# Introduction: The guises of reciprocity

A general theme of interest to practically every ethical system or theory would have to be reciprocity, whether we understand that as a kind of ethical constant, universalism, the Golden rule, or one of its other many masks. And fittingly, this issue of *Ethical Perspectives* is loosely based around this theme, and in many ways. But what do we understand by reciprocity? Basically: the idea that on the ethical stage, the actors are on equal footing. That nobody is above anyone else; that I expect my sound moral judgments to be reciprocated in the moral judgments of others.

Generally speaking, this requirement for reciprocity dominates ethics, with the notable exception of Levinas. But for the rest, ethicists seem largely consumed with this requirement, and the large number of ethical systems that they have developed differ only on the basis these ethicists isolate for making sound moral judgments. Whether seeking utility (happiness), eudaimonia, hedonism, religious teleology, or the categorical imperative, philosophers continually stress the universal applicability of their principles, and thus a binding reciprocity at the core. Even theories based on social atomism (Hobbes) and *Herrenmoralität* (Nietzsche) depend on the universality of their descriptions despite the fundamental inequality assumed by their systems – and thus too depend on a type of reciprocity, whether arising out of the fear of an overarching authority, or contempt for the slaves.

Levinas is the odd man out here. His system explicitly rejects the notion of reciprocity, of universalism, of any attempt to place the ethical actors at the same level. In fact, for Levinas, there are no ethical actors, but only an actor: I. In writings amazingly free of third person pronouns, or any plural pronouns whatsoever, Levinas uses I and you alone to weave an incredibly tight ethics of my responsibility in the face of a demanding, superior other – you, dear reader. In light of the philosophical tradition

of reciprocity, it is no surprise that resistance to Levinas, and critiques leveled against him, arise from this lack of reciprocity.

And as Tomáš Tatranský argues below, some scholars find Levinas's ethics to be unfeasible because of its asymmetry. Along with Derrida, he inquires into the possibility of Levinas's asymmetry being grounded in some sort of transcendental asymmetry, and then follows Ricoeur in addressing the Other's asymmetrical transcendence through a type of mutual recognition. The end result is Tatranský's own concept of "asymmetrical reciprocity" as modelled through friendship and the gift.

Nathan Bowditch takes Aristotle as his interlocutor, stressing another sort of reciprocity – but certainly a form that is much more classical. For Aristotle, morality lies in virtue, which in turn lies in the golden mean: never too much, never too little. Who can live according to this virtue? The wise person, the *phronèmos*. The key then lies in developing the *phronèmos*, and that is the task of (moral) education. The virtuous person grows into virtue at the hands of teachers and parents. Bowditch addresses the process of this moral education by stressing the reciprocal, or biconditional, character of the virtues of the intellect and character.

Toon Braeckman's paper leads us away from meditations on specific philosophers, and poses a topical question: how are we to make sense of the sort of post-national cosmopolitanism argued for in the contemporary theory of reflexive modernization? Braeckman sees a fundamental problem in this cosmopolitanism, in that it mirrors (national) civil society, and yet this mirror itself does not exist in reality: there is no "cosmo'political'" body capable of mirroring the civil society at the international level. Simply put: there is no world state. Looking to the thought of Marcel Gauchet, Braekman explicates this disconnect, and suggests that political representation is essential in the formation of a political society.

Then follow three papers addressing the notion of forgiveness, each of which includes the notion of reciprocity in one of its guises. First we

read, in Paul van Tongeren's piece, of the intersubjective, and thus reciprocal, nature of forgiveness. Looking at claims of the impossibility of forgiveness, van Tongeren shows how it is possible to remember an evil act *as evil* and yet to forgive the actor. First turning to St. Thomas's notions of forgiveness as a theological virtue, van Tongeren also finds support in Derrida and a more secular approach: forgiveness becomes an unconditional, intersubjective act demanding reciprocity between two actors.

Neelke Doorn then addresses the issue of forgiveness in transitional justice practices, themselves inherently reciprocal, discursive activities. Transitional justice practices are an alternative form of justice, whereby through such mechanisms as truth commissions, nations attempt to overcome painful legacies of oppression and hopefully attain national reconciliation and a break from the past. Restorative justice conferences are another form of transitional justice practices, and can be used to replace court cases in dealing with criminals (especially in New Zeeland and Australia). However, argues Doorn, the oft-stated aim of "collective forgiveness," beyond being vague in itself, is perhaps unrealistic and runs the risk of coercing forgiveness from victims. Instead, Doorn seeks alternative accounts of reconciliation that start not from forgiveness but from the reciprocity inherent in a "narrative equilibrium" and mutual recognition.

Finally, Bas van Stokkom uses the findings of research into peacemaking in restorative justice conferences, and, like Doorn, argues that forgiveness is perhaps descriptively not the best basis for such conferences. Research shows that victims are often not interested in forgiveness, and also that forgiveness can be seen as an obstacle in the way of dealing with past injury. Van Stokkom seeks other grounds for such conferences, perhaps in "opening up" and the reciprocity found in developing understanding through discourse.

John Hymers