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## Self-Love, Love of Neighbour, and Impartiality

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### 1. Introduction

In an important and widely discussed series of papers, John Cottingham has defended a ‘partialist’ ethic against supporters of ‘impartialism’.<sup>1</sup> The main theme of these papers is that what have come to be called particularistic obligations and permissions based on special relationships are the ineradicable and justified core of morality. These special relationships are said to begin with one’s relationship to oneself – self-love, or *philautia* to use the Aristotelian term employed by Cottingham.<sup>2</sup> They then radiate outwards, to family, friends, and other social and communal groupings such as associations of various kinds (professional, recreational, and the like), geographical and political communities (civic bodies, one’s country), and ultimately to all of humanity.<sup>3</sup>

This basic structure of moral preferences is, in my view, fundamentally correct, at least insofar as relationships among humans are concerned.<sup>4</sup> It has been a signal contribution to ethics by Cottingham to have underlined its importance, sought to give it a theoretical justification, clarified common misconceptions concerning what the structure entails, and refuted some of the most important objections to it coming from the camp of those who, following the current terminology, support a broadly impartialistic ethic. The terminology of ‘partialist’ and ‘impartialist’ is itself somewhat misleading though (as others have pointed out<sup>5</sup>), and I hope to dispel some of the confusions in the following discussion. On the more substantive questions – the nature, scope, and justification of partialistic preferences – there are, side by side with Cottingham’s many correct points, a number of crucial positions he espouses with which a partialist ought to disagree, and others where expansion and clarification are called for. I will explore this in what follows, though a

more detailed account of the specific moral problems raised by various partialistic relationships will be for another occasion. The present discussion is intended as a contribution to what must be an ongoing debate among moral philosophers, one which Cottingham is to be commended for having stimulated; a debate which, in the age of 'globalization', is more needed than ever.

## 2. The basis of self-love

Why is it that morality provides – to some extent, and with caveats and exceptions – that a person may, and in some respects must, exercise a preference for himself over others, for his own activities, commitments, and projects over those of other people? Why, in general, must I be more concerned with my own situation in life than with my neighbour's?<sup>6</sup> Why should I be more worried about whether I am doing my job properly than about whether my neighbour is doing his? About whether I can pay my bills more than about my neighbour's financial situation? Whether I am providing for my own family more than whether my colleague is providing for his? Why should I spend far more time and effort developing my own character than fretting over whether the person over the road is developing hers, or whether her character is good or bad?

The sphere of self-preference involves both permissions and obligations. I am permitted to offer Fred across the road the chance to taste the latest red wine I have acquired for my cellar. If Fred knocks on my door, parched and begging for water, I am obliged in charity to give him something to drink. If Albert and Bill are sitting an exam, and both are tempted to cheat, Albert is not obliged for one second to worry about what Bill might do but is under a strict duty to talk himself out of cheating first (and vice versa). In this latter case self-obsession is a positive obligation. Is this primarily a matter of psychological reality? For Cottingham, it appears that it is. Discussing the impartialism of William Godwin, according to which an agent's preferences must be directed at those who 'will be most conducive to the general good',<sup>7</sup> he asks rhetorically whether 'such an ethical blueprint ... is psychologically possible'. Personal affections and ties are 'an unavoidable part of what it is to be a human being'.<sup>8</sup> Again, '[w]hat empirical evidence we have suggests that transcending the ties of partiality is an enormously difficult process'; and '[i]n short, if ethics is sensitive, as it surely must be, to facts about what most people are capable of, the ethics of impartiality is, *prima facie*, in deep trouble.'<sup>9</sup> Many similar passages can be found throughout Cottingham's writings on the subject.

This is not the only way in which Cottingham justifies partialist morality, but it is the principal one. There are others, one based on a view of perspectives within which ethics can legitimately be done, and another which is metaphysical in character and appeals to a more robust view of human nature. They introduce an ambiguity and unclarity into his argument, and I will return to them in section 4. For the moment, and restricting the issue to self-preference – what Cottingham calls ‘agent-related partialism’ and ‘self-directed partialism’<sup>10</sup> – the emphasis on what is psychologically possible or realistic leaves it open, as Cottingham himself realizes, that a person *might* be capable of surmounting what is ‘deeply ingrained’ and of achieving a life of ‘sainthood’.<sup>11</sup> But ought not all of us aspire to sainthood? Even if we cannot achieve it, must we not admire it and encourage it in those who seem capable of achieving it? If so, how can it be that at the same time we should believe that ‘some degree of self-preference is morally desirable’, not merely permissible?<sup>12</sup> How can a course of action be both morally desirable and yet such that we admire those who renounce it?

The most that Cottingham offers to loosen this apparent tension is to say that although we do not need ‘to disparage sainthood or deny its existence’ in order to defend self-preference, we must acknowledge that ‘for most people, for most of the time’, the ‘autocentric perspective is ... all but impossible to transcend’. For the impartialist to legislate such transcendence for the ‘mass of mankind’ is a ‘blatant violation of the maxim that ought implies can’.<sup>13</sup> Yet this will not do: not only is it incoherent morally, but it is to misunderstand the very nature of sainthood. The incoherence lies in supposing that a common ethic of self-preference should be supplemented by a moral ideal of true impartiality whereby an agent works to ‘free himself from the bonds of selfhood’.<sup>14</sup> How can morality consist of a set of norms for the mass of mankind yet be overlaid by an ideal that is completely *at odds* with what those norms require? It is to treat the saint not as a person who follows *par excellence* the precepts that govern all of us and which the vast bulk of us obey only imperfectly; it is to place the saint in a wholly different species of agent, as though she were not *one of us* – an exemplar for mankind. Hence we can, without appealing to any specific conception of sainthood bequeathed to us by religious tradition, see that there is an argument in favour of thinking of the saint in a certain way – one that preserves a kind of *continuity* between the norms governing the mass of mankind, given our nature, and those governing the saint. The norms are in fact the *same*, though the saint follows them *par excellence*.

Moreover, we can see from religious tradition itself that the saint is not a person who transcends the life of self-preference in favour of one fully devoted to serving an impersonal general good. He is precisely the opposite: the saint is a person who takes the care of his *own* soul so seriously that he reaches a level of moral perfection to which the rest of us should aspire yet which we rarely meet. And the way in which this care of self – a kind of total and unflinching self-preference – manifests itself is not in devotion to an impersonal good, but first in the cultivation of a character that guarantees the saint will reach ultimate happiness or beatitude, and secondly (something inextricably linked to the first) in a love for others – a care of their souls – that takes those others *one at a time*, as individuals, rooted in their particular circumstances, and situated in highly particular relations to the saint. That the saint may choose to do what he does in his own city or in the wilds of Borneo is of no great significance. He is no utility maximizer, seeking whatever is ‘most conducive to the general good’, but a person who seeks to lead other individuals, one soul at a time, to their ultimate happiness – in whatever particular circumstances he and they may find themselves. These may involve many prior obligations and commitments which the saint is still duty-bound to perform, and many special relationships from which he can escape only on pain of serious wrongdoing. If he has the latitude to choose Borneo over Bournemouth, and is inclined to do so, then so he may. But he is under no obligation, and *sees himself* as under no obligation, to make some sort of contribution to an illusory, impersonal greater good. Now it is true that I am speaking primarily of the Christian conception of sanctity – the tradition to which Cottingham pays most attention. There may be differing conceptions in other traditions, but at least where the major monotheistic religions are concerned, to the extent that the non-Christian traditions have a conception of sanctity, it is of a piece with the Christian one.<sup>15</sup>

At the level of what is psychologically possible for most of us, Cottingham’s observations are true enough: the brute fact is that most of us are, and always have been, constitutionally unable to reach the moral heights of the saint. Yet it is still an ideal to which we must all aspire, and history shows that sainthood can emerge in the most unlikely of cases and situations. Yet whatever the psychological realities, the spectrum from sinner to saint never deviates from the path of self-preference or self-love. Only a full-blooded theory of the good can explain why.

So why should anyone love themselves in the first place? And why should they love anyone else? Remember that what we are concerned

with is not self-love as ‘rank egoism’ or selfishness,<sup>16</sup> nor a love of others that might be called concupiscence – love of another for your own sake, that is, for whatever pleasure or usefulness they have for you. Our concern is with genuine benevolence or charity, whereby one wishes the good of a person for that person’s own sake, because they are capable of being good and pursuing the good, and you want them to be and pursue the good, and to help them where possible. Now if a person (*A*) has this attitude of benevolence to another (*B*), then the relation of charity between them will be a kind of partnership or union. Person *B* wants to pursue the good and be good; person *A* wants this for *B* as well, and to help him. Yet *A* also (ex hypothesi) wants to be and pursue the good. But the relation he has to himself is evidently not one of partnership – it is one of identity. So the basic reason *A* has to want the good for *B*,<sup>17</sup> namely that there is a kind of union or partnership between them in the pursuit of the good, must, *logically*, be outweighed by the reason *A* has to want the good for himself, namely that he has a nearness to himself outstripping all others – for nothing is as close as identity. Another way of putting it is to say that the very reason a person has for loving another is at the same time the reason he has for loving himself more.<sup>18</sup> This structure of motivation applies to the saint no less than anyone else.<sup>19</sup>

Here is another way of thinking about the necessity of self-preference, closely related to the argument just given. Charity is more than *mere* benevolence. Wishes are admirable but cheap. True charity requires beneficence as well: as we all know, actions speak louder than words (and much louder than thoughts). So in order truly to love someone, a person needs at the very least to be disposed to act concretely towards the person loved, in a way intended and likely to protect and promote<sup>20</sup> that person’s good. But it is only rational to act (or be disposed to act) in such a way to the extent that one has some amount of realistic *control* over whether the good of the person loved is protected and promoted. To be disposed to do good to a person and yet have no realistic prospect of making any difference to that person’s good<sup>21</sup> is irrational; or if not irrational, then it is insincere or hypocritical – perhaps a kind of ‘babbling’, as Cottingham, echoing Aristotle’s discussion of *akrasia*, puts it in respect of impartialists who perforce do not live up to the norms of their own position.<sup>22</sup> Yet we can see immediately that *whatever* control one may have over the good of another, one must have *more* over one’s own good. Can we think of an even remotely plausible scenario where one has more control over the good of another than one has over one’s own good? Moreover, what else is there to motivate the degree of love

one has for a person other than that (a) they are a person (and so capable of being good and pursuing the good) and (b) one has some amount of control over the ways and extent to which that person is and pursues the good? It follows, then, since one necessarily has the most control over one's own good, that one *must*, on pain of irrationality, love oneself to a greater degree than one loves anyone else, however close they may be. Self-love, then, in its priority of degree over love of another is a *rational* obligation.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. 'Love thy neighbour as thyself'

It is impossible to consider love of neighbour without discussing the very context in which it is rooted, namely that of Christianity.<sup>24</sup> I make no apology for this, first because of the enormous influence the Christian precept of neighbour-love has had over the centuries on ethical debate in Western philosophy, and secondly because Cottingham himself gives it extensive attention in his papers on partiality. As to the first point, I note in particular the extent to which even the most secular or unbelieving of moral philosophers have developed their ideas – usually impartialistic – out of the Christian precept. Typically they seek a non-religious, wholly secular conception of neighbour-love sufficient to replace the religious doctrine for an age in which no religion, especially not Christianity, acts as a norm of behaviour for the majority of people.<sup>25</sup> As to the second point, I note the consistent antipathy Cottingham displays towards the Christian precept of neighbour-love. I want to focus on this latter issue, and will argue that it is born of a serious misunderstanding of what the precept amounts to. Whether Cottingham still holds to this (mis)interpretation is another matter. I will return to the first point later in this section.

What does the injunction to love thy neighbour amount to, on the standard interpretation given to it by theologians and Christian philosophers over the centuries? It is quite clear that my neighbour is any human being, without distinction.<sup>26</sup> It is simply in virtue of sharing a common nature that every one of us is bound to love every other; in theological terms, we are all made in the image of God. Yet this is only the starting point for moral reflection, not the terminus. First, we must note that the love of all human beings could not possibly involve a love of *unqualified* beneficence, since we cannot do good, or even be disposed to do good, to every human being simpliciter.<sup>27</sup> Cottingham is quite right about the necessarily limited resources we have for doing good to others, an obvious fact when considering friendship.<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, however, the same point about limited resources does not apply to the love of benevolence: it would be curious to argue that we are not psychologically capable of unqualifiedly *wanting* the good for every human being,<sup>29</sup> as though doing so would induce in us a kind of mental exhaustion. Yet wouldn't Cottingham's strictures against insincerity and babbling apply? No, because his criticism is directed against impartialists for whom universal love is a norm of *action*, not of attitude; as he says, 'there must be some connection between the holding of a moral principle and the *actions* of those who hold it',<sup>30</sup> where the context makes clear that the principle concerned is one of sacrificing my particular interests and relationships for the sake of global utility. His accusation hits the mark, but the precept of universal, unqualified benevolence is untouched.

Thirdly, given that beneficence cannot apply globally in an unqualified way, and given that the general precept of loving one's neighbour includes beneficence, it follows that to *that* extent love of neighbour cannot apply globally in an unqualified way. So to whom does it apply? Again, the standard – and quite plausible – view is that it applies to those in need, by a kind of moral law of gravitation (to put the point metaphorically but vividly). That is to say, the closer the relationship and the more severe the need, the greater the obligation of charity – but the idea needs unpacking. The obligation involves both action and attitude. Overlying the wholly general and equal benevolence for all human beings is an unequal benevolence based on the psychological reality of degrees of closeness and the constitutional limitations on a person's spreading their affections over every other person without distinction. Again, on this Cottingham is right. Moreover, it is not just a question of affection but of natural limitations on meaningful ties, whether it be to physical proximates, town, city, community, club, political organization, country, and so on. Psychological integrity demands that the dispositions to action on the part of an agent must bear some fairly close relation to the attitudes the agent has, or could realistically have, to the potential object of the action. We would think a man very odd who said to himself: 'I love all people equally. I love my wife too – she's a person, after all. But because she is my wife, my beneficence is primarily directed at her.'<sup>31</sup> Beneficence and benevolence cannot come apart altogether. A person wants to do well by a proximate precisely *because* he loves her in particular or has some other particular positive attitude or affection towards her, no matter how thin it might be.

In what way does the parable of the Good Samaritan<sup>32</sup> suggest anything different from what has just been outlined? None, as far as I can see. The Jew went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Having been assaulted

by robbers and left for dead, he was passed in the street by two of his own race – a Priest and a Levite – who ignored him. The Samaritan, however – not of his own race – ‘*came near* him, and *seeing* him was *moved* with compassion’ (my emphasis).<sup>33</sup> And Christ asks the lawyer (who posed the question ‘who is my neighbour?’) which of the three was the neighbour to the victim, to which the lawyer correctly replied, ‘he who showed mercy to him’. The message is clear. The Priest and Levite were what we might call ‘default proximates’ by virtue of various communal ties – blood, racial, religious, country. The Samaritan was outside all of these, but he became a proximate as soon as he was, like the other two, physically close and in a position to help. The victim was in need, and the person who was not a default proximate was both willing and able to exercise beneficence. Note the use of words in the parable such as ‘*came near*’, ‘*seeing*’, ‘*moved*’: we are not concerned here with a person thinking the abstract and precious thought, ‘whom might I help today?’ but with someone who passively became a proximate through simply passing by, and then actively involved himself in the victim’s plight. Needless to say, by calling the Samaritan the neighbour among the three, Christ was not implying that the other two were in *no* way neighbours; from the point of view of proximity, they were as much neighbours to the victim as the Samaritan. The true *neighbourliness*, however, was exercised by the latter.

So it is clear from the Parable of the Good Samaritan that loving one’s neighbour, at least according to the Christian understanding, requires acting in particular circumstances towards particular people with whom one is in some relation of proximity. The proximity need have no passive element: the aid worker who *chooses* to travel to the wilds of Borneo to provide medical care for people she has never met, and never would have known anything about but for her choice, still exercises the virtue of neighbour-love, even though the proximity is self-imposed. (If doing this involved wrongful treatment of her own nearest and dearest, of course, she would *not* be exercising such a virtue, she would rather be doing good to some at the expense of others to whom she had a more serious obligation. So says the partialist, and I agree.) Moreover, the differential beneficence shown to others must, as I have argued, be grounded on differential benevolence; we can safely assume that the Samaritan, *moved* by the plight of the victim, felt a far more intense love and desire to help him than he felt for the Priest, the Levite, or anyone else who happened to be passing by at the time.

If differential benevolence and beneficence, then, are to co-exist with *equal* love for all human beings, since neighbour means ‘every person without distinction’, we have to say something like the following.

The injunction to 'love thy neighbour *as thyself*' (my emphasis) must – as far as the qualification 'as thyself' goes – refer only to *manner*, not to *measure*.<sup>34</sup> As far as benevolence goes, it must mean that we ought to want the same generic good for ourselves and for all of our fellow human beings without distinction or qualification. As far as beneficence goes, it must mean that we ought to have a *disposition* to do good to others that is qualitatively equal in respect of those others and equal to my disposition to do good to myself. But this disposition *must* be subject to qualification: that our general inclination to do good to ourselves and others in equal *manner* is also an inclination to do good in unequal *measure*, depending on which relations of proximity we are in with respect to other people, where the measure is also governed by the severity of the need of those who are our proximates. Further, that differential beneficence must be grounded (at least in usual cases) in a benevolence that is also unequal in intensity or measure. Finally, for reasons I have already given, the intensity or measure of benevolence and beneficence one has towards oneself will and must be greater than one has towards other people.<sup>35</sup>

Yet despite this fairly standard understanding of what the precept of neighbour-love amounts to, it is not the one Cottingham espouses, and throughout his writings on impartiality we find disparaging references to what he regards as a precept positively inimical to an agent's psychological and emotional integrity. Perhaps things go wrong at the very beginning, when Cottingham relies – unwisely – on the explicit link drawn by utilitarians such as Godwin and, latterly, Peter Singer, between the maxim of utility and the precept of loving one's neighbour as oneself.<sup>36</sup> It is simply incorrect, albeit rhetorically useful, for a utilitarian to equate any kind of principle of utility with the Christian precept of neighbour-love. The principle of utility is not even a legitimate development of the precept for a secular age; it is a *replacement* for it. If the interpretation of the precept I gave above is correct, then one can see on its face how loving thy neighbour as thyself has nothing to do with utilitarianism or any other kind of consequentialism.

Having accepted the exegetical move made by Godwin and his followers, however, Cottingham goes on to tell us: 'Even a little reflection on the precise implications of loving one's neighbour *as oneself* shows that it represents a grotesquely impracticable conception of morality', and he follows Mackie in calling it the 'ethics of fantasy'.<sup>37</sup> It is doubtful, he wonders, whether anyone who 'seriously attempted' to live by the precept 'could survive as a person, as a whole individual, at all'.<sup>38</sup> Such a person would 'risk ceasing to be a whole human being ... risk

losing [their] human integrity and individuality'.<sup>39</sup> Again, not only is disparagement of self-preference in favour of the 'life of universal *agapē*' hypocritical, but 'taking seriously the injunction to love one's neighbour as oneself would be incompatible with an enormous range of ordinary, intuitively quite legitimate, human pursuits ... The contrast between Aristotelian *philia* (friend-love, personal love) and Christian *agapē* (neighbour-love, universal love) is instructive here'.<sup>40</sup> Cottingham tells us that '[t]he Christian injunction to love your neighbour ... as yourself seems to presuppose something impossible: that the sense of special concern which is the hallmark of genuine personal relationships could somehow retain its strength when indefinitely diluted to extend to all humans'.<sup>41</sup>

What does Cottingham recommend instead of Christian neighbour-love? He splits Aristotelian ethics off from its supposedly specious medieval development and commends to us a return to the healthy pagan virtues described by Aristotle. Hence in a section explicitly titled 'The Christian Tradition Versus Aristotle',<sup>42</sup> he takes 'duty to self' in Christian teaching to be 'very much at the bottom of the list, below duty to God and neighbour'.<sup>43</sup> Yet as we have seen, the position of self and neighbour is exactly reversed in the proper understanding of the precept: one is duty-bound to love, first God, then oneself as made in the image of God, then one's neighbour – for God's sake, as also made in the image of God and with whom one is partner in the task of obtaining happiness. (Why must one love one's neighbour for God's sake? Because if we rely on our neighbour-love's being motivated by something agreeable about our neighbour, our love will find itself somewhat faltering. Cottingham may show a touch of sympathy for Hume and the sentimentalist tradition in British ethics, but he also appreciates how little sentimentalism can gain for us when it comes to love of others.)

Instead we must, says Cottingham, 'move back to a pre-Christian perspective', replacing Christ's command to us to 'be perfect'<sup>44</sup> with the 'more down-to-earth slogan of the Aristotelians', which is 'nothing to excess'.<sup>45</sup> The Doctrine of the Mean is to replace the requirement to love one's neighbour, because to follow the latter – in particular as embodied in the Christian saint – is 'lacking in that balanced sense of moderate self-esteem that is necessary for a fulfilled human life'.<sup>46</sup> Yet as I observed earlier, in the same paper Cottingham asserts that adopting his Aristotelian, autocentric perspective does *not* entail disparaging sainthood! It seems that Cottingham does see a problem in the very idea of a person who is 'maximally altruistic, and who (as Jesus himself did) gives up everything for his fellow man'.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, his reinterpretation of the precept of neighbour-love along pagan lines turns a norm of charity into a norm of justice. For having taken on a misinterpretation of the precept, he then proposes that we avoid its unwelcome implications by adopting a more moderate, partly negative maxim owing more to Polemarchus than to Jesus: ‘help your friends, and do not harm your neighbours’ is a ‘promising first attempt at a minimal definition of morality’, where ‘neighbour’ can be construed globally.<sup>48</sup> Remove the original misinterpretation and one hopes the motivation for taking on this far narrower precept would disappear; but not because Cottingham’s pagan reinterpretation has much in common even with the *properly interpreted* Christian maxim. This is because the hallmark of differentiation between justice and charity is that the duties of justice are primarily negative (apart from the fulfilment of agreements, contracts, promises, and so on) and those of charity primarily positive. ‘Do not harm your neighbours’ is precisely a demand of justice, not of charity. It reminds one of the famous remarks of Lord Atkin in the celebrated negligence case of *Donoghue v. Stevenson*:

The rule that you are to love your neighbour becomes in law, you must not injure your neighbour; and the lawyer’s question, Who is my neighbour? receives a restricted reply. You must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to injure your neighbour.<sup>49</sup>

Now Lord Atkin goes on to gloss ‘neighbour’ in a more restricted way than Cottingham, framing the issue in terms of reasonable foresight. Nevertheless, Cottingham’s more global gloss cannot turn a precept of justice into one of charity. His neo-pagan maxim obliges nothing positive in respect of my neighbour – no benevolence, no beneficence (qualified or not), no general attitude of *friendliness* to those not in need, and no gratitude for the kindness of strangers (also a matter of charity, not justice).<sup>50</sup> How any kind of charity is supposed to fit in with, or justifiably be added to, this minimal negative precept is itself not clear. Nor is it easy to see what basis is left even for the special feelings and preferences I have for my *friends*: the justification I offered above, on the standard interpretation of ‘love thy neighbour’, is based on a recognition that general benevolence and beneficence still must vary by *degree* in proportion to relations of proximity. But if the general attitude and disposition of neighbour-love is removed, as it is from Cottingham’s reinterpretation, then what *rational* ground is there even for *loving* my friends, let alone preferring them over strangers? It can’t be that my

friends are human beings just like me, since so are strangers, yet they are excluded by Cottingham from any duty of charity. Can it be simply that they are my friends? But this won't do, because the question will now be: *why* are they my friends? Is it pure sentiment? Is it that they give me pleasure or are useful? Neither of these, as we know from Aristotle, is a basis for true friendship. With a general duty of love for others removed from the obligations of charity, it is hard to see what is left. If I am not bound positively to love all my fellow human beings, then the very *reason* for loving my own friends seems to vanish in favour of pure sentimentalism, whose limits Cottingham himself recognizes.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, why should a person even love themselves? Because they like or 'feel good' about themselves? Yet we know how fickle such sentiments can be. It seems Cottingham's reinterpretation of the maxim of charity is self-defeating.

Since Cottingham misinterprets what love of neighbour amounts to in the Christian tradition, this undercuts the very ground in which he fastens the supposed 'unmistakable logical implication about the nature of virtue' in Christianity, namely that it can be expressed as a 'linear function'.<sup>52</sup> He has no warrant for asserting that according to Christian virtue theory (one part of its overall ethic), for any kind of virtuous conduct or emotion, the more of that conduct or emotion the better; and that as the agent ascends in goodness via increased virtuous action and feeling, so he commensurately leaves self-concern behind. For since, according to Christianity, the aim of every person is to achieve ultimate happiness (by saving their own soul), so the increase in virtue could not *possibly* entail the abandonment of self-concern. If what I said earlier about the perfect self-concern of the saint is correct, the exact opposite is true. Moreover, it is an oversimplification for Cottingham to contrast his Christian linear function with a parabolic function supposed to represent the Doctrine of the Mean in Aristotelian ethics.<sup>53</sup> It is not merely a question of how *Aristotle* viewed the doctrine, but of how one should *reasonably* view it. It could not possibly be, for one thing, that the apex of virtue is as Cottingham represents it, with excess and deficiency symmetrically mapped on either side, in what looks like equal measure. If we know anything about what Aristotle thought about ethics, we know he disparaged any such quasi-mathematical interpretation of virtue and vice,<sup>54</sup> and in this he is surely correct.

More importantly, though, to represent Christian virtue as a linear function leaves no room for any kind of vice of deficiency, and this too is wrong. Since everyone is bound to give preference to their own good – not their own material welfare, or their own possessions, or their own

pleasure, but, in the fullest and most morally loaded sense of the term, their own *good* – a person who acts in such a way as intentionally or otherwise culpably to neglect their own good is guilty precisely of a vice of deficiency, indeed the ultimate in bad conduct. In ordinary circumstances, everyone is bound in charity to look after their own health and bodily well-being. If Joe were to decide one day simply to hand over all his food to his next-door neighbour, or to a stranger in the street, with the result that Joe simply faded away from starvation, then even if we could interpret this as sane behaviour, it would certainly be a vice of deficiency, tantamount to suicide. (Aristotle would probably regard it as an excess, but from the Christian viewpoint it is probably better to regard it as a deficiency with respect to care of one's own well-being.) What if Joe were an aid worker whose specific job it was to distribute food to the starving? Then it might be an obligation of his very state in life to hand over even his own food; at least it would be to carry out a counsel of perfection, as such behaviour is often called in Christian theology.<sup>55</sup> But even Joe in his special state of life, or others who are under obligations of charity that exceed those normally imposed on agents, can be guilty of excess and deficiency. Joe might have an excess of zeal that causes him to neglect other duties; he might despair of being able to help as many people as he would like – such would be a deficiency of hope and confidence in his own work. Whether one should take any specific example, so many of which are all too common even in the least religiously inclined of people, to be a species of excess or of deficiency would require too much analysis for the confines of this discussion. The point is that such falling away from virtue is as well known in the Christian tradition as it is in pagan, other theistic, and secular traditions.

So it could not possibly be that the sort of 'emptying out' of one's self for others of which the New Testament and the behaviour of the saints speak so eloquently (and of which behaviour the Passion of Christ is the exemplar) is to be modelled as a linear function where more is always better. It is not simply that at some point self-sacrifice in most situations is a counsel of perfection and not an obligation (which would suggest, if one were to persist, somewhat dangerously, with lines and graphs, an asymptotic tapering off rather than a straight line as depicted by Cottingham).<sup>56</sup> It is that the unconditional, absolute obligation of seeking one's own good imposes clear, impassable obstacles in the path of one who would sacrifice everything for another, no matter how near and no matter what the severity of need. So Aquinas states the common understanding of love of neighbour when he makes it clear that although a person should bear injuries for her friend's sake, she may *never* commit

a sin in order to benefit her neighbour, even if it is to free her neighbour from sin.<sup>57</sup> To put the matter non-theologically, no one may do wrong to benefit their neighbour. Call it an excess of giving if you like, or a deficiency of self-concern, or (better) both; but such behaviour, on the standard Christian understanding of these things, is unqualifiedly wrong and vicious. No saint literally ‘gives up all for others’, as Cottingham describes it;<sup>58</sup> for no saint gives up her own soul for others. Certainly, ‘to the Aristotelian way of thinking’,<sup>59</sup> that is what saintly behaviour can look like, so Cottingham is right inasmuch as from the point of view of pagan virtue<sup>60</sup> such behaviour appears to lack ‘that balanced sense of moderate self-esteem that is necessary for a fulfilled human life’.<sup>61</sup> But that does not show Christian ethics to have overthrown the Aristotelian perspective, as any glance at the shelves of commentary by theologians such as Aquinas on Aristotle’s ethics testifies. Rather, Christian ethics built on Aristotelianism, jettisoning some parts and retaining others. There is no glib contrast to be had between a linear and a parabolic function. The model cannot be arithmetical, nor can it be simple. The Doctrine of the Mean most certainly survives in the Christian tradition, but how it is to be interpreted, and what its place is in the space of virtue theory, cannot be explored here.

#### 4. The ‘God’s-eye point of view’

If it were merely a question of how properly to interpret the precept ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’, we would not get much beyond exegetical and theological niceties. These should be of interest to any ethicist, theistic or not, since secular ethics, as I have already intimated, defines itself either in opposition to or as a development of ethics as rooted in the Christian tradition.

The issues go beyond mere interpretation, however, and suggest a more worrying thread in Cottingham’s writings on impartiality. This concerns the kind of *justification* available for partialistic relations, which in turn is connected to the metaphysical – or perhaps better in Cottingham’s case, arguable lack of metaphysical – foundations of a morality that allows and obliges agents to engage in certain kinds of preferential treatment of themselves and others, at the same time as obliging them to espouse a universal benevolence, and a universal but qualified beneficence, towards all human beings without distinction.

Cottingham’s considered, overall position seems to be that it is vain to hope for an objective, external justification for ethical partialism. Note that I do not say an ‘impartial’ justification, because although he

opposes this as well, it is in fact a separate and less important issue, for all that the two tend to be conflated in his writings. We can dispense with the second in fairly short order. Cottingham's scepticism towards any impartialist justification of partialistic preference is in my view quite correct, at least if we confine ourselves to those interpretations of impartiality that are his main targets. There can be no justification in terms of impartiality understood as global utility.<sup>62</sup> For all Godwin's later backsliding over whether one should save one's wife (father, and so on) rather than the great Fénelon, he never gives up on the view that the *right* thing to do is to save the author of the immortal *Telemachus*, even if, on subsequent reflection, he seems to think that a person might not be *blamed* for saving his wife instead, and if, as some commentators have suggested, Godwin ultimately opts for a more 'sophisticated consequentialist' position or toys with a kind of rule utilitarianism.<sup>63</sup> Further, the attempt to construct a Kantian-style justification in terms of universalizability, formal consistency, the rational will, or autonomy, will yield something too thin and insubstantial to justify an autocentric perspective with its subtle panoply of complex, multidimensional personal relations.<sup>64</sup>

Where, for Cottingham, does this leave the prospects for justifying partial preferences? This brings me to his ostensible scepticism about any external or objective justification. He brings out his worries in several ways. One is to amplify what I have charged is his misinterpretation of the Christian precept of neighbour-love, by asserting that 'the Christian moralist aspires, in effect, to adopt the perspective of God himself', whereby 'any clinging to the remnants of self-love, however understandable and "natural", represents a kind of failure – a falling away from the highest duty of mankind.'<sup>65</sup> Yet he adduces no evidence of any such view on the part of philosophers and theologians who have interpreted the precept. It simply does not follow from the mandatory aspiration to perfection that one must adopt the 'God's-eye view' of things. On the contrary, since God is equally concerned with the salvation of all souls, whereas for the individual the salvation of his own soul must be his primary objective, for the reasons explained above, it cannot be that humans must adopt the perspective of God Himself, even on the false assumption that they *can*.

In addition, it might be that Cottingham implicitly equates the God's-eye perspective with a consequentialist one, and that this is why he rejects it. In other words, he might think that Christian morality requires adopting the God's-eye viewpoint, but since this viewpoint is consequentialist or maximizing, the follower of such morality is bound

to an ultimately impartialist ethic, which is unacceptable. But even if this is what he has in mind, there is no reason to think, and every reason to deny, that any such viewpoint is what the follower of the precept 'love thy neighbour' is supposed to aspire to. The very idea that God is in some sense a maximizer, and that since the follower of Christian morality is bound to imitate God she is therefore obliged to be a consequentialist, has too many non sequiturs and absurdities in it to list here. On the other hand, if Cottingham understands by the God's-eye point of view the transcendence of self and adoption of a vantage point from which the good of the individual agent's soul is but one among many, then this too is simply not part of what adherence to the precept of neighbour-love entails.

In short, the failure of a utility-based justification of partiality does not of itself militate against other kinds of objective, external justification. And it doubly muddies the waters for the partialist to tie Christian neighbour-love to the God's-eye point of view, and then to think of that point of view as incoherent or unacceptable for being consequentialist or otherwise inconsistent with partialistic preference. For it gives the false impression that any attempt, as it were, to step outside the framework of our special relationships in order to give them an objective foundation is ultimately self-defeating. I will now explore the issue of justification at greater length.

## 5. Inside-out ethics, levels of justification, and natural law

The principal way in which Cottingham broaches the issue of justification is by his repeated assertion that we can only build our ethics 'from the inside outwards'.<sup>66</sup> The phrase is somewhat obscure, but other statements give it some flesh: since we live, he thinks (at least when he wrote these words in 1997) in a 'post-Nietzschean cosmos, with no divine creator looking down on the planet ... there is a sense in which we need instead to create our own values, from our own resources'. This means that 'the search for detached sources of value is not just a *philosophical* mistake ... it is also a mistake which distorts our everyday understanding of what gives human life worth and meaning'. Rather, if we are to 'give richness and meaning to the short journey each of us has to undergo', we must see that 'we ourselves generate that worth and significance by the intensely personal commitments and preferential networks of mutual interdependence to which we wholeheartedly devote ourselves'.<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere, he says that 'each of us must construct the blueprint for fulfilment from the inside outwards, by using our reason to reflect on the

best pattern for a worthwhile life';<sup>68</sup> and, on the Aristotelian autocentric view of human fulfilment, 'the working out of the activities that generate or constitute such fulfilment is taken to be a task which falls within the autonomous control of each individual human being'.<sup>69</sup>

There are some hints of what I submit to be the proper way of looking at these things in the above passages and their general context; taken as a whole, though, the picture they paint is worrying, and not just for a theist. For what they suggest is that the autocentric point of view can only be justified – if such would even be a justification – by an essentially subjective process of discernment with no underwriting by truths that transcend the perspective of the agent 'constructing the blueprint for fulfilment'. One does not have to be a partisan of global utility-style justifications of partiality, or of appeals to consistency, universalizability, and the like, to see that appealing to an 'inside-out' conception of the good life is insufficient for showing why a structure of partial preferences commends itself to *all* agents at all times and places, no matter what the contingencies of social setting, historical condition, or psychological and emotional disposition. Why is it that every person *must* strictly prefer their own good – not necessarily, to repeat, their own material welfare, or their own pleasure, or their own short-term interests – to that of anyone else, no matter how close or beloved? Why in some cases *may* they prefer the good of proximates to those of strangers, whereas in other cases they *must*? (I am not concerned with, or able to explore here, when the agent is permitted and when they are obligated; it is enough to note that there is such a distinction, as Cottingham and other partialists readily accept.) Why, if an agent is free to construct her own blueprint for a fulfilling life free of any 'impersonally defined rules of conduct',<sup>70</sup> is it *not* permissible for a person to prefer his proximates over strangers in any and every case – or even to commit what would otherwise be blatant wrongs in defence of the 'intensely personal commitments' he had constructed for himself, such as lie, cheat, steal, or simply run roughshod over strangers? If the autocentric perspective allows him to prefer himself over others, may he not do with others as he will, if it is in furtherance of his own personal projects?

I do not mean to suggest for a moment that Cottingham would allow any such conduct, or that he would see it as following from autocentricity. My concern is that it is just not clear why none of it follows, in the absence of a transcendent framework of principles that places inherent limits on the dimensions of self-love, love of proximates, and love of neighbour construed globally. The disquiet I have is not one that should be reserved for theists, but shared by any theorist who believes in a realist

foundation for ethical attitudes and decision making. Will the principles we need involve ‘impersonally defined rules of conduct’? Not if by ‘impersonal’ is meant that they make no reference to persons (as opposed to impersonal utility, formal consistency, or some such). They must make reference to persons, to agency, and to the good that objectively fulfils persons as agents. Alan Gewirth, for one, has sought to give a justification for partialistic preference in terms of a principle of universal human rights.<sup>71</sup> Since it is a human right voluntarily to form associations, whether family, community, nation, and so on, there is an impartial justification – in the sense of one applying equally to all agents irrespective of their particular circumstances – for being, at least to some extent, unimpeded in the exercise of preferences for those groupings and their members as against others. The justification, argues Gewirth, applies indirectly, in other words, not at the level of individual action, but at the level of rules and institutions that express the human right to form such associations. So, to use his example of a baseball game, the umpire can call a batter out and force him from the box against the batter’s will without thereby violating his freedom, since the umpire’s action is in accordance with rules justified by the universal right to free association; the batter ‘has freely consented to play the game and to abide by its rules’.<sup>72</sup>

Although Gewirth’s general approach to justifying partial preferences is admirable, it has serious problems that show it to be inadequate, one of the main ones being that many, perhaps most, of the associations and institutions within which partiality is either permissible or obligatory are not voluntary. More precisely, they are not voluntary in the sense required for his argument and certainly not for all of the agents who belong to them, yet whose practice of partiality with respect to them is every bit as justified as it is for those who do act freely in the required sense – say in constructing or maintaining the institution, entering into the relevant relationships, and so on. Gewirth recognizes the problem in respect of one’s country: ‘There is a crucially important respect in which one’s country is not a voluntary association, adherence to whose rules is at the option of its members.’<sup>73</sup> He tries to solve the justification problem by appeal to the idea that the ‘universalist principle’ of human rights includes not just freedom of association, but ‘equal protection of the freedom and basic well-being of all the inhabitants’<sup>74</sup> of a country, where he means ‘freedom’ in a broader sense than mere freedom of association. This in turn justifies a ‘minimal state’ that allows enforcement of the criminal law, and thereby infringement of freedoms at the individual level, without violation of rights – due to the justification of such infringements at the universal, impartial level.

By bringing in further kinds of justification, Gewirth shows that if partiality is to be justified in all its various manifestations, a number of principles need to do some work; justification cannot be reduced to a simple formula of voluntary association. This in itself does not undermine his project, but it fails on its own terms since although the protection one receives from the state might justify certain preferences one has for that state of which one is a member over others, how does it justify a member's preferences for *other members*, that is, for one's fellow countrymen? Is it that each of us receives protection from everyone else as well? This is a highly artificial generalization, realistic in times of war perhaps, but not in ordinary times. Moreover, exactly which protections justify which partialities? Is there a narrow *quid pro quo* of some sort, or a larger idea at work? What if the state protects some of my interests but not others: is my partiality to be circumscribed, and if so how?

Moreover, what about institutions such as the family? People voluntarily create families, but they are also born into them: no consent is had or possible. Gewirth does not extend his 'equal protection' justification to families, so what should be said of familial preferences when there is no question of voluntary association? Surely he cannot want to say that Fred is allowed partiality towards his son since he voluntarily produced him, but not towards his mother because he didn't ask to be born. The baseball game model might work well for clubs, start-up communes, and political parties, but it has nothing to say to any person who finds herself belonging to something not of her own making (at least partly). Yet if we do what Gewirth does not, and extend his equal protection idea to families, or perhaps to those familial relationships that are non-voluntary, we end up with absurdities: are we then to say that I am not even *permitted* to exercise partial preferences in favour of my second cousin twice removed, who lives on the other side of the country, because in no sense can I be construed to receive any protection from him or to share with him in any kind of mutually protective relationship? What if we cannot stand the sight of each other? Are we still forbidden to exercise any special preferences towards each other (for example, to bequeath everything I have to him because he is my sole surviving family member)? I doubt that Cottingham for one would countenance such a thought, nor should any defender of partiality. That my cousin is *my cousin* does matter, and can sometimes be enough for partiality towards him.

Must we, then, take Godwin's bait by affirming that there is after all some 'magic in the pronoun "my"?'<sup>75</sup> Not at all in the sense in which Godwin intends it, which is without any reference to the goods secured by the existence of families and other particular relationships – by which

I mean not any general utility, whether at the level of individual actions or at the level of rules and institutions, but the goods secured *for those who are in such relationships*. And this is where the other thread in Cottingham's discussion of ethical theory is relevant and important, albeit not disentangled by him from more subjectivist, anti-realist, Nietzschean thoughts. For Cottingham does in several places recognize that it is simply essential to human flourishing that there be families, friendships, and by extension communities and nations or other political associations devoted to the common good of their members. He accepts Aristotle's insistence that we must live 'according to nature', that is, according to what fulfils us in our entire human essence. He affirms that our 'ordinary and characteristic' dispositions of preference for self and proximates carry at least *prima facie* ethical weight sufficient to place the onus on the Godwinian impartialist to justify overturning 'our natural human sentiments and predispositions'.<sup>76</sup> He acknowledges that 'moral backing' is given to our familial preferences by 'the close emotional bonding which people develop towards their offspring and the role which such bonding plays in the fulfilment and happiness of those involved'; and more generally, that 'human beings, or at least most of them,<sup>77</sup> find it difficult to flourish unless they can integrate their lives into at least some network of partiality, some structure of mutual dependence and loyalty'. 'In order to live happy lives', Cottingham judges, 'human beings may require, beyond self-concern and family concern, wider partialist structures of interdependence'. Yet he finishes this last point by saying that the concerns had by people within those structures 'will not be limited to that which an impartial observer might assign on the basis of purely objective criteria'.<sup>78</sup>

Now if by 'purely objective criteria' Cottingham means simply utility, or some other impersonal standard of goodness that does not derive from the experience of those who stand within partialist structures, we can agree. But an account of flourishing in terms of what is good *for persons*, given their *natures* – an account founded on the facts of human existence, which as far as anyone can tell, and reason itself proposes, are not mere contingencies or empirical generalizations subject to falsification – is also objective, independent of subjectively constructed blueprints for living. Such blueprints are not the *source* of worth for partialist structures; rather, the structures and relationships of partiality are part of the fabric of human nature to which any worthwhile and reasonable blueprint for living must *answer*. Perhaps this is what Cottingham means when he says that structures of partiality 'seem to rest on an unassailable moral foundation in so far as any ethical blueprint which

attempted to eliminate them from the world altogether would be self-defeating'.<sup>79</sup> If so, then post-Nietzschean thoughts can safely be set aside – in favour of a return to that robust ethic and metaphysic of natural law within which partiality and the objective good for man are most clearly and plausibly shown to cohere.

## Notes

1. Cottingham, 1983; 1986; 1991; 1996; 1997–8. For some of the discussion, see Baron, 1991; Friedman, 1991; Jollimore, 2000; Etzioni, 2002.
2. Cottingham, 1983, p. 90, referring to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 9, Ch. 8: 1168b.
3. In fact Cottingham does not mention all of these groupings, and there are others one could mention, but they fit into the overall structure he proposes. I leave aside for the moment the question, briefly tackled by Cottingham himself, as to how one may distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate preferences (questions of race, class, and gender being the most prominent).
4. As a theist, I hold that a human being's particularistic relationships begin with his relationship to God, on which the structure of all human relationships is based. This will not be an explicit theme of the present paper – much of what I will argue is at least not directly dependent on it – though it will inevitably play a part in my discussion of the proper interpretation of the Christian precept to love one's neighbour. Also, the term 'moral preference' and related terms must be understood correctly; it is far too easy for the opponent of partiality to load these terms with a meaning the supporter certainly does not give them. It is part of the aim of this paper to make the necessary clarifications, following Cottingham's instructive example.
5. Deigh, 1991.
6. I will say more about the meaning of 'neighbour' later, but for the present I use it to cover any other person *including* those closest to me.
7. Godwin, 1985/1798, Book II, Ch. II, p. 169. See pp. 168–77 for the infamous discussion of Archbishop Fénelon and the valet, in earlier editions the chambermaid.
8. Cottingham, 1983, p. 89 for both quotations.
9. Cottingham, 1991, p. 815 for both quotations.
10. Cottingham, 1986, p. 364–8. The difference between the two is that agent-related partialism concerns the 'general structure' of agency – the idea that 'in deciding whether to support *X*'s goals or *Y*'s goals, the fact that I am *X* may legitimately carry a certain degree of moral weight' (Cottingham, 1986, p. 364). Self-directed partialism, also called by Cottingham 'self-favouritism', involves the further thought that as far as the *content* of my commitments is concerned, 'I may assign special weight to my own private interests and satisfactions (as against those of others) simply because they are mine' (Cottingham, 1986, p. 366). He goes on to identify 'philophilic partialism' as a kind of self-directed altruism towards nearest and dearest, whereby I favour their welfare over that of non-proximates simply because the former are specially related to me (Cottingham, 1986, pp. 368–70).

11. Cottingham, 1991, p. 815.
12. Cottingham, 1991, p. 802.
13. Cottingham, 1991, pp. 815–16 for the three quotations.
14. Cottingham, 1991, p. 815, in reference to the Buddhist monk. Cottingham treats such a person and the Christian saint in the same way, as though all such persons aim at the same transcendence of self. It is true that this is what the Buddhist monk aims at, and to this extent he really does follow a pseudo-ideal at odds with anything grounded in the reality of human nature. The case of the saint is wholly different, a distinction Cottingham does not appear to acknowledge.
15. Here is a quotation from a work that explains the nature of Christian virtue, with obvious implications for the notion of sanctity: such virtue 'is an active reflection of the moral attributes of God, and a certain partaking, such as the creature can receive, of the virtue of God. Giving the soul an active resemblance to her Creator and a divine attraction to unite her spirit with Him, this virtue begins in faith and is perfected in charity [that is, love of God], and is the true nobility of the soul'; Ullathorne, 1882, p. 29. Such an explanation implicitly links virtue to concern for the state of one's soul, the objective being, of course, unity with God in beatitude. Love of others, for the sake of God, is built on this concern. And what is true of people in general will be true of the saint in the extreme. Consider also Proverbs 11:17, which says: 'A merciful man doth good to *his own soul*: but he that is cruel casteth off even his own kindred' (my emphasis). This is cited as encapsulating saintliness by the famous Jewish Talmudic scholar of the third century AD, Resh Lakish, in the Babylonian Talmud, *Ta'anit* 11:b. Indeed the Hebrew verb *gomél* suggests not just doing good to one's soul, but *perfecting* it.
16. Cottingham, 1983, p. 90; 1996, p. 65.
17. 'Basic' in the sense of the general reason that motivates love for all human beings, as opposed to more particular reasons having to do with one's attitude to this or that individual.
18. This argument is nothing more than an unpacking of the brief statement of the idea by St Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*, II.IIae, q. 26, a. 4, resp. (1916, vol. 9., pp. 336–7).
19. None of this is to imply that concern for one's own good, in some specific instance, may come apart from concern for another's good: one may lay down their life for their friend (John 15:13), where one gives up a mere bodily good of one's own for the sake of a friend's bodily or spiritual benefit. Or, conversely, one may prefer a specific good of one's own, say one's health, at the expense of doing for others what would otherwise damage one's physical well-being. But in all such cases one's actions must in some way redound to one's *overall* good. So one's good and that of others, although they may come apart in certain specific kinds of case, can never wholly come apart, and the fundamental basis and justification of neighbour-love is one's desire for one's own perfection.
20. And to enhance, stimulate, encourage, and so on for all the proper attitudes one may have, and actions one may take, towards a person's good.
21. Let us leave aside possible mismatch between the control one has and the control one *believes* one has. A person may believe they have control and not have it (or the converse), such that they will not be irrational if their belief

is reasonable, and so on. Spelling out these details is tangential to the main argument, and in fact irrelevant to one's own case, where it is certain that a person who believes they have no control over their own good is either irrational or in some other way malfunctioning cognitively.

22. Cottingham, 1983, p. 93.
23. Although Aquinas does not spell out an argument from control for the priority of self-love, it seems consistent with the argument he does give, and a natural corollary of it.
24. Other religions have versions of the same precept, of course, but I intend to restrict the discussion to the religion that places it at the heart of morality, in which it receives its fullest treatment, and that has had the greatest influence on Western civilization.
25. This was already becoming apparent in the time of Hume and Godwin. It is implicit in the latter's answer to Dr Samuel Parr's *Spital Sermon* condemning Godwinian impartialism. At one point in the reply, discussing the 'doctrine of universal philanthropy', Godwin reduces Christ merely to having the status of being 'among its most conspicuous advocates', as though Christianity were just another place in which the doctrine is to be found. Needless to say, since Godwin identifies universal philanthropy with the 'maxim of utility', Christ turns out to be just another utilitarian, albeit a 'conspicuous' one who made good use of parables. See Parr, 1828 and Godwin, 1968/1801. The relevant points in both are summarized in Singer, Cannold, and Kuhse, 1995.
26. For a representative sample of glosses on Luke 10:29–37 the Parable of the Good Samaritan, see Aquinas, *Catena* (1997, vol. 3, pp. 370–7), and also the *Glossa Ordinaria*. The interpretation of the man who fell among thieves as being, in a manner of speaking, Adam himself, representing all human beings since we share a common nature, was a universal teaching of the Fathers, held int. al. by SS Augustine, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Irenaeus, and Clement, and by Origen. A more recent, standard discussion of the subject, says: 'Our fellow man here [in the context of the obligation to love our neighbour] means absolutely every man without exception' (Higgins, 1992/1958, p. 333).
27. This is the case whatever the scope given to 'every'. If it has narrow scope (meaning something like 'being disposed to do good to every human being at the same time') it is obviously a disposition no sane person could have. But even if it has wide scope ('for every human being, being disposed to do good to that individual', with the implication that the disposition is to actions at different times) it is still not a realistic disposition to have, indeed arguably incoherent. What disposition do I have to do good right now to a Kalahari bushman? What disposition could I have? I could certainly put myself in a position of being so disposed, for example, by visiting the Kalahari, or finding out about aid projects to which I might contribute, and so on. But to do any of these things is precisely to put myself in a position of proximity (of whatever degree) to some individual, as a necessary precondition for my having any meaningful disposition to do good to them. Beneficence is always circumscribed in this way; benevolence is not. Note, however, a single exception to what I have just said, one of relevance only to theists. It is possible to be beneficent to all people at once simply by praying for them. Indeed, one should suppose it an obligation to pray for all people. This specific exception is recognized by Aquinas

- (*Summa Theologiae* II.IIae, q. 31, a. 2, ad 1; 1916, p. 401), and is mentioned also in Scripture (1 Tim 2: 1–5). I am grateful to David Gallagher for bringing it to my attention.
28. See, for example, Cottingham, 1991, p. 800–1, echoing Aristotle's famous discussion of the limits of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8, Ch. 6: 1158a11.
  29. Note – wanting the good for every person, not wanting to *do* good to every person.
  30. Cottingham, 1983, p. 93.
  31. Modulo other family relationships, etc.: we can easily make the thought more complex, but not more natural or admirable.
  32. At this point I note that Cottingham, even though his interpretation of the parable is wrong, is however right to dismiss Marilyn Friedman's criticism of him on this score. Friedman claims he has two different interpretations of the scope of 'neighbour' in the parable – a 'narrow' one in 1983 and a more global one in 1991. She gives no textual evidence of the former, nor is there any; Cottingham makes it quite clear in his 1983 paper that he reads 'neighbour' in the global sense both as regards the impartialist thesis and as regards his own, more minimal reinterpretation of the precept of loving thy neighbour. So it is not at all clear how Friedman manages to detect an 'earlier reading' that has a 'rhetorical purpose' but is nevertheless a 'misinterpretation of Christian doctrine', albeit neither intentional nor unintentional (Friedman, 1991, p. 827, n. 26). Rather, since both Friedman and Cottingham construe 'love thy neighbour' globally without qualification, they both misinterpret the doctrine, as I will show. But whereas Cottingham is quite clear that his criticism is of impartialism as so understood, Friedman mistakenly thinks both she and Cottingham have in their sights only an especially narrow reading of 'neighbour' that takes no account of need, rather than any kind of impartiality thesis (p. 828). But Cottingham's criticisms of 'love thy neighbour' are consistently directed at its alleged impartialism, not at a supposed, objectionably narrow reading of the precept taken as a partialist injunction, and which reading is not to be found in his 1983 article. Friedman, then, mistakenly interprets both the precept and Cottingham.
  33. 'ἤλθεν κατ' αὐτὸν καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν ἐσπλαγχνίσθη' (Luke 10:33).
  34. I use the term 'measure' to mean something like intensity, or strength of feeling and concern. Aquinas speaks of a 'more potent reason' (*potior ratio*), and also of 'quantity' of love (*quantitatem*): Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, II.IIae, q. 26, a. 4, resp. and ad 1 (1916, pp. 336–7).
  35. This, at least, is how I interpret *Summa Theologiae* II.IIae, q. 26, aa. 4, 6, as do writers who base their moral philosophy on the same foundation: see, for example, Higgins, 1992/1958, pp. 332–7; Glenn, 1930, pp. 183–9.
  36. Cottingham, 1983, p. 86. On Godwin, see 1968/1801, pp. 332–3; on Singer, see 1993, p. 11, where he misinterprets the Christian precept of neighbour-love as meaning that one should 'give the same weight to the interests of others as one gives to one's own interests'.
  37. Cottingham, 1983, p. 87; Mackie, 1977, pp. 129–34.
  38. Cottingham, 1983, p. 87.
  39. Cottingham, 1983, p. 88.
  40. Cottingham, 1991, pp. 800–1.

41. Cottingham, 1991, p. 801.
42. Cottingham, 1991, pp. 808–13.
43. Cottingham, 1991, pp. 808–9. The only theological citation he gives for his understanding of this aspect of Christian teaching is, rather oddly, John Locke: p. 808, n. 36.
44. Matthew 5:48.
45. Cottingham, 1991, p. 809.
46. Cottingham, 1991, p. 811.
47. Cottingham, 1991, p. 810.
48. Cottingham, 1983, p. 98.
49. *Donoghue v. Stevenson*, [1932] A.C. 562, at 580.
50. This is because by rendering thanks to another I do not give him what is his (as when, say, I return borrowed property), but what is mine – my pleasure, my relief, and so on, at being helped.
51. Cottingham, 1991, pp. 806ff.
52. Cottingham, 1991, pp. 809–10.
53. Cottingham, 1991, p. 811.
54. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2: 1106ff.
55. Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, II.IIae, q. 26, a. 5, ad 3 (1916, p. 339), on the perfection of charity (*perfectio caritatis*).
56. In other words, if one insisted on looking at it quasi-mathematically, the existence of counsels of perfection (as opposed to strict obligations) would modify the linear function so that the straight line of obligation plotted with respect to conduct and goodness – the more the better – would taper off at the point at which more wasn't strictly better in the sense of being more fulfilment of duty. Rather, more self-sacrifice, say, would mean more goodness but increasing at a lesser rate. The graph would be saying, in effect: 'As you carry out your obligations of charity (for example), then the more you do so the more good you are without deviation or slow-down. But when you start doing things that are admirable but not obligatory – counsels of perfection – then yes, you do increase how good you are, but not so much. You're adding icing to the moral cake, but no more.' One can see how metaphorical this is all bound to become.
57. Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, II.IIae, q. 26, a. 4, resp. and ad 2 (1916, pp. 336–7).
58. Cottingham, 1991, p. 811.
59. Cottingham, 1991, p. 811.
60. Not just Aristotelian. Also, Cottingham's parallel between Christian love and Platonic communal life among the guardians is tendentious (Cottingham, 1983, p. 90). Platonic thought had to undergo many mutations before it could resemble something to which Christian theologians were able to make appeal.
61. Cottingham, 1991, p. 811.
62. Cottingham, 1983; 1991, pp. 802–5; 1997–8, pp. 1–8.
63. For a very useful survey and interpretation of the development of Godwin's views, see Singer, Cannold, and Kuhse, 1995.
64. Cottingham, 1991, pp. 805–6.
65. Cottingham, 1991, p. 89.
66. Cottingham, 1997–8, p. 7; 1996, p. 75.
67. Cottingham, 1997–8, p. 7, for all of these quotations.
68. Cottingham, 1996, p. 75.

69. Cottingham, 1991, pp. 812–13.
70. Cottingham, 1997–8, p. 7. Cottingham uses the expression in the context of what makes human lives ‘valuable’, and I share his principal target, according to which I am permitted or obliged to save one life or another in a Godwin-style fire case according as the life to be saved contributes to social utility. But it seems he has something more radical in mind, speaking of the way in which ‘we ourselves generate that worth and significance’ by means of our personal commitments; and lest he be thought to be making a purely epistemological point about how we come to *know* what is valuable in our lives, he is explicit that ‘[h]ere, in a sense, epistemology and metaphysics coincide’.
71. Gewirth, 1988, pp. 283–302.
72. Gewirth, 1988, p. 293.
73. Gewirth, 1988, p. 299.
74. Gewirth, 1988, p. 299.
75. Godwin, 1985/1798, p. 170.
76. Cottingham, 1991, pp. 813–15.
77. The qualification, as far as I can see, is unwarranted. I do not think one will find a single person in history, no matter how reclusive, eremitical, withdrawn, or devoted to ‘saving the world’ (if that means anything) who has not either relied on some structure of particularistic relationships or suffered for the lack of it. Hence I think Cottingham is wrong to claim that ‘clearly there have been human beings (hermits, wandering friars, and so on) who have managed to live without the ties of special affection’ (Cottingham, 1986, p. 369). A cursory look at the lives of the Desert Fathers should put paid to the notion, let alone consideration of the special affection Christ Himself showed to the Apostles: ‘You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men’ (Matthew 5:13); and many passages in which His particular love for His disciples is manifest.
78. Cottingham, 1986, p. 372, for all of these quotations.
79. Cottingham, 1986, p. 370.

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