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Why Human Beings Need the Virtues

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

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20

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Animals

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THE PAUL CARUS LECTURE SERIES 20

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Vulnerability, dependence, animality

We human beings are vulnerable to many kinds of affliction and most of us are at some time afflicted by serious ills. How we cope is only in small part up to us. It is most often to others that we owe our survival, let alone our flourishing, as we encounter bodily illness and injury, inadequate nutrition, mental defect and disturbance, and human aggression and neglect. This dependence on particular others for protection and sustenance is most obvious in early childhood and in old age. But between these first and last stages our lives are characteristically marked by longer or shorter periods of injury, illness or other disablement and some among us are disabled for their entire lives.

These two related sets of facts, those concerning our vulnerabilities and afflictions and those concerning the extent of our dependence on particular others are so evidently of singular importance that it might seem that no account of the human condition whose authors hoped to achieve credibility could avoid giving them a central place. Yet the history of Western moral philosophy suggests otherwise. From Plato to Moore and since there are usually, with some rare exceptions, only passing references to human vulnerability and affliction and to the connections between them and our dependence on others. Some of the facts of human limitation and of our consequent need of cooperation with others are more generally acknowledged, but for the most part only then to be put on one side.

And when the ill, the injured and the otherwise disabled *are* presented in the pages of moral philosophy books, it is almost always exclusively as possible subjects of benevolence by moral agents who are themselves presented as though they were continuously rational, healthy and untroubled. So we are invited, when we do think of disability, to think of “the disabled” as “them,” as other than “us,” as a separate class, not as ourselves as we have been, sometimes are now and may well be in the future.

Adam Smith provides us with an example. While discussing what it is that makes the “pleasures of wealth and greatness . . . strike the imagination as something grand and beautiful,” he remarks that “in the languor of disease and the weariness of old age” we cease to be so impressed, for we then take note of the fact that the acquisition of wealth and greatness leaves their possessors “always as much, and sometimes more exposed than before, to anxiety, to fear and to sorrow, to diseases, to danger, and to death” (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* IV, chapter I). But to allow our attention to dwell on this is, on Smith’s view, misguided.

To do so is to embrace a “splenetic philosophy,” the effect of “sickness or low spirits” upon an imagination “which in pain and sorrow seems to be confined,” so that we are no longer “charmed with the beauty of that accommodation which reigns in the palaces and economy of the great . . .” The imagination of those “in better health or in better humor” fosters what may, Smith concedes, be no more than seductive illusions about the pleasures of wealth and greatness, but they are economically beneficial illusions. “It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind.” So even someone as perceptive as Smith, when he does pause to recognize the perspectives of ill health and old age, finds reason at once to put them on one side. And in so doing Smith speaks for moral philosophy in general.

As with vulnerability and affliction, so it is correspondingly with dependence. Dependence on others is of course often recognized in a general way, usually as something that we need

in order to achieve our positive goals. But an acknowledgment of anything like the full extent of that dependence and of the ways in which it stems from our vulnerability and our afflictions is generally absent. Feminist philosophers have recently done something to remedy this, not only by their understanding of the connections between blindness to and denigration of women and male attempts to ignore the facts of dependence, but also—I think here particularly of the work of Virginia Held—by their emphasis upon the importance of the mother-child relationship as a paradigm for moral relationships. Even more recently some striking philosophical work has been done on the nature of disability and on the condition of the disabled and the dependent, for example, in the Netherlands by Hans S. Reinders and in the United States by Eva Feder Kittay, who has also been an important contributor to feminist discussions (see Hans S. Reinders' work in progress, *Should We Prevent Handicapped Lives? Reflections on the Future of Disabled People in Liberal Society*, and Eva Feder Kittay, 'Human Dependency and Rawlsian Equality' in *Feminists Rethink the Self*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996; 'Taking Dependency Seriously: The Family and Medical Leave Act Considered in Light of the Social Organization of Dependency Work and Gender Equality', *Hypatia* 10, 1, Winter 1995; and "'Not My Way, Sesha, Your Way, Slowly": "Maternal Thinking" in the Raising of a Child with Profound Intellectual Disabilities' in *No Easy Answers: Mothering in the US Today*, ed. Julia Hanisberg and Sara Ruddick, New York: Beacon Press, 1998. Her forthcoming book, *Love's Labor: Essays on Equality, Dependence and Care*, London & New York: Routledge, 1999, will be an important focus for future discussion. See also Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*, New York: Routledge, 1996, and the review of it by Anita Silvers in *Ethics* 108, 3, April, 1998. Another landmark book will be *Disability, Difference, Discrimination: Perspectives on Justice in Bioethics and Public Policy* by Anita Silvers, David Wasserman, and Mary Mahowald, with an Afterword by Lawrence Becker, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.).

But such work is only beginning to make any systematic impact on what is currently established as mainstream moral philosophy in the advanced societies of the West. And, given those characteristics of the Western inheritance in moral philosophy that I have just noted, this is scarcely surprising.

The question therefore arises: what difference to moral philosophy would it make, if we were to treat the facts of vulnerability and affliction and the related facts of dependence as central to the human condition? As does the further question: how should we begin to try to answer this question? In philosophy where one begins generally makes a difference to the outcome of one's enquiries. One possible starting point is to acknowledge that the habits of mind that have been apt to obscure the significance of the facts of affliction and dependence for the moral philosopher are not only widely shared, but genuinely difficult to discard. They are after all *our* habits, part of a mindset that many of us have acquired, not only from our engagement in the enquiries of moral philosophy, but from the wider culture which provides the background of those enquiries. So we might do well to begin with a certain suspicion of ourselves. For whatever the philosophical idiom in which we frame our initial enquiries, whatever the philosophical resources upon which we find ourselves able to draw, we will be liable to think in terms that may prevent us from understanding just how much of a change in standpoint is needed.

Consider how both physical and mental disability are afflictions of the body and how therefore habits of mind that express an attitude of denial towards the facts of disability and dependence presuppose either a failure or a refusal to acknowledge adequately the bodily dimensions of our existence. This failure or refusal is perhaps rooted in, is certainly reinforced by the extent to which we conceive of ourselves and imagine ourselves as other than animal, as exempt from the hazardous condition of "mere" animality. Such defective modes of self-understanding and imagination at the level of everyday thought and practice seem often to coexist without any notable difficulty with a theoretical acknowledgment of the past evolutionary

history of human beings. But cultural prejudice often divorces the human present from the human past. And this same cultural prejudice sometimes finds support in philosophical theorizing that is itself innocent of prejudice. So philosophical theories about what it is that distinguishes members of our species from other animal species—it has been alleged by some theorists, as we shall see, that nonhuman animals cannot have thoughts, beliefs or reasons for action—may seem to provide grounds for the belief that our rationality as thinking beings is somehow independent of our animality. We become in consequence forgetful of our bodies and of how our thinking is the thinking of one species of animal.

There is also another and perhaps more fundamental relationship between our animal condition and our vulnerabilities. It will be a central thesis of this book that the virtues that we need, if we are to develop from our initial animal condition into that of independent rational agents, and the virtues that we need, if we are to confront and respond to vulnerability and disability both in ourselves and in others, belong to one and the same set of virtues, the distinctive virtues of dependent rational animals, whose dependence, rationality and animality have to be understood in relationship to each other.

If therefore we are to reckon adequately with the facts of disability and dependence, it may perhaps be to the point to begin with and from a reassertion of human animality. One way to do this is to return to Aristotle's texts, if only because no philosopher has taken human animality more seriously. Yet even the relevant texts of Aristotle can be and sometimes have been read in a way that deprives them of their instructive power. All nonhuman animals, Aristotle wrote, "live by perceptions and memories and have little experience; but the human kind live also by art and reasonings" (*Metaphysics* A, 980b 25–28). And Aristotle's account of human beings as distinctively rational has sometimes been interpreted as though he meant that rationality was not itself an animal property, but rather a property that separates humans from their animality. Aristotle did not of course make this mistake. *Phronesis*, the capacity for

practical rationality (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI 1140b 4–6, 20–21) is a capacity that he—and after him Aquinas—scribed to some nonhuman animals in virtue of their foresight (1141a 26–28), as well as to human beings. This of course does raise the question of how the *phronesis* of some types of nonhuman animal is related to specifically and distinctively human rationality. But some commentators have ignored this problem and in so doing have failed to ask the relevant questions about the relationship between our rationality and our animality. They have underestimated the importance of the fact that our bodies are animal bodies with the identity and continuities of animal bodies, and they have failed to recognize adequately that in this present life it is true of us that we do not merely have, but are our bodies. Other commentators have understood this. And it was his reading not only of Aristotle, but also of Ibn Rushd’s commentary that led Aquinas to assert: “Since the soul is part of the body of a human being, the soul is not the whole human being and my soul is not I” (*Commentary on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians* XV, 1, 11; note also that Aquinas, unlike most moderns, often refers to nonhuman animals as “other animals”). This is a lesson that those of us who identify ourselves as contemporary Aristotelians may need to relearn, perhaps from those phenomenological investigations that enabled Merleau-Ponty also to conclude that I am my body.

Forgetfulness of human animality is of course not the only obstacle to acknowledging the facts of affliction and dependence. And Aristotle himself exemplifies two other attitudes that are barriers to this acknowledgment. For while Aristotle understood very well the importance of the relevant kinds of experience for rational practice—“we see,” he wrote, “that the experienced are more effective than those who have reason, but lack experience” (*Metaphysics* A 981a 14–15) — in neither ethics nor politics did he give any weight to the experience of those for whom the facts of affliction and dependence are most likely to be undeniable: women, slaves, and servants, those engaged in the productive labor of farmers, fishing crews, and manufacture. “On important matters we undertake delibera-

tion in common with others, distrusting ourselves as inadequate to make decisions" (*Nicomachean Ethics* III 1112b 10–11). But it matters a good deal with which others we choose to deliberate and Aristotle's own failure to acknowledge the facts of affliction and dependence may be in part at least a consequence of his political exclusions.

Another Aristotelian obstacle to that acknowledgment is constituted by two characteristics of Aristotle's conception of masculine virtue. When Aristotle discusses the particular need that we have for friends in times of adversity and loss, he insists that men who are manly differ from women in being unwilling to have others saddened by their grief. They do not want, by sharing their loss, to inflict it on others (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX 1171b 6012). And Aristotle plainly takes it that the man who acts like a woman in this regard is inferior in his masculine virtue. Moreover, the magnanimous man, who is on Aristotle's account, a paragon of the virtues, dislikes any recognition of his need for aid from and consolation by others. He "is ashamed to receive benefits, because it is a mark of a superior to confer benefits, of an inferior to receive them" (*Nicomachean Ethics* IV 1124b 9–10). And Aristotle goes on to remark that the magnanimous man is forgetful of what he has received, but remembers what he has given, and is not pleased to be reminded of the former, but hears the latter recalled with pleasure" (12–18).

Aristotle thus anticipated Smith—and a great many others—in importing into moral philosophy the standpoint of those who have taken themselves to be self-sufficiently superior and of those who take their standards from those who take themselves to be self-sufficiently superior. And he also and correspondingly anticipated them in being unable to give due recognition to affliction and to dependence. Nonetheless when we try to remedy this injury to moral philosophy, it will turn out, so I shall be suggesting, that we have to draw to a quite remarkable extent upon Aristotle's concepts, theses and arguments. Even although Aristotle and some Aristotelians have positions against which it is important to argue, it was Aristotle

who provided the best resources that we as yet have for identifying what is mistaken in those positions and how those mistakes should be corrected. So at certain points I will be turning Aristotle against Aristotle, sometimes with the aid of Aquinas, and this in the interests of defending three sets of theses.

The first concerns our resemblances to and commonality with members of some other intelligent animal species. I shall contend that, although our differences from all other species are certainly of crucial importance, it is also important that both initially in our earliest childhood activities and to some significant extent thereafter we comport ourselves towards the world in much the same way as other intelligent animals. In transcending some of their limitations we never separate ourselves entirely from what we share with them. Indeed our ability to transcend those limitations depends in part upon certain of those animal characteristics, among them the nature of our identity.

It is not just that our bodies are animal bodies with the identity and the continuities of animal bodies, as I have already asserted. Human identity is primarily, even if not only, bodily and therefore animal identity and it is by reference to that identity that the continuities of our relationships to others are partly defined. Among the various ills that afflict us are those that disturb those continuities—loss of or damage to memory, for example, or disfigurement that prevents others from recognizing us—as well as those that disable us in other ways.

A second set of theses concerns the moral importance of acknowledging not only such vulnerabilities and afflictions, but also our consequent dependences. Modern moral philosophy has understandably and rightly placed great emphasis upon individual autonomy, upon the capacity for making independent choices. I shall argue that the virtues of independent rational agency need for their adequate exercise to be accompanied by what I shall call the virtues of acknowledged dependence and that a failure to understand this is apt to obscure some features of rational agency. Moreover both sets of virtues

are needed in order to actualize the distinctive potentialities that are specific to the human rational animal. Identifying how and why they are needed is a prerequisite for understanding their essential place in the kind of human life through which human flourishing can be achieved.

What type of social relationship and what type of conception of the common good are required, if a social group is to be one in and through which both the virtues of rational independence and the virtues of acknowledged dependence are sustained and transmitted? A third set of theses provides answers to those questions and I shall argue that neither the modern nation-state nor the modern family can supply the kind of political and social association that is needed.

How do we become
independent practical
reasoners?

How do the virtues make this
possible?

What then are the social relationships without which we cannot become independent practical reasoners? Are there also social relationships that are necessary if we are to be sustained as independent practical reasoners? And what are the virtues without which these relationships cannot be brought into being and maintained in being? If we are to answer these questions, we first need a further and more detailed account of the dimensions of the child's development out of infantile dependence.

In most moral philosophy the starting point is one that already presupposes the existence of mature independent practical reasoners whose social relationships are the relationships of the adult world. Childhood, if noticed at all, is a topic that receives only brief and incidental attention. (There are of course a very few but striking exceptions, among them Rousseau's

Émile and more recently Gareth B. Matthews's *The Philosophy of Childhood*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994. The neglect of childhood parallels the neglect both of old age and of experiences, at all stages of life, of disability and dependence.) But practical reasoners enter the adult world with relationships, experiences, attitudes, and capacities that they bring with them from childhood and adolescence and that always to some significant, and often to some very large degree they are unable to discard and disown.

To become an effective independent practical reasoner is an achievement, but it is always one to which others have made essential contributions. The earliest of these relate directly to our animal existence, to what we share in our development with members of other intelligent species. We owe to parents, especially mothers, to aunts, grandparents, and surrogates for these, that care from conception through birth and infancy to childhood that dolphins also owe to elders who provide maternal and other care. And in human as in dolphin life there are patterns of receiving and giving, enduring through and beyond the life-span of particular individuals. Dolphins, having been cared for, care for others, sometimes extending such care beyond their own species to human beings. So Plutarch, in a dialogue comparing the excellences of sea creatures to those of land animals, ascribed to dolphins—in contrast to what he took to be the narrow self-interest of swallows—“that virtue so much sought after by the best philosophers: the capacity for disinterested friendship” (*Moralia* LXIII, ‘Whether Land or Sea Animals Have More Practical Intelligence’). But, tempting as this thought about dolphins may be, it emphasizes a resemblance at the cost of obscuring a difference.

The care for others that dolphins exhibit plays a crucial part in sustaining their shared lives. Yet this part is one that they themselves cannot survey, lacking as they do, any capacity to look back to infancy or forward to aging and death as humans do. Both dolphins and humans have animal identities and animal histories. Human beings are able on occasion to ignore or to conceal from themselves this fact, perhaps by thinking of

themselves instead as Lockean persons or Cartesian minds or even as Platonic souls (See for a statement of some of the relevant philosophical issues and arguments Eric T. Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). But, unlike dolphins, they also have the possibility of understanding their animal identity through time from conception to death and with it their need at different past and future stages of life for the care of others, that is, as those who, having received care, will be from time to time called upon to give care, and who, having given, will from time to time themselves once more be in need of care by and from others. What we need from others, if we are not only to exercise our initial animal capacities, but also to develop the capacities of independent practical reasoners, are those relationships necessary for fostering the ability to evaluate, modify, or reject our own practical judgments, to ask, that is, whether what we take to be good reasons for action really are sufficiently good reasons, *and* the ability to imagine realistically alternative possible futures, so as to be able to make rational choices between them, *and* the ability to stand back from our desires, so as to be able to enquire rationally what the pursuit of our good here and now requires and how our desires must be directed and, if necessary, reeducated, if we are to attain it. It is the last of these that we should consider first.

I have already remarked that one early cause of inadequacy as a practical reasoner is a failure to separate ourselves adequately from our desires, so as to be able, when necessary, to pass judgment on those desires from an external point of view. This incapacity, I have suggested, characteristically results from a failure to make ourselves sufficiently independent of those others on whom we depended, first for sustenance during infancy and then for initiating us into the procedures of practical reasoning. For it is not just that the infant desires immediate satisfaction of clamorous felt needs. It is also that those desires become focused upon whomsoever and whatever it is that satisfies those needs. And the attitudes of the child towards the objects of its desires are informed by attachments

and affections—and accompanying deprivations, pains, and fears—that for it define its first social relationships.

All this may seem too obvious to be worth remarking. But it provides reminders that are badly needed if we are to understand the full extent of the difficulty confronted by parents and others whose aim is to enable dependent young children to become independent reasoners, practical reasoners who not only have the ability to reach their own conclusions, but also can be held accountable by and to others for those conclusions. The resources that they bring to this task derive largely from the child's initial dependence. The child will have learned through its experiences of attachment and affection that, in order to satisfy its desires, it must please its mother and other adult figures. It therefore acts so as to please those adults. Yet what those adults have to teach the child, if the child is indeed to become an independent practical reasoner, is that it will please them, *not* by acting so as to please them, but by acting so as to achieve what is good and best, whether this pleases them or not. All adults find it difficult and some find it impossible to teach this. So that the early learning of the child is characteristically imperfect learning at the hands of imperfect teachers, in which the child confronts conflicting demands and responds, if her or his teachers are successful, in struggling against this imposition. The imperfection of the teacher, we should note, is a matter not only of the difficulty of the task, but also of the fact that the teacher too was once an imperfect learner.

The child who has become adequately independent both of her or his own desires and of the undue influence of adults will therefore generally have had to free her or himself through a series of conflicts. How to engage in conflict, so that one is destructive neither to oneself nor to others, is another skill that has to be learned early and it too is generally learned imperfectly. We are therefore never completely weaned from either the attachments or the antagonisms characteristic of early childhood, nor is it perhaps desirable that we should be. But what we should have learned from reflection upon the practice of psychoanalysis, and most of all perhaps from the work of

D. W. Winnicott, is that one outcome of failure to transform the attitudes and relationships of early childhood is an inability to achieve the kind of independence that is able to acknowledge truthfully and realistically its dependences and attachments, so leaving us in captivity to those dependences, attachments, and conflicts. Acknowledgment of dependence is the key to independence. For one consequence of failure to break free from such captivity may be an inability even to acquire an adequate sense of oneself as an independent person with one's own unity as an agent. Winnicott has shown us how in achieving this sense of self there is a sequence in which "relaxation in conditions of trust based on experience" is followed by "creative, physical and mental activity manifested in play," so that finally there is a "summation of these experiences forming the basis for a sense of self" (*Playing and Reality*, London: Tavistock, 1971, p. 56). (Winnicott in the passage from which I am quoting uses this sequence to narrate the history of an analysis, but it also has application to the histories of early childhood.) Play is important because it is exploratory, because it releases those who engage in it from the pressures of felt need, because it extends both the range of activities found worth pursuing for their own sake and the range of pleasures that can be taken in such activities, and because in moving from the kind of playfulness exhibited both by humans and dolphins to more sophisticated forms of play we move from animal intelligence to specifically human reasoning (see D. W. Winnicott, 'The Baby as a Person', chapter 11 of *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1987). What analysts are sometimes able to provide for those whose early childhood experiences were defective is what good mothers and other caregiving adults do provide, a situation in which the child's unqualified trust in such adults releases the creative physical and mental powers expressed in play, resulting in a sense of self sufficient for an increasing degree of independence in practical reasoning.

What I become able to do, if I acquire an adequate sense of self, is to put in question the relationship between my present

set of desires and motives and my good. What constitutes a good reason for my doing this rather than that, for my acting from this particular desire rather than that, is that my doing this rather than that serves my good, will contribute to my flourishing *qua* human being. But what if my desires are otherwise directed? Very young children initially cannot but pursue the satisfaction of their wants and felt needs without any reference to a good beyond that satisfaction. And with adults it is often the case in particular situations that what it would be good and best for them to do is one thing, while what they want to do is quite another. In the case of both children and adults there is a gap between what they have good reason to do and what would satisfy some present desire or other member of what Bernard Williams has called "the agent's subjective motivational set" ('Internal and External Reasons', *Moral Luck*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 102), defining this broadly so that it includes "dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties" and commitments to various projects (p. 105).

Williams has argued that there can be no such thing as a reason for action by a particular agent which is external to and independent of the members of this agent's motivational set, but he is careful to point out that we should not think of that set as "statically given" (p. 105). So Williams certainly allows that an agent may come to be moved by considerations which do not at present move her or him; what had been an external reason may become an internal reason. But what Williams's conclusion does exclude is the possibility that it can be true of some particular agent that it would be good and best for her or him *qua* human being or *qua* aunt or *qua* farmer to do such and such, and that *therefore* she or he has good reason to do such and such, independently of whether or not at any present or future time that agent will have, perhaps even could have, given her or his individual circumstances, the requisite motivation. And it seems that this is because for Williams to assert about some agent that it would be good and best for her or him to do such and such is one thing, while to assert about that same

agent that she or he has reason to do such and such is quite another. Williams's account certainly allows for moral development of some kinds, but it obscures from view the way in which agents have to learn at various stages how to transcend what have been up till this or that point the limitations of their motivational set and will fail badly in their moral development, if they remain within those limitations.

What a child who is making the transition from the infantile exercise of animal intelligence to the exercise of independent practical reasoning has to achieve is a transformation of her or his motivational set, so that what were originally—in Williams' terminology, although now differently understood—external reasons also become internal. This is the passage from desiring *x* and wanting my desire for *x* to be satisfied, just because it is my desire, to desiring *x* qua good and wanting my desire for *x* to be satisfied, just because and insofar as it is a desire for what it is good and best for me to desire. What are the qualities that a child must develop, first to redirect and transform her or his desires, and subsequently to direct them consistently towards the goods of the different stages of her or his life? They are the intellectual and moral virtues. It is because failure to acquire those virtues makes it impossible for us to achieve this transition that the virtues have the place and function that they do in human life. How do they enable us to do this? Even a minimally adequate answer must wait upon a more extended account of the transition through which the child must pass and of its end-state. But enough has already been said to make it clear that certain kinds of answer are ruled out.

Just because our degree of success or failure in first acquiring and then practicing the virtues determines in significant measure what it is that we find agreeable and useful, the characterization of the virtues, in Humean terms, as qualities that are generally and naturally agreeable and useful is misleading. Consider the virtue of temperateness, the virtue concerned with the pleasures and pains of eating, drinking, sexuality, and other bodily activities and states. To have this virtue is not only to know how to avoid the extremes of self-indulgent and even

addictive appetite, on the one hand, and of an unappreciative and insensitive puritanism on the other, but also to do so, as Aristotle remarked, with an eye to our own particular circumstances. What temperateness requires of an athlete in training is not what it requires of a convalescent whose strength needs to be rebuilt. What it requires of someone who is tempted to excess in eating is not the same as what it requires of someone whose vice is fanatical devotion to a cult of fitness and weight-loss.

Someone who has become temperate will have come to enjoy moderation and to find excess disagreeable and even painful. She or he will no longer practice moderation in spite of a desire for the pleasures that belong to excess, but because desire itself has been transformed. What she or he finds agreeable and useful is no longer the same. And temperateness itself will now have become agreeable and will now be recognized as useful. The class of the virtues, that is to say, includes some virtues at least, such as temperateness, that are agreeable to and are recognized as useful by those who possess them, but that may well seem disagreeable and even harmful not only to those with the corresponding vices, but also to those whose purposes are such that it is useful to them that others should have those vices. So it is highly agreeable and useful to those who market certain kinds of consumer goods that there should be intemperate consumers. Their own vice of acquisitiveness makes the vice of intemperateness in others agreeable and useful to them.

The progress of the child towards a condition in which she or he is able to stand back from her or his desires and evaluate them is then in key part an extended initiation into those habits that are the virtues. And the child's teachers will need themselves in some measure to possess those virtues, if they are to be able to instruct the child. But we would make a mistake, if we inferred from this that some part of the child's education has to be set apart for specifically moral instruction. Just as the virtues are exercised in the whole range of our activities, so they are learned in the same range of activities, in those contexts of

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Social relationships, practical reasoning, common goods, and individual goods

We become independent practical reasoners through participation in a set of relationships to certain particular others who are able to give us what we need. When we have become independent practical reasoners, we will often, although not perhaps always, also have acquired what we need, if we are to be able to give to those others who are now in need of what formerly we needed. We find ourselves placed at some particular point within a network of relationships of giving and receiving in which, generally and characteristically, what and how far we are able to give depends in part on what and how far we received.

Consider how these relationships extend in time from conception to death, presupposing a conception of human identity as animal identity. We receive from parents and other family elders, from teachers and those to whom we are apprenticed, and from those who care for us when we are sick, injured, weakened by aging, or otherwise incapacitated. Later on others, children, students, those who are in various ways incapacitated, and others in gross and urgent need have to rely on us to give. Sometimes those others who rely on us are the same individuals from whom we ourselves received. But often enough it is from one set of individuals that we receive and to and by another that we are called on to give. So understood, the relationships from

which the independent practical reasoner emerges and through which she or he continues to be sustained are such that from the outset she or he is in debt. Moreover the repayment of the debts in question is not and cannot be a matter of strict reciprocity, and not only because those to whom one is called upon to give are very often not the same individuals as those from whom one received. Even when what we receive is the same kind of care or assistance as that which we are called upon to give, it may be that one of these is far greater and more demanding than the other. And often enough what we receive and what we give are incommensurable: there is generally, for example, no relevant way of comparing what our parents gave us by way of care and education with what we are called upon to give to the same parents by way of care in illness or old age (although this account of moral relationships is in important respects at odds with that defended by Lawrence J. Becker in *Reciprocity*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, I have learned a good deal from it).

This is not the only asymmetry. We know from whom it is that we have received and therefore to whom we are in debt. But often we do not know to whom it is that we will be called upon to give: our parents and teachers perhaps, if they survive; our children, if we have children; those whom contingency and chance put into our care. And we do not know just what they will need. We can set in advance no limit to those possible needs, just as those who cared for us could at an earlier time have set no limits to what our needs might have been. We might have been disabled by, say, brain damage suffered at birth, or severe autism, so that those who cared for us would have found it impossible to develop the potentialities that we originally had. And the kind of care that was needed to make us what we have in fact become, independent practical reasoners, had to be, if it was to be effective, unconditional care for the human being as such, whatever the outcome. And this is the kind of care that we in turn now owe or will owe. Of the brain-damaged, of those almost incapable of movement, of the autistic, of all such we have to say: this could have been us. Their mischances could

The virtues of acknowledged dependence

Adam Smith's contrast between self-interested market behavior on the one hand and altruistic, benevolent behavior on the other, obscures from view just those types of activity in which the goods to be achieved are neither mine-rather-than-others' nor others'-rather-than-mine, but instead are goods that can only be mine insofar as they are also those of others, that are genuinely common goods, as the goods of networks of giving and receiving are. But if we need to act for the sake of such common goods, in order to achieve our flourishing as rational animals, then we also need to have transformed our initial desires in a way that enables us to recognize the inadequacy of any simple classification of desires as either egoistic or altruistic. The limitations and blindnesses of merely self-interested desire have been catalogued often enough. Those of a blandly generalized benevolence have received too little attention. What such benevolence presents us with is a generalized Other—one whose only relationship to us is to provide an occasion for the exercise of *our* benevolence, so that we can reassure ourselves about our own good will—in place of those particular others with whom we must learn to share common goods, and participate in ongoing relationships. What are the qualities needed for such participation?

To ask this question returns us to the discussion of the virtues and why they are needed. The emphasis in my earlier

account was on the indispensable part that the virtues play in enabling us to move from dependence on the reasoning powers of others, principally our parents and teachers, to independence in our practical reasoning. And the virtues to which I principally referred were familiar items in Aristotelian and other catalogues: justice, temperateness, truthfulness, courage, and the like. But if we are to understand the virtues as enabling us to become independent practical reasoners, just because they also enable us to participate in relationships of giving and receiving through which our ends as practical reasoners are to be achieved, we need to extend our enquiries a good deal further, by recognizing that any adequate education into the virtues will be one that enables us to give their due to a set of virtues that are the necessary counterpart to the virtues of independence, the virtues of acknowledged dependence.

Conventional understandings of the virtues, even the conventional names for the virtues, may be unhelpful at this point. If, for example, we search for a name for the central virtue exhibited in relationships of receiving and giving, we will find that neither 'generosity' nor 'justice', as these have been commonly understood, will quite supply what is needed, since according to most understandings of the virtues one can be generous without being just and just without being generous, while the central virtue required to sustain this kind of receiving and giving has aspects both of generosity and justice. There is a Lakota expression 'wancantognaka' that comes much closer than any contemporary English expression. That Lakota word names the virtue of individuals who recognize responsibilities to immediate family, extended family, and tribe and who express that recognition by their participation in ceremonial acts of uncalculated giving, ceremonies of thanksgiving, of remembrance, and of the conferring of honor. 'Wancantognaka' names a generosity that I owe to all those others who also owe it to me (Lydia Whirlwind Soldier, 'Wancantognaka: the continuing Lakota custom of generosity', *Tribal College* Vii, 3, Winter 1995-6). Because I owe it, to fail to exhibit it is to fail in respect of justice; because what I owe is

uncalculating giving, to fail to exhibit it is also to fail in respect of generosity. But it is not only among the Lakota that we find a recognition of this kind of relationship between justice and generosity.

Aquinas considers as one objection to the view that liberality is a part of the virtue of justice that justice is a matter of what is owed, and that therefore, when we give to another only what is owed to that other, we do not act with liberality. It is on this view the mark of the liberal, that is, the generous individual to give more than justice requires. To this Aquinas replies by distinguishing obligations that are a matter of strict justice, and of justice only, from the *decentia* required by liberality, actions that are indeed justly due to others, and are a minimum in the reckoning of what is due to others (*Summa Theologiae* IIa-IIae 117, 5). If we are to understand what Aquinas is saying here, we need to put it in context by considering also his treatment of the virtue of charity, or friendship towards God and human beings, of the virtue of taking pity, *misericordia*, and of the virtue of doing good, *beneficentia*. In discussing beneficence Aquinas emphasizes how in a single action these different virtues may be exemplified by different aspects of that action. Suppose that someone gives to another in significant need ungrudgingly, from a regard for the other as a human being in need, because it is the minimum owed to that other, and because in relieving the other's distress I relieve my distress at her or his distress. On Aquinas's account that individual at once acts liberally, from the beneficence of charity, justly, and out of taking pity. There is indeed that which is required by liberality, but not by justice, that which may be due from pity, but not from charity. But what the virtues require from us are characteristically types of action that are at once just, generous, beneficent, and done from pity. The education of dispositions to perform just this type of act is what is needed to sustain relationships of uncalculated giving and graceful receiving.

Such an education has to include, as we already noticed, the education of the affections, sympathies, and inclinations. The deprivations to which just generosity is the appropriate re-

sponse are characteristically not only deprivations of physical care and intellectual instruction, but also and most of all deprivations of the attentive and affectionate regard of others. To act towards another as the virtue of just generosity requires is therefore to act from attentive and affectionate regard for that other. To this it is sometimes said that our affections are not ours to command. But, while in particular situations this may be true—I cannot here and now decide by an act of will to feel such and such—we can of course, as we also noticed earlier, cultivate and train our dispositions to feel, just as we can train our dispositions to act and indeed our dispositions to act with and from certain feelings. Just generosity then requires us to act from and with a certain kind of affectionate regard. When we are so required, not to act from inclination is always a sign of moral inadequacy, of a failure to act as our duty requires. Hume, unlike Kant, understood this very well. “Were not natural affection a duty, the care of children cou’d not be a duty: and ’twere impossible we cou’d have the duty in our eye in the attention we give to our offspring” (*A Treatise of Human Nature* III, ii, 1, ed. Selby-Bigge, p. 478). Do we then perhaps sometimes act from duty when we ought instead to act from inclination? Yes, replies Hume, we do so when we have recognized in ourselves the lack of some requisite motive: “a person who feels his heart devoid of that motive, may hate himself upon that account, and may perform the action without the motive, from a certain sense of duty, in order to acquire by practice that virtuous principle, or at least, to disguise to himself, as much as possible, his want of it” (p. 479).

I have already remarked that the practices of receiving and giving informed by particular just generosity are primarily exercised towards other members of our own community related to us by their and our roles. Yet this may have been misleading in more than one way. First of all we are often members of more than one community and we may find a place within more than one network of giving and receiving. Moreover we move in and out of communities. If therefore from now on I continue for simplicity’s sake to speak of *the* commu-

nity or network to which someone belongs, the reader should supply the missing arm of the disjunctions: 'community or communities', 'network or networks'. Secondly, it is important to the functioning of communities that among the roles that play a part in their shared lives there should be that of 'the stranger', someone from outside the community who has happened to arrive amongst us and to whom we owe hospitality, just because she or he is a stranger. Hospitality too is a duty that involves the inclinations, since it should be willing and ungrudging. But thirdly the scope of just generosity extends beyond the boundaries of community. Consider two testimonies from very different cultures, one from Sophocles, one from Mencius.

When, according to Sophocles, a shepherd was given the task of killing the infant Oedipus, he was instead moved by pity to dangerous disobedience and secretly entrusted the child to another shepherd, so that a home might be found for the child. And when Neoptolemus saw the open suppurating wound of Philoctetes and heard his screams of pain, he too was moved by pity to act otherwise than he had promised to act. Mencius said that "all human beings have the mind that cannot bear to see the sufferings of others . . . when human beings see a child fall into a well, they all have a feeling of harm and distress" and this not because they think that acting upon this feeling will gain them credit with others (and not because the child is a member of their household or community). What they will lack, if they do not respond to the child's urgent and dire need, just because it is urgent and dire need, is humanity, something without which we will be defective in our social relationships (see *The Book of Mencius* 2A:5, in Wing-tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 65). Such action-changing onsets of pity may of course sometimes be no more than momentary episodes in which a surge of nonrational feeling prompts a particular individual to act without further reflection. But Aquinas asserts that insofar as the occurrence of *miser cordia* (I use the Latin rather than the English in order to avoid the association in English of 'pity'

with condescension) is informed by the appropriate rational judgment, '*miser cordia*' names a virtue and not just a passion (S. T. IIa-IIae, 30, 3), and that is to say that a capacity for *miser cordia* that extends beyond communal obligations is itself crucial for communal life. Why is this so? *Miser cordia* has regard to urgent and extreme need without respect of persons. It is the kind and scale of the need that dictates what has to be done, not whose need it is. And what each of us needs to know in our communal relationships is that the attention given to *our* urgent and extreme needs, the needs characteristic of disablement, will be proportional to the need and not to the relationship. But we can rely on this only from those for whom *miser cordia* is one of the virtues. So communal life itself needs this virtue that goes beyond the boundaries of communal life. And it is the virtue and not just the capacity for sentiment that is needed. Sentiment, unguided by reason, becomes sentimentality and sentimentality is a sign of moral failure. What then is the virtue? If I turn immediately to Aquinas's account, it is in part because, although the practical recognition of this virtue is often widespread, theoretical accounts are rare and I know of no other similarly extended account. What then does Aquinas say?

He treats *miser cordia* as one of the effects of charity, and, since charity is a theological virtue, and the theological virtues are due to divine grace, an incautious reader might suppose that Aquinas does not recognize it as a secular virtue. But this would be a mistake. Charity in the form of *miser cordia* is recognizably at work in the secular world and the authorities whom Aquinas cites on its nature, and whose disagreements he aspires to resolve, include Sallust and Cicero as well as Augustine. *Miser cordia* then has its place in the catalogue of the virtues, independently of its theological grounding. Towards whom is it directed?

To those, whoever they are, who are afflicted by some considerable evil, especially when it is not the immediate outcome of the afflicted individual's choices (IIa-IIae, 30, 1), a qualification that perhaps itself needs qualifying. Extreme and

urgent necessity on the part of another in itself provides a stronger reason for action than even claims based upon the closest of familial ties (31, 3). And when such need is less extreme and urgent, it still may on occasion be rightly judged to outweigh the claims of familial or other immediate social ties. (This is a feature of Aquinas's account that goes unnoticed in Arnhart's otherwise illuminating argument, designed to show how Aquinas's theses about the natural law are compatible with a biological understanding of human nature, *op. cit.*, p. 260.) There is no rule to decide such cases and the virtue of prudence has to be exercised in judgment (31, 3, ad. 1). It might then seem that we have two distinct and sometimes competing kinds of claim that might be made upon us: on the one hand by those who stand to us in some determinate social relationship by virtue of their place in the same community as ourselves, and on the other by those severely afflicted in some way, whether or not they stand in such a relationship to us. Aquinas's account of the virtue of *miseriordia* however requires us to reject this contrast, at least as I have so far formulated it.

Miseriordia is grief or sorrow over someone else's distress, says Aquinas, just insofar as one understands the other's distress as one's own. One may do this because of some preexisting tie to the other—the other is already one's friend or kin—or because in understanding the other's distress one recognizes that it could instead have been one's own. But what is involved in such an understanding? *Miseriordia* is that aspect of charity whereby we supply what is needed by our neighbor and among the virtues that relate us to our neighbor *miseriordia* is the greatest (30, 4). So to understand another's distress as our own is to recognize that other as neighbor, and, says Aquinas, in all matters with regard to love of the neighbor, "it does not matter whether we say 'neighbor' as in *I John 4*, or 'brother' as in *Leviticus 19*, or 'friend', since all these refer to the same affinity." But to recognize another as brother or friend is to recognize one's relationship to them as being of the same kind as one's relationship to other members of one's own community. So to direct the virtue of *miseriordia* towards others is to

extend one's communal relationships so as to include those others within those relationships. And we are required from now on to care about them and to be concerned about their good just as we care about others already within our community.

I have so far catalogued three salient characteristics of relationships that are informed by the virtue of just generosity: they are communal relationships that engage our affections, they extend beyond the long-term relationships of the members of a community to each other to relationships of hospitality to passing strangers, and, through the exercise of the virtue of *miser cordia*, they include those whose urgent need confronts the members of such a community. And in speaking of the type of action that issues from just generosity, I have used the word 'uncalculating', but this predicate now has to be qualified. Just generosity requires us to be uncalculating in this sense, that we can rely on no strict proportionality of giving and receiving. As I have said before, those from whom I hope to and perhaps do receive are very often, even if not always, not the same people as those to whom I gave. And what I am called upon to give has no predetermined limits and may greatly exceed what I have received. I may not calculate what I owe on the basis of what others have given me. There is however another sense in which prudent calculation is not only permitted, but required by just generosity. If I do not work, so as to acquire property, I will have nothing to give. If I do not save, but only consume, then, when the time comes when my help is urgently needed by my neighbor, I may not have the resources to provide that help. If I give to those not really in urgent need, then I may not have enough to give to those who are. So industriousness in getting, thrift in saving, and discrimination in giving are required. And these are further aspects of the virtue of temperateness.

Notice that to these virtues of giving must be added virtues of receiving: such virtues as those of knowing how to exhibit gratitude, without allowing that gratitude to be a burden, courtesy towards the graceless giver, and forbearance towards the inadequate giver. The exercise of these latter virtues always

involves a truthful acknowledgment of dependence. And they are therefore virtues bound to be lacking in those whose forgetfulness of their dependence is expressed in an unwillingness to remember benefits conferred by others. One outstanding example, even perhaps *the* outstanding example of this type of bad character and also of a failure to recognize its badness is Aristotle's *megalopsychos*, about whom Aristotle remarks approvingly, that he "is ashamed to receive benefits, because it is a mark of a superior to confer benefits, of an inferior to receive them" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1124b 9–10). So the *megalopsychos* is forgetful of what he has received, but remembers what he has given, and is not pleased to be reminded of the former, but hears the latter recalled with pleasure (12–18). We recognize here an illusion of self-sufficiency, an illusion apparently shared by Aristotle, that is all too characteristic of the rich and powerful in many times and places, an illusion that plays its part in excluding them from certain types of communal relationship. For like virtues of giving, those of receiving are needed in order to sustain just those types of communal relationship through which the exercise of these virtues first has to be learned. It is perhaps unsurprising then that from the standpoint of such relationships urgent need and necessity have to be understood in a particular light. What someone in dire need is likely to need immediately here and now is food, drink, clothing and shelter. But, when these first needs have been met, what those in need then most need is to be admitted or readmitted to some recognized position within some network of communal relationships in which they are acknowledged as a participating member of a deliberative community, a position that affords them both empowering respect from others and self-respect. Yet such respect for others is not the fundamental form of human regard that is required for this kind of communal life. Why not?

Those in dire need both within and outside a community generally include individuals whose extreme disablement is such that they can never be more than passive members of the community, not recognizing, not speaking or not speaking

intelligibly, suffering, but not acting. I suggested earlier that for the rest of us an important thought about such individuals is 'I might have been that individual.' But that thought has to be translated into a particular kind of regard. The care that we ourselves need from others and the care that they need from us require a commitment and a regard that is not conditional upon the contingencies of injury, disease and other afflictions. My regard for another is always open to being destroyed by what the other does, by serious lies, by cruelty, by treachery, by victimization, by exploitation, but if it is diminished or abolished by what happens to the other, by her or his afflictions, then it is not the kind of regard necessary for those communal relationships—including relationships to those outside the community—through which our common good can be achieved.

The political and social structures of the common good

What are the types of political and social society that can embody those relationships of giving and receiving through which our individual and common goods can be achieved? They will have to satisfy three conditions. First they must afford expression to the political decision-making of independent reasoners on all those matters on which it is important that the members of a particular community be able to come through shared rational deliberation to a common mind. So there will have to be institutionalized forms of deliberation to which all those members of the community who have proposals, objections and arguments to contribute have access. And the procedures of decision-making will have to be generally acceptable, so that both deliberation and decisions are recognizable as the work of the whole.

Secondly, in a community in which just generosity is counted among the central virtues the established norms of justice will have to be consistent with the exercise of this virtue. No single simple formulation will be capable of capturing the different kinds of norm that will be necessary for different kinds of just relationship. Between independent practical reasoners the norms will have to satisfy Marx's formula for justice in a socialist society, according to which what each receives is

proportionate to what each contributes. Between those capable of giving and those who are most dependent and in most need of receiving—children, the old, the disabled—the norms will have to satisfy a revised version of Marx's formula for justice in a communist society, "From each according to her or his ability, to each, so far as is possible, according to her or his needs" (*Critique of the Gotha Program*, I). Marx of course understood his second formula as having application only in an as yet unrealizable future. And we must recognize that limited economic resources allow only for its application in imperfect ways. But without its application, even if imperfectly, even if *very* imperfectly, we will be unable to sustain a way of life characterized both by effective appeals to desert and by effective appeals to need, and so by justice to and for both the independent and the dependent.

Thirdly, the political structures must make it possible both for those capable of independent practical reason and for those whose exercise of reasoning is limited or nonexistent to have a voice in communal deliberation about what these norms of justice require. And the only way in which the latter can have a voice is if there are others who are able and prepared to stand proxy for them and if the role of proxy is given a formal place in the political structures.

What I am trying to envisage then is a form of political society in which it is taken for granted that disability and dependence on others are something that all of us experience at certain times in our lives and this to unpredictable degrees, and that consequently our interest in how the needs of the disabled are adequately voiced and met is not a special interest, the interest of one particular group rather than of others, but rather the interest of the whole political society, an interest that is integral to their conception of their common good. What kind of society might possess the structures necessary to achieve a common good thus conceived?

If at this point we turn for assistance to recent social and political philosophy, we will be for the most part disappointed, since with rare exceptions work in that area ignores questions

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