



The Moral Majesty of Acts of Goodwill



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Perspective

To begin with a very simple but yet ever so profound truth: Acts of goodwill are very wide ranging. Jumping into a river in order to save a person's life is certainly an act of goodwill. But we just as clearly have an act of goodwill when, for example, a healthy 25-year old passenger on a vehicle of public transportation gives up her or his seat to either an elderly person or a handicapped person who has just boarded the vehicle of transportation. Likewise, we clearly have an act of goodwill with the following situation. Unbeknownst to individual Alpha, money has fallen out of Alpha's pocket. The person walking behind Alpha sees what happened and that person (whom we may call Tarik) essentially has two choices:

- i. Pick up the money and keep it or,
- ii. Call Alpha's attention to the fact that money had dropped out of her/his pocket. Needless to say, if Tarik does option,
- iii. Then we unquestionably have an act of good will on the part of Tarik.

Needless to say, there can be well-planned acts of goodwill. A surprise birthday party for a beloved friend would be a case in point. Taking a marvelous trip with one's own family and inviting a brilliant child from a poor family who graduated with honors would be another example. However, an indisputable reality is that acts of goodwill can also be quite spontaneous precisely because no one had any reason at all to believe that her or his assistance would be so readily needed. A case in point would be a person who stops everything that she/he is doing at home in order to help a perfect stranger whose slipping on ice resulted in considerable damage to her/his neck. A simpler example of basic goodwill would be that of person who's next in line at the check-out counter of a grocery store seeing that the parents who are buying food and milk for their infant are \$1 short of what the

casher register bill turns out to be. Without hesitating at all, the person in line who is immediately behind the parents gives \$1 to the cashier. Needless to say, the parents are ever so grateful. We have a non-trivial act of goodwill although no more than a single dollar was involved.

As is quite obvious, the very majesty of goodwill is tied to the fact that a person so behaves not because she/he is concerned about how others will view her/him, but precisely because the individual finds so behaving to be ever so morally meaningful and thus ever so gratifying. Put another way: goodwill plays the role that it should play in the life of an individual precisely because the exercise of goodwill on the part of an individual tremendously underwrites the individual's desire to continue being a person of goodwill precisely because goodwill at its best is none other than a marvelous form of moral excellence.

Now a quite important fact is that genuine goodwill requires genuine self-honesty. That is, genuine goodwill is quite incompatible with self-deception. The explanation is surely obvious, namely that the proclivity for self-deception is woefully incompatible with purity of heart, it being understood that making a mistake does not in and of itself constitute either a form self-deception or the absence of purity of heart. However, the point just made is not to be confused with a different point, namely that a person who has goodwill is one who is completely honest all individuals. Quite the contrary, one of the defining features of having genuine goodwill is that one acquires an extremely clear sense of those with whom one can be honest.

Whether we like it or not, an absolutely immutable truth is that one cannot be honest with everyone. And, of course, there is all the difference in the world between a malicious lie and a lie that deflects being honest. Here is a classic example. Suppose that Jacques asks Jordon the following question: "Have you ever thought about having sex with my romantic partner?" Well, as it

happens Jordon has had that thought but he has never ever made even the slightest gesture in that direction. Never Alas, saying that one had that thought but never acted upon it tends not go over very well. Not at all and Jordon knows this. So to Jacques' question "Have you ever thought about having sex with my romantic partner", Jordon's answer is an unqualified "Absolutely not". Although Jordon lied, there is nothing at all malicious about his lie.

There is no denying the fact that justice should be a fundamental part of each and every society. Alas, the reality is that there is all the difference in the world between (a) acting justly because doing so means so very much to one and (b) acting justly simply as a matter of fitting. It is only when (a) holds for the vast majority of the citizens of a given society that justice stands as a truly fundamental part of that very society. And thus, routinely experiencing goodwill throughout that society is rightly seen by the members of that society as an ever so fundamental aspect of the very social structure of a society that is truly just.

Alas, to a degree that far surpasses all other living creatures, human beings have the capacity for goodwill. But, no other living creature has been an impediment to human beings exhibiting goodwill like human beings themselves have been. And while there may have been a time in the history of human beings, when it was not reasonable to have tremendous certainty regarding the marvelous benefits of genuine good will that is no longer the case. Thus, a question that mightily presents itself is

the following: Unlike many centuries ago, it is now an immutable truth that tremendous cooperation between human beings would be truly a benefit to human beings throughout the world. Thus, the question that mightily presents itself is the following: Why is that it has not become the case that across the globe all human beings have become the very embodiment of the ideal of goodwill in their interactions with one another? For so doing would occasion a truly phenomenal moral majesty in terms of marvelous social interaction. And as a result, the world would be so much the better.

There is a biblical passage that reads "Jealousy is as cruel as the grave" (Song of Solomon 8:6). I routinely ask myself whether the capacity for jealousy on the part of human beings constitutes a primary impediment to human beings ever so majestically cooperating with one another. I would very much like for the answer to be a resounding "Absolutely not". But clearly the evidence regarding the character of jealousy makes it manifestly clear that jealousy between individuals is typically a horrific impediment to there being genuine goodwill between them, and therefore to the individuals truly cooperating with one another and flourishing together. Thus, the view that I hold is that as modernity soars ahead, we must find away to mightily minimize, if not eliminate entirely, the capacity that human beings have for jealousy. With the elimination of jealousy, we will see goodwill soar; and the lives of human beings will be so much the better as a result of the increasing prominence of genuine goodwill.



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