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Introduction to the Special Issue on Philip Pettit's *The Robust Demands of the Good*

<https://doi.org/10.1515/mopp-2018-1001>

Is there anything that unites the diverse goods of love and friendship, of the virtues of character, and of respect? In *The Robust Demands of the Good: Ethics with Attachment, Virtue, and Respect* (RDG, Oxford University Press, 2015), Philip Pettit argues that there is. Pettit takes some of the core insights that have motivated his theory of republican freedom and uses them to back up the bold and surprising claim that the goods of attachment, virtue, and respect all share a common basic structure: they are all, in Pettit's terminology, 'robustly demanding' (RDG, p. 2). To Pettit, these goods are moreover central to living a good life. As Pettit puts it, 'beyond the satisfaction of basic needs, there is nothing more important to having a good life than enjoying the attachment, the virtue, and the respect of our fellows' (RDG, p. 1). In RDG, Pettit thus puts forward a novel way of thinking about important goods that he plausibly suggests sit at the core of the good life for a human being. Along the way, Pettit offers a partial defense of a non-orthodox consequentialism that incorporates elements of virtue ethics and Kantianism, as well as offering insights into moral psychology, philosophy of action, and philosophy of mind. RDG is a very perceptive work of philosophy that is characteristically straightforward in style. What is perhaps most striking about it is its extremely wide-ranging scope.

In this special issue, five philosophers grapple with the arguments and the implications of Pettit's book, and Pettit engages with their contributions in a careful and extensive response. In this introduction, we outline the core idea of a 'robustly demanding' good, we explain how Pettit employs it, and we sketch the main arguments of the five contributing authors.

Pettit's main claim in RDG is that the 'goods of attachment' such as love and friendship, but also the virtues of character and the good of respect, all share a basic structure that makes them *robustly demanding*. To get a first grip on the

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notion of a robustly demanding good, consider the marriage vows that we make in the context of loving relationships. When we get married to our partner, we promise to stand by them *for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health*. It is characteristic of love that such steadfastness is required; love which falls away as soon as our partner loses their job or is diagnosed with an illness is not really love at all. Similar considerations apply to virtue and respect. If you are an honest person, then you will tell the truth also when speaking the truth is inconvenient, and if you respect me, then I cannot lose your respect merely by doing something that you would have preferred I abstain from doing. These examples suggest that love, virtue, and respect all make *robust demands* on us, in the sense that whether we are loving, virtuous, or respectful in our present situations depends not only on what we are doing here and now, but also on what we would be doing in relevant counterfactual scenarios.

From this intuitive starting point, Pettit moves on to give a complex analysis of rich goods. First, for every robustly demanding or ‘rich’ good there is a corresponding ‘thin’ good (RDG, p. 6). It is only when a thin good is provided robustly that the corresponding rich good is provided as well. On Pettit’s analysis, love is the robust provision of ‘care’ (RDG, p. 12); friendship is the robust provision of ‘favour’ (RDG, p. 34); honesty is the robust provision of ‘truth-telling’ (cf. RDG, p. 46), and respect is associated with the thin good of ‘non-interference’ (cf. RDG, p. 78). As the intuitive examples suggest, robust provision is in part a counterfactual idea: you provide a thin good robustly only if you provide it in a number of relevant variants on the actual circumstances. But what variants are ‘relevant’ needs careful elaboration. For one thing, we don’t require heroism out of lovers and friends; we can imagine circumstances where it is understandable that someone’s love or their friendship would end. Just as importantly, there are circumstances where it is entirely appropriate to withhold thin goods. To make these ideas more precise, Pettit presents three main constraints on the possible worlds in which a thin good needs to be provided for the presence of a robustly demanding good. We refer to this relevantly constrained set of possible worlds as the *operative set of variants*.

First, the *priming constraint* clarifies that robust provision of a thin good requires provision only in variants where the primers for that good are in place (cf. RDG, p. 46). Consider the virtue of honesty. As an honest person, I do not need to go around speaking as many truths as possible. Instead, the virtue of honesty requires that I tell the truth whenever someone asks me for information, or whenever it is important that I speak my mind. Similar considerations apply to other robust goods. I am your friend if I look out for your interests when you need me to; if I look out for your interests even when you clearly do not need me to, I am unduly meddlesome or overly concerned. The priming constraint thus

limits the operative set of variants to situations where there are suitable prompts to provide a relevant thin good.

Second, the *support constraint* says that robust provision of a thin good requires provision only in variants where providing the thin good is supported by the overall balance of reasons (cf. RDG, pp. 19–22). The support constraint recognises that even when there is a prompt to provide a thin good, the reason that the prompt provides in favour of providing the thin good may still be outweighed by considerations that speak against it. When my friend is sick, I have a reason to bring her soup. But if I have a medical emergency, the reasons to attend to my emergency may decisively outweigh the reason to drop by my friend's place with a container of soup. If I go to the hospital instead of visiting my friend, I fail to provide the thin good of favour to my friend, but I do so for reasons that our shared understanding of friendship accommodates as valid.

To provide a robust good, then, is to provide a 'suitably primed and supported [thin good] in actual circumstances' and 'in maintaining that [thin good] over a range of possible variations on those circumstances' (RDG, p. 17). Importantly, though, there is nothing counterfactual about the realisation and the enjoyment of the *value* that is inherent in robust goods. Take the example of being loved. We value being loved for elements that are *present in the actual circumstances* that help explain *why* the person who loves us would also provide us with care across a range of counterfactuals. More precisely, what we value about being loved, according to Pettit, is the fact that the person who loves us provides us with care out of a *disposition* to do so (cf. RDG, p. 24). A loving person is disposed towards those she loves to provide them with care when priming and support are present, and those who are loved value this disposition both instrumentally 'as a means of generating the robust pattern of care' (RDG, p. 25), but also as an end.

Once it is recognized that thin goods are provided out of a disposition, a third constraint—referred to by Pettit as the *modesty constraint*—presents itself. According to Pettit, the operative set of variants must be 'modest in the sense of preserving the disposition out of which you act in the first place' (RDG, p. 28). The fact that I would not bring my ill friend soup in a possible world where our friendship had come to a natural end does not mean that we are not friends now. More generally, the provision of a robust good does not require that we would provide the associated thin good also in those possible worlds in which we had come to lack the relevant disposition, or where the disposition was in some way blocked or inhibited.

This structural analysis unifies Pettit's accounts of the goods of attachment, virtue, and respect. For each of these rich or robustly demanding goods, what matters is that the associated thin good is provided in modest variants on the actual circumstances where priming and support are maintained. Crucially, the

operative set of variants does not coincide with the set of variants that are most likely to occur. To take the example of friendship, it may well be quite likely that a friend of mine needs a favour for which the support condition will not be in place. At the same time, the operative set of variants may well include some extremely improbable variants, such as those where my friend falls ill with a rare illness. The operative set is defined by how it is morally appropriate that we relate to each other, or, to put the same point differently, by the roles that rich goods appropriately occupy in shaping our lives.

As Pettit emphasises in chapter four of RDG, we do not value the robust provision of thin goods because this maximises the extent to which we can expect to be provided with a thin good or because of the peace of mind that such provision often produces. Instead, we value the robust provision of thin goods because of the place that we occupy in others' deliberations via their dispositions. Pettit cashes this out in terms of decreased vulnerability to the whim and free will of others. The idea is that when others provide us with a robust good, they do not just *happen* to provide a thin good because it suits them to do so under the circumstances. Instead their dispositions—dispositions which we all train, cultivate, and work to maintain—*control* for providing relevant thin goods across all operative variants. This control is effective even when it is not conscious or deliberate. To explain how our dispositions constrain our deliberation, Pettit uses the illuminating analogy of a cowboy who by default drives his herd of cattle by letting them find their own way but who is also ready to intervene in case anything goes astray (cf. RDG, pp. 153f.).

If a person's dispositions are fully developed, this leads her to 'submit to the requirements of a curved space in which there is no possibility of passing unhindered and unheeding in the neighbourhood of [her] fellows' (RDG, p. 136). For Pettit, dispositions to provide thin goods robustly are 'indispensable resources of mutual security, providing us each with a welcome hold over others: a welcome lock on how we treat and can be expected to treat one another' (RDG, p. 136). Ultimately, dispositions enable us to live together on secure terms that are essential to our flourishing.

On Pettit's way of looking at things, we have reason to move away from a picture of right action and of moral psychology that envisions moral agents carefully considering in every instance the balance of reasons, and then acting on this balance. A more suitable picture paints agents as under a duty to develop their dispositions. These dispositions subsequently allow us to act well without much reflection; they help us find our way through the world in such a manner that we do not need to constantly reevaluate the balance of reasons. While it is important that we further develop imperfect dispositions where they have the potential to lead us awry, and while it is important that we

carefully cultivate sufficiently honed dispositions, on any particular occasion it is generally still appropriate for us to act on our dispositions without questioning their guidance. This view forms the basis of a non-orthodox consequentialism that Pettit defends as both normatively compelling and not unduly demanding (cf. RDG, ch. 7).

As should have become clear in the preceding paragraph, Pettit ultimately utilises the idea of robust demandingness in a way that goes far beyond a structural analysis of the goods of attachment, the virtues, and of respect. When defending his non-orthodox consequentialism, Pettit argues that even from a consequentialist perspective, the proper objects of moral evaluation often are not simply *acts*—as defined by their causal effects, i. e. the thin goods or bads that they produce—but *actions*, where an action is understood as an act and the disposition that controls for the act (cf. RDG, ch. 5). Interestingly, this focus on dispositions implies that Pettit, an eminent consequentialist, shares important concerns with Kantians, who argue that in our moral evaluations, we should pay attention primarily to an agent's maxims.

Pettit also considers whether there are dispositions to inflict harm robustly that form the mirror image of dispositions to provide thin goods robustly (cf. RDG, ch. 6). Such evil dispositions would lead us to harm others across a wide range of situations, possibly even when it would not be in our self-interest to inflict such harm. Pettit argues that such evil dispositions are rare, and that we usually inflict harm on others simply when it serves our interests to do so. But while we generally applaud the provision of thin goods only if they are provided out of a disposition, we tend to condemn harmful acts even when they are not the result of evil dispositions. Pettit suggests that various empirical findings support this conjecture. To give an example, the Knobe effect describes our increased willingness to accuse an agent of having inflicted harm intentionally, compared to our reduced willingness to grant that an agent has bestowed benefits intentionally (cf. RDG, pp. 179–83). It seems that we conceptualise *intentional harming* simply as *knowingly setting back someone's interests*, whereas we conceptualise *intentional benefitting* as something that an agent by definition cannot do incidentally while in the pursuit of other ends.

Despite this relative insignificance of evil dispositions, Pettit argues that it is nevertheless worse to inflict harm in a more robust manner (cf. RDG, pp. 183f.). Actions that involve more robust inflictions of harm imply an increased exposure of the victim to the ill will of the perpetrator, and this increased exposure adds to the badness of the action. If this is correct, then it is worthwhile to pay attention to how robustly harm will be inflicted if particular rules are followed. Pettit uses this idea to explain the underlying normative appeal of three deontological moral principles. He argues that the Doctrine of Double Effect, the

Doctrine of Doing and Allowing, and the deontological preference for remedy over prevention all identify, and caution against, modes of harm imposition that tend to be more robust. To Pettit, this renders these principles useful as heuristics or rules of thumb.

The five contributions to the special issue take up various aspects both of Pettit's analysis of robustly demanding goods, as well as of his defence of a non-orthodox consequentialism that builds on this analysis.

Benjamin Ferguson accepts the idea that a number of important goods are characterised by the fact that they are robustly demanding. What he challenges is Pettit's account of why we value robustness. First, Ferguson argues, a disposition that I have towards you is able to reduce your vulnerability towards me only if it is not within my power to choose to relinquish my disposition towards you. As long as relinquishing my disposition remains within my power—and it usually does—you remain vulnerable towards me. Second, even if dispositions did reduce vulnerability, this is not the reason why we value them. Based on the example of love, Ferguson argues that we can disvalue vulnerability reductions, e. g. in the context of unrequited love, and he proposes that we frequently value being in a loving relationship even though this leads to an increase in our vulnerability all things considered. Ferguson then puts forward a promotional account of robustness and argues that it better explains many of the phenomena and intuitions that drive Pettit's arguments. On Ferguson's promotional account, we value the robust provision of thin goods because it probabilistically increases the extent to which we will receive these thin goods.

Dorothea Gädeke focuses on the robust good of respect and how it relates to the good of freedom that Pettit prominently discusses in some of his earlier work. In earlier work, Pettit characterises freedom as *robust non-interference*, which leads Gädeke to conclude that in RDG, Pettit presents an analysis of respect that, rather implausibly, renders respect indistinguishable from freedom. Based on this, she proposes that we should think of the thin good associated with respect not as *restraint* or *non-interference*, but as 'discursive address'. On this understanding of respect, another person shows us respect if, and only if, they robustly treat us as someone who is able to give and respond to reasons. Gädeke argues that genuinely respectful exchanges between unequally powerful individuals are possible only when such exchanges are backed up by requirements of law; in the absence of suitable legal requirements, unequally powerful individuals will not be able to genuinely meet each other at eye level. Gädeke moreover suggests that respect takes priority over other goods, in the sense that it puts constraints on, and gives shape to, these other goods. As Gädeke puts it, respect imposes demands of the *right*, not merely demands of the *good*.

Isaac Taylor questions Pettit's presumption that 'more robust is worse', or that other things equal, a harm is worse if it is inflicted more robustly. According to Pettit, more robust harms are worse largely because they involve an increased exposure of the victim to the ill will of the perpetrator. Against this, Taylor argues that if a perpetrator inflicts harm robustly, they do so out of a disposition to inflict harm, and this disposition should be thought to *constrain* the perpetrator's free will. If this is correct, it follows that *pace* Pettit, more robust harms involve a *decreased* exposure of the victim to the ill will of the perpetrator. Taylor goes on to argue that even if the 'more robust is worse presumption' were correct, it could not be used to ground a defence of important deontological principles as valuable moral heuristics. After presenting these negative arguments, Taylor proposes a novel defence of deontological principles as heuristics that he thinks is more successful than Pettit's. In Taylor's view, following deontological principles generally helps reduce public norm violations, which in turn helps maintain the social norms that are necessary to guarantee our safety.

Federica Gregoratto problematises Pettit's account of love as the robust provision of care. Drawing on familiar as well as recent feminist critiques of care, Gregoratto argues that the demands of love can be asymmetric, and can frequently become oppressive. While Pettit recognises that loving relationships can become pathological—Pettit sketches lovers who are unduly heroic, slavish, and ruthless—it is unclear whether his account of love can make enough room, and the right kind of room, to accommodate a description of love in its best emancipatory, egalitarian sense. Gregoratto moreover questions Pettit's appeal to established social norms to help determine whether the support condition is in place, as well as his endorsement of the social censure that violation of established social norms implies. Pettit welcomes the social censure that norm violation entails because it strengthens and helps maintain loving dispositions and the relationships that they sustain. Gregoratto remarks that if we rely too heavily on established social norms, then patterns of oppression and injustice are simply reinforced and reproduced. She argues for a more agonistic conception of love, where social norms are problematised, and where the terms of a relationship are explicitly negotiated.

Sven Nyholm also focuses on loving relationships, and argues that Pettit mischaracterizes the reasons why we value love, especially critiquing Pettit's analogy between the reasons we value respect, or robust non-interference, and the reasons why we value love, or the robust provision of care. Pettit's general account of the value of robustly demanding goods has three implications, Nyholm argues: robustly demanding goods are valuable instrumentally because they shield us from undesirable outcomes, they are valuable instrumentally

because they grant us access to thin goods, and they are valuable in these ways because of the constraints that their associated dispositions put on others' free will. Nyholm then goes on to argue that these implications fail to capture how we value being loved. Nyholm proposes that we value being loved in itself, and not just for the benefits that being loved tends to secure. Moreover, we value being loved freely, or by an individual who is rationally committed to us. It is not an elevating thought that our partner provides us with care only to the extent that their free will is overridden by a disposition to look after us.

One of the most striking features of RDG is the way in which it tells a coherent and unifying story about the structure of the good and how we relate to one another in morally valuable ways. The contributions to this special issue challenge particular elements of Pettit's story, while leaving others in place. However, taken together, the contributions seem to pose a formidable challenge to the theory that Pettit presents. If Pettit's analysis doesn't capture love very well, as Gregoratto and Nyholm argue, and if respect should be seen as importantly disanalogous to other robust goods, as Gädeke argues, and if the idea of robustness does not illuminate harm, as Taylor argues, and if the property of robustness matters only because it promotes other goods, as Ferguson argues, then it no longer seems true that the idea of a robustly demanding good is fundamental to morality, and can helpfully explain how we relate to each other in morally valuable ways. Yet in his thoughtful response, after clarifying important points within his theory, Pettit shows how his account of robustly demanding goods can successfully deal with many of the criticisms that the contributing authors raise against it. Other points that the authors raise he is frequently able to fully take on board. All things considered, we believe that this special issue leaves Pettit's account improved and refined.

As guest editors of the issue, we have found it enormously rewarding to give serious consideration to Pettit's ambitious theory and to the many important issues that it highlights and illuminates. We hope that as a reader of this special issue, you will find yourself in agreement with us.