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THE FAINTEST PASSION*

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Presidential Address delivered before the Eighty-Eighth Annual Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in New York City, December 29, 1991.

1. My title is from an observation by A.E. Housman. “The faintest of all human passions” he wrote, “is the love of truth.”¹ There are two senses in which a passion may be faint: it may be weak, or it may only be difficult to discern. Housman certainly intended the former. But be that as it may, there is a passion that, in both senses, is even fainter than our love of truth. Surely the very faintest human passion—both the least salient and the least robust—is our love of the truth about ourselves.

The ability both to believe something and at the same time to conceal this from oneself is a bit paradoxical. Philosophers have found it difficult to explain how we do this. There is no problem, however, in understanding *why*. The facts about ourselves are often hard to take. When they move us to self-deception, it is because we find them irreconcilable with what we want to believe. We hide from the truth, it seems clear, because it conflicts with our self-love. My theme today, however, is not self-deception. I am aiming at another enemy of the truth about ourselves—one whose relation to self-love is rather more complex and uncertain. My approach will be somewhat oblique. I begin with a question about lying.

2. When we object to being the victim of a lie, just what is it that we find so objectionable? I am not asking why lying is wrong. My question has to do with the morality of lying, but with our experience of it. What offends us when we are offended that someone has told us a lie? What accounts for how the lying affects us?

Much is often made of the notion that lying undermines the cohesion of human society. Kant says that “without truth social intercourse and conversation become valueless.”² And he argues that because it threatens society in this way, “a lie always harms another; if not some particular man, still it harms mankind generally. . . .”³ Montaigne makes a similar claim: “our intercourse being carried on solely by means of the word, he who falsifies that is a traitor to society.”⁴ “Lying is an accursed vice,” Montaigne declares; and then he adds, warming rather frenetically to his subject, that “if we did but recognize the horror and gravity of it, we should punish it with flames more justly than other crimes.”⁵

* I dedicate this address to my first teachers in philosophy—George Boas and Albert Hammond, of blessed memory.

Montaigne and Kant certainly have a point, but they exaggerate. Profitable social intercourse does not really depend, as they maintain, upon people telling each other the truth; nor does conversation lose its value when people lie. The actual quantity of lying is enormous, after all, and yet social life goes on. That people often lie hardly renders it impossible to benefit from living with them. It only means that we have to be careful. We can quite successfully negotiate our way through an environment full of lies, as long as we can reasonably trust our own ability to discriminate more or less effectively between instances in which people are lying and those in which they are telling the truth. General confidence in the honesty of others is not essential, as long as we are justified in having confidence in ourselves.

In any case, however, it is not because we think that lies threaten or encumber the order of society that we are upset by them in the first place. Our concern when someone lies to us is not the concern of a citizen. What is most immediately aroused in our reaction to the liar is not public spirit. The reaction is personal. As a rule, we are dismayed far less by the harm the liar may have done to others than by his conduct towards ourselves. What stirs us against him, whether or not he has somehow managed to betray all of mankind, is that he has certainly injured us.

Lying is a rather complicated act. Someone who tells a lie invariably attempts to deceive his victims about matters of two distinct kinds: first, about the state of affairs to which he explicitly refers and of which he is purporting to give a correct account; second, about his own beliefs and what is going on in his mind. In addition to misrepresenting a fact about the world, then, the liar also misrepresents various facts about himself. Each of these aspects of what he does is significant in its own way.

First of all, the liar aims at inducing his victims to regard as real a world that he himself has designed. To the extent that he is successful in this, he is the originator of what they take to be reality. How the facts appear to them is determined by what he says. Thus he arrogates to himself something like the divine prerogative of creative speech, simulating the omnipotent will by which God (according to *Genesis*) brought a world into being merely by stipulating that it should be so. This arrogance offends our pride. We are angered by the liar's insulting effort to usurp control over the conditions in which we understand ourselves to live.

Secondly, by imposing a false world on his victims, the liar excludes them from his world. Insofar as he places them within an understanding of reality that differs from his own, he separates them radically from himself. This is what leads Adrienne Rich to observe, with poetic exactitude, that "the liar leads an existence of unutterable loneliness."⁶ The loneliness is precisely *unutterable* because the liar cannot even reveal that he *is* lonely without disclosing that he has lied. By hiding his own thoughts, he makes it impossible for others to be in touch with him—to understand him or to respond to him as he really is, or even to be aware that they are not doing so. This forecloses a mode of human intimacy that is both elementary and normal, and for this reason it too is insulting. Like his presuming to exercise the creative prerogative of a god, the liar's refusal to permit himself to be known is an injury to his victim's pride.

3. In certain cases, lies cause a deeper damage. Adrienne Rich says that “to discover that one has been lied to in a personal relationship leads one to feel a little crazy.”⁷ Here again, her observation is perspicuous and exact. When we are dealing in an important matter with someone whom we hardly know, we can be confident that what he says coincides with what he believes only on the basis of a more or less deliberate evaluation of his reliability; and ordinarily, this evaluation only covers specific communications. With our close friends, as a rule, both of these conditions are relaxed. We suppose that our friends are generally truthful with us; and we take this pretty much for granted. We tend to trust whatever they say; and we do so, mainly, not on the basis of a particular calculation that they are telling the truth, but because we feel comfortable with them. As we familiarly put it, “we just know they wouldn’t lie to us.”

With friends, the presumption of intimacy has become natural. It derives most immediately from our feelings—that is, from our sense of our own state, rather than from an evaluation of pertinent evidence about them. It would be too much to say that a person’s inclination to trust his friends belongs to his essential nature. But it could properly enough be said that trusting them has come to be second nature to him.

This is why finding that we have been lied to by a friend engenders a feeling of being crazy. The discovery exposes something about ourselves more disturbing than that we have merely miscalculated or made an error of judgment. It reveals that our own nature (i.e., our second nature) is unreliable, leading us to count on people who cannot be trusted. Needless to say, the deception of a friend implies a fault in the one who tells the lie. But it also shows that the victim is defective too. The liar betrays him, but he is betrayed by his own feelings as well.

Self-betrayal pertains to craziness because it is a hallmark of the irrational. The essence of rationality is to be consistent; and being consistent, in action or in thought, means proceeding so as not to defeat oneself. Aristotle explains that an agent acts rationally insofar as he conforms his actions to the mean. Suppose that for the sake of good health, a person follows a diet either so meager or so indulgent that it actually leads him away from his goal of well-being. It is in this self-betrayal that the irrationality of his divergence from the mean consists. Intellectual activity is similarly undermined by logical incoherence. When a line of thought generates a contradiction, its further progressive elaboration is blocked. In whatever direction the mind turns, it is driven back: it must affirm what it has already rejected, or deny what it has already affirmed. Like behavior that frustrates its own ambition, contradictory thinking is irrational because it betrays itself.

When a person discovers that someone he had found it natural to count upon has lied to him, this shows him that he cannot rely upon his own settled feelings of trust. He sees that his sense of whom he can have confidence in has betrayed him. It has led him to miss the truth rather than to attain it. His assumption that he could guide himself by it has turned out to be self-defeating, and hence irrational. He may well feel, accordingly, a little crazy.

4. According to Aristotle, philosophy in the ancient world began in wonder.⁸ In the modern world, of course, it began in doubt. These are both attitudes of uncertainty. We are moved to wonder when the phenomena are unclear. On the other hand, the uneasiness that lying may arouse in us, concerning our own cognitive capacities, is more like the mode of uncertainty that beset Descartes. What disturbed him was not how to think about the phenomena, but what to make of himself. The doubt in which his epistemological and metaphysical enterprise began was self-doubt.

The ancient philosophers, Aristotle explains, “philosophised in order to escape from ignorance.”⁹ Descartes was moved to philosophise less by ignorance than by anxiety, less by a lack of knowledge than by a lack of self-confidence. What worried him was that he might be by nature so profoundly defective that his intellectual ambitions would be betrayed by the very cognitive capacities upon which he needed to rely in pursuing them. “How do we know,” he asked, “that we have not been made in such a way that we constantly deceive ourselves?” In other words, how do we know that rationality is possible at all? Descartes’s particular fear was that we might perceive, with equally irresistible clarity and distinctness, both that certain propositions are true and that they are not true. That would show reason to be hopelessly divided. It would mean that anyone who attempted persistently to be rational would end up not knowing what to think.

Spinoza defines a condition of our affective nature that is analogous to this division within reason. The “constitution of the mind which arises from two contrary affects,” he says, “is called vacillation of mind, which is therefore related to the affects as doubt is to the imagination.”¹⁰ Now I want to consider a somewhat different, but still analogous, type of psychic instability or conflict. I shall call it “ambivalence.” Here what is divided is neither a person’s reason nor his affects, but his will. Insofar as someone is ambivalent, he is moved by incompatible preferences or attitudes regarding his affects or his desires or regarding other elements of his psychic life. This volitional division keeps him from settling upon or from tolerating any coherent affective or motivational identity. It means that he does not know what he really wants.¹¹

Ambivalence is constituted by conflicting volitional movements or tendencies, either conscious or unconscious, that meet two conditions. First, they are inherently and hence unavoidably opposed; that is, they do not just happen to conflict on account of contingent circumstances. Second, they are both wholly internal to a person’s will rather than alien to him; that is, he is not passive with respect to them. An example of ambivalence might be provided by someone who is moved to commit himself to a certain career, or to a certain person, and also moved to refrain from doing so.

Conflicts involving first-order psychic elements alone—for instance, between an attraction and an aversion to the same object or action—do not pertain to the will at all. They are not volitional, but merely impulsive or sentimental. Conflicts that pertain to the will arise out of a person’s higher-order, reflective attitudes. But even conflicts that do implicate a person’s will are nonetheless distinct from ambivalence

if some of the psychic forces they involve are exogenous—that is, if the person is not identified with them and they are, in that sense, external to his will.

An addict who struggles sincerely against his addiction is contending with a force by which he does not want to be moved and which is therefore alien to him. Since the conflict is not wholly within his will, he is not volitionally divided or ambivalent. The unwilling addict is wholeheartedly on one side of the conflict from which he suffers, and not at all on the other. The addiction may defeat his will, but does not as such disrupt its unity.

A person is ambivalent, then, only if he is indecisive concerning whether to be for or against a certain psychic position. Now this kind of indecisiveness is as irrational, in its way, as holding contradictory beliefs. The disunity of an ambivalent person's will prevents him from effectively pursuing and satisfactorily attaining his goals. Like conflict within reason, volitional conflict leads to self-betrayal and self-defeat. The trouble is in each case the same: a sort of incoherent greed—trying to have things both ways—which naturally makes it impossible to get anywhere. The flow of volitional or of intellectual activity is interrupted and reversed; movement in any direction is truncated and turned back. However a person starts out to decide or to think, he finds that he is getting in his own way.

The extent and the severity of ambivalence nowadays are probably due in some part to conditions especially characteristic of our time. But volitional disunity itself is, of course, nothing special and nothing new. St. Augustine observed that “it is . . . no strange phenomenon partly to will to do something and partly to will not to do it.” Division of the will, he believed, is “a disease of the mind” from which we suffer in punishment for Original Sin.¹² At least in his view, then, ambivalence in one degree or another is inherent in the destiny of man.

5. If ambivalence is a disease of the will, the health of the will is to be unified and in this sense wholehearted. A person is volitionally robust when he is wholehearted in his higher-order attitudes and inclinations, in his preferences and decisions, and in other movements of his will. This unity entails no particular level of excitement or warmth. Wholeheartedness is not a measure of the firmness of a person's volitional state, or of his enthusiasm. What is at issue is the organization of the will, not its temperature.

As in the case of the unwilling addict, the unity of a healthy will is quite compatible with certain kinds of virulent psychic conflict. Wholeheartedness does not require that a person be altogether untroubled by inner opposition to his will. It just requires that, with respect to any such conflict, he himself be fully resolved. This means that he must be resolutely on the side of one of the forces struggling within him and not on the side of any other. Concerning the opposition of these forces, he has to know where he himself stands. In other words, he must know what he wants.

To the extent that a person is ambivalent, he does not really know what he wants. This ignorance or uncertainty differs from straightforwardly cognitive deficiency. There may be no information concerning his will that the ambivalent

person lacks. The problem is rather that since his mind is not made up, his will is in fact unformed. He is volitionally inchoate and indeterminate.

This is why ambivalence, like self-deception, is an enemy of truth. The ambivalent person does not hide from some truth or conceal it from himself; he does not prevent the truth from being known. Instead, his ambivalence stands in the way of there being a certain truth about him at all. He is inclined in one direction, and he is inclined in a contrary direction as well; and his attitude towards these inclinations is unsettled. Thus, it is true of him neither that he prefers one of his alternatives, nor that he prefers the other, nor that he likes them equally.

Since ambivalence is not a cognitive deficiency, it cannot be overcome merely by acquiring additional information. It also cannot be overcome volitionalistically. A person cannot make himself volitionally determinate, and thereby create a truth where there was none before, merely by an "act of will." In other words, he cannot make himself wholehearted just by a psychic movement that is fully under his immediate voluntary control.

The concept of reality is fundamentally the concept of something which is independent of our wishes and by which we are therefore constrained. Thus, reality cannot be under our absolute and unmediated volitional control. The existence and the character of what is real are necessarily indifferent to mere acts of our will.

Now this must hold as well for the reality of the will itself. A person's will is real only if its character is not absolutely up to him. It must be unresponsive to his sheer fiat. It cannot be unconditionally within his power to determine what his will is to be, as it is within the unconstrained power of an author of fiction to render determinate—in whatever way he likes—the volitional characteristics of the people in his stories.

Indeterminacy in the life of a real person cannot be overcome by preemptive decree. To be sure, a person may attempt to resolve his ambivalence by deciding to adhere unequivocally to one of his alternatives rather than to the other; and he may believe that in thus making up his mind he has eliminated the division in his will and become wholehearted. Whether such changes have actually occurred, however, is another matter. When the chips are down he may discover that he is not, after all, decisively moved by the preference or motive he supposed he had adopted. Remember Hotspur's reply when Owen Glendower boasted "I can call spirits from the vasty deep." He said: "Why, so can I, or so can any man; but will they come when you do call for them?"¹³ The same goes for us. We do not control, by our voluntary command, the spirits within our own vasty deeps. We cannot have, simply for the asking, whatever will we want.

We are not fictitious characters, who have sovereign authors; nor are we gods, who can be authors of more than fiction. Therefore, we cannot be authors of ourselves. Reducing our own volitional indeterminacy, and becoming truly wholehearted, is not a matter of telling stories about our lives. Nor, unless we wish to be as foolish as Owen Glendower, can we propose to shape our wills by stipulating peremptorily at some moment that now we are no longer divided but have become solidly resolute. We can be only what nature and life make us, and that is not so readily up to us.

This may appear to conflict with the notion that our wills are ultimately free. But what is the freedom of the will? A natural and useful way of understanding it is that a person's will is free to the extent that he has whatever will he wants. Now if this means that his will is free only if it is under his entirely unmediated voluntaristic control, then a free will can have no genuine reality; for reality entails resistance to such control. Must we, then, regard our wills either as unfree or as unreal?

The dilemma can be avoided if we construe the freedom of someone's will as requiring not that he originate or control what he wills, but that he be wholehearted in it. If there is no division within a person's will, it follows that the will he has is the will he wants. His wholeheartedness means exactly that there is in him no endogenous desire to be volitionally different than he is. Although he may be unable to create in himself a will other than the one he has, his will is free at least in the sense that he himself does not oppose or impede it.

6. Being wholehearted is not always warranted. There are circumstances in which it is only reasonable, no matter how uncomfortable it may be, for a person to be drawn in several directions at once. But while accepting ambivalence may sometimes be helpful or wise, it is never desirable as such or for its own sake. And to remain persistently ambivalent, concerning issues of substantial importance in the conduct of life, is a significant disability. Moral and political theorists often emphasize how valuable it is for people to have extensive repertoires of worthwhile options from which they are free to choose. The actual value to people of possessing these options depends to a large extent, however, upon their capacities for wholeheartedness.

After all, what good is it for someone to be free to make significant choices if he does not know what he wants and if he is unable to overcome his ambivalence? What is the point of offering a beguiling variety of alternatives to people who can respond to them only with irresolute vacillation? For someone who is unlikely to have any stable preferences or goals, the benefits of freedom are, at the very least, severely diminished. The opportunity to act in accordance with his own inclinations is a doubtful asset for an individual whose will is so divided that he is moved both to decide for a certain alternative and to decide against it. Neither of the alternatives can satisfy him, since each entails frustration of the other. The fact that he is free to choose between them is likely only to make his anguish more poignant and more intense.

Unless a person is capable of a considerable degree of volitional unity, he cannot make coherent use of freedom. Those who care about freedom must therefore be concerned about more than the availability of attractive opportunities among which people can choose as they please. They must also concern themselves with whether people can come to know what they want to do with the freedom they enjoy. It may be, as St. Augustine supposed, that a thoroughly unified will comes only as a gift of God. Still, the extent to which people suffer from volitional indeterminacy is not entirely independent of the social, political, and cultural

conditions in which they live. Those conditions may either facilitate or impede the development of unambivalent attitudes, preferences, and goals.

7. So far I have provided for wholeheartedness only a brief conceptual sketch, elaborated primarily in relation to an equally sketchy account of the notion of ambivalence. Now I will try to develop a more fully articulated understanding of what it is to be wholehearted, by construing it as tantamount to the enjoyment of a kind of self-satisfaction. In speaking of self-satisfaction, I do not mean to refer pejoratively to a state of narcissistic complacency or smugness. The state I have in mind—a state of satisfaction with the condition of the self—is utterly inoffensive and benign. Clarifying its structure will actually help not only to illuminate what is involved in being wholehearted. It will also help in coping with an alleged difficulty in hierarchical analyses of the self. And I believe that, in addition, it will enhance our understanding of a rather troublesome notion—the notion of identification—that is fundamental to any philosophy of mind and of action.

Consider a person who believes something wholeheartedly, who is wholehearted in some feeling or attitude, or who intends wholeheartedly to perform a certain action. In what does his wholeheartedness with respect to these psychic elements consist? It consists in his being fully satisfied that they, rather than others that inherently (i.e., non-contingently) conflict with them, should be among the causes and considerations that determine his cognitive, affective, attitudinal, and behavioral processes.

This is compatible with his also being wholehearted with respect to other psychic elements, which contingently (i.e., due to particular circumstances) conflict with these and which are more important to him. The fact that a person is satisfied with an intention, a feeling, or a belief does not entail that he is committed to acting on it. Being wholehearted with respect to one element is consistent with assigning a higher priority to another. Someone may be satisfied to have both elements play active roles in his psychic economy, though not roles that are equally urgent or compelling. The element that is less important to him is not necessarily alien, threatening him from outside the structure of his self. It may be as much a part of him as those other elements that are more important parts of him.¹⁴

Now what does it mean to say of a person that he is satisfied with his psychic condition, or with some element or aspect of it? It does not mean that he considers it the best condition available to him. Some people may be so demanding that they are never willing to settle for anything less than that. But as a rule, satisfaction is not conditioned by an uncompromising ambition to maximize. People often settle gladly for less than what they think it would be possible for them to get. From the fact that someone is satisfied with his condition, then, it does not follow that no alteration of it would be acceptable to him. It goes almost without saying, of course, that he would be satisfied with an improved condition. However, he might also be satisfied even with a condition inferior to the one he is in.

What satisfaction does entail is an absence of restlessness or resistance. A satisfied person might willingly accept a change in his condition, but he has no active interest in bringing about a change. Even if he recognizes that he could be better

off, the possibility does not engage his concern: being better off is simply not interesting or important to him. This is not because he believes that becoming better off would be too costly, or because it is too uncertain. It is just that, as a sheer matter of fact, he has no ambition for improvement; he accepts the state of things as it is, without reservation and without any practical interest in how it compares with other possibilities. Perhaps his condition could be improved at no net cost, and perhaps he is aware of this, but he simply does not care.¹⁵

To be satisfied with something does not require that a person have any particular belief about it, nor any particular feeling or attitude or intention. It does not require, for instance, that he regard it as satisfactory, or that he accede to it with approval, or that he intend to leave it as it stands. There is nothing that he needs to think, or to adopt, or to accept; it is not necessary for him to do anything at all. This is important, because it explains why there is no danger here of a problematic regress.

Suppose that being satisfied did require a person to have, as an essential constitutive condition of his satisfaction, some deliberate psychic element—some deliberate attitude or belief or feeling or intention. This element could not be one with which the person is at all dissatisfied. How could someone be wholehearted with respect to one psychic element by virtue of being halfhearted with respect to another? So if being satisfied required some element as a constituent, satisfaction with respect to one matter would depend upon satisfaction with respect to another; satisfaction with respect to the second would depend upon satisfaction with respect to still a third; and so on, endlessly. Satisfaction with one's self requires, then, no adoption of any cognitive, attitudinal, affective, or intentional stance. It does not require the performance of a particular act; and it also does not require any deliberate abstention. Satisfaction is a state of the entire psychic system—a state constituted just by the absence of any tendency or inclination to alter its condition.

Of course, a person may make the judgment that he is well enough off; and on that basis he may decide to refrain from doing anything to improve his situation. Making this judgment or this decision does not, however, either make him satisfied or entail that he is satisfied. His decision to refrain from trying to change things is, in effect, a decision on his part to act *as though* he is satisfied. Refraining from trying to change things *simulates* the equilibrium in which satisfaction consists. But to simulate satisfaction is not the same as being satisfied. A person is actually satisfied only when the equilibrium is not contrived or imposed but is integral to his psychic condition—that is, when that condition is settled and unreserved apart from any effort by him to make it so.

Being genuinely satisfied is not a matter, then, of choosing to leave things as they are or of making some judgment or decision concerning the desirability of change. It is a matter of simply *having no interest* in making changes. What it requires is that psychic elements of certain kinds *do not occur*. But while the absence of such elements does not require either deliberate action or deliberate restraint, their absence must nonetheless be reflective. In other words, the fact that the person is not moved to change things must derive from his understanding and evaluation of how things are with him. Thus, the essential non-occurrence is neither deliberately

contrived nor wantonly unselfconscious. It develops and prevails as an unmanaged consequence of the person's appreciation of his psychic condition.¹⁶

8. Let me try briefly to sketch how this bears on the hierarchical approach to analysis of the self and on the notion of identification. On hierarchical accounts, a person identifies with one rather than with another of his own desires by virtue of wanting to be moved to action by the first desire rather than by the second. For example, someone who is trying to quit smoking is identified with his first-order desire not to smoke, rather than with his concurrent first-order desire for another cigarette, if he wants the desire not to smoke to be the one that effectively guides his conduct. But what determines whether he identifies with this second-order preference?

Considered in itself, after all, his desire to defeat the desire to smoke is just another desire. How can it claim to be constitutive of what he really wants? The mere fact that it is a second-order desire surely gives it no particular authority. And it will not help to look for a third-order desire that serves to identify the person with this second-order preference. Obviously, the same question would arise concerning the authority of that desire; so we would have to find an even higher-order desire; and so on endlessly. The whole approach appears to be doomed.

Hierarchical accounts of the identity of the self do not presume, however, that a person's identification with some desire consists simply in the fact that he *has* a higher-order desire by which the first desire is endorsed. The endorsing higher-order desire must be, in addition, a desire with which the person is *satisfied*. And since (as I tried to explain earlier) satisfaction with one psychic element does not require satisfaction with any other, being satisfied with a certain desire does not entail an endless proliferation of higher orders and desires. Identification is constituted neatly by an endorsing higher-order desire with which the person is satisfied. It is possible, of course, for someone to be satisfied with his first-order desires without in any way considering whether to endorse them. In that case, he is identified with those first-order desires. But insofar as his desires are utterly unreflective, he is to that extent not genuinely a person at all. He is merely a wanton.

9. Is it possible to be satisfied with ambivalence? A person may certainly come to accept the fact that he is ambivalent as unalterable. It seems to me, however, that it is not a fact with which he can possibly be satisfied. No one can be wholeheartedly ambivalent, anymore than someone can desire unequivocally to betray himself or to be irrational. That someone accepts his ambivalence can mean only that he is resigned to it; it could not mean that it satisfies him. Perhaps conditions are imaginable in which a person might reasonably regard ambivalence as worthwhile in order to avoid some even more unsatisfactory alternative. But no one can desire to be ambivalent for its own sake.

It is a necessary truth about us, then, that we wholeheartedly desire to be wholehearted. This suggests a criterion for use in the design of ideals and programs of life, and generally in determining what to regard as important and to care about.

What we care about should be, to the greatest extent possible, something we are able to care about wholeheartedly. We do not wish to work against ourselves, or to have to hold ourselves back. There are many things to which we find ourselves attracted. In trying to decide which of them is to be important to us, we must anticipate the extent to which each can be coherently elaborated in our lives.

This may be quite different than the extent to which, considered in itself, it is worthy of being cared about. The fact that something is important to us does not primarily consist in our estimate of its own value. The question of what we are to care about is not settled by arriving at judgments as to the inherent or comparative merits of various possible objects of devotion. The fact that a person cares about or is devoted to something—an ideal, or another person, or a project—means that, whatever he may *think* about it, to one degree or another he *loves* it. The problem has to do most fundamentally, then with what we are capable of loving.

What about self-love? That a person is fully satisfied with himself means that he is wholehearted in his feelings, his intentions, and his thoughts. And insofar as being wholehearted is tantamount to loving, wholeheartedness with regard to such things is the same as self-love. Now someone who is engaged in self-deception, in a matter concerning what he is or what he is doing, is conceding thereby that he is not satisfied with himself. Like everyone else, of course, he would like to be wholehearted; as all of us do, he wants to love himself. Indeed, this is his motive for self-deception. It is his desire to love himself that leads him to replace an unsatisfying truth about himself, which he cannot wholeheartedly accept, with a belief that he can accept without ambivalence.

Of course, the effort is misguided. Psychic unity obviously cannot be achieved by dividing oneself. However, the self-deceiver is in fact attempting to escape from being ambivalent. He is trying to overcome the indeterminacy of his cognitive state. What he desires, in other words, is that there be an unequivocal truth concerning what he thinks. We might even say, if we are fond of paradox, that what moves him to deceive himself is the love of truth.

10. Unfortunately it is rare, as we know, for our desire to love ourselves to be fulfilled. We are not often satisfied with our conduct or with what we are. Our lives are marred, to one degree or another, by ambivalence. St. Augustine thought that a transition to psychic unity from a state of volitional division requires a miracle. So he prayed for conversion. That is not actually such a bad approach to the problem. In any case, it seems to have worked out well for him.

I have another suggestion, however, which he appears not to have considered. I will offer it by relating a conversation I had a few years ago with a woman who worked in an office near mine. She and I did not know each other very well, but one day our talk somehow became a bit more personal than usual. At a certain point in the conversation she told me that, in her opinion, in a serious relationship only two things are really important: honesty, and a sense of humor. Then she thought for a moment, and she said: "You know, I'm really not all that sure about honesty; after all, even if they tell you the truth, they change their minds so fast, you can't count on them anyhow."

Sometimes a person is so ambivalent, or vacillates so fluidly, that there is no stable fact concerning what he thinks or feels. In cases like that, when the only truth is too limited to be helpful, meticulous honesty may not be such an important virtue. No doubt the best thing would be for the person to settle down: give up trying to have things both ways, and find some coherent order in which he can be more or less wholehearted. But suppose you are simply unable to make up your mind. No matter how you twist or turn, you cannot find a way of being satisfied with yourself. My advice is that if your will is utterly divided, and volitional unity is really out of the question, be sure at least to hang on to your sense of humor.

Endnotes

1. A.E. Housman, *M. Manilii, Astronomicon I* (London, 1903), p. xliii.
2. *Lectures on Ethics*, p. 224.
3. "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives".
4. "Of Giving the Lie".
5. "Of Liars".
6. "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying," in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (New York, 1979), p. 191.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
8. *Metaphysics I*, 2: 982b12.
9. *Ibid.*, 982b20.
10. *Ethics*, 3P17S.
11. There are degrees of the sort of conflict I am considering. In discussing ambivalence, I am concerned with conflict sufficiently severe that a person: (a) cannot act decisively; or (b) finds that fulfilling either of his conflicting desires is substantially unsatisfying.
12. *Confessions VIII*, 9.
13. *Henry IV, Part 1*.
14. It is only to persons that wholeheartedness and ambivalence are attributable. For this reason, wholeheartedness is not exactly equivalent to the absence of ambivalence: the fact that there is no inherent conflict among the various elements of someone's psychic state does not quite entail that he is wholehearted with respect to them. To be a person, as distinct from simply a human organism, requires a complex volitional structure involving reflective self-evaluation. Human beings that lack this structure may be free of inherent volitional conflict, but they are not persons. Therefore, they are neither ambivalent nor wholehearted.
15. A satisfied person may become dissatisfied upon realizing that things might be better. The realization may cause his expectations to rise. This does not mean, of course, that he was dissatisfied before they rose.
16. Being or becoming satisfied is like being or becoming relaxed. Suppose that someone sees his troubles recede and consequently relaxes. No doubt it is by various feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that he is led to relax. But the occurrence of these psychic elements do not constitute being relaxed, nor are they necessary for relaxation. What is essential is only that the person stop worrying and feeling tense.