

Gratitude as an Economic Ideal

Abstract. Each of us plays a part in a vast web of mutually beneficial economic relationships. I argue that these relationships give rise to debts of gratitude. We should be grateful to those who benefit us economically and they should be grateful to us. I then show how this bears on three economic issues. First, it bears on trade. International trade gives us debts of gratitude to foreigners. This means we should take their welfare seriously in setting trade policy. Second, it bears on markets. Market exchange, I argue, creates looser bonds of gratitude than does gift giving. We should, usually, regret the looseness of such bonds. Thus, we have reason to limit markets. Third, it bears on economic inequality. Some people make a greater economic contribution than do others. We owe them more gratitude than we owe to others. Thus, we have reason to give them a greater share of the economic pie. Together, these points give us a broad understanding of how gratitude matters to our economic interactions. They trace the outlines of gratitude as an economic ideal.

Keywords— Gratitude · Economic justice · Trade · Markets · Inequality

1 Introduction

One Tuesday in 2018 A. J. Jacobs, popular author, beheld a special cup of coffee. The cup was special not because of its taste, texture, temperature. It was special because of what Jacobs had decided to do with it. He had decided to thank everyone who had made its production possible. This turned into a quest. He first thanked Chung Lee, the barista. He then thanked Ed Kaufman, the man who chose the coffee beans for the coffee company. He thanked the coffee grinders and roasters. He thanked the people who made the cardboard cup and the coffee cup lid. He thanked those who invented that coffee sleeve which protects your fingers. He thanked the truckers who got the coffee from port to factory, the pavers who paved the roads that the trucks drive on, the steelworkers who made the steel which goes into the trucks. He thanked the Colombian brothers (all six of them) who grew the coffee beans. But, early on, his resolve faltered. He decided that he would stop after thanking a thousand people. It was impossible to thank everyone who contributed to his Tuesday cup of coffee. They were too many. His quest failed.

But the story was a success. Millions of people watched Jacobs talk about his quest. Many, but not millions, bought the book.¹ What struck a nerve, what people thought right, was the idea that we have reason to be grateful to those whose work helps us out:

¹The talk was, of course, a TED talk. The book is Jacobs (2018).

who provide us with food, warmth, shelter—with coffee. Yet the economic import of gratitude has been neglected by political philosophers. The idea that we have reason to be grateful to our economic partners is almost wholly unexplored.² This, in my view, is a serious oversight. Gratitude is an important part of morality. It also, I believe, illuminates an important part of political philosophy: how we should view and manage our economic relationships. My aim in this paper is to describe how it does so. It is to map the contours of gratitude as an economic ideal.

Let me situate this project in relation to other approaches to economic justice. Many people believe that equality is the central determinant of how we should arrange our economic affairs. Our economic relationships are proper, they think, only insofar as they are egalitarian.³ Others think that we should see economic justice in terms of pre-institutional property rights. Our economic relationships are appropriate, they think, only insofar as they are constituted by free transfers between true owners.⁴ A third set of people think that desert should be the core economic ideal. Our economic relationships are acceptable, they think, only insofar as they reward the hardworking or talented.⁵ I think none of these views are complete: gratitude also determines the propriety of our economic relationships. That does not mean that I think gratitude is the only thing that determines that propriety. I am a pluralist about economic justice: I don't think one single value determines how we should manage our economic relationships, but rather a dizzying array of values bear on such management: gratitude is *an* economic ideal, not *the* economic ideal. But it is an economic ideal missing from contemporary philosophical discussions of economic justice: my aim is to rectify this oversight.

The order of affairs will be as follows. In the next section, I'll lay out a conception of gratitude. Some accounts of gratitude are too simple. Many think gratitude is fitting in response to benefits. Others think that it is fitting in response to benevolence. Neither view is sustainable in the face of counterexamples. I consider a third view, that gratitude is fitting in response to benefits motivated by benevolence. But I argue that, on both intuitive and explanatory grounds, we should prefer a fourth view: that gratitude is a fitting response to benefits bestowed nonobligatorily. I then apply this view to concrete issues. In section 3, we apply it to trade. In section 4, we apply it to markets. In section 5, we apply it to inequality. These applications will give us a good grip on how gratitude matters to our economic interactions. They chart the implications of gratitude in the economic sphere. In section 6 I explore how gratitude as an economic ideal interacts with other conceptions of economic justice.

2 The basic framework

Gratitude is an attitude.⁶ When one is grateful to someone, one has a certain attitude towards them. This attitude involves caring for their well-being. Such caring may in

²In contemporary political philosophy, gratitude only appears prominently in discussions of political authority. Some people think we should obey the law because we owe gratitude to the state. See Walker (1988). For a contrary view, see Simmons (1979). Feinberg (2000, 241–42) and Scanlon (2013, 114) both mention the possible economic import of gratitude, but they dismiss the possibility quite briefly. We'll return to their views in section 5.

³For this sort of view, see classically Dworkin (1981) or Anderson (1999). More recently, see Schemmel (2011).

⁴Nozick (1974) is this view's classic advocate. For more recent defenders, see Otsuka (2003) and Brennan (2012).

⁵For this kind of view, see Miller (1996) and Mulligan (2018).

⁶This kind of view is common. See e.g. Berger (1975, 302), Walker (1980, 47), Fitzgerald (1998, 120) and Riedener (2020).

part be affective. It may be that, when we're grateful towards someone, we feel positively about their successes and negatively about their failures. But, more salient for our purposes, it is in part dispositional. When we're grateful towards someone, we are disposed to make their life better. When we can make them better off, without too much personal sacrifice and consistent with our obligations, we do so. If we lack such a disposition, we are not grateful towards the person.⁷ Thus, when one is grateful towards someone one is pleased by their flourishing and disposed to make them better off.

When should one be grateful to people? This is a moral question. The question is: when does one have weighty enough moral reason to be grateful to someone for that gratitude to be owed to that person? One widely-held view says that benefits are the primary source of reasons for gratitude.⁸ We should be grateful to someone if, and insofar as, they've played a role in benefiting us. There's two ways for someone to play such a role. Firstly, their actions might simply benefit us directly. We can understand this counterfactually. Someone doing something benefited you if, and to the extent that, had they not done the thing, you would have been worse off than you actually are. Second, they may have *contributed* to benefiting us. Imagine you're caught in an earthquake. You get stuck under a fallen beam. It take three strong men to lift it. But you're lucky: four arrive, and together do the job. In this case, none of them benefited you in the counterfactual sense. We could have subtracted any one of them and you would still have been saved. But they each contributed to benefiting you. Each man's actions partially caused the beam to be lifted off your chest. In this sense, each helped get the beam off your chest.⁹ The natural view is that you owe gratitude in both cases: both benefitting and contributing to benefits provide reason to be grateful. We'll call this the *benefits view*.

The benefits view is simple, elegant, and covers a wide range of cases. Unfortunately, it seems subject to serious counterexamples. Suppose, for example, that someone benefits you maliciously. Your enemy shoots you in the arm. They were aiming for the head, but they're a lousy shot. Fortunately for you, it's just a flesh wound: they don't hit any bone or sever any arteries. Once it's cleaned and bandaged up, you'll be out of hospital immediately. But, while treating you, the nurse notices a peculiar lump on your shoulder. She insists on doing a biopsy, and it turns out to be very early-stage cancer. You get the cancer successfully treated, but had you not no doubt it would have metastasized. In a roundabout way, your assailant saved your life: they benefitted you tremendously. But you don't owe them any gratitude. The fact that they were motivated by malice seems to mean that the benefit, in this case, does not give you any reason to be grateful to them.¹⁰ That seems to refute the view that benefits are sufficient for gratitude.

This case suggests that people's motivations play an important role in making gratitude fittingness. Specifically, they suggest that gratitude is not made fitting by benefits but rather by benevolence. We should be grateful to someone if, and insofar as, they have acted benevolently towards us. Someone is benevolent towards you insofar as they care about your well-being. They take pleasure in your successes and the moral import of your interests plays a weighty role in their deliberations. They act benevolently towards you when this concern leads them to do what they think will make you better off: their benevolence drives their actions. When you enemy shoots you, they are clearly not motivated by benevolence. They are driven to make your life worse rather than better.

⁷This too is a common view. See e.g. McConnell (1993, chap.2), Wellman (1999) and Riedener (2020).

⁸See e.g. Ross (1931, ch.II), Berger (1975, 299), McConnell (1993, 44).

⁹For more on this notion, see Goldman (1999).

¹⁰For a similar case, see Manela (2020, 3255)

That is why, on this view, you need not feel grateful to your enemy. The view says that, when people's actions are driven by benevolence towards you, that gives you reason to be grateful to them. Let us call this the *benevolence view*.¹¹

Unfortunately, this view also seems subject to serious counterexamples. Consider a case of incompetent benevolence. Let's suppose that that you have a friend, Terry, who deeply cares about your well-being. But they do not have much of an idea about how to make you better off. Imagine that it's your birthday and they organize a surprise party. You hate surprises, and indeed tend to faint at loud noises. Lo-and-behold, when the guests shout out your name you're taken off guard, and you wake up on the ground a few seconds later. Terry has carefully curated the guest list, and you notice the familiar face of an ex-partner leaning over you. Clearly, Terry did not know that your relationship with this partner had ended on very unhappy terms. You had hoped never to see them again. The rest of the night gets worse rather than better. The food doesn't meet your dietary needs, the music is too loud and the guests are the kind of people who should never be in a room together. Terry has tried to benefit you, and has genuinely been motivated by benevolence, but you have an utterly miserable time. It does not seem that in this case you are obligated to feel grateful to Terry. Their incompetence undermines their claim on gratitude.

If that is correct, then neither benefit nor benevolence view is tenable. Specifically, neither the provision of benefits nor the motives of benevolence are, on their own, sufficient to give you reasons to be grateful to people. This means we must look for somewhat more complicated views. A natural third view simply combines benefits and benevolence. It says that you have reason to be grateful to someone only when they benefitted you due to benevolence. They acted in a way that made you better off, and those actions were motivated by a concern for your well-being. On this view, you don't owe gratitude to incompetent would-be benefactors because they fail to provide benefits. You don't owe gratitude to malicious benefactors because they entirely lack benevolence. It is the combination of benefits and benevolence, rather than either alone, which generate reasons for gratitude. Let's call this the *benevolent benefits view* of gratitude.

Again, this view seems subject to counterexamples. The issue is that benevolence doesn't seem necessary for gratitude.¹² Good evidence for this claim occurs in economic cases. Consider, first, the economic interactions many of us regularly have with those in service professions. Consider the barista who serves you coffee, the waiter who brings you a meal, the taxi driver who takes you to the airport. Likely, in none of these cases do they do this out of the goodness of their heart. Yet, in each case, you should feel some gratitude. Now, these cases don't warrant an enormous upwelling of gratitude. This is because the people in these cases didn't benefit you all that much. But some gratitude is obligatory. This seems to me a completely quotidian part of morality. It is the kind of thing parents teach to young children, the kind of thing that you better remember on a date. It is why you should thank your barista, waiter, driver. Not doing so is falling short of your moral obligations. We can owe gratitude, then, even when our benefactors are not driven by benevolence.

Other more extreme cases cement this point. Sometimes our lives are saved by those acting out of motives other than benevolence. Imagine that you swim too far out into a rough sea. The lifeguard sees you struggling. They're annoyed: didn't you see the warning signs? But they know it's their neck if you drown. They dive in and

¹¹For this view, see Berger (1975, 299) and Manela (2016).

¹²Although this is a controversial claim, many endorse it. See McConnell (1993, 19–22) and Fitzgerald (1998). I myself think the arguments in the text provide it with strong support.

save your life. They're not acting out of benevolence. But you should be enormously grateful to them. It would be wrong for you to get back to dry land, dust yourself off, and just walk away, without a word of thanks. This would be objectionably ungrateful. Or imagine you're in a hospital. The hospital is overburdened, the doctor overwhelmed. But they inspect your file, they prescribe you the right treatment. They might do this mechanically. They might not be thinking about your benefit. They might be focused on being a good doctor, at excelling at the art of medicine. But they too save your life. Again, you should be enormously grateful to them. I suspect many of us will experience something like this at some point in our lives. Many of us will have our lives saved by someone who didn't do it strictly out of benevolence. Yet in these cases, despite the lack of benevolence, gratitude is owed. You would, in Shakespeare's words, be a "marble-hearted fiend" not to be grateful to the lifeguard or doctor (*King Lear*, 2004, I. 4). Thus, debts of gratitude arise even when benevolence is absent.

I suspect that we should thus adopt a fourth view. This view builds from the observation that, when someone owes some benefit to you, you need not feel grateful towards them.¹³ Suppose I've borrowed your car, and I give it back. My giving it back benefited you in the counterfactual sense: had I not give it back to you, you would have been worse off. But you don't need to feel grateful to me for returning the car: I owed it to you. The fourth view says that it is only benefits you weren't owed that give rise to reasons of gratitude. More specifically, it says that people's treatment of you can fall either above or below a threshold of what they owe you: when it falls below, it doesn't generate any reasons of gratitude. When it falls above, and it benefits you, it does generate such reasons. How much gratitude you owe someone, then, is given by how well they treat you multiplied by how much they benefit you. Let's call this the *nonobligatory benefits view*. It says one needn't be grateful to malicious benefactors, because they wrong you. It says one needn't be grateful to the incompetently benevolent, because they don't benefit you. But it says you should be grateful to great benefactors who aren't very benevolent, because they benefit you while treating you well. This view, then, seems to fit best with the intuitive cases that we've just canvassed.

The main reason to prefer the nonobligatory benefits view to the benevolent benefits view, though, is explanatory power. The nonobligatory benefits view can straightforwardly explain various other general features of gratitude. First, it can explain the feature central to the benevolence view; that one's benefactors motive often does matter to whether gratitude is a fitting response. Motives matter because we often owe people attitudes. We owe everyone a minimum level of moral regard. We owe them, at least, a minimum level of concern for their welfare. Thus, when our benefactor's attitudes fall short of this minimum, we owe them less gratitude for benefiting us. Imagine the lifeguard saved you out of malice. They (incorrectly) thought your life so miserable that you would be worse off living than drowning. Then you don't owe them any gratitude. Yet, the more their attitudes rise above this minimum, the more gratitude do you owe them. Imagine the lifeguard saved you out of an urgent and saintly concern for your welfare. Then, you owe them more gratitude than if they saved you out of self-interest. Thus, the nonobligatory benefits view can neatly explain how motives matter to gratitude.¹⁴

Second, the nonobligatory benefits view can explain why it is only accepted benefits that generate reasons of gratitude. Suppose that you are deeply estranged from your father. They were a baleful presence in your youth and, as a result, you haven't talked

¹³For this idea, see e.g. Walker (1980, 48), Heyd (1982, 140), Weiss (1985, 493) or Macnamara (2019).

¹⁴For a more extended defense of this idea, see Riedener (2020).

to them for several years. They want to reconnect, but you still want nothing to do with them. Imagine they offer to pay off your student debt and you refuse, but then they go behind your back and pay it off anyway. This benefits you, but you don't owe gratitude to them. That, I think, is because generally we *shouldn't* help people when they do not consent to our helping them. We should have control over whether people do things for our own good; if we do not want to be benefitted, then a benefactor wrongs us by benefitted us.¹⁵ Thus, the nonobligatory benefits view neatly explains why benefits we don't accept do not generate reasons of gratitude. I take these virtues—explanatory power and intuitive fit—to make the nonobligatory benefits view the most plausible account of when gratitude is fitting.

Let us now apply this conception of gratitude to economic relationships. To start with, reconsider A. J. Jacobs' cup of coffee. Jacobs enjoys his coffee. It makes his life better. It benefits him. Thus, on the nonobligatory benefits view, it seems that Jacobs has two reasons to be grateful to those who made its production possible. First, they contributed to a benefit to him: him getting the cup. That doesn't mean that, if any of those individuals had stopped working, he wouldn't have got a cup of coffee. Their particular part in making the coffee was replaceable. But they nonetheless helped him get the cup. Second, often, they also each directly benefitted him. If any of them had stopped working, his coffee would be a little worse. It might be a little more expensive or a little less tasty. Or, if not this particular cup of coffee, one of his other cups further down the line would have these ills. The direct benefit here is usually small, but it generates a reason of gratitude too. He owes them gratitude for this benefit too. Thus, Jacobs' owes gratitude to those who contributed to him getting his coffee cup.

Critical to this conclusion is that Jacobs barista was not obligated to take a job at the coffee shop and pour him a cup of coffee. This seems extremely plausibly: we're typically not obliged to interact economically with other people. We're typically free, morally speaking, to do with our lives what we want. If so, the conclusion generalizes. When you buy your morning coffee, get on the subway, greet the building guard, start your work, you play a part in a vast web of mutually beneficial economic relationships. This web extends very widely and touches every part of your life. The people in the web are not morally bound to play the roles they play: they could permissibly do other things, or indeed not work at all. And the same is true of you. Thus, you have reasons to be grateful to the other participants in this web and they have reason to be grateful to you. That includes those of your economic partners you meet face-to-face. But it also includes those you never know and who never know you. All freely benefit, or help benefit, you. All play a part in the web of economic relationships. The central claim of this paper is that we have reason to be grateful to this vast multitude of people. Economic relationships give rise to reasons of gratitude.

Let us discuss a couple of issues around this central claim. First, let us return to the import of motive. As Adam Smith says, "it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love..." (Smith, 1776, Bk. 1, Ch. 2). Your economic partners are probably driven by self-interest more than by altruism.¹⁶ Does this matter? On the nonobligatory benefits view, it only undermines your reason to be grateful to them if they have morally impermissible attitudes towards you. But there seems no reason to believe that they do. It seems much more likely that people usually have mildly benevolent attitudes towards their economic

¹⁵For a defense of this view, see Parry (2017, 370–76).

¹⁶Feinberg (2000, 241–42) and Scanlon (2013, 114) raise this point.

partners. They participate in the economy, in part, to benefit others. They would rather provide people a useful service, than do something utterly useless for the same reward. This is supported by some survey evidence. A nationally representative survey from Pew (2009) found that three in four Americans cite “to help improve society” as a reason that they work. Six in seven cite “to feel like a useful and productive person.” Both seem indicative of mildly benevolent motives. That is enough for their attitudes to lie above the minimal required level, and so enough for us to owe them gratitude for the benefits that they bestow upon us.¹⁷

Second, some might think that there are intentional constraints on reasons of gratitude. Perhaps we only have reason to be grateful to a benefactor when they intended to benefit us in particular. They have to have had us in mind when doing the thing that made us better off. This would further constrain the sorts of benefits that generate reasons of gratitude, and those constraints generates worry: many of our economic partners don’t know who we are. The truckers who trucked Jacobs’ coffee, for example, had probably never heard of him. But then these economic partners cannot have us in mind when doing their jobs. They cannot have intended to benefit us in particular. Thus, if there are such intentional constraints on gratitude, we don’t have reason to be grateful to such partners. But the reply to this is straightforward. There are no such constraints on gratitude. Some cases make this clear. Imagine a philanthropist endows a scholarship and you receive the award.¹⁸ The philanthropist might not know who you are. Thus, they might be unable to intend to benefit you. But, still, one owes a debt of gratitude to this benefactor. If you later see this philanthropist in distress, you have special reason to help them. Thus, you have reason to be grateful to a benefactor even when they didn’t intend to benefit you in particular.

Now that’s not to say that you have reason to be grateful to someone who benefits you by complete accident. Imagine that you’re getting mugged in a New York alleyway. A stranger, annoyed but oblivious, shouts from their apartment window: “Keep the noise down!” This spooks the mugger; they flee. In this case, perhaps you have no reason to be grateful to the stranger.¹⁹ That they benefited you was purely accidental. But when your economic partners benefit you, it is not pure accident. They can foresee that their economic participation will benefit others, much like philanthropists can foresee that their donations will benefit someone. Indeed, in both cases the benefactors intend to benefit *someone*. They just can’t identify who that person is. This, I think, is enough to ensure that they their benefit isn’t accidental. Thus, our economic partners might not have intended to benefit us. But their so doing is sufficiently purposive for us to owe them gratitude. So neither the motives or the intentions of our economic partners precludes the benefits one receives from them from generate reasons of gratitude. That completes my defense of this paper’s central claim: that our economic relationships generate reasons of gratitude.

Let’s turn to a final theoretical point. How exactly should we regard our having such reason? Is it good or bad? Well, generally speaking, debts of gratitude are not something to be lamented. You shouldn’t dread being given a gift at Christmas. You shouldn’t think that it onerously binds you to your family. You should treasure such bonds, not shunt them aside. The explanation of this, I think, is that caring relationships are valuable. It is intrinsically good to be in relationships in which the partici-

¹⁷If this is so, even on the benevolent benefits view one will owe some gratitude to one’s economic partners.

¹⁸The case if from McConnell (1993, 28).

¹⁹Perhaps you should have propositional gratitude, gratitude *that* you weren’t mugged. But you needn’t have targeted gratitude, you needn’t be grateful *to* the stranger. For the difference between these attitudes, see McAleer (2012).

pants care about one another. But the value of such relationships is amplified when the participants care about one another on the basis of good reasons. If we care for people who we have no reason to care for—the abusive partner—the value of our relationship is much diminished. If we care for people who we have great reason to care for—our loving parents—the value of our relationship is much enlarged. Thus, bonds of gratitude amplify the value of a valuable relationship. Now what goes for family members goes too, I think, for economic partners. Bonds of gratitude can amplify the value of caring for our economic partners: our business partners, our employers or employees, those we buy from or sell to. Thus, we should not, on the face of it, regret the fact that we have reason to be grateful to our economic partners. We should treasure it. It puts us in a position to be in especially valuable relationships with them.

Yet there is an important caveat to this. It is, generally, worse to violate an obligation than not to have had an obligation at all. It's worse to make a promise and break it than to make no promise. It is worse to make a friend and betray them than it is to make no friend at all. The same goes for gratitude. It is worse to owe a debt of gratitude and not pay it than it is to never owe such a debt. Ingratitude, in other words, is a distinctive bad. It is, in Hume's words, the "most horrid and unnatural [crime]" (Hume, 1738, III.II). It follows that we should not always treasure debts of gratitude. When such debts will go unpaid, it would be better were they not incurred in the first place. In personal cases, this is usually not such an important consideration. We have control over whether we make good our debts of gratitude to our friends and family. But it does matter in political cases. As we'll see, there are cases where policies create debts of gratitude that one might reasonably think will go unpaid. In such cases gratitude's bonds should be shunned rather than treasured.

Let's sum up. I've argued that we have reason to be grateful to our economic partners. The basic idea behind this is simply that benefits typically generate reasons of gratitude, and our economic partners benefit us enormously. This has two consequences. First, it means we have reason to care about these partners' welfare. This, in turn, means we have reason to benefit them when we can. Doing so is just to repay our debt of gratitude. Second, when we do repay the debt, the debt itself should be treasured. It is valuable to be in relationships of care with people. This value is amplified by the appropriateness of those relationships. But, when we don't repay the debt, the debt itself should be lamented. It is bad to be locked into debts that we do not repay. We now turn to the implications of this for concrete issues.

3 Trade

We begin with international trade. Nowadays, about one fourth of the world's production comes from export industries. That amounts to roughly twenty trillion dollars. In the United States, export industries directly support about 11 million jobs. In China, they support about 70 million jobs. The parts from the computer on which you are likely reading this paper are made in about a dozen countries. The raw materials for those parts come from many more. Economic activity now crosses borders to a very great extent. This means foreign workers benefit us tremendously. They provide us with goods and services that make our lives much better. Now, that isn't to say that such things wouldn't be provided without this international trade. But they would be provided at higher prices and probably lower quality. American lives would be worse without Chinese factory workers or German engineers. This gives us reason to be grateful to our foreign trading partners.

Why does this matter? Abstractly, it matters because it gives us reason to care about the welfare of our trading partners. This means we must be disposed to make their lives better. When we can make them better off, without too much sacrifice to ourselves, we should do so. More minimally, this gives us a weighty reason of non-maleficence. We have weighty reason not to harm our trading partners. This is because inflicting harm on a benefactor is a paradigm case of ingratitude. You don't care about the welfare of those you knowingly harm for little benefit. Now, of course, sometimes we might harm even those we care about. We might, for example, do this when the benefits to us are much greater than the harm. I might borrow my friend's umbrella without asking, because I can't go to my job interview soaked through. But when we harm someone for a commensurate personal gain, that means we do not care about them much. Thus, we have reasons to benefit, and not harm, those with whom we trade.

Concretely, that matters to the ethics of trade policy. It does so in three ways. First, it affects how trade negotiations should be conducted. It is inappropriate to threaten someone to whom you owe gratitude. If we owe gratitude to Chinese workers, it is wrong to threaten them with tariffs or other trade barriers. This is to threaten the infliction of harm. But one should not harm one's benefactors. And, in this context, that means one should also not threaten to harm one's benefactors. So, the use of threats in trade negotiations is inappropriate; it is ungrateful. Second, it affects the proper aim of trade policies between existing trading partners. When the United States is negotiating with Chinese officials, it should not aim to get the best deal for Americans *alone*. It should put some weight on the welfare of the Chinese. It should do this because it owes them a debt of gratitude. Thus, the demands of gratitude make a type of economic nationalism morally unsustainable. When setting their trade policies, nations shouldn't be just in it for themselves. Such nationalism expresses ingratitude for the benefits that their partners have bestowed on them. Trade policy towards existing trading partners should take account of the well-being of both the partner and the policymaker.

These two points apply just to current trading partners: those who have already benefited us. They don't apply to potential new partners. That brings us to our third point: the fact we'll owe gratitude to our trading partners impacts whether we should support policies that increase trading links. It impacts, for example, whether we should support further free trade agreements. Should the United States sign such agreements with countries on the Pacific Rim? With the United Kingdom? The key point is that such policies will increase the number and depth of beneficial economic relationships between Americans and people in these countries. Thus, they'll increase the bonds of gratitude between the two. Whether this is good or bad is a delicate matter. If these bonds of gratitude come along with relationships of mutual care, then they are good. Such bonds amplify the value of such relationships. But, if they do not, then they are bad. They mean Americans assume obligations which they do not discharge. Americans owe gratitude, but are not grateful (and, perhaps, vice versa). In this case, it would have been better if they had never assumed the obligations at all. Thus, what gratitude means for pro-trade policies depends on an empirical issue. It depends on whether cross-nationals tend to discharge their debts of gratitude or not.

This is an open question. I myself think the evidence currently supports some mild optimism. Kleimberg and Fordham (2010) finds that people are more likely to have favorable opinions of their country's major export partners.²⁰ Baker and Cupery (2013) find that, in Latin America, "day-to-day economic exchange with the United States—

²⁰Although they don't find evidence of favorable attitudes to import partners. They themselves think this is because importing produces more mixed benefits and burdens than exporting.

trade, aid, migration and remittances—promote good will” (2013, 107).²¹ This suggests that, often, trade creates the very attitudes it makes especially valuable. Now, of course, this does not always happen. Trade sometimes creates relationships of contempt rather than care. Yet there is little evidence that this happens systematically. Thus, on balance, it seems to me that the current evidence favors optimism. But I want to stress that the issue is empirically open. Whether gratitude supports freer trade or not is dependent on the effects of such trade on people’s attitudes. This can be discovered only with empirical work.

Let me sum up the section. My central claim is that international trade creates debts of gratitude. This has three important consequences. It means trade negotiations should be conducted without threats. It means we should take our trading partners’ welfare seriously in forming trade policy. And it makes free trade agreements a fraught business. If repaid, the debts such agreements create are valuable. If ignored, they are lamentable.

4 Markets

In this section, we turn to how gratitude matters to a particular type of economic transaction: market exchange. Market exchange is to be distinguished from gift giving. Both involve transfer of ownership over some good, or a right to some service, from one person to another. But they differ in the motives underlying the transfer. In market exchange, each participant is motivated by the benefit they get from the thing they receive in return. I give you my car because I want the money you’re offering. You give me the money because you want the car. In contrast, in gift giving we’re not motivated by such benefits. We’re motivated by benevolence. I give you my car because I know you need a car to get to work. I’m concerned about your well-being, not about what you will give me in return. We can define a market as a situation in which market exchanges happen. Markets are, by definitional fiat, places where people transfer goods for the benefits they get in return.

There is a tradition of thinking that market exchange is inferior, in some respect, to gift giving. Richard Titmuss (1970) is the prime example of this tradition. Titmuss thought that gift-giving was superior to market exchange and so he argued against allowing markets in blood. Now, Titmuss’ main claim was that allowing market exchange in blood reduces the quantity and quality of the blood provided.²² But this was not his only thought. He also thought that gift giving was inherently superior to market exchange.²³ This is an attractive idea. In this section, we’ll see exactly how it can be spelt out. The main pay-off of this lies in helping us to see exactly how much influence it should have on policy. My own view is that it might sometimes make a difference to what policies we should support, but such times will be rare. Market exchanges have defects, but usually their virtues outweigh the defects.

²¹In a working paper, they find that this extends to far more cases than those in Latin America. See Baker, Cupery, and Molina (Baker et al.). In contrast to Kleinberg and Fordham, they think that imports drive the good will.

²²Most of Titmuss (1970) consists in arguing for this claim. It is likely incorrect. See Lacetera et al. (2013) for a contemporary summary of the counter-evidence.

²³Thus, in a long list of problem with market exchange in blood, he claims that it “represses the expression of altruism, erodes the sense of community...limits both personal and professional freedoms...” (Titmuss, 1970, 210). At another point, he laments that “no money values can be attached to the presence or absence of a spirit of altruism in a society” (1970, 167). These points differ markedly from claims about quantity and quality of market supply of blood. I read them as claims about the noninstrumental superiority of gift giving.

Let's spell out the thought. The key point is simple. Benevolence amplifies bonds of gratitude. When someone benefits us out of benevolence, we typically value them more than when they benefit us out of self-interest. This is because people don't usually owe us much benevolence at all. Perhaps they have a general duty to do some good: but they don't owe you a kidney. Thus, being the subject of benevolence creates uniquely strong bonds of gratitude. So gift giving creates stronger bonds of gratitude than do market exchanges. We should be more grateful to those who give us gifts than those with whom we engage in market transfers. Now we've seen how it's valuable to be bound to others more tightly by bonds of gratitude. It is good to have reason to be grateful to others, and for them to have reason to be grateful to you. Thus, gift giving is, in this respect, superior to market exchange. It creates a more valuable form of bond. It creates a stronger bond of gratitude. Again, the caveats we noted in section 2 apply. These bonds are valuable only insofar as they align with caring relationships. If they don't, they are bad. But concrete cases of gift giving will plausibly generate such attitudes. When the gift is blood, or a kidney, it seems likely to make the recipient grateful. Thus, we should prefer people gift such goods than exchange them for their market value.

What is the upshot of that? Under certain conditions, it gives us reason to limit markets. These conditions are those in which allowing market exchanges crowds out gift giving. Suppose allowing market exchanges of blood makes it less likely that people give it away as a gift. Then we have reason to forbid such exchange. Allowing it impairs the value of people's relationships. Such conditions are probably quite common. The evidence for this comes from the literature on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. This literature probes whether giving people extrinsic motivations to perform certain tasks makes them less likely to perform the task in the absence of such motivations. Extrinsic motivation is usually monetary compensation. Intrinsic motivation is the interest or perceived value of a task. If extrinsic motivations make one less likely to do something absent such motivations, they crowd out intrinsic motivation. Most, albeit not all, meta-analyses of this literature suggest that such crowding out happens.²⁴ This suggests that market exchanges also crowd out gift giving. This would be an instance of extrinsic motivation crowding out intrinsic motivation. Thus, we probably do have reason to limit markets. We have reason to restrict market exchanges in goods, like blood, for which we can expect much gift giving.

Yet this is not the end of the matter. For policy purposes, the weight of that reason is critical. Many of the relevant goods—blood, organs—are very important to their recipients. Shortages of these goods mean people die. We have more reason to save a single life than to create a very large number of bonds of gratitude. So if forbidding market exchange creates such shortages, this likely outweighs our reason to promote gift relationships. The crowding out concern may sometimes make a difference. Suppose instrumental considerations are finely balanced. Or suppose we're highly uncertain which way they push. Then the crowding out concern may mean we should limit markets. But in other cases it won't outweigh instrumental considerations. When such limits mean people don't get the blood or kidneys they need, we should prescind from market limitations. Their costs are not worth their benefits. We should see markets as regrettable, but justifiable, sacrifices for instrumental good.²⁵

²⁴See, for example, Rummel and Feinberg (1988); Wiersma (1992); Tang and Hall (1995); Deci et al. (1999). Cameron and Pierce (1994) and Eisenberger and Cameron (1996) are the two (very similar) dissenting reviews. Their concerns seem to me well answered by Deci et al. (1999).

²⁵Anderson (1995, 150–58) and Satz (2012, 91–112) gives some other reasons why markets in certain goods may be objectionable. These reasons might make a difference in cases where gratitude doesn't. I take no stand on this.

5 Inequality

We now turn to our final issue: inequality. The argument of this section is that the import of gratitude justifies some level of economic inequality. In particular, it justifies a level of inequality commensurate with the inequality in people's contribution. To put the point vividly, let's characterize two types of people. First, consider the Big Producers. Perhaps the Big Producer is Alexei Stakhanov, hero of Socialist Labor. Stakhanov, reputedly, mined 102 tons of coal in five hours and forty-five minutes. That's a lot: it got him on the cover of *Time* magazine. Or perhaps the Big Producer is someone like Elon Musk. Musk's companies have cut the cost of getting a satellite into space tenfold. They've produced almost a million electric cars. He's made more of a contribution to two great problems—climate change and space exploration—than most of us will make to anything. Compare these Big Producers to the Beach Bums. The Beach Bums have never made any contribution to anything. They spend all their time bumming around Long Beach. It's a good life for them, but it doesn't much help the rest of us. The argument of this section is that we collectively, as a society, owe more gratitude to the Big Producers than to the Beach Bums. And that means we should give the Big Producers a bigger share of the economic pie than the Beach Bums. Some level of economic inequality is justified.

We'll start by emphasizing two aspects of gratitude. First, note that debts of gratitude aren't only owed by individuals. They can also be owed by pluralities. Consider the philanthropist who gives your department a new scholarship. It's not just the awardee who owes them gratitude. The entire department benefits. Thus, the entire department owes gratitude. You owe it collectively, as a plurality.²⁶ Second, how much gratitude we owe someone is proportional to how much they've benefited us. I owe more gratitude to the person who saves my life than to the person who gives me a coffee. This follows from the idea that how much gratitude you owe is determined by how well someone treated you multiplied by how much they benefitted you. As the second term rises, the gratitude owed increases. When someone treats us in a saintly way, and for instance benefits us at substantial personal sacrifice, I suspect we owe them a greater benefit in return. But in most cases when we owe someone gratitude, I suspect we should give them a benefit commensurate to the benefit they gave to us. If they benefited us an enormous amount, we should try to benefit them an enormous amount. If we can do so without violating other weighty obligations, or incurring undue sacrifice, then not doing so is an ingratitude.

We can now bring these points to bear on economic inequality. The Big Producers benefit us much more than do the Beach Bums. The Beach Bums don't make us better off at all, the Big Producers make us much better off. Here 'us' refers to society as a whole. Members of society are, collectively, benefited by the Big Producers more than by the Beach Bums. Thus, we have reason to be more grateful to the former than the latter. Yet, to feel grateful for someone is in part to care about their well-being, how they're doing in life. So, we have a special reason to care about the well-being of the Big Producers. This means we should care about their welfare more than that of the Beach Bums. After all, there's a certain level of care both are owed purely by dint of their common humanity. This is the baseline level of care owed to all. We then have reason to care more about the Big Producers welfare. That should push how much we care about them above the baseline. But, then, we have special obligations to be disposed to promote the well-being of the Big Producers. Thus, we have a special obligation, an

²⁶See Dietz (2016) for a recent defense, and exploration, of such collective obligations.

obligation of gratitude, to promote the well-being of the Big Producers.

How can we discharge that obligation? Well, we might give the Big Producers special medals or fancy thanking ceremonies. But some people don't care much for ceremony. This is not a very reliable way to benefit them. Yet consumption does very reliably benefit people. People like nice cars, big houses, holidays in the Bahamas. So, a simple way to repay our debt of gratitude to the Big Producers is to let them consume more. We can give them a bigger share of the economic pie. The Soviets can let Stakhanov have a nicer apartment. The Americans can let Musk have a big house. Thus, some level of economic inequality is a justifiable reflection of our unequal obligations of gratitude. What is that level? Well, we should give the Big Producers a benefit commensurate to their contribution. Thus, when the Big Producers contribute much more than the rest, the level of inequality this supports may be substantial. When they produce only a little more, the level of inequality supported is small. Thus, the level of inequality that gratitude justifies matches the level of inequality in contribution.

This thought is not entirely novel. Both Joel Feinberg and Tim Scanlon have considered whether gratitude might ground a defense of economic inequality. Both give little time, and short shrift, to the idea. They share an objection: they think that we only owe gratitude to people who have benefited us for the right reasons (Feinberg 2000, 241–42; Scanlon 2013, 114). Both claim we don't owe gratitude to people when they've benefited us out of self-interest. We addressed this point in section 2. Motives do matter to gratitude. You should feel more gratitude to those who benefit you out of good motives. But motives are not the *sine qua non* of debts of gratitude. We owe gratitude to all the many people who benefit us in their daily life, even when we've addressed their self-love rather than their humanity. We owe it to our baristas, waiters, drivers. We owe it to people who save our lives because they're just doing their job. Feinberg and Scanlon, on the face of it, look committed to denying these quotidian moral facts. So, their shared objection seems to me to rest on a shared mistake.

There is another way to resist this argument. One might agree with Elizabeth Anderson, when she says that “the attempt, independent of moral principles, to credit specific bits of output to specific bits of input by specific individuals represents an arbitrary cut in the causal web that in fact makes everyone's productive contribution dependent on what everyone else is doing” (Anderson, 1999, 321). And this might ground an objection. To see how, let's first reiterate what it means for a Big Producer to benefit us. We understand this counterfactually: were the Big Producers to have stayed idle, we would be much worse off. Now here's the objection. The idea is that the distinction between Big Producers and Beach Bums is a misleading one. It is rarely or never the case that some people benefit us more than others. It's not even the case that they make more of a contribution to such benefits. They benefit us no more, the thought goes, than anyone else. This is because economies are such complex entities. Their complexity means that everyone's work depends on everyone else's. And thus, one might think, it's not true of anyone that, were they to stop working, we would be worse off.

This would astound me were it true. It seems clearly false for people like Stakhanov and Musk. It is straightforward to identify the benefits these people have produced. Were Stakhanov to have worked less hard, the USSR would have many tons less coal. Were Musk to have slacked off, it would be much costlier to get satellites into space. Very complex causal chains underpin these counterfactuals. But that is little evidence against their truth. And I think the same goes for many doctors, engineers, teachers. If they stopped working, someone would surely replace them. But, often, this would leave us a little worse off. We would have poorer medical care, costlier bridges, worse schools. Again, very complex causal chains underpin the truth of the relevant counterfactuals;

economies are complex entities. But that doesn't imperil their truth. Some people do, through work, benefit us more than others. Intuitively, the same point goes for contributions. Doctors make more of a contribution to the general good than Beach Bums. Doctors save lives. Beach Bums surf. The former is a greater contribution to our collective good. In practice, it is of course hard to quantify differences in contribution.²⁷ But in theory it seems deeply misguided to deny that there is such a difference. Thus, I think neither of these objections hold water. Reasons of gratitude do tend to justify some amount of distributive inequality.

Let me end by discussing the weight of these reasons. I have suggested that gratitude is a required response to nonobligatory benefits. Thus, when one fails to show someone gratitude for benefitting you, you are treating them as if they were required to benefit you. You are treating them in the way that would be appropriate were they obligated to make you better off in the way that they did. You are treating the Big Producers as if they're obliged to work for your well-being, rather than their own. I think that there is an expressive complaint against this. Treating someone as if they must live their life for your benefit, rather than their own, expresses that they are your moral inferior. This is because nobody with equal moral status to you would have such an obligation, and so treating someone as if they do have such an obligation can reasonably be interpreted as presupposing that they lack such status. When our actions can reasonably be interpreted as presupposing something, they typically express that thing. Thus, failing to show gratitude to those who benefit us must often express that our benefactors are not really our moral equals. Intuitively, we have very weighty moral reasons not to express the moral inferiority of others. Thus, insofar as ingratitude does express such moral inequality, we have weighty moral reason not to show ingratitude: the reasons grounded in gratitude are weighty ones.

6 Equality, property, and desert

I want to finally turn to how gratitude interacts with some alternative economic ideals. My aim is not to argue against these alternatives. As I've said, I'm a pluralist about economic justice: I think a wide array of factors bear on how we should manage our economic justice. My aim is merely to clarify the connection between gratitude and these other factors.

Let's start with equality. Many people think that the main thing guiding our management of our economic affairs should be the goal of making them egalitarian. There are, very broadly, two ways to spell this out. Distributive egalitarians think that it what is most important is that resources or well-being is distributed equally. As I'll understand it, this is a *sui generis* moral demand: it is just a fundamental normative fact that we're required to bring about egalitarian distributions, perhaps *modulo* certain appeals to responsibility.²⁸ There is a serious tension between this view and what gratitude requires. As we've just seen, gratitude requires some level of distributive inequality: those who contribute more should get more. I want to say two things about this. First, I myself suspect that this conflict is more theoretical than practical. In reality, our societies are very far away from ones in which people's remuneration matches their contribution. Well-paid executives, for example, get paid far more than they contribute to the com-

²⁷See Mulligan (2018, 131–34) a recent argument that, in an ideal labor market, this difference in contribution would equal difference in wages. In our non-ideal markets, as Mulligan recognizes, the issue is not so simple.

²⁸Dworkin (1981) and Cohen (1989) are classic advocates of this position.

mon good. This is likely because they set their own pay.²⁹ Additionally, much material inequality is due to inheritance. But no one deserves gratitude for the contribution (if it was a contribution) of their ancestors. So, in practice, the conflict between gratitude and distributive equality may not bite too deep: the former does not support many of the more egregious kinds of inequality.³⁰

Yet there remains a conflict in theory. However, I suspect that our reasons of gratitude at least very often outweigh distributive complaints. Imagine, for example, that one has a benefactor. This might be a great benefactor: someone who fed you, housed you, put you through school. Or it might be a minor benefactor: someone who commented on your manuscript. Now suppose that you can benefit your benefactor alone, or you could split the benefit between them and a stranger. The stranger has a distributive egalitarian complaint against you helping out your benefactor alone. This gives you reason to split the benefit. But this reason is usually outweighed by those of gratitude. Overall, you should usually give the benefit, or at least more of the benefit, to the benefactor in such a case. Thus, reasons of gratitude often outweigh distributive complaints. My own view is that this is because distributive complaints are not very heavyweight at all: we just don't have weighty *sui generis* reasons to distribute goods equally. Insofar as it has seemed that we do, it is because equal distributions of resources conduce towards other important values.

Those other important values are, I suspect, relational egalitarian values. So let us turn to the relational egalitarian approach to economic justice. The core idea here is that we have weighty reason to avoid inegalitarian relationships and to promote egalitarian relationships.³¹ We have weighty reason to avoid being in relationships of domination or subordination, and to instead make our relationships more like friendships. From this perspective, there are two worries about inegalitarian distributions of resources. One worry is an expressive worry: when some people are materially much better off than others, that tends to express that the interests of the former are worth more than the latter. But such expressive inequalities tend to generate social inequalities.³² Another worry is that money is power, and monetary inequalities tend to generate inequalities of power, and especially of political power. But inequalities of power tend to generate inegalitarian relationships.³³ Thus, we often have reason to tamp down material inequalities. The core idea, then, is that how we manage our economic affairs impacts the nature of our relationships, and that imposes requirements on that management.

These requirements only partially conflict with those imposed by gratitude. There is no obvious conflict in the domain of either international trade or markets. So let us turn to the distribution of resources. Here it is important to note, as I suggested in section 5, ingratitude is expressively freighted: to avoid expressing that others are more inferior, we need to avoid showing them ingratitude when gratitude is owed. Thus, to ensure that our economic distributions don't violate the expressive constraints generated by egalitarian relationships, we must be sensitive to the import of gratitude. However, insofar as material inequality does ineluctably translate into political inequality, that will give us a reason to tamp down the inequalities that gratitude supports. Yet this conflict does not seem that deep. Material inequality only translates into political inequality when the political framework allows it to do so. At minimum, campaign finance restrictions together with public financing of elections can help stop wealth translating into political

²⁹Piketty (2014, 330–35) defends this point.

³⁰Mulligan (2018, 137) makes a similar point.

³¹This view has its roots in Anderson (1999) and Scheffler (2003).

³²For this worry, see O'Neill (2008, 126–28) and Schemmel (2011, 380–85).

³³See Schemmel (2011, 370–80) and Scanlon (2018, 74–94).

power.³⁴ So, I doubt that there is an ineluctable practical difference between relational egalitarian considerations and those raised by gratitude.

We now look at the approach to economic justice that foregrounds natural property rights.³⁵ The most influential idea here has been that one can justly come to own something if one appropriates it when unowned or receives it via a series of just transfers from such an appropriation. One can appropriate something, roughly, when one takes possession of it without worsening the lot of others and a just transfer is simply a transfer untainted by coercion, deceit or manipulation. When you come to own something, it is wrong for others to take it from you: doing so is a violation of your property rights. Were such property rights to come into conflict with duties of gratitude, the former cannot be trumped. That is because duties of gratitude are not typically enforceable: we cannot coerce people into paying their debts of gratitude. Although I may owe gratitude to a friend, it would be wrong for a third-party to make me pay such a debt, for instance by seizing my property. Thus, owners are morally obligated to do what gratitude requires. But, if they ignore these obligations, we are not permitted to seize their (natural) property in order to enforce them. In this sense, natural property rights cannot be overruled by the demands of gratitude.

However, in practice, I suspect that this does not much sap the import of gratitude. This is for two reasons. First, I myself suspect that we should not think of property rights as natural rights. I prefer an institutional theory of such rights, on which we own things insofar as we've been assigned them by just institutions.³⁶ The extent to which institutions match the demands of gratitude will, I suspect, determine their justice. Second, even if this is wrong it is not clear that there are any natural property rights in actuality. This is simply because there is no way that what we own now stretches back to original appropriation via series of unerringly just transfers. Force or fraud or manipulation is bound to have interrupted any such series. So, on the face of it, this view says we don't own anything at all.³⁷ But if we don't have natural property rights over anything at all, then these rights provide no bulwark against the demands of gratitude. The upshot of this is that gratitude may in theory demand things of us that property rights makes unenforceable, but in practice property probably provides little protection against the demands of gratitude.

Finally, let us explore views that say desert determines economic justice. The clearest notion of desert is moral desert: people deserve good things for morally good actions and bad things for morally bad actions. Unfortunately, it is not clear how to apply this clear notion to our economic affairs: it's just not obvious who is more morally commendable than whom in the sphere of economic production. Most work seems to be neither morally forbidden nor saintly: it is simply morally permissible. Some people think, however, that effort and ability are bases for desert.³⁸ The idea is that hard-working talented people deserve more than the lazy or the talentless, and perhaps we will have better luck at locating the hard-working and talented than the morally commendable. But it seems somewhat implausible that hard work and ability really are desert-bases. I might put a huge amount of effort into digging worthless holes. And I might be very good at it. Few may be able to find as worthless a spot for a hole as I. But that doesn't mean that I deserve high wages.³⁹ For that reason, the most promi-

³⁴For some concrete discussion of these policies, see Malhotra (2008).

³⁵The classic account here is Nozick (1974). For a more recent advocate, see Brennan (2012).

³⁶For this sort of view, see Murphy (2020).

³⁷Zwolinski (2016) also makes this point, as indeed does Nozick (1974, 231).

³⁸For discussions of some such views, see Dick (1975, 259–60) and Sher (1979).

³⁹For a similar point, see McLeod (1996, 208).

ment desertist views of economic justice give contribution a central place. They say that one deserves rewards in proportion to one's economic contribution, and this principle should guide how we manage our economic affairs.⁴⁰

This view coheres very well with gratitude as an economic ideal. Both see contribution as a core guide to economic distributions. But I am inclined to think that it is better to think of how contribution matters in terms of gratitude rather than desert. The key point here is that contribution is very different from other putative desert-bases. Moral character, effort, and ability are all identify properties that are in some sense internal, or intrinsic, to each person. It is plausible that this is why they can ground desert; we only deserve things on the basis of properties intrinsic to us. But there's no sense in which each person's contribution is internal to them. How much anyone contributes depends on a wild variety of external factors. I suspect that means one cannot really deserve something on the basis of one's contribution in anything like the sense that one deserves things on the basis of one's moral character or effort. The former is not sufficiently about the subject of desert. Thus, instead of thinking of contribution as a basis for desert, we should think of it as a basis for a debt of gratitude. Now, of course, we do sometimes speak of gratitude in terms of desert: we say people deserve gratitude. But here we just mean, I think, that some people are owed gratitude. This is a thinner sense of desert than that in play in the other cases, and so should not be collapsed into them. The upshot of this, then, is that gratitude as an economic ideal supersedes the most plausible version of desert as an economic ideal.

If this is correct, gratitude interacts in various ways with other factors that bear, or may bear, on economic justice. It typically outweighs any *sui generis* distributive egalitarian reasons. It partially complements and partially conflicts with relational egalitarian reasons. It conflicts with natural property rights, and it is probably not enforceable against such rights. And it gives us a more satisfying way of spelling out the idea that contribution matters than is given by desertist views. Gratitude, in sum, amounts to a distinctive and important ideal for our economic relationships.

7 Conclusion

Let me conclude. Economic activity, I have argued, isn't just the sphere of work and production and allocation. It is a sphere in which millions of people benefit one another. Iowan farmers feed New York bankers; New York bankers finance Californian actors; Californian actors entertain Iowan farmers. Chinese workers clothe American programmers; American programmers code for German engineers; German engineers equip Chinese workers. We are economically interconnected. These interconnections amount to a vast web of mutually beneficial relationships. The moral import of this is twofold. First, it gives us reasons to be grateful to those who so benefit us. We have reason to care for, and thus promote, their well-being. Second, it gives us something of value. In the right circumstances, the duties these reasons generate are not burdens to be born; they're bonds to be cherished. It is valuable to be bound together by a web of gratitude to other people. Gratitude, as an economic ideal, should draw our attention to both facts.

⁴⁰See Miller (1999, 177) and Mulligan (2018) for this sort of view.

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