The fragility of rightness. Adjudication and the primacy of practice

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Acknowledgments

Writing a dissertation has been, if anything, a humbling experience, first of all because of the (philosophical) richness of the literature that I found pertinent to my inquiry. This often gave me the sensation that I would do better to continue reading rather than start writing myself. Luckily I gradually managed to overcome some of my reluctance.960

The process was also humbling because of all the support I received. I am grateful to many institutions and people. First of all I owe thanks to the Department of Law of the University of Amsterdam, which offered me a professional context in which I felt and still feel at home. I am grateful for the funding and the temporary relief from teaching, which allowed me to spend one semester at the Philosophy Department of Harvard University and another semester at the Philosophy Department of Chicago University. These semesters have been most fruitful, not in the least because of the inspiring courses I could attend and the wonderful intellectual environment.

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Because of its international and multi-disciplinary character the Human Development and Capabilities Association literally opened new worlds for me. Its conferences were intellectually stimulating events where I could present my papers and learn from others.

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960 Yet, I do think that a period of silence can be a fitting expression of one’s respect for the quality of the tradition in which one participates. Unfortunately, the ‘out-put’ criteria that are presently in force in academia do hardly allow one to be hesitant about contributing.
into the ‘tragic tradition’ in philosophy.

More generally, I benefitted from countless suggestions offered by participants at all kinds of seminars and lectures, including the ones organized by the Paul Scholten Centre for Jurisprudence at the University of Amsterdam.

Students offer an invaluable and sometimes merciless ‘mirror’. I persistently experienced that in order to convey one’s message as a teacher one should try to be as clear and as transparent as possible. Teaching also forced me to always try to relate abstract theory to the concrete concerns that students may have. I hope that this preoccupation with transparency and conveying a sense of relevance has influenced this book. In any case, I am also grateful for the experience of teaching and to my students.

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As the title of the book clearly indicates, I am indebted to Martha Nussbaum and the world that she opened up for me. At some time I happened to find her books in a local bookshop. Not yet formally trained in philosophy, her work nonetheless grasped me because of its inviting, accessible and personal style. It made me (want to) study philosophy. Of course it was an honour to later on have the opportunity to work with her and to attend her instructive and inspiring courses on modern virtue-ethics and on the work of Bernard Williams. I benefited greatly from her pointed comments on this project.

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Needless to say that all mistakes and errors in this book (and in life) are undeniably my own.