

My mother, who is 95 years old God Bless her, was noted to be sweeping her front porch last week by a caregiver. She was barely able to balance herself without her walker but became upset when the caregiver volunteered to help her.

“I can do it,” Mother snapped to the caregiver. “I want to be independent.” On the surface this response seems to reflect an almost admirable quality in an individual and something we should try to emulate. For example, when I told my Uncle Tony how much Mom tries to get rid of caregivers he said: “Well, **I** can understand that.”

But is dependency **really** a character defect? And is total independency a virtue?

Looking up the word “depend” in Webster’s dictionary I found that the root comes from the latin “dependere” or to hang down from. So in essence to depend means to be attached to something or someone. Other concepts of the word includes to rely upon, to trust (which, of course, is the foundation of all good relationships), to confide, to have full confidence or belief -- the example that is used in the dictionary is “we depend on the word or assurance of our friends.” Now that doesn’t sound too bad.

In the dictionary, dependence also can imply another kind of relationship: one that is **subordinate** to another person or thing or susceptible to **control** by another. Perhaps that is the antipathy when we feel we must not be dependent. In that way we are not at the whim of being controlled by others. I suppose “ego” is also somewhat involved on this level.

Of course, this control that must be repelled implies (in a biological sense) the evil potential of a parasitic relationship -- one person benefits and the other person is harmed. If we try to form symbiotic relationships that would imply that both people get something positive from the relationship; who cares if we depend on someone benevolent?.

Now symbiosis implies reciprocity. It's funny: my mother would never object to helping someone else out or having someone depend on her for their needs. Its only when she has to depend on others that she gets rubbed the wrong way. She can buy **you** a sweater, but don't think about buying her one. Giving is OK but receiving is a no-no. As much as I love my mother, I don't think this is a good thing.

On the contrary, it is wonderful to give and also gracious to receive. It is good to have others dependent on us; it is good (and necessary) to be dependent on others. There is virtue on both sides.

When we were very very young we were all extraordinarily dependent and gradually, and hopefully, we gained a measure of independence. But, we are NEVER totally independent. We need air to breathe; we need God for Grace. As we age we become increasingly dependent. Thank the Lord, for those of us who are fortunate to have a loving community around us.

The only kind of dependency we should really try to avoid is -- well--Depends.