 + 1$  is different from but equal to  $3 + 4$ , so too are we different from, but equal to, one another.

21. Woolf's account of her mother's life can be found in autobiographical fragments published as "A Sketch of the Past," in *The Virginia Woolf Reader*, ed. Mitchell Leaska (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984).

22. This obvious lesson is often missed. Consider that airlines find it necessary to teach parents that if oxygen masks are necessary during flight, they should place the masks over their own noses and mouths first, and only then help their children to secure their masks.

23. I am indebted to Elizabeth Willott for this way of putting the point.

24. For a prominent discussion, see Jon Elster, *Ulysses and the Sirens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); the fact that Elster takes for granted the idea that Ulysses's desire to steer the ship toward the rocks is not a genuine desire is noted, and criticized, by Don Hubin, "On Bindings and By-products: Elster on Rationality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Winter 1986), pp. 82-95.

25. See again her "Moral Saints."

26 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX, 1166b22-24. The quote is drawn from the W. D. Ross translation in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. R. McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

7. I am indebted to David Schmitz for this last point.

28. Catherine Keller discusses Kierkegaard's views in this context in her *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 12.

29. See Soren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, pp. 80-81n.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 81n.

31. Christian theology uses the Greek word *agape* to denote this form of love.

32. But there may be times when a person serves reluctantly because he has a conflict between his love for others and his own self-regarding interests. I discuss such conflicts in the next section.

33. So my position is not so anti-Kantian as it might initially appear. Like Kant, I agree that morality requires service to others, despite one's self-regarding interests. But I see that service as commendable only if it is connected in a certain way not only to that person's will but also to his conception of himself.

34. See Neera Kapur Badhwar, "Altruism Versus Self-Interest: Sometimes a False Dichotomy," in this volume. I am indebted to Badhwar for helping me to develop many of the ideas in this paragraph.

35. I cannot pursue here the difficult question of when (and in what way) human beings should establish connections of love with others. It cannot be morally required that we become friends with everyone, or that everyone become some kind of parent, although the kind of universal connection with fellow human beings experienced by the rescuers does seem to be morally required of us all. I have argued elsewhere that answering this question will involve, among other things, considering issues of justice (to oneself and others); see my "Feminist Contractarianism."

36. Quoted by Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking" in *Women and Values: Readings in Recent Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Marilyn Pearsall (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1986), p. 340; from J. Echegaray, "Severed Heart," quoted by Jessie Bernard in *The Future of Motherhood* (New York: Dial, 1974), p. 4.

37. Quoted by Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking," p. 344; original story told to Ruddick by Miriam Schapiro.

38. This story was told during a sermon by the Rev. John Snow, delivered at the Harvard University Chapel, in 1978. I am quoting from the text of that sermon.

39. Life is filled with such unfairness, but we ought to blame our social systems for some of that unfairness if we live in a society that persistently puts people of a certain class, or gender, or race, or caste in the position of having to choose between caring for those whom they love and developing themselves as persons. Granted, it is hopelessly utopian to strive for a world in which individuals never have to compromise their own development in order to care for others whom they authentically love. But surely it is reasonable at least to strive for a world in which society is not persistently doing things that encourage such dilemmas for only some of its members.

40. Might this be a way to explain why many people regard as morally permissible Gauguin's choice to leave his family and go to Tahiti to develop as an artist? It strikes me as preferable to Bernard Williams's explanation that we commend the choice only because Gauguin prospered as an artist in Tahiti, and thus was "morally lucky." See Williams's discussion of this example in his "Moral Luck," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

41. This is partly because contemporary moral philosophy has been fixated on other-regarding moral duties, to the serious neglect of self-regarding ones. What explains this fixation? A Marxist explanation (which was suggested to me by Christine Korsgaard) is that the call for equal rights by those who have been in lower class, "servant" groups (e.g., women and African Americans) has alarmed the rest of society sufficiently that they have encouraged servile conceptions of morality that would, if accepted by these people, keep them in their servile roles--and such conceptions have (wittingly or unwittingly) been accepted by moral philosophers (who have traditionally come from more powerful, nonservile social groups). An alternative explanation (which is potentially consistent with the first) is that moral philosophy, up until very recently, has been done almost exclusively by males, who commonly hold a Jake-like understanding of morality, and who are attracted to an other-regarding conception of morality as they become aware that their highly self-regarding conception of their connection to other people needs correction (not realizing that many people might need a very different kind of correction). Moreover, recent feminist celebrations of women's propensity to care have certainly encouraged this tendency to think of morality as almost exclusively other-regarding.

42. Thus, I do not mean to be hostile to the currently popular celebration by feminists of women's persistent interest in caring. I only wish to put caring in its proper moral place. There are a number of women that have sounded similar themes recently; e.g., Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); and Marilyn Friedman, "Beyond Caring: The Demoralization of Gender," in *Science, Morality, and Feminism*, ed. Marsha Hanen and Kai Nielsen (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1987). See also my "Feminist Contractarianism."

