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THE MORAL GOODS OF THE PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP¹

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Abstract: In this article I will reflect on the moral goods involved in the parental relationship. In particular, I am interested in explaining the specific nature of the moral goods involved in the parental relationship. To do so, it is necessary, first of all, to make a distinction between the stages of development of the person. I argue that an explanation of the moral goods of this relationship must distinguish between the developmental stages of children and adults, proposing an explanation based on the moral goods typical of each stage. Secondly, I argue that moral philosophy has always had, as its focus, the goods of adults, their moral goods are those that identify the various ethical theories. However, in the explanation of the moral goods of childhood, a particular reflection is necessary. I examine the literature on the subject and systematize the findings of the various authors, together with my own position on this point. From an ethical point of view, I am interested in reflecting on how these goods are integrated in the context of the parental relationship. In

¹ This paper was possible under a project funded by the “XVI Concurso de investigación y Creación para Académicos, organizado por la Dirección de Pastoral y Cultura Cristiana en conjunto con la Vicerrectoría de Investigación de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile” (XVI Grant of Research and Creation for Academics, organized by the Office of Pastoral and Christian Culture and the Research Vice-Rectorate of the P. Universidad Católica de Chile).

the final part of the article, I argue that 1) the goods of the parents are the goods of the children and the way in which these are promoted; 2) the core of the parental relationship is gratuitousness, in a manner similar to friendship.

Keywords: *ethics of parenthood, parental relation, childhood, children, gratuitousness.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between parents and children is a particularly intimate one, different from others (such as friendship, or conjugal or partner love). It is, in the first place, a relationship that implies a unique combination of goods and possibilities for both the child and the adult. Secondly, it implies an active role of the parents in providing care and well-being to the child, as well as in promoting his or her abilities. Thirdly, it is an asymmetrical relationship, in that the parent has the power and responsibility to make certain decisions for the child. Unlike more symmetrical intimate relationships, the child has not the autonomy to decide for themselves with regards of their well-being and to pursue it (Brighouse & Swift 2014a, pp. 14-15). This last point has led to the argument that, in the absence of actual autonomy, the moral status of the child would be lower than that of an adult (Brennan 2014, pp. 30-32). This, moreover, has led to the consideration of childhood - and its specific goods - as “propaedeutic” to the adult state (Brennan 2014, pp. 35 ff.), a consideration which could well be called “adult-centered”. From these considerations, a series of philosophical problems arise whose resolution is vital for a better understanding of the moral value of childhood, of the virtues and responsibilities associated with parenthood, and, finally, of the appropriate public policies to promote the well-being of children and families.

In this paper I will address the problem of the moral goods of the parental relationship. To do so, it is necessary to understand the difference that exists between child and parent goods. One way to do this is through understanding the qualitative differences that exists between childhood and adulthood. This point will be addressed in section 2, where I will discuss conceptions of childhood. My position is that, between the two competing theories about the nature of childhood, the best option is an intermediate position that understands that there are goods specific to