Debts of Gratitude

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Gratitude is a positive emotion, typically classified with joy, pride, and admiration. But unlike those emotions, gratitude often comes with uncomfortable strings attached—the so-called debt of gratitude. Imagine you were on dialysis, and your eager young coworker, having learned that she is a match, offered to donate a kidney. I stipulate that you suspect no ulterior motive, nor do you think she feels pressured into offering; you are satisfied that she has thought through the implications. Nonetheless, you might be so pained by the prospect of what gratitude calls for in response to such a massive act of beneficence that you have difficulty bringing yourself to accept. And if you do accept, your gratitude to her will be tinged with a feeling of indebtedness. In such a case, that feeling of being burdened by how much you owe her is part and parcel of gratitude.

The debt of gratitude points to the existence of norms governing the reception of benefits. But we can make a corresponding point about the other positive emotions: it is possible to respond inadequately or excessively in respect of joy, pride, or admiration. And yet we don't speak of a "debt of joy" or a "debt of pride." What is special about the norms that govern being benefited, such that they generate an uncomfortable feeling of indebtedness?

In some cases, they don't. Suppose my best friend gets me, for my birthday, the quirky dress only she could have known I'd love. I am delighted; I feel grateful; I thank her—or perhaps the look on my face is thanks enough. I do not feel myself to be under any sort of standing normative burden. The demands of gratitude are exhausted by what I feel and express in reaction to the dress. She'll be happy that I'm happy, and that will be all. In this case, there is no debt of gratitude, no discomfort. My gratitude is a purely positive emotion, akin to joy, admiration, and pride.

In this chapter, I explain what a debt of gratitude is, and why there is no debt of gratitude in the birthday dress case. I also argue that when there *is* a debt of gratitude, it needn't take the form of the kidney-donation case. Debts of gratitude come in two variants, corresponding to the two "objects" that the feeling of gratitude takes. In the kidney-donation case, beneficence generates an obligation that regulates how one acts toward, thinks of, and feels about *the person* who gave you something. I will call this a "debt of reciprocation." In another kind of case, the obligation in question governs one's feelings, thoughts, and behavior in relation to *the thing* given by someone. I will call this a "debt of appreciation." Let me begin by describing in detail a debt of this second kind.

My Teacher

I have been taught by many good teachers, and one great teacher. Her name was Amy Kass, and her classes—more specifically, her questions—were the centerpiece of my college education. Her special talent was to treat a work of literature as a jumping-off point for exploring issues in ethics, metaphysics, and areas of human life and thought

that are impossible to classify. She once asked me why I wouldn't want to be Helios, the sun god. Another time, she asked whether the lyrics of the Simon and Garfunkel song "Blessed" are true to the message of their biblical source: "Did they understand what Jesus was trying to say?" She had a lot of questions about eating: does it matter what we eat? Who we eat it with? How we eat it? And *why* do these things matter? She wondered whether I'd be satisfied with having an immortal soul that was not personalized to me: "Do you think your immortal soul has to have your name written in the corner?" She wanted to know whether Socrates was guilty as charged, whether Ahab's quest to kill the whale was noble or foolish, and what I thought about Cordelia's refusal of Lear's demand for a profession of love—was she principled or cold-hearted?

She would ask a question, and then she would give you *this look*. I have spoken to many of her students about this moment, so I know that my reaction was not idiosyncratic. When her eyes fall on you, and you are poised to answer, something about her face conveys the following thought: she has been waiting her whole life for this moment, to encounter *you*, the one person who knows the answer to this deeply important question. As absurd as that sounds, she sold it. Hers is the countenance, the demeanor, the mood that I project onto Socrates, when I imagine him asking his interlocutors: "What is X?" I model my Socrates on her because when it came to eliciting answers people never dreamed were in them, I have never met anyone more earnest or more ruthless.

This questioning helped me see the meaning in everyday human practices, in philosophy, in literature, in community, in teaching and being taught. The list could go on and on. Her classes exposed the connection between thinking and living: that thinking about something could make doing it more meaningful, and that much of what was worth thinking about could be thought about only by drawing on one's lived experience in the relevant domain.

She once told me that someone once told her that whenever you teach a class, you should imagine that someone much smarter than you is in the classroom. After I left college for graduate studies in Classics, I often found myself imagining her. Having been assigned a massive amount of Greek reading, I'd be tempted to peek at the translation to speed myself up; sitting in a seminar on material I didn't really understand, I'd wonder whether I should raise my hand. I knew what she would tell me to do, and when I didn't take her "advice," I felt guilty. Teaching my first class—Intro Greek—I often felt her presence, advising me to be patient, to admit ignorance, to make sure that I conveyed something of the beauty of the language and not only the grammar.

I felt I owed it to her to do all these things—that any less would constitute ingratitude. And this feeling was uncomfortable, in that it blocked the easy way forward. I subjected myself to criticism; I monitored for self-indulgence; I never felt that I had done enough. To give just one example: in view of what I perceived to be the deficiencies in the textbook assigned for the class, I felt obliged to write my own Greek textbook for my students.

My life both during and after college was suffused with a feeling of indebtedness, but little of this debt took the form of a desire to reciprocate, benefit, or even come into contact with my college teacher. What I felt obligated to do—what I felt I owed her, in view of her beneficence to me—was the completion of the project we began together.

Gratitude has two targets—we are grateful *to* someone—our benefactor—*for* something—the benefit. Gratitude is a response to benefit, not per se, but more specifically to the fact that some benefit is received *from another* as opposed to self-generated or the product of chance. Gratitude is a response to another's goodwill toward us, not per se, but as manifested *in some action* they take for the sake of our good.[1] Gratitude expresses the second-personal thought: "it means something to me that you did this." We are touched by the fact that the well-being that we are experiencing was the intentional object of another person's agency. My claim in this chapter is that the debt of gratitude I feel toward my teacher is a matter of being called upon to appreciate *what* she gave me—the benefit—whereas in the kidney donation case described earlier, the debt is primarily a matter of appreciating (the goodwill of) the benefactor. Before I describe the difference between these cases, however, it will be useful to differentiate both of them from a case of gratitude in which there is no debt at all, such as the birthday dress example sketched earlier. For this reason, I turn now to a discussion of the gratitude we feel for gifts.

Gift-Gratitude

It is hard to give a good gift, because the gift-giver must navigate two pitfalls of gift-giving—the overly useful gift and the useless gift. The reason why these are bad gifts is that in either case, one generates a debt of gratitude. The art of gift-giving calls for one to be beneficent without generating a debt of gratitude.

Overly useful gifts fail to allow the gift-giver to shine. When I was 12, my prize possession was a Polaroid camera. I told my mother all I wanted for my birthday—from her, from relatives, from family friends—was film for the camera. My mother had to explain to me that people don't want to give me packages and packages of film. Such a request did too much to instrumentalize the gift-giver into subservience to my ends. The purely instrumental gift makes it hard to appreciate the gift-giver. The pleasure one takes is too much a pleasure simply in the object, rather than in the fact that one received it *from so and so*.[2] Unlike the case of the birthday dress described earlier, one's reaction to the instrumental gift does not already contain an appreciation

[1] Should we feel grateful to those who *intended* to benefit us, but are prevented from doing so by forces outside their control? I leave the question for the reader.

[2] The exception might be the *secretly useful* gift—where the knowledge that this gift was useful betrays an intimate connection. The secretly useful gift allows the beneficiary to appreciate the benefactor in the gift in spite of its usefulness.

of the giver. One is, therefore, liable to feel that one still "owes" the giver some kind of debt in this regard. A gift that leaves the recipient feeling indebted is, under most circumstances, defective *qua* gift.

At the other extreme is the useless gift, such as a kitchen implement given to someone who doesn't cook. If you give me such a failed gift, my "thank you" will be a bit strained. When I say "it's the thought that counts," I'm appreciating the fact that you had goodwill toward me, rather than the benefit in which that goodwill materialized. Here the outstanding "debt of gratitude" will be in relation to the object—I may feel obligated to *try* to like it, and feel somewhat bad for not doing so. I may think I *ought* to display it (or at least to do so when you visit ...). This outstanding debt, once again, indicates a defect in the gift.[3]

Gifts can be useless even when they are not tools. It is risky to give someone, for example, an objet d'art, because the recipient may not have the same tastes as the giver. Such a gift is "useless" in the broader sense: it cannot be enjoyed. The educational gift is an especially interesting species of useless gift. If you are not interested in poetry or painting, it will usually be a mistake for me to gift you, for example, a book collecting my favorite poems or paintings. It may be true that your life would be vastly improved if you took to poetry or painting, but it is (usually) inappropriate for me to try to effect the change via a gift. In this case, there is too much, as opposed to too little, of the giver in the gift; and this is likely to be felt by you as an imposition. A good gift, such as the birthday dress, allows the recipient's gratitude to take the form of an immediate pleasure or happiness in response to what she has been presented with. That means it must speak to her current ends, rather than those ends one would desire her to be educated into.

The perfect gift strikes a kind of mean between drawing our attention toward the benefit given and toward the person giving it, and it does so by being neither too useful nor utterly useless. A holy grail of gift-giving is to discover something the recipient never knew existed, but which ideally serves one of their idiosyncratic standing ends. The gift-giver makes her mark on the gift by presenting the recipient with something that reflects the giver's efforts, tastes, and ingenuity, but the receiver can immediately appreciate the gift as directed to them in particular, by way of being subordinated to some peculiar concern of theirs. In this sort of case, a heartfelt "this is just what I've always wanted!" can obviate even the need to add, "thank you." The perfect gift is perfect precisely in that it elicits an affective response[4] that exhausts all the demands of gratitude. It leaves no normative remainder to stand as a "debt of gratitude."

The intentional avoidance of a "debt of gratitude" stems from the fact that gifts are, ideally, *expressions* of gratitude, appreciation, or love. We give gifts to those people whose presence in our lives we want to mark in some positive way. The disposition to

[3] There are also cases in which the feeling of indebtedness is traceable to faults in the recipient's oversensitivity to issues of debt rather than to any fault in the gift.

[4] Note that I include expression of the emotion as part of the affective response.

give to those people is part and parcel of the fact that (1) we are affectively vulnerable to both how they treat us and what happens to them; (2) we believe that it is good to have our lives implicated with theirs; (3) we are motivationally disposed to act in ways that protect and benefit both the people themselves and our connection to them; and (4) we reflectively endorse the above set of attitudes[5]. In short, we *value* our relationship with them and the gifts we give them are one way of marking this fact.[6] (Given that forms of the word "value" are often ambiguous as to whether they pick out a feature of the object valued or the subject doing the valuing, I will often use the word "valuation" or "valuational" to mark the condition of the subject specifically.)

Gift-giving is a recognition of the existence of such a shared valuational structure binding two people together. The excellent gift marks and celebrates ties that are already present; this project cuts against that of generating new ones. This is why educational gifts, or "motivational" gifts prompting the recipient to take up, for example, cooking or exercise, are problematic. To give such gifts is to suggest that one is not happy with the way things are, but it is precisely such happiness that gift-giving ought to express. The normative remainder prohibition does not apply to the two other forms of beneficence I would like to discuss, and this is because they represent the opening rather than the closing act of a valuational story. Gift-gratitude comes *from* valuing; the debt of gratitude, by contrast, is felt when gratitude moves one *toward* valuing.

Assistance Gratitude

If the aforementioned description of gift-giving is persuasive, it will be acceptable to restrict the word "gift" to mark an act of beneficence that is subject to the demand that the recipient's affective response exhaust all demands of gratitude. Not all that is given is, in my sense, a gift. The account of gift-gratitude given earlier is not a complete account of gratitude. Sometimes it is no defect in the act of benefaction that it provides something purely instrumental:[7] when we save the life of a drowning

[5] For an account of valuing as having these four components, see Scheffler (2010) and Callard (2018, pp. 117–123).

[6] The phrase "value our relationship" can be understood in two ways. The first is to see the relationship as a historical or biological connection that exists independently of the attitude of valuation directed at it. The second is to see the relationship as identical to the evaluative connection between its participants. On this second view, relationships are constituted by an activity of shared valuation. "I value my relationship with her" becomes another way of saying, "I have a relationship with her" and "I engage in valuing with her." For the first view, see Kolodny (2003). For the second view, see Callard (2017, pp. 130–132).

[7] I am setting aside cases of minor assistance—holding the door open for the person behind you, picking up something that someone on line in front of you has dropped. It is also worth noting that the "size" of one's assistance depends on the relationship in question—in the context of a close personal relationship, someone's giving you money or cooking you dinner or driving you to the airport might be something small. Cases of minor assistance do not call for much in the way of gratitude, a fact that is interesting in its own right but which I do not seek to explain here.

stranger, or bring food to our recently bereaved colleague, we provide them with help that is not inflected by the demand that the giver's idiosyncrasies be recognized. Call the gratitude one experiences in response to such benefaction "assistance-gratitude."

Assistance gratitude is typically not exhausted by a person's emotional reaction to having received assistance. Even after the beneficiary has made full use of the benefactor's gift by, for example, spending the money in a way that was profitable to herself—she feels she still owes the benefactor some kind of debt. Her enjoyment of the benefit he provided her does not contain within itself an acknowledgment of the fact that this enjoyment was secured by way of another's concern for her. In addition to enjoying the benefit, she feels she owes it to him to (become disposed to) make corresponding sacrifices on his behalf. I will call this a "debt of reciprocation."

Consider the following example from my own life. An editor of a journal went out of his way to expedite the refereeing process for a paper I submitted shortly before my tenure file was due. Two years later, I still never turn down his referee requests, no matter how inconvenient; I owe him. The debt of gratitude in such a case constitutes a normative remainder from the action that was done, such that her benefactor's ends, needs, and interests become, in some way or other, a source of normative demands for the beneficiary.

Whether benefaction generates a debt of gratitude is not simply a matter of the benefactor's choice—I may feel indebted to your assistance even if you wish that I didn't. There are, however, means benefactors can take to mitigate the beneficiary's feeling of indebtedness. Some charitable donors choose to remain anonymous, so that there is no target to whom the beneficiary might take herself to be indebted. Other benefactors might cast certain forms of assistance as a loan, in order to establish specific terms, the satisfaction of which would constitute repayment and cancellation of any debt. Here the normative debt of gratitude is transmuted into a financial debt—and, under some circumstances, this might make it more feasible for the beneficiary to accept the assistance. Another strategy is for the benefactor to minimize the cost of the benefit to himself, downplaying his own role in such a way as to try to get the beneficiary to see her situation as close to that of a person who has received a chance windfall.

Notice that in a case of gift-gratitude, the benefactor would have no inclination to subtract herself from the equation in any of these ways: I would not want to give a birthday present anonymously, or to treat it as a loan, or to downplay my role in getting it. Gift-gratitude is not beset by the problem these mechanisms are designed to address. Gift-gratitude doesn't put someone under a standing normative burden; it doesn't leave a remainder.

We can explain the source of the difference in terms of the relation to the practices of shared valuation described earlier: in the gift case, the benefaction comes from a place of already secured shared valuation, whereas in the assistance case, it moves one toward that place. When someone assists a stranger, this expresses a care or concern that the beneficiary who feels the debt of gratitude experiences herself as obligated

to return. Likewise in the case where someone assists a friend or colleague in a way that goes beyond the already established terms of that relationship. The feeling of gratitude is the feeling that the benefactor has initiated the proceedings of a new form of valuation in which it behooves one to participate. When the benefactor tries to subtract herself from the equation in the ways described earlier, her aim is to benefit without thereby eliciting such a feeling in the beneficiary.

Reciprocation Is Not Payback

Gratitude is structured in such a way as to have a dual target: we are grateful to someone for something. Well-chosen gifts elicit an emotional response of gratitude that exhausts any normative demands toward either target; this is possible because both giving and receiving are governed by a pre-existing valuational state, namely mutual valuation of the interpersonal relationship in question. By contrast, in the case of assistance (and, as we will see later, mentorship), the grateful person experiences beneficence as an invitation to enter (more deeply) into valuation: her gratitude calls not for the expression, but rather for *the acquisition* of a practical disposition.

In the case of assistance-gratitude, the disposition to be acquired is one of valuing her relationship with her beneficiary. If she had such a disposition, she would be inclined to make (certain kinds of) sacrifices for her beneficiary and to act for the sake of (some of) her beneficiary's interests. Which kinds of sacrifice and which kinds of interests? The answers to these questions will depend on the kind of relationship they have, and on this point the beneficiary takes her cue from the benefactor's act of beneficence. The result is that gratitude often calls for a person to become disposed to do the kind of deed that was done for her; hence, I will call this kind of debt, a "debt of reciprocation."

But it is important to see that gratitude does not point toward paying someone back for what she did. Usually, our attitude toward debts is to discharge them, with a view to returning to our earlier, unindebted condition. The "debt of gratitude" is one that draws us up into normative demands rather than promising any kind of release from them. I do not deny that sometimes the beneficiary's goal is to do just *enough* to "balance out" what her benefactor did for her, with a view to thereafter being freed from any connection to him. In this sort of case, the beneficiary wishes to convert the debt of gratitude into one more closely resembling a financial debt. But such a motivational makeup can be the grounds for an accusation of ingratitude.

Reciprocation is not payback; hence the debt of reciprocation doesn't necessarily involve doing the sort of thing that was done for one. If a teenager's wealthy neighbor pays for him to take an expensive summer photography course, he might write her weekly letters detailing what he learns there. This is an appropriate expression of his valuation of the distinctive kind of tie that binds them, which is some species of what the Romans called a "patron-client relationship." It would make no sense for him to aim to pay for *her* education. He is not trying to undo the favor she did him; he is

trying to play his part in the new relationship to which he reads her beneficence as an invitation. In the next section, I will discuss a debt of gratitude in which one's benefactor invites one to "step up" into valuing something other than a relationship with him- or her-self.

Mentor-Gratitude

Assistance leaves a normative residue of gratitude to be directed toward the giver. If someone expresses a valuation of your welfare that goes beyond your current relationship to them, your gratitude is the feeling of being pulled into (a deeper) community with that person. You feel that you ought to value your relationship with them in a way that corresponds to the way in which their act of beneficence demonstrates that they do. I have used the phrase "debt of reciprocation," to describe the object of this feeling.

Mentorship generates a different sort of normative demand. The mentee's debt of gratitude points toward deepening her relationship with the gift rather than the giver. The job of a mentor is to help us acquire new ends by sharing their own; what their benefaction leaves behind is a *debt of appreciation* for what they have shared with us.

When reviewing the case of gift-gratitude, we noted that it is problematic when people give you gifts designed to educate you into their interests. It doesn't follow that it is inappropriate to try to educate someone—merely that it is, at least typically, inappropriate to do so on an occasion of gift-giving. Gifts express appreciation for what is already there; and this sentiment is incompatible with the desire to see someone change.

How, then, does one come to "give" someone a new end, desire, project, or passion? We don't usually educate people by handing them things—not even when the things are tickets or course-registrations. One helps another come to value something by sharing one's own passion for it in such a way as to guide the other's efforts to come to acquire it. Usually, this kind of support is received not from peers but from elders: the parents, teachers, coaches, and religious counselors who are further along than we are with respect to the relevant end. Let me use the word "mentor" to cover all of these various categories. I propose that what makes someone an excellent mentor with respect to some domain of human value is the fact that, for that person, sharing the value with others is a, perhaps even the best, way of realizing or fulfilling that value on a personal level. My teacher was someone who valued Homer *by* teaching others to value him.

Could someone be good at causing others to care about, for example, music without finding that educative activity to be musically fulfilling, or even without caring at all about music? Perhaps. But if such a person agreed (perhaps reluctantly) to do what it took to induct you into the world of music, and if she succeeded, you would not feel that you owed it to her to become musically excellent. At most you owe her assistance-

gratitude for having been willing to do you the favor of making you musical. In this case, the person was making a sacrifice to educate you; my teacher made no such sacrifice.

My claim is that we feel a special kind of gratitude to those whose valuational projects are pursued by helping us acquire those values. Mentoring is not a zero-sum game: one doesn't lose anything by giving another person an end.[8] The help our mentors gave us did not alienate them from their own interests and so we don't, as in the cases of assistance-gratitude, feel obliged to develop a corresponding concern for those interests. I didn't owe my teacher personal favors. Her ministrations were an initiation into value—not that of our relationship, but of Homer and Plato, of literature and human reason and culture. My feeling of gratitude to her for those overtures is the feeling that I ought to become a full-fledged valuer of those things.

Just as it is not all the same whether I found the money as opposed to receiving it from a kind benefactor—in the second case, I have a debt of gratitude—it is likewise not all the same whether I discovered Homer and Plato on my own or whether I had them entrusted to me by someone to whom I likewise owe a debt of gratitude. I have a debt of appreciation when, as a result of what someone has done for me, I ought to (more fully) acquire some value.

Conclusion: Why Do Debts of Gratitude Exist?

The beneficiary of assistance feels that she ought to acquire a disposition that would move her to benefit her benefactor in ways that correspond to the benefits she has received from him. I have called this kind of debt of gratitude, a "debt of reciprocation"; it is directed at the giver as opposed to the gift. In the case of mentor-gratitude, the disposition in question is one that would move her to properly value whatever value the mentor was helping her acquire. I have called this kind of debt, the "debt of appreciation"; it is directed at the gift as opposed to the giver.[9]

Why don't gifts and assistance give rise to debts of appreciation? There is, to be sure, a norm of appreciation that applies here: those who receive assistance or gifts ought to appreciate what they have been given. So, for instance, if someone gives me money because I need it for an operation, I ought to use the money for the operation. If, instead, I gamble it away, I'm failing to appreciate what they have given me. But it is also true that I will tend to use the money for the operation—and not because I appreciate the gift, but because I need the money. Likewise, if you give me a book for

[8] Though one might well, by taking on a mentee, make oneself vulnerable to new forms of loss, e.g., disappointment if one's mentee fails to make the most of her talents, or sadness if her development is cut short by factors outside her control.

[9] All debts are owed to people and not things; what I'm marking with the phrase "directed at the giver/gift" is the difference between owing someone a favor and owing it to someone to apply myself in some domain; in the first case what I owe are debts of reciprocation and in the second, debts of appreciation.

my birthday, I ought to read it; whereas if I had simply found the same book lying on the sidewalk, I would have no obligation to read it. But if you chose well, I will not experience the obligation to read the book as demanding, since I will *want* to start reading. I will already have the values that (are partly constituted by the dispositions that) motivate me to read it. I do not need to become a new or different person—to change in value—in order to appreciate what I should appreciate; for these reasons, I refrain from describing the fact that I ought to appreciate gifts and assistance as a "debt of appreciation."

Parallel claims apply with respect to reciprocation. We owe it to the gift-giver to *express* our delight, to make them see that we see the care and love with which the gift was chosen. Once again, in the case of a good gift and a good relationship, the recipient already has the disposition from which such a reaction will spring. Likewise, if we have been touched by the care and attentions of our mentors over the course of their mentorship, we will have developed the valuational disposition that inclines us to communicate how much they have meant to us. What we may not yet be fully inclined to do is to love Homer and Plato; this may still strike us as onerous and guilt inducing, insofar as it is a form of valuation we have not fully internalized, but feel that we ought.

A debt of gratitude is generated when beneficence gives rise to a duty to come to care about someone or something. Valuing, as described earlier, is a complex disposition: it contains cognitive, motivational, affective, and self-reflective attitudes.[10] To value is not merely to believe that something is valuable and it is not merely to act as though something were valuable. To value is to feel, believe, and be motivated in a new way. When our values change, we become, to just that extent, different people.

How could it be that a simple act of beneficence—either one of mentorship or assistance—generates a duty to become a different person? I have not tried to answer this question, and I admit I view it as one of the great mysteries of life that human beings feel moved to rise to the occasion in this particular way. Let me indulge in a conjectural answer to this question. Perhaps the reason we read the actions of others as beckoning us to enter a new normative space is that we are all, in one way or another, antecedently looking for opportunities to grow in respect of value.

Unless we had feelers out, how could we increase our stock of values in anything but an accidental way? It is not irrational[11] to entrench oneself in what one currently cares about; to focus one's attentions on one's present concerns; to close oneself off from coming to care about anything that would detract from a full pursuit of what one has

[10] See note 2 and corresponding text.

[11] Here I use the word "rational/irrational" as a gloss for "what I have (no) internal reason to pursue," rather than in the broader way I argue for in Callard (2016). There, I try to show that reasons-internalism is false because we have (what I call) "proleptic reasons" to come to acquire new values. In Callard (2016), I argue that we sometimes have reason to pursue something precisely to the extent that it doesn't (yet) serve any of our standing desires, interests, or values; for the purposes of the present paper, I have relinquished the terminology of "rationality."

already committed oneself to. Indeed, sometimes rationality dictates this move—when, for instance, we find ourselves stressed out, overcommitted, and close to the breaking point. But even when rationality doesn't dictate it, it is always open to us to close the circle of caring and say "this is what I care about, and I'm satisfied with that." And the rational availability of this move doesn't depend on the size of the circle. What, then, prevents human beings from shutting themselves tight into hermit-like balls of self-concern? Even if rational egoism is false, and there exists an argument for caring about more than the pursuit of self-preservation and (narrowly conceived) pleasures, it usually isn't *argument* that breaks through that wall. It's emotion.

My claim throughout this chapter has been that the debt of gratitude is a call for the opening out of the self; my concluding conjecture is that we hear this call because we are listening for it. We are striving to strive. The existence of this standing disposition to become more than we are makes it possible for others to treat us, proleptically, as though we already were the people we might become. They assist us in ways that would be appropriate if we already were in a certain kind of community with them, and we correspondingly experience this treatment as beckoning us into that community. If we posit a standing disposition to become valuers of other people, we can explain the debt of gratitude as a case where that disposition is activated by the beneficence of another.

When I showed up in my teacher's classroom, I was an awkward, insecure teenager who knew nothing of great books or big ideas. But I wanted to be more—I strove to strive. My teacher saw that, and it led her to treat me not as the person I was, but as the person I could become. If she could envision me as a lover of Plato, then I could become one. And if I could, I should: when you're itching to move, the fact that someone is making a destination available to you is enough to give you reason to get going.

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