

2 Gratitude in the History of Ideas

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He who receives a benefit with gratitude repays the first installment on his debt.

—Seneca (*On Benefits*, 2.22.1)

I hate ingratitude more in a man
than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness,
Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption
Inhabits our frail blood.

—Shakespeare
(*Twelfth Night*, Act 3, Scene 4)

Blow, blow, thou winter wind!
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude.

—Shakespeare
(*As You Like It*, Act 2, Scene 7)

As justice dependeth on Antecedent Covenant; so does Gratitude depend on Antecedent Grace; that is to say, Antecedent Free-gift; and is the fourth Law of Nature; which may be conceived in this Forme, *That a man which receiveth Benefit from another of meer Grace, Endeavour that he which giveth it, have no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will.*

—Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*, p. 105)

Gratitude in the generality of men is only a strong and secret desire of receiving greater favours.

—La Rochefoucauld (*Maxims*, 298)

Sentiments soon discovers, however, this would be a serious mistake. To be sure, individuals are driven by self-interest. But, according to Smith, they are also capable of love, compassion, pity, self-sacrifice, resentment, and gratitude. Smith the moral philosopher was less concerned with trumpeting the triumph of self-interest in commercial society than coming to terms with the proper balance that should exist between self-interest and other passions and virtues.

Far from believing that a commercial society could flourish solely on the basis of the drive of self-interest, Smith argued that a certain moral capital was needed if a society was to flourish. For contracts to work, people had to keep their word. Property had to be respected for exchange transactions to take place. People also had to be willing to respect and tolerate one another, particularly on divisive matters like theology. The values of friendship, family, and love had to be preserved and promoted. Individuals had to be willing to sacrifice their own good for the good of the whole, particularly in times of war where the nation's very existence was in question. The individual championed in Smith's moral theory as well as his political economy was not simply an isolated utility maximizer. He or she was a social creature linked closely to others in the community through passions and affections.

What Smith recognized as obvious, many social, political and economic theorists consider today to be a heresy. The rational actor that underlies much contemporary theory in the social sciences is a far cry from the individual analyzed by the father of modern economics. In a quest for an internally consistent predictive empirical theory, many theorists have lost touch with a dimension of human existence that is obvious to everyone in everyday life. This is particularly apparent when we consider what has happened to our understanding of gratitude. For Smith, gratitude was one of the major topics that must be considered in a theory of the moral sentiments. For most modern theorists, gratitude is but an afterthought, an idea better left alone than seriously investigated.

Gratitude is defined by the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* as "the quality or feeling of being grateful or thankful" (1967, p. 617). Be grateful to those who do good to you; be grateful for your blessings. This is something that we teach to our children at the youngest of ages. Gratitude is an important dimension of life as we interact with one another in our everyday affairs. It is impossible to imagine a world where individuals don't receive and give gratitude regularly. Gratitude is one of the building blocks of a civil and humane society.

Although an appreciation of gratitude lies at the heart of common life—even in our commercial age—it has all but been forgotten by the modern academy. As we will see, this was not always the case. The Roman philosopher Seneca wrote an entire book on the subject, entitled *On Benefits*,

Although an ungrateful heart is not an offence in itself, still a name for ingratitude is regarded as baser, more odious and more detestable than a name for injustice.

—Samuel Pufendorf (*On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law*, p. 66)

Of all the crimes that human creatures are capable of committing, the most horrid and unnatural is ingratitude, especially when it is committed against parents, and appears in the most flagrant instances of wounds and death.

—David Hume (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 466)

Gratitude, as it were, is the moral memory of mankind.

—Georg Simmel (1908/1996, p. 45)

No other animal plays non-zero sum games as tirelessly as we do.

Much of your emotional life is natural selection's way of getting you to play. Gratitude for favors rendered and guilt over neglecting a friend help you start or sustain potentially win-win games.

—Robert Wright (2000, p. 59)

Ours is a commercial age, one driven by the impulse of self-interest. Adam Smith understood this well when he noted in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776/1981) that it is not benevolence or love of our fellow human beings that brings food to our table. We receive our daily bread by appealing to the self-interest of the baker and offering something in return that is needed. Two factors lay behind Smith's defense of self-interest over benevolence. First, he believed that self-interest was a more steady passion than benevolence because the unintended consequences of self-interest could be calculated and projected into the future. We can rely on the self-interest of others more readily than we can their benevolence or love. Second, Smith believed that an appeal to self-interest was also an appeal to the dignity of the individual. Only a beggar depends on the benevolence of others for everyday subsistence, and even then only on a limited basis. In contrast to benevolence, self-interested exchange was predicated on the idea that individuals could enter into market exchanges and affirm their existence as free and autonomous human beings.

Given the central role of self-interest in Smith's economic theory of commercial society, it is tempting to conclude that Smith believed—as all too many of his twentieth- and twenty-first-century counterparts now seem to believe—that humans are at heart self-interested creatures who care little for the concerns or interests of others. As any reader of his *Theory of Moral*

around A.D. 54. The idea of gratitude was an important topic taken up by philosophers as diverse as Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, Samuel Pufendorf, and Adam Smith and remained an important idea throughout the Middle Ages (see Dunn, 1946; Galloway, 1994; Tronto, 1999). Over the past hundred years, the philosophical essays published on the topic have been few and far between. Although a number of articles have been written on the subject of gratitude as a foundation for political obligation (see Klosko, 1989; Walker, 1998, 1999), Terrance McConnell's (1993) book, *Gratitude*, is notable because it almost stands almost alone in its attempt to provide a general philosophical account of gratitude (see also Fitzpatrick, 1998; Roberts, 1991; Simmel, 1908/1996). The disjuncture between our common life and our academic endeavors at the very least should raise troubling questions.

This chapter is an attempt at recovery. It begins by exploring the idea of gratitude in the history of ideas, focusing particular attention on the thought of Seneca, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, and Samuel Pufendorf. I then turn to consider Adam Smith's discussion of gratitude. Smith placed an analysis of the phenomena of gratitude at the heart of his moral thought. He was particularly concerned with understanding the role that gratitude plays in modern society and the forces that threaten to undermine it. Understanding his analysis sheds light on how we moderns have come to think about gratitude and its place in the life of a commercial society grounded on the workings of self-interested behavior. At the end of this chapter, I suggest that the time may have come to resurrect the idea of gratitude by reconsidering the proper role that it should play in human affairs in a commercial society. By taking up the subject of gratitude in a historical context, I hope to nudge our theories of the human condition into a little closer contact with the everyday life that we live.

THE IDEA OF GRATITUDE PRIOR TO SMITH

The first (and, for many centuries, the only) great treatise on gratitude in Western thought was *On Benefits*, written by the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca. Addressed to a friend, Aebutius Liberalis of Lyons, the work is long-winded and repetitious. But it raises many of the concerns that would define how later thinkers conceptualized the problem of gratitude. The importance of understanding the place of gratitude in human society was stated clearly in the first paragraph: "Among the many and diverse errors of those who live reckless and thoughtless lives, almost nothing that I can mention, excellent Liberalis, is more disgraceful than the fact that we do not know how either to give or to receive benefits. For it follows that, if they are ill placed, they are ill acknowledged, and when we complain of their not being returned, it is too

late; for they were lost at the time they were given. Nor is it surprising that among all our many and great vices, none is so common as ingratitude" (trans. 1935, p. 3).

Identifying ingratitude as our most common vice is intriguing. It may be because it is such a common vice that we do not properly understand its complexity. Throughout the treatise, Seneca tried to provide a perspective for sorting out the complexity underlying the problem of gratitude.

He began his inquiry into gratitude by noting that gratitude must be understood as part of a dyadic relationship between a giver of benefits and a receiver of benefits (Tronto, 1999, pp. 12–14). To understand gratitude, one must grasp both sides of the relationship fully. In regard to giving, Seneca posed a series of questions that must be addressed: What exactly is a benefit? To whom should benefits be given? What is the proper way to give a benefit? One of Seneca's major arguments was that for gratitude to be properly expressed in the world, a gift must be properly given. Similar questions were raised in regard to the actions of a person who receives a benefit from another: How does one properly show gratitude for a benefit given? Are there different forms of gratitude? Is gratitude more than just being grateful for a benefit provided? Does gratitude involve something more substantial than just thanks under certain conditions, such as an equal or greater return of benefits given for those received? Is gratitude only a relationship that can exist between equals, or can a master be grateful to a slave for benefits provided?

A number of general ideas that emerged from Seneca's inquiry are worth highlighting. First, he argued that the intentions of both the givers and the receivers of benefits are of the utmost importance in understanding gratitude (trans. 1935, p. 23). Good consequences devoid of good intentions do not create a debt of gratitude (p. 91). If the intention of a giver is not to help another individual, but to bind the receiver or to make that person feel bad, then a benefit has not been given, and gratitude is not required. Similarly, a debt of gratitude has not been fulfilled if the receiver of the benefit does not truly feel thanks to the giver but responds to the benefit merely out of a sense of duty or guilt or anger. Rules join together providers and receivers of benefits, and these are the foundation on which gratitude rests (see p. 67).

Second, an egalitarianism ran through Seneca's arguments, as it did through the work of many other Stoic writers. Providing benefits and creating bonds of gratitude tie people together in society, whatever their place in the social hierarchy. According to Seneca, it is a mistake to believe that "slavery penetrates into the whole being of a man" (trans. 1935, p. 165). Only the body is at the mercy of the master; the mind remains free. As Seneca explained, "He who denies that a slave can sometimes give a benefit to his master is ignorant of the rights of man; for, not the status, but the intention, of the

one who bestows is what counts" (p. 161). Social inferiors thus can provide a benefit to their superiors. Masters can come under a debt of gratitude to their slaves under the proper circumstances.

Third, Seneca sharply distinguished debts in the marketplace and debts of gratitude. Gratitude does not arise as a result of an exchange in which one individual gives another a gift with the expectation that something of equal value will be given in return. On the contrary, gratitude arises in response to a gift freely given by another. A person does not provide another with a benefit because he or she expects something in return. That would be an exchange in the marketplace, subject to different sorts of sanctions. A gift is given freely because of a desire, in and of itself, to assist another person. Similarly, a person does not simply respond to a benefit with an equal benefit, not more, not less, in return. That would be to treat gratitude as a commodity exchanged between individuals for an equal benefit. As Seneca explained, "Although to repay gratitude is a most praiseworthy act, it ceases to be praiseworthy if it is made obligatory; for in that case no one will any more praise a man for being grateful than he will praise one who has returned a deposit of money, or paid a debt without being summoned before a judge. So we spoil the two most beautiful things in human life—a man's gratitude and a man's benefit. For what nobility does either one show—the one if, instead of giving, he lends a benefit, the other if he makes return, not because he wishes, but because he is forced?" (trans. 1935, pp. 137–139).

Lurking in the background of this line of argument is the idea that a free gift should touch off a feeling of gratitude in the recipient that, in turn, sparks additional actions of benevolence and feelings of gratitude. Giving benefits and feeling grateful is, in the language of modern game theory, a positive-sum game.

Finally, Seneca argued that providing benefits freely and expressing gratitude are to be desired in and of themselves and for their consequences. In many ways, the ideal model of a giver is God (or Nature), who bestows his many gifts upon mankind with no thought of any return. Because God needs nothing, when he bestows a benefit he is only concerned with the advantage of the recipient. A benefit, in this respect, is good in and of itself. Gratitude also makes one a better person, a more virtuous person. It builds bonds of harmony and community in the world. Ingratitude, on the other hand, is a vice to be avoided, one that destroys the individual and society by disrupting the harmony that ties us to one another. As Seneca explained:

For how else do we live in security if it is not that we help each other through an exchange of good offices? It is only through the interchange of benefits that life becomes in some measure equipped and fortified against sudden disasters. Take us singly, and what are we?

The prey of all creatures, their victims, whose blood is most delectable and most easily secured. For, while other creatures possess a strength that is adequate for their self-protection, and those that are born to be wanderers and to lead an isolated life have been given weapons, the covering of man is a frail skin; no might of claws or of teeth makes him a terror to others, naked and weak as he is, his safety lies in fellowship. (trans. 1935, p. 241)

There are many problems with Seneca's general approach to the subject of gratitude. His analysis was far from systematic and never linked to a larger theory of moral judgment. Indeed, the argument proceeded from one question to another in an almost haphazard manner. Interesting ideas were introduced, then dropped, only to taken up in later works. Most disturbing of all, it is often unclear to the reader what the standards are by which we are to judge appropriate behavior on the part of both the giver and the receiver of the benefits. Understanding gratitude, for Seneca, seems to have meant simply mastering the complexity of the situation under which a particular example of gift giving has taken place. Other than reading Seneca's own explanation for understanding a particular situation, the student is left on his or her own to master a new situation, with insight (it is hoped) provided by earlier discussions. Finally, there is the problem of gratitude to God for the blessings bestowed on us. We clearly must be grateful to God for the many benefits given to us, but how are we to express this gratitude? Through prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God? Through beneficent actions aimed at others?

In the Middle Ages, there was an important shift away from Seneca in how gratitude came to be understood. According to Andrew Galloway (1994), the Latin term *gratitude* is of scholastic origin and never appeared in the work of Augustine. Moreover, Augustine's use of the term *gratia* was almost always in terms of divine grace rather than human obligation. In Aquinas, many of the issues surrounding gratitude taken up by Seneca were given a particularly Christian reading. Gratitude was a sentiment or emotion that people feel in response to a particular situation or action. For Aquinas as for Seneca, intentions continued to play an important part in defining the relationship between benefactor and recipient. But the egalitarian underpinnings were largely missing. People were linked to others up and down the social hierarchy in a great chain of being through various types of debts of gratitude: humankind to God, child to father, servant to master, and recipient to benefactor. Gratitude, for Aquinas, was a complex phenomenon that must be understood as a continuous scale of obligations; he wrote, "The nature of a debt to be paid must needs vary according to various causes giving rise to the debt, yet so that the greater always includes the lesser. Now the cause of debt

is found primarily and chiefly in God, in that He is the first principle of all our goods: secondarily it is found in our father, because he is the proximate principle of our begetting and upbringing: thirdly it is found in the person that excels in dignity, from which general favors proceed; fourthly it is found in a benefactor, from whom we have received particular and private favors, on account of which we are under particular obligation to him" (trans. 1920/2003, Q.106, A.1).

Another shift away from Stoic egalitarianism took place when discussions of gratitude were joined to a notion of one's larger social duties given one's place in the social hierarchy. As Catherine Dunn (1946) showed, during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance notions of gratitude and fealty became closely linked together, as did those of ingratitude and treason. To be ungrateful in the feudal world could be tantamount to engaging in treasonable actions against one's lord (see Dunn, 1946).

Along a different line of thought, theologians throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance considered the problem of gratitude and ingratitude in terms of one's relationship to God. Ingratitude to God was condemned as being worse than ingratitude to one's fellow human beings. Not only was it a rejection of God's infinite love and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but it was an enemy of the soul's salvation (see Dunn, 1946, pp. 91–121).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a series of economic, political, and religious revolutions helped to transform the intellectual environment of Europe. The Reformation destroyed the religious unity that had held Western Christendom together for over a thousand years. A commercial revolution introduced market forces into many parts of Europe, replacing forever the insularity of a feudal economy with the dynamics of international trade and production. Finally, a series of political revolutions put into place new political regimes based on new understandings of the origins and nature of political power.

Awareness of the role of self-interest in both the modern commercial economy and in modern political systems helped to stimulate the rise of modern social contract theory in the seventeenth century. In the work of philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes in England and Samuel Pufendorf in Germany, sophisticated social contract theories were developed to explain the origins of political power in terms of self-interest. (It is not my purpose to inquire into social contract theory *per se*, only to note that in the work of at least two of the leading philosophers of the day, the problem of gratitude was important.)

Hobbes is known for his rather dismal assessment of the human condition as being "nasty, brutish, and short." Humans surrender their natural right to all things to an absolute sovereign to escape the uncertainties of the state

of nature and enter into civil society. It is interesting that, in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, gratitude is considered to be the fourth law of nature, following the laws of seeking peace, contracting for peace, and performing one's contracts (that is, following the rules of justice). As Hobbes explained the fourth law of nature, "That a man which receiveth Benefit from another of mere Grace, Endeavor that he which giveth it, have no reasonable cause to repent of his good will" (Hobbes, 1651/1991, p. 105). From a Hobbesian position, gratitude is a necessary condition in society to assure us that self-interested people will be willing to act in disinterested ways for the benefit of others and for society in general. To use a slightly different terminology, the fourth law of nature helps to overcome problems of collective action when people do things that do not directly benefit themselves. Gratitude is thus less a result of the relationship between two people than it is a general social condition (or social virtue, as Joan Tronto put it) that promotes general sociability in society as a whole (see Tronto, 1999).

Similarly, Samuel Pufendorf, an individual whose political philosophy was written in response to Hobbes, provided a central place in his thought for gratitude. Unlike Hobbes, however, he returned to the idea that gratitude is based on a dyadic relationship between a giver and a receiver of benefits. According to Pufendorf, our first two duties in society are not harming others and recognizing the equality of others with ourselves. The third duty is being useful to others, so far as one conveniently can. Providing charity and gifts to others was, for Pufendorf, one of the best ways individuals can promote commendous living, particularly when the response to such beneficence is gratitude. Echoing Seneca, Pufendorf noted how complex the entire problem of gratitude is. Intentions must be taken into account. Debts of gratitude must not be confused with debts of exchange. Neither the giver nor the receiver of benefits must be harmed by either the original gift or the gratitude in response (see Pufendorf, trans. 1991, chap. 8).

In echoing the concerns of Seneca, however, Pufendorf's analysis of gratitude shows how little thought had progressed since the first century. For Pufendorf as for Seneca, it was essential to master the particular situation in which gift giving was taking place, to understand gratitude. Although he did link his discussion of gratitude to a general theory of moral judgment, he offered little more than very abstract guidelines as to how one might go about mastering that situation outside the existing manners found in a particular society at a particular time. Readers are left to master a new situation on the basis of inferences drawn from earlier discussions.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Scottish philosopher and political economist Adam Smith changed the way the gratitude was conceptualized in the West. Rather than rationally accounting for gratitude, he tried to describe the mechanism that gives rise to the feeling of gratitude and to explain

how this mechanism relates to other moral issues. He then turned to developing a perspective for explaining when and why gratitude is an appropriate response to certain situations, a perspective that was far more sophisticated than the thought of most earlier moral philosophers.

To consider Smith to be one, if not the most, important modern philosopher of gratitude may strike some people as strange. He is, after all, considered to be the father of modern political economy and one of the first students of the dynamics of self-interest in a market economy. But before he wrote the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, Smith authored in 1759 *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a work that would go through six editions in his lifetime and mark him as one of the leading moral philosophers of his generation. Deeply embedded in his thought from the outset was the desire to understand the role that gratitude could and should play in a modern commercial order.

SMITH ON GRATITUDE

Adam Smith is often identified with the so-called moral sense school of the eighteenth century. Responding to rationalist philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes or John Locke, moral sense philosophers such as the first Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, and David Hume rejected the idea that morality was based solely on reason, arguing instead that morality was ultimately derived from emotions and feelings. Morality was something felt, and not just a conclusion of reason. If one wanted to understand moral norms, including gratitude, one had to understand the moral sentiments.

According to Smith, gratitude is the passion or sentiment that prompts us to reward others for the good that they have done us. Like the passions of love, esteem, and resentment, gratitude takes us beyond ourselves and interests us in the happiness or misery of others. Smith thus took the existence of the passion of gratitude as a given. His problem was not so much to account for this passion as to analyze the implications that it has for human society. More specifically, he wanted to provide an account of three dimensions of the phenomena of gratitude in the world: First, under what circumstances do individuals feel gratitude? Second, when is the feeling of gratitude proper and when is it not? Third, how is an individual's sense of gratitude channeled in directions that are socially beneficial?

Smith's explanation of the propriety of gratitude is an essential part of the analysis of moral judgment found in Parts I and II of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and works directly out of the moral sense tradition. Through an account of the emotions and the passions, Smith sought to provide an explanation of moral judgment in the world. As he explained in one of the few

lengthy footnotes in the text, "The present enquiry is not concerning a matter of right, if I may say so, but concerning a matter of fact. We are not at the present examining upon what principles a perfect being would approve of the punishment of bad actions, but upon what principles so weak and imperfect a creature as man actually and in fact approves of it" (1790/1982, 77-78).

The first part of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is an explanation of the process by which humans judge actions and motives to be right or wrong. At the heart of this theory of moral judgment lies the idea of sympathy. According to Smith, there are principles in our nature that interest us in the fortunes of others, regardless of our own self-interest. Sympathy is an inborn mechanism of the imagination that enables us to place ourselves in the situation of another, allowing us to experience the passions, affections, and emotions that arise from this situation. Sympathy, for Smith, thus was not the same as empathy. When we sympathize with other people, we do not empathize with them or feel their actual emotions. Rather, we imaginatively place ourselves in the actual situation of others and experience analogous emotions that rise from such situations in attentive spectators. This capacity to sympathize with others' situations is the way in which we come to judge the propriety or impropriety of a sentiment, emotion, or action of another individual in a particular situation. As Smith explained, "To approve of the passions of another, therefore, as suitable to their objects, is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them; and not to approve of them as such is the same thing as to observe that we do not entirely sympathize with them" (1790/1982, p. 16).

A second idea Smith used to explain moral judgment in the world was that of mutual sympathy. There is planted in the human breast, Smith argued, a desire for mutual sympathy. By this, he essentially meant that individuals want other people to feel the same passions and emotions that they feel. According to him, "Nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast, nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary" (1790/1982, p. 13). Mutual sympathy is a powerful socializing force that works through sympathy. To realize this mutual sympathy, individuals are willing to moderate and bring under control their passions and emotions when these are too strong for others to enter into completely. For example, an individual who is experiencing overwhelming hate will attempt to temper or cool his passion so that others are able to enter into it through sympathy and judge it to be a proper response to a particular situation. The net effect of sympathy is to help bring about a certain harmony between the sentiments expressed by people in society: "As their sympathy makes them look at it, in some measure, with his eyes, so his sympathy makes him look at it, in some measure, with theirs,

especially when in their presence and acting under their observation: and as the reflected passion, which he thus conceives, is much weaker than the original one, it necessarily abates the violence of what he felt before he came into their presence, before he began to recollect in what manner they would be affected by it, and to view his situation in this candid and impartial light" (Smith, 1790/1982, p. 22).

A third idea that lies at the heart of Smith's theory of moral judgment is that of the impartial spectator, an idea that follows directly from his analysis of the mechanism of sympathy and our desire for mutual sympathy. We judge the propriety of other people's passions and emotions as spectators who imagine ourselves in their situation. Over time and with experience, we learn to view others impartially, that is, in the manner that indifferent third-party spectators might observe them. Finally, we come to extend this capacity of being impartial observers of others to being impartial observers of ourselves. Through experience, we learn to view and to judge our own affections and sentiments as imaginary impartial spectators might observe them. The idea of the impartial spectator thus embodies Smith's notion that within each individual is the imaginative capacity to judge himself or herself as that person would judge others or as others might judge him or her.

Smith's discussion of gratitude is part of the larger discussion found in Part II of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* regarding merit and demerit. Part II investigates how we come to judge actions as being proper or not proper. Part II takes up the question of what action or conduct is deserving of our reward or punishment. Smith began his inquiry by arguing that actions deserve to be rewarded if they are the proper object of gratitude; they deserve to be punished if they are the proper objects of our resentment.

Like Seneca, Smith thus began his analysis of gratitude on the dyadic relationship between an actor and a receiver of benefits. But he immediately took up the question of the propriety of gratitude in terms of a third-party spectator who is removed by the relationship itself. How are we to know if a recipient's response of gratitude is appropriate or not? Smith's answer was clear: "But these, as well as all the other passions of human nature, seem proper and are approved of, when the heart of every impartial spectator entirely sympathizes with them, when every indifferent by-stander entirely enters into, and goes along with them" (1790/1982, p. 69).

Gratitude is a natural response to a particular situation when good things happen to an individual, but it also may be an incorrect response. We may be so biased by good things that happen to us that we respond incorrectly to a particular situation. For example, we may feel gratitude toward an individual whose intentions do not deserve such a response. We may credit inanimate objects for saving our lives or bringing us luck, to the point that we feel gratitude to the objects. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we should be

grateful to things. Only by adopting the position of an impartial spectator can we successfully judge whether our response has been appropriate.

How does the impartial spectator come to judge the propriety of gratitude? First, the impartial spectator comes to sympathize with the joy of gratitude felt by the recipient of free gifts. Much like we sympathize with the joy of our companions, we sympathize with the love and affection that they feel for an object or individual that has brought them joy. But before we can sympathize entirely with the gratitude of a recipient, we as impartial observers must also sympathize with the motives and affections of the original provider of the benefits. If the motives themselves are not deserving of reward—for example, if they are based on the self-interest of the actor rather than the best interest of the recipient—impartial spectators will not approve of the gratitude being felt by the recipient for the good things that befall him or her in this life. Similarly, impartial spectators will not sympathize with the gratitude felt by an individual for inanimate objects incapable of intending anything at all.

Smith's understanding of the social dynamics did not end here. Through his notion of mutual sympathy, he explained how an individual's feeling of gratitude can be modified and corrected by the judgments of others in society. An individual wants others to feel the sentiments in their breasts. When others cannot, the individual moderates his or her passions to the point that they can be adopted and approved by others. By looking through the eyes of others and by adopting the position of the impartial spectator and viewing my own passions and responses to a particular situation, I learn to be grateful in socially appropriate and socially approved ways. The impartial spectator thus functions as a mechanism for ensuring the proper functioning of gratitude. Much as the state enforces contracts and maintains justice in civil society, the impartial spectator stands behind benevolence and gratitude, making sure that the benefits of each can spread from one individual to another.

Smith's analysis of merit and demerit moves our understanding of gratitude forward along a number of different dimensions. First, it explains clearly where gratitude fits into our social world and why self-interest is not enough to tie people together or bring about the many benefits of social interaction. *The Wealth of Nations* (1776/1981) was predicated on the assumption that self-interest is a more reliable foundation than beneficence and gratitude for securing the basic economic needs of a society. But it did not eliminate the need for either benevolent acts or responses of gratitude. As Smith showed in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1790/1982), gratitude plays a vital role in making the world we live in a better place. Second, Smith's analysis provided a secular account of gratitude that freed itself from many of the theological and hierarchical assumptions of medieval thought. Gratitude is a human phenomenon that binds people together in society. As such, it is subject to

philosophy. Gratitude has a place in the modern world, but it is a place that must be defended against the corrupting influences of modern life.

Promoting sentiments like proper gratitude is by no means an easy task. Smith noted that the civil magistrate is entrusted with preserving the public peace and restraining injustice as well as "promoting the prosperity of the kingdom" (1790/1982, p. 81). This means that the state must establish good discipline in society by promoting virtue and discouraging vice and by commanding "mutual good offices to a certain degree" (p. 81). This is easier said than done. As Smith explained, "Of all the duties of law-giver, however, this, perhaps, is that which requires the greatest delicacy and reserve to execute with propriety and judgment. To neglect it altogether exposes the commonwealth to many gross disorders and shocking enormities, and to push it too far is destructive of all liberty, security, and justice" (p. 81).

Like Seneca, Smith recognized that there are limits to what could be done to promote sentiments of gratitude in the world. Allowing the legislator, rather than the impartial spectator, to be the judge and enforcer of debts of gratitude may undercut one of the most important psychological bonds that naturally tie one person to another.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Not all eighteenth-century philosophers had the insight or ability of Adam Smith to explain the interrelations between self-interest and gratitude in modern commercial societies. His contemporary Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the great eighteenth-century critic of the modern commercial order, seemed at a loss to explain either the positive features of self-interest or the role that gratitude continued to play in modern society. In his last autobiographical work, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782/1979), Rousseau lamented the fact that ordinary human dealings were no longer based on "natural kindness and sociability" but had become sullied and polluted by venal motives such as self-interest. In the past, he argued, Europeans could receive housing free of charge by relying on the hospitality of the host and the gratitude of the lodger. He noted that, in modern times, the situation is different. Self-interest has displaced all. Rousseau wrote, "I have noticed that only in Europe is hospitality put up for sale. Throughout Asia you are lodged free of charge. I know that it is harder to find the comforts that you are used to. But then it is something to be able to say to yourself: 'I am a man and I am the guest of my fellow-men; it is pure humanity that I have to thank for my sustenance.' Little hardships are easy to endure when the heart is better treated than the body" (pp. 151-152).

the frailties and tensions that threaten the human condition as well. Third, Smith's analysis explained how feelings of gratitude are socialized through interaction with other people and how the prevailing standards of gratitude found in a society can be improved by a deeper appreciation of the psychological forces that give rise to and sustain gratitude in the world. Fourth, Smith identified with great clarity the forces that might threaten proper feelings of gratitude in the modern world. Self-interest, in particular, was identified as a factor that can warp and even pervert proper feelings of gratitude in a human being. Failing to place oneself in the position of an impartial spectator can cause one to both overestimate and underestimate the gratitude that may be owed to another individual. Learning to adopt the proper perspective for viewing moral questions is the key for giving gratitude its proper place in a modern commercial order.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, this theme about possible threats to gratitude is extended into a wholesale analysis of the problems that accompany the division of labor in a market-oriented society. In Book I, Smith argued that the key to wealth and economic growth in a commercial order is an extensive division of labor. In Book V, however, he noted that an extensive division of labor brings with it serious and disturbing unintended consequences. Workers who are engaged in highly specialized jobs in the production process may become dehumanized to the point that they lose touch with their basic humanity. An extensive division of labor confines some men's mental capacities to a few simple functions, rendering them stupid and narrow minded. As Smith explained:

The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life. (1776/1981, p. 782)

According to Smith, the modern economy may undercut the psychological forces that naturally give rise to gratitude in society. Efforts thus must be made to counteract these tendencies, particularly through the institution of public education among the laboring classes and the teaching of science and

the latter. Like Rousseau, we find ourselves lost in a false choice between the world of cold rational calculation and the sweets sentiments of humanity. If we are to bring our social, political, and economic theory into closer contact with the everyday world in which we live, we must recognize, as Smith did, that gratitude is a significant force in developing relationships to others and organizing society as a whole. Self-interest may be the driving force of our modern capitalist economy, but it has not made gratitude a vestigial passion. On the contrary, the triumph of self-interest and the modern market economy may demand that we intensify our awareness of gratitude and the dynamic forces it unleashes. Failure to do so may not only cause us to miscast our theories about our social world, but may also undercut positive social consequences that follow from these theories.

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In this passage, it appears that Rousseau was decrying that European commercial societies have lost something that Asian societies have not: a sentiment of hospitality and the pleasures of receiving such hospitality and being grateful for it. For Rousseau, hospitality and gratitude were exemplars of "pure humanity." Unlike Smith, who provided a place for both self-interest and gratitude, Rousseau offered nothing but a stark dichotomy between them. Significantly, it was a dichotomy in which Rousseau himself was caught.

At first blush, it seems that Rousseau (1782/1979) was rejecting the world of commercial prosperity for a simpler one based on natural human sentiments. In an earlier passage in *Reveries*, he noted that gratitude is part of a sacred bond that links a benefactor and a recipient in a close personal relationship. These bonds naturally flow from the pleasure that individuals have in interacting with one another and thus differ sharply from the bonds of duty established by self-interest (see p. 97). Nevertheless, despite his apparent championing of hospitality and gratitude over self-interest, he would not personally accept the conclusion that we are better off relating to one another through gratitude rather than self-interest. Experience had taught him that natural sentiments such as gratitude embodied a downside. As a young man, Rousseau claimed, he trusted others and allowed such relations based on beneficence and gratitude to blossom. Age and experience, however, caused him to distrust others and the natural sentiments that tie people together, because he came to believe that the bonds of dependency that were being forged were more dangerous to the individual in the modern world than connections that were being established (see pp. 98–99). Paradoxically, Rousseau, the champion of sentimentality, could not accept the human consequences that followed from expressions of gratitude. Benevolence and gratitude may be expressions of our deepest humanity, but they also threaten us with chains no free man could desire. Forced to choose between freedom and humane sentiments, Rousseau chose the former.

But even in this choice, Rousseau found it difficult to be consistent. Ironically, his final word on the subject of gratitude at the end of *Reveries* (1782/1979) was hardly consistent with this rejection. In the final sentence of the book, he stated that he would employ his remaining leisure hours "to repay the best of women for all the help she had given me" (p. 154). Earlier protestations aside, his last thoughts were to thank the one individual who helped him most along the path to enlightenment. For Rousseau, gratitude bubbled to the surface, whatever else was done to keep it under control.

Rousseau's ambivalence about the place of gratitude in the modern world is echoed by many of our contemporaries today. Abandoning Smith's attempt to understand the place of both gratitude and self-interest in our modern world, too much theory has ignored the former and misconstrued

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3 Gratitude in Judaism

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Jewish teachings on gratitude are attempts to cultivate a sense of gratitude to God, and to nurture gratitude in human relationships. Although these two manifestations of gratitude can be considered independently, in the religious literature of Judaism they are often connected. We begin with the human-divine relationship.

GRATITUDE IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

In their analysis of the sentiment of gratitude McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, and Larson (2001) conceptualized gratitude as having three morally relevant functions, that of a moral barometer, a moral motivator, and a moral reinforcer. In examining the role of gratitude in Judaism, in the individual's relationship to God whom he or she believes is the benevolent provider of life and all that sustains it, the motivating and reinforcing functions of gratitude are evident. Feelings of gratitude to God *motivate* proper behavior toward him, which means obeying his commandments and loving him. In the dominant paradigm of divine theodicy in the Hebrew Bible and in later rabbinic literature, gratitude also functions as a *reinforcer* of God's munificence. God will confer further prosperity and other rewards on those who express their gratitude to him, whether in sacrifice, in prayer, in good deeds directed toward others, or in performing rituals, all of which he has prescribed in his Torah (teachings).

We need to take note, however, of a major biblical exception to the notion of a God who rewards fidelity, love, and gratitude, which is articulated in the poetic section of the book of Job (in contrast to the prose prologue and