"Resanctifying Human Life

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The idea that human beings have a unique dignity and a special moral status is a theme common to many moral traditions and ethical theories. This special worth of human beings--often referred to as the sanctity of human life[1]--has been more zealously affirmed than argued, however.[2] This lack of argument becomes more noteworthy in light of contemporary challenges to such doctrines, expecially in right-to-life and-death discussions, and in animal rights discussions.[3] An example of such challenges which especially well illustrates the connectedness among these discussions is Peter Singer's "unsanctifying Human Life"[4]. Singer argues that we have no moral reason to grant special status to the life of a being simply because of its species, any more than because of its race. Singer isn't or at least wasn't sure what it is that human beings have which accounts for their moral worth—though he mentions as candidates the abilities to feel pain, to have preferences, to act intentionally, to solve problems, to communicate, to be self-aware, to envision a future, and some others[5]—but he argues that whatever it is, it is had to a greater or lesser degree by better and lesser developed *homo sapiens*,and by better and lesser developed nonhuman animals. The lives of relevantly better developed members of our species ought to receive more consideration than the lives of some very undeveloped or malformed members, and the lives of some nonhuman animals ought to be preferred to the lives of some members of *homo sapiens*. We need only ascertain what it is about beings which accounts for their moral worth, Singer reasons, and decide which members of whichever species meet the criteria. His position is a strong one: "...there can be no possible justification for making the boundary of sanctity run parallel with the boundary of our own species, unless we invoke some belief about immortal souls", and thus, he clearly suggests, no possible justification at all.[6]

I want to defend a version of the sanctity of human life, in just the way that Singer claims it can not be defended: without presupposing any doctrine of immortal souls. Broadly speaking, I will argue that morality requires us to aim at the best life obtainable for us in our interaction with others, and that respect for the sanctity of human life is essential for the attainment of such a life. More specifically, I will argue that morality requires all persons to aim at the acquisition of three particular goods which are part of the best life obtainable for all human beings: namely, adequate self-esteem (which will be the main focus of the argument); basic relationships with other human beings

which are maximally fertile for more developed human relationships; and a maximally rewarding awareness of and participation in the lives of other human beings, valuable both for its own sake and as a means to the second good mentioned.

That morality requires the acquistion of these goods is a controversial claim. I will begin by discussing the nature of morality, then, before addressing the bulk of the arguments supporting the sanctity of human life.

Morality and Rationality

I am siding with traditions which claim that the aim of the moral life is to live as well as possible.[7] More specifically, I will argue that the end of morality for each moral agent is the best life obtainable for that moral agent. By the best life obtainable I mean a life in which one obtains as many as possible of those goods which one would not regret having obtained even if one fully knew all that was obtainable for him or her. By full knowledge of what was obtainable for an agent, I mean to include knowledge of what it would have been like for the agent to have experienced both those goods which are part of the best life obtainable, as well as those goods which the agent would have had to pass by in order to obtain that best life.[8]

Let me briefly indicate why I believe that the best life obtainable for the individual agent is the end of the moral life. It seems, first, that such a life is the end of rational action. For it appears contrary to reason to act such that one believes that one will regret one's actions, all-things-considered; such actions would lack the purpose which is characteristic of rationality.[9] Rationality also requires an openness to knowledge about the possibilities for one's own life. Thus, rationality would seem to require not acting such that one believes one would regret one's actions in light of increased knowledge--even full knowledge-- of one's own possibilities. Since rationality requires us to act in openness to the best life obtainable for us, morality can not require otherwise, insofar as it is to guide the actions of persons acting rationally. I take it as basic that the requirements of any acceptable morality must be consistent with the demands of reason. Thus morality must require us to act in ways consistent with an openness to the best life obtainable for the individual moral agent.

While moral requirements must not conflict with rational requirements, moral evaluation is somehow different from rational evaluation, and this difference must be identified. There is no single conception of morality in use in the Western world, as MacIntyre's work in the History of Ethics has so well illustrated.[10] But the points of common ancestry among the various conceptions of morality acount for common charateristics among those conceptions. Let me hold up two of these characteristics as central. Morality involves the notions of community, and of a standard. Of community, both in that actions have been commonly taken to have moral significance insofar as they affect some others, and in that moral evaluation is part of the life or culture common to a community. Of a standard, in that morality

involves a kind of evaluation, and thus evaluative criteria.

Some version of the concept of 'good' seems always to function in moral standards in some way. Essential to the notion of good is that of desirability, but as it has functioned in moral contexts 'good' cannot mean just whatever is in fact desired. Instead, the good is what somehow ought to be desired. An evaluative term has been re-introduced in this analysis of 'good'; calling for some criteria for what ought to be desired. Some traditions have appealed to the rational self-interest of the individual moral agent as the standard for what ought to be desired. Here the concept of rationality plays an evaluative role. Rationality can be understood as something like a requirement for consistency, so that any consistent set of one's own preferences is thought to constitute an individual's rational self-interest. Alternately, some appeal can be made to the implications of the agent's constitution—sometimes cast in terms of one's 'nature'—for what the agent would actually desire under certain circumstances. I intend to argue for an account of morality which makes such an appeal.

First, though, any attempt to ground morality on rational self-interest must tie that account back to the community-related aspects of morality mentioned above. If my rational self-interest determines what ismorally appropriate for me, and yours, for you, what in all this accounts for at least a basic level of agreement between us about what is morally appropriate, or is not? One set of attempts to account for this agreement is along Hobbesian lines; as things stand, we might both agree, we would both be better off cooperating in the prohibition of certain sorts of action.[11] Such contractarian approaches to morality fail to measure up to our intuition that others matter for their own sakes, and not only because they can affect our pursuit of our own interests.

This criticism of contractarian theories could very well be taken as a reason for rejecting any attempt to ground morality on rational self-interest. Instead, one might seek to ground morality on some notion of the good for the whole community. The good of the whole community can be understood, again, either as the sum of the preferences of the community, or as a feature of the natures or constitutions of the members of the community. A still different route is to find some notion of good which does not depend on what any agent actually wants or actually would want; some appeal can be made to 'inherent value' or 'intrinsic value', or the Good itself. The problem with all these attempts to separate morality from the self-interest of the individual moral agent is that they seem to sever the connection between morality and reasons for action.[12] Why should I care about a thing's having whatever 'intrinsic value' is, any more than its being, say, of the color yellow? I pursue what I value, not what is "valuable-in-itself". I may happen to like yellow, or intrinsically good things, but I may not. The same is true for the good of others, however conceived. Your need is unconnected with my action, logically, unless I somehow care about you. And why should I?

Theories of morality can retain an account of the action-guiding

force of morality when they ground morality on rational self-interest. The counterintuitive implications of some theories of this sort are avoided by a rational self-interest theory of morality which has what is in my view an adequate account of what the rational self-interests of human beings really are. I take the standard of morality to be the best life obtainable for the individual moral agent, as defined earlier. Such a life consists in the attainment of *true goods* for the agent: those possible objects of the agent's activity which are such that their attainment would not be regretted in light of full knowledge of what is obtainable for that agent. If it can be shown that among the true goods for all human beings is an incommensurably high level of respect for all human beings, based upon the recognition that they are human, then this approach to morality will be able to provide a reason for human beings to treat one another as ends-in-themselves.

Facts about goods.

If morality is understood in this way, then to show that an action is morally required of an agent, one need only show that so acting is necessary for obtaining something which concerns the agent's interaction with others and which the agent would continue to be glad to have obtained, in light of full knowledge of what was possible for that agent. To show that something is morally required for all human beings, moreover, one would need to show that all human beings are alike with respect to whether they would or would not continue to be glad to have obtained a certain object in light of relevant knowledge. To understand morality in this way, it seems, is to face no small task in establishing universal moral requirements. I hope to show why I believe that this task, though formidable, is not insurmountable.

In claiming to identify some goods as true goods for all human beings, I am implying that there is a question of fact about whether a thing is truly good for a human being, that some things are truly good for all human beings, and that we can know whether some thing is truly good for all human beings. I will begin by defending those implications.

What I mean by *good* is this: a thing is good (for a person) insofar as a person is inclined toward it when he or she apprehends, or perceives it. This inclination toward a thing is an inclination to keep it if the thing is already possessed, or maintain it if the state of affairs is already actual. (This discussion could be cast either in terms of objects, or states of affairs.) Enjoyment is an inclination of this kind. If the thing is not yet possessed (or actual), the inclination is to obtain the object (or render actual the state of affairs), and is usually called wanting or desiring. And if the object has been but is no longer possessed, an inclination toward it is something like gladness, or not regretting having possessed it. (In the discussion below I will assume the interchangeability, *salva veritate*, of talk about objects and about states of affairs, without further comment.)

Let us define an *end* as an object judged to be good, not yet possessed, and obtainable, in an all-things-considered judgment. By

an all-things-considered judgment, I mean one in which all those factors have been considered which will in fact be taken into account by the agent before giving assent to some judgment. Included among those factors, for an all-things-considered judgment about the goodness of an object, are judgments about other goods which will yet be obtainable, or rendered unobtainable, if the agent acts to obtain the good in question.

Whenever a person acts, he or she would seem to be moved by something which is an end for him or her. To *motivate* a person to act in a certain way, then, one must point to something which he or she *in fact* apprehends as an end; that is, to something which the person is inclined toward, all-things-considered, and which he or she judges to be obtainable. To give a person a *good reason* to act, though, is to point to something which is *appropriately* apprehended as an end. The force of "appropriately" is the suggestion that so apprehending is consistent with perceiving the world rightly. To give a person a *sufficient* or *compelling reason* to act is to point to something which he or she *ought* to apprehend as an end. The force of "ought", here, is to imply that so apprehending is a necessary condition for perceiving the world rightly.

The possiblity of evaluating reasons for action in these ways is rooted in the finitude and fallibility of human abilities to apprehend the world. We can only incline to possess what we apprehend; indeed, it is the thing *as apprehended* which the agent is inclined to obtain. Apprehension is not a static process for us; we interact with our surroundings, and we move into certain relationships with the world as we interact with it, anticipating certain sorts of future interactions. Whenever a person apprehends an object in such a way that he or she inclines to obtain or possess it, among those future interactions which the person anticipates is that he or she will be glad to have inclined toward that object. This not to say that we never anticipate regret over some aspect of our decisions; of course we do, as any dieter knows. But when we make such decisions, we anticipate that the object we are pursuing is worth the ensuing regret. We could not act, if we believe that the reward of so acting were not worth the cost that accompanies it. Thus when one is inclined toward some object, one anticipates that when one possesses or more nearly possesses it, one will continue to be inclined toward it. If one's expectations are fulfilled, and one in fact inclines toward possessing the object when it is apprehended at later moments, then one's initial judgment is confirmed; if not, it is disconfirmed (perhaps weakly, or strongly, or definitively.) One has evidence that he or she apprehended the object correctly, in the first case, and incorrectly or inaccurately, in the second. This evidence is for the truth of certain claims about what the person would incline toward under certain conditions; it is evidence for the truth of claims about a thing's being good for some person.

A *true good,* as defined above, is an object which one would be inclined toward if it were accurately perceived (recalling that part of an accurate perception of an object is awareness of the total cost of

obtaining it.) As one proceeds to more fully perceive such goods, one continues to apprehend them as good, all-things-considered. We can define a *merely apparent good* as an object which one is inclined to obtain during some stage of the process of apprehending it, and yet which is not a true good.[13]

Whether a thing is a true good or a merely apparent good for a person, in these senses, is a matter of fact. The hard task in life is to accurately perceive which goods are true goods, and which are not. It is not so hard to tell whether a person--oneself, or even another--has enjoyed a thing, but it is often difficult to tell whether oneself or another would continue to be glad to have enjoyed it, were he or she to fully appreciate the cost of that enjoyment. Thus, these facts about goods are extremely difficult to ascertain. Personal experience and the testimony of others clearly provides some evidence in these matters, but neither source is infallible.

In spite of the difficulties here, I believe that a person can have warranted true opinions about whether or not something is really good--a true good--for the person himself or herself, or for another person. Consider this example: An older married woman may know enough about life, about herself, and about her husband to know that she would continue to be glad she married him, under any practically possible circumstances. She may know, moreover, that something similar is true for her husband. Marrying one another was truly good for both of them.

One may also have warranted true opinions about whether a thing of some kind constitutes a true good for persons *qua* persons--about whether there are any things which all human beings need to attain a level of existence which could fairly be called an enjoyable or happy life. Freedom from excruciating pain suffered to no purpose is such a good. John Stuart Mill identified another: Being Socrates--actually, a person like Socrates--dissatisfied, rather than a fool satisfied.[14] Having a good friend is a third. In general, if one finds it implausible to imagine that any human being really would regret having obtained some particular good in light of full knowledge of what was possible for him or her, then--insofar as one judges oneself to be adequately acquainted with human possibilities and human needs--one has at least a bit of evidence for the claim that the particular good in question is a true good for all human beings.

I want to point to some true goods for human beings, and argue that they cannot be obtained short of respecting human beings (read *homo sapiens*) in a way which amounts to holding their lives sacred. There are three kinds of goods on which I will focus: adequate self-esteem, a basic level of relationship with other human beings which is maximally fertile for excellent human relationships, and a maximally rewarding awareness of and participation in the lives of other human beings. These goods are important elements of the happiness of human beings; all human beings would be inclined to obtain these goods, were they to know fully the relevant facts. These inclinations are features of the way we are put together, of the kind of being we are.

I am not overly concerned to argue for the claim that these are true goods for all human beings; I will be satisfied if I keep the attention only of those who think that it is at least likely that these things are truly good for every person.[15] In what follows I will consider these goods one at a time, beginning with and focusing largely on self-esteem, showing how each can only be obtained by affirming the dignity of human beings.

Self-esteem and the sanctity of human life.

Perhaps the best way to introduce the notion of self-esteem is to construct imaginary cases of inadequate self-esteem. Consider: Rene', who feels bad about her life and tries to accomplish very little, convinced as she is that she does not have what it takes to achieve any worthwhile goal; Martin, who also won't try to accomplish much, because he suspects that he is a very bad person who doesn't deserve any really excellent things; and David, who spends his life anxiously comparing himself with others--with respect to intelligence, popularity, good looks, athletic ability, etc.--both because he worries about what others think of him, and because he feels better when he perceives himself as measuring up to others in various ways.

Each of these and persons like them suffer from a poor self-concept. They have poor estimations of themselves, poor self-esteem, poor self-respect. Persons who suffer chronically from some such malaise are not glad to be who or what they are; they aren't very good, they think, or not good enough. Self-esteem seems to be necessary for the attainment of two important human goods; first, for motivation (as seen in Rene's and Martin's case). With a low appraisal of oneself comes a low appraisal of what is possible for one to attain or become. Since no one pursues what he or she does not think can be attained, persons with low self-esteem suffer some lack of motivation. (It is true that some persons with lower self-esteem are especially active in their attempts to prove their worth to themselves or others. But the objects of their activity, for persons so motivated, are sought for the sake of self-esteem, and not or not primarily for their own sakes. Other things which the person really wants are less vigorously pursued, except insofar as they help shore up self-esteem. Thus does their motivation suffer.)

A second good for which self-esteem seems necessary is psychological tranquility, or peace of mind, or "feeling good about oneself" (as seen in all three of the cases imagined.) Really poor self-esteem can cause significant unhappiness in these areas, even to the point where persons judge their own lives to be not worth living. Self-esteem is an estimation of one's own worth, a kind of valuing of oneself, and when it is low, life is thought cheap.

I want to categorize some varieties of self-esteem, and evaluate several different kinds of self-esteem considered under these categories. In order to categorize these varieties, I will first say something about the concept of value in general, and then return to discuss valuing oneself.

The concept "value" is closely connected with the concept "good". To value something in the senses I mean to consider, is to be inclined toward it in some way, and thus to esteem it as good in one of the senses considered above. The value of some things depends both upon our goals and on the capacities of the things in question to help us meet those goals. To value a thing *as a means* is to judge it valuable or good because of its perceived capacity to help us achieve some goal or goals of ours. Money is valuable in this way, and so too is anything insofar as a price can be attached to it. The value of such things depends on both the capacity of each thing, and the excellence of the goals possibly affected: on how much money it is worth, for example, and on what we could do with that money.

Other things are valued, or desired, for their own sakes. The "why do you want that?" question stops at these things. They are valuable in themselves; they are our goals; they are valuable as *ends*. We want things like peace-of-mind, friendship, a sense of purpose, challenges, and a host of other things not or not only because they help us attain other goals, but because these things are simply good to have. These are not simply means for us to other ends; we enjoy such things, when we have them, for something about them other than their connection with other things we want.

Because our goals are all interrelated--we must achieve them in the real world in some integrated fashion--even the things we want for their own sakes must be compared with one another in various ways. Can I achieve all of these in the real world? Which do I prefer, if I can't have all? We must sacrifice our access to some goals, in order to achieve others. Judgments of value which are related to action, then, are all-things-considered judgments, which were discussed earlier.

Having considered these kinds of value, let us move to consider next that among those things which we can value are our own capacities for acting. One can value one's own capacities as means; what I really want is the respect of others, suppose, and my athletic ability helps me get it. I need to know things to get around in the world, so I'm glad that I have the capacity to learn. Alternately, one can value one's own capacities as ends: my being able to run is a good thing, whether or not others respect me on that account. Knowledge is useful, but I want to be able to learn independently of whether or not the knowledge I acquire helps me obtain other goals.

We are now in a postion to consider the application of the distinction between these kinds of value to the concept of self-esteem. One can value one's *self* in virtue of one's *capacities*. People can see that they are able to act in certain ways or to accomplish certain things, and they can value themselves accordingly, and in different ways. What I really want, really value, suppose, is the respect of others. I have the capacity to achieve that respect; therefore, I am worth something to myself. It is a good thing to be me, because I can get what I want. This is to value myself as a means, based upon my capacities. Similarly, I can value myself as an end, in virtue of my capacities: I am a knower, one who is able to know, and being able to

know is an excellent thing; therefore, I am an excellent thing. We can see, then, at least two categories of self-esteem: valuing oneself as a means, in virtue of one's capacities; and valuing oneself as an end, in virtue of one's capacities. These categories are genera under which fall a wide variety of species; as many species, in fact, as there are capacities and combinations of capacities which human beings can possess and be glad to possess.

Not all of these species of self-esteem seem to provide as well as others the goods of psychological tranquility and motivation for which self-esteem seems necessary. Each of these goods is important for human prosperity--a true good--so each should be present always, and in a sufficient degree or quality. Thus the adequacy of varieties of self-esteem can be measured by how well they promote these important human goods. Since self-esteem is required to attain these goods, it should be based on a secure foundation: ideally, one which can not be lost. To provide adequate motivation and psychological tranquility, moreover, self-esteem should be sufficiently high. How high? This is a complicated question, but let me suggest with scant argument a simple answer. Without feeling that we belong to some group, we go through life essentially by ourselves. Without feeling equal in some way, we don't fully belong. And belonging to an insignificant or worthless group is not a rewarding thing. Thus it would seem that an adequate self-esteem would be high enough, at least, to ground a sense of place as an equal among a group of significant peers. If it is good for persons, moreover, to esteem themselves of equal fundamental worth with all human beings, then self-esteem should be high enough to ground a sense of place as an equal in the human community.

Let us hold up the kinds of self-esteem outlined thus far against these standards of adequacy. Suppose one valued oneself only as a means, in virtue of one's capacities. One might think that this is not *self*-esteem at all; what one valued for its own sake would be something other than oneself; the person himself or herself would be merely useful, merely able to get things which were valuable as ends. Leaving this point aside, though, if one valued oneself in virtue of one's capacities, whether as a means or as an end, one could lose that self-esteem, if one could lose the capacity or capacities in question. Many capacities which seem often to serve as a basis for self-esteem are easily lost: physical appearance, strength, wealth, the respect of others, etc. Of course, some capacities are more apt to be lost than others. Aristotle noted that virtue is enduring, and Ayn Rand thought that one's own moral excellence was the foundation for ideal self-esteem.[16] "Sadly, though, even virtue can be lost." Varieties of self-esteem can be more or less secure on account of their foundations, then. There are also some capacities which cannot be lost; certainly the capacity to have a self-concept cannot be lost at any time which could affect one's self-esteem. But no such capacities seem to be the sort on which self-esteem can actually be based: having a self-concept just is not that exciting a feature about me. Thus, real self-

esteem which is based upon one's capacities would seem to lack ideal stability.

A second short-coming of varieties of self-esteem which are based on an appraisal of one's capacities is this: because capacities admit of degrees of development, one's own sense of worth would be dependent on the perceived excellence of the capacities of those around us, if one's sense of worth were grounded on an appraisal of the excellence of one's capacities (and we could include accomplishments). This is also, at least, insofar as one's estimation of the excellence of some capacity depends on its comparison with others of greater or lesser development. Such relativity of appraisal would seem to hold true for such attributes as physical beauty--"don't hate me because I'm beautiful", the commercial says--athletic ability, respect of others, intelligence, moral virtue, and others. Persons whose sense of self-worth was based upon such capacities would have to compete, in effect, for that sense of worth by acquiring or maintaining capacities of sufficient prominence relative to the perceived capacities of those around them. Moreover, those with the better developed capacities will be esteemed as not only better looking, kinder, or better at mathematics, say, but as simply better, if any such capacities form the bases for judgment of the worth of persons, one's own worth included. Thus self-esteem which is based upon such capacities would seem to lack stability on account of this relativity of appraisal, and would not securely ground an estimation of oneself as an equally worthy peer of all human beings.

There is a variety of self-esteem which escapes these difficulties. Suppose one considers that while some human beings are good at math and others are not, no nonhuman animals can do calculus. Human beings are the kind of things with the potential to do mathematics. It is true that some human beings have developed that potential, while others have not, and that some human beings have had this potential permanently impeded from being actualized (severely retarded persons.) Human beings remain, nevertheless, the same kind if thing, and thus the kind of thing with the potential to do mathematics.[17] Other kinds of things lack that potential. There are countless many areas of human potential which might be similarly considered. Human beings can envision and plan for the future; we unlock the secrets of the physical universe and apply them; we are able to develop self-control, bravery, compassion; we are creative, adaptable, imaginative; we can conceive of justice, choose what is just, and indeed become just, ourselves.

We learn about what a thing is, about its essence, by uncovering its potential. We learn of a thing's potential not merely by looking at how some particular thing of that kind actually is, but by looking at the whole spectrum of ways in which things of that kind actually are. We learn about what it is to be a human being by looking at the full range of development of human capacities. Of course, we only encounter the lower limit of human possibility in this way; at least this much, though perhaps more, is possible for human beings.

The more we learn about the possibilities of human existence, the more we become impressed--even excited--by what is possible for human beings. And insofar as we are impressed by what human beings can do, that far will we be impressed by the kind of things human beings are. We are the kind of things which actually are such as to have the potential (developed, undeveloped, impeded) to develop these impressive capacities; that is, to live human life.

Impressed by the excellence of developed human capacities, and by the kind of lives which human beings can live, one may be glad to be a human being, and glad that human beings are such excellent kinds of things. To go a bit further, suppose that one found *being a human being* to be a more impressive feature about oneself than one's capacity (however well developed) to do mathematics, or to plan next years taxes, or even to work for a just social order. Being able to do these things is good; these are among the things which makes it a good thing to be a human being. But being the kind of thing which has the potential to do these and whatever else human beings have the potential to do, is a fact about each human being which encompasses more than just these or any specifiable set of actually developed capacities. The significance of human life, and thus of each human being, is measured by all that human beings can possibly become and do, and is accordingly incommensurate. Thus the significance, the excellence, of being what I am, is not limited to the excellence of the capacities which have been or will be developed in me, or the things I have been or will be able to accomplish.

I may value being a human being more than I value my capacity to do mathematics, then, or more than any other capacity or capacities which are developed in me, or which could be developed in me. I may value *being a human being* more highly than I value anything else about me. Being a human being, of course, I would thus value for its own sake--as an end--if I valued it more highly than anything else, since what is valued only as a means to any end is never valued more highly than is the end in question.

It is possible, then, to value oneself as an end, based on the fact that one is a human being, and to value one's humanity incommensurably. This is surely a kind of self-esteem, and a kind which meets the criteria for adequacy which were proposed earlier: roughly, that self-esteem be both stable and sufficiently high, insuring both adequate motivation and psychological tranquility. Self-esteem which is based upon the highest evaluation of one's own human nature is stable, for unlike capacities which can be lost, it is not possible for human beings to exist other than as human beings. What is essential cannot be lost. Neither will our evaluation of the worth of human beings diminish, insofar as we have accurately envisioned what is possible for human beings. In fact, our appraisal of the excellence of what is to be a human being can only increase as we continue to expand our awareness of the possibilities for human existence. Being very much impressed by what it is to be a human being, then, will ground not only a lasting but also a high self-esteem.

Such self-esteem will be high enough to provide the psychological tranquility which comes from a sense of belonging to a group of significant peers, moreover. For if our valuing ourselves is grounded on the highest level of respect for what it is to be a human being, then we will esteem ourselves as equals with all other human beings, because we all are precisely the same excellent kind of thing. As we grow in appreciation for the excellence of what it is to be a human being, both our self-esteem as well as our sense of the significance of belonging to human kind will become higher. We will grow in our appreciation of the dignity of human beings--our own included--and in our sense that life is worth living.

Thus, valuing oneself as an end, most highly, based on one's humanity meets those criteria for adequate self-esteem which were not met by varieties of self-esteem based upon some particular developed capacity or capacities. It is a true good for all human beings to value themselves in this way, then. And since this kind of self-esteem can only be had by those who affirm the dignity of every human being, it follows that it is truly good for every human being to think that all human beings are things of incomparable worth. And this is to respect the sanctity of human life, in the sense we have been considering.

Other Arguments

There are other goods which are best obtained when human beings have this attitude toward human life, and I'll describe two of these somewhat briefly. To begin, we should note that it is truly good for people to be respected by others on account of their humanity. For all people would like to receive from others a basic level of respect which meets the following two criteria: first, that it be unconditional. Although we ought to gladly prove our worth as teachers or colleagues or friends, we do not want to have to show our ticket--our credentials--to get an appropriate basic level of respect from other people. We believe--rather, do well to believe--ourselves to be deserving of some significant level of respect because there is something excellent about us, apart from what we can do or what we have done, though we may deserve respect on these latter accounts, also. We want (ought to want) other persons to respect us in the way we believe ourselves to be worthy of respect: unconditionally. Others want respect of this same sort from us. When we respect another person because he or she is a human being, our respect for him or her clearly meets this criterion.

A second criterion for this truly desirable basic level of respect from others is that the respect be inviolable. Even when others acknowledge that we are unconditionally deserving of some respect (meeting the first criterion), we require also that they not use us to obtain something they perceive as more valuable to them than we are. Kant's dictum that we treat persons always as ends, and never as means only, captures something about how all of us would like to be treated by others. We sell what we value less for what we value more,

and no human being wants to be sold out in this way. If we place an incommensurably high value on human beings, though, we will never sell any human being for something we value more, for there will be nothing more valuable to us than human beings.

If we value human beings as ends, most highly, based upon their humanity, then, we will accord others the respect which those others would like. In respecting human beings in this way, each person is doing his or her own part toward the establishment of a second true good for all human beings: a community of mutual respect, out of which fruitful relationships, the various forms of friendship, develop. These relationships are truly good for human beings, and so it is truly good for all human beings to have the attitude toward human beings which promotes the kind of community out of which these fruitful relationships develop.

Fruitful human relationships will indeed develop, in a community of unconditional and inviolable respect. For respecting persons in this way brings with it a concern for their welfare. It is only because we esteem human goals to be excellent that we find being a human being to be an excellent thing. We will be glad when human beings achieve these excellent goals. Thus, others achieving what is truly good for them will be truly good for us. The higher our appreciation for the excellence of human goals, the more enjoyment we will experience from the lives of others. This participation in the lives of others is a third true good which is optimized when we have the highest level of respect for human life.

I cannot avoid considering an objection, here. Involvement in the lives of others is famously and perilously two-edged. Concern for the welfare of others brings with it not only joy in the successes of others, but also suffering in their failures, and both in proportion to our appraisal of the excellence of their goals. Insofar as we find the goals of others to be important or valuable, thus far are our own lives complicated by the problems of others. In the face of this, some human beings retreat from real connectedness with others, or at least with many others.

Mature and experienced human beings recognize that retreat from relationships with others is not the best way to deal with the risks that come with those relationships. "Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied"; "Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all", we say (quoting Mill and Tennyson.) There is a real issue here, however, which ought not be dismissed with citations from folk wisdom. It is not obvious that human beings would be better off living with an intense concern for just any being whose actions can be considered remotely goal-related. In a person whose aims are ordered toward the best life obtainable for him or her, it seems there ought to be a limiting of concern to those goals which are such that the rewards of having the concern truly outweigh the costs. It is admittedly difficult to determine just where this line of concern should be drawn. Perhaps there are individual variations among human beings which account for variations in the optimal place for each to draw this line of concern.

I am claiming that for all human beings, though, this line of concern should encompass the life of every human being. This claim is supported by the argument from self-esteem given above, but that argument--by itself--surely cannot justify the claim. If the cost of having concern for others considerably outweighed the benefit of participating in their prosperity, one might wonder whether it would be better to settle for some less secure variety of self-esteem, and perhaps a less secure foundation for relationships with others, in order to avoid this cost.

Even to suggest a course smacks of moral failure, but not of rational failure; not, at least, in the abstract.[18] I believe that this is so because human beings have learned something about how to live well in recent millennia, and our moral intuitions reflect this knowledge. John Stuart Mill wrote that "When people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable for them, the cause generally is, caring for nobody but themselves."[19] Mill cites a sense of purpose as one rewarding feature of altruistic concern. I think that Mill is right about this, and in my own mind I have little doubt that it is in fact truly better for each human being that he or she have a developed sense of concern for every human being.[20] My own experience of the rewards of compassion leave little room for doubt about such concern being truly good for me; nor do I find it very plausible that its being truly good for me is somehow a special feature of my own personality, or upbringing, or culture. This conviction has been strengthened through interaction with others of similar experience. Insofar as it is plausible that having such concern is truly good for all human beings, there is further reason to believe that it is truly good to have an incommensurably high level of respect for all human beings based upon the excellence of what they are, since such respect brings with it this advantageous concern.

I turn next to consider one last objection. One might claim that it is possible to ground the special moral status of human persons--and perhaps of some nonhuman beings also--on the basis of something other than a respect for what it is to be a human being. Let us suppose, for example, that it is some special capacity--such as the capacity to have goals--which accounts for the special moral status of those beings which have this capacity. Morality would then require us to treat as ends-in-themselves all and only beings with this capacity, including perhaps some higher nonhuman animals, and not including human infants, at least not for their own sake. To objectively and impartially commit oneself to concern for all beings who have goals, it may be claimed, is to adopt the moral point-of-view.

What is lacking in such approaches is a satisfactory account of the connection between the morally significant features of other beings and the kind of real concern for those other beings which issues in action and which is characteristic of morally good persons. I simply am not overwhelmingly impressed by the mere ability to set

goals, nor the capacity to envision a future, nor to experience physical pleasure and pain, nor any other of the candidate grounds of moral significance that are so often discussed. I am not moved to lay down my life for a being merely on account of the fact that it has preferences. It is good to be able to envision a future, and to experience physical pleasure and pain and the rest; better than being a plant.[21] But neither these nor any other specifiable capacity or set of capacities ground my own sense of worth, any more than my sense of the worth of other human beings. Nor do these capacities fully account for my drive to live well, any more than they alone move me to take care that others live well. It is only a much fuller appreciation of what is possible for human beings, and hence of the excellence of being the kind of thing for whom such an impressive mode of existence is possible, that accounts for a human being's whole-hearted commitment to his or her own life and to the lives of others.

Conclusion

I have given reasons for thinking that the lives of human beings go better when they affirm the excellence of human life, and of being the kind of being which can live such a life. Whether these are *moral* considerations depends on the relationship of *homo sapiens* prosperity to morality. To jump directly from *homo sapiens* prosperity to moral propriety is to assume that members of *homo sapiens* have some special moral status. It would be no surprise, perhaps, if from such an assumption one could defend the special moral status of members of *homo sapiens*. No such assumption is made here, however. Instead, I have taken as basic the requirement that the demands of morality be consistent with the demands of reason, and have argued that this implies the special moral status of the individual moral agent. All of the individual moral agents of whom we know are members of *homo sapiens*. For all of us, then, our particular attitudes toward *homo sapiens* life will be morally relevant, since our attitudes toward what we are have bearing on our prosperity.

I have identified some important true goods for every human being which can only be achieved when human beings respect all human beings most highly, as ends, based upon our humanity; in virtue, that is, of our being the kind of thing--*homo sapiens*--that we are. Thus there is compelling reason for all human beings to uphold the sanctity of human life.

FOOTNOTES

1 This way of conceiving of doctrines of the sanctity of human life should not be confused with their real or purported implications, such as the absolute moral prohibition of the intentional killing of an innocent human being. I believe that on a rightly conceived approach to morality, the sanctity of human life as I consider it here does have this implication. I am making no such argument or assumption in this paper, however.

2 For an argument that Rousseau, Mill, Sartre, and Kant all imported an assumption

about the dignity of persons without adequate argument, see Pepita Haezrahi, "The Concept of Man as End-In-Himself," *Kant-Studien*, Band 53 (1962), reprinted in *Kant: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 1968, pp. 291-313.

3 See, for example, Michael Tooley's "A Defense of Abortion and Infanticide," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2, 1972, pp. 137-165; Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: New York Review of Books) 1975; Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1983; James Rachels, 'Darwin, Species, and Morality', *Monist, 70*, 1 (Jan. 1987) pp. 98-111; and Helga Kuhse, *The Sanctity of Life Doctrine in Medicine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1987.

4 Peter Singer, 'Unsanctifying Human Life', in *Ethical Issues Related to Life and Death*, ed. John Ladd; (New York: Oxford University Press) 1979, p. 44. Singer's opposition to what he calls 'speciesist' doctrines has remained adamant since the time of that article: see his 'Animal Liberation or Animal Rights', *Monist, 70*, 1, (Jan 1987), p. 3-14.

5 This list is adapted from Singer's "Unsanctifying Human Life", p. 46. For another discussion of the requirements for the moral significance of human beings, see Joseph Fletcher, *Humanhood* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books) 1979, pp. 12-16.

6 Singer, "Unsanctifying Human Life' p. 59. For a criticism of contemporary arguments against 'speciesism', see Michael Wreen, "Abortion: The Extreme Liberal Position," *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 12, 3, Aug. 1987, pp. 241-266.

7 The founding father of this tradition is, of course, Aristotle, followed in the Christian tradition by Aquinas. For an account of the history of morality which claims that the grounding of morality on some conception of the good life or human *telos* has always been a dominant theme, see Alasdair MacIntyre's *A Short History of Ethics*, (New York: Macmillan Press) 1966. This tradition has its critics, of course, to whom space does not permit an adequate response here. See, for example, Gilbert Harman, 'Human Flourishing, Ethics, and Liberty', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12 (Fall 1983) pp. 307-322.

8 If there are goods corresponding to the absence of pain, evil, etc. then the goods which the agent would have had to pass by in order to obtain the best life obtainable amount to the cost of that life.

9 Here I am agreeing with Philipa Foot, who wrote that "Irrational actions are those in which a man in some way defeats his own purposes, doing what is calculated to be disadvantageous or to frustrate his ends." See her "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" in *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press) 1978, p. 162.

10 See especially Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, and also *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 1981, 1984.

11 See David Gauthier, *Morals By Agreement* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1986 for a contemporary contractarian account of morality.

12 See, for example, Kai Nielsen, "Why Should I Be Moral?" in W.K. Frankena and J.T. Granrose, eds., *Introductory Readings in Ethics*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall), 1974, pp. 473-492. See also Peter Singer's "Why Act Morally", ch. 10 in his *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1979.

13 This distinction between true and merely apparent goods is formulated to solve the same problems as is Adler's distinction between real and apparent goods, but the distinctions are importantly different. Adler's real goods are for me true goods for all human beings, whereas his class of apparent goods contains what are for me true goods for some persons, and all merely apparent goods. See Mortimer Adler, *Six Great Ideas* (New York: Macmillan) 1981, Collier Books Edition, 1984, ch. 11, pp. 72-81.

14 See J.S. Mill's *Utilitarianism*, in the *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. F.E.I. Priestly (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) Vol. X, 1969, p 212. My criterion for distinguishing between true and merely apparent goods is similar to Mill's criterion for distinguishing between his higher and lower quality pleasures, but a broader range of

possible experiences is appealed to on my account.

15 Although I will not argue for the claim that the goods in question are true and important goods, I will suggest a comparision of these goods with those which Maslow has claimed are needed by every human being, life, safety and security, belongingness and affection, respect and self-respect, and self-actualization. See Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (2nd ed.) (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co.) 1968, p.3.

16 Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1156b11, and Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics" (1961) in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: N.A.L. Penguin) 1964, p. 27.

17 Here I am presuming without argument some version of objectivity concerning natural kinds. I believe that my central argument could proceed on other, nominalist assumptions about kinds, with slightly altered yet still substantial conclusions, but I will not attempt to make explicit such a version of the argument.

18 Philippa Foot has argued this point in her "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives", *"Virtues and Vices,"* p. 161. See also Kai Nielson's "Why be Moral?", cited above. My central argument constitutes a rebuttal of the motivational skeptic's challenge, and of the subjectivist thesis as Nielsen describes it.

19 J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 215.

20 Here, as elsewhere, I am abstracting from religious considerations.

21 For a contrasting view, see Paul Taylor, "Are Humans Superior to Animals and Plants?" in *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 6, 2 (Summer 1984) pp. 149-160.