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## Reciprocity (But I Repeat Myself)

It is rumored that some retired philosophers write less than they used to, and publish more. I am trying to avoid that. But now there is a new difficulty. More and more of what I want to publish is growing out of a desire to repeat myself -- especially on the topic of reciprocity. Medication, in the form of table wine, does not seem to help.

This particular desire for repetition is new to me. In the '80s I thought that the general silence about my writing on the topic was due to agreement from the many, and politeness from the remaining few, so I felt no need for further comment. (The only impolite response I got at the time was from an aggressive graduate student, several states northward, who came up to me after a colloquium and said "I guess I agree with what you say, but I don't see how I can get an article off of it.")

Alas, it is now dawning on me that the silence might have had other origins. It is just possible that people didn't read the reciprocity book. The sales would certainly support that thesis. But at the time I was so vain that I assumed pirated copies were in wide circulation.

These are good views on reciprocity, people. Hence my desire to repeat them -- or rather to restate parts of them, with some significant new twists. I am 20 years older now, and at least 5 years wiser. So I want to begin by addressing some misunderstandings.

### Misunderstandings

Reciprocity is a matter of making a fitting and proportional return for the good or ill we receive. That is the general concept of it, common to social norms everywhere. Within that general concept there are competing "conceptions" of reciprocity -- attempts to turn the general concept into a more determinative set of norms and standards.<sup>1</sup> It is worth remembering (by referring to the anthropology) that every society of record has an elaborate set of social practices that amounts to a pretheoretical conception of reciprocity; that such pretheoretical conceptions differ significantly from each other, and that they are everywhere regarded as defining something fundamental to human life.. This poses an important problem for social and political philosophers -- namely, deciding which conception of reciprocity is best, all things considered. In the '80s I was puzzled about why this problem, compared to the similar one about justice, had received so little attention. I remain puzzled.

Consider Rawls, who made increasing reference to reciprocity over the years. In *A Theory of Justice*, in 1971, he says that "the difference principle expresses a conception of reciprocity. It is a principle of mutual benefit."<sup>2</sup> He explains that when the difference principle is satisfied, the least advantaged will benefit from the inequalities produced or left in place by the scheme for social cooperation, and the most favored members of society will benefit also, from the willing cooperation of all the others.<sup>3</sup> This is one of the reasons he thinks the difference principle is superior to utilitarianism, since the latter does not guarantee mutual or reciprocal benefits, and therefore does not provide a self-interested motive for adopting its supreme principle.<sup>4</sup> He repeats these arguments more pointedly in *Justice As Fairness: a Restatement*,

published in 2001, but does not develop the underlying conception of reciprocity that he is using.<sup>5</sup> In fact, one could argue that he is not using a "conception" of reciprocity at all, but rather an incompletely stated version of the general concept. I say incompletely stated, because his references to reciprocity make no explicit mention of fittingness and proportionality, but only the much vaguer notion of a fair return in kind, which is a common oversimplification. This may be deliberate on his part, since if he gave a fully articulated conception of fittingness and proportionality he would then have to show how it is reflected in the difference principle. Inequalities would not only have to be beneficial for the least advantaged members of society, but beneficial in a way that is demonstrably fitting and proportional to what they are asked to contribute. This introduces significant complications that Rawls may well have wished to postpone.

To be fair, however, this oversimplification in Rawls is not surprising. In Western political philosophy, the concept of reciprocity is routinely oversimplified, and then either abandoned or abused. It is oversimplified in at least four ways.

*Direct, one-to-one exchanges.* One of these is the frequent, but usually unstated assumption that the standard case of reciprocity is direct, one-to-one exchange. We often see this in discussions of collective action problems, fair play, and prisoner's dilemmas. The assumption seems to be that rational actors will cooperate with others only if those very others play fair, and that playing fair means contributing to the project at hand. But in any large and complex social structure, a large percentage of our reciprocal behavior is indirect, or roundabout, or one-many.. Some of us give money, say, to support Oxfam, in the devout hope of never having to use its services, and what comes around to us reciprocally, at 106 degrees of separation, is something so remote from our contribution that we are unlikely to recognize it as reciprocity for anything in particular. Moreover, many of the people and institutions in the intervening links of the chain may themselves have made no contribution to Oxfam, or even be aware of its existence. Yet we all understand the importance of these long chains of generalized reciprocity, and dutifully throw our various contributions to the wind in the expectation that what goes around comes around. Direct, one-to-one exchanges are no more central to the practice of reciprocity than indirect and diffuse ones. Forgetting this -- oversimplifying reciprocity in this way -- can be seriously misleading. It can mislead us in identifying free riders, for example, by thinking that people who don't join us in contributing to our worthy causes are ipso facto getting some benefit for free. This in turn can lead us to mischaracterize collective action problems, even at the theoretical level.

*In-kind returns.* Another oversimplification is the frequent assumption that reciprocity (direct or generalized) is equivalent to tit-for-tat, in which you get back, roughly in-kind, more or less what you put in. But it is easy to find examples that embarrass that practice, and then to jump to the conclusion that reciprocity is at most some kind of regulative rule of thumb, rather than a fundamental principle of justice. Cephalus, you'll recall, in Book One of Plato's *Republic*, offers the opinion that justice is a matter of speaking the truth and paying your debts, and Socrates produces a well-known counterexample -- namely that we don't want to return a weapon that a friend has left in our care, if the friend is deranged when he asks for it back.<sup>6</sup> One consequence of this is clearly a difficulty for reciprocity narrowly construed. How can we possibly think that some principle like tit-for-tat undergirds justice or right conduct? It must be the other way around.

Cephalus's son Polemarchus doesn't immediately see this difficulty, and proposes that justice is a matter of helping your friends and harming your enemies -- which is pretty close to

saying outright that justice is a matter of behaving reciprocally, returning good for good, and harm for harm. In this case Socrates tackles the idea of returning harm for harm. He famously argues that it is unwise to harm one's enemies, since that would only make them worse.<sup>7</sup> What this may neglect is the way in which a failure to reciprocate at all, in some more complicated sense, also tends to make one's enemies worse. They take advantage, and never learn.

So that is a second oversimplification: underestimating the importance of reciprocity by construing it as a simple form of in-kind returns, tit-for-tat.

*Scope restrictions.* A third oversimplification is a restriction on the scope of reciprocity. In particular, people are often uneasy with the idea that they "owe" a reciprocal return of good for good to just anyone who might benefit them. In the ancient and medieval worlds the scope was limited mostly by status. Reciprocity among equals was routinely endorsed, but reciprocity among unequals was judged to be unworkable, unnecessary, or unseemly. (See Aristotle on friendship.<sup>8</sup>) At the moment, in the Western world at least, the scope is more frequently limited to voluntary transactions. We are ready to accept the notion that if people are engaged in an arrangement for mutual advantage, then they all have to do their fair share, and that involves reciprocating. But it is also now common to think that we ought to be able to opt out of these reciprocal obligations. Others may shower us with gifts, but if we don't ask for them, and don't accept them willingly, we should not be under an obligation to make returns. Socrates, in Plato's *Crito*, was concerned about the contrapositive of that -- the way in which *accepting* benefits *generates* obligations. But in these more individualist times, we want to keep our escape routes open and our moral baggage packed.

What this neglects is the fact that the practice of reciprocity is a feature of a very general human project -- nothing less than living a good life in concert with others, under what Hume called the circumstances of justice (moderate scarcity, limited altruism, and rough equality of power and vulnerability).<sup>9</sup> Reciprocal social relationships are an important part of this, and we need a definition of reciprocity that can handle the full range of our concerns. Restricting it to voluntary transactions won't work. Many of our most rewarding (as well as most burdening) reciprocal relationships are not fully voluntary, either in origin or in continuance. Think of parental and filial relationships, and those growing out of one's cultural and political heritage. To exclude the norm of reciprocity from such relationships seems unwise, even if it does close off some escape routes.

*Equal absolute value.* A final oversimplification of reciprocity is the assumption that the things exchanged must be of equal value in some agent-independent sense. If I give you a beautiful work of art, for example, then the assumption seems to be that you will have to respond with something that is comparable in taste and market value. But if that is the case, then it is easy to show again that reciprocity cannot be a rock bottom principle of justice, because left unchecked, it will generate seriously unfair burdens on the young, old, poor, powerless, unlucky, and disabled. If a child "owes" a thing of equal monetary value and personal importance to his parents in return for his breathtakingly beautiful and liberating first bicycle, he will be burdened with this debt for years, even though it might have cost his affluent parents little or nothing, relative to their resources. Further, on a grander scale, such obligations of reciprocity can create lasting hierarchical arrangements in social and political life. The rich get richer in such exchanges, and the powerful get more powerful, simply by engineering debts in others. That result seems to drive yet another wedge between reciprocity and justice, and to suggest that we want the principles of justice to regulate reciprocal exchanges.

That is also based on oversimplification -- this time about the scale of the returns that

reciprocity requires. Once again, we need to address the question in terms of the way reciprocal relationships contribute to human flourishing generally. Then we will see that the appropriate rate of exchange is not a simple one.

What I want to do now is two things. The first is to outline a normative understanding of reciprocity -- one that corrects all four of these oversimplifications. I regard this as a restatement of my earlier views, with some new twists.<sup>10</sup> I do not think there is anything here that is inconsistent with the *Reciprocity* book, but of course that might be wishful thinking. In any case, after this restatement I will conclude with some reasons for thinking that reciprocity bridges a fundamental division between political theorists.

#### A Restatement of the Norm of Reciprocity

My conception of reciprocity -- my normative proposals about it -- are centrally these: I propose that the standards for fittingness and proportionality have two parts -- one part for the good we receive, and another for the bad. Both parts of the fittingness standard come from the range of things that count as goods for the recipients, and in the case of reciprocating for injuries, the conception is to return corrective good for bad received. The two parts of the proportionality standard are that (a) for the good we receive, we respond with an equal marginal sacrifice, and (b) for the bad, our corrective responses be limited to recouping the marginal losses we have sustained. I propose, moreover, that we ought to accept a norm of reciprocity that covers all the good and bad we receive from others, rather than just what is received in the course of voluntary transactions. And I propose this conception for both direct, one-to-one relationships and indirect, generalized forms of reciprocity.

*Fitting returns for good received.* Take fittingness first, in cases where we are responding to goods we have received. Say that you are setting up a household, and I try to help, uninvited. At considerable expense, I give you a spiffy toaster oven -- my very favorite kind of small appliance. How should you respond? Well, if you dislike toaster ovens, never use them, and already have three of them from other busybodies, my fourth will not be welcome. It won't be a good for you, given your situation, and even my gesture in giving it will be exasperating.

The conception of reciprocity I propose is pretty clear about such cases -- and in general about all cases in which we receive uninvited gifts that are more burdensome than beneficial: If no good is *received*, no return of good needs to be made. In fact, in those cases, a return of good *for good received* is not even logically possible. The norm of reciprocity should direct our attention to the value of the thing *for the recipient*, not for the giver. It is pretty clear that my gift hasn't given you a good to respond to, apart from my good intentions. If you want to continue your relationship with me for the long haul, despite my blunder this time, my good intentions will need to be reciprocated. But not the toaster oven.

Careful attention to this standard of fittingness removes some of the worries we may have about getting trapped in a bog of unwanted, uninvited, and burdensome reciprocal exchanges -- especially those initiated by busybodies or reciprocity entrepreneurs. And it also leaves exactly the escape routes individualists want, even at the political level. Living in a political system we did not choose and cannot leave, a system which showers us with things like Terminator movies, does not by itself create obligations of reciprocity in us.

*Fitting returns for bad received.* The next issue is reciprocity for wrongs, harms, and bad things generally. A conception of reciprocity must define fittingness in this context as well. The conception I defend requires making a *corrective* response designed to restore and sustain productive reciprocal relationships. That will often involve retaliation that the offender will

initially regard as unpleasant or harmful. But as Plato points out, it is unreasonable to make a genuinely harmful response -- a response that makes the offender genuinely worse than he already is, as opposed to temporarily worse off. The reasonable thing to do is to try to correct the situation, both by getting restitution for our loss and by restoring productive reciprocal relationships with the offender. The fitting return is therefore not **A**bad for bad received,<sup>@</sup> but rather **A**corrective good for bad received.<sup>@</sup>

*Proportionality in returning good for good received.* Now for proportionality in returning good for good. Here it helps to think first of simple commercial agreements and contracts. We sometimes assume that such transactions will automatically be balanced -- proportional, fair -- if they are fully voluntary. Contractualists, including Rawls, trade on this idea. But we cannot reasonably assume that the notion of "balance" here involves equal, dollar-for-dollar values for the parties. Quite the opposite, in ordinary commerce. If the things exchanged didn't have different relative values, there would be no economic motive for the transaction. I have cash, you have a car to sell for cash. The economic motive for the deal is the fact that your car is more valuable to me than my cash, while the opposite is true for you. The notion of balance or proportionality in reciprocal transactions generally can also have an agent-relative standard. In fact, it is fairly easy to see that it ought to have such a standard.

We can see this if we put reciprocity into its largest context -- specifically, into its role in the project of creating and sustaining productive social relationships generally. In that context (rather than in the special case of exchanging commodities) it is clear that a dollar-for-dollar exchange rate will often be self-defeating. The young, old, poor, powerless, unlucky, and disabled will not be able to "afford" many such exchanges for long, and will thus often have to withdraw from them, and from the relationships in which they are embedded, defeating the life-sustaining and life enhancing purposes of reciprocity for everyone.. Either that or they will have to accept a redefinition of their reciprocal relationships in which their service, subservience, and deference to the rich and fortunate count as goods. This is also self-defeating, along two dimensions. One is that we are likely to exhaust our ability to make such substitutions long before we exhaust the life-sustaining need for reciprocal relationships. The other is that such exhaustion is likely to lead to class or caste resentments that produce social instability and economic inefficiency -- things that reciprocal relationships are supposed to prevent.

My conception of reciprocity proposes an equal marginal sacrifice rule. Specifically, I propose that we understand the norm of reciprocity to require us to make a return that is proportional to the sacrifice made by the givers. This is hardly a novel principle, or even a controversial one in our personal, noneconomic dealings with each other. The parents who gave the bicycle to their five-year-old son can readily appreciate, as fully reciprocal affection, the son's hand-painted thank you card. Some mothers have even been known to preserve such cards long after the bicycle has been discarded. Similarly, the rich person who gives to the poor can readily appreciate, as fully reciprocal, a response that represents a marginal sacrifice roughly equal to her own, and to appreciate the way in which expecting more than that would be expecting some kind of unjust enrichment.

More importantly, the young, old, poor, powerless, unlucky, and disabled will be able to sustain an equal marginal sacrifice relationship over time without going deeper into disadvantage. In terms of the life-sustaining function of reciprocal relationships, we can all understand how this is a good thing for everyone. In fact, we understand this principle even in the case of exchanging commodities. Henry Ford raised wages. Sam Walton lowered prices. Both are forms of discounting that keep the economy rolling. What the poor and the middle-

class get out of it is the Ford Escort, not the BMW; the Wal-Mart experience, not the Neiman Marcus one. But we get workable stuff, and the rich certainly do not suffer for it. In fact they make a bundle. Welfare liberalism embraces a similar understanding of the value of Social Security, price supports, disaster relief, food stamps, medical care, bankruptcy protection, and so forth.

What the economic and political analysis of such discounting may lack, however, is an explicit appreciation of the way in which satisfying the equal marginal sacrifice rule is a form of *full* reciprocity -- one that exemplifies a form of fully balanced, equal exchange. It is not the only form of equal exchange, and there are no doubt special cases in which, for special reasons, we ought to insist on a dollar-for-dollar rule. But I think it is best to regard those as exceptions. Equal marginal sacrifice is the rule that will best sustain generalized reciprocity, will best sustain most of our direct one-to-one reciprocal transactions, and will best provide us with the life-sustaining and life-enhancing benefits of reciprocal relationships.. We should regard it as a fully reciprocal response.

*Proportionality in reciprocating for bad received.* The question now is what counts as a proportionate amount of corrective good, as a return for the bad we receive. This is complicated in practice, but the idea is roughly this. The “general justifying aim”<sup>11</sup> of the corrective response is to restore productive reciprocal relationships between the offender and others. Proportionality is a distributive principle that limits our pursuit of this aim by prohibiting excessive responses, and in the conception of reciprocity I propose, it is limited to making corrective action no more than equal to the marginal injury we have received. Sometimes the corrective response will involve making the injured parties whole at the expense of the offender, but that will not always be possible, or necessary, or compatible with the general justifying aim. (Think of the futility of trying to make people whole for irreplaceable losses, the pointlessness of pursuing forgivable offenses, and the self-defeating nature of inflicting destructive penalties on offenders, respectively.) But in any case proportionality excludes excessive responses, defined as responses in excess of what is necessary to achieve the general justifying aim.

*Reciprocating for all the good (and bad) we receive.* Now, finally, the scope of reciprocity. The conception I propose insists that the norm not be restricted to voluntary or invited transactions, or be a synonym for the notion of fair play. The argument for this can be made in three steps.

First Step: Reciprocal relationships, especially those of a generalized sort, are an essential part of the social conditions necessary for flourishing as human beings. They are necessary for a good life. This is so because human beings have elaborate conceptions of themselves as separate persons with individual interests; because our individual interests often compete with those of others, yielding cooperation problems that only reciprocity reliably solves; because even the strongest among us are dependent for long stretches of our lives, and are vulnerable to misfortune, yielding recurrent needs for help that only reciprocity -- especially generalized reciprocity -- reliably solves; and because (although there are logical alternatives to it) a general pattern of fully reciprocal relationships appears to be psychologically and sociologically necessary for creating and sustaining the social conditions in which human beings can flourish.<sup>12</sup>

Second Step: It is good to have essential social norms such as reciprocity embedded in stable, pervasively potent character traits -- that is, embedded in pervasive dispositions to be sensitive to when and why reciprocity is appropriate, to appreciate the range of methods for appropriate reciprocation, and to have a strong, almost reflexive, motive to behave reciprocally.<sup>13</sup> This is so for two reasons: first because the range, subtlety, and pervasiveness of occasions for reciprocity are so great that a general readiness to reciprocate is needed -- especially for handling

all the occasions for generalized reciprocity; second because a deeply embedded motive to reciprocate is effective in re-establishing cooperative and reciprocal relationships that have been disrupted. Someone has to make the first move after a rupture. It helps if everyone wants to get back to cooperating.<sup>14</sup>

Third Step: It is good to have an unlimited form of the disposition to reciprocate, rather than one restricted to voluntary arrangements for mutual advantage. This is so because restricted forms of reciprocity cannot reliably sustain the social conditions for which generalized reciprocity is necessary. It is generalized reciprocity that gives us a mechanism for dealing with the way in which injustice anywhere is (at least sometimes) injustice everywhere, and that gives us a way of avoiding or ending tit-for-tat spirals of noncooperation, by making it possible to shift our cooperative efforts to other projects rather than to end them. And it is so because a restricted norm seems inconsistent with the moral education needed to embed reciprocity in our character. Think of teaching a child how to respond to unexpected, uninvited good from others, such as a gift from a new neighbor. Not, presumably, with an insult or injury, or even indifference, but rather with something neighborly. Not, presumably, with something excessive, however, but rather proportional. That amounts to reciprocity.

#### Where This Restatement Leads

Enough restatement. Where does it lead with respect our favored questions about justice? Is probably obvious by now that in some sense I don't care. I'll evidently keep talking about reciprocity even if it leads nowhere. But I do want to close with two brief remarks about reciprocity and theories of justice..

The first one begins, again, with Plato, and the central problem of the opening books of the *Republic*. That problem is how to show that justice and individual well-being coincide. At one point the conversation turns to the reasons people might have, at bottom, for cooperating with each other, and for organizing themselves into societies in the first place. In the neighborhood of what has become the individualist tradition in political theory, Glaucon and Adeimantus argue that we must cooperate in order to reduce interference from each other -- in order to get the peace and security we need to get on with our individual lives and projects. Socrates, by contrast, moves over into the neighborhood of what has become the collectivist tradition in political theory. We must cooperate, he says, in order to accomplish things together that we cannot accomplish by ourselves. He points to the benefits of a division of labor as an example.

Now in one sense individualism has won the day in Western secular philosophy. Almost everyone of our acquaintance measures the success of social organizations and political institutions in terms of their consequences for the welfare of their members, or in terms of their ability to reflect the values and choices of their members (including religious choices). Yet in another sense collectivism has won, since we seem thoroughly committed to a form of life that can only be sustained by elaborate systems of cooperation. This is reflected in persistent divisions in political theory. In liberalism alone, for example, we have a libertarian wing and a welfarist wing, and it is disturbing to see how difficult it has been to bridge that divide. Recent philosophical work on justice for the disabled illustrates this, with its contentious debates about equality of resources versus opportunity versus welfare versus capabilities.<sup>15</sup>

I suggest that work on the appropriate conception of reciprocity holds the promise of bridging this gap. This is so, however, if and only if we can eliminate the oversimplifications I mentioned at the outset. In particular, we need to get beyond the idea that the paradigm case of reciprocity is direct, tit-for-tat exchange, and focus every bit as much attention on indirect,

generalized reciprocity. And we need to understand the way in which a plausible understanding of fittingness and proportionality, in the context of generalized reciprocity, can make plain how varied and surprising fully reciprocal relationships can be. My assumption is that the libertarian wing will be impressed by the necessity for and the payoffs of reciprocal relationships of a generalized sort (as well as by the exits they leave open for people who tire of social obligations), and that the welfare wing will be impressed by the inclusiveness and supportiveness of such relationships (as well as by their robustness in maintaining the social fabric). While the general “concept of reciprocity is not terribly impressive, some conceptions of reciprocity provide common ground for designing, motivating, and assessing social and political institutions.

This leads to my second concluding remark. If justice is fundamentally about fairness, and reciprocity is a form of fairness, then perhaps we should reject the effort to construct elaborate conceptions of justice that fail to develop equally elaborate conceptions of reciprocity. A case in point, as I have mentioned, is Rawls's theory of justice, which over the years came to rely more and more on references to reciprocity but which, as far as I can tell, never seriously tackled the problem of getting a good general conception of it. This gap in the theory makes it unnecessarily difficult to see how parties to the social contract would want to define fundamental principles for the basic structure of society that were inclusive of people who lack the capacity for direct, tit-for-tat transactions at a dollar-for-dollar rate of exchange. When we focus on generalized reciprocity, and an equal marginal sacrifice standard of fully reciprocal exchanges, these difficulties largely disappear. It is a pity that Rawls resisted attempts to expand his theory along these lines, but he has given us so much to work with that it would be churlish to complain that he hasn't given us everything.

Getting the right conception of reciprocity is a problem that remains, and I commend it to you. Again.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 5, makes this point with respect to justice. He notes that he is following a distinction made by H. L. A. Hart, in *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 155-159.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* p.102.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*. p103. He says

We have seen that, at least when chain connection holds, each representative man can accept the basic structure as designed to advance his interests. The social order can be justified to everyone, and in particular to those who are least favored; and in this sense is egalitarian.... Now what can be said to the more favored man? To begin with, it is clear that the well-being of each depends on a scheme of social cooperation without which no one could have a satisfactory life. Secondly, we can ask for the willing cooperation of everyone only if the terms of the scheme are reasonable. The difference principle, then, seems to be a fair basis on which those better endowed, or more fortunate in their social circumstances, could expect others to collaborate with them when some workable arrangement is a necessary condition of the good of all.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p14. He says

[O]nce the principles of justice are thought of as arising from an original agreement in a situation of equality, it is an open question whether the principle of utility would be acknowledged. Offhand it hardly seems likely that persons who view themselves as equals, entitled to press their claims upon one another, would agree to a principle which may require lesser life prospects for some simply for the sake of a greater sum of advantages enjoyed by others. Since each desires to protect his interests, his capacity to advance his conception of the good, no one has a reason to acquiesce in an enduring loss for himself in order to bring about a greater net balance of satisfaction. In the absence of strong and lasting benevolent impulses, a rational man would not accept a basic structure merely because it maximized the algebraic sum of advantages irrespective of its permanent effects on his own basic rights and interests. Thus it seems that the principle of utility is incompatible with the conception of social cooperation among equals for mutual advantage. It appears to be inconsistent with the idea of reciprocity implicit in the notion of a well ordered society.

<sup>5</sup> Here is what he says in *Justice As Fairness: a Restatement* (Cambridge, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001) P. 124?

[The Difference Principle] meets the following reciprocity condition: those who are better off at any point are not better off to the detriment of those who are worse off at that point. Since the parties represent citizens as free and equal, and thus take equal division as the appropriate starting point, we say this is an (not the only) appropriate reciprocity condition. We haven't shown there is no other such condition. But it is hard to imagine what it might be.

To sum up: the difference principle expresses the idea that, starting from equal division, the more advantaged are not better off at any point to the detriment of the less

well off. But since the difference principle applies to the basic structure, a deeper idea of reciprocity implicit in it is that social institutions are not to take advantage of contingencies of native endowment, or of initial social position, or of good or bad luck over the course of life, except in ways that benefit everyone, including the least favored. This represents a fair undertaking between the citizens seen as free and equal with respect to those inevitable contingencies.

This is an elaboration of the idea from *A Theory of Justice* that reciprocity is a matter of mutual benefit. What it adds is the interesting remark about the "deeper idea of reciprocity" implicit in the difference principle.. Nonetheless this is cryptic, and quite possibly misleading. It is true that in reciprocal relationships we have a measure of control over our lives that helps us transcend "the contingencies of native endowment, or of initial social position, or of good or bad luck over the course of life." That is a reason for thinking people would choose, from behind the veil of ignorance, to organize their lives in terms of reciprocity rather than status and luck. But it is startling to hear, without analysis or argument, that a conception of reciprocity includes the notion that "social institutions are not to take advantage of contingencies of native endowment" etc. There is clearly some deep connection here, but it is not an immediately clear connection.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Republic* at 331c

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* at 335a-335e.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1162b (Bk VIII, Ch 13).

<sup>9</sup> David Hume, *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* Section III "Of Justice", Part I; also *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Book III, Part II, Section ii

<sup>10</sup> *Reciprocity*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1986; reprinted in paperback by the University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> I borrow this phrase, and the distinction between a general justifying aim and a distributive principle, from H. L. A Hart, "Prolegomenon to the Principles of Punishment," in *Punishment and Responsibility: Essays in the Philosophy of Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) pp 8-11.

<sup>12</sup> See the social science literature referenced in the scholium to Chapter 3 of *Reciprocity*. In his typically fluid way, Rawls makes the point in *The Theory of Justice* as follows, at pp 494-495:  
 ... the active sentiments of love and friendship, and even the sense of justice, arise from the manifest intention of other persons to act for our good. Because we recognize that they wish us well, we care for their well-being in return. Thus we acquire attachments to persons and institutions according to how we perceive our good to be affected by them. The basic idea is one of reciprocity, a tendency to answer in kind. Now this tendency is a deep psychological fact. Without it our nature would be very different and fruitful social cooperation fragile if not impossible. For surely a rational person is not indifferent to things that significantly affect his good; and supposing that he develops some attitude toward them, he acquires either a new attachment or a new aversion. If we answered love

with hate, or came to dislike those who acted fairly toward us, or were averse to activities that further our good, a community would soon dissolve. Beings with a different psychology either have never existed or must soon have disappeared in the course of evolution. A capacity for a sense of justice built up by responses in kind would appear to be a condition of human sociability.

<sup>13</sup> This is compatible with the important argument about situational determinants of behavior made by John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). While it may be true that the cardinal virtues of moral character are normally much less fixed than we have traditionally assumed, it is still the case that we have many sorts of stable, pervasive dispositions or character traits, ranging from language acquisition and use to dispositions to adjust to what situations demand. The disposition to reciprocate appears to be one of these stable and pervasive traits.

<sup>14</sup> The so-called "Stockholm Syndrome," often presented as the tendency of long held hostages to become attached to their captors, is more complicated than that. Captors in such situations also may become attached to their hostages, and some of this seems to come about because minor reciprocal relationships spontaneously emerge from initiatives on both sides. An imaginative and convincing account of this can be found in the novel by Ann Patchett, *Bel Canto* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> See Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), especially Chapters 1-5, and Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (eds.) *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), especially Part I. Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: the Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), Chapters 1, 2, and 7; Richard Arneson, "Luck and Equality II" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplemental Volume 75* (2001): 73-90.