

CHARITY, RECIPROCITY, AND THE MORAL LAW

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In her classic novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Willa Cather provides a short but rich scene which helps crystallize the tensions underlying the relationship among charity, reciprocity, and the moral law (1990). The setting is the New Mexico territory in the middle of the 19th century. Father Joseph arrives at a remote *rancho* riding his broken-down mare. He's greeted by the patron, Manuel Lujon, who affords him all the hospitality due a stranger and, indeed, the hospitality due a priest visiting a faithful clan of believers. On the day before Father Joseph's departure, after an evening of marriages and feasting, Manuel takes Father Joseph for a tour of his corral, where he displays his two prize, cream-colored mules, Contento and Angelico. Father Joseph swings up on Contento's back and parades around, lamenting that his own lame mare will never see him through the miles to his final destination. Thoughtfully and, we are led to believe, somewhat reluctantly, Manuel offers the mule to the priest as a gift. "You have made my house right with Heaven," he tells Father Joseph, "and you charge me very little. I will do something very nice for you; I will give you Contento for a present, and I hope to be particularly remembered in your prayers" (61).

We have the picture here of an apparently simple gift, but one whose contours prove to be complex. Father Joseph has, in some sense, cleverly asked for the mule. Manuel, for his part, cares genuinely for the well-being of Joseph, who has performed his sacramental duties with joy and generosity of spirit. Both men have acted in the spirit of charity—*caritas*, self-giving love. Neither sees the gift in the spirit of reciprocity—Manuel is not responding to a sense of being in debt, and Joseph makes no moral claim in his playful yet serious intimation that the mule might make a suitable substitute for his nag. And yet the gift might be seen to

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contain a hint of duress and exchange—Manuel parts with the mare with circumspect happiness, but asks to be remembered in the priest’s prayers. Cather continues: “Springing to the ground, Father [Joseph] threw his arms about his host. ‘Manuelito!’ he cried, ‘for this darling mule I think I could almost pray you into Heaven!’ The Mexican laughed, too, and warmly returned the embrace. Arm-in-arm they went in to begin the baptisms” (61).

The scene ends with friends on equal footing embracing each other in the spirit of freedom—a gift has been freely offered and freely accepted. Any reservations on Manuel’s part are eclipsed by the joy of his new friend’s pleasure and well-being. The mule is not a payment for past or future prayers; Joseph’s prayers are not recompense for the mule. In this, both he who gives and he who receives would seem to stand outside a logic of gift-giving which often has unspoken within it a legal notion of proportional justice.

The Logic of Reciprocity

There is—for perhaps every gift—an unspoken expectation of reciprocity, a sense that a gift (if only a gift of thanks) must be given in return, proportionate to the original gift (von Mises 1962, 75-77; see also Mauss 1967; Godbout and Caille 1998).¹ This expectation obtains sometimes on the part of the giver, sometimes on the part of the recipient; very often it is an expectation shared (if not explicitly acknowledged) by both parties. My aim is to consider this underlying juridical notion of proportionality, not concerning the legal code of charitable giving but rather the moral law and logic of reciprocity and the nature of the gift itself. These issues relate significantly, if indirectly, to the possibilities of a culture of philanthropy in a free market, and specifically to the beliefs most conducive to a truly philanthropic society. Does the logic of the gift permit the giving of a gift without the expectation of something in return, or does every gift ultimately reduce itself to the logic of exchange? That is, can there ever be a wholly free gift, or are all human relations inescapably implicated in what Marx called the “naked cash nexus”? How do we separate, both psychologically and morally, a gift for the good of another from the possibility that we are really giving for selfish (or primarily self-interested) motives?²

Let us return to our New Mexican *ranch*. All is well between Joseph and Manuel until the following morning, the morning of Joseph’s departure. Manuel finds Joseph in the barnyard, “leading the two mules about and smoothing their fawn-coloured flanks, but his face was not the cheerful countenance of yesterday”

(Cather 1990, 61). Joseph insists that he cannot accept the gift of such a beautiful mule while his bishop rides a common hack. A troubled Manuel offers Joseph the pick of his horses, but Joseph declines, saying that he will work hard to buy the pair. Manuel looks around the barnyard for an avenue of escape, but he sees his position clearly. Reluctantly, he gives both the mules to Father Joseph, who cries, “You will be all the happier for that, Manuelito.... Every time you think of these mules, you will feel pride in your good deed” (63). Manuel watches “disconsolately” as Joseph departs with the mules. “He felt he had been worried out of his mules, and yet he bore no resentment. He did not doubt Father Joseph’s devotedness, nor his singleness of purpose.... He believed he would be proud of the fact that they [Joseph and the Bishop] rode Contento and Angelica. Father [Joseph] had forced his hand, but he was rather glad of it” (63).

Are the mules still a gift, either in the manner in which they were given or in the spirit in which they were received? Joseph does not ask for the mules with a sense of entitlement, but would it be entirely fair to say that he has only his bishop’s and Manuel’s interests at heart? Manuel is clearly bullied into relinquishing the mules, and yet he bears no resentment, nor does he seem concerned about any costs or penalties should he quite reasonably refuse Joseph’s request. Are we to assume that the spirit of charity has overcome too prideful an attachment to these two lovely beasts? Or has Manuel in effect purchased both a putative spiritual reward and social approbation, the pride of knowing that the clerics will be riding *his* prize mules? What obligations, if any, do Manuel and Joseph now owe each other, or is there no presumed reciprocity beyond a continuing good will?³

Aristotle, Kant, Smith

Aristotle might be inclined to praise Manuel’s action as generosity or even as magnanimity. For Aristotle, generosity is a virtue of character concerning material wealth. The generous man is moderate toward wealth insofar as he is willing to part with it in giving it to others, in his judgment of the goodness of the person to whom he is giving it, and in giving neither too much nor too little. He receives honor for this virtue of character and rejoices in acting in concert with the good. One might also see Manuel’s gift as an act of Aristotelian magnanimity. It is a great deed reflective of a greatness of soul conducted nonetheless with a moderate sense of pride. Although giving two mules instead of one might be an unusual gift—even for a wealthy *ranchero*—Manuel’s offering is not excessive, indiscriminate, or vulgar, and he takes pleasure in the giving. There is something fine and beautiful

in how Manuel is portrayed, and he would seem to meet Aristotle's criteria of generosity and magnanimity (Nicomachean Ethics, V.4: 1119b20-1125a).⁴

There is one Aristotelian criterion, however, which is not met. The logic of generosity and magnanimity in Aristotle's account presupposes the superiority of the giver and inferiority of the recipient. It is, for Aristotle, better to give than to receive, but this is because the receipt of a gift carries with it an implicit, if not explicit, judgment of being in need or suffering a lack or deficiency (1124b10-20).⁵ There is no hint of superiority or inferiority in Cather's portrayal of Manuel and Joseph. Indeed, their relationship, however recently formed, resembles more closely the equality of exchange which characterizes Aristotle's account of friendship. In this, Aristotle would seem to recognize a transcendence of the cycle of exchange and obligation in the relations which obtain between friends. That is, the fullest expression of giving is that which obtains between friends.

Aristotle follows his account of the virtues of character with a discussion of justice. His approach is not initially in terms of the classical Greek definition—rendering unto each what is due—but rather from its status as a virtue: What sort of mean is justice? What are the extremes between which justice is an intermediate? He acknowledges from the outset the difference between what is lawful and what is fair: both the lawful and the fair person will be just, but one can be unfair without violating the law. Yet neither category—fairness or lawfulness—would seem to apply to the giving-receiving we see with Manuel and Joseph. To use the terms of justice to understand Cather's scene would be to engage in a category mistake.

Aristotle's fruitful differentiation of four kinds of justice—distributive, corrective, proportional, and political—gives us a foothold for thinking about the relationship between what is charitable and what is just. As Aristotle understands them, the four kinds of justice aim at: the distribution of goods to effect equality; the corrective or proportional rectification or restoration of goods; and the political actions of ruling and being ruled. Charity as reflected in the relationship between Joseph and Manuel would seem to have no part of any of these. It does bear some resemblance, however, to a notion of justice as proportionate reciprocity. Reciprocal justice pertains to the proportional equality which should obtain in relationships of exchange where the relative values are incommensurable. That is, reciprocity in exchange requires a numerical equality facilitated by money, for all items of exchange must be reducible to an intermediate value. "Reciprocity that is proportionate rather than equal, holds people together," Aristotle says in

Nicomachean Ethics V.5, “for a city is maintained by proportionate reciprocity.” This bond finds its strength in the presumption that there will be “a return of benefits received,” for “when someone has been gracious to us, we must do a service for him in return, and also ourselves take the lead in being gracious again” (2000, 74).

How are we to understand the intermediate value of the exchange between Manuel and Joseph, if it is to be understood as an exchange at all? Presumably we could determine a price per prayer (either as a unit price or as a function of labor) and draw some equivalent with respect to the market price of cream-colored mules in mid-19th-century territorial New Mexico. But this would seem to be beside the point. In Aristotelian terms, Manuel’s gift to Joseph is an act of virtue and so intelligible under principles of general justice, but not amenable to the principles of specific justice. Aristotle gives a nod in this direction with what is effectively a footnote (*Nicomachean Ethics* V.8) on the relation between decency and justice. In the same way that what is decent is just by subsuming the category of justice, so by extension one might view generosity as opening more widely than justice, transcending the category without being inconsistent with it.⁶ That is, justice is fulfilled and transcended insofar as the very ground of justice is transformed.

In contrast to this Aristotelian approach, what if we were to view Manuel’s gift from the perspective of Kantian duty? There is nothing in Joseph’s suggestion that Manuel has a duty—spiritual or ecclesiastical—to give the mules, nor does Manuel see his actions in terms of duty, even a duty of reciprocity for the good that Joseph has performed on the *rancho* (acts which, properly speaking, are the duties of a priest). Manuel’s joy in giving would disqualify his gift as a disinterested act. Further, one is left with some discomfort at the prospect of making Manuel’s gift a principle of universal law (See Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, preface and Section I). It would seem unfair to enjoin—either through positive law or some principle of universal moral law—all people to give their prize possessions to a newfound, if worthy, friend. Moreover, the extreme particularity of the circumstances of Manuel’s gift would seem to preclude universal generalization. Manuel’s offer is prepared by his sense of gratitude at the accidental and rare arrival of a priest at his remote *rancho*, reinforced by the personal and mutual goodwill that develops between them, and spurred by Joseph’s unselfconscious appreciation of something that Manuel too loves and deems beautiful. That is, the gift is highly particularized in time, place, personality, and circumstance. If any one of countless variables were to change, the nature of the gift in Cather’s portrayal would be compromised.

What if we were to view Manuel's gift in terms of Adam Smith's theorizing about moral sentiments? Again, we do not see in Cather's portrayal of Manuel any calculation of costs and benefits, nor do we have a hint that he is making his decision in accordance with the view of an impartial spectator, either human or divine (See Smith 1982, II.ii.2 and VI.i). Manuel will not be known where Joseph and his bishop are riding the mules, there is no advertisement from which he would derive public esteem, nor will he receive a tax deduction for his gift. Though these ancillary benefits might accrue, they do not seem to lie at the essence of his gift. And although Manuel is hopeful of Joseph's prayers, the anticipation of God observing him favorably for his gift does not figure in Manuel's reflections. His pride in his gift is not inconsistent with the notion of an impartial spectator, but the validation of his action seems to derive from something other than social (or even spiritual) approbation.

Beyond Human Categories

We can certainly account for Manuel's gift in Aristotelian, Kantian, and Smithian terms, but individually and collectively those accounts seem not to capture the entirety of what transpires in the scene Cather has given us. Manuel's gesture (that very word is significant) is an act of charity implicated in a web of reciprocity which defies theorization, and it neither responds to nor can form the basis of a moral law. It is an act of virtue, of a character formed by habit, but it is not a response to duty or to an imagined judgment of the merit of the act.⁷ Both the gift of the mules and their receipt is spontaneous and free. The exchange of mules and gratitude entails no obligation beyond that of good will (of which prayer is a special function). And although there is no explicit obligation, the two are obliged to one another in love. There is, properly speaking, a philanthropy defined not by the gift but of which the gift is itself a feature. The gift both expresses and extends in a new and special way a preexisting affection and good will. There is an expansion of their friendship, and as Aristotle says, "when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality" (2009, 142). The gift displaces us from the normal categories of human moral relations.

Aquinas addresses the failure of human categories fully to account for the nature of the gift by recognizing its dual valence: in terms of the virtue of charity and under the aspect of grace. True to his Aristotelian roots, Aquinas considers charity as a human virtue, embedded in benevolence and friendship. True to his

Augustinian roots, he also sees that any good can be simultaneously referred to nature and to God. For Aquinas, it is consistent with human nature to give of oneself. But the good of charity is grounded in God's goodness. That is to say, the capacity of humans to give is both natural and divine. The completion of the human act of giving is super-human and requires a super-natural gift, of which God is both the source and the example (*Summa Theologica*, 2a2aeQ27 art. 2, 3, 8). For Aquinas, to give truly is a kind of excess, a spilling over of love, having both its source and intelligibility in God. Thus Aquinas recognizes an overlap between a human and a divine logic of giving—an anthropological understanding of what it means to give and a theological one. A gift understood in terms of human virtue is not less meritorious, but it would seem to be less complete.

The distinction between the anthropological and theological understandings of a gift underlies a difficulty in contemporary phenomenology taken up by Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. Derrida lays out a fundamental problem with respect to the very possibility of a gift. Leaving to one side the interesting and significant technical issues of phenomenology in his account, Derrida's argument is this: the moment either the giver or the recipient is conscious of the gift as such—i.e., *as a gift*—it ceases to be a gift. That is, the moment of self-conscious recognition cancels out the event of giving, and implicates it irretrievably in the logic of economy and exchange, of credit and debt. As a giver, I take credit in the currency of *amour propre* and am conscious of deserving some recognition of thanks, either from the recipient or from some third party.⁸ As a recipient, I am conscious of being under some obligation to the giver, owing a debt of gratitude and, perhaps, responsible for some kind of reciprocal gift, however proportionate to my means. Where Aristotle saw bonds of benevolence, Derrida sees the handcuffs of the cycle of exchange whose moral currency can never find an equilibrium. Derrida does not—at least as a philosophical matter—deny the possibility of the gift in an absolute sense, but he does render highly problematic the possibility of anyone being in a position to observe the gift, insofar as the giver and recipient are ignorant of it. In the end, Derrida's account is a phenomenological transposition of the Kantian approach, recast as a problem of knowledge and self-awareness (Derrida 1994; 2008).

Jean-Luc Marion, by contrast, insists upon at least one participant's consciousness of the gift, but offers two putative ways out of the economy of exchange: anonymity and immaterial gifts. Where the giver or recipient is unknown, Marion argues, the horizon of exchange recedes to a vanishing point. Further, he says,

we have many examples of immaterial gifts—gifts where no thing or object is given, but rather gifts of time, love, authority, and trust, for example. We clearly value immaterial gifts, but can we put an exchange value on them? Yes, Marion suggests (like Derrida), but in so doing we destroy their character as gifts. Marion continues:

The gift does not always imply that something is given. Now this remains true, not only in daily life, but in the most important and meaningful experiences of human life. We know that, to some extent, if the gift is really unique, makes a real difference, cannot be repeated, then in such a case, the gift does not appear as something that could shift from one owner to another owner. Each genuine gift happens without any objective counterpart. When we give ourselves, our life, our time, when we give our word, not only do we give no thing, but we give much more. Here is my point: We can describe the gift outside of the horizon of economy in such a way that new phenomenological rules appear. For instance, the gift or the given phenomenon has no cause and does not need any. It would sound absurd to ask what is the cause of the gift, precisely because givenness implies the unexpected, the unforeseeable and the pure surge of novelty. And also the gift cannot be repeated as the same gift. So we discover with the gift, and to let it display its visibility according to its own logic, we have an experience of a kind of phenomenon that cannot be described anymore as an object or as a being (1999, 63-64, italics in original. See also Marion and Carlson 1998).

Several points are worth highlighting. First, the gift is a unique event in time and place which cannot be transferred or valued according to the traditional rules of economic exchange. Second, the gift has the character of spontaneity—it is free precisely because it emerges outside of a system of causality; it is not in its origin a reciprocating act. Third, it cannot be repeated, which is to say that by definition it cannot be systematized or taken to scale.

At stake in the debate between Derrida and Marion is the status of *grace*—the divine possibility of an absolutely free gift. Can the possibility of a free gift transcend the limits of law? Rather, as Hannah Arendt puts it, “Caritas fulfills the law, because to caritas the law is no longer a command; it is grace itself” (1996, 91). Or, in the words of St. Augustine: *Lex libertatis, lex caritatis est*. “The law of liberty is the law of love.” The freedom of the gift thus understood transcends and so fulfills a legal, juridical notion of reciprocity, allowing an account of human giving which enriches the dignity of both the giver and the recipient. How relations

are understood shifts from what Augustine called the *libido dominandi*, possessive desire, to the expansion of love beyond desire. Only in giving do we learn to possess lovingly. Just as the gift is spontaneous and therefore free in its origin, so too it is free in its acceptance—neither the act of giving nor the act of receiving includes an expectation of causal consequence; the gift is not intended to produce a result. It is not an exchange, nor is it intended to produce change—it is absolutely free.

And yet, change does occur. When we give, when we receive, we are changed—unpredictably. We are changed most by gifts that are unattended, unexpected by giver and recipient alike. Part of this change is the experience of being outside the horizon of economy altogether, the experience of being free with a super-natural logic of causality in which each act of giving or receiving ushers in something radically new and unpredictable. The currency of this new economy is love, and the conditions it produces are those of human flourishing.⁹

Transcending Exchange

In Cather's story, what is really being given? Manuel is only incidentally giving Joseph the mules. He is in essence, rather, giving a good that he loves and so gives a part of himself, enlarging his soul by parting with a beloved possession in favor of an overflowing of love which cannot be possessed. It is right that Manuel is attached to his mules. Were they not valuable to him, they would not have had the same value as a gift. In giving up the mules, he actually comes to possess them more perfectly. Joseph receives the mules, but in fact he receives the overflow of Manuel's love; in being the occasion of Manuel's expansion of love, Joseph is not made inferior but is equally expanded in his graceful receipt. What occurs is not an exchange but a creation, a refusal of a zero-sum horizon of economy.¹⁰ As such, it is something of a miracle—something super-added to our common life that is not subject to the laws of human necessity and indeed might be at odds with those laws altogether.¹¹ "But if love can be measured by nothing other than itself," writes Hans Urs von Balthasar in a profoundly Augustinian vein, "then love appears as formless, transcending all creaturely determinateness and precisely for this reason is a threat to it" (2004, 125).

The gift which yields a miracle changes us. Cather herself puts it this way, in a passage just before that in which Joseph stumbles across the mules at Manuel's *ranchito*: 'Where there is great love there are always miracles,' he [the bishop] said at length. 'One might almost say that an apparition is human vision corrected by divine love. I do not see you as you really are, Joseph; I see you through my affection for you. The Miracles of the Church seem to

me to rest not so much upon faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always' (1990, 50).

The miracle, for Cather, is a refinement of our perception, the enriching of our sensibility, an enlargement of our humanity, a recognition of the dignity of giver and receiver beside which the beauty of any cream-colored pair of mules cannot compare.

What are the implications of this account for philanthropy? The nature of the gift is best preserved when it is understood outside the causal cycle of reciprocity and the dictates of the moral law. This causal cycle would seem to include a sense of obligation (or *noblesse oblige*) to spend one's money well, and from a sense of trying to accomplish some anticipated good. This causal cycle can readily be seen at work when philanthropy seeks to borrow forms of accountability either from government, by employing bureaucratic rules and procedures, or from business, by seeking to quantify returns on investment. Similarly, it would seem that in such a causal cycle recipients would not only come to expect being given to but would also come to have no shame or sense of inferiority in receiving. The desire to alleviate potential shame for the recipient may also be what is at work in some efforts of philanthropy to move responsibility for "charitable" activity into the social welfare state or, alternatively, to insist that the market can wholly fulfill the demands of moral reciprocity through commercial exchange.

Anonymity, whether of giver or recipient, would seem to be one way of breaking the cycle of exchange and expectation, of credit and debt, and both bureaucratic social welfare provision and the flow of goods through market production and consumption can afford anonymity. At the same time, anonymity would seem to be at odds with another criterion of a gift in the fullest sense, namely particularity. If Manuel had given 1,000 pesos to the Mule Fund for Itinerant Priests, the same material object would have been achieved, but the nature of the gift would have been very different.

These two elements—standing outside the cycle of causality and embracing fully the particularity of time, place, and person—force us to think anew about two pressing issues in philanthropy: measurable impact and scale. One could measure Joseph's new mobility, but how would one calculate the increase of love, both individually and socially, which is the essence of the gift of the mules? And if the essence of the gift is in large measure the particular bond of love between giver and recipient, how are we to think about taking effective giving to scale?

Perhaps this closing example will help reframe these practical questions. Several years ago a friend quit his high-level European job to start an after-school program in the worst ghetto of a major Eastern-European capital city. The neighborhood around the school is a wreck, strewn with heroin syringes and garbage, plagued by unemployment and teen prostitution, and largely neglected by government and nonprofit institutions alike. Many of the state-sponsored classrooms do not function because of teachers' laziness and administrative corruption, and the after-school program is, for many children, the only safe place for study and tutoring, and its staff members have become a surrogate family in a very real sense. When the program received coverage by a national television station, the CEO of a major bank phoned to offer the bank's financial support. "When can you visit?" my friend asked. When the CEO replied that he was too busy to visit the ghetto, my friend thanked him for his concern, said he wasn't interested in the bank's money, and hung up. The CEO found time to visit, but the bank drew the line when my friend asked that funding be contingent upon bank officers volunteering regularly to tutor and play sports with the kids. My friend's insistence on human participation is an implicit recognition of the economy of love. In this case at least, the bank's financial support is a means, not an end, a condition for the far greater giving and receiving that occurs when human beings share the profound gifts of love, trust, resilience, and dignity.

There can be philanthropy without charity. And if this distinction has any value, we might say that philanthropy is measurable and scalable, but charity is not. Philanthropy can be the praiseworthy giving of one's self and one's means. Charity fosters the enlargement of the soul of the one who gives and the one who receives. Philanthropy aims to change others and their circumstances, and so operates in a material register. Charity, in having no aim other than itself, changes us, and so resounds in a spiritual register. Those whose souls are enlarged by charity are restored to themselves and to their communities.

Philanthropy can help establish the material conditions in which charity can flourish. Habits of philanthropy can nourish the soil in which seeds of charity may grow. But a truly good society will be full of miracles, in Cather's sense, a society in which each of us grows in love by giving of ourselves, becoming, however incidentally, the beneficiaries of a new creation. Those gifts are richest which are unattended, miracles of grace which shine with the beauty of the light of dawn.

NOTES

- ¹ Ludwig von Mises suggests that in exchange, each gives the less valuable for the more valuable. In this example, by contrast, Manuel gives what is most valuable in ignorance of what he will receive.
- ² The true valence of one's motives is always difficult to assess, and one can have an interest in being disinterested. T. S. Eliot underscores the problematic character of even the noblest of actions when his Beckett, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, exclaims, "The last temptation is the greatest treason:/To do the right deed for the wrong reason (1963, 44)." For a further exploration of the relationship between selfishness and self-interest in a theological vein, see C. S. Lewis, 2001. Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (2003) portrays the conventional absurdity of purely selfless action.
- ³ It is worth noting from the outset the cultural context of gift-giving. In Arab culture, I am told, admiring an object obliges the owner to give the object as a gift. In Indian culture, the recipient's response of gratitude for a gift is seen as redundant, even strange, since the giver is already grateful for the occasion the recipient has afforded in being the object of his giving. Manuel's gift may coincide with the first of Maimonides' eight levels of charity (1972, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Charity, 10:7–14: 135-138).
- ⁴ Manuel's action would seem not to satisfy the demands of magnificence, which is generosity publically displayed and for a public good; a gift to the cathedral fund might, however, be so termed.
- ⁵ See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae Q27 art.1, where Aquinas reaffirms that loving is more proper to charity than being loved, though to be loved is also praiseworthy insofar as one is lovable. It is worth noting that the modern culture of individualism accentuates this sense of the inferiority of the recipient. Prizing as we do individual autonomy and self-sufficiency, being the recipient of a gift is often experienced as an insult of sorts, a reduction of dignity in being the object of paternal care, a recognition or creation of tacit inequality. Yet the inability or unwillingness to freely receive a gift may be as corrosive of human relations as the inability or unwillingness to give a gift. That is, modern autonomous individuals would do well to learn how to receive a gift gracefully and with joy. To receive a gift in such spirit, however, would require a revision of our dearly held embrace of autonomy as well as a recognition that there can be non-oppressive relationships of inequality. As givers and receivers we become more human.

- ⁶ In a section on alms in Chapter 1 of *The Gift*, Mauss notes that the Arabic *sadaka* and Hebrew *zedaka* originally meant justice exclusively, but later came to mean alms.
- ⁷ The highly particularized character of the gift recalls Aristotle's definition of virtue: to do the right thing in the right way to the right person at the right time and for the right reason.
- ⁸ One might see taxable deductions for charitable giving as a kind of third party recognition. Making a charitable donation primarily for a tax deduction would seem to implicate the gift in the cycle of exchange; taking advantage of a tax deduction as a secondary benefit would seem to be incidental and therefore less implicated in the horizon of exchange. To refuse to take a tax deduction to maintain a supposed purity of the gift as a gift seems to me a sensible but not strictly necessary position. One could argue, on the contrary, that taking a tax deduction as a secondary benefit simply reduces transaction costs, leaving more funds for use or distribution. On this argument, a system of taxation might provide deductions as an incentive for greater philanthropy in the hope of facilitating social conditions more conducive to acts of charity.
- ⁹ John Locke, in the *Second Treatise*, makes it clear that he is ambivalent about money as a durable medium of exchange. Bartering makes goods liable to spoilage, but in so doing imposes a natural limitation on the desire for them. Money, by contrast, is a surrogate for the goods themselves, and is therefore an abstraction not subject to natural limitation when treated as an end in itself. The gift given and received by Manuel and Joseph is a concrete surrogate for the love they share (1980).
- ¹⁰ Implicit, further, is a revision of our customary notion of property. In 17th and 18th century English, "property" and "propriety" were largely interchangeable terms, though propriety carries its sense of the *how* of an exchange rather than just the *what*. The valence of the latter term underscores an important element of what Manuel possesses—the *how* of his gift recalibrates the very nature of his ownership of the mules.
- ¹¹ Cf. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* (one of the earliest occurrences of "philanthropy"), where the gift of fire is also an act of rebellion (1961).

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