



Is Impersonal Benevolence a Virtue?

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Abstract

Benevolence is generally understood as an embracing attitude towards our fellow creatures that we can associate with “love”, “friendship” or „sympathy“. However, it is not clear whether benevolence is really a virtue or not. This case gets even more complicated, if we distinguish personal from impersonal (or universal) benevolence. In my talk, I begin with some shortcomings of Kantian and consequentialist approaches to impersonal benevolence. Finally, I would like to demonstrate how to reconcile impersonal benevolence with a classical virtue ethics account.

Key Words: Benevolence, Utilitarianism, virtue ethics, Kant, sympathy, friendship

1. Introduction: The General Nature of Benevolence

By benevolence we generally understand an embracing attitude towards our fellow creatures, which is sometimes associated with “love”, “sympathy” or “friendship”.¹ However, benevolence does not exactly coincide with these forms, especially not with “love”, regardless of whether it is *agape*, love of the neighbour, philanthropy² or the Platonic love of the Good. Furthermore, benevolence cannot be the same as “love” because there always must be a concrete will (a ‘good will’, if you want) that enables lovers to make their objects of love identifiable with the loved people. Therefore, benevolence is, unlike the Platonic love of the Good, an other-regarding and personal disposition.

The existence of a concrete will to do good for others can prevent us from confusing benevolence with the psychological stance of sympathy. Sympathy as a complex affective sensation does not express a real or sufficient concern for the good of others, although it is always necessary to find out by asking our emotions whether a person is worthwhile to be the right addressee of my promoting and sympathizing activities.³ Against this backdrop, it could be more adequate to explain benevolence in terms of friendship.⁴ Indeed, friendship entails almost all features that are necessary in order to speak of

¹ For virtue ethicists like Philippe Foot friendship and benevolence are closely interconnected, especially for defining the scope of our moral duties: „For firstly there are virtues such as friendship which play their part in determining the requirements of benevolence, as for example by making it consistent with benevolence to give a small service to friends rather than than a greater service to strangers and acquaintances“. (Foot 1983, 280f.)

² For example, Thomas Nagel’s influential concept of altruism differs from mere philanthropic approaches to benevolence (cf. Nagel 1979).

³ Scheler (2018) argues that the notion of sympathy should not be confused with „Mitgefühl“ (*empathy*); to be sympathetic with someone is rather a form of experiencing a person.

⁴ Cf. the relationship between friendship and moral theory: Stocker (1976), Blum (1993); Friedman (1993), Badhwar (1991); Cocking & Oakley (1995). Most of these accounts argue that friendship is not compatible with deontological und consequentialist theories.

benevolence. There has to be, of course, a natural sympathy among friends and every real friend should be concerned about the good of others and its promotion beyond his or her own sphere of interest. But what then is the pivotal difference between benevolence and friendship? One answer could be: Friendship cannot give a full account of how to deal benevolently with persons who are not my friends. Real friendship is always a personal or partial issue while benevolence is not. Besides, friendship rather seems to be a consequence or an almost perfect concretisation of being and acting benevolently.

But before speaking about personal and impersonal benevolence we first have to take a look at the practical form of benevolence. Is benevolence really a virtue? At first glance it does not seem so, because, according to Aristotle, benevolence is neither a mean between two vices (Which vices could that be?) nor a robust character trait (Who would be, so to speak, benevolent in any situation or by all accounts?). Nevertheless, benevolence (similar to friendship) probably presupposes virtuous actions but it is not clear whether virtuous actions themselves automatically lead to benevolence. If benevolence is not a virtue, do we have to keep back ourselves from making us and the others happy? I think not. Benevolence is and ought to be “something valuable for human well-being.” (Koutsouvilis 1976, 429)⁵

Perhaps, it might be the easiest way to distinguish benevolence from a very connatural concept, beneficence. According to William Frankena, “only persons and groups of persons, and perhaps some animals, can have benevolence or be benevolent, because this involves ways of feeling, thinking, and willing.” (Frankena 1987, 2) By contrast, as Frankena puts it, “beneficence [...] does not necessarily involve feeling, thought, or will. The sun can be beneficent, or a climate or an institution.” (ibid.) While “something is beneficent if it tends actually to do or produce good and not evil, whether it is benevolent or not, [...] something is benevolent if it seeks to do or promote good and not evil, whether it is actually beneficent or not.” (ibid., 3) From that it follows that “benevolence is a matter of intention, not of outcome; beneficence is one of outcome, not intention, though it may be intentional.” (ibid.) The good will of the person, who is or wants to be benevolent, is the overriding (Kantian) principle here. Beneficence only refers to the good works of someone, no matter what special intentions the beneficent person has – this could be the perspective of an utilitarian or virtue ethicist. Frankena himself argues that “benevolence is the disposition to be beneficent and beneficence is what a benevolent person would have or be if he or she had the needed knowledge, power, and good fortune.” (ibid.) However, Frankena’s account is misleading because benevolence is not a deficient capacity that needs to be perfected by qualities that are external to benevolence. In my opinion, benevolence as a concept should even encompass beneficence. It provides charitable persons with the right knowledge, adequate faculties and an openness for life’s contingencies.

2. Benevolence in Normative Ethical Frameworks

2.1 Virtue Ethics: Benevolence as a Personal Disposition to Act Well

Within a virtue ethics framework benevolence is defined as a *personal* disposition to act well. With regard to this personal dimension of benevolence, one often refers to the good of the beloved ones, while impersonal benevolence takes “world”, “mankind”, “good states of affairs” or “overall benefit” as the abstract objects of its concern. The “objects” of personal benevolence are more concrete and knowable by acquaintance. Personal benevolence preferably encourages virtues relating to persons or institutions that are closely affiliated to the benevolent agent.

⁵ „While a world without benevolence would be a poor thing, an appeal for benevolence is not enough.“ (Koutsouvilis 1976, 431)

In Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics benevolence traditionally plays a crucial role in the context of friendship. For Aristotle, friendship is a sort of particular or partial benevolence⁶ because every feeling or attitude of friendship is derivable from an attitude towards ourselves and somehow transferred to others.⁷ Although there is a primacy of self-love, Aristotle is always aware of the negative egoistic tendencies in human agency; for instance, when he speaks about the conflict between the virtue of generosity and the vice of greed. By contrast, one can also find altruistic elements in Aristotelian virtue ethics, primarily in his account of friendship: A friend is only a friend if he or she *wants* the other's good for the other sake. In this respect, being a friend seems to be the same as being personally benevolent.⁸ However, our wantings as related to other people can never be clear of egoistic intentions or self-regarding reasons. Suppose I hand over a distinguished book to my best friend Paul, for instance, Goethe's *Theory of Colours*, because I want him to experience pleasure while helping him to extend his knowledge. But Paul doesn't like reading at all. Occasionally, he is looking for car magazines.

The example shows that to say 'I want this or that for his sake' does not necessarily correspond with Paul's authentic needs which can differ from the need to read more or less boring books. My special needs and wantings as a giver or friend can only meet the needs of the addressee if I am able to clarify the kind of relationship that I have to the person I am or I would like to be in touch with.⁹ For Aristotle and many virtue ethicists friendship is a special relationship that is characterised by shared pleasure, advantage and excellence of character. We need the virtues in order to show what benevolence affords.

2.2 Deontology: Benevolence as Reverence for Rational Agency

Benevolence has not only a genuine place in virtue ethical approaches but also in deontological accounts. For Kant, benevolence is not nothing but something like a "great moral ornament" (Koutsouvilis 1976, 428). In opposite to some forms of Utilitarianism, benevolence is not the whole of the moral life but one of its parts. However, the Kantian notion of benevolence seems to be quiet ambivalent: His notion of benevolence in the *Rechtslehre* alludes to the duty of respecting the moral agency of others whereas benevolence in the *Tugendlehre* means to have "a duty to further, within limits, the happiness of others." (Mayr 2018, 227)¹⁰ However, if we go back to the example of Paul, the other's happiness ("Glückseligkeit") is not the same as the attainment of his or her ends. As Kant writes: "It is for them to decide what they count as belonging to their happiness; but it is open to me to refuse them many things that *they* think will make them happy but that I do not." (Kant 1996, 388) From the perspective of a giving friend, it could be adequate to further Paul's happiness as long as he does not

⁶ For Bentham, partial benevolence fundamentally contradicts with impartial benevolence: „Partial benevolence may govern the action, without entering into any direct competition with the more extensive benevolence, which would forbid it.“ (Bentham in Raphael 1991, 345)

⁷ NE 1166 a1-42; 1068 b5. There are some interesting similarities to the stoic concept of *oikeiosis*. In Aristotle, we can hardly find something about general benevolence, except in NE 1155a21; 1161b8. From that it follows that "general benevolence is not a Greek moral ideal" (Kahn 1981, 40). Therefore, John Leslie Mackie calls Aristotelian benevolence a kind of "self-referential altruism" (Mackie 1977, 132).

⁸ The Christian tradition of ethics even tells us to be benevolent towards our enemies. Although our enemies are not near and dear to us, we should treat them as benevolently as we should treat our friends. To love his or her enemy seems to be, at least in that case, an over-demanding claim or supererogatory act. Although this is undeniably true, we cannot restrict to scope of benevolence to the ones we have special ties to.

⁹ Cf. for the particular value of special relationships: Keller (2013). Thomas Nagel emphasizes that there is no need to subordinate personal to the impersonal because „only if we know what people have reason to do for themselves can we discover what, if anything others have reason to do for them.“ (Nagel 1970, 17)

¹⁰ Benevolence for Kant is to make the good of others to be an end (= beneficence).

refuse the adoption of the end (e.g. the end of reading Goethe's *Theory of Colours* in order to feel pleasure and gain knowledge) that I as a friend have offered him.

In my view, it is an extraordinary balancing act for Kant to reduce benevolence to reverence for moral agency while upholding it as a disposition for sympathetic engagement. It is remarkable that Kantian benevolence qualified as a disposition for sympathetic engagement that should lead to beneficence is merely of instrumental value. Like any other virtue benevolence is a *fortitudo moralis* that helps us to fulfil our primary and reverence-based moral duties.¹¹ Benevolence itself cannot tell us anything about the moral value of an action or attitude. Perhaps, benevolence in Kantian terms is not the kind of virtue we have found in Aristotelian frameworks. Benevolence within the special network of friends is hardly of instrumental value because every member engages in the others for their own sake or engage in the good of these others for its own sake.¹²

2.3 Utilitarianism: Benevolence as an Impersonal Attitude towards Goodness and its Promotion

David Hume has famously introduced benevolence as the overarching principle of utility and fellow-feeling. In his *Treatise* he first locates benevolence within a theory of passions. As a secondary passion or impression, which evaluates and specifies our feelings, benevolence is "a desire for the happiness of the person beloved" (Hume 1978, 367) In this respect, benevolence is not an impartial passion but biased to favor those who are near and dear to us: „But tho' the appearance of objects to our senses be the original standard, by which we judge them, yet we do not say, that they actually diminish by the distance; but correcting the appearance by reflexion, arrive at a more constant and establish'd judgment concerning them.“ (ibid., 603) Humean benevolence also has the function to silence and undifferentiate our judgments. Later on Hume relates benevolence to justice in order to prove that benevolence is the original motive to justice.

As we can easily see here, benevolence for Hume is a complex issue. But it would be too hasty if we interpret Humean benevolence merely in utilitarian terms while equating it with modern approaches to beneficence. Nevertheless, Hume is the father of the utilitarian idea to be and act benevolently by laying the ground for fulfilling the philanthropic law of expanding the circle of sympathy. Unlike Hume for modern utilitarians benevolence is not formed within a special and virtue-based network of friends; it is not informed by a Kantian reverence for moral agency either. Benevolence is rather an impersonal phenomenon, something that consists of the promotion of ends that are standing outside morality.¹³ Therefore, benevolence must be the only virtue – in modern Utilitarianism, it is even "the whole of morality" (Foot 1983, 281). Consequently, impersonal benevolence tries to get rid of the idea that local and close relationships must be prioritized anyway. Proponents of impersonal or universal benevolence, such as Henry Sidgwick or Peter Singer, push for expanding the circle of empathy in order to establish a non-anthropocentric solidarity among all sentient inhabitants of the earth whose acceptance is obligatory for all human beings who are able to contribute.

3. The Particular Psychology of Benevolence: Classical and Contemporary Approaches

¹¹ Cf. Mayr 2018, 229; Wehofsits 2016, 132-134.

¹² Kantian benevolence „can help us specify our general duties to help which would otherwise to abstract to guide us in our actions.“ (Mayr 2018, 243)

¹³ For Foot utilitarian ends are standing outside morality because they are qualified as „good states of affairs“ (Foot 1983, 280).

We can find benevolence as a special matter of psychological concern since the 18th-century moral sense theory. David Hume, as we have already seen, was the first who gave benevolence a place in moral philosophy. Unlike Francis Hutcheson, Hume has never reduced all moral principles to benevolence because he was too sceptical about the view that benevolence is the only virtue. For that reason and by virtue of our special relationships to our family, friends, and neighbours,¹⁴ we have to supplement benevolence with other personal or impersonal virtues.¹⁵

Between Hume and the world of today, the way we analyse benevolence has fundamentally changed. Modern happiness research, which works empirically nine times out of ten, claims to characterize benevolence as an unbiased human kindness to do good that predominantly manifests itself as a general form of pro-social behaviour or “natural altruism”. In the words of Weinstein and Ryan: “Benevolent acts satisfy the need for competence, insofar as one feels effective in helping; the need for relatedness, insofar as one feels more connected with others; and the need for autonomy, insofar as prosocial acts are volitional and autonomous.” (Martela and Ryan 2016, 750f.)¹⁶ From that it follows that in empirical psychology benevolence, if it is a natural and basal trait of human behaviour, do not vary from beneficence because if everyone has a natural tendency to behave pro-socially he or she cannot help acting beneficently. However, there is no agreement between the people who say that we as humans are more egoistic than altruistic and the people who claim that we are more altruistic than egoistic. All above, modern empirical psychology challenges virtue theory which assumes that there are robust and trans-situational character traits called „virtues“. For modern empirical psychology, every virtue is only a certain state of affairs that takes place out of character and regardless of how we can interpret a virtuous action as egoistic or altruistic. In addition to it, it does not play a role to speak about the vital source and spring of being benevolent. Benevolence is only a mental phenomenon, something that has overridden our primitive strives and wantings insofar as it supposed to express or fully represent these strives and wantings. Obviously, the existence of general benevolence as this high-order dimension can be verified by different means of experimental psychology. Several studies that have been working with structural equation modelling and unit-weighted aggregate scores come to the result that there are pure altruistic tendencies indicating that benevolence is based on a genuine concern for others.¹⁷

A last point regarding the particular psychology of benevolence should be mentioned here: In recent moral psychology, we can learn, of course, a lot about how our moral beliefs and attitudes should be affected by psychological findings. In view of benevolence, the so-called *dual-process-model* of moral psychology – that is the idea that there is a dualism of emotion-based and rationally-based cognitive processes concerning moral reasoning – is even able to explain the divergent character of personal and impersonal benevolence. However, this model cannot really differ consequentialist accounts of impersonal benevolence from Kantian or Neo-Kantian accounts of benevolence, which are also

¹⁴ This supplement has nothing to do with extensive benevolence or the fact of expanding the scope of benevolence. Benevolence, in this respect, is no longer a self-standing virtue. We need other virtues in order to put benevolence in its right place.

¹⁵ Hume holds that the impersonal virtue of justice, which is independent of distance, is able to compensate the disadvantages of a morality of partiality: „When an injustice is so distant from us, as in no way to affect our interests, it still displeases us: because we consider it as prejudicial to human society, and pernicious to everyone that approaches the person guilty of it.“ (Hume 1978, 499)

¹⁶ Although Weinstein and Ryan (2010) have shown full mediation of wellness effects by these needs, they did not measure beneficence satisfaction itself.

¹⁷ Cf. Hubbard et al. 2016, 1351. In a recent review on prosocial development, Eisenberg and colleagues indicated the necessity to discuss prosocial behaviour broadly “because it usually is impossible to differentiate between altruistically motivated actions and actions motivated by less noble concerns” (Eisenberg et al. 2006, 647)

impersonal.¹⁸ Perhaps, we have to describe benevolence as a double-sided virtue that is contingent on the other virtues and on the moral system we are living in.

4. Benevolence as a Personal or Impersonal Virtue?

Given that benevolence is a double-sided virtue, the case gets even more complicated if we intend to separate the personal part from the impersonal part of the virtue. Although we agreed that benevolence is not a moral ideal,¹⁹ we must admit that benevolence is a way to promote good states of affairs that lie ahead or are not realized yet. However, we do not even know of what these good states of affairs or best consequences are consist. Benevolence, in my view, is always bound to principles showing the agent how to act well. Consequentialists, who generally adhere to an impersonal view on benevolence, cannot sufficiently explain to what happiness amounts because there are numerous accounts: pleasure, absence of pain, maximizing the satisfaction of preferences etc. In the words of Michael Slote: „One of the most notable features of act-utilitarianism and of act-consequentialism generally' is its appeal from the standpoint of impersonal benevolence. When (and if) we abstract from our particular identities and our personal desires and concerns, and view what happens in the world benevolently but as it were from outside, we wish for optimific acts to be performed and are glad when they are performed.“ (Slote 1995, 37) Consequentialist accounts are based on the idea that there are no natural qualities of a X but there are only states of affairs as commensurable and quantifiable outcomes. With regard to the impersonal side of benevolence, it is rather the aim to make good X's than to make a X good. But what are these good states of affairs? They are “presumably opposed to a good state of affairs from my point of view or from your point of view, and as a good state of affairs from my point of view is a state of affairs which is advantageous to me, and a good state of affairs from your point of view a state of affairs that is advantageous to you, a good state of affairs from an impersonal point of view is presumably one that is generally advantageous, or advantageous to most people, or something like that.“ (Foot 1983, 278)

Talking about good states of affairs perfectly fits situationist accounts of benevolence. According to them it is not me personally who is promoting my happiness and the happiness of others; it is the contingent situation itself and the general law to strive for the advantageous that brings about good states of affairs. By contrast, a virtue ethics account can provide the agent with a reasonable set of necessary character traits enabling him or her to be benevolent or to perform benevolently. In a short passage of *On Virtue Ethics* Rosalind Hursthouse discusses Peter Singer's account of impersonal benevolence from an exclusive virtue ethics perspective. Hursthouse argues that Singer considers impersonal benevolence as a virtue that “knows no species-boundaries and recognizes no special bonds of family and friendship.” (Hursthouse 1999, 224) Like Singer Hursthouse believes that impersonal benevolence is a virtue. She argues that impersonally benevolent agents cannot secure the ends of species survival and the good functioning of the social group. Besides, every person is forced to pay special attention to friends, families, and his or her own communities. Unfortunately, Hursthouse do not give any reasons why moral distance is normatively relevant. Her answer remains unclear or, at least, ambivalent. On the one hand, she says that being partial is natural for human beings, on the other hand

¹⁸ Cf. see the criticism of Thomas Nagel who claims that utilitarianism is not the only normative theory, which constructs an impartial morality (cf. Nagel 2013).

¹⁹ On the question whether benevolence is a supererogatory stance: Stangl (2016). “What is right to, on the Neo-Aristotelian account, is not what is virtuous in some sense but what is overall virtuous. So the mere fact that the agent acts out of benevolent motives is not sufficient to make the action right in any sense, whether obligatory, permissible, or supererogatory. The action must also be, for example, just.” (Ibid., 364.)

she warns not to impede moral education (this comprises how to learn being impersonally benevolent) by fostering these two natural ends.²⁰

As distinct from Kantian approaches virtue theory and consequentialism are able to give our duties to help a motivational basis but they fail to specify these positive duties in a sufficient way. Although Kantian benevolence can help specify our duties to help it lacks a certain criterion that shows how far-reaching this or that duty could be. The case of moral distance could be interesting here (cf. Kamm 2007).

At this point, this juxtaposition of virtue ethics and consequentialism reveals one important shortcoming. While consequentialists like Singer do not need to differentiate between impersonal and personal benevolence, virtue ethicists like Hursthouse have to insist on this discrimination. However, both accounts fail to give an appropriate answer to the question why and how we should differentiate between impersonal and personal benevolence. What could be the reason for that? In my opinion, there is no overriding psychological reason. A sufficient answer depends on what we do understand by justice and whether moral distance matters or not.

5. Conclusion and Perspectives

As a first conclusion, I agree with John Hacker-Wright who argues that “impersonal benevolence is not a virtue, whereas benevolence is one virtue among others.” (Hacker-Wright 2013, 94) This view is unambiguously non-consequentialist. For consequentialism, benevolence can only exist as impersonal benevolence. And if benevolence is a virtue, it must be the only one. From that it follows that every other “virtue” (e.g. justice) depends on benevolence.²¹

In my paper, it was the aim to emphasize that benevolence can only exist as personal benevolence having an universal or impersonal dimension insofar as it is, in the first place, “a contemplative stance” (cf. Spaemann 2006).²² Benevolence, as a non-extensive universal attitude, is not a self-standing virtue but only one virtue among others. It cannot be the only virtue, because every “virtue” has its own end.²³ Consequently, the general pursuit for benevolence should be replaced by an explanation of what “natural goodness” means and to what this goodness amounts to when people try to live in accordance with their capabilities and their moral ideals. Maybe Foot is right when she says that virtues have to serve as correctives in order to give other virtues room for considering special reasons. For example, benevolence can intervene where some bad general human tendency manifests itself, e.g. when justice is lacking.

But let me come to a last reflection about the concrete form benevolence has to take on. As we saw above, consequentialism cannot render benevolence concrete, because it often leads to moral over-demandingness. In Kantian frameworks benevolence only plays an instrumental role: “We ought to foster this disposition only because and in order that it helps us fulfil our primary moral duties” (Mayr

²⁰ Hursthouse 1999, 251, introduces a distinct concept of „social nature“ in order to defend her objective and naturalistic approach against several objections made by socio-biology.

²¹ It is worth mentioning that consequentialists understand by justice neither distributive justice nor a certain virtue.

²² “The universality of benevolence is a contemplative one, not active.” (Spaemann 2000, 106); “Ethical action [...] is a *presentation* of benevolence, and not benevolence itself.” (ibid., 142)

²³ On the separation of ends referring to the promotion of goodness on the one hand and to justice/responsibility on the other hand see: Foot 1983, 281.

2018, 229). Similar to virtue ethics approaches Kantian benevolence is not a self-standing virtue; but unlike Neo-Aristotelians, benevolence does not relate to other virtues although depending on the (impersonal?) reverence for rational agency, which is not a virtue at all. None of these normative accounts is able to give an appropriate answer to the problem of psychological and non-psychological boundaries of fairness. While consequentialists believe that the scope of justice coincides with the expanding circle of empathy, Kantians and deontologists draw a sharp line between the unlimited fulfilment of negative duties (“vollkommene Pflichten”) and the limited fulfilment of positive duties or duties to help (“unvollkommene Pflichten”). Virtue ethicists rarely speak about duties because they believe that a just person has to be, in the first place, only responsible *to* oneself and to other persons. Only then, the just person can also be responsible *for* oneself and the others, namely for its own well-being and the well-being of others.

Finally, I would like to make a case for a revised understanding of benevolence, which is psychologically plausible and not morally over-demanding. In my view, benevolence always depends on how we understand moral distance and whether we accept it as a normative concept. Referring to the phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas each theory of benevolence must not neglect self-other-asymmetries in general and particular relationships.²⁴ These interpersonal structures can be included in a comprehensive account of *graduated benevolence* that considers these relations of nearness and remoteness as a complex of geographical, biological or psychological considerations. Moral distance as a broad concept necessarily implies an independent perspective that one can share if he or she wants to be part of the segmented realm of benevolence. However, this independent perspective should not be mistaken with the consequentialist idea of being able to occupy the moral standpoint of the universe. It is rather a perspective that tries to combine the requirements for being naturally good with the contingent supplement to fulfil the eternal laws of *agape*.

Against this background, we can expect to know more about our responsibilities, respectively about the scope of our benevolence. Incidentally, Kantian benevolence can help us to dimension our responsibilities for ourselves and to others by delineating the duties of help. This could also be an answer to the situationist challenge: If every situation is part of an evaluative network of nearness/remoteness-relationships, it seems feasible to act benevolently towards my parents *and* towards strangers without neglecting the separation of these two ends (e.g. the genealogical distance to my parents vs. the geographical distance to strangers).²⁵ If we take all these points seriously, we have to come to a quite surprising result. Benevolence is really a virtue but not the only one. Benevolence can only render concrete if we know our responsibilities. If moral distance really matters, we can have a good instrument to reframe our responsibilities according to nearness/remoteness-relationships. This would mean that, although we prefer virtue ethics accounts, we first have the task to create a moral system that prevents us from the bad consequences of “completely impersonal benevolence”. (Hursthouse 1999, 224)

²⁴ “It is through the condition of being hostage that there can be in the world pity, compassion, pardon, and proximity.” (Levinas 1981, 117)

²⁵ Genealogical distance overrides geographical distance: If my mother and a stranger are in danger of drowning next to me, I will rescue my mother first. In this respect, my duties to help are as strong as my negative duties not to cause harm.

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