Need, Humiliation and Independence

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1. Needs, justice and community

The needs principle—that certain goods should be distributed according to need—has been central to much socialist and egalitarian thought. It is the principle which Marx famously takes to be that which is to govern the distribution of goods in the higher phase of communism. The principle is one that Marx himself took from the Blanquists. It had wider currency in the radical traditions of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century it remained central to the mutualist form of socialism defended by Tawney and Titmuss. The principle underlay the development and justification of the modern welfare state—thus the National Health Service is still founded upon the idea that the distribution of medical resources should be determined by medical need, not by ability to pay. One source of the power of the needs principle lies in the fact that it appears to be both a principle of justice and a principle of community or social solidarity. As a principle of justice it is offered as a corrective to the particular forms of unequal distributions of goods that can result from market transactions, and as a principle of community or social solidarity as a corrective to the possessive individualism taken to be the corollary of a market order.

Recent discussion of the needs principle in political philosophy has focused on its status and defensibility as a principle of justice.[1] However, in much of the history of egalitarian thought, it's role as a principle of community was at least as significant. This is clearest in the work of Marx in which its status as a principle of justice or equality is denied,[2] but its status as a principle of community is affirmed. Production and distribution according to need involves a

[1] See for example D. Miller, *Social Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1976), ch.4 and *Principles of Social Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1999) ch.10.

[2] K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in K. Marx and F. Engels *Selected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968). For a discussion see N. Geras, 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice' in *Literature of Revolution* (London: Verso, 1986).

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direct concern for the well-being of other persons. It forms a bond of community between members of a society and confirms our social nature:

> In your use or enjoyment of my product, I would have the *immediate* satisfaction and knowledge that in my labour I had gratified a *human* need, i.e. that I had objectified *human nature* and hence procured an object corresponding to the need of another *human being*. I would have acted for you as the *mediator* between you and the species, thus I would be acknowledged by you as the complement to your own being.[3]

Market transactions on the other hand involve acting towards others not as ends in themselves, but as a means. In market exchange we approach others as self-interested agents whose relations to each other are instrumental and impersonal: 'Man ... produces only in order to *have*. The object of his production is the objectification of his own *immediate* selfish needs ... I have produced for myself and not for you, just as you have produced for yourself and not for me'.[4] This emphasis on community and social solidarity is typical of defences of the needs principle in the wider currents of nineteenth century egalitarian thought.[5]

A similar line of thought underpins the appeal to need in the form of egalitarianism defended by writers such as Tawney and Titmuss, in which equality is defended as a condition of a particular kind of community. The ideal of equality is tied to the creation of a community in which certain forms of power, exploitation and humiliation are eliminated and solidarity and

[3] K. Marx, 'Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*' in L. Colletti ed. *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 277.

[4] Ibid.

[5] For example in the work Kropotkin, while the needs principle is taken to be a principle of justice (D. Miller, *Social Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1976) ch.7), it is primarily introduced as a principle of distribution that expresses relations of community. Organisations based on the principle 'to every man according to his needs', such as museums, libraries, parks, and schools are presented as examples of local communism that run counter the 'the current of Individualism' that is fostered by market society (P. Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (London: Chapman Hall 1906), 33–35). So also are the variety of associations of mutual aid through which individuals responds directly to the needs of their fellows, such as the guild, the trade union, village communities, life-boat associations (P. Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1955) chs.6–8).

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fellowship fostered and in which vices of character of which inequality is a constitutive condition—such as dependence, servility, sycophancy, arrogance and snobbery—are overcome.[6] The needs principle is sometimes offered as a principle that fosters such a community. It is particularly evident in the work of Titmuss, informing his account of the central institutions for the distribution of social welfare. Non-market institutions providing welfare services on the basis of need are taken to create bonds of social solidarity in modern societies which market economies would otherwise undermine. Thus for example the following account of his 'institutional-redistributive model of social welfare':

> It sees social welfare as a basic integrated institution in society providing both universal and selective services outside the market on the principle of need. Universal services, available without distinction of class, colour, sex or religion, can perform functions which foster and promote attitudes and behaviour directed towards the values of social solidarity, altruism, toleration and accountability.[7]

Titmuss's influential account of the gift relationship belongs to this model of social welfare.

In this paper I will be concerned primarily with the defensibility of the needs principle as a principle of community or social solidarity, rather than as a principle of justice.[8] Why might the

[6] See for example R. Tawney, *Equality* (London: Unwin 1964), pp.40–44 and passim. For a discussion see D. Miller, 'Equality and Justice' *Ratio (new series)*, **10**, 1997, pp.222–237 and J. O'Neill, 'Chekov and the Egalitarian' *Ratio (new series)* **14**, 2001, 165–170.

[7] R. Titmuss, 'Developing Social Policy in Conditions of Rapid Change: the Role of Social Welfare' in B. Abel-Smith and K. Titmuss (eds.) *The Philosophy of Welfare: Selected Writings of Richard M. Titmuss* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987) 263.

[8] It might be objected that distinguishing the needs principle as a principle of justice from its role in promoting a well-constituted community is somewhat artificial. One reason for thinking distribution according to needs is constitutive of a good community is that it is a condition of justice within a community. However, there are I think good reasons for analytically separating the two. A just society need not necessarily be one marked by strong bonds of community, and it may be that considerations of the quality of our social relations entail that sometimes we depart from strict justice. See J. Wolff, 'Fairness, Respect and the Egalitarian Ethos', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, **27**, 1998, pp.97–122 and J. O'Neill, 'Chekov and the Egalitarian' *Ratio (new series)*

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needs principle be thought to problematic as an account of social relations? One stark formulation of possible problems is to be found not in criticisms of the needs principle but in one of the early statements of the principle. While the principle of distribution according to need has been at the centre of one strand of modern egalitarian thought it has a much older lineage. It appears in the *Acts of the Apostles* iv.35 as the principle of distribution among the early Christian communities. In virtue of its place in the *Acts* it had a continuing influence in Christian thought in particular as a basis for the monastic community. One formulation of that principle is to be found in Rule of St. Benedict which is presented in Bettenson's *Documents of the Christian Church* as follows:

> As it is written: 'It was divided among them singly, according as each had need' [Acts iv. 35]: whereby we do not say – far from it – that there should be respect of persons, but a consideration for infirmities. Wherefore he who needs less, let him thank God and not be grieved; but he who needs more, let him be humiliated on account of his weakness, and not made proud on account of the indulgence that is shown to him.[9]

Now this may be a bad translation.[10] However, it is a translation that captures a real potential difficulty in the needs principle, that at least in certain circumstances to make a needs claim can be a source of humiliation. To appeal to others on the basis of need or to distribute goods on the basis of need can be inconsistent with the demands of dignity and the respect of persons.

14, 2001, pp.165–170. Likewise, questions of the adequacy of the needs principle as a principle of community raise different considerations from those concerned with justice.

[9] Rule of St. Benedict, XXXIV in H. Bettenson, (ed.), *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p.167.

[10] Other translations have 'show humility' in place of the rather more blunt phrase 'be humiliated'. There are also complications about the term 'respect of persons' which since Kant has a particular meaning which differs from older usages. The denial of 'respect of persons', can be traced back to *Ephesians* 6.9. The standard gloss on the denial is that it is required by justice: 'a just judge regards causes, not persons'. To give respect to persons is to grant a person some good in virtue of who they are—because they are that particular person—not in virtue of their qualities which renders that good their due (Aquinas *Summa Theologica* IIa-IIae 63.).

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Versions of this Benedictine problem are to be found in more recent debates both among defenders and critics of the needs principle. Among its defenders, one version appears in the recognition that in certain conditions distribution according to need, for example through means-tested benefits, is a source of social stigma and humiliation; hence the concern with the conditions in which redistribution of wealth can made consistent with the dignity of the needy.[11] Among critics, other versions of the problem form part of a wider set of worries about collectivist models of community.[12] Those models of community are criticised for being insufficiently alive to the loss of individual autonomy and independence which some forms of community can involve. Objections invoke a family of concepts associated with dignity and independence—autonomy, self-sufficiency, social standing, social worth. While the appeal to needs is *prima facie* constitutive of relations of care within a society, it is open to objections concerning its compatibility with the autonomy and independence of individuals in modern societies. Correspondingly, needs based criticisms of the market fail to recognise the ways in which markets foster independence and autonomy.

In recent discussion such scepticism about the appeal to needs in the distribution of goods is expressed in concerns about paternalism or authoritarianism. To appeal to needs is to appeal to the existence of necessary conditions for a person to live a flourishing life or realise some basic capacities for human functioning.[13] As such a needs principle is normally taken to involve a commitment to some form of objectivity about human flourishing that allows for some distance between what a person believes is good for her and what is good for her. In the background to a number of criticisms of the needs principle is the worry that this feature of needs-claims forms the basis for a paternalist or authoritarian practice. Some set of experts are able to judge for an actor what is in her interests. Paternalism can be local, where the doctor or social worker determines his patients' or clients' needs

[11] R. Titmuss, 'Universal and Selective Social Services' in B. Abel-Smith and K. Titmuss, (eds.) *The Philosophy of Welfare: Selected Writings of Richard M. Titmuss* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

[12] R. Keat, 'Individualism and Community in Socialist Thought' in J. Mepham and D.-H. Ruben, (eds.) *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, Vol IV, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981).

[13] I assume here that the needs principle concerns categorical or non-instrumental needs. See D. Wiggins, 'Claims of Need' in *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

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without reference to their account of their good. It can be global, where at a political level at worst it leads to 'a dictatorship over needs' in which the state imposes upon a citizens its particular conception of their needs according to its particular contested account of the good life.[14] In virtue of these features the needs principle is incompatible with a recognition of the autonomy of persons, with their capacity to formulate their own conceptions of a good life and make choices according to that conception. It is inconsistent with what Harsanyi calls the principle of Preference Autonomy: 'The principle that, in deciding what is good and what is bad for a given individual, the ultimate criteria can only be his own wants and his own preferences.'[15] In contrast, a market economy since it is directly responsive to the preferences of individuals through their expression of willingness to pay for a good is consistent with the autonomy of individuals. A market order responsive to the wants of individual is to be preferred to a social and political order that is responsive to their needs.

This line of argument is not compelling. That there are real dangers in appeals to needs leading to objectionable paternalistic or authoritarian practices is undeniable. However, nothing in the needs principle as such requires a commitment to the forms of authoritarianism that form the proper object of liberal criticisms, nor is the issue of objectivity as such at issue. A needs principle may involve a commitment to some form of objectivism about human flourishing or well-being. However that commitment is consistent with a commitment to autonomy. The objectivist can recognise that the capacities to deliberate about the ends of life and make choices on the basis of such deliberations are basic human capacities and their exercise is part of what makes for a flourishing human life. Hence, a theory of need can recognise there are educational, cultural and material conditions for the development and exercise of those capacities and a principle of need can insist upon their proper distribution. Insofar as preferences expressed in markets are themselves formed by rational deliberation, they presuppose that those prior conditions have been met. Autonomy requires individuals who have the capacities to exercise rational judgements and choices and those capacities require non-market

[14] F. Fehér, A. Heller and G. Márkus, *Dictatorship over Needs: An Analysis of Soviet Societies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

[15] J. Harsanyi, 'Morality and the Theory of Rational Behaviour' in A. Sen and B. Williams, (eds.) *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 55.

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domains of informal and formal education, and material, cultural, familial and working conditions that develop the capacity for self-determination. Given these non-market conditions for the development of the capacities for rational deliberation in the formation of preference, the market cannot of itself provide a reliable basis for the distribution of resources.[16] Moreover, an objectivist account of human well-being does not entail that what people want is irrelevant to their well-being. It is consistent with an endorsement constraint on what makes a person's life go well. One cannot improve an individual's life by supplying resources that are by some objective criterion valuable to the individual, but which are not recognised and accepted as such by that individual.[17] However, that endorsement is a necessary condition of a good life does not entail that it is sufficient. That people are unhappy if they do not get what they want does not entail that they are happy if they do.

The objectivity of needs-claims in itself does not render the appeal to needs inconsistent with autonomy. There are, however, lines of argument around the consistency of the appeal to needs with a proper recognition of the independence and self-sufficiency of individuals which are distinct from these recent concerns with the objectivity of needs-claims. One powerful line of argument is to be found in the work of Adam Smith. Smith's argument appeals to the Stoic values of independence and self-sufficiency and the potential conflict of those values with appeals to necessities in public life. It is Smith's line of argument that will be my central concern in this paper.

2. Needs, benevolence and independence

At the centre of Smith's defence of commercial society is the appeal to the values of self-sufficiency and social independence: 'Nothing tends so much to corrupt and enervate and debase the mind as dependency, and nothing gives such noble and generous notions of probity as freedom and independency. Commerce is one great preventative of this custom.'[18] However, while the conditions

[16] For a discussion see C. Macleod, *Liberalism, Justice, and Markets: A Critique of Liberal Equality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[17] R. Dworkin, 'In Defence of Equality' *Social Philosophy and Policy*, **1**, 1983 pp.24–40.

[18] A. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press 1982), vi.6.

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for social independence stand at the heart of Smith's account, he also clearly recognises that human beings are vulnerable beings who are dependent on each other and indeed that society flourishes when members attend to the needs of others:

> All the members of human society stand in need of each others assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries. Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by agreeable bonds of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices.[19]

However, while in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith allows that society flourishes in such conditions of mutual benevolence, Smith goes on to make a number of qualifications to that that claim. First, there are limits to the degree to which such bonds of benevolence can extend to the wider assembly of strangers that makes up society. Individuals' partiality to themselves and to the local communities to which they belong render beneficence too weak to act as a basis for wider community. Individuals show partiality to themselves: 'the misery of one, who is merely their fellow-creature, is of so little importance to them in comparison of what they feel for themselves'.[20] In his echo of Hume's famous example, if an individual loses his little finger he will not sleep, whereas he can still sleep soundly following the news of disaster that kill millions of strangers in China.[21] Individuals show partiality to the local communities of families and friends to whom they are directly related.[22] Benevolence cannot be expected to extend to or be extended from the wider 'assembly of strangers' with whom our lives are related.[23] Secondly, such bonds of reciprocal beneficence are not a necessary condition of society. Specifically, through market exchange, individuals who are not directly motivated by concern for each other's needs can still serve each others' necessities.

> Society may subsist among different men, as among different merchants, from a sense of its utility, without any mutual love or

[19] A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1982), II.ii.3.1 p.85.
[20] Op.cit., II.ii 3.4, p.86.
[21] Op.cit., III.3.4, pp.136–7.
[22] Op.cit., VI.ii.1.
[23] Op.cit., I.i.4.9.

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> affection; and though no man in it should owe any obligation, or be bound in gratitude to any other, it may still be upheld by a mercenary exchange of good offices according to an agreed valuation.[24]

The market order thus described does not exist in a moral vacuum. Rules and sentiments of justice governing negative responsibilities to avoid harming others are a necessary condition for a social order. However positive sentiments of beneficence are not necessary conditions for society.

Smith's claim that through market exchange individuals can meet each other's needs without benevolence is expressed more famously in the much-quoted passage from *The Wealth of Nations*:

> It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.[25]

In this passage in *The Wealth of Nations*, however, claims about the limits of benevolence are supplemented by a distinct claim concerning the problems concerning the status of the person who is the object of an act of beneficence, with the forms of social dependence it is engenders. To make an appeal on the basis of one's own need, to talk of 'our own necessities', and hence to call on the benevolence of others, is to render oneself dependent on others: 'Nobody but a beggar chooses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens.'[26] Smith is not claiming here that we should never appeal on the basis of our necessities to the benevolence of others or their humanity. However to 'chiefly' make such appeals is not consistent with one's independence as an agent. The direct appeal to need renders me dependent on the gift of others. In this respect the request that calls upon need contrasts with a demand made upon a person's interest or self-love which in contrast are consistent with one's independence. To appeal to their advantage is to approach others as an independent agent among other independent agents. The argument here for commercial society turns not merely on the negative point that market exchange is consistent with limited benevolence. It is rather the positive point

[24] Op.cit., II.ii 3.2, 86.

[25] A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press,1981), I.II.2.

[26] Ibid.

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that by stripping away reliance on the gift of others, the market foster social independence. Commercial society realises the Stoic virtues of independence and self-sufficiency: 'Every man, as the Stoics used to say, is first and principally recommended to his own care; and every man is certainly, in every respect, fitter and abler to take care of himself than of any other person.'[27]

This claim that commercial society fosters the virtues of independence is central to Smith's account of the achievements of commercial society over pre-modern societies. In commercial society, through exchange and the division of labour, the labourer is no longer personally dependent on the wealthy. Markets free us from the forms of dependency that the gift in pre-commercial economies involves. In pre-commercial society the 'rustic hospitality' of the large property owner serves as a means by which the wealthy exercised power and the poor were rendered dependent: '[The great proprietor] is at all times ... surrounded with a multitude of retainers and dependants, who, having no equivalent to give in return for their maintenance, but being fed entirely by his bounty, must obey him ... Before the extension of commerce and manufacture in Europe, the hospitality of the rich, and the great, from the sovereign down to the smallest baron, exceeded everything which in the present times we can easily form a notion of.'[28] In commercial society ties of personal dependence are broken. The interdependence of individuals is disassociated from personal dependence. Since the income of each worker is not tied to that of any particular individual, the ties that the rich previously exercised over their workers is broken. 'Though [the wealthy person] contributes, therefore, to the maintenance of them all, they are all more or less independent of him, because generally they can all be maintained without him.'[29]

Central to Smith's defence of commercial society is a concern with the conditions in which particular virtues of independence can be sustained and vices of servility avoided. The division of labour mediated by exchange relations is taken to allow the combination of the interdependence of individuals through the division of labour in the production of the necessities and luxuries of life with social independence. A person's fate is no longer dependent on others. Smith recognises that this is partial. Social recognition in

[27] A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* VI.ii.1.1.

[28] A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* III.IV.5–6.

[29] Op.cit., III.IV.11.

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commercial society still follows wealth and vanity is the prime mover of economic growth.[30] And as I shall show below, for Smith this entails self-delusion about the extent of our self-sufficiency. However, in contrast to pre-commercial society, it is taken to offer social independence to actors in the market place. By appealing to each other as self-interested agents, we sustain our independence. Appealing to each other as agents in need of each other's benevolence cannot sustain that independence.

In Smith's argument one can see the embryo of a reply to Marx's criticisms of commercial society and his defence of the forms of community based on direct appeals to need. The argument would run that while market exchange is instrumental, it does not follow that it is simply a matter of treating others as means and not ends. Rather, through market relations we recognise others as independent agents of standing, towards whom we act neither as benefactor nor as dependent. Agents are recommended to their own care and we mutually recognise each other as individuals who are best able to care for themselves. Marx's claim that in commercial society individuals care primarily for their own needs and not those of others is not a failing of markets, but a virtue. In market society there is a recognition of mutual independence. It is rather a society organised directly around meeting the claims of need that render individuals problematically dependent upon each other and fails to properly acknowledge their capacities to care primarily for their own lives.[31]

Now clearly there is much in Smith's argument the egalitarian can accept, in particular that there is something objectionable in the

[30] A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.iii.2.1, p.50.

[31] This line of defence of commercial society finds expression in a different idiom in Hegel's account of civil society. Through contract individuals recognise each other as independent rights holders, as individuals of standing. Correspondingly, the direct alleviation of poverty by welfare payments from public sources of income or the wealthy leads to a dependency that is incompatible with the principle of civil society: 'the needy would receive subsistence directly, not by means of their work, and this would violate the principle of civil society and the feeling of individual independence and self-respect in its individual members.' (G. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (London: Oxford University Press 1967), paragraph 245). The difficulty for Hegel is that poverty is also taken to be an inevitable consequence of the workings of civil society. Central to Hegel's solution is alleviation of poverty through corporations based on particular skills, where membership of the association already confirms an individual's standing (Op.cit., para. 253A). The problem with the

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forms of dependency in pre-commercial society. Marx, for example, joins Smith in praising commercial society for rescuing individuals from personal dependence that existed in pre-commercial society. Typical is the following comment from the *Grundrisse*: 'in the money relation, in the developed system of exchange ... the ties of personal dependence ... are in fact exploded, ripped up ... and individuals *seem* independent ...'[32] What Marx rejects in the kind of view presented by Smith is the form of independence that individuals realise in modern market societies. It is 'an independence which is at bottom merely an illusion'.[33] There are two components to Marx's argument. First personal dependence is replaced by what Marx calls 'objective dependency',[34] their dependency on the impersonal workings of market society, and for the worker while he is not dependent on any particular capitalist, he must sell his labour power to some capitalist. Full independence requires social relations being brought under the 'communal control' of individuals.[35] Second, Marx repeats the theme that this form of independence cannot adequately express individuals' social nature. The independence achieved by the money relation is 'more properly called indifference'.[36] The needs principle shorn of its relation to personal dependence is taken to be the basis for a wider community. Those two claims are independent. There are grounds for scepticism about Marx's claim about the possibility of bringing all social relations under conscious communal control. There are epistemological limits to any such project.[37] However, the second claim may still have independent force. Marx's own specific arguments on independence and community have been examined in

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solution, as Hegel recognises, is that those who are most vulnerable to poverty, unskilled day labourers, are excluded from corporations (Op.cit., para. 252A).

[32] K. Marx *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 163.

[33] Ibid.

[34] A variation on this theme is to be found in the work of Kant: '[M]oney makes one independent, one gains respect by the possession of it; one has worth, needs no one and depends on no one. But in making us independent of others, money in the long run makes us dependent on itself; it frees us from others in order to enslave us.' (Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (London: Methuen, 1979), 177).

[35] K. Marx, Op.cit., 162.

[36] Op.cit., 163.

[37] I discuss this further in J. O'Neill, *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge and Politics* (London: Routledge 1998), ch.10.

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detail elsewhere and I will not pursue them further here.[38] Rather I will draw on a larger tradition of egalitarian argument about the forms of independence or self-sufficiency fostered by market exchange. As we shall see Smith himself argues that commercial society is founded upon a fortuitous self-deception about self-sufficiency. The nature of that deception and a wider related set of misconceptions about autonomy I explore in sections 5 and 6. I want however to begin by considering in the next section some prior issues about the relation between benevolence, justice and need.

3. Impersonality, rights and justice

Smith's arguments on independence in commercial society turn on assertions about the relation between claims of need and benevolence, the limits of benevolence in a world of strangers, and the conflicts between calls on the benevolence of others and personal independence. One response to the arguments might be to break the first link between claims of need and benevolence. Consider the following illustration of the possible conflict between need and dignity from Ignatieff's *The Needs of Strangers*:

> I came upon one old man once doing his shopping alone, weighed down in a queue at a potato stall and nearly fainting from tiredness. I made him sit down in a pub while I did the rest of his shopping. But if he needed help, he certainly didn't want it. He was clinging on to his life, grasping for breath, but he stared straight ahead when we talked and his fingers could not be pried from his burdens.[39]

The old man does not want help since it potentially robs him of his independence and dignity. He doesn't require the charity of others.

[38] See C. Gould, *Marx's Social Ontology: Individuality and Community in Marx's Theory of Social Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), R. Keat, 'Individualism and Community in Socialist Thought' in J. Mepham and D.-H. Ruben, (eds.) *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, Vol IV, (Brighton: Harvester Press 1981) and D. Archard, 'The Marxist Ethic of Self-Realisation: Individuality and Community' in J. Evans, (ed.) *Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[39] M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* (London: Hogarth Press 1990) 9.

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The moral that Ignatieff wants to draw from the tale, however, is not that we should reject the distribution of goods according to need. It is rather that claims of need are not to be addressed by personal benevolence and gift. The virtue of the welfare state is that it transforms needs into rights and entitlements satisfied by bureaucratic means.

> [The old] have needs, and because they live within the welfare state, these needs confer entitlements—rights—to the resources of people like me ... The mediated quality of the relationship seems necessary to both of us. They are dependent on the state, not upon me, and we are both glad of it. Yet I am also aware of how this mediation walls us off from each other' [40]

Through the pension book the old receive benefits without dependency on the gift of particular persons. It grants some form of personal independence: 'The bureaucratic transfer of income among strangers has freed each of us for the enslavement of gift relations.'[41] However while the satisfaction of need through impersonal bureaucratic means sustains social independence, it also undermines solidarity, the direct response to needs of others: 'Yet if the welfare state does serve the needs of freedom, it does not serve the needs of solidarity. We remain a society of strangers.'[42] To call upon impersonal institutions to distribute according to entitlements appears to rob the principle of distribution according to need of its power as a form of social solidarity.

Ignatieff's line of argument breaks the link between needs-claims and personal dependence. However, it does so by breaking the link between needs and social solidarity. How compelling is Ignatieff's argument? There are two components to the argument. One is institutional. The welfare state realises personal independence by distributing goods through impersonal bureaucratic means which cut us off from direct concern with others. It is unclear to me that relations between strangers that remove claims of need from personal gift-relations need be of that kind. There are a variety of different institutional forms which can mediate between strangers and which can have different effects on social solidarity. Some distributions according to need among strangers might foster

[40] Op.cit., 9–10.
[41] Op.cit., 18.
[42] Op.cit., 18.

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solidarity. Titmuss argues plausibly for example that blood donation might have that nature.[43]

The second component to Ignatieff's argument concerns the relation between needs-claims and rights and entitlements. The expression of needs-claims as rights-claims does promise to break the link between claims of need and calls upon benevolence Rights-claims turn moral requests into moral demands. To make a claim on the benevolence of agents is to make a moral request. It is to place power in the hands of the benefactor. To claim a right or entitlement is to make a demand that appeals not the benevolence or charity of agents, but rather to what is required of them. To express needs-claims in the form of rights is thus to put the power in the hands of the recipient of a needs claim. Hence, the transformation of needs-claims into rights-claims renders needs-claims consistent with an agent's affirmation of her independence. However, again it might be argued that while this serves the needs of justice, it does not serve the needs of solidarity. The translation of needs into rights threatens to undermine the forms of direct solidarity involved in response to needs.[44] If responding to needs-claims is only a matter of respecting rights, then it belongs to Kantian sphere of impersonal and impartial duties, not to the sphere of the sentiments. If it is granted that sentiments of benevolence cannot be extended into the sphere of strangers, and that in meeting claims of need we have to rely simply on rights, then the needs principle can no longer be understood as a principle of community. If one's concern is purely with justice then this is not a problem. The needs principle as a principle of justice takes need out of the sphere of benevolence and charity. It does so however to the detriment of needs principle as a principle of social solidarity. Indeed it might be argued that the source of the

[43] R. Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970) and D.Archard 'Selling Yourself: Titmuss's Argument against a Market in Blood,' *The Journal of Ethics*, **6**, 2002, 87–103.

[44] The thought that it might be is central to some of Simone Weil's scepticism about rights and to 'the shrill nagging of claims and counter-claims' that she took the language of rights to engender. Hence the following comment: 'to place rights at the centre of social conflicts is to inhibit any possible impulse of charity on both sides ...' (S. Weil, 'On Human Personality' in D. McLellan *Simone Weil* (London: Macmillan 1989), p.280). For a discussion of Weil's arguments see P. Winch, *Simone Weil: 'The Just Balance'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch.14.

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attraction of the needs principle, that it is a principle of both justice and solidarity, is also a source of instability. The demands pull in opposite directions.

The obvious response to that argument is to deny the Kantian assumptions about justice on which it is based. Justice need not be understood as a cold virtue that takes us into sphere of impersonal duties. Justice is not just a matter of laws and duties, but also of the passions, and to be moved sentiments of justice is to be moved directly by the condition of those who are the victims of injustice. Solidarity can be and often is based on the passions of justice. Indeed this response might be thought to be broadly consistent with Smith's view of justice. For Smith, justice is also a matter of the sentiments. However, as far as the needs principle is concerned a clear inconsistency with Smith's views remains. While Smith rejects an impersonal view of justice he holds that sentiments of justice, unlike those of beneficence, are not concerned with meeting the needs of others. Benevolence and justice differ in their object and related sentiment: sentiments of benevolence are based in the 'sympathetic gratitude' a spectator feels for actions that aim at some positive good; sentiments of justice are based in the 'sympathetic resentment' that a spectator feels for actions that are hurtful of others and are deserving of punishment.[45] While negative duties to avoid harm to others are morally required of us and can be enforced, positive duties to do some positive good are not requirements and are not enforceable in the same way.[46] Acting directly to meet the needs of others falls under those positive duties. Negative duties to avoid harm to others are a necessary condition for a social order. No society can exist without the rules and sentiments of justice. However, commercial society makes possible a social order that can survive without sentiments of beneficence that aim at some positive good for others.[47]

Smith's account of the moral psychology of justice, has two components, an account of the basis of sentiments of justice in the emotions of sympathetic resentment, and an account of the proper

[45] A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, II.ii.1–2.

[46] Op.cit., II.ii.3.

[47] The claim is one about which there are good grounds for scepticism. Market relations themselves require a background of social relations of positive regard. As MacIntyre notes, if one's butcher has a heart attack before one, the response 'Ah! Not in a position to sell me my meat today I see' (MacIntyre, *Rational Dependent Animals* (London: Duckworth 1999), 117) would not just be improper, it would make the workings of a market society itself impossible.

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scope of those emotions. One response to Smith's account might be to reject the first component and enlarge the scope of the sentiments of justice. Emotions such as compassion or pity also come within the sphere of justice. One might indeed deny there is a real distinction between justice and benevolence and with Leibniz take justice to be the charity of the wise.[48] There are, however, considerations that suggest that Smith's account of the moral psychology of justice as being specifically related to emotions such as resentment or anger might have something right about it. A response to injustice, say involving some terrible injury visited upon a person, may involve not just anger or resentment on behalf of the injured person, but also benevolent emotions of compassion and pity. However, the object of those benevolent emotions are the condition of the person, not the fact of injustice. A person who suffers the same injuries but from accidental causes will still be a proper object of compassion and pity, but anger and resentment will no longer be appropriate responses to their situation. The emotions of sympathetic resentment and anger are specific responses to the injustice. Benevolent emotions are a response to a person's needs, not to injustice as such. So would go one plausible line of reply on behalf of Smith.

A second response to Smith would be to enlarge not the sentiments of justice, but rather the proper scope of those particular sentiments that Smith takes to be constitutive of justice. The emotions of sympathetic resentment or anger include among their proper objects not just harms consequent on the intentional actions by individuals, but wider conditions of neediness. One might for example take the forms of neediness in the world that are consequent on avoidable structural conditions to be themselves the proper object of sympathetic resentment. Or again in the case of a person accidentally injured, while sympathetic resentment or anger might not be appropriate to the condition as such, it can be appropriate with regard to failure by specific individuals or public bodies to assist that person. Correspondingly, the sentiments of justice can govern positive duties to meet certain needs. Sentiments of justice can include positive regard for the needs of others. They can and do form bonds of social solidarity with others including

[48] 'Justice is charity a habit of loving conformed to wisdom. Thus when one is inclined to justice, one tries to procure the good of everybody ... in proportion to the needs and merits of each.' (Leibniz 'Felicity' in P. Riley, (ed.) *Political Writings*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 83).

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strangers. This response closes something of the possible gap between the needs principle as an account of justice and an account of community. The promise of the needs principle as I noted at the outset might lie in its combining the two. However, what of the positive concerns of benevolence? In the next section I will argue that even if we reject this account of the passions of justice, there are grounds for questioning the assumption that being an object of benevolence entails a loss of social independence.

4. Equality, community and vulnerability

To make a needs-claim is to acknowledge one's dependence on others. However, is it the case that it necessarily involves a loss of social independence, or correspondingly a failure of standing? A feature of Smith's examples of benevolence and pre-commercial gift economies and the dependence that is taken to follow from them is that they take place against the background of large asymmetries of wealth and vulnerabilities. There is in the history of the egalitarian tradition of political thought a position that reverses this argument, that insists that a background of a rough equality in vulnerabilities is a condition of a community based on needs. Part of the thought behind this is to be found in the following passage from Rousseau:

> Why have kings no pity on their people? Because they never expect to be ordinary men. Why are the rich so hard on the poor? Because they have no fear of becoming poor. Why do the nobles look down upon the people? Because a nobleman will never be a commoner ... So do not train your pupil to look down from the height of his glory upon the sufferings of the unfortunate, the labours of the wretched, and do not hope to teach him to pity them as long as he considers them as far removed from himself. Make him clearly thoroughly aware of the fact that the fate of these unhappy persons may one day be his own, that his feet are standing on the edge of an abyss, into which he may be plunged at any moment by a thousand unexpected irresistible misfortunes.[49]

Rousseau in this passage defends a strong claim about the emotions of compassion—that 'we never pity another's woes unless we may

[49] J. J. Rousseau, *Emile* B. Foxley, (trans.) (Dent: London, 1911), book IV, 185.

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suffer in like manner ourselves'.[50] That claim that the belief that a like calamity could befall oneself is constitutive of the emotion of pity is one that is found often in the philosophical tradition. Thus Aristotle offers the following characterisation:

> Pity may be defined as a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours, and moreover to befall us soon.[51]

Hobbes makes a similar claim:

> *Griefe*, for the Calamity of another, is PITTY; and ariseth from the imagination that the like calamity may befall himselfe; and therefore is called also COMPASSION, and in the phrase of this present time a FELLOW-FEELING.[52]

However, while our belief in the possibility of calamity may foster emotions of pity or compassion, it is far from clear that the belief is a necessary condition for the emotion. On the conditions for the possibility of sympathetic emotion Smith is I think right to deny the necessity of the thought that the some condition could befall oneself: 'A man may sympathize with a woman in child-bed; though it is impossible that he should conceive of himself as suffering her pains in his own proper person and character'.[53] It is possible to feel pity or compassion for persons in situations one could not possibly fall into. There are epistemic limits on fellow-feelings in such cases: imagination is not a substitute for the direct experience of a particular condition for which one feels fellow-feeling. However, the possibility of compassion or pity as such is not ruled out. Similarly to return to Rousseau's example, while kings, the rich, and nobleman may seldom feel pity for those in a subordinate position, it is possible for them to do so.

What is true, however, is that an equality of vulnerabilities—the real possibility that like calamities might fall agents—transforms the social meaning of the attitude, in particular for the person who is its object. A condition of equality removes the possible condescension that follows inequalities in vulnerabilities. There is a difference between expressions of pity or benevolence within an

[50] Ibid.

[51] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* W. Roberts, (trans.) (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1946), II.8 85b12ff.

[52] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), I.6 126.

[53] A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VII.iii.1.4.

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inegalitarian society and that within a society in which as Rousseau puts it 'tomorrow, any one may himself be in the same position as the one he assists is in today'.[54] In conditions of equality the emotion can be understood as an expression of solidarity or fellow feeling, where the standing of individuals is recognised to be equal. In conditions of inequality it cannot be thus understood—and hence its problematic status as a possible expression of charity. The benefactor does 'look down from the height of his glory upon the sufferings of the unfortunate', and the recipient finds themselves an object of a sympathetic gaze from above.

The principle of distribution of needs in the socialist tradition came out of a particular practical experience within working class communities in which the expression of fellow feeling in this sense was central. As Tawney and Titmuss have noted, a particular mutualist model of equality grew out of the experience of mutual aid in conditions of common vulnerabilities that marked the early history of working class movements.[55] Mutual assistance on the basis of needs took place on the basis of an awareness of a background of equality of vulnerabilities. Certainly something of this kind finds formal expression in the rules of the trade-unions and friendly societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Consider for example the following from the Rules of the Sociable Society in Newcastle, 1812:

> We, the members of this society, taking into our serious consideration, that man is formed a social being ... in continual need of mutual assistance and support; and having interwoven in our constitutions those humans and sympathetic affections which we always feel at the distress of our fellow creatures.[56]

Or again consider the introduction to the Rules and Orders of the Honourable Society of Workington February 2nd, 1792:

> When we look upon mankind as being subject to an innumerable train of evils and calamities, resulting either from pain or sickness, or the infirmities of old age, which render them unable

[54] J. J. Rousseau, *Emile* p.185.

[55] R. Tawney, *Equality* (London: Unwin, 1964), 40ff and R. Titmuss, 'Social Welfare and the Art of Giving' in B. Abel-Smith and K. Titmuss, (eds.) *The Philosophy of Welfare: Selected Writings of Richard M. Titmuss*, 122.

[56] Cited in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1968), 461; see chapter 12 for a discussion of this tradition.

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> to procure even a scanty subsistence, when at the same time they are made capable of the noblest friendship, common prudence induces us so to form ourselves into society, that the insupportable condition of the individual may, by the mutual assistance and support of the whole, become tolerable.

Such societies had clear limitations as organisations to meet common needs. They were limited in the scope of those they included and existed within a wider context of large inequalities of wealth which carried real inequalities in vulnerability. However, in the local communities of vulnerability which they formed, they expressed a central theme taken up in a wider tradition of egalitarian thought, that the existence and recognition of common vulnerability to evil and calamity robs the fact of dependency of its potentially humiliating condition.

5. Autonomy, self-sufficiency and independence

The egalitarian response to the problems of the possible conflicts between claims of need and social independence is founded upon a claim about the limits of self-sufficiency. Rousseau's individuals always stand on the edge of an abyss: misfortune can always befall us. The association of mutual aid start from the 'innumerable train of evils and calamities' to which individuals' lives are subject. This recognition of the real limits of self-sufficiency and of our dependence on others is not as such inconsistent with a modest account of the ideal of social self-sufficiency. Indeed Smith's account of self-sufficiency looks on first reading to offer a suitably modest account of the ideal. A feature of Smith's version of the Stoic ideal of self-sufficiency and social independence which marks it off from many more recent accounts of those values lies in its acknowledgement of our dependence on others. It is true that the assertion 'every man, as the Stoics used to say, is first and principally recommended to his own care'[57] invites the response that on entering the world we are first recommended to the care of others on whom we are dependent. However this is an observation that Smith himself goes onto make: 'In the natural state of things ... the existence of the child, for some time after it comes into the world, depends altogether upon the care of the parent'.[58]

[57] A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VI.ii.1.1.
[58] Op.cit., VI.ii.1.3.

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In saying we are first recommended to our own care, Smith's claim is that as adults who have matured from such states of early dependency, the primary responsibility for our well-being is ourselves. In making that claim Smith as we noted earlier is well aware that this responsibility can only be discharged against the background of dependence on others: 'All the members of human society stand in need of each others assistance, and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries.'[59] Finally Smith stresses that wealth and power do not protect individuals from the vulnerabilities of illness, old age and death to which we are all subject:

> In the languor of disease and the weariness of old age, the pleasures of the vain and empty distinctions of greatness disappear ... Power and riches appear then to be, what they are, enormous and operose machines contrived to produce a few trifling conveniences to the body, consisting of springs the most nice and delicate, which must be kept in order with the most anxious attention ... They keep off the summer shower, not the winter storm, but leave him always as much, and sometimes more exposed than before, to anxiety, to fear, and to sorrow; to diseases, to danger, and to death.[60]

The account of self-sufficiency which Smith holds we can realistically expect to achieve looks and indeed is a modest one and indeed may seem to echo the remarks of Rousseau or the documents of early mutual aid associations.

However, Smith gives a twist to this account of social independence. He goes on to argue that while this 'splenetic philosophy' might be true, it is not the account of self-sufficiency that actors in commercial society themselves must assume. The development of commercial society itself requires self-deception about the limits of our self-sufficiency:

> But though this splenetic philosophy ... thus entirely depreciates those great objects of human desire, when in better health and better humour, we never fail to regard them under a more agreeable aspect ... The pleasures of wealth and greatness ... strike the imagination as something grand and beautiful and noble, of which the attainment is well worth all the toil an

[59] Op.cit., II.ii.3.1.
[60] Op.cit., IV.1.8.

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> anxiety which we are so apt to bestow upon it ... It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind.[61]

It is in this context that the well-known metaphor of the invisible hand appears in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* to refer to the indirect and unintended link between the self-deception of the rich, 'their natural selfishness and rapacity' in the pursuit of 'vain and insatiable desires' and 'the distribution of the necessaries of life' across the whole population and hence the general improvement of the condition of the poor through the encouragement of commerce and industry.[62] Now Smith himself raises about the corruption of the character that is a consequence of that self-deception.[63] And there are questions of the empirical adequacy of this claim about the link between this self-deception and the general improvement of conditions for all. But over and above this, the self-deception issues in a misconception about the nature of self-sufficiency which is fostered by commercial society.

Amongst defenders of market economies, and indeed many of its critics, there is a general tendency to immodest characterisations of the values of independence, self-sufficiency and autonomy.[64] Consider the way in which autonomy is characterised through a series of one-dimensional contrasts between autonomous and non-autonomous persons: autonomy is a virtue that is defined in opposition to one vice—heteronomy. The autonomous person who displays self-authorship in the sense that her judgement and choices are her own, who is able to rely on her own capacities of thought and decision, is contrasted with the person who displays excessive dependence on the authority of others, who is acquiescent to the judgements and choices of others. The autonomous person who determines in some significant way her own character is contrasted with heteronomous individual whose identity is defined in terms of some pre-given or other-determined role or character. These vices of heteronomy are vices. However, the simple contrast of autonomy with heteronomy is liable to blind one to other vices which equally undermine autonomy. To use the Aristotelian

[61] Op.cit., IV.1.9–10.

[62] Op.cit., IV.1.10; cf. Smith *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* III.iv.17 and IV.ii.9.

[63] A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.iii.3.1.

[64] J. O'Neill, *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge and Politics* (London: Routledge 1998), ch.5–7.

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terminology, the virtues of the autonomous character need to be contrasted not only with vices of deficiency, but also those of excess.

Self-authorship can take the excessively individualistic form which fails to acknowledge necessary dependence on others: the resulting self-conceit is as much opposed to autonomy as excessive dependence. Benson makes the point thus:

> The virtue of autonomy is a mean state of character with regard to reliance on one's own powers in acting, choosing and forming opinions. The deficiency is termed heteronomy, and there are many terms which may be used to describe the heteronomous person, some of which suggest specific forms of the vice: credulous, gullible, compliant, passive, submissive, overdependent, servile. For the vice of excess there is no name in common use, but solipsism might do, or arrogant self-sufficiency.[65]

The existence of these vices often goes unrecognised. Worse, a feature of much recent discussion of the concept of autonomy, especially in discussions of the relation of markets and autonomy, is that the concept is given an elaboration which celebrates not the virtues of autonomy but these vices. The vices of arrogant self-sufficiency are presented as virtues. The post-modern celebration of the self who plays with identity is perhaps the starkest example. However something of it can be found in the widespread assumption made in many defences of market society noted earlier, that the ultimate criteria for determining what is good and what is bad for an individual are that person's wants and preferences. The principle expresses a strong conception of autonomy according to which to be automonous not only requires being the author of one's own projects but also of the standards by which they should be judged. This romantic image of autonomy expresses not a virtue but a vice. The existence of authoritative standards that are independent of the preferences of individuals is a condition of education within a variety of practices that are a condition of autonomy. The very capacity to rationally reflect upon one's own projects that is constitutive of autonomy relies on the acceptance of such standards.[66]

[65] J. Benson, 'Who is the Autonomous Man?' *Philosophy* **58**, 1983.

[66] See J. O'Neill, *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge and Politics* ch.7 and R. Keat, *Cultural Goods and the Limits of the Market* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

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Smith's core account of self-sufficiency does not display the vices of arrogant self-sufficiency. However, the assumptions of radical self-sufficiency that he takes to be required by commercial society do display those vices. Its obverse is the social invisibility of the networks of care and support that sustain the apparently self-sufficient actors of market society, in particular the rich and powerful. There are good reasons to prefer the egalitarian line of thought that begins from that modest account of self-sufficiency, from what Smith calls 'splenetic philosophy', that starts from our vulnerabilities and the degree to which such vulnerabilities render us dependent on others. A good social order needs to start not from the denial of common vulnerabilities but an acknowledgement of their existence. Self-deception about the limits of self-sufficiency and the extent of our neediness is not a proper basis for public policy that is concerned to foster proper autonomy and social independence. While there can be contingent conflicts between some needs-claims, in particular social conditions of inequality and social independence, there is no necessary conflict between neediness and autonomy. The acknowledgement of our dependence on others, both physical and social, need not be in conflict with a proper understanding of the virtues of the autonomous person.

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