

COMPASSION: THE BASIC SOCIAL EMOTION*

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I. MISFORTUNE AND RESPONSE

Philoctetes was a good man and a good soldier. When he was on his way to Troy to fight alongside the Greeks, he had a terrible misfortune. By sheer accident he trespassed in a sacred precinct on the island of Lemnos. As punishment he was bitten on the foot by the serpent who guarded the shrine. His foot began to ooze with foul-smelling pus, and the pain made him cry out curses that spoiled the other soldiers' religious observances. They therefore left him alone on the island, a lame man with no resources but his bow and arrows, no friends but the animals who were also his food.

Ten years later, according to Sophocles' version of the story, they come to bring him back: for they have learned that they cannot win the war without him. The leaders of the expedition think of Philoctetes as a tool of their purposes; they plan to trick him into returning, with no empathy for his plight. The Chorus of soldiers, however, has a different response. Even before they see the man, they imagine vividly what it is like to be him—and they enter a protest against the callousness of the commanders:

For my part, I pity him—thinking of how, with no living soul to care for him, seeing no friendly face, wretched, always alone, he suffers with a fierce affliction, and has no resources to meet his daily needs. How in the world does the poor man survive?¹

As the members of the Chorus imagine a man they do not know, they stand in for the imaginative activity of the audience, for whom the entire tragic drama is a similar exercise of sympathy.

Philoctetes' story displays the structure of the emotion that I shall call "pity" or "compassion," the emotion that lay at the heart of ancient Athe-

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¹ Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, lines 169–76.

nian tragedy. My plan is to investigate this emotion and its social role. First I shall examine the emotion itself, following the fine analysis given by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*. (This analysis is continuous with less systematic earlier treatments in the tragic poets and in Plato; it is taken over, in most respects, by a long tradition in Western philosophy—major later exponents include both defenders of pity such as Rousseau, Schopenhauer, and Adam Smith, and opponents of the emotion such as the ancient Stoics, Spinoza, Kant, and Nietzsche.) With this analysis before us, we can then proceed to adjudicate a long debate about the suitability of pity as a basic social emotion.

Why should this be important for people who are thinking about the relationship between the individual and the community? I can give three reasons. First, compassion, in the philosophical tradition, is a central bridge between the individual and the community; it is conceived of as our species' way of hooking the interests of others to our own personal goods. It would therefore be a good thing to think hard about the structure of this moral sentiment, so that we might understand better how to produce it and how to remove obstacles to it.

Second, some modern moral theories—liberal and individualist moral theories in particular—have treated compassion as an irrational force in human affairs, one that is likely to mislead or distract us when we are trying to think well about social policy. (I shall give some examples of this below.) Once again, it would behoove us to scrutinize this claim by investigating the structure of compassion. I shall argue that such an investigation will undermine the simple dismissal of the emotion and will show it to be based on thought and evaluation.

Third, this simple opposition between emotion and reason has also been invoked by communitarian critics of liberalism, who have suggested that if we are to make room for sentiments such as compassion, which do not seem to be much honored in liberal theory, this will mean basing political judgment upon a force that is affective rather than cognitive, instinctual rather than concerned with judgment and thought.² The analysis of compassion for which I shall argue will undermine that claim as well, by showing that compassion is, above all, a certain sort of thought about the well-being of others. The upshot of this will be to show that a certain type of objection to the project of the Enlightenment fails, and that Enlightenment thinkers (such as Kant and John Rawls) who do not give this emotion a central place could do so without altering very much in the substance of their moral theories. If we want a compassionate community, we can have one without sacrificing the Enlightenment's commitment to reason and reflection—because compassion is a certain sort of reasoning.

²See, for example, the treatment of compassion in the legal theorists cited in note 6 below.

A brief note on terms: When I use the words "pity" and "compassion," I am really speaking about a single emotion. The analysis I shall offer focuses on an experience that remains remarkably constant from Sophocles to the present day, even though many terms in many languages have been used to name it. Such variation reveals some real, subtle difference in the understanding and the experience of the emotion itself;³ but on the whole the philosophical tradition is in such vigorous conversation that the terms are frequently heard as translations of one another, and are thus pulled toward one another in meaning.⁴ I shall use the term "pity" when I am talking about the historical debate, since that is the term generally used in English to translate both Greek *eleos* and French *pitié*; but since, from the Victorian era onward, the term has acquired nuances of condescension and superiority to the sufferer that it did not have formerly, I shall switch over to the currently more appropriate term "compassion" when I am talking about contemporary issues.

The Greek debate about pity and its philosophical legacy are, as I have already suggested, of more than historical interest. They have important implications for contemporary thought about public reasoning. In contemporary discussions of public rationality, we find, in fact, traces of the debate, but in an unclear and degenerate form. In economics, in politics, and especially, perhaps, in the law, we find a recurrent contrast between "emotion" and "reason," especially where appeals to compassion are at issue. (Later on, I shall give examples of this.) Both compassion's defenders and its opponents in legal theory seem to grant that this emotion is "irrational." Some would exclude it from legal reasoning on that account; some, by contrast, wish to let it in as irrational and yet valuable in addition to reason—a weak position, and one that opponents eagerly assail. Thinkers in the law-and-economics movement—for example, Richard Posner—are in the vanguard of the theoretical attack, claiming that emotions, being irrational, have nothing valuable to contribute to public reasoning.⁵ Feminist legal scholars such as Lynne Henderson, Toni

³ Nietzsche emphasizes, for example, the fact that the word *Mitleid* stresses the concurrent suffering of the onlooker; he typically uses it when he wants to argue that pity simply doubles the amount of suffering. On the other hand, the onlooker's pain is part of the definition of *eleos* in Aristotle and *misericordia* in the Roman Stoics, and still figures today in definitions of pity or compassion: see, for example, the excellent analysis in Andrew Ortony, Gerald L. Clore, and Allan Collins, *The Cognitive Structure of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁴ Thus, Cicero uses *misericordia* to translate the Greek *eleos*; Nietzsche employs the German *Mitleid* to render Rousseau's *pitié* and also *eleos* and *misericordia*; Kant, alluding explicitly to the ancient Stoics (whether Greek or Roman) uses *Mitleid*; modern translators of both Aristotle and the Greek tragedians use "pity" for *eleos*, as they also do for Rousseau's *pitié*.

⁵ Richard A. Posner, *The Economics of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 1-2. Having assumed "that people are rational maximizers of satisfactions," Posner now asks:

Is it plausible to suppose that people are rational only or mainly when they are transacting in markets, and not when they are engaged in other activities of life, such as

Massaro, and Martha Minow have tended to lead the defense, holding that "irrational" factors make a valuable public contribution.⁶ Much the same opposition can be found in practice, in recent judicial opinions. For example, in a recent jury-instruction case, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor condemns appeals to compassion as irrational, contrasting them with a "reasoned moral response," while Justice Harry Blackmun, employing the very same contrast between reason and emotion, argues that such "irrational" motives should play a part in the deliberations of the juror.⁷ Again, Blackmun puts himself in a weak position, one that seems unlikely to persuade.

Both sides in this debate go wrong because they fail to examine this strong opposition between compassion and reason. The claim that compassion is "irrational" might mean one of two things. First, it might mean that compassion is a noncognitive force that has little to do with thought or reasoning of any kind. This position, I shall argue, cannot bear serious scrutiny. Second, the claim might mean that the thought on which compassion is based is in some normative sense bad or false thought; this is in fact what the serious anti-pity tradition holds. To hold this, however, as we shall see, one must defend a substantive and highly controversial ethical position, one that very few of the contemporary opponents of the emotion would actually be prepared to endorse. In this way, a more precise analysis of the emotion and the historical debate about its normative role can clear the ground for a more adequate contemporary approach. I believe that I will be able to show that a good deal of the public reasoning that would be endorsed even by theoretical opponents of compassion actually makes essential use of compassion, properly understood.

I shall also try to show, however, that those who look to compassion for an intuitive or nonreasoned alternative to judgments based on principle—and, in general, for an alternative to Enlightenment conceptions of the basis of morality—are looking in the wrong place. I shall argue that all compassion is "rational" in the descriptive sense in which

marriage and litigation and crime and discrimination and concealment of personal information? . . . But many readers will, I am sure, intuitively regard these choices . . . as lying within the area where decisions are emotional rather than rational.

In other words, we can respect people's choices as rational in the normative sense only if we can show that they do not reflect the influence of emotional factors.

⁶For two examples, see Lynne N. Henderson, "Legality and Empathy," *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 85 (1987), pp. 1574-1653; and Toni M. Massaro, "Empathy, Legal Storytelling, and the Rule of Law: New Words, Old Wounds," *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 87 (1989), pp. 2099-2127; see also Martha Minow and Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Passion for Justice," *Cardozo Law Review*, vol. 10 (1988), pp. 37-76; and Paul Gewirtz, "Aeschylus' Law," *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 101 (1988), pp. 1043-55. Among these authors, only Minow and Spelman criticize the emotion-reason dichotomy. None presents any analysis of emotion that would clarify the role of cognition in emotion.

⁷*California v. Brown*, 479 U.S. 538ff. (1986); for further discussion, see Section VI.D below.

that term is frequently used—that is, not merely impulsive, but involving thought or belief. Nevertheless, not all compassion is rational in the normative sense, that is, based upon beliefs that are true and well-grounded. Properly filtered, however, compassion proves to be an essential ingredient in an Enlightenment moral conception—as Rousseau and Adam Smith saw clearly. Because compassion frequently has deep roots in early moral development, it can be legitimate to contrast it with more fully theorized forms of reasoning; for this same reason, it can be appropriate at times to trust its guidance when it conflicts with theory. None of this, however, shows that it is not suffused with thought, and thought that should be held to high standards of truth and appropriateness.

II. AN ANALYSIS OF PITY

Let us now ask what pity actually is, following the general lines of the analysis in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.⁸ Pity, Aristotle argues, is a painful emotion directed at another person's misfortune or suffering (*Rhet.* 1385b13ff.). It requires and rests on three beliefs: (1) the belief that the suffering is serious rather than trivial; (2) the belief that the suffering was not caused primarily by the person's own culpable actions; and (3) the belief that the pitier's own possibilities are similar to those of the sufferer. Each of these seems to be necessary for the emotion, and they seem to be jointly sufficient. Let us examine each of these beliefs in turn.

Seriousness first. Pity, like other major emotions,⁹ is concerned with value: it involves the recognition that the situation matters deeply for the life in question. Intuitively we see this easily. We do not go around pitying someone who has lost a trivial item, such as a toothbrush or a paper clip, or even an important item that is readily replaceable. Internal to our emotional response itself is the judgment that what is at issue is indeed serious—has "size," as Aristotle puts it (1386a6–7). The occasions for pity enumerated by Aristotle are also the ones on which tragic plots most commonly focus: death, bodily assault or ill-treatment, old age, illness, lack of food, lack of friends, separation from friends, physical weakness, disfigurement, immobility, reversals to expectations, or absence of good prospects (86a6–13).

An important question now arises: From whose point of view does the pitier make the assessment of "size"? Consider the following two exam-

⁸ I discuss this account in Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Interlude 2; and also in Nussbaum, "Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on Fear and Pity," in *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. Amélie O. Rorty (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 261–90; a longer version appears in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 10 (1992), pp. 107–60. See also the very perceptive analysis of both Aristotelian and tragic pity in Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

⁹ To analyze the connection between emotion and evaluative thinking is the central purpose of the Gifford Lectures: see note * above.

ples. Q, a Roman aristocrat, discovers that his shipment of peacocks' tongues from Africa has been interrupted. Feeling that his dinner party that evening will be a total disaster in consequence, he weeps bitter tears, and implores his friend the Stoic philosopher Seneca to pity him. Seneca laughs. R, a woman in a rural village in India, is severely undernourished, and unable to get more than a first-grade education. She does not think her lot a bad one, since she has no idea what it is to feel healthy, and no idea of the benefits and pleasures of education. So thoroughly has she internalized her culture's views of what is right for women that she believes that she is living a good and flourishing life, as a woman ought to live one. Hearing her story and others like hers, workers in the province's rural-development agency feel deeply moved, and think that something must be done.

What these examples bring out is that people's judgments about what is happening to them can go wrong in many ways. Suffering and deprivation are usually not ennobling or educative; they more often brutalize or corrupt perception. In particular, they often produce adaptive responses that deny the importance of the suffering; such adaptive responses are especially likely to arise when the deprivation is connected to oppression and hierarchy, and taught as proper through religious and cultural practices.¹⁰ Adaptation works in both directions: people can become deeply attached to things that on reflection we may think are either trivial or bad for them; their suffering at the loss of these things may be real enough, even though the onlooker is not disposed to share in it. Pity takes up the onlooker's point of view, informed by the best judgment the onlooker can make about what is really happening to the person being observed—taking the person's own wishes into account, but not always taking as the last word the judgment that the person herself is able to form. Adam Smith, following the Greeks, makes this point powerfully, using as his example a person who has altogether lost the use of reason. This, he argues, is "of all the calamities to which the condition of mortality exposes mankind . . . by far the most dreadful." It will be an object of pity to anyone who has "the least spark of humanity." The person affected does

¹⁰ Aristotle was aware of this to some extent, since he frequently stresses the fact that one's sense of pleasure and pain, and related emotional responses, are influenced by moral education. His examples of cultural deformation, however, tend not to focus on poverty (they involve, for example, the excessive valuation of money and honor). For modern work on adaptive preferences, see Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), and Elster, "Sour Grapes—Utilitarianism and the Genesis of Wants," in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 219–38. See the related criticism of deformed preferences in John Harsanyi, "Morality and the Theory of Rational Behaviour," in Sen and Williams, *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, pp. 39–62. The adaptation of preferences to circumstances in situations of poverty and hierarchy is a major theme in Amartya Sen's work on development: see, for example, the essays in his *Resources, Values, and Development* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

not judge that his condition is bad, however — that, indeed, is a large part of what is so terrible about it.¹¹

In short: implicit in pity itself is a conception of human flourishing, the best one the pitier is able to form.

Now I turn to *fault*. Insofar as we believe that a person came to grief through his or her own fault, we will blame and reproach, rather than pitying. Insofar as we do pity, it is either because we believe the person to be without blame for the loss or impediment, or because, though there is some fault, we believe that the suffering is out of proportion to the fault. Pity, Aristotle insists, sees its object as “undeserving” (*anaxios*) of the suffering.¹²

This point about desert is strongly emphasized in Greek tragic appeals for pity. The horrible suffering of Philoctetes becomes a focus for the soldiers’ pity without further debate, since his innocence is agreed. Where there is disagreement about culpability, however, the appeal for pity comes closely linked with the assertion of one’s innocence. Throughout *Oedipus at Colonus*, for example, Oedipus, asking for pity, insists on the unwilling nature of his crimes. Where there is some fault, the sufferer attempts to establish a discrepancy between fault and punishment. Thus, Cadmus, at the end of Euripides’ *Bacchae*, joins to his admission of wrongdoing a claim that the god, by inflicting “unmeasurable sorrow, unbearable to witness”¹³ has exceeded the just penalty. Only this justifies his claim to pity from the other characters.

Putting seriousness and fault together, we see that pity requires the belief that there are serious bad things that may happen to people through no fault of their own, or beyond their fault. In pitying another, the pitier accepts a certain picture of the world, according to which the valuable things are not always safely under a person’s own control, but can be damaged by fortune. This picture of the world is profoundly controversial. Nobody can deny that the usual occasions for pity occur: that children die, that cities are defeated, that political freedoms are lost, that age and disease disrupt functioning. But how important, really, *are* these things? This is the question that the anti-pity tradition will ask.

I now turn to the third requirement of pity, as Aristotle and writers in

¹¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Liberty Press, 1976), p. 12. Smith uses his device of the “judicious spectator” to distinguish proper from improper emotions; but it is important that this spectator — a model for public rationality — is rich in emotion. I discuss Smith’s conception of impartiality in chapters 3 and 4 of *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination in Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), with detailed discussion of texts from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. For a related discussion of Smith, see my essay “Steerforth’s Arm: Literature and the Moral Point of View,” in Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹² Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1385b14, 1385b34–1386a1, 1386b7, b10, b12, b13; *Poetics*, 1453a4, 5.

¹³ Euripides, *Bacchae*, line 1244; see, e.g., the excellent English version by C. K. Williams (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), with an introduction by M. Nussbaum.

the poetic tradition understand it. This is a judgment of *similar possibilities*: pity concerns those misfortunes "which the person himself might expect to suffer, either himself or one of his loved ones" (*Rhet.* 1385b14-15). This fact is repeatedly stressed in poetic appeals to pity: thus, Philoctetes reminds his visitors that they, too, may encounter uncontrollable pain. This element in pity is the focus of the marvelous discussion of that emotion in Rousseau's *Emile*. Drawing his account from the classical tradition, Rousseau argues, agreeing with Aristotle, that an awareness of one's own weakness and vulnerability is a necessary condition for pity; without this, we will have an arrogant harshness:

Why are kings without pity for their subjects? Because they count on never being human beings. Why are the rich so hard toward the poor? It is because they have no fear of being poor. Why does a noble have such contempt for a peasant? It is because he never will be a peasant. . . . Each may be tomorrow what the one whom he helps is today. . . . Do not, therefore, accustom your pupil to regard the sufferings of the unfortunate and the labors of the poor from the height of his glory; and do not hope to teach him to pity them if he considers them alien to him. Make him understand well that the fate of these unhappy people can be his, that all their ills are there in the ground beneath his feet, that countless unforeseen and inevitable events can plunge him into them from one moment to the next. Teach him to count on neither birth nor health nor riches. Show him all the vicissitudes of fortune.¹⁴

There is much debate in the tradition about how this identification with the sufferer works. Does one actually think, for the time being, that one is the sufferer?¹⁵ Does one imagine one's own responses as *fused* in some mysterious way with those of the sufferer?¹⁶ These analyses seem

¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 224; I have altered Bloom's translation in several places, in particular substituting "human being" for "man." Bloom, it is clear, intends "man" in a gender-neutral sense, as the French strongly suggests, and as the Greek discussions that Rousseau is following would require (Greek, unlike French, has two words commonly translated as "man": *anthrôpos* for the species, *anêr* for its male members). A gender-neutral translation is essential to make sense of Rousseau's overall argument. By now, however, it is probably wrong to assume that the word "man" would be understood gender-neutrally by readers.

¹⁵ This appears to be the view of Adam Smith in some passages: "By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations . . ." (Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 9). This is, however, corrected by his later observation that the relevant viewpoint is that of the judicious spectator—not that of the sufferer, which may be ill-informed.

¹⁶ This seems to be the view of Arthur Schopenhauer, *Preisschrift über das Fundament der Moral* (Prize essay on the foundation of morality) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), p. 107: Compassion requires "that in *his* pain as such I directly feel, with suffering, *his* pain as I otherwise feel only my own, and on that account want his good directly, as I otherwise want only

wrong, if we think back to what we have already said about the estimation of "size." Pity does indeed involve empathetic identification as one component: for in estimating the seriousness of the suffering, it seems important, if not sufficient, to attempt to take its measure as the person himself measures it. But even then, in the temporary act of identification, one is always aware of one's own *separateness* from the sufferer — it is for *another*, and not oneself, that one feels; and one is aware both of the bad lot of the sufferer and of the fact that it is, right now, not one's own. If one really had the experience of feeling the pain in one's own body, then one would precisely have failed to comprehend the pain of another *as other*.¹⁷ One must also be aware of one's own *qualitative difference* from the sufferer: aware, for example, that Philoctetes has no children and no friends, as one does oneself. For these recognitions are crucial in getting the right estimation of the meaning of the suffering.

While retaining awareness of her separateness, however, the pitier at the same time acknowledges that she has possibilities and vulnerabilities similar to those of the sufferer. She makes sense of the suffering by recognizing that she might herself encounter such a reversal; she estimates its meaning in part by thinking about what it would mean to encounter that herself, and she sees herself, in the process, as one to whom such things might in fact happen. That is why pity is so closely linked to fear, both in the poetic tradition and in philosophical accounts such as those of Aristotle and Rousseau.¹⁸

Why is this important? The point seems to be that the pain of another will be an object of my concern only if I acknowledge some sort of community between myself and the other, understanding what it might be for me to face such pain. Without that sense of commonness, both Aristotle and Rousseau claim, I will react with sublime indifference or mere intellectual curiosity, like an obtuse alien from another world; and I will not care what I do to augment or relieve the suffering.

This fact explains why so frequently those who wish to withhold pity and to teach others to do so portray the sufferers as altogether dissimilar in kind and in possibility. In *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Raul Hilberg shows how pervasively Nazi talk of Jews, in connection with their murder, portrayed them as nonhuman: either as beings of a remote animal kind, such as insects or vermin, or as inanimate objects, "cargo" to be transported. When by surprise an individual sufferer was encountered

my own. This, however, requires that in a certain manner I should be *identified* with him, that is to say, that the entire *distinction* between me and that other person, which is the basis for my egoism, should be, at least to a certain extent, removed" (my translation).

¹⁷ See Stanley Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Scribner's, 1969; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 238-66.

¹⁸ See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1386a22-28, 1382b26-27; *Poetics*, 1453a5-6. For discussion, see Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*; and Nussbaum, "Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency," pp. 274-75.

in a manner that made similarity unavoidably clear, one frequently saw what might be called a "breakthrough," in which the seriousness of the suffering was acknowledged and pity led to shame and confusion.¹⁹

In short, the judgment of similar possibilities is part of a construct that bridges the gap between prudential concern and altruism. Equipped with her general conception of human flourishing, the spectator looks at a world in which people suffer hunger, disability, disease, slavery, through no fault of their own or beyond their fault. In her pity she acknowledges that goods such as food, health, citizenship, freedom, do all matter. Yet she acknowledges, as well, that it is uncertain whether she herself will remain among the safe and privileged ones to whom such goods are stably guaranteed. She acknowledges that the lot of the poor might be (or become) hers. This leads her to turn her thoughts outward, from her own current comfortable situation to the structure of society's allocation of goods and resources. For, given the uncertainty of life, she will be inclined to want a society in which the lot of the worst off—of the poor, of people defeated in war, of women, of servants—is as good as it can be. Self-interest promotes the selection of principles that raise society's floor. The floor does not get very high up in most of Greek literature, where a beggar gets a handout rather than a living; but as time goes on, there is a tendency for the exercise of imagination to yield more and more egalitarian results. Rousseau seems right that, followed through rigorously enough, it supports something like democratic equality: democracy because pity sees the value to each person of having a choice in his or her way of life and in the political conception that governs it; equality because it concerns itself at least with the provision to all of a basic minimum welfare.²⁰

We can now observe that pity constructs an emotional analogue of the original position in John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*,²¹ in which prudentially rational agents are asked to select the principles that will shape their society, knowing all the relevant general facts but not knowing where in the resulting society they will themselves end up. (This similarity is no accident, since Rawls is in many ways indebted to Smith, who follows the ancient pity tradition.) There is one great difference between Rawls's parties and my pitier. Rawls's parties are determined to be fair to all conceptions of the good that the citizens in the resulting society might have; they therefore refuse themselves knowledge of their own conceptions of the

¹⁹ See Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, abridged edition (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), pp. 274–93; on "breakthroughs," I am grateful for Jonathan Glover's discussion in an unpublished paper.

²⁰ On the relationship between that basic minimum and equality, see my "Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings," in Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover, eds., *Women, Culture, and Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

²¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

good. My pitier, by contrast, like the spectator at a tragic drama, operates with a general conception of human flourishing that is the best one she can find; and although she does not fail to notice that the concrete specification of flourishing will be different in different times and places and forms of life, and does not fail to note the value of choice in selecting the conception by which one lives, she does stake herself to a single general conception, when asking whether and to what extent disease, hunger, losses of children, losses of freedom, and so forth, are really bad things. She does not neglect the sufferer's view of things, as I have said; but she is prepared to find his or her preferences and judgments distorted, and to pity in accordance with her own view of the good. A deep similarity to Rawls remains, however: for in both cases the structure of self-interested prudential reasoning is mined to yield altruistic principles. The extent to which this yields a determinate political program may be questioned.²² What we see clearly, however, as in the case of Rawls, is that it makes political thought attend to certain human facts, and in a certain way, with concern to make the lot of the worst off as good, other things equal, as it can be, since one might oneself be, or become, a member of that worst-off group.

Compassion is in this way intimately related to justice. It is not sufficient for justice, since it focuses on need and offers no account of liberty, rights, or respect for human dignity. And there is another difference as well. Although compassion does presuppose that the person does not deserve the (full measure of) the hardship he or she endures, it does not entail that the person has a *right* or a just claim to relief. Further argument would be required to get to that conclusion. On the other hand, compassion at least makes us see the importance of the person's lack, and consider with keen interest the claim that such a person might have. In that sense it provides an essential bridge to justice.

It is natural to ask at this point whether one could not have all the judgments involved in pity without having the painful emotion itself. I see a stranger in the street. Someone tells me that this woman has just learned of the death of her only child, who was run over by a drunken driver. I have no reason not to believe what I have been told. I therefore believe that this woman has suffered an extremely terrible loss, through no fault of her own. I know well that I myself might suffer a similar loss. Now I might at this point feel compassion for the woman; but then again, I may not. As Adam Smith says, using a similar example, the fact that she is a stranger might make it difficult for me to picture her suffering; or I might

²² For some attempts to describe the political consequences of this difference from Rawls, see the essays by Nussbaum and Sen, and Nussbaum's commentary on O'Neill, in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and also Nussbaum, "Aristotelian Social Democracy," in *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. R. B. Douglass et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 203-56.

simply be too busy and distracted to focus on what I have been told.²³ Doesn't this show that I can, after all, have all the judgments without the emotion?

The answer is, I think, that we have to distinguish between really accepting a proposition and simply mouthing the words.²⁴ If I really am too distracted to focus on the woman's predicament, then I may be able to parrot the sentences in question, but it seems wrong to say that I really believe them, am prepared to defend them in argument, etc. One way we could see this would be to see how and whether they affect the pattern of my other actions and beliefs. But if the propositions lodge deep enough in me to alter my cognitive life, my motives for action, and so forth, then I think they do prove sufficient for the emotion. We all learn in books that human beings are mortal and subject to various diseases. I think it is fair to say, however, that being able to parrot these sentences does not suffice for really having the judgment: to have the judgment, one must understand what those facts really mean. Rousseau describes an Emile who has suffered himself, and who has it on good authority that others suffer too. He sees gestures indicative of suffering, and his teacher assures him that they mean in the case of others what they would in his own. But, Rousseau claims, he does not really believe or judge that this is so, until he has become able to imagine their suffering vividly to himself, and to suffer the pain of pity: "To see it without feeling it is not to know it."²⁵ By this he means something very precise: that the suffering of others has not become a part of Emile's cognitive repertory in such a way that it will influence his conduct, provide him with motives and expectations, and so forth. He is merely paying it lip service, until he can imagine in a way that is sufficient for being disturbed.

On the other side, if Emile really does the cognitive work, if his imagination really contains the thoughts of pity, with all their evaluative material, in such a way that they become part of his cognitive makeup and his motivations for action, then he has pity whether he experiences this or that tug in his stomach or not. No such particular bodily feeling is necessary.²⁶ To determine whether Emile has pity, we look for the evidence of a certain sort of thought and imagination, in what he says, and in what he does.

²³ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 17-18.

²⁴ I develop this position in much more detail, with regard to emotions in general, in Gifford Lecture 1 (*supra* note *).

²⁵ Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 222. One might, following Ludwig Wittgenstein, try a different line of argument, saying that the connection between the emotion and action taken to relieve suffering is criterial, not causal. In the Gifford Lectures (Lecture 2), I give the reasons why I do not want to take this route. Although in many cases emotions will lead to related action, there are many reasons why that might not occur in a particular case, and I see no reason why we should withhold ascription of the emotion.

²⁶ Again, this is a position for which I argue in detail in Gifford Lecture 1. In Lecture 2, I show that recent work in cognitive psychology supports this conclusion.

III. PITY AND TRAGIC DRAMA

How could such a complex sentiment be learned? There is a great deal to say here, but I shall focus simply on one point, of great importance both to the philosophical tradition and to our contemporary concern with moral development: the moral importance of tragic drama and related narrative literature.

Tragedy, as ancient Athenian culture saw it, is not for the very young; and it is not just for the young. Mature people always need to expand their experience and to reinforce their grasp on central ethical truths.²⁷ To the young adolescent who is preparing to take a place in the city, however, tragedy has a special significance. Such a spectator is learning pity in the process. Tragedies acquaint young people with the bad things that may happen in a human life, long before life itself does so: they thus enable concern for others who are suffering what the spectator has not suffered. Moreover, they do so in a way that makes the depth and significance of suffering, and the losses that inspire it, unmistakably plain—the poetic, visual, and musical resources of the drama thus have moral weight. By inviting the spectator to identify with the tragic hero,²⁸ and at the same time portraying the hero as a worthy person, whose distress does not stem from his own deliberate badness, the drama sets up pity; an attentive spectator will, in apprehending it, have that emotion.

In the process, tragedy leads the spectator to cross boundaries that are usually regarded as firm in social life. Through sympathetic identification, it moves him from Greece to Troy, from the male world of war to the female world of the household. It asks him to identify himself not only with those whom he in some sense might be—leading citizens, generals in battle, exiles and beggars and slaves—but also with many whom he never in fact can be, though one of his loved ones might—such as Trojans and Persians and Africans, such as wives and daughters and mothers. In the process of playing the spectatorial role, as the drama constructs it, then, a young Athenian male would suspend knowledge not only of his wealth and comfort, but also of his national and ethnic origins, even of his gender. He would be asked to see the distresses of human life from points of view that include those of young women who are raped in wartime, queens who are unable to enjoy the full exercise of power on account of their gender, a sister who must violate all the conventional norms of a woman's life to behave with courageous piety. Becoming a woman in thought, he would find that he can remain himself, that is to say, a reasoning being with moral and political commitments. He would,

²⁷ See Nussbaum, "Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency" (*supra* note 8).

²⁸ On identification, see Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (*supra* note 8), where Halliwell argues that this is promoted by keeping the tragic hero within the bounds of human frailty and imperfection. Though the hero does not fall through wickedness, his having flaws makes possible the audience's sympathetic response to the tragedy.

however, be confronted with the fact that this group of able people face disaster in ways, and with a frequency, that males do not, on account of their powerlessness.

What this means is that when tragic drama constructs the original position, it does so in an especially radical way. Rawls himself did not stipulate that the parties in the original position are ignorant of their gender, though Susan Moller Okin has forcefully argued that his account of the moral point of view should be so extended.²⁹ By investigating both the common humanity of foreigners and women, and, at the same time, the special vulnerabilities that they have simply in virtue of being foreigners or women, the spectator is getting an education in social justice. Some disasters are inevitable, some are not; there are ways of making the world so that the lot of the worst off does not include rape and slavery. The reality of this suffering might not have dawned on the mind of the young spectator, without the experience of tragic pity. This does not mean that he will go out and make radical social changes; nor are my claims about the radical content of the tragic genre falsified by the evident fact that this genre existed in an extremely hierarchical and unjust society. Certain ideas about humanity may be grasped for a time, and yet not enacted, so powerful are the dulling forces of habit, the entrenched structures of power. What I want to say is simply that tragic pity provides a powerful vision of social justice.

The tragic form is radical, in a sense. It is, however, so abstract—it omits so much of the structure of daily civic life, with its distinctions of class and race and gender and their concrete institutional forms—it focuses so much on the sufferings of ruling classes—that an advocate of a more thorough democratic approach to pity might find it educationally insufficient. Just as Rousseau applied the essential insights of the ancient pity tradition to the new problem of constructing democracy, so the novel, a literary form in which Rousseau was one of the great pioneers, develops the educational insights of ancient tragedy, affording its reader a more concrete thought experiment about class and daily life. In reading a realist novel with eager participation, the reader does all that the tragic spectator does—and something more. She embraces the ordinary. She cares not only about the children of kings, but about David Copperfield, painfully toiling in a factory, or walking the twenty-six miles from London to Canterbury without food. These small realities of the life of poverty are brought home to her with a textured vividness unavailable in tragic poetry; and she is made a participant in that form of life. The contemporary realist novel takes advantage of this feature of the genre to explore the experience of marginalized groups whose experience it would

²⁹ See Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), reviewed by Nussbaum in *New York Review of Books*, October 2, 1992.

be especially important for a citizen to understand. The reader of E. M. Forster's *Maurice* is asked to identify with a young man who may be in many ways similar to the reader in education and class—but who has one difference, and for whom this difference (of sexual orientation) shapes the whole of his experience. The reader of Richard Wright's *Native Son* comes upon rich liberal Mary Dalton's wish that she could know how "your people" really live—at a time well after the reader has herself crossed "the line" in participatory imagination, entering Bigger Thomas's enclosed, enraged world, "living" in a tenement in which morning begins with the killing of a large rat. Such a reader understands some crucial social differences more clearly than the spectator at a drama of Sophocles, and also the difference between the vulnerabilities common to all human beings and those constructed for the powerless by the empowered. Her attention has, therefore, a more determinedly egalitarian form than would that of the tragic spectator—again, whether or not this has any practical consequence. And all this she grasps in her pity itself.

IV. THE SOCRATIC/STOIC ASSAULT ON PITY

Defenders of pity, such as the tragic poets, Aristotle, and Rousseau, assume that many of life's misfortunes do serious harm to good people. But for Socrates, as for the Stoics who follow his lead, a good person cannot be harmed;³⁰ and Socratic/Stoic thinking about virtue and self-sufficiency inaugurated a tradition of thought that opposes pity, as a moral sentiment unworthy of the dignity of both pitier and recipient, and one based on false beliefs about the value of external goods. According to this tradition, the most important thing in life is one's own reason and will. One can achieve a virtuous reason and will by one's own effort, without the aid of external resources; and virtue, once achieved, is indestructible. The only way to be seriously damaged by life, then, is to make bad choices or become unjust; the appropriate response to that would be blame, not pity. As for the events of life that most people take to be occasions for pity—losses of loved ones, loss of freedom, ill health, and so on—these are of only minor importance.³¹ Thus, pity has a *false* cognitive-evaluative structure, and is objectionable for that reason alone. It acknowledges as important what has no true importance. Furthermore, in the process, pity insults the dignity of the person who suffers, implying that this is a person who really needs the things of this world, whereas no vir-

³⁰ Plato, *Apology*, 41D, cf. 30D–C; on this, see Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³¹ It appears that for Socrates such events can affect the *degree* of one's flourishing, though not flourishing itself: see Vlastos, *Socrates*. The Stoics refuse to admit even this much.

tuous person has such needs.³² (Kant calls this an "insulting kind of beneficence, expressing the sort of benevolence one has for an unworthy person.")³³ Given the judgment of similar possibilities, pity also insults the dignity of the person who gives pity.³⁴ As Kant puts it, adopting the Socratic/Stoic position: "Such benevolence is called softheartedness and should not occur at all among human beings."³⁵

This position on pity becomes the basis for Plato's assault on tragedy in the *Republic*.³⁶ The good person, he argues, will be "most of all sufficient to himself for flourishing living, and exceptionally more than others he has least need of another. . . . Least of all, then, is it a terrible thing to him to be deprived of a son or brother or money or anything of that sort" (387d-e). Accordingly, speeches of lamentation and requests for pity, if retained at all, must be assigned to characters whom the audience will perceive as weak and error-ridden, so that these judgments will be repudiated by the spectator. The Stoics take this line of thought further, insisting that the true hero for the young should be Socrates, with his calm, self-sufficient demeanor in misfortune, his low evaluation of worldly goods. Tragic heroes, by contrast, should be regarded with scorn, as people whose errors in evaluative judgment have brought them low. (Epictetus defines tragedy as "what happens when chance events befall fools.")³⁷ This Stoic position on pity and value is taken over with little change by Spinoza and Kant, and seriously influences the account of Adam Smith, who approves of pity up to a point, but thinks that all emotions must be kept strictly in bounds by a rather Stoic sort of "self-command." The position is given an especially complex and vivid development in the thought of Nietzsche, whose connection to Stoicism has not, I think, been sufficiently understood.³⁸

³² See the extensive development of this line of argument in Nietzsche—especially *Dawn*, 135 ("To offer pity is as good as to offer contempt"); and *Zarathustra*, "On the Pitying." Nietzsche actually makes three related points here: (1) pity denigrates the person's own efforts by implying that they are insufficient for flourishing; (2) pity inappropriately inflates the importance of worldly goods; and (3) pity has bad consequences, undermining self-command and practical reason.

³³ Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, 35, *Akad.*, p. 457, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982). Kant's entire argument in this passage is very close to, is indeed appropriated as a whole by, Nietzsche—a fact that ought to give pause to those who think Nietzsche's view cruel or proto-fascist. Both Kant and Nietzsche add a further argument: that pity adds to the suffering that there is in the world, by making two people suffer rather than only one (Kant, *ibid.*; Nietzsche, *Dawn*, 134).

³⁴ See Nietzsche, *Dawn*, 251 (called "Stoical"), 133; *Zarathustra*, IV, "The Sign."

³⁵ Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, 34, *Akad.*, p. 457, Ellington trans., p. 122.

³⁶ See Nussbaum, "Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency," for a detailed analysis.

³⁷ See Nussbaum, "Poetry and the Passions: Two Stoic Views," in *Passions & Perceptions*, ed. Jacques Brunschwig and Martha Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³⁸ I analyze the Stoic roots of Nietzsche's position on pity, and draw some new interpretive consequences, in Nussbaum, "Pity and Mercy: Nietzsche's Stoicism," in *Nietzsche: Genealogy, Morality*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 139-67.

The classic attacks on pity make two further objections. The first concerns the partiality and narrowness of pity; the second concerns its connection to anger and revenge. Pity, the first argument goes, binds us to our own immediate sphere of life, to what has affected us, to what we see before us or can easily imagine. This means, however, that it distorts the world: for it effaces the equal value and dignity of all human lives, their equal need for resources and for aid in time of suffering. This argument, which is first introduced in the ancient Stoics, is given an especially vivid form by Adam Smith, who argues that to rely on pity as a social motive will, on this account, produce very unbalanced and inconsistent results.³⁹

Finally, the classic attack examines the connection between pity and the roots of other, more objectionable emotions. The person who pities accepts certain controversial evaluative judgments concerning the place of "external goods" in human flourishing. But a person who accepts those judgments accepts that she has given hostages to fortune. And to give hostages to fortune is to be set up not only for pity, but also for fear and anxiety and grief—and not only for these, but for anger and the retributive disposition as well. What Stoic analyses bring out again and again is that the repudiation of pity is not in the least connected with callousness, brutality, or the behavior of the boot-in-the-face tyrant. In fact, in this picture it is pity itself that is closely connected with cruelty. The pitier acknowledges the importance of certain worldly goods and persons, which can in principle be damaged by another's agency. The response to such damages will be pity if the damaged person is someone else; but if the damaged person is oneself, and the damage is deliberate, the response will be anger—and anger that will be proportional to the intensity of the initial evaluative attachment. The soft soul of the pitier can be invaded by the serpents of envy, hatred, and cruelty. When Seneca writes to Nero reproving pity,⁴⁰ he hardly aims to encourage Nero in his tendencies to brutality. On the contrary, his project is to get Nero to care less about insults to his reputation, and about wealth and power generally. This, Seneca argues, will make him a more gentle and humane ruler. But this project is not hindered by the removal of pity; indeed, it demands it, because it demands the removal of attachments to external goods.

This line of argument is developed vividly by Nietzsche, who argues, with the Stoics, that a certain sort of "hardness" toward the vicissitudes of fortune is the only way to get rid of the desire for revenge. The "veiled glance of pity," which looks inward on one's own possibilities with "a profound

³⁹ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 136; see the excellent account of these aspects of Smith's thought in Ronald Coase, "Adam Smith's View of Man," *Journal of Law and Economics*, vol. 19 (1976), pp. 529-46.

⁴⁰ Seneca, *On Mercy*, Book II.

sadness,"⁴¹ acknowledging one's own weakness and inadequacy — this glance of the pitier is, Nietzsche argues, the basis of much hatred directed against a world that makes human beings suffer, and against all those, in that world, who are not brought low, who are self-respecting and self-commanding: "It is on such soil, on swampy ground, that every weed, every poisonous plant grows. . . . Here the worms of vengefulness and rancor swarm."⁴²

If pity is in this way bound up with the inclination to revenge, however, and if the task of a strong society is to contain and control the inclination to revenge, then one might conclude that society has reasons to extirpate pity in its citizens, and in its legal system, rather than fostering it. And this seems to mean removing the tragic poets from the city.

The debate over pity constructs, in effect, two visions of political community, and of the good citizen and judge within it. One sees the human being as both aspiring and vulnerable, both worthy and insecure; the other focuses on dignity alone, seeing in reason a boundless and indestructible worth. One sees a central task of community as the provision of support for basic needs; it brings human beings together through the thought of their common weakness and risk. The other sees a community as a kingdom of free responsible beings, held together by the awe they feel for the worth of reason in one another. Each vision, in its own way, pursues both equality and freedom. The former aims at equal support for basic needs, and hopes through this to promote equal opportunities for free choice and self-realization; the other starts from the fact of internal freedom — a fact that no misfortunes can remove — and finds in this fact a source of political equality. One sees freedom of choice as something that needs to be built up for people through worldly arrangements that make them capable of functioning in a fully human way; the other takes freedom to be an inalienable given, independent of all material arrangements. One attempts to achieve benevolence through softheartedness; the other holds, with Kant, that this softheartedness "should not occur at all among human beings." The debate between the friends and enemies of pity is not a debate between partisans of reason and partisans of some mindless noncognitive force. It is a substantive debate about ethical value. Both sides agree that pity is judgment; they differ about whether the judgments are true. To the adjudication of that debate I now turn.

V. A DEFENSE OF PITY

Let me address first the charge that pity ascribes to misfortunes an importance they do not really possess — insulting, in the process, the dignity of both the receiver and the giver of pity.

⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), Book III, ch. 14.

⁴² *Ibid.*

The first thing we must say in response to this charge is that it is, so far, much too blunt. For why are we forced to make an all-or-nothing choice between pitying a suffering person and having respect for that person's dignity? Why can't we both pity the person for the wrongs luck has brought her way and at the same time have respect and awe for the way in which she bears these ills? Indeed, it is difficult to know what we would be admiring in such a case if we did take the Stoic position that the loss was not a serious loss. For then, where would the fortitude be in bearing the event with dignity?

In another way as well, the attack is too blunt. For it takes an all-or-nothing position on the importance of external goods for flourishing: either pity all over the place, or no pity at all. The pro-pity tradition, however, is not prevented from judging that some occasions for pity are illegitimate, and based upon false evaluations. As I have said, pity takes up not the actual point of view of any and every sufferer, but rather the point of view of a reflective spectator who asks which reversals are of true importance and which are not. Thus, pity will not be given to my Roman aristocrat who misses an evening of peacocks' tongues (discussed in Section II), no matter how much he minds this. On the other hand, pity will be given to the person who is unaware of the extent of her illness or deprivation because of mental impairment or the social deformation of preferences. The pro-pity tradition is in fact preoccupied with the criticism of those who attach inappropriate importance to money, status, or pleasure.

One further distinction can now be drawn. When the defender of pity depicts the best human life as vulnerable to fortune, she is not bound to embrace as good any and every sort of human neediness and dependency. Even with respect to those "external goods" that are endorsed by the pitier's own reflection as of enormous importance for flourishing, the pitier is not required to wish on people the maximum vulnerability. For there are ways of arranging the world so as to bring these good things more securely within people's grasp; and acknowledging our deep need for them provides a strong incentive for so designing things. There are some important features of human life that nobody ever fully controls: one cannot make oneself immortal, one cannot will that one's children should be healthy and happy, one cannot will oneself happiness in love. Nevertheless, differences in class, race, gender, wealth, and power do affect the extent to which the sense of helplessness governs the daily course of one's life. Taking up the reflective view of the tragic audience, one will see inequalities in vulnerability: therefore I argued, with Rousseau, that one will have reasons to raise the floor of security for all.

Nor is the anti-pity tradition prepared to repudiate concern for material well-being, as its own position might seem to demand. No member of this tradition expresses indifference to benevolence. Indeed, the tradition prides itself on promoting benevolence by minimizing competitive

grasping for goods. Kant follows the Stoics in insisting that when we get rid of pity, that “insulting kind of benevolence,” we will still be able to think of the needs of others with “an active and rational benevolence.” This benevolent disposition will include an active attempt to understand the situation of another – what Kant calls *humanitas practica* – but will repudiate the softhearted commiseration characteristic of pity, which “can be called communicable (like a susceptibility to heat or to contagious diseases).”⁴³

The question is, however, what sense such Stoic thinkers can make of the need for benevolence, when they hold the dignity of reason to be complete in itself. If people can exercise their most important capacities without material support, this very much diminishes the significance and the urgency of that support. The original Stoics at this point invoke teleology: Zeus’s design asks us to be concerned with material necessities even though, strictly speaking, such things have no true worth.⁴⁴ But Kant and other modern Stoics can help themselves to no such religious picture; thus, the status of benevolence in their theories becomes problematic. We are put on our guard when Kant writes as follows:

It was a sublime way of representing the wise man, as the Stoic conceived him, when he let the wise one say: I wish I had a friend, not that he might give me help in poverty, sickness, captivity, and so on, but in order that I might stand by him and save a human being. But for all that, the very same wise man, when his friend is not to be saved, says to himself: What’s it to me? i.e. he rejected commiseration.⁴⁵

Kant here accepts the Stoic view that there is no good way to respond with distress to the present distress of another. He immediately tries to salvage the motivational foundations of benevolence by insisting that, since active benevolence is a duty, it is also a duty to seek out circumstances in which one will witness poverty and deprivation:

Thus it is a duty not to avoid places where the poor, who lack the most necessary things, are to be found; instead, it is a duty to seek them out. It is a duty not to shun sickrooms or prisons and so on in order to avoid the pain of pity, which one may not be able to resist. For this feeling, though painful, nevertheless is one of the impulses placed in us by nature for effecting what the representation of duty might not accomplish by itself.⁴⁶

⁴³ Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, 34, *Akad.*, pp. 456–57, Ellington trans., p. 121.

⁴⁴ On the difficulties of interpreting the Stoic position here, see my discussion of the scholarly literature in Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), ch. 10.

⁴⁵ Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, 34, *Akad.*, p. 457, Ellington trans., pp. 121–22.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 35, *Akad.*, p. 457, Ellington trans., p. 122.

This fascinating passage shows us as clearly as any text the tensions of the anti-pity position, when it tries to defend benevolence. In what spirit, we may ask, does the Kantian visit places “where the poor are to be found”? Should he do this in a truly Stoic spirit, performing a moral duty with no thought of the universality and importance of human need, no thought of his own personal similarity to the sufferers? But then what will the sight of this misery mean to him, and how will it inspire benevolence? Won’t he be likely to have some contempt for these people, insofar as they are depressed by their lot? Won’t he want to remind them, using Kant’s own words, that “a good will is good not because of what it effects or accomplishes, . . . it is good only through its willing, i.e. good in itself”?⁴⁷ He might then reflect, gazing at them, that

[e]ven if, by some especially unfortunate fate or by the niggardly provision of stepmotherly nature, this will should be wholly lacking in the power to accomplish its purpose . . . yet would it, like a jewel, still shine by its own light as something which has its full value in itself. Its usefulness or fruitlessness can neither augment nor diminish this value. Its usefulness would be, as it were, only the setting to enable us to handle it in ordinary dealings or to attract to it the attention of those who are not yet experts, but not to recommend it to real experts or to determine its value.⁴⁸

And won’t the Kantian then say to himself: I am a real expert, and I see here, in this place where the poor are to be found, not the squalor itself, not the poverty, but the pure light of human dignity, which has full value in itself and cannot possibly be increased by my gifts? But if, as Kant here acknowledges, this way of thinking might not lead to benevolence, if the motives connected with pity are also required, isn’t this more than an accident of the hard-wiring of human psychology? Doesn’t it mean that the *evaluations* characteristic of that emotion are also required, in order to inform the onlooker about what is going on here, and why it matters? Without these evaluations—which seem in any case to be endorsed in other parts of Kant’s moral theory—he will be like a Martian onlooker, and only some external commandment—with which the Stoics can supply him, but Kant cannot—would make him intervene. Kant cannot consistently accept the full Stoic anti-pity position, if he really wishes to allow for the thoughts entailed by our duty to promote the happiness of others. This inconsistency escapes his notice, I think, because, unlike most of his philosophical predecessors, he does not investigate the cognitive foundations of the emotions, and tends to treat them as unintelligent (unthinking, nonreasoning) parts of our animal nature. It seems impor-

⁴⁷ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, section I, *Akad.*, p. 394, Ellington trans. p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, section I, *Akad.*, p. 394, Ellington trans., pp. 7-8.

tant to point out that an endorsement of compassion, far from being inconsistent with Kant's Enlightenment interest in impartiality and universality, seems actually to be entailed by some parts of Kant's own position, although for the reasons given he does not see this.

I turn now to the objection about partiality. It is not exactly an objection to compassion or pity itself; but it says that people so rarely exhibit perfect universal compassion that it would not be good to rely on it too much. Any conception of public rationality that appeals to emotion will have to grapple with this issue; later I shall suggest some practical strategies. Nevertheless, I can begin my reply with two more-general arguments, one concerning development and one concerning adult deliberation.

The friend of pity should argue, I think, that pity is our species' way of connecting the good of others to the fundamentally eudaimonistic (though not egoistic) structure of our imaginations and our most intense cares. The good of others means nothing to us in the abstract or antecedently. Only when it is brought into relation with that which we already understand – with our intense love of a parent, our passionate need for comfort and security – does such a thing start to matter deeply. The Stoics, of whom I have otherwise been very critical in this essay, have a vivid metaphor for this process. Imagine, they say, that each of us lives in a set of concentric circles – the nearest being one's own body, the furthest being the entire universe of human beings. The task of moral development is to move the circles progressively closer and closer to the center, so that one's parents become like oneself, one's other relatives like one's parents, strangers like relatives, and so forth.⁴⁹ One has to build on the meanings one understands, or one is left with an equality that is empty of urgency – what Aristotle, attacking Plato's removal of the family, called a "watery" concern all around.⁵⁰

But could adult rationality do without compassionate emotion – for example, by adopting an economic-utilitarian account of rational choice in terms of self-interest? Economics is so skeptical of compassion that it has excluded it from rationality by stipulative definition, simply assuming that all but the most deluded and perverse human behavior can be explained without it; but such accounts of human motivation are now under heavy attack within economic thought itself, precisely because they leave compassion out. A leading example of such criticism is Amartya Sen's famous essay "Rational Fools,"⁵¹ which argues that we cannot

⁴⁹ This image is from Hierocles, a Stoic of the first-second centuries A.D.; see the discussion in Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, ch. 9. The job of a reasonable person is to "draw the circles somehow towards the centre," and "the right point will be reached if, through our own initiative, we reduce the distance of the relationship with each person." (See my discussion in *ibid.*, pp. 34–44.)

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, Book II, ch. 4.

⁵¹ Amartya Sen, "Rational Fools," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 6 (Summer 1977), pp. 317–44, reprinted in Sen, *Choice, Welfare, and Measurement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

give either a good predictive account of human action or a correct normative theory of rationality without mentioning the concern people have for the good of others, as a factor independent of their concern for their own satisfactions. For people very often sacrifice their own interests and well-being, and in many cases even their lives, for the well-being of those they love, or for good social consequences that they prize. They also stand by commitments and promises they have made, even when to do so requires major personal sacrifice. One cannot, Sen argues, explain the behavior of loving members of families, or of soldiers who give their lives for their country, or of many other decent yet unselfish acts, without pointing to patterns of action that are motivated by sympathetic emotion.⁵² In short, people may not be perfect in their compassion, but that is no reason to deny that a good deal of human behavior is explained in this way. Neither predictive nor normative analyses can afford to ignore this.

My argument, like Sen's, does not say that we should dismiss economic and mathematical analysis and rely on the the heart alone. (Indeed, compassion itself is not a matter of the heart alone, if that means being devoid of thought.) Later (in Section VI) I shall say what I think an economics that takes emotion seriously would look like. Here I am saying that judgment that does not employ the intelligence of compassion in coming to grips with the significance of human suffering is blind and incomplete. Let the analysis be as sophisticated and as formal as science requires it to be. Still, if, like the economic analyses of Dickens's Mr. Gradgrind, it is concocted in a room that is like an astronomical observatory without windows, where the economist can arrange the world "solely by pen, ink, and paper,"⁵³ we should not be surprised to find it lacking in vision concerning our world.

We now face the argument about revenge, which seems difficult for the friend of pity to answer. For it tells her that she cannot have a form of reasoning that she prizes without also taking on attitudes that she herself views with alarm. The defender of pity can insist once again, however, that the opponent's picture of her position is far too crude. For just as she is not committed to saying that any and every calamity is an appropriate occasion for pity, so too she is not committed to saying that any and every damage, slight, or insult is an appropriate occasion for retributive anger. By far the largest number of the social ills caused by revenge concern damages to fortune, status, power, and honor, to which the defender of pity does not ascribe much worth.

Furthermore, when we move the outer circles closer to the self, as an education in pity urges, our inclination to revenge will diminish, in that

⁵² Notice that the family altruism to which Sen alludes is not the "altruism" assumed in standard economic models, which is really a kind of instrumental dependency, contingent on the familial bond serving the good of the agent in some way.

⁵³ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, ed. David Craig (New York: Penguin, 1963), p. 131.

we will become concerned for others as for members of our own family, and see any damage befalling them as a damage to ourselves as well. Pity shows the significance of vindictive acts for those who suffer from them: by moving these victims closer to us, it makes us think twice before undertaking such acts.

At the conclusion of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, the Furies are not banished from the city: instead, they are civilized, and made a part of Athena's judicial system. Now called "Eumenides," for their kindly intentions toward the people of Athens, they cease to snarl, to crouch like dogs, to sniff for blood. But they do not cease to demand punishment for crime: and in that sense to place them at the heart of the judicial institutions of the city is to announce that these dark forces cannot be cut off from the rest of human life without impoverishing it. For these forces are forms of acknowledgment of the importance of the goods that crime may damage.⁵⁴ Placing retribution under the control of law, however, is a signal way of limiting the domain of revenge in the city's life. The link between pity and revenge supports that move.

VI. COMPASSION IN CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC LIFE

Now that I have defended the pro-pity tradition against its opponents' most powerful objections, I want, more briefly, to sketch some of the roles that this emotion can and should play in public life.

A. Moral and civic education

If we believe that the ability to imagine the ills of another with vivid sympathy is an important part of being a good person, then we will want to follow Rousseau in giving support to procedures by which this ability is taught. Much of this will and should be done privately, in families.⁵⁵ But every society employs and teaches ideals of the citizen, and of good civic judgment, in many ways; and there are some concrete practical strategies that will in fact support an education in compassion. First of all, public education at every level should cultivate the ability to imagine the experiences of others and to participate in their sufferings. This, I think, means giving the humanities and the arts a large place in education, from elementary school on up. It also means recognizing that the arts serve a vital political function, even when their content is not expressly political—for they cultivate imaginative abilities that are central to the political life. This would give us special reasons for supporting the arts, and for giv-

⁵⁴ See Gewirtz, "Aeschylus' Law" (*supra* note 6); and Richard Posner, *Law and Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), where Posner perceptively suggests that this is one of the most important contributions literature can make to the law.

⁵⁵ For some valuable assistance in that task, see the section on compassion in William J. Bennett, *The Book of Virtues* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

ing artistic expression a high degree of protection from the repression that so often threatens it.

This education of the imagination should take a particular form. I have said that a crucial part of the ethical value of pity is its ability to cross boundaries of class, nationality, race, and gender, as the pitier assumes these different positions in imagination, and comes to see the obstacles to flourishing faced by human beings in these many concrete situations. I have argued that although Greek tragic drama already promoted this sort of understanding to some degree, the novel goes further, by connecting the reader to highly concrete circumstances other than her own, and by making her imagine what it would be like to be a member of both privileged and oppressed groups in these circumstances.

What I now want to suggest is that an education aimed at promoting compassionate citizenship should also be a multicultural education. Our pupil must learn to appreciate the diversity of circumstances in which human beings struggle for flourishing; this means not just learning some facts about classes, races, nationalities, and sexual orientations other than her own, but being drawn into those lives through the imagination, becoming a participant in those struggles. One ingredient in this education will certainly be the study of political, social, and economic history; but another equally important ingredient will be contact with works of literature and other artworks that involve the spectator in the human meaning of these events. This does not commit us to cultural relativism, or to any sort of hands-off attitude toward cultural criticism. In fact, the compassionate spectator is always attempting to compare what she sees with her own evolving conception of the good; and though she is likely to modify that conception during the educational process, she is also likely to be keenly aware of hidden impediments to flourishing in the lives she encounters.

B. Political leaders

We should demand political leaders who display the abilities involved in compassion, who show not just mastery of pertinent facts about their society and its history, but also the ability to take on in imagination the lives of the various diverse groups whom they propose to lead. One may find an example of this ability at an especially high level in Lincoln, whose empathy for the situation of the slave was one of the most important sources of moral force in his public rhetoric.⁵⁶ It is also reassuring to encounter, in President Clinton's inaugural address, the claim that the idea of America is "an idea tempered by the knowledge that, but for fate, we—the fortunate and the unfortunate—might have been each other."

⁵⁶ In Gifford Lecture 6, I give examples of this.

C. Economic thought: Welfare and development

I would argue that the compassionate imagination provides information essential for economic planning, by showing the human meaning of the sufferings and deprivations different groups of people encounter. I have insisted that I am not proposing to substitute emotion for economic modeling; rather, I am urging that formal economic models take account of compassion's information. Let me describe what I mean by this more concretely.

When the well-being of a nation is measured by development agencies, following the lead of development economists, by far the most common strategy still is simply to list GNP per capita. This crude approach does not tell us much about how people are doing: it does not even describe the distribution of wealth and income, much less investigate the quality of lives in areas not always well correlated with wealth and income—such as infant mortality, access to health care, life expectancy,⁵⁷ the quality of public education, the presence or absence of political liberties, and the state of racial and gender relations. What development planners need to know about the overall “political economy” of a nation is far more than such approaches tell us, even where economic planning in the narrow sense is concerned. For they need to know how the economic resources of the nation are or are not supporting human functioning in these various areas, and how they might do so more effectively.

For these reasons, a number of development economists⁵⁸ have recently argued that the focus of welfare and development economics should not be resources as such, as if they had some value in themselves, but the role of resources in supporting the *capabilities* of human beings to function in important ways. The “capability” approach has begun to have a major influence on the ways in which international agencies measure welfare.

There is an intimate link between this approach to quality-of-life measurement and the thought experiment of compassion. For the point that Sen has continually made, against liberal views that focus on resources, is that we do not have information enough to tell us how these resources are working, unless we see them at work in the context of human func-

⁵⁷ These may appear to be well correlated with GNP per capita, if one considers only gross contrasts, such as those between Europe and North America on the one hand, and the poorer regions of Africa on the other. If one breaks things down more finely, however, large and significant discrepancies begin to appear; for many examples of this, see Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); and the *Human Development Reports* for 1993 and 1994, prepared by the United Nations Development Program (New York: United Nations, 1993, 1994).

⁵⁸ In addition to Sen and Drèze, this group includes the contributors to the *Human Development Reports*, including Sudhir Anand and others. For a similar approach, see Partha Dasgupta, *An Inquiry into Well-Being and Destitution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). For an application of this approach to the situation of women in developing countries, see Nussbaum and Glover, eds., *Women, Culture, and Development* (*supra* note 20).

tioning. When we do so, however, we see that individuals have widely varying needs for resources, if they are to attain a similar level of capability to function. A person in a wheelchair needs more support in order to become mobile than a person who lacks this disability. A large and active person needs more food in order to be healthy than a small and sedentary person, and a pregnant or lactating woman more than a non-pregnant woman. Groups that have been disadvantaged with respect to education may need special educational investments to attain the same level of capability. Whether a government wishes to promote equality of capability is, of course, another story—though I have argued that compassion leads in an egalitarian direction, or at least in the direction of support for a basic level of capability, where the most important functions of life are concerned. What is important to me here is to say that the imaginative exercise itself, and the emotion itself, provide information without which no informed decision about allocation can be made.⁵⁹ Incorporating emotion in this way does not mean abandoning the aim of modeling human action scientifically; it does mean that science must be responsive to the human facts.

D. *Legal rationality*

What I have already said has many implications for legal and judicial rationality: for lawyers and judges are concerned with issues of human welfare, and will want to use the sort of deliberative rationality that is best equipped to handle welfare issues. They are also, some of them, leaders, to whom my argument about the importance of a compassionate leadership clearly applies. This means, I think, that it is especially important for judges and future judges to acquire the kind of information my imaginary curriculum for citizenship will offer—not just collecting facts about the diverse ways of life with which they are likely to come in contact, but entering into these lives with empathy and seeing the human meaning of the issues at stake in them.⁶⁰ Through compassion, the judge will be especially likely to discern the disadvantages under which certain people or groups have labored. The compassionate judge is committed to neutrality in the appropriate sense, that is, to the fair treatment of all the groups concerned and to judgments that are based upon articulable reasons. She has no tendency to suppose, however, that this pursuit of fairness requires her to stand at a lofty distance from the social realities of the cases before her.

This distinction goes to the heart of a famous and controversial argument made by Herbert Wechsler in his 1959 article “Toward Neutral Prin-

⁵⁹ See the introduction to Nussbaum and Sen, eds., *The Quality of Life* (*supra* note 22).

⁶⁰ For examples in this area, both good and bad, and further discussion, see Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice* (*supra* note 11).

ciples of Constitutional Law.”⁶¹ The opening of Wechsler’s argument would find strong support from the friend of compassion: for he argues that judges need criteria that are not arbitrary or willful, not simply tailored to the “immediate result.” A good decision is one “that rests on reasons with respect to all the issues in the case, reasons that in their generality and their neutrality transcend any immediate result that is involved.” As the argument continues, however, Wechsler seems to take the demand for neutrality to entail ignoring certain specific social and historical facts that seem highly relevant to the equal and principled application of the law. In particular, he suggests, criticizing the reasoning in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954),⁶² that judges deciding cases relating to “separate but equal” facilities should refuse themselves concrete empathetic knowledge of the special disadvantages faced by minorities, in order to ensure that their principles should be applied without political bias. From this point of view, as Wechsler sees it, Southern blacks and whites suffer similar burdens from segregation: the fact that he and a black colleague cannot eat lunch together is an equal deprivation to both.

This, however, is all too like Kant taking a tour of places “where the poor are to be found.” There is such a lofty distance here that the human facts are not correct. In terms of the human meaning of segregation for the two groups involved, the burden is not equal. The evidence that was presented in the arguments in *Brown v. Board of Education* showed the impediments to self-esteem, and thence to learning, that were unequally faced by black children in separate schools; like a tragic narrative, the materials presented in the case appealed to reasoned compassion. By taking his stand above emotion and the judgments involved in it, Wechsler prevents himself from seeing, and is thus unable to be truly fair. In this sense, when properly filtered for personal bias and when appropriately based on the evidence presented in the case, compassionate emotion is not the enemy but the indispensable ally of legal rationality. For the facts considered by the law are human facts, invested with the significance with which people endow them in their lives. Martian neutrality—or even Kantian neutrality—cannot so much as get at the facts, far less render an adequate judgment about them.

If a good judge cannot do without compassion of the appropriate sort, then one would expect to find compassion even in the opinions of a judge who in theoretical writings leads the opposition to emotion’s public role—if, that is, he is a good judge in the sense I have described. When one examines the judicial opinions of Richard Posner, now chief judge of the

⁶¹ Herbert Wechsler, “Toward Neutral Principles of Constitutional Law,” *Harvard Law Review*, 1959, pp. 1ff. Wechsler’s argument is discussed in greater detail in Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, ch. 4.

⁶² *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, one does indeed, I believe, find thoughts that (according to the long philosophical tradition) entail compassion.

The document I wish to examine here is an opinion written by Posner in a case of child sexual abuse, *Nelson v. Farrey* (1989).⁶³ The case concerns a father's abuse of his four-year-old daughter. The abusive father asks the court not to admit the testimony of a psychiatrist about the latter's lengthy interviews with the little girl, during which she gave very convincing evidence of her abuse, without giving the father an opportunity to confront the girl herself in court. Posner, ruling against the father, writes eloquently about the suffering of the little girl, about the clear evidence of sexual abuse that emerged in the psychiatric setting. He rejects summarily the father's claim that she could have learned what to say from the "anatomically correct" dolls given to her by the doctor: for, as Posner notes, she repeatedly said that she got "white mud" all over her face from her father's penis, and the dolls "are not *that* anatomically correct."⁶⁴

Now recall that I insisted that there was no twinge or pang, no feeling of any particular sort, that was necessary for the emotion of pity or compassion. What is necessary, and sufficient, are certain value-laden thoughts and perceptions. This is not everyone's view, but it is the view for which I have been arguing, along with a great part of the philosophical tradition. This means that in order to find out whether Posner has compassion for the little girl, we do not need to ask him whether he feels a pain; we need only look at the perceptions and thoughts expressed in what he writes (assuming that he is sincere). When we do this, we see in his opinion all the materials of compassion: the judgment that the little girl has suffered serious harm through no fault of her own; the judgment that this is a very bad thing and must not be renewed by a courtroom confrontation, which would be, he writes, "psychologically harmful to her," indeed, a "monstrous cruelty";⁶⁵ and clearly, as well, the thought that this is not just an isolated *sui generis* case, but a case that displays a vulnerability to damage that is the lot of all too many human beings — for Posner writes that if this sort of psychiatric evidence were not admissible, "molesters of small children, especially incestuous molesters, would rarely be punished."⁶⁶ All this is arrived at by a process of empathy that is precisely what the pro-pity tradition demands. In short, Posner here is the compassionate judge I have been describing; and I think it is clear that

⁶³ *Nelson v. Farrey*, 874 F.2d 165 (7th Cir. 1989).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1229.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1228, 1229.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1229. We do not exactly see the belief that Posner himself could suffer a similar damage, since the damage in question requires the victim to be very young; but we do have, I think, the sense that such damage is not an alien thing, that it might happen to someone that Posner knows or cares about.

this capacity for compassion is a vital part of his judicial equipment, and of his judicial rationality.⁶⁷

What does this example show? In fact, it is not at all isolated in the judicial opinions of Posner.⁶⁸ To some extent, we see an increasing interest in sympathy in his more recent theoretical writings.⁶⁹ It is difficult to tell which shift is prior; but one may at least conjecture that the repeated confrontation with human misery that is a consequence of being a judge has had some bearing on the evolution of Posner's theoretical position.

E. Public institutions

What do we do, however, when we cannot rely upon compassionate actors in public life? It seems obvious that in some areas, such as the judiciary, we cannot embody everything we want in systems of rules; and individual actors will continue to exercise broad discretion. But the final point I want to make here is that compassion can and should inform the structure of public institutions themselves, so that we do not need in every case to rely on the perfect compassion of individual actors. (This is an important part of my answer to Adam Smith's point about partiality, discussed in Section IV.) I have compared the perspective of the compassionate spectator to John Rawls's "original position"—though with the difference that compassion embodies a highly general conception of the good. The original position, however, is a device that shows us how to design political institutions, and especially systems of distribution. Compassion, and the imaginings it prompts, is another such device, similar in spirit though different in some of its implications. We do not need to rely upon perfectly compassionate philanthropy, for example, since we can design a just welfare system, and a system of taxation to support it. It will be a complicated matter to determine how far we should take this course, and how far we ought to leave individual agents free to act compassionately by their own lights. In part, this will be an efficiency question, and will be settled by empirical trial and error. In part, it will also be a matter of the intrinsic worth of liberty; and we will need to ask carefully what sorts and what amount of liberty we should take to have intrinsic value. Aristotle was not wrong to conclude that in Plato's fully

⁶⁷ Compare Posner's criticism of the opinions in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (478 U.S. 1186 [1986]) for their lack of "empathy" with the situation of the homosexual in contemporary American society: Richard A. Posner, *Sex and Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 345ff.

⁶⁸ In *Poetic Justice*, I discuss a recent sexual harassment case that contains similar material: *Mary J. Carr v. Allison Gas Turbine Division, General Motors Corporation*, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, July 26, 1994.

⁶⁹ In Richard A. Posner, *The Problems of Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), he presents a sympathetic discussion of appeals to sympathy under the rubric "Literary and Feminist Approaches"; see also his discussion of *Bowers v. Hardwick* in *Sex and Reason* (*supra* note 67).

controlled society there could be no generosity, since the scope for individual choice in matters of distribution was removed. On the other hand, we want institutions to take account of Smith's problem, and to find some way of solving it—whether his own way, with its heavy reliance on the operation of the market, or some other way.⁷⁰

This point has two sides. If it is true that compassion can be embodied in the structure of legal and political institutions, it also seems true that the construction of these institutions influences the development of compassion in individuals. Because compassion requires fellow-feeling, its birth is very much aided by institutions that place people in similar circumstances, weakening or removing hierarchies of wealth, gender, and class. Alexis de Tocqueville argued that there was an unusually great potential for compassion in the American democracy, because the Constitution had situated citizens as equal to a degree unknown in Europe: "[T]he more equal social conditions become, the more do men display this reciprocal disposition to oblige each other."⁷¹ As William Bennett says of this passage, "we are forced to ask ourselves: How does modern America measure up to the portrait he painted more than a century and a half ago?"⁷²

In short, compassionate imagining and compassionate institutions reinforce one another. Institutions may compel behavior in the absence of virtue; but they are also educators of virtue, without which it will be far more difficult to bring up children who can imagine vividly another citizen's pain.

VII. CONCLUSION

Compassion is not the entirety of justice; but it both contains a powerful, if partial, vision of just distribution and provides imperfect citizens with an essential bridge from self-interest to just conduct. The spectators who watched Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, like readers of Richard Wright's *Native Son* today, did not live in a just society, nor did they go directly out to create one as a result of their compassionate experience. But this does not, I think, undercut the insights either of the literary works or of the emotions they construct. It simply shows that people are often too weak and confused and isolated to carry out radical political changes in their

⁷⁰ In this connection Smith's allegiance to Stoicism should be fully recognized: the "invisible hand" is not some blind natural force, but Zeus's Providence, deliberately, wisely, and justly arranging things. It is because markets are thought to embody ideal justice, and not because they promote interests, that Smith relies on them to the extent that he does. For criticism of the idea that markets *do* in fact have this high moral standing, see Amartya Sen, "The Moral Standing of the Market," *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring 1985), pp. 1-19.

⁷¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.

⁷² Bennett, *The Book of Virtues* (*supra* note 55), p. 180.

own world. It shows that the power of the imagination is human and finite, and does not all by itself alter political reality. Without a just city in words, however, we never will get a just city in reality; without a compassionate training of the imagination, we will not, I think, get a compassionate nation. Without being tragic spectators, we will not have the insight required if we are to make life somewhat less tragic for those who, like Philoctetes, are hungry, and oppressed, and in pain.

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