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On Benevolence

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Abstract

It is widely agreed that benevolence is not the whole of the moral life, but it is not as widely appreciated that benevolence is an irreducible part of that life. This paper argues that Kantian efforts to characterize benevolence, or something like it, in terms of reverence for rational agency fall short. Such reverence, while credibly an important part of the moral life, is no more the whole of it than benevolence.

I

Introduction. Some views, such as utilitarianism, suggest that benevolence is the only moral virtue and wellbeing the only moral value. Others, such as Kantianism, suggest that the only virtue is a kind of reverence and rational agency the only thing of moral value. Both the utilitarian and the Kantian are wrong. At the very least, it takes the two virtues – benevolence and reverence – to make a moral person and at least the two values – wellbeing and rational agency – to make morality. These virtues and values are not reducible to one another. This paper is part of this larger project.

II

Benevolence. Philippa Foot maintains that, if utilitarianism is correct, benevolence is the only virtue (Foot 1983). Reading Foot, one might wonder why, or in what sense, utilitarianism implies that benevolence is the only virtue. Does it not stand to reason that many character traits increase utility, and all of them would be virtues if utilitarianism were true? But Foot's idea makes perfect sense if one accepts, as I think she does, that a morally virtuous person is not only disposed to do right or morally desirable actions but also to do such actions *for the right reasons*, namely, for the reasons for which the actions are right. Given this assumption, it is clear that if simple utilitarianism is true and all right actions are right in virtue of being utility maximizers then a morally virtuous person is nothing but a person who is *concerned* with utility

and does the right actions because these actions are, as far as she can tell, utility-maximizing actions. Thus, a kind of benevolence is the only virtue.

For the rest of this paper, I will assume two views that I have defended in the past. One is the view just mentioned – that the morally virtuous person characteristically acts for the reasons that make her actions right or morally desirable¹. The other is the view that an action has moral worth if and only if it is done for the reasons that make it right, or, if you wish, for its right-making features, whether these features have to do with utility or anything else².

Foot argued that benevolence is not the only virtue and many, many others have compellingly argued that classical utilitarianism, or any wellbeing-based consequentialist view of morality, is false. I do not intend to add new objections to theirs. Instead, I would like to turn to (contemporary) Kantian ethics, some version of which is widely perceived as the main alternative to utilitarianism. For the Kantian, to do the right thing for the reasons for which it is right amounts to one's will being determined by the moral law. Famously, this law is put both in terms of universalizability and of treating people as ends. I will leave universalizability to one side – I have discussed it elsewhere³ – and focus on the idea that to be guided by the moral law or by reverence towards it is to be guided by something like properly appreciating or revering human beings as rational agents, as beings who have the capacity to set ends for themselves. If some such version of Kantianism is true, it is this reverence for the value of rational agency, whatever exactly it is, which concerns the morally virtuous person as such, and being compelled by such reverence is acting from duty, that is, from the motive that makes right acts morally worthy.

It is natural to think of benevolence as, roughly, concern for human⁴ wellbeing. Such concern certainly looks like a virtue: after all, one of the first things we teach children about good people is that they help others. Admittedly, the end of the benevolent person is not quite the same as the end embraced by classical utilitarianism, that is, 'the greatest good for the greatest number.' Intuitively, a benevolent person helps those in need, and so the morally virtuous person is first and foremost concerned with protecting people from 'illbeing' (as opposed to improving the lives of those who are already well off)⁵. The details should be left for another day, but some kind of concern for wellbeing does seem pre-theoretically to be a virtue. It also seems that there are other virtues, most prominently virtues that have to do with respect for rights and with fair dealing: honesty, fairness, and so on. A defender of any view in the neighbourhood of utilitarianism is in need of showing either that these things merely seem to be virtues or, more plausibly, that they or something like them are traits the value of which is derived from that of benevolence. This, I agree, would be a tall order. The Kantian, however,

¹ Arpaly (2014)

² Arpaly (2003)

³ Arpaly (2015)

⁴ For the sake of this discussion, I will leave to one side the plausible view that nonhuman animals are also relevant.

⁵ Which supports a prioritarian view (Parfit 1997).

faces a parallel task. Reverence for the value of rational agency seems like a plausible virtue but prima facie there seem to be others. Concern for wellbeing does not appear to be the same thing as reverence for the value of rational agency. Thus, the Kantian needs to show us either that benevolence, interpreted as concern for wellbeing for its own sake, is not a virtue or, alternatively, that the value of wellbeing can be derived from the value of rational agency.

Accordingly, Kantians often hold that benevolence – or, as they sometimes call it in the old-fashioned way, love – is adopting and promoting other people’s ends. The need to adopt and promote other people’s ends is, for the Kantian, derived from the value of rational agency. An agent, after all, is someone who sets ends for herself. Respecting an agent is allowing him to set his own ends. ‘Loving’ an agent or being benevolent is adopting and promoting the end of the other’s attainment of his own ends. The connection between promoting the ends of others and promoting their wellbeing is where, I think, many contemporary Kantians differ from Kant, and I with them.

Without getting into details of Kant interpretation, it seems that ultimately, promoting an agent’s wellbeing or ‘happiness’ and promoting the ends that an agent sets for himself are the same thing for Kant, or at least are tightly connected and essentially harmonious tasks. A person who promotes the ends of other agents will be compelled to promote their happiness. If the view often attributed to Kant is true, it is easy to forge the needed connection between benevolence and reverence for the human capacity for end-setting. There are good reasons, however, to suspect that promoting an agent’s ends and promoting her wellbeing are not tantamount to the same thing – and, in fact, that the two tasks can conflict with each other in many ordinary situations. A Kantian who shares this suspicion faces a more complex task in anchoring the value of wellbeing in the value of our end-setting capacity.

Stephen Darwall has famously argued that promoting an agent’s ends is different from promoting her wellbeing. Darwall (2004, pp. 22-49) argues that people often have ends that differ from their wellbeing and can be incompatible with it, so that, if you sought to promote a person’s ends, presumably with attention to their respective levels of importance to her, you might be as likely to hurt her wellbeing as to promote it. A person who chooses to sacrifice himself for his country might well be achieving an end that he had set for himself, but it is hard to make sense of the idea of self-sacrifice without maintaining that, as he achieved the end he set for himself, he gave up his wellbeing for the sake of something that was more important to him than his wellbeing. If I know that someone aspires, above all, to serve her country – as a non-instrumental end of hers – and if doing so is likely to require a substantial sacrifice from her then I cannot, at the same time, promote her overall achievement of ends and promote her wellbeing.

Even more ordinary people will often have some ends the pursuit of which would be at odds with maximizing wellbeing. Even having your wellbeing as a top priority does not require always doing the thing that increases your wellbeing, just as a person who, given a limited choice, would take Mozart CDs to a desert island but not Jimi Hendrix CDs, is not required by rationality to prefer listening to Mozart to listening to Jimi Hendrix on every single occasion. It is, of

course, hard to fully theorize wellbeing and I will not attempt to do so here. I will rely on Darwall's insight that my wellbeing is the reason for actions done *for my sake* (including by me) and on the pre-theoretical distinction between the motive of self-interest and other motives. It should be noted right away that it can be very hard, in some contexts, to tease apart the concern for one's own wellbeing from other motives. If glory for the Seattle Seahawks is something you care about for itself, the team's victories and defeats will tend to affect your feelings and mood and so your wellbeing, and thus even if you care more about the glory of the team than you care about your wellbeing you will often want it to win both intrinsically *and* in order that you be happy, and a friend might want the team to win for your sake.

Suppose, then, that a Kantian holds that promoting a person's ends differs from promoting his wellbeing. How can such a Kantian reconcile the view that morality is about reverence for our end-setting capacity with the intuition that benevolence is a virtue? The Kantian, it seems, can hold that the real virtue concerning helping others is not benevolence in the sense of concern for wellbeing but rather concern for their ends. The view, she can say, is not as revisionary as it seems, because for most agents, their wellbeing is a major end they have, and thus a morally virtuous person *will* be significantly concerned with the wellbeing of others. Wellbeing is valuable, it is even something that a moral person will value for its own sake, but its value is derived from the fact that it is a major human end.⁶ In other words, the Kantian might offer to replace, or explain, or partly replace and partly explain, benevolence with the adoption of other people's ends.

In the rest of this paper, I will argue that such a strategy will not work. The moral value of wellbeing, while not the only moral value, is not derived from another value, such as agency. Good old benevolence – concern for wellbeing – is a virtue that cannot be replaced or explained through appeal to the adoption and promotion of ends.

A few caveats: the issue here is not the value of acting from 'inclination,' 'sympathy,' or a warm and fuzzy feeling – a tired and irritable person can force himself to do something for the sake of another's wellbeing without any such feelings. Nor do I wish to defend all of the emotions that go by the name 'love,' some of which Kantians rightly criticize. For example, I do not wish to argue that the fondness, ascribed to us by Kant, for small and cute creatures on account of their being easy to control, would be a virtuous, moral worth-granting motive. Running concern for wellbeing together with such motives can cause us to dismiss it unduly, so care should be taken to distinguish concern for human wellbeing from cheap substitutes, just as care should be taken to distinguish a sense of duty from a tendency to obey authoritative voices.

Another bad reason to dismiss concern for wellbeing as a moral motive is the common Kantian belief that motives other than reverence for agency (or for the categorical imperative in another form) are somehow flighty. Concern for wellbeing can seemingly wax and wane, but one's appreciation for the human capacity to set ends can also seemingly wax and wane. The critical question one needs to ask about a candidate moral motive is not whether it is

⁶ For how something can be valuable non-instrumentally but derivatively, see Korsgaard (1983)

psychologically reliable but whether the content of the motive is properly related to that of morality – whether it involves acting for the reasons for which the action is right. It should also be remembered that if Sabina acts in order to protect the wellbeing of a fellow human being her reasoning need not be ‘I, Sabina, care about human wellbeing, and I would like to indulge myself, so I will protect human wellbeing’ – no more than a more Kantian agent’s reasoning need be that ‘I, Wolfram, have a sense of duty, and I would like to avoid pangs of conscience, so I’ll tell the truth.’ If her motive is non-instrumental concern for wellbeing, Sabina’s reason for action is simply that some person needs help. If one is not already a Kantian there is no reason to assume that all motives other than reverence for agency are somehow self-centered.

III

Benevolence and the Badness of Paternalism. Such distractions aside, the most serious reservations expressed about benevolence as a potential moral motive have to do with it leading to wrong actions. Some of these reservations, I think, provide conclusive arguments against benevolence as the only virtue, but they are not in themselves reasons to dismiss the idea of benevolence as *one* of the virtues, while holding there are other virtues such as *respect* and *fairness*. Under the label ‘respect’ I am thinking of something similar to what Kant calls ‘respect’ when he contrasts duties of love and duties of respect – that which tells us not to coerce, lie or grossly manipulate but rather to allow agents to set their own ends (so long as these ends are not immoral). If one cares about the wellbeing of the person who decides to risk death or suffering for a morally optional ideal one might naturally say that though one does not ‘like’ the fact that he does so, one ‘respects his wishes,’ and indeed an important case of *disrespect* would be paternalism – coercion, deception or gross manipulation of an agent that is (truly and without self deception) aimed at her own good.

One simple way to explain why paternalism is wrong is simply to say that respect of this kind is morally mandatory in all relationships between adult, competent human beings, and that benevolence must operate within the constraints of such respect. Yet some Kantians might be suspicious of such an explanation because they might suspect that if benevolence is to be regarded as concern for people’s wellbeing, being benevolent requires a stance that is in essential tension with respect, or even with valuing a person’s agency at all. By ‘essential’ tension I mean tension that is not the result of accidental circumstances in which benevolence as concern for wellbeing seems to recommend something that respect forbids but is due to the contents of the two attitudes. This suspicion is expressed by Kyla Ebels-Duggan in ‘Against Beneficence’ (Ebels-Duggan 2008). Ebels-Duggan maintains that adopting the stance of someone’s benefactor is treating this person as less than a fully autonomous agent, because the stance implies not treating her as someone who can run her affairs on her own. However, to care about a person’s wellbeing does not imply that one appoints oneself this person’s benefactor, and appointing oneself someone’s benefactor does not imply taking her to be unable to run her own affairs. Most importantly, taking a person to be needy and dependent does not imply disrespect for her autonomy in any sense that is morally relevant.

Start with the first point. Contra Velleman (1999, pp. 351-4), concern (or desire) for a person's wellbeing does not imply making it one's business to constantly act to protect that person's wellbeing. A wise person knows that the people he cares about do not always need him to intervene in their lives and would often fail to benefit from such intervention, in which case concern for their wellbeing would itself instruct him to keep his distance rather than to play the benefactor.

As for the second point, in the cases in which such concern does instruct one to act, it is by no means always true that one treats the object of one's concern as too weak or incompetent to tend to her needs herself. It is true that in some contexts, giving someone help that she does not need can be legitimately insulting, as when it implies, for example, that you take her to lack some abilities because of her sex, age or ethnicity, but there are plenty of other contexts in which an act of good will that is not, strictly speaking, *needed* by the recipient is compatible with appreciation for her competence. One can be greatly impressed with the way an acquaintance handles a terrible predicament, be sure that he will triumph, suspect that he is stronger than one would ever be, and still offer to help make his life a little easier by offering help with a chore as 'the least I can do.' This is known as kindness, and people often respond to it not with offense but gratitude.

The third point has to do with the meaning of the ambiguous, overworked term 'autonomy'. Respect for agency is often referred to as respect for autonomy, and of course there is a sense in which treating a person as needy is treating her as less autonomous. There is a sense of the word 'autonomy' in which a person is more autonomous if she can drive than she would be if she couldn't drive, and even more autonomous if she can repair her car herself. However, when Kantians wish to base morality on the value of agency, and refer to rational agency as 'autonomy', they cannot refer to autonomy in this sense. The autonomy which Kantians tell us to revere and respect is an autonomy that all adult humans have who do not suffer from severe psychological or neurological disorders that make one incapable of rationality. You cannot become more worthy of Kantian respect by learning to drive or become less worthy of Kantian respect by losing your ability to walk. So long as you can appreciate and respond to practical reasons, you are in possession of Kantian autonomy and entitled to Kantian respect. The ability to appreciate and respond to practical reasons, also known as the ability to set ends, is not the same as the ability to *perform a successful action*, as there are many ways in which the world can fail to cooperate with us without our becoming less practically rational as a result. Imagine, for example, that Michaela is concerned with Carlos's wellbeing. It so happens that she does become his benefactor (with his grateful consent) because Carlos happens to be in the unfortunate position of being unable to survive without a great deal of help, due to severe illness and poverty. Michaela knows this, and in this sense treats him as less autonomous than some other people are. However, she also knows that his illness does not detract in any way from his rationality. She is therefore careful not to use coercion, deception or manipulation in their relationship, and especially not to help him against his will. In this case, it is simply false that Michaela is disrespecting his autonomy in any morally relevant sense.

Benevolence as concern for wellbeing does not conflict in content with reverence for human agency.

IV

Why Benevolence Is Not About Ends. Now return to the Kantian who wishes to say that benevolence is *about* reverence for agency – specifically, adopting people’s ends. Such a Kantian might say that wellbeing is a major end for all, or almost all, people, and so quite often we are required by benevolence to protect wellbeing. This would be an unsatisfactory explanation of the moral importance of wellbeing. A person’s wellbeing is important above and beyond the fact that it is likely to be a major end of hers.

Consider an illustration involving, not classical benevolence, but rather caring about a specific individual – love of a friend or a partner rather than love for ‘thy neighbour.’ Imagine that Mirja cares about Alaitz, her romantic partner. For the last while, Alaitz has devoted most of her time to pursuing two ends: the wellbeing of the Basque language, which is in danger of going extinct, and the wellbeing of Alaitz herself. Alaitz ranks the two ends as about equal in priority. Consider now two alternative endings to this vignette.

In the first, Mirja says to Alaitz: ‘Darling, you have done a lot for the Basque language lately, but I’m worried that you haven’t been doing enough for your own wellbeing. You don’t do enough fun things. Also, you don’t exercise anymore and I’m worried about your health. Please do not neglect yourself. At least try to get enough sleep.’

In the second, Mirja says to Alaitz: ‘Darling, you have done a lot for yourself lately, but I’m worried that you haven’t been doing enough for the Basque language. Please do not neglect the Basque language. At least make some calls or stuff some envelopes tonight.’

There is an asymmetry between the two endings. It is Mirja’s business as someone who loves Alaitz to make sure Alaitz has been kind to herself. Making sure that Alaitz has been loyal to her cause is not a basic expression of love in the same way.

Perhaps you find it hard to imagine the Basque language as a cause (though people have literally killed and died for it), and perhaps, if you imagine you and your beloved agreeing to support a cause to which you can relate, you do not find it strange of him to remind you to work on it. Naturally, if Mirja shares Alaitz’s concern for the Basque language it would not be strange or unloving of her to tell her that she has been too lazy with regard to the cause and she had better get to work. However, if she does so, she speaks in her capacity as a fellow lover of the Basque language, not in her capacity as someone who loves Alaitz. That is, of course, unless she is indirectly interested in Alaitz’s wellbeing – perhaps she fears that Alaitz will feel terrible later if she does not make some effort this week on behalf of the Basque language, or perhaps she thinks that it is generally good *for* a person to be loyal to her causes.

Your beloved's wellbeing is not like her other ends for you. It is an end in which you have a special stake, whether your beloved ranks it as high or a low priority. Another way to see it is to note that if you fail to care non-instrumentally about one of your beloved's major ends – say, about her beloved Basque language – it might or might not be a serious problem in the relationship you have with her, depending on the type of relationship, its history, your respective characters, and so on. However, if that one end that you fail to care about is her wellbeing, it's hard to see how you can be said to love her at all.

To a benevolent person, just as to a loving partner or friend, protecting a beneficiary's wellbeing has a special status that is not afforded to other ends that are equally important to her. Imagine that Mercedes is in her comfortable office when Roger, a young acquaintance who is relatively poor, comes in, desperate and terrified. Slowly he explains that he owes money to a gangster and that if he does not return the money today, in cash, he will be beaten up. He will not be killed, but he will suffer considerable pain and will probably spend a bit of time in a hospital. While not every suffering or injury brings with it an overall reduction in a person's wellbeing, Roger's is the ordinary case, and he clearly treats the prospect of being beaten up by criminals as a serious threat to his wellbeing. He tells Mercedes he is missing fifty dollars, and while this is only a small percentage of the sum he promised to pay, the gangster is likely to make an example of him if he does not pay back exactly the right amount. Could Mercedes lend him fifty dollars, please? He has learned his lesson and will not borrow from gangsters again. Mercedes is a good judge of character and has known Roger for a while. The evidence she gathered over the years suggest the Roger, who is not a bad sort but gets into foolish situations from time to time, has told her the truth, though it is not clear when he would be able to pay her back comfortably and likely that he will conveniently forget to do so. If Mercedes is a benevolent person she will give him the money anyway so as to prevent him from being beaten up. Many would argue that even if Mercedes is not quite benevolent but merely decent, in the sense articulated by Judith Jarvis Thomson,⁷ she will give him the money.

Compare this situation to a different one. Mercedes, sitting in her comfortable office, receives a visit from Leonard, a young acquaintance who is relatively poor. He needs fifty dollars to round off the sum required for a trip to Africa that he has a rare opportunity to make. Leonard, a Mennonite (albeit not of the Old Order), wishes to go to Sierra Leone and spread his religion there. Mercedes had read that malaria is common in Sierra Leone, that an outbreak of the Ebola virus has also been reported, violent crime is rampant and atrocities have been recently committed. She firmly believes that spreading the Mennonite religion is neither good nor bad – it is morally neutral. She asks Leonard about the things she has read and wonders if he might encounter serious hostility given his mission. Leonard waves her off. He had deliberated about all the dangers, and he is ready to suffer greatly for his religion if necessary. Mercedes, a good judge of character, realizes that Leonard cares more about spreading the Mennonite religion than about his own wellbeing. In fact, Leonard cares about his project of spreading the Mennonite religion in Sierra Leone at least as much as most people care about their wellbeing. She thinks that, given his inspiring enthusiasm, he has a chance of converting some people to

⁷ See her idea of 'minimal decency' (Thomson 1971, p. 62).

his religion. Yet, if she is not inclined to give him money for his mission and in fact turns him down, she is not thereby lacking in benevolence and is certainly not lacking Thomsonian decency. The apparent fact that in Leonard's set of ends his religion ranks at least as highly as Roger's wellbeing ranks in Roger's set of ends does not make it the case that refusing to help Leonard with his religious enthusiasm is as bad as refusing to protect Roger's wellbeing.

There are two things that Leonard can do to bolster his chance of convincing the reasonably virtuous Mercedes to give him the money. He can indicate that a refusal on her part *will* severely effect his wellbeing – and as I have mentioned, often people are emotionally crushed when they fail to achieve their ends, even their unselfish ends. It is not, however, always the case. We can imagine that Mercedes, before refusing to donate, considers the question and concludes that Leonard is an emotionally sturdy person who will 'get over it' and ask God for a new mission, or that, given his personality and the nature of the project, whatever he might lose, in terms of wellbeing, through failure to execute his plan pales when compared to the misery that might well come from executing it. If he evinces a surprising urgent despair that leads Mercedes to conclude that Roger would, in fact, be suicidal if he does not make his journey then her helping him might, after all, be a matter of protecting his wellbeing and not merely of promoting his religion. Another thing Leonard can do is try to convince Mercedes of the merits of his mission. For example, he could point out to her that, should it happen, his mission will involve not just trying to convert people to but also, for example, providing help to poor people. However, if Mercedes is convinced in this way, her donation will not be an act of benevolence towards Leonard. It will be an act of benevolence towards the poor of Sierra Leone.

If the only reason to protect another's wellbeing were the high priority that she is likely to give it, we would have an equally compelling reason to protect any other (morally permissible) end to which a person assigns an equally high priority. If the urgency of removing a serious threat to a person's wellbeing were just the urgency of removing a serious threat to her achieving an important end then helping Leonard would be every bit as urgent as helping Roger. Anyone who has a morally permissible end that she is willing to suffer and die for, whatever the end, would be someone that we would have a duty to help when she encounters a large enough setback to achieving her end. However, other things being equal, refusing to protect a person from a serious setback to her wellbeing is often selfish, lacking in benevolence in a way that refusing to protect a person from a serious setback to her achieving another end is not⁸.

Is there some other way in which a Kantian might argue that a concern for wellbeing is derivable, on good Kantian grounds, from a concern for rational agency? Many contemporary Kantians will agree that we have a duty of easy rescue: a duty to protect a person from serious bodily harm when it can be done at a low cost to ourselves, as when we can help the person bleeding by the side of the road through calling an ambulance. They distinguish the duty of easy rescue from the more general imperfect duty that we might have to help people from time to

⁸ Compare Scanlon's argument for the special importance of the state protecting its citizens' wellbeing (Scanlon 1975).

time, or otherwise make it clear that one cannot permissibly avoid helping in this kind of emergency simply by having done other good deeds during the relevant time period.⁹ Kantians, however, will deny that the feature of ultimate importance about such a rescue situation is the existence of a serious threat to someone's wellbeing and hold instead that the normative force of such cases comes from the threat to the potential victim's rational agency. Such an explanation, however, does not make sense in cases where the victim does not face death or brain damage but rather physical suffering or physical disability, and if the amount of physical suffering to be expected is not quite so bad that it deprives one of the ability to respond to practical reasons. Rational agency is not the ability to achieve ends but the ability to set ends; it is not the ability to perform successful actions but the ability to respond to practical reasons. One is not normally deprived of this ability through damage to one's limbs. Furthermore, compare a case in which a person who might be bitten by an insect is at risk for a short period of severe pain to a case in which the effect would be not pain but a period of deep sleep lasting the same amount of time, with no harm to her wellbeing expected. Other things being equal, helping the person avoid the agony-inducing insect bite seems more morally urgent than helping a her to avoid the soporific insect bite would be, even though involuntary sleep deprives a person of her agency just as much as any pain and more than most pain.

Nor is suffering only problematic when it interferes with the victim's ability to achieve a large number of ends. We can imagine cases where the suffering interferes severely with the agent's wellbeing without interfering significantly with any other end she has. In these cases, it would still be true that a benevolent, or even merely decent, agent would help the potential victim avoid the suffering if doing so would not be very hard. Great suffering is usually an emergency simply because it is bad for one: it diminishes one's wellbeing.

V

Two Objections. One objection to consider concerns the connection between benevolence and respect. To a Kantian, benevolence and respect come 'from the same place' – reverence for agency. If benevolence is concern for wellbeing as such, not wellbeing as an end agents have, then benevolence and respect seem to come, as it were, from different places. But is concern for wellbeing without reverence for human agency morally valuable at all?

One must remember here that if one is not a Kantian, one is free to hold that there are such things, with regard to moral worth, as degrees and partial credit. Imagine that Jennifer helps John, despite considerable difficulty, and that she does so in order to protect his wellbeing without ulterior motive. Pre-theoretically, Jennifer is worthy of esteem for her action (not merely encouragement or praise). She is not like Kant's prudent grocer, or like the person who does the right thing because it is honoured, or like the person who does the right thing so she can think well of herself. She is acting well and acting kindly. This indicates that her motive has something to do with that which makes her action right. Suppose, now, that she would have, for example, told John a lie if that would have been critical to protecting his wellbeing, though

⁹ See, for example, Herman's view of mutual aid (Herman 1984).

in fact no lie was told. Suppose that such a lie would have been wrong. That she would have lied still does not make her action like that of Kant's prudent grocer. It rather tells us that Jennifer is someone who is responsive to some moral reasons – reasons of wellbeing – but at least partially unresponsive to other reasons. She is benevolent, but dishonest or disrespectful of autonomy. Her action gets partial credit for moral worth as she is motivated by some of what makes her action right.

If the lie would have been of an ordinary sort, we might feel Jennifer's character flaw is moderate. Our feelings toward her might shift if we discovered that her indifference to moral reasons other than wellbeing is so deep that she is not only capable of telling a paternalistic lie but of things like pushing men in front of trollies and framing innocents to prevent a riot: capable of acting as a Stark Raving Consequentialist. According to Foot, one does not call a person who hangs an innocent man benevolent, regardless of her motives. Does that mean that proper benevolence and respect are in fact impossible to untangle from each other as I wish to untangle them?

Things are more complicated than this. Consider how unusual the Stark Raving Consequentialist is, how hard to imagine: a person who is all about an honest-to-God, utterly unselfish, non-instrumental and non-derivative passion for protecting wellbeing but whose indifference to considerations of respect and fairness is deep enough to allow her to unhesitatingly murder or torture people in order to protect the wellbeing of others. One need not be an advocate of the unity of the virtues to expect anyone whose parents taught him benevolence to have also been taught fairness. Many dictators have used the rhetoric of 'the greater good' – or at least that of their own people's good – to justify atrocities, and the Soviets even popularized the saying 'the end justifies the means.' We are naturally suspicious of people who evoke such associations. However, I have yet to find an example of a dictator of this sort, the purity of whose motives has not been doubted by historians. At best, one finds dictators to be rationalizing self-aggrandizers who like to see themselves as saviours of their people, and even if some real concern is mixed in somewhere, one is confident that they preferred to see the people continue to suffer with them in power to seeing them saved by someone else. If we were to find a dictator who was an honest Stark Raving Consequentialist we *would* call him a benevolent dictator. Would we also call him morally perverse or misguided? We surely would. I think we would be struggling quite a bit for the right words with which to describe such an anomalous character, as for all her sins, many of us would still want to distinguish her from those dictators motivated by self-interest, lust for power, and so on (think about the legend of Eva Peron). Bad as he is, a Stark Raving Consequentialist is not as bad as an equally unjust dictator motivated by egotism or by some sinister cause such as anti-Semitism, because for all that he is an abusive dictator, he is a benevolent one.

One other objection a Kantian might raise is that, on the view of benevolence I have been defending, the benevolent person cares about wellbeing and not about persons. This has been

put in terms of treating people as mere cups to be filled with wellbeing.¹⁰ A person who cares, for examples, about knowledge may be indifferent to people, seeing them as important only as receptacles for knowledge. Is a person who cares intrinsically about human wellbeing similarly indifferent to human beings? Only if the content of her concern entails that she would wish to create additional people full of wellbeing, just as the knowledge fanatic would wish to create additional knowledge-filled people in order to increase knowledge in the world. The benevolent person, on my view, only wants to create wellbeing in the sense of wanting to ‘make people happy’ rather than wanting to ‘make happy people.’¹¹ For each person, she wants *that* person to do well. This is quite different from wanting there to be ‘more wellbeing in the world’ as such. The latter attitude has the problem captured by the ‘cups’ metaphor, and I agree that a person with such an attitude is not benevolent. Naturally, if the genuinely benevolent person does not have the power to protect each and every one of us from illbeing, he will, seeking to do the best he can, run into problems involving trade-offs, dilemmas, and the like, which is why it is important, for a person to be good, that he has not only the virtue of benevolence but also the virtue(s) of fairness. He will meet people who aim at things other than happiness, and this is where respect comes in.

VI

Conclusion. Robert Louis Stevenson said that life without kindness would be a practical joke in the worst possible spirit. Reading what he said brings into sharp relief the effect that decades in which Kantianism has been the ascendant view in ethics have had on some of us: getting us used to viewing the wellbeing of our fellow humans as a value that is somehow beneath us unless mediated by, justified by, or derived from something more complex, like the value of rational agency. Benevolence as concern for wellbeing has been viewed by many as somehow primitive and coarse. This is unwarranted. Concern for the wellbeing of others is a virtue pure and simple. It is far from enough to make a fully virtuous agent, but it is required, and it is a start.

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¹⁰ The comparison between the role of humans for utilitarianism and the role of containers of valuable states can be traced back (at least) to John Rawls (1974, p. 17), but the evocative image of cups and a valuable liquid was developed famously by Regan (Regan 1983, pp. 205-6). Legend has it that the great utilitarian J.J.C Smart used to exclaim ‘we’re all buckets!’ at conferences.

¹¹ This distinction is credited to Jan Narveson (Narveson 1973, 80).

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