

***Caritas and Tzedakah:* An Interfaith Understanding of Interlocutor Dynamics Surrounding the “Act” of Begging**

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Abstract: This essay attempts to destigmatize the act of panhandling/begging and to mitigate the demonization of the panhandler/beggar by elucidating the meaning of charity in Christianity (*caritas*)—through the works of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and, contemporarily, Pope Francis and the preeminent ethicist of the twentieth century, Emmanuel Levinas—and in Judaism (*tzedakah*)—through the works of Maimonides. Moreover, we examine the contentious relationship between charity’s theological and secular, legal contours. We conclude by reflecting on why the act of panhandling need not be an aberration of societal norms and that *caritas* and *tzedakah* allow for the realization and actualization of central ethical tenets in interlocutor dynamics.

Keywords: panhandling/begging, charity, Maimonides, Pope Francis, nonverbal communication

Introduction

As stated in the introduction to their edited volume *Urban Communication Regulation*, Jassem and Drucker observe that the twenty-first century “is the first century in which the majority of the world’s people will live in urban areas with over three billion residents in cities representing a demographic transformation on an unprecedented scale” (2018, ix). Against the backdrop of skyscrapers, luxury condominiums, high-end stores, and other venues showcasing material wealth and the creature comforts of living—all purportedly contributing to the “American dream” in one way, shape, or form—and teeming with people who are well fed, well-heeled and well loved, we have in each urban center a tale of two cities, where for hundreds of thousands of people across the country, the dream is illusory and more nightmarish than oneiric. In keeping with the Dickensian allusion, one of the most well-known stories encompassing themes of poverty, charity, and begging is Charles Dickens’s 1837 novel *Oliver Twist*. At the end of

Chapter II, *Oliver Twist* twice utters the famous request, “Please, sir, I want some more” (Dickens 2005, 36). According to Dennis Walder in *Dickens and Religion*, “the fundamental aim of *Oliver Twist* . . . is to move us . . . into sympathy and charity for the poor” (2007, 42), and charity is the vehicle for the triumph of goodness (44). He further explains that Dickens believed that “charity is ‘the one great cardinal virtue, which properly nourished and exercised, leads to, if it does not necessarily include, all the others’” (45).

According to the National Homelessness Law Center (NHLC), begging and panhandling are appellations ascribed to “acts of asking for help by people experiencing homelessness and those at risk, often by ordinances that criminalize this act” (“Panhandling,” n.d.). In supplementing this definition, the NHLC adds that, as more people find themselves in the perilous situation of being unable to meet their basic needs (food, water, shelter), the legal constraints legally banning panhandling and begging have increased 43% over the past decade (“Panhandling,” n.d.).

The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH, n.d.) conceives of begging and panhandling as “subsistence strategies” characterized as “informal economic activities” facilitating a key goal of “earn[ing] income on a day-to-day basis so that they can meet their immediate needs for food, shelter, hygiene products and/or entertainment.” Panhandlers and beggars can also provide entertainment to others, known as busking (“Panhandling, Busking and Squeegeeing,” n.d.). Although the IGH notes that not all homeless people panhandle and beg, and that not all panhandlers or beggars are homeless, there is an overlap between homelessness and panhandling/begging (IGH, n.d.). The IGH delineates 17 “causes & intersections” of and with homelessness, of which begging and panhandling constitute a paired intersection on the list. On a given day in January 2020, 580,466 people were homeless (National Alliance to End Homelessness, n.d.; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2021). Panhandling and begging seem like stopgap measures—as mere ersatz—but they are necessary for managing the quotidian exigencies. The goal of the campaign #IAskForHelpBecause, initiated by the NHLC in 2018, is to “humanize those who need to ask for help while advocating for their constitutional right to do so” (“Panhandling,” n.d.). In their brilliant article, “Begging to Differ: The First Amendment and the Right to Beg,” Helen Hershkoff and Adam S. Cohen acknowledge that “many of the world’s major religions—and many secular ethicists—hold that there is a duty to give money to people in need” (1991, 899).

This essay attempts to destigmatize the act of panhandling/begging and to mitigate the demonization of the panhandler/beggar by elucidating the meaning of charity in Christianity (*caritas*), through the works of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and, contemporarily, Pope Francis, and in Judaism (*tzedakah*), through the works of Maimonides. As a society, we have been more magnanimous toward the more institutional approaches to giving (e.g., food banks, the American Red Cross, round-up giving, social mediated solicitations like GoFundMe), as well as at extolling the virtues of the act of giving, while downplaying the act of receiving, rendering it more of a vice than a virtue both in intent and practice. The charitable act, manifest here as begging/panhandling, is fundamentally a phenomenological

and ethical communicative reciprocal encounter between interlocutors, employing both verbal and nonverbal modalities of communication.

Our argument proceeds as follows: We trace the meaning of charity as defined by prominent Church fathers and its resonance in the views of the current pontiff, Pope Francis, and the preeminent ethicist of the twentieth-century, Emmanuel Levinas; we look toward the meaning of charity as defined by twelfth-century Jewish philosopher and scholar Maimonides and its resonance with contemporary economic paradigms; we examine the contentious relationship between charity's theological and secular, legal contours; we conclude by reflecting on why the act of panhandling need not be an aberration of societal norms and that *caritas* and *tzedakah* allow for the realization and actualization of central ethical tenets in interlocutor dynamics.

St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Pope Francis on *Caritas* and the Act of Almsgiving

The provenance of *caritas* is as long-standing as the patristic tradition itself with the redoubtable Church fathers, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, writing extensively on the *topos* of Christian charity. More recently, Pope Francis provides an intriguingly pastoral and phenomenological hermeneutic for how one is to practice *caritas* through almsgiving. His guidance illuminates ethical communication modalities and, as can be argued, operates from a Levinasian vantage. In light of this fact, the scope of this section will limit its explanations of *caritas* as it relates to the rhetorical and theological appeals surrounding the practice of almsgiving.

Much of St. Augustine's rhetorical triumph in spreading Christianity can be attributed to the abiding influence of Cicero's rhetorical theories and his views on wisdom written in *Hortensius*, which Augustine admitted induced in him a prayerful ardor (Troup 1999, 15–32). Relatedly, the concept of *caritas* or charity, characterized by Cicero as the love for humankind, was also appropriated by patristics; when used to translate the Greek *agape* found in Holy Scriptures, *caritas* was Christianized to embody Jesus's principal teaching on love of God and love of neighbor ("Works of Charity" 2003). Gary A. Anderson's exceptional book *Charity* offers a profound explication of *caritas* as not just a "Kantian 'duty' . . . but a declaration of belief about the world and the God who created it" (2013, 4).

In his *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine defines charity as "a motion of the soul whose purpose is to enjoy God for His own sake and oneself and one's neighbor for the sake of God" (Riga 1968, 378). Augustine also defines and expounds upon Christian charity in several writings and important sermons in the early fifth century. Some of Augustine's most codified teachings on charity are articulated in his *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, a set of sermons dedicated to the exegesis of a single biblical text in an effort to lay the foundation of the newly formed faith with the first stone of Christian love. Augustine argued that the motivation and benefits of *caritas* enacted through almsgiving centered on several scriptural-based premises including consubstantiality between God and the poor, almsgiving as universal obligation, almsgiving as indemnification for sins, carnal

gifts as a means of securing spiritual recompense, and almsgiving as interdependent burden sharing between rich (burden of superfluity) and poor (burden of not having) (Ramsey 1982, 257). The primary principle we focus on, since it relates directly to the theological turn in phenomenology and ethical encounters with panhandlers, is the first premise, what Boniface Ramsey labels “the identification of Christ and the poor,” which constitutes Christian almsgiving specifically as “Christian” (1982, 253–54). *Caritas*’s consubstantiality between love of God and the poor is expressed in Augustine’s oft quoting of Matthew 25:40: “When you did it to one of these least of mine you did it to me” (Ramsey 2007, 298). Moreover, in another sermon, Augustine instructed that “if you love the brother whom you see, you will see God at the same time, because you will see charity itself, and God dwells within it” (Levering 2013, 58). St. Augustine established an act of *caritas*, such as almsgiving, metaphorically, not only as an expression of faith but also as a mutually reciprocal encounter with Christ.

In terms of the act of almsgiving, Augustine explicates St. John’s warning that “if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17). As we will see, Aquinas argues that it is kindness or mercy, and not *caritas* directly, that is the catalyst for almsgiving, a vehicle of charity that Riga (1968) calls “a participated theological virtue” (379). Augustine qualifies St. John’s admonitory statement by reassuring his flock that one’s charity must be nourished by practice. This transpires through almsgiving. Augustine makes the connection more pointedly: “Lend your money to the Lord, therefore, in the hand of the poor” (Ramsey 1982, 229). As Ramsey (1982) wrote, all of Augustine’s attempts to equate the panhandler with Christ and with charity itself are aimed to rhetorically animate and galvanize the imagination of the auditor or reader and represent more than “simply the necessary accouterments to eleemosynary exhortations” (230). To date, the Catechism of the Catholic Church advocates *caritas*’s central connection between love of neighbor and love of God as well as its refining and conversionary capacity. “Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love” (Catholic Church 1997, 1827).

Volume thirty-four of St. Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* provides an exhaustive examination of the Christian virtue of charity and articulates and prioritizes a hierarchy for love (Question 26) and later for charitable giving (Question 32). For Aquinas, *caritas* was more than a Christian obligation; echoing St. Paul, he averred that it was the greatest of all virtues (1975, 25). He defined it as “a friendship of man and God” (1975, 7). Thus, sharing in the nexus of happiness between the human person, one’s neighbors, and God is the very groundwork of *caritas*.

It should be noted that more recently, Seth Chalmer views Aquinian *caritas* as an emotional element of love and questions the locus of *caritas*, contending that while Aquinas insists *caritas* must lead to concrete actions of kindness, its “essential principle is an internal love . . . an intangible feeling rather than real, measurable action” (2012, 172). Yet, love based on this agapistic logic does indeed comprise and command outward acts of kindness or mercy, for as Aquinas wrote, such is the “same act which loves God and which loves neighbour. And this

account of charity extends not merely to the love of God, but also to the love of neighbour" (1975, 83). In this respect, Aquinas is simpatico with Augustine on *caritas's* divine interdependence between recipients of charitable acts and God. Aquinas elucidates this point with respect to almsgiving, "whereby something is given to the needy out of compassion and for God's sake" (1975, 239). Concomitant with Augustine on the question of almsgiving as an act of charity, Aquinas, with his ubiquitous and methodical Rogerian "on-the-other-hand" maneuver, frames his response around the same rhetorical question Augustine asks of his audience, quoting 1 John 3:17: "But if anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" (1975, 239).

Jean Porter points out that Aquinas's hierarchy of loving and consequently almsgiving stands in direct contradiction to Augustine's unequivocal democratic application of *caritas* that "[o]ne ought to love all persons equally" (1989, 199). Consistent with what he said regarding loving one neighbor more than another, Aquinas (1975) explicitly asserts that a certain order should be observed when it comes to who should be given preference in matters of almsgiving (133): "Give to the Godly man, but do not help the sinner, Do good to the humble, but do not give to the ungodly" (1975, 267). Thus, those who are holier, rather than those in spiritual proximity to fallen laity, are to be the favored candidates of almsgiving. Aquinas's final article on "how we should give alms" is somewhat misleading in that the focus relies on the quantity of distribution, vis-à-vis articulating interpersonal communication modalities and mores for interlocuter encounters with those in most need.

Some 750 years later, Pope Francis's perspective on *caritas* is unequivocally more intimate, Other-centered, and rooted in the Catholic social teaching of the preferential option for the poor. Speaking to a group from a global charity in 2019, Pope Francis warned of inchoate and ersatz forms of charity, those we might call institutional. *Caritas* is not "a sterile performance or simple offering to donate to silence our conscience. . . . [I]t is not an idea or pious feeling" (quoted in Brockhaus 2019). This view stands in contradiction to Chalmer's interpretation of Aquinian charity. Moreover, for Pope Francis, authentic *caritas* cannot be an institutionalized form of philanthropy; it must be an intimate and "experiential encounter" (Brockhaus 2019). While there may be an efficiency to institutional giving, as De Freitas et al. (2019), argue, even institutional charities recognize the importance of cultivating a more interpersonal dynamic with recipients:

Many charitable organizations ask big donors to go on tours in which they become personally involved with the beneficiaries. These tours may satisfy some of the evolved psychological criteria for being involved directly with beneficiaries and the community. The tours may signal that the donors are not just motivated by a concern with their reputations, that they are asserting a higher status than the beneficiaries, and that they are genuinely interested in establishing relationships with those in need. (172)

Charity demands an interpersonal relationship with the poor. Similar to Augustine and Aquinas, Pope Francis underscored a charitable act's capacity to

fashion an intimate and interdependent nexus between benefactor, recipient, and God. In his Angelus Address in 2020, Pope Francis exhorted that practicing authentic acts of *caritas* is “[o]n the one hand . . . looking at others through the eyes of Jesus himself, and on the other hand, seeing Jesus in the face of the poor” (Catholic News Agency 2020). Relating to almsgiving specifically, Pope Francis advocates that giving be an important dialogic and communicative performance undergirded by ethical and phenomenological enactments of *caritas*.

In February 2017, Pope Francis was interviewed by the monthly magazine *Scarp de’ tenis* (*Tennis Shoes*), which serves the homeless and the marginalized in Milan. When asked whether it is right to give alms to people who ask for help on the street, Pope Francis provided an exhortation to prospective benefactors that giving “is always right” and that it should be done with respect and compassion because “tossing the money without looking in the eyes is not the gesture of a Christian” (Holy See Press Office 2017). Moreover, Pope Francis accentuated the import of nonverbal gestures when giving, saying to “look them in the eyes and touch their hands” (2017). Pope Francis also shared that when he meets people who are homeless and living on the street, he always greets them and sometimes asks about their lives and background. Furthermore, Pope Francis chastised those who will not give because of their concern that the poor will invariably spend the money on drinking wine (a reasonably Italian objection). Pope Francis responded that “if a glass of wine is the only happiness he [a panhandler] has in life, that is fine” (2017). Even Adam Smith concedes that beer and ale have a salutary as well as “wholesome and invigorating” benefit for beggars being “relieved from one of the burdens of which they at present complain the most” (1976b, 422). Pope Francis added to “ask yourself what you do secretly. What ‘happiness’ do you seek in private?” (Holy See Press Office 2017). The Pope continued by saying that “you are more fortunate, with a house, a wife, children.” Then, Pope Francis asked why we look for reasons to relinquish our responsibility to help others. He ended the exchange by stating, “Teaching charity is not about offloading one’s own sense of guilt, but it is touching, looking at our inner poverty that the Lord understands and saves” (2017). Pope Francis’s beliefs here also contravene Augustinian and Aquinian claims to *caritas*’s compensatory and redemptive functions.

Pope Francis’s view of *caritas* provides exemplary instruction for how the charitable act, manifested as begging, is fundamentally a phenomenological and ethical communicative and reciprocal encounter between interlocutors employing both verbal and nonverbal communication. His emphasis on the performative praxis demands an enhanced dimension of nonverbal communication not only of eye contact but also of haptics: “by looking them [panhandlers] in the eyes and touching their hands” (Holy See Press Office 2017). These main points draw a sustained engagement with and parallel the phenomenological ethics of Emmanuel Levinas.

Pope Francis’s reflections on the importance of solidarity call us to embrace the “reality that we are bound by the bonds of reciprocity” (2020b, 107). Additionally, Pope Francis contends that human beings are so made that they cannot live, develop, and find fulfillment except “in the sincere gift of self to others” (2020a, sec. 87). This attends precisely to what Ronald C. Arnett has named

the “universal ethical echo: ‘I am my brother’s keeper’” (2017, 63). O. Carter Snead, reflecting on the outward-facing act of practicing virtue ethics, remarks that “one’s gaze is not fixed, limited to her inner self and its depths. One’s attention instead turns outward, understanding that flourishing is becoming a participant and steward in the network of giving and receiving that sustains life as humanly lived” (2020, 99).

Pope Francis, Caritas, and Levinas

Pope Francis’s conception of *caritas* is imbued with a Levinasian and phenomenological spirit indicative in his ethical imperative that it is always right to give. Quoting Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis states that “being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea,” like, say, epistemology or ontology, “but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (2013a, sec. 7). Encountering poverty, for Pope Francis, is a kind of first ethics or, as he has stated, “first category,” whereby he signifies poverty as a central theological term manifest in Christ’s own abasement: “This is our poverty, the poverty of the flesh. A poor Church for the poor begins by reaching out to the flesh of Christ. If we reach out . . . we begin to understand something, this poverty, the Lord’s poverty” (2013b).

Pope Francis’s phenomenological genuflections are recognizable in the register of terms like “gaze,” “encounter,” “horizons,” “the other,” and “the face” found in many of his encyclicals and other writings (Oltvai 2018, 317). Since his election, Pope Francis has called for and embodied a shift in the Church’s priorities, favoring a more outward, pastoral, and kerygmatic hermeneutic. This Other-centered orientation is rooted deeply in Gospel principles, praxis, the virtue of mercy, and views of the Church as a field hospital; it embraces experiences and encounter over the soundness of doctrine. For Pope Francis to advocate and operate out of such an orientation has no doubt been influenced by the so-called “theological turn” in phenomenology and, in particular, the work of Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Levinas.

Moreover, Dominique Janicaud argues that Moses’s encounter on Mount Horeb in Exodus 3:5 represents the “sacred ground of the other” and demarcates the cardinal function of this encounter as the so-called “theological turn” in phenomenology (Oltvai 2018, 319). As more robust evidence for this turn, consider the passage from *Totality and Infinity* in which Levinas equates “the alterity of the Other and the Most-High” (1969, 34). Beyond this, in *Difficult Freedom*, Levinas acknowledges that “Ethics is the optics of the divine” (1990, 157). More explicitly in *Ethics and Infinity*, Levinas remarks, “In access to the face, there is certainly also access to the idea of God” (1985, 92). Related more specifically to Augustinian *caritas*, the identification of Christ with the poor, and Pope Francis’s vision of encountering the panhandler, Levinas reminds us, “The Divine can be manifested only through my neighbour”; then, in quoting Jeremiah 22:16, Levinas makes known who one’s neighbor is and underscores a similar imperative to Pope Francis’s: “He judged the course of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me, says the Lord” (1990, 157). Thus, Pope Francis’s ethical encounter

of giving, a care for the wellness of the poor and needy, comes to see the Other as sacred.

We might characterize the primacy that Pope Francis places on justice, the poor, and his clarion call to aid the most vulnerable in terms of "*caritas* as first theology." A similar perspective is shared by Levinas, who penned in *Difficult Freedom* that "giving is in some way the original movement of spiritual life" (1990, 62). Levinas also expresses a deep concern for the poor and uses the term "poverty" to describe the face-to-face encounter with the Other.

What is the relationship between ethics and *caritas* effectuated through giving to the panhandling Other? In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes, "To recognize the Other is to give" (1969, 75). "I can recognize the gaze of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan," all vulnerable social stations that are often dependent on the aid of others, "only in giving" (77). While such figures could be interpreted merely as biblical metonymies, Levinas argues that we encounter them in concrete ways and that they enable potential giving. Said another way, to welcome the homeless is to disturb the being at home with oneself. Levinas continues, explaining that "my welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact, and in it, the things figure not as what one builds, but as to what one gives" (77). The giving here vanquishes "the originative I." To encounter the panhandler and to give in the way Pope Francis recommends is to welcome the Other into one's conceptual scheme. Such a view discloses symmetry with Levinas's claim that "the face of the Other is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all. And me, whoever I may be, but as a 'first person,' I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call" (1985, 89). Responding to the command, what Arnett calls the "immemorial ethical echo" of 'I am my brother's keeper,'" demands our responsibility to the Other; it is an obligation that is formed when, as Arnett puts it, the "derivative I" responds with an outward "here I am" (2017, 39).

Moreover, how one gives should include recognizing the human dignity of the panhandler. Beggars are not toll booth baskets. As Hacker Daniels remarks, "Martin Buber's I-Thou/I-It continuum clearly calls for a relational dynamic between beggar and benefactor, with I-Thou as the more dialogue driven relationship" (2021, 105). Additionally, Johannesen et al. include the qualities of "mutuality, open heartedness, directness, honesty, spontaneity, frankness, lack of pretense, nonmanipulative intent, communion, intensity and love in the sense of responsibility of one human for another" (2008, 52). It is important to recall the communicative component of Pope Francis's ethical imperative of giving, which includes awareness of meaning, attitude, and intentionality and finds its telos in a performative praxis.

Levinas may interpret the choice to ignore the panhandler, or to simply toss money at her, as disregarding "the face's suspension of ontology and to preserve the correlation between absolute knowledge and being" (Hand 1989, 76). Feeding the ego's attempt to protect its own autonomy in the world places knowledge before relation and obligation. Egoism must be teleologically suspended for the Other. Emphasizing ego and ontologically driven deportment derails the productive disruptions of ethics as first philosophy. Likewise, giving *only* out of a concern for one's personal salvation, an upshot of *caritas* according to Augustine

and Aquinas, divorces one from the ethical responsibility endemic to *caritas*. This is why, when experiencing the encounter of giving, Pope Francis mandates that the charitable act perform the dialogic practices of not just eye contact but also active gazing and physical touching. As John Heron has remarked, “[A]ctual encounter occurs only in mutual touching and mutual gazing, each person both gives and receives in the same act” (1970, 243). When such a fruitful encounter occurs, the “divertive eye” of civil inattention to the presence of the panhandler is vanquished by, playing off of Arnett’s concept, a derivative “eye,” whereby an intimately focused, opened presence, an “infinite vigilance” (Hand, 1989, 75), seeks not totality but solidarity with the face of the Other. As Pope Francis wrote, “For what saves us is not an idea but an encounter. Only the face of another is capable of awakening the best of ourselves” (2020b, 107). Or, as Levinas puts it, “[T]he epiphany of the face as face is ethical” (1969, 76, 199).

Throughout his papacy, Pope Francis has modeled this recognition of poverty’s flesh and how the ethical encounter of haptics functions as a kind of conversion. His conversionary vision of the Church is rooted in an outward-facing, periphery-centered, and literally “hands-on” approach, whereby one “takes on the smell of the sheep” (2013a, sec. 24). Giving in this way must be done by touching the Other in order to authentically encounter the flesh of poverty. Touching the Other is a relational language outside the claim to know, or to castigate, or to dominate. For Pope Francis, the gift of touching the flesh allows one to see the face of the Other (2013a, sec. 270).

Pope Francis’s command to look into the eyes of a destitute person when giving alms seems to affirm Levinas’s grand notion that “ethics is an optics” (1969, 23). Beyond this, in the opening line of the section titled “Sensibility and the Face” in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas inquires, “Is not the face given to vision?” He also noted that “the connection between vision and touch . . . remains essential. Vision moves into grasp. Vision opens upon a perspective, upon a horizon, and describes a traversable distance, invites the hand to movement and to contact, and ensures them” (1969, 191). Whether Pope Francis had Levinas’s relationship between vision and touch in mind when he included the nonverbal communication practices of eye contact and haptics in his instruction on giving cannot be known. However, it is important to note that vision for Levinas is a relational obligation, but that to see the face of the Other is not to observe an occurrence, but to hear a call, the response-ability of the Other that addresses me. In this sense, Pope Francis’s directives for almsgiving from a Levinasian perspective would supplement the sensorial gazing and touching with hearing/responding to the command of the face of the Other, thereby resulting in ethical conversion. The face of the panhandler speaks, but she speaks antecedent to any particular encounter.

At first glance, Levinas seems to share Pope Francis’s communicative demand of eye contact and touch when giving; however, upon further reading of Levinas regarding vision and touch, discrepancies and conceptual tensions in how one might encounter the indigent Other emerge. Take, for example, in *Ethics and Infinity* when Levinas declares, “The best way of encountering the Other is to not even notice the color of his eyes” (1985, 85). In this sense then, the face does not occupy the precinct of the visual. Equally as countervailing in *Totality and Infinity*,

Levinas remarks that the face “is neither seen nor touched” (1969, 194). Thus, the face’s ostensible visibility notwithstanding, Levinas seems to claim that the face is not all a visual phenomenon. However, recall that Levinas’s central principle of ethics as first philosophy recognizes the face as a signpost of ethical ubiquity; it is phenomenological first, and its empirical nature comes later. Augustine shared a similar expression related to Christian fidelity when he argued that charity reveals itself through the vehicle of almsgiving, saying that “we acknowledge Christ in good works, not in bodily manner, but with the heart, not with the eyes of flesh, but with the eyes of faith” (Ramsey 2007, 298). In light of the resemblances to Pope Francis’s ethics of giving that we have hitherto attempted to draw, how can this be? What are we to make of these seemingly paradoxical claims of Levinas? Why select a visual to emphasize the invisible?

With respect to encounter, eye color, and touch, what we interpret Levinas to be saying here is that focusing attention on physical features, more sur-“face” traits of the Other, can become a perceptual encumbrance and thereby blur the intentionality and sincerity that motivates one to give, rendering the act opaque. In other words, the nidus of Levinas’s moral obligation toward the radical alterity of the Other transcends what may appear to the eye. Moreover, any signification one might glean from the physiognomy of the Other should not matter because the face is a command, antecedent to all signs. As Bastera has clarified, the face of the Other addresses us thus and focuses our attention prior to considering the face’s empirical qualities (sex, ethnicity, etc.) (2015, 125–26).

Finally, despite these more abstract philosophical discrepancies, what is most important is that Levinas does not deny the particularity of the universality of giving. The Saying engendered by the substantial act of giving, specifically in the ways Pope Francis directs, allows for the Said of all our hesitations and biases to be interrupted. As Levinas suggested in *God, Death, and Time*, “Meaning begins with giving bread to another and requires practical material acts” (Arnett 2017, 241).

When encountering the panhandler, the synthesis of Levinas and Pope Francis occurs in the recognition of the conceptual moral imperative to heed the command of the face of the Other philosophically, ethically, transcendentally, and invisibly with an equivalent practical, phenomenal, tactile, and visible act of *caritas*. According to Levinas, “*giving* is in some way the original movement of spiritual life” (1990, 62). Pope Francis may express this “*caritas* as first theology,” but Levinas pushes things a bit further: “the Other is always the poor one, poverty defines the poor person as Other, and the relation with the Other will always be an offering and a gift, not an ‘empty handed’ approach” (1990, 62). Timothy Rothhaar (2018) explains the economic and spiritual solidarity that giving engenders with the Other. The material resources aid the Other in “survival of the body,” which consequently breeds sharing a spiritual resource, i.e., the virtue of solidarity for “the survival of the relationship” (2018, 4). Thus, Pope Francis’s imperative that it is always right to give and the phenomenological import of how one gives, which we examined earlier, echoes Levinas, who declared, “To recognize the Other is to give” (1969, 75). And the inverse is true for Pope Francis: to give is to recognize the Other.

The macro-links between Christianity's and Judaism's respective concepts of charity should not be surprising or underestimated, especially when examining the provenance of St. Thomas Aquinas's "harmonizing" of "Biblical doctrine with Biblical teaching" (Dienstag 1975, 195), which Jacob Dienstag attributes to Maimonides's success in cultivating the Aristotelian influence within scholasticism and Christian theology (194). Although competing scholarly opinions exist regarding the degree of Maimonides's influence upon St. Thomas Aquinas, and Dienstag concedes that it could arguably be overstated, he does, however, quote the "Catholic historian of philosophy, Emile Saisset (1814–1863) . . . that 'Maimonides is the precursor of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Guide announced and prepared the way for the *Summa Theologica*'" (196).

Maimonides, *Tzedakah*, and the Laws on Giving

While *caritas* is Latin for "love," the Hebrew word *tzedakah* has polysemous meanings, all converging in its meaning of charity (Meszler 2003, ii). Although the word *tzedakah* is commonly understood as "charity," the Hebrew root of *tzedakah* (tz-d-k) translates as "just," "justice," and "righteousness," and an individual who is an embodiment of justice and righteousness is known as a "Tzadik" (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 2007; Bernstein 2013).

The most influential treatise on charity in Jewish literature is Maimonides's "Laws on Gifts for the Poor," in the *Matnot Aniyim*, the seventh section of the *Mishneh Torah* (Cronbach 1947, 471). As Jacob Neusner points out, the *Mishneh Torah* furnishes the most incisive depiction of the Judaic law of *tzedakah* (1990, 10). In its entirety, the treatise on charity is comprised of ten chapters (Meszler 2003, ix–x). Maimonides introduces the treatise with an itemization of the thirteen germane *mitzvot* (divine commandments) (Meszler 2003, 1). The first eleven *mitzvot* are alternately paired as a positive and a negative commandment (1). The eleventh commandment commands one "to set aside the tithes for the poor" (1–2). Worthy of observation is that the first eleven *mitzvot* are applicable to an agrarian setting, while the twelfth and thirteenth *mitzvot* are more applicable to the urban setting. Chapters 7–10 are also read as being more applicable to the urban venue (Meszler 2003, 60) and even more directly related to the context of the beggar on the street. In the last chapter of "Laws on Gifts for the Poor," 10:7–14 delineate what are arguably the most important and influential passages, known collectively as the eight degrees, or levels, of charity (Meszler 2003, 84–86), or the eight degrees of benevolence (Cronbach 1947, 529). The lowest number represents the highest degree, and the highest number represents the lowest degree:

7. The greatest level, higher than all the rest, is to fortify a fellow Jew and give him a gift, a loan, form with him a partnership, or find work for him, until he is strong enough so that he does not need to ask others [for sustenance].

8. One level lower than this is one who gives *tzedakah* to the poor and does not know to whom he gives, and the poor person does not know from whom he receives,

9. One lower level is one who gives *tzedakah* and the give knows to whom he gives but the poor person does not know from whom he takes.
10. One level lower is when the poor person knows from whom he takes but the giver does not know to whom he gives.
11. One level lower is to give to him with one's own hand before he can ask.
12. One level lower is to give him after he has asked.
13. One level lower is to give him less than one should but with kindness.
14. One level lower is to give to him begrudgingly. (Meszler 2003, 84–86)

Maimonides, or Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1135–1204), also known by the acronym Rambam, and who predated Aquinas by a century, is one of the most influential figures in Jewish history. His greatest works—*Guide for the Perplexed*, the *Mishneh Torah*, and the commentary to the *Mishneh Torah*—have exerted profound influence on Christian scholasticism, represented in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 2007). Distinguished by its logic, the *Mishneh Torah* codifies Jewish law. On its face, it might seem contrary to the charitable act, which intuitively, one might think, should be more steeped in pathos than logos. For Maimonides, “every law . . . has a reason, and ultimately living in accordance with the law leads to the perfection of humanity” (Meszler 2003, v) and that the laws of *tzedakah* possess a “constitutional foundation” (Meszler 2003, iv).

Deontologically, as an act of duty, *tzedakah* is not separate from motivations engendered by kindness, generosity, and empathy. The art of *tzedakah* is equally utilitarian in responding to the practical, basic needs of life for the poor, and it also engages a more transcendent dimension in its “quality of ennobling humanity with virtue” and teaching “one to become more like God through imitating God’s level of generosity” (Meszler 2003, ix-x).

As Seth Chalmer (2012) explains, although significant differences are exhibited between Aquinas’s notion of charity in *caritas* and Maimonides’s in *tzedakah*, their respective concepts of charity converge in meaningful ways. He states that “both agreed that charity includes, but transcends, giving material support for the needy and that charity unites the human-Divine relationship with interpersonal relationships” (Chalmer 2012, 184). A significant divergence observed by Chalmer is curious in his saying that

Jewish thought demeans *caritas* by claiming that it does not command tangible action, but its focus truly is primarily on internal love. Christian thought demeans *tsedaqah* by claiming that it is only external with no element of a higher principle of faith, but it truly is more rigidly defined in earthly terms. (184)

In sum, the correspondences between St. Thomas Aquinas and Maimonides make for a fertile corpus of scholarly inquiry. Admittedly, essential differences exist, but the key links are more magnanimously recognized by Dienstag. The

Christian and Jewish ethical perspectives of charity might be understood as distinct in terms of the sequencing and proportionality of each perspective within each theological tradition. Pope Francis's broader reorientating vision of the Catholic Church, from one fixed on doctrinal rigidity and "small-minded rules" (Sparado 2017) toward a more pastoral "poor Church for the poor" spirit, invites compassionate encounters with the panhandling Other. Such a view is indeed indicative of the phenomenological-theological turn that *caritas* implores. In light of established and antecedent claims where Pope Francis diverges from Augustine and Aquinas on the "how" of giving, it is perhaps surprising, but nonetheless the *raison d'être* of an interfaith hermeneutic, that Pope Francis's challenges to Aquinian provisos of proportionality and those "attached strings" that come with almsgiving are more attuned to a social justice-oriented, Maimonidean telos. The act of almsgiving is sedimented in a sacramental duty and should, as Pope Francis persists, come without worry.

Maimonides's "Laws on Gifts for the Poor" are irrefutably steeped in a Kantian deontology and concomitant categorical imperative (Patterson, Wilkins, and Painter 2019, 11). In the Maimonidean paradigm, the "moral force" of charity resides "in the act itself, rather than the person who acts" (Patterson, Wilkins, and Painter 2019, 11). As has been acknowledged, charity ought to be endowed with consequentialism, imbued with an inherent duty to act and to achieve desired and intended outcomes or goals (12–14). The individual also has a responsibility, as instantiated in Aristotelian virtue ethics and distinguished by the individual's *phrenemos*, understood as "practical wisdom" (4). Lastly, Maimonidean charity possesses as one of its characteristics a high degree of communitarianism, whereby individual choices and acts achieve an augmented communitywide societal impact, "assert[ing] that social justice is the predominant moral virtue" (16). Even exceedingly affluent benefactors, who aspire to the betterment of the world, understand the importance of cultivating significant interpersonal and dialogic relationships. In their brilliant quantitative study, "Maimonides' Ladder: States of Mutual Knowledge and the Perception of Charitability," Julian De Freitas, Peter DeScioli, Kyle A. Thomas, and Steven Pinker conclude that the organizational approach to charity can work and actually benefits from a robust relationship with a more individualistic and non-organizational approach:

Many charitable organizations ask big donors to go on tours in which they become personally involved with the beneficiaries. These tours may satisfy at least some of the evolved psychological criteria for being involved directly with beneficiaries and the community. The tours may signal that the donors are not just motivated by a concern with their reputations, that they are not asserting a higher status than the beneficiaries, and that they are genuinely interested in establishing relationships with those in need. (2019, 172)

With these ethical dimensions of *tzedakah*, charity is unfalteringly an act of righteousness and the righteous, and an integral component of social justice.

Conjoining Commerce, Capitalism, and an Outstretched Hand

In furthering our understanding of acts of charity, the import of communication ethics intersects with the enterprise of commerce and capitalism vis-à-vis its transactional nature. This interplay is uniquely perspicuous in the work of the eighteenth-century moral philosopher Adam Smith. In his excellent essay on Smith, Arnett (2018) says the following of Smith's contribution to communication ethics:

He unites the practical and the philosophical in response to the historical moment of 18th century Scotland and Europe. Smith points to a communication ethic aligned with sensibleness that is void of idle abstraction and lives within thoughtful and reflective applicability. (462)

Arnett points to Smith's two great works, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), as exemplifications "of the Scottish Enlightenment's gathering of sentiment and practical application" (2018, 462). Interestingly, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* ("Of the Sense of Duty"), Smith extols the importance of God in our verbal and nonverbal expressions of charity and manifestations of gratitude. Smith says that they are founded on a sense of duty, but adds, "The sole principle and motive of our conduct in the performance of all those different duties, ought to be a sense that God has commanded us to perform them" (1976a, 171).

In Part IV, "The Effect of Utility," Smith promulgates a part-utilitarian, part-communitarian ethic, reminding us that even the most selfish, individualistic motives can reap rewards for others in unintended ways:

The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. (184–85)

Part VI, "Of the Character of Virtue," is redolent of Book II of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Smith explores the ways one manages one's emotions in achieving what he calls "self-command" (237) and allowing one's virtues to flourish in alignment with the Aristotelian Golden Mean (270–72).

In one of the most recognized passages in *The Wealth of Nations* (Book I, Chapter II), Smith (1976b) expounds upon the transactional nature of the commercial enterprise:

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 their own necessities but of their advantages. (18)

Immediately thereafter, Smith turns his attention to the beggar, with a curious observation but one that, when reflected upon, is eminently true:

Nobody but a beggar chuses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens. Even a beggar does not depend upon it entirely. The charity of well-disposed people, indeed, supplies him with the whole fund of his subsistence. (18)

Smith contravenes the conventional wisdom surrounding charity, in that, even when accepting charity given to you, and even when those fruits of the benevolence are perceived as “necessities,” the recipients do not jettison their transactional choices, both in terms of what to accept and when to accept it:

But though this principle ultimately provides him with all the necessaries of life which he has occasion for, it neither does nor can provide him with them as he has occasion for them. The greater part of his occasional wants are supplied in the same manner as those of other people, by treaty, by barter, and by purchase. With the money which one man gives him, he purchases food. The old cloaths which another bestows upon him he exchanges for other old cloaths which suit him better, or for lodging, or for food, or for money, with which he can buy other food, cloaths, or lodging, as he has occasion. (18–19)

As morally laudatory and rather uncomplicated it seems to “give” in response to an outstretched hand and/or an oral plea, the legal ramifications of panhandling are seemingly much less pellucid.

The Legal Imperatives of the First Amendment

Panhandling is the recipient of a very “mixed First Amendment reception” within the urban environment, and an even more confounding reception in the more kinetically complex environment of the subway system in large metropolitan areas (Hacker-Daniels 2021, 100). Some legal decisions question whether panhandlers’ and beggars’ requests are speech or conduct and, if determined to be the former, whether the speech is even a bona fide message. If the message is part speech and part conduct, more commonly known as “speech plus” (Tedford and Herbeck 2017, 306), the communication garners an attenuated First Amendment protection and can be affected as well when circumstances of safety and commerce-driven communication are factored in.

When Dan Norton and Karen Otterson sued the city of Springfield (*Norton v. City of Springfield, Illinois*, 768 F.3d 713 (2014)), the Court deemed the Springfield ordinance prohibiting panhandling in the downtown historic district of Springfield to be constitutional. According to Hacker-Daniels, “Since panhandling is speech, the court had to determine if the restriction was content-neutral.

Individuals were allowed to hold up signs asking for money, in addition to making oral requests for money, but the contribution could not be executed contemporaneous with solicitation, resulting in an immediate transaction” (2021, 103). Moreover:

The deal had to be sealed at a deferred point in time, since the request for money through the spoken word in direct face-to-face communication with a prospective contributor was construed by the city as potentially threatening and minimally intrusive. Ironically, individuals can ask for money using whatever modality of communication they choose, resulting in immediate contributions in any other area of the city except for the downtown historic district. (103)

In Judge Manion’s dissenting opinion in *Norton v. City of Springfield, Illinois* (768 F.3d 713 (2014)), he states that “the City of Springfield’s panhandling ordinance is a content-based regulation of speech, subject to strict scrutiny” (Calvert 2015). The parsing of these distinctions as articulated in the dissenting opinion in *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* (576 US 155 (2015)) upended the 2014 decision, with the Seventh Circuit reversing its 2014 decision in *Norton v. City of Springfield* (806 F.3rd 411 (2015)), deeming the preponderance of the panhandling laws in the country unconstitutional (“Panhandling,” n.d.).

The First Amendment protections of panhandling/begging are significantly diminished when the act interfaces with mass transit. “In the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, plaintiffs William Young and Joseph Walley sued New York’s Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) in *Young v. New York City Transit Authority*, claiming that provisions adopted by the MTA violated their free speech rights under the First Amendment” (Hacker-Daniels 2021, 100–101). Judge Sand conclusively stated that begging and panhandling undeniably fall under the aegis of expressive speech and that “while often disturbing and sometimes alarmingly graphic, begging is unmistakably informative and persuasive speech” (*Young v. NYCTA*, 729 F. Supp. 341, (S.D.N.Y.1990)).

However, in a legal episode of peripeteia heard in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, the *Young* opinion was drastically different. “Circuit Judge Altimari argues that the subway cannot be characterized as a designated public forum and avoids triggering the strict scrutiny standard and a concomitant violation of the First Amendment” (Hacker-Daniels 2021, 101). Judge Altimari “express[es] grave doubts as to whether begging and panhandling in the subway are sufficiently imbued with a communicative character to justify constitutional protection,” and, beyond this, Altimari suggested “that most individuals who beg are not doing so to convey any social or political message” (*Young v. New York City Transit Authority* 903 F. 2d 146, (2nd Cir. 1990)). Even when begging/panhandling engage speech, it is merely tangential, whereby the conduct (act) is privileged over the speech (Hacker-Daniels 2021,101).

In a meta-reversal, in *Loper v. New York City Police Department* (999 F.2d 699 (2nd Cir. 1993)), “Judge Miner of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit affirmed the communicative essence of begging/panhandling while shutting down the slippery slope that panhandling and begging . . . inexorably lead to more

aggressive activity and greater incidence of serious criminal activity” (Hacker-Daniels 2021, 101–2).

In their examination of the constitutional questions circumscribing begging, Hershkoff and Cohen (1991) disabuse detractors of the reasons for abrogating the First Amendment protection of begging, including the one which argues that begging “is about private need and not the public good” (902). This claim ostensibly comports with the premise that begging is “predominantly commercial speech with financial gain its primary *raison d’être*” (Hacker-Daniels 2021, 104). Militating against this supposition, Hershkoff and Cohen observe, “the beggar implicitly proposes a communitarian vision in which citizens have a responsibility for each other’s survival, a perspective that an informed decision maker should consider” (1991, 902).

In light of this higher ethical good, the beggar’s speech should not be punished because commercialism does not necessarily vitiate the communitarian goals of begging. Each beggar is, in fact, a part of the bigger issue whose speech functions synecdochically (Hacker-Daniels 2021, 104). And as counterintuitive as it may seem to those not in want, begging allows one to participate in self-realization, which is fundamental to “the premise of individual dignity and choice,” as elucidated in *Cohen v. California* (403 US 15 (1971)) in Hershkoff and Cohen (1991, 903). Hacker-Daniels recounts Hershkoff and Cohen’s recognition of the First Amendment disparity in protecting charitable solicitations and not the individual beggar (Hershkoff and Cohen 1991, 905–6; Hacker-Daniels 2021, 104). They note that the lack of a “middleman,” as it were, ought not attenuate the constitutional protection of the beggar’s speech.

Given that many different constituencies of speakers/messages are afforded the First Amendment protection to communicate with strangers, the beggar’s particular act of communication, with solicitation predicated as it is on appeals like those of Blanche Dubois to the “kindness of strangers,” is an abrogation insofar as it fails to meet the strict scrutiny standard and ineluctably devolves into a content-based restriction (Hershkoff and Cohen 1991, 906). But, arguably, what is most intimately tied to the moral imperative to protect the right to beg is the cultivation of the relationship in the beggar/donor dyad.

The immediacy of her appeal breaks down the wall between speaker and listeners and engages her interlocutor in a social interaction. Sociologists call this kind of encounter a “relationship wedge.” Its power lies in the fact that once an individual has extended to another enough consideration to hear him out for a moment, some kind of bond of mutual obligation is established, which the initiator can use, in turn, as a basis for still further claims. (Hershkoff and Cohen 1991, 913)

If the communication exchange is consummated, salutary impact can be achieved not only on a one-on-one level but also on a societal level, with intended and possibly unintended positive outcomes, including the beggar’s ability to engage a prospective benefactor, where the diminution of the beggar’s marginalization can “forge a more inclusive society” (Hershkoff and Cohen 1991, 914). And even when the beggar’s presence and speech engender hostility and a

discordant rapport, the benefit of such an experience lies in the created “rhetorical situation”—in the exigence brought to light, and we can certainly say that this embodies an imperfection marked by urgency (Hershkoff and Cohen 1991, 914; Bitzer, 1968). Adding to this exigence is the “dehumanizing imagery” used against the poor, the homeless, and the indigent.

As Slipp argues, panhandling affords the homeless the opportunity to express themselves with very limited options and to avoid being “out of sight, out of mind” (1994, 629). She is not suggesting that one’s responsibility is Maimonidean at the highest degree of charity in saying that “it is not each individual’s personal responsibility to ensure the livelihood of the homeless,” but rather she is stating the importance of a message that is irrefutably expressive and message engendering as both speech and conduct (632).

Conclusion

As evinced by our engagement with interfaith and secular/legal perspectives on the virtue of *caritas* and *tzedakah* pertaining to encounters with panhandlers and beggars, questions of meaning and the performative, practical enactment of *caritas* and *tzedakah* illumine and edify the who, what, how, where, when, and why, but provide no hard and fast answers. Predictably, responses to the synthesis of interfaith conceptualizations (of *caritas* and *tzedakah*) and interlocutor dynamics including communication ethics surrounding the “act” of begging that we have established, regrettably, can and do manifest in partisan political, cultural, and economic ideology. Assigning blame and fault on both sides of the (donor/recipient) equation is ill-conceived, and where none should be assigned. For the ancient rhetorical fragment *Dissoi Logoi* reminds the would-be benefactor:

Are you not in the position of pitying beggars because they are in a very bad way and also (contrariwise) congratulating them for being well off, if the same thing is good and bad? And there is nothing to stop the King of Persia from being in the same condition as beggars. (Anonymous 2020, 72)

The achievement of self-realization and self-actualization reciprocally serves both the panhandler and the giver/donor in an enantiomorphic way. But this is no reflection of Narcissus, since each interlocutor sees their image (donor and beneficiary), reflected—not in terms of physiognomic features—but more essentially, in the reflection that the donor and beneficiary have of each other (e.g., love, caring, empathy, pain, dignity). Seeing the Other as yourself is foundational not only to dialogical ethics but also to the charitable act itself. Neusner proclaims that the donor is not only obliged to give but is in fact privileged. How might this be? “We are not whole and complete human beings unless we give. That is the fundamental affirmation of this stunning statement that a poor person must give to the poor. I cannot imagine a more profound and complete statement of Judaism than that simple one” (1990, 21). From a Maslovian vantage point, the beggar actually facilitates the giver’s ultimate need for “self-actualization,” fully understood through Adler’s concept of “*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*,” defined as “the

flavor of the feeling for mankind expressed by self-actualizing subjects" (Maslow 1970, 165).

One such aphorism from the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu is often expressed in an erroneous either-or fallacy as a simple reductive corrective to the societal problem of poverty: "Give a man a fish, and feed him for a day, teach him to fish, and feed him for life" – to which a compelling counterstatement may be articulated in quoting the Gospel of Mathew 7:9–11: "Ask and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. . . . Would any of you who are fathers give your son a stone when he asked for bread? Or would give him a snake when he asks for a fish?" (*Good News Bible* 1979)

We arrive at the conclusion that charity as *caritas* and *tzedakah* is integral to not only the physical and emotional sustenance of the recipient and equally the donor but that it is also *sine qua non* to the health and well-being of society at large, reinforcing the importance of the concept *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, defined by the American Psychological Association (n.d.) as "a social interest or community spirit; a spirit of equality, belonging, and unity."

Whether short or long term, institutional or conventionally interpersonal charity, the modes, mechanisms, and logistics of giving are not the fundamental issues (although legal and ethical contours certainly need to be taken into account), but rather are tangential to personal, ethical, and spiritual deliberation. As Dorothy Day insisted, "The Gospel takes away our right forever, to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor" (Dorothy Day House, n.d.). As it is quoted in the Tractate Sanhedrin, "For this reason was man created alone, to teach thee that whosoever destroys a single soul of Israel, scripture imputes [guilt] to him as though he had destroyed a complete world; and whosoever preserves a single soul of Israel, scripture ascribes [merit] to him as though he had preserved a complete world" (Epstein 1994, 37a). These discrete acts of charity irrefutably qualify as acts that can save an entire world.

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