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**"Gentle as Doves and Wise as Serpents:
The Philosophy of Care and the Sociology of Transmmission"**

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Gentle as Doves and Wise as Serpents: The Philosophy of Care and the Sociology of Transmission

Paul G. Schervish

The subject of this book—passing on the tradition of care to the next generation—has various subtopics that we treat in the five main parts of the book. These include an examination of how individuals become dedicated to care, the importance of civic, ethical, and spiritual traditions, the involvement of children and youth as providers of care, the institutions, here and abroad, that infuse care into daily life, and the productive role of self-interest properly understood in mobilizing care and service to the community.

In the pages introducing the specific parts of the book, we will speak more about these topics and how the contributors address them. In the conclusion, Margaret Gates also takes up several of these topics, elaborating the important practical implications of what our contributors have written. In my comments that follow here, I want to say a few words about the two central themes of this volume—care and its transmission. I am aware of the rich literature on both these topics that has fashioned our Western intellectual heritage. It is not my intention, however, to review this legacy even in a rudimentary way. Rather my purpose is to present what I have learned from my teachers, colleagues, and research about the meaning of care and about the social-psychological processes that teach us to care. In speaking about care and its transmission, I invoke Jesus' injunction in the Gospel of Matthew (10:16): "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and gentle as doves." If caring

requires us to be gentle as doves, teaching people to care requires us to be wise as serpents.

Gentle as Doves: The Virtue of Care and the Ethics of Identification

I believe there is something profoundly mistaken in the way many people think about philanthropy. The mistake is to conceive of philanthropy as an act that must be spurred on because it is not something people would naturally desire to do and find rewarding. Such a notion is not without precedent or intellectual authority. In fact, it originates—at least in its modern form—in Immanuel Kant, one of the giants of Western intellectual history. In an essay on Hegel's philosophy of history, Frederick Copleston (1965) points out an important distinction between Kantian and Hegelian ethics. In the Kantian tradition, an act loses its moral value if performed from inclination—that is, if it is something that people naturally want to do. But in the Hegelian tradition, says Copleston, morality does not require “a constant warfare against inclinations and natural impulses” (p. 250). Rather, a moral act can be inspired just as much as an immoral one from what people find pleasing and satisfying. This does not mean that morality consists in whatever someone feels like doing. It does mean that morality derives from choices people make from among competing inclinations rather than from choices between immoral inclinations and moral disinclinations. Now it seems to me that much of our current thinking about philanthropy is quite Kantian. By this I mean that otherwise genteel and wise advocates tend to idealize a morality that is foreign to human inclinations—that is, a morality of selflessness.

How did Kant come to fashion his ethics of disinclination, or what we have come to know as his duty principle? Kant's starting point is that human senses are unreliable. Principles of morality must be derived from deductive logic rather than from inductive experience. Thus Kant justified his categorical imperative—that we

should act in a way that it would be beneficial if everyone acted in the same way—by its correspondence to reason rather than to experience. Of course I have no objection to elevating duty to its rightful prominence. Indeed, it is a salutary antidote to the relativism that spans the political spectrum. From my point of view, however, the Kantian perspective is problematic because its proper emphasis on duty is undermined by an unfounded ideal of selfless altruism. To be fair, I should point out that those who advocate a Kantian perspective rarely, if ever, claim that all efforts to care for others require pure intentions. Still, the notion prevails that for philanthropy to be moral it should, at least in some minimal way, embrace the counterinclination of selflessness. Why, one may ask, am I so resistant to the Kantian viewpoint? After all, how much damage can be done by selfless intentions? A lot, suggests the Sufi story told by Idries Shah about the philanthropist who turns out to be just a well-meaning meddler (see Dervish, 1982, pp. 29–30).

One day a dervish discovers a poor family that, despite his persistence, refuses his charity. To make his gift more acceptable, he disguises himself as a carpet merchant and returns to the woman of the house, offering 100 pieces of gold to buy a dirty rug that an ancestor had left them. The woman says she will have to discuss the offer with her husband and asks the merchant to return the next evening. Suspicious of the merchant's intentions, the family has the rug appraised and discovers it is worth ten times more than the merchant offered. When the holy man returns to the house, the police arrest and convict him on “what seemed to everybody but him the clearest possible evidence that he was trying to steal from a poor family by a mean trick.”

Does the fate of this well-intentioned but unenlightened holy man imply that we should abandon the ideals of duty and care? Certainly not! It does mean that high intentions are no substitute for careful attention. It also means that we should look somewhere other than selfless altruism to locate the principle of duty and the ideal of care. It is one of the ironies of philanthropy

that cherishing altruism does so little to advance our cherishing of each other.

So can we do any better if we put aside the Kantian perspective? Can we find an ethic of care that corresponds more closely to our natural inclinations, helps us avoid the pitfalls of pure intention, and offers a productive practical strategy for teaching others the duties of care? I believe we can, and at least implicitly, so do the contributors to this book.

As an alternative to the Kantian ethic of *selfless engagement*, I propose the Thomistic ethic of *dutiful identification*. As we will see, Thomas Aquinas advances a morality in which people extend to others rather than curtail their love of self. Three considerations are important to establish a motivating principle for philanthropy that is based on natural inclinations and the potential for those inclinations to mature over the course of one's life.

Philanthropy as a Social Relation

The first consideration is the somewhat obvious but often-neglected fact that philanthropy is a social relation (see Ostrander and Schervish, 1990). It is a form of human interaction in which donors respond to the needs of others as valuable in their own right. In the commercial realm, firms generally respond to needs to the extent that those needs are expressed by dollars to be spent. In the political realm, politicians generally respond to needs to the extent that they are expressed by votes and campaign contributions. In philanthropy, however, donors respond to needs to the extent that these needs are felt to be important to the donors. If in commerce and politics there is a material basis for responding to needs, in philanthropy there is a moral basis. This does not deny that some aspects of commerce and politics move toward philanthropy to the extent that they honor needs expressed nonmaterially. Nor does it deny that philanthropy can move toward politics and commerce to the extent that it responds to material incentives. Still, the point is that

the heart of philanthropy is a relationship between donor and recipient ultimately mobilized and regulated by moral incentives. Since the philanthropic donor is in a superior material position, the donor must embody a high level of moral sensitivity if a materially adequate philanthropic relationship is to exist.

Caritas: Meeting the True Needs of Others

The second consideration concerns the nature of this moral sensitivity. What rudimentary disposition is substantial enough to be the basis for duty and yet familiar enough to be a natural inclination? It is the virtue of *care*. The term *care* derives, of course, from the Latin *caritas*. It is usually translated as "love" or "charity"—two words with profound meanings despite a tendency to be taken superficially. In the realm of philanthropy, love is sometimes seen as too soft, ambiguous, pretentious, or private. Charity, for its part, is viewed as too reminiscent of guilt-assuaging remedial intervention or entailing the paternalistic attitude of *noblesse oblige*. Let us put aside these two terms and concentrate instead on the fundamental dimension of *caritas* encompassed by the attribute of care.

Philosopher Jules Toner (1968) goes to great pains to formulate a notion of care grounded in a phenomenological analysis of love. For Toner, care is love focused on meeting the true needs of others. Care is the practical implementation of *radical love*, which he defines as the affection by which a lover "affirms the beloved for the beloved's self (as a radical end) . . . [and] by which the lover affectively identifies with the loved one's personal being, by which in some sense the lover is the beloved affectively" (p. 183). Therefore, according to Toner, radical care

is an affirmative affection toward someone precisely as in need. It is not the need nor what is needed that is the object of radical care; radical care is of the one who has the need, under the aspect of needing. For example, I have an affection of care toward one who needs

food or friendly words or a listener or instruction. As a consequence of care, I desire food for him, or friendly words and so on. If I have a care or concern for the food or words or instruction, etc. it is only . . . relative and derivative care [p. 75].

The implication for philanthropy of Toner's definition of care is to elevate care as the cardinal moral characteristic defining the relation between donor and recipient. The philanthropist is first and foremost a caregiver, not a giver of time and money. Time and money are the medium by which care is expressed. But the fundamental moral standard to which philanthropists should dedicate themselves is caring for others in need. While Toner cannot tell us what caring will mean in any particular situation, he does point us in the right direction. First, he emphasizes that care for another person is a radical end. Certainly people speak of caring for education or for the Boston Symphony. But Toner is clear that such concerns are derivative care, not to be confused with or substituted for radical care directed toward the only worthy object—other human beings, the so-called “ultimate recipients” or “ultimate beneficiaries” of philanthropy. Second, Toner insists that care, as the practical implementation of love, is an affective involvement in meeting others' *true needs*. Again, we can never know in the abstract what another's true needs are; nor does simply setting out to attend to someone's true needs exempt us from critical scrutiny. Yet by emphasizing the notion of *true needs*, Toner places front and center the obligation not just to respond to others but to respond effectively. According to him, taking the effort to figure out how to respond in a way that accomplishes a beneficial end (even if not always viewed as such by others or even by the recipient) is a crucial test of how much we care in the first place.

Thomas and Tocqueville: The Ethics of Identification

Along with understanding philanthropy as a social relation and as a disposition of radical care, the third step in establishing the moral

imperative of philanthropy is to recall the Western religious emphasis on the identity between love of neighbor and love of self. Toner's notion of care explicitly makes this connection, as we saw earlier: “The lover affectively identifies with the loved one's personal being, by which in some sense the lover is the beloved affectively.” Notice two things, about which I will say more in a moment. First, a true act of care is an act of identification with another. It is recognizing a radical affinity connecting the destinies of self and neighbor. Second, a true act of care is actually an act of self-love. We have now arrived at the point where it is possible to specify a morality of natural inclination that is substantial and familiar enough to ground the duties and ideals of philanthropy. I call this morality an *ethic of identification*.

If the essence of philanthropy is a social relation, and the essence of such a relation is radical care, the essence of radical care is identification. In modern discourse, self-identity revolves around the awareness of oneself as a distinctive personality. However, such a notion was not always prevalent. If our contemporary emphasis is on the notion of *self-identity*, the more classical emphasis of Thomas Aquinas, for instance, was on *self-identity*. To be clear, I should stress that not only did Aquinas not share our modern conception of identity, he did not even use the term. But he did speak eloquently about *identification* as the basic condition of *caritas*—what Toner refers to as radical care. As Aquinas puts it, “by the fact that love transforms the lover into the beloved, it makes the lover enter inside the beloved, and conversely, so that there is nothing of the beloved that is not united to the lover, just as the form attains the innermost recesses of that which it informs, and conversely” (*III Sent.*, d 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4; cited in Gillemann, 1959, p. 126).

It is not stretching things too far to suggest that what Aquinas describes in scholastic terms as the fundamental mutuality of love is akin to what Tocqueville enunciates in civic terms as “self-interest properly understood.” As Tocqueville ([1835] 1966, p. 526) says, Americans “enjoy explaining almost every act of their lives on the principle of self-interest properly understood. It gives them great

pleasure to point out how an enlightened self-love continually leads them to help one another and disposes them freely to give part of their time and wealth for the good of the state." Harriet Martineau ([1838] 1989, p. 218), a contemporary of Tocqueville who wrote six volumes on her travels in America, is equally persuaded about the need for a sense of identification to make a society a place where "charity has gone deep as well as spread wide." According to Martineau, the spirit of charity becomes one with "the spirit of justice" only in those societies with a full-fledged "spirit of fraternity." Such a spirit of fraternity, she maintains, arises "from the movers feeling it their own concern that any are depressed and endangered as they would themselves refuse to be" (p. 218).

An obvious objection is that the above formulations too easily permit self-interest to masquerade as mutual self-interest. But having to confront this prospect turns out to be one of those proverbial "good problems." Having to be vigilant about the dangers of specious mutuality is a small risk compared to the potential benefits of an ethic that predicates duty on the mutual inclinations of identification. In his treatise on charity, Gerard Gilleman (1959) acknowledges that Aquinas properly recognizes the possibility that in the name of love one may end up being egocentric. It is always appropriate to ask whether a professed intention of charity actually accomplishes its desired end. Still, holding individuals accountable for objective outcomes makes the most sense from the point of view of an ethic of identification that from the outset requires us to scrutinize actions as well as intentions. In the end, to accept an ethic of identification is to accept a rigorous (though nondogmatic) criterion for judging practical affairs, namely, whether I have loved my neighbor as myself. Even though the morality of *caritas* does not enable us to make *ultimate* judgments about another person's moral status, it does establish the primacy of charity as an ethical standard, supports the notion of philanthropy as a social relation, and provides the basis for us tentatively to appraise our own and others' behavior. In the long run, the most important implication of mov-

ing charity to center stage is that it avoids the distracting debate about the contaminating influence of self-love and shifts attention to the quality of one's identifications.

From my point of view, then, it is woefully inadequate to offer an ethic of altruistic selflessness precisely in that area of human dedication in which the self is most involved. When it comes to *caritas*, what matters is the quality of the self and not the absence of self, the quality of what we do in the name of identification and not the absence of identification, the horizon of our interests and not the absence of interests. Aquinas recognizes and even extols this seemingly paradoxical unity of duty and pleasure in the implemental aspects of *caritas*. As Gilleman (1959, p. 125) says, "For St. Thomas there is no place in a morally good act of will for an absolute disjunction between love referred to self and love referred to another. The proper effect of love is to associate self with the other."

Relation, care, and identification, then, are three pillars of philanthropy because they are three pillars of morality. To repeat, neither philanthropy nor the nonprofit sector has a corner on virtue. But because the charitable sector must rely on the moral sensitivity of those in command of resources, it is crucial to be clear about the meaning of care and about the human inclination toward identification that motivates that care. Fortunately, care and identification are not foreign endeavors. By inclination we identify our fate with the fate of others, even if these others are at first just family and close friends. Experience imbues us at least with embryonic sentiments of radical love and radical care. Although we may tend to ignore these sentiments or limit their application to those in our immediate environment, we are also constantly invited to expand our horizons.

Wise as Serpents: The Social Psychology of Socialization

To say that care and identification are natural proclivities does not mean they are uneducated virtues or easily applied outside our

familiar frontiers. The ethic of identification requires moral instruction if we are to care effectively and identify with souls beyond our immediate habitat. For this reason, we must devote a comparable amount of attention to the transmission as we do to the understanding of care. We must care about the transmission of care. That is, we must be wise as serpents in addition to being gentle as doves. The second theme of this book is the mechanisms by which parents and institutions transmit to their charges a dedication to care. While as a practical matter transmitting care is never easy or automatic, it is theoretically something as simple as moral education or socialization. Just as there is nothing more central to the philosophy of philanthropy than love and identification, there is nothing more central to the conduct of philanthropy than setting and socialization.

My own research on charitable giving among the wealthy (Schervish and Herman, 1988) and the population at large (Schervish and Havens, 1994) reveals a specific array of important motivating factors. Our eyes tend to glaze over when we hear social scientists speak of "multivariate analysis." Nevertheless, researchers who apply sophisticated statistical techniques to ferret out causal forces are simply being systematic about a notion that is a matter of common sense for any thinking person—that every outcome stems from several overlapping and interacting forces. Indeed, it is generally not the multidimensionality so much as the unidimensionality of an explanation that undermines its credibility.

I have found six factors especially important for inculcating a moral identity of care. Of course others may wish to add or subtract variables from this list. But for now, the following may serve as a preliminary working model of the six mobilizing factors that appear to induce charitable engagement across levels of income: (1) groups and organizations in which we participate, (2) frameworks of consciousness that shape values and priorities, (3) persons or organizations that directly invite participation in philanthropy, (4) discretionary resources, (5) people or experiences from our youth

that serve as positive inspirations for our adult engagements, and (6) the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of engagement that draw us deeper into a philanthropic identity. The first five variables work to induce charitable involvement in the first place and then to increase our level of commitment. The sixth variable—reinforcing rewards—is by definition relevant, since rewards reinforce the participation of those who have already become involved. For a particular individual, any one of the first five factors may be enough to induce at least a minimal level of philanthropic care; but in most cases the path to philanthropic care is via the influence of several if not all the factors.

Communities of participation—the first factor—comprise the entire range of informal and formal organizations in which individuals participate as a result of circumstances or choice. For instance, people with children are drawn into a number of school, extracurricular, and sports programs that offer opportunities to volunteer time and contribute money. The same is true if we belong to a church, alumni association, work-based professional association, union, or social club. Affiliation with a political party, social movement, political candidate, or neighborhood cause are other avenues for engagement. As I will discuss in a moment, these communities of participation often directly request assistance from the participants. But simply becoming involved in such organizations ends up creating a familiar setting in which we are spontaneously made aware of needs to which we may choose to respond.

Frameworks of consciousness—the second of the six factors—are the ways of thinking and feeling that are rooted deeply enough in our awareness to make us committed to a cause. These ways of thinking and feeling can have to do with religious beliefs, political ideology, or social concerns. An awareness of the redemptive value of Alcoholics Anonymous's twelve-step program in our own or a family member's life is one example. Equally common are the deeply felt convictions about political prisoners that lead concerned citizens to join Amnesty International, about the homeless or battered

women that lead volunteers to work at a shelter, about community violence that lead parents to patrol the streets as part of a neighborhood watch, about the value of religious faith that lead church members to work in a food bank or a program for racial justice. The list of motivating concerns is, of course, as long as the list of cherished beliefs. Just as there are different types of organizations in which we may participate, there are different types of beliefs. Some mobilizing beliefs are better described as general values, other beliefs are really fundamental orientations, while still other beliefs involve causes we are dedicated to. Again, there are no impermeable boundaries separating these kinds of beliefs, any more than there is a sharp demarcation between what we do because of heartfelt feelings, on the one hand, and communities of participation, on the other. Communities of participation and frameworks of consciousness almost always occur together.

The third mobilizing factor entails *direct requests* for contributions of time and money. Many of these invitations arise as a result of our participation in an organization. Multivariate analysis of the biennial INDEPENDENT SECTOR Survey on Giving and Volunteering being carried out by Virginia A. Hodgkinson and her associates and by our research team at Boston College has begun to produce a set of consistent findings. In addition to being connected to the level of involvement in communities of participation (for example, the frequency of attendance at religious services), the most important factor leading to involvement is simply being asked for assistance. Certainly, some people volunteer their time and money without being asked. But the majority of givers cite being asked as a major reason for their charitable efforts. Of course, we are all asked through telephone and mail solicitations. But there is every reason to believe (as Hodgkinson points out in Chapter One) that people in all income groups follow what I found among wealthy contributors, namely, that being asked by someone we know personally or by a representative of an organization we participate in is a major mobilizer. Again, a multivariate model makes sense. Being asked to

contribute occurs from within existing communities of participation and appeals to existing frameworks of consciousness.

The presence of *discretionary resources* is a fourth factor leading to charitable commitment. The level of our discretionary resources of time and money is of course a mixture of objective and subjective considerations. For instance, the amount of discretionary time available to retired people with children out of the house may seem greater than that available to members of the labor force who are still raising children. Similarly, a family of four with a household income of \$75,000 presumably enjoys more discretionary spending than a family of four with an income of \$25,000. But there are a number of complicating factors, including the amount of time needed to care for a sick spouse and the amount of money devoted to necessary expenditures such as college tuition and taxes. One family's necessity is another family's luxury, which highlights the fact that the amount of discretionary resources is also a matter of subjective disposition. Although difficult to measure, the amount of resources people are ready to give is in large part a function of how much they identify with and care for others in need. As is true with the previous three variables, disposable resources, while an important variable in its own right, also reflects the fundamental quality of our moral identity. The organizations in which we participate, the cultural frameworks we embrace, the pleas to which we are attuned, and the resources we feel we are able to give are all inextricably linked to each other and to our moral identity as caring individuals.

The same is true for the fifth determinant: the positive *models and experiences from our youth* that encourage adult philanthropy. By speaking of models from our youth, I do not mean to neglect models from our adult life that we emulate. But for the sake of clarity, I include such adult models (be they friends, business associates, or colleagues on a board of directors) as part of our community of participation. Emphasized here are the activities and lives that we are more or less drawn into in the course of growing up. To some

extent, we voluntarily choose such contacts. But the majority of them are likely to have been unavoidable, put in our path by our parents, grandparents, churches, youth groups, and schools. As such, they are forms of initiatory training in identification and care. They are part of a moral education that molds our lives in a period when we are less guarded about our priorities and more apt to accrue at least a feel for the charitable impulse.

As I have said, a sixth variable influences the intensity of people's philanthropic commitment. This is the set of *intrinsic and extrinsic rewards* that accrue to individuals who are already active in philanthropy. The source and intensity of such satisfactions are connected to the additional communities of participation and frameworks of consciousness that philanthropists encounter in the course of carrying out their commitments. Such reinforcing factors will include getting to know other givers, formal and informal expressions of gratitude, public recognition of various sorts, and direct material benefits such as preferred seating at the symphony and decision-making clout at a welfare agency. But most important among such reinforcing rewards is the personal satisfaction from helping others and from seeing one's money and time used as an effective investment to accomplish cherished goals. In this regard, less involved philanthropists might take a hint from Hull House founder Jane Addams and from those who work directly with the beneficiaries of their philanthropy. One of the richest sources of reinforcing satisfaction is to witness firsthand the positive effect of care on the lives of others and to be able to more fully identify with one's beneficiaries as radical ends.

Conclusion

Although we have assigned the chapters of this book to specific sections, each chapter makes some original contribution to the themes of care and the transmission of care that I have just presented. Together with the preceding comments and Margaret Gates's con-

clusion, these chapters suggest several propositions about care and the generation of a caring society. First, care entails not just a willingness to assist others. It also involves an inner disposition that regards those in need as ends in themselves. As such, care requires that caregivers concentrate on discovering just what in fact is needed and how to provide it. Care is loving others in their true needs. Becoming informed about the lives of those for whom we care, especially through direct contact, may be one of the most important yet least practiced aspects of contemporary philanthropy. Where such contact does occur, we find both an extraordinary dedication of resources and exceptionally fruitful outcomes.

Second, the disposition of care is a matter of moral identity. Caring individuals come to view themselves and not just others in a different light. To exhibit a caring orientation toward others in a consistent and dedicated fashion is to assume a self-definition in which one does not so much become selfless as self-expansive. A caring person is one who becomes profoundly self-concerned about what happens to others by identifying with their fate. When self-interest properly understood is properly understood, it is the noblest—not the basest—motivation. In this way, all help of others is self-help and all true self-help is help of others.

Third, participation in organizations from church and school to social movements and political efforts is the breeding ground for philanthropic commitment. While not automatic or inevitable, initial engagement tends to spawn deeper engagement. Participation opens our eyes to where we are needed and places us in circumstances where we will be invited to commence or expand our dedication.

Fourth, extraordinary commitment requires extraordinary inspiration. Heartfelt civic, political, and humanistic values are one such source of motivation. Perhaps even more profoundly influential are spiritualities in which one discerns the inextricable affinity between love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self. In either case, however, such frameworks of consciousness induce care by guiding peo-

ple to first taste and later embrace the ancient wisdom in which duty becomes an attractive path. Virtue, says Aquinas, is the habit of doing good. Transmitting the tradition of care means awakening people to more habitually encounter and more readily bear that *munus suavissimum* ("most agreeable burden") of *caritas*.

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