

Gratitude: Duty, Virtue, and Practice

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This paper constructs gratitude as a virtue from an unabashedly Christian perspective. It contends that a virtue construction supplements a duty construction by emphasizing joy and generosity. Gratitude as a virtue has implications for social work practice, such as responsible stewardship, resiliency, emphasis on the gift of giving, and engagement in growth-producing relationships. The paper argues, thus, that gratitude as a virtue can create an inspirational guide to practice.

ON OCTOBER 13, 2010, THE WORLD WAS CAPTIVATED AS RESCUERS pulled each of 33 miners from a mine that had collapsed 69 days prior. For 17 days after the fateful mine collapse on August 5, the miners had survived one-half mile below the earth's surface on just two spoonsful of tuna, one cup of milk, and some peach topping every other day (McNeil, 2010). After a small shaft was drilled on August 24, they were able to receive what must have seemed like a godsend: medical supplies, food, and water. Several months later on October 13, a capsule lifted the men individually through a crooked tunnel. Within 24 hours, they were all safely out of the mine. As each reached the surface, they, along with family members, gave thanks to God. Many, in fact, wore T-shirts emblazoned on the front with ¡*Gracias Señor!* (Thank you, Lord!) and on the back with Psalms 95:4: In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him (Kwon, 2010). Said one family member of a miner, "I'm so overcome with emotion now, as if I've been touched by God" (Avalos as cited in Barrionuevo & Romero, 2010).

Against all odds, the miners had survived. Words, it seemed, could not capture the flood of thankfulness, thankfulness for the blessings of life and family. The photographs of tearful, hugging families and miners lifting their hands in praise to the Lord are poignant pictorial representations of gratitude. Their harrowing experience had helped them to see and express joy and thanks for the seemingly simple gifts we often take for granted on a daily basis.

My own story of gratitude is not nearly as dramatic as that of the miners (indeed, few are). During the initial months of my service in the Peace Corps, I found much about which to complain: buses that were stuck in mudslides, internet speeds circa 1992 in the nearest “city,” and no good café mochas (organic soy milk, dark chocolate, dually certified fair-trade and organic espresso, sprinkled with cinnamon and chocolate flakes). And as friends and family can attest, most of the time spent at the Internet café at the beginning of my service was devoted to delineating a list of complaints via email (and the rest of the time was spent tapping my finger impatiently in response to the sluggish dial-up internet connection).

Over the course of my service, my ungrateful outlook softened. The aforementioned nuisances seemed small in comparison with the compassion and generosity shown to me by my neighbors. They would invite me as a guest of honor, sometimes forgoing food themselves to give me a warm and hospitable welcome. Their generosity humbled me. I observed how community members wholeheartedly threw their support behind me, the young and naïve *gringa*, making personal and professional sacrifice to support my sometimes ill-conceived community development projects. Their trust humbled me. I witnessed families who faced great adversity maintain an unflagging faith in Christ Jesus and give thanks for *all* things as evidenced by the expression “*gracias a Dios*” that percolates common parlance. Their faithfulness humbled me.

By the end of my service, I realized that I had received much more than I had given, and I had thoroughly engaged in service “done right.” I had shared my gifts, and community members had shared theirs in a cross-cultural exchange worthy of a glossy promotional Peace Corps brochure. The reciprocal exchange left an indelible imprint on all of us. The exemplary manifestations of generosity, trust, and faithfulness had changed me at my core. My courage in journeying to a distant place and my creativity in promoting children’s rights left a mark on the community as well. My neighbors threw me a surprise party before I returned to the United States. As I attempted to croak out a farewell speech, I dissolved into sobs of thanksgiving. I am a volunteer, I explained amidst the tears. I am supposed to serve you, yet you have served me and loved me in ways I never expected. They threw their arms around me. They affirmed how much they valued the gifts I had shared with them. In spite of their professed appreciation of my gifts, I believed they had matched and even superseded my commitment of time, energy, and passion. They had planted something inside of me, and I was determined to keep paying it forward. I was teeming with gratitude that I needed to share with others.

Framed by Roman philosopher Cicero as the parent of all virtues, by German sociologist Georg Simmel as the moral memory of humankind, and by English writer G.K. Chesterton as happiness doubled by wonder, gratitude has captivated scholars across time and space. In spite of disparate

origins, the perspectives seem to converge on the relevance of gratitude to individual and social welfare.

This article focuses on gratitude as a construct that can contribute to robust social work practice. It is divided into two sections. The first fleshes out the construct of gratitude. It presents two perspectives on gratitude: one as a duty and the other as a virtue. This article contends that thinking of gratitude as a duty rather than a virtue is commonplace. In spite of its widespread acceptance, I espouse the view that gratitude as a narrowly conceived duty is a limiting construct since it sets a ceiling on appropriate behavior. Gratitude as a virtue can build upon the duty framework by striving for limitless excellence. This article unearths the virtuous construct of gratitude and argues that this construct can supplement the duty construct to provide for meaningful human interaction.

The second section of the paper examines how gratitude might specifically inform social work practice. It outlines four ways through which gratitude might be constitutive of good stewardship, resiliency, the social work mission, and a strengths-based approach. The second section also argues that gratitude as a virtue can supplement service as a value/principle/standard enshrined in the *Code of Ethics*.

Gratitude and Philosophical Discourse

Gratitude is described both as being cognizant of having received a benefit and as being expressive of thanks. Gratitude derives from two Latin roots: *gratia*, meaning favor, and *gratus*, meaning pleasing (Emmons, 2004). Its contemporary usage reflects its roots; gratitude is evoked by a well-intentioned gift, whether in the form of a good or a deed. Specifically, the literature identifies three key components: the benefactor, the beneficiary, and the benefit (Roberts, 2007). The benefactor refers to the one bestowing a gift; the beneficiary, the one receiving the gift; and the benefit, the gift. Noteworthy is that the root of all three components (i.e., benefactor, beneficiary, and benefit) contains the Latin for *good*. The benefactor does a good deed by bestowing a gift; the beneficiary perceives the gift and the benefactor's intentions as being good; and the benefit works to the beneficiary's good. Thus, gratitude is traditionally associated with the good life.

Roberts (2004) presents an explanatory deconstruction of the causal process that evokes gratitude. He analyzes the statement, "I am grateful to X" according to the following scheme: (1) the beneficiary identifies the gift as being a benefit, (2) the beneficiary identifies the good behavior on the part of the benefactor, (3) the beneficiary acknowledges not just the good but the supererogatory behavior of benefactor, (4) the benefactor, indeed, is good and has acted benevolently, and (5) the beneficiary possesses a desire to express indebtedness to the benefactor. According to Roberts, these are the criteria necessary to trigger gratitude.

McCullough and Tsang (2004) discuss the effects of gratitude. First, gratitude functions as a moral barometer. That is, gratitude indicates to people what is good. A grateful response indicates both a benefactor's good intent as well as the perceived goodness of the benefit. Thus, it is a response to a specific type of interaction between people. Second, gratitude serves as a moral motive. People who feel grateful as beneficiaries are likely inspired to return the favor to the benefactor and/or to others. Finally, it serves as a moral reinforcement in that it encourages benevolent behavior in the future toward others. That is, benefactors who receive gratitude from beneficiaries are likely to persist in seeking opportunities to be benefactors.

On the components, the cause, and the effects of gratitude, thinkers from two schools, the duty perspective and the virtue perspective, can generally agree. Regarding how and why gratitude unfurls vis-à-vis social interactions, however, engenders slight distinctions between these two schools. This section explicates gratitude from a duty perspective and then from a virtue perspective. In common discourse, gratitude is often cast as a duty. However, the section concludes by arguing that gratitude as a virtue can extend gratitude as a duty.

Gratitude from a Duty Perspective

Though not the first to write about gratitude, Immanuel Kant was perhaps the first to cast gratitude in a duty-bound frame, a frame which has become practically axiomatic. Kant, assuming his deontological view, viewed gratitude as a moral obligation. Gratitude, according to Kant, is an imperfect duty. Upholding the construct depends on one's adherence to a moral maxim rather than an enforceable law (Visser, 2008). Kant identified gratitude's motivation as deriving from respect rather than love (McConnell, 1993). Love, claimed Kant (2001), was shared among equals, and gratitude did not create a scenario among equals. Rather, gratitude created a scenario in which one was indebted to the other, and thus the beneficiary expressed gratitude on the basis of respect. Nevertheless, the respect involved with an expression of gratitude, wrote Kant, was incompatible with perceiving the benefit as an undue burden; gratitude opened up the possibility of love. Finally, important to Kant's view is that the debt of gratitude can never be repaid fully. For having initiated a kind action, the benefactor will always remain in a superior position to that of the beneficiary. The expression of indebtedness by the beneficiary is an acknowledgment of the kindness but cannot fully repay the kindness. Thus, gratitude is a lifelong obligation.

The economist Adam Smith also contributed to an understanding of gratitude in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759/1976) in terms of an imperfect social duty. In this text, Smith identified gratitude as the action of rewarding benefactors for the benefits they have bestowed. In another oft-cited text, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776/2009), Smith noted that self-

interest is a sounder foundation for social exchanges than beneficence. Self-interest, following Smith's logic, creates more ironclad cohesion than that engendered by gratitude. Nevertheless, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he claimed that gratitude plays a key, supplemental role in promoting social cohesion and in making the world a pleasant place.

Georg Simmel, a German sociologist at the turn of the 20th century, also focused on gratitude as a conduit of social cohesion resulting from socially obligatory, though unenforceable, reciprocity. According to Simmel (1950), gratitude serves as the moral memory of humankind; it creates social webs of good will through the duty of reciprocity. Simmel noted that faithfulness coupled with gratitude enables societies to achieve stability even as they change. Faithfulness ensures that commitments are fulfilled, and gratitude promotes social interaction. Both faithfulness and gratitude, according to Simmel, supplement the legal order. Similar to Kant, Simmel cast gratitude as a moral, but not a legal, obligation. He claimed that it could be morally demanded and morally rendered, which creates micro fibers that bind society together across time and space.

The construction of gratitude from a duty perspective results in a system of social rules regarding why, when, and how a beneficiary is to express gratitude. Gratitude, in the duty framework, is the beneficiary's response to having received a benefit from a benefactor. The response takes into consideration both the gift and the donor. Not just any gift triggers a response. The benefit must embody both goodness and intentionality on the part of the benefactor. A benefit bestowed as part of one's regular routine does not elicit a grateful response unless the benefactor conducted his or her routine in a supererogatory manner. The beneficiary should respond first with an expression of thanks to the benefactor by, for example, saying "thanks." Next the beneficiary should use the benefit in a manner that is congruent with the sensibilities of the benefactor. Social norms in the duty framework dictate that the gift is not for use entirely at the discretion of the beneficiary. Rather, the beneficiary is to use the gift in a manner that would express appreciation for the benefactor's efforts. For example, the beneficiary should not use a rare Shakespearean folio, which was probably purchased at enormous cost and effort, as kindling paper. Finally, the beneficiary should respond with a benefit to the benefactor at some point in time but neither too soon nor too late. If one reciprocates too quickly, then the benefactor might sense the beneficiary's discomfort with indebtedness. If the beneficiary responds too tardily, then the benefactor might feel maligned.

Thus, the duty framework fits gratitude, which has evolved from the writings of Kant and others, into a prescriptive and proscriptive gift-giving cycle. The key theme that emerges is the social cohesion that results from reciprocation, which derives from socially desirable yet legally unenforceable customs. Construed as such, gratitude is definitely something that is

identifiable as good. It promotes peaceful and harmonious social relations. Missing from these literatures, however, is an identification of why there is an innate will and expectation of reciprocation. In short, from what does the social custom derive? And who was the first giver to overcome self-interest in order to bestow a gift? I argue that a virtue perspective can shed light on the mechanism behind the will to reciprocate and to give. Moreover, it clearly identifies a divine being as the first giver.

Gratitude from a Virtue Perspective

Aristotle, perhaps credited as the father of virtue ethics, did not perceive gratitude to be a virtue. Rather, he believed that gratitude was a sign of weakness, to which he imputed negativity. He believed that one who is grateful is placed in an inferior, indebted position, and thus gratitude is antithetical to magnanimity (Roberts, 2004). Two centuries later, Cicero demurred by claiming that gratitude was not only the greatest but also the wellspring of all other virtues (McCullough & Tsang, 2004). This article concurs with Cicero's dissenting opinion that gratitude, indeed, is a virtue, and it draws from Christian thought to substantiate its claim. The virtue perspective of gratitude is perhaps less common than the duty perspective, yet I contend that the former can build upon the latter to open robust and enduring social interaction.

The crux of the Christian virtue perspective involves thinking of gratitude as more than a mere moral obligation; it is an expression of charity and an overflowing of generosity. Reciprocation evolves not from a social custom but from abundance and eagerness to share. Though Aristotle belittled the notion of gratitude as a virtue, the Bible redeemed it as such. The biblical notion of gratitude is intertwined with grace. The Christian God is perceived as being the ultimate gift giver through life on Earth and eternal life. As written in the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*, "We, thine unworthy servants, do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men; We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory" (Marshall, 1989, p. 185).

The gifts of creation and grace create a debt that can never be repaid. The inability to repay the gift, however, does not engender inferiority on the part of the beneficiary in a Christian worldview. Rather, it inspires joy and an overwhelming generosity to be exemplified through interactions with other people. In 2 Corinthians 1:3 (NIV), Paul writes "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received

from God.” Hodge (1995) notes that the term *praise* represents the highest possible expression of thanks to God. In this verse, according to Hodge, Paul is expressing thanks to God for consolation. In times of suffering, God has comforted Paul, which enables Paul to comfort others. Later he writes in the same book, “All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God” (4:15; NIV). In this passage, again according to Hodge, Paul is acknowledging that the favor shown to him enabled him to share with others, and thus the thanksgiving to God multiplied exponentially. Thus, gratitude is framed not as an obligation but as an abundance of joy and generosity. Because God has given more than is needed or imagined, the abundance can be shared.

Gratitude in the Christian sense also reflects the previously described notions of reciprocity in terms of an ever-expanding, not merely self-reinforcing, cycle of charity. Paul writes again in 2 Corinthians 9:11-12, “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.” This verse reflects the broadening nature of gratitude in the Christian tradition. Gratitude, in this sense, is like a ripple of co-centric circles. It inspires acts of charity beyond the first one initiated. Of this passage, Garland (1999) noted, “Giving to others becomes a kind of thank-offering to God that multiplies itself” (p. 412).

Also implicit in the Christian construction of gratitude is the idea that people are stewards of God’s earth. People must not be stingy with the resources that they possess since all things belong to God. David reflects this in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13,

David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, ‘Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.

Thus, thanks are given to God in all things. All things belong to God, and gratitude indicates the joy experienced by sharing in God’s creation.

Indeed, thanks are given to God even in distressing circumstances. Gratitude in the Christian sense entails giving thanks to God for both the good and the ostensibly bad because He is present in and works through all

things. At the end of the first letter to Thessalonica, Paul urges his readers to “give thanks in all circumstances” (5:18). Thus, gratitude entails more than a momentary response to a windfall. Rather, the Christian concept of gratitude involves a lifelong outlook, one of being joyful and patient whatever the case may be. Wiersbe (2007), in fact, identifies thanksgiving as a vital worship practice of the church.

Finally, the Bible offers a cautionary tale about what a lack of gratitude can effect. Romans 1:21 notes, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Thus, gratitude is framed as a precondition to human flourishing, productivity, and happiness. Gratitude is both an attitude and an action. In sum, the Bible upholds gratitude as a crucial virtue, or what Koenig termed the “very axis of Christian life” (Koenig as cited in Vacek, 2000, p. 81). Gratitude towards God for His grace through Jesus Christ and all that He provides—both the good and the seemingly bad—prescribes a certain attitudinal orientation that is infectious and leads to an enlargement of the self.

Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1273/1964) made great strides in affirming that gratitude is a virtue based on its Biblical framing. Aquinas noted that gratitude is a virtue in its own right, albeit one subsidiary to justice. In his description of gratitude, Aquinas drew from Seneca (63/2008) who contended that gratitude is more about the hearts of the giver and the receiver than about the physical manifestation of the gift itself. For Seneca, the intent behind a gift is more important than the gift itself because it is the good will and the kindness of gift giving that endures. Aquinas echoed Seneca’s sentiment. Gratitude, noted Aquinas, has less to do with the benefit and more to do with the heart. It is the dispositions of the giver and the receiver that define gratitude. Aquinas distinguished gratitude from indebtedness. For Aquinas, gratitude is not a tit-for-tat duty. Rather, the manifestation of gratitude reflects charitable generosity. Martin Luther, too, emphasized that gratitude emanates not from a sense of duty but rather from a sense of love (Meilander, 1984). When people experience God’s graciousness, claimed Luther, they will be moved to share the generosity with others through using his gifts wisely and joyfully.

Religious scholar Paul Camenisch (1981) further explicated gratitude from a Christian perspective. Camenisch emphasized that a grateful response is not merely one that repays the donor but rather augments the circle of gift giving and strives to bring more gift givers and gift receivers into the mix. He identified three components of a grateful response: grateful conduct, grateful use, and an attitudinal element. Grateful conduct entails giving thanks for what has been given. Grateful use entails Christians being good stewards of what God has given. We are to use what God has given in a joyful and a wise manner, in a manner attempting to reflect His undeserved generosity. Use of the gifts that He has bestowed is not entirely

under the discretion of people but rather should be done in a way that is pleasing to Him. A grateful response also entails a shift in attitude, which slightly distinguishes the virtue perspective from the duty perspective. According to Camenisch, gratitude generates a thankful outlook towards all of the world and existence itself. With such a grateful outlook, one will see the interrelatedness of persons and of things whereby all life is enriched through an outpouring of generosity.

A grateful response that is attitudinal in nature also informs how Christians give to each other (Camenisch, 1981). Christians are to learn to receive from others as well as to give. Since the goal of Christian gratitude is to continually expand the gift-giving community, how one gives and how one receives is important. Being a grateful person entails accepting the gifts of grace and acceptance from God and also from other people because to refuse such gifts is to break the cycle of gratitude, since it would maintain the receiver in an indebted position and reinforce power imbalances. Nevertheless, always being the receiver can undermine a person's sense of self-worth and foster a negative sense of dependence as opposed to a mutually affirming sense of interdependence. Thus, gratitude entails malleable role-switching between being a giver and a receiver. The description of the gift-giving process does not entail elaborate rules and guidelines. It describes how people's hearts should be aligned as they approach the gift-giving process. Mother Teresa perhaps buttresses Camenisch's argument when she noted, "The best way to show our gratitude to God and the people is to accept everything with joy" (1996, p. 77)

Thus defined, gratitude is rightly classified as a virtue in spite of Aristotle's denigration. Devettere (2002) outlines key points associated with defining virtues. Virtues are deserving of praise; they are psychological states; they are based on shared humanity; and they play some role in the good life. These ideas associated with virtues, and others (e.g., the focus on the person rather than the action, the idea that pursuing others' interests is in one's best interest, the assertion that virtues provide gateways into thinking about the good life, and the implication of the will in resulting action) all reflect the Christian construction of gratitude. The paper next compares the construction of gratitude as a duty to gratitude as a virtue, arguing that the latter supplements the former.

Comparison of Gratitude as a Duty and Gratitude as a Virtue

Gratitude as a duty and gratitude as a virtue share several characteristics. Both entail a response to a benefit bestowed. Both take into consideration the benefactor's intention regarding how the benefit should be used. Both acknowledge indebtedness that can never wholly be repaid. However, I contend that there are subtle, yet significant differences, between the two. In short, I concur with Visser's (2008) assertion that people can uphold the

social norms of gratitude from the duty perspective yet not be grateful from the virtue perspective. Gratitude as a duty describes an activity, yet gratitude as a virtue describes an activity emanating from and necessarily reinforcing a worldview. Thus, the virtue framework builds on the duty framework.

The duty framework lays the foundation for the practice of gratitude by drawing attention to the manifestation of gratitude. In the duty framework, the emphasis is on the benefit and the reciprocating counter-benefit. In the virtue framework, gratitude is extended as an outlook and as an inner state of being exhibited by both benefactor and beneficiary. Though the benefit is a part of the virtue framework, the main focus is on the disposition of the giver and the receiver. As Seneca articulated and Aquinas rearticulated, what is at stake is not the benefit *per se* but rather the intent behind the benefit and the heart with which the benefit was received. Gifts are not construed as being good because of their material composition but rather because of their moral signification.

Second, the frameworks have distinct normative constructions of the gratitude process. I argue that the virtue construction encompasses the duty construction. The duty framework outlines rules regarding how a gift is to be reciprocated. It is not to be returned too quickly otherwise it belies a sense of discomfort with indebtedness. Moreover, it is not to be overly compensated or else that undermines the original intentions of the giver. Thus, one is to demonstrate gratitude via an action that complies with certain prescriptions and proscriptions. Maintaining a mental record of gifts and return gifts is not the crux of the notion of gratitude as a Christian virtue. Rather, because of God's generosity, people are filled with gratitude, which enables them to give generously to others. The spirit of gratitude informs both what they give (i.e., they are to be good stewards of what God has given) and how they give (i.e., joyfully and lovingly, which do not correspond with any singular set of actions). Thus, in some sense, the virtue framework expands the duty framework in terms of the normative construction of gratitude.

Third, the scope of gratitude in the virtue framework is more extensive than the scope in the duty framework. In the duty framework, gratitude is cast as a zero-sum game, albeit one that is conducive to prosocial behaviors and opens up the possibility for love. The virtue framework casts gratitude as necessarily an ever-expanding community filled with love. One is to give to other people because God has created the world and redeemed it through the sacrifice of His son Jesus Christ. Thus, people can express their gratitude towards the divine being by acting generously towards each other. Moreover, the virtue perspective highlights the importance not just of giving but also of good giving. Good giving empowers receivers to become givers and vice versa. Good giving entails flexibility in roles, acknowledging each person's gifts. In the virtue framework, people are not self-sufficient. Rather, they are inherently social beings and cannot be reduced to the status of atom-

ized individuals. Giving, thus, is not a lifelong debt but a way of life that reflects the gifts of creation and grace first given by God.

Finally, the conception of a benefit from a virtue perspective builds on the conception of a benefit from the duty perspective. From a duty perspective, the benefit is constructed as something that is good, narrowly conceived to signify something that directly, explicitly, and immediately promotes well-being. From a Christian virtue perspective, the gift is constructed as all things given by God. Thus, even something that is typically imputed with negativity can assume gift status if it is given by God. As noted earlier, Paul urged his readers to give thanks *in* all circumstances, both in joy and in suffering because of the overwhelming gifts of life and grace despite one's immediate negative circumstances. The reconceptualization of a gift reflects the construction of gratitude not as an action but as an outlook, an attitude, and a way of being. Again, the gift itself is not as important as the dispositions of the giver and the receiver. Other essays have laid out similar arguments about the robustness of gratitude as a virtue as opposed to a duty (see, for example, Wellman, 1999). This article attempts to contribute to the literature in the subsequent sections by identifying how virtuous gratitude relates to social work practice.

Gratitude and Social Work Practice

I next consider how gratitude framed as a virtue can inform social work practice. I strive not to be too Pollyannaish or naïve in my suggestions. Joel Shuman, a theologian well acquainted with medical settings, wrote, "To the ears of the desperately ill, admonitions to 'be thankful,' or to 'to count your blessings,' are sure to be heard as platitudes—saccharine or offensively pious" (2002, ¶ 1). He goes on to write that Christians are called to live in a broken world with hope and gratitude. Social workers are all too familiar with the brokenness of the world. The call to be grateful might seem "saccharine" or "offensively pious" to social workers dealing with sensitive social issues, yet the gifts of creation and salvation are so incomprehensibly great that, indeed, social workers can be grateful and practice gratitude in all circumstances.

As mentioned previously, a grateful response has three components from a virtue perspective: grateful conduct, grateful use, and, most distinctively, attitudinal reorientation. I consider four ways that grateful responses and a grateful outlook would influence the virtuous social worker's practice: responsible stewardship, resiliency, joy in the gift of giving, and engagement in mutually affirming and growth-promoting relationships with clients.

Responsible Stewardship

A grateful social worker is one who uses resources with great care and appreciation. Everything that people enjoy emanates from God's grace and good will. Thus, social workers should use what God has given in a way that uplifts God's goodness and speaks to God's graciousness. Social workers are often asked to do a lot with very little. We should ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively. However, being grateful stewards entails more than careful cost-benefit analysis. Grateful use of the resources with which God has blessed humanity ensures that clients receive the resources that they need to thrive and to flourish. Thus, grateful use requires that social workers be mindful of waste yet also that we advocate on our clients' behalf to ensure an adequate and/or equitable allocation of resources. God has given us more than people could ask for or imagine, and as agents of social change social workers need to be aware of and modify structures that prohibit people from accessing God's abundance.

Resiliency

The virtuous social worker is also one who draws from gratitude to hold burnout at bay. The grateful social worker gives thanks in all circumstances, which can be framed as gifts irrespective of their face value. As Paul noted in 2 Corinthians 1:3, times of distress provide clear moments of God's comfort, and experiencing God's comfort better situates social workers to comfort others. Social workers face many stresses: high caseloads, few resources, low financial compensation, and conflicting role demands, among others. Gratitude creates a well of resiliency from which to draw. In spite of challenging circumstances and numerous barriers, grateful social workers can learn to give thanks in all things. A grateful attitudinal orientation reframes a disheartening sense of scarcity into a perception of abundance and generosity. Though resources may be perceived as lacking, the ever-present gifts of creation and grace exceed what is needed and expected. Thus, though burnout is a pervasive syndrome in the workforce, gratitude couples an accepting attitude with heartfelt action to overcome barriers.

Joy in the Gift of Giving

Given the pressures of social work, it can be difficult to remember that the profession is a blessed opportunity to work intimately with others who are vulnerable, oppressed, or marginalized. Those who are blessed to serve as social workers have the opportunity to intimately integrate faith and practice on a daily basis. Social work provides Christians the opportunity of giving. Rather than approaching social work from a deficiency orientation, a grateful approach to social work is a reminder that it is a joy to serve in

the profession and that the profession provides outright opportunities to engage in noble work: to work with the poor, the widowed, the orphaned, and the alien. Few other occupations are as overt in their ability to live out God's word through daily practices on the job.

Engagement in Growth-Promoting Relationships

Finally, the grateful social worker is one who views clients in a genuinely affirming manner. It is often easy to pity or to grow frustrated with clients. A grateful orientation, however, eschews such emotions. Participating in the gift-giving cycle of gratitude frames clients not just as recipients of services but as potential givers and as contributors to social welfare themselves, and social workers can seek ways to bring this potential to fruition. Grateful givers are those who see the reciprocity and the interconnectedness between and among people. Grateful benefactors (i.e., grateful social workers) delight in seeing beneficiaries become benefactors themselves. Good giving requires affirming the capacities of others such that they are not relegated to a subordinate role but rather are assured of their self-worth. Beneficiaries, or clients, are not to feel the debilitating sense of dependence but rather the joy of interdependence. Gratitude evokes the image of the body of Christ, through which all people have gifts that are needed for the whole to function. Thus, gratitude frames interactions with clients as ones of affirmation. Beneficiaries can become benefactors, and when they do, reciprocity abounds bringing more and more people into the community of gift giving. Thus, a grateful orientation to social work practice necessarily entails debunking self-sufficiency as a myth and using a strengths-based approach by seeing the gifts that clients have the potential to offer. Thus, gratitude requires that virtuous social workers learn to think of clients as potential benefactors. The perception of oneself always in the role of the benefactor without recognizing the ways God can work through weaknesses to build up the community of Christ undermines the spirit of gratitude.

In these four ways, gratitude maps onto social work practice. Gratitude as a virtue does not prescribe any particular action or set of actions. Rather, it provides a framework and an approach to social work practice. Furthermore, as I argue next, focusing on gratitude as a virtue as opposed to service as a value/principle/standard might provide a more meaningful practice orientation.

Service as a Value Versus Gratitude as a Practice Virtue

Here I suggest that the robust construct of gratitude from a virtue perspective can augment a narrowly conceived construct of service in the *Code of Ethics*. Gratitude is not delineated as a specific duty in the code. Nevertheless, service is, and it is a homologous construct to gratitude as

a virtue. The National Association of Social Workers upholds service as a concept intrinsic to the profession in its *Code of Ethics*. The concept of service is discussed in two distinct ways. First, it is discussed as a value that corresponds to the principle of helping those in need. It is secondly discussed as the concrete provision of aid and consultation to clients. When used in the latter sense, the code outlines relevant standards to be taken into consideration in social work practice, such as billing, informed consent, referral procedures, sexual misconduct with clients, and the maintenance of records. The precision with which the minutiae of social work practices are outlined suggests, and rightly so, that a few sentences defining the value of service and its corresponding principle do not suffice to guide social work practice. Nevertheless, outlining facets of social work practice might serve to lower the bar. Rather than aspiring to excellence, a checklist of guidelines might be perceived to set a ceiling of acceptable standards and disconnect service from any recognition of what one has been given.

In contrast, the virtue of gratitude rightly inculcated encourages social workers to aspire to excellence. A grateful social worker is one who perceives his or her interests as intertwined with those of clients. Additionally, instilling the virtue of gratitude goes beyond the principle of offering some portion of one's time pro bono since one will be inclined to share in God's generosity in whatever capacity possible. Additional standards outlined in the code, such as attention to client self-determination and appropriate sexual conduct, may also be redundant when gratitude is a part of the virtuous social worker's practice. The grateful social worker will strive to bring clients into the broadening gift-giving circle by safeguarding their well-being, affirming their gifts, and affording them the opportunity to be benefactors. In short, by focusing on virtues rightly fostered, many of the guidelines would be subsumed under the habituation of virtues. Focusing on virtues calls us "beyond basic obligations to each other to an endless quest toward the perfection of our being" (Meilander, 1984).

Concluding Remarks

This article retrieves a virtue perspective of gratitude from Christian sources. It contends that a virtue perspective supplements a duty perspective by emphasizing joy and generosity, and that the virtue perspective has implications for social work practice, such as responsible stewardship and resiliency. The paper contrasts the practice implications of gratitude as a virtue with those of service as a value/principle/standard as explicated by the *Code of Ethics*. Rather than motivating excellent practice, service in the code seems to set a ceiling for acceptable practice. The paper argues, thus, that gratitude as a virtue might create a more inspirational guide to practice than service as described in the code.

In anticipation of Thanksgiving, a number of articles frequently appear in the popular media espousing the merits of gratitude by drawing from the recent proliferation of research on gratitude in the field of positive psychology (for examples of research on gratitude in positive psychology see Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010; Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Sansone & Sansone, 2010; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). According to one such article that appeared in *The Huffington Post*, people who incorporate quotidian gratitude-promoting practices are more likely to be happy, healthy, rested, satisfied, and optimistic as compared to people who do not incorporate such activities into their daily lives (Robbins, 2011). The article then delineated a set of three practices that readers can incorporate into their lives to embody gratitude: (1) keep a daily journal of three things for which one is grateful, (2) tell partners, spouses, and friends something appreciated about them each day, (3) recognize something of which one is proud each day. These practices set the stage for grateful behaviors and attitudes.

As I reflect on my time in the Peace Corps, I think of the limitations of conceptualizing gratitude as “service,” and I wish that I had incorporated gratitude-promoting practices, such as those mentioned above, at the beginning of my tenure as a volunteer. My time abroad was not merely about helping those in need; it was about opening myself up to others and touching others’ lives. In this deeply moving exchange, gratitude served as the conduit. Community members were grateful for my presence, and I was grateful for their generosity. At first, it is perhaps true that I was merely going through the motions, or complying with a duty framework, in terms of expressing gratitude for the chicken feet and the marinated pig intestines that were served to me. Over time, my dutiful expression of gratitude evolved into the genuine sense of joyful thanksgiving as I realized the sacrifice and the intent behind the gifts.

There is a much beloved piece of wood that sits on my bookshelf on which the neighborhood children wrote, “*Por eso amistad como la de nuestra querida Samantha no se encuentra en el mundo*” (For a friendship like the friendship with our beloved Samantha is not one you can find just anywhere in the world) and signed their names in the now faded ink. In terms of monetary value, the wood is worth very little, but the intent of the children and the joy with which I received it still fills me with joy. Memories such as this one reflect a thick virtue perspective of gratitude, one that expands on a duty perspective and supersedes service. ❖

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