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The fragility of rightness. Adjudication and the primacy of practice

van Domselaar, I.

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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.

The courses that the Dutch Research School for Philosophy offered, its conferences and seminars have been valuable for me as a place where I could learn and where I could discuss my work. The same goes for the Netherlands Association for Philosophy of Law. Not only have I enjoyed being a board-member and as such have come to know (a bit) about the Dutch community of legal philosophy, also through its conferences I have been able to discuss my work.

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.

Participation in the 2011 Tilburg Philosophical Summer School, 'Tragedy and its Limits', which was taught by Simon Critchley, was of great value to me. The depth of the literature offered and the inspiring exchanges with the participants gave me opportunity to really delve

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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This book would not have been written without the support of my teacher, former colleague and friend Joep van der Vliet. Long ago he subtly mentioned the option of writing a dissertation. There it all began. From him I learned a lot about philosophy and, as I can now say with hindsight, even more about life. I would be glad if this book could be seen as a worthy tribute to his career, a career that was almost fully dedicated to teaching and that has had an enormous and positive impact on the lives of many of his students.

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.