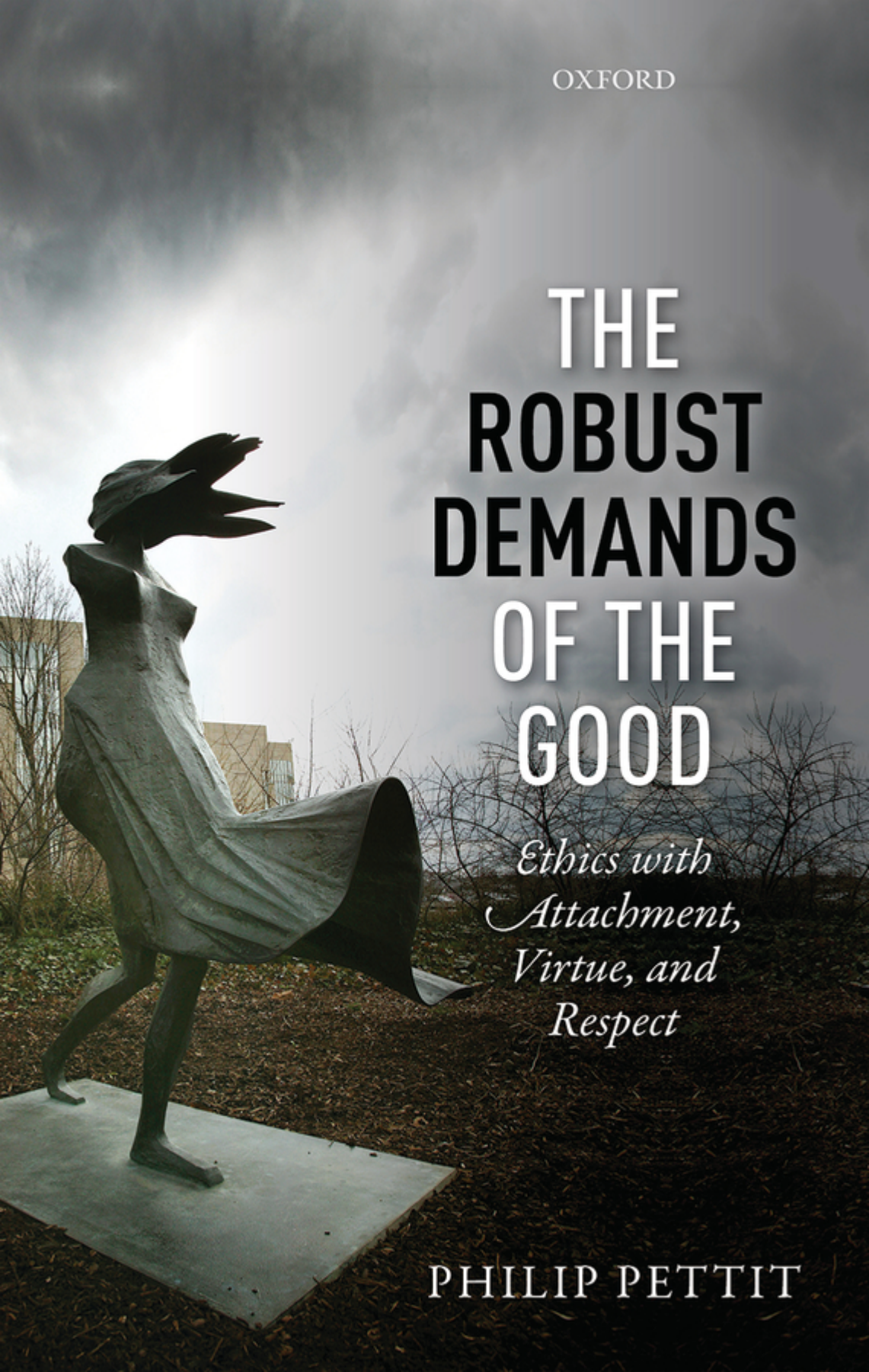
OXFORD
THE ROBUST DEMANDS OF THE GOOD
Ethics with Attachment, Virtue, and Respect
PHILIP PETTIT

The Robust Demands of the Good

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Ethics with Attachment, Virtue, and Respect

Philip Pettit

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Julian Savulescu

Director, Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, University of Oxford

For Tori and Eileen

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Preview

The Guiding Ideas

Three ideas, each from a different domain of philosophy, provide the foundation for this book. The first belongs to normative ethics, the second to metaphysics, the third to the philosophy of mind. It was a sense of convergence between the implications of those ideas that prompted me to propose the robust demands of the good as the topic of the Uehiro Lectures in Ethics that I presented in Oxford in June 2011. The book is the text, now much revised, on which I based those lectures.

The guiding idea from normative ethics is that beyond the satisfaction of basic needs, there is nothing more important to having a good life than enjoying the attachment, the virtue, and the respect of our fellows. And, to look at the message from the other side, there is nothing more central to living a good life—to being and doing good—than reciprocating on those three fronts. In forming and maintaining special attachments, in proving faithful to the demands of virtue in dealing with one another, and in individually and communally sustaining a framework of reciprocal respect, we do incalculable, mutual good. We do a sort of good that is indispensable for our together enjoying a life that is truly worth living.

This is not to say, of course, that it is acceptable in moral life to retreat into a narrow enclave of good friends, or even the broader enclave of a fortunate, prosperous society, remaining indifferent to the demands of our own species elsewhere or indeed of the other species with which we share this planet. And equally it is not to say that it is acceptable in moral life to abjure political awareness and activity, treating the structures under which we conduct our lives as a fixed framework for which we are not responsible. It is just to emphasize that the disinterested efforts that we are required to make on those fronts should not crowd out a

special concern for the quality of our own lives and relationships. This is the moral homeland and the first, though not the only, demand of ethics is to cherish and cultivate it.

The second guiding idea of the book is from metaphysics rather than ethics. Consider the properties that you enable me to enjoy when you give me your attachment as a friend, your honesty as someone who reliably tells the truth, or the respect that allows me to speak my mind or to practise the religion of my choice. In order to provide me with any of those rich goods you have to conduct yourself appropriately in actual circumstances, providing me as the occasion requires with the favour of a friend, the truth-telling that honesty prompts, or the restraint that bespeaks respect. But that in itself is not enough. For in order for me to enjoy the rich good of your friendship, honesty, or respect, what also has to be the case on the occasion in question is that you would have given me favour, truth-telling, or restraint, even if it had been less convenient for you to deliver such a benefit or even if I had been a less congenial beneficiary. The fair-weather friend is not a friend at all, the opportunistic truth-teller is not an honest person, and those who only display restraint when it suits them do not give respect to others.

The lesson of this observation is that in order to give me friendship or honesty or respect, you must provide me with the corresponding benefit—favour, truth-telling, or restraint—reliably or robustly, and not just as a contingent matter: not just as luck or chance or a spasm of good will would have it. In this regard these rich goods have a structure of a kind with the structure that is to be found in the ideal of freedom, as I have argued elsewhere (Pettit 1997c; 2014). As friendship requires robust favour, honesty robust truth-telling, and respect robust restraint, so freedom requires robust non-interference. In each case there is a rich good that I can actually enjoy—friendship or honesty, respect or freedom—only insofar as I robustly enjoy a corresponding, intuitively thinner benefit: a benefit that is not in itself robustly demanding. I enjoy that benefit, not just actually, but across a certain range of possibilities, where the extent of that range determines the degree of robustness with which I enjoy it.

The lesson in the case of freedom is widely acknowledged. While some have argued for a greater, 'neo-republican' degree of robustness, myself included, almost all sides agree that freedom makes robust demands in at least the following, 'neo-liberal' measure. In order for you to give me

freedom in a choice, it must not only be the case that you actually give me the relatively thin benefit of not interfering with the option I actually prefer; it must also be the case that you would not have interfered, had I preferred another option instead. Each option must be an open door, as Isaiah Berlin (1969) puts this requirement of freedom, and not just the option I prefer: not just the door I happen to push on. Freedom in a choice requires not just actual non-interference, then, but non-interference across certain mere possibilities as well: for example, the possibilities in which my preferences between the options change.

This is to say that freedom in a choice requires robust non-interference. And as this is true of freedom, so the claim here is that a similar lesson holds with each of the rich goods of attachment, virtue, and respect. You provide me with freedom insofar as you provide non-interference with the degree of robustness that freedom requires, whatever that is thought to be. And you provide me with friendship, honesty, and respect insofar as you provide favour, truth-telling, or restraint with the degree of robustness that the richer good is taken to require in each case.[1]

The third guiding idea of the book belongs to the philosophy of mind and action rather than normative ethics or the metaphysics of possibility. It is that if we grant the robustly demanding character of attachment, virtue, and respect, and if we take those goods to be central to the good that we can do for one another, then we have to conceive of the actions we take in delivering those goods in a distinctive manner.

What is it that you should be characterized as doing when you give me the favour of a friend, or tell me the truth out of honesty, or give me the restraint required by respect? A natural assumption is that the behaviour should be identified with the act you take in realizing one or another option, where that has little or nothing to do with the intention or motive or policy out of which you take it. It should be identified with giving me favour, telling me the truth, or showing restraint, not with giving me friendship, honesty, or respect. The identity of the act or deed, understood in this way, is independent of the disposition out of which it is performed so that your behaviour in each of our three cases would have

[1] The notion of robustness is now invoked across a great range of disciplines. My sense is that there are quite deep commonalities in the usage of the idea but I do not explore them here. See Calcott 2011; Chandra, Buzi, and Doyle 2011. And for the relevance of robustness or resilience in social science see Pettit 2007b.

been just the same act—and would have had just the same evaluative character as a piece of behaviour—had you taken it out of sheer opportunism, and not out of friendship or honesty or respect.

This view of the identity of behaviour makes dispositions irrelevant to the evaluation of behaviour and allows us to give them importance only in the distinct exercise of evaluating agents. But I prefer to distinguish behaviour into two categories, which I describe respectively as acts or deeds on the one side and actions and doings on the other. And I think that we should recognize three domains of moral assessment, not just two. I describe these as domains of act-evaluation, action-evaluation, and agent-evaluation.

When you give me favour out of friendship, the disposition of friendship does not just trigger the production of that act and, with its work done, leave the scene. The presence of the disposition means that you produced that favour as part of a larger project of controlling for the production of favour across any of a certain range of possibilities—including the circumstances that actually happen to obtain—where I am in need. And to think that what you did in treating me as a friend was just to produce an act of favour, setting aside the role of the disposition, would be to miss out on the fact that you controlled in that same way for giving me favour. We may identify your actions or doings with controlling interventions of this kind, which essentially involve the dispositions out of which you perform them. And we may think of acts or deeds as what you produce in the exercise of such control, where the dispositions out of which they are produced are irrelevant to their identity.

The importance of action-evaluation is not just restricted to actions with independently identifiable, robustly demanding effects like those of friendship, honesty, and respect. Every act is taken out of this or that disposition or complex of dispositions and the action involved has related disposition-dependent effects: effects for which it controls in this or that degree, or with this or that level of robustness. In assessing the action associated with any act, we should take account of the dispositions out of which it is selected and the degree to which it robustly generates good, or indeed bad, effects: the degree to which it controls for such effects. And we should give a kind of importance to this assessment that is different from what it would enjoy if it were just part of the larger exercise of agent-evaluation.

The Plan of the Book

Chapters 1–3 of the book look at the three broad areas—the domains of attachment, virtue, and respect—where, by our common conceptions, agents can and should provide robustly demanding goods for one another. In each case we look at the grounds for thinking that those goods are robustly demanding. We explore the range of possibilities over which they each argue for conferring suitable benefits on one another; this fixes the degree of robustness with which each sort of good makes its demands on us as providers. And we argue that it is important that the benefits be robustly provided, not just on any old basis, but on the basis of a stable disposition: a voluntarily maintained disposition in the case of attachment and virtue, a disposition that is constrained by law in the case of respect.

Chapter 4 explores the reason why robustly demanding goods have an appeal in human life, arguing that they give us an important protection and assurance in dealing with one another within certain relationships and contexts. And then Chapters 5–7 look at important implications for our ethical assumptions of recognizing the place of robustly demanding goods. Chapter 5 looks at the tight connection it establishes between being good—being well disposed towards others—and actually doing good. Chapter 6 charts the divide that the new perspective opens up between doing good and doing evil. And Chapter 7, the final chapter, explores its significance for the relationship between doing good and doing right.

Apart from these chapters—and an overview of the chapters that is provided in a separate section at the end—the book contains three appendices. Appendix I deals with methodological issues raised by my approach to the analysis of attachment, virtue, and respect; Appendix II with a question of how to make room for probability in allowing that such dispositions may promise only a highly probable level of performance; and Appendix III with an intriguing, formal question as to how we should think of the possibility that robustness may iterate, so that the robust provision of a benefit may itself be robust, doubly robust, triply robust, and so on.

It should be clear what Chapters 1–3 attempt, since they focus respectively on the robust demands of attachment, virtue, and respect. But it may be useful to sketch the plot of the final four chapters in a little more

detail. Chapter 4, which focuses on the rationale of robust demands, begins from the observation that to value rich goods is to embrace the project of making the corresponding thin benefits robust. This means that to value rich goods and let them dictate when to provide the associated thin benefits is to spurn the more standard project of promoting them in a way that is sensitive to issues of probability: in the standard version, maximizing the expected realization of the benefits. The observation does not rule out the project of maximizing the expectation of the rich goods themselves but it runs against received assumptions insofar as it restricts the range of the expectational approach. How can this restriction make sense?

The claim is that it makes sense because we each put a premium on being made secure in certain domains against the unconstrained exercise of the free will that we ascribe to one another. The rationale for valuing robustly demanding goods is precisely that they give us this hold on one another's choices, protecting our enjoyment of the corresponding thin benefits: favour in the case of friendship, truth-telling in the case of honesty, and restraint in the case of respect. They guard us against being exposed to the waywardness of a will that might provide them, not as a matter of right, but only as that is prompted by self-interest, sheer caprice, or even detached benevolence.

Chapter 5, which explores the connection between doing good and being good, begins with the observation that to provide the goods of attachment, virtue, and respect for one another means acting out of corresponding dispositions: it requires having those dispositions and being moved by them. This observation means that the nature of the actions we take in such cases is fixed by the dispositions out of which they are performed as well as by the acts produced, so that their moral value is itself dependent on those dispositions.

To act out of a disposition like that of friendship or honesty or respect is not just to produce corresponding effects like favour or truth-telling or non-interference, as we noted above; it is to control for the production of such effects, no matter how the circumstances turn out to be in this or that regard. It is because you control in this sense for the favour you grant me as a friend, indeed control for it across a very wide range of possibilities, that you give me friendship. It is because you control across a similar range for the truth-telling you grant me as an informant that you give me honesty. And it is because you control in that way for the

restraint you show me in various areas of choice that you give me respect. These observations argue for a view of actions as interventions that always control for relevant effects, whether they control in the full protective measure required by attachment, virtue, and respect, or in a lesser degree.

With this notion of actions as controllers in place, we turn in Chapter 6 to some interesting questions about the relationship between doing good and doing evil. The relationship is marked by asymmetry on one side and symmetry on the other. Doing good and doing evil are asymmetrical insofar as there are many cases where doing good consists in controlling for good effects as such, whereas there are few where doing evil consists in controlling for bad effects as such: these are restricted to situations where agents selflessly, even demonically, seek to impose harm on others. This asymmetry is noteworthy for a number of reasons. It connects with some traditional doctrines that treat good as primary and cast evil as just the absence of good. And it helps to explain the psychological finding—the Knobe effect, so called—that people are more ready to treat bad actions as intentional than they are to treat good ones.

Doing good and doing evil display symmetry as distinct from asymmetry insofar as they are governed in another respect by similar principles. The more robustly you control for good effects, the better that is, according to the one principle, even when you do not control in the full, protective, or beneficent measure associated with attachment, virtue, and respect. And the more robustly you control for bad effects, the worse that is, according to a parallel principle, even when you do not control to a fully maleficent, demonic degree. This explains why presumptions like the doctrine of double effect and the principle of action and omission have a certain appeal. Intending to impose a harm rather than foreseeing that what you intend will impose a harm generally means imposing that harm more robustly. And the same goes for actively doing harm to another rather than failing to prevent the harm occurring. But it turns out that the appeal of such presumptions fades in the sorts of cases where they are usually invoked. While they may borrow a certain plausibility from the presumption that the more robust a harm the worse it is, they are not fit to serve as rock-bottom moral guides.

Chapter 7 turns finally to the question of how our discussion bears on determining what option it is right to take in a choice. Any plausible theory of the right has to be sensitive to the values generated by

dispositions of attachment, virtue, and respect. Whether the theory be consequentialist or non-consequentialist, it will acknowledge the agent-relative value that each of us gains in enjoying the attachment, virtue, and respect of others. A consequentialist theory will think it is justifiable to promote such agent-relative values insofar as this makes sense in a currency of presumptively common, agent-neutral values, including the agent-neutral value that consists in friends giving one another favour, informants telling the truth, and people in general displaying a suitable restraint in their interactions. A non-consequentialist theory will argue that it may be justifiable to promote such agent-relative values just insofar as they are concordant values: your favouring your friends is consistent, at least in principle, with my helping mine; your telling the truth to your informants is consistent with my telling the truth to mine; and so on.

Chapter 7 suggests that in practice there may not be a great divide between a consequentialist and a non-consequentialist ethic if each gives importance to the rich goods of attachment, virtue, and respect. While it canvasses some considerations that favour a consequentialist approach, the main focus is on a guidance problem that each approach has to face in giving a deliberative role to the rich goods of attachment, virtue, and respect.

In order for you to provide me with such goods, you have to act out of the corresponding, relatively partisan dispositions. My position as a friend gives me a special claim on your favour; my position as an interlocutor in need of information gives me a special claim to learn the truth from you; and my position as someone vulnerable to your interference gives me a special claim to your restraint. In acting out of friendship or honesty or respect, you honour those claims, giving special significance to my position in relation to you. Thus it will not do for you to give me benefits like favour or truth-telling or restraint out of an independent motivation: say, a consequentialist desire to promote agent-neutral goods or, indeed, a desire to satisfy a higher-level deontological principle like Kant's categorical imperative. But how to act out of dispositions of attachment, virtue, and respect without locking uncritically into those dispositions, thereby running the risk of doing something that is wrong by any plausible criterion, consequentialist or otherwise?

The solution offered to this problem is one of standby guidance. Assume that the theory of the right must allow for people to act routinely

out of dispositions of attachment, virtue, and respect. The only way in which it can avoid locking agents uncritically into those dispositions is to rely on an arrangement under which external cues guide them to decide on appropriate occasions that the disposition should be suspended and replaced by full-scale deliberation. You will help a friend to move an apartment without a second thought—certainly without one thought too many for the preservation of friendship—but you will not necessarily help a friend to move a body; such a request will put on the red lights and call for full deliberative consideration. In normal circumstances you will act spontaneously on dispositions like those of attachment, virtue, and respect, thereby providing for others the rich goods that they promise. But when an external cue indicates that circumstances are not normal, you will suspend such dispositions in favour of comprehensive consideration of the pros and cons. You will not relentlessly monitor the effect of your acting out of the dispositions, since monitoring would compromise the goods they can deliver. But you will remain in standby mode, poised to adopt full deliberative control in the event that the red lights go on.

The image of ethics that emerges from these arguments combines elements of virtue ethics in its stress on the values of attachment, virtue, and respect and elements of Kantianism in its emphasis on actions as controllers: that is, as initiatives that cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of the dispositions or maxims they incorporate. Yet, as suggested in Chapter 7, it may make best sense within a consequentialist rather than a non-consequentialist framework. I did not set out to construct an eclectic picture of this kind. It emerged in the process of exploring the robustness of the demands made by the goods of attachment, virtue, and respect and of its implications for how we should think about the nature and the value of our actions. I would like to be able to think of the end result as an organic hybrid, bred from different traditions, rather than a jerrybuilt compromise between competing approaches.

I hope that these brisk observations help to give a sense of the argument developed in the following pages. The argument is an analogue in the domain of moral philosophy of a position I have tried to develop elsewhere in political philosophy. I have argued in that domain, as already mentioned, that we should understand political freedom as making especially robust demands and I have explored the possibility of building a unified philosophy—a theory of democratic, social, and global justice—out of

the requirements of neo-republican freedom alone (Pettit 2014). The focus of this book means that I generally ignore political issues, although the discussion of respect in Chapter 3 incorporates a discussion of the robust sort of freedom—freedom as non-domination—that the republican tradition casts as the cardinal political ideal.

1

The Robust Demands of Attachment

In Oscar Wilde's comedy, 'The Importance of Being Earnest', Jack Worthing uses the pseudonym 'Ernest' on his visits to London, as he wishes to retain a certain anonymity in the big city. Under that pseudonym he attracts the attentions of Gwendolen, the cousin of his friend, Algernon, and they fall in love. Or do they? Gwendolen's attachment may not earn the name of love, since it transpires that it is only as deep as Jack's pseudonym. As she explains in response to his confession of attachment: 'my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence.' And as if that were not sufficiently bewildering, she adds: 'The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you'. Jack remonstrates with her, of course, explaining that he would much rather be called 'Jack'. But Gwendolen will have none of it, waxing ever more enthusiastic about the name of 'Ernest'. 'It suits you perfectly', she says. 'It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.'

Does Gwendolen really love Jack? Well, if she does, she has a strange way of thinking about it and that is part of what is so funny about Jack's predicament. What makes it even funnier is that he immediately wonders if he should be re-christened 'Ernest', as if that would put the situation right. The theme is amusing, because the passionate degree of love that Gwendolen declares for Jack fits ill with its turning on the fortuity of his name. It seems a shame to spoil the joke by philosophical reflection but that, alas, is what our project requires me to do.

Love's Robust Demands

Wilde's comedy teaches us that while the good of love—the good that consists in enjoying the love of another—certainly requires the affectionate, invested concern that Gwendolen declares and shows for Jack, it also requires something more. If you love me, then on any actual occasion where it is appropriate you have to show me care, to use a single term for a complex form of indulgence in which you discriminate in my favour. You have to register and respond to the stimulus of my needs and wishes in the partisan manner we expect of a lover. But under our received conception of love the care you offer me in this way must not be premised on exactly how I happen to be: it must be able to survive a variety of possible changes in me, among them the change or apparent change in the name I bear.

If you love me, so the lesson goes, not only must you feel and offer care that would survive sickness as well as health, poverty as well as affluence, to cite the standard vows. You must also feel and offer me care independently of how I currently look, what I currently do, or how I am currently called. Shakespeare already made the point in Sonnet 116: 'Love is not love, Which alters when it alteration finds'.

The lesson, in philosophical terms, is that love is a robustly demanding good. It requires the actual provision of care in response to the needs or wishes of the beloved. But it also requires that this care should not depend on the beloved having certain contingent features such as bearing a favoured name. The care provided should not be forthcoming just so long as those contingencies obtain; it should be fit to survive over possibilities, however improbable, in which they vary. Love makes robust demands, requiring the provision of care in response to relevant prompts or stimuli, not just in actual circumstances, but in a range of merely possible scenarios.

But this observation only directs us to one respect in which love is robustly demanding. If the care you give me amounts to giving me love, then it ought to be forthcoming, not just as things actually are, and not just under variations where there are certain changes in me, the beloved, but also under variations where there are certain changes in you, the lover. Thus, if you give love, then the care that you offer ought to persist in possible scenarios where it is less easy for you to show me care or where care does not deliver the motivating reward of satisfying

independent needs. If you offered me care only when it fitted with your independent, self-interested inclinations, then by criteria we all recognize it would not be loving care. It would be opportunistic in a way that is intuitively inconsistent with love.

Under a presumptively shared conception, then, love requires the care that you actually provide, under relevant primers or triggers, prompts or cues, to be able to survive various possible changes on my part and on yours. Broadly characterized, those include changes in my congeniality, on the one side, and changes in your convenience, on the other. The care you provide does not constitute love and does not give me love if it is delivered only contingently on my remaining suitably congenial or on your continuing to find it convenient to provide the care. If it is to constitute love in actual circumstances, then the care has to materialize under a range of possible variations affecting me or you in these ways. This is remarkable since some of these variations, as the example with the change of name makes clear, may be quite unlikely ever to be realized.

The explanation for why love makes these robust demands is that there are presumptive reasons of love—reasons salient under a shared conception of the good—that explain why you ought to provide me with loving care in response to prompts like my needs or wishes. Those reasons give support to acting on the prompts, not just under the circumstances that actually obtain, but across a variety of other possible scenarios that might have obtained instead. The relevant scenarios will certainly include possibilities in which my congeniality or your convenience differs in certain ways. And of course they will include any of an endless range of possible scenarios in which our situation differs in collateral, manifestly irrelevant respects; for example, scenarios where the Tower of Pisa straightens up, the United Nations moves, or the average sea level rises.

Love is a rich good, we might say, insofar as it is robustly demanding. And the care that goes with love is a thin benefit insofar as it makes no such demands. In order for me to enjoy care at your hands, you have to make things thus and so only in the actual circumstances in which we interact. In order for me to enjoy love at your hands, you also have to make things thus and so in a range of possible scenarios, some of them very improbable. While actual care itself requires nothing counterfactual, actual love requires counterfactual as well as actual care.

These observations are sufficient to explain the sense in which love is a robustly demanding good. But they leave many questions unanswered, and the remainder of the chapter will be given to addressing those questions—and the parallel questions raised by other attachments—as well as commenting on some more general issues that the answers raise. There are three broad questions addressed. They bear, in turn, on the range of possibilities over which love's demands are robust and the conception of that good that they reflect; on the executor of those demands: that is, the factor required to ensure their satisfaction; and on the particularistic and norm-governed character of the demands themselves.

The Range of Love's Demands

We have seen that the value of love, as we generally think of it, provides a reason for your responding to the stimulus of my needs or wishes by providing me with care. But according to virtually all moral theories the reason it constitutes is only a *pro tanto* reason to provide that care. It may be outweighed in some circumstances by the balance of other values and other reasons; while some reasons may stack up on its side, the reasons on the other may have greater aggregate weight. This will be so, it is worth noticing, no matter how the relationship between value and reason is understood. That which is valuable may be taken to identify what there is reason to do, as under one standard approach, or what there is reason to do may be taken to identify that which is valuable, as under the standard alternative (Scanlon 1998).

We describe the reasons you may have to respond appropriately to the primers of care as reasons of love. The fact that these reasons may be outweighed in many circumstances means that in order for you to count in any actual situation as giving me the benefit or good of love—in order for you to treat me as a lover there—it cannot be required that you would give me care in all the possible variations that preserved the personal primers for care. Many of those situations will be ones where reasons as a whole argue against providing me with care. And it would be strange to think that in order to treat me as a lover in giving me care, it must be that you would give me that same care even in scenarios where love's reasons were outweighed by the balance of other considerations.

Suppose that you give me care in a situation where I am in need of consolation over some loss like the death of a pet. And suppose that you do this in response to the priming effect of that need, more or less heedless of issues of congeniality or convenience or collateral circumstance. Would your care fail to constitute love if it is the case that while you would provide that care across various scenarios where the priming remains in place, you would not do so in a situation where, for example, it required denying help to someone in danger of death? Surely not. By almost all accounts, you could treat me as a lover without the care you give me being robust over such an extreme possibility.

The observation that love's reasons may be outweighed in the balance of other considerations raises a question about actual circumstances as well as possible. We know from the observation that while love requires you to provide care in actual circumstances only when love's reasons support that provision, you may still provide actual care even when those reasons are outweighed. We have to decide, then, on whether or not to assume in general that when you give me care in actual circumstances, you do so on the basis of reasons of love that are not outweighed by other considerations. I propose that we do make that assumption, stipulating that when you care for me under actual conditions, you do so in a way that is supported by reasons of love. This will help to make the presentation more straightforward and to offer a simpler characterization of the good that love constitutes.[1]

With this assumption in place, we can turn to the question about the range of love's demands. What is the range of circumstances, actual and possible, over which you are required to maintain care if you are to count as giving me love or, equivalently, treating me properly as a lover? How far, in Shakespeare's formula, does love have to constitute 'an ever-fixed mark, That looks on tempests and is never shaken'? Suppose that you actually give me care—say, consolation for the death of my pet—in

[1] What of the case where you actually give me care in a way that is suitably primed but not suitably supported by reasons of love; say, where you give me care in a heroic fashion? What is required in order for this provision of care to constitute love? We need only note that in order to give me love in the actual circumstances you could hardly be required to continue to provide that care in possible variations where priming is preserved but support lacking. It would be outrageous to think that whether your heroic effort constitutes an act of love depends on whether you would continue to be heroic. It would surely be sufficient that you would continue to provide the care, so long as support as well as priming was present.

response to suitable priming and with suitable support. What are the possible variations on that scenario under which your care has to remain in place in order for it to be true that you give me love? The remarks we have made so far point us towards two constraints on those possibilities, one related to priming, the other to support.

The priming constraint is that you must provide me with care only in variations on the actual scenario that preserve the personal primers or prompts, the stimuli or cues, that actually move you to offer me care. The support constraint is that you should provide me with care only in variations that preserve the support that love's reasons give the provision of care: that is, in variations where love's reasons continue to outweigh the balance of competing considerations.

This support constraint means that it is not required that you give me that care even in a possible variation on actual circumstances where someone's life or fortune is at stake. And equally the constraint means that it is not required that you give me that care, even if it is your own life or fortune that is at risk. I would scarcely conclude that you are not treating me as a lover in giving me consolation over the loss of a pet just because I learn that you would not provide that care in a situation where your own life or fortune was in the balance. That you had to bear such a cost would not amount, by received assumptions, to its just being inconvenient to provide the care.

By the emerging account, you give me love only if you give me care with a certain degree of robustness in the presence of suitable priming and support. You must give me the care in actual circumstances, and across a range of variations on those circumstances, all of which pass the priming constraint, on the one side, the support constraint, on the other. Are you required to give me care across all the variations that pass both constraints? No, as we shall see later; there is also a constraint of modesty that the variations must satisfy.

Although the priming and support constraints combine in a similar way to put a limit on the scenarios over which love requires you to provide robust care, priming and support play quite different roles in your motivation and deliberation as a lover. The priming serves as a generator or motivator of the response, which is essential to your counting as a lover; the support serves in the role of a filter that may constrain the generation: it is a proviso whose failure to be satisfied can reasonably inhibit the response. You cannot give me love without deliberatively

registering the prompt of my need or wish; in that sense the action of giving me love is stimulus-bound. But you may give me love without actively registering that love's reasons are not outweighed. It will be enough that they are not actually outweighed, whether or not you register that that is so.

It would be mistaken, by this account, to require you to have positively established that love's reasons are not outweighed before actually offering me the care for which those reasons argue. Imposing that requirement would fail to distinguish between the generative role of suitable priming and the filtering role of suitable support. It would suggest, implausibly, that lovers should be as careful about erring on the side of generosity in treating a beloved as they are about erring on the side of stinginess. In order to preserve the different roles of priming and support, we have to take love to require that lovers should provide care on the default assumption, not the confirmed assumption, that the care they offer is suitably supported. They should refuse the benefit of that care when they have conscious reason to believe that the assumption is false. But they should not be required to check in every case on whether it is.

This raises the question as to what is required of you by the independent and intuitive desideratum—the standard associated with being a moral person—of acting in accord with the balance of reasons. Does this demand require you, implausibly, to look at all the reasons relevant to the provision of care before you allow yourself to act as a lover? And is that consistent with acting in a way that is primed by the needs or wishes of the beloved? We return to that problem in Chapter 7 when we look at the relationship between doing good—say, acting as love requires—and doing right.

The Good of Love

This gives us a common structural conception of what the good of love ideally requires. On this conception that good consists, first, in giving me suitably primed and supported care in actual circumstances and, second, in maintaining that care over a range of possible variations on those circumstances, albeit only ones that preserve that priming and support.

This common conception of the good of love is structural in character, because different societies and cultures may have different standards of support and may hold by different substantive interpretations of what