Gratitude, Disability, and Philosophy

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The combination of concepts in the title might seem a bit disjointed, but the plan is to be able to show that there is a connection between gratitude as a virtue, disability (whether constituted personally, biologically, or socially), and philosophy as an academic discipline and as a way of life. For me, the personal is philosophical – and the philosophical is personal. In most of my research, especially in ethics and social thought, there is some issue of a personal nature that I have investigated. The personal nature of the research is sometimes an issue that is very personal about myself or it is sometimes an issue regarding a personal or social occurrence or condition affecting a friend or family member that has served as a backdrop for the position I took. The same can be said for this address. In it, I wish to recount some personal reasons for feeling grateful, to talk about the moral import of gratitude, and to show the connection (which may quite reasonably seem a tenuous connection at best – but only, I hope, at least at first) between gratitude, disability, and philosophy. I am doing this using an analogy and there are many inferences that can be made from the analogy that I invite you to make in addition to those I explicitly make and those at which I only hint.

So I'll tell you some things related to gratitude and philosophers or philosophy generally.

I am grateful for many things and to many people. I am grateful to my family for sacrificing for me, years and years ago, so that I could go to University of South Florida (hereafter USF) and major in philosophy. Back then, I had the options either to pay independently, seek a grant based on financial need, get a scholarship, or take out a loan. There was no scholarship, my family's income was too high for a grant, and a loan was out of the question. So several family members and I pooled our money every semester so that I could stay in school. I am grateful to USF for the education I received there, and especially to the faculty members in philosophy at USF, most of whom are now retired and some of whom have unfortunately died, and to the few who are still there even after all these years.

Gratitude to the University of Central Florida (hereafter UCF) probably goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway. I love this university and have since the first time I stepped foot on its campus

for a job as an adjunct in 1987. You may laugh about this, but I felt like I was on top of the world – or that I had conquered the universe – because a few people in what was then a very small department said they'd give me a class or two to teach and see how it would work out. I think it worked out pretty well over the past 25 years. I am grateful to this university and to my colleagues for a rewarding academic life as an adjunct, as an instructor, as an assistant professor, an associate professor, and assistant dean.

The Departments of Philosophy at USF and UCF have provided me with the academic life I wanted from the time I started college at the age of 15. I am grateful to them as "things" or as places – that is, as educational institutions, and I am grateful to my colleagues and to my students for making my academic life both possible and personally worthwhile.

I am also very grateful to my colleagues, friends, and family members who visited me in the hospital four years ago during the 19 days of pure hell that I endured with a severe intestinal condition resulting in two surgeries. I am especially grateful to my brother and sister who proved to be the saints of all brothers and sisters during and after my experience at the hospital. Several of my colleagues from the UCF Philosophy Department came to visit, and several of them came to visit more than once. While most of what I remember of that hospital stay is a blur, and most of it I don't remember at all, there are some things that stand out that are things for which I am grateful to particular people. For example, Ronnie Hawkins used her medical background to get pertinent information from the surgeon and to advocate on my behalf. And on one exceptionally unpleasant day I was so cold that there was nothing any hospital employee seemed able to do to help me to get warm. Nobody could figure out what the problem was that led to this peculiar condition, so they piled blankets on me and hoped that it would work. It didn't. But then the chair of my department, Bruce Janz, came to visit. I told him I was so cold that I hurt everywhere, and that my hands were like ice. His reply was something like this: "I am a Canadian. I know how to fix that." He put both of his hands around mine and somehow – miraculously, it seemed to me – he warmed them up. I remember it very clearly. And for it I am grateful to Bruce for the time he took and for caring enough to help me feel a little bit more comfortable. To him, it is probably just a small and maybe even an insignificant thing, but to me, it is much more. It meant, and it still means, very much to me. It is one of the few pleasant memories I have of that place.

Ah. That place. I am grateful to the physician who said to me the day after Christmas in 2008 that he didn't think I'd ever get out of intensive care – that is, he said he thought I'd die. I am grateful that he didn't give up on me and tried different medicines. I'm grateful to the surgeon for finally figuring out that there was a major problem that needed to be taken care of. But that place – that hospital. That's the place where I became disabled and something of a misfit. "Misfit" is an important concept in this address. When I walked into that hospital for the original surgery, I had a

condition that needed repair. When I was wheeled out of it 19 days later, I was – and still am, and probably always will be – a person with a disability. I am – and you may find this hard to believe – grateful for it. It has changed me in ways that I believe – and hope – are for the better.

I just related bits and pieces of two stories. One is about my education and work and being grateful for them. The other about which I will say a bit more later concerns my disability and, oddly (or not) being grateful for that, too.

But what do these stories have in common? And what do they have to do with philosophy? To start to answer these questions, consider something that may appear, at least at first, decidedly un-philosophical: the 1964 Christmas special, "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."

In this story, Rudolph is born to Mr. and Mrs. Donner. When it became apparent that Rudolph had a "disability" or peculiarity, his mother noted that they should all just overlook it while his father dug up some mud and put it on Rudolph's nose to hide the fact that Rudolph was "different." Rudolph was obviously uncomfortable with a mud-based prosthetic device on his nose, but his father told him that he would get used to it. Even Santa Claus, who sang happily about how he wouldn't overlook anyone at Christmas, noted that Rudolph had better out-grow the red nose or he wouldn't be able to part of the sleigh team regardless of the fact that he was a "sturdy little fellow" and "smart, too." Santa is a bully, apparently.

It's not only Rudolph, however, who is odd in this story. There's also Hermie, one of Santa's elves, who doesn't fit in because he doesn't like to make toys. He's a strange one, indeed, because he'd rather be a dentist than a toymaker. Nobody seemed to realize that Hermie's dreams could be beneficial to everyone, and Hermie even did his best to try to fit in by fixing dolls' teeth instead of building toys, but the foreman elf made it abundantly clear to Hermie that he would never fit in. Dejected, Hermie left the toy shop to set out on his own, alone.

In the meantime, Donner crafted a plastic black prosthetic nose for Rudolph and proclaimed: "There are things more important than comfort. Self respect. Santa can't object to you now." Rudolph then proceeded to the reindeer games at which Santa Claus inspects all the yearlings for their suitability to be on the sleigh team. Unfortunately for Rudolph, one of the little does, Clarice, told him that he was cute and in his excitement over this, Rudolph jumped for joy, flying a short distance but also losing his prosthetic nose. The coach and Santa Claus were highly impressed with his jumping and flying ability, but none of that mattered in the face of the red, shiny, bulbous nose. Rudolph's little friend Fireball completely freaked over the red, shiny nose and even Santa, who, we have found, is not so kind, understanding, and giving after all, told Donner that he ought to be ashamed of himself for having a son with a red nose. To add insult to injury, Comet, another reindeer who doubles as coach of the reindeer games, encouraged all the other reindeer not to let Rudolph play in any reindeer games.

Rudolph, completely dejected, ran away into the snowy landscape. Clarice followed him and told him that his nose is handsome, better than the false one, and that what makes it grand is that it is different. At least Clarice had good sense. Clarice's father, however, wouldn't let his daughter be seen with a red-nosed reindeer. Clarice was led away by her father, at which time Hermie the elfin dentist popped up from a snowbank.

Hermie and Rudolph introduced themselves to each other. Hermie said he wants to be a dentist and is independent. Rudolph says he is independent, too. Hermie proposed that they be "independent together." Neither minds the other's oddities. They fit in with each other at least, and they embark on a journey into the snow-filled and dangerous landscape – independently together. Ultimately, they end up on the Island of Misfit Toys, greeted by "Charlie in the Box." The island is reserved for misfit (disabled) toys such as a toy gun that shoots jelly, a train with square wheels, an airplane that doesn't fly, a spotted elephant, a swimming bird, an ostrich-riding cowboy, and a sinking boat. There's also a red-haired doll who seems perfectly, physically "normal" to me, but perhaps she has a hidden or invisible disability like mine. In any case, all the unloved misfit toys are banished to the island and miss all the fun of playing with kids. Hermie and Rudolph figured they would fit in perfectly on the island, but they didn't. The island is only for toys, so they don't even fit in with other misfits! The king of the island, however, offered the wanderers lodging for the night and asked them when they returned home to remind Santa to come pick up the misfit toys because "A toy is never truly happy until it is loved by a child."

Months passed and Rudolph began growing up. He realized he must return home to face his problems. He found, however, that his mother, father, and Clarice had been gone for months trying to find him. So Rudolph set off to find his family and friend only to discover that the Abominable Snow Monster of the North was terrorizing them. Rudolph and some of his misfit friends arrived on the scene and vanquished the Abominable together. Everyone then returns home to a blinding snowstorm, but Rudolph saved the day (and Christmas) with his shiny red nose, able to break through snow and fog on Christmas Eve. Hermie is accepted by the other elves and is allowed to practice dentistry. Santa, in a better mood, promises to find homes for the misfit toys. Christmas is saved and everyone lives happily ever after.

Nice story. Or is it? We'll see about that.

Now here's the rest of the first story. I, too, am a misfit. I am a misfit physically because I have a disability. It is covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act in that it interferes with a major bodily function that requires the use of assistive technology or devices and that has an actual or expected duration of 6 months or more. That's me. But the funny thing about my disability is that even my surgeon looks at me strangely when I see him every 6 months for a check-up and he sees that I am STILL not distressed over my limited physical condition. He apparently takes the medical

model of disability (which makes sense, I suppose) in that "a bodily difference that proscribes normal functioning is presumed to be negative. Accordingly, the individual body is seen to be in need of cure and is appropriately treated within a medical setting. An individual's claim not to want normalization through medical treatment is considered surprising, and in need of explanation."[1] I was distressed about it at first, but not any longer. In fact, at first – and some of you who haven't seen through my façade may find this surprising – I cried about it and was ashamed of it, and I worried about it and made myself miserable. After a while, though, things changed. I became accustomed to it; nobody else can see it unless I show them; and I kind of like it. The surgeon, however, can't seem to wrap his mind around the notion that it is now part of who I am. You see, prior to the surgery, I was sick most of the time. Now, I am rarely ill. I can go places and do things in relative comfort. The big plus is that, unlike Rudolph, my disability is fairly easy to hide most of the time. It is invisible to others at least most of the time. But my disability is something I often find myself explaining to people who know or ultimately find out that it exists. I end up explaining something either because they don't understand what it is or once they do, they don't understand why I'm not depressed, distressed, ashamed, uncomfortable, and otherwise miserable because of it. Even when I tell them that I am not sick anymore and that this disability is in a way a very small price to pay, they still don't really get it most of the time. Some people have even told me that they couldn't stand to have my disability, and more than one person has told me that they would rather be dead than have it. But when you have a disability, perhaps Goering is right that people with disabilities generally don't think primarily about their bodies when considering the quality of life, but instead they concentrate on "opportunity for achieving self-determination, building community, and participating in work and social life."[2]

So you see – I am grateful for my disability – not for the disability in and of itself, but for the freedom it usually gives to me. And because I have changed due to its existence. And because I have even used the fact of it in teaching my classes. It has turned out on a few occasions to facilitate one of those "teachable moments" that people are always talking about. In other words, there are ways in which the disability has (I think) improved me in making me healthier, in making me appreciate my life even more, it keeps me alive and oddly enough it was part of the cure (even if accidental) of a very unpleasant and potentially life-threatening condition, and it has made me aware of aspects of disability and the interests of others that I don't think I would have ever understood quite so clearly otherwise. Before the creation of my disability, I believed the opposite of what I believe now. I believe this: "If people with impairments claim that their lives are of good quality despite an inability to (do something that their disability prevents them from doing), why not at least have a presumption in favor of believing them rather than insisting that non-disabled lives are inevitably better?"[3]

Rudolph and I are certainly not exactly alike. But there are aspects of our disabilities – or different abilities or handicaps or whatever you would like to call them – from which arise similarities of some importance. Rudolph was ashamed at first, and so was I. Other people had a hand in feeling that way. Rudolph's relatives were taken aback by his disability, as were some of mine. Rudolph's friends were "freaked out" over it, as were some of mine. But Rudolph and I both have friends and family who think our "differences" aren't all that bad. Rudolph and I both doubted our ability to fit in, and we worried that others would find out about our disabilities. Note that Rudolph didn't refuse to wear the prosthetic nose, and I certainly don't refuse to wear my prosthetic device, either. And you are glad about that. Rudolph's disability was met with revulsion and shock; and usually my disability is considered in the same way. Nobody in their right mind wants a bulb-like, lit-up, shiny red nose and nobody in their right mind wants my disability, either. But Rudolph and I figured out how we could be useful, and not only are we thankful for our disabilities, it turns out that there are benefits for others created by or facilitated with our disabilities. You see, we fit in after all! I think. Maybe.

But Rudolph and I don't really fit in and we shouldn't be forced to be useful to fit in or to be accepted. What about when Rudolph is not being useful? There's someone who will laugh at him because of his red nose. There will again be someone who will be repulsed by my disability. Rudolph will someday find himself compelled to explain how useful he *was* when the snowstorm set in and Santa could deliver Christmas gifts only because Rudolph's nose lit the way. I will find myself compelled to explain why not being "normal" doesn't really bother me, and how I can even use the fact of my physical disability's existence in teaching my classes, at least sometimes. Rudolph and I have to justify our placement in the world of those without disabilities, and sometimes we have to convince others that our disabilities aren't so bad, really, if you think about them differently.

Rudolph is grateful to have found a way to fit in; and the residents of the North Pole are grateful to Rudolph for saving Christmas. I am grateful not to be sick and not to be dead, and there are people in the world who are grateful that I am still around. Some of those who are grateful love me regardless of the disability and because I have value; some who are grateful that I still exist despite the hospital's valiant attempt to do me in have found a use for me. I am grateful in general for all of that.

Even more, however, I am grateful for philosophy. I think other people ought to be grateful to it and for it, and to and for us as philosophers. But, you see, we and our discipline are misfits.

We live in the midst of social and political conditions in which our discipline – and the humanities generally – and even we individually – are under siege. Our discipline – and any others falling under the broad heading of "humanities" – is often treated, I think, much like a disability. When our students are asked by others outside the discipline, "What is your major?" and they say

"Philosophy," the almost inevitable reply is: "What will you do with that?" To me, it is like someone asking me how I can stand my disability, and how could I possibly not be devastated by it.

The social climate encourages attitudes such that the humanities are to be avoided as majors because they don't fit the pattern – they don't fit in – with the STEM model of education. This is, to me, much like what happens when the guy in the wheelchair is either stared at as a curiosity or pointedly ignored with not much attention in between. We try sometimes, as philosophers, to convince the powers that be that our discipline fits with STEM to make it "STEAM," and that is all well and good and most likely something useful to us and to our survival as philosophers, but just as Rudolph has inherent value even if he isn't guiding sleighs through foggy blizzard conditions, so too does philosophy have a value in itself. But we don't live in a society that sees this easily – until individuals in that society become disabled and find themselves at least part of the time explaining their disability, explaining why it doesn't make them less valuable than anyone else, and simply trying to live their lives as best they can. We do that as philosophers, too.

And parents sometimes dissuade their children from pursuing humanities disciplines as majors, and our own governor thinks, in a curious twist of reasoning, that disciplines he claims are least financially lucrative after graduation ought to cost more in tuition. Those disciplines are generally in the humanities and the social sciences. He and his apologists are quick to point out that the idea here is not to exterminate (and that is their term, not mine – and I find it most distressing due to its implications, connotations, and historical use) these major disciplines, but to ensure that those who choose such majors are really serious about them. It makes, they think, good sense. If you refuse to be or can't be "normal" like everyone else, then you will be further marginalized.

The problem is that there is not enough information about our discipline in the larger society in which we live. When people don't understand something, they fear it, they reject it, they avoid it. I can't begin to count, and I'm sure you can't either, how many times someone has asked me what I teach and when I say "philosophy," they reply with something like "Oh, do you think I'm crazy?" They apparently believe that I've said "psychology" or they don't know the difference between philosophy and psychology in the first place. I often secretly want to say, "No, but I think you're stupid," but I resist the temptation. Instead, I explain what sorts of things philosophy is about and in most cases I receive polite nods and a "That's interesting." Occasionally, I hear laudatory comments about philosophy and that so-and-so was a philosophy major, or that so-and-so went to law school, or into business, or whatever, and is very well read. But I only hear this from people who know what philosophy is.

It's similar to my disability. There's not enough information about it, people fear it, they reject or they reject the person with it, and some people will even forego medical attention in fear that they will not be able to avoid it, that some accident will happen to them, rendering them

possessors of the same disability I have. When someone asks me about it, I explain patiently, and on occasion if someone asks I'll even show them my usually invisible disability, and those who care about me come to accept that it's really not so bad after all, especially if I don't mind it and it has been a major factor in not being sick and most importantly in not being dead and in making my life better. They still don't want my disability, but at least they don't reject it or me out of hand. Once they understand what it is, they realize that my disability amounts to another way to do, albeit in a more complicated fashion, what they do, too. As Sara Goering put it with respect to quality of life judgments about people with disabilities, people without disabilities "overestimate the degree of difficulty faced by people with impairments and incorrectly identify the main causes of the difficulties" and that "it is both unnerving and frustrating to people with impairments, who see them as threatening the well-being and sometimes even the existence of people like themselves."[4]

It's like that for philosophy. When I explain, for example, that ethics is about living well, and asking questions about the right and the good, people often tell me that they deal with issues like that and they wonder about such things on a regular basis. I tell them that even if they aren't aware of it, for example if they concentrate on duty in the moral realm, that they are most likely considering moral issues from a Kantian point of view. I then tell them about the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, one of Kant's more accessible works, and that they might enjoy reading it. That doesn't mean I think they'll enjoy my disability if they had it, but they might learn to be grateful for it or at least appreciate it in the long run if they had it or if only they understood it.

As you know, I've been working here on an argument by analogy and as we all know, analogies are far from perfect especially when the analogized items are not sufficiently similar. I think, however, that my disability and philosophy are relevantly similar in enough ways to explain how all these comparisons, the story about Rudolph, and the analogy generally lead to something of some significance – or at least I think it is of significance – about gratitude and philosophy.

Patrick Fitzgerald, in his article "Gratitude and Justice," challenges what he sees as the traditional or common approach in philosophy toward gratitude. He notes that it is an emotion such that one cannot really be grateful without feeling grateful. While, for example, one can satisfy a debt simply by performing a particular action and that is probably the end of it such that if you owe someone money and pay it back even if you don't particularly want to you have satisfied your obligation, it's not the same with gratitude. I add to this that if Hume is right that reason is and ought only to be a slave to the passions, then reason leads me to believe that feeling grateful may very well lead to, and is more than, just a feeling. It may and perhaps it should lead to some type of action.

Fitztgerald notes that "gratitude is (1) a warm sense of appreciation for somebody or something, (2) a sense of goodwill toward that individual or thing, and (3) a disposition to act which

flows from appreciation and goodwill." But more, Fitzgerald adds that "Gratitude is not merely an emotion; however, we describe it as a virtue when it contributes to living one's life well."[5]

A peculiar thing about gratitude, however, is that "philosophers agree that gratitude ought to be a response to a benefit (or an attempt to provide a benefit), a benefit given from an appropriate motivation (usually benevolence), and a benefit that was either wanted or accepted by the beneficiary."[6] Fitzgerald challenges all three of these points of agreement regarding gratitude. He uses the example of Buddhist thought in which it is possible to feel gratitude toward those who have harmed you when, for example, the harm has led to some beneficial spiritual progress. In such cases, then, the first aspect of the philosophical understanding of gratitude does not apply. Neither does the second in that the motivation may have been malevolent; and the third also does not apply since the "beneficiary" did not accept the benefit, or at least did not necessarily wish for the "benefit" to be given. Another example used by Fitzgerald is that in which a benefactor feels gratitude toward those who are benefited by him such that the benefactor gains benefits from others.

Both of these anomalous cases are ones in which it is possible to analyze the moral reasons cited in favor of gratitude. These moral reasons are:

1. Juridical reasons – justice requires it, the recipient of gratitude deserves it or is entitled to it. It creates a debt of gratitude.
2. Non-maleficent reasons – cases in which not feeling and expressing gratitude will hurt someone else, most likely emotionally.
3. Beneficent – to provide benefit to someone else.
4. Caring reasons – to promote or preserve a special relationship such as with a friend.
5. Civic reasons – to promote or preserve communal relationships.
6. Perfectionist reasons – to develop the virtues.

So Where Do I Go from Here?

A few months ago I received a call from a representative of an organization of which I am a member asking me whether I would be interested in speaking at their conference this coming August. The man on the phone, who is a person with the same disability I have and an officer in the organization, said that he thought it would be good to ask me to speak to other people with my disability about the value of the disability, what it is like to live with it, and some issues of social and personal life associated with it or at least life does not have to be miserable with it. The idea is at least in part to help people new to the disability to become more accepting, to help them to deal with its problems and challenges, and to see that life can be made better with it. It is a disability.

There is no doubt about that. But part of what makes it a disability is socially constructed, not simply physical or biological. That's a whole different issue in itself. But the point here is that I agreed to do this out of gratitude to the organization that exists to support people with my kind of disability. They helped me, and it turns out, until recently unbeknownst to me, I have helped them and the people in the organization by participating in it and offering help and advice to others. So why am I jumping at the request to speak at the conference? Simple. Because it is the right thing to do.

Maybe we, as philosophers, have a similar duty or debt of gratitude to philosophy. When I think of the opportunity to teach that I have here at UCF, when I consider the time and effort that went into the preparation of classes and lectures that I heard from my professors, and when I see the value of the education I received in philosophy and from professors to become one of them, I realize that I have an obligation – a debt of gratitude, perhaps, or more than that – to the discipline and to those who taught me – to reciprocate as a member of a community to continue to build that community, and perhaps even to protect it. Consider again Fitzgerald's comments on moral reasons for gratitude and what they might imply.

We may have juridical reasons for gratitude toward philosophy in general, or perhaps toward our teachers and mentors, because of what they taught to us and gave to us as their students. It and they may be entitled to our gratitude, and if gratitude can be a debt, there may be something we are required to DO in order to respond appropriately to the benefit we received from it and them.

We may have non-maleficent reasons for feeling gratitude toward philosophy. If there is harm to society in having philosophy – and the disciplines in humanities generally – pushed to the margins, to the outskirts of educational value, and if we feel that our discipline is worthwhile and that it has provided a benefit to us and that it provides benefit to others, then perhaps we have an obligation to do something as a result of that feeling of gratitude and as a result of our knowledge that there is harm in ignoring, sidelining, and marginalizing our discipline.

We may have beneficent reasons to feel and act according to gratitude toward philosophy. I doubt that there is one of us in this room or attending this conference who thinks that philosophy has no benefits to offer to society, to individuals, and to the education of students. If that were the case, it seems odd to think that we would all be here engaging in this type of conference at all. So as a matter of gratitude to philosophy, and recognizing its value, perhaps we have an obligation to do something to promote it.

On a more personal note, perhaps there are caring reasons that any of us might and probably do have to feel gratitude toward philosophy or toward philosophers. I feel gratitude, for example, to Stephen Turner for being my dissertation director so many years ago. I called him a few days ago to ask his opinion on something related to work that I was thinking about and when I called I said,

"See, you'll never get rid of me." His reply was that "I don't want to get rid of you. You are my baby." The gratitude I feel toward Stephen Turner for directing my dissertation, which was one of the major steps in being able to live the life I want to live, is to "pay it forward," so to speak and to borrow from the movie of the same name, as a way to show that gratitude and appreciation. But more, there is a sense in which, as an educator and as a philosopher, I recognize that caring about my students is more than teaching my classes, directing their theses, or writing letters of recommendation for them for jobs or for graduate work. There is also the matter of maintaining and tending to the obligations I have to them, and of preserving the relationship between my teachers and myself, and myself and those I teach.

It is, I think, entirely possible that there are civic reasons to be grateful to philosophy. No one's education is complete without philosophy (or at least that's my opinion). Who can realistically imagine a college or university without a philosophy department or at least a reasonable set of courses in philosophy available for students to take? Part of what it is to build and sustain entire communities is to ensure that the essential elements of community, its glue, so to speak, are available and in abundant supply.

And I think, in addition to all these, there are perfectionist reasons to feel gratitude toward philosophy. Philosophy is *the* discipline that is uniquely situated to help our students, our society, ourselves, our culture, our political and social existences, to be more virtuous, more complete. This may be true in the sense that we teach critical thinking and reasoning, we delve into the deeper issues in understanding rather than simple-minded training for technical skills, and we help to develop the "human" in human beings.

For me, there is more than simply identifying the reasons to be grateful to philosophy and to philosophers. But more, I was educated at a Florida public university and I work at a Florida public university. Perhaps we should take the word "public" to heart in that we all, I think, have an obligation to be public intellectuals – to teach our students in classes of course – but also to repay our society, our teachers and our discipline by doing what we can to educate the public about the value, the use, the importance, and the beauty of philosophy. We owe it as a debt of gratitude for what we have and for what knowledge of our discipline can do to improve our society and to enrich the lives of everyone it touches. It is, I think, the right thing to do.

Gratitude for philosophy is one of those emotions that has moral import and, as Fitzgerald noted, gratitude is anything but a side issue in morality because "the consequences of gratitude can be significant. Gratitude offers a way to avoid many sources of suffering in ourselves and in others. It offers a way to avoid psychological patterns that can harm us physically and psychologically, destroy our most important relationships, and lead to actions that harm others. In all of these ways gratitude is at the center of ethics, not at its fringe."[7] It is time, perhaps, for us as philosophers to do

what we can to make the public and our politicians realize that philosophy is not a disability that needs to be corrected, it is not an anomaly to be pushed to the margins or hidden away, and it is not a misfit that doesn't and can't belong. Rudolph and I have a place in the world even with our disabilities. In fact, some people have found them useful and both of us have found that we are not happy in spite of our disabilities, we are happy even with them. Philosophy may be treated like a disability in a society that doesn't understand it, doesn't appreciate it, thinks of it as a burden rather than a benefit, and wants to banish us to the Island of Misfit Academic Disciplines. We know better than that. It is our duty to ensure that everyone else knows better, too.

Notes

[1] Sara Goering, "You Say You're Happy, but...: Contested Quality of Life Judgments in Bioethics and Disability Studies," *Bioethical Inquiry*, Vol. 5 (2008): 127.

[2] Goering, "You Say You're Happy, but...," 129.

[3] Goering, "You Say You're Happy, but...," 130.

[4] Goering, "You Say You're Happy, but...," 126.

[5] Patrick Fitzgerald, "Gratitude and Justice," *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy* 109:1 (Oct. 1998): 120.

[6] Fitzgerald, "Gratitude and Justice," 121.

[7] Fitzgerald, "Gratitude and Justice," 153.

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"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Rankin/Bass Productions, CBS Classic Media, 1964 (Film).