

Human Frailty and the Virtues that Make Flourishing Possible

BLAINE J. FOWERS
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Beginnings

Two obvious ideas

- Humans can flourish
- Humans have frailties

Ancient idea

- Flourishing is excellent functioning

Two novel concepts

- The specific design of virtues
- Human frailties are pathways to flourishing

Simple Example

We are vulnerable to harm

Fear is a natural and sensible response

Fear is constraining

Courage is the capacity to act appropriately in risky situations

When something important is at stake, risk-taking is fitting

Courage helps us pursue what is good as vulnerable creatures

Appropriate risk taking is necessary for flourishing

Frailties and Flourishing?

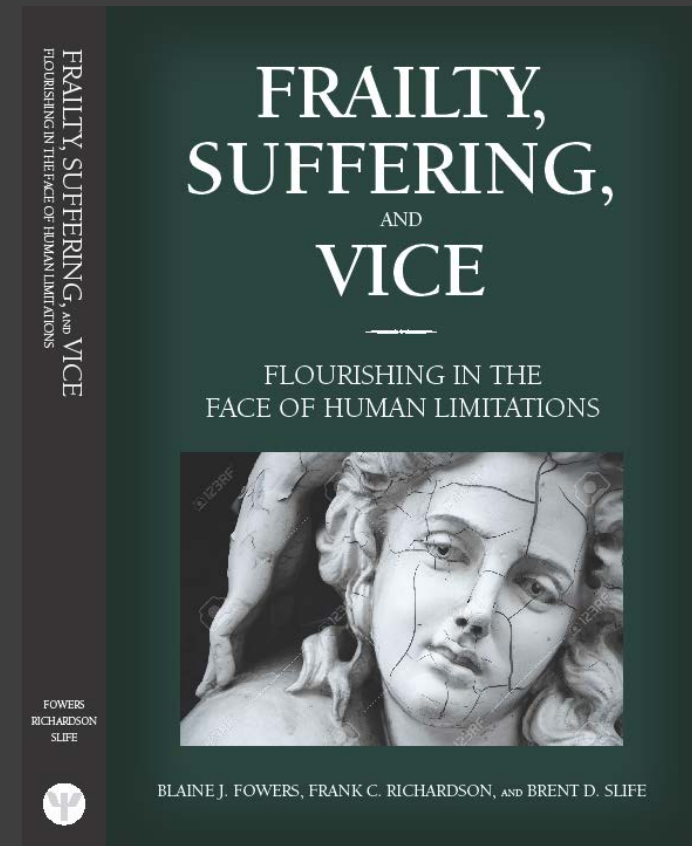
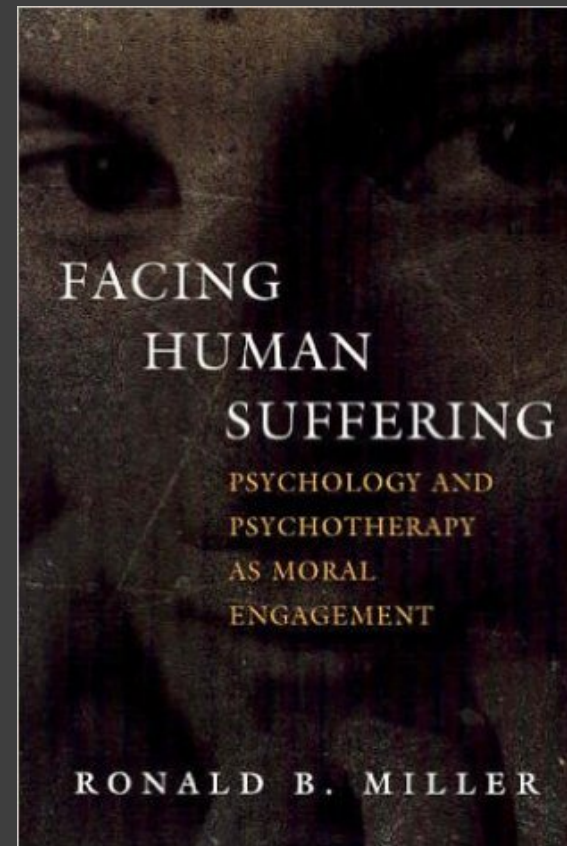
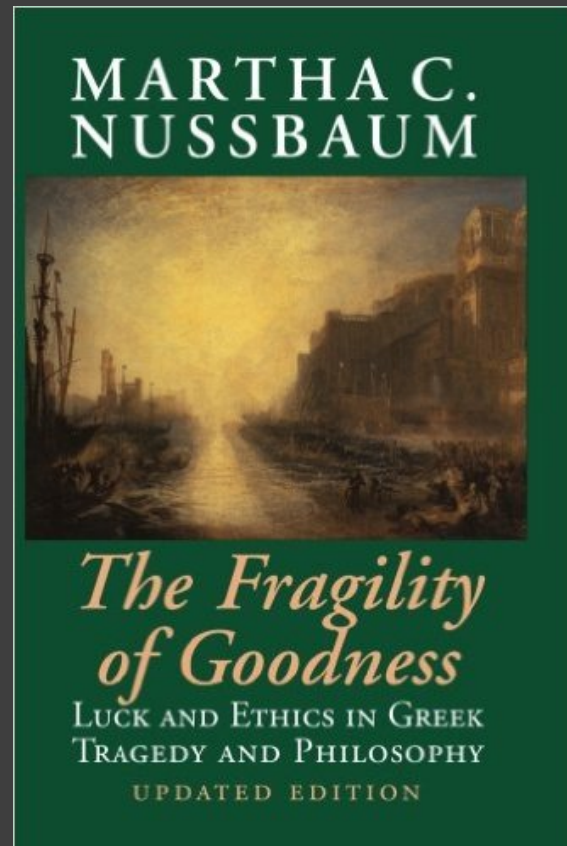
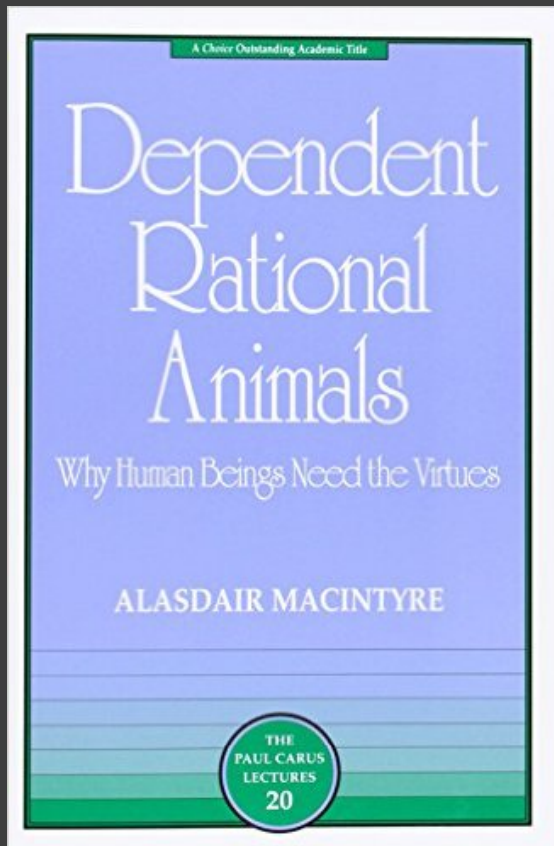
Humanity entails frailty

- Dependency
- Complexity
- Limitations
- Suffering
- Human evil

How is it possible to flourish as frail creatures?

Contemporary theories of flourishing largely fail to incorporate frailty

A Few Exceptions



Dependency

Minimization of dependency

The vulnerability of dependence

Appropriate, reasonable, (usually) mutual reliance

Dependence endemic for ultrasocial species

Good dependence is existential

Unavoidable Dependency

We are dependent on each other in all of these domains:

- Identity throughout life
- Language
- Reasoning
- Adapted to cooperate
- Group belonging
- Shared goods

Excellence in Dependency

Friendship (*philia*)

- Outcome based (utility or pleasure)
- Communally based (virtue)

Virtue friendship

- Valuing the friend's goodness
- Shared activities and goals
- Shared identity
- Friend's welfare
- Shared joy and sorrow

Loyalty

Human Vulnerability

Physical and emotional beings

- Illness and injury
- Mortality
- Loss

Vulnerability entails suffering

Virtues of suffering

- Courage
- Compassion
- Practical wisdom

Human Diversity

Forms of diversity

- Cultural variation
- Individual differences
- Within individual variation

Diversity entails complexity

The virtues of complexity

- Practical wisdom
- Generosity

Human Imperfection

Limitations

- Time
- Imperfectability

Imperfection entails limitations

Virtues of limits

- Reverence
- Generosity

Human Agency

Human life is open-ended

- Cultural elaboration (for good or ill)
- Creativity (for good or ill)
- Personal development (for good or ill)

Agency entails the possibility of viciousness

Virtues for combatting human viciousness

- Integrity
- Courage

Conclusion

Humans can flourish with frailty

Flourishing is excellent functioning

Virtues are the strengths that make flourishing possible

The virtues are attuned to specific human frailties

Humans flourish in and through our frailties