Paul and the Gift

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CHAPTER 1

The Anthropology and History of the Gift

“Gift” is neither a single phenomenon nor a stable category. A great variety of objects, acts, and relationships have been regarded as “gifts” in different cultures and at different times. Likewise, in many cultures, the definition of “gift” (in distinction from other forms of exchange) has altered over time. If Paul and his contemporaries spoke about divine and human benevolence using the language of “gift,” we need to be sure that we know what is implied in the evocation of such terms, and what is not. A modern Western dictionary tells us that “gift” means something handed over “gratuitously, for nothing.” But even the slightest knowledge of antiquity would inform us that gifts were given with strong expectations of return — indeed, precisely in order to elicit a return and thus to create or enhance social solidarity. Those of us brought up in the modern West are likely to be surprised (even shocked) by the gift practices of non-Western cultures today. We should expect a similar or even greater surprise when we encounter ancient practices and opinions.

In this chapter I hope to achieve three ends: first, to use the rich discussion of “the gift” in the field of anthropology in order to raise appropriate questions about the operation of gifts in contexts outside and before modern Western culture (1.1); second, to outline the role of gifts or benefactions in the Greco–Roman world contemporary to Paul (1.2); and third, to trace what has happened to notions of “gift” in Western modernity, in order to alert us to unconscious assumptions liable to distort our reading of first-century practices and texts (1.3). (When in a subsequent chapter [3] we examine significant moments in the interpretation of Paul on “grace,” it may prove possible to


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identify correlations between shifts in the reception of Pauline theology and changes in conceptions of the gift.) By pursuing these three ends, we begin to interrogate what is meant by “gift” and “grace” and to lay both conceptual and historical foundations for the investigations to follow in the rest of this book.

1.1. The Gift in Anthropological Perspective

1.1.1. Mauss and “the Gift”

Marcel Mauss’s famous “Essai sur le Don” (1925) is justly regarded as the seminal treatment of our topic, spawning a vast array of anthropological research and academic debate in subsequent decades. In this uneven but immensely suggestive essay, Mauss harvested the research of ethnographers working at various points around the Pacific Rim (on the western seaboard of America and Canada; in Melanesia; and in the Polynesian islands, including the Maori population of Aotearoa/New Zealand), supplementing this with his own encyclopedic knowledge of ancient languages and texts in the Indo-European tradition. Reconfiguring the sociological tradition of Durkheim (his uncle), Mauss took care to use detailed and historically specific ethnographic evidence, but constructed it on a synthetic hypothesis about a core characteristic of archaic societies, which he called “le régime du don” or “le système des dons échangés.” His analysis was innovative in interpreting society as a “totality,” in all its interconnected and correlative parts; it was also powerful in suggesting how, in archaic societies, the gift-system was basic to, and the glue between, all the realms which modernity has distinguished — economics, law, kinship, religion, aesthetics, ritual, and politics. Although the essay title speaks of “le Don,” the term Mauss preferred was the old-fashioned French “prestations” (with a meaning something like “obligatory community services”): the “gift” being discussed is not confined to objects (or people) passed from one hand to another, but includes a large range of favors and services, symbolic and material, performed by one party for another. Mauss’s thesis is that in such societies the exchange of such “prestations” constitutes a unifying social choreography “under different forms and for reasons different from those with which we are familiar.”

Mauss identified three key elements in “l’institution de la prestation totale”: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to return. Each of these interdependent moves carries the force of social necessity, since they constitute the most important bonds of society (and of relations between humans and gods). Families and groups (tribes) are tied together internally and externally by the offering and receiving of gifts — an unwillingness to receive is a sign of hostility or mistrust. Since “things are never completely detached from those carrying out the exchange,” “the mutual ties and alliance that they establish are comparatively indissoluble.” Such bonds may be the chief source of cohesion in a gift-centered culture, although their very significance is also often the occasion for rivalry and competition. Mauss was fascinated by the extremes of “agonistic” gift-giving in the “potlatch,” the enormous disposal (even destruction) of wealth that had been reported (and perhaps misunderstood) by ethnographers among the First Nations of the North American western seaboard. As he rightly noted, generosity in such contexts is a form of power — a display of wealth that challenges the honor of others by requiring them to reciprocate with an even greater return. He noted how in many contexts gift-giving operates as a substitute for war — soothing or sublimating hostility with gifts that constitute either challenge or riposte. In such a system, how and to whom one gives matters greatly. A gift given inappropriately or received in the wrong spirit can create resentment, even hostility (as Mauss noted, the word Gift in German can mean “poison”). And, given the importance of the tie created by gifts, the choice of recipient is strategic. Commenting on the kula gifts circulated around the Trobriand Islands, Mauss


7. Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 42. Tracing a survival of this principle in Brahmin society, Mauss notes that “the gift is therefore at one and the same time what should be done, what should be received, and yet what is dangerous to take. This is because the thing that is given itself forges a bilateral, irrevocable bond, above all when it consists of food” (*The Gift*, p. 76).


notes: “They seek out the best possible partner in the opposing tribe. The affair is a serious matter, for the association one attempts to create establishes a kind of clan link between the partners.”[11] If there is a danger in omitting (and therefore offending) powerful people from the circle of recipients of one’s gift,[12] there is also a danger in including unfitting recipients, who would be unable to make a return, or from whom one would not wish to receive it.[13] Mauss’s essay specifically sets out to explain the obligation to return a gift. Whence comes the pressure (real even if not enforceable in law) for the gift to be reciprocated to an equal if not greater value? Why is it that a gift is received “with a burden attached”? His answer is that the thing or service given is not detachable from the person who gives it, and that the tie with the donor can only be acknowledged by a counter-gift. In this connection, he famously (and controversially) made appeal to a report from a Maori informant, who spoke of the hau of the gift that had to return to the giver. Taking this to refer to the “spirit” inhabiting the gift, Mauss concluded that one must give back to another person what is really part and parcel of his nature and substance, because to accept something from someone is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, his soul. . . . The thing given is not inactive. Invested with life, often possessing individuality, it seeks to return to what Hertz called its “place of origin” or to produce, on behalf of the clan and the native soil from which it sprang, an equivalent to replace it.[17]

Elsewhere, Mauss speaks of the social forces obliging a return — the loss of honor that would result from failure to reciprocate[18] or the general need to maintain a profitable alliance with the donor. But he is generally concerned to emphasize the fact that the gifts themselves were not simply objects, that is, the passive, depersonalized things that are passed from one person to another; rather, they “had a personality and an inherent power.”[20] The very distinction between property and persons, which is basic to Western legal systems at least since Roman times, is, he insists, absent from the archaic societies he is analyzing.[21] The gifts not only belong to people, they are invested with the personality of the donor.

Mauss thus observed that his analysis requires a mixing, or scrambling, of the categories and values that have become associated with “gifts” and their opposites in modern, Western culture. At the beginning of the essay, he speaks of gifts that are “apparently free and disinterested but nevertheless constrained and self-interested,” as if they were part of a polite fiction and social deceit.[22] But by the end, he suggests that, more fundamentally, our polarized categories need to be reassessed:

These concepts of law and economics that it pleases us to contrast: liberty and obligation; liberality, generosity, and luxury, as against savings, interest, and utility — it would be good to put them into the melting pot once more. . . . This [Trobiand] notion is neither that of the free, purely gratuitous rendering of total services [prestation] nor that of production and exchange purely interested in what is useful. It is a sort of hybrid which flourished.[23]

In this connection, Mauss criticizes the representation of the Trobriand gift-system offered by Malinowski (his chief informant on the kula exchange). Malinowski had distinguished between various kinds of gifts, placing at one end of the spectrum what he considered “free” or “pure” gifts — gifts given “willingly” and “free of any counter-gift” — which he found operative between husbands and wives, and fathers and children. As Mauss insists, this moral gradation of gifts is inapplicable and loaded with inappropriate assumptions; if, as Malinowski himself reported, husbands’ gifts to wives are regarded in their culture as “a kind of salary for sexual services rendered,” then that is what they were, an obligatory counter-gift that is not at all “free” or “pure” in a modern

14. In the archaic societies Mauss was examining, there is no distinguishable sphere of “law,” and so no possible distinction between what is morally and legally obliged. Testart’s criticism of Mauss for failing to distinguish between what is legally and socially obligatory illustrates well the misunderstanding of gift that arises from adopting the assumptions of modernity: A. Testart, “Uncertainties of the Obligation to Reciprocate: A Critique of Mauss,” in James and Allen, eds., Marcel Mauss, pp. 97-110.
24. B. Malinowski, Argonauts of the Western Pacific (London: Routledge, 1922), pp. 177-80. He notes — but then discounts — the fact that “the natives” have a “very coarse” way of thinking of such gifts, as in fact not “free,” but the repayment by the husband for the sexual favors of his wife, and for her production of sons.
sense. In effect, Mauss insists that gifts can be both “voluntary” and “obliged,” both “disinterested” and “self-interested,” both “free” and “compulsory”: if we find this confusing or nonsensical, the problem may lie with the categories that we have invented.

The boldness and fertility of Mauss’s essay includes his suggestion that “the economy of gift-exchange” that he identified in archaic societies also lies at the root of Indo-European society, and can be traced in shadowy outline in the early texts and customs of Indian, German, and Roman cultures. He thus suggests not an absolute contrast between different cultures of gift, but a trajectory, by which Western culture has evolved out of a common “total” system of gift into the differentiated domains and practices of today. In this regard, he suggests that “it is precisely the Romans and Greeks, who, perhaps following upon the Semites of the north and west, invented the distinction between personal and property law, separated sale from gift and exchange, isolated the moral obligation and contract, and in particular, conceived the difference that exists between rites, laws, and interests.” He does not altogether bemoan this “great revolution,” but he notes the way it has led to a conceptual distinction between “free” gifts and obligatory exchange (in sales or contracts), as also between “disinterested” generosity and “utilitarian” or “interested” procedures of *quid pro quo*. The final chapter of the essay celebrates co-operative gift-relations as against the “cold” and “calculating” ethos of utilitarian individualism, contributing to political debates of the 1920s by showing that alternative systems of social relation have left traces even in twentieth-century Europe, and can be created anew. In this way, Mauss indicated that the analysis of gift-relations could play a crucial role in revealing the structural relations operative within any society; he thus placed “gift” at the centre of subsequent anthropological analysis and debate.

There is much in Mauss’s essay that is (as he acknowledged) incomplete and ambiguous, but also (and partly for that reason) much that has proved fertile for future thought and research. It would be a mistake to use Mauss’s analysis of archaic societies as a kind of “model,” applicable to every relation of gift: as we have seen, he was acutely aware of cultural developments that have changed the role and even the understanding of “gifts” over time. But his work generates fruitful questions for the analysis of gift-relations, their functions within society, their relation to other domains (if their reach is not comprehensive), and the values and power-dynamics with which they are loaded. By highlighting the role of gifts in the creation of social solidarity, and the patterns of obligation which they represent and induce, Mauss alerts us to aspects of gifts/benefactions in antiquity that will be important to explore. He simultaneously draws attention to the cultural relativity of modern assumptions about “gifts,” which are liable to distort our perspective on the past.

1.1.2. The Anthropology of “Gift” Post-Mauss

The iconic status of Mauss’s “Essai sur le Don” ensured that, in the extensive subsequent debates, it was both co-opted and criticized in the service of various agendas. This fate was evident already in the way Lévi-Strauss presented Mauss as the forerunner of a structuralist analysis of culture: he took Mauss’s three movements of gift (giving, receiving, and returning) to constitute a single structure of exchange, a system of reciprocal relations lying deep in the universal, but unconscious structures of the human mind. Lévi-Strauss criticized the role Mauss had given to the Maori notion of *hau* (the spirit in the gift); such “native mystification” was not necessary to explain the obligation to return the gift, which was built into the very structure of gift-reciprocity. However, Mauss’s question about the obligation to return has continued to haunt debates about “the gift” for many decades. His interpretation of the Maori *hau* has been strongly disputed, and his appeal to the notion of a non-material presence of

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29. Mauss specifically denies that he is offering a model; he sees his work as “really posing questions to historians and ethnographers, and putting forward subjects for enquiry rather than resolving a problem and giving a definitive answer” (*The Gift*, p. 100).


the giver in the gift has proved distasteful to those who would banish such ideas as the naïve objectification of social forces. 33

Everyone is agreed that recipients of gifts are under a strong (though nonlegal) obligation to make some return for a gift — even if only in gratitude. Is this in order to preserve honor, or out of ambition for some further gift (i.e., out of the self-interest of the recipient)? Does it represent the power of the donor, in some sense present in the gift, laying on the recipient the requirement to return? 34 It seems impossible to decide absolutely between these forms of explanation, and it may be best to conclude more generally that the return of the gift represents the desire to reproduce social relations: each party to the gift relation is in some sense “produced” by the exchange between them, and social relations can only be maintained or reproduced in the continual motion of exchange. 35 In this sense, the counter-gift is rarely the end of the relationship, replacing an inequality with a stable equilibrium: it is liable to constitute, rather, a form of “giving-again,” adding to the gift relation a continuing forward momentum.

Since Mauss, the analysis of such exchange relations has been further refined, as research has probed more deeply into a variety of traditional societies. Weiner brought to the fore the gender-dimension of gifts, and the vital but often unnoticed role of women in gift-relations, though her analysis of male exploitation was challenged by Strathern, who questioned her use of Western notions of identity and ownership. 36 The importance of honor or prestige has also been emphasized by a variety of researchers: if material gifts are returned in the form of honor, such “symbolic capital” should not be downplayed as an insubstantial return, since the power that is entailed by the possession of honor may be precisely the purpose of the gift-giving. The power-dynamics of gift-giving, already recognized by Mauss, have indeed drawn much attention. Sahlins, for instance, noted the importance of the time delay between the gift and the return, and of the impression in the value of the gift: both keep the obligations of the recipient open-ended, and cement the power of the original donor. 37 Gift-giving is thus by no means always an innocent or even a friendly enterprise, but is easily manipulated by those in a position of power: as Sahlins cynically remarks, “everywhere in the world the indigenous category for exploitation is ‘reciprocity.’” 38

As Mauss had noted, there are some forms of exchange which are not “gift”: he learned from Malinowski, for instance, that even in the Trobriand Islands there are forms of trade (gimwall) that are very different from the personalized and enduring relationships formed by kula-gifts. 39 Even gift exchange can take extremely diverse forms, and gifts can vary greatly in their value, in the personality they bear, their productivity, and the time gap between gift and return. In this connection, Sahlins helpfully charted the correlation between different kinds of exchange and different types of people with whom that exchange is carried out. For immediate kin, or those in a closest relationship, he mapped forms of “generalized” (or “indefinite”) reciprocity, where the counter is not stipulated by time, quantity, or quality: the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite. 40 At a midpoint, there is “balanced reciprocity” or “transactions which stipulate returns of commensurate worth or utility within a finite and narrow period.” 41 Such, he suggests, are liable to occur between individuals or groups on friendly but less intimate terms. At the “unassociable extreme” he places “negative reciprocity,” where, in a contest of opposed interests, each looks “to maximize utility at the other’s expense.” 42 The mapping is necessarily simplified, drawing from a wide range of ethnographic material, but the essential point is valid: different forms of exchange reflect, and create, different degrees of social proximity and thus different kinds of social relation. Not every gift relation is the same, and not everyone is a desirable partner. Even a lavish giver is not indiscriminate: gifts are carefully placed, or refused, according to prior and desired relations, and even in societies strongly deter-

34. For discussion, see, e.g., Sahlins, Stone Age Economics, and Godelier, Enigma of the Gift (who returns to something close to Mauss notion of the presence of the giver in the gift).
36. See Strathern, Gender of the Gift, based on her own field research in Papua New Guinea, in reaction to A. Weiner, Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976). Strathern's sophisticated analysis suggests that in such societies a person does not possess a stable individual identity, but is composed of social relations (on an ongoing basis), such that identity does not inhere in a person or thing, but is the outcome of social interaction.
42. Sahlins, Stone Age Economics, p. 195.
mined by gift-relations there are limits to gift-distribution where the ties which gifts produce would be unprofitable or unfit.\textsuperscript{43} Gift-research also shows that not everything is exchangeable; some things simply cannot be given away. Mauss had noticed that even in the "potlatch," some family possessions are \textit{sacra} and therefore cannot be given, and this notion of "inalienable" goods has been the subject of much further research.\textsuperscript{44} One might distinguish here between different kinds of "inalienability." There are some possessions that simply cannot be alienated (given away) at all, without loss of individual or group identity. There are others that are in one sense given, but in another sense still belong to the giver: a sister remains a sibling even when a family gives her in marriage, and a group may retain a strong attachment to, and interest in, property or possessions even after they are "given away." Other gifts again are given on the expectation that they, or something closely equivalent, will be returned: like a ball on an elastic string, they remain ever liable to be retracted into the hands of the original giver. The relationship between objects that can and that cannot be given may vary greatly in traditional cultures, but "inalienable" goods serve to remind us of the strong investment of the giver in the gift.

As we saw, Mauss’s interpretation of gift-giving advocated a conceptual scrambling of contemporary polarities between exchanges that are "free" or "obliged," "pure" or "interested." But it is striking how often these modern moral polarities have crept back into the anthropology of gift. Sahlin's persisted in regarding certain types of gift (at the "generalized" end of his spectrum) as "pure" and "altruistic," labeling contrasting forms of exchange "selfish" or "interested."\textsuperscript{45} In the preface to the second edition of his work (2004), he recognized that there is something wrong with assessing economic life as "a contest between self-satisfaction and social constraint" (p. 95). In their communally shared activities, individuals go about acquiring and disposing of the material means of their personal existence.\textsuperscript{46} But the main text of his work is still beset with antithesis between "sacrifice in favor of another" and "self-

\textsuperscript{43} For examples of the refusal of gift (e.g., hospitality) to distant kinsmen, outsiders, or well-known "spongers," see, e.g., Sahlin, \textit{Stone Age Economics}, p. 246; J. P. Johansen, \textit{The Maori and His Religion in Its Non-Ritualistic Aspects} (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1954), p. 54.\textsuperscript{44} See esp. Weiner, \textit{Inalienable Possessions}, and Godelier, \textit{Enigma of the Gift}, pp. 108-210.\textsuperscript{45} Sahlin, \textit{Stone Age Economics}, pp. 191-94. "At one end of the spectrum stands the assistance freely given, the small currency of everyday kinship, friendship and neighbourly relations, the 'pure gift' Malinowski called it... At the other pole, self-interested seizure" (p. 191). "Put another way, the spirit of exchange swings from disinterested concern for the other party through mutuality to self-interest" (p. 193).\textsuperscript{46} Sahlin, \textit{Stone Age Economics}, p. xi.

interested gain," or between "obligations" and "altruistic assistance," as if the categories were unproblematic.\textsuperscript{47} The same categories dominate the analyses of Weiner,\textsuperscript{48} and reappear in a subtle form in the famous analysis of Kabyle gift-giving by Bourdieu. Acutely sensitized to the power-dynamics of gift-giving, Bourdieu argued that there is a deliberate ambiguity, a "double reality," in the exchange of gift. The "official reality" is of generosity, with the delayed return imagined as an independent act of disinterested giving; but the "objective reality" is of power, domination, and "the law of self-interest," cloaked by relations of gift. In his view, it is important to regard both aspects as socially "real," and not merely to discount one in favor of the other. But he concludes that the objective reality requires for its working a careful, even conscious policy of self-deception. When domination cannot take place overtly, it "must be disguised under the veil of enchanted relationships, the official model of which is presented by relations between kinsmen; in order to be socially recognized it must get itself misconceived."\textsuperscript{49} Thus, "the whole society pays itself in the false coin of its dream,"\textsuperscript{50} everyone plays their part in the fiction. It is hard to avoid the impression that Bourdieu’s Marxian analysis requires the subtle re-imposition of exactly those polarities (between "interested" and "disinterested," "obliged" and "free") that Mauss suggested were liable to skew our perception of gifts. If, as Mauss insists, gifts in traditional societies exhibit \textit{both things at once} (and not just one at one level, and one at another), it is important precisely \textit{not} to play off against one another characteristics that are not contradictory in their cultural context.

One further trend in the anthropology of gift should also be noted here. If traditional gift-societies still preserve a place for ordinary trade, that space has grown greatly in importance where the Western market for commodities has penetrated cultures traditionally built around gift.\textsuperscript{51} In the analysis of
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this phenomenon, there has arisen a tendency to “essentialize” a distinction between a Western “commodity-economy” and a traditional “gift-economy,” the one characterized by the circulation of goods, in a “cold” and “calculated” exchange, the other by the personal relations in which people and property are closely interlinked.\(^{52}\) There is value in this distinction if it can be used to question our assumptions about exchange, but there is a danger of making “gift” in every sense the opposite of “commodity” and thus forgetting that in traditional or archaic societies gifts too are exchanged and carry heavy loads of obligation.\(^{53}\) What has happened to “gifts” in the modern West is a subject we will explore below (1.3), but for now we must note the danger of retreating to the modern conceptualization of the polarity “commodity vs. gift” onto the relations between gifts and commodities in a pre-modern context.

The anthropology of traditional gift-giving offers no simple “model” of gift-relations, and is not straightforwardly transferable to the world of Paul and his contemporaries, who are the main subject of this book. It cannot be used to “essentialize” the gift, or to provide a defined and clearly delimit concept. But it does generate some valuable angles of perception, raising salient questions and sensitivities that alert us to possibilities we might miss (or misconstrue) from a modern perspective. Thus, for our further study we should note:

1. It may be helpful to work with a broad definition of “gifts,” including favours, benefactions, and services of many kinds. Such services may include important forms of “symbolic capital,” such as prestige or honor, which may be precisely the kind of “return” that more material goods expect, especially in asymmetrical relationships. Gifts and counter-gifts may be presumed to function as important media of power.

2. It is important to map the role and the significance of “gifts” within the larger social matrix of relations: how significant are they beside other modes of transaction and forms of exchange? What spheres of social life are affected by gift relations (or kept separate from them)? And how do gifts relate to trade and commodity exchange?

3. It is equally important to map what kinds of relationship are created, ce-

52. Strathern, Gender of the Gift, self-consciously adopts this oppositional fiction in order to expose inappropriate Western categories. See the summary of this polarity by Gregory: “Commodity exchange is an exchange of alienable objects between people who are in a state of reciprocal independence that establishes a quantitative relationship between the objects exchanged. . . . Gift exchange is an exchange of inalienable objects between people who are in a state of reciprocal dependence that establishes a qualitative relationship between the transactors” (Gifts and Commodities, pp. 100-101).


As Mauss indicated, the nature of "gifts" and their relation to other forms of exchange have developed significantly over time.\(^{56}\) In order to position our research more precisely, it is therefore necessary to outline the role of "gifts" or "benefactions" in the context of the Greco-Roman world contemporary to Paul (1.2) before noting the changes that have taken place in Western culture since that time (1.3). Such changes have inevitably affected the way in which interpreters of Paul (including ourselves) have heard what he has to say about gifts and "grace."

### 1.2. Gift and Reciprocity in the Greco-Roman World

The hybrid adjective "Greco-Roman" in the title of this section gestures to the complexity of the Mediterranean world in the first century, where the overlay of Roman political power onto "Greek" traditions created a complex and socially layered interaction of cultural traditions, changing over time and varying from East to West. It will be well to begin by surveying the assumptions of Greek gift-reciprocity and some of its institutional forms, before introducing distinctively Roman systems of "patronage" and outlining the problematics surrounding gifts or benefactions in the early Roman Empire.\(^{57}\)

#### 1.2.1. Greek Reciprocity and the Limits of the Gift

It is widely recognized that one of the fundamental principles of Greek social relations, both among humans and in the relationship between humans and gods, was the expectation of reciprocity in gifts, favors and "good turns."\(^{58}\) Hesiod’s advice on this matter seems well tuned to the everyday lives of farmers:

> Invite your friend, but not your enemy, to dine; especially be cordial to your neighbour, for if trouble comes at home, a neighbour’s there, at hand. . . . Measure carefully when you must borrow from your neighbour, then, pay back the same, or more, if possible, and you will have a friend in time of need. Shun evil profit, for dishonest gain is just the same as failure. Love your friends, visit those who visit you, and give to him who gives, but not, if he does not. We give to a generous person (δωρητής), but no-one gives to someone who is stingy (αδωρητός). . . .

The man who gives ungrudgingly is glad at heart, rejoicing in his gift, but if a man forgets his shame and takes something, however small, his heart grows stiff and cold. (Works and Days 342-59)\(^{59}\)

In its commonsense ordinariness, this advice shows acute awareness of the vulnerability of everyday existence: taking care in reciprocal relations not only makes life pleasant; it makes it more secure. It is important to be generous, and glad-heartedly so, but also discriminating and cautious: to give to the stingy, to those who cannot or will not give back, would be as useless as "sowing seeds in the sea" (Ps.-Phocylides 152). A reputation for "grasping" is dangerous: when you are the recipient of the gift, it is crucial to give a well-measured return, if possible with sufficient increment to place your friend under obligation (for when you need his aid). Such ordinary reciprocal favor excludes exact calculation, but requires a rough awareness of who is under obligation to whom. Nonetheless, these are gifts — the exchange of services

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\(^{56}\) The simple transfer of anthropological analysis derived from archaic societies (e.g., Sahlins) to the interpretation of the Roman world is justifiably criticized by Z. A. Crook, "Reflections on Culture and Social-Scientific Models," JBL 124 (2005): 515-32.

\(^{57}\) For the importance of historical context in understanding gifts in the ancient world, see the essays in M. L. Satlow, ed., The Gift in Antiquity (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

\(^{58}\) The literature on this topic is enormous; recent important contributions include S. von Reden, Exchange in Ancient Greece (London: Routledge, 1995), and the essays in C. Gill et al., eds., Reciprocity in Ancient Greece. The discussion was opened by Finley's analysis of the social world of the Homeric epics (M. Finley, The World of Odysseus [London: Chatto & Windus, 1956]), influenced by Mauss's analysis of the gift.

\(^{59}\) Translation by D. Wender in Hesiod and Theognis (London: Penguin, 1973), pp. 69-70, slightly adapted. Hesiod’s date is unknown (c. 700 BCE?), his social level somewhere between the peasant farmer and the aristocrat. For commentary on this passage, drawing out its similarities with Mauss’s analysis of reciprocal gift-giving, see P. Millett, Lending and Borrowing in Ancient Athens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 30-34. There is every reason to think that the social norms outlined here were constant and pervasive in the Mediterranean world for centuries; Cicero cites this passage as still highly relevant in his day (De Off. 1.48). A millennium after Hesiod, the rabbis considered it grounds for divorce when a man prevented his wife from lending kitchen implements to a neighbor or from mourning with a bereaved friend (y. Ketubbot 75, 31b — a reference I owe to S. Schwartz, Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010], p. 14 n. 26). By this inability to give she will be deprived of the social credit necessary for her own flourishing in the future.
not a trade in goods — and it is crucial that they are suffused with the warm sentiments of “friendship.”

While every social situation has its specific nuance, these norms of reciprocity could be illustrated a thousand times over from Greek sources of many different kinds. Never specified in legislation (they were too deeply embedded, too obvious, and too incalculable for legal purposes), such norms are the stuff of popular maxims and high literature, the everyday etiquette of social communication as well as the formulaic language of civic proclamation. As everyone knows, “one hand washes another” (the Greek equivalent of “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours”); “give something and get something” (Epicharmus, DK 30). Plenty of popular maxims encourage people to “favor a friend” while being sure to “return a favor.” The rules of gift-reciprocity — the willing exchange of valued items or services, the obligation to return in some form and at some time — are fundamental also to the dynamics of Greek literature, from Homeric epic to tragedy, comedy, and novel: as Sophocles pithily puts it, “one favor always begets another” (χάρις χάριν γάρ ἐστιν ἡ τικτοῦσ’ αἰε, Ajax 522). The semantic field for gifts and counter-gifts embraces a broad array of terms, but prominent are nouns from the δώρ- root (δώρον, δωρεά, etc.), with their associated verbs (διδώμι and its counterpart, ἀποδίδωμι), interwoven with nouns and verbs from the χαρ- stem. These latter (among nouns, most commonly χάρις and its plural, χάριτες) typically convey the ethos of the gift as voluntary benevolence, but are also used often for specific acts of beneficence, favor expressed in a particular object or action. As Sophocles’ line makes clear, the fact that the same term could be used for a favor given and a favor returned made the reciprocity of gift-giving all the more obvious: when χάρις is returned, it is often hard to distinguish between the meaning “favor” and “thanks” (cf. χαριστήριον; εὐχαριστία), since gratitude is always expressed in, and at least part of, the counter-gift. By at least the fourth century BCE, the image of the Three Graces (Χάριτες) dancing in a ring had become a trope for the perpetual cycle of gift-and-return, both graceful and tightly bound (Aristotle, Eth. Nic. 1133a2-4).

The sense of obligation arising from the gift is particularly clear in papyrus letters, where individuals, across the social range, call on favors from those they have helped and express their gratitude in what seem to us tactlessly explicit and extreme terms. Authors routinely indicate their obligation to return some favor to their beneficiary, and according to Ps.-Demetrius’s template of a letter of gratitude, one should put oneself under practically limitless obligation: “if you wish anything that is mine, do not write requesting it, but demand a return favor (ἀπαγορεύω χάριν). For I am in your debt” (ὁσεῖλα χάρις). The use of the language of debt indicates the common roots of the financial sphere of loan-and-debt and the gift sphere of gift-and-return. As we shall see, it was the proximity, yet distinction, between these two transactional realms that was to become one of the problematics of the gift.

Relations between humans and the gods are closely modeled on the expectations of gift-reciprocity at the human level, even where the relationship is acknowledged to be grossly asymmetrical. Fundamental to the structure of Greek religion is, in fact, the acknowledgement of the gods as benefactors (to nations, cities, and individuals), distributing their favors (χαρίσματα) with appropriate discrimination, while humans, in prayer, in dedicatory gifts, and, above all, in sacrifice, participate in the reciprocatory cycle of gifts. As in


61. See below, Appendix: The Lexicon of Gift.

62. See R. Parker, “Pleasing Thighs: Reciprocity in Greek Religion,” in Gill et al., eds., Reciprocity in Ancient Greece, pp. 105-25, at 108-14. Of course, authors could deploy and develop the sense of such a significant term in a variety of ways. For a subtle analysis of Pindar in this connection, see L. Kurke, The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); her analysis starts from the assumption that “Charis, as always, designates a willing and precious reciprocal exchange” (p. 67).
the normal cycle of human reciprocities, it is not always clear, or necessary to be clear, about where the cycle began: sacrifices can be figured as return-gifts (for benefits already given), or as gifts of inducement (for benefits to be given in the future), or both at once.\(^\text{67}\) The common representation of Greek (and Roman) religion as _do ut des_ ("I give that you may give") is right to recognize the reciprocity ethos of ancient religious practice, but is wrong in putting one-sided stress on the human giver as the initiator of the gift-cycle, and in suggesting a crude commercialism in the transaction. Just as friends are engaged in continuous cycles of benefit exchange, without calculating who started the process or totting up precisely what each benefit is worth, so Greek (and Roman) worshipers gave honor, gratitude, and gifts to the gods to recognize and continue the bonds of benevolence between them, always with the potential that the relationship may go sour.\(^\text{68}\) Among other things, such gifts made clear who were fitting recipients of the favors that the gods would distribute to worthy (e.g., pious and grateful) partners in such an exchange.\(^\text{69}\)

Ever since Homeric times, friendship has been the paradigmatic relationship of gift-reciprocity.\(^\text{70}\) The common tag that "friends have things in common" (κοινὰ αἰτία) usually meant in practice that friends could call on one another for benefits or good turns whenever they needed them ("pooling" in this case is a higher order description of reciprocal exchange).\(^\text{71}\) Already by the

and Jewish sources on "benefactor relationships with the gods," since the same dynamic of gift-and-return pervades them all.

\(^\text{67}\) For examples of all three, see Parker, "Pleasing Thighs." Cf. J.-M. Bremmer, "The Reciprocity of Giving and Thanksgiving in Greek Worship," in Gill et al., eds., Reciprocity in Ancient Greece, pp. 127-37; Harrison, Paul's Language of Grace, pp. 55-57.

\(^\text{68}\) See esp. A. J. Festugière, "ANB" TAN: La Formule 'en échange de quoi' dans la Prière Grecque Hellenistique," Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques 66 (1976): 369-418, mirrored in Bremmer, "Reciprocity of Giving." On the aim of unpredictability around the behavior of the gods in the Greek tradition, see Gould, "On Making Sense." Apuleius suggests that it is characteristic of "blind Fortuna" to give to "the wicked and unworthy, never favoring anyone by discerning choice" (Metamorphoses 7.3), while Ias is properly given to those whose purity and faith are worthy of her sovereign protection (11.16, 16).

\(^\text{69}\) On the worth of the recipients, see, e.g., SEG 8:550 and SIG\(^{\text{72}}\) 708 (cited in Harrison, Paul's Language of Grace, pp. 55-56).

\(^\text{70}\) Finley, World of Odysseus, pp. 61-66; for an analysis of the shift in gift-relations between the Homeric era and the fifth century B.C.E., see R. Seaford, Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). S. D. Goldhill rightly insists that "the appellation or characterization _philos_ is used to mark not just affection but overridesingly a series of complex obligations, duties, and claims" (Reading Greek Tragedy [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], p. 82).

\(^\text{71}\) See Sahlin, Stone Age Economics, p. 188, on pooling as "an organisation of reciprocities, a system of reciprocities." The closer the relationship, the more a friend could be sure that fourth century B.C.E., the term "friend" had been stretched to cover a wide range of reciprocal relations, some extremely unequal. Aristotle notes that the term becomes less meaningful the more asymmetrical the relationship it describes, but he finds the principle of reciprocal benefit everywhere present (Eth. Nic. 1158b13ff.). Though children can never fully pay back the benefits (of life and upbringing) received from their parents, they are beholden to them to give service and honor in any way they can; honor is indeed the main form of return that the socially inferior can give to superiors (Eth. Nic. 1163b1-4). With elite and philosophical refinement, Aristotle can distinguish between friendships founded on pleasure, those founded on utility, and those (the best) founded on the quality of friends, in themselves. But even (in fact, especially) here, the friendship is figured as reciprocal, not unilateral: friends can be called such only if they love each other, "if they derive pleasure from and confer benefits on each other" (Eth. Nic. 1157b7-8).

The reciprocity, and therefore the sense of obligation, inherent in gift-giving is vividly illustrated by a particular kind of friendship that was to become problematic with the rise of the Greek city-states. The friendship (έξων) that tied aristocrats to one another across geographical and ethnic divides was an important tool in international "diplomacy" in the Greek world: pledges to support the interest of a foreign party in your home environment were reciprocal, and the elaborate exchange of gifts (both presents and costly grants or favors) placed their recipients under strong and lasting obligations.\(^\text{73}\) Such alliances could be greatly beneficial to the emerging Greek city-states, but there could also arise a clash of obligations, highly significant in the history of the gift. In fifth- and fourth-century Athens, we find a number of accusations


\(^\text{72}\) Aristotle's distancing of friendship from factors of utility made him insist that one does not give to a friend in order to get something back (Eth. Nic. 1163a1-2); but he is unabashed in claiming that doing good to a good person is inseparable from doing good to oneself, and that self-love is no bad thing (Eth. Nic. Book 9 passim). For a subtle analysis, see C. Gill, "Altruism or Reciprocity in Greek Ethical Philosophy?" in Gill et al., eds., Reciprocity in Ancient Greece, pp. 301-28, who rightly insists that the modern polarity between "egoism" and "altruism" serves us very badly in assessing Aristotle's ethic (and Greek thought in general); "other-benefiting" is part of a total structure of mutual benefit, governed by solidarity and reciprocity.

\(^\text{73}\) See esp. G. Herman, Ritiulised Friendship and the Greek City (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and Mitchell, Greeks Bearing Gifts.
against leading figures in the city that their acceptance of gifts from foreign kings or cities had caused harm to the city, compromising or weakening civic interests because of the obligations arising from their friendships with external powers. Their receipt of such gifts (δωροδοξία) was entirely in accord with the rules of friendship, but this term gained a negative nuance by the fact that it clashed with an alternative regime of obligation, that owed to the home city. It is important to observe here that the gift takes on this negative coloring not because it was in itself irregular or underhand — only because it stands in conflict with an alternative, communal interest. Critics of such gifts (which we would term "bribes") insist on the superior authority of the local political community (or, in Athens, "the people"). Precisely because the gift is so powerful, they insist on its limitation in a context where a centralized and depersonalized power ("the city") makes a higher claim on the individuals concerned. To abstain from gift exchange (to be δωροδοξός) became a mark of good citizenship, a virtue acclaimed in speeches and in civic decrees. As Herman remarks, "to turn this negation of heroic virtue into a term of praise and offer communal interest as a new standard of individual morality was probably one of the most significant victories of the community over the hero."

A parallel restriction of the power of gift-reciprocity is evident in laws concerning the administration of justice. Because gifts expect, and oblige, a return, those invested with judicial roles who are also embedded in gift relationships, and therefore have obligations to their benefactors, are liable to skew their assessment of legal disputes. Hence Pericles' innovation, in fifth-century Athens, that citizens who took part in judicial hearings should receive payment from the state (a source that commits them to the interests of the city) — and this to counter the power of Cimon, whose gifts to his demesmen kept them beholden to him. Wherever we find civic officials swearing to conduct their roles without regard to favors, and judges required to refuse gifts, we find the clash between two transactional regimes, the regime of the gift, with its strong personal ties of loyalty and reciprocation, and the regime of civic-legal power, which claims a higher authority within its own domain. Gifts are no longer "total social facts" (Mauss): a centralized and partly depersonalized civic power is claiming some spheres of life as being beyond the influence of the gift.

The Athenian Constitution figures the city's reward of citizen-jurors not as gift but "pay" (μετοχισμόν, 27.2), and thus evokes another limitation to the sphere of the gift: its distinction from "pay" and trade. In the economy of the Greek world, trade transactions became increasingly important, with many kinds of goods transported and exchanged in markets using the impersonal medium of coins. Parties involved in gift relations at all social levels might continue to exchange material goods: the difference between these two spheres of exchange is not the goods themselves but the ethos of the exchange and its social connotations. For instance, Strabo, commenting on the Arab spice trade, concedes that a merchant may get "some sort of wealth" by this trade, "whereas Menelaus [of Homeric fame] needed booty or presents from kings or dynasts who did not only have something to give, but also had the goodwill to make him presents because of his distinction and fame" (Geogr. 1.2.32). This comment reflects the snobbery of the self-sufficient (land-owning) elite all through the Greek and Roman eras: they typically disdain those who are vulnerable to the vicissitudes of trade, and who are suspected of gaining profit ("money for its own sake") by underhanded means. But Strabo's remarks also reflect something of the difference in ethos felt to distinguish gifts from trade: for gifts, it matters greatly whom you receive them from (in Menelaus's case, from those of his own social class), why they are given (as a mark of social worth), and in what spirit they are given (with "goodwill," εὐοίκοι). As we have seen, gifts, like trade or pay, involve reciprocity: in all these spheres, there is a common structure of quid pro quo. What distinguishes the sphere of gift is not that it is "unilateral," but that it expresses a social bond, a mutual recognition of the value of the person. It is filled with sentiment because it invites a personal, enduring, and reciprocal relationship — an ethos very often signaled by the use of the term χαρία. In this connection, a subtle change comes over the

74. Herman, Ritualised Friendship, pp. 75-80.

75. Herman, Ritualised Friendship, p. 78; for further analysis of gifts that shade into "bribes" (without changing their name: there is no Greek word for "bribe"), see D. M. MacDowell, Athenian Laws about Bribery, RIDA 30 (1983): 57-78; Mitchell, Greeks Bearing Gifts, pp. 81-86; von Reden, Exchange in Ancient Greece, pp. 94-97.


77. A gymnasiarch binds people to judge without regard to χαρία, SEG 28:261 (second century BCE; cited in Harrison, Paul's Language of Grace, p. 37); punishment for judges who accept gifts, Ath. Pol. 54.2 (fourth century BCE); parallel rules in the Jewish tradition, Exod 23:6; Deut 16:19; 27:25 (historical origins uncertain). Josephus emphasizes the conflict between "money" and "justice" (Ant. 4.196), but elsewhere recognizes that this is about "gifts" not just "money" (Apion 2.207); his strictness in this matter mirrors Plato, Leg. 955c-d.


79. For the use of this term for expressing what is given and owed over and above a merely financial relationship, see Milletts, Lending and Borrowing, pp. 123-26.
meaning of such words as μισθός. Its traditional meaning (and its continuing meaning in the sphere of gifts) may be conveyed by such English terms as "prize" and "reward," the recognition of worth that is part of a benefit or gift. But within the domain of commodity exchange or work-for-pay, it gains the meaning of "wage" or "hire," with a commercial sense outside of (and morally inferior to) the domain of gift. It was a devastating rhetorical jibe for Demosthenes to suggest that Aeschines, who enjoyed a noble ἡλεία-friendship with Alexander, was nothing more than Alexander's μισθοτός (De Cor. 51-52).  

1.2.2. Civic Euergetism

In recent years, particular attention has been given to a form of public gift relation, "euergetism," that is prominent in the inscriptive record of Greek cities deep into the Roman era. With roots in the royal gifts made by kings to their subjects, a form of civic benefaction arose in the Greek city-states where members of elite families were expected to perform "voluntary" services (λατρευταί) for their fellow citizens while exercising a variety of civic roles, including magistracies. In time, a large array of public benefits might be fulfilled in this way: the construction and refurbishment of public buildings, the provision of military equipment and defences, the dedication and enhancement of temples (together with the public sacrifices, feasts, and banquets associated with the worship of the gods), the funding of games and choral competitions, the equipment of gymasia, and the performance of embassies, priesthoods, and civic administration — all, or chiefly, at their own expense. In most cities, where taxation was inadequate for "extraordinary" expenses, these burdens were shouldered by a small number of wealthy families, whose unequal status was tolerated by their fulfilment of such services.

80. "Like harvesters and those who do something for μισθός" (31). The word thus forms a paradigm case of the change in the meanings of words effected by large-scale transformations in social structures (with resulting alteration, or disaggregation, of modes of relation). On the changing meanings of this term, see E. Benveniste, Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européens, vol. 1: Économie, Parenté, Société (Paris: Minuit, 1969), pp. 163-70, with further discussion in von Reden, Exchange in Ancient Greece, pp. 89-92.

81. The label was made popular by the seminal work of P. Veyne, Bread and Circuses, abr. and trans. B. Pearce from the French original, 1976 (London: Penguin, 1990); the benefactors are commonly described in inscriptions as ευεργεταί.

82. For all its quirikiness, Veyne, Bread and Circuses, pp. 70-200, remains a classic treatment of this phenomenon. For a selection of relevant inscriptions, see F. W. Danker, Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field (St. Louis: Clayton, 1983), and Harrison, Paul's Language of Grace, pp. 26-63. Aristotle spells out the implicit social contract: "the people . . . will take no offence at the privileges of their rulers when they see that they pay a heavy fine for their dignity" (Pol. 1321a30).

83. Veyne, Bread and Circuses, pp. 134-42, citing a fine example of the difficulty faced by a wealthy individual in Hermopolis (second century CE) trying to wriggle out of public demands (Rylands Papyrus 277).

84. As we saw in relation to Mauss, that a gift is both obligatory and voluntary is not a self-contradiction. As Veyne insists, euergetism was "both spontaneous and forced, voluntary and constrained" (Bread and Circuses, p. 103); for examples of inscriptions making much of the "willing" participation of the donor, see Veyne, Bread and Circuses, pp. 158 n. 14 and 187 n. 214.

85. For convenient access to examples, see Harrison, Paul's Language of Grace, pp. 37-63, pointing out that the term χάρις is, as we would expect, used both for the favor/gift of the benefactor and for the favor/gratitude of the city in return.
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(e.g., SIG³ 834). At the same time, donors are careful to seek out “worthy” recipients of their benefaction: as Aristotle sees it, a generous person will give lavishly but certainly not indiscriminately (τοις γυναις), “so he can give to the right people at the right time, and where it is noble to do so” (Eth. Nic. 1120b3–4). Of course, what counts as “noble” (καλὸν) will be variously defined according to the donor’s system of values, and not all would share Aristotle’s definition of worthy recipients as people of “respectable character” (οἱ μὲν ρήμα τὰ ἔρημα, 1121b7). But it is clear that the status of the recipient was important in cementing and enhancing the worth of the giver. The civic benefactions we are discussing here were given to the city — that is, to its citizens — whose effusive response did much to prove that they were a “most worthy home city.”

Sometimes the benefactions reach a wider circle — not just male citizens, but also visiting foreigners (e.g., at festivals or games) and women. Where the benefaction was designed to meet an economic crisis (e.g., a shortage of grain, relieved by subsidizing the price), the beneficiaries would certainly include “the poor” (citizens) — sometimes expressly so — but it is clear that they are receiving this benefaction qua citizens and not qua the poor. There was a widespread presumption in the Greco-Roman world that the poor were morally as well as economically at the bottom of the scale: in a revealing mix of categories, Theognis warns that it would be futile to do favors (χάρις τειχεῖο) to the despicable poor (διέλοι) since, unlike the good (ἀγαθοῖς), they will never repay (Theognis, 105–12). Indeed, giving specifically or only to the poor would be a gift-without-return, since even their gratitude would be worth nothing. Aristotle clearly spoke from a great height when he said that the person who wants to be “magnificent” (μεγαλοπρεπής) will not waste money on objects of small importance, like Odysseus who claimed to give alms often to the homeless (Eth. Nic. 1122a26–27, citing Homer, Odys. 17.420). But, as we saw in Hesiod, even for those of modest means, there was every reason not to give to those who could only be “stingy” in return.

The implicit social contract operative in Greek civic euergetism was easily applied to new institutions as they arose. Thus, we find identical language used in the numerous honorific inscriptions to benefactors of “clubs” and “associations,” whose proliferation in the cities of the Greek and Roman worlds gave new opportunities for wealthy individuals to gain honor by constructing or

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equipping club premises, funding sacrifices, and subsidizing meals. Such decrees give plenty of scope for the clubs to parade their worth — their ethnicity, their trade, their local identity, or whatever else was the ground of their association — while praising their donors in terms that will make it worth their while to continue their generosity. With the arrival of the power and presence of Roman sponsors, the same rules of gift-reciprocation were readily applied, since they made as immediate sense to Romans as to Greeks. By the first century, the ultimate prize was to attract the emperor as the supreme benefactor, with provinces, cities, institutions, and individuals going to extraordinary lengths to win, and then to publicize, his superior gifts. Given the magnitude of his extraordinary power, and the tendency towards obsequious exaggeration in the grateful response, it is no surprise that emperors were soon given honors equal to the gods, whether they wanted them or not.

1.2.3. Roman Patronage

The term “patronage” can be used in a wider or a narrower sense, as a broad label for unequal but enduring personal relations involving an exchange of services and favors, or in specific reference to the “patron-client” relations that were integral to Roman systems of social transaction. Given the confusions that this variability has created among classicists and historians of early Christianity, it seems best, in discussing antiquity, to restrict the label to distinctively Roman phenomena. Drawing on cross-cultural anthropology,


90. For the range of honors (loosely bundled together by scholars as "the imperial cult"), and the logic of exchange that underlay them, see esp. S. R. F. Price, Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Veyne, Bread and Circuses, pp. 392–482, also traces this development in detail.


86. See Veyne, Bread and Circuses, p. 132, citing a Laodicene inscription.
87. For examples, see Veyne, Bread and Circuses, pp. 105–7, 144–47.
88. In friendship-relations, the same considerations apply: “In choosing friends, primary considerations were willingness and ability to repay services in full” (Millett, Lending and Borrowing, p. 118). Millett cites Democritus in support: “When you do a favor, study a recipient first, in case he prove a scoundrel and repay evil for good” (DK 93).
Saller described a patronage relationship as a *reciprocal* exchange of goods and services, which is *personal*, *enduring*, and *asymmetrical* (thus involving the exchange of different kinds of service). He also rightly insisted that such a relationship could be traced even when the terms *patronus* and *clients* were not employed, social etiquette often requiring the ambiguous and less demeaning language of "friendship." But, as we have seen, many forms of unequal gift relations could fit into this broad description (e.g., between the gods and humans, or between parents and children), such that the term is in danger of losing analytical precision. In this context, I speak of "patronage" only in reference to the unequal but personalized relationships of reciprocal gifts and services operated by Roman senatorial families (and, in due course, by the emperor), offering access to the resources of the Roman state.

The social and political life of the Roman Republic was dominated by a cluster of elite families whose privileged access to the Senate and to the skills necessary for legal and political influence made them indispensable channels to all the key resources of a rapidly growing and increasingly wealthy "state." Their rivalries set up competing, and often heritable, networks of political connection in which less powerful figures desired relations of loyalty (*fides*) and dependence as a means of social, financial, or political advancement. A

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92. Saller, *Personal Patronage*, p. 1. Some authors in Wallace-Hadrill, ed., *Patronage in Ancient Society*, would add the characteristic of "voluntariness," although this would not apply to the relationship of a *libertus* to his former owner (his *patronus*). Saller's description of the chief characteristics of patronage is not best used as a definition of Roman patronage, since it would include many kinds of relation that the Romans would not have recognized to be similar in character.


94. I leave to one side the relationship between freedmen and their *patroni*, as a special form of patronage imposing legal obligations on *liberti* (who were not called clients). For the social and political functions of senatorial and imperial patronage, see esp. A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman Society: From Republic to Empire," in Wallace-Hadrill, ed., *Patronage in Ancient Society*, pp. 63-87. Of course, many forms of gift exchange existed in the Roman era apart from "patronage"; for resistance to applying this label too broadly, see M. Griffin, "De Beneficiis and Roman Society." *JRS* 93 (2003): 92-113.

95. In this context, literary patronage, while understandably prominent in our literary sources, is only a fragment of a wider socio-political phenomenon, with special expectations of its own; see B. K. Gold, ed., *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1984).


97. See the analysis by D. Braund, "Function and Dysfunction: Personal Patronage in
The Roman extortion laws (de repetundis) represent an attempt to limit the public harm caused by the patronage of powerful Romans abroad, but these were notoriously ineffective, not least because competing patronal interests in Rome could manipulate such laws or blunt their force. What Cicero called corrupta was pervasive, not least in his own behavior in Cilicia; it is striking that his definition of "corruption" is not that it damages the state, but that it demeans people who should be looking for honor not in financial kickbacks but in the rewards of virtue (De Off. 2.52-53).

The Roman Republic collapsed as powerful individuals sacrificed the common interests of the state to their quest for political supremacy, and in place of this dysfunctional pluralism Augustus eventually emerged as the supreme patron of the Roman state. Although Augustus and his successors certainly curtailed the exercise of senatorial patronage in Rome, and developed their own direct patronage of the Roman plebs, it would be a mistake to regard the emperor's universal patronage as entailing a monopoly of patronal power. Rather, by making the senatorial families, together with his "friends" and familia, the brokers of his own power, the emperor enhanced their patronal networks in extension of his interests. The same provincial governors who extol emperors as universal benefactors (mirroring the precedent of Augustus's Res Gestae) can be found promoting their friends and cultivating local clients through the influence they acquired as friends of the emperor: Pliny's Panegyricus of Trajan and his letters of recommendation, dispensing and calling in favors, are good examples of this duality. In this sense, as Saller has shown, the establishment of the Empire was not the end of Roman patronage, but simply its realignment; now state power was operative through imperial benefactions (directly granted or mediated through brokers), which were reciprocated in deference, loyalty, and "voluntary" contributions, in legacies or donations, to the imperial purse.

Evident in both senatorial and imperial patronage is the common system of reciprocal exchange pervasive in Roman culture, in this case adjusted to


98. See Saller, Personal Patronage and Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman Society"; the latter rightly insists that the emperor was the universal but not the sole patron of the Empire.


the unequal status of the parties involved and their varying needs. In every manifestation of this system of "duties" (officia), it was taken for granted that a benefit expected a return—not immediately, and not necessarily in kind, but as a powerfully pressing, if extra-legal, requirement. Romans were explicit and completely unapologetic about the fact that gifts create ties of obligation: the language of "binding" (obstringere; obligare) is ubiquitous in such contexts.

100. For this reason, they also insist that the donor must judge the worth of the recipient: one does not want to tie oneself to a disreputable, ungrateful, or otherwise worthless beneficiary. Cicero's discussion of this matter makes it clear that different benefactors will use different criteria of worth. Most will judge on the utility of the connection formed by benefactions, and thus by the financial or other benefits to be reaped in return. As a philosopher, he advocates a moral criterion: people might be suitable (idoneus) beneficiaries if they are good, even if they are poor (De Off. 2.54, 69-71). But it is clear to him that indiscriminate gifts are disreputable; among his three rules of generosity is the rule that benefits should be given pro dignitate ("on the basis of worth," De Off. 1.42-45). Thus, in the complex etiquette involved in the giving and receiving of favors, where each party strives to make clear its open-ended commitment of gratitude, it is common to insist that the recipient of the benefit is in some sense worthy (dignus; meritus) of the gift.

102. Naturally so: nobody wants to think that they have voluntarily tied themselves to people who degrade their social capital.

1.2.4. Were the Jews Different?

It has recently been argued by Seth Schwartz that, in contrast to the "Mediterranean" culture of reciprocity and exchange, the Jews preserved a quite differ-

100. Cicero is probably representative in insisting that no obligation is more pressing (magis necessarium) than the return of gratitude (referenda gratia, De Off. 1.47). For the ubiquity of this assumption in Seneca, see below, 1.2.5. For the accompanying virtues as noted in inscriptions, see E. Forbis, Municipal Virtues in the Roman Empire (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1996). J. Michel, Gratitude en droit romain (Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1962), has clarified the distinction in Roman law between contracts, with legal obligations, and gifts, where a return is desired and expected but not legally enforceable.

101. E.g., Pliny, Ep. 2.13; 6.18; 10.6. Cicero speaks of a patron obligating/tying others to himself by his benefactions (beneficis suis obligare, Ad Fam. 13.65). In all these cases, obligations are not resented or concealed, but positively advertised as the reason for giving or requesting favors. As Saller notes, "The Roman ethic of exchange was precise and powerful: a man who accepted a beneficium was considered to be indebted to his benefactor and obliged to display gratitude" ("Status and Patronage," p. 839).

102. E.g., Cicero, Ad Fam. 2.6.1-2 (meritus); Pliny, Ep. 10.51 (non indignus).
ent tradition, founded on the “rejection of reciprocity” and harboring “profound reservations about the gift itself.”103 Schwartz associates reciprocity (or at least “institutionalized reciprocity,” like “friendship” and “patronage”) with inequality, dependency, and oppression, and finds in the Torah, and to some extent also in later Jewish literature, an ideology of solidarity and equality constituting “mediterraneanism’s nearly perfect antithesis”: here concern for the poor fosters “charitable donation” not “gift,” rejecting personal dependency in favor of dependency only on God, within a community bound together by “unconditional love.”104 Schwartz recognizes that he has created a contrast between “ideal types” in the Weberian sense, and also that the Torah’s vision is to some degree “utopian.” In practice (and in the texts he surveys, from Ben Sira, Josephus, and the rabbis), these two systems of thought are intertwined and mutually dependent. Nonetheless, he thinks that their combination causes acute tensions, because Jews had a “core religious ideology” that idealized the “pure, reciprocated gift.”105

There are many features of this construction of Jewish difference that are immediately open to question. It is not clear why “solidarity” and “equality” are in principle opposed to “reciprocity” since, as we have seen, the normal give-and-take among kin, and the friendship of equals extolled by Aristotle, both operated in expectation of reciprocal exchange.106 Given that the narratives of the Hebrew Bible depict both Jews and non-Jews engaging in the reciprocal exchange of gifts, one may question whether the Torah is plausibly read as instilling a quite opposite ideology of social relations.107 At the same time, Schwartz’s use of the language of “pure” gift should make us wonder whether

103. Schwartz, Mediterranean Society, pp. 5, 75; Schwartz describes this tradition as “antireciprocal” (p. 10) and “non-reciprocal” (p. 17).
106. Schwartz claims inspiration from Sahlin on the notion of “pooling” as the basis for non-reciprocal solidarity (Schwartz, Mediterranean Society, pp. 14, 18 n. 33). However, Sahlin does not contrast pooling with reciprocity, but describes it as “an organisation of reciprocities,” which is also typically not egalitarian but governed by an extreme hierarchy of power (Stone Age Economics, pp. 188-91).
107. Where he recognizes the presence of gift exchange in narratives, Schwartz considers these marginal phenomena subject to criticism by the authors (e.g., Schwartz, Mediterranean Society, pp. 27-28, 48 n. 27). But there are plenty of examples of ordinary exchange that are integral to Hebrew Bible narratives (e.g., Gen 33:1-14; Exod 23:6-22; 1 Sam 25:1-24). The self-sacrificing conduct of heroes in battle is by no means a rejection of reciprocity (pace Schwartz, Mediterranean Society, pp. 94-95, on Saul) but central to the honor culture of antiquity, where glory is the chief form of return for the noble gift; see C. Barton, Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
108. The classic discussion remains H. Bolkestein, Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek, 1939); Veyne’s description of the distinctive Christian ethos gives minimal recognition to its Jewish roots (Bread and Circuses, pp. 19-34). See the nuanced discussion of the matter in B. W. Longenecker, Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 60-107, though his attention to a criterion of motivation in the definition of charity is apt to skew the analysis; as he himself points out, the modern polarity of “altruism” versus “self-interest” is unhelpful in analyzing ancient gift-ethics (Remember the Poor, p. 95).
110. For begging and attitudes to beggars in the Roman world, see A. Parkin, “‘You Do Him No Service’: An Exploration of Pagan Almsgiving,” in Atkins and Osborne, eds., Poverty
of Israelite/Jewish society was based on ethnicity, internal divisions were apt to be based not on political status (which was the same for all Jews) but on levels of wealth, such that "the poor" could be recognized as a distinguishable (if only loosely definable) social entity. Again, most relief for the destitute would come from affective bonds with their immediate kin and neighbors, but there are indications that efforts were made toward communal redistribution of wealth, in which the wealthier felt responsible for all their ethnic "kin," and thus for "the poor," even in the absence of more personal ties of kinship or patronage. In the Hellenistic and Roman eras, we find examples of benefaction to Jewish communities both in the Diaspora and in the homeland parallel to non-Jewish phenomena, but since Jewish communities combined the power of individual benefactors with an obligation on the wealthy to assist the whole community, there was a better chance that all of the Jewish poor would receive some benefits from their social superiors.

The Jewish social context is thus structurally parallel to that of the later Roman Empire, when citizenship distinctions became increasingly insignificant, and the "humble" began to emerge as a distinct social category; see Osborne, "Roman Poverty in Context." Philo presumes that the poor are generally reliant on the equally poor (Spec. Leg. 2.107); cf. Sirach 40:24. The blindness of Tobit is cared for by relatives (Tobit 3,20). For the "third tithe," see Tobit 1:8 (based on Deut 14:28-30); whether the periodic redistribution of land and cancellation of debts commanded in the Torah (e.g., Lev 25; Deut 15) was ever practiced is uncertain. For communal meals in Diaspora communities, see Josephus, Ant. 4.131-136; for the common (charitable) fund set up by Jews in Aphrodisias (third century CE), see J. M. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987).

For benefactors in the Diaspora (e.g., sponsoring synagogue buildings), see T. Rajak, The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 373-91. Schwartz has noted how Josephus portrays himself as a local patron in Galilee: S. Schwartz, "Josephus in Galilee: Rural Patronage and Social Breakdown," in F. Parente and J. Sievers, eds., Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 290-308. The benefactions of Helena of Adiabene to the Jewish people in the homeland are well documented and honored by Josephus (e.g., Ant. 20.49-53). Tacitus notes that Jews support one another (apud ipsos . . . misericiordia in promptu, Hist. 5.5.1), and Josephus takes some pride in this matter (Apion 2.207, 211-14, 235). Tobit makes clear that this is generally a matter of intercommunal support to fellow Jews ("brothers from my people," 1:13, 16, 21-2, etc.). The solidarity here is by no means a matter of equality, as is made clear by indications of

With regard to the ideology of benefaction, both Greek and Roman cultures encouraged a general ethos of benevolence (πραξις; benevolentia), one of whose manifestations was donating the basic requirements of existence to those who needed help. The fact that it was worth begging in Greek and Roman cities indicates that it was common to exercise some pity on the destitute, and the prevalence of beggars around temples might suggest that this pity was evoked in the context of religious ritual. However, the fact that the practice of ritual was in general not integrated in either Greek or Roman tradition with philosophical (and thus ethical) discourse on religion meant that benevolence to the needy was connected to the motif of divine benevolence only in philosophical circles. And since the destitute could give nothing worthwhile back to the donor (except the limited good of ceasing to "hassle" them), the motivation for giving to the poorest members of society was comparatively weak. By contrast, within the Jewish tradition, the domains of law, ethics, and ritual practice were more closely integrated, such that giving to the poor was both (unusually) a matter of legislation and integral to a religious piety that pervaded all spheres of life. Within this context, all Jews were expected to live out their allegiance to God, and their commitment to "righteousness," in giving to the poor; and since this expectation was flexibly adjustable to the resources of the giver (see Tobit 4.8), everyone could perform this religious duty, however great or little were their financial resources. Moreover, since such giving to the poor was closely connected to religious piety, both giver and recipient could figure benefaction as receiving its most important return not from the human recipient but from God.

Tobit's wealth (e.g., 1:14) and the references to fellow Jews who are malnourished and poorly clad (1:16-17, 4:16-17). See further, G. Hamel, Poverty and Charity in Roman Palestine: First Three Centuries C.E. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

For the widely known rules on giving fire, water, and food to those who need them, known as "the curses of Bouvyce," see T. Williams, "The Curses of Bouvyce: New Evidence," Mnemosyne 15 (1962): 396-98; they are known by Cicero (De Off. 1.52: 3.54-55) and enter into the ethic of Josephus (Apion 2.211). On poverty in the Roman world and reactions to it, see Atkins and Osborne, eds., Poverty in the Roman World.

See Longenecker, Remember the Poor, pp. 96-104, also noting the traditional label of Zeus as the god of hospitality.


This motif is not wholly absent from Greek and Roman traditions: see, e.g., Plutarch, Nicias 3.7; Seneca, Ben. 4.11.3; when there is no possibility of a human return, a beneficiary deputes the gods to return the favor. Sorek is right to emphasize the Jewish motif of recompense
This emphasis on the return of the gift as both human and divine is clear already in the Torah and is prominent in later Jewish texts, such as Tobit. In the Torah, it is anticipated that the beneficiary of a favor will "bless you" (Deut 24:13; that is, invoke God's blessing on the giver), or at least not "cry to the Lord against you" (24:15; cf. 15:9), so that the gift will be "to your credit before the Lord your God" (Deut 24:13); indeed, throughout this legislation, it is repeatedly stressed that doing good to the poor will result in blessings from God (Deut 14:29; 15:4-5, 10; 24:19, etc.). Thus, even if the poor are unable to return anything matching the gift, the transaction is by no means without return, but is undergirded and justified by the expectation of a return from God.\(^{119}\) Similarly, in Tobit, instructions on giving to the poor are routinely supported by a promise of return. Giving "will lay up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity" (4:9; probably an expectation of some human return) and will certainly be rewarded by God. Those who do not turn their face from the poor will not have God turn his face from them (4:6); if you serve God (through just treatment of your workers) you will be paid back (4:14); almsgiving rescues from death and cleanses from all sin (12:9; 14:10-11).\(^{120}\) In other words, contrary to Schwartz, Jewish giving to the poor is fully enmeshed in the expectation of reciprocity, and its distinctive elements are justified not by an "anti-reciprocal" ethos but by the modulation of the reciprocity-ethos into the expectation of reciprocity from God. The Jewish ideology is undergirded not by the ethos of a "pure," unreciprocated gift, but by an emphasis on the certainty of reciprocation from God.\(^{121}\) Jews were perhaps more likely than by God (in the afterlife) in the motivation of Jewish benefactions in Palestine, but overplays the contrast with this-worldly recognition as found in Roman euergetism: S. Sorek, Remembered for Good: A Jewish Benefaction System in Ancient Palestine (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010).\(^{119}\) For recent discussion of charity and divine reward in the Jewish tradition, see G. A. Anderson, Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). The divine participation in the "infinite circle" of gift giving in the Jewish tradition is emphasized by P. J. Leithart, Gratitude: An Intellectual History (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014); as he writes, "the promise of divine reward underwrites Israel's economy of generosity to those who cannot pay" (p. 61).

\(^{120}\) Cf. Sirach 12:2: "Do good to the devout, and you will be repaid — if not by them, certainly by the Most High." The author also urges care in the distribution of the gift: "Give to the devout, but do not help the sinner; do good to the humble but do not give to the ungodly" (12:4-5).

\(^{121}\) For this figuring of God as the ultimate source of reward, greater than crowns, money, or public proclamations, see Josephus, Apion 2.217-18. This makes clear that although Jewish forms of honor may not be identical to those common in Greco-Roman culture (e.g., in declining to make statues of benefactors), this by no means signals a renunciation of honor or reciprocity tout court. The expectation of divine reward could even make philanthropy less humiliating for the poor, who cannot reciprocate in kind; as Barton notes, the unreciprocated non-Jews to give to beggars, not because they did not care about a return, but because they had stronger ideological grounds for expecting one — not of course from the beggar, but from God.

1.2.5. Stoic Solutions to the Problems of the Gift

Among the ancient philosophical discussions of the gift, the fullest extant example is Seneca's seven-book De Beneficiis, written in the mid-first century CE.\(^{122}\) Writing from an elite position among the imperial "friends," Seneca analyzes the gift, the receipt, and the return of "benefits" (beneficia, munera, officia, dona), drawing examples largely from his own social level.\(^{123}\) None-theless, the favors and services he depicts are intentionally varied, since his object of study is not any single social institution, but the whole system of voluntary reciprocal exchange that "is the chief factor in tying human society together" (quae maxime humanam societatem alligat, 1.4.2).\(^{124}\) Seneca's perspective on this system is distinctly Stoic, and it would be a mistake to take his recommendations as representative of his contemporaries' opinions. Rather, his treatise should be read as a combination of three elements: (i) a selective restatement of largely common assumptions about gift-reciprocity; (ii) an intelligent analysis of the problems of gift exchange; and (iii) the provision of distinctively Stoic solutions to those problems, aimed at keeping the system gift is generally unwelcome in antiquity, because it places the recipient in a position of permanent inferiority (Barton, Roman Honor, p. 235). If the recipients can at least "bless" the giver, they can look to God to provide the necessary return.


\(^{123}\) Thus, we hear most frequently of the favors circulating among Roman aristocrats, such as legal assistance, parcels of land, honors, legacies, political advancement, and sizeable financial subventions. For Seneca's social and political location, see M. Griffin, "Imago Suae Vitate," in C. D. N. Costa, ed., Seneca (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 1-38, and eadem, Seneca. In what follows, I shall give only a few illustrative references on each point: the treatise is full of repetition and overlapping arguments.

\(^{124}\) Griffin, "De Beneficiis," rightly insists that Seneca's scope includes but is not confined to relations of patronage.
of benefit exchange operational for the good of all.\textsuperscript{125} We will consider each of these elements in turn.

Both from what Seneca himself claims, and from parallels in other texts (both literary and non-literary), we know that De Beneficiis restates a host of common assumptions about the reciprocal exchange of gifts. Thus, Seneca here takes for granted that gift giving is a matter not of individual ethics but of sociality (\textit{res socialis}, 5.11.5), tying people together in bonds of debt or obligation (the verbs \textit{debo} and \textit{obligo} are ubiquitous). The strength of this bond arises from the strong (though extra-legal, 3.6-17) expectation that a gift must be returned in one form or another: "the whole world" regards ingratitude as among the worst social vices (3.1.1; 3.6.1-2). In one of his favorite images (borrowed from Chrissipus), Seneca describes the gift-exchange system as a ball-catching game, whose point is to keep the ball (the gift) continually circulating back and forth (2.17.3-5; 2.32.1; 7.18.1); although he will offer a particular Stoic definition of what constitutes a return (see below), Seneca shares with all his contemporaries the assumption that gifts are meant to be reciprocal, not unilateral.\textsuperscript{126} Seneca also stresses, in common with others, that gifts or favors can only be recognized as such if they are in some sense voluntary, given "freely" (\textit{libenter}; \textit{sponte sua}) and from friendly goodwill (\textit{a bona voluntate}, 6.9.3). At the same time, he presumes, with others, that gifts are best given discriminately, to "worthy" recipients. Although he will give some Stoic nuance to this notion, it is a foundational assumption that we should choose those worthy (\textit{digni}) of benefits (1.1.2); it is the combination of freedom and personal selection in the giving of gifts that endows them with their strongly obliging character (1.7.1-3; 2.18.7-19.2). Seneca also presumes a common awareness of the power in gifts: those who give benefits are in a superior position, and are apt to humiliate or aggravate those to whom they give (1.1.4-8; 2.4.5; 3.34.1).\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{125} Drawing on parallel comments in the Roman elite, Griffin is largely right to insist that "Seneca is not misdescribing reality: he is urging his readers to realize an ideal they already share" ("De Beneficiis," p. 106). Inwood, "Politics and Paradox," stresses that Seneca's Stoic perspective on the subject (e.g., his use of distinctively Stoic paradoxes) is propounded not in order to set an impossibly high ideal but to offer a framework for the amelioration of ordinary social practice. See further, M. Griffin, "Seneca's Pedagogical Strategy: Letters and De Beneficiis," in R. Sorabji and R. W. Sharples, eds., \textit{Greek and Roman Philosophy 100 B.C.-200 A.D.} (London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London, 2007), pp. 89-113.

\textsuperscript{126} Cf. Seneca's use of the image of the three Graces, which he identifies with the giving, the receiving, and the returning of the gift (1.3.2); as T. Engberg-Pederson notes ("Gift-Giving and God's Charis: Bourdieu, Seneca, and Paul in Romans 1-8," in U. Schnelle, ed., \textit{The Letter to the Romans} [Leuven: Peeters, 2009], pp. 95-111, at p. 98), it is interesting that these are exactly the same three "moments" of the gift identified by Mauss.

\textsuperscript{127} For this as a common perception in Roman society, see Griffin, "De Beneficiis," pp. 102-4.

Because of this power differential, the recipient often tries not just to match but to outdo the initial favor, in the spirit of competition basic to Greek and Roman culture (1.4.3-5; 3.36-38). Finally, Seneca presumes (and develops) the commonly felt proximity and difference between gift-exchange and commercial exchange, as operative in loans or sales. The language of debt and reciprocity makes the two spheres easily comparable, but it is also felt inappropriate to "reduce" gift-exchange to trade (\textit{negotiatio}) or loans (\textit{feneratio}, 1.1.9; 2.31.2 and passim). As we shall see, Seneca can use this distinction to give gift-return a peculiarly Stoic twist, but he continues here an old elite distinction between friendly gift-exchange and the impersonal calculation of "sordid" monetary transactions (1.2.3; 3.15.4; 4.1).

But Seneca's treatise is designed to do more than describe common practice and belief: it is specifically targeted at a number of interrelated dysfunctions in the system of gift-exchange. In his perception, the motor in the system, the benefactors' willingness to give, is being disabled by the failure or reluctance of the recipients to reciprocate with an appropriate return; when giving becomes unfruitful, its motivation will simply collapse.\textsuperscript{128} There are a number of ways in which he thinks that benefactions, as currently practiced, fail to create — indeed even destroy — healthy reciprocal relations. Part of the blame rests on the benefactors themselves, who give unwisely (to the wrong people), indiscriminately (creating no personal goodwill), or grudgingly (causing not gratitude but resentment; 1.1.2-8; 1.7.3; 2.1.17). Benefactors who use their gifts for self-publicity or similar selfish purposes, and those who follow up their gifts with insistent reminders, are also at fault for degrading the ethos and thus the fruitfulness of gift exchange (1.1.4; 2.11-13). On the other hand, the recipients of favors are also often at fault. They are reluctant or tardy in expressing gratitude, and frequently forget the benefits they have received (2.26-28; 3.1-5). Sometimes they decline even to acknowledge a benefit and, where there are significant disparities in power or wealth, they despair of their ability to give an adequate return (2.35.3). Precisely because gifts are everywhere obliging, the recipients may be unwilling to accept their social indebtedness; in the attempt to escape this condition, they may give an over-hasty return, fearful of a reputation for ingratitude but also of the social disgrace in being an indebted beneficiary (4.40.3-5; 6.41-43). In lauding benefactions, Seneca is acutely aware

\textsuperscript{128} This problem is immediately highlighted in 1.1.3, forms the basic problematic addressed through the early, core books (books 1-4), and is reiterated at the end of book 7; as Inwood remarks, "from the opening lines to the conclusion of book VII Seneca is persistently concerned with ingratitude and with the discouraging effect it has on the giving of benefits" ("Politics and Paradox," p. 263).
of their potential to dry up or to go sour; his treatise is perhaps the fullest and most acute analysis of the problematics of gift exchange from any age.

In addressing these problems, Seneca does not advocate the one-way, unilateral gift: since humans are social animals (7.17) and society is constituted by the interchange of benefits (beneficiorum commercio, 4.18.1-4). Seneca's ideal is neither individual isolation nor un reciprocated gift, but a better reciprocity for the sake of friendship between the parties involved (2.18.5; 6.16) and for the "public good" (7.16.2). What he brings to the discussion is a distinctively Stoic value theory, according to which the only true "good" is what is virtuous (honestum, 5.12.5), while every other phenomenon normally considered "good" is redescribed as merely preferable (7.2). Thus, for Seneca, the essence of a benefaction is not its *content*, the favor or gift contributed by one party to another, but the *goodwill* in which it is given: as a Stoic, his primary focus is on the *anima*, not the *res* (2.34-35; 6.2.1). What matters about a benefaction is not what is given or how much it is worth (which may be determined by fortune, good or bad), but how it is given (1.5.3): it is this, the deepest, level that human relationships are most powerfully formed. At the same time, and for the same reasons, what matters about the return is not the thing reciprocated but the grateful attitude of the beneficiary: since Stoics refer all things to the *anima* (2.31.1), what a benefit aims to achieve is not an external counter-gift, but an internal virtue, gratitude.

This Stoic reevaluation of "goods" does not wholly discount the material, social, or political favors constituting the benefaction-as-thing; it does not operate at a level completely unrelated to the benefactions exchanged, but is offered as a way of alleviating the problems of a system in which such things continue to be exchanged.199 Thus, donors should be concerned first and foremost with eliciting gratitude: this element of the "return" is certainly necessary (anonymous giving is contemplated only as a rare exception, and is not ideal, 2.10.1-4). This means, among other things, that in giving generously they should give judiciously; there is no point scattering goods at random (where they are scarcely unnoticed) or to people known to be ungrateful, but one should choose instead "the worthy" — not the rich who can give back handsomely, but the morally worthy who are likely to show fidelity and gratitude (1.2.1; 1.15.3; 3.14.1-2). Seneca advocates a careful balance here (virtue

199. On the relationship between the level of virtue (benefaction as *anima*) and the objects exchanged (benefaction as *res*), see Inwood, "Politics and Paradox," with close analysis of two key passages, 5.12-17 and 2.31-35: although the material exchange, required by social norms, is not strictly speaking part of the *beneficium* (which can be complete without it), it is an additional factor that should accompany the goodwill of the *anima*, so far as this is possible for the actors involved.

is a mean, 2.16.2). One should not be over-scrupulous (he wants to encourage, not limit, benefactions); like the gods, one should give generously even to the ungrateful and even after disappointment (1.1.9-10). On the other hand, one should use judgment (judicium) to place goods with those likely to be grateful (or at least give only less valuable goods to the unworthy, 1.10.4-5; 4.9-11). If the gods give widely, it is only because some blessings (e.g., sun and rain) can be given to the good only if they are also given at the same time to everyone (4.28). A well-placed gift will also be a visible gift (1.3.5), meant to be seen and to endure: in that way, the recipient will be constantly reminded to be grateful, which is what the gift is really about (1.12.1-2; 2.11.5).

To preclude the giver from always looking for a return-as-res, Seneca employs a famous paradox: the benefactor should immediately forget the gift; the beneficiary should always remember it (2.10.4). At the end of the treatise, Seneca admits that this is somewhat hyperbolic language (7.22-25): what he is really targeting is the tendency of donors to keep harping on about their gifts and their desire to enhance their honor, to humiliate the recipient, or to prompt some material return. In the same vein, he criticizes any benefaction that is performed for the sake of *utilitas*: one should give for the goodness of giving alone (1.2.3), and for the benefit of the beneficiary, not for one's own profit (4.1-15).130 This argument is replete with the language of commerce, strongly contrasting benefactions with loans, sales, and other such "sordid" transactions (4.1; 4.13.3). But the renunciation of *utilitas* does not entail the renunciation of a return *tut court*, since a return is sought — in gratitude. In a less stringent mode, Seneca can allow that a benefaction should be recognized with gratitude if it benefits both the giver and the recipient (2.15.1; 6.12-24); the essential point is that it is performed from a genuine desire (voluntas) to bring benefit to another (2.35.1). The donor should be perfectly happy to receive a material return (2.17.7); it does not "sully" the gift. But one should not demand it, or give with such a return primarily in mind; what matters is the *anima*, the benevolentia toward the recipient.131

130. Although *utilitas* is often translated "self-interest" (e.g., by Basore in the Loeb translation), the term has the particular resonance of material benefit; Seneca is not renouncing, for instance, the satisfaction in giving or any other benefits that arise from the exercise of this virtue. The chief target throughout this section (4.1-15) is the Epicurean assertion that pleasure is the goal of all human activity.

131. See the fine analysis by T. Engberg-Pedersen, "Gift-Giving and Friendship: Seneca and Paul in Romans 1-8 on the Logic of God's Gift and Its Human Response," HTR 101 (2008): 15-44, at pp. 18-22. He notes that Seneca combines interest in the other (in goodwill) with an interest in the good operation of the system of gift exchange, which allows for a certain "self-interest in the system as a whole" (p. 21). He thus rightly distinguishes Seneca's renunciation of *utilitas* from the modern concept of the "pure gift" (on which see 1.3, below).
By the same token, the most essential task for the recipient is gratitude: those who are grateful have already made a return (2.31–35). The purpose of this consciously paradoxical statement is to insist that there is no excuse for failing to acknowledge benefits (*everyone* can be grateful, even if they can't make a material return, 7.16.1–4) and also no need to feel crushed by one's inability to make a sufficient counter-gift (2.35.3–4). Where a counter-gift is possible, it should be made (2.31.4–5), and in this sense, gratitude is only the first installment on a debt (2.22.1). But it is the only *essential* part of the debt, Seneca insists, so that even if one feels one still owes something, one is not weighed down or rendered anxious by a sense of indebtedness (2.35.5).

Seneca’s Stoic advice is subtle but realistic, sophisticated but designed for practice. It is a fine example of the Stoic ambition both to understand and to solve the problems that threaten both the individual psyche and the welfare of society.

Seneca's philosophical concern to refine the meaning of a *beneficium* offers a number of examples of a tendency that we will trace throughout this book, the tendency to "perfect" the notion of gift (or grace) in a variety of forms. Several factors contribute to this tendency to paint the motif of gift in a refined or exaggerated form. As a philosopher, Seneca seeks to distinguish between the meanings of sometimes ambiguous words (e.g., 5.12–17) and will thus delight in distinguishing the "real" sense of a term from its common, unreflected usage: thus "gift" for him is more the *animal* than the *res* in an act of giving. Secondly, Seneca is well trained in exploiting the power of rhetorical polarities; his constant efforts to distinguish gifts from financial exchanges lead him to stretch the distance between these transactional spheres, "purifying" gifts from the connotations attached to "sordid" trade. Thirdly, Seneca often uses analogies regarding the gods, who are held up as models for imitation; and in speaking of the beneficence of the gods, whose giving is unrestrained in scope and requires no material return, the conceptualization of the perfect gift will tend towards an extreme. Seneca thus provides some good examples of ancient "perfections" of the gift, which we will categorize in the following chapter. But one thing is striking: for all the extremes in his conceptualization of the gift, Seneca *never* idealizes the one-way, un reciprocated gift. While he figures the return in unusual ways (primarily as gratitude itself), he retains the unanimous ancient assumption that the point of gifts is to create social ties; thus, the proper expression of gift is reciprocal exchange.

1.3. The Emergence of the Western "Pure" Gift

As we noted above (1.1.1), Mauss initiated interest in the way that gifts have changed in meaning over the course of time, in association with changes in the economy (e.g., the invention of money) and in the social location of gifts vis-à-vis other transactional modes (market exchange, contracts, taxation, etc.). In his wake, it has been common to narrate an oversimplified evolutionary narrative, according to which the growth of markets has caused gifts to shrink into insignificance, or to retreat to the sentimentalized margins of modern societies. Since Mauss, such a narrative has commonly adopted a highly moral tone, bemoaning the loss of solidarity and traditional generosity in the wake of the "cold" and "calculating" search for profit, driven only by utilitarian self-interest. Historians could then argue as to when this "turn" from gift to market took place in the history of Western civilization, with answers ranging from the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries.

Recent scholarship has rightly insisted that "gifts" and "commodities" are not mutually exclusive: the two modes of interaction can overlap or interpenetrate (e.g., payments with additional "gratuities"), and the same items can move from one form of transaction to another. Philanthropic gifts and mutual services among family and friends have not withered away, even in advanced capitalist societies. Nonetheless, it is clear that gifts play different and more limited roles in modern Western societies than in earlier eras, a change accompanied by a significant shift in their ideological configuration.

132. Thus, Inwood rightly claims that "Seneca begins from an apparently paradoxical and rigorously ethical thesis and concludes with a position which makes a serious contribution to social thought while still maintaining a consistency with the technical Stoic position" ("Politics and Paradox," p. 258).

133. For the notion of "perfection," see chapter 2 below, where we will return to some examples from *De Beneficiis*.


136. The absolute contrast between "gifts" and "commodities" was encouraged by the ideal-type definitions offered by Gregory (*Gifts and Commodities*, pp. 100–101; see above, n. 52). But he himself noted the ways in which items move from one mode to the other; for their mixing and the gray areas between them in the medieval period, see, e.g., W. Davies and P. Fouracre, eds., *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
For our purposes, it is especially important to trace the emergence of the "pure" gift — the notion of the gift as ideally "free" from obligation, and unreciprocated, given without a return. As we have seen, in antiquity it was taken for granted that gifts are accompanied by obligations and should elicit some form of return; even philosophers who disavowed a material return (Aristotle) or scorned utilitas (Seneca) considered gifts/benefactions to be necessarily embedded in reciprocal relations. They did not share the modern idealization of the unilateral gift, which has such a powerful hold on contemporary notions of "altruism," especially in religious discourse. Given the tendency of this ideology to color our reading of the ancient evidence, it is important to trace its origins. Once we understand the "pure" gift as a cultural product, we can resist the modern tendency to take it as a natural or necessary configuration of the paradigmatic gift.

3.1. Persisting Modes of Gift Exchange

A recent flurry of research on gift exchange in medieval Europe has emphasized the persistence and importance of gifts at all social levels (and across social strata), while giving nuanced attention to different gift-repertoires in varying social and cultural contexts.  

It is clear that gifts "normally implied both a social relationship and some form of reciprocity," varying in kind and size according to the relationship sought or expressed. While the boundary between gifts and market sales was not watertight, a distinction between the two modes of transaction was normally clear: remuneration for sales was immediate, certain, and calculable, while gifts fostered enduring relations in which the return was uncertain and often not commensurable with the gift. Gifts could cause conflict as well as harmony, and in awkward social situations the exchange of goods might be negotiated as one form of transaction rather than another, deploying a range of gift and non-gift terminology. But there was no specialized vocabulary for "bribes," since "gifts" influenced political decision-making and appointments, whatever efforts might be made to limit their operation in courts. Donations to the church (or to God) constituted in this period an important domain of gift giving, but these too operated with an implicit (and often explicit) expectation of return: while the difference in status, and God's self-sufficiency, ensured that God could never be put under obligation by human gifts, it was clear that one could "deal with God," hoping for reward (for one's self or for others) either in this life or, more significantly, in the next.  

Early modern Europe was similarly characterized by formal and informal exchanges of gift, as Zemon Davis demonstrated in her famous book The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France (2000). While distinguished from sale and from taxation, gifts (of many different kinds) continued to be both voluntary and obliged/obliging — just the combination that Mauss had noted in earlier contexts. As Zemon Davis notes, it was important to insist that gifts were given "freely," as a matter of choice outside the regularities and calculations of the market, but it was also obvious to all concerned that they laid the recipient under obligation, requiring at least gratitude if not a counter-gift: "one favor begets another" and "a thing well given is never lost." Zemon Davis traces an increasing anxiety in the sixteenth century about the power of gifts to pervert politics — at least, the king's anxiety about controlling his judicial and political officers, whose loyalty could be diluted by gifts received from local sources of influence. She also notes that the king's right to give as he pleased became the subject of discussion in this century: in some views, the king's absolute sovereignty was demonstrated precisely in his right to give gifts without regard to merit — a notion of "sovereign grace" that we will find paralleled in the theology of Calvin (see below, 3.4).  

Tracing the pattern of gifts in early modern England reveals a similar story: gifts were ubiquitous at all social levels, charitable giving was not diminished but if anything invigorated by civic systems for the care of the poor, and ties of friendship and patronage continued to infiltrate mechanisms for social advancement, in commerce, politics, and church (from our perspective, all heavily "corrupt"). Although giving to the poor received no material return, it was generally praised as a matter of virtue and honor, and even "anonymous" gifts were carefully recalled in funerary addresses in memory of the deceased.  

139. See Wickham's conclusions in Davies and Fouracre, Languages of Gift, pp. 244-45: "Whatever theologians thought, people wanted to feel safe, and thought that one could deal with God; and influential parts of the church hierarchy must have in part agreed, if the eight-century Gregorian Sacramentary could include the phrase 'receive, Lord, the host which we offer you, and by this holy commerce (sancta commercio) absolve the chains of our sins.'"  

140. N. Zemon Davis, The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 20 (French proverbs); "both volition and obligation were expected to inspire the charitable gift" (p. 24).  

141. Zemon Davis discusses Calvin in another context (The Gift, pp. 190-203), which we will note below; on the king's power, and the influence of "bribes," see pp. 142-66.  

142. See Ben-Amos, Culture of Giving, pp. 242-76, with discussion of the tension between...
Alongside the social changes outlined above, we may trace the development of a new ideology of the gift, distinctively Protestant in origin, which has contributed greatly to the antithesis Parry has articulated. The Christian tradition inherited from Judaism the effort to enmesh ethics within religious piety, and thus to view gift giving within a specifically religious frame of reference. It also inherited (from the same biblical roots, with New Testament elaborations) the Jewish perception that in giving to those who do not (or cannot) return, one is giving to God, or at least will receive from God a reward, in one form or another. 148 Thus, the exhortations and motivations for giving expressed from early Christianity onward through the Middle Ages include the hope of a return from God. Gifts to the church, and to the poor, could be expected to reap some reward, whether in earthly blessings or in the redemption of the soul; in the words of an old French proverb, “Who gives, God gives to him.” 149

Zemon Davis has traced in Calvin an attempt to break with this ideology of reciprocity with God (and by extension reciprocity with fellow humans), contrasting Catholic “reciprocity” with Reformed “gratuitousness.” 150 In one important respect, this antithesis seems incorrect. Calvin, in fact, put great emphasis on the return of gratitude to God, characterizing a life of obedience and holiness as what is owed to God in return for the immeasurable gift of Christ. 151 Nonetheless, it is right to say that the Protestant Reformers put great effort into figuring a return to God as always only a response to the one completed and all-sufficient gift, and not as the means toward earning a future gift or favor from God. In that sense, human praise and obedience are never instrumental in Protestant theology, never part of a repeatable pattern of gift and return.

In fact the architect and in many respects the “purest” exponent of this ideological break was Martin Luther (1483–1546). As we shall analyze in greater depth below (3.3), Luther challenged the construction of human relations with God as a repeated cycle of gift-and-return, and thereby countered notions of human merit as eliciting benefits from God. Luther’s theology is centrally about gift — the gift (grace) of God expressed definitively and once-for-all in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the gift/generosity of Christ passed on to others in free Christian service. Against a long-established tradition, Luther reconfigured the Mass as the reception of grace in Word and sacrament, not as a sacrifice offered to God in the hope of obtaining benefits (for oneself or for others) from God. God, in other words, gives freely and without strings attached, and believers are to do likewise. Luther places much emphasis on imitation of Christ or, better, participation in the dynamic of the Christ-event: believers are to be (as he puts it) “Christ’s” to another one, passing on the unconditional love of Christ to others (see below, 3.3.2). It is essential for him that this love is practiced for no reward or calculation of return: it is not an interested or instrumental love. The believer “lives only for others and not for himself . . . considering nothing except the need and advantage of the neighbor.” 152 The spirit of this self-giving is also crucial: service must not be grudging or obliged, but given cheerfully, willingly, and freely. Gift-giving is, in other words, a pure, gratuitous act, liberated from the need to gain anything by the fact that Christ has given all things already, and freed from a self-seeking attitude by pure concern for the other. 153

This tradition is lifted to the position of a universal ethical ideal in the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). On Kant’s definition, the duties of virtue (ethics) are not externally imposed but constitute a freely chosen constraint, founded on pure reason alone. Such duties should be performed solely for their own sake, not from any prudential considerations: “the thought of duty for its own sake is the sufficient incentive of every action conforming

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149. “Qui donne Dieu luy donne” (cited by Zemon Davis, The Gift, pp. 18 and 228 n. 2); for the reciprocity from God expected from charity to the poor (“with no hope of recompense except from God”) and from payment for masses and various pro anima donations to the church, see Davis, The Gift, pp. 83, 167-82. For early Christian expectations of a “return” from God for giving to others, see, e.g., 2 Clement passim.


153. Melanchthon (1497–1560) offers a fine example of this principle of unilateral giving in his commentary on Colossians 3:14: “The Colossians do not do good to the saints as if they were money-lenders, buying big profits by small favors. The world, on the other hand, is generous in the hope of getting more back. All gifts are greedy, as the saying goes. In Martin’s felicitous expression, ‘Presents are like fish-hooks.’ But the saints do good because they know this is what God wants, and because they value his will above the promised rewards. Their action is not prompted by the desire to earn something in return. For they know that all things have already been freely given, and that they cannot be won by any human merits, nor given their due value by them. . . . Thus the magnitude of the reward stirs the Colossians into doing good works, not to obtain fuller blessings, but because they believe themselves to have obtained so much already, that they long to show God their gratitude.” (P. Melanchthon, Paul’s Letter to the Colossians, trans. D. C. Parker [Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989], p. 34; I am grateful to Stephen Chester for drawing this citation to my attention).
to duty” (Die Metaphysik der Sitten 6.393). The key duties are one’s own perfection (eigene Vollkommenheit) and the other’s happiness (fremde Glückseligkeit) — crucially, not one’s own happiness, except in a purely moral sense. Thus, one should never serve another’s happiness as a means to one’s own; duty should be performed without hope of return: “To be beneficent, that is, to promote according to one’s means the happiness of others in need, without hoping for something in return, is everyone’s duty” (6.453). Any resulting benefits to oneself are an accidental product, falling outside the moral compass of the duty (they have prudential but not moral value). Kant is acutely aware of the fact that gifts are liable to put the recipient under obligation, and in a position inferior to the donor, but he is morally uneasy with this fact: “since the favor we do implies that his well-being depends on our generosity, and this humbles him, it is our duty to behave as if our help is either merely what is due him or but a slight service of love, and to spare him humiliation and maintain his respect for himself” (6.448-49). It is apparent here that individual self-regard is more important than the ties of obligation that bind persons together. The rich person “must carefully avoid any appearance of intending to bind the other,” otherwise “it would not be a true benefit that he rendered him.” He must try every means to avoid obliging the other; indeed, it would be “better” if possible to “practice his beneficence in complete secrecy” (6.453).

Kant thus provides a powerful ideological (and easily secularized) sanction for the one-way, non-obliging, and preferably anonymous gift. There are clearly motifs here in common with Seneca (whose works were highly influential on European thought from the Renaissance onward): among others, the notion of virtue for virtue’s sake is closely parallel. But the discrepancies indicate how the gift now operates within a significantly different context. Whereas Seneca’s concern, as we saw (above, 1.2.5), was to foster the social ties of friendship that were enabled by the circulating, reciprocal gift, such that obligation and return were recognized as essential elements of social cohesion, Kant prioritizes the moral integrity and self-respect of the autonomous individual. Although society is still characterized by Kant as a community of mutual help (6.453), it is morally desirable to minimize or even remove the obligation that arises from the gift; indeed, the gift can be considered morally valuable without reference to its construction or consolidation of social ties. Kant thus legitimates the unilateral gift, which is given universalizable definition as a moral ideal. When this ideology becomes influential within the social-structural developments outlined above, the conditions are set for the celebration of the “gratuitous” gift — “gratuitous” not only in the sense that it is freely willed, but in the novel sense that it expects and even desires no return.155

1.3.3. The Modern Notion of the “Pure” Gift

The argument outlined above suggests that the modern ideology of the “pure” gift is the construct of a specific historical and cultural configuration — an invention of the modern West. As Parry argues, “those who make free and unconstrained contracts in the market also make free and unconstrained gifts outside it. But these gifts are defined as what market relations are not — altruistic, moral, and loaded with emotion.” In this ideological polarization, “Gift-exchange — in which persons and things, interest and disinterest are merged — has been fractured, leaving gifts opposed to exchange, persons opposed to things, and interest to disinterest.”156 As we saw from the anthropology of the gift and from the Greco-Roman evidence, the traditional role of the gift in creating and reproducing social ties entails that gifts create obligations and expect returns, mixing disinterest and self-interest in ways that confound modern categories. But the ideal of a pure “altruism” (a term created in nineteenth-century France) necessitates the suppression of these traditional elements.157 Thus, Noonan presents as the “ideal case” a gift on which “no obligation is imposed which the donee must fulfill. The donee’s thanks are but the ghost of a reciprocal bond. That the gift should operate coercively is indeed repugnant and painful to the donor, destructive of the liberality that is intended. Freely given, the gift leaves the donee free.”158 In a similar vein, Hyde polarizes the gift and the market economy, relating to each other as the emotional to the impersonal, the dynamic to the static, the generous to the accumulative, and the excessive to the scarce. Pervading these polarities is another, that between freedom and obligation — and if the gift cannot be completely unobliging, it is best if it “disappears” by moving among more than two parties, preventing any direct return.159

It is easy to see how this ideology fits the social context in which many

155. For a fuller reading of Kant on this topic, see Leithart, Gratitude, pp. 154-60.
157. “Altruism” (French: altruisme) was coined by A. Comte (1798-1857), whose motto was "vivre pour l'autrui"; see Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.
158. Noonan, Bribes, p. 695.
kinds of "gift" take place in the modern West. \footnote{The analysis of modern philanthropy and its relation to the anthropology of the gift, see, e.g., D. J. Cheal, The Gift Economy (London: Routledge, 1988), and I. Silber, "Modern Philanthropy: Reassessing the Viability of a Maussian Perspective," in W. James and N. J. Allen, eds., Marcel Mauss: A Centenary Tribute (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), pp. 134-50.} Charitable giving, generally mediated through large nonprofit organizations, leaves donors and recipients unknown to one another and receives no recipient-return. Where gifts are reciprocated (at Christmas, in the workplace, etc.), they are typically of merely symbolic significance; a return is rarely essential for economic or social survival and therefore easily trivialized. In modern forms of "euergetism," where charitable foundations or wealthy individuals support "good causes," the return (generally in the form of honor) is hardly recognized as a form of return, so the gift can still be conceptualized as a unilateral transaction. What is idealized is the anonymous, unreciprocated and disinterested gift, where no return is possible or expected: Titmuss's famous analysis of blood donation elevated this particular form of gift to the level of a modern paradigm. \footnote{R. M. Titmuss, The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976). His conclusion that voluntary donations (in the UK) were in fact medically safer than payment for blood (in the USA) has had a wide influence on the discussion of altruism in medical ethics. As he notes, even blood donation may be motivated by a hope for a return if and when required (in a form of generalized reciprocity, as defined by Lévi-Strauss). But in the "free gift" of blood to unknown strangers, there is "no formal contract . . . no situation of power, domination, constraint or compulsion . . . no gratitude imperative . . . and no explicit guarantee of or wish for a reward or a return gift" (p. 89).} Of course not all gifts are, or can be, this detached, and alongside the theory of the "pure" gift ("the bearer of a utopia"), \footnote{Godrier, Enigma of the Gift, p. 208.} there is also a deep recognition that gifts do oblige their recipients and do look for a return. \footnote{For sociological analysis of gifts in contemporary forms of solidarity, see A. E. Komter, Social Solidarity and the Gift (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).} Gifts of patronage, favor, and friendship continue to create relationships of obligation and reciprocity, and it is the recognition of this dynamic that, in some countries, severely restricts their operation in business and politics. Such gifts are treated with suspicion precisely because of their power to oblige; everyone knows that "there is no such thing as a free lunch." In some cases, the reciprocity can be masked by the fact that the return is delayed in time, or radically different in kind; or where the reciprocity is simultaneous (e.g., Christmas presents), it can be figured as the presentation of matching unilateral gifts. As always, the development or manipulation of language can also shift the same transaction into or out of the "gift" domain. In general, as Carrier comments, "At the level of articulated cultural values the perfect present may be free. At the level of structural cultural expectation and everyday behavior the obligation that giving generates can be strong." \footnote{Carrier, Gifts and Commodities, p. 157.} Although the etiquette of gift-giving has always been delicate, this mismatch between (modern) ideal and persistent reality appears to be the product of a particular Western development.

Two theoretical attempts to analyze this mismatch indicate the modern allure of the wholly disinterested gift. As we noted above (1.1.2), Pierre Bourdieu assumes a polarity between "interest" and "disinterest" in his analysis of the structural "self-deception" entailed in all gift-giving. Taking the gift to be ambiguous, the site of a "dual truth," he suggests:

On the one hand, it is experienced (or intended) as a refusal of self-interest and egotistic calculation, and an exaltation of generosity — a gratuitous, unrequited gift. On the other hand, it never entirely excludes awareness of the logic of exchange or even confession of the repressed impulses or, intermittently, the denunciation of another, denied, truth of generous exchange — its constraining and costly character. \footnote{P. Bourdieu, Marginalia — Some Additional Notes on the Gift," in A. D. Schrift, ed., The Logic of the Gift, trans. R. Nice (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 231. This essay summarizes and develops themes explored in Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory, pp. 171-97, and P. Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, trans. R. Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 98-121.} This doubleness, he suggests, is created by the time delay between the gift and its return, so that each appears, independently, as an act of pure disinterest. The "misrecognition" here involved is not necessarily conscious, but it operates at a deep level of individual or collective self-deception that is part of the labor of gift-giving itself. On this view, the "purely disinterested" gift is actually, at an "objective" level, an interested act of power, but society needs to think otherwise for its own good.

At a philosophical level, this tension between ideal and reality became central to the highly influential analysis of the gift offered by Jacques Derrida. Derrida considers that the gift, on the one hand, necessarily operates within a circular "economy," characterized by return and obligation. But on the other hand, in his view, what makes it gift (as opposed to economic exchange) is that it does not come back: "it must not circulate, it must not be exchanged." \footnote{J. Derrida, Given Time, vol. 1: Counterfeit Money, trans. P. Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 7.} For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt. If the other gives me back or owes me or has to give me back...
what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of a long-term deferral or difference.\textsuperscript{167}

Pushing this thought to its logical limits, Derrida insists that any kind of return will destroy or annul the gift. If the recipient recognizes the gift as a gift (let alone expresses gratitude for it), if the gift appears as a gift to either donor or recipient, if the donor knows or intends it as such (and thus pays himself back with self-congratulation), if the gift is remembered by either party, either consciously or subconsciously — in all these ways, it is annulled and ceases to be a gift.\textsuperscript{168} Since the gift is both necessarily engaged in circularity and destroyed by it, this makes the gift “the impossible” (not just impossible, but “the very figure of the impossible”),\textsuperscript{169} and thus an essential tool with which to clarify the indeterminate openness characteristic of deconstruction. With the gift thus defined, Derrida claims that Mauss’s “monumental work” “speaks of everything but the gift: It deals with economy, exchange, contract (do ut des), it speaks of raising the stakes, sacrifice, gift and counter-gift — in short, everything that in the thing itself impels the gift and the annulment of the gift.”\textsuperscript{170}

Theological reactions to Derrida have ranged from rejection of his insistence on the impossibility of the gift to delight in its openness and excess (identified with God).\textsuperscript{171} Derrida’s provocative analysis of this central religious theme has certainly catalyzed an outpouring of contemporary Christian theology on gift, which cannot be surveyed here.\textsuperscript{172} For our present purposes, what is important to note is that Derrida’s construction of the impossibility of the gift is based on the premise that the gift by definition should be free of reciprocity or return. But this definition, I have argued, is a modern construction, not a natural or necessary construal of the gift. The pure gift, free of interest and unsullied by return, is an extreme “perfection” of the gift, reflecting a modern ideological polarization between freedom and obligation, interest and disinterest. From an anthropological point of view, “even the idea of a pure gift is a contradiction,” since such a gift, anonymous and unreturned, does nothing to enhance solidarity.\textsuperscript{173} Taking a long historical and anthropological perspective, one might even retort that Derrida’s treatment of the aporia of the gift “speaks of everything but the gift.” In any case, we should be conscious that, despite the enormous influence of Bourdieu and Derrida, it would be arbitrary to make the absence of reciprocity and “self-interest” the very essence of the gift.

1.4. Conclusions

Our journey through the anthropology and history of the gift has clarified a number of issues of foundational importance for this volume. We have found that the broad anthropological field of “gift” may be valuable in encompassing many kinds of service, favor, and donation in a common field of social relations, which tend to be characterized as voluntary, personal, and enduring. The relation between such “gifts” and other modes of transaction has varied over time and between cultures (and may be open to complex forms of negotiation), but we should be alert to the possibility that their sphere of significance is more extensive than in modern Western cultures. Anthropology does not provide any single “model” or “essence” of the gift, but it suggests that gifts may have important roles in creating or reproducing social ties. It further suggests a presumption (well-founded in relation to the Greco-Roman world) that gifts operate in reciprocal relations, and entail the expectation and obligation of return, whether the parties are equal or unequal in status. In the latter case, the return of honor is often found in pre-modern societies to be an essential element of the gift-relationship, expressing differentials in social and political power. We have noted the possibility that gifts may scramble and combine

gift-giving as the pooling of resources, see K. Tanner, Economy of Grace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). I hope to return to this matter in a subsequent volume focusing not (as in this volume) on the divine gift, but on the social configurations of gift in Pauline and Christian ethics.

173. Douglas, introduction to Mauss, The Gift, p. x. From her perspective, “the whole idea of a free gift is based on a misunderstanding” since “refusing requital puts the act of giving outside any mutual ties” (p. ix).